



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Opponent's Review

Giulia Parin, "The Organs of Perception and Expression in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Works" MA thesis

Giulia Parin's MA thesis explores the ways in which the role of the body in three plays by Samuel Beckett – *Play*, *Not I* and *Footfalls* – might be understood with reference to Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*. Dante's significance to Beckett has recently been appraised by Daniela Caselli (*Beckett's Dantes: Intertextuality in the Fiction and Criticism* [2009]), a book Ms Parin duly acknowledges. The focus of this work on fiction and criticism leaves a promising space for an investigation of the theatre work which this thesis goes some way to filling. In her introductory chapter Ms Parin shows a strong awareness of the distinctions between the experiences offered by fiction and theatre and through the work is careful to keep the distinction in view. By the end of chapter 1 the proposed territory of the study has been sufficiently articulated, it is rather less clear of what the argument of the thesis consists.

The work is quite neatly structured into a framing chapter on "Corporeality, Expression and Perception in the *Inferno* of Dante Alighieri" and the subsequent chapters devoted to each of the plays selected. Chapter 2 on Dante provides many excellent details and concludes with a persuasive section on the differences between the texts in question that bears some vital questions. A reservation with regard to this otherwise informative chapter is the fact that it deals solely with the *Inferno*, whereas the frame of reference applied to the plays is not always coterminous with just the *Inferno*. As a result chapter 3 comes across as the one most consistently allied to the promised field of enquiry, while chapters 4 and 5 tend to drift more. The discussion of *contrapasso* in Dante and Beckett in chapter 3 is lucidly elaborated, while the section titled "Circles of Incontinence" (a coinage one would expect Beckett would find quite amusing given the fixation on constipation in some of his works *viz.* *Krapp's Last Tape*), finishes well. Overall the project has many interesting aspects even if its through-line wavers.

The research undertaken for this project shows a good sense of initiative and judgement; the use of this research is appropriate and consistent, even if more descriptive than critical. She has clear read widely and thoughtfully on her chosen subject. Ms Parin's writing style is fluent, but is somewhat marred by minor grammatical errors (i.e. Beckett' rather than Beckett's, slippages in subject verb agreement, the confusion of motif with motive). Clarity is sometimes threatened by a reliance on run on sentences. The presentation of the thesis is clean. Despite small issues with capitalisation and format of footnotes, it is clear that a great deal of care has been taken with format of the project.

A few of matters might form the basis of discussion at the defence:



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1. On page 3 it is stated that “what Beckett essentially derives from Dante and consequently problematizes in his plays, is the consideration of the isolated acts and events constituting the chain of transmission by which subjects belonging to separate environmental and physical circumstances are put in contact.” Could this be explained more clearly?
2. On page 25 Caselli’s argument that the relationship between Beckett’s texts and Dante’s is one of interplay and innovation rather than homage. I would like to hear more about how Beckett fundamentally alters Dante’s work and Ms Parin’s opinion of why he does so. What role does world view have to play?
3. Regarding chapter 4: the question of trauma / abuse seems to be sidestepped. How would the collation of the ‘talking heads’ in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* with *Not I* work if we understood the play as a trauma narrative?
4. Chapter 5: could the interplay with Dante and the focus of the chapter be succinctly clarified?

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade the work “very good” 2.

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doc. Clare Wallace, PhD