

# STAGING BECKETT IN SPANISH

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## 1. Staging Beckett in Spain

Beckett's theatre arrived in Spain in the late fifties when the fascist censorship exerted a stifling effect on the performing arts. Almost "everything was banned, especially if it came from abroad. Comedies, melodramas and the "poetic theatre of the already known", defended by the "official" playwright, José María Pemán, contributed to the poor theatrical atmosphere of the 50s. Dramatists like Unamuno or Valle-Inclán were rejected; their plays being suspected of "intellectualism". A kind of cultural xenophobia was also encouraged by the establishment. Everything coming from abroad was bad, especially if it came from France or Britain —nations which had helped the wrong party in the Civil War.

In this kind of cultural desert only a few groups: "Teatros de Cámara y Ensayo" were able to inject some oxygen into the stifling theatrical atmosphere. Experimental groups such as: "Arte Nuevo", "El Duende", "El Candil" or "DIDO Pequeño Teatro" in Madrid —and other similar groups in other parts of the country— managed to introduce in Spain the plays of Camus, Sartre, O'Neill, Miller, Claudel, Schéhade, Ionesco, Beckett, etc., to very limited audiences. These groups were given 'a performance licence' only for one day, and for very small theatres, to protect the morals of the 'new Spanish Society'. The list of the suspected playwrights who could undermine the moral principles on which Spanish society was being built, was incredibly long.<sup>1</sup>

It is not surprising then that in this rather special cultural atmosphere, *Waiting for Godot* was not even granted a 'one-day' performance licence. Eventually the play was secretly produced on 28 May 1955, by the group "Pequeño Teatro de Madrid" in the Assembly Hall of the Faculty of Arts, of the 'Universidad Complutense' of Madrid, thanks to the cunning of the play's director Trino Martínez Trives. After being refused a licence by the censors, who considered the play, 'obscure and obscene, not worth the trouble',<sup>2</sup> Trives —a key figure in the introduction of 'avant-garde' theatre in Spain— went to see the Rector of the University of Madrid, Pedro Lain Entralgo and asked for his permission to perform *Esperando a Godot*, in the Faculty of Arts. Permission was granted, and in this unusual way the Spanish clandestine *Godot* was born. The premiere of the play was as much a political as a theatrical event. It was an act in support of the freedom of artistic expression.

Trives confesses that he thought that right-wing demonstrators who were in the theatre were going to stop the performance at any moment. The great support of the majority of the audience including students, theatrical people, intellectuals, artists... etc. prevented the right-wingers from jeering. The play was received enthusiastically and many people congratulated Trives, among them the playwright Fernando Arrabal who told him: "if this is the kind of drama being performed in Paris, I shall go there". Trino Trives staged the play around the idea: "no es vacío lo que falta", (there is no lack of void). The setting was very simple: a bare stage with a leafless tree. To make this tree more visible, given the technical limitations of the theatre, they hung a rectangular white cloth behind it. This was, Trives says, their only innovation; apart from this they followed the stage directions of the text very closely. The lighting was 'pale grey' until the end of each act when "it faded gradually, engulfing the characters in shadows".<sup>3</sup> The acting was very good, by all accounts especially Alfonso Gallardo and Ramón Corroto in the main roles. Costumes were very much like those in Roger Blin's Paris production which Trives had seen several times.

This production, with the same cast was presented in Barcelona on 8 February 1956, in a 'real' theatre, the "Teatro Windsor", and later in Madrid on 28 March in the theatre of the 'Círculo de Bellas Artes' produced now by "Dido Pequeño Teatro". Audiences and critics alike were divided in their wild enthusiasm or utter rejection. Beckett was for critics: "A fraud admired by the Spanish cultural snobs", and also, a theatrical genius, true inheritor of Calderón, Unamuno and Valle-Inclán". The audiences were also divided into those who gave a standing ovation and others who jeered and walked out of the play before the end. This kind of response to Beckett's theatre was typical in the 50s and 60s.

Two groups competed for the premiere of *Final de Partida* (Endgame) in 1958. "Dido" —possibly the best experimental group of the time, based in Madrid, and directed by Josefina Sánchez Pedreño— won the battle and presented the play on 11 June in the theatre of the "Círculo de Bellas Artes" of Madrid. The Spanish version was by Luce Moreau, Arrabal's wife, and was directed by González Vergel.

A few days later "Los Independientes" directed by Javier Laffleur, using Trino Trives's version, staged the same play in the "Teatro Recoletos".

These two productions were very different, according to their directors. González Vergel says that he wanted to transmit the anguish and desperation underlying the play with a "certain serenity and harmony". Javier Laffleur, on the other hand, thinks the staging of *Final de Partida* should have "an irritating quality" and therefore its pace should be rapid.<sup>4</sup> Laffleur's version was repeated several times and was selected for the 'I Festival de Teatro de Madrid'. Laffleur was also responsible for the premiere of *Acto sin Palabras I*, (Act Without Words I), on 17 March 1959, with a woman, María Escudero, as the protagonist.

The critical response to *Final de Partida* was similar to that which greeted *Esperando a Godot*, though the attacks from the establishment critics were in "crescendo". If *Godot* was "a kind of 'Bolero de Ravel' of the theatre full of unnecessary details of repulsive, crude realism", the characters of *Final de Partida* were "nothing, less than nothing... projects, sketches, outlines of creatures who haven't developed from their embryonic state... and the play was destructive and repulsive".<sup>5</sup> As one might expect *La Ultima Cena (Krapp's Last Tape)* raised the furies from the conservative critics, but also received very sensitive reviews which showed that Beckett's theatre was accepted, if not by the majority, at least by a very interesting minority.

The premiere of *La Ultima Cinta, (Krapp's Last Tape)* took place on 5 November 1962. It was directed by José Guevara, a dramatist and painter who, very impressed by Blin's 1960 Paris production, decided to stage the play in Spain with the Chilean Mime actor Italo Ricardi to play Krapp. Guevara was as respectful as Trives and Laffleur had been with Beckett's stage directions. His only innovation was in the setting. Several black and white square blocks were piled on the left corner of the table and others were scattered on the floor. They looked like boxes, perhaps where Krapp kept his tapes... Ricardi's acting stressed the comic and grotesque elements of the play. His face was painted like a clown's. He wore black trousers, waist-coat and white collarless shirt.

Passionate arguments for and against Beckett's plays reached their highest point after this production of *La Ultima Cinta*. I cannot refrain from quoting some of the reviews which I think sum up not only the critics 'views but also these of the spectators'.

Alfredo Marquerie, a conservative critic very well known at the time for his tirades against the French avant-parde theatre, wrote: "this play is a joke in very bad taste... To provoke disgust and nausea is one of the aims of the so called 'theatre of shock', people who think this can be called art are really wrong". Perhaps the best example of this kind of 'bias-criticism' was Gómez Picazo's review from the newspaper *Madrid*. "*La Ultima Cinta* is an atheistic and amoral play... with no value whatsoever in our world, which still believes in higher values. The actor was Italo Ricardi. God forgive him!". Among the most sensitive critics, García Pavón, a writer and drama teacher wrote: "It is impossible to stage more economically and with such dramatic intensity, the tragedy of a man who suddenly sees frustration pouring upon him", or Enrique Llovet, "what is fantastic about this play is Beckett's determination to place us inside a man... he wants to shake up the established order and he achieves it". This kind of passionate conflicting controversy, by public and critics, died down a little when Beckett received the Nobel Prize in 1969. "Official" critics toned down their abuses but before this *Días Felices, (Happy Days)* was staged by Trino Martínez Trives, and presented in the course of a Festival, at the Teatro María Guerrero in 1963, and then "officially" on 14 May 1964, at the Teatro Valle-Inclán of Madrid. This production was repeated in 1965 and with slight changes in 1974, for a tour to various Spanish cities. Trives's staging

followed Beckett's stage directions very closely. The actress Maruchi Fresno, very well known in the Spanish Theatre, played Winnie. Here is her account of this production: "I was placed in a sort of box which was extended to my right and left and was covered with sand. I wore a tiny bowler hat, in the premiere, which afterwards was replaced by a cocktail-hat with a long bright coloured feather. I used to wear either an elegant shabby looking dress or a brightly coloured blouse. Ms. Fresno added that her acting "emphasised the grotesque elements of the play". *Días Felices* was the last Beckett production by Trino Trives, who unfortunately abandoned the theatrical scene too soon, after some years of intensive work with experimental groups. With Trives' early retirement the direct French influence on the staging of Beckett's plays in Spain, also ended.

The experimental group "Los Goliardos" staged "Beckett 66", 10 December 1966. This production included, *Eh Joe, Vaiven (Come and Go)* and *Palabras y Música (Words and Music)*. The first two plays were staged by Angel Facio, who still is one of the most controversial Spanish Theatre directors. He placed the three women of *Come and Go* inside a church and repeated the lay three times. The names of the actresses Ru, Vi and Flo were changed to musical notes: Do, Mi, Sol. Compared to this, the staging of *Eh Joe* was quite conventional. Joe sat on a big armchair moving very little during the whole performance, listening intently to the female voice. But the most daring experiment was the staging of *Palabras y Música*, directed by Miguel Angel Arrieta. On a square stage-space two platforms were built up-stage right and left, one for 'Music' and another for 'Words'. 'Palabras' (Words), was a chorus of four actors, three men and a woman, wearing masks. 'Musica' was an orchestra of four actors, plus one director, all dressed in workers' blue overalls. They played music composed for the occasion by Agustín González de Acilu. Croak represented bourgeois power and was dressed in a kind of equestrian attire. The best comments on this incredible production—well received by audiences that didn't know the original plays—came from the group itself in the programme: "We were attracted by the interest of the texts and the unique personality of its Irish author... our own failings due to our professional immaturity are compensated by our findings in this risky field of theatrical experimentation. Spectators, you will be our only judges!"

In 1967 "Beckett 66" was invited to the "Festival de Teatro Independiente" of Valladolid, where "Los Goliardos" introduced the Argentinian Mime actor, Julio Castronuovo, in an interesting show under the title: "Pantomimas en Blanco y Negro y *Acto sin Palabras I* de Samuel Beckett". Castronuovo was very much praised by the critics.

In the early 70s, two independent groups, "La Gabia" in Barcelona and "El Corral de Comedias" in Valladolid, staged Beckett's plays. The Catalan group produced the two *Acts Without Words, Come and Go* and *Krapp's Last Tape* and 'El Corral de Comedias' staged the Spanish premiere of *Comedia (Play)* in

1975.

At the end of the 70s and in the early 80s the interest of professional actors and private companies in Beckett's theatre increased. The approach to his plays and to their author also changed. From being a tragic metaphysical poet of doom, Beckett starts to be regarded as a hard realist with a corrosive sense of humour and a master of theatrical language. Three productions of this period showed this change of approach to Beckett's theatre. The three were greatly acclaimed by critics and audiences and stand out for the professionalism of their staging —though they were marred slightly by naturalism and over-acting.

On 13 September 1978 the "Teatro Estable Castellano" company staged *Esperando a Godot* in the Teatro Martín of Madrid with an all female cast. Although I am totally against 'a female *Godot*', I must confess I was very impressed by the excellent acting. Paz Ballesteros who played Vladimir and who produced the play, told me recently that she fell in love with Beckett's 1975 Schiller Theatre production of the play, which she saw at Belgrade's International Theatre Festival. She gave the text to her stage-director husband Vicente Sáinz de la Peña with a note: "write a Spanish stage version of this, because we are going to produce it". They looked for a male cast, but good actors refused, or were unavailable. They decided then to stage the play with women, "we have many more good actresses in Spain, than actors" Ballesteros says, "and it was not very difficult to find a suitable cast".<sup>7</sup> The setting, a sloped playing area brightly lit with a bare tree with two menacing dried-up branches, was created by the plastic artist Josep M. Subirachs. Although the predominant tone of this production was comic, the undercurrent of anguish inherent in this play was beautifully brought out by the acting and the precise direction. The only problem was the Spanish version by Vicente Sáinz de la Peña who also directed the play. He tried, sometimes, to clarify and modernize the text and this marred the production considerably.

Julio Castronuovo, a director/actor with a lot of experience in Beckett's work and a drama teacher at the "Real Escuela de Arte Dramático" in Madrid, directed in 1980 an excellent production —by all accounts— of *Final de Partida*, in Logroño with the "Adefesio" group. Four years later, on 4 January 1984, the company of "Teatro del Arte", directed by one of the most popular Spanish directors, Miguel Narros, staged, in the 'Sala Cadarso' in Madrid, another production of *Final de Partida*, which was regarded by the critics as an authentic premiere. Narros' staging evolved around the central situation of the play which he saw as, "the end of a dictator", and his direction stressed the mutual dependance and hatred between the two main characters. Francisco Vidal and Manolo de Blas were physically very much suited to their roles of Clov and Hamm respectively. Vidal especially conveyed the right note of contained desperation, through his painful walk and his hesitation in obeying Hamm's orders. De Blas sometimes over-acted.

Although Narros approached the play with all respect for the author, and

followed Beckett's stage directions quite closely, he directed the play at a relentlessly slow pace, and the performance lasted two hours —the opening mime was stretched to ten minutes—. The comic aspects of the play were emphasised thus relieving somehow the slowness of some scenes. The setting, a beautiful creation by Andrea D'Odorico, also presented two innovations, a huge closed door in the back wall of the stage, between the two small windows and a lamp above Hamm's throne. This 'extra-door' remained closed until the end of the play when Clov decides to leave. He opens the door only to find behind it another closed door, implicitly suggesting an infinite number of receding looked doors, showing visually that "there is no way out". The final ambiguity of the play was thus undermined.

The lighting, an extraordinary variation of shades of grey, was brighter in the centre by the 'extra-lamp' that hung over Hamm's chair. Though this lamp was less distracting than the door, it was also an unnecessary addition. In spite of all this, this was the best Spanish production of *Endgame* I have seen. It had the mixture of 'black humour' and suppressed anguish inherent in this play.

Another professional production greatly acclaimed was the Catalan premiere of *Happy Days: Oh els bon dies*, presented on 28 February 1984 at the Teatro Regina in Barcelona, directed by José Sanchis Sinisterra and beautifully acted by Rosa Novell as Winnie. Novell's stylized movements, sense of rhythm and meticulous attention in showing Winnie's "many voices", were the high points in her acting. If she sometimes exceeded in gesture for example in the first act, her acting was perfect in Act II. The play was directed with meticulous precision, and sensitivity towards the text by José Sanchis Sinisterra. The main problems of this production were in the setting. The lighting wasn't 'hellish' enough and the sound of the bell did not have the required terrifying quality. Winnie's mound, a beautiful creation by Nogera and Simó which was a work of art in itself, was too small and Willie's movements behind it were sometimes visible to the audience.

In spite of their shortcomings, these last mentioned three productions are very interesting examples of staging Beckett without metaphysics, in a more 'realistic' and theatrical style.

The most important attempt made in Spain so far to put Beckett's theatre in perspective took place last year in Madrid. From 29 March to 5 May, the "Círculo de Bellas Artes" devoted the main part of its magnificent building to a Beckett Festival: "Muestra sobre la vida y obra de Samuel Beckett", which included exhibitions, lectures, film and video shows... and the staging of ten plays, of which five were Spanish premieres.

To demonstrate Beckett's bilingualism, the Festival opened with "La Dernière Band" in Beckett's own 1975, Paris, production, with Pierre Chabert as Krapp, and closed with the English production of *Company*, staged by Stankey Gontarski and acted by Alan Mandell. The Spanish contributions to the festival were: *Qué Hermosos Días*, (*Happy Days*), the Spanish version of the 1984 catalan production of the play mentioned above, also with Rosa

Novell as Winnie and Luis Miguel Climent as Wille. The two 'Acts Without Words', *Actos sin palabras I y II* in a very good production of Julio Castronuovo who acted with total precision as the protagonist of the first play, and directed with the same accuracy *Acto sin Palabras II*, with Miguel Angel Sánchez and Carlos Zabaleta as the two protagonists. *Vaiven (Come and Go)* was staged by Angel Facio with a similar experimental approach of his 1966 production. The play was repeated three times and the protagonists also meet in a church, kneeling on a pew whispering prayers. "In Spain three old spinsters like this surely meet in a church", Facio told me when I told him some of many reservations about his staging of *Vaivén*. His is really a director's theatre.

The four Spanish premieres of the Festival were *Primer Amor*, *Nana (Rockaby)*, *Impromptu de Ohio* and *Catástrofe*.

*Primer Amor*, in a dramatised version of the novel by José Sanchis Sinisterra, directed by Fernando Griffell, with Luis Miguel Climent as the protagonist, was very well received by audiences and critics. It was a challenge for both Sinisterra and Griffell to create a Beckettian atmosphere without the authors precise stage directions. Griffell says that his staging was born out of "passionate repeated reading of the text"... "I was worried about the coherence of the character with the universe of everyday physical actions. I did not want to create a 'logical' but a 'coherent' character" ( ). The protagonist created was a typical Beckett tramp dressed in a long dark coat with a bowler hat. The setting was a kind of rubbish dump, with a large petrol-can down-stage right which was used sometimes as a chair. The pile of miscellaneous rubbish down-stage left was very stylized, a sort of Warhol, 'pop-art' style sculpture. There were several realistic objects scattered on the floor. Bits and pieces, sticks, papers, a bowl, plastic tea cups... The movements of the protagonist were slow and horizontal. Sometimes he crawled on all fours as if looking for some lost object. Climent's interpretation was excellent. The surprising theatrical element in this production —totally against the spirit of the play— was a long string which fastened to a bell stage-left, went down to the auditorium crossing the stalls half a metre, more or less, above the heads of the spectators. Near the bell, on stage, stood a poster with the inscription: "To make him act pull the string." This was not a joke, for the play did not start until someone in the audience stood up and pulled the string. Several times during the performance this trick was repeated, when the main character took his hat off and looked inside it. He remained silent in this position until some spectator get up and pulled the string... This "trick" marred what was otherwise a good production. The typical Beckett 'instruments of torture', and the urge of his characters to talk are always "internal". In *Primer Amor* the whims of the spectators, destroyed the rhythm of the play.

A production totally controlled to perfection, and beautifully adjusted to the spirit of the plays was that of *Nana*, *Impromptu de Ohio* and *Catástrofe*, directed by Pierre Chabert with three excellent Spanish actors: Maite Brik,

Francisco Vidal and José Lifante. The three plays were staged on a totally black stage, where the light —manipulated extraordinarily by Genevieve Soubirou— brings the characters to a fleeting existence and restores them at the end to their original darkness. Time is totally abolished especially in *Nana* and in *Impromptu* and audiences are invited thus to penetrate into the simultaneity of an instant. Total precision and meticulous attention to detail and tone of voice were the clues to Chabert's staging, and the result was very impressive.

Maite Brik, the protagonist of *Nana* —she played 'Lucky' in the 1978 all female *Godot*— talked to me recently about her problems in acting in this play. "First of all, it was very difficult to learn the text by heart with all its subtle variations... it was also difficult to achieve a general rhythm for the play while, at the same time, adjusting your 'internal rhythms' to the meaning of the words thus avoiding falling into monotony. I wanted to *say* the play every night. It was a torture to listen to my recorded voice, for I always thought I could have improved my recording... I really fell in love with *Nana* which is a beautiful calm song..." Brik had more problems, she says, with the Assistant in *Catástrofe*. "I never quite got into my role, and I cannot explain why". José Lifante, the Director in this play talks about the problems he and Maite had to find an adequate 'tonality' voices. "The way you say these short cutting phrases is crucial to establish the right power/submission relationship implicit in *Catástrofe*." Lifante says Chabert tried to help them: "The Director knows he has all the power and this amuses him, and for this reason he tries to humiliate his assistant. His problem is how to change the Protagonist in "our catastrophe... all this has to be expressed with subtlety and irony".<sup>6</sup> Francisco Vidal, the Reader of the *Impromptu de Ohio*, confesses that this has been his most difficult role in his career. "It was very complicated", he says, "to search for an adequate neutral voice for the Reader which could give to the words that kind of dream-like reality which is latent in the play". Vidal apparently found this right neutral tone of voice one day when he approached the reading; "in a sort of contained rage" which at the same time was full of tenderness and sensibility towards the Listener, a very Spanish mixture of tenderness and fury that make Chabert exclaim with a satisfied smile: "Voici l'Impromptu d'Espagne."

This excellent production of *Nana*, *Impromptu de Ohio* and *Catástrofe*, in my Spanish translation, amazed audiences not acquainted with Beckett's theatre of the 70s and 80s. Critics were respectful but baffled by the plays. The passionate arguments, for or against, of the 50s and 60s were somehow revived. But admiration and interest for Beckett's theatre is now very well established in Spain, amongst a theatrical/cultural minority. Although there is no continued tradition of performing Beckett's plays, the most recent Spanish productions show an increased interest and understanding of his theatre.

Beckett's radical research into the essence of the theatrical is too daring for our conservative theatrical establishment; this explains in part the absence of Beckett's plays from "official" theatres. The Festival in the 'Círculo' showed

that the professional standards of staging Beckett in Spanish have greatly improved.

## 2. Staging Beckett in Latin-America

The Latin-American countries with the best theatrical tradition are Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Chile —before the dictatorship— and Mexico. Other countries, like Colombia or Peru for instance, have a very interesting autochthonous theatre but European plays are very seldom staged there. Venezuela is a similar case, but it is more open to foreign theatre.

The brief summary that follows about the presence of Beckett's plays in Latin-America has been completed mainly through conversations with stage directors and actors who have their residence in Spain, like Julio Castronuovo, or who were temporarily working here like the Argentinian Roberto Villanueva or the Venezuelan Omar Gonzalo. My efforts to obtain information in theatre magazines or through cultural Latin-American institutions in Spain have not been very successful. I have received written information only from Chile and Argentina.

The only Beckett plays that have been performed in almost all Latin-American countries with a theatrical tradition are *Esperando a Godot* and *Final de Partida*. These plays arrived on their stages in the mid 60s —with the expectation of Argentina, where *Godot* was premiered in 1956—.

In Chile, *Final de Partida* was staged in 1964 before *Esperando a Godot* (1966), but this last play has been produced more often. The last production was in 1978 by one of the most interesting Chilean theatrical groups, the 'Teatro Universitario Independiente', directed by Agustín Siré.<sup>7</sup> *Acto sin Palabras I* has been produced several times. In 1981 it was staged by a 'street theatre', Teatro Urbano Contemporáneo, and performed on the streets of Santiago.

According to the actor Omar Gonzalo who is very interested in Beckett's theatre and who acted as Vladimir in the best Venezuelan production of *Esperando a Godot* (1979), until 1985 the only plays staged in Venezuela were *Esperando a Godot*, *Final de Partida* and *La Última Cinta*. From these plays Venezuelan audiences jumped to what seems to have been an excellent production of *Nana (Rockaby)*, *Yo no (Not I)* and *Impromptu de Ohio* staged by Ugo Ulive, who according to Omar Gonzalo is probably the best Venezuelan stage director. Ulive created a new theatrical space for the occasion. He converted the 'Sala Juana Sujo' into a black box for only 30 spectators who were almost touching a very small playing area. The whole performance lasted 50 minutes without an interval, "the atmosphere of the theatre", Gonzalo says, "was very tense, almost claustrophobic. But it was a unique theatrical experience I shall always remember". The prestigious actress Dah Sfer was the protagonist in *Yo No* and *Nana*.

The only production of *Esperando a Godot* which the Peruvian actor Juan

Ureta remembers was staged in Lima, in 1970, by the group 'Histrión Teatro del Arte'.

I have not been able to trace the premières of *Esperando a Godot* and *Final de Partida* in Mexico. But in the theatre magazines *Escénica* and '*Anuario del Teatro de Mexico*' There are recorded many repetitions of these two plays, especially in the 80s. *Happy Days* has been also staged recently in Durango by the group 'Espacio Vacío'.

The most remarkable case of staging Beckett in Latin-America is Argentina. From 1956, when the "Teatro de Cámara de Arquitectura" staged the first Argentinian *Esperando a Godot*, the play has been on stage almost every year. Roberto Villanueva, director, actor and founder of the revolutionary cultural centre 'Instituto Ditela' in the early 60s, explains the extraordinary acceptance of *Godot* there "because in Argentina there is a very popular tradition of the grotesque and of 'theatrical play', very similar to the one found in this play". One of the most prestigious Argentinian dramatists, Griselda Gambaro, confesses to have been very much influenced by Beckett's first play.

The first Argentinian *Godot* directed by Jorge Petraglia —a great director/actor who has acted as Pozzo, Hamm and Krapp— with Roberto Villanueva as Estragon and Leal Rey as Vladimir had an apotheosic reception on the day of the première. Then they play to almost empty houses for ten days until excellent reviews appeared in the newspapers. The last four days they theatre was packed. This production with very slight changes was repeated every year till 1973. Villanueva recalls the staging of the 1956 *Godot* as follows: "we played on an empty stage without any special theatrical effects, only the tree sprouted some leaves in the second act in a mechanical way as in the circus. We wore very shabby looking dress coats, mine was too big. Didi's was too small. Pozzo's attire was impeccable. Lucky wore a worn out livery and the messenger was dressed all in white like an angel. One of the first messengers was Roberto Mosca, a great actor, who in 1979 was Vladimir in an excellent production of *Esperando a Godot* in the 'Teatro San Martín' of Buenos Aires". In the early 60s Jorge Petraglia staged *La última cinta Magnética (Krapp's Last Tape)*, in the 'Instituto Ditela', and also in this centre in the late 60s, Luisa Vehi acted as Winnie in *Días Felices (Happy Days)*.

Julio Castronuovo, an Argentinian actor/director, now resident in Madrid, was responsible for the premières of *Acto sin Palabras I* (1960) and *Final de Partida* (1961). *Endgame* was banned after four performances because of Castronuovo's refusal to eliminate from the play five words that were considered immoral by the censors, 'bastard and louse' were two of them. Reviews were very good, but audiences were baffled. Castronuovo followed very closely Beckett's stage directions, as he usually does. For Castronuovo Beckett is "a master of the theatre and one learns a lot by staging his plays". This first Argentinian production of *Endgame* was repeated, without cuts, in 1967.

The last productions of Beckett's plays on record in Argentina are the

following: *Final de Partida* (1980), Teatro San Telmo, Buenos Aires; *La Última Cinta Magnética* (1975) in the 'Centro Dramático' in Buenos Aires; *Días Felices* (1985) in the Teatro Lasalle, Buenos Aires; *Esperando a Godot* (1986) Teatro San Martín in Buenos Aires.<sup>8</sup>

One can infer from this very limited summary that Beckett's theatre is not very well known in Latin-America, with the exception *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. This is also the opinion of the stage directors and actors I have talked to in Madrid. They explained this in part by the political situation of most Latin-American countries, where a theatre of protest and political commitment has been favoured and the most experimental theatre has been neglected. Beckett's plays of the 70s and 80s are practically unknown.

Neither in Latin-America nor in Spain is the theatre of Beckett very well known, but in Spain, at least, there are signs of renewed and increasing interest in his plays.

**Notes:**

1. Information about the theatrical atmosphere of the 50s and 60s was given to me by José Monleón, director of *Primer Acto*, and by the critic Juan Guerrero Zamora.
2. I would like to thank Trino Martínez Trives for his vivid account of the first Spanish *Esperando a Godot*. I interviewed Trives on 8 February 1986.
3. Martínez Trives, Trino, "Mi versión de *Esperando a Godot*", *Primer Acto*, n.º 1, 1957, p. 15.
4. González Vergel and Javier Laffleur talk about their productions of *Final de Partida*, in *Primer Acto*, n.º 11, December 1959, p. 23.
5. Alvaro Francisco (editor), *El Espectador y la Crítica. The Theatre in Spain in 1958*. Marquerie's review of *Endgame*, from the newspaper *A.B.C.*, p. 174.
6. I would like to thank Luis Araujo, Chabert's assistant in this production, for allowing me to quote from his rehearsal note-book Chabert's remarks to the actors.
7. I would like to thank Agustín Letelier and Andrés Piña, theatre critics, for their information about Chile.
8. For information about Argentina my thanks to Julio Castronuovo, Roberto Villanueva and Fernando Griffell.