

LUCIE HALAŠKOVÁ  
“FRAGMENTATION AND DISJOINEDNESS IN SAMUEL BECKETT’S PLAYS”  
OPPONENT’S REPORT

Questions from the Abstract:

What specifically is meant by “different *levels* of fragmentation and disjointedness in Samuel Beckett’s [plays]”? Why “levels”? Why not “forms” or “modalities” or even “techniques”?

What is a “fragmentary” concept? “Fragmentary” with regard to what?

How is language a “concept”?

What is the “subjectivity” of a concept? Can we meaningfully speak of the “objectivity” of a concept, and if so, how?

By “what is *absent* in the treated plays,” do you mean “what remains only *implied*”?

“The characters of the treated plays *prove* that language is a delicate *method of expression*”? How? Is language a “method” or a “fragmentary” “subjective” “concept”? What does it “express”? If “language” is a “concept” whose “fragmentation” and “multiplicity” has been “exposed,” how can you then speak of “*the* form and function of language”? And if we have a “perception towards language,” in what does the subjectivity/objectivity of language consist? (Ditto re. “time” and “reality.”)

Questions from the Thesis:

Is it not necessary to differentiate between *fragmentation* and *complexity*? Also between *fragment* and *aspect*. Neither an aspect nor a complexity is incoherent.

If language, time, identity and reality are not “unified,” how does it make sense to continue speaking of them as given? What assumptions of so-called language, time, identity and reality underwrite your argument as to why they are not “coherent” etc?

Why is it significant to claim that Beckett departs from “classical notions of unity and mimesis”? Does saying so not in fact imply that such notions are *essential* (let alone “relevant”) for Beckett—even if, as Esslin states, such notions “have lost their validity”? What does it mean to speak of “validity” in theatre? “An entirely new system of interpretation”? Is Beckett’s work really just a dialectical inversion of “old notions of objectivity, unity, and universality”?

Over-reliance on Lehmann and uncritical assumption of his views. Concerning which:

Cannot a “mélange of fragments” be considered, precisely, in terms of “unity”? (Are not “holes” part of something? Even black holes are conservative...) Is there really any such thing as “simultaneous” perception? How are “moving images” *not* “linear-successive”? What does *perception* have to do at all with “the acceptance of the text as being structurally conservative”? How can you reconcile Lehmann’s volitional, and rather simplistic/dogmatic notion of “perception” with Beckett’s?

Can “irresolution” be objectively defined? Why assume that “open-endedness” as a theatrical device cannot, in and of itself, give rise to an interpretive “synthesis”? What, in fact, do you mean when you use the term “synthesis”? “interpretation”?

Lehmann’s statement re Chaos Theory (10n4) is flatly wrong.

You don’t actual define “fragment” or “fragmentation,” nor do you explain the agency of “fragmentation.” You assume a “fragmentation of the body” and thus a prior pristine body: does Beckett’s theatre thus stage a rejection of the “body” or rather engage with its [the “body’s”] “inherent [fragmentary] nature”?

Is “the claim the language is an inadequate *vehicle* of expression” a credible place to begin a reading of Beckett? What does this take for granted—particularly in light of the fact that all Beckett’s plays were written some time after ‘Whoroscope,’ *Watt* and his period of secretarial work for Joyce during the composition of *Finnegans Wake*? Kirsch defines language as a “communication” (which in turn is defined as a “social activity”); but this is merely Kirsch’s definition, isn’t it, rather than a universal truth? And isn’t his definition rather at odds with Lehmann’s celebration of disorder, anti-communication, and the anti-social function of

theatre? Why ascribe, then, to a functionalist approach to language as the starting point for a thesis that shows how easily such definitions of communicability can be contradicted?

Is it irrational, as you paraphrase Hassan as saying, to expect an “inadequate linguistic system to evoke any sense of meaning or truth”? Does not this experience itself evoke a “truth”? Does not all of Zen, for example, along with much Christian and Jewish theology, etc., argue that “meaning” can, and in fact only really does, arise from the irresolvable—which some might wish to call linguistic “inadequacy”? And how do you gauge what is and isn’t “irrational”? And can you really agree that “Beckett considers *language* a dead habit”?

Pages 15 to 21 are a “mélange” of quotations and names of critics, with little analytic reflection or examination of the details of what is being claimed, giving rise to doubts that you in fact comprehend the arguments or/and what is at stake in them.

Despite the fact that you often echo claims about Beckett breaking away from some traditional notion or other, you don’t actual define what these traditional notions are. What, for example, is “the traditional notion of time” (22)? Does such a thing exist, or is it not just a rhetorical device employed by lazy critics like Chambers? And why echo such claims only to go on talking about time (the “effects if time” etc.) as if “the concept” of “time” remained nonetheless stable (i.e. so that Beckett can still go around “employing” it)?

“The issue of establishing a sense of identity can be accounted for by the dislocating effect of time...”?

Is “identity” “presented in a fragmentary state” or is its “nature” “fragmentary”?

Why is a “multi-perspectival form of perceiving” any *more* subjective than a single-perspective “form of perceiving”? Is there any such thing as an “objective” perspective? (31) How many “perspectives” would be *subjective enough* for Lehmann? (Incidentally, does Lehmann think that the “reality” described by Chaos Theory is a *personal* experience?)

re Kennedy: “The opening silence is as significant as the closing one”: but don’t “opening” and “closing” imply an Aristotelian concept of structure and structural “unity” bound together by formal “significance”? re Lehmann: can a “hole” exist without “unity”? A hole, after all, is a finitude; it is exactly circumscribed—to speak of an indeterminate “hole” wouldn’t be very meaningful, would it? Can you have a fragment of a hole? Are not all holes whole, in some fundamental sense? (36)

In conclusion I would only add this: perhaps by beginning with Beckett, rather than theories that you have not derived yourself, and by paying attention to the exactness of Beckett’s language, and by adopting a similar rigour in your own thoughts, you might be able to arrive at a more serious grasp of the concepts that you claim interest you. But what you have done here is instead collect a series of quotations from Beckett that superficially appear to support the (sometimes contradictory) claims of the few critics you have read; in the process you exhibit a limited critical acumen and a curious lack of engagement with Beckett’s *writing*.

In general terms, the procedural scope of the thesis is in keeping with established practice. Its ambitions raise expectations that most likely at this level cannot be met. I would recommend a grade of 2/3, provisional upon the candidate’s responses to the above questions during the defence.

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