

## How Beckett Became a French Avant-Garde Playwright: *Godot's* French Premiere and its Influence on the Reception of the Play in England and Germany

Matthieu Protin

*En attendant Godot* was a huge success. This is a well-known fact. However, the complexity of the process which led to this event, and especially the importance of the Irishness of the play, has been less studied. I would like to show how *Godot's* premiere not only represents an important shift in Beckett's work from a generic viewpoint, from poetry and novel to drama, but also in terms of reception.

If Blin chose *Godot*, it was mainly due to his knowledge of Irish literature. Well acquainted with Irish plays, Blin could see the parallel existing between *Godot* and *The Well of Saints*, and he had staged *The Moon in the Yellow River* by Johnston in 1949. Staging *Godot* was, in this perspective, quite logical.

If *Godot* was staged by Blin because of its Irishness, the reception of the play by a French audience would insist on its novelty. Unable to establish connections with the Irish theatre – about which they knew almost nothing – the French audience pointed out the avant-garde features, rather than the influence of Irish plays such as *The Well of Saints* or *Purgatory*. Being classified as a French avant-garde playwright had a huge influence on Beckett's career. Both the German and English Theatre showed a great interest for the French Theatre in the 1950s – for different reasons. Therefore, while Blin established continuity from Yeats to Synge to Beckett, Hall and Stroux went from Ionesco, Genet, and Sartre to Beckett.

Therefore, what took place in the Babylone Theatre in 1953 was not only a triumph, but a metamorphosis: Beckett was no longer an Irish writer. He had become a French avant-garde playwright.

### Short Bio:

Alumnus of the Ecole Normale Supérieure of Paris, *agrégé* of Modern Literature, Matthieu Protin is teaching drama at Sciences-Po Paris. He also taught at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University of Paris, and at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts et Techniques du Théâtre. He is a member of the research group on the Poetics of Modern and Contemporary Drama at the Institute for Research in Theatre studies. Besides his academic activities, he is also working as a professional actor.

His PhD, *Pratique et poétique du drame. Beckett auteur-metteur en scène de son premier théâtre* was awarded the “Prix des Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle” and the “Prix Louis Forest de la Chancellerie des Universités de Paris” in 2015.

He recently published his first book *De la page au plateau: Beckett auteur et metteur en scène de son premier théâtre*, and wrote many academic papers in English and French, amongst which are: “Elective affinities? Beckett's theatre, between denial and philosophy in action”<sup>1</sup> and “Beckett tel qu'en lui-même Cambridge nous le révèle”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Samuel Beckett and the Encounter of Philosophy and Literature*, Arka Chattopadhyay (dir.), London, Roman Books, 2013, p. 100-117

<sup>2</sup> *Filiations & Connecting Lines, Samuel Beckett Today*, n°23, Sfej Houppermans and alii (ed.), Amsterdam-New York, Rodopi, 2012, p. 277-293.