

Worstward Ho: Beckett's Case for Pure Language

Arthur Broomfield

Beckett's status as a world figure in literature is built on his ground-breaking insistence, stressed through his later works, that "words are all" i.e. that empty language is the real and as such, is privileged over presuppositions of the perceived world. Both philosopher and artist his works transcend the assumed barrier that divides the two and rises to a level from where his unique vision of reality creates an art form that is, according to Stanley Cavell, getting on with the game of un-doing, which may be the essence of Beckett's vision, to undo the connection between language and perceptions.

To understand Beckett's works is to go beyond fashionable literary theory and to build on the thinking of the great philosophers, for Beckett exceeds all philosophers. It is to recognize that, far from being an absurdist or existentialist, he is a believer, not in God "the bastard" but in a reality towards which his works incessantly aspire to go on. To fulfil this aspiration, the real, pure language, divorced from the senses, must free itself from the body and progress to a dimension that is unattainable for the body.

Beckett's vision imagines a dimension freed of all trappings of the corporeal, possibly best enunciated in *Worstward Ho*, the book of on, which brings the reader on a journey from "On, say on" through the systematic dismissal of the world, the body and the void to "Nohow on". We are left with language that is as pure as is possible in a dimension where language is dependent on the aid of the senses. Yet, through the cross fertilisation of language and philosophy Beckett leaves us with little option but to go on to explore the possibility of the dimension that is pure language.

Short bio:

Dr Arthur Broomfield has published a major study on the works of Samuel Beckett: *The Empty Too; language and philosophy in the works of Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge Scholars' Publishing 2014). He is attached to Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. Dr Broomfield has written essays, delivered conference papers, and lectured on the works of Beckett.