SKENÈ

Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

1:2 2015

Short Forms

SKENÈ Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

ISSN 2421-4353

SKENÈ Theatre and Drama Studies
http://www.skenejournal.it
info@skenejournal.it

Contents

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Shorter and Shorter: Samuel Beckett's Challenge to the Theatre

Abstract

Samuel Beckett's poetics of "less is more" has anticipated and even partly shaped the evolution of contemporary drama and theatre as one of the fundamental models of the performative turn of the last decades. His late style as a dramatist and a director has influenced contemporary performative theatre in artistic, socio-cultural, and even commercial terms (formats, bills, venues and unconventional settings such as installations, exhibitions, and urban spaces). Nevertheless, his most challenging pièces, the shorter plays, appear to be still waiting for a 'staging tradition' which could make the most of their constitutive brevity. In fact, productions of the so-called "dramaticules" have multiplied on the world scene, although often presented in antologies, collections, or multiple billings. Yet, there have already been some interesting and promising productions, and this paper aims at showing the centrality and pregnancy of brevity on the artistic and performative contemporary scene approaching Beckett's poetics of subtraction in the wider perspective of the interplay between the theatre and other arts. Both focusing on the spectator's experience and the 'commercial challenge', contemporary arts and Beckett's late theatre have come closer and closer. A brief assessment of the fortune of Beckett's shorter plays on the Italian stage confirms the fecundity of this intersectional path on which the artistic and performative scene seems to be going further along.

Talking about his friend Samuel Beckett, E.M. Cioran once said:

> The Buddhists say, of one who tends toward illumination, that he must be as relentless as 'a mouse gnawing a coffin.' Every true writer puts forth such an effort. He is a destroyer who adds to existence, who enriches it while undermining it. (qtd in Graver and Federman 1979: 375)

If coffins make one easily think of Beckett,[1] they can also relate to theatre, which has been often given up for dead during the twentieth century,

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[1] As Keir Elam has pointed out, "[t]he language of Beckett's dramaticules is all a cipher for the R.I.P. word" (1994: 159; see also Morrison 1982).

because of its intrinsic fragility and the overwhelming assault by media as well as all the technological changes of the world. Theatre is dead. Long live the theatre.

With his theatrical work serving as an ongoing provocation to the theory and practice of theatre, Beckett has certainly contributed to the death at least of the kind of theatre Peter Brook called "deadly" (1968), but he has also extended our understanding of what theatre is and what it can do, especially in a "convergent" (Jenkins 2008), "performative" (Fischer-Likte 2008), "postdramatic" (Lehmann 2006) world. Actually, Beckett has "enriched" the life of theatre "while undermining it".

This paper wishes to explore how Beckett's shorter plays, none of which takes up more than eight pages in print or more than thirty minutes in performance, have particularly contributed to the enrichment of the variety of theatrical forms on the contemporary scene, while also developing new perspectives on the theatre, including venues and bills, on the consumption of different cultural forms, and on the intersection between different artistic forms.

"The creative act is first and foremost an act of destruction" (Picasso)

In the second half of the twentieth century, visual and plastic arts moved towards performance and audio-visual forms; conceptual art, performance art, and installation art all flourished in the same years when Beckett devoted himself to theatrical practice and to the writing and staging of shorter plays. These developments called upon the need to rethink long-held assumptions about what art is (and concepts such as authenticity or 'authorial intention' were questioned) and to re-examine routine practices and treatment procedures[2]: when museums acquire, present and wish to preserve installation artworks, for example, they are confronted with new challenges (see Van Saaze 2013), not to mention the difficulty in defining what the 'artwork' is in performance art and articulating debates around the advisability of preserving a 'representation'[3] of it.

Among the changes that brought theatre and the arts closer to one another, two of the most intriguing and significant aspects are: spectators'

[2] See Bishop 2005; Corris (ed.) 2004; Costanzo 2007; Zuliani (ed.) 2006. On the theme of mutating and adapting media as a starting point for a twofold inquiry into the contemporary performing arts see Vanderbeeken (*et al.* ed.) 2012.

[3] "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations" (Phelan 1993: 146).

participation (defined as the "essence of installation art", Reiss 1999: xiii), the core of the performance, and the challenge to the commercial mechanisms of the art market and related institutions issued by these ephemeral and theatrical artworks. As Phelan wrote, "[p]erformance resists the balanced circulations of finance. It saves nothing; it only spends" (1993: 148).

It is no surprise then that Beckett's theatre – one of the most influential models of recent theatrical developments, leading in the last few decades towards the concept of "performative theatre"[4] now spread worldwide – emphasized the centrality of participation and 'commercial challenge'.

In Beckett's own works (on the page and on the stage) and in his legacy, theatre and other art forms have achieved a very profound level of dialogue and interchange. This development has usually been investigated in terms of creative processes with suggestions, allusions, strategies, and the sharing of compositional patterns. Such investigations examine above all the inspiration Beckett drew from a field he loved so much and, on the other side, his seminal influence on it:[5] the Irish performance artist Amanda Coogan has described Beckett's works as "essential pivots for performance practitioners globally" (qtd in Tubridy 2014: 43), and since the Sixties many artworks have been clearly and often explicitly inspired by Beckett's *oeuvre* (ibid.), no less than dramatic and theatrical works. What is more, these interrelations may suggest a reconsideration of the space-time situation in which the artist, the artwork, and the spectator interact; the traditional ideas about theatrical and artistic venues as very definite and separated places may be therefore usefully questioned.

The museological debate has long revolved around the relationship between objects and viewers, and the ongoing crisis which museums are assumedly experiencing (Casey 2005: 79) has mostly been dealt with through a shift in their role from "legislating meaning through . . . objects" to "interpreting that meaning" (ibid.). In a much quoted article of 1971, the famous museologist Duncan Cameron described the change in museums, which he considered "in desperate need of psychotherapy" (Cameron 1971: 11), as a metaphorical shift from authoritative "temple" to contextualized "forum" containing multiple voices and perspectives and the importance of the museum's interpretative mission (and educative aim) has increased since then, "emphasizing the emotional rather than the intellectual tenor of the place" (Casey 2005: 84).

[4] Following Annamaria Cascetta, I use this apparently tautological expression "to define the specific trend of postmodernity" (2014: 6) and its characteristics. See also at least Auslander 1997; Carlson 2004; Bial 2010.

[5] To mention some particularly well-known studies, see McMillan 1975; Ben-Zvi (ed.) 2003; Oppenheim 1999, 2000; Phelan 2004; see also Brater 1974; Rabinovitz 1985; Taban 2011. On Beckett's use of images borrowed from philosophy and aesthetics see Uhlmann 2006.

"Emotional rather than intellectual" is also the experience Beckett's late theatre offers to its audience. As Laughlin wrote: "Beckett's plays move their spectators beyond exegesis into a theatrical experience of a very different sort" (Laughlin 1989: 20), getting closer to that language addressed first of all to the senses as already invoked by Artaud (1958).[6]

These parallels, analogies, and strict intersections between Beckett and the arts could perhaps suggest some new ideas for the staging of his late plays, which go further along this intersectional path. Indeed, *apropos* of *Footfalls*, which he considered as "words … only built up around this picture" (i.e. the image of the woman pacing relentlessly up and down) (Asmus 1977: 254), Billie Whitelaw commented:

> … well, perhaps he should be in an art gallery or something. Perhaps I should be pacing up and down in the Tate Gallery, I don't know, because the way the thing looks and the way he paints with light is just as important as what comes out of my mouth. (qtd in Kalb 1989: 235)

In fact, nowadays we can easily find live performances which involve actors and bodies in museums. There is no need to mention the long tradition of body art or more recently the world famous example of Marina Abramovic at the MoMa (*The Artist is Present*, 2010; Biesenbach ed. 2010). There are also – as already noted – many performances inspired by Beckett's works; on the other side, actors in a theatrical context can be hidden within a structure such as a real sculpture, as it occurred in the Pan Pan theatre company's production of Beckett's radioplay *Embers* (winner of Herald Angel Award at the Edinburgh International Festival 2013), which placed an enormous wooden skull centre stage, wedged into mounds of grey pebbles. Similarly, in a recent production of *Not I* with Lisa Dwan at the Royal Court Theatre in London (2013),[7] the performance was followed by the screening of an interview with Whitelaw focused on her experience of performing in *Not I* and a panel discussion with Lisa Dwan and other special guests; all this sounds more like a didactic project of 'edutainment' usually hosted in museums rather than a traditional theatre-night.

And what can one say about the applauded *Rough for Theatre I* and *Act without Words II* directed by Sarah Jane Scaife at the 2013 Dublin Fringe Festival, in a car park?[8] Since installations and exhibitions have started to inhabit urban

[6] On the relationship between Beckett's theatre and Artaud and other twentieth-century notable theatrical masters, as well as on the quality of Beckett's work in training actors, see Peja 2010.

[7] Lisa Dwan first performed in *Not I* at the Battersea Arts Centre in 2005. In 2014 she returned to the Royal Court and then to London's West End with *Not I*, alongside *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* directed by Walter Asmus.

[8] This 2013 production of *Samuel Beckett's Rough For Theatre I and Act Without Words II*

spaces, such a displacement of modern art is not uncommon, yet it remains a rather unusual space for what is, after all, an example of 'text-based' theatre.

Certainly, a briefer play may fit better in a location such as a car park, considering all the noises and distractions, and the audience's general discomfort, and it is therefore not a coincidence that among his plays Beckett's shorter ones are the most often produced in these unconventional ways.

Therefore, even if there are also many examples of 'heterodoxical' stagings of Beckett's 'longer plays', (as, for instance, the award-winning Italian production of *Endgame* by Teatrino Giullare in 2004, staged on a chessboard using chess pieces and two players),[9] it is in his late style that Beckett's theatre "is on the verge of becoming something else" (Brater 1987: 3) and one comes "to grips with the need for a new kind of critical vocabulary" (ibid.) in order to face these late "textlets" that Elam considers "surely the most intense and disquieting body of texts conceived for the twentieth-century stage" (Elam 1994: 146). In fact, Beckett himself was utterly conscious that he had written plays that were "on the very edge of what was possible in the theatre" (Knowlson 1996: 602)[10].

As has been pointed out, Beckett's later plays "exist somewhere between installation and poetry, their strict aesthetic bringing the meditative rhythms of visual art into performance" (qtd in Tubridy 2014: 49). That is why they also

> provide especially fertile ground for the study of the audience response. In their very sparseness and challenges to dramatic conventions, these plays help to 'lay bare' the specific nature of the dramatic work and its implications for their reception. (Laughlin 1989: 20)

Installation for Beckett in the City was preceded by Scaife's *mise en scène* of *Act Without Words II* which "was first produced to critical acclaim in 2009 as part of Dublin's 'Absolut Fringe Festival'. It was re-presented at the 2010 'Ulster Bank Dublin Theatre Festival', and subsequently travelled to two major London festivals in 2011 with support from Culture Ireland: 'Greenwich & Docklands' (where it played in St Alfege's Park) and 'Imagine Watford' (where it played in the stage-door laneway of Watford Palace Theatre). In June 2012 it played in Theatre Alley, New York, as part of the River to River Festival" (Tubridy 2012). The company's website (http://www.company-sj.com, last access 20 November 2014) offers plenty of detailed information and some very enjoyable photos and videos.

[9] This production received the "Premio speciale Ubu 2006", the National Italian Award of Critics 2006, and the Special Jury Recognition and the "Brave the new world" Award for the direction at the 47th MESS International Theatre Festival at Sarajevo in 2007. See Teatrino Giullare 2006.

[10] On Beckett's late theatre see Brater 1987; Davis and Butler (eds) 1989; McMullan 1993; Porter Abbott 1995.

"Brevity is the soul of wit" (Hamlet)

At the head of a series of notes he prepared for Donald McWhinnie's 1976 Royal Court production of *That Time*, Beckett wrote his 'theatrical manifesto', the most succinct and explicit statement of his late aesthetics: "To the objection that visual component too small, out of all proportion with aural, answer: make it smaller, on the principle that less is more" (qtd in Gontarski 1999: xxv).

This statement, in all its paradoxical as well as literal truth, can be usefully applied also to the aspect of the length of his works. Beckett seems to have progressively realized that the shorter his plays were, the more they displayed their power. As Rosemary Pountney had it with regard to *Come and Go*: "The more concise, the more highly stylised Beckett's 'dramaticule' becomes, the more telling it is, until the final point is wordless" (1989: 16-17).

In the sixteenth of his *Provincial Letters*, Blaise Pascal wrote that he had made that letter longer because he did not have the time to make it shorter ("Je n'ai fait celle-ci plus longue que parce que je n'ai pas eu le loisir de la faire plus courte", 4 December 1656). Brevity is an aim, not a starting point; it requires great effort and the Latin expression *labor limae*, typical of literary work, appropriately evokes the idea of the harshness of material work, of a handicraft made by shaping and polishing.

Similarly, even in the case of Beckett, shortness is a goal, laboriously achieved, in every instance, in every work, thanks to a wide range of different strategies,[11] but also throughout his whole career as a playwright, which is quite a long one even though he was famously 'wordless' and always on the verge of silence. As one of his famous adages states, "there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express" (Beckett 1983: 139).

Beckett himself proved he was aware of his going along the path of brevity towards silence and, talking to James Knowlson, he linked this fact – quite intriguingly – to an *ab contrario* influence of Joyce:

> I realized that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, in control of one's material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look to his proofs to see that. I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, subtracting rather than adding (Knowlson and Knowlson 2006: 47).

[11] A paper (*Towards Lessness: Samuel Beckett's Short Forms*) presented by Federico Bellini at the International Conference on "The Short Form" held in Turin from 7 to 9 April 2014 has been devoted to the discussion of two of the principal strategies Beckett uses to become concise (a combinatorial one which goes toward abstraction, using symmetry and ellipsis, and a second one using fragmentation, concentration, and *accumulatio*).

Many studies[12] devoted to his drafts and writing phases, which are sometimes very complicated and prolonged, have elucidated his struggles and the extended process of "discovering" and "uncovering" (Gontarski 1985: 134) that, through writing and rewriting, adding and deleting, correcting and polishing, led to his published works, and more and more to a conquered brevity. After all, his theatrical work on the whole starts with the longest plays (with a first one, *Eleutheria*, amounting to over one hundred pages, even if small-sized, in the first and posthumous publication by Les Éditions de Minuit in 1995). Only gradually did he reduce the length of his works, often further abridging during their staging when he 're-wrote' them as he started doing in the second half of the Sixties at the beginning of the period that S.E. Gontarski terms "Beckett's working through Beckett" (1999: xxiii). Then directing became a crucial part of his creative process and he "corrected" (his own word) the theatrical insufficiencies he found in his earlier plays and started writing with more and more brevity.

However, when Beckett wrote "less is more", he referred to all the elements of theatre and therefore his writing became shorter and shorter, but also stiller and stiller, with a progressive circumscription of motion "within the bound of invariant location" (Garner 1994: 72), greyer and greyer, giving up colours and dulling what manages to come out of the dark,[13] and more and more dismembered, with few, truncated parts of the body visible and more often disembodied figures.

Significantly, in the mid-Fifties, he had claimed that "For some authors writing gets easier the more they write. For me it gets more and more difficult. For me the area of possibilities gets smaller and smaller" (qtd in Admussen 1973: 26). Obviously this also affects the audience. The spectator is not well treated in Beckett's last plays:

> As stage space conceded to invading darkness of offstage, language diminished toward silence, characters devolved into creatures, and plays dwindled to dramaticules, the possibility of audience empathy would fade (almost) to zero. Yet an audience ignored would become an audience involved, implicated and, ultimately, liberated. (Davies 2009: 82)

The relationship is always inversely proportional: less is more. Nonetheless, the brevity of Beckett's last plays is so extreme that it seems in fact

[12] For a concise but thorough illustration of Beckett's manuscript and published works see Cohn 2001. See also Gontarski's seminal 1985 study, Admussen 1973; Mitchell 1976; Pountney 1989.

[13] Stanton Garner justly underlines how in *Come and Go* the already "dull" violet, red and yellow for the "full-length coats, buttoned high" of Ru, Vi, and Flo was further reduced to "different shades of grey" by Beckett himself when he directed the play in 1966 (Garner 1994: 70).

to undermine even the possibility of mere survival of the theatre which, as a business, must follow some rules. The public cannot be asked to pay a ticket for a less-than-twenty-minutes show, which is the length of most of his dramaticules (not taking into account the shortest ones: according to its stage directions, for example, *Breath* should run about thirty-five seconds!).

Not only do the shorter plays often include very few words, but in many cases we know that Beckett wanted them played at a very fast pace, pushing the limits of intelligibility. To Jessica Tandy's complaint that *Not I*'s suggested running time of twenty-three minutes rendered the work unintelligible to the audience, Beckett responded: "I'm not unduly concerned with intelligibility. I hope the piece may work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect" (qtd in Gontarski 2014: 10)[14] and the New York première he directed with Billie Whitelaw as Mouth ran about fifteen minutes.[15]

For another New York première, that of *Play*, directed by Alan Schneider, Beckett's instructions (eventually not followed because of the producers!) were that "*Play* was to be played through twice without interruption and at a very fast pace, each time taking no longer than nine minutes", that is eighteen minutes overall (Schneider 1986: 341).

Does this mean that Beckett was not interested in audiences? Is unintelligibility (or, rather, the risk of it) due to his disregard for spectators? On the contrary, it is exactly because he puts the audience at the centre of his theatre that his plays give them a hard time. Entering less familiar experiences involves a sense of uncertainty and a strong urge to find alternative grounds of stability. In fact, this also happens to the actor who is playing Beckett. Yet both the actor and the spectator are carefully guided in the performance through sparseness and precision of signs. Less is more and, for example, it is the reduction of mobility that characterizes these plays that provides the theatrical image "with focal points of movements and gesture" (Garner 1994: 72).

By cutting details, adding ellipses, and increasing non-specific and ambiguous references,[16] Beckett also undermined what had traditionally been

[14] And in the letter to Alan Schneider dated 16 October 1972, again: "I hear it breathless, urgent, feverish, rhythmic, panting along, without unduly concern with intelligibility. Addressed less to the understanding than to the nerves of the audience which should in a sense *share her bewilderment*" (Harmon 1998: 283).

[15] See also Beckett's comments on the German performance of *Not I* directed by Ernst Wendt, with Hanne Hiob as Mouth (in a letter to Schneider, dated 8 December 1973): "*Not I* in Schiller Werkstatt performed by Brecht's daughter! Well, they say, just 30 minutes. *Du Lieber!*" (Harmon 1998: 312). The *Not I* already mentioned by Lisa Dwan has cut down to nine minutes the play, making it the quickest it has ever been performed. For a famous account of this exhausting actorial experience see Whitelaw 1995: 101-33.

[16] Rosemary Pountney clarifies this process very well with regard to *Come and Go*, and

called 'meaning' or 'content', but at the same time he made the audience confront different possibilities: not exclusively verbally expressed, often demanding, but also extremely rewarding. As Gontarski has claimed, "Beckett's own art may reject much (but not all) of the referential quality of language, but, like music, its mainstay is its own relational structure" (1985: 11). The audience are not detached objective observers, but rather "are positioned as an inherent part of the performance" (McMullan 2010: 13), and in that Beckett stages his spectators "as deliberately as he does his characters, consciously manipulating the experiential orientation of audience to stage" (Garner 1994: 81). Interestingly enough, the spectator is often doubled on the stage, sometimes explicitly, and sometimes also with reference to the inner core of the genesis of the play, as it is said to have been for *Not I*. As reported by Enoch Brater, Beckett told him about a scene he had observed in Morocco in late February 1972: a "solitary figure, completely covered in a djellaba, leaning against a wall" (Knowlson 1996: 589), which is clearly a 'foreshadowing' of the Auditor, not of Mouth.

Being a Beckettian actor is certainly not a piece of cake, but a high degree of concentration and perception is demanded from his spectators too, which could perhaps imply they can do better with shorter performances. Nonetheless these dramas have often been grouped into double or even triple bills. *Footfalls* and *That Time*'s world premières opened in a triple bill with *Play* at the Royal Court Theatre in 1976 during the celebrations for Beckett's seventieth birthday. He had volunteered to direct the first one (starring Billie Whitelaw) himself, while helping McWhinnie with the first production of *That Time* and "casting an eye" (ibid.: 622) over the revival of *Play*. Again, only a few months later, he himself rehearsed the two more recent plays at the Schiller-Theater Werkstatt in Berlin.

Evidently Beckett himself did not oppose the staging of more than one of his plays in one night, but he would not have given his consent for every programme. For example, he expressed to Alan Schneider his doubts about the order ("Surely *Act without Words* before *Happy Days* unless technically quite unfeasible. After seems to me impossible", Harmon 1998: 284) and he drastically resisted some combinations: "Feel it [*That Time*] should be kept apart from *Not I*, i.e. the two never be included in same programme. Mutually damaging" (ibid.: 320). And, as he wrote to Schneider on 1 September 1974, and again, one year later: "*That Time*

concludes: "The ambiguities in the final version of *Come and Go* fill out with surprising richness and depth, a textually bare play. Beckett has achieved this effect by combining an obscure minimal text with precise and explicit stage directions, capable of directing audience attention to possibilities not verbally stated and making the play a *tour de force*" (1989: 19).

should never figure in the same programme with *Not I*" (ibid.: 329).

In fact, one cannot deny that the matching of multiple texts has often been unsatisfactory, if not detrimental. Echoes, cross-references, and shared aspects in different works can prove redundant and end up in an impoverished hotchpotch (see Bertinetti 1994: xlii). But even when carefully measured, redundancy is extrinsic to the striking concentration of Beckett's later texts for theatre, which has perhaps not yet been fully exploited on stage (not even by himself, who opened some doors but could not follow the whole path lying forward).

If in recent years, Beckettian productions have increased in number on the European stages, often thanks to famous directors (Peter Brook's work provides a comprehensive example),[17] the shorter plays still seem to be waiting for the establishment of a 'staging tradition' capable of making the most of their constitutive brevity in a form that differs from anthologies, collections, and multiple billings, with their inevitable redundancies.

However, a few efforts already look promising,[18] as Shannon Jackson's account of the difference between her first encounter with Beckett's *Rockaby* and a recent one can perhaps demonstrate. Jackson has pointed out how the first time she saw the play she was sitting in a theatre and the experience was completely dissatisfying: "…. I found the piece to be in marked violation of my expectations … I remember feeling trapped by the pace and by the unending repetition and wanting to jump out of my seat" (Jackson 2011: 3). Some twenty years later, she saw "another incarnation of *Rockaby*, this time lodged inside an evening of works that were part performance and part 'installation'"; this time being a "moving spectator" rather than a seated one, her involvement with the piece "was completely different" as she found herself "quite at ease with the presentation of the stage image and with the staggered, delayed-timing of her voice-over" (ibid.).

Obviously twenty years had not passed in vain and in the meantime she presumably read (as she admitted) and saw many other things. Time also passes for the average expectations of audiences, who become used to things once considered bewildering; but this example as well as the increasingly widespread use of installations and actuations based on Beckett's work[19] suggest that there are fruitful intersections open for us to in-

[17] In Autumn 2006 Peter Brook directed *Fragments*, bringing together five short pieces: *Rough for Theatre I*, *Act Without Words II*, *Rockaby*, *Come and Go*, and the poem *Neither*. The programme has toured since 2006, and it was again in Paris at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in January 2015.

[18] See, for example, the already mentioned Sarah Jane Scaife's Company SJ project *Beckett in the city*, which is meant to "re-insert his writing within the architecture and social spaces of the city of Dublin" (see www.company-sj.com, last access 20 November 2014).

[19] See Tubridy 2014 and also a very interesting project entitled "Beckett and the Visual Arts", organized as a collaboration of the Naughton Gallery, Drama Studies at Queen's,

vestigate and it is indeed time to explore different routes if we really want to exploit the specificity of Beckett's later work in the theatre.

A Glance at the Italian Stage

The Italian stage was quick in embracing Beckett's theatre. In November 1953 *En attendant Godot,* directed by Roger Blin at the Théâtre de Babylone at the beginning of the same year, was staged at Piccolo Teatro in Milan, and the following year the first Italian production of *Godot* occurred and *Aspettando Godot* was mounted at the Teatro di Via Vittoria in Rome on 22 November 1954. The play was directed by Luciano Mondolfo, with Marcello Moretti (Estragon), Claudio Ermelli (Vladimir), Antonio Pierfederici (Lucky), Vittorio Caprioli (Pozzo), and Maurizio Landi (a boy).[20]

The Italian stage was prompt in welcoming the shorter plays, too: *Not I* opened at Teatro Flaiano in Rome on 17 March 1973, just a few months after the London première and in the same year Faber and Faber published the play, while France had to wait until 1975! *Non io* was played by Laura Betti; the director was Franco Enriquez and the evening programme (whose general title was *Beckett* 73) also included *Breath*, the projection of *Film*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Act without Words I* with the 'definitive Italian Krapp', Glauco Mauri (see Cascetta 2000: 290-2).

During the Spoleto Festival of Summer 1977, Daniele Formica and Luisa Rossi played *Trio per Samuel Beckett*, directed by Romolo Valli, a bill that included *Eh Joe, Footfalls*, and *That Time*, just one year after the world debut of the first two.

In July 1982 the Asti Festival's production *Una voce dal pianeta Beckett* [*A Voice from Planet Beckett*] staged *Ohio Impromptu, A Piece of Monologue* (both in a well-timed Italian première), and *That Time*, all directed by Giancarlo Romani Adami, starring Virginio Gazzolo and Paolo Cosenza.

The outsize *Buon compleanno Samuel Beckett* [*Happy Birthday Samuel Beckett*] at "La Versiliana" in July 1986, directed by Giancarlo Sepe, included more than thirty Beckett's works (taking in prose, poetry, and television pieces) among which *Rockaby* and *Catastrophe* that appeared in Italy for the first time, albeit with a delay of several years from their first productions.

What is worth noting is that, apart from its timeliness, the Italian stage has also helped to enlighten the deep connection between Beckett's work

the Queen's Film Theatre and Reading University and launched in 2009. The project includes exhibitions, films, and seminars (see www.brianfrieltheatre.co.uk/Conferences/BeckettandtheVisualArts, last access 20 November 2014).

[20] For the whole history of Beckett's staging in Italy until the year 2000, see the appendix ("La fortuna scenica") to Cascetta 2000: 264-327. On the first Italian Godot see ibid.: 267-8.

and the arts; it is no coincidence that many of Beckett's plays have been performed by exponents of the experimental theatre who started the careers in the arts, or have above all been concerned with the encounter of various arts and often with the use of technologies on the stage[21]. I think, for example, of Carlo Quartucci's lifelong interest in Beckett, Pier'Alli's rigorous and refined as well as internationally applauded *Winnie dello sguardo* (from *Happy Days*) in 1978 and 1984,[22] Federico Tiezzi's Beckettian mises en scène, Giancarlo Cauteruccio's whole career, or even, more recently, the Motus Company, with their homage to Beckett which reveals an 'original inspiration'.

Director, scenographer, and dramatist Carlo Quartucci's theatrical events have always been strikingly visual. His first *Godot* dates back to 1959 and since then has continually worked on Beckett, staging *Act Without Words* (1962), *Endgame* (1963), *Waiting for Godot* in 1964,[23] and even some shorter plays, although it has to be said that his productions have often proved excessive at all levels from costumes to acting, to duration (Cascetta 2000: 280). The running time of *Primo amore* (1989), for example, was more than three hours.[24] His work on Beckett focused on an experimental 'scenic writing', with special attention to the anti-naturalistic and geometric precision of the set design and to the actors' exact movements. Being one of the first of the 'avant-garde' theatre of the Sixties to stage Beckett, his influence must not be underestimated.

Federico Tiezzi founded the theatre company "Il Carrozzone" (later "Magazzini Criminali", then simply "I Magazzini" and in more recent years

[21] On contemporary Italian stage and its connection to the arts and technologies see, among others, Quadri 1977; Ponte di Pino 1988; Balzola and Prono 1994; Valentini 2007; Monteverdi 2011.

[22] *Winnie, dello sguardo*, Firenze, Rondò di Bacco, 16 July 1978, Compagnia Ouroboros, directed by Pier'Alli, with Gabriella Bartolomei, Franco Cadenzi, Gianfranco Morandi, Pier'Alli; a second edition opened at Milano, CRT Teatro dell'Arte on 11 April 1984 again with Gabriella Bartolomei, and Luca Di Napoli, Riccardo Bini, Ferruccio Bigi/Pier'Alli. An analysis of this performance is to be found in Cascetta and Peja 2003: 88-90.

[23] *Aspettando Godot*, Roma, Teatro Brancaccio, 20 September 1959, Compagnia Universitaria Latino-Metronio; directed by Carlo Quartucci, with Carlo Quartucci, René Monti, Maurizio Navarra, Ernesto De Vito, Gina Greco, Celeste Benedetti, Corinna Pasqualotta; *Atto senza parole I*, in *Me e te*, Roma, Teatro Goldoni, 13 October 1962, Compagnia Teatro della Ripresa, directed and performed by Carlo Quartucci; *Finale di partita*, Roma, Teatro Ateneo, 4 February 1963, Compagnia Teatro della Ripresa, directed by Carlo Quartucci, with Rino Sudano, Leo De Berardinis, Anna D'Offizi, Cosimo Cinieri; *Aspettando Godot*, Genova, Teatro Duse, 31 March 1964, Compagnia Teatro Studio dello Stabile di Genova, directed by Carlo Quartucci, with Rino Sudano, Leo De Berardinis, Maria Grazia Grassini, Claudio Remondi, Mario Rodriguez.

[24] *Primo amore* (Roma, Teatro Ateneo, 9 January 1989, Compagnia La Zattera di Babele, directed by Carlo Quartucci, with Carla Tatò, Sandro Lombardi, Franco Citti, Rada Rassimov, Jan Schade, Fabien and Dan Demuynck, Adrienne Larue, with the recorded voice of Laura Betti) staged *Footfalls*, *Ohio Impromptu*, *A Piece of Monologue*, *Not I*, *Rackaby*, *That Time*, *Breath*, *Catastrophe*.

"Compagnia Lombardi-Tiezzi") with performers Marion D'Amburgo and Sandro Lombardi, while studying art history at the University of Florence. They produced provocative pictorial performances challenging the boundaries of theatre practice and started presenting their highly formal conceptual theatre events in contemporary art galleries during the Seventies. In the mid-Eighties Tiezzi turned towards a sort of 'poetic theatre' and in 1987 staged *Come è* (from Beckett's novel *How it is* translated from French and adapted by Franco Quadri) which won the "Premio Ubu" for the best theatre direction of the year, while later on he staged Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1989) and *Endgame* (1992).[25]

Magazzini's *Come è* is a successfully accomplished example of the great fascination Beckett's narrative works have exercised on most Italian theatre practitioners. It is important to note that even before staging Beckett's theatre, "Beckett fitted the cultural outlook of Tiezzi's company" (Restivo 2003: 99) and in fact we find Winnie's burning umbrella from *Happy Days* in one of Tiezzi's first productions: *La donna stanca incontra il sole* [*The weary woman meets the sun*] (1972).

What we can especially appreciate in Tiezzi's *Endgame* is the intersection between poetry, music, and the visual arts. Indeed, he speaks of theatre as a "conglomerate" that must appear as an indivisible unit,

> the literary text 'dying', as he says, the moment it becomes theatre and being reborn in the actor, this theatrical unity thus achieved, fusing words, music, action, images, colours, and dance, must express its emotions like a face, be dynamic like Gordon Craig's screens, in a space as ideal and 'pure' as that conceive by fifteenth century painters and architects. (Ibid.: 100)

Giancarlo Cauteruccio, who studied architecture, is among the most innovative directors, scenographers, and actors in the Italian theatrical panorama since the 1980s. In 1982, he founded *Krypton* and started experimental research on theatre and technology using videos, laser lights, electronic and digital tools in his *mises en scène* as part of a creative process which is also deeply aware of dramaturgical aspects, finding in Beckett's works a constant point of reference throughout the years. From *Forse. Uno studio su Samuel Beckett* (1989), which assembled a few dramas,[26] to *Trittico*

[25] *Come è*, Modena, Teatro Storchi, 10 January 1987, Compagnia I Magazzini, directed by Federico Tiezzi, with Marion D'Amburgo, Sandro Lombardi, Federico Tiezzi, Rolando Mugnai; *Aspettando Godot*, Palermo, Teatro Biondo, 14 February 1989, Compagnia Teatro Biondo Stabile di Palermo, directed by Federico Tiezzi, with Virginio Gazzolo, Franco Mescolini, Gianluigi Pizzetti, Gustavo Frigerio, Gigi Lo Cascio; *Finale di partita*, Brescia, Teatro Santa Chiara, 14 April 1992, Compagnia CTB-I Magazzini, directed by Federico Tiezzi, with Virginio Gazzolo, Gianfranco Varetto, Emanuela Villagrossi, Paolo Ricchi. About Tiezzi see, among the others, Quadri (ed.) 1987; Mango 1994; Valentini 1988.

[26] *All that Fall*, *Happy Days*, *How It is*. Firenze, Teatro di Rifredi, 23 February 1989,

beckettiano (2006), his work includes another four Beckettian productions: two different *Krapp's Last Tape* (in 1993 and 2003), one *Happy Days* (1995) and a very peculiar mise en scène of *Endgame* in Calabrian dialect: *U iuocu sta' finisciennu* (1997).[27]

Again with *Krypton* we can see how, for most Italian artists, staging Beckett means focusing on a fusion of languages and arts, with a frequent preponderance of the visual impact.

An avowedly Beckettian inspiration also stood at the basis of the creation of Motus, a group founded in Rimini in 1991 (and christened Motus in 1992) by Enrico Casagrande and Daniela Nicolò, whose internationally known work concentrates on the interchanges between languages and technologies, in a 'post-modern' imaginary journey from comics to photography, from painting to fashion.

In 2006, presenting *A place. [that again]*,[28] subtitled "una performance di Motus dedicata a Samuel Beckett" [a Motus performance dedicated to Samuel Beckett], they wrote:

> After ten years, Motus is back at work on Beckett: it's back in 1994-95 when the show *L'occhio belva* joined the members of the company allowing them to start living-transforming non-theatrical places into real artistic "invasions".

Following two previous 1992 Beckettian projects (*Strada principale e strade secondarie* [*Highway and secondary roads*], inspired by Paul Klee and Samuel Beckett, and *Ripartire da lì*, [*Starting again from there*] inspired by *Texts*

starring Daniela Cerri, Graziano Dei, Roberto Visconti and directed by Giancarlo Cauteruccio.

[27] *L'ultimo nastro di Krapp*, Scandicci, Teatro Studio, 14 January 1993, Compagnia Krypton, directed by Giancarlo Cauteruccio, with Massimo Verdastro (the old Krapp) and Fulvio Cauteruccio (the young Krapp); *Giorni felici*, Scandicci Teatro Studio, 7 December 1995, directed by Giancarlo Cauteruccio, with Marion D'Amburgo and Giancarlo Cauteruccio; *U juocu sta finisciennu. Endgane*, Palermo, Cortile della Biblioteca Comunale, 14 August 1997, translated by John Trumper, directed by Giancarlo Cauteruccio, with Giancarlo Cauteruccio, Fulvio Castiglia, Alessandro Russo, Ricchezza Falcone; *L'ultimo nastro di Krapp*, Prato, Teatro Fabbricone, 18 November 2003, directed and performed by Giancarlo Cauteruccio; *Trittico beckettiano. Act without Words I* (with Fulvio Cauteruccio), *Not I* (with Monica Benvenuti), *Krapp's Last Tape* (with Giancarlo Cauteruccio) directed by Giancarlo Cauteruccio, Scandicci (FI), Teatro Studio January 2006. These data are mainly drawn from Cascetta 2000 and Krypton's website, www.compagniakrypton.it (last access 30 November 2014). On Cauteruccio see Cauteruccio 2010; Gaglianò 2014.

[28] *A place. [that again] Performance dedicated to Samuel Beckett*, Scandicci, "1906 Beckettcentoanni 2006" Teatro Studio, 6 March 2006, devised and directed by Enrico Casagrande and Daniela Nicolò; shootings Simona Diacci and Daniela Nicolò; motion graphic and video editing p-bart.com; on screen Silvia Calderoni and Gaetano Liberti, voice off Emanuela Villagrossi and Dany Greggio. See Motus's informative website: www.motusonline.com (last access 30 November 2014). In general, about Motus see at least Chinzari and Ruffini 2000; Molinari and Ventrucci 2000; Motus 2006.

for Nothing by Samuel Beckett[29]), in 1994 *L'occhio belva* [*The Beast Eye*][30]was inspired by a definition Beckett used to indicate the video camera, and the show itself focused on an obsession for the glance; although this production did not include the performance of any particular text, it kept *Quad* and *The Lost Ones* as its main references. It "goes beyond Beckett's works as the synthesis of his works and thought":

> L'*Occhio Belva* was a big proof of love towards Beckett's visual lyrics, towards his "white" period, made of "speechless acts"; before starting rehearsing with the unusual and unique show, we shot a short video in super 8 format about *All Strange Away*, as a study concerning the relation between the eye of the camera and the body/the skin of the actor . . . every further theatre action by Motus bore this sign . . . (http://www.motusonline.com/en/spettacoli/a_place, last access 30 November 2014)

In the long run, our rapid 'tracking shot' of the most interesting Beckettian productions in Italian avant-garde theatre (often keen on visual aspects and technological interchanges) seems to validate the idea that these aspects of Beckett's theatre are fecund and are still worthy to be explored. In fact, even though on its first appearance Beckett's later theatre may have seemed to some critics at risk of "being confined to the printed pages", due to its challenging shortness and novelty of language (Bertinetti 1994: xlii), its extensive performative qualities have now been recognized, the road lying open to a re-composition of the segmentation of art in the search of a unity, a "form that accommodates the mess", that is – as Beckett taught us – "the task of the artist now" (qtd in Graver and Federman 1979: 243).

[29] *Strada principale e strade secondarie* (*Highway and secondary roads*), inspired by Paul Klee and Samuel Beckett. Forlì, "Festival Sogni Onomatopeici", Palestra di Piazzale della Libertà, 31 March 1992; directed by Enrico Casagrande, music Fernando Del Verme, Domenico Filizzola, Coco, with Emiliano Ceccarini, Daniela Nicolò, Francesco Riccioli. *Ripartire da lì* (*Starting again from there*) inspired by *Texts for Nothing* by Samuel Beckett. Ravenna, rassegna "In centro c'è spettacolo", 16 September 1992, directed by Enrico Casagrande, Daniela Nicolò, music by Fernando Del Verme, with Emiliano Ceccarini, Daniela Nicolò, Francesco Riccioli, Alan Crescente.

[30] *L'occhio belva (The Beast Eye)* inspired by Samuel Beckett's latest literary production, Verona, Stazione Frigorifera Specializzata Interzona, Ex Magazzini Generali, 2 December 1994, directed by Enrico Casagrande; focus Daniela Nicolò; sound Claudio Bandello, Marco Montanari; Super 8 Motus/Sistemi Rudimentali, David Zamagni; with Giancarlo Bianchini, Enrico Casagrande, Nicola Fronzoni, Daniela Nicolò, Sabrina and Simona Palmieri, Monica Pratelli, David Zamagni. In 1999 within the project "Prototipo" organized by Fanny & Alexander, Masque Teatro, Motus, Teatrino Clandestino and Interzona in collaboration with "Biennale di Venezia - settore Teatro", they presented *L'occhio belva remake* (Verona, Stazione Frigorifera Specializzata Interzona - Ex Magazzini Generali, 7 October 1999).

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