

# Understanding Beckett: A Study of Monologue and Gesture in the Works of Samuel Beckett



Understanding Beckett: A Study of Monologue and Gesture in the Works of Samuel Beckett is the first book to attempt a radically materialist analysis of language and sexuality in Beckett's work, specifically through a politics of resistance to dominant patriarchy. The book concentrates on the complexities of Billie Whitelaw's monologues, such as *Not I* and *Rockaby*, and her gestural acts in *Footfalls*, three of the most powerful pieces of theater of the twentieth century. The viewer/listener is positioned via the complexities of impossible language and sexuality as Billie Whitelaw speaks/acts the Beckettian texts. Any Attempt to make natural the meaning of language, sexuality, narrative, are resisted by the texts and by Beckett's own stagings (which are the ones mainly discussed). Such productions force struggle and resistance against bourgeois interpretation as much by the viewer/listener as by the writer and actress. This book attempts to bring out such issues through the very process of its writing, and utilizes important lessons from a radically materialist feminism and post-Althusserian communism to do so. Understanding Beckett also (for the first time in English) investigates (and includes several original translations of) the hilarious and crucial comic monologues/dialogues of Karl Valentin and Liesl Karlstadt, whose cafe-theater and beerhall productions in Munich in the 1920s must be seen as a historical connection in their breakdown of language authority. Their massive influence on Brecht has been acknowledged; Beckett was to encounter them in 1938. A section of this book also attempts to revise the standard opposition of Brecht's as political theater and Beckett's as formalist theater; the politics of Beckett's (political) theater is not satisfied with an academic notion of distancing. Rather, the Beckett texts discussed here are radically materialist dialectic processes of

contradiction and struggle (of voice, act, subjectivity, and the social).

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