
Andrew J. Kettler
University of California, Los Angeles, andrew.kettler@utoronto.ca

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Abstract

Keywords

In order to comprehend Arka Chattopadhyay’s *Beckett, Lacan and the Mathematical Writing of the Real* the reader must have an intense knowledge of mathematical subversions within literary modernism. As well, they must have read nearly the entire canon of Samuel Beckett, with an emphasis on his later works though with full knowledge of his psychological and emotional origins as a writer. The reader also must have nearly complete understanding of the seminars of Jacques Lacan. The scholar who attempts this work must know the meanings (or beyond meanings) of lalangue, sinthome, the mirror phase, the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary with an understanding of both the roots of those terms within psychoanalysis and how those expressions work within the study of literary criticism. In general, these terms can only be defined (or are established as unable to define) within the realm of Lacanian criticism, as their denotations are often vague and reliant upon earlier understandings gained from reading through the sequence of Lacan’s seminars and published works.

Not only must the reader have full and complete knowledge of these fields to be able to read the terminology of this work with any goals of applicability for their own studies, they must also understand combinatorics to such an extent as to comprehend the Borromean Knot within different mathematical, historical, and linguistic fields. Now, if the reader has these broad and intensive interdisciplinary tools, this is an attractive and important work in the field of Beckett studies. If the scholar does not have these skills, this book is probably one to forego, even with the broadly applicable assertion that mathematical questions of the psyche can be approached through literary analysis.

There are certainly fresh ways of thinking that emerge from reading Chattopadhyay, although it is generally difficult to tell if those new methods of understanding are what the author intended. Within the introduction, the audience is placed in *media res* within a debate on signification and meaning that ranges from recent works of Alain Badiou and Baylee Brits back to the writings of Parmenides and Aristotle. The outlines of Beckett studies within this introductory chapter place *Beckett, Lacan and the Mathematical Writing of the Real* as the first monograph to offer an intellectual bridge between the understanding of late Lacan and the writings of late Beckett using the corporeal definitions of the Real expressed through mathematical and geometric terminologies and an understanding of the aporetic logic of modernism through a reading of the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary that highlight the importance of the inherently unspeakable. The work consequently engages with scholars working within fields of embodied mathematics, specifically through focusing on how the modernism of Beckett
implied challenging the limits of language to imply meaning through foregrounding
the “human dimension of the mathematical in the literary” (9).

The next section, the finest of the work, focuses on Beckett’s *Comment c’est* (How It Is, 1961) to look at a torturing world of solitude made into company as a
reading of the mathematical and corporeal aspects of the Real related to inscriptions
upon the body and the signifying cut of language as an initiator of the Real existing
between and as subversion of both the Symbolic and the Imaginary. The third
chapter continues to look at mathematical aspects of the meanings of the one, the
Other, motility, and the many in *Company* (1979). This reading focuses on
Beckett’s use of diacritical marks to highlight relationships between the
unspeakable and unconscious mathematical aspects of the Real and the Symbolic
signification of numbers.

In the fourth chapter, Chattopadhyay explores *Worstward Ho* (1983)
through a reading of how Beckett examines signification through an application of
the corporeal and libidinal aspects of lalangue. Through analyzing attempts to
remove the Symbolic from language, or worsening language into lalangue, Beckett
is offered here as a modernist who debated whether the Real consists of an endless
ending of an infinite series of incomprehensibility or has limits. The final chapter
takes a broader look at Beckett’s later canon through his shorter works to search
the possibilities of sexual rapport between mathematized bodies through the Real.
A short conclusion wavers between mathematical and literary language in what
seems to be an attempt to reiterate a thesis regarding how Beckett’s works
consistently entomb the Real through an endlessly ending mathematical series
striving to be apart from the Symbolic.

Essentially, the argument of *Beckett, Lacan and the Mathematical Writing
of the Real* is that “The materiality of Beckettian textuality speaks to Lacan’s late
insistence on the mathematical aspects of the signifier” (10). However, there is no
simple conclusion to be made regarding why that communication between
Beckettian textuality and Lacanian insistence of the mathematical matters. If it is
purely an academic exercise that pulls two writers together, there is some applause
that can be provided to Chattopadhyay’s ambition and personal grasp of the
evidence at hand. However, the attempt seems something much greater and
frustratingly inconclusive.

This work is not solely an exercise for Chattopadhyay. The author is
consciously attempting to explain something deep within the human psyche that
exists in the later literature of Beckett. To do this, Chattopadhyay studies the
influence of mathematics within the endpoints of Beckett’s writing and Lacan’s
psychoanalytics, and attempts a perplexing knotting. For a work that aims to
describe a puzzling connection between the philosophies of two complex writers,
the conclusions of *Beckett, Lacan and the Mathematical Writing of the Real* lack
clarity, and it does not seem that the convolution in the work was meant to implicitly
teach the reader about the meanings of complexity or that the human psyche is an endless void that can never be captured.

Rather, there seems to be an attempt to argue that there are some logical and mathematical aspects of the unconscious, a “mathematical humanity,” that can be found through linking analyses of literature and psychoanalysis, as consistently cyclically and self-reinforcing fields of inscription, which can then crosspollinate to form common understandings of human universals (192-193). If this is the conclusion to be taken, that is a seemingly interesting analysis of misconceptions about the place of the mathematical unconscious within psychoanalytical discussions of what can be deemed “human.” But it is never quite understood that this conclusion is what Chattopadhyay wants the reader to gather, as contradictions abound as to whether this type of mathematical formalizing in literature and psychoanalysis can ever provide the scholar a better grasp of the endlessly ending void.

Andrew Kettler

University of California, Los Angeles