



Deconstruction in Samuel Beckett's Plays

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Abstract: Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) is a well-known name in the history of English literature. He perceives that life resembles the movement of a river. It holds significance in the continued growth. We can't stop the current of a river. If we forcibly halt the flow of a river, it loses its significance. In reality, we cannot establish fixed meaning, as life is inherently fluid. Beckett breaks all regulations, constraints, limitations, and hierarchical divisions. He does not depend on words. Language is inherently insufficient to convey meaning. There are words that don't mean anything, like "Godot," and words that do mean something, like "silence." Derrida is a French philosopher who presents the theory of Deconstruction.

IndexTerms – Deconstruction, Silence, Pauses, Boundaries, Barriers, Philosophy

I. INTRODUCTION

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) is a well-known name in the history of English play. He breaches all regulations, constraints, limitations, and hierarchical boundaries. Samuel Beckett, the Nobel laureate, innovates literature by utilizing both words and silence. Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) is a distinguished French philosopher and literary theorist known for deconstruction. He challenges the logocentric western tradition of the metaphysics of presence, which has prevailed from Plato's *Phaedrus* to Edmund Husserl's *Origin of Geometry* in western philosophy. His groundbreaking theory of deconstruction critiques the metaphysical assumptions underlying Western philosophy, ethics, society, politics, and literature. It may provide a novel interpretation and viewpoint on Samuel Beckett's seminal plays, which have long been a focus point for global literary critics. This study tries to demonstrate a connection between the theories and practices of Derrida and Samuel Beckett.

Samuel Beckett seems to be able to communicate in any language. Instead of establishing a single meaning, the deconstructionist approach to literary analysis broadens and improves interpretations, providing a variety of significant viewpoints. But through the use of silence, pauses, and ellipses, the well-known playwright Samuel Beckett not only reveals multiple levels of meaning within a phrase, but surpasses it. Because Beckett uses neglected literary devices like pauses and silences to express ideas, thoughts, feelings, and compassion, meaning in his writing is revealed without the use of words. Beckett brings these neglected tools to the fore, where silence becomes a source of infinite meaning. In his well-known novel "The Waste Land", T.S. Eliot has combined Indian mythology where gods, men and demons go to Lord Brahma and ask him some questions. Lord Brahma responds with 'Da, Da, Da,' with each 'Da' signifying a distinct meaning for them individually. The situation is similar for readers of Samuel Beckett. Each book possesses multiple levels of meaning. This phenomenon is referred to as intertextuality. Beckett's plays exhibit several layers: pre-text, subtext, text, and post-text. It is an endless process of intertextuality. In works such as *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, and others by Samuel Beckett, silence and pauses are crucial elements.

The goal of deconstruction is to make it possible for opposing elements to coexist. Both Beckett and Derrida favor a simultaneous order of the past and present in which the present's identity and capacity are maintained within a unique component of unified contradictions and oppositions; after all, harmony and order are impossible without contradictions, oppositions, movements, and transformations. In the end, the universal concept will reconcile them. Birth and death are the same as death and birth. Since the latter becomes the former and vice versa, good and bad are interchangeable in this situation.

According to Derrida and Beckett, deconstruction is a conflict between seemingly incompatible ideas, one that forms boundaries while overlapping its edges. The performer and the observer are distinct yet potentially same; Derrida perceives no differentiation between the two.

Beckett forces his audience to derive meaning by intentionally obscuring his interpretations. He neither assumes power over his own works nor imposes his intentions on listeners. When American director Alan Schneider, a close personal friend of Beckett, inquired about the identity of Godot in *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett said, "Had I known, I would have put it in the play" (Schneider pg. 7). As the audience, the author, and the nature of literature change with time, there is also a visible change in the conceptions which public hold, for the work and its societal purposes. This undoubtedly applies to Beckett's situation. In the early stages of his

career, Beckett expressed a lack of trust in words, believing they limited his ability to convey his thoughts. In an interview with Martin Esslin, Beckett stated of the significance of his works:

"There is nothing to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together the obligation to express."

(Beckett pg. 17)

Beckett refrained from giving any final meaning to the works as he thought that the meaning of a work changes with time, situation and the reader. Deconstructivists attribute meaning not to the text itself, but to the audience members, who must derive interpretation of the entire performance from their personal experiences.

Deconstruction theory produces an effective and stimulating approach to critical analysis. Deconstructive theorists excel in paradox. They disrupt readers' perceptions and refuse to assert meaning, despite implying that meaning is present. These theorists invert and dissect concepts. *Waiting for Godot* has been described as a play perpetually seeking definition. Andrew K. Kennedy is right when he says:

"The play is written in such a way that it cannot be pinned down, can only be opened up for further questions. Some kind of principle of uncertainty is built into the fabric of the play at every level; all is implicit".

(Beckett pg. 32)

In Samuel Beckett, as in Derrida's texts *Writing and Difference* and *Of Grammatology*, meaning is incessantly postponed through supplementation or substitution. Similar to Derrida, Beckett opposes the legitimacy of logocentrism. Derrida asserts that there exists no pre-existing truth, transcendental signifier, or logos to which we can refer in order to ascertain meaning. Truth cannot be discussed independently of signification.

The two wanderers in *Waiting for Godot*, who lack the heroic traits of traditional Aristotelian characters, are shown waiting for "Godot," an enigmatic figure who never makes an appearance on stage. His presence is felt throughout the proceedings, as he remains the focal point and inspiration of their expectation despite his absence. The play commences abruptly and concludes abruptly. Beckett, through his play's setting, deliberately avoids pinning it to a specific location, allowing the audience or critics to interpret it as any place they choose. For instance, setting of *Waiting for Godot* is a "A country road, A Tree, Evening in Act I and in Act II it is Same Time, Same Place". (Beckett pg. 37)

In the play "Endgame" there is portrayal of pain and absurdity of existence. The characters have never experienced "an instance of happiness" (Beckett pg. 123) in their lives. In these circumstances, Hamm, the blind and unhappy being, desires to be the focal point of the play's narrative. As he is unable to move, words are his sole means of expression. He tries to engage with them as effectively as possible to construct his logocentric, teleological game. He is fixated on a logocentric ambition to establish a center in both the world and the text. He constantly seeks to return to the center, where he can attain equilibrium, power, control, and security; however, the center, or the logos, is unattainable in the apocalyptic realm of *Endgame*. His lament, "Can there be misery [he yawns] than mine?" (Beckett pg. 93) He asserts the ability to "end it," (Beckett pg. 93), yet his impotence undermines this boast, as both the audience and spectators are fully conscious of his utter reliance on Clov. Consequently, his central position becomes devoid of significance, of which he is fully conscious. Beckett has broken the tradition or inverted the role. He has placed the audience in a decentered position. Beckett departs from contemporary notions of consistency, order, and construction, approaching Derridean ideas of delogocentrism and deconstruction.

Like other works, *Happy Days* is also an open ended play which invites multiple interpretations on behalf of the readers/spectators. About fifty-year-old Winnie is buried waist-deep in the middle of the mound, surrounded by bright light; she is sleeping with her big bag on her right side. Her husband, Willie is asleep behind her, to her right side. Winnie wakes up by listening to the ringing of the bell. "Another heavenly day" (Beckett pg. 138) are the first words of Winnie when she wakes up. We can observe that the bell marks the beginning and end of the play, but the audience soon realizes that day and night are defined by the intense heat and light. *Happy Days* ends where it starts, and the same thing can be observed in many other works of Beckett. There is no observable development leaving the viewer to speculate as to whether it will end definitively, thus creating an environment of undesirability in the deconstructionist sense.

The majority of the dialogues in the play consist of lengthy monologues delivered by Winnie, which are filled with the pain of solitude and the underlying horror of her situation. A. Alvarez asserts that Winnie's language is simply "suburban prattle... which hardly does its justice" (Alvarez pg. 109), as language fails to ease her suffering. There are instances when words fail, prompting Winnie to go back to her habitual practice of removing items from the bag and subsequently returning them. Winnie recognizes the futility and constraints of her language.

Krapp's Last Tape is a new kind of monodrama that shows a person and their mind being alone. In it, one character talks to both their old and younger selves. Unlike other playwrights of the period who composed realistic dramas situated in the past or present, Beckett set *Krapp's Last Tape* in the future. Beckett sought to avoid any skepticism regarding the implausibility of a sixty-nine-year-old man listening to forty-year-old tapes in 1958. By disregarding conventional temporal structures, Beckett employed the

then-novel tape recorder to craft one of his most technologically innovative plays. *Krapp's Last Tape* is, in many aspects, a play of personal decline, characterized by a potent yet gentle eroticism, which is simultaneously tempered by parody and self-deprecation.

The play is composed for a single actor, featuring two voices of the same character: Krapp-now (sixty-nine) and Krapp-then (thirty-nine), who critiques the self-recording of a younger Krapp. The interaction between the living and the recorded voices over time is meticulously organized, establishing poignant ironic tensions, repetitions, and echoes that enabled Beckett to dismantle the hierarchy of past/present, youth/old age, dream/reality, dependency/interdependency, and physical/mechanical in deconstructionist terms.

The Old Tune is a highly significant radio drama. Beckett ironically depicts the main characters as friends who remain oblivious to each other's lives. Beckett endeavors to convey the absent past through dialogue, demonstrating that both the present and the past are perpetually intertwined.

II. CONCLUSION

Beckett has altered the relationship between joy and sadness, or vice versa, while accepting the past in its absence. Beckett undoubtedly makes use of contemporary equipment and technology in his plays, but it appears that he is making the case that people cannot lead fulfilling lives with it. Because the average person finds little use for such advancements, the fundamental truth remains unchanged even if science advances to the moon. The hierarchy of growth and advancement is inverted when it comes to innocence.

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