



Beckett's Theatre Garden and the Contemporary Dramaturgy: An Eco-critical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

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Current study is intended to unearth the relation of man and nature as a key concept of eco-criticism. It is meant to uncover the eco-critical aspects that are there in Beckett's plays in general and with respect to Waiting for Godot and Endgame in particular. The impacts of World War II and nuclear sublime on human nature as well as "nature" have also been amply addressed in the study. In order to achieve these objectives the researcher has made use of descriptive qualitative methodology. In addition, he has consumed eco-criticism as a theoretical approach to unearth relation between man and nature. Here, nature has been taken in an aesthetic sense rather than in scientific terms. The findings of the study indicate that there is a direct link between human and nature. It is human that has demolished nature and environment especially due to World War II and nuclear sublime.

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Introduction

Beckett is regarded to be one of the key figures of modern dramas and is among the pioneer of "Theatre of Absurd". In his plays he has introduced a novel form in which the miseries and suffering of modern man especially after World War II attained a significance place. He has also given due consideration as far as the relation between nature and literature is concerned which is indicative of the Eco-critical approach of Beckett. As a writer, instead of following the norms of the time he has brought about innovation and novelties to his plays. Mostly plays were based on action in his time but he ignored the concept of action and his plays lack action. Instead of action, the words and dialogues are keys that are symbolic and convey deeper meanings. That is why people not only watch but also feels his plays. His plays also lack characters, plot and story. He even doesn't disclose the identity of his characters.

Nothingness and purposelessness of modern people have been depicted through nobody comes, nobody goes and nothing happens in his plays especially in Waiting for Godot. His language is very simple and apt. Though, nothing significant is presented but his dialogue and words carry deeper and symbolic meanings. His language, art of plays and nothingness are all unique as compare to others dramatists of his time. Another key feature is that his plays are based on reality about the actual matters of human instead of projecting fanciful ideas and situations. As the reality of Beckett' time was passive and pessimist hence his approach is also based on pessimism and there is either little or no hope as far as his plays are concerned. There is a complexity in his plays as he does not make anything clear and obvious, elements of mystery prevail. The nature and world of

Beckett is rational as well as self conscious. It is due to these traits as an artist that Beckett was awarded with Nobel Prize in 1969.

Current study is meant to analyze Beckett's concept of eco-criticism with regard to his work in general and with respect to *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot* in particular. Specifically it is meant to unearth the answers of subsequent research questions.

- What are the key Eco-critical aspects that have been depicted in the plays of Beckett?
- How nature has been projected in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*?
- How has World War II contributed in demolishing both human nature as well as "nature" as portrayed in Beckett's plays?

Current study is an attempt on the part of researcher to bridge the gap in the relation of man with nature that has been disrupted by man himself. The impacts of War and nuclear sublime have stressed upon the need and essentiality of reconciliation with nature, climate and surrounding to make it worth living. Despair, disappointment and nothingness in life are also caused by the fact that human nature has become unnatural and has caused enormous loss to human nature which is needed to be amended. The study highlights the need to build a soothing and healing relation with nature to minimize the implication of nuclear sublime.

Literature Review

Eco-criticism is a broader term that has been amply made use of by literary and cultural scholars in order to evaluate and analyze global crisis related with ecological issues through literal, cultural and environmental lenses. Initially it was coined as literary ecology which later turned into eco-criticism which developed into a literary and cultural theory in 1990s. By now, eco-criticism is not merely limited to literary and cultural patterns rather it has evolved science, economy, politics, philosophy, ethics and aesthetic (Clark). Glotfelty & Fromm summed up the concept of eco-criticism through their famous state "eco-criticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies". Phillips gives a mystical view of nature as a refreshing critique of eco-criticism. The role of scholars such as Phillips, Garrard, Coupe, Clark, Glotfelty & Fromm, Rueckert and Meeker in the development of eco-criticism is illustrious.

Meeker has juxtaposed the tragic and comic elements as ecological concept through connecting literary and environmental studies. He is among the pioneer who has set the critical discussion on eco-criticism as "literary ecologies". Rueckert is primarily noted for using the term eco-criticism in published form for the first time "to find the grounds upon which the two communities—the human, the natural—can coexist, cooperate, and flourish in the biosphere" (107). Love has highlighted the need and explosion of eco-criticism as a literary and cultural theory. Hughes is of the view that human ecology is a study in a rational way to interlink man with other species of earth including climate and weather that are associated with nature and are the base for eco-criticism or Eco-critical Approach. Hence, plays and literary works that treat nature are deemed exceptional.

Garrard in his book explains the concept of eco-criticism as a study that connects human with non human. It is something that assess and evaluates the concept in relation with the environment and its issues. Eco-criticism is an interdisciplinary study that involves natural scientists, literary artists, critics, writers and scholars from various historical contexts. eco-criticism allows evaluating ourselves and the world in and around us. In addition, it also allows examining our way of negotiating and interacting with natural environment. In short, Buell deems it as "a commitment to environmentality from whatever critical vantage point" (11). eco-criticism is an approach that links nature with literature. It approaches nature from an aesthetic point of view and not that of a scientific view point. All types of environmental phenomenon can be projected by means of nature and diverse elements of nature.

Theoretical Framework

Eco-criticism has been used by the researcher as a theoretical framework in this study. Glotfelty defined eco-criticism as a study that connects literature with nature. In the current study the researcher has analyzed the relation between man and nature keeping in view the desolation and destruction that has been brought about by World War II through the prospective and lens of Beckett's *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*. Specifically it is defined as "eco-criticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts language and literature" (Glotfelty). Eco-criticism emerges on the literary horizons in the latter part of 20th century and enjoys its headway place in the 21st century. The term eco-criticism first appeared in 1979 in an essay "Literature and ecology" written by William Rickett. It is term that

is derived from Greek words *oikos* and *kritis*. *Oikos* means link between nature, human and spirit while *kritis* means “arbiter of taste who wants the house kept in good order” (Howarth 163).

Results and Discussion

Waiting for Godot: an Eco-critical Study

Waiting for Godot has depicted the demolition of nature in the hand of man due to 2nd World War. Nature has an integral part in human life and society but due to war that relationship between nature and man has been disrupted in the post war modern era. In this play Beckett had depicted the dual nature of “nature” through the characters of Estragon and Vladimir. Nature has a symbiotic power which has a healing and soothing impact that let human as well as other creatures to live in a bewitching environment we called “earth”. Eco-criticism serves as a bond between nature and literature so is what Beckett has done in the play Waiting for Godot. Here, Beckett has portrayed the society of the 20th century in which nature has been painted as a destructive phenomenon. Vladimir and Estragon are projected as a typical representative of 20th century people who are always shown in the play as quarreling with one another.

Their quarrelsome nature is a typical representation through which they have projected the disintegration of this beautiful land right from the beginning of the drama. Nature has been given due recognition and deemed as “God” at the beginning of human civilization in this world but the projection of Vladimir and Estragon who are shown sitting tactically on a low mound, reminding their past in utter despair is a depiction of harm done to nature since the emergence of civilization initial concept to present condition. Another key point is that in Waiting for Godot, the portrayal of Estragon and Vladimir is a reflection of skeptical mindset of modern people who jeers at the creation of God through the eyes of Estragon and Vladimir in the play. They are behaving like a mad person who have lost power and in utter despair discredit everything in and around them chiefly related to nature.

In the drama, Waiting for Godot both the tramps are behaving wildly as if they have lost their inner power as well as satisfaction and are in a phase where they are trying to console each other by involving in cheap activities in a cheap world. Modern environmentalists believe that nature as a healing phenomenon strengthen and protect our inner soul, hence we should not destroy anything under the sun and pollute the environment in any way. Romantics believe that nature has modifying and purifying impact on human mind that is way nature has been given due recognition in Romantic period of literature. But in this drama Estragon and Vladimir have shown their licentiousness attitude with nature as a representative of behavior of 20th century modern people. Estragon and Vladimir are shown in a state of bewilderment when they see leaves on a tree in a single night. Such is the healing and soothing power that nature has but modern people are unable to relish it.

In spite the fact that Estragon and Vladimir are projected as tramps who have no appreciation and liking for the nature nor have they deep or profound observation with regard to nature, yet there are hints in the drama in which both Estragon and Vladimir are having some sort of appreciation towards nature such as in this conversation. “Estragon – I see nothing Vladimir”, – “In a single night Estragon – Leaves?”, “Vladimir – But in a single night.” Even the scarcity of food is depicted which was a direct impact of 2nd World War. Estragon and Vladimir take a piece of meat to eat which is already eaten by Pozzo. Likewise, Estragon does not like carrot but his hunger and appetite forces him to eat carrot. In every religious doctrine nature has been taken as “mother” and “divine” that is deemed essential for the productivity and anyone who disobeys nature is adequately punished by nature. Estragon and Vladimir are also seen behaving rudely towards the nature and the result is lack of happiness in their life as they live a wretched life.

Endgame: an Eco-critical Study

World War II has a great influence as far as Beckett as a writer is concerned. His play Endgame is deemed to be the pioneer drama as far as eco-criticism is concerned due to its perfect portrayal for despair and climatic change that is caused due to world War. Garrard has projected Endgame “as dramatic representation of life that anticipates global warming.” Interjection on the part of Hamm alters the very meaning of nature as nature has been projected as nothing else than weakness and deterioration. It is amply depicted through the comment of Clov, “She hasn’t forgotten us.” It is in contrast to the conventional aspect of nature which has both the aspects i.e. decay and vitality. But Endgame does not allow so much of diversity of meaning with regard to nature. It is amply supported through the comment “Clov: If they were going to sprout they would have sprouted. [Violently] They’ll never sprout.” (Beckett 17)

The projection of nature and humanity in Endgame on the part of Beckett has challenged the concept of demonstration. Beckett has not projected nature in Endgame from the stage while Clov through his window projected nature as “corpsed”. On the other hand Hamm talks about “nuclear sublime” which gives a hint of nuclear technology as far audience and readers of Endgame are concerned which too have destructive effects on ecological perspective of nature. The very name of the play

Endgame is symbolic of the end of game of life with the advent of nuclear weapons in war related activities. Nuclear activity has not only damaged and destroyed human life at a massive scale but also has affected the nature and its impacts on nature can be seen even after many decades. Hamm and Clov have also projected master slave relational impact on humanity in which both are tagged with each other. The result is ultimately suffering and abuses on the part of characters to each other with no ending.

Another interrelated concept is that nature as well as human nature both have become polluted and destroyed. Nature in either sense has become unnatural and un-presentable as far as Beckett as a writer is concerned. The waste that was there in external environment has been depicted in the internal setting through the characters of the drama. Despair, fear and apprehensions of nuclear warfare are depicted through the surrounding environment in the play as both the explicit name and implicit meanings of the play are representative of the critique termed as modernity. Both internal and external destruction caused by nuclear warfare are also indicative of man unnatural blind faith on the technological capabilities. Through nuclear and hydrogen bomb man is acting brutally against other human beings causing destruction and horrifying imprints on human nature as well as nature in general.

Collins has summed up this aspect of eco-criticism in the play as “Endgame portrays the total domination of both nature and humanity, that which has become un-presentable, and thus implicitly acts as a warning to modernity’s trust in ideologies that perpetuate technological progress towards human liberation by representing the aftermath such a project can have. This allows Endgame to be read as a critique of modernity’s ideological project of the rational mastery of nature through technology” (79). Nell comment, “Nothing is funnier than unhappiness” (20), who is seemed to be the most concerning character in the play, also asserts the lack of happiness and ravishment in life. This aspect of Beckett portrayal is summed up by Pandya as “Because of the apparently ruined environment, Beckett’s Endgame seemingly alludes to natural desolation” (1604).

Beckett’s Theatre Garden

Keeping in view the minimalist mode of Beckett’s Theatre, a term has been coined for the theatre of Beckett in which nothing happens, no conflict, no space, no narrative, no location like in *Waiting for Godot* where only one thing happens the coming of solitary leaf on a naked tree. Time has been slowed down in Beckett’s Theatre Garden. In *Endgame* it is reminded by Hamm that Theatre is a temporary sort of art. In addition, we have a state of despair and desolation in the Theatre of Beckett. The inculcation of nature and its relation with human has also been projected in the Theatre Garden of Beckett. However, there is a non sentimental and accurate experience of man with nature unlike Romantics who have intimate and sentimental relation with natural objects and nature itself. “Beckett discloses the alien presence of the inhuman in his theatre garden” Lavery (20), chiefly through the presence and projection of man relation with nature.

Human beings in *Endgame* are unable to recollect, materialize and actualize their connection as far as nature is concerned. Nell also has a desire for nature but is actualize merely through storytelling, his association with nature is amply depicted through the portrayal of Lake Como’ trip. Even in the same depiction nature is projected as abstract, slightly disturbing and vague. However, it is noticeable that there are hints of happiness in his portrayal which are missing in Hamm’ mood “It was deep, deep. And you could see down to the bottom. So white, so clean (29). She later repeats, you could see down to the bottom (30), and so white (31). Nell’s last line of *Endgame* refers to Lake Como as desert!” (31). Last but not the least Pandya concludes this concept as “Beckett shows us that a radical shift in nature and society has occurred which has caused the wasteland of *Endgame* to become manifest” (1604).

Conclusion

To conclude, the findings of the study indicate that there is a direct link between human and nature. Here, nature has been taken in an aesthetic sense rather than in scientific terms. It is human that has demolished nature and environment especially due to World War II and nuclear sublime. In both the plays which have been analyzed in the current study human relation with nature, climate and other natural objects have been depicted though the role of nature is not as soothing and healing as it might be. Characters in both the plays are showing hostile attitude towards nature and its has a major reason that modern man has demolished drastically the relation between him and nature chiefly due to World War II and nuclear sublime. Nuclear bombing has not only destroyed human life, human nature but also has adverse and destructive impacts on nature itself. Climate change, global warming and polluted environment are the direct outcomes of the harm human have done to nature through his deeds in general and through nuclear sublime in particular.

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