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Anthony Paraskeva. *Samuel Beckett and Cinema*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017.

Katarzyna Peric
University of Toronto, kasia.peric@gmail.com

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Abstract

Review of Anthony Paraskeva. *Samuel Beckett and Cinema*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017. 195 pp.

Keywords

Beckett, cinema, modernism

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Samuel Beckett, a renowned playwright, novelist, poet, and director was awarded a Nobel Prize in 1969 for his innovative forms of expression, and his work to this day draws the attention and interest of many scholars and researchers. In Anthony Paraskeva's recently published book, *Samuel Beckett and Cinema* (series *Historicizing Modernism*), the author offers an analysis of Beckett's cinematographic, television, and theatre productions amply supported by private correspondence (some of which was made publicly accessible only recently), archives, and production notebooks. Paraskeva organizes the book into four chapters, with a rich introduction that represents a detailed overview of the intended study, clearly stating goals and presenting in general terms the idea of modernist cinema and its relationship to literature. This first section also provides insight into Beckett's approach to theatre productions and reveals the beginnings of his interest in filmmaking. Beckett's letters indicate that he was very much cognizant of the tendencies in the cultural world, whether through encounters with artists themselves or through the appreciation of their work. Therefore, according to Paraskeva, there are many different sources of inspiration that influenced Beckett's directing style, such as "silent cinema, German expressionism (G.W. Pabst, Fritz Lang and Robert Wiene), Hollywood comedy (Laurel and Hardy, Keaton, Chaplin and the Marx Brothers), Soviet cinema (Eisenstein and Pudovkin) as well as French impressionism (Germaine Dulac Louis Delluc, Marcel L'Herbier and Jean Epstein)" (2). However, this study seems important mainly because, as Paraskeva claims, he is the first one to fill the gap in the scholarship that has, to date, neglected to situate Beckett's work in relation to the second wave modernist cinema and failed to explore the rich influence of many great artists of that period, such as Marguerite Duras, Jean-Luc Godard, and Alain Resnais, on his oeuvre.

The first chapter provides a detailed analysis of Beckett's *Film* (produced in 1964) starring Buster Keaton. According to Paraskeva, it draws from the tradition of silent film and late modernism when it comes to the "exploration of the limits and conditions of the medium" (38) as well as the inclination to avoid the use of sound. The main actor plays the double role of E and O ("Eye and Object") and the film relies on a game of perceptions. However, Paraskeva's main line of inquiry focuses on the examination of Keaton's performance of "the Keaton persona" (43) which is closely related to his past acting experience and real identity. This enabled Beckett to achieve "a pseudo-documentary effect" (43), and in this respect, as observes Paraskeva, the production of *Film* bears resemblance to the works of many modernist artists, especially those belonging to the *nouvelle vague*.

In the second chapter Paraskeva aims to demonstrate that "the similarities of camera operation and editing" (74) are of greater significance in the study of

Beckett's art than the "distinctions . . . between his film and television work" (74). His meticulous analysis relies on multiple cross-comparisons of Beckett's *Eh Joe* (broadcasted in 1966) with films by Godard, Dreyer, Hitchcock, and Resnais. He observes that Godard's *Vivre Sa Vie* (1963) and Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1927) echo the documentary aspect of *Film* while Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1966) and Resnais's *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (1962) share the technique of unsynchronized voiceover and image. Paraskeva also investigates the evolution of the effect of "self-spectatorship" (89) in the television version of *Krapp's Last Tape* (1969), which has been developed and described by Beckett in his "Berlin Production Notebook" (89).

The third chapter sheds light on Beckett's directing practice in theatre that was, as pointed out by Paraskeva, impacted by his cinematic experience. In this respect, Beckett's extensive notes and letters turn out to be an invaluable source of knowledge pertaining to his working process. He was reluctant to allow others to direct or to adapt his plays because of the very specific effect he wanted to achieve on stage. His "auteurist control" (106) over formal execution spanned the tone and rhythm of speech, the scope of body movement, and reiteration. In his approach to the use of restricted and precise movement in performance, Beckett drew inspiration from Eisenstein, and as Paraskeva suggests, also from Meyerhold, although there is no clear evidence of it. Theatrical effect in his directing style is also reminiscent of the works of Duras and echoes a general trend in contemporaneous French cinema.

In the last chapter Paraskeva explores the extraordinary work relationship between Beckett, Billie Whitelaw, and Delphine Seyrig, the actresses he was most fond of. Their mutual appreciation, trust, and understanding led to remarkable performances that conveyed Beckett's vision of femininity. Paraskeva also considers the technical solutions, especially the use of close-ups in directing style, and draws a parallel between Beckett's television play *...but the clouds...* (1977) and "French impressionist silent film" (145).

Altogether Paraskeva successfully realizes the goal of exploring the various influences of first and second wave modernist cinema on Beckett's work and directing practice. Through his thorough, incisive, and engaging analysis and methodical comparison, Paraskeva provides us with a great read not only of Beckett's oeuvre but also of the other examples present in his research, and his diligently researched book should be considered necessary reading for anyone wishing to study Beckett's work for film and television.

Katarzyna Peric
University of Toronto