



JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

First selection du Jury – Edition 2011

Antoni Libera

Godot's Shadow

Godot's Shadow is a rich and original combination of genres: an autobiographical novel which contains, woven into its action, a very precise, text-grounded analysis of Beckett's work and, connected with and developing out of it, an equally clear and well-structured series of reflections on Western culture.

The action takes place within the space of a little under a month, at the very end of 1977. The author returns to Europe after a few months in the US and, following upon a series of unexpected twists and fortuitous circumstances, finds himself in Paris, where he meets Samuel Beckett – the mysterious „silent“ writer who for so long has been his spiritual master and his ideal of the artist. Also woven into the action are a series of flashbacks which explain his fascination with Beckett and describe the journey from his first encounter with the legendary name Godot – symbolic of Beckett's work as a whole – to his meeting with Godot's creator.

The narrative takes up and develops two main topics: (1) the idea of literature (poetry) as the highest form of the human communication and (2) the spiritual and moral crisis of Europe, felt on both sides of the Iron Curtain and flowing from the same source: the decline of the sacred and the shrinking and gradual disappearance of the metaphysical sphere.

It is through his insightful and clear analysis of Beckett's work that the author is able to identify the source of the illness common to both sides of a Europe torn apart by the cold war: the experience of the poverty of human condition in this „wasteland“. And although his realization is hardly a happy one, the very fact of having come to it brings a kind of catharsis and a hope of rebirth. That, at any rate, is one way of interpreting the final part of the book, where a detailed description of the author's conversation with Beckett in a Paris café is followed by a brief epilogue describing the creative fruits of that dialogue – a dialogue between a western-European literary master and his eastern-European pupil, between an Irishman and a Pole, between the great prophet of catastrophe and a victim of the „little apocalypse“ of our so called modern times.



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POUR
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LITTERATURE

Libera's novel is a touching literary example of biographical and intellectual bridge between two parts of Europe deeply divided by history and politics not so long ago - but always being an alive source of common values in hidden roots of culture, and human identity.

Włodzimierz Bolecki
Member of the Jury

13.06.2011



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Titre original : Godot i Jego Cien

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