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A PSYCHOANALYTICAL CONSTRUAL OF SAMUEL BECKETT'S DRAMATIC CREATIONS: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Samuel Beckett's theatre puzzles the audience with a non linear progression, as it lacks a beginning, middle, or an end. Even the characters are the baffling images of tormented souls which further augment its ambiguous structure. His plays symbolically demonstrate the characters and situations those are woven together like strands in a multi-coloured cloth. Some critics believe that the metaphorical meaning in his plays can be analyzed through psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung which emphasizes on the role of unconscious. Nevertheless, they also recommend that psychoanalytical reading of Beckett's text can expose his own introspection, paranoia and guilt which resulted in his uncanny creative outputs. The present review paper aims at understanding Beckett's work through various psychoanalytical perspectives that the researchers have presented in their papers. The paper has included research papers in which the close analysis of language and co-text of the writer is distinctively analyzed. The review has offered explorations of various researchers which unanimously agreed that human psychology can appreciate and interpret literature at different levels through the theories of psychoanalysis.

Key words: Psychoanalytical theories, unconsciousness, complexes.

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INTRODUCTION

All around the world Samuel Beckett has mesmerized the audience with his multidimensional theatrical images. He demonstrated the hollowness of human existence through the evidences of empiricism of his personal experiences. He has questioned the most fundamental philosophical aspect of human life. His approach is justified through his dismaying experiences during the war and his sanguine answers to the same. Samuel Beckett, an Irish playwright chose not to accept

Noble prize awarded to him .When he was informed about the prestigious award being bestowed upon him, he connoted it as 'a catastrophe'. Beckett, since his birth had an ironic association with the term absurd- his life has been a series of absurd encounters in life. Throughout his life he encountered extremely strange and bizarre personalities who shaped his own personality as an 'Absurdist'. As a result, he became an introvert and deserted himself from the crowd. He subsisted amidst his awfully moody and taciturn mother

'May', a schizophrenic friend 'Lucia', a frenzied beloved 'Peggy' and an indifferent wife 'Suzanne'. Consequently one might discern that absurdity in Beckett was naturally compelling. One of the absurdist illustrations of his life is the fact that, as a writer he struggled hard to publish his uncanny works and when they gained international fame, he feared publicity.

Beckett's biography reveals that he sought treatment at London's Tavistock clinic to cope up with the trauma aftermath his father's death. During his treatment under the leading Psychotherapist, Wilfred Bion, Beckett mentioned about some of his memories of entrapment. He also confessed that this led to his tendency to disengage and isolate himself. He also admitted that the treatment not only gave him some mental solace but also helped him to control the panic he was experiencing. He was also highly influenced by a particular lecture he attended of C.G.Jung which made a strong impact on Beckett's mind and deeply influenced him as a writer. Thus since his formative years, psychoanalysis, subconscious and unconscious drives of mind were living experiences for him. It is observed that especially in his later works, he has employed Jungian and Freudian texts for depicting realistically the traumatic minds of his characters. He has psychoanalytically dissected his characters, through their nothingness which make them feel not worthy of living in such a hostile world. This has led to quite a large number of critical works which have enquired into the different aspects of psychoanalytical insights into Beckett's dramatization. Of them, the following are specially chosen who are worth –mentioning.

In her paper entitled "A Psychoanalytical Reading of Vladimir and Estragon in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*" Lisa Missing has clearly indicated her understanding of Beckett's work in light of psychoanalytical theories. For the aforesaid study the theories of Psychoanalysis such as consciousness, uncertainty, coping mechanisms and ways of waiting were taken into consideration. In this critical work she has attempted to compare the two main protagonists of his masterpiece 'Waiting for Godot', named as Vladimir and Estragon. She claimed that both of them are contradictory to each

other and has narrowed down the comparison to the theme of waiting. This is to say that how differently they act in their waiting for Godot.

This exhaustive research initiated the analysis by focusing on the word 'waiting' and its different interpretations by various experts. This particular aspect was centered on Lacanian principle of psychoanalysis which gives emphasis on a 'spoken word'. According to Lacanian, Peter Barry, "when unconscious behavior is verbalized it becomes conscious – and therefore mental health is restored" (Lisa 4). Missing deduced that because Vladimir does not allow Estragon to open his dream, those repressed feelings remain in his unconscious mind. Nor Vladimir discloses his dreams and thus, as their unconscious behaviors are not put into words, they are mentally unstable.

The study has an interesting analysis regarding the purpose of their waiting. It revealed that Estragon is not at all concerned with Godot and therefore remembering him is not important for him. He is a repressed soul who is unable to take decision about waiting for Godot. Lisa noted that Estragon has literary taken Corcoran's postulation that waiting include some level of uncertainty and he keeps saying "Nothing to be done". On the contrary, Vladimir is avoiding the confrontation of Godot's absence and thus he prefers waiting consciously. The researcher has also pointed out that Vladimir is conscious that they need to wait for Godot, so he engages himself in various tasks that make him feels confident and secure in his wait for Godot. He boastfully projects that he will continue to wait for Godot, by repressing his thoughts about waiting in vain for him.

The study has also taken into account Calderwood's views on Vladimir's uncertainty about Godot's arrival as he claims that everything is a round. Calderwood writes "Vladimir seems to be aware of the never-ending circle he is in, which is shown by this "round". He adds "The play, like the round, has neither beginning nor end and even the character's names, Didi and Gogo, are similar to a circle –since these names "end where they begin". (Lisa 12). The study has analyzed three different strategies used in the stressful situation as postulated by Drew Western, which are called as

'Problem focused strategy' and 'Emotion focused strategies' In the analysis, Lisa claimed that initially both characters seem to be trying to alter the situation, by focusing on the problem. However when their efforts in this regard fail, they try to alter their thoughts by repressing them. And thus it can be deduced that as they are unable to bring their fears into words, their mental health suffers. The study has also examined the two tramps from Schweitzer's standpoint that is based on the categorization of 'waiters'. Lisa has identified Estragon as a non-waiter, who is absolutely not interested in waiting, whereas Vladimir is categorized as an 'impatient waiter', as he is ready to wait. In Act 2, Vladimir seems impatient – walking "to and fro" several times. She concluded that "Time seems to be unwanted for Vladimir, he simply waits- which makes him an impatient waiter" (Lisa 23).

Ioana's paper entitled "The Shape of the Beckettian Self: Godot and the Jungian Mandala" is an attempt to make an objective analysis of Beckett's characters with reference to Martin Esslin's analysis of the two pairs in 'Waiting for Godot'. Here the researcher has endeavored to cast a fascination light on contradictory aspects of the characters. She argued that instead of complimentary personalities they are two contradictory pairs. The active one is the master-slave duo Pozzo and Lucky while the contemplative one is the Estragon and Vladimir. To strengthen this view, Ioana has classified them as "extrovert"-one anchored in reality and "introvert" – one removed from reality, respectively (Ioana 1-2). Further, Ioana, has perceived the four characters as the four sides of *quadratura circula or a mandal* - an archetype proposed by Carl Jung, when she first saw the play. According to Jung "mandala" is which unites earth, God and man. The researcher also cited a similar example of a mandala found by the four characters of Susan D Brienza in a later mime Quad. It stated "the four characters rhythmically draw mandal pictures that reveal concentric circles and include four quadrants. The dancers' counter –clockwise pacing evokes Jung's patient's leftward movement, which is equivalent to a progress towards the unconscious. They desperately attempt to achieve "centering" and reinstate order and peace, to

abolish the separation between the unconscious and the conscious mind"(Ioana 3). Nevertheless, according to Ioana's analysis, Beckett was inclined towards concentric geometrical images and thus he used such patterns in his plays. She observed that in 'Waiting for Godot', the movements of the protagonists are curvilinear and rectilinear as they are found walking between the tree and the stone in the same manner and these half circle movements finally makes a circle. The analysis has also accomplished the symbol of the tree as the centre of the mandala around which the characters wander. The tree is the symbol of the cross and thus in act 2, Didi and Gogo "do the tree", which was deduced by the researcher as "doing the cross"(Ioana 6).

The paper has also categorized the four characters into four archetypal personalities as (the ego and the shadow) and the persona and the soul's image. Ioana affirmed that Lucky is the shadow who represses all the hurtful emotions where as Pozzo represents the despotic ego. Pozzo consistently suppresses Lucky's thoughts and actions and often force him to "think" for his master. The study also emphasized by stating Carter's analysis of Estragon as 'estrogen a female hormone'. In concurrent with the above analysis Ioana postulated Estragon as anima – the feminine images of Vladimir whose sensitivity, love for poetry, dreams and irrational moods strengthen this point of view. On the other side, Vladimir is more of a rational and masculine person between the two. Side by side, Ioana has also mentioned the character analysis done by Guy Christian Barnard who categorized them, according to William Blake's four functions of the psyche outlined in his Prophetic Books. He suggested that Estragon represents 'Imagination', Lucky as 'Thought', Vladimir as 'Feeling' and Pozzo as 'Sensation' (Ioana 8). She also added a different vein developed by Bernard Dukore which is based on Freud's Trinitarian description of the psyche in 'the Ego and the Id (1920)'. Dukore affirmed that Go-go is the Ego which is incomplete, while Didi is the Id. For him Godot is the superego who controls them even when he is absent. A similar analysis of Beckett's favorite play 'Endgame' revealed Clov as the Ego, Hamm as Id and Nagg and Nell as Superegos. She concluded that 'Waiting of Godot'

juxtaposes opposite aspect of life, as it very creatively represents a zero as well as wholeness. She added "The reconciling vision of Godot's mandala provides a feeling of harmony and guides us inwards and downwards to the ultimate centre of our self"(Ioana 11).

Journal of social and Political Thought, Volume One, No. 4 January 2003, 'Meaning and Melancholia in Beckett's 'Endgame' by Sandra Raponi, University of Toronto, has also been thoroughly analyzed in this review. Sandra in her paper has primarily projected Kristeva's point of view regarding Beckett's work. According to Kristeva, Beckett's works are artistic examples of curbing melancholy as apposed to Dura's novels. Sandra was further inclined to study whether Beckett's 'Endgame' can be considered as a sublimatary solution or as a work of despair. She also affirmed and argued that the play is not a pessimistic display of emotions and that the characters are not the ones who prefer silence to speech. Even though the play is unable to provide catharsis, Sandra pointed out that Hamm and Clov are continuously desirous of finding meaning of their life. She critically acclaimed that in melancholia loss of meaning is well depicted by Hamm and Clov through their half hearted attempts. She proposed that both the characters in 'Endgame' had melancholic egos and claims themselves as being punished and miserable. In his first speech, Clov says, "I can't be punished any more". In Hamm's first speech, he asks, Can there be misery-(*he yawns*) – loftier than mine". Both of them are wounded and incomplete as they suffer from melancholia- which is an unconscious loss. The study also investigated the inadequacy and the arbitrariness of words of a melancholia witnessed in 'Endgame'. This analysis is strengthened by the fact that they both are alien to words or language. They either repeat each others words or speak irrelevant phrases. For them language is of no importance or meaningful. They are unable to name their loss, so they refer it as "this thing" or "something"(Sandra 10). Another interesting aspect of melancholic condition is revealed in the study. Sandra observed that the characters are unable to form a meaningful connection with each other. This is depicted through

their physical aversion towards each other. Nagg and Nell are shown in separate dustbins, and so they are unable to touch or kiss each other, which they wish to. On the contrary Hamm and Clov in spite of being able to touch each other prefer to stay away. It is evident from the fact that when Hamm asks Clov to kiss him and hold his hand, Clov refuses. Sandra's study has provided a most observant aspect of the love –hate relationship between the couples of the play. Their association seems to be enforced upon them as they, at all times are found detesting each other. Hamm hates Clov, his father Nagg and he is also indifferent to Nell. A never ending resentment of Hamm is evident from his derogatory remarks like "accursed progenitor", "accursed fornication" and even "scoundrel" addressed to them. It is also minutely observed that Hamm is not at all upset at Nell's death. Sandra seemed to be skeptical about Nell's relationship with Hamm. As Hamm never calls her as "mother" Sandra deduced that she can only be considered as Nagg's wife.

"The Entrapment of the Female Body in Beckett's Plays in relation to Jung's Third Tavistock Lecture" by Julie Campbell besides discussing the impact of Jung's Lecture on Beckett's life has attempted to capture the attention of the readers to view on the reason why the female characters of Beckett are often entrapped or immobile. The study has tried to answer the questions about the female entrapment in Beckett's works, in connection with the story of young girl as discussed in Jung's lecture which affected Beckett's psyche deeply. The young girl who died very young said "she had never been born entirely" (Julie 163). The same words have been scripted in his play "All That Fall", where Mrs. Rooney is found uttering,

"I remember him telling us the story of a little girl, very strange and unhappy in her ways ... When he had done with the little girl he stood there motionless for some time, quite two minutes I should say, looking down at his table. Then he suddenly raised his head and exclaimed as if he had had a revelation, the trouble with her was she had never been born"!

To strengthen this view, Julie has quoted Whitelaw who considered that Beckett "was trying to convey something that was in his head, possibly dream, something ghostly, mystical, *not quite there*" (Julie 164). Julie also elaborated that it was Beckett who has instructed the actress Whitelaw to make the dialogue very ghostly. The study also aimed to examine another concept of Jung, regarding complexes that emerged in Beckett's work. Jung in his lecture mentioned that "in dreams.... Our complexes ...often appear in a personified form". On this note the researcher has dwelled on some key psychoanalytical issues of Jung's Theory of Dreams and has analyzed that Beckett's characters are his own dream images which he has learnt from Jung's lecture. According to her, Beckett has literary adopted what Jung has stated in the same lecture about how an artist "has the capacity to dramatize and personify his own mental contents. When he creates a character on the stage That character in a certain secret way has made itself" . This analysis is strengthened by Whitelaw's assessment about Beckett "He wanted to get to some unconscious centre"; his plays "represent emotional states of mind"; there is a core there which we all can recognize" (Julie 165).

Julie also suggested that the characters are in real the personified forms of his own unconscious "fragmented personalities" and quoted that "all his plays I have referred to have an uncanny dream-like quality" (Julie 165). She has interpreted Nell's dustbin as a dramatic representation of repression of Hamm's ego. Beckett's another play 'Play' has been interpreted as a nightmare vision which again reminds of Jung's lecture in which he talked about emancipated complexes which appear as visions, and speak in voices which are like the voices of definite people. The three characters in play W1, W2 and M are in the same way appears as ghostly bodies with constant voices emerging from their illuminated heads. In the "Rockaby" the woman is being insisted by the unconscious to end. These incidences too prove interesting observations mentioned in the paper regarding Jung's concept of the unconsciousness. They are based on Jung's contention that "we always forget that our consciousness is only a surface" and presumably we

are dreaming all the time, although we are not aware of it by day because consciousness is much too clear. But at nightThe dreams can break through and become visible" (Julie 166).

Julie also seemed to be in accordance with O' Kelly's interpretation which portrays Winnie as a sexually repressed woman. She affirmed that Beckett portrayed her repression through her partial imprisoned body particularly her lower part. A startling impact of Jung's lecture on Beckett is examined by focusing on the end of the play. Jung has cautioned that our consciousness is only a surface and our head is only one end, which Beckett has powerfully dramatized it through Winnie. At the end Winnie is seen embedded up to her neck, her "head poking out of the surrounding mound that has engulfed her" (Julie 167). This symbolically means that the conscious surface of her is only apparent whereas the unconscious part which is the body is not seen. At the end Julie concluded that it was Beckett's understanding and inclination towards Jung's lecture when he wrote dramas. They take us to the dark area of our dreams and nightmares, into an unconscious realm, which Beckett had unconsciously shaped for us.

Conclusion

All the researchers in their respective studies have tried to convey that Beckett through his works has tried to explain the psychic bombarding of the characters and they have deeper entrenchments than mere social and philosophical conundrums. They, in a way concluded that it was his unconscious drives and not the conscious ones that govern the psyche of the creator in the post-war period. His plays clearly emphasized on the idea of the unconscious, which according to Freud, is the part of the mind beyond consciousness which nevertheless has a strong influence upon our actions. Each one of them, though from different psychoanalytical perspectives, have analyzed the nothingness of the characters and inferred that it is not concerned with their physical and the tangible but with the vacuity of their humdrum minds. Scene after scene the apparent absurdity of the world is stressed by the silences of the characters. However these silences are governed by the uncertainties in the vortex of their unconscious mind. Their study

complied that Beckett's dramatization was focused on the problems of the mind rather than society. Everyone concurrently suggested that some playwrights have discussed socio-political problems of the impending war but Beckett's success undoubtedly lies in his exploring and exhibiting its impact on mind.

The studies were focused on the specific aspects of psychoanalysis postulated by different theorists. It seems that one needs to explore the Irish Playwright's dramatic vision through more interesting psychoanalytical concepts of Freud such as tripartite model of the psyche, Ego defense mechanisms, Dream Interpretation Theory in detail. Further scope for the study also includes analysis of Beckett's creative outputs through Jungian archetypes, complexes and his models of anima and animus. Thus expansion of the psychoanalytical construal of his works will endow us with better understanding of his absurd and meaningless characters that travel through a series of events which are often a part of his real life. It will help in investigating new facets of his stories that are the pigeonholes of his life's journey each symbolizing various phases of life.

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A Brief Bio of Author

SHRADDHA DESHPANDE has completed a UGC Sponsored Minor Research Project titled 'Recent Trends in Developing Communicative Competence through e-learning' with 9 years of teaching experience. She has to her credit two paper presentation Awards each in an International Conference and a National workshop. She has published papers in Journal with ISSN number and also Conference Souvenir with ISBN Number. She has presented papers in National and International Conferences, Seminars, Workshops and Symposia. She is inclined to Psychoanalytical Literary Criticism and her area of interest is teaching English Language through Innovative Techniques.
