

‘Sterilization of the mind and apotheosis of the litter’: Beckett, Sexuality, and the “Ordinary Reader”

Commissioned in 1934 by the soon to be defunct *Bookman* and first published 1983, ‘Censorship in the Saorstát’ has received relatively scant attention from Beckett scholars, who have tended to treat the article as a convenient shorthand for the author’s commitment to free-expression. Taking its cue from Beckett’s abiding concern with the overlooked and the excluded, this paper aims to restore Beckett’s *disiectum membrum* to its intended role as a publisher’s guide to the logic and inner-workings of the 1929 Irish Censorship of Publications Act. In doing so it will offer an account of the ways in which regimes of state censorship use the legal fiction of the “ordinary reader” to enforce idealized models of citizenship on the populations they purport to serve. Through a close analysis of Beckett’s scathing polemic and the Act it was written to critique, this paper will highlight the role of the “ordinary reader” in the Irish Free State’s coercive agenda of reproductive nationalism. It will likewise chart the rhetorical strategies through which Beckett sought to resist the models of readership and citizenship prescribed by the Act, the most striking of which is his somaticisation of the process of reading itself. This paper claims that by establishing a firm lexical relationship between bodies and books in his close-reading of the Censorship Act, Beckett sought to emphasise to his readers the very tangible limitations upon their physical freedom that would be exerted by the Act’s apparently intellectual restriction of the act of reading. Finally, it will trace the lasting influence that Beckett’s attempt to explode the category of the “ordinary reader” was to exert upon his aesthetic development following his departure from Ireland in 1937, an influence perhaps best exemplified by the coprophilic acts of narratorial *écriture* dramatised in 1946’s *Premier Amour*.