

RECENZJE

SANGES ANTONIO, *LES JEUX SONT FAITS: LA CULTURA DELLA SUPERFICIE. BECKETT E IL TEATRO DELLA CRISI*, BIBLIOTHECA PHONEIX N. 113, CARLA ROSSI ACADEMY PRESS, MONSUMMANO TERME – PISTOIA, 2023, STR. 103

In Antonio Sanges' book *Les jeux sont faits: La cultura della superficie. Beckett e il teatro della crisi*, Sanges challenges conventional interpretative approaches to Samuel Beckett's works, particularly rejecting the absurd poetic and allegorical explanations. Instead, he advocates for a literal ('logical') interpretation grounded in the notion that Beckett's discourse on nothingness signifies a conscious acknowledgment of the failure of poetic language. The key argument posits that a hermeneutics of superficiality, contextualised within an aesthetics of small talk, unveils the true meaning of Beckett's oeuvre. Sanges distances himself from established interpretative schools asserting that Beckett's works do not necessitate interpretation but are justified by the aesthetic game crafted by Beckett himself.

Les jeux sont faits: La cultura della superficie. Beckett e il teatro della crisi is divided in three distinct sections. *Les jeux sont faits*: This section discusses the challenge of crafting a narrative that effectively conveys a message and the decision to opt for the theatrical genre, wherein both the epic and the dramatic elements are neutralised. This results in a paradoxical dramatic situation where action is absent. Yet, this lack of action is specifically nullified through a theatrical diversion that amounts to nothing more than a linguistic game, its significance resides in the small talks of which it is made of and the complete alignment of its sounds ("my work is fundamentally about sound. No joke intended", Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta. Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment by Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Ruby Cohn, (London: Calder, 1983), p. 108). *What do talk about when we talk about nothing*: In the second part, Sanges demonstrates that talking about nothing is not simply coherent with the poetics of the absurd but is justified within the creation of an aesthetic game. After 1945 the imperative was, and still remains, that of continuing to aim for such aesthetic game ("nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express,



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no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express”, Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*, (London: Calder and Boyars, 1965), p.103). Going against every school of thought (particularly against Adorno’s dominant reading in his *Trying to understand Endgame*), Sanges ultimately argues for the impossibility of an interpretation of Beckett because any interpretation that aligns with a specific school of thought serves only as a means for retroactively justifying the chosen method of investigation. Instead, Sanges stresses the role played by the deficiency of interpretive means – parallelism with Beckett’s aesthetic of failure and with his activity of self-translation – concluding that Beckett’s aesthetics, which revolves around the idea of creating theatrical works built upon banality, justifies itself. In other words, Sanges claims that Beckett’s work arises from a ‘*tabula rasa*’ and literally means nothing but this is merely the consequence of the historical period from which it emerged. *Musa epidermica*: In the third part of his work, Sanges delves into the theme of the *tabula rasa*, closely analysing *Endgame*, as to investigate the possibility that Beckett’s work truly means nothing other than itself. Thus, he postulates the possibility (to be further explored) of a distinction between ‘depth’ and ‘superficiality’ and that an interpretation of Beckett’s work is possible only by sticking to what the author ‘actually’ said and thus, analysing it according to a hermeneutics of superficiality.

The implication of Sanges’ *Les jeux sont faits: La cultura della superficie. Beckett e il teatro della crisi* lies in re-evaluating Beckett’s works through a set of fresh lenses, moving away from established interpretative frameworks while advocating for an aesthetic of ‘small talk’. The emphasis on a literal interpretation offers a novel perspective on Beckett’s intentions and the inherent meaning of his works. By challenging the ideological biases embedded in philosophical readings of Beckett’s plays, Sanges underscores the importance of considering the cultural and historical context of Beckett’s works and advocates for an approach that goes beyond traditional literary criticism. Given the intention as well as the depth of *Les jeux sont faits: La cultura della superficie. Beckett e il teatro della crisi* it is clear that Sanges is addressing an audience including scholars, researchers, and students in the fields of literature, theatre studies, and philosophy. Sanges’ study is tailored for those interested in a nuanced understanding of Beckett’s works and a critical engagement with interpretative methodologies.

The author adopts a methodological approach grounded on the scrutinization of on-stage drama as a preliminary step to interpretation. Rejecting predetermined philosophical frameworks and considering the cultural context from which Beckett was writing, Sanges provides a novel perspective on Beckett’s works. His hypothesis is that the non-representation of the ending in Beckett signifies a postponement of meaning and a ‘concealing’ (a ‘non-showing’) of the representation of the end. From a purely literary perspective, the non-representation of the ending is a substantial innovation in this context because it signifies that the author’s focus is not on achieving something immediately knowable or interpretable by the audience or the critics. Instead, Sanges proposes, it lies in a stripped-down essentiality. However, if

the attention is on that linguistic and minimalist essentiality that does not necessarily mean that this is its most important element. The paradoxical and meta-interpretative aspect is that every interpretation of Beckett is an interpretation that serves only as a means for the interpretive act itself. In other words, interpreting Beckett is only an a posteriori justification for legitimising the act of interpreting Beckett's work. Thus, Beckett's text should be understood only as a succession of sounds, and the continued 'interpretation' of these sounds is an obligatory act for the continuation of their criticism, just as Beckett's continued small talks were required for reasons that the author never precisely defined.

Sanges strives to go beyond ideological-philosophical interpretations of Beckett, yet this does not imply their exclusion from his study. Sanges demonstrates a profound comprehension of the scholarship, encompassing analyses by Deleuze, Kermonde, Adorno, Federman, Gontarsky, Knowlson, Kenner, Delye, Uhlmann, and Locatelli, among others. This showcases his adeptness in depicting Beckett's reception across various periods and languages. However, Sanges' 'logical' approach, as opposed to the dominant 'ideological-philosophical' paradigms for reading Beckett, is not without issues. A weakness could lie in the fact that the perspective Sanges offers is, ultimately, an interpretation – although Sanges would rather call it a 'non-interpretation' – and therefore, ideological in itself. Sanges' *Les jeux sont faits: La cultura della superficie. Beckett e il teatro della crisi* recommends further exploration of the philosophical implications of small talk, drawing on references to Heidegger, Adorno, and Wittgenstein. This, together with Sanges' explicit aim to challenge metaphorical and ideological-philosophical readings of Beckett's work suggests the authors' intention to provoke the well-established scholarship into reconsider, once again, Beckett and his work.

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