


Waiting for Godot: A requiem for cultural paralysis in post-independence Ireland

Shahriyar Mansouri 

Department of English, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

Article Info	Abstract
<p>Original Article Main Object: Literature Scope: Ireland</p> <p>Received: 08 April 2023 Revised: 28 April 2023 Accepted: 03 May 2023 Published online: 22 May 2023</p> <p>Keywords: cultural paralysis, distant reading, imperialism, independence of Ireland, opacity.</p>	<p>Among scholars of Irish culture, literature and politics, Samuel Beckett's <i>Waiting for Godot</i> is a multimodal apparatus; the significance of the use of the concept of anticipation and waiting is twofold: on the one hand, it is a reminder of the national effort to discard intellectual exploitation and to re-imagine the national identity after the revolution and independence of Ireland in 1921 and to dismantle the yoke of British colonialism after 800 years. And on the other, it signifies the continuation of political stagnation, cultural paralysis, and the expansion of the broad lord-servant policy along the internal regulations of the provisional and independent government, from 1922 to early 1950. This article analyzes the logic of anticipation and waiting as a structural feature of colonialism in the direction of exploiting nations, and examines the determining role of the concept of opacity in removing the structure of colonialism, and ultimately achieving the independence of the Irish. Opacity, according to this article, appears as a cultural veil that stands between the structure of colonial subjugation, and the risk of the formation and rise of an internal colonial context. The seemingly mistaken result of opacity is cultural disunity and individual self-referentialism; however, as this article explores these categories are initiatives that coalesce into an understanding of independence and the destruction of the colonial structure.</p>
<p>Cite this article: Mansouri Sh. (2023). "<i>Waiting for Godot: A requiem for cultural paralysis in post-independence Ireland</i>". <i>Countries Studies</i>. 1(2): 51-55. doi: https://doi.org/10.22059/jcountst.2023.357530.1027.</p>	
<p> Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License Website: https://jcountst.ut.ac.ir/ Email: jcountst@ut.ac.ir EISSN: 2980-9193 Publisher: University of Tehran</p>	

* Email: s_mansouri@sbu.ac.ir,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9497-8311>

Extended Abstract

Introduction and Aim

Ireland declared its independence as after years of national and civil wars in 1921, and introduced the Irish Free State in 1922, ending the socio-political, and cultural-linguistic hypotheses that surrounded the Gaelic revivalist vision¹ as a national project. The end, as Irish scholars note, also alienated a revisionist vision whereby a united Emerald Island could be had. This was the moment when culture was instrumentalized by critics and artists alike to awaken the masses, moving further away from a dominant culture of colonialism and subjugation to a resistant, and conscious emergent one wherein dismantling structural formalism, and cultural paralysis appeared as an inherent merit. However, as the new State was seeking to protect its political and social interests, a clash between a conservative political and social atavism, cultural retrospection and a radical modernism advocated by a globally renowned crowd of Irish modernists such as Joyce, Flann O'Brien, Máirtín Ó Cadhain, and of course Beckett was inevitable. The stylistic and structural war waged by modernists was to challenge a crawling politics of division and dominance. Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* engages the concept of anticipation and waiting as a cultural value enacted by Vladimir and Estragon, and Pozzo and Lucky as binary duos: the former represents locals, while the former reflects a continued localized slave-master system. Whereas the latter pair transform waiting into an individual culture of compliance and obedience, the former regard waiting as the ultimate cure for their ontologically catastrophic state of being. To understand the critical undertones in Beckett's critique of the final years of the de Valera's administration as the Prime Minister [*Taoiseach*] in 1948, this article draws upon Franco Moretti's distant reading as the a textually detached approach to reading the socio-cultural and theoretical events that affected the formation of texts.

Method

Distant reading relies on computational, biographical, personal correspondence, historical, and hermeneutical data that explicate the formation of the text. Rather than dealing with formalism, structuralism as textual approaches, distant reading engages that which theoretically stands out as the extra or excessive information to a formalistic, structural and/or deconstructive reading. Distant reading, therefore, enables the reader to understand the hidden layers that resulted in the production, ideation and presentation of the text; this would be an approach that starts in rejecting formalism, and respects the otherness of the underrepresented, and the marginalized. This essay borrows from Edouard Glissant's concept of Opacity, and treats

1. Athbheochan na Gaeilge

it as a threshold in postcolonial context, one that reveals how the Irish responded to what Kiberd calls an internal colonialism during the de Valera's administration. A close analysis of Beckett's play will complement the socio-cultural distant reading of the text.

Discussion and Results

The Land Acts, the land annuities, the formation of an internal, individual resistance, the symbolic representation of the culture of waiting, a remodeled lord-bondsman relationship in 1950s Ireland, a structured colonial system, and a linguistic defiance enacted by Lucky will be the main issues this paper addresses. Glissant's opacity will be used as a cultural catalyst that empowers colonized nations to stand against potential young neo-colonial governments, by respecting their original values and constantly evaluating their current status quo as a de-colonizing nation. In *Waiting for Godot*, we are introduced to two colonial pairs, each imposing a micro-politics of dominance and control. Whereas Vladimir appears as the more logical-reserved character, trying to control Estragon as his exasperated pair, Pozzo emerges as the mirror of Hegelian lord, one who reaps what Lucky as the bondsman or the server sows. Lucky, however, suddenly speaks as a postcolonial subject who sees existence in defiance, exerting his presence by dismantling the most triumphant achievement of colonial dominance, namely, the language. Lucky's speech, in this respect, is examined as a public address, one the internal dynamics of which shatters the structural backbone of the English language as a colonial artifact.

Conclusion

Opacity can initially be mistaken as a stance that advocates individual and social disconnection and separation. This is mostly advertised by colonial nations that regard total transparency as a feature valued by the global community; opacity, in this respect, is tantamount to disconnection, isolation and lack of reciprocity. However, opacity as enacted by Lucky, representing a modern Irish nation in control of their national and international horizon, contradicts such shallow and narrow readings; opacity is understanding and accepting social, political, ideological, and cultural differences.

Ethical considerations

The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the author on reasonable request.

References

- Adorno TW, Jones MT. (1982). "Trying to Understand Endgame". *New German Critique*. 26: 119-150. <https://doi.org/10.2307/488027>.
- Atkins A. (1967). "Lucky's Speech in Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot': A Punctuated Sense-Line Arrangement". *Educational Theatre Journal*. 19(4): 426-432. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3205022>.
- Beckett S. (2012). *The Complete Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett*. London: Faber and Faber. Kindle Edition.
- (2009). *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*. Vol. I: 1929–1940. ed. Craig G, Fehsenfeld MD, Gunn D, Overbeck LM. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ben-Zvi L. (1980). "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language". *PMLA*. 95(2): 183-200. <https://doi.org/10.2307/462014>.
- Bixby P. (2009). *Samuel Beckett and the Postcolonial Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brooks P. (1984). *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. New York: Vintage.
- Cambria M. (2014). "Is it English what we speak? Irish English and Postcolonial Identity". *Studi Irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies*. 4(4): 19-33. <https://doi.org/10.13128/SIJIS-2239-3978-14665>.
- Cohn R. (2001). *Just Play: Beckett's Theater*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cronin A. (1997). *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*. London: Flamingo.
- Esslin M. (1960). "The Theater of Absurd". *The Tulane Drama Review*. 4(4): 3-15.
- Foucault M. (1996). "What is Critique?" in *What is Enlightenment?* Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Glissant E. (1990). "For Opacity" in *Poetics of Relation*. Wing B, trans. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Gontarski SE. (2023). "A Cabinet of Curiosities: Bad Godots and Lucky's Brain Science". *Modernism/Modernity*. 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.26597/mod.0247>.
- Hegel GWF. (2009). *Phenomenology of The Spirit*. Trans. Miller AV. Kindle ed., Oxford University Press.
- Kane L. (1984). *The Language of Silence: On the Unspoken and the Unspeakable in Modern Drama*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- Kiberd D. (2017). *After Ireland: Writing the Nation from Beckett to the Present*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- (2005). *The Irish Writer and the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Knowlson J (1996). *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Knowlson J, Knowlson E eds. (2017). *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett: A Centenary Celebration*. Kindle ed., New York: Arcade Publishing.
- Mays JCC. (1992). "Irish Beckett: a Borderline Instance". *Beckett in Dublin*. Steve Wilmer. Dublin: Lilliput Press.
- Mercier V. (1977). *Beckett/Beckett*. London: Souvenir Press.
- McDonallad R. (2009). "Groves of Blarney: Beckett's Academic Reception in Ireland". *Nordic Irish Studies*. 8(1): 29-47.
- Mcmullan A. (2004). "Irish/postcolonial Beckett". *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett Studies*. Palgrave Advances. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230504622_6.
- McNaughton J. (2010). "The Politics of Aftermath: Beckett, Modernism, and the Irish Free State". *Beckett and Ireland*. Ed. Kennedy S. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 56-77.
- Moosavinia R, Hekmatshoar Tabari B. (2013). "Waiting for Godot is an Irish Endgame: A Postcolonial Reading of Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot and

- Endgame". *IJALEL*. 2(1): 60-67. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/ijalel.v.2n.1p.60>.
- Moretti F. (2013). *Distant Reading*. London: Verso Books. Kindle Edition.
- Paul-Dubois LFA. (1908). *Contemporary Ireland*. Dublin: Maunsel Ltd.
- Public Business. - Land (Purchase Annuities Fund) Bill, 1933—Final Stages. (16 March 1933). <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1933-03-16/7/>. (access: 08 April 2023)
- Quigley M. (2013). *Empire's Wake: Postcolonial Irish Writing and the Politics of Modern Literary Form*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Rampton B. (2016). "Foucault, Gumperz and governmentality: Interaction, power and subjectivity in the twenty-first century". *Sociolinguistics: Theoretical Debates*. ed. Coupland N. Cambridge University Press.
- Sardar Z. (2021). "Afterthoughts: Transnormal, the 'new Normal' and other Varieties of 'Normal' in Postnormal times". *World Futures Review*. 0(0): 1-17.
- Sardin P. (2020) "Samuel Beckett's maternal passion or hysteria at work in *company/compagnie*". *Journal of the Short Story in English*. 52. <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/964>.
- Smyth G. (1997). *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in the New Irish Fiction*. London: Pluto Press.
- Vogel S. (2022). "Waiting for Godot and the Racial Theater of the Absurd". *PMLA*. 137(1): 19-35. <https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812921000766>.