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## Expecting Godot not to Come!

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**ABSTRACT.** Beckett, as a typical modern author, adopts a position between subjectivity and objectivity, and in the gap between these two, by focusing on the latter on one hand, represents an image of Lukacs's realistic view and on the other hand, by scrutinizing more precisely, offers a profile of the existentialist view. Beckett's presence itself in this gap inevitably entails a critical representation of both realms. His characters, in confrontation with modern subjectivization, seek refuge to the fragmented reified objectivity leading to desubjectivization, which is in line with Beckett's characters' anxiety and angst of thinking about their existential how-ness. Meanwhile, their denying the past is synonymous with negating Dasein's temporality features, and this ends in the dissolution of their most primary existential feature, projection. The concomitance of these features eventuates in the appearance of characters such as Vladimir and Estragon who evade thinking like a modern subject, that is, a kind of thinking which revolves around a transcendental signified.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Does the application of the word, "absurd" to Beckett's works refer only to the contents of the dialogue or all the other things pertaining to contents? Or does this word show itself in the form of the works rather than in the contents? In Beckett's works, the external form including scenery, language used in the dialogues, the references of the dialogues, clothing and the actors' act, consciously involve manifold paradoxes which imply the claim of meaninglessness. This meaninglessness has its roots in the immediate perception of the world; a world which is composed of ambiguous events and acts, the reasons for which are left concealed to all. Thus, the form of the work encompasses elements which at first sight and later considerations, are not connected by any single logic; evading a structured bond among the elements of the work is in fact evading all the traditional forms; forms which attempt to offer a plausible and cogent logic for the events of the world by claiming to represent a realistic reflection of the reality. In this view, forms in Beckett's works still adhere to offer a realistic representation, and to put it more precisely, the form of Beckett's works are the most realistic forms to reflect the events of the modern world; a world replete with fragmented and disintegrated events far away from humans' logic of causality. To offer and represent itself precisely, a world, which cannot be incorporated in the formal system of signs, requires a form whose fragmentation is born out of the contents of that world. Thus, it is not just the form which reflects the contents of the world, but the realities of the world themselves produce such a fragmented form. To put it more precisely, one fragment of the contents of the world necessitate a specific form, and another fragment of its contents negates this specific form to induce the genesis of another form and out of this dialectic of negation of negation ( negative dialectic)(Adorno 11-22), Beckettesque form emerges. Therefore, the formal fragments of the work are the sedimentation of all the fragmented elements of the world's meaning or in Adorno's phrasing, the "form has truth-contents"(Jarvis 25-80) .

## 2. FRAGMENTED UNITY

As we said before, events are essentially meaningless, therefore, any image of an aesthetic essential idea which can show the unity of the intention and its representation, turns out to be an illusion. The word, "meaning":

Covers the metaphysical content that is represented objectively in the complex of the artifact; the intention of the whole as a complex of meaning that is the inherent meaning of the drama; and finally the meaning of the words and sentences spoken by the characters and their meaning in sequence, the dialogic meaning. But these equivocations point to something shared. In Beckett's ... that common ground becomes a continuum. Historically, this continuum is supported by a change in the a priori of drama: the fact that there is no longer any substantive, affirmative metaphysical meaning that could provide dramatic form with its law and its epiphany. That, however, disrupts the dramatic form down to its linguistic infrastructure. Drama cannot simply take negative meaning, or the absence of meaning, as its content without everything peculiar to it being affected to the point of turning into its opposite. The essence of drama was constituted by that meaning."(Adorno 275-299)

Adorno distinguishes between two kinds of meanings. When we, as a rationalizing being, stick to our totalizing reason and try to grasp the whole meaning of the text, we get involved in the inherent meaning, but, when we focus our attention on some isolated contexts of the text, and attempt to realize the logic of the coincidence of the words and the sentences, plus their subsequent connotative and denotative meanings, we are engaged in unearthing the dialogic meaning. However, there should be something common between these two which unite them, while pervading through the work. In contrast to the previous self-evident presumptions of the dramatic coherence, this evasive unity never succumbs to any affirmative metaphysical meaning which ends in regulated and organized form and it shows itself in the fragments of language, disintegrating form into the least linguistic bits.

Were drama to try to survive meaning aesthetically, it would become inadequate to its substance and be degraded to a clattering machinery for the demonstration of world views, as if often the case with existentialist plays. The explosion of the metaphysical meaning, which was the only thing guaranteeing the unity of the aesthetic structure, causes the latter to crumble with a necessity and stringency in no way unequal to that of the traditional canon of dramatic form. Unequivocal aesthetic meaning and its subjectivization in concrete, tangible intention was a surrogate for the transcendent meaningfulness whose very denial constitutes aesthetic content "..."(Adorno 299)

From this view, the fixed, integrate and well-composed form of the existentialist works which is a cliché, has an ideological characteristic leading to nothing but confirmation of the status quo. One cliché after another, facing the content-less world which is represented by these works, is a ridiculous paradox which is a far distance from realism. On the other front, the socialist realism which claims to understand the objective and with an eighteenth century optimism believes that an objective and exact historical representation of the bourgeois evolving forces for creating revolution is possible, finally is trapped within a rational and coherent narrative of reality(Good 1-12). We should notice that any rational and coherent form means that the status quo of the world is a rational situation, while catastrophe signifies a confusing cul-de-sac of rationality and also it is a consequence of the absence of human rationality. In the absence of reason, how can we present a rational narration of the catastrophe? Thus, any kind of the (formal) rational narrative seeks to give a rational image of an irrational world, as if the reader hasn't lived the catastrophe before and after reading the work; the elimination of the catastrophe from the narrative implies that we are leading a salubrious life, thereby confirming the status quo.

### 3. THE SILENCE OF THE LANGUAGE

Confronting the catastrophe, reason is left frustrated, the reason which tends to conceptualize and categorize; the reason which levels the particular and the individual in the shape of homogenizing totalities and therefore, sacrifices the possibility of concrete comprehension of the particular for the sake of the total categories; the reason which optimistically introduces the process of categorizing from the world of objects into the world of human beings and classifies people into orderly, inviolable ranks (Adorno and Horkheimer 38-45). Now, this reason cannot incorporate the present catastrophe into any of its categories. The catastrophe is an object which cannot be integrated in any abstraction of the narcissistic reason. Reason cannot present a coherent and rational narrative of the catastrophe. Consequently, language, which used to reveal the categories of the reason devoutly, and provided reason with the seemingly sufficient (and suspicious) possibility of presenting a rational narrative, kneels down in front of the catastrophe, due to the incompetency of reason.

As Adorno and Horkheimer point out in "the dialectic of enlightenment", before the formation of the enlightenment reason, the dread of the human beings was represented in the form of onomatopoeia, which is in fact mimesis of the real things and had its roots in the objective experience of human beings (12-65). At this point, with the decadence of the enlightenment reason, it is as if human beings are facing a similar situation, as if human beings are thrown into pre or post-enlightenment situation. So we cannot expect the utterances to represent the reality as they did faithfully before the catastrophe. Concepts shrink from their references, words won't be reference-oriented, and signifiers will be alienated from their signifieds. So floods of fragmented sentences, words devoid of references, illogical repartees and repeated ironies, etc are representative of the failure of language (as a result of the failure of reason). Language in Beckett's works approximate silence. This silence of language, reveals a specific form of concision in Beckett's works, he never refers to the atomic "catastrophe" in his work, "endgame". If he gives an account of the event like the so-called realistic works, he is trapped in a rational narrative and if he just mentions the catastrophe, as in well-consumed minimalistic works, he confirms the rational correspondence between the signifier and the signified, the concept and the reference. Beckett washes his hands off these two and shows the silence of language in a concision evading meaning. This process of the silence of language, goes so far as it, in Beckett's works such as "All that Fall" "Waiting for Godot", questions the communication through language itself. Can we really find a reference for the meaningless word, "Godot"? Are the context-less dialogues of "All that fall", looking for the communication as their final end? Why does Beckett in his, "Act without Words II", shows all what he says in three simple graphic pictures? Don't all these represent the silence (failure) of language in Beckett's works?.

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It can be said that the failure of language is a result of the reification of language. When human relationships have been radically reified in the late capitalism, relations, phenomena, objects, all and all, own their meaning to the concept of reification, that is, ideas, words and concepts find their meaning in reification. To put it more clearly, since language is considered to be a reflection of reality, the reified reality creates commodified concepts and ideas through the medium of language. From this perspective, the certainty and validity of the object is more than those of subjective concepts, so the subject seeks recourse to the objects even for proving and understanding his own existence. The language which used to be regarded as a self-enclosed system, although it still depends on its own differential and relational characteristics, now gets its functions of conveying meaning from objects in a unilateral relationship. From this perspective, this failure is characteristic of Beckett's works which disclose the psychological situation of his characters in the context of irony. Throughout "All that Fall", the characters have no choice but seeking recourse to the objects in order to represent their own psychological condition. For example, Mrs. Rooney who is obsessed with her infertility and barrenness, likens herself to a mole. And in another example, she likens herself to a sack which shows the death of all of her natural emotions and the reification of her body.

With one glimpse, Beckett's characters are similar to the objects not only in their simile grounds, but also in regard with their self- understanding. They are fragmented as the objects surrounding them. In the commodified world, the objectivity of the commodity is more valid and reliable and meaningful. When the individual labor force finds its most valuable determination in the commodity, when the laborer must live to just produce the commodity, so to define himself, to utter his psyche, what other way does he have but seeking recourse to the object? Unlike the Cartesian subject, who insists on his existence amid the division between him and the object, Beckettian characters are thrown into isolated objects. These subjects own their existence to their similarity to the object.

The subjects of Beckett's characters, are afflicted with reification on the one hand, and are entangled in seeking to understand themselves on the other hand, that is, they are wandering in the conflict between self-estrangement (the negation of identity) and the formation of the identity. And unlike Adorno's *Odyssey*, their self-negation (the death of the self) doesn't signify the formation of their rational subject. In other words, to sacrifice the self for the sacred is the beginning of the formation of the identity. In the next step, sacrifice is internalized, and this self-sacrifice leads to the formation of the rational subject of *Odyssey* (Adorno and Horkheimer 85-120), (something like Freudian civilization which directs the Libido and leads to the formation of the superego (Freud 12-85)). If Adorno thinks that *Odyssey*, equates the fear of regression into Nature with the dissolution of the self, these Beckettian characters steep themselves in the reified objectivity of the world blissfully. All Winie's life in "Happy Days", is dependent on lipstick, gun, umbrella, bag, and newspaper in her hand. If these things didn't exist, what would she be?

Another aspect of Beckett's characters' relationship with objects is their obsession with objects. It is as if Vladimir is always involved in checking his own hat, Estragon is preoccupied with his shoes, Lucky is concerned with carrying the bag and so on. These mental obsessions with habitual behaviors of Beckett's characters, in Beckett's words, are a way out of their existential suffering (along with their memories)(Alvarez 121-167). Emancipation for a moment, brought about by these habitual relations with objects, divulges the memory of the dissolution of the rational subject. The obsession of Beckett's characters on the other hand, covers their fundamental tension; if they stop their preoccupation with objects, and their verbosity, that tension will surge up. That fundamental tension is the assignment of thinking about existence. The assignment of conceiving themselves as an integrate existence in a fragmented world. Fear of thinking, anxiety of reflection, is the axis of their personality. If I think, therefore I am, but I don't consider this kind of being as belonging to me. So unlike the Sartrean subject, I have no existential angst, but I have the anxiety of thinking, since just after thinking, I will exist and then I should accept the responsibility of what I am. If Vladimir and Estragon enjoy waiting, this is because waiting means not doing anything, therefore, Vladimir would like the sun to set, till they can leave with a happy conscience. The obsession of these two characters is a way to reduce the tension, aren't they anxious about Godot's coming more than his not coming? If Godot comes, everything will be all right, the transcendental signified (Godot) gives meaning to everything, words find their own references again, the signifiers rely on the signifieds, the subject starts his abstract process of subjectivization, the particular submits to the authority of the universal and thinking begins, and the anxiety of thinking prevails. So it will be better if Godot does not come, so that the subject does not get engaged in this fundamental tension (thinking being equal to Godot's coming).

#### 4. TIME AS A POINT DE CAPTION

The interesting point about Beckett's character is that despite the fragmentation of their lives, a particular temporal point concentrates all their acts on itself, Vladimir waits for the sunset, Ham expects to take his pills and so on. For one thing, it can be said these points are the last faintest traces of modern organized world, the last sign in which we should seek the truth in Adorno's phrasing in the actuality of philosophy (15-28). The time which gives a temporal narrative of the subject in the daily of human beings, the time, the reference to which constructs the illusion of identity integrity, here, is merely a point of deferring the understanding of the present desperation.

In fact, avoiding thinking about what happens to us at the time being, casts us to a seemingly meaningful future. This future is more meaningless than the present, since Beckett's characters who are subjectivizing themselves, not only consider every determinate and exact moment as having no meaning, but also deem the process of reference (in any utterance) intentionally unintended, thereby presenting a paradoxical parody out of organized a modern man.

From this perspective, Beckett's characters in their being there ( Da-sein) and their projection into a moment in the future, have the most un-ontological approach. Thus, what we said about the dissolution of these characters in the fragmented reified objectivity can be interpreted in an ontological perspective as having inclination toward ontic understanding(Babak Ahmadi 29-117). To put it more exactly, Beckett's characters are the least dense form of Dasein. The relationship between Beckett's characters and temporality involves some ontological points about them. Dasein is itself a temporality(Heidegger 12- 82). In Heidegger's view, Dasein, primordial temporality has three kinds of ecstasy, including ecstasy of present perfect, of present simple, and of future. Among these three, the ecstasy of future, is the most important one and has the closest affinity with projection. In understanding the primordial temporality, the point to be reflected on is that the primordial temporality is not identical with the daily clock-time. On the contrary all the clock time (daily) hours can only be primarily based on this primordial temporality. Furthermore, the way temporality times itself, must be considered as "has been presenting future"(Gorner 35-69) . in this timing as Heidegger says, there is no chronological order among those three ecstasies, that is, future is not later than "has been" and is not sooner than the present(. From this discussion we can conclude that: first, ( as we said before), the projection of Beckett's characters to a temporal point in the future which is absurd and meaningless, ruins the most crucial existential characteristic, that is, projection. Besides, Dasein's temporality, from Heidegger's view, is not specially directed to the present; neither is it trapped in the past events, nor specifically oriented towards an action in the future. The question which arises here is that what the relationship between Beckett's characters and this temporality is. To put it in a more tangible way, this question can take the following forms: why does Estragon repeatedly deny his past consciously? Why does Krap conjure up his past in the tape? and so on. By focusing on temporality, Estragon's situation is particularly meaningful. In contrast to Alvarez's belief that Estragon is suffering from amnesia(112), Estragon is definitely aware of his past, but he consciously pretends to be unaware. The fact that a person can remember his yesterday, the day before yesterday, and two days before yesterday, and so on, in a coherent temporal sequence, is synonymous with the fact that he gives a temporal narrative of himself and in each of his acts, he is flowing in time ontologically and his being there is the same as his temporality. But Estragon not only has no such an ontological understanding of his temporality, but also he doesn't accept even the clock time. He ,through a process of desubjectivization, by driving the past from his memory, exempts himself from thinking about his frequent experiences. From this perspective, he is taking two simultaneous actions, in two different philosophical levels; in one level, avoiding the human existence, resulted from avoidance of temporality, and in the other level, moving in the direction of desubjectivaztion( influenced by anxiety of thinking in contrast to Sartrean anxiety of being) and also in the direction of anxiety caused by the dissolution of the self in fragmented reified objectivity( in contrast to the Odyssean self-development)( Adorno and Horkheimer91-105). When these points aligned with his obsessive behavior ( with Vladimir ) are considered as a way to escape from their fundamental tension, specifically their anxiety for Godot's coming ( in a way that they would like Godot not to come, since his coming means the resurgence of the transcendental signified, that is, the beginning of meaning, the correspondence between the signifier and the signified, abstraction and the beginning of thinking) which signifies their anxiety of thinking.

It can be said the process of desubjectivization concealed in Estragon is the origin of the cynical postmodern subject. Estragon is the prototype of the postmodern intellectual; the intellectual who is afraid of thinking like a modern subject. The experience of the modern subject revolves around the transcendental signifier, (reason, human, money, surplus value..), but now Godot who is parodically and paradoxically suggestive of the word "God" ( the transcendental signifier of all

ages), even while being converted into the transcendental signifier, is parodied again. Estragon is waiting for a Godot who is nothing, and whose existence does not carry such significance as that of his shoes. Estragon is a subject who is anxious of thinking like a modern subject, whose thinking orbits around the transcendental signified (and signifier) and to conceal this anxiety, he exorcises all things in the past, present and future from his memory, all that which leads him to Godot and instead, gets attached to his daily obsessions.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this essay we tried to introduce Beckett as a typical modern writer who takes a stance between subjectivity and objectivity; and in the gulf between these two, firstly, he focuses on the latter and depicts an image of Lukacs's realistic standpoint and secondly he delves further into the modern reified conditions and presents a profile of the existentialist view. Amidst this gap, Beckett's existence itself ineluctably involves a critical depiction of both areas. His characters, in facing modern subjectivization, find their niche in the fragmented reified objectivity ending in desubjectivization, which coincides with Beckett's characters' anxiety of thinking about their own existential conditions and subsequently their angst of thinking itself. In the meantime their negation of the past is in line with negating Dasein's temporality characteristics, and this gives rise to the dissolution of their most essential existential feature, projection. The concomitance of these features culminates in the emergence of characters such as Vladimir and Estragon who evade thinking like a modern subject, that is, a kind of thinking which is based on a transcendental signified (and signifier). In this respect, they happen to be the harbingers of postmodern thinkers.

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