

Samuel Beckett and the Transcultural Notion of Pain

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Abstract:

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) and *Endgame* (1957) are two of the most famous works by the Irish author that reflect both ideological and physical pain with the presence of limping, blindness, the authority that never fulfills the promise, and the dreadful isolation caused by an apocalyptic-like condition. This paper explores the notion of pain as a transcultural expression, which would present an anthropocentric aspect of Beckett's works beyond the western realm with references to adaptations of the plays in non-western cultures. The discussion is inspired by discussions of the Anthropocene within literary criticism (such as *The Ecology of Modernism* (2015), *Green Modernism* (2016), and *Ecocriticism in the Modernist Imagination* (2016), *Modernity at Large* (1996), *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (1993), and *Grenzgänge der Ästhetik* (1996), to name a few), and the ways such concepts can add a cultural dimension to any literary discussion. The focus in particular is on the transcultural role of imagination in creating a situation that makes it possible to endure 'torments' collectively. It further introduces pain within the discussion of transcultural thought by tackling pain as a form of expression that can be categorized as a socially imposed condition. The dual nature of Beckett's characters presents a rare opportunity to study the transition of the literary imagery of pain from a western culture to a non-western one with reference to specific adaptations and inspired adaptations of the works.

Key Words: Samuel Beckett – Transcultural Thought – Pain – Waiting for Godot – Endgame

Received: 19/07/2023

Accepted: 24/08/2023

Available online: 30/03/2024

1. Introduction

The discussion of pain in Samuel Beckett's practice, especially theatrical work, brings in the phrase "aesthetic of failure," which is not a foreign phrase for those who read criticism on Samuel Beckett as it was used as early as the 1980s by Eric Levy in relation to his analysis of *Texts for Nothing* and the *Three Dialogues* with George Duthuit (Levy, 2015, p.75). Such a phrase got popularized with the fame of one particular quote by Beckett that is centered on failure: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better" (Beckett, 1983, p. 7). Pain has always been, mostly, viewed as a notion of failure within the realm of Beckett's studies. Due to the critical approaches adopted within Beckett's scholarship, the pain inflicted on his characters has been rendered as a quality that would increase the aesthetic value of his texts as a result of the personal struggles he came across as a writer. This paper does not attempt to explore the concept of pain within Beckett's oeuvre (as such a topic is covered in *Samuel Beckett and Pain* (2012)) or approach it as a notion of failure; rather, it explores the notion of pain as a transcultural expression that would present an anthropocentric aspect of Beckett's works beyond the western realm. The paper is divided into two sections, in which the first section positions the exploration of pain within an anthropocentric framework that allows for transcultural thought to be traced within literature. The second section focuses on adaptations of Beckett's plays that reflect Chinese/Taiwanese and Palestinian/Israeli relations to present a commentary on the way Beckett's stage has a transcultural impact outside western countries. The exploration is inspired by discussions of the Anthropocene and transcultural thought within literary criticism (such as *The Ecology of Modernism* (2015), *Green Modernism* (2016), and *Ecocriticism in the Modernist Imagination* (2016), *Modernity at Large* (1996), *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (1993), and *Grenzgänge der Ästhetik* (1996), to name a few), and the ways such concepts can add a cultural dimension to any literary discussion. More specifically, the paper focuses on the transcultural role of imagination in creating a situation that makes it possible to endure 'torments' collectively. It further introduces pain within the discussion of transcultural thought by tackling pain as a form of expression that can be categorized as a socially imposed condition. The dual nature of Beckett's characters presents a rare opportunity to study the transition of the literary imagery of pain from a western culture to a non-western one with reference to specific adaptations of the works.

Generally speaking, there are two main approaches used to tackle the representation of pain within Beckett's works: (1) an aesthetical approach and (2) an empathetic approach that tackles the relationship between the individual and the community. The aesthetical approach is usually based on Beckett's own critical writings, as evident in Eric Levy's *Beckett and the Voice of Species: A Study of*

Prose Fiction (1980). It also tackles the Christian iconography presented in many of his works, as initiated by Mary Bryden's *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God* (1998). Mainly, this approach suggests that "the critical emphasis on abstraction collides with the recurrent textual emphasis on pain" (Levy, 2015, p. 21), which seems to represent Steven Bruhm's statement in *Gothic Bodies: The Politics of Pain in Romantic Fiction* (1994) about pain being "the most aesthetic experience we can have" (Bruhm, 1994, p. 5). On the other hand, the empathetic approach is more focused on possible textual interpretations of the text that tackle the relationship between the individual and community. Foucault is usually referred to in terms of the function of pain in such relationships and how it is being proclaimed as socially "constructed" (Dowd, 2012, p. 67). Elaine Scarry, in *The Body in Pain* (1985), explores such a relationship by utilizing "Jungian formulations" to explore the way "pain isolates its sufferer" through the "correlation between physical and psychic pain" (Dowd, 2012, p.69). Such critical approaches raise the question of how pain would be perceived in non-western cultures. The predominant theme linked to pain within western adaptations of Beckett's work is isolation, which is viewed simply as a tragic situation that would create a form of catharsis. Ruby Cohn, in her first study, *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut* (1962), referred to the isolation resulted by pain as "tragic isolation" (Cohn, 1962, pp. 7-8). The use of the word tragic is very significant since it denotes more than an emotion or a state but rather a theoretical form of evoking pity and fear, which corresponds to Aristotelian doctrines of tragedy. The centrality of pain in Beckett's works seems to have made early commentators and critical perceptions of him based on demonstrating the way his works are not restricted to one particular literary genre or type of theoretical representation, as Martin Esslin introduced the name of the Theatre of the Absurd to the critical landscape in 1961 and noted in a re-revision of the *Theatre of the Absurd* in 1968 that Beckett's work "tends towards a radical devaluation of language, towards a poetry that is to emerge from the concrete and objectified images of the stage itself" (Esslin, 1968, p. 26). The tragic isolation of characters, the radical devaluation of language, and the objectification of images explain the existence of the two approaches that were used to tackle pain in his works and call for a need for a new approach that would support the transcultural impact of Beckett's notion of thought on non-western cultures. What I am suggesting in this paper is utilizing transcultural thought within an anthropocentric framework to approach such concepts and present the transcultural nature of the literary imagination through the notion of pain.

2. Pain, Transcultural Thought, and the Anthropocene

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) and *Endgame* (1957) challenge the geographical understanding of the Anthropocene when it is linked to the empathetic representation and expression of

pain. Beckett's two works in question can highlight the anthropocentric aspect of literature, as recent commentators on Beckett, such as Anna McMullan, claim that his work can help provide an "ecocritical perspective which focuses on the interrelationship between humans, other creatures, and the environment" (2021, p. 4). The ecocritical perspective has been evident in recent Beckettian scholarship with publications by Amanda Dennis (2020), Mary Brayden (2013), Paul Davis (2006), Greg Garrard (2012), Joe Kelleher (2015), and Anna McMullan (2021), which call for readings of Beckett's work that "go beyond the literal level of representation or content" (McMullan, 2021, pp. 4–5). This paper is not interested solely in presenting an ecocritical perspective, but rather in presenting a way of tracing the transcultural impact of his work on other cultures using the Anthropocene as a framework that would help in showcasing the transcultural impact of Beckett's work on other cultures by relying on pain as a transcultural expression that goes "beyond the literal level of representation" (McMullan, 2021, pp. 4–5). In a way, it reflects the ability of transcultural thought to reflect the process by which two cultures can transmit a change, emphasizing the unity of the human condition and the ability of literature to reflect cultural struggles. The universality of Beckett's work makes it relatively possible to study the way literature can embody transcultural thought since his characters reflect what constitutes the main features of a transcultural text as they are "self-doubting characters, whose actions are dominated by uncertainty, a mind-set which thereby frequently influences the whole narrative" (Helff, 2008, p. 82). The focus on pain as a bridge between transcultural thought and the Anthropocene allows the narrative to shift boundaries between transcultural spaces since it has "the power to redefine and modify processes and experiences in the social world" (Helff, 2008, p. 83). The different adaptations of his theatrical work reflect Mieke Bal's statement that "practically everything in culture has a narrative aspect to it" (Bal, 1999, p. 19). The adaptations that are part of the following section are not identical with each other even though they follow the same text, which echoes the individuality of each adaptation and highlights the difference between the way pain is perceived and represented within western and non-western cultures.

As a concept, the Anthropocene developed from Arthur Tansley's term 'ecosystems', which he coined in the 1930s. The scientific definition of the Anthropocene entails "the irreversible impact made by human beings on the global climate" (Howel, 2017, p. 12). The scientific concerns of the way the environment coexists with communities were imperialistic in nature since they supported the political project that is "bent on understanding and managing foreign environments and, frequently, their human inhabitants" (Howel, 2017, p. 6). With recent publications such as Joshua Schuster's *The Ecology of Modernism* (2015), McCarthy's *Green Modernism* (2016), and Kelly Elizabeth Sultzbach's *Ecocriticism in the Modernist Imagination* (2016), its meaning progressed beyond the

ecological meaning to simply describe “how a whole is created by single things” (Howel, 2017, p. 7). The cycle of cause and effect becomes transcultural in such a context since “human beings are each other’s’ environment” (Morton, 2010, p. 4). The centrality of humans within such cycles is further emphasized by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, who reflected “the central role of mankind in geology and ecology” in 2000 (p.17). Due to the diverse disciplinary contexts of modernist thought, the Anthropocene extended its meaning beyond the scope of geology to be present within many disciplines, such as literary studies. The dichotomy between nature and culture invites a transcultural take on the Anthropocene and how literature can embody the anthropocentric aspect of transcultural thought, which can refer to the process of understanding “that has been used to understand phenomena of cultural change within situations of cultural contact” (Osten, 2009, p. 17). Ursula Heise explains that the modern understanding of nature differs from that of the Romantic age since nature as an agency has disappeared and transcultural thought has taken center stage to explain the impact of the environment on human society (Heise, 2016, p. 8). From a general perspective, it appears that there is an intersection between the Anthropocene and transcultural thought when placed within a literary framework, as they both involve a form of cultural change that takes place when two entities come into contact with each other in order to form “a process of transformation that unfolds through extended contacts and relationships between cultures” (Juneja and Kravagna, 2013, p. 24). In a sense, literature represents a “developing concern with the changing relations between humanity and nature,” as attested by Jon Hegglund and John McIntyre (2023, p. ix). The form or medium of literature opens up a space for “the consideration of planetary and ecological forces that cannot be contained within either an individual or historical framework” (2023, p. xiii). Within literature, transcultural thought becomes magnified through “a process from which a new reality emerges” that is “original and independent” (Stein, 2008, p. 251). Hence, the new reality within literature becomes “a cultural mode of expression” (Bal, 1999, p.21).

With the globalized modes of textuality, transcultural thought became more dominant within literary criticism, which led to the emergence of transcultural English studies as supported by publications such as Arjun Appadurai’s *Modernity at Large* (1996), James Clifford’s *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), Iain Chambers’s *Migrancy, Culture, and Identity* (1993), and Wolfgang Iser’s *Grenzgänge der Ästhetik* (1996) (Helff, 2008, p. 76). As Sissy Helff argued, what led to the rapid development of transcultural thought within 21st-century literary criticism is whether it can “offer perspectives that add anything that could not be addressed by post-colonialism” (2008, p. 77). It should be noted that the transcultural understanding of the Anthropocene equally stresses its geological

and ecological importance, which ultimately stimulates multidisciplinary approaches within literary criticism. The multidisciplinary approaches pushed for transcultural thought to develop and set the stage for the decolonializing of the literary scene. Hence, it becomes important to highlight the difference between transcultural and postcolonial thoughts, as they might seem to share similar grounds for dealing with cultural interactions. Whereas postcolonial approaches “almost obsessively remain tied to notions of difference,” transcultural thought relies on the “processes of cultural amalgamation as the very foundation of ‘culture’” (Helff, 2008, p.78). In such a sense, transcultural thought “therefore, challenges postcolonial concepts such as hybridity, which always implies and thus relies on notions of subversion” (Helff, 2008, p.78). In a general sense, transcultural thought is not focused on the process of domination between two cultures but rather on the exchange in which “both of them active, both contributing their share, and both co-operating to bring about a new reality of civilization” (Stein, 2008, p.251). The focus on difference would cloud discussions of cultural authenticity since it “reveals the radical insufficiency of sedimented, settled systems of meaning and signification” (Stein, 2008, p.251). As Sissy Helff points out, the main concern revolving transcultural thought is the limitation revolving the involvement of minorities within a transcultural discussion of any culture since they form “the margins of society,” which is not included in the collective image of society (2008, p. 79). Such limitation is viewed as a strength by Frank Schulze-Engler (2000), who believes that such a feature is what makes transcultural thought different from postcolonial thought since it focuses on the collective identity of any culture. The focus on the collective identity would facilitate tracing a change between two cultures within a literary framework since modern literature places literary narratives within collective “Western” and “non-Western” settings (Helff, 2008, p.78). As this paper presents examples from Chinese/Taiwanese and Palestinian/Israeli relations, transcultural thought “seems particularly appropriate for an analysis of radicalized diasporic situations” rather than appropriating cultural struggles and flattening them to prove a point or to establish a difference (Helff, 2008, p. 79). Moreover, such an approach is appropriate in relation to Samuel Beckett since it “constitutes a central theoretical concept for describing cultural globalization in high modernity” (Helff, 2008, p. 79). Beckett has been declared the ‘last modernist’ by Anthony Cronin (1999), and the 1969 Nobel Prize announcement referred to him as a pioneer of “new modes of expression in fiction and on the stage” to become “a miserere from all mankind, its muffled minor key sounding liberation to the oppressed, and comfort to those in need” (Nobel Prize Speech). Using transcultural thought to examine adaptations of Beckett’s stage and the way they reflect pain would emphasize “cultural globalization in high modernity” (Helff, 2008, p. 79), since transcultural thought “ascribes a positive connotation to cultural hybridity” (Helff, 2008, p. 80).

The transcultural thought, Anthropocene, and Beckett intersect again within the modernist thought as they are part of what modernism represents since 'modernism' reflects "a wide field of cultural production consisting not only of new theories of art and new visions of society, but an engagement with the potentially planetary impacts of technology and environmental change" (Howel, 2017, p.22). Further, Beckett is an author who was influenced by different cultural experiences being an exiled Irish author who lived in France and England most his career which signifies another characteristic of transcultural texts as it is produced by an author who is "shaped not by a single homeland, but by differing reference countries [and] literature[s]" (Welsch, 1999, p. 198). It can be argued that one of the powers Beckett's stage holds is the visualization of pain whether it is physical or mental, which can be interpreted as attributions of "mental and physical decay" imposed by a cultural collective pain (White, 2009, p. 9); such as weak memory exhibited by Estragon, Lucky's disoriented speech, Clov's erratic behavior, Hamm's and Pozzo's blindness to name a few. The different adaptation of Beckett's stage indicates the affinity between the condition of the characters and the audience that faces such adaptation regardless of its geographical location, as by "imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations" (Smith, 1976, p. 12). The paper looks back at past performances of Beckett's plays that took place in the Far East and the Middle East to highlight the efficiency of pain as a transcultural attribute within the creative process; in other words, pain is used as a catalyst to view the adaptations of *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* outside the western context to gauge the ability of literature to magnify cultural changes.

3. Beckett in Taiwan and Middle East

3.1. Taiwan

The Taiwanese adaptations of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* demonstrate a fascination with transcultural thought that does not exclusively focus on cultural elements but also language through the thematic representation of a cultural 'pain' or what I am referring to in this paper as a transcultural notion of pain. The purpose of this paper is not to provide an over-review of past performances but a critical commentary that ought to highlight the functionality of the Anthropocene and introduce how pain can be a catalyst that allows for a transcultural adaptation of performances. The transcultural thought in relation to Beckett's theater can be seen in statements by Wei H. Kao (2005), who argues that Beckett's "border-crossing theatrical legacy can serve as a dialogic platform for the Irish and the world" (2005, p. 160). He further points out that what made Beckett's theater

impactful in Taiwan is the fact that it encourages spectators to question authority (Kao, 2005, p. 160). Kao's comment can be generalized to explain the appeal Beckett's stage has on non-western audiences and young directors with the amount of creative liberty it holds, which echoes a remark voiced by Beckett himself when he was directing a production of *Endgame* in 1967 as he remarks, "There for me lies the value of the theatre. One turns out a small world with its own laws, conducts the action as if upon a chessboard" (qtd in McMillan and Fehsenfeld, 1988, p. 231). It is not surprising to see his influence across different countries, as *Waiting for Godot* is a cultural and theatrical phenomenon that led to the emergence of what is referred to as absurd theater. What made this particular play popular across the globe is the fact that 'waiting' reflects a symbolic representation of pain, whether it is mental, physical, cultural, or political, with emphasis on the need for an authority that would initiate change. *Waiting* itself is transformed into a minimalistic visual expression with the existence of the road and bare tree, which can be easily integrated into any cultural setting during any adaptation. Hence, waiting is being transformed into a form that becomes the focus of any adaptation. Martin Esslin comments on the characteristics of the phenomenal play as he writes:

The subject of the play is not Godot but waiting, the act of waiting as an essential and characteristic aspect of human condition. Throughout our lives we always wait for something, and Godot simply represents the objective of our waiting—an event, a thing, a person, death. Moreover, it is in the act of waiting that we experience the flow of time in its purest, most evident form. (Esslin, 1968, 50)

Beckett's plays were firstly approached by Taiwanese directors to "find possibilities in revolutionizing or revitalizing their theater" (Tanaka, 2003, p. 47), which highlights the transcultural aspect through the way Beckett's work stimulated non-western directors generally and Taiwanese directors especially to challenge both cultural traditions and classical dramaturgy, urging a theatrical resolution using local tactics to a political blockade. The Taiwanese directors did not present it as it is but altered the original work through adaptations to target a certain cultural issue. Beckett had a strong presence in the contemporary theater of Taiwan since the 1960s, as his stage was used directly and indirectly in response to de-Chinese movement, which resulted in the introduction of experimental theater through the adoption of anti-play and environmental theater (Kao, 2005, pp.160-162),

To draw some cultural parallels between Ireland and Taiwan, censorship seems to be the first cultural characteristic that existed in both countries. It can be argued that one of the major elements that young Taiwanese directors suffered from during the 1960s was censorship. Their reaction towards censorship led to the emergence of techniques that transmitted western theatrical traits to be integrated into their culture without compromising the essence or tradition of the Taiwanese culture by adopting

anti-play and environmental theater as the two major stylistic changes to the Taiwanese theatre, which highlights the positive cultural transmission of transcultural thought. With the movement of translating western plays and performing them in Taiwanese society, major concerns appeared as a reaction to such exposure to western forms of expression. *The Theatre Quarterly* in Taiwan voiced a valid concern about the negative impact of embracing western forms of expression, as they claimed it “would incur ineffectually romantic sentiments and intellectual cultural impotence” (Kao, 2005, p.163). Such concern has been further stressed by Da-Ren Liu in “Note before Performance” of the 1966 production of *Waiting for Godot* in Taiwan. Liu’s remark indicates that the adaptation’s aim is not only to target the aesthetic modernity of the Taiwanese theatrical scene but also the social modernity; he writes, The entire membership of Theatre Quarterly Association has deeply sensed that the current movement of modernization is tossing us around the issue of whether we should despise romanticism; of whether we could rebuild a pure modern China by both fixing the tradition and adopting the Western one. We become so weak, nearsighted and head-in-the-clouds. We are uncritical, irrational, and unable to scrutinize the reality and react to it. (qtd in Kao, 2005, p.163).

The fact that the 1966 adaptation of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* aimed at social reform created a sense of defiance among the early spectators, which impacted the way directors implemented stylistic changes in their later adaptations. However, the implementation of the anti-play created a steppingstone for experimental theater in Taiwan, which encouraged a pertinent revision of cultural aesthetics. Thus, Beckett’s influence is not a commercial one that made directors and theaters gain materialistic profits; rather, he offered a non-commercial level of influence on a transcultural level. One reason for such a challenge is that Beckett’s “anti-play” challenged Western cultural standards. Even though the perception did not have a major impact on the public, it demonstrated the modernist thought and level of experimentation that began to integrate the consciousness of Taiwanese society. The promising progression of the western thought of theatrical experimentation matured in 1988 (specifically after 23 years after the first Beckettian performance in Taiwan in 1966). Six plays by Beckett were performed under the supervision of Stan Lai: *Come and Go*, *Footfalls*, *Play*, *What Where*, *Act without Words II*, and *Ohio Impromptu* (Kao, 2005, pp.164-165). Whereas the first stage of the theatrical adaptation of Beckett in Taiwan was focused on the form of anti-play, this mature stage was centered around the ‘environmental theater’ where the audiences were the focus rather than the artistic expression. Such a mature outlook of Beckett’s theater corresponds with the Beckettian scholarship that remarks, “Beckett’s use of the *theatrum mundi* concept” (McMullan, 2021, p.11), which has been studied by Ruby Cohn as a theatrical technique used by Beckett to increase the

audience's self-awareness as observers of the characters (Cohn, 1967, p. 30). By using a Chinese setting for his adaptations, Lai increases the awareness of the Taiwanese as observers of the characters to create a transcultural space that would help in making the adaptation acknowledged by them since it reflects their own struggle using a setting derived from their own surroundings. *Waiting for Godot* attracted the majority of the Taiwanese directors as it would present a simple artistic expression that allowed the audience to become familiar with the 'western' medium of expression. An example of this is the integration of "Chinese folk dancing, Taiwanese folk opera, and Chinese cross talk" (Kao, 2005, p.167), which were added to the adaptation of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 1996 by Ai-Ling Lu (1966).

The addition of Asian elements makes the claim that literature is a perfect medium for transcultural thought stronger, as theater "allows different cultures to be transferable" (Kao, 2005, p.167). The Taiwanese adaptation of Beckett's drama was mostly concerned with increasing the accessibility of the Taiwanese audience to modern forms of western theater. Such an aim introduced a new method of experimentation based on transforming western symbolism into local ones. In 1997, Ching-Mei Chu's expressionist production of *Waiting for Godot* did not aim to produce a half-Western and half-Chinese adaptation of the play. It focused on utilizing familiar symbolism known by the Taiwanese audience to introduce the premise of the play by replacing the tree with a stepladder, having the little boy carry a pair of black broken wings, using colorless makeup, and having a cross-dressed character (Didi) for examples. However, not all symbols were able to be altered easily. One of the most difficult aspects of any Beckettian adaptation was the religious aspect of his plays. There are some Christian symbolism and references in his plays, especially *Waiting for Godot*, that made adapting the play outside a western country challenging since the predominant religion outside western countries is not necessarily Christianity, as evident in the examples discussed in this paper. Such an aspect was admitted by Hsing-Kuo Wu (founder of the Contemporary Legend Theatre), who aimed to attract young audiences to theaters by presenting adaptations of western plays. To overcome such a challenge, he replaced the Christian connotations within Beckett's plays with Buddhist references (Kao, 2005, p.173). The process of familiarizing the Taiwanese audience with the context of the plays was not restricted to altering symbolism. The process included the language of the adaptation, which was a fundamental development in the history of theater in Taiwan. In 1987, the Trainer Ensemble was established, focusing on using the Minnan vernacular as the main language in its performances. Po-Shen Lu, the director of the Trainer Ensemble, declared that "the repertoire which the Minnan vernacular can perform is beyond regional realistic drama. . .) Native speakers could realize that their colloquial language [has] potential for performance" (qtd in. Kao, 2005, p.174). The Trainer

Ensemble's adaptation of *Endgame* was one of the plays that received a local and global appraisal as it "outshone most of his predecessors and contemporaries" by crafting a version that captures the identity of the audience without sacrificing the melody of the original text (Kao, 2005, p.175). Steven Connor writes that, in *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory, and Text* (1988), "Endgame plays notably with the audience's conceptions of inside and outside" (2007, p.142), which complements the adaptation that reflects on using a vernacular language rather than a national one "to arouse the awareness of native identity" (Kao, 2005, p.175).

3.2. Middle East

As evident by the Taiwanese adaptations in the late 1960s to the late 1990s (adaptations by the Theatre Quarterly Association (1966), Hsing-Kuo Wu (1986), The Trainer Ensemble (1987), Stan Lai (1988), Ai-Ling Lu (1996), and Ching-Mei Chu (1997)), the non-western adaptations have a political significance, as labeled by Ilan Ronan, who directed the first Arabic-Hebrew adaptation of *Waiting for Godot*, in a chapter entitled "*Waiting for Godot* as a Political Theatre" (2000). The cultural significance of a Beckettian adaptation in the Middle East can be reflected in Ronan's bilingual adaptation of *Waiting for Godot*, which was first performed in 1984 (at the Haifa Municipal Theatre) and revived in 2018 (at Jaffa Theatre). As stated by the director, the play has an allegorical significance in which waiting "has come to symbolize the search for meaning" (2000, p. 239). The adaptation was based on reflecting the current political state of the Middle Eastern land by positioning the play on a construction site rather than a simply abandoned road "to make the audience identify emotionally with the characters and become involved with their fate" (Ronan, 2000, p. 239). What is striking about this adaptation is that the director chose to turn Beckett's two 'tramps' into two Palestinian laborers who are waiting for their misery to end. Ramon affirms the bold political adaptation that highlights the political Palestinian/Israeli tension by stating that he "had no doubt that by portraying Vladimir and Estragon in the Israeli political reality of the period I [Ronan] would only deepen the audience's identification with the characters" (2000, p.240). The integration of Arabic in the play was intended to further stress the audience's identification by involving the Arabic-speaking audiences in Haifa in the theatrical scene promoted by the Haifa Municipal Theatre. Same with the Taiwanese young directors who saw western plays as a perfect venue to express local theatrical development; both the director and the actors involved in the Hebrew-Arabic play "expressed their desire to act in a play that would enable them to demonstrate their ability to do stylized body work in a realistic setting" (Ronan, 2000, p. 240). This particular adaptation reflects the transcultural nature of literature in the way "theatrical texts or productions can be like ecosystems," as argued by Clare Finburgh and Carl Lavery through the

utilization of the political meaning of waiting (2015, p.15). Ronan elaborates further on the significance of the adaptation and the way it reflects an anthropogenic pain linked to the local land that hosts the adaptation by writing:

The decision to ascribe a political meaning to *Waiting for Godot* had a special significance against the background of the Israeli scene at that time. Nearly all the construction workers in Israel were Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza. Each day, in the early morning hours, they left their homes, traveling in convoys to the cities of Israel. There they sat and waited for contractors and foremen to hire them. This created an absurd situation, in which the country, including the Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, was being built almost exclusively by Palestinians under the rule of Israeli occupation (Ronan, 2000, p.240).

The director explains that the first reaction to the 1984 production was violent, and a “furious public debate” erupted that demanded the cancellation of the production for turning “an important work by a renowned playwright” into a political tool (Ronan, 2000, p.241). However, there were those who were ‘impressed’ by it. Unlike the Taiwanese stage, which chose the Minnan language, this stage decided to emphasize the peaceful unity of the land by embracing a bilingual adaptation that presents characters who interact with each other using Arabic and Hebrew interchangeably to confront “each other also through the medium of the two languages, both of which are so emotionally charged and arouse countless associations” (Ronan, 2000, p.242).

The adaptation integrated both Hebrew and Arabic into the dialogue as the translator of the play, Anton Shammas, and the director of the play, Ilan Ronan, decided to have four Arabic-speaking characters: Estragon, Vladimir, Lucky, and the Messenger. Estragon and Vladimir deliver their lines in Arabic, in which each has their own regional dialect (in which Estragon represents an Arab villager whereas Vladimir represents “a city dweller”). Lucky spoke in “literary Arabic” to reflect “old age,” compared to the boy who spoke simple Arabic (Ronan, 2000, p. 242). The only character who was chosen to speak exclusively in Hebrew is Pozzo. However, when the two characters, Estragon and Vladimir, speak to Pozzo, they speak in Hebrew while speaking in Arabic when they converse with each other. Ronan notes that the Hebrew-Arabic adaptation instigated different opinions among the Arabic-speaking audience compared to the Hebrew-speaking one, in which the Arabic-speaking audience felt that “Beckett had written the play in this version especially for them” (Ronan, 2000, p.243). The Hebrew-speaking audience “reacted with a sense of confusion and uneasiness at hearing Arabic and experiencing the feelings that language arouses” (Ronan, 2000, p. 243). Similarly to the obstacles faced with the Taiwanese adaptation, the religious connotations of Beckett’s text created a challenge that led to the omission of the parts that are linked to Christianity without compromising the

audience's recognition of the adaptation by adding "a new facet to the play's universal existential statement" (Ronan, 2000, p. 248). The HaAretz review of the play reflects the power of such an adaptation by writing:

Due to the metaphoric nature of *Waiting for Godot*, it can be produced in various ways without changing its structure or action. When the characters are placed in the Here and Now they become more real. It also adds a dimension of truth to their suffering and an additional dimension to the play ... the play is a relevant political statement thanks mainly to the actors' superb performances in Hebrew and Arabic. The ring of the Arabic language spoken by the actors takes on a special political hue, and the actors' presence on the stage expresses a great deal of the painful significance of the play due to their powerful acting, which is pure "Beckett," over and above the political significance (M. Handelsaltz, HaAretz, 12 December 1984). (qtd in Ronan, 2000, pp. 248-9)

4. Conclusion

Beckett's minimalist stages, disoriented characters, and lack of plot allowed his plays to be adapted in non-western countries while presenting to the audiences a collective artistic expression without compromising the national identity of each country. It can be argued that an adaptation of a theatrical work cannot be considered an original work, but the alteration process presents a new piece of work that reflects the cultural struggles each society is facing. The main takeaway from examining the examples discussed previously is that the notion of pain, when placed within transcultural thought, removes it from the western tendency of attaching it to failure, as is the case within Beckett's studies. Further, the discussion of transcultural thought in relation to Beckettian adaptations in the Far East and Middle East enhances the empathetic approach, which is focused on the relationship between the individual and community, and highlights the argument that pain is indeed socially "constructed" within the anthropocentric framework (Dowd, 2012, p. 67). The Chinese/Taiwanese and Palestinian/Israeli tensions are a good example of a form of pain that is predominant in non-western countries, as the adaptations highlight it through the alterations made by each production. Ultimately, such adaptations push the work to "go beyond the literal level of representation or content" (McMullan, 2021, pp4-5). They further enhance the transcultural aspect of Beckett's minimalist theater with its "power to redefine and modify processes and experiences in the social world" since the focus of most adaptation is pain (Helff, 2008, p. 83). The fact that both countries found Christian symbolism a challenge for some of the adaptations adds to the tension between the West and East when it comes to creative expression. It presented an opportunity to study the transition of the literary imagery of pain from a western culture to a non-western one to express a socially imposed condition through theatrical experimentation.

المستخلص

صموئيل بيكيت ومفهوم الألم عبر الثقافات

امجاد الشعلان

تعد مسرحيتي "في انتظار جودو" (1953) و"نهاية اللعبة" (1957) لصامويل بيكيت من أشهر أعمال المؤلف الأيرلندي التي تعكس الألم الأيديولوجي والجسدي مع وجود العرج والعمى والسلطة التي لا تفي بالوعد أبدًا والعزلة الناجمة عن حالة تشبه نهاية العالم. تستكشف هذه الورقة فكرة الألم كتعبير عابر للثقافات، والذي من شأنه أن يقدم جانبًا إنسانيًا من أعمال بيكيت خارج العالم الغربي مع إشارات إلى عروض لمسرحياته على مسارح غير غربية. المناقشة مستوحاة من مناقشات الأنثروبوسين في النقد الأدبي والطرق التي يمكن أن تضيف بها هذه المفاهيم بعدًا ثقافيًا إلى أي مناقشة أدبية. وينصب التركيز بشكل خاص على الدور العابر للثقافات في خلق موقف يجعل من الممكن تحمل "العذاب" بشكل جماعي. كما أنه يقدم الألم ضمن مناقشة الفكر العابر للثقافات من خلال معالجة الألم كشكل من أشكال التعبير الذي يمكن تصنيفه على أنه حالة مفروضة اجتماعيًا. تمثل الطبيعة المزدوجة لشخصيات بيكيت فرصة نادرة لدراسة انتقال الصور الأدبية للألم من الثقافة الغربية إلى ثقافة غير غربية مع الإشارة إلى تعديلات محددة وتعديلات ملهمة للأعمال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: صامويل بيكيت- الفكر العابر للثقافات - الألم - انتظار جودو- نهاية اللعبة

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