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## DOCTOR IN LITTERIS

### MARTHA DOW FEHSENFELD

Nihil nisi verba tenemus.

(Samuel Beckett)

Quodam die stupebat puella docta Americana, auditis histrionibus de illa vana expectatione sic fabulantibus: ‘Quodam die obmutuit ille, quodam caecatus ego, quodam surdescemus; quodam die nati sumus, quodam denique moriemur’. Illud ‘quodam die’ in pectore inhaesit. Quodam die, undeviginti annis praeteritis, fabulae illius auctor, Samuel poeta auratus, quaerenti forte eidem puellae num epistulas ullas servasset sibi missas a pictore illustri, fratre vatis Hibernici, nullas unquam servavisse comiter respondit et simulate (nam postea quinquaginta fere epistulas sponte produxit). Quodam die duos post annos mulierem doctam constat intente observasse quanta arte ille instrueret fabulam de crepitu pedum in ludo regio Londiniensi, cum repente ipse eam allocutus est familiari salutatione. Quodam die, decem fere post annis poetae denique placuit (mirabile auditu) non solum epistulas suas edere, sed etiam eas credere mulieri illi studiosissimae. Quam obstupuit femina docta! Quanta atque insperata sibi obvenissent intellegere non potuit. Verum novit poeta illustris, eius virtute diu confisus; novimus quoque nos, considerantes magnanimitatem qua Marta sapiens eiusque mentor Samuelis fato quodam providenti coniungebantur. Eximia enim utrique est scientia audiendi, vel potius dicam attente ac piissime exaudiendi, nulla superbia, nulla insolenti alacritate; tempus vero sentiunt quid sit et quam vario cursu fugiat omniaque secum rapiat, unde illud dictum ‘Haec omnia, quando haec omnia fuerint tantummodo lusus quidam?’ Nunc demum tempus est ad vos ducam MARTHAM DOW FEHSENFELD, peritam artis recensendi ac scribendi, ludis scaenicis versatam, ad finem praesidi quarto rei publicae Hiberniae, et praecipue Samuelis poetae sodalem fidelem. Studiis de arte scaenica, de litteris, de locutione feliciter excultis apud Universitates quasdam Americanas egregias, quodam die vocata est a genio suo ad scaenicam artem disciplinamque. Iam persona in tribus Samuelis fabulis scaenicis, quattuor observavit a viro ipso instructas, ipsa ludi extremi qui dicitur adiuvante. Fideliter cum describeret poetam choragum fieri fabularum suarum, sagaciter percipiebat quanto tumultu illius animus agigaretur, hinc acri dolore quasi patris a sua prole seiuncti, illinc optimae cuiusque artis mitissima observantia. Nunc venio ad maximum mulieris laborem et decorum, quo triginta fere annos Samuelis epistulas a quocumque, ut ipse mandaverat, undecumque terrarum indefessa petivit et rescripsit, perlegit et funditus perscrutata editit, ab illa prima Jacobo illi scriptori Dubliniensi usque ad postremam scriptam paulo ante diem funestum. Sedecim fere milia epistularum reperta produxit documenta hominis studii et constantiae, sive a rebus adversis animus in desperationem redactus esset, sive varia spe fluctuaret, sive viam temptaret qua verba quasi veste exuta denique exhiberent opertam magnitudinem vel, ut voluit, nihilitudinem rerum. Vitam ipsam poetae aperiunt epistulae, quas edendas iure optimo optimae huic mulieri ille commisit, ut olim suas Cicero facundus fido Tironi: ‘Mearum epistularum nulla est συναγωγή; sed habet Tiro instar septuaginta... eas ego oportet perspiciam, corrigam; tum denique edentur’. Tironiana quidem cura atque disciplina haec mulier epistulas Samuelis in libros quattuor spectatae fidei factos edidit, longo labore et sibi adhuc gratissimo. Ut laetatur mulier magnanima, sic placeat nobis quodam die, immo hodie, ei maxime gratulari.

## DOCTOR IN LETTERS

### MARTHA DOW FEHSENFELD

Words are all we have.

(Samuel Beckett)

One day. A young woman sat entranced by a theatrical performance, transfixed by a voice: ‘One day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we’ll go deaf, one day we were born and one day we shall die’ (*Waiting for Godot*, Act II). She would never forget those words, ‘one day’. Nineteen years later, now an expert researcher, she wrote to the playwright himself, daring to ask if he happened to have a letter from the artist Jack Yeats. ‘I don’t keep letters’, was the Nobel laureate poet’s reply (as it turned out, he kept over fifty of them). Two years on, that woman is at work, attentively observing the playwright’s direction of *Footfalls* at the Royal Court Theatre in London. All of a sudden, the man himself walks up to her seat, ‘I’m Sam Beckett,’ just like that. A decade goes by, and even more surprisingly, ‘I want to publish my letters’, he asked, ‘and I want you to edit them.’ Why? She asked herself. Beckett knew why: ‘I chose you because I trust you’. We know why: Fate sometimes brings kindred minds together. Martha and her Mentor recognised each other’s rare ability to listen, to pay attention, not to speak all the time; they both realised that one has to deal with different kinds of time: ‘All this, when will all this have been...just play?’ (S. Beckett, *Play*). That remarkable woman is before us today, MARTHA DOW FEHSENFELD, editor, author, actress, and trusted friend of Samuel Beckett. An American woman with an Irish family connection (her paternal aunt was married to President Erskine H. Childers), she perfected her studies in Drama and Comparative Literature at Chapel Hill, in Speech and Drama at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She performed in three of Beckett’s plays, she observed the playwright’s direction of four, she contributed to the production of *Endgame*; she co-authored *Beckett in the Theatre: The Author as Practical Playwright and Director*, which records the unique experience of perceiving both his soul’s painful conflict as he saw his work somehow separated from him, and his utmost respect for the creativity of actors and technicians alike. She has devoted over thirty years to find and edit Beckett’s letters, researching archives, but mostly ‘going around to see people’, as he had asked her to do. She travelled the world to retrieve, copy, research the context of each letter. He had given her fifty letters; she edited sixteen thousand, from the first one of 23 March 1929 (‘To Mr Joyce’) to the last one, dated 19 November 1989. The correspondence weaves a moving narrative of ambition and determination, failure and despair, doubts and hopes; it reveals the awareness that one’s work ‘asks to remain without ties’, and continually evolves; it documents the struggle to write, when language feels like ‘a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it’. And, of course, letters document *a life*. Beckett trusted this woman to handle the documents of his life exactly in the way that he wanted—just as the most eloquent letter-writer in antiquity had once entrusted them to his loyal assistant Tiro: ‘There is no collection of my letters, but Tiro has about seventy... I must examine and correct them. Then and only then will they be published’ (Cicero, *To Atticus* 16.5.5). This woman has produced four volumes of truly Tironian fidelity, published between 2009 and 2016. ‘It has been an incredible journey,’ she says, ‘it still is, and it goes on.’ One day, today, we will gratefully acclaim this woman’s splendid achievement.

DOCTOR IN UTROQUE JURE

WILLIAM ROBERTUS DUNCAN

‘**T**utela est vis ac potestas in capite libero ad tuendum eum, qui propter aetatem sua sponte se defendere nequit, iure civili data ac permissa’ (*Dig.* 26.1). Quae definitio, iusti sodales, vetusta, non vitiosa mihi videtur quaerenti unde tractum sit non solum ius patrium, sed etiam illud, ut ita dicam, puerile; nonne docet praehonorabilis Cancellaria nostra peritissima, iura pueris puellisque propria tribuisse primum maiores nostros sapientes, deinde doctores ecclesiae Christianae antiquissimae ac medievalis, postremo, nullo discrimine fidei, rectissimum quemque reformatorem patriae potestatis Romanae? Quid ergo est quod, saeculis innumeris intervenientibus, ea iura quae dixi puerilia nondum sint perfecta? Hic est tutor et vindex iustissimus, WILLIAM ROBERTUS DUNCAN, princeps iuris privati ad familiam pertinentis, idemque decus ac gloria Collegii nostri. Ornatus primo doctor in utroque iure ab Universitate Dubliniensi, professor deinde apud nos leges civiles et indagare et docere strenue solebat viginti per annos. Cum eximias eius virtutes Fama extolleret, aures acerrime intenderunt docti Concilii iustissimi quod (si licet nota narrare) apud Hagas Comitum diu patrocinator aequalitati legum civilium ubicumque iure constitutae sint, praesertim quae pertinent ad tutelam familiarum civiumque iuniorum. Nulla mora interposita virum nostrum magnanimum Concilium illud sibi adscivit, primum legatum Hiberniae, mox deinde sodalem, postremo consulem, ut ita dicam, qui inter alia munera praecipue nationibus consuleret de iuniorum tutela, cum extra fines liberi lege adoptati vel iniuria abducti essent. Eo enim duce instituta sunt iudicia recta atque expedita. An vobis parum de hominis virtute persuasi, quia minime iuris perita? Laudibus igitur credite, quaeso, quas nuper tribuerunt eius collegae peritissimi, cum gratias ei maximas publice agerent: hunc virum consecutum esse, paucis libentissime adiuvantibus, quod vix consequi posse videbatur. Nec patriam Hiberniam neglexit dum talia aguntur peregre, nam, ut decet civem fidelem ac piissimum, tunc Hibernicas leges reformandas curavit, nunc matres illas miserrimas earumque infantes strenue vindicavit. Proinde ne miremur si tam validus indagator, tam impavidus reformatore, tam strenuus fautor pacis ac concordiae iure visus est Praesidi rei publicae Hiberniae dignus qui praemium pro ingentibus erga patriam meritis acciperet, ut more nostro decorari solent cives optimi peregre degentes. Summa igitur laurea academica ornare laetamur tutorem probum puerorum puellarumque, cuius spectata rectitudine gloriamur sicut olim Cicero in prima Tusculana disputatione, quia ‘mores et instituta vitae resque domesticas ac familiares nos profecto et melius tuemur et lautius’; cuius virtus insignis sit nobis exemplo vivendi recte pieque, liberisque nostris spem augeat iustissimae securitatis.

Puer vero pater viri;  
utinam aetatis meae dies  
pietas iungat naturali.

W. Wordsworth, *Subsilit cor meum*

## DOCTOR IN LAWS

### WILLIAM ROBERT DUNCAN

‘Child protection is the power given and permitted by civil law to protect those who are too young to defend themselves’ (*Digest of Roman Law* 26.1). While not perfect, this pronouncement marks an important moment in the story of children’s rights. That story, our Chancellor reminds us, ‘owes much to the western philosophical tradition, to the teachings of the early and medieval Christian church and to interventions from a number of sources, Christian and non-Christian, which modified the *patria potestas* of ancient Rome’ (Mary McAleese, *Children’s Rights and Obligations in Canon Law*). Two thousand years later, that story still awaits its happy ending. We owe an exceptional advance to a man of perfect justice, WILLIAM ROBERT DUNCAN. A pioneer of international family law and reform, our distinguished guest started his mission within our very walls. Not long after being acclaimed Doctor in Laws by our University, he was appointed Professor of Law and Jurisprudence in our Law School, where he lectured in Family Law and Private International Law from 1967 to 1989. His inspiring research, vision and commitment did not go unnoticed. He was invited as expert delegate from Ireland to the prestigious Hague Conference, which since 1893 has aimed to create a unified system of private law, including, significantly, protection of the family and children. This generous man responded. He soon became a Member of the Permanent Bureau and, from the turn of the millennium, Deputy Secretary General of the Conference. Among other important roles, he was responsible for the Hague Children’s Convention, providing assistance worldwide on matters of child abduction, inter-country adoption and international child protection, and laying the foundation of fair, swift and effective cross-border procedures. Allow me to quote his colleagues’ words of appreciation: ‘He has accomplished an incredible job, assisted by his wonderful small team, which he inspired to do the near impossible.’ If he made The Hague his adopted home, he never forgot Ireland. His service to the country continued until recently, as Member of the Law Reform Commission in Ireland and as Commissioner of the Irish Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes. A tribute to his life-long contribution to academic research and law reform in Ireland came last November, with the Presidential Distinguished Service Award for the Irish Abroad in the category ‘Peace, Reconciliation, and Development’. Today we bestow our highest recognition on a resolute defender of children’s rights. We owe it to him if we can truthfully say, paraphrasing the old Roman authority (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.2), that ‘morality, rules of life, family and household economy are surely maintained by us in a better and more dignified way’ than ever before. We owe it to him if we can confidently hope for a future of true justice and compassion.

The Child is father of the Man;  
And I could wish my days to be  
Bound each to each by natural piety.

W. Wordsworth, *My Heart Leaps Up*