Études irlandaises

46-1 | 2021

Passer au crible les traces du passé : modèles, cadres
et métaphores

Pop Beckett: Intersections with Popular Culture, Paul Stewart, David Pattie (eds.)

Megane Mazé

Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/10973>

DOI: 10.4000/etudesirlandaises.10973

ISSN: 2259-8863

Publisher

Presses universitaires de Caen

Printed version

Date of publication: 8 July 2021

Number of pages: 173-175

ISBN: 978-2-38185-030-6

ISSN: 0183-973X

Electronic reference

Megane Mazé, "*Pop Beckett: Intersections with Popular Culture*, Paul Stewart, David Pattie (eds.)", *Études irlandaises* [Online], 46-1 | 2021, Online since 08 July 2021, connection on 14 November 2022. URL:

<http://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/10973> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesirlandaises.10973>

Creative Commons - Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

referendum, the century-old Irish border question has still not been solved and little progress towards a final and comprehensive settlement has been made since 1998.

All in all, although this review is unfortunately too short to give a full analysis of all the merits of this book, the reviewer wanted to stress three essential reasons why anyone engaged in the scholarly study of the Northern Irish question should be greatly thankful to Brendan O'Leary for writing this volume. First, it is by far one of the most comprehensive and detailed analyses of the processes, negotiations, actors and changes which, since Direct Rule was re-imposed in 1972, have led to such a lasting and quasi general cessation of political violence in Ireland. Second, because it is certainly the most complete and synthetic defense of consociationalism that Professor O'Leary has ever produced. Third, because, as any piece of outstanding scientific value, it raises questions as much as it answers them, questions on how the future of Northern Ireland can be definitely agreed without the political, cultural and territorial rights of one community prevailing over the political, cultural and territorial rights of the other.

Philippe CAUVET

***Pop Beckett: Intersections with Popular Culture*, Paul Stewart, David Pattie (eds.), Stuttgart, Ibidem-Verlag (Samuel Beckett in Company; 6), 2019, 308 p.**

If his name is alien to no one, Samuel Beckett remains in the popular imagination as a somehow hagiography-prone obscure authorial figure, whose texts are difficult to decipher. The sixth volume of the "Samuel Beckett in Company" collection, entitled *Pop Beckett: Intersections with Popular Culture* is a timely investigation of the author's presence in our everyday life. Following the publication of P. J. Murphy and Nick Pawliuk's book *Beckett in Popular Culture: Essays on a Postmodern Icon* (2015), this new collection gives an insightful reevaluation of the dichotomy between "high" and "low" cultures in the context of Beckettian studies. The introduction identifies a series of artistic fields on which the Beckett persona sits: a bridge inaugurated in 2009 in Dublin, an episode in the BBC TV series *Urban Myths*, his portrait laid on many Trinity College gifts, and so on. The list seems endless and shows to what extent an author and his oeuvre soon become commodities for the sake of popular culture. This collection offers thus a clear overview of how, where and why Beckett's oeuvre remains present in many forms.

The first part of the book investigates the way in which Beckett interacted with popular culture in his own time and how it manifests itself in his texts. In his essay, John Pilling starts by giving an abundance of allusions to popular culture within Beckett's earlier texts, with a special emphasis on songs in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. He goes on to demonstrate that Beckett's texts were never completely

deprived of biographic references, hence already blurring the line between the everyday and the literary. Pim Verhulst and Jonathan Bignell follow on this line with studies of mass culture through Beckett's BBC radio play *All That Fall* and *Godot*'s ITV broadcasting – a network heavily relying on advertisements – placing Beckett in a context of historical British instability. The use of such media allows the emergence of yet another in-betweenness, from the privacy of the audience's home to the public transmission of broadcasting. Verhulst explores the ways in which Beckett had to adapt and simplify his commonly known tropes in order to make those texts accessible to a wider audience. In an attempt to comprehend Beckett's paradoxical association with counter-culture and high academic standards, Stephen Dilks and James Baxter both reinvestigate the common idea of Beckett's relative reluctance to any form of publicity and examine how editors and practitioners alike helped ingrain his iconic image through readings of Barney Rosset's controversial *Evergreen Review* and Oxford University's failed attempt to build a theatre bearing his name.

The second part of the book explores how both Beckett's oeuvre and persona are nowadays fashioned through interpretation and commodification. Paul Stewart interrogates Beckett's presence in Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus*, both revealing and assessing his influence on many artists. According to Stewart, the use of a quotation taken from an interview rather than a published book allows to see the emergence of a popular authorial figure. Ken Alba, Mark Schreiber and Anna Douglass all offer a proficient evaluation of Beckett's presence in the digital environment. Online, Alba posits, Beckett's oeuvre is fragmented into a wide range of (mis)quotations, memes and bots that further highlight how technology gives an easy access to culture while at the same time subverting and multiplying the image commonly associated with Beckett. Schreiber and Douglass both argue that Beckett's presence in video games – and digital media at large – helps understand his multi-genre oeuvre. By focusing on the idea of "failure", Douglass outlines the paradox of "an experience worth enduring" (p. 220). Beckett's presence on screen is further investigated in Hannah Simpson's thorough analysis of Barry McGovern's scene in the drama TV series *Game of Thrones*, allowing for a variety of intertextual references. By soliciting social media to understand the reception of such a nod in a worldwide show, she highlights the impact scholars and Beckett enthusiasts have on the dissemination of Beckett's work. Selvin Yaltir's essay explores Blanchot's thesis on the everyday to draw a parallel between *Mercier and Camier* and the Coen brothers' movies and compares their views on obscure sociability through repetition, dull conversation and small talk. David Pattie investigates "the performative rhetoric of faith" (p. 268) and the fragmentation of the self in both Beckett's texts and Nick Cave's songs, reinforcing the idea that solitude is built on in a way that renders the creation of a clear sense of identity impossible. The book concludes on an interview with Jo Baker conducted by Stewart in which the author of *A Country Road*, *A Tree* is asked about the challenges in writing a novel based on a persona such as Beckett's, highlighting yet again the literary and popular heritage of Beckett.

This collection of essays offers a wide range of riveting examples of where to find, feel or imagine a Beckettian presence in our everyday encounters with pop

culture. This further highlights the need to accept the emergence of new cultural forms and the interweaving of “high” and “low” cultures – not so much as a way of “dumbing down” (p. 10) but as a need to accept their strong connection. Simpson’s final stance summarises what needs to be taken into account: “[Henry] Jenkins warns: ‘No one group can set the terms. No one group can control access and participation’ [Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York – London, New York University Press, 2006, p. 23]. As this timely volume engages in a closer interrogation of the interrelationship between Beckett’s work and pop culture, we as scholars and academics might do well to heed his words” (p. 242).

Megane MAZÉ

Niamh Campbell, *Sacred Weather. Atmospheric Essentialism in the Work of John McGahern*, Cork, Cork University Press, 2019, 224 p.

The number of books of criticism on the work of John McGahern could now approximate twenty, notwithstanding the numerous Master theses and PhD dissertations presented in universities around the world, which tells a lot about the canonical status reached by the novelist in his own country where he started out being considered “parochial”, then somehow outrageous, at the time when his second novel *The Dark* was censored and he lost his job as a primary school teacher. More recently, the trend in McGahern studies has been to unravel the numerous intertextual references which could be disclosed through his writings, or to retrace the influence of either Irish, English, French or Russian authors on the Leitrim novelist. Proust, Camus, Flaubert, Beckett, Tolstoy or even Jane Austen and Wordsworth have been thus called forth to recreate his imaginary library. Such is not at all what Niamh Campbell set out doing in this thought-provoking, ambitious, challenging, extremely sophisticated essay. Indeed one of her aims in adding up to the voluminous literature seems to have been to distinguish herself from the already well-established “traditions” of McGahern criticism, of which she offers throughout the essay a sort of meta-critical survey, listing the main authors of monographs written on McGahern over the last twenty years, and distributing good and bad points in the process, depending whether these authors do or do not cling to what she calls “the conservative interpretation” (p. 50) of McGahern’s writing, which she also links with a notion defined by Leo Bersani as “the culture of redemption” (p. 51). While engaging in a straightforward, yet honest, dialogue with previous McGahern critics, Campbell means to address, if not to redress, what she sees as a refusal by the state or the academic institutions, to acknowledge McGahern as an “immensely skilled and subtle writer of Irish realism” (p. 44), while taking stand with those who have limited the interpretations of his works to “kitsch”, or to ideology. Her critique of the body of McGahern criticism extends to the whole of Irish studies, in response to Conor Carville’s essay