



Célia Berretini. *Samuel Beckett Escritor Plural*. São Paulo, Editora Perspectiva, Coleção Debates, 2005. 241pp. ISBN 85-273-0697-2

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To write about Beckett is certainly a complex task: his production challenged the established standards in arts and literature in the twentieth century, and created disturbingly experimental forms of expression of the perplexity experienced in view of the horrors and desolation of twentieth-century post Second World War world.

Beckett is one of the key names in the context of artistic modernity, and his production extended the previously known frontiers between literary and theatrical expression, between prose and poetry, between fiction and philosophical investigation, between words and silence.

Samuel Beckett Escritor Plural, by Célia Berretini, is a careful inventory and at the same time a thorough analysis of Beckett's works and achievements in different literary genres, and the first critical and analytical study of Beckett's complete works in Portuguese. For all these reasons, the book is a more than welcome release.

Célia Berretini, the author, is a distinguished scholar from the University of São Paulo, Brazil, and a researcher and essayist whose well-grounded knowledge of Beckett's works relies not only on a lifetime of academic investigation, but also on the familiarity with an incredibly long and constantly updated list of bibliographical resources.

The style of the book is fluent and pleasant, and the reader, even if not previously introduced to the main features of Beckett's work, is led through a voyage of exploration of the author's creations in a highly informative and at the same time thought-provoking way, with wide use of examples and references for further reading.

In the first part of the book, Beckett's literary and artistic profile is drawn in the context of twentieth century shifts in artistic sensibility and literary expression. The biographical account is followed by the two segments examining respectively the author's use of language and forms, and the productions for different media.

In the second part, an exhaustive chronologically arranged sequence of commentaries to Beckett's works is provided, together with the sinopses of the different titles. Not a single one was left out, regardless of its length or of having been created for the printed page, the stage, or for electronic media such as the television or radio. Brazilian readers have, thus, been offered an unprecedented opportunity for a global overview and at the same time a closer contact not only with Beckett's well-known works like *Waiting for Godot* or *Endgame*, but also about pieces never translated into Portuguese or staged in Brazilian theatres like *Nacht and Träume*, *Words and Music*, *Footfalls* and others.

The diversity of forms and genres and the wide network of sources employed testify to the pertinence of the title chosen for Berretini's study: Beckett's nature as a writer is certainly plural, as the implicit assertion suggests.

As a matter of fact, one of the most important aspects of the book is the careful investigation of the interweaving of poetry, prose and fiction observed in Beckett's works, a remarkable feature considering that the production is characterized by multiplicity combined to an undeniable sense of unity.

Berretini keeps a constant eye on the shifts in style and mood observed throughout Beckett's career, stressing, for example, the contrast between the verbosity of the early works, where a gloomy sense of comedy was always somehow observable, and the terse and extremely self-contained expression of despair, which comes up in later works.

In the accounts of Beckett's life, the book provides an interesting insight of the cultural and literary context of the different periods of the author's career, and discusses the importance of Beckett's inclination towards particular areas of interest (such as the mastering of foreign languages and their respective literatures) and his literary affinities (among which the names of Dante, Leopardi, Baudelaire, Apollinaire and other crucially influential writers are included).

Beckett's personal sense of uprootedness and mobility is also stressed from the point of view of the effects produced on his works, and the reason why he wrote part of his works in French is discussed. The author's love for the arts and his willingness to experiment in the use of new media are also stressed.

Berretini demonstrates an astounding familiarity with historical, interpretive and analytical works, and her sources, most of which very recently published, include titles by both English, North American and French critics.

The biographical account does not lead to an over stressing of personal circumstances in detriment to in-depth analysis, and the analytical study is tuned to the dialogue with unfamiliarized readers without disregarding the necessary density and complexity to keep the interest of connoisseurs and scholars.

In order to draw a panel of the most representative aspects of Beckett's production, Berretini combines the construction of a richly detailed chronology of the author's production to an economically constructed yet extremely dense examination of specific aspects of his career and works.

The core of the book is certainly the analytical approach to characters and themes: aspects like the taste of the characters for storytelling, the use of speech as a refuge from nothingness, the frequent use of open ended stories and the recurrent presence of lonely creatures are shown and discussed.

The same happens concerning the examination of themes: widely known aspects such as the one of the "absurd of human condition" are dissected from an original point of view, showing Beckett's approach in contrast with Sartre's or Camus's. The examples provided give the reader a clear comprehension of the point: unlike the two French writers, who philosophically pondered over the question as well, Beckett exposed

the mechanism implied in it, thus making it more effective and at the same time more striking from the point of view of the effect upon the reader or viewer.

Berretini is always prolific in the use of examples, and this is particularly true in this part of the book, where the themes are submitted to thorough investigation. References to features widely or typically associated to Beckett's works (the "lack of justification for human existence", for example) are examined, as well as others, less frequently highlighted in the analysis, such as the combination of tragic and derisory tones and moods, the cynicism resulting from Beckett's derision and the use of theatrical illusiveness are the most impressive ones. Beckett's artistic attraction to the representation of physical deformity and death is another important element investigated in this part.

The analysis shifts comfortably from the examination of essays to the discussion of narrative techniques in Beckett's fiction, thus gathering elements to produce interesting insights into the author's techniques and thought. A carefully elaborated inventory of the narrative techniques is carried out in Chapter Two, where metalinguistic techniques and the narrative destruction of the possibilities of representation are closely looked into.

Most of the titles discussed in the book have neither been published, studied or staged in Brazil: this is the case of the series of short pieces and of medium-length ones (novels, novellas and short stories), and of most of the plays and TV and radio scripts.

In the analysis of the plays and theatrical techniques, Berretini places emphasis upon the analysis of confining spaces, where elements previously evoked or suggested in Beckett's novels are given concreteness on stage.

The main focus of the analysis of the theatrical works is set upon language and communication, through the examination of the effects and significance of dialogues, monologues, sound, music, the inarticulateness of voice, the effects produced by noise, and the function of silence. Theatrical elements like scenery, characters, the use of props, gestures and pantomime are examined in detail as well.

The sinopses provided in this part of the book include references to the circumstances of elaboration and to the main features of each work. The interpretive commentaries that follow them provide the reader with important elements for a global and critical view of the different plays and novels from a highly investigative point of view.

For all these reasons, *Samuel Beckett Escritor plural* is certainly a landmark in the area of contemporary studies of literature and theatre in Brazil.