

Bloom in Wonderland

Godot meets Dedalus in Stong symposium

By S. JENNIFER HUNTER

Alice would have had a gay old time. The Cheshire Cat would have smiled benignly at the proceedings, and the Mad Hatter would have been a smash at the banquet. But alas, they were not invited.

Lewis Carroll and his friends had been upstaged by a more venerable group of characters — the Molly Blooms, the Krapps, and the Stephen Dedaluses.

Literary history was made last weekend at York when the Joyce-Beckett Symposium, the first of its kind in North America, attracted a respected group of actors, directors, academia and students to Stong College.

The Symposium, a series of lectures, films and panel discussions, was organized by Virginia Rock, English professor and master of Stong College, and Harry Pollock, president of the James Joyce Society of Canada and associate fellow of Stong College.

Both James Joyce and Samuel Beckett were Dubliners who left Ireland early in their careers and established themselves in France. Beckett, the playwright, admired the writings of Joyce, whom he visited in

Paris, and perhaps was influenced by him.

"I've been writing to Beckett," Pollock said. "He indicated how pleased and honoured he was to be included in a Joyce Symposium."

The two highlights of the weekend were a panel discussion on Beckett's plays, moderated by Mavor Moore, and actor Maurice Good's impressions of Beckett.

GODOT AND KRAPP

The panel discussion focused on two of Beckett's plays: *Waiting for Godot* and *Last Tape*. Members of the panel included Alan Schneider, director of the Arena Stage and professor of theatre arts at Boston University; Alan Simpson, one of the directors of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin; and Donald Davis, actor and co-founder of the Crest Theatre.

Schneider, who has directed 27 productions of "Sam" Beckett's plays, including one with Davis, recalled a conversation he had with Beckett about *Waiting for Godot*.

"I asked him, who is Godot? He thought a moment and said that if he knew, he'd put it in the play."

Schneider said one of the problems inherent in producing a Beckett play is the actors' misconceptions of their roles.

"We're not doing Arthur Miller or Eugene O'Neill. You have to deal with Beckett in a certain way," Schneider tells his actors.

He remarked that the English and Irish pronounce "Godot" GOD-ot, while the French and Americans pronounce it Gidot.

"I remember the first English production I saw of *Godot*," Schneider recalled, "with Sam sitting beside me saying that they're doing it all wrong."

VITAL TEXT

"Sam, when he works as a director, fools around with the text. It's interesting to me that he considers it a

vital, organic piece. For someone like Sam, the text remains living."

The next speaker, Alan Simpson, turned the topic to Joyce.

"It was very unfortunate for the Irish theatre that Joyce's career didn't lead him into more contact with the theatre," he said. "His one play, *Exile*, is certainly not a blockbuster."

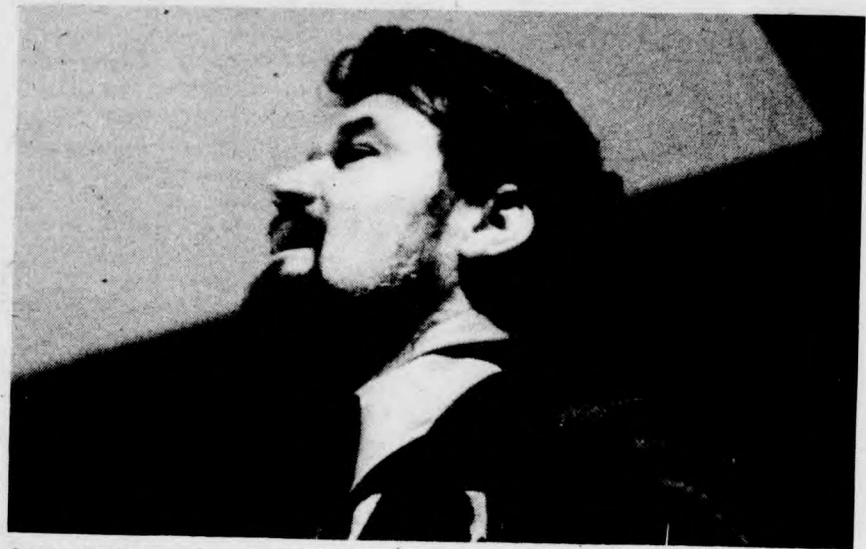
Simpson viewed Beckett as primarily an "Irish" writer. "The first time I got the script of *Godot*, I remember reading it avidly. Immediately it came to me as Irish."

Donald Davis, who originated the role of Krapp in North America and has played it on five different occasions, said that he feels "possessive" about the role. He showed the audience his somewhat tattered actor's text of the play.

"It was chewed up by the now-deceased dog of the stage manager," he said.

Saturday evening, after a banquet in the Stong Masters Dining Hall, Maurice Good, "tramp actor", amused and cajoled the audience with his impressions of Beckett.

Good is the persona of an actor's actor. Dashing on stage in a black trench coat, he unveiled a white sheet covering his props — a tape recorder and a chair. He then flung his coat from his shoulders and exposed a tuxedo com-



Actor Maurice Good, talking about the Ham in Sam last weekend at Stong College.

plete with bowtie.

"I'm a casual labourer in the arts," Good said. "Being an Irishman and more particularly a Dubliner, I talk a lot."

"All Irishmen are actors and Sam Beckett is no different from the rest of us. Actors get very close to Beckett. He's a difficult and dangerous man to get close to, but we endeavour."

Besides the many lecturers and theatrical offerings, an exhibit of Beckett memorabilia is on display in

the Samuel Zacks Gallery in Stong. (Zacks was a close friend of Beckett.)

Virginia Rock expressed enthusiasm for the student participation in the symposium. "It's the kind of thing that inspires an interested student to study further and continue to explore," she said. "I was delighted to see so many students here."

In March the university will hold a continuing discussion of modern Irish writers in a symposium entitled *Contemporary Irish Writing*.

Top entry

A film made by a first year film student at York has won first prize in the senior division of the Young Filmmakers' Festival sponsored by Buffalo's channel 17.

The contest, open to amateur cinematographers from Western New York and Southern Ontario, offered a first prize of \$50.

John Bertram, 18, won with his seven-minute 16 mm. production, *Future Light*, filmed during the summer on a budget of \$500 with a volunteer cast of four.

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