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الحب والوحدة في مسرحية بيكيت شريط كراب الأخير

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ملخص البحث

يتناول الباحث مسرحية شريط كراب الأخير للكاتب الحائز على جائزة نوبل للآداب صاموئيل بكت، وبكت لم يكن كاتباً مسرحياً فحسب، بل كتب الشعر والقصة والرواية والنقد كما عرف عنه شغفه بالترجمة ولم ينل شهرته إلا بعد عرض مسرحيته في انتظار كودوفي في حزيران من عام ١٩٥٣، وتلك المسرحية هي بداية ما يعرف الآن بمسرح اللامعقول أو مسرح العبث، كتب بكت مسرحية شريط كراب الأخير للممثل الإيرلندي باتريك ماكي الذي أحب صوته ولذلك أطلق عليها في أول الأمر اسم حوار ماكي الذاتي أو (مونولوج ماجي).

وفي المسرحية يحتفل كراب - كل عام - بعيد ميلاده مكرراً نفس الطقوس نفسها التي يكررها كل سنة وهي الأكل والشرب والاستماع إلى ذكرياته مع النساء، البحث الحالي يركز على تحليل شخصية وذكريات كراب الشيخ مقارنة بحالته حين كان شاباً مفعماً بالحياة محباً للعلاقات العاطفية وبين ما يعاينه الآن من القاتلة التي يجد نفسه فيها.

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Love and Loneliness in Beckett's Play Krapp's Last Tape

Abstract

Samuel Beckett has written in almost all genres: poetry, fiction and drama .He is a critic, an essayist, a short story - writer and also a translator. His fiction did not receive much critical attention till the first stage performance of his play Waiting for Godot (5 Jan. 1953), which marks not only the end of Beckett's first phase of drama writing, but also the beginning of The Theatre of the Absurd.

Krapp's Last Tape was written for the Irish actor Patrick Magee whose cracked voice was the model for the cracked sounds of old Krapp. Thus, the play was originally called Magee's Monologue .Yearly, at the moment of birth, Krapp repeats a ritual: taping a birthday message .The old man shuffles, eats bananas, drinks backstage, but above all listens intently and comments on his love relations of thirty years ago. This paper is on Krapp's intimate relations with women in his youth compared to his present loneliness.

Love and Loneliness in Beckett's Play Krapp's Last Tape

Samuel Beckett's minimalist bleak writings about alienation, memory and language made him one of the

twentieth century most influential playwrights. Many critics consider him as one of the founders of the Theater of the Absurd. Beckett's plays and novels exhaust Man's rational efforts to explore reality and seek the meaning of existence and the self. They address the essential concern of Man and his universe such as his craving for meaning and knowledge understanding, and the failure of human efforts to form a meaning out of the chaos of existence.

Krapp's Last Tape one of the outstanding plays Samuel Beckett wrote demonstrates the complex polysemy, overlaying of dramatic significance and texture that were achieved through the use of recorded tapes on stage .Krapp's Last Tape is Beckett's first postwar writing in English.

Beckett wrote this play for the Irish actor Patrick Magee, who played the role of Mr. Solcum in the BBC production of Beckett's radio play All that Fall .Deirdre Bair reports that Beckett told Magee that his voice was the one he heard as he wrote Krapp's Last Tape.

This play marks a new step in Beckett's plays in which the tape recorder features the voice of Krapp at the age of 39 and the listener, Krapp at the age of 69, with 'cracked voice' and 'laborious walk .'The old man shuffles, eats bananas, and drinks at the backstage, but above all listens intently and comments on his relationships of thirty years ago.

Beckett's use of recorded memory in Krapp's Last Tape helps us to understand the fundamental roles of the characters in some of his plays besides portraying the dramatic construction on which his dramatic composition is based. The process of recollecting some happening or event, which has occurred in the past, is both selective and subjective. How far it coincides with the actual happening becomes questionable. Whether or not it is a faithful representation of the past is also doubtful. However, memory itself is uncertain, unreliable, and fluctuating. Thus, it is difficult to distinguish between one's grasp of the real event and the recollected one in form of memory. In this paper, an attempt will be made to analyze how Krapp uses his recorded memory, in Krapp's Last Tape, to portray love and loneliness in Krapp's life.

A close analysis of his plays shows that the Beckettian characters are always in a struggle with their minds in an attempt to verify events which have happened or which they have experienced in their lives. But it is memory itself which thwarts them in its unreliability. With exception to Krapp's Last Tape in which Beckett uses tapes to record memory, it is almost difficult to evaluate what has happened to those characters because of the unexplored gaps which appear in the texts. We are placed in front of a group of characters who

are constantly trying to grasp at these straws like memories of the past.

The dramatic power of Beckett's work arises from the fact that memory is ambiguous and uncertain. One is never quite certain whether what the character recollects is true, whether the Boy of the First Act is the same who comes at the end of the Second Act in *Waiting for Godot* or whether Dan killed the boy or was it simply a dream on Jerry's part (*All that Fall*).

In almost all his plays, Beckett's characters turn to the past. The present is not important because they are all ruined pieces of human existence. They are old decrepit beings, at the other end of their lives, hopefully awaiting a merciful release from the misery and agony of the present. All of them are conscious of the fact "the time of death is every moment", to use Eliot's expression from his *Four Quartets*.

Krapp tells the girl he loves that it is no use going on and he shuts himself in the darkness of his den. But this voluntary step in the direction of loneliness does not help Krapp to come to term with the present which is both meaningless and directionless. He moves backward in years to recall his early days, and his frequent recourse to his tape recorder is an attempt to recall and recapture his passionate moments of intense experiences and live in his past.

Therefore, recorded memory in Krapp's Last Tape creates a biographical play, revealing three phases of Krapp's life. Though the play opens on one man, we are witnesses to three Krapps - Krapp in his near thirties, Krapp in his near forties and Krapp in his near seventies. The play covers roughly a span of forty years, seen as a sequence of fragmented selves knit together by the one unchanging self of Krapp. From his early years, when Krapp was twenty-nine, he had harbored none of the illusory feeling about love and life. Krapp at twenty nine, Krapp at thirty nine and Krapp at sixty-nine follow the same pattern of renouncing love and passionate involvement at moments of intensity. Every time he had the chance to admit a woman in his life, he deliberately withheld love and thereby withheld himself. The young Krapp at twenty- nine gives up Bianca, rationalizing later that it was all pointless and meaningless to get involved. "At that time, I think I was still living on and off with Bianca in Kedar Street. Well out of that, Jesus, yes! Hopeless business"(1) His rejection of Bianca has not been due to some inadequacy on the part of the girl, but has been prompted by his awareness of it turning out to be a "hopeless business". One remarkable thing recurrent in his relationships with the opposite sex has been his appreciation of the girls despite his later rejection of them. Krapp pays

rich tribute to Bianca's eyes: "Very warm. I suddenly saw them again. (Pause) Incomparable". (P. 218) But Krapp is aware concurrently of the "flagging pursuit of happiness" and gives up the girl. Later he "sneers at what he calls his youth and thanks God that it's over.. .What remains of all that misery? A girl in a shabby green coat, on a railway-station platform? No? (P. 218).

So does Krapp at thirty-nine bid farewell to love during the memorable moments with the girl he comes closest to in his life. The boat scene, reminiscent in all its richness and intensity of sensuous details reveals the best moments of moments of ecstasy, gratification and fulfillment. Krapp's savoring of these moments by constant replay of this particular tape is illustrative of his appreciation of a life of involvement. Krapp at sixty -nine lingers over his past moments of calm telluric bliss.

I lay down, across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us gently up and down, and from side to side, (p.221)

But this moment of intensity happened after Krapp had bid farewell to love .Earlier they had agreed mutually to part. She offered no protest on his decision that "it was hopeless and no good to go on."(p. 221) These memories of love,

movement, stillness, light, eyes‘ coupling and equipoise are echoed in the end of Beckett's" Imagination Dead Imagine:"

Between their absolute stillness and the convulsive light the contrast is striking, in the beginning, for one who still remembers having been struck by the contrary.

It is clear however, from a thousand little signs too long to imagine, that they are not sleeping. Only murmur ah, no more, in this silence, and at the same instant for the eye of prey the infinitesimal shudder and icy, there is better elsewhere.(2)

Recorded memory portrays Krapp's predicament; he seems to have lived with the tension between realities of passionate involvement and loneliness. His detachment in the midst of an active association with the girl accounts for the experience of calm bliss after they had decided to break. It seems that love, friendship ‘and compassion are impossible in his real world, where man remains alienated from his fellow beings. Such relations, for Krapp, have no meaning in a world that has lost all meaning and significance, where things take place in an arbitrary and unjust manner:

Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indigence until the memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty,

in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when I suddenly saw the whole thing. The vision at last. This I fancy is what I have chiefly to record this evening, against the day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory, (p.220)

It is quite clear that Krapp fears these passionate relations and so voluntarily seeks confinement. Krapp can be seen as a silent sufferer incapable of rising beyond his personal problems. Perhaps the best example for his behavior is seen as he recalls his mother's dying day. Krapp remembers sitting on the bench by the weir, looking at her window, "wishing she were gone" (p.219) Krapp did not weep at his mother's funeral, not because he was stone-hearted, but he seemed indifferent to life. In fact, Krapp looks like Beckett in his relationship with his mother. Deirdre Bair in her book Samuel Beckett A Biography states that the relationship between Beckett and his mother was without harmony. In a letter to Thomas McGreevy dated 6th. October 1937 Beckett wrote:

I am what her savage loving made me, and it is good that one of us should accept that finally as it has been all this time...I simply don't want to see her or write to her or hear from her ...and if a telegram came now to say she is dead I would not do the furies the favour of regarding myself even

as indirectly responsible, which I suppose all boils down to saying what a bad son I am, them amen.(3)

Beckett's characters in Krapp's Last Tape and Play are silent sufferers worn out with age and ailment and awaiting a slow, uncertain extinction as a possible relief from their languid, weary existence. Their present seems completely hopeless in which there is no possible relief. They cannot but go through their memories as the only option open to them. Perhaps, it is an option they would love to do away with though they have no alternative but to recourse to it. So they speak and live their memories ‘even when they are disinclined to do so. Beckett has demonstrated this in many plays. In his first play Waiting for Godot and in Krapp's Last Tape ‘Beckett demonstrated such a return to the lovely moments of the past as a replacement to the misery of the present.

Vladimir: "What do they say"?

Estragon: "They talk about their lives."

**Vladimir: "To have lived is not enough
for them."**

Estragon: "They have to talk about it", (p.57)

The same themes of passionate relationships are repeated in Play ‘Beckett introduced three voices (W1,W2,M) emanating from three torsoless speak about

their love memories in the past and then proceed on to a consideration of their miserable present state. In the end of the play memories are rehearsed again exactly. The play comes to a close when they begin memories for a third time:

M: We were no longer together when she smelled the rat. Give up that whore 'she said, or I'll cut my throat_[Hic cup.] pardon_ so help me God. I know she could have no proof. So I told her I did not know what she was talking about.(p.308)

In Play 'memories of love are prompted by a swiveling beam that flashes from a spot that placed uncomfortable state of self - imposed solitariness as a result of their failure to cope with the pressures of loneliness. Thus, they cannot but go back to their happy memories as the only room left to them. These unfortunate characters have the obligation to say what they wish to delete from their memory, unlike Krapp, who constantly selects from his recorded memories what he wants. He interrupts his recorded memories and these interruptions are made in an attempt to satisfy him .In fact, what Krapp wants us to hear is perhaps what he misses in his present loneliness. Paul Lawley says that "actor Rick Cluchey describes Krapp as notorious self- interrupter and

quotes Beckett, in his directorial capacity, as saying of the character: His whole life has been interruption. "(4)

In Krapp's Last Tape and Play light is strongly attached to memories and enjoyment; light suggests a strong return to love and warm relation and darkness signifies misery and loneliness. Krapp is "Very near-sighted (but unspectacled). Hard of hearing sits at "A table and immediately adjacent area in strong white light. Rest of stage in darkness"(p.215) 'Krapp enjoys light when he wants to recall his relationships with women; " The new light above my table is a great improvement. With all this darkness round me I feel less alone. (p.217) In the scene of the boat the focus is on light, darkness and sex. Here the scene is filled with sunlight'

She lay stretched out on the floorboards with her hands under her head and her eyes closed. Sun blazing down, bit of breeze, water nice and lively. I noticed a scratch on her thigh and ask her how she came by it . Picking gooseberries, she said. (p.221)

The scene in the boat reflects also the relationship between light and darkness but, light is attached to memory strongly. When Krapp wants to recall his past he goes back to light and when he wishes to drink and hide he goes into

darkness. Krapp at sixty-nine continues to drink and is addicted to bananas by the dozen 'though they are "fatal things for a man with my condition" (p.217) His sexual life also continues though with much diminished vigor than before. So his zest for writing ended in failure. At thirty-nine he has decided to embark on 'False ring there] .Pause] Shadows of the opus... magnum' (p.218) and at sixty- nine he cynically remarks: "seventeen copies sold, of which eleven at trade price to free circulating, libraries beyond the seas. Getting known. (Pause.) One pound six and something "eight I have little doubt." (p.222) Like Krapp, Beckett published his first book Proust in 1931 but, the sale was extremely low, with only twenty copies being sold in one year.

In his twilight epoch, he contemplates the frustration of his ambition, the anticipated fulfillment which gave him the hope and illusion to go on. Frustrated and mocked by desire, which is an inescapable concomitant of being born in the world, Krapp remains a lonely, old man, physically depleted, and drained in his enthusiasm for life. He sings:

**Now the day is over Night
is drawing nigh- igh
Shadows of the evening
Steal across the sky (p.222)**

Krapp awaits darkness to close in upon him, to make himself feel alone. There is nothing more to say "not a squeak". As he decides to lie propped up in the dark, he allows his mind to wonder, to his boyish days:

**Be again in the dingle on a Christmas
Eve, Gathering holly, the red-
berried) Pause.)**

**Be again on Croghan on a Sunday morning, in the daze
with the bitch, stop and listen to the bells. (Pause.) And
so on.(Pause.) Be again be again.(Pause.) All that old
misery. (Pause.) Once wasn't enough for you. (Pause.)
Lie down across her. (p.223)**

And with this Krapp once again plays the tape that had recorded these unforgettable memories with the girl in the punt. This time he plays the tape to its end ironically enough the tape concludes with Krapp's assertion that he would no longer harbor any desire in the wake of his awareness of its unattainability. "Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Now with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back", (p.223). Krapp's desire to reject human relationships is also mocked at. He had failed both in his attempt to keep himself alone and to sustain with the other. None of his passions could be fulfilled and yet being born, he has no

alternative but to desire 'to seek after illusory goals to keep going till darkness closes in upon him. Krapp's fantasy to recall his boyhood days to Christmas Eve and Sunday morning, to days of love and excitement, after his having bid farewell to passionate involvement shows the impossibility of stopping memory.

Unlike Krapp, Hamm in Endgame shows more authority and courage than Krapp. Hamm's blindness and paralyzed immobility do not deter him from going on with his miserable relations. Hamm feels that when love disappears from human life the result would be catastrophic. Blind and groveling in darkness, Hamm has the insight into the grotesque of the reality of love and loneliness :**Hamm: One day you will blind, like me. You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me'** Pause...**\Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all ages wouldn't fill it, and there you'll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe\,pause[yes one day you'll know what it is , you'll be like me, except that you won't have had pity on any one and because there won't be anyone left to have pity on. (p.109-110)**

Hamm seems to have clear knowledge of the painful demands of human relations that call for a high order of

endurance to overcome personal desires by accepting others without giving in to illusory hopes .Perhaps intimate relations with human beings are a sort of games. Thus, he begins Endgame with his famous words 'Me to Play'. Nothing is more important for Hamm than the exercise of his authority in his game. He orders Clov to do this and that according to his particular whim. Once he asked him to put him to bed soon after he had woken up. Yet, love and human relations for Hamm are games in which he is a solo champion. In fact, in some parts of Endgame one feels that Hamm's attitude towards love and loneliness is a rare mixture of fear and carelessness:

Hamm: Kiss me [Pa»se]Will you not kiss me?

Clov: No.

Hamm: On the forehead.

Clov: I won't kiss you anywhere, (p.125)

To stand up to Clov's cold reply, Hamm has no alternative in facing his miserable present but to go back to relaxing memories of Christmas Eve. In fact, Hamm looks like Krapp in his fantasies of Christmas Eve and Sunday morning. He goes back to days of joy and excitement after his having bid farewell to love and passionate relations:

Hamm: It was an extra -ordinary bitter day, I remember, zero by the thermometer .But considering it was Christmas Eve there was nothing ... extra- ordinary about it. (p. 117)

In Krapp's Last Tape ‘Krapp continues to record at sixty - nine, but he is tied to the basic themes of the play love and loneliness. Sidney Homan, in his book Beckett's Theaters ‘says that the play:

is about love, and self-love is perversion of real love. It is little wonder that Krapp fears being alone; the obsession of Beckett's characters is just that: of not being alone, of being heard or remaining together even in forming a couple leads to misery. Being alone Krapp defines the unprofitable time in the wine house, the one-third of his life spent drinking on public premises, and the aloneness in his den, in the realm of his own mind until he activates the tape recorder. In darkness he confesses, he feels less alone, and we may assume that when the physical reality is blotted out by darkness, the character meet himself, his real but also his other half (5)

Krapp fails to come into term with intimate relations and loneliness. He switches from one to the other,

concordant with the switching on and off his tape - recorder. His inveterate habit to return to his memories is a proof of his inability to enjoy his loneliness. His engulfment with specific moment in the past reflects his inability to move beyond certain stations of his happy past. "The understanding and fire" that he speaks of testifies to his recognition of the mockery of all human relations and his consequent anger and disapproval defines such frustration. Krapp is a mute sufferer who seems to be incapable of rising beyond his personal suffering and therefore remains lonely in his den. Krapp recognizes the unauthenticity of his love relations, and turns away from it. But he has no reserve strength to sustain him in his state of aloneness. His inveterate habit to return to his tape -recorder to listen to his past is proof of his inability to remain immune to the world outside himself. He continues recording for the future references so that he could retain the outside world within himself and recourse to it when his voluntary isolation and loneliness become unendurable. Krapp keeps chewing the cud of the bygone past as he lacks the will to persevere in the painful tenor of a lonely existence.

Conclusion

Krapp's Last Tape evokes a grotesque vision compounded of the metaphysical fear of annihilating force,

the horror of loneliness and the sense of alienation from the inexorable working of the universe. In Krapp's Last Tape, Beckett incorporates the theme of hostile mechanism reducing human existence to nothing and presents a frightening perception of the ceaseless manner in which life continues through the cycle of birth and death. To Beckett, human existence is pathetic because it is inseparable from pain and misery and is lacking coherence. In this play Beckett presents a picture of Krapp and his women dominated and frustrated by the Absurd. In the context of the Absurd, Krapp looks at life with no hope or illusion. It is in this universe, divested of illusion and light, that Krapp feels an alien, and a stranger. Thus, Krapp continues to live on the fringes of his memories. The flame in him is now reduced to embers and he does not have the will either to put it off or fan it into a bright and intense conflagration.

References

- (1) Samuel Beckett ‘(The Complete Dramatic Works)London. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1986) 218. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses. (New York)
- (2) Samuel Beckett ‘Stories and Texts for Nothing. (1976) 13.
- (3) Deirdre Bair ‘(Samuel Beckett) London, Pan Books Ltd,) 226.
- (4) John Pilling ed ‘.The Cambridge Companion To Beckett) Cambridge University Press, 1994) 90.

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