



FACULTY OF ARTS
OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY
IN PRAGUE



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Opponent's Review

Galina Kiryushina, "Saying Seen Again: Audio-Visual Aspects of Samuel Beckett's *Company*, *Ill Seen*, *Ill Said*, and *Worstward Ho*" MA thesis

Galina Kiryushina's BA thesis explored the ways in which Beckett worked with voice and visual / aural binaries in three works – a radio play, a television play and a theatre play. At first sight her MA thesis seems occupied with similar core concerns; however it does not succumb to a repetition of her previous discoveries. Rather it extends and refines an understanding of the technologies of Beckett's writing with reference to the *Nohow On* trilogy: *Company*, *Ill Seen*, *Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho*. This project is intellectually ambitious, critically clear-sighted and showcases its author's abilities to pursue a complex yet lucid analysis of the techniques Beckett develops across these prose works.

The work is structured around an investigation and analysis of the ways Beckett incorporates aspects of other media into the narrative texture of his writing in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Chapter 1 marks the modernist impulses that might be traced here, highlighting the significance of advancements in radio and film technology to literary modernity. The significance of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and Beckett's appraisal of that text is cogently handled. In this chapter the thesis uses Rudolf Arnheim's 1930s observations on radio as a springboard for a conceptual discussion of Beckett's fascination with disembodied, "radiophonic speech" (9). Arnheim's view that radio obliges a listener to supplement "acoustic action" (13) with imagination is a notion that unfolds in complex ways across Beckett's oeuvre. Ms Kiryushina discusses how "the idea of speech issuing from an untraceable source" (10), the voice "coming out of the dark" is inflected in *Company* through the use of tense, alterations in "grammatical persons of utterance" and spatial disorientations to produce the impression of "radiophonic montage" (15). She goes on to explore the roles of tone and recording in *Company*'s narrative rendering of memory. Chapters 2 and 3 then take up a cinematographic angle to proceed with the analysis of *Ill Seen*, *Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho*. Sergei Eisenstein's theories of film provide the main theoretical framework here with fine outcomes. In Chapter 2 Beckett's reliance on light/darkness motifs to transpose a "monochromatic visual aspect" (27), his use of tense to achieve compressions, dilations, freeze frame effects is impressively explored. Chapter 3 continues to consider the cinematographic qualities of the text in terms of movement, specifically "the idea of (semantic) motion which is accomplished chiefly by way of amassing verbal reconstructions of theoretical and technical properties of superimposition" (37). The ambiguities of translation are perceptively handled – in particular the resonances of the word 'on' in "say on." Ms Kiryushina's coining of the term "on-narrators" is especially apt, returning the reader to the question of voice (anonymity, plurality) and folding this into the issue of movement (and compulsion). Again Eisenstein's work proves an incisive conceptual tool, enabling a fine discussion of superimposition and blending, and ultimately, intertextuality. The thesis closes with an overview of how the *Nohow On* trilogy "signal[s] the progressive disintegration of the text and image" and notes the "shared thematic concern with the revival of the past in the present, with the evoked ideas of objects fallaciously attempting to substitute for the once existent objects themselves" (48).

The research undertaken for this project is both original and incisive; the use of this research is consistently insightful and critical. Although noted already with regard to her BA work, it is worth emphasising again that Ms Kiryushina's writing style is fluent, consistent and accomplished. Her



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command of written English is exceptional. The presentation of the thesis is likewise excellent. Clearly a great deal of care has been taken with format of the project.

A couple of matters might be further discussed at the defence:

1. To what extent is Beckett's adoption of audio-visual motifs and techniques also remarkable as a 'time lapse'? After all by the late 1970s and early 1980s the technological modernity that animated Joyce's or even Eisenstein's thinking/writing/experimenting are rather distant – Could we see *Nohow On* as nostalgic in some way? Nostalgic modernism?
2. How would you situate your research in relation to the existing work on Beckett and media?

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade the work "excellent" 1.

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doc. Clare Wallace, PhD