

## The University of Gdańsk Samuel Beckett Seminar 2023

### *Who Wrote Godot?*

18-19 May 2023

University of Gdańsk, Poland

The title of the seminar – *Who Wrote Godot?* – was suggested by Professor **S.E. Gontarski** (Florida State University, USA). During the seminar, he will be in Gdańsk/Sopot to launch his new book *Bad Godots: “Vladimir enters from the barrel” and other Interventions*, published in the Cambridge University Press “Elements in Beckett Studies” series. Professor Gontarski’s keynote address will be followed by a showing of the films and documentaries in which he has been involved since the early 1980s. We invite scholars who are eager to share their current work on Beckett in a variety of (global) contexts. We suggest that the question posed in the seminar title and in the following note by Professor Gontarski might trigger papers and discussions of a variety of works, in a variety of ways, and through a variety of approaches.

“Who, finally, wrote the script for the *Waiting for Godot* we are reading, or who ‘authored’ the performances we watch? The answer may depend on what one means by such a question, which edition one is holding, say, or how much attention the producer and director (at least) have paid to the script they at least began with before other theatrical professionals – producers, designers, directors, actors, and investors – entered the scene? Some texts of Beckett’s first produced play were censored, others localized, overtly re-written, and, as published, these remain in circulation, part of the marketplace amid serial reprints and resales. They are seldom withdrawn or destroyed for reasons of corruption or infidelity, and so they remain in circulation, sitting in libraries, school closets and on personal bookshelves to be lent to friends and reused for performances.

The alterations in these texts may be minor on the whole, but they are almost never inconsequential. ‘French’s’ or ‘Samuel French’s Acting Editions’ are high water marks of textual corruption, the product of unauthorized intervention even as they have attracted little attention from Beckett scholars. Minor as each may be individually, the range of these alterations is vast, as Beckett’s terse, astringent prose is continually inflated, the silences rendered less so. In the London premieres, for example, the sparse, arid set is littered with a barrel, cattails, hanging vines, ‘A rostrum’, and other clattering ‘details’ – some of Pozzo’s whip-wielding cruelty is eliminated. As strangers approach, our two waiters ‘huddle together, behind the barrel’ (SF 10). What barrel? Who wrote this? Not Beckett! But this is the text as performed in London in 1955 and subsequently published repeatedly.

While all theatrical performance is subject to variation – from show to show, from theatre space to theatre space, from night to night, from actor to replacement actor – so that all performance is adaptation, to one degree or another, but the degree of variation, the differences between the contingencies of performance, the failures of memory, say, and the deliberate reconfiguration of a script and its staging are the issues at play here. The productions of *Waiting for Godot* that premiered in London at both The Arts (August 1955) and Criterion Theatres (September 1955-March 1956) and the Dublin premiere at the Pike Theatre (October 1955) were co-authored texts, as was the American premiere that opened in Coral Gables, Florida, in January of 1956 – each director tampering with, localizing, regularizing, stamping the text as his own by intervening and altering in the script far beyond what the author would deem acceptable (if he knew). Both credited (the LC in the UK) and uncredited interventionists (producers, directors, and actors on both sides of the Atlantic) shaped and altered what audiences saw in performance, some of what was subsequently and repeatedly published.” (S.E. Gontarski)

Confirmed keynote speakers for the seminar are:

- Professor **Octavian Saiu** (Hong Kong Metropolitan University): *Rereading, Rewriting, Reimagining Beckett: Text and Context Beyond the Canon*;
- Professor **Robson Corrêa de Camargo** (Federal University of Goiás, Brazil): *Samuel Beckett and Maskara at the Brazilian Savannah: Lost and Found*.

In addition to the above, Dr hab. Tomasz Wiśniewski, Prof. UG, will discuss two recent productions Zé Celso's *Esperando Godot* by Teatro de Oficina Uzyna Uzona (São Paulo, Brazil) and Jarosław Fret's *Back to Beckett* by Teatr ZAR / The Grotowski Institute (Wrocław, Poland) as examples of experimental Beckett for the present times.

The University of Gdańsk Samuel Beckett Seminar is part of the Between.Pomiędzy Dispersed Festival, which also includes the conference *The Geography of the Theatre Imagination* (18-20 May 2023), performance workshops run by Katarzyna Pastuszek, open discussions with Teatr Amareya and the Sopot Dance Theatre, and other events. For more information on Between.Pomiędzy see: [www.between.org.pl](http://www.between.org.pl)

We invite proposals for 15-minute papers that provide insight into current Beckett scholarship. The deadline for a 200-word proposal is 15 March 2023 ([tomasz.wisniewski@ug.edu.pl](mailto:tomasz.wisniewski@ug.edu.pl)). The seminar fee is 200 PLN / 50 euros.

The conference is organised by the Beckett Research Group in Gdańsk (University of Gdańsk) in partnership with *The Theatre Times*, The Grotowski Institute in Wrocław, and Teatr ZAR.

The Beckett Research Group in Gdańsk was founded and is led by Dr hab. Tomasz Wiśniewski, Prof. UG. It is affiliated to the Department of Theatre Arts in the English and American Studies Institute at the University of Gdańsk. It brings together people in English, Romance, and Polish studies and artists from various centres in Poland and abroad. Its honorary patron is Professor S.E. Gontarski of Florida State University in the USA. BRGiG works together with Beckett scholars from Poland and the world (Trinity College Dublin in Ireland, the Federal University of Goiás in Brazil), and with translators and artists engaging in work related to Beckett. Indeed, the encounter of academic and creative worlds – searching for varied and not always complementary ways of seeing Beckett's work – is the main axis of the activities of BRGiG. We organize regular Beckett seminars in the Three Cities area, and also theatre workshops/laboratories and discussions with poets, writers, film makers, and theatre workers. We also engage in publishing activities and support various artistic projects. In 2012, the collections of essays *Samuel Beckett. Tradycja-awangarda*, and *Back to the Beckett Text* opened the Between.Pomiędzy series published by the University of Gdańsk Press. In 2017, the eleventh volume in the series appeared, entitled *Beckett w XXI wieku. Rozpoznanie*. In 2016, from Maski publishers, the book *Przedstawienie Becketta (Representing Beckett)* appeared, containing Polish translations of essays by S.E. Gontarski. Cooperation with the Sopot Dance Theatre has led to the production *Wszystko co widać. Ohio*, and the film *All This This Here*. Professor Gontarski's laboratory work from the Festival is documented in the film "...but the clouds...", which has been shown in Poland and the USA, during the Beckett Summer School at Trinity College Dublin, and at the Charles University in Prague. In 2010, the documentary film *Back to the Beckett Text (Beckett na Plaży)* appeared, and at the 2019 Between.Pomiędzy Festival, S.E. Gontarski's film *Beckett on the Baltic* had its world premiere.

## **The Geography of The Theatre Imagination: British and Irish theatre and drama – contemporary perspectives**

**18-20 May 2023**

**University of Gdańsk, Poland**

The conference is about contemporary British and Irish theatre and drama, as well as contemporary takes on classical pieces, and their role in the context of Central Eastern European scholarship. One aim is to discuss those plays and playwrights that are pivotal for the present (post-pandemic?) reality, and another is to examine theatre productions that are of relevance in the geopolitical situation in which we live, including the war in Ukraine. A comparative approach that embraces Central Eastern European perspectives will be central to the conference. The question of the role and status of studies on British and Irish theatre and drama in this part of the world will also be taken into consideration. In addition, it is expected that papers which concentrate on analysis of individual plays and performances will be delivered.

The conference will host a roundtable discussion on matters that appear most urgent in connection with its main theme and will include the following participants: Aleksandra Kamińska (moderator), Klaudia Łączyńska (University of Warsaw), Michał Lachman (University of Łódź) and Tomasz Wiśniewski (University of Gdańsk). The keynote addresses will be delivered by Professor S.E. Gontarski (Florida State University), and Professor Paul Allain (University of Kent).

*The Geography of The Theatre Imagination* will include performance workshops run by Katarzyna Pastuszek, the University of Gdańsk Samuel Beckett Seminar, and other events.

We invite proposals for 15-minute papers that address the above questions, considering general issues or examining case studies that relate to individual plays, performances and theatre-makers. The deadline for a 200 word proposal is 15 March 2023 ([tomasz.wisniewski@ug.edu.pl](mailto:tomasz.wisniewski@ug.edu.pl)). The conference fee is 200 PLN / 50 euros.

The conference is part of the Dispersed Festival Between.Pomiędzy 2023 and will be continued in the years to come. For more information on Between.Pomiędzy see: [www.between.org.pl](http://www.between.org.pl).

The conference is organised by the Between.Pomiędzy Research Group (University of Gdańsk) in partnership with TheTheatreTimes.