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Welcome to the latest edition of the IACI e-news.

Founded in 1962, the IACI is the leading Irish American cultural organization. The IACI is a federally recognized 501(c)(3) not-for-profit national organization devoted to promoting an intelligent appreciation of Ireland and the role and contributions of the Irish in America.

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Samuel Beckett

Irish Nobel Prize for Literature

by

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When I was a sixteen-year old senior in high school, in late 1954, there weren't many good TV programs to watch. Channel 13 was the New Jersey Station and featured test patterns all day until it was time to broadcast cowboy movies featuring the likes of Gabby Hayes. One evening they advertised the Theater of the Absurd. The play was called Waiting for Godot. There were only four characters and I was riveted to it. I was only 16 at the time and I didn't have much life experience to bring to the play. What I discovered was that I brought to the play all the life experience that was required. There are almost infinite levels of understanding, and no level exhausts the possibility of understanding. The meaning of the play is as broad as the meaning of life. It is a parable in the strict sense of the word. I have seen the play more than a dozen times, and each viewing is not a repeat, but a new experience. The author, Samuel Beckett, never revealed his own understanding of the play or why he wrote it. He was following an innovative path of writing plays that was developed by Henryk Ibsen with influences from philosophers, Albert Camus and Rene Descartes.

The play, presented as live TV, was repeated via tape on WAAT-TV four times during that week and I have seen it many times since. Beckett wrote the play in French and later translated it into English. I believe "Godot" is from a French slang word for "boot," so the title gives no clue to the author's meaning. Therefore, Godot is not God as many, including me, interpreted it. Beckett points out the play was originally written in French. If he intended them to be waiting for God, he would have written, "Dieu." Each member of the Nobel committee had their own understanding of the play and awarded Beckett the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969.

Samuel Barclay Beckett, April 13, 1906 – December 22, 1989, was an Irish avant-garde novelist, playwright, theatre director, and poet, who lived in Paris for most of his adult life and Samuel had an older brother, Frank Edward wrote in both English and French. He is widely regarded as among the most influential writers of the 20th century. Beckett's work offers a bleak, tragicomic outlook on human existence, often coupled with black comedy and gallows humor, and became increasingly minimalist in his later career.

The Beckett family were members of the Anglican Church of Ireland. The family were people of means. They lived at Foxrock in the south end of Dublin. The family home was a large house, Cooldrinagh, with a large garden and tennis courts. His father, William Beckett, was a quantity surveyor. His mother, Maria Jones Roe, was a nurse. He had an older brother, Frank Edward.

Beckett attended local schools on the pre-school level. He also attended Earlsfort School in Dublin. At age 14, he was enrolled in Portora Royal School in County Fermanagh which lists Oscar Wilde among its alumni. He was a good student and a terrific athlete, excelling at Cricket.

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He also played Cricket at Dublin University and played in Ireland at a level equivalent to the major leagues the United States.

During the years 1923 – 1927, Beckett was studying Romance Languages at Trinity College where he received his bachelor's degree. He taught briefly at the Campbell College, Belfast. He then moved to Paris, accepting a teaching position at Ecole Normale Superieure from 1928 - 1930.

It was during this time in Paris that Beckett became acquainted with James Joyce and was invited to join with his circle of friends. This was a lifelong friendship except for one frosty period when Beckett had rejected the romantic attentions of Joyce's sister who was suffering from an increasingly deepening schizophrenia. Beckett himself suffered from depression throughout his childhood and adolescence. He was treated by a psychoanalyst for several years after his father's death.

In 1930, he returned to Ireland having accepted a post as a Lecturer in French at Trinity College. He remained in this post for two years before embarking on a period of restless wandering in London, France, Germany, and Italy.

His first published work appeared in 1929, an essay on Joyce's writing method. His was one of several essays published in a book on literary criticism.

Because he was a citizen of a neutral country, he remained in Paris during World War II, in spite of the occupation. He did, however, join an underground resistance group. When the group's existence was exposed, he went on the run, escaping to an unoccupied area of France. He hid out on a farm and worked as a farm hand.

In 1945, he returned to Ireland and volunteered for the Red Cross. Because he was totally bilingual, they sent him back to France to work as an interpreter in a military hospital at Normandy. The following year he returned to Paris where he was awarded the *Croix de Guerre* for his work with the resistance.

Major Works

The post-war period was one of intense creativity, by far the most fruitful period of Beckett's life. His relatively few prewar publications included the essay on Joyce and an essay on the French novelist, Marcel Proust. A volume of short stories, *More Pricks Than Kicks* published in 1934 contained 10 stories describing episodes in the life of a Dublin intellectual, Belacqua Shuah. The novel, *Murphy* in 1938 concerns an Irishman in London who escapes from a girl he is about to marry to a life of contemplation as a male nurse in a mental institution.

His two slim volumes of poetry were *Whoroscope* in 1930, a poem on the French philosopher René Descartes, and the collection, *Echo's Bones* in 1935. A number of short stories and poems were scattered in various periodicals. He wrote the novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* in the mid-1930s, but it remained incomplete and was not published until 1992.

During his years in hiding in unoccupied France, Beckett also completed another novel, *Watt*, which was not published until 1953. After his return to Paris, between 1946 and 1949, Beckett produced a number of stories, the major prose narratives *Molloy*, in 1951, *Malone*

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Meurt also in 1951, *L'Innommable* in 1953 and two plays, the unpublished three act *Eleutheria* and *Waiting for Godot*.

It was not until 1951, however, that these works saw the light of day. After many refusals, Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil, Beckett's lifelong companion whom he later married, finally succeeded in finding a publisher for *Molloy*. When this book not only proved a modest commercial success but also was received with enthusiasm by the French critics, the same publisher brought out the two other novels and *Waiting for Godot*. It was with the amazing success of *Waiting for Godot* at the small Théâtre de Babylone in Paris, in January 1953, that Beckett's rise to world fame began. Beckett continued writing, but more slowly than in the immediate postwar years. Plays for the stage and radio and a number of prose works occupied much of his attention. This period of Beckett's life is treated in a second volume of letters, published in 2011, covering the years 1941–56.

Beckett continued to live in Paris, but most of his writing was done in a small house secluded in the Marne valley, a short drive from Paris. His total dedication to his art extended to his complete avoidance of all personal publicity, of appearances on radio or television, and of all journalistic interviews. When, in 1969, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature, he accepted the award but declined the trip to Stockholm to avoid the public speech at the ceremonies. A substantial selection of archival and letter writing material was published as *Dear Mr. Beckett: Letters from the Publisher, the Samuel Beckett File* offering readers insight into his process.

Philosophical Explorations

Beckett's writing reveals his own immense scholarship. It is full of subtle allusions to a multitude of literary sources as well as to a number of philosophical and theological writers. The dominating influences on Beckett's thought were undoubtedly the Italian poet Dante, the French philosopher René Descartes, the 17th-century Dutch philosopher Arnold Geulincx—a pupil of Descartes who dealt with the question of how the physical and the spiritual sides of man interact—and, finally, his fellow Irishman and revered friend, James Joyce. But it is by no means essential for the understanding of Beckett's work that one be aware of all the literary, philosophical, and theological allusions.

The widespread idea, fostered by the popular press, that Beckett's work is concerned primarily with the sordid side of human existence, with tramps and with cripples who inhabit trash cans, is a fundamental misconception. He dealt with human beings in such extreme situations not because he was interested in the sordid and diseased aspects of life but because he concentrated on the essential aspects of human experience. The subject matter of so much of the world's literature—the social relations between individuals, their manners and possessions, their struggles for rank and position, or the conquest of sexual objects—appeared to Beckett as mere external trappings of existence, the accidental and superficial aspects that mask the basic problems and the basic anguish of the human condition. The basic questions for Beckett seemed to be these: How can we come to terms with the fact that, without ever having asked for it, we have been thrown into the world, into being? And who are we; what is the true nature of our self? What does a human being mean when he says "I"? (The entire section, Philosophical Explorations, comes from the Encyclopedia Britannica.)

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Legacy

Beckett is one of the most widely discussed and highly prized of 20th-century authors, inspiring a critical industry to rival that which has sprung up around James Joyce. He has divided critical opinion. Some early philosophical critics, such as Sartre and Theodor Adorno, praised him, one for his revelation of absurdity, the other for his works' critical refusal of simplicities; others such as Georg Lukács condemned him for 'decadent' lack of realism.

Since Beckett's death, all rights for performance of his plays are handled by the Beckett estate, currently managed by Edward Beckett (the author's nephew). The estate has a controversial reputation for maintaining firm control over how Beckett's plays are performed and does not grant licenses to productions that do not adhere to the writer's stage directions.

Historians interested in tracing Beckett's blood line were, in 2004, granted access to confirmed trace samples of his DNA to conduct molecular genealogical studies to facilitate precise lineage determination.

Some of the best-known pictures of Beckett were taken by photographer John Minihan, who photographed him between 1980 and 1985 and developed such a good relationship with the writer that he became, in effect, his official photographer. Some consider one of these to be among the top three photographs of the 20th century. It was the theater photographer John Haynes, however, who took possibly the most widely reproduced image of Beckett: it is used on the cover of the Knowlson biography, for instance. This portrait was taken during rehearsals of the San Quentin Drama Workshop at the Royal Court Theatre in London, where Haynes photographed many productions of Beckett's work. An Post, the Irish postal service, issued a commemorative stamp of Beckett in 1994. The Central Bank of Ireland launched two Samuel Beckett Centenary commemorative coins on April 26, 2006: €10 Silver Coin and €20 Gold Coin.

On 10 December 2009, the new bridge across the River Liffey in Dublin was opened and named the Samuel Beckett Bridge in his honor. Reminiscent of a harp on its side, it was designed by the celebrated Spanish architect, Santiago Calatrava, who had also designed the James Joyce Bridge further upstream opened on Bloomsday (16 June) 2003. Attendees at the official opening ceremony included Beckett's niece Caroline Murphy, his nephew Edward Beckett, poet Seamus Heaney and Barry McGovern. The newest ship of the Irish Naval Service, is named for Beckett. An Ulster History Circle blue plaque in his memory is located at Portora Royal School, Enniskillen, County Fermanagh.

Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival is an annual multi-arts festival celebrating the work and influence of Beckett. The festival, founded in 2011, is held at Enniskillen, Northern Ireland where Beckett spent his formative years studying at Portora Royal School

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ON THIS DAY IN IRISH HISTORY -AUGUST

1st

- 1906 - The Catholic hierarchy rule out mixed education at Trinity College, Dublin.
- 1915 - Funeral of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, at which Patrick Pearse gives an oration.
- 1969 - A huge rally outside the GPO in Dublin protests events in Northern Ireland.
- 1980 - Eighteen people die in the Buttevant Rail Disaster.

3rd

- 1916 - Roger Casement hanged for treason.

5th

- 1969 - Severe sectarian rioting in Belfast.

7th

- 1957 - A war memorial in Limerick is blown up.
- 1986 - Peter Robinson, deputy leader of the DUP, is arrested for illegal assembly after a Loyalist mob takes over a village in County Monaghan.

8th

- 1980 - Ten people die in a hotel fire at Bundoran.

9th

- 1971 - Internment without trial is introduced in Northern Ireland.

11th

- 1927 - Fianna Fáil TDs join the Dáil for the first time.
- 1950 - At a meeting of the European Consultative Assembly in Strasbourg, Irish representatives vote against the European army proposed by Winston Churchill.

12th

- 1898 - James Connolly publishes the first copy of the Workers' Republic newsletter.
- 1946 - A plane carrying 23 French Girl Guides crashes in the Wicklow Mountains.

13th

- 1931 - Business resumes in the Four Courts following damage caused in the Civil War.
- 1969 - The Taoiseach Jack Lynch says on television that Ireland 'can no longer stand by' given the situation in Northern Ireland.
- 1995 - Gerry Adams tells a rally in Belfast that the IRA 'haven't gone away'.

14th

- 1903 - Wyndham Land Act passed, offering incentives to landlord to sell their estates.

15th

- 1838 - Government introduces relief work and a reduction in tithes for the poor.
- 1843 - Repeal meeting at Tara.
- 1969 - A night of violence and arson in Belfast. Sinn Féin calls for UN intervention and the boycott of British goods.
- 1998 - Real IRA bomb at Omagh kills 29 people.

16th

- 1879 - Land League of Mayo founded at Castlebar.
- 1969 - British soldiers are deployed in Belfast.
- 1982 - The Attorney General Patrick Connolly resigns after a wanted killer is found at his house.

17th

1922 - Dublin Castle is formally handed over to the IRA by the British.

1969 - Northern Ireland protesters clash with the Garda Síochána in Dublin.

18th

1911 - The British House of Lords loses its veto power beyond two years, making Home Rule possible.

19th

1989 - 10,000 people march in Dublin calling for Britain's withdrawal from Northern Ireland.

20th

1888 - Christian Brothers College founded in Cork.

21st

1962 - Former US President Eisenhower arrives in Belfast.

1970 - The Social Democratic and Labour Party is founded in Northern Ireland.

22nd

1922 - Michael Collins is killed in an ambush at Béal na Bláth.

23rd

1921 - Stormont Castle agreed as the Parliament building for Northern Ireland.

27th

1928 - Ireland becomes a signatory of the Kellogg Peace Pact.

1969 - The B-Specials begin to hand over their guns. British Home Secretary James Callaghan visits Belfast.

1979 - The IRA kill Lord Mountbatten, his grandson and the grandson's friend; on the same day, an IRA ambush at Warrenpoint kills 18 British soldiers.

28th

1835 - St. Vincent's Ecclesiastical Seminary opened at Castleknock.

1930 - Rembrandt painting found in an Irish cottage is authenticated.

31st

1994 - IRA announces a ceasefire.

AUGUST IRISH TRIVIA

In 1951 which film was shot on location in Cong, County Mayo and directed by John Ford?	The Quiet Man
Is a bodhran a drum or a fiddle?	Drum
Armagh 'The Orchard County', is known for which fruit?	Apple
What does GAA stand for?	Gaelic Athletic Association
Which actress played the part of Mary Kate Danaher in "The Quiet Man"?	Maureen O' Hara
By what other name is the Liffey Bridge in Dublin known as?	Ha'penny Bridge
What lies on top of an Irish Coffee?	Cream
"Dancing at Lughnasa" was written by which Irish playwright?	Brian Friel
What traditional instrument does Sharon Corr (of The Corrs) play?	Fiddle
In the legend of the Fianna, what was the Land of Eternal Youth?	Tír Na Nóg
Between 1849 and 1920, which port in County Cork was known as Queenstown?	Cobh
What did Lir turn his wife Aoife into after he discovered what she had done to his children?	A Vulture
Which bird is said to be "king of the birds"?	The wren
What are the Twelve Bens?	Mountains
In 1986 which Bob received an honorary knighthood after founding Band Aid?	Geldof
Which Irish city is also known as "the city of the tribes"?	Galway
Which island off Cork has an observatory of migratory birds?	Clear Island
In which city is the Irish soap "Fair City" set?	Dublin
Where in the Shannon estuary were transatlantic crossings initially made?	Foynes
In which town in Co. Roscommon is the Irish Famine Museum?	Strokestown
What is the name of the fictional town in Donegal where most of Brian Friel's plays are set?	Ballybeg
In which museum is the Tara Brooch?	National History Museum, Dublin
Which is the most famous title at the Tralee festival?	The Rose of Tralee
Who duetted with Westlife on Against All Odds?	Mariah Carey