

***Beketto no Kotoba* [Words of Beckett], edited by the Samuel Beckett Research Circle of Japan, supervised by Kumiko Kiuchi (30th Anniversary Commemorative Volume), (Tokyo: Michitani, 2023), 344 pp.**

A beautiful volume has been published: *Beketto no Kotoba*, commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Samuel Beckett Research Circle of Japan. At the center of its black dust jacket lies a modest yet captivating lithograph by Bram van Velde, evoking a Beckettian aesthetic of stillness and internal motion. The original art belongs to a collection aptly named *Celui qui ne peut se servir des mots* ('He who cannot make use of words', 1975), foreshadowing the silent voice that resonates across Beckett's oeuvre from poetry to television works.

The book's layout conveys quiet elegance, reflecting the editorial team's dedication. Each academic essay is paired with selected 'Words of Beckett', making the volume accessible to newcomers while offering scholarly depth. The eleven chosen selections reflect Beckett's bilingual identity, presenting original texts in English or French alongside Japanese translations.

In her preface, Kumiko Kiuchi introduces Beckett's final utterance—'What—/ What is the word—/ /What is the word?'—and explores the intractability of meaning in his oeuvre. Beckett maintained a fundamental skepticism towards language, believing nothing could truly be expressed in words. Kiuchi warns against the seductive danger of 'understanding' Beckett too easily, discerning in his work a 'halting motion toward something like an ending', and charts this trajectory into three parts—'Words in Fiction', 'Border-Crossing Words', and 'Resonant Words'—to show how each contributor engages in a textual struggle with Beckett's language and vision.

Part I: Words in Fiction

Sayaka Shimizu, 'The Disappearance of Limbs in Beckett's Novels'

Shimizu highlights a passage from *L'Innommable* (*The Unnamable*): «Mais avant d'en brosser le portrait, sur pied, il n'en a plus qu'un, mon prochain représentant en existence sera un cul-de-sac, c'est décidé... » ['But before sketching his portrait, standing up—he only has one leg left—my next representative in existence will be a dead end, it's decided...'].

Shimizu analyzes the progressive disappearance of limbs in Beckett's novels—Molloy's stiffening legs, Malone's dysfunctional hands—as bodily transformation into what Beckett describes, in *The Unnamable*, as 'a big talking ball'. Drawing on Georges Bataille's terminology, she interprets this as exposure of 'the base materiality of existence'. However, she argues that the disappearance of limbs should be read not as mere physical degeneration, but as a radical experiment interrogating the boundaries between language and body, being and non-being.

Tomoya Kawashima, 'Words around Nothing: The Absence of the Self in *The Unnamable*'

Kawashima's chosen passage highlights the impossibility of writing and fragmentation of subjectivity: 'How, in such conditions, can I write, to consider only the manual aspect of that bitter folly. I don't know... It is I who write, who cannot raise my hand from my knee'.

Starting with the question of who this ‘I’ might be, Kawashima argues that the narrative voice lacks coherent subjectivity. The ‘I’ functions not as an agent of speech but as a grammatical fiction and nothing but the narrated. Drawing on Émile Benveniste’s distinction between discourse and narration, and Maurice Blanchot’s concept of the neuter voice, he concludes that Beckett’s language resists convergence upon any fixed subject, constituting a radical attempt to destabilize the very structure of language that presumes a speaking subject at its center.

Michiko Tsushima, ‘The Truth of the Inner Self: Religious Experience in *The Unnamable* and D. T. Suzuki’

Tsushima turns to comparative study of Beckett and D. T. Suzuki, selecting striking ‘Words of Beckett’: ‘I have always had the feeling that there was within me a murdered being. Murdered before my birth. I had to find that murdered being again’. She links this haunting image to Beckett’s notion that writing is a descent into ‘the authentic weakness of being’. By juxtaposing the abyss of the *Unnamable* with Suzuki’s ‘abyss of the Nameless’, she uncovers resonances between Beckett’s metaphysical questioning and Zen ego dissolution. This essay adds a vital Buddhist dimension to Beckett studies, emerging not from Schopenhauer’s influence but from shared confrontation with the void.

Part II: Border-Crossing Words

Taro Ishikawa, ‘Montage of Sight and Sound in *That Time*: Beckett and Eisenstein’

Ishikawa selects Beckett’s utterance: « Il faudrait trouver une ombre vocale, (...) une voix qui soi une ombre. Une voix blanche » [‘One would have to find a vocal shadow, (...) a voice that is a shadow. A white voice’]. His essay offers a compelling intermedial reading of *That Time* through Sergei Eisenstein’s montage theory. Focusing on Beckett’s synesthetic expression, Ishikawa explores how Beckett blurs boundaries between sound and image. Drawing on Eisenstein’s expansion of montage theory to auditory elements, especially those inspired, for example, by Chinese character collisions such as ‘tears’ = 涙 = 目 + 水, Ishikawa reveals how *That Time* enacts semiotic montage, in which disjunctive elements coalesce into affective meaning. This cross-cultural approach suggests shared aesthetic logic between Beckett’s minimalism and Eisenstein’s ideogrammatic thinking.

Minako Okamuro, ‘The Mediumized Body: On the Origins of Language in *Drive My Car* and *Ohio Impromptu*’

Okamuro quotes from *Ohio Impromptu*: ‘Seen the dear face and heard the unspoken words. Stay where we were so long alone together...’ She connects Beckett’s later play with Ryusuke Hamaguchi’s film *Drive My Car* (2021), which contains clear Beckettian echoes. Okamuro identifies a shared structure in which ‘Reader’ and ‘Listener’ figures reenact loss, memory, and spectral presence. She links Beckett’s table-tapping cue to spiritualist traditions and views the cassette tape in *Drive My Car* as a medium that channels absent voices. Drawing on W. B. Yeats and Jacques Derrida, she develops the concept of the ‘mediumized body’ to explore indeterminate origins of language in both works.

Hajin Park, ‘Televisual Vision: Moving Pictorial Images in *Nacht und Träume*’

Park selects a stage direction from Beckett’s final television play: ‘B raises his head further and stares at the unseen face’. She interprets this monochromatic composition

as ‘televisual vision painting’, linking it to Beckett’s childhood memory of Dürer’s *Praying Hands* and visionary painting traditions, in which saints perceive divine apparitions. Park argues that *Nacht und Träume* blurs boundaries between dream and waking through fade-ins, fade-outs, and image superimposition. Her essay introduces the critical framework of ‘moving visionary painting’, establishing a foundation for future analyses of Beckett’s televisual aesthetics.

Mariko Hori, ‘The Writer’s Agony Seen through *What Where*’

Hori’s chosen passage echoes Schubert’s *Winterreise*: ‘I am alone. In the present as were I still. It is winter. Without journey...’. Tracing the production history of Beckett’s final play *What Where* from stage to television, she highlights revisions Beckett made while grappling with ‘memory’. The repeated cycle of forced confessions and transformation of victims into torturers is interpreted as metaphor for memory’s burden. Hori focuses on Beckett’s ceaseless revisions even into his seventies, framing this as testament to his unending artistic pursuit of the unknown.

Part III: Resonant Words

Eri Miyawaki, ‘The Aesthetics of Failure: Beckett and Duthuit’

Starting with Beckett’s assertion ‘To be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail’, Miyawaki explores the ‘aesthetics of failure’ shaped by postwar dialogues with art historian Georges Duthuit (1945-1949). Central to this was the avant-garde painter Bram van Velde, whose rejection of representational art deeply impressed Beckett. Miyawaki highlights how van Velde’s art enacts ‘non-meaning’—a concept Beckett tried, and inevitably failed, to express in language. This failure, she argues, is not a flaw but the heart of Beckett’s aesthetic: a drive to articulate the inarticulable.

Yoshiyuki Inoue, ‘Beckett’s Dantesque Architecture: On *The Lost Ones*’

Inoue explores hidden Dante influence in *The Lost Ones*, beginning with Beckett’s contradictory remarks: ‘Dante invented a new language... Dante was a Joycean writer’, versus ‘Keep whole Dantesque analogy out of sight’. Employing a philological approach, Inoue traces key terms across translations and drafts, highlighting spatial metaphors of ascent and enclosure. In *The Lost Ones*, a cylindrical chamber appears as negated purgatory: verticality without ascent. His close reading uncovers a hidden system of descent and enclosure where purgatory and hell are no longer distinguishable.

Kōjin Kondō, ‘The Shadow of Mallarmé’

‘Mallarmé is important to me. His poetry. Not his prose’. This remark from a 1983 interview with Beckett provides Kondō’s starting point to explore how Mallarmé’s legacy echoes throughout Beckett’s work. Positioning Beckett within a Mallarméan lineage shaped by negation, absence, and silence, Kondō recounts asking Beckett about death and silence in his literature. Beckett’s reply—‘A long journey to that end, uncomfortable’—encapsulates his protagonists’ trajectory towards dissolution.

Kondō’s most illuminating argument involves Mallarmé’s claim that *Hérodiade* was ‘created entirely through deletion’. Beckett’s subtractive style, defined by erasure and minimalism as opposed to Joyce’s exuberance, may owe more to Mallarmé than previously recognized.

Throughout, the essays demonstrate both critical rigor and an openness to

intertextuality—establishing connections between Beckett and modern philosophy, Zen Buddhism, Russian cinema, Italian and French poetry, modern art, contemporary Japanese film, and language and memory—thus presenting this volume as a landmark publication from the Samuel Beckett Research Circle of Japan.

Naoya Mori

Emeritus professor of Kobe Women's University