

## **The Presence of the Absent Women in Selected Plays of Samuel Beckett**

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### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on contrary to their male counterparts. Women arrive as protagonists in Beckett's theatre relatively late in the play's development. *In Oh Les beaux jours* (1960), Winnie is the first example of a female character who takes up most of the scenic area in a motion picture. Winnie is dealing with the loss of her physical body as she is filling the stage with her voice. Throughout Beckettian plays, women feel a sense of loss. The body and words have been reduced to fragments and are now signified by absence rather than presence. For actors in late-stage theatre, the body that is not seen and the words that are not uttered have become the most important signifiers of the performance. While all parts of theatrical depiction are in flux, the characters maintain their unique identities, and their gender roles are clear. Beckett's plays deal with mother-daughter relationships and failed parenting in a small but considerable number of instances. The mother's failure is part of a more significant debate on theatrical semiotics and life in general. These women never exist as full personalities since they are either voices without forms or bodies without voices. Similarly, they can indeed be mothers in the actual world because that position may only lead to more death and sorrow. For once, Beckett's generally non-mimetic vision of theatre finds a counterpart beyond the stage. This paper focuses on the absence of women in Beckett's plays, which might be linked to their negative roles that one can see when reading Beckett's works.

**Keywords:-** Females, Feminism, Beckett, Not I, Absurd Theatre, Drama

### **حضور المرأة الغائبة في مسرحيات لمصموئيل بيكيت**

#### **الملخص**

تركز هذه الورقة على عكس صورة نظرائهم الذكور. حيث تصل النساء كبطلات في مسرح بيكيت في وقت متأخر نسبياً في تطور المسرحية. في فيلم *Oh Les beaux jours* (1960)، تعد ويني المثال الأول لشخصية أنثوية تشغل معظم المساحة ذات المناظر الخلابة في صورة متحركة. تتعامل ويني مع فقدان جسدها المادي لأنها تملأ المسرح بصوتها. خلال مسرحيات بيكيت، تشعر النساء بالخسارة. لقد تم اختزال الجسد والكلمات إلى شظايا وهي الآن تدل على

الغياب بدلاً من الحضور .بالنسبة للممثلين في المسرح الحديث ، أصبح الجسد الذي لا يُرى والكلمات التي لا تُلفظ من أهم الدلائل على الأداء .في حين أن جميع أجزاء التصوير المسرحي في حالة تغير مستمر ، تحافظ الشخصيات على هوياتها الفريدة ، وأدوار الجنسين واضحة .تتناول مسرحيات بيكيت العلاقات بين الأم وابنتها وفشل الأبوة والأمومة في عدد صغير ولكن مهم من الحالات .يعتبر فشل الأم جزءاً من النقاش الأكثر أهمية حول السيميائية المسرحية والحياة بشكل عام .هؤلاء النساء لا يتواجدن أبداً كشخصيات كاملة لأنهن إما أصوات بدون أشكال أو أجساد بدون أصوات .وبالمثل ، يمكن أن يكونوا بالفعل أمهات في العالم الفعلي لأن هذا الموقف قد يؤدي فقط إلى المزيد من الموت والحزن . لمرة واحدة ، تجد رؤية بيكيت غير المحاكية للمسرح نظيرها خارج المسرح .تركز هذه الورقة على غياب النساء في مسرحيات بيكيت ، والذي قد يكون مرتبطاً بأدوارهن السلبية التي يمكن للمرء رؤيتها عند قراءة أعمال بيكيت .

**الكلمات المفتاحية -** :إناث ، نسوية ، بيكيت ، ليست أنا ، مسرح العبث ، دراما

## 1- Introduction

A vocal transformation occurs in Samuel Beckett's theatrical and media works. The feminine body is gradually occluded from the visual fields (where relevant) and is heard as a 'Female Voice' or a 'Woman's Voice,' and frequently exclusively so. When a man dies, his voice travels a great distance. Waiting for Godot author Samuel Beckett sued a Dutch theatre company in 1988 for casting women in his existential play because of the business's sexism. That task was transferred to his nephew Edward when the playwright died a year later, and he has proceeded to stifle any performance that deviates from his uncle's stringent guidelines. After more than 30 years and several legal disputes, Beckett's gender rule is still effective. The Beckett estate's conservatism is being challenged by a group of female and non-binary performers in a new production.

The absence of female characters in Samuel Beckett's work is a topic that has been addressed by many critics who have drawn attention to this topic. Most of Samuel Beckett's works, especially his literary works that appeared at the beginning of his career, witnessed a distinct presence of male characters and the absence of female characters. Due to this reason, it is expected that this topic will be the question of most of those who read Beckett's works. However, some female characters appear in Beckett's works. However, these literary characters still retain a negative role in the theatrical work, as if they are weak characters or characters represented only by voice.

In the Foxrock neighbourhood of Dublin, Samuel Barclay Beckett was born on 13 April 1906 to a quantity surveyor of Huguenot origin, William Frank Beckett, and a nurse, Maria Jones Roe. When he was born, his parents were both 35 years old and had just been married in 1901. Frank Edward Beckett (1902-1954) was Beckett's elder brother. In Dublin, he began his musical education in a neighbourhood playschool when he was five years old. From there, he attended Earlsfort House School on Harcourt Street in Dublin. As a child, Beckett was reared as an Anglican, but he subsequently became an agnostic, and his literature reflected this.

A beautiful house and garden with a tennis court erected by Beckett's father in 1903, Cooldrinagh, was the author's family home. For example, he often visited the neighbouring Leopardstown Racecourse, Foxrock Railway Station, Harcourt Street Station, and the nearby Leopardstown Racecourse with his father when they went for a stroll. He attended Portora Royal School in Enniskillen about 1919 or 1920, where Oscar Wilde had previously studied. In 1923, he left and went to Trinity College in Dublin to study contemporary literature. He was a natural athlete in cricket as a left-handed batter and a medium-pace left-arm bowler. He then played for Dublin University, facing Northamptonshire in two first-class matches. Because of this, he became the first Nobel literature laureate to play first-class cricket.

As a writer, Beckett can be divided into three distinct periods: his early works, which spanned from the end of WWII to the beginning of 1960s. His middle period, which spanned the period from 1945 to the early 1960s; and his late period, which lasted from the early 1960s to Beckett's death in 1989, during which his works tended to become shorter and more minimalistic in tone.

## **2- Absurdity and Woman:**

Albert Camus' journey influenced absurdist playwrights of the post-WWII period through absurdity in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. By offering a "foundation for reference that would reveal [the works of the Theatre of Absurd] inside its convention," Martin Esslin seeks to understand what he observed growing up in France, which was a departure from the realistic theatre that was prevalent at that time (Esslin 29).

Simone de Beauvoir, along with Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, is a critical figure in elucidating the relationship between feminism and absurdism. *The Second Sex*, despite de Beauvoir's self-declared Existentialist leanings, connects subjectivity with feminist thought. Despite her ties to Marxism and materialist feminism, she appears closer to Camus' writings on absurdity and the human condition than Sartre's on the man who creates his meaning via the objectification of women. De Beauvoir begins her book by asking three questions: "Is there a problem? In addition, what do you mean by that? Do women exist at all?" The third paragraph of Beauvoir (Beauvoir, 3). There is an issue with absurdist thinking regarding the last question. In a world built by males, what place do women have?

As De Beauvoir points out, "the man who puts up the woman as an Other would therefore discover in her a profound complicity," the notion of a woman has been shaped by men. Because she lacks concrete means, she recognizes the essential connection tying her to man without positing its reciprocity. Because she frequently receives joy from her function as "Other," she does not stake a claim for herself as a subject (10). A long time ago, the Greeks restricted women "to the home," removing them from public life and "losing their economic and legal capabilities," as well as "being limited to a world of domestic labour, child-bearing, and attendant sexual obligations." It has persisted ever since (Case, 9). A woman's status as a subject has never been established. Men and women in male-dominated societies have traditionally interacted as subject and object, with the subjective male determining the objective female. It is no longer the case. When a woman accepts the

identity of a male, it becomes possible for her to have her thoughts and feelings. When a woman attempts to behave like a person, she becomes an outsider on both sides of the gender divide, despised by men and ridiculed by their female counterparts. Is it possible for a woman to be self-aware?

While writing about the human condition, as noted by Esslin, he recognizes that Camus uses only male pronouns and only refers to the Absurd Man isolating women from the subjectivity. He discusses the first step toward a sense of subjectivity for women. Don Juan and Sisyphus are the only fictitious figures used by Camus to depict the Absurd Man. Despite his reputation as a womanizer, Don Juan is well aware of his own needs and the futility of trying to fulfil them. Being attracted to a beautiful woman is a never-ending source of pleasure. "However, he has a different" (Camus 72). He has spent his life with innumerable women, never searching for love but instead defining them as sexual objects put on Earth to pleasure him via his craziness. He has made the conscious decision to make the most of the one gift he has been given as a man: the capacity to shape the perceptions of women. Both Sisyphus and Don Juan are cut off from the rest of society. Camus is neither of the two people offered as examples are connected to society, and he never examines the implications of their conduct. However, Camus does not allow women to relate to these tales or perceive the opportunity to be an individual in these stories. Because the work of the conscious playwrights would be so revolutionary if they could acquire this level of subjectivity, how can women do this?

Changing perspective means a woman is closer to seeing absurdity regularly than a male. 'Let us suppose that ladies are looking for a sense of self-awareness. To this want, the world's silence and the voice of societal constructs that have made women into objects have both succumbed. For women, there is a double absurdity. Being an Absurd Person may help women perceive absurdity via Camus's lens of subjective experience and the absurdity of the social environment. Men's designs for women are worthless, much like the world. Societies would engage in a subject-to-subject interaction in which "men and women must, among other things and despite their inherent differentiations, explicitly acknowledge their brotherhood" (Beauvoir 767). Even if the term "brotherhood" is a misnomer, the notion of communal living on an equal footing represents this new social arrangement, much like Marxism's utopian goal. As a result, this situation shows absurdity as it exposes the need for subjectivity clashes with the nonsensical at every instant. Revolt is life for the Absurd Person, who appropriates the notion of Absurd Man to convey the suffering of women. While living in a condition of absurdity, fighting back against the male-dominated society, a woman's subjectivity can only emerge via her awareness of her predicament.

### **3. Discussion: Women in the Plays of Beckett**

In April 1988, a Dutch theatrical group called De Haarlemse Toneelschuur launched the production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The news quickly travelled among Haarlem's female actors. Beckett famously sued the Haarlem theatrical group over this choice, alleging that the organization neglected to inform him of their planned cast when

they applied for a production license. Beckett's contentious and ambiguous view that the casting choice broke his play's creative aim justified the trial legally (Bordewijk 152).

All Godot works under the direction of Beckett were subject to his rigid norms of direction. Disputed performances of *Waiting for Godot* have led Dutch theatre critic Cobi Bordewijk to recount Beckett's complaints about the 1955 Dublin production's choice of costume colour and the London production's shorter length of dialogue pauses. Moreover, in Berlin, the stone is replaced with a heap of twigs. Here, the simultaneous presence of the animal, the human and nature can be achieved.

Haarlem court judge let the female cast perform despite the playwright's exact instructions, citing earlier court judgments permitting mixed-race casting. Because "the play was about the human situation in general...it could be performed by either men or women," according to the judge, argues Beckett historian and close friend James Knowlson (610). Knowlson recalls that Beckett's anger at the Haarlem production prompted him to demand a ban on all future performances of his plays in the Netherlands, but Beckett could not stop it from opening (610). After the trial, Beckett passionately claimed that he did not think women should be cast in any part of the play.

The absence of a feminist component in Beckett's work has led to Beckett's work being widely studied by feminists. Thus this textual interpretation of *Waiting for Godot* is based on the work of several Beckett feminist scholars. Each character takes on different gradations of masculinity—identities that fluctuate depending on how each character is placed in the power scheme between them and other masculine characters—feminist perspectives on gender and power are used in tandem to define the different categories of masculinity. Beckett's feminist study primarily inspires Lacan's cardio-centrism model for constructing gender identity, and thus my model for gender power dynamics derives from Lacan's work. Although Lacan's concept of power provides only two opposite positions on the gender spectrum, the play's presentation of its characters in pairs makes it a helpful tool for assessing the power relations in *Waiting for Godot* (Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky, and Godot and the boy).

Godot and the Boy (or the Boy and the tramps, as will be contended), Pozzo and Lucky, and Vladimir and Estragon are the three pairings of characters most influenced by power dynamics in the play. With the Lacanian paradigm in mind, it is possible to get a fresh perspective on the disempowerment each character experiences. *Waiting for Godot* has much existential dread that comes from the incapacity of the notable characters to sustain stable power relationships with one another. Gender differences are always constituted by and are even synonymous with tensions of power between differently gendered bodies, as Lacan and many feminist scholars since have discussed. In part, I hold that the play reflects an anxiety about the instability of each character's gender identity due to their instability within a complex set of power relations, as have many other feminist scholars. Pozzo and Vladimir are plagued by existential dread because they cannot depend on solid, hegemonic masculinity. No matter how each character is compared to the eponymous patriarch Godot

or how weak or powerless they concern a more fantastic framework of gender and power, masculinity is weakened and impotent in this drama.

Even if Godot is not in the play, his hegemonic masculinity limits the other characters' ability to assume it. It has been said that the difficulty of restoration to pre-WWII male authoritative tradition is shown by feminism Beckett researcher Jennifer M. Jeffers' textual interpretation influenced by biographical premises (96-97, italics in original). Even if the characters may try to embody an ideal of maleness, she claims that they fail for the same reason Godot cannot arrive: contemporary males are no longer empowered to do so. Anglo-Irish males of Jeffers' day had "no means to reclaim masculine privilege and years of hegemonic domination in Ireland," according to Jeffers (97, italics in original). As Jeffers sees him, Godot is a full promise of an authoritative, patriarchal essence of power essential to my textual understanding of masculinity in the play. Because of Godot's degree of hegemony, characters like Pozzo and Vladimir may have what Connell calls "subordinate masculinities," defined as "cultural domination in society as a whole.' Groups of males have particular gender relations of dominance and submission within that general framework (Connell 78). An economy based on Godot's hegemonic authority rules and subordinates all the masculine characters on stage.

The absence of a feminist element in more than one of Samuel Beckett's most important works has led some to believe that Beckett deliberately excluded female characters. Moreover, some critics believe that he believed that literary works would be more critical if all the characters in the play were only male. Moreover, even the allusions to women in the play are very few.

Moreover, Samuel Beckett wrote *Krapp's Last Tape*, a one-act drama, in English in 1958. One person and a tape recorder from the cast of the drama. A year after the events of the previous twelve months, Krapp brings out his old tape recorder and reviews a previous year's recording, this time from when he was thirty-nine. He then makes a new recording, commenting on the current happenings. The piece is set up as a conversation between Krapp and an audio recording of his voice. He is attentive and thoughtful regarding what others have to say. When Krapp listens to the recordings, the audience realizes that there is nothing but the voice of his past on the tape. This play presents a vivid image of Beckett's intention of using few characters. However, whenever he uses one character in this play, he employs a male character to do the role. It shows the precise aim of Beckett to eliminate women characters from his works. Even when referring to some female characters, Samuel Beckett does not employ these characters how he uses his male characters. Beckett uses female characters in an unconventional way where most of these characters, although few, do not play significant roles in his works.

Endgame is the first Beckett play in which a female character appears during the author's lifetime (1958). Head and shoulders, with her hands clinging to the trashcan rim, are all we see of her. According to what we have heard, she has lost both legs and is thus entirely immobile. Although she has a similar situation as Nagg, she emerges from the

garbage for a shorter time, has a smaller vocabulary, and dies throughout the play. The next play in which a woman is prominent is *Happy Days* (1961), which I shall analyze in depth in this piece. The audience can notice that spotlight is on her. "buried up to above her waist in the precise centre of the mound," a mound of "scorched grass," is observed in the opening act (CDW 139). In the second act, she gets "buried up to the neck" in the second act (160). Willie, her counterpart in this drama, is not a prisoner like her. However, rather a free person with the ability to go out. Three people, two ladies and a man, are enclosed in gigantic urns in the play (1964), and the stage directions indicate how "from each ahead protrudes, the neck held firm in the urn's mouth" (307). Only the lips are seen in *Not I* (1972), a further reduction of the feminine form. Moreover, the woman is confined to a tiny strip of light, surrounded by darkness, in *Footfalls* (1976). She is "caged by this one small strip... she is bound... unable to escape out of her obsessive, limited rut," Billie Whitelaw, a superb Beckett actor, defines this character (109). Then there is *Rokeby* (1981), a motionless woman sitting in a rocking chair while a voice talks in sync with the chair's movement. Each picture is remarkable and will stay with you for a long time. The women remain alone even while sharing the stage with another character or characters. In no way, form, or shape can they make touch. When Winnie asks Willie many questions, Willie does not provide an answer. Their tales are told continuously by the characters in the play, who seem to have little regard for the other prisoners.

Beckett's female characters seem to be secluded and static, but why is this so? We frequently perceive just bits of the female body rather than the whole picture as a society. What message does he want to convey to the audience via his dramatic images?

*Not I* may be seen as one of these voices: we hear a voice from the unconscious when examined from this perspective. Our ears can only detect a sound from inside since the actor's body is disguised behind a mask. The actor's physicality is irrelevant here, but rather the freed "voice" from the unconscious that has "a body of its own." As we look at the lips, from where the sound emerges, we hear it as well.

"Blazing light" is the theme of *Happy Days* (138). "There is no longer darkness, i.e. nothing but the day," said Beckett in a letter to Alan Schneider (Harmon 102). "A sadly failed realism," according to Beckett, is what the set should seem like: "that quality of pompier, absurdly serious awful imitation" (Harmon 94). Throughout her life, Winnie is surrounded by brightness. She seems to be unaware of the seriousness of her predicament. As if nothing had happened, she is seen going about her business as if nothing had happened at all. We can make out the oddity. We are puzzled by her strange apathy as we see her pinned down and unable to move. It is easy to observe the "pathetic failed reality" that surrounds her, but she seems to embrace it and behaves in a manner that we anticipate from an older lady in her fifties who has been "well-preserved" (138). It reflects "the common human duty of getting through the day," according to Whitelaw (Whitelaw 148). She regards Winnie as a prototypical female: Linda Ben-Zvi:

We are taught that women are expected to "make the best of circumstances," "say their prayers," read their favourite books (such as Jane Austen's *Jane Eyre*), take care of their physiological functions, and fix their beauty. Winnie follows these social expectations.

She says that a parody of the middle-aged woman, Winnie is "the bodily embodiment" of what it means to be female in her culture (xii-xiii). According to Andrew Kennedy, Beckett has developed "a mythological dimension for the modest lady trying to go through her minimum day with as much grace as possible". The latter sees her as an "Everywoman" (78). Whitelaw said, "She is gutsy" (Ben-Zvi 7). She characterized her as "very joyful" to Jonathan Kalb (Kalb242)

"Winnie is like a bird that cannot fly, a bird with a broken wing," Beckett told O'Kelly during rehearsals of *Happy Days* (Lamont 32). His advice to Martha Fehsenfeld was that she "think of her as an oil-stained bird" during her rehearsing sessions (Fehsenfeld 55). To illustrate Winnie's desire for wings like those on the heads of tiny angels, she mentions at one point that if the ground "would surrender and let me go" (151), she might "just float up into the blue." The "most valuable link with the unconscious" that enables us to connect "with our fellow human beings" was cut off by Winnie's insistence on awareness. She has suppressed a crucial part of her humanity in the process when it comes to (Jung 10).

#### 4. Conclusion

This study aims at highlighting the absence of female characters in Samuel Beckett's plays. This study indicates that the absence of these female characters was very present in most of Beckett's works. Even when Beckett chose to employ female characters in his works, he was careful to give these characters secondary or often marginal roles. Most of the feminist figures that appear in Beckett's work, though few, are marginal and non-essential.

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