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RECEPTION OF SAMUEL BECKETT'S WORKS IN POLAND

TREATISE SUMMARY

This doctoral thesis consists of three parts: the first are its three chapters, the second are the appendices, and the final part is the bibliography.

The analysis of Beckett's presence in Poland has been divided into three periods. The first, covered in the chapter titled "Beckett and The Theatre of The Absurd" covers the years between 1952 and 1989. It presents the historical and social background of the author's first works, as well as the reactions they caused: essays, stage productions, and their reviews. The second chapter, "Beckett Familiar. 1990-2006", describes the period when Beckett was already well-established in theatres and in literary criticism, as well as the opinions of Beckett himself on "non-canonical" stage productions, that is ones that were contrary to his intentions. A particularly interesting point appears to be a certain lack of consistency on the author's end, which is the source of modern debates about Beckett's intellectual property rights around the world. The final chapter, "Beckett Transformed. 2007-2016", discusses the emergence of a new perspective on Beckett's oeuvre and the need to translate his works using various media.

The three appendices are a list of over 170 premieres Polish stage productions, a list of 24 musical pieces inspired by Beckett's texts, and a list of 13 festivals and seminar organised in Poland.

The bibliography is divided in five sections in total: a list of Beckett's works, consisting of 38 works of prose, 31 plays, nine volumes of poems, six critical essays, seven translations, as and nine works written for radio, television, and a short film; a list of Polish-language translations, that includes 64 translations of prose, 42 translations of plays, 15 poems, 13 translations of radio and television auditions, and ten translations of other works; nine pages of selected studies, biographies, and reminiscences or memoirs by prominent Beckett scholars; an extensive chronological list of Polish publications on Samuel Beckett.

First mentions of Beckett made by Polish critics were published abroad, in the Paris-based *Kultura* and the London-based *Wiadomości*. Beckett's first reception in Poland would be in 1956, when Jan Błoński mentioned Beckett's novel, *Molloy*, in *Przekrój*. A year later,

Julian Rogoziński published in print the only interview given by the Irish-French author to the Polish press. At the same time, Jerzy Zawieyski saw the Parisian premiere of *Endgame*, and Adam Tarn began to systematically publish translations of the future Noble prize recipient's works in *Dialog*. 1957 was also the year when two of Beckett's most important plays premiered in Poland: *Waiting for Godot* in Warsaw's Teatr Współczesny and *Endgame* in Krakow's Teatr 38.

Beckett's works were initially linked by the critics with the contemporary social and political background. His plays were interpreted through the lens of the drabness and absurdity of daily life in communist Poland. The phrase recurring throughout *Endgame*, "There is no more", was automatically associated with shortages in shops, the absence of Godot was interpreted as the failure of communist dictators to deliver on their promises, while the then-scarce product, Krapp's banana, caused as much agitation among audiences discussing the play as the play's contents. Sometimes Beckett's works would be set side by side with the romantic canon, whereas in other cases they were discredited as expressing trivial existential pain through a philosophical circus Stefan Treugutt went so far as to predict that "*Godot* will not open new roads for drama", although his opinion on the subject evolved with time. Wisława Szymborska and Andrzej Kijowski saw truth in Beckett, as did Czesław Miłosz, who appreciated his humility and honesty in talking about the fall of Western European culture from the perspective of its inhabitant, and not of someone who points it out with a sense of superiority.

With time, once people became familiar with the works of the Irishman from Paris, the Polish discussion of his works began to focus on an important issue dividing the critics and the thespians, that is on how to approach the spreading practice of departing from the play's text and stage directions? Should it be treated as a reprehensible transgression against the will of the author, or rather as Beckett-inspired artists' right to autonomy of expression? Over the recent decades we could witness that the phenomenon of experimenting with his plays, combining his works with those of other writers, or modernising them, has intensified. The key observation made in this treatise is that Beckett's directions for stage productions have never been treated in Poland as having paramount value, which may perhaps be the reason for the reluctance to do it now.

Another observation made during research is the presence of Beckett in music. Among the numerous Polish composers a special place belongs to Roman Haubenstock-Ramati, who created *Credentials or Think, Think Lucky*, one of the first and at the same time surprisingly innovative piece inspired by Beckett's oeuvre, as early as the 1960s. The body of musicians

participating in the debate on attempts at “translating” Beckett into other media includes such artists as Paweł Szymański, Agata Zubel, Wojciech Blecharz, Gaba Kulka, Lidia Zielińska, Tomasz Sikorski, as well as bands, including Armia and Republika.

In recent years the first Polish association of Beckett scholars, Beckett Research Group in Gdańsk, was established and is represented in large numbers at annual academic seminars devoted to Beckett, which are organised during the Between.Pomiędzy foundation’s festival since 2010. The discussions, regular publication about Beckett, and the popularising efforts, have led to a resurgence of the author’s reception by the young generations of Polish scholars and artists.