This splendidly edited volume brings to a close the intrepid editorial project that began with the publication of James Knowlson's volume on Happy Days in 1985. Like other volumes in the series, it comprises facsimiles, accompanied by virtually infallible transcriptions, of the notebooks that Beckett kept while directing his plays, in this case, a number of his "shorter" plays, including Play, Come and Go, Eh Joe, Footfalls, That Time, What Where, and Not I. In addition, it provides revised texts for Come and Go, Footfalls, and What Where. This volume will be welcomed by students of Beckett's theater as an indispensable resource for two related reasons: first, it meticulously documents the textual changes as well as the details of staging that Beckett introduced into productions of his plays; second, Gontarski, in textual notes that convey his long and deeply pondered involvement with these notebooks, unfailingly provides the reader with valuable enlightenment as to the underlying spirit that informed Beckett's directorial choices.

In his "General Editor's Note" to this volume, James Knowlson implicitly defends the publishing of Beckett's notebooks against the charge that they are likely to establish a single, authoritative standard for future productions of his plays. Knowlson's disavowal of any such ambition has behind it the authority of Beckett's own recognition that his directorial choices were influenced by the specific circumstances of a particular production and that each future production of a play "would have a different 'music' from his own" (vii). In keeping with the spirit of Beckett's remark, the modest ambition of this series is to prepare the way for "not dead museum pieces at all but living creatures" (viii).

At the same time, however, as the notebooks themselves amply attest, Beckett's productions did not simply amount to one possible interpretation among a host of others. Rather, Beckett crafted for each of his productions a visual, scenic language, quite autonomous from the words of the play, and whose presence is not necessarily self-evident to a director who has based his own production exclusively on the published text of the work. Beckett did not simply interpret his plays in the sense of elucidating the meanings implied by their verbal language. Rather, he created rhythmical, visual patterns that displaced attention away from dialogue and dramatic action as Illustration opposite: Figure 3, entitled "Imago," of Dellas Henke's illustrations for Company.
well as from the presumed meanings that they were intended to convey. Oftentimes, these patterns served to provide the audience with precisely that experience of wholeness and completion that is otherwise absent from plays whose dramatic action is notoriously truncated.

Gontarski alludes to the crucial importance of these patterns in his comment that "[o]n the page, without the full visual counterpart, the [late] works are denuded, skeletal, finally unreadable" (xv-xvi). He also remarks pertinently that Beckett's approach to directing amounted to an assault on theater—a "de-theatricalization" (xxiii). He usefully illustrates this reconceptualization of dramatic performance by mentioning George Devine's remark, in his theatrical notes for Play, that Beckett suggested he rehearse his actors separately, "to get the idea of cues from the light and not from each other" (xviii). The clear intent of this recommendation was Beckett's desire to create a pattern of relationships that would be independent of the love triangle formed by his three characters. In this respect, three is not only the minimal number required for the adulterous relationship whose recounting constitutes the verbal text of the play; it is also the number that Beckett needed in order to enact the complex pattern of interrogations—and the associated alternations of light and darkness—that produce the visual image that accompanies the narrative part of the play.

The "obsession with structure" (xxv) that Gontarski attributes, in particular, to Beckett's notebooks for Play creates an abstract pattern that challenges the traditional prestige of dramatic action as the fundamental structuring feature of a play. This underlying intent of Beckett's directorial practice may likewise be noted in his creation, preparatory to rehearsals, of what he called a "continuity version" of Play. This was a script that grouped together all of the speeches spoken by a particular character as though they were being spoken continuously rather than in alternation with the speeches of other characters. In this version, the first woman's twenty-five speeches are followed by the second woman's twenty-five speeches that are, in turn, followed by the man's thirty-one speeches. Having assembled his "continuity version," Beckett then underlined the formal symmetry that these groupings constituted by indicating that each was organized according to a tripartite structure: beginning with a series of speeches having to do with each character's present condition, followed by a middle phase that recounted imagined reunions involving the other two characters, and completed by a final phase in which each character
returned to an account of his or her present circumstances.

While Beckett's approach to directing is highly original, the experiential core of his plays is as old as western drama itself. The question in which classical tragedy originates—as to how a human community may obtain relief from its suffering—recurs repeatedly throughout Play. As James Knowlson has pointed out, in Frescoes of the Skull, each of the three characters invests hope for relief from his or her personal suffering in a specific stratagem: "W2 hopes that madness might provide her own form of release from torment, M seeks darkness and peace, and W1, more desperately, tries to discover what must be done or said to rid herself of the light" (117). The repertoire of strategies to which Beckett alludes in Play echoes the available ritual solutions to the problem of suffering that are enumerated by the chorus at the beginning of Aeschylus's Oresteia:

\[
\text{And now it goes as it goes} \\
\text{and where it ends is Fate.} \\
\text{And neither by singeing flesh} \\
\text{nor tipping cups of wine} \\
\text{nor shedding burning tears can you} \\
\text{enchant away the rigid Fury. (106; emphasis added)}
\]

The plays themselves will enact a sequence of ritual murders, each of which will, in its turn, likewise fail to "enchant away the rigid Fury." Finally, Athene will bestow the longed-for relief from violence and suffering through an act of judicial legerdemain that makes a divine, and, hence, unimpeachable claim to finality.

Beckett revisits the problem of suffering and the quest for a cure with which Aeschylus had inaugurated Western theater, but without the prospect of making a plausible appeal to divine intervention. James Knowlson alludes to the alternative solution devised by Beckett when, having enumerated the characteristic hopes of each of the three characters, he then remarks: "But more important than this is the fact that, rather like a fragmented musical round song, with each voice starting at a different point on the score, the three sets of statements follow the same basic pattern" (117). The priority of pattern over the thematics of suffering and release implied by this observation points to the aesthetic means—based upon principles of musical composition—that Beckett used to produce an order
whose arrival had traditionally been entrusted to a dramatic action that evolved under divine supervision. The tripartite division of each character's monologue to which Beckett had called attention in his "continuity version" of the text, along with the rhythmical patterns created by the interplay of light and voices, creates an aesthetically satisfying design that brings some relief to the audience, if not to the characters. In response to a question that he addresses to himself in his notebook, Beckett indicates that the play itself finally comes to an end, not through divine intervention, but as the result of a desacralized authorial decision. As Gontarski speculates in his note on this detail, "[t]he question here seems to be Beckett's justification to himself for why the cycles of Play end at all: the Author decides to go no further or the Interrogator decides to grant mercy, that is, darkness and silence" (194, n. 30).

The creation of formal visual patterns that guided Beckett in his directing was, as Gontarski points out in his textual notes, also at work in his revisions of Emil and Erika Tophaven's German translation of the play. As Gontarski observes, Beckett made changes that, without altering the literal meaning of speeches, created echoing patterns that contributed to their abstract formal structure. Thus a change from "mal" to "einmal" at one point prepares for the appearance of the same word much later in the play. Such details also call attention to the care that Beckett devoted even to details of patterning that would very likely be perceptible only to the most attentive of listeners, if at all.

Beckett's foregrounding of patterns that are distinct from dramatic action is likewise observable in Come and Go, a play whose opening chorus alludes to the chorus of witches at the beginning of Macbeth but whose unfolding subverts the classical tragic motif whereby an individual becomes isolated from his community by reason of some distinguishing trait. Beckett disassembles the traditional action of a tragic play by twice repeating the "discovery" scene so that Vi's enigmatic affliction, which had at first appeared to be a distinguishing and, thus, an isolating characteristic, proves, in fact, to be equally shared by all three of the women.

Beckett further subverts the distinguishing process upon which tragic action depends through certain details of costuming—what Gontarski calls "cross-dressing" (236)—as well as of movement and gesture that effectively dissolve any significant visual clues as to signifying distinctions among
the women. Classical tragedy began with the separation of one actor—who then became the object of a sacrificial ritual—from the larger community formed by the chorus. *Come and Go*—by creating the image of a community in which the process of making exclusionary distinctions is rendered inoperative—thus implies the destructuring of this process as well as of the sacrificial ideology that had given it legitimacy. As in *Play*, Beckett's "obsession with structure" will provide, in the form of highly stylized movement, the restoration of order that had been traditionally achieved through ritualized action.

The shift from a traditional theater—in which the relief sought by characters arrives via a dramatic action that magically expels the source of their torment—to a theater in which this ritual action has been replaced by ritualized movement was already observable in Beckett's 1975 production of *Waiting for Godot* at the Schiller Theater in Berlin. The relief that Godot failed to provide was amply bestowed by Beckett himself through the "form in movement" (his own phrase) that he created throughout this production. Vladimir and Estragon, to the extent that they pin their hopes on the arrival of Godot,—himself the latest incarnation of the "deus ex machina" that presided over the beginnings of western theater—are left as lost and frustrated as they were at the play's beginning. The spectators to Beckett's production, however, to the extent that they responded to his shift of attention away from action and toward movement, were provided with a kind of catharsis that did not require resort to the perennial expedients of divine intervention and/or expulsion of a sacrificial victim.

Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* established with greater clarity than any other classical tragedy the privileged role of the dramatic action as the means whereby the human longing for a magical solution to the problem of suffering could be satisfied. Responsibility for the plague that afflicts the city of Thebes is conveniently attributed to a solitary criminal, whose punishment will lead to its being ended. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle, by choosing "catharsis"—with its overtones of purgation through expulsion—as the term best describing the experience produced by the dénouement of a tragedy, conferred philosophic sanction upon that sacrificial mode of resolution from which tragedy would henceforth draw its ritual inspiration.

Beckett's staging of his own plays underlines their radical departure from this practice of depending upon a cathartic solution to the problem of
disorder and suffering. Order, in a Beckett play, is not brought into being thanks to the operation of a sacrificial dramatic action. On the contrary, the blatant absence of action—and the corresponding irritation that it risks arousing in the audience—is precisely the cost of Beckett’s revolutionary refusal to submit to the inherited requirements of his genre. Future directors of his plays will be profoundly indebted to the painstaking work of gifted and devoted Beckett specialists that now reaches its terminal phase in this fourth volume of his theatrical notebooks. Thanks to this labor of preservation, they will have before them a model for the staging of the “living creature” of which James Knowlson had spoken. This will take the form of a play that proposes an aesthetic resolution to the human longing for order, which had traditionally been satisfied by resort to sacrificial rituals that were predictably, and all-too-conveniently, commanded by the gods.

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Works Cited
