

fused into a new synthesis. He quotes Beckett's famous phrase on page 178: "Here the content is the style, the style the content".

This study by Mr Naganowski closes with a chapter devoted to the difficulties Joyce encountered in trying to get his first works published, as well as in overcoming the rigours and Victorianism of the British censors. It is perhaps interesting to note that the only country in which Joyce is still banned is the homeland he once forsook.

This first full-length study on Joyce written in Polish is a very useful introduction of Joyce to the Polish public. It succeeds in what it sets out to do, namely to present to the man-in-the-street a working key with which to open one of the treasure houses of world literature.

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Hugh Kenner, SAMUEL BECKETT. A CRITICAL STUDY. Grove Press, New York 1961, ss. 206.

Mr Kenner has presented us with the first full-length study of one of the most controversial writers this, or for that matter any, century has known. The formal emptiness of Beckett's prose has given rise to radically opposed schools of thought, as to the meaning of his writings. Mr Kenner deems it necessary at the very outset of his book to assure his readers that his aim is not to explain Samuel Beckett's work but to help him to think about it. In the light of this statement, one can only feel grateful to Mr Kenner for having brought so much material together in his book which presents abundant food for thought. Like Beckett's own style, Mr Kenner's is one of imperturbable calm, affronting the reader with a whole barrage of facts and relative details. Mr Kenner, in the spirit of sound Eliotian criticism, remains in the background, allowing his material to speak for itself without any interference from the author. Such a presentation on Mr Kenner's part was indispensable so as not to enrage scholars who might feel disappointed at the apparent lack of analytical penetration in the work. Mr Kenner has such a fluent style that his study of Beckett could almost rank as a piece of literature in

its own right. As a result of this "literature-making" in the course of the book, one point seems to lead on to another, or else items seem to come along, without there really being an overall homogeneous plan to the study. At times, it might even be said, Mr Kenner wavers unconsciously between two diametrically opposed standpoints, namely whether Beckett's work is one preoccupied with style or meaning. This shortcoming arises from the fact that Mr Kenner, at various intervals, had already published sections of his book as articles in literary magazines before he decided to make a larger critical study on Beckett. For all this, one is greatly in Mr Kenner's debt, because for the first time one has at one's disposal an exhaustive account of almost every theme running through Beckett's work.

Far too little attention, in general, has been attached to the formal side of Beckett's writing. He has been interpreted in a Christian way, a Philosophical way, a Hegelian way (in Poland) and so on. One would, I feel, do well to keep in mind a highly significant commentary Beckett once made on Joyce's work: in 1929, he wrote: "Joyce is a writer, in whom form is content, content form". In Beckett's own novels and plays the same is true. Mr Kenner deals with the problem very well, but only in the last chapter after spending the others to discuss semantic content in Beckett. On various occasions, Mr Kenner makes passing reference to Beckett's use of language, but it is not till he begins to deal with the radio dramas that style really interests him as such. One cannot but think he would have done much better to discuss Beckett's linguistic and stylistic views at the very beginning. It is only on page 99 that we come across such a basic admission of Beckett's as: "Every statement I make is meaningless". This, as Mr Kenner so rightly deduces, hands over all discourse to the domain of style: terms have sounds but not referents, sentences shape but no purport. A little further on we can read: "I am interested in the shape of ideas — Beckett told Harold Hobson — even if I do not believe in them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. I wish I could remember the Latin. It is even finer



than in English: »Do not despair: one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned«. This sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters". Hence, fact in Beckett dissolves into symmetry. Semantic interpretations of similar sentences in Beckett have given rise to a flock of erroneous conclusions as to his "message".

In the last chapter Mr Kenner returns to this question in more detail and, one might say, intensity. Beckett's narrative and its substance grow absolutely identical, thus rendering it impossible to treat them separately as in traditional criticism. People, or should one say, characters in Beckett's works are assailed and harassed by three impossibilities: the impossibility of speaking, because language has exhausted itself of meaning, the impossibility of not speaking, for then they would lose all impression of their own existence, and the impossibility of getting out of this vacuum of silence expressed with words. Beckett's characters, just as Didi and Gogo from *Godot*, indulge in games of making up conversation about anything at all that will give them the impression of being alive. Their bodies, subject to an accelerated process of decay, can only heighten their fears of not truly existing. The mechanical dialogue they use, is supposed to offset this. Beckett's is a universe created by voices. As the Unnameable said in one of Beckett's first literary achievements, all is a question of voices, everything is made of words. Mr Kenner for some reason, although constantly hovering over this essential key to the understanding of Beckett, never really gets beyond merely stating these points as parts of the latter's universe. They are in fact the very core of Beckett's work, right from the sixth chapter of *Murphy*, in which the title-character retires into the world of his own mind. Mr Kenner is unable to draw conclusions from his own statements, for in any piece of literature where nothing happens, not just in radio plays, as he would have us think, whatever falls silent disappears, fades into nonexistence. Hence, all living is an illusion in which speech struggles with decay and silent death, latent in all actions and words as they course through

time. What is intriguing in Beckett (as in a Polish playwright of the beginning of the century whose work is undergoing a revival lately — namely, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz) is that Death becomes almost a positive value, a presence to be felt. In this hopeless state, says Mr Kenner, all is locked inside the word-spinner's prison. If one must talk, talk, talk to convince oneself of one's existence, then life takes on a negative shape. Language becomes the only activity allowed in Beckett. Furthermore, all of his characters lose their limbs, their senses one by one, until in the end they exist only in what they say. Hamm, for instance in *Endgame*, is blind, paralyzed and unable to touch anything. How, then, can all the objects he enumerates have real meaning? As the Subjectivists at the beginning of the century insisted, objects exist and have being only through our senses and our experience of them. Beckett's characters, wandering in a universe deprived of such experience, roam in a desert of words and sounds and voices. Sound detaches itself from meaning in this way, until it reaches the point where it is capable of expressing only Silence. As a matter of fact, Beckett's work is not, as Mr Kenner suggests, one in which lots of pauses figure: it is the literature of Silence, disturbed by the vain babbling of voices. Mr Kenner says on page 182; "It is a world locally freakish but totally shaped by two laws, the law of conservation of energy and the law of thermodynamics". By the first criteria, everything is static, that is in a Hegelian sort of way, the quantity of matter cannot change. Hence, Beckett's language is taught with contradictions — a system of tensions. The second element of Mr Kenner's most ingenious innovation in this section of the field of Beckettian studies concerns the feverish energy of such speeches as Lucky's and whole sections of other works in which every relevant qualifying circumstance is noted in a neverending stream which turns in upon itself. Despite Mr Kenner's inference to the contrary, this linguistic atmosphere is not merely a characteristic of Beckett's later radio plays, but one of the most persistently recurring qualities of his work.



Mr Kenner's greatest single contribution to the study of Beckett is the insistence he places on the influence Descartes exerted on him. This is indeed an inspiring section betraying Mr Kenner's wide knowledge of European culture. Beckett, he points out, has succeeded in abolishing all content save gestures of the intellect. His work is concerned mainly with the mind struggling to grasp ideas and to control its own processes. This, to a large measure, explains the cerebral quality of Beckett's writing, as well as the selfconscious way his characters delight in artificial word games, the composing of unending stories, stock-taking of their meagre possessions and so on. Mr Kenner, unfortunately, fails to see that the connexion between Beckett and Descartes is only an indirect one. The Phenomenologists at the beginning of the century took Cartesian subjectivity to the absolute boundaries of sense. Bretano, in 1874, published his book on "Appearances", in which he pointed out that objects exist merely as the goal towards which all our psychological activity is directed. Whenever we think, we think about something, some object — whenever we believe, it is something we believe. Thus, for the Phenomenologists, as for Beckett, the intricate workings of the mind are far more important than the conclusions reached. Hence, going one point further, Beckett's style is as important by itself, if not more so, than the meaning contained in the words. A follower of Bretano, Alexius Meinong couched the Phenomenologist's conclusions in one concise phrase, which might almost be taken as the key to Beckett's work. In his *Theory of Objects* he states: "The Sosein of any object — the object's having the characteristics it has — is affected neither by its Sein nor by its Nichtsein". This, for instance, explains much concerning Beckett's style. In his early novels we come across pages of description in which, as Mr Kenner so justly observes, the speaker occupies himself with exhausting by system every relation between objects. Another frequent point of Beckett's style can be quite easily explained in the light of what Husserl called "transcendental phenomenology" — namely, his constant habit of repeating himself, as well

as contradicting himself. People who continually ask one another the same boring questions, day in and day out, to be met by equally monotonous replies are playing at a philosophical game — they are, as it were, bracketting the real world and confining themselves to the intangible universe of psychic experience as such. The following analogy might help people to grasp this very difficult problem better: whereas Existentialism is an attempt to provide a phenomenological description of man's place in the world, Beckett's writings confine themselves to the description of the mental, and for that the "essential" processes involved, before one can make any universal statement about Man.

These are some of the conclusions Mr Kenner's penetrating observations about Descartes' influence on Beckett have allowed us to draw. Beckett's characters wander through the cerebral world of their own psychic experiences which is governed by a special interior logic of its own, very reminiscent of Constructive Grammar in modern linguistics. Mr Kenner makes constant reference to Beckett's constant tendency of turning his works in upon themselves. He draws attention to the number of times Beckett includes stories within stories, plays within plays, novels within novels and even characters within characters. This is considerably more than Symbolistic and Surrealistic Narcissism, or Cartesian empirism — it is a case of phenomenological bracketting of the real world outside, enclosing the characters of a work inside the universe of their own minds. Mr Kenner even points out that the decors of the play *Endgame* is like a huge skull, and the two little windows, he feels, are the eyes through which the outside world can be seen. Mr Kenner, at considerable length, develops the thesis that a writer performs a similar sort of phenomenological bracketting during the act of writing. In a closely connected fashion, Beckett's characters are constantly aware of their literature and conversation making, and, indeed, live only for that, until in the end it can be said of them, they are nothing but voices, everything is a question of voices —



everything is a question of voices — a character is the words he utters, nothing more.

Mr Kenner seems ever on the point of making this discovery concerning Beckett's writing, although he never brings himself to express it so. He mentions on page 89 that Beckett would appear to be the first to have read the *Discours de la Méthode* "for what it is, a work of fiction". It is for us now to continue along this road and to unveil further secrets lying hidden in Beckett's cosmos. Beckett's characters are completely cerebral, even more so than, say, James Duffy in *A Painful Case* from Joyce's *The Dubliners*. "He lived at a little distance from his body, regarding his own acts with doubtful side glances. He had an odd autobiographical habit which led him to compose in his mind from time to time a short sentence about himself containing a subject in the third person and a predicate in the past tense". In such instances, identity fades into the background until it becomes nonexistent. Tensions in the single moment take the place of plotdevelopment in the traditional sense. There is no longer any such thing as the stable, unalterable statement: what is important is the effect of the single instance, in Beckett's own words; "l'éternité de l'instant sans bornes". Mr Kenner goes so far as to suggest that anyone wishing to read exotic interpretations into such literature is free to do so, although he himself would not advise it. Nevertheless, Mr Kenner himself, for the more considerable part of his book seems loth to jettison all semantic content from Beckett's work. A Polish writer, Witkiewicz, in his book *Pure Form* (2432), suggested that pure abstract form was impossible to achieve since every artist must grow up and mature in a world of things and objects. The most he can do is to so deform such objects that their traditional "meaning" will no longer occupy the place of honour. Once this has been achieved, then he is at liberty to combine these shapes (stripped of meaning) into any weird and extravagant combinations he wishes.

In another very enlightening chapter called "The Cartesian Centaur", Mr Kenner brings to light some highly interesting material concerning the role Proust played in the forming

of Beckett's literary ideas. For Proust, he points out, the only world of value was that of latent consciousness, in which, through the miracle of "la mémoire involontaire" happenings and experiences of the past flood our minds by accident, inspired by some unsuspected association of ideas or of the senses. Beckett's characters, Mr Kenner affirms, can only be happy of what they are conscious, and consequently are in a perpetual state of expectancy, waiting for Godot or, perhaps, the Proustian miracle. Again, one can only regret that Mr Kenner did not develop his line of thought far enough, nor analyse his own ideas with rigorous logic. While mentioning the fact that objective time values has ceased to exist for Beckett, in the same way as with Proust, throughout whose work the past and present are completely fused into a new synthesis of time, he fails to recall Henri Bergson's important analysis of time and space in modern literature. Bergson wanted a "simultanéité" of moments and actions in modern art. This Beckett has achieved admirably. In *Textes et Nouvelles pour rien*, we read on page 82: "le temps c'est fait espace il n'y aura plus". In a literature where the style and the content of a work are completely interfused, as Beckett affirmed his own is, then, the time (or in other words the duration of the plot), and the space (the plots immediate effects) elements will also melt into a new synthesis. Mr Kenner is quite right in stating that Descartes invented the mode of speculation in which all Beckett's characters indulge, but more than that, this form of selfinterrogation destroys the link between objective and subjective time. The elements of Beckett's work with which critics seem most concerned, the things said, are merely, as Witkiewicz called them, material drawn from the artist's own experience which he will use in his attempts to compose new shapes.

The chapter "Life in the Box", as one would rightly suppose, is devoted to reflections on Beckett's theatre. This is, perhaps, the least successful section of the study. Mr Kenner even allows himself such sweeping generalisms like: "All this is capital material for fiction, but not for drama" — this is when he eventu-



ally comes to the question of the formal vagueness of Beckett's style. A little further on, on page 146, he puts forward the following wouldbe explanation: "It would seem clear that for Beckett the drama was a hopeless form [...]" since, in his opinion, Beckett's dialogue has no power to stop and none to go on. Such a conclusion is difficult to accept, especially as Mr Kenner so convincingly affirms that Beckett's is a quintessential theatre in the same way as Phenomenology is the first real quintessential philosophy for a long long time. We are told once again about the narcissism of Beckett's writing, with special reference to the repetitions in *Godot*, the spiral-style of some of the dialogue between Didi and Gogo, and the "play within the play" atmosphere of Lucky's thinking upon command. However, despite these unfortunate generalities, this chapter could prove of considerable interest to the person desirous of finding out a little more about Beckett, even if the professional student would feel disappointed with it. The Beckett universe, Mr Kenner informs us page 138, consists of a shambles of phenomena within which certain symmetries and recurrences are observable, like the physical world as interpreted by early man. However, it is not till the very end of the chapter that he finally begins to discuss Beckett's style as such. Until that time, we are presented with an analysis of Beckett's dramatic work, which is judged against objective criteria. *Godot* is again interpreted as being God, or at least an "absent divinity" (p. 138). We are once more confronted with Mr Kenner's indecision — whether to treat style as such or the semantic meaning of the words. There exists a yawning gap between what has been said in connexion with the novels and what is now being said about Beckett's theatre. Didi, he states bluntly, must make do with memory, and Gogo (who can scarcely remember the previous day) with Didi's account of things. One can only regret Mr Kenner's not drawing the appropriate conclusions from this, namely, that all Didi's language is in the past, while Gogo's is imprisoned in the immediate present before it has a chance slip into the oblivion of the past. Hence although the

two "heroes" address one another, it is obvious that, under such conditions, their dialogues are condemned to receive no proper answer: Didi and Gogo utter unending monologues from the very beginning of the play to the end. Their language, although appearing to make contact, is doomed to go unanswered.

Mr Kenner, having agreed that nothing happens in Beckett's theatre, stubbornly proceeds to list what he calls "the irreversible actions" of the plays. These are things like the carrot which is eaten on stage, the string which is broken, the trousers which fall down "revealing something that was not revealed before", and so on. His conclusion that "the world is now poorer by one carrot and one rope" proves to what a hopeless extent Mr Kenner is determined to find semantic meaning in Beckett's theatre. His suddenly stating that these are "not ways of life so much as modes of being" serves merely to complicate the whole matter more than ever.

*Endgame* one is lead to believe, constitutes, for him, a play about the last days of humanity after a hydrogen war, and the shell-like decors is the air-raid shelter. All this, despite his having already mentioned that the set is suggestive of a skull. One finds it, thus, difficult to follow Mr Kenner's thought, at times. The problem entangles itself further at the end of the chapter, when style, as such, is discussed for the first time, and even then far too briefly. "The dialogue" — answers Hamm in reply to Clov's question "What is there to keep me here?" As has already been said in connexion with Beckett's novels, the absurd state of man's incommunicability presents him with a situation in which what he does or says is not the most vital thing — but how he says it. Since it is impossible for man to communicate with his fellow-travellers in life by means of language, then all he can do is give vent to this very feeling of futility. And that Beckett's characters do. Beckett's plays do, indeed, contain whatever ideas we discern inside them — but they are themselves not contained within any single idea.

One can only repeat in conclusion that this is a valuable criticism of Beckett's work from the traditional point of view. Mr Kenner has



thrown revealing light on many of the problems connected with Beckett's thought and ideas, and, for that alone, this book will be of inestimable value to the reader affronting Beckett for the first time. For the scholar of Beckett, what must surely be disconcerting is the lack of emphasis in Mr Kenner's style. One cannot, in all justice, help feeling that far too many vital points are met with by accident. Facts given without suitable stress are passed over quickly, before the mind has time to accommodate itself accordingly. It still remains for someone to treat Beckett from the stylistic or linguistic angle, which would of itself entail a philosophical examination of his work against the background of phenomenology, Joyce's ideas, and, of course, Bergson and possibly symbolist poetics. Until that time comes, works on Beckett, like Mr Kenner's, while dealing very competently with half of the picture, cannot hope to put his work in its rightful place in world literature. Beckett is the principal master of the formal declarative sentence in our time. The pace of his prose is even and indomitable, and utterly unrelated to the pace of events, as Mr Kenner repeatedly tells us, while constantly shying away from a formal appreciation of the tricks Beckett uses in this empty prose. We are left unsatisfied with the statements made about the quality of Beckett's style. The number of pauses in his theatre is referred to, and nothing more. The Unnameable says in the novel of the same name, "That's why there are all these little silences, so that I can break them!" There exists a homogeneity in Beckett's work which Mr Kenner's preoccupation with details prevents him from seeing. Nevertheless, we are indebted to Mr Kenner for having touched upon the most important contents of Beckett's work. He has been faithful to his aims, namely, he has presented food for thought and reflexion. It was not his intention, as he stated at the very beginning of the book, to give solutions, or to resolve the problems which hang about Beckett's work. He has, indeed, succeeded in sharpening people's intellectual appetite, as far as the content of Beckett's work is concerned. It now remains for critics to start from where Mr Kenner

has left off, and in that way justice will be done to the greatest writer of the twentieth century, besides Joyce. Mr Kenner's book should be read by all people interested in Beckett, for, although, like ourselves, they may find much to be criticised, they will find it an excellent stepping stone to further, more profound research.

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Dieter Faulseit, DIE LITERARISCHE ERZÄHLTECHNIK. Eine Einführung. VEB Verlag Sprache und Literatur, Halle (Saale) 1963, s. 88 (Beiträge zur Gegenwartsliteratur, Deutscher Schriftstellerverband).

Wymieniona w nagłówku recenzji praca stanowi wyraźne nawiązanie do obszernej książki Dietera Faulseita i Gudrun Kühn pt. *Stilistische Mittel und Möglichkeiten der deutschen Sprache* (2 wyd. 1963), opublikowanej w tejże serii jako jej numer 19. Książka ta w sposób bardzo systematyczny przedstawia zakres „stylistycznej aktywności” niemieckiego języka artystycznego, od pojedynczych słów począwszy, a skończywszy na rozległych, rozbudowanych zespołach, w różnorodnych funkcjach semantycznych. Obecna zwięzła praca, nazwana wprowadzeniem, jest kontynuacją i dopełnieniem poprzedniej w tym sensie, iż wychodząc również od „języka” bada różnorodne ukształtowanie form podawczych utworu literackiego, prezentującego swą zawartość za pomocą metody narratywnej (pośredniej).

Książka Faulseita, wyrosła z lektury prac specjalistycznych, własnych obserwacji i przemyśleń autora oraz dyskusji w kręgach uniwersyteckich i literackich (w Związku Pisarzy Niemieckich, NRD), adresowana jest bardziej do pisarzy niż do specjalistów. Jednakże autor wyraźnie zaznacza, iż jej celem nie jest bynajmniej uczenie sztuki artystycznego pisania (komponowania), lecz przedstawienie podstawowego materiału z zakresu sztuki narracji literackiej. Materiał ten może stać się bardzo pomocny w twórczej pracy literackiej, gdyż zwróci on uwagę na specyficzność kompozycji dzieła literackiego w odróżnieniu od utworu publicystycznego i wyostriży u pisarza zrozumienie metod kształtowania wypowiedzi za