'The air is full of our cries': staging Godot during apartheid South Africa

‘The air is full of our cries’: Staging *Godot* during apartheid South Africa

Matthew McFrederick

Narratives of how productions of Beckett’s drama have handled specific political circumstances represents a limited field of exploration in Beckett Studies. Scholars have often referred to three specific performances of *Waiting for Godot* in Israel, Bosnia and Herzegovina and South Africa as the best examples of when Beckett’s work has been adopted to political contexts due to the comparable predicaments of his characters and their situations, but these histories have been approached with varying detail to date. Of these three, much of this attention has focused on Ilan Ronen’s 1984 staging in Israel and Susan Sontag’s celebrated 1993 Sarajevo Youth Theatre production. However, the earliest and least discussed of these productions is the Baxter Theatre’s 1980 production, which began in Cape Town, before embarking on a national and international tour. According to Cóilín Parsons, the multi-racial production staged during apartheid has ‘retained a certain celebrity status’ when Beckett’s drama is revived in South Africa, but the recycled memories from this production have yet to be reflected in a written history (257). It is this production, directed by Donald Howarth, that is the focus of this chapter.

Before offering an extended narrative on Howarth’s production, it is worth highlighting how political performances of Beckett’s drama are proving a more popular means by which artists in countries from around the world respond to their political environment and this emerging field of enquiry requires a more concentrated history of its own. In recent years, theatres, festivals and practitioners have offered diverse interpretations of Beckett’s work linked to their own political situation or moment of crisis, a development which signifies the transferability of Beckett’s *oeuvre*; a leading characteristic in its longevity across theatre

cultures. For example, the Cuban artist Tania Bruguera produced *Endgame* as an installation (Endgame Study #7, 2006) and later as a stage production (Biennial of Contemporary Arts, 2017), where she was drawn to the play's relevance 'when the world is seduced by so-called strong political figures and when democracy is abused instead of enacted. It feels like the end of a chapter' (Sharp). In Northern Ireland, the 2018 Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival produced another alternative way of experiencing Beckett in their event *Walking for Waiting for Godot*.[1] In this participatory performance, audience members were invited to walk along a section of the Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geo-park, which spans sections of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Across this rural landscape, which included Antony Gormley's *Tree for Waiting for Godot* (2013), actors from the Lyric Theatre in Belfast performed sections of the play on land that has been much disputed territory, from the partition of Ireland to the recent Brexit negotiations. As these examples show, Beckett's drama is today utilised by practitioners to signify precarious political moments or critique current political structures and environments, thus suggesting that his drama acts as a conduit connecting art with real-life, political events.

This chapter will offer the first in depth examination of Howarth's landmark production of *Godot*. It will begin by discussing Beckett's position in South African theatre cultures and contextualising the social, political and cultural factors that influenced Beckett's decision to place an embargo on his work scheduled for segregated audiences in South Africa. The chapter will proceed to analyse the practical considerations behind the Baxter production that situated *Godot* in South Africa through its text, setting and casting; strands of the history that benefit from interviews with the director Donald Howarth and Pieter-Dirk Uys, who originally played the role of Pozzo in South Africa. It will consider the varied responses this staging received as it toured South Africa, the UK and America, where it highlighted the divisions of South Africa

abroad, including how a misunderstanding of the production's intentions infamously prompted anti-apartheid protests in Baltimore and the cancellation of the production.

Beckett and South Africa

South Africa's vibrant theatre culture is renowned for its diverse performance traditions, its high-quality artists and the eclectic range of creative responses it produced during and after the nation's struggles with apartheid. Despite the international reputation some South African writers or theatre makers would have during apartheid, the reality that consumed the everyday existence of South African people tainted the infrastructure of theatres and the facilitation of theatrical events. These divisions were written into the government policy with the introduction of Proclamation 26 (from 12 February 1965) making it 'illegal for theatres, concert halls and other venues of entertainment to admit at their own discretion patrons of any race or colour without a special permit' (Barrow and Williams-Short 28). Beyond the theatre, the reality of apartheid affected every strand of South African life with the writer Brian Barrow noting, 'everything a person did from the cradle to the grave was determined by skin colour: education, recreation, sport, entertainment, travel – nothing was excluded' (Barrow and Williams-Short 11).

Many South African theatre practitioners, producers or writers, responded to the political injustice in their work or through attempts to bypass censorship laws, but several artists also felt the toll of these restrictions on their creative endeavours. Conversely, international writers and theatre practitioners highlighted their disapproval of the political system through the International Playwrights Boycott, which began in 1963. Boycotts became one of the main ways for the international community to demonstrate their condemnation of the National Party's apartheid policy and, as a result, boycotts were adopted in politics,

economics, academia, sport and culture. The Playwrights Against Apartheid initiative saw forty-eight playwrights, including John Osborne, Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett, sign the following letter to *The Times*:

> While not wishing to exercise any political censorship over their own or other works of art, but feeling colour discrimination transcends the purely political, the following playwrights, after consultation with the Anti-Apartheid Movement and with South African artists and writers, as an expression of their personal repugnance to the policies of apartheid and their sympathy with those writers and others in the Republic of South Africa now suffering under evil legislation, have instructed their agents to insert a clause in all future contracts automatically refusing performing rights in any theatre where discrimination is made among audiences on grounds of colour. (Beckett 2014: 544)

A letter from the anti-apartheid activist and writer, Freda Troup, prompted Beckett's actions, as he was in 'entire agreement' to promote performances for 'mixed audiences in all theatres' (Beckett 2014: 543). Ideologically, the decision corresponded with Beckett's long held tolerance for other religions and races, which has been traced as far back as his days as a student at Earlsfort House by James Knowlson, though his actions here suggest what Knowlson refers to as 'a much more active anti-racism' (36).

The decision by international playwrights to withhold the rights of their work initially had a negative impact on South African cultural life and writers such as Athol Fugard disagreed with the boycott, as he felt South Africa writers and artists were cut off from the rest of the world at a time when they needed to be uplifted with fresh creative perspectives. But, as Middeke et al have argued, 'apartheid legislation, censorship laws and boycotts ironically contributed to the groundswell of new indigenous South African English plays rather than

stifling it' (3). Beckett's decision to put an embargo on his work was not taken lightly, but on reflection it is evident that the decision – like that taken by the other writers – restricted his reception and relationship with the country. The limitation has been evident in critical studies of his work, such as *The International Reception of Samuel Beckett* (2009), where South Africa and the continent of Africa were – by the editors' own admission – not discussed (Nixon and Feldman 5). Even in writing this chapter, I acknowledge that Beckett's reception in South Africa deserves a more extended study, but this chapter will begin to open this relationship by contextualising Beckett's performance history before focusing on the Baxter Theatre production.

One of the earliest known performances of *Godot* in South Africa saw Fugard direct an all-black production at the Rehearsal Room in Johannesburg in 1962. Fugard identified how the play resonated with major moments of humanity's failings, as he explained of his reading of *Godot*, 'I told the cast that Vladimir and Estragon must have read the accounts of the Nuremberg trials – or else they were at Sharpeville, or were the first in at Auschwitz. Choose your horror – they know all about it' (Orkin 126). As the International Playwrights embargo came into effect one year later, *Godot*'s political echoes were suppressed and, following this performance, it has been difficult to ascertain how many more official or unofficial productions of Beckett's drama were staged in South Africa during the restrictions. Beckett withheld his rights until the mid-seventies, but it was a stance he had to occasionally reassert to South African theatres, producers and his agents, when he disagreed with the environment where his work would be staged. For example, he wrote to Jenny Sheridan of Curtis Brown in 1972, 'Please refuse permission for production of Endgame by this Pretoria Theatre and all other future proposals from S. Africa to present my work before segregated audiences' (Beckett 2016: 287).

After the boycott, records suggest Beckett's work was quickly staged more frequently in South Africa. In 1976, The Space Theatre in Cape Town (commonly referred to as The Space) staged *Endgame* in its first Beckett production. Led by Brian Astbury, The Space was 'the first non-racial, commercial arts venue' in South Africa and this was epitomised through its staging of *Endgame*.[2] The production came at a significant time in the theatre's history as it had just opened its new venue located on Long Street in Cape Town, but the play's relevance to the political oppression experienced within the country was not lost on Astbury, who recognised that '"Endgame" contained in it the core of the whole South African situation' (71). The production would in fact follow the 1976 Uprising and riots that began in Soweto and spread nationwide, factors which Astbury had in mind when *Endgame* was staged: 'Nobody seemed to want to be reminded of the situation – which we were to do relentlessly for the next six months' (71). Directed by Dimitri Nicolas-Fanourakis, the production's political allusions were evident by casting a white Hamm and a black Clov in the form of Keith Grenville and Bill Curry. However, despite the significance of this decision in the South African context, Astbury believed they 'allowed the play to do its own talking' (71). In the same year at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, Benjy Francis directed an all-black cast in *Waiting for Godot*, which confirmed the Theatre's aspirations for racially integrated and politically aware performances. As well as assembling a strong cast in James Mthoba, Ben Mabaso, Sam Williams, Eddie Nhlapo and Ngatumue Kamiwa, the race of the cast epitomised how the Market were willing to represent political matters on stage. But for Francis, the production's powerful message was also conveyed through the text and setting, as he argued:

> The tree was central to my staging; when it started to sprout leaves in act two, that sent a powerful message to oppressed people – it suggested new life and resolution, an image of hope against all desolation. (Smith et al)

South African practitioners suggested how Beckett's plays could offer multi-faceted responses and metaphors to their situation, because of the way his worlds applied to the South African experience and the treatment of race within the nation. As I will now discuss with the Baxter Theatre production, this was initially not intended, but when the production toured, a production of *Godot* from apartheid South Africa could be read in many ways.

The Baxter *Godot* in South Africa

When *Waiting for Godot* was first presented at the Baxter Theatre in 1980, the theatre was still in its infancy. Largely funded from a bequest left by Dr William Duncan Baxter to the University of Cape Town, the theatre opened on 1 August 1977 fulfilling Baxter's wish to see a theatre constructed that would fill a cultural void in the life of the city. Baxter first dreamt of the theatre at a time when Cape Town had a limited number of venues after the old Opera House and Tivoli Theatre were closed to make way for the General Post Office and a commercial building respectively. Meanwhile, as highlighted earlier, The Space's earnest beginnings in 1971 represented a new, experimental fringe theatre within the proximity of the city centre. Although these venues faced their own political challenges, the effects of apartheid were most evident when comparing the larger scale ambitions of the Baxter with the Nico Malan Theatre Centre (now known as the Artscape Theatre Centre)[3], which opened in May 1971. The ideology of the two theatres could not have been more different. The Baxter was designed to be open to people of all races or ethnicities and, because it was built on University land at the Rosewater site, they could welcome audience members without permits or restrictions. In contrast, the Nico was built on the Foreshore – a site ironically first considered for the Baxter – and audience members required a permit to enter the venue, with Malan announcing in his inaugural address that 'as long as he was alive no black performer or patron

would ever be allowed into this exclusively white opera house' (Barrow and Williams-Short 31). Inevitably, such policies had a negative impact on the international reputation of the arts in South Africa, but the Baxter's refreshingly open policy offered a different perception of the nation's wider theatre culture, particularly once its lively programming added to the vibrancy of the beautiful Theatre.

Among the many obstacles the Baxter faced in its early history, it is fair to argue that several eventualities appeared fortuitous for the Theatre. One such example concerns its founding director John Slemon, who was accidentally not shortlisted for the role of Manager in the first instance, before the Irish native was subsequently appointed and then promoted to Director in what would prove to be a successful tenure lasting until his retirement in 1995.[4] Across the Baxter's three spaces close to fifty productions a year were scheduled by 1980, and Slemon aimed to cater for a range of tastes to attract audiences to the theatre: 'We were having commercial theatre besides serious non-commercial stuff, an Agatha Christie beside a *Woza Albert*, *The Cherry Orchard* with a bedroom farce next door' (Barrow and Williams-Short 49). The decision to stage *Waiting for Godot* appealed to the three key agents Slemon approached as collaborators on a potential project: Donald Howarth, Winston Ntshona and John Kani. As Howarth suggested:

> It was John Slemon's creative management that asked me if I would do a production for him and the Baxter with John Kani and Winston Ntshona. And I said what shall we do? And there was either, because he was Irish, Beckett and *Waiting for Godot*, or we would improvise a play with John and Winston, because that's what they did.[5]

From the outset, the initial rationale behind staging *Godot* was not political, but these readings would develop over the life of the production.

The company that assembled for the 1980 production of *Godot* was talented and experienced, and epitomised the inspired programming from Slemon's tenure. Howarth directed and designed the performance, but he was perhaps best known as an early playwright for the English Stage Company at the Royal Court, where he had his plays, *Sugar in the Morning* (1959) (previously *Lady on the Barometer* 1958), *OGODIVELEFTTHEGASON* (1967) and *Three Months Gone* (1970) produced.[6] After previously working as the Literary Manager at the Royal Court, Howarth moved to South Africa in the early 1970s, where he quickly integrated himself into the country's theatre community and directed his own play, *Othello Slegs Blankes* (Othello for Whites Only), at the Space Theatre in 1972, an adaptation of *Othello* where the eponymous character does not appear.[7] Like other Beckett productions in South Africa, the race of the actors cast in the Baxter production of *Godot* proved significant. Howarth's multiracial cast was led by the country's most high-profile black actors, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, who played the roles of Vladimir and Estragon. By 1980, Kani and Ntshona were already internationally renowned actors, particularly for their collaborations with the playwright Athol Fugard. With Fugard, they co-wrote and acted in *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* (1972) and *The Island* (1973), for which they jointly won the 1975 Tony Award for Best Actor in a Play. Alongside this notable double act, Howarth cast white actors, Pieter-Dirk Uys and Peter Piccolo, as Pozzo and Lucky, and a nineteen-year-old black actor Silamour Philander as the boy. Although it may be possible to argue that the production's casting was politically motivated, these initial decisions were made with less discernible political intentions than became evident through the play's international reception, as I will discuss later.

Unlike other productions of *Godot* staged in political circumstances, Howarth met Beckett in Paris to discuss his plans for the Cape Town production, thanks to an introduction from their mutual friend Jocelyn Herbert. Beckett was supportive towards Howarth's plans, offering advice, answering questions, and agreeing to specific changes relating to the context

of the performance. For example, rather than strictly setting the play on a country road, Howarth chose to locate the play in the South African veldt – a move epitomised by the dusty tracks of his rolling, rural wasteland set. Furthermore, Howarth explained to Beckett that in this environment, Kani and Ntshona "can't wear bowler hats in the middle of the veldt", as he believed it would eschew his social realist reading of the play, and as a result, the actors wore lax cloth hats that could be easily moulded. While these decisions were agreed with Beckett, some South African commentators, most notably Peter Fourie in a letter to *The Cape Times* on 8 March 1980, argued 'Howarth's attempt to give it a local connotation [was] an affront to the serious theatregoer and an unforgiveable bastardisation of one of the great plays of the century' (Fuchs 164). Fourie's main grievances related to the local connotations and changes to Vladimir and Estragon's dialogue, which Howarth and Uys did not recall. Howarth did, however, seek Beckett's permission to amend one specific line in the text:

> I did change one word, which I thought they would never ever say it. They say when Pozzo is on the stage in the scene with him, they say, "We are not caryatids." […] There is no way that John and Winston would have used that word. So, we changed it to "crutches", and of course they had this wonderful accent: "We are not his crutches."

These small alterations to the set, costume and text represented unusual concessions for Beckett and rather than spoiling Beckett's play, they enhanced the relevance of *Godot* to the cast and creative team, but also to the diverse South African audiences that would access Beckett's play – in most cases – for the first time.

The play's resonances with South Africa saw the Baxter schedule a national tour, where the production was also staged at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg and the Grahamstown Festival, but controversially, the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT) 'refused to sponsor the presentation in the Transvaal (Fuchs 164).' Distractions aside, for the cast, creative

team and Theatre, it was an exciting production to mount in South Africa and one that was favourably received by its audiences. This reception was alluded to by Uys, as he reflected on aspects of the performance:

> we started performing to a fantastic reaction and everyone was very excited. I did realize quite soon that John and Winston weren't interested in the chorus. They were up there. Acting to row 3 and row 14, and they were like this…scratching their arses. They behaved like two black men from Port Elizabeth, which was ok for the tramps. Lucky – Peter Piccolo – was amazing. He just got that thing where he was so fucking heart breaking. And I sort of pounced around like Orson Welles on crack.[8]

Although Uys was frustrated that Kani and Ntshona's performance acknowledged the audience, he was complimentary of the overall mark they left on the play and its connection with the time: 'John and Winston made it their own with the huge atmosphere of their reality: two black men in apartheid South Africa. But whenever they said things, it made total sense.' Howarth recognised the production could not escape from the political allegory of a South African context and his considerations towards the text and performance highlighted how he read the underlying circumstances Kani and Ntshona were situated in as Vladimir and Estragon. Howarth admitted he did find it difficult to look beyond the poignancy of the play's final moments without a political perspective: '[They ask] "What are we waiting for." We're waiting for Mandela to come out of prison. Of course, you don't say that. We're waiting for the end of this. It's not going to end. This was 1980, it's another ten years you've got to do this.' At the time of their production, Kani and Ntshona's situation as Didi and Gogo highlighted the resilience and the need for black South Africans to persevere against the uncertainty of their future and the limiting restrictions of the system that governed their lives. Howarth indicated this in his reading of the characters in a South African context: 'when Gogo keeps saying, "Can't we go now?" [He is trying to say:] Can't we stop being black? Can't we

just be South Africans yet? They don't say that of course...that is the under text. Why do we have to stay in this wasteland? Because we have passbooks. We can't go anywhere else. We're here.' These sentiments suggest how Didi and Gogo's situation in *Godot* connected with the realities of daily life for black South Africans, and although the native iteration of this production attempted to offer a close reading of Beckett's text, the time of the production, its local connotations, the actors and the play itself meant – whether it was intended or not – the Baxter Theatre presentation brought politics to Beckett's drama.

The Baxter *Godot* in London

Following the production's success in Cape Town, and during its national tour, the next step for the Baxter production was to tour England and America, where the combination of Beckett and South Africa represented an attractive proposition for receiving theatres in both countries. The tour was an opportunity to export South African culture, but also, given *Godot*'s multi-faceted meanings and Beckett's prominence as a writer, an opportunity to raise awareness of apartheid to international audiences through a more political reading of Beckett's text.

The Baxter production began their Old Vic residency on 17 February 1981, but with some notable changes. Significantly for the tone of the production, Howarth decided Pieter-Dirk Uys needed to change his portrayal of Pozzo. As he explained, 'He played him sort of Humpty Dumpty, like it was a European production. When we came to the Old Vic, I said you can't play it like that. You can't play it English, you've got to play it like an Afrikaner'. Here, Howarth highlighted the need to stress the South African predicament to international audience. This artistic decision opened the performance to more overtly political interpretations rather than the subtler insinuations he deployed in South Africa. When he was first offered the role of Pozzo, Uys initially questioned whether he was cast because of his P. W. Botha impression

from other sketches, but akin to Howarth's reflections he recalled a conversation ahead of the tour where:

> Donald said, "You do understand, we can't do it like we've done it here. We've got to really be a South African production. You asked me before about P. W. Botha. We now want you to do it like P. W. Botha." I said, no, no, no, we can't go to London with a pantomime of crap politics, we can't do that.

While Uys protested, the company – who supported the decision – did manage to convince him to do one run through as the newly politicised Pozzo, where he beat Didi and Gogo by whipping them, but he found the idea so repulsive he admitted to throwing up after the first scene. As a result of the tour's political intentions, Uys resigned from the production and was replaced by Bill Flynn, whose costume as Pozzo saw him wear a checked shirt and gumboots – clothing traditionally associated with an Afrikaner landlord.[9]

Beckett was invited to attend rehearsals when the production arrived at the Old Vic, though he declined, fearing his meticulous working methods may upset the practitioners in rehearsals, leaving Howarth to work with his cast alone.[10] When the company arrived in London, Howarth recalled how they were affronted to find a poster of the production's key information displayed with an inappropriate main image: a cartoon of two white characters, foreshadowing Kani and Ntshona's Vladimir and Estragon. The mistake left Howarth furious and he insisted they change the image out of respect to Kani and Ntshona, but to the frustration and embarrassment of both sides, it was too late to change the poster's design. Beyond this little known, but significant *faux pas*, relations did improve in a performance that would mark the first London *Godot* to feature black actors.[11]

Ironically, despite the complications that arose from the poster, the same image featured on the Old Vic's accompanying programme. Indeed, the programme was loaded with political

emphasis as it drew clear connections between the actors' situation as Vladimir and Estragon with the plight of black South Africans and the ruling government's apartheid system. Under the heading, 'The adventures of Didi and Gogo', five pages of the Old Vic programme deliberately presented images of the Baxter Theatre production with quotes from the play, including the following examples:

- Didi: We've lost our rights.
- Didi: Did they beat you?
- Didi: Was I sleeping while the others suffered?
- Gogo: And if he comes?
  Didi: We'll be saved.

These examples highlight the additional weight given to Beckett's text when played in a South African production during apartheid. Rather than produce humour or inspire conversations, the lines act as a reminder of the authoritarian regime and the severity of the racial segregation imposed and implemented across the country.

Unsurprisingly, when the production opened, many London critics read the performance through its South African context. Michael Coveney saw the political connotations behind the touring performance by arguing Kani and Ntshona represented 'black vagrants dumped on a useless terrain by an intolerable political system', while he read Bill Flynn's Pozzo as an Afrikaner landlord – 'not the racist bully you would imagine, but a mildly ineffective plump caricature on his way to market to sell the bit of "white trash", Lucky'. One of the strengths of the Kani and Ntshona double act in Cape Town was their comedic portrayal of Didi and Gogo, but in London several critics felt their well-intended physical and cross-talk humour was weakened due to the production's political connections. As Irving Wardle commented, 'It is true that the racial setting diminishes the comic opportunities; but even so, the performance could do with more invention'. Beyond the political associations that some British critics would inevitably read into the performance, many saw it as an 'illuminating

event', albeit with some reservations due to the impressive range of *Godot*s previously staged in the UK, including the recent tour of Beckett's Schiller Theater production in 1976.

The Baxter *Godot* in America

After its initial teething problems and a varied reception in London, Howarth's *Godot* moved on to the American leg of its tour, where a more complex and problematic set of challenges awaited the touring company. It began with a critically acclaimed presentation at New Haven's Long Wharf Theatre in 1981, where Mel Gussow in the *New York Times* declared it 'a challenging act of political theater'. Although Gussow's perception of the performance did not motivate what was to follow, when the production travelled on to the Baltimore International Theatre Festival for its eight scheduled performances, it found itself in the middle of an unusual political storm.

What unfolded in Baltimore highlights how intended political viewpoints can be miscommunicated. The Baltimore International Theatre Festival was due to be the final leg of the Baxter's tour, but as this unconventional history has suggested, this would not prove straightforward and the planned presentation did not materialise. As the *New York Times* reported, 'A racially integrated South African drama troupe today cancelled its appearance at a theater festival after a protest against apartheid by local black leaders.' Although the tour had artistic and commercial merits for the Baxter, in many respects it was also intended to highlight the ongoing system of apartheid in South Africa to international audiences. However, this ambition received opposition from a group known as the Baltimore Coalition in Support of the Liberation of South Africa, who criticised their multi-racial production for 'not represent[ing] the political realities of South Africa'. The demonstrations were aimed at the event as it was a product of South Africa, but they were undoubtedly motivated by the Baltimore City Council's

decision to condemn South Africa's apartheid policy, which was announced in the same week. When interviewed about the production, Kani commented, 'We were led to believe we would be welcomed by all segments of the community, and we are disappointed to find there is disagreement between blacks and whites in Baltimore.' In discussing these unforeseen events many years later, Howarth was frustrated in his recollection of what transpired and sarcastically commented:

> They said we are boycotting this performance…we want apartheid to come to an end. *We* didn't of course. *We* were all for keeping apartheid. John and Winston were doing *Waiting for Godot*, because they couldn't find white actors to do it. So that's why we're taking it to a Festival in Baltimore to represent apartheid South Africa.

As a result of this surprising protest, which included pickets outside the venue, the company decided to withdraw from the Festival, despite the best efforts of the organisers for them to reconsider. The Festival Director, Hope Quackenbush, was upset at the reception the touring production had received before it was even staged, and argued, 'the troupe's appearance was an artistic, not a political, event', before adding, '[w]e didn't invite South Africa, we didn't invite England, we didn't invite Israel, we didn't invite Ireland. We invited performers.' Howarth believed the locals read their performance as 'made in South Africa' and as a result they were, as Quackenbush stated, 'misdirected' over the treatment of race in performance from a Company of those origins.[12]

Ironically, the unusual events in Baltimore would prove the inspiration for a play by Bruce Bonafede entitled *Advice to the Players*, a one act play about a collision of art and politics[13], but the non-performance in Baltimore marked a depressing conclusion to the life of the Baxter *Godot*. Nonetheless, the profile, reception and challenges this production faced at home and on tour ensured it would seep into the cultural memory of Beckett's performance

history in South Africa. Unfortunately, the non-event in Baltimore was also the final act of Howarth's practical career in the theatre.[14] Nevertheless, the production highlighted the open and varied ways through which Beckett's drama could be read or adjusted in terms of text, setting, race, tone and its overtones for a given audience. Whether intended or not, the production would be read as political due to the immediacy of the performance in the backdrop to apartheid South Africa. Regardless of its reception, the production's desire to convey facets of the South African experience through the situation of Beckett's characters, underlined the need for hope and resilience to audiences at an uncertain and fraught time in South Africa's national politics.

[1] Described on the Festival's website as: 'This is participatory, experiential drama at its most extreme and on the last *Happy Days* before Brexit the festival is culturally occupying the border with a quintessentially Irish play that nonetheless has universal appeal, whose themes could not be more relevant to our times'. See http://www.artsoverborders.com/programme/walking-for-waiting-for-godot/ [accessed 24 October 2018]

[2] See http://thespacetheatre.com/ [accessed on 25 October 2018)

[3] This venue became known as "The Nico" with the Theatre bearing the name of the Administrator of the Province of the Cape of Good Hope who led proposals for the Centre.

[4] Slemon was – by his own admission – a failed actor on the boards of the Peacock Theatre in Dublin, before he demonstrated his flair as a Manager at the city's Abbey Theatre. His appointment at the Baxter was initially questioned, but any doubts were quickly nullified by the energy and zeal he brought to the role, the theatre's vision and its programming.

[5] Interview between Donald Howarth and Matthew McFrederick on 14 January 2015. All subsequent quotes from Howarth are taken from this interview.

[6] *Sugar in the Morning* was originally produced as *Lady on the Barometer* in 1958. Meanwhile, another Howarth play, *A Lily in Little India* (1965), was also staged at the Hampstead Theatre Club in a performance that would see Sir Ian McKellen's West End debut when it transferred to the St Martin's Theatre in 1966.

[7] Howarth told me of this production: 'The programme said *Othello* by William Shakespeare and when Brian Astbury gave out the programme he would stamp it with "Slegs Blankes" on the programme.'

[8] Interview between Pieter-Dirk Uys and Matthew McFrederick on 5 June 2018. All subsequent quotes from Uys are taken from this interview.

[9] On reflection, Howarth said he would have made further changes to the casting: 'If I had been able to do it again, I'd have cast Lucky as neither African nor white, as there's a large Indian population in Durban and in the Cape.'

[10] See Letter from Samuel Beckett to Jocelyn Herbert, 11 January 1981, UoR, Special Collections, HER/102.

[11] The production histories of Beckett's drama in London has been dominated by white actors. Of the few performances featuring black actors, Norman Beaton played in *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Bloomsbury Theatre in 1988 and, more recently, Talawa Theatre Company presented the first London performance of *Godot* with an all-black cast at the Albany Theatre in 2012.

[12] Amidst the dispute, the actors had decided to postpone their first performance by one day 'to allow members of the company to observe the fifth anniversary of the Soweto student rising in which more than 600 blacks were killed.'

[13] *Advice to the Players* was first presented at the "Shorts Festival" at the Actors Theatre in Louisville before becoming a 90-minute play when it was staged at the Philadelphia Festival Theatre for New Plays in 1986.

[14] Howarth has since played an active role in maintaining and judging the winner of the George Devine Award, an annual award given to the most promising playwright in the UK.

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