

Cambridge Elements

Elements in Beckett Studies

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BECKETT AND STEIN

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Beckett and Stein

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Abstract: What motivated Beckett, in 1937, to distance himself from the ‘most recent work’ of his mentor James Joyce and instead praise the writings of Gertrude Stein as better reflecting his ‘very desirable literature of the non-word’? This Element conducts the first extended comparative study of Stein’s role in the development of Beckett’s aesthetics. In doing so it redresses the major critical lacuna that is Stein’s role and influence on Beckett’s nascent bilingual aesthetics of the late 1930s. It argues for Stein’s influence on the aesthetics of language Beckett developed throughout the 1930s, and on the overall evolution of his bilingual English writings, contending that Stein’s writing was itself inherently bilingual. It forwards the technique of renarration – a form of repetition identifiable in the work of both authors – as a deliberate narrative strategy adopted by both authors to actualise the desired semantic tearing concordant with their aesthetic praxes in English.

Keywords: Samuel Beckett, Gertrude Stein, influence, repetition, bilingualism

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