

REVIEWS

BERNINI, MARCO. *Beckett and the Cognitive Method: Mind, Models, and Exploratory Narratives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (Cognition and Poetics), 2021. 256 pp. £64.00 / \$99.00. ISBN 978-0-1906-6435-0 [hardback]. Marco Bernini's *Beckett and the Cognitive Method* is a critical deep dive into psychologically informed narratological methods (and subversions) in Beckett. This text is better read as a book, cover-to-cover, than as a desk reference to psychological readings of Beckett, largely because, as Bernini argues, Beckett engages in all the cognitive modelling practices outlined throughout the book at once, creating what Bernini (among others) calls a 'complex system' (p. 166). Chapter 1 considers the ways in which Beckett models inner selves, cultivating a model of the 'mind as a space' with a homuncular 'inner agent' observing that space (p. 37). In this sense, the mind functions as an architectural apparatus which provides boundaries for thought. Chapter 2 sets the voice as the 'core modeling element' of the Beckettian cognitive model. This voice, according to Bernini, is 'defamiliarized or, [...] "detuned" as a modeling alteration to explore its functioning within human cognition' (p. 46). As such, Beckett's knowledge of narratological conventions, and how the voice functions in narrative, allowed him to imitate the ways in which a voice might function in human cognition (p. 68). This leads to what Bernini calls the 'dialogic cloud', constituted by a collection of internally constructed voices (a co-presence) which have a reciprocal relationship with the listener, as the listener must listen, but can also alter the voice – exemplified by Krapp's ability to stop, skip or restart the voice (p. 82).

Chapter 3 proposes an ecological innerscape which is characterized by an 'estranged intimacy' (p. 105). This ecology features a synesthetic 'sound-sight perceptual coupling' which produces an 'atmosphere that heightens experientiality' (p. 112). Chapter 4 shows how Beckett 'lesions' – a neologism which, for Bernini, seems to imply impairment – individual and highly specific processes of human cognition to lay bare the fundamental elements of human cognitive makeup (p. 123). In so doing, Beckett forces characters into 'threshold mental states' of 'cognitive liminalism' (p. 123). This chapter concludes with perhaps the most interesting idea in the book: that readers themselves experience the liminality of the Beckettian characters as they are pulled between the inherently fictive non-persons of the texts, and their human desire to coalesce and stabilize information into a 'natural' narrative (pp. 155–56). Bernini concludes that Beckett's fictional minds are 'models' which use readers' minds as 'cognitive workspaces or resonators' (p. 157). Finally, Chapter 5 considers the mind as a complex system, and draws together the disparate threads of the previous four chapters. Bernini's stated goal with this chapter is to shift our understanding of Beckett from a 'complex author' to an author of real, psychologically nuanced, complexity (p. 168).

Bernini has produced a compendious study of Beckett's work; however, this compendious nature is both the text's biggest advantage and its greatest shortcoming. Each chapter brims with textual references, yet due to the brevity of the volume the individual novels, plays, poems and sketches often feel relegated to glosses and catalogues, and Bernini's readings would benefit from greater detail via which the reader could fully think *through* and *with* individual pieces of source material. As such, this work functions well as a potential point of entry to future cognitive studies of Beckett, or as the beginning of an expanded second edition. The book is a crucial addition to the bookshelf of any psychologically inclined Beckett scholar; but, for the more general Beckett reader, it might feel as though Bernini skews toward psychology and narratology at the expense of Beckett's works themselves. [<https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqad018>]

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