

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on three plays written by Samuel Beckett: *Play*, *Not I* and *Footfalls*. Corporeality is the central theme of these works, which also connects them to an important and celebrated source of study and inspiration for the dramatist, *The Comedy* of Dante Alighieri. The influence played by Dante's descriptions of the body, particularly in the cantica of *Inferno*, is visible in Beckett's works for the ways in which the organs of perception and expression are treated at both textual and theatrical level. In the three plays the activities of mouth, eyes, ears (and less relevantly, nose) constitute the narrative focus of the text, while the sensorial aspects derived by their presence on stage determine the kind of exchange at play between actors and spectators. Staging immobilized, constricted and barely visible characters who, narrating obscure, uncertain stories, obsessively try to make a sense of their existential and physical conditions, the author gives life to a metatheatrical language rooted on instability and doubt.

After the introductory opening chapter, the second chapter looks at the language of Dante's *Inferno* and at its thematization of corporeality, introducing the continuities between the poem and Beckett's drama. The third chapter juxtaposes the characters and the uncertain narrative of *Play* to the the figures and to the atmospheres described by Dante in the circles of the Sins of Incontinence. The fourth chapter provides a reading of *Not I* in light of two episodes of interrogation and confession that Dante describes in Canto XXXII of *Inferno* and Canto XXXI of *Purgatorio*. The fifth chapter compares the character of *Footfalls'* to the Dantean figures of the Futile. After the confrontation with the Dantean source, the chapters devoted to the analysis of the plays proceed with the analysis of the textual and scenographic treatment Beckett gives to the organs of expression and perception of the characters and subsequently, with the consideration of the audience's experience of the performance.