A. J. LEVENTHAL

1896—1979

Dublin scholar, wit
and man of letters

Edited by
Eoin O’Brien

Published by
THE CON LEVENTHAL SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE
THE DR. A.J. (CON) LEVENTHAL SCHOLARSHIP

Con Leventhal died in Paris in 1979. Two years later a group of his friends came together in Dublin to consider how best to commemorate his erudition, charm and literary influence. It was resolved to establish a scholarship that would enable a graduate student in English or Modern Languages of Trinity College, Dublin to study in Europe. Con’s friends and literary associates, and academic institutes at home and abroad contributed generously to the scholarship fund and to the scholarship auction in the Samuel Beckett Rooms in Trinity College on March 15th, 1984. The first scholarship will be awarded in the academic year 1984-5.

THE SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE

Secretary: Dr. Eoin O'Brien  Treasurer: Prof. Barbara Wright
9, Clifton Terrace,  Dean of the Faculty of
Monkstown,  Arts (Letters)
Co. Dublin.  Trinity College
Dublin.

Jacob Weingreen  Gerald Davis
Samuel Beckett  John Jay
Niall Sheridan  Bernard Moss
Niall Montgomery  K.W.J. Adams
Anne Woolfson  Desirée Hayter
Marion Leigh  Anne Madden
Thomas N.F. Murtagh  Marcella Senior
Colin Simon  Brian Coyle
Francis Barry  Hassia Jameson
Harden Jay  Martha Fehsenfeld

THE A.J. LEVENTHAL SCHOLARSHIP
AUCTION
will be held
in
THE SAMUEL BECKETT ROOMS
TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
on Thursday 15th March 1984
at 8.15 p.m.
On view Wednesday and Thursday, 14th and 15th
12 midday to 6 p.m.
(Catalogue p. 32)
Con Leventhal was born in Dublin in 1896, and educated at Wesley College. His childhood experiences in Catholic Dublin are recounted with humour and poignancy in "What it means to be a Jew". His undergraduate studies at Trinity College were interrupted when he joined the first Zionist Commission immediately after the first World War and spent a year in Palestine where he helped to found the Palestine Weekly. He was invited to join the London office of the Jewish National Fund where he became associated with the Zionist Review.

Returning to Dublin to take up his academic studies, he recognised immediately the remarkable talent of his fellow-Dubliner James Joyce, of whose work he remarked "the riches are embarrassing". Leventhal submitted a review of *Ulysses* to the *Dublin Magazine* (this was to mark the beginning of a literary association and deep personal friendship with its editor Seumas O'Sullivan that was to last until O'Sullivan died and with him his famous magazine in 1958), but as he corrected the galley sheets word came that the printers in Dollards would down tools rather than have part in the publication of the blasphemous writings of Joyce. In anger Leventhal wrote — "A censoring God came out of the machine to allay the hell-fire fears of the compositors sodality." Determined that his review would appear in print, he produced a delightful magazine, *The Klaxon*, which introduced itself in strident tones —

"We are the offspring of a gin and vermouth in a local public-house. We swore that we were young and could assert our youth with all its follies. We railed against the psychopedantic parlours of our elders and their maidenly consorts, hoping the while with an excess of Picabia and banter, a whiff of Dadaist Europe to kick Ireland into artistic wakefulness".

*The Klaxon*, lasting for only one issue, was not permitted to achieve its nobly stated ambition, but it did at least publish a truncated version of Leventhal's article on *Ulysses*.

"In truth, there is no real parallel to Mr. Joyce in literature. He has that touch of individuality that puts genius on a peak. Rabelaisian, he hasn't the *joie de vivre* of the French priest; Sterneque, he is devoid of the personal touch of the Irish clergyman. Trained by the Jesuits, he can't guffaw like Balzac when he tells a good story. He is a scientist in his detachedness, but *Ulysses* is nevertheless, a human book filled with pity as with sexual instinct, and the latter in no greater proportion in the book than other fundamental human attributes."
The Writings of A.J. Leventhal

After the demise of *The Klaxon* Leventhal became involved with another magazine *Tomorrow*, which was to fare only slightly better than its predecessor in that it lasted for two issues, each of which had to be printed overseas to escape the moral rectitude of the Irish typesetters. It provided Yeats, Stuart, Lennox Robinson and Leventhal, among others, with a platform from which they voiced with an iconoclastic honesty their stifled sentiments on art—

"We proclaim that we can forgive the sinner, but abhor the atheist, and that we count among atheists bad writers and Bishops of all denominations".

Completion of a doctoral thesis was the signal for Leventhal's return to the academic world, and when Samuel Beckett resigned his lectureship in French literature at Trinity College, Leventhal was appointed to succeed him. The two became close friends, and of Beckett's many critics Leventhal is unique in his empathy with Beckett, a quality that gives to his comments on his friend's work an immense value. Leventhal saw in Beckett a genius even greater than that which had attracted him to Joyce—

"Beckett is in a sense a more intellectual writer than Joyce and his jousting with words has a background of erudition deeper, one suspects, than that of the master—the cher maître of the avant garde of the twenties and thirties in Montparnasse".

It was Beckett's universality that elevated him, in Leventhal's view, above the mightiness of Joyce. Beckett was for all men of all time, even if "Mr. Beckett's work is not for the many", whereas Joyce demanded for full appreciation certain preconditions—"To appreciate Joyce fully one had not only to be a Catholic but have a Dublin background in addition..." Beckett's refusal to conform, his desire and ability to lift literature from the abyss of convention, his audacity and courage in daring to go further than Joyce, all appealed to Leventhal—"It may well be" he wrote of *Fin de Partie* in 1957 "that there is still a public that believes the age of experimentation is not over, that profundity however painful, is still preferable to vapid iterations of tried and tiring formulae". Above all it was his friend's ability to establish landmarks in literature that most fascinated him—"En attendant Godot belongs to no school, it will make one"—he wrote in 1954.

Leventhal’s contributions to magazines and newspapers are many and varied. He was for most of his life closely associated with influential periodicals. At Trinity he was Assistant Editor of the University Magazine, *Hermathena*. He was also a regular broadcaster from Radio Eireann and the B.B.C.

The influence of Judaism in life and art is a recurring theme in many of Leventhal’s articles and in his poetry. His appreciation of lesser known writers such as Amy Levy and Hannah Berman was a characteristic of his literary awareness.

Con was probably happiest in the theatre. Here the expressionism of
literature could be projected in innovative form. For fifteen years he contributed quarterly a "Dramatic Commentary" to the *Dublin Magazine*, and he has left a remarkable diary of Dublin theatre through the forties and fifties. He tried and enjoyed acting.

After his retirement from Trinity College, he lived in Paris where he continued to contribute to Irish newspapers, to the *International Herald Tribune* and to *The Financial Times*.

This bibliography is not complete. Many of Con's translations and some of his published poetry may, I suspect, have been omitted. Others will, I hope, undertake the task of assessing more fully not only the writings of A.J. Leventhal, but also the relevance of his influence on his contemporaries.
The Writings of A.J. Leventhal

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. ARTICLES AND CRITICISM (1922-1978)

Dramatic Commentary

A.J. Leventhal wrote the first of the series entitled *Dramatic Commentary* in the October-December issue of the *Dublin Magazine* in 1943. The strident tones, the felicitous style, and discerning criticism that were to characterise this unique diary of Dublin theatre during its fifteen years existence are evident in the opening lines of that first contribution in the forties:

"At its inception the Abbey Theatre incurred abuse to be followed by universal approval with a consequent acceptance at home like the prophet approved by proverb who only receives posthumous canonisation in his native town. Recognised in the first instance by the discerning few for the right reasons, praised by the equally discerning few in foreign parts, the latter brought their compatriots round to appreciation of a dramatic mode which despite a regional language and local *dramatis personae*, succeeded in crawling out of its provincial rompers to an adult metropolitan influence."

Leventhal's appreciation of theatre and the literature emanating from it, his affection for Irish theatre and his empathy with actors and actresses (he was himself an accomplished performer) give to his criticism a warmth and feeling that is at the same time devoid of parochial sentiment. These qualities together with his familiarity with European theatre, and the catholicity of Leventhal's interests make the *Dramatic Commentaries* a valuable legacy in theatrical criticism.

The last contribution to the series was in the April-June issue of the
The Writings of A. J. Leventhal

Dublin Magazine of 1958 which also bears a poignant farewell tribute to the editor Seumas O'Sullivan:

“As this Magazine goes to press we regret to have to announce the death of its founder and Editor, James Sullivan Starkey, otherwise Seumas O'Sullivan, the name by which he is known in the world of letters. From the first number of the Dublin Magazine in 1923 up to the present issue there is continuous evidence of the product of a mind with one standard — the highest. The list of contributors' names to be found elsewhere in this number, bears witness to Seumas O'Sullivan's catholicity of taste in poetry and prose. Many of these writers found their first platform in this Magazine. While Ireland's greatest writers shine magnificently in its files, there is no narrow nationalism. O'Sullivan could find room for English, French and American contributors if they fitted into his scheme of things. And through the annals of this journal there emerges the individuality of the Editor, stamping it with his brave decisions as much avant garde as traditional. Much will yet be written about Seumas O'Sullivan as poet, essayist and editor, much about the man himself but there is little need to address the readers of this Magazine in this respect.

The future of this journal, now that its great artificer is gone, is uncertain. One would have liked at least one more issue in which writers could pay homage to this unique figure in the literary world. But many material and other considerations must be counted before a decision can be reached.

A.J.L.”

In the following listing of the Dramatic Commentary the year and volume number of the Dublin Magazine are given at the head of the series for that year, and the issue number and page numbers follow each contribution.

II. DRAMATIC COMMENTARY
The Dublin Magazine
1943-1958

1943. VOLUME 18
1. Dramatic Commentary. No. 4. pp. 52-55.

1944. VOLUME 19
Le Gendre de M. Poirier. By Emile Augier. Théâtre Molière de Londres.
The Son of Learning. By Austin Clarke. Lyric Theatre Company.
8. The Lady from the Sea. By Henrik Ibsen. Dublin Gate Theatre.
Marks and Mabel. By Brinsley MacNamara. Abbey Theatre.
The Last of Summer. By Kate O’Brien and John Barry. Gaiety Theatre.

The Dandy Dolls. By George Fitzmaurice. Lyric Theatre Co.
The Death of Cuchulain. By W.B. Yeats. Lyric Theatre Co.

The Man Who Came to Dinner. By Kaufman and Hart. Dublin Gate Theatre.
The Old Man of the Mountains. By Norman Nicholson. Faber & Faber. 6s. net.
This Way to the Tomb. By Ronald Duncan. Faber & Faber. 6s. net. No. 2, pp. 47-50.
Oak Leaves and Lavender. By Sean O’Casey. Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 6s. net.
The Shadow Factory. By Anne Ridler. Faber & Faber Ltd., 6s. net.
Happy as Larry. By Donagh MacDonagh. Dublin: Maurice Fridberg. 6/- net.
Theatre Newsletter. Nos. 1 & 2. London: 20 Buckingham Street, W.C.2. 10/- per annum. No. 4, pp. 42-44.

The Flame. By Austin Clarke. Lyric Theatre Company.
The Writings of A. J. Leventhal

The Firstborn. By Christopher Fry. Cambridge University Press. 6/- net.

Happy as Larry. By Donagh MacDonagh. Lyric Theatre Company.


1948. VOLUME 23

Volpone, or The Fox. By Ben Jonson. Gate Theatre.
Arnalet of Jade. By the Earl of Longford. Gate Theatre.


Tankardstown, or A Lot to be Thankful For. By Christine Longford. Gate Theatre. No. 4. pp. 48-51.

1949. VOLUME 24

The King of Friday's Men. By M.J. Molloy. Abbey Theatre.
As the Crow Flies. By Austin Clarke. Lyric Theatre Company.
Bluebeard, by Mary Davenport O'Neill. Lyric Theatre Company.


The School for Wives. By Moliere. Translated by the Earl of Longford. Hodges, Figgis & Co. Ltd. 6/-.

[26]

1950. VOLUME 25


1952. VOLUME 27


The Writings of A.J. Leventhal

Venus Observed. By Christopher Fry. Gate Theatre.
The Dragon. By Lady Gregory. Bernardette Hall.

36. Home is the Hero. By Walter Macken. Abbey Theatre playing at the Queen's Theatre.

1953. VOLUME 28


Ring Round the Moon. By Jean Anouilh. Translated by Christopher Fry. Gate Theatre.
The Wood of the Whispering. By Michael J. Molloy. Abbey Theatre playing at the Queen's Theatre.


39. This Other Eden. By Louis D'Alton. Abbey Theatre playing at the Queen's Theatre.
Aisling. By Maurice Meldon. 37 Theatre Club.


1954. VOLUME 30

41. The Hill of Quirke. By Christine Longford. Gate Theatre.

The Follies of Herbert Lane. The Pike Theatre Club.


[29]
The Writings of A.J. Leventhal

1956. VOLUME 31


1957. VOLUME 32


Nekrassov. By Jean-Paul Sartre. Translated by Sylvia and George Leeson.
The Writings of A. J. Leventhal

Pike Theatre Productions playing at the Gate Theatre.
_The Little Hut._ By Andre Roussin. Adapted by Nancy Mitford. Pike Theatre Productions playing at the Gate Theatre.
54. _A Leap in the Dark._ By Hugh Leonard. Abbey Theatre playing at the Queen’s Theatre.
_Say it with Follies._ The Pike Theatre Club.
_The School for Scandal._ By Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Longford Productions, Gate Theatre.
55. _Dublin International Theatre Festival._ No. 3. pp. 52-54.
56. _All that Fall._ By Samuel Beckett. Faber & Faber. 5s.

_The Less We Are Together._ By John O’Donovan. Abbey Theatre playing at the Queen’s Theatre.
_Stealing The Picture._ By Joy Rudd and Carolyn Swift. Pike Theatre Club.

1958. VOLUME 33

_The Diary of Anne Frank._ Dramatised by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett. Gaiety Theatre.
_Exiles._ By James Joyce. Dublin University Players.
_The Moment Next to Nothing._ By Austin Clarke. Lyric Theatre Company.
_Romanoff and Juliet._ By Peter Ustinov. The Globe Theatre Company.