

EDU WORLD 2018
The 8th International Conference

SYMBOLS AND GESTURES IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S THEATRE

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Abstract

Beckett's world is a decaying universe. One might say that, like a mythical creator, this writer destroys the universe as it creates it. Whatever occurs, a gesture, a word, is denied by the next word or gesture. Physiology is the subject to a constant catabolism. The decomposition - the biological and psychological miseries, engulfs in our century a sort of medieval macabre dance, an endless, never-ending triumph of death. But more than the miseries of the biological degradation, we are obsessed by the degradation of meanings, the dissolution of the linguistic structures, the overthrow of the values. As soon as one thing acquires a meaning, it becomes volatile, disappears, and the work remains nude, meaningless. The symbols represent the characters' direct communication of the complex reality they live in. The affection the Beckett's characters or the daily life routine, the real situations they express, always have a symbolic equivalence or correspondence. Thus, Beckett describes specific points of view about the world, it shows a specific way to establish relationships between facts that the common sense does not usually correlate with. The symbols could not be presented in a clearer and more meaningful way by the writer, the symbolic object leaving a margin of inaccuracy, ambiguity, which demands intensively the affective involvement of the character to whom it is addressed.

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Keywords: Mythical creator, degradation, metaphor, symbol.



1. Introduction

The absurdity of the dialogues in Beckett's theater does not lie in logical nonsense. On the contrary, the partners' spirits will sometimes be logical to excess. In reality, what they say is irrelevant. Questions that are not answered, statements that are lost on the road, the labyrinth of human speech and non-authentic verbal clichés. The language is made up of signs that call each other, roll and annihilate one another. The language degradation refers to something beyond the spoken word: the ontological and axiological decomposition: "The human being itself, the values of human culture are mined, threatened by routine. A public conditioned to an accepted convention tends to receive the impact of artistic experience through a filter of critical standards..." (Esslin, 1977, p. 28).

The progress of the dialogue violates the rules of semantic continuity in the traditional dialogue, this being achieved by association, a word invoking by its sonority another one. Sometimes, this progression is achieved by going from the comic register to the serious one. The most powerful ally of progression, however, remains the contradiction. And this is based on nuances, through which Beckett's characters express what they see and feel, the general impression being the lack of communication between the characters. Beckett's characters lose contact with the surrounding reality and because there is no real communication between the characters, the dialogue is constantly interrupted.

The human consciousness has had its great crises, buried its gods, passed through spectacular metamorphoses. The crisis has never been more acute than in this century of the great revolutions of society, science and the arts. Silence marks the characters' hesitation in front of people and of life, of their absurd destiny. So, during our article we try to look at the tragic-casting faces that Beckett's theatre features in the light of the great human experiences of the age.

2. Problem Statement

Even though Beckett constantly rejected any commentary on the symbolic, profound meaning and essence of his feminine characters that makes Beckett's theatre more difficult to decipher, the women were even ignored or rejected in his entire work. It is the case of "All That Fall", followed closely by "Death and the Maiden" where Mrs. Rooney cannot stand anyone's look, being it an animal too. But the deep meaning is more intense: being afraid to be watched by somebody else symbolises the fear of herself.

In "Happy days", for example, Samuel Beckett tries to present the life cycle, concentrated in the female silhouette buried first to the waist and then to the throat in the sand mound. Winnie symbolises birth as death, which establishes a connection between the tomb and the feminine character, deciphering a tomb in the cavity of the womb, symbol of safety, growth and birth. According to researchers, the tomb is the place where the rebirth is being prepared, "the place where the being disappears in the dark" (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1994, p.320). There is no possibility of rescue because the "road" is set from the very beginning, as birth only leads to death. This life experience, of aging and death, is staged. Beckett's woman appears as susceptible to decomposition and pending the end, while "the man, buried in the ground, represents the symbol of the biblical text" (Pruneanu, 2009 p.142). Winnie continuously makes efforts to keep her good mood, although she is sunken in the ground to the waist on a mountain peak, from where she begins her discourse about world, God and her husband, Willie. More, "her psychic discontinuities, her inner labyrinth invaded by anxiety, are the basis of her inner monologue, supported by pauses and an

incoherent flux of thoughts” (Munteanu, 1970, p.282). Among the objects handled by Winnie, the mirror is the carrier of the most complex symbolic meanings. The most powerful symbol here is represented by the mirror, a symbol of the sincerity, the heart and the consciousness content. It makes the connection between past, present and future, symbol of the revelation of the word of God and the creative intelligence. Known for ages as a symbol of wisdom and knowledge, this tool of enlightenment is used with caution anytime Winnie analyses her face in the mirror- double picture, a young Winnie in her heart and consciousness and a second Winnie, who has already gone to death. In front of the mirror, of the real truth, the only stages left are those of a journey to a non-existence, a stage of the decay and the disintegration. The ringing of the bell symbolises the Divine Power and Winnie’s ended time in this world. It also symbolises the despair towards Winnie’s senseless destiny.

As we have seen, however, the word never has the freedom to turn into action, that is why Beckett’s characters move, speak, but do not act”. (Balota, 1971, p.498). There are always present and acted from outside, either by another character - in a relationship of interdependence: Winnie-Willie – even by an invisible power, paradoxical by itself and anger-generating force, but also by false hopes, ordered by present suspicion, but also creating chaos, because of the supposing never materialized in the actual appearance.

Time and space largely contribute to the definition of Beckett’s characters as limited beings, claustals, and thus enclosed in an existence that they do not even seem safe to do. “Endgame” is obviously built on the space and the reduction delimitation of its austere at the four-star island-room, caught between the earth and the water, thus between two elementary materials, which immediately send the reader-viewer to a clear representation of death. It is said to us that the grains sown by Clov did not sprout nor that they will never grow up, while the waters are calm, with “lead” waves, without a boat or any fish that disturbs their moral silence. The gray color invades the whole atmosphere and contributes to the accentuation of the apocalyptic sentiment generated by the scenery seen by the window - always indirect and deformed by the intermediate object. Any attempt to exit this landscape is proven from the very beginning a failure and a death sentence. An abstract, unconscious death desired by Beckett’s entire being, but an inaccessible death precisely because it is perceived as death, so as a final point, after which there will be nothing but a huge “abyss”.

3. Research Questions

To that self that monologues in Beckett’s novels, the certainty of existence lacks totally. Being diffused, mutilated, paralyzed, enclosed in a room or a clay pot, buried in the sand, crawling through mud, dismantled, blind, these characters represent the fauna of a decomposed humanity, passed through strange catastrophe, or, more precisely, waiting for a final catastrophe that is not happening but throwing bad shadows like a cloud that darkens the face of the earth before the outbreak of the storm. All these situations of man embedded in the earth - clay, sand, mud - are only metaphors (Pruneanu, 2012, p.240) of the sentence of the Bible “you are made of ground and you will return in it”.

Indeed, the situation of Beckett’s characters is an absurd, even a grotesque one. They are not seen as ordinary people, but as puppet characters who have a similar appearance as some comic entertainers. It is the case of Beckett’s characters in “Happy Days”, “Waiting for Godot” and even “Endgame” that bring

into discussion their little or lack of the past memories and which both ruins them and makes them gleeful in the same time. The researchers conclude that this stage represents is the motif of their destroyed memory.

4. Purpose of the Study

Beckett himself is seen as a solitary individual who faces the surrounding world with fear, resentment, frustration or disregard... "He does not believe in the brotherhood of man; and questions of equality are disposed of by the eager admission that he is, in all respects, inferior. He lays no claim to any virtue that can be named except to a rather dubious humility and a too eagerly embrace resignation.... The Beckett man has usually no past except, since he has been born, a mother or mother memory. He belongs to no recognizable community. He has no employments or qualifications for employment. Nor has he any sources of income except charitable ones". (Cronin, 1999, p.379)

Beckett's world is a decaying universe. One might say that, like a mythical creator, this writer destroys the universe as it creates it. Whatever occurs, a gesture, a word, is denied by the next word or gesture. Physiology is subject to constant catabolism. The decomposition - the biological and psychological miseries, in which the writer seems to be complacent - engulfs in our century a sort of medieval dwarf dance, an endless, never-ending, triumph of death.

But more than the miseries of the biological degradation, in Beckett's work, the meanings' degradation, the linguistic structures' dissolution, the values' overthrow. As soon as one thing acquires a meaning, it becomes volatile, disappears, and the work remains nude, meaningless. The absurdity of dialogues does not lie in logical nonsense. On the contrary, the partners' spirits will sometimes be logical to excess. In reality, what they say is irrelevant. Unanswered questions, affirmations lost on the road, labyrinth of human speech.

The language made up of signs which call each other, rolls and annihilates one another. The degradation of language refers to something beyond the spoken word: ontological and axiological decomposition. The human being itself, the values of human culture are mined, threatened by routine.

5. Research Methods

A dramatic opera that expresses a profound intuition should ideally take place in a single moment, so the structure of such a piece expresses the totality of a complex poetical image divided into a suite of interdependent elements that make the spectator the impression of a static fundamental situations. The correspondence between voice, noises, light, music is the one that gives the rhythm of this extremely expressive creation, while the action is continuously decentralized, in the relative continuum of the scenic space, inserting stories that constitute so many cancerous interventions of the past and present in the same time. Content and form are confusing. There is no action but voltage figures.

The discussion of theatricality no longer seeks to emphasize the conventions of the theatre, its artifact, its procedures to function, but its non-existence. Beckett does not cease to show us that theatre does not really mean anything, that as he attempts to say something, through the spoken words, through the objects shown, by the characters that are constantly stirring, he actually reveals the end of the vital illusions that are not rather than scenic illusions. The less the character signifies, the more acute his presence becomes. The drain of time, in its purest and most obvious form, is felt by the strongest waiting, which

implies a change of the existing situation. But as nothing ever changes in real terms, change itself is an illusion that cannot hide the terrible stability of the world. The world's tears are immutable.

6. Findings

Beckett strives to remove ironically any immediate significance, any simplifying sentence that would clearly expose his conception, often overlapping the comic over tragic or alternating unevenly. Humor, illogic, and derision come to eliminate emotion whenever it seems to be born with the image of a desperate human condition. The comic paralyzes any identification or compassion for the clowns on the stage. If there is a word defining the means of expression of Beckett's theater, it is "literality". The disjunction of dialogues signals the crack of inter-human relations, the circularity and the monotony of action shows us how humanity revolves or strikes the scene, the mutilated or degraded body progressively reveals, before or in opposition to the word, the failure of the character.

"Absurd" actually means "wildly unreasonable, illogical, or inappropriate, out of musical concord". Esslin (1988) concludes that "Beckett's plays lack plot even more completely than other works of the Theatre of the Absurd. Instead of a linear development, they present their author's intuition of the human condition by a method that is essentially polyphonic; they confront their audience with an organized structure of statements and images that interpenetrate each other and that must be apprehended in their totality, rather like the different themes in a symphony" (p.23). The absurd comes from a deliberate abandonment of rules, a depreciation of language that is no more than an element subordinate to a multiple-image poetic image that also simultaneously incorporates visual elements, movement and light, fusion of matter and form, poetry which arises from concrete and direct scenic imagery, the non-reality status of the visible corresponding to the reality of the invisible.

In this sense, Beckett's theater is revealed as what it is: a closed space, actors who pretend to play a role, gestures and words without motivation that mobilize the time of representation, reaching their goal, which is to cast a shadow of doubt about the possibility of representing the world. Beckett never answers his critics, from the belief that for a writer the only possible spiritual evolution is in the sense of depth.

7. Conclusion

By what he writes, Samuel Beckett is looking for the answer to fundamental questions such as "Who am I?" and here's the paradox. He makes our inability to represent us. The mystery plays at the level where the word traps the image, catches the mime, clings the thought. Beckett never dissociates the word of space, gesture, motion, light, place, physical position. The dramatic force of the concrete poetry of his theatre consists in the fact that it addresses more to the senses and nerves than discursive comprehension. The priority given to the visuals and even the gravity of a single image in the most recent plays retires the split of a genesis: on the one hand, the inner monologue, the voice, and on the other the building of essentially visual images that develops occupying the whole space. There are times when the presence of tranquility is so intense in songs that it becomes itself a protagonist.

Beckett challenges theatre spirits and the distance separating audiences who feel destabilized by ironic or even injurious apostrophes. As a matter of fact, the scene and the world are confusing. Life itself becomes an illusion, an entertainment we present to others to feel that we exist.

In normal human experience, space and time are inevitably connected. They represent a continuance. However, in Beckett's entire work the two coordinates of the human experience seem to be in a mental or emotional strain. "Time (the fourth dimension of space, as a famous definition describes it) is effectively non-existent for the space-bound tramps. With only the haziest fragments of memory and no future prospects, they exist in a static, perpetual present". (Malick, 1989: 21)

The theatre thus becomes a search for self, the reality behind the concepts, an attempt to overcome the state of conceptual thinking as abstract representation goes beyond the boundaries of the identifiable object. Beckett seeks maximum clarity and economy of expression. To him everything is indispensable, necessary, and this enormous labor of searching for precision, of eliminating surplus, explains this extraordinary clarity of the writing. Beckett feels like a vampire doll. He has to use the tricks to not express what the words make him to convey without his continence, to express precisely the uncertainty, the contradictory, the incredible.

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