

## **Supervisor's Report**

### **Vendula Kmoníčková, "Samuel Beckett: The Process of Impoverishment in his Theatre Plays" (MA Thesis)**

Vendula Kmoníčková's thesis examines the work of Samuel Beckett for the stage in largely chronological fashion, tracing what is postulated as a gradual development from absurdism to minimalism. The opening chapter of her work presents a thorough summary of the basic features of the theatre of the absurd, as described by Martin Esslin, and argues for the absurdist as being the relevant mimetic mode for the post-World War II era. The following two chapters provide a detailed and mostly sensitive close reading of the entire corpus of Beckett's stage plays, with a central focus on the various ways of impoverishment, lessening, and erasure. Chapter 4 subsequently sketches basic elements of minimalism in a variety of art forms, and tentatively summarises these as they are manifest in Beckett's mature and late work.

The structure of the argument is lucid, and the writing mostly elegant and to the point. The extent of research undertaken in Beckett criticism is sufficient for the purpose, and the results are judiciously used; nonetheless, the thesis would have benefited from a more extensive investigation of theoretical studies on minimalism, particularly as related to the theatre. The uneven length of the individual chapters is somewhat distracting, especially given that Chapter 3 (the longest) devotes a measure of time to what are essentially plot summaries of the plays, rather than attempting the – admittedly much more difficult – task of linking individual themes and motifs across the plays to the issue of gradual minimalisation of the means of expression.

The central argument in Ms Kmoníčková's work may not be particularly innovative; however, it still addresses what remains to be a thought-provoking relation between two types of aesthetic – the absurdist and the minimalist –, one that besides deserves continual critical attention, given the distinctive nature of its treatment by critics of very different philosophical dispositions and/or professional backgrounds. The straightforward genealogy of minimalism from absurdism (only) that seems to be implied in the thesis makes for an all too reductive assertion; regardless of that, the tendencies towards erasure in the early absurdist plays are certainly plausibly linked to minimalist works. It is here that further research is called for, which should also take into account other artistic directions that have emerged or re-emerged from the 1950s onwards, and assess their influence on the classics of minimalist art.

The shortcomings outlined above, however, need to be regarded in the context of an otherwise meticulous work, whose extent in terms of primary texts is exceptional for an MA thesis. Moreover, the treatment of some of the most difficult and ambiguous moments in Beckett's drama demonstrates a good critical sensibility and an agreeable expository flourish. I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade it as "very good".

Prague, 21 January 2011

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