

**Rákóczy, Anita, Mariko Hori Tanaka, Nicholas E. Johnson, eds. *Influencing Beckett / Beckett Influencing*. Budapest: L'Harmattan, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, 2020. 168 pp. ISBN 978-2-343-21911-0**

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Although Beckett is a highly acclaimed author in Hungary whose works are available in translation, and his plays have been staged several times since the Hungarian premiere of *Waiting for Godot* in 1965, books written about him by Hungarian authors were unduly delayed. This strange, long-standing situation became luckily altered by the publication of the essay collection under review here in 2020. The essays were originally papers given at the Samuel Beckett Working Group meeting held at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Budapest, organized by the three scholars who edited the collection. The preface to the book is written by renowned Beckett scholar Linda Ben-Zvi, also one of the organizers as representative of IFTR, the International Federation for Theatre Research, “the largest theatre organization in the world.” The Beckett Working Group of the organization had its first meeting in Tel Aviv in 1996, and in 2017 it was hosted by Károli Gáspár University of Budapest. From the start, Ben-Zvi emphasizes, discussions have been enlivened by the diverse cultural experiences of the international mix of group members, ranging from PhD students to professors (9). In accordance, the authors of the present essay collection are from several countries, including Hungary.

Beckett himself was, as is well known, a uniquely international author: born in Ireland, he became one of the self-exiled Irish modernists beside Joyce and Sean O’Casey who lived abroad, namely in France, most of his life. Since Beckett used both English and French in writing, three countries, Ireland, Britain, and France claim that his oeuvre is part of their national literature and theatre history. Therefore, the focus of this book, influences on Beckett and Beckett influencing others, understood in the broad sense of the word, is a most appropriate one to allow the contributors to add to international Beckett scholarship with their essays. The book is divided into three parts: “Influencing Beckett,” “Beckett Influencing,” and “Practitioner Voices,” of which the last title indicates that the importance of “theatre matters” beside textual analyses is both acknowledged and emphasized to complete the scope of the volume. Beckett lived through the age of high modernism and well into what is arguably called the postmodern era and has invited attention from scholars specializing in a variety of critical discourses which have emerged and flourished over the years. No wonder, then, that the essays in the collection display a considerable variety as well.

In the “Influencing Beckett” part Teresa Rosell Nicolás (University of Barcelona) opens the line of chapters under the title “In Search of Lost Image,” which unmistakably nods to Proust’s novel cycle *In Search of Lost Time* (1909-1922). One of Beckett’s early prose pieces was his extended essay on Proust (*Proust*, 1931) and the concomitant issues of how to represent memory, voluntary as well as involuntary. It is the latter that the author pinpoints as characteristic of Beckett’s memory plays, especially *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958), which she studies hypothesizing that it is an anti-Proustian play because “Dramatically, Krapp as a character does experience not evolution but regression; tragically, *Krapp’s Last Tape* represents the reversal of the Proustian revelation, and instead it shows the deep truth of an unattainable image” (30). Alongside, the author looks at *L’image*, a monologue written also in 1958, and concludes that the “Proustian privileged moments, in Beckett’s oeuvre, particularly in *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *L’image*, reminiscences which are entirely fragile and aroused with a painful effort, are associated to the memory of someone lost” (31). The second essay in this part, “The Theatricalization of *Endgame* as the Painterly World of Bram and Geer van Velde: Changing Perspectives in the Poetics of Cubism and Sartre’s Phenomenology” by Laurens De Vos (University of Amsterdam), explores painterly influence on Beckett. As the third piece, “Samuel Beckett and the Sinic World” by Patrick Armstrong (University of Cambridge), reaches back to *Krapp’s Last Tape* as an antecedent of *That Time* (1975). However, the difference between the two plays lies in the echoes of Eastern philosophy characteristic of the later work, where Beckett assimilated the Buddhist “concept of cyclical time,” Armstrong opines (55). This, one should add, results in a more complex portrayal of the protagonist’s memories of his life course than what *Krapp’s Last Tape* offers.

The second part of the book, “Beckett Influencing” is the longest unit with five essays which form one group quite loosely. Jonathan Bignell’s (University of Reading) “‘Random dottiness’: Samuel Beckett and the Reception of Harold Pinter’s Early Dramas” introduces a relatively new comparative aspect: the parallel journey of their works in the media, radio, and then television. Another major contemporary playwright, Caryl Churchill’s relation to Beckett in the mirror of her latest plays is examined by Mariko Hori Tanaka (Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo). Churchill, Tanaka writes, represents post-traumatic subjects in her later work, reminiscent of Beckett’s displaced and degraded characters. With its four elderly women on the stage, the author finds Churchill’s *Escaped Alone* (2016) similar to Beckett’s *Come and Go* (1966), while also conveying “the importance of passing on knowledge of the apocalyptic disaster to posterity,” which is enhanced by the title quoting from the Book of Job (79). Churchill’s *Far Away* (2000) and *Here We Go* (2015) are discussed in the essay as dramatized examples of the “pre-traumatic syndrome,” a term borrowed from Paul K. Saint-Amour, as well as of humans imagining, even wishing that they belonged to a lower form of life, which reveal a subtle complication of Beckett’s legacy (83-85).

“Shoes That Are Left Behind: Gábor Tompa’s Beckett Heritage” by Anita Rákóczy (Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church, Budapest) discusses the power of Beckettian inspiration in a Transylvanian-born Hungarian director’s innovative re-imagining of some Beckett plays for the stage, beginning in 1979 when, as a student, he produced *Happy Days*. The title of the essay refers to a random display

of footwear as part of the setting in Tompa's 2005 direction of *Godot*, which evoked the collective trauma of the Holocaust by reference to the horrific event when a group of Jews were ordered to take off their shoes before they were shot into the Danube. Another innovation of this *Godot* was, Rákóczy points out, the casting of Lucky by an actress who started to present the character's unique monologue slowly, sounding "like a prophecy, scanned, gradually accelerating, with her standing straight, right in the middle of the stage, and looking up towards the sky all the while" (93). This dramaturgical choice may be interpreted as a rendering of "pre-traumatic syndrome," connecting up with Beckett's and Churchill's late plays which suggest the terrifying approach of an unknown disaster. The remaining two essays in Part II of the collection carry on the analysis of the links postmodern art can have with Beckett. Llewellyn Brown's (Lycée international de Saint-Germain-en-Laye) "Body, the Gaze, and Abstraction: From Samuel Beckett to Bruce Nauman" calls attention to installation and video artist Nauman's "Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk)" (1968), "a one-hour monochrome video that explicitly pays tribute to Beckett's writings" (101). Yoshiko Takebe (Shujitsu University, Japan) in "Translating Silence: Between Beckett, Chekhov, and Hirata" addresses parallels between *Three Sisters* and *Come and Go* and traces silence in them as it fertilizes the artistic context to Japanese playwright and director Oriza Hirata's production of Chekhov's play with an android taking the part of the youngest sister. As the author assesses this striking innovation, "By including an android ... the non-verbal modalities are more emphasized, encouraging the actors and the audience to become more conscious of what it means to be human" (120).

In part III of the collection, under the rather comprehensive title "Practitioner Voices," three papers give a diverse picture of broadcasting, translating and digitalizing Beckett's work, set in relevant contexts. Márton Mesterházi (Hungarian Radio), in his "How We Made the Hungarian Version of Samuel Beckett's *All That Fall*" describes the difficulties they had to cope with in 1960s socialist Hungary to get permission for broadcasting this play on the radio. Grotesquely, in the politicized culture of the period, a catchphrase helped them achieve their goal: "The Czech comrades have already done it" (133). Next to Mesterházi's, Gábor Romhányi Török's (free-lance translator and scholar) "My Way with the Work of Samuel Beckett" is a personal account of his making most of Beckett's prose available in Hungarian translation, including the novel trilogy. As a decisive experience, Romhányi Török discusses his attraction to the early, less known Beckettian novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932), first published posthumously in 1993 and soon translated into Hungarian by him. For him, this work deserves special recognition: "The novel is an encyclopaedia of Beckett's literary concepts. He certainly made use of it in composing his other novels. ... It is the peak of early Beckett prose, and we are witnesses of the desperate struggle against the influence of Joyce and Proust, and of the shift towards his later style" (141). Finally, Nicholas E. Johnson, Néill O'Dwyer, and Enda Bates's (all based in Trinity College, Dublin) paper, "Samuel Beckett's *Play* in Digital Culture: Technologies of Influence" provides a timely, experimental approach to a Beckett text.

All in all, the diversity of the book carries a strong inspiration for further research. Several scholars agree that each nation has its own Beckett and these "Becketts" can be brought into fruitful dialogue in an internationally authored work such as *Influencing*

*Beckett / Beckett Influencing*. Beside the editors and authors, L'Harmattan publisher at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary deserves all praise and respect for enriching our Beckett scholarship with this pioneer collection. Once the line has begun, other book-length studies delving into Beckett's oeuvre by Hungarian authors or (co)editors are coming to the fore; Anita Rákóczy's monograph, *Samuel Beckett's Endgame and Hungarian Opening Gambits* (Budapest-Paris: L'Harmattan, 2021) is followed by a book of Erika Mihálycsa (Babes-Bolyai University), titled "*A wretchedness to defend*": *Reading Beckett's Letters* (New HJEAS Book Series, Debrecen: University of Debrecen, 2022). May lovers of Beckett enjoy the publication of many more studies and volumes pursuing novel ideas inspired by his works in Hungary.