

INANIMATE CHARACTERS IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S ENDGAME

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Abstract

Characterization is one of the significant elements of writing a dramatic work. Much focus is given to the representation of characters on the stage in communicating the dramatist's theme in the past research. However, less attention is paid to the study of the role of non-human elements in communicating the same theme. The current study claims that inanimate characters share with the human characters the significance in conveying the main theme in the dramatic work in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*. Inanimate characters are used by the modern dramatist symbolically to state various aspects, conditions and beliefs of the characters and the whole action of the play. Modern playwrights animate the inanimate objects because the human characters are depersonalized and disfigured in the modern world. So, they invest this technique and charge it with various meanings to help the audience in understanding the illogicality and absurdity of the human characters. Thus this study examines the inanimate characters, and their role beside the animate characters in communicating the main theme of the play. It concludes that they have a great contribution on the stage in conveying Beckett's themes to the audience in his *Endgame*.

الملخص

تشاطر الشخصيات الغير الحية الاهمية مع الشخصيات الحية في اىصال الفكرة الاساسية في العمل المسرحي. أعطي الكثير من الاهتمام لدراسة الشخوص الحية وتجسيدها على منصة المسرح ودورها في اىصال فكرة الكاتب. ولكن لم تنل دراسة العناصر الغير حية ودورها في نقل نفس الفكرة الاهتمام الكافي. لذا تزعم هذه الدراسة ان الشخصيات الغير حية تمتلك دورا مهما في فهم الشخوص الحية على المنصة في مسرحية صاموئيل بيكيت "نهاية اللعبة". تستخدم هذه الشخصيات الغير حية بشكل رمزي من قبل الكاتب المسرحيين الحداثيين لإيضاح وجهات النظر والظروف والافكار المتنوعة للشخصيات الحية والحدث الكلي في العمل المسرحي. افعم الكاتب المسرحيين الحداثيين هذه الشخصيات الغير حية بالحياة لان الشخصيات الحية تم تجريدتها من هويتها وتشويهها في العصر الحديث. لذلك استثمر هؤلاء الكاتب هذه التقنية وشحنوها بالمعاني المختلفة لمساعدة النظارة في

فهم عدم منطقية وعبثية الشخصيات الحية. يدرس هذا البحث الشخصيات الغير حية ودورها الى جانب الشخصيات الحية في اىصال الفكرة الاساسية في العمل المسرحي. تستنتج الدراسة مدى اسهام الشخصو ص الغير حية على المنصة في اىصال فكره الكاتب المسرحي بيكيت الى النظارة في مسرحيته "نهاية اللعبة".

Introduction

The theatre of the Absurd is not concerned with presenting information, problems or destinies of the characters that are outside the inner world of the author. It is not also concerned with the representation of the events, the fate or the adventures of the characters. The theatre of the absurd is concerned with the presentation of the individual's basic situation. It is a theatre of situation and therefore it uses a language based on patterns of concrete images rather than argument and discursive speech (Esslin, 293).

The playwrights use various techniques to convey his ideas on the stage. One of these techniques is "how he expresses himself through his personal style or design in the medium of his creation, be it scenery, lighting, costumes, sound or camera work" (Wright, 104). Among these techniques is the use of the inanimate characters to give them a dramatic importance in the visual action of the modern age.

For hundreds of years, the script and the actors were the only important elements in theatre. But nowadays in the modern theatre, many essentials were added. The detailed scenery, appropriate costumes and properties become not only embellishments but important prerequisites in the production of the modern plays (101). Lighting, for instance does not give mere visibility but helps to convey the mood and atmosphere of the production. Scenery with its colours is not limited for decoration but exceeds decoration for suggesting the locale and mood of the action. Also, a setting that has bright colours suggests happy and pleasant mood, but when black colour dominates the scene, it suggests a gloomy and dismal mood.

In order to activate these meanings on the stage, the visual means become too necessary in the production of the plays. They enrich the play with certain thematic possibilities as far as there are certain meanings hidden and concealed beneath the surface of the literal level of the play's events. The inanimate characters are associated with symbols and visual signs for revealing the hidden meanings under the surface language. So that, the inanimate characters are "example of how an image that takes visual form on stage can convey a meaning not communicable through the dialogue alone...." (Morgan, 134).

The dramatic work contains characters who are the key elements in every literary work as in the other literary forms of poetry, novel, and short story. Those characters are not necessarily to be only human characters. The Concise Oxford Dictionary's defines the character, the "character in a literary work of art can be human, animal, inanimate object, abstract concept like god, angel, devil, or a virtual object" (Mansour, 1). This

definition shows that the literary character can not be only a human character but also an inanimate object.

Sometimes, the playwright can not express certain things directly, so he resorts to some objects to communicate them. These can be stated in other way than language such as the use of inanimate characters. It is an instance of a dramatic technique of "communicating experience not so much through characters, and not in many final way, through speech, but rather by means of objects; things on or off stage which are made to bear significance" (Williams, 99).

Inanimate Characters in Beckett's *Endgame*

Samuel Beckett is one of those dramatists who present their characters as declined and damaged figures whose images suggest a present immobility in contrast to a former bygone vitality. The character looks like a remnant of an individual, who sees himself and the objects that surround him as the residue of a past time (Lyons, 60)

Beckett has a good comprehensive knowledge and experience of the physical resources of the theatre. He tends to the economy in the use of language and scenery. He directs his attention to the colour, form, and texture of scenic elements. He shows a good skill in the manipulation of the physical aspects of production. So, he used them extensively, but sparingly because he knows well their power (12-13).

Being seated in his armchair in the center of the stage, Hamm pretends controlling everyone in the play while having absolutely no control over himself or his environment. He bosses Clov around to no end and silences his parents, Nagg and Nell, whenever they talk for too long, but as for his own unrelenting misery and the gray, unchanging fallout around him, he is powerless. He is like the King in chess, the most powerful piece whom all others serve, but who is also the most vulnerable. Therefore, he feels threatened to go too far with his armchair of the center.

After a long futile conversation between Nagg and Nell, Hamm orders them to keep quiet to be able to dream if he could sleep. He asks Clov to move him around on his chair and, as he can't see for himself, to hug the walls, he tells him to stop, and then twice strikes the hollow wall, beyond which is the "other hell." Hamm directs Clov to return him back to his spot in the exact center. After Clov makes several adjustments of the chair, he declares that if he could kill Hamm, he'd die happy. Ruby Cohn describes Hamm in his chair:

Hamm refers to his kingdom_ an ironic name for the room before our eyes. In production, his armchair looks like a mock-throne, his toque like a mock-crown. He utters high-handed orders to Clov, a servant who is intermittently good and faithful. Both Hamm and Clov suggest that the world off stage perished by Hamm's will (Chevigny, 43).

Eugene Webb comments on the household of Beckett's *Endgame* saying:

At the center of the household, both literally and figuratively, is Hamm. He is the proprietor, and from his chair, in the center of the room, he presides over the others. And he will not let them forget it. Nothing is more important to him than his power (Webb, 55).

Therefore, the armchair for Hamm symbolizes power and self-control. When he goes far away of the centre, he loses control over others and over himself, so he quickly retreats to his throne (the armchair). When he approaches the wall in his chair, he tells Clov 'Beyond is the... other hell'. The centre is the centre of Hamm's being, in which every thing far of the centre symbolizes lovelessness, boredom, ruthlessness and nothingness. The armchair is the means that links Hamm to Clov. Hamm wants Clov to move him out of the center, so the moving of the chair signifies both Hamm's wish to run away of the deadly boring routine inside and his desire to explore the tedious world outside. The misery of Hamm stems from the contradictory impulses towards humans and change. From one side, he wants to be alone or to get silence and on the other, he complains being a lone and that Clov couldn't hear him. He has a belief that their minds and bodies are changing, but he feels threatened when Clov moves him away with his chair, therefore he orders Clov to get him back in the centre of the room to get back his balance.

Simultaneously, the armchair is one of the many significant things that associate Hamm to Clov. Hamm needs Clov when he wants to be pushed in his armchair or when he whistles for Clov to fetch him food. The restriction of the movement on the stage shows the interdependence of the characters. Hamm needs Clov because he is the only one who can wheel him for a circuit of the walls or a trip to the window (Hayman, 23). Then, Hamm is very concerned with returning precisely to the centre of the room:

Hamm: Am I right in the center?

Clov: I'll measure it.

Hamm: More or less! More or less!

Clov: (moving chair slightly): There!

Hamm: I'm more or less in the center?

Clov: I'd say so.

Hamm: You'd say so! Put me right in the center!

Clov: I'll go and get the tape.

Hamm: Roughly! Roughly!

(Clov moves chair slightly.)

Bang in the center!

Clov: There!

(Pause.)

Hamm: I feel a little too far to the left.

(Clov moves chair slightly.)

Now I feel a little too far to the right.

(Clow moves chair slightly.)
 I feel a little too far forward.
 (Clow moves chair slightly.)
 Now I feel a little too far back.
 (Clow moves chair slightly.)
 Don't stay there.
 (i.e. behind the chair)
 you give me the shivers.
 (Clow returns to his place beside the chair.)
 Clow: If I could kill him I'd die happy. (pp.26-27)

Hamm lets Clow push him in his wheelchair into the middle of the bare interior, which is what is left of the world and which is simultaneously the interior of his own subjectivity (Chevigny, 111). The armchair shows not only the physical paralysis of Hamm, but even the spiritual one because he fears going with his chair to the outside desolate world.

Another inanimate character in the play is the telescope. It is a piece of equipment shaped like a tube, containing Lenses, that make objects that are far away appear larger, clearer and nearer. Clow describes it saying 'That's what I call a magnifier'. He looks for the telescope and moves Hamm's chair in the process, which frightens Hamm, who wants to be returned to the center. Clow gets the telescope, which serves as an outlet to explore the outside world. Hamm doesn't trust Clow's description of the world outside unless Clow uses the telescope:

Hamm: Look at the earth.
 Clow: I've looked.
 Hamm: With the glass?
 Clow: No need of the glass.
 Hamm: Look at it with the glass.
 Clow: I'll go and get the glass.

The characters are living in a prison, in which none is able to face the deadly gray world outside. So, the telescope motivates Clow to go out of the prison. Clow takes the telescope and goes up the stepladder. The telescope helps to visualize the nothingness and barrenness of the outside world to the audience:

Clow (after reflection):
 Nor I.
 (He gets up on ladder, turns the telescope on the without.)
 Let's see.
 (He looks, moving the telescope.)
 Zero...
 (he looks)

...zero...
 (he looks)
 ...and zero.
 Hamm: Nothing stirs. All is---
 Clov: Zer---

Using the telescope, Clov reports the scenes of the sea, ocean, the waves, the sun and light which all help to visualize the sterility and desolateness of the outside world. It transfers the sense of hopelessness and despondency to the audience through the descriptions of Clov:

Hamm: Then what is it?
 Clov (looking):
 Gray.
 (Lowering the telescope, turning towards Hamm, louder.)
 Gray!
 (Pause. Still louder.)
 GRRAY!

Through the telescope also, Clov is stimulated to depart the prison inside the castle of Hamm by seeing a small boy, whom he called, 'a potential procreator':

(Clov moves ladder nearer window, gets up on it, turns telescope on the without.)
 Clov (dismayed): Looks like a small boy!
 Hamm (sarcastic): A small... boy!
 Clov: I'll go and see.
 (He gets down, drops the telescope, goes towards door, turns.)
 I'll take the gaff.
 (He looks for the gaff, sees it, picks it up, hastens towards door.)
 Hamm: No! (Clov halts.)
 Clov: No? A potential procreator?
 Hamm: If he exists he'll die there or he'll come here. And if he doesn't...
 (Pause.)
 Clov: You don't believe me? You think I'm inventing?
 (Pause.)
 Hamm: It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I don't need you any more.
 (Pause.)
 Clov: Lucky for you.
 (He goes towards door.)

Evoking the consciousness of the audience was an important feature of the Absurd theatre. This is achieved in Beckett's *Endgame*, through Clov's turning of the telescope

on the audience, “He gets down, picks up the telescope, turns it on auditorium.” But Beckett's self-consciousness is not merely for laughs. Just as the characters cannot escape the room or themselves, trapped in self-conscious cages, neither can the audience escape their lives for a night of theatrical diversion (sparknotes, 1).

Hamm's parents appear in two ashbins covered with old sheets. The two ashbins show the audience the nothingness and worthlessness of its dwellers. His parents lost their legs in an accident while they were cycling through the Ardennes on their tandem, on the road to Sedan (Esslin, 48). Being in two ashbins, Nagg and Nell suffer negligence and disrespect. Nothing is kept in the ashbins but the waste and useless materials. The uselessness of the parents to Hamm indicates also their valuelessness for him. The two ashbins would be a very disenchanting reference to Proust's vases, containing useless memories of the past (Hayman, 26). He calls them only when he needs listeners to his story, “*The lid of one of the bins lifts and the hands of Nagg appear, gripping the rim. Then his head emerges. Nightcap. Very white face. Nagg yawns, then listens.*”

The figure of Nagg and Nell imprisoned in their ashbins and maltreated by their son, jars the sensibility of the audience. This scene creates a comic image which diffuses the pathos. Their appearance in two ashbins as refuse reveals the distance between the present and the past in Hamm's consciousness. Hamm persistent endeavours to exercise his authority create victims. So, Nagg, Nell and Clov serve the role-playing that gives Hamm some sense of himself (Lyons, 60).

Hamm hates his parents, especially Nagg who is awakened to listen to Hamm's tale. Nagg tries to remind Hamm with his childhood when he was a baby, crying for his parents. Now, it is Nagg who cries for Hamm for food. So, the selfishness is exchanged and expressed not only in the language, but also in the behaviour. Hamm orders Clov to press down Nagg to the ashbin when he becomes obnoxious, ‘Bottle him!’ (*Clov pushes Nagg back into the bin, closes the lid.*) Hamm's abhorrence for his parents is shown when they take the role of speaking, so he cries at them:

Hamm (wearily):

Quiet, quiet, you're keeping me awake.

(Pause.)

Talk softer.

(Pause.)

If I could sleep I might make love. I'd go into the woods. My eyes would see... the sky, the earth. I'd run, run, they wouldn't catch me.

Alan Schneider states that the gentle aged couple in the two ashbins is an amazing invention and yet completely organic to the theme of the play (Chevigny, 16). The two ashbins are set to show the paralysis and impotence of Nagg and Nell, which compromise the powerlessness of Hamm, who is seated pathetically in his armchair.

The two ashbins of the legless parents and Hamm's armchair paradox Clov, the only one who is able to move. The two ashbins represent the cut of communication between the parents and Hamm, who recycles them whenever he needs listeners. In addition to their isolation of Hamm, they are separated from each other by these two ashbins:

Nagg: Kiss me.

Nell: We can't.

Nagg: Try.

(Their heads strain towards each other, fail to meet, fall apart again.)

Nell: Why this farce, day after day?

(Pause.)

The two ashbins are the graves of Nagg and Nell where they are buried and can't be resurrected but for a short time by Hamm's orders.

Eugene Webb says that the play is built around images of isolation and imprisonment. The scene of the play opens with two ashbins within the room, which is another similar container. The content of all the containers is refuse. Hamm's parents are in two ashbins and Hamm and Clov are in the room (Webb, 55).

The ashbins simply indicate where Hamm has thrown his parents. (Beckett has a liking for visual images of this kind: Lucky, in *Godot*, is mind at the end of its tether; Winnie, in *Happy Days*, is buried to the waist, and finally to the chin, in the sandpile of her trivial life.) Verbal images can doubtless define more complex and more subtle emotions. Beckett, sacrificing complexity to economy, reduces the brutality of child to parent to a couple of battered ashbins, as he reduces the toys of power in age (Lear's hundred knights) to a whistle and a stuffed dog in page 151 of Beckett's *Endgame*. Nagg's long story of the tailor upsets Hamm, who immediately commands Clov to send them back to their ashbins, which symbolize their prison:

Hamm: What? What's she blathering about?

(Clov stoops, takes Nell's hand, feels her pulse.)

Nell (to Clov):

Desert!

(Clov lets go her hand, pushes her back in the bin, closes the lid.)

Clov (returning to his place beside the chair):

She has no pulse.

Hamm: What was she drivelling about?

Clov: She told me to go away, into the desert.

Hamm: Damn busybody! Is that all?

Clov: No.

Hamm: What else?

Clov: I didn't understand.
 Hamm: Have you bottled her?
 Clov: Yes.
 Hamm: Are they both bottled?
 Clov: Yes.
 Hamm: Screw down the lids.

The two windows high up on the rear wall suggest that the room may represent the inside of the skull of a man who has closed his eyes to the external world (55). They serve as a link between the world on the stage and the hellish world outside. The windows command not a single landscape but the two great masses of the globe, earth and sea. High in the back wall, the two windows, one looks out on the land and the other on the water. The scene is located within a set which has been likened to the inside of a brain, with the two windows high up right and left as eyes and Clov's drawing back the curtains and taking the dust-sheet off Hamm standing for waking up in the morning (Hayman, 25-26).

Hugh Kenner in his 'Life in the Box' says that when the two curtains rise on Beckett's *Endgame*, sheets cover all visible objects. Clov's first step is to move back the curtains of the two high windows and inspect the world outside with his telescope. The second step is to remove the sheets and fold them, disclosing two ashbins with Nagg and Nell inside and the figure of Hamm in an armchair in the centre. This is a metaphor for waking up, in which the stage is fancied, with its high peepholes, to be the inside of a skull (Chevigny, 53).

The two windows help Clov to report and visualize the barrenness and sterility of the world outside to Hamm and the audience. Life outside comes to an end. Clov ascends the ladder, draws back the curtains of the windows and says:

Clov (fixed gaze, tonelessly):
 Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished.
 (Pause.)
 Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a
 heap, a little heap, the impossible heap.

Everything outside is dying 'corpsed', 'zero', there is 'no more nature', no 'gulls', the waves are 'lead', and even the light is 'gray' from pole to pole. The two windows serve as the outlet to the gray world outside. The two windows are Clov's eyes which see the big world outside only as a double desolation of earth and water (Fletcher & Spurling, 80):

Hamm: Look at the sea.
 Clov: It's the same.

Hamm: Look at the ocean!

(Clov gets down, takes a few steps towards window left, goes back for ladder, carries it over and sets it down under window left, gets up on it, turns the telescope on the without, looks at length. He starts, lowers the telescope, examines it, turns it again on the without.)

Clov: Never seen anything like that!

Hamm (anxious):

What? A sail? A fin? Smoke?

Clov (looking):

The light is sunk.

When Clov sees the small boy through the windows, he is motivated to take the chance to make a new life of his own, and to explore the possibility of living in the desolate world outside, (Clov moves ladder nearer window, gets up on it, turns telescope on the without.):

Clov (dismayed): Looks like a small boy!

Hamm (sarcastic): A small... boy!

Clov: I'll go and see.

(He gets down, drops the telescope, goes towards door, turns.)

I'll take the gaff.

(He looks for the gaff, sees it, picks it up, hastens towards door.)

Hamm: No! (Clov halts.)

Hamm's blindness makes him take desperate vision of the world outside. Therefore, when Clov reports seeing the small boy through the window, Hamm says, 'If he exists he'll die there or he'll come here.' Hamm lives within the framework of the 'old questions, the old answers', in which hope of regeneration of the world is lost. The small boy will die a physical death in the wilderness or a moral death in Hamm's house. Hamm used to see things through the eyes of Hamm, so everything is seen as ashes. But the image of the small boy activates Clov to face the world and to live in it (Webb, 65).

The dog 'a black toy dog' also plays an important role in the play through the association between Clov and the dog. Clov is likened to the dog in the play. Whenever Hamm whistles, Clov comes fast like the dog, (*He whistles. Enter Clov immediately. He halts beside the chair.*) Hamm puts the whistle round his neck for this purpose. Another indication for this association is the answer of Clov when Hamm whistles for him:

Hamm: Is my dog ready?

Clov: He lacks a leg.

Hamm: Is he silky?

Clov: He's kind of a Pomeranian.

Hamm: Go and get him.

Clov: He lacks a leg.

Hamm: Go and get him!

(Exit Clov.)

We're getting on.

(Enter Clov holding by one of its three legs a black toy dog.)

Clov: Your dogs are here.

(He hands the dog to Hamm who feels it, fondles it.)

This kind of association helps to show the impotence of Clov, who can not leave Hamm like the stuffed dog, which can not go because, 'He's not a real dog'. Hamm also exercises his power over the dog, 'as if he were begging me for a bone.' to enhance his feeling of self-centeredness and egoism (Chevigny, 64).

The toy dog has only three legs, which does not enable it to leave Hamm. This impotence is associated with Clov's, who is not able to leave Hamm also. Hamm used to threaten Clov with hunger, 'You'll be hungry all the time'. As Clov implies when Hamm orders him to bring him his toy dog, Clov's position is essentially the same as that of the stuffed animal, 'Your dogs are here.' (webb, 56).

The inanimate characters are the vehicle of communicating information and constitute a way and form of thinking about life and its various situations. In the theatre today, the visual aspects of the production represented by the inanimate characters are part of the conceptual ideas formulated by the dramatist. They have added in the theatre exciting dimensions beyond what may be called for in the text.

Conclusion

The absurd theatre characterizes man as a dehumanized and depersonalized creature living in a desolate futile world. The character on the stage is lifeless like other stuff on the stage. Thus, this study examines the role of the inanimate characters in conveying the absurdist themes on beckett's *Endgame*. The study concludes that absurdist dramatists depend on the use of inanimate characters to help the audience to understand what is happening to the animate characters. Samuel Beckett, in his *Endgame* invests the use of the inanimate characters to visualize the nothingness and barrenness of the world inside and outside to the audience. Clov's telescope, for example conveys the barrenness and nothingness of the world outside to the audience. Also, the study concludes that the two ashbins on the stage are used by Beckett to show the audience the worthlessness of its dwellers (his parents). This shows the audience the cut of communication between Hamm and his parents, as well as Hamm's contempt and disregard for his parents who are part of the reason behind his misery.

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