

Destruction of Nature and Its Effects in *Endgame*

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Abstract

The fertile ground has always been the object of God's wrath or blessing. In Creation Story of Genesis, God blessed first humans Adam and Eve with a fertile ground of Eden and upon their disobedience, they are again cursed with lack of it. When God delivers his curse to Adam, he uses the ground metaphor, vowing that people will need to toil earth for food. Subsequently, the fertility of the earth symbolizes the satisfaction, blessing, wrath and regeneration. On another occasion, God comparably annihilates the ground when he is not pleased with humanity. He sends the great flood to Noah. When flood recedes and Noah walks out from the ark, the fertile earth becomes the epitome of renewal and regeneration of human life. In this sense, I will comment on Samuel Beckett's apocalyptic play *Endgame*, which displays the damage inflicted upon environment and its devastating effect on characters' psyche.

Keywords: Endgame, Nature, Ecology, Fertility of Ground and Mankind, Regeneration

Endgame'de Doğanın Yok edilmesi ve Etkileri

Özet

Verimli toprak Tanrı'nın hem öfkesinin hem de kutsayışının sembolü olmuştur. Eski Ahit' in yaratılış öyküsünde, Tanrı, ilk insanlar Adem ve Havva'yı verimli bir zemin ile kutsamış ve itaatsizlikleri üzerine, yine verimli topraklardan uzaklaştırarak lanetlemiştir. Tanrı Ademin lanetini, insanların Dünya'da yaşamlarını sürdürebilmeleri için , yiyecekleri topraktan çıkarmak için çalışmak zorunda bırakarak göstermiştir. İncilin daha sonraki bölümlerinde, toprak; bereket, tatmin, bolluk, verimliliği ve yenilenmeyi simgelemektedir. Yine diğer bir olayda, Tanrı insanlardan memnuniyetsizliğini zemini yok ederek göstermektedir. Örneğin Nuh'a büyük sel göndermektedir. Nuh gemiden dışarı yürüdüğünde, bereketli toprak, insan hayatının yenilenmesini, ve tekrar çoğalmasını sembolize eder. Bu çalışma Samuel Beckett'in Endgame adlı oyununda çevrenin yok edilmesinin karakterler üzerine sebep olduğu yıkım ve etkiyi konu edilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Doğa, Ekoloji, İnsan ve Zeminin Verimliliği, Rejenerasyon

Introduction

To begin with, similar to the weather's effect on human mood, characters in the play are deprived of their inner peace and happiness because of the destruction done to natural flora. As a result of two World Wars, the atrocities of Nazi camps, and creation of atomic bomb a fear of apocalyptic ending is reflected in the play. Those scientific and political upheavals brought a consciousness of man's inclination to savagery and still, small voice of the ruinous force of investigative learning. Likewise thwarted expectation with both the liberal and social hypotheses about financial and social advancement brought an absence of good confirmation and decrease in religious confidence. In addition, because of the total destruction of environment, mankind went through a wide despair and hopelessness, and conditions casted a gloom on people's inner peace. The source of human being's unhappiness, despair and hopelessness is arrayed with the disharmony between human and destruction of nature.

Nature provides the necessary elements to sustain human life on earth. The destruction of nature means the destruction of the support systems of the environment that may result in life-threatening consequences. Therefore, the damage inflicted will eventually affect the life cycle of humankind. Because environment sustains life, it also plays a crucial role human's psyche.

As a result of destruction of environment through wars, social and political upheavals humankind has been led to investigate his inner world, self and his own existence. Wars have had devastating results on human psyche and environment, which are related because of the traumatic experience that occurs thereof. Connection between the physical world and human psyche is illustrated through the stage setting in *Endgame*. The setting reminds of a skull with two ashbins, and two windows: the windows as eyes, and the characters as mind, finally ashbins as nostrils. This desolated area appears to have suffered a catastrophe of great magnitude. The gloomy atmosphere of outside is further emphasized by the continuous loss of light through the windows of the room. The use of objects, gloomy images and a deliberately designed dreadful scene outside are all employed to create the sense that the catastrophe has devastated the nature along with characters' psyche, which are intertwined. Hamm describes the end of the world through the mad painter's story:

HAMM: I used to go and see him, in the asylum. I'd take him by the hand and drag him to the window. Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All that loveliness! [Pause.] He'd snatch away his hand and go back into

his corner. Appalled. All he had seen was ashes. [Pause.] He alone had been spared.

[Pause.] Forgotten. [Pause.] It appears the case is... was not so... so unusual.

In fact, the end of the world has come and those characters are spared and the play shows us a day in the lives of the last survivors. For them, time has stopped and so is the life and regeneration. Clov states the 'time is as usual' and indeed it is frozen. The vicious cycle of events are further depicted with the opening line 'finished'. It is finished because the outside world is dead and empty. Clov goes on stating 'nearly finished', and this 'nearly' refers to a loophole in which the whole play takes place. These lines illustrate the fact that destruction of the outside world has driven them crazy and time has become a torture which never stops. Hamm wants to stop the time and in his soliloquy, he recites his desperate need to get out of this loophole;

Enough, it's time it ended, in the shelter, too. (*Pause.*) And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to...

to end. Yes, there it is, it's time it ended and yet I hesitate to— (*He yawns.*) —to end.

End is nowhere in sight. He does wish to bring a halt but he is hesitant, as he knows there is no way to do it. Hamm states, 'we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!' His optimism for living or regeneration in essence is meaningless because as long as the time remains same and does not go any forward it will not bring any heal to their misery. In fact, it is the time itself that makes it worse, and the characters are doomed to an endless torture without the notion of time.

The sense of loss and psyche are dominant throughout the play. Boulter states 'Beckett signals an awareness of how melancholia pervades the world of Endgame by continually foregrounding his characters' peculiar relation to temporality, to time.' (Boulter, 2008, p. 48).

NAGG: I've lost me tooth. NELL: When? NAGG: I had it yesterday. NELL (elegiac): Ah yesterday. (They turn painfully towards each other".

The way Nell talks about yesterday shows how nostalgic she is towards past. Given the fact that their condition is full of a great pain, her nostalgia can be justified. The unnamed catastrophic event (possibly a nuclear war) has devastated the nature as exemplified by Clov. 'There's no more nature, the whole place stinks of corpses,' and Clov asks, 'The whole universe?' The statement here shows that once there was something meaningful in their lives and it was nature, however it's gone and the characters cannot handle this loss. As life has become unbearable, and to kill the pain or escape from this painful reality, Hamm repeatedly asks Clov for a painkiller, and Clov's response is that the time for it has not yet come. At the end, he says: 'There's no more pain-killer' which indicates that there is no escape. In fact,

Hamm knows the answer, but he never gives up his constant demand to show that he exists. Another possible explanation to his demand could be based on Freud's topographical model of how mind functions. According to Freud, in the conscious part of psyche the repetitive patterns are stored and these memories are stored into another part called preconscious. Charles Bresler states, 'The preconscious is the storehouse of memories that the conscious part of the mind allows to be brought to consciousness without disguising these memories in some form or another.' (Bressler, 2006, p. 148). The constant demand for painkillers is actually the surfacing of suppressed feelings. The idea of regeneration is considered as a treat and feared by the characters. Clov says 'Light! How could anyone's light be on?' he refers to the dreadful event had happened which wiped out life on the face of the earth. At some point Hamm yells 'rat! Are there still rats?' The existence of rats surprises him as rat might indicate survivors other than themselves. The catastrophic event effects in the play are further depicted when they talk of a flea.

CLOV: [Anguished, scratching himself.] I have a flea!

HAMM: A flea! Are there still fleas?

CLOV: On me there's one. [Scratching.] Unless it's a crablouse.

HAMM: [Very perturbed.] But humanity might start from there all over again!

Catch him, for the love of God! CLOV: I'll go and get the powder.[Exit CLOV.]

HAMM: A flea! This is awful! What a day!

[Enter CLOV with a sprinkling-tin.]

CLOV: I'm back again, with the insecticide.

HAMM: Let him have it!

[CLOV loosens the top of his trousers, pulls it forward and shakes powder into the aperture. He stoops, looks, waits, starts, frenziedly shakes more powder, stoops, looks, waits.]

CLOV: The bastard!

The idea of regeneration is the central theme in the story of Noah. Yet, regeneration in this play is of something feared most. Thus, the idea that there is a possibility for regeneration and potential for survival therefore a contribution to their endless wait in the shelter freaks them out. This has deprived them of their health and sense as Hamm begs 'But humanity might start from there all over again!' Another fear of regeneration is the sudden appearance of a boy outside which is considered as a threat. Clov plans to kill that boy because he poses a danger as he represents a possible regeneration. Hamm urges him 'If he exists he'll die

there or he'll come here and if he doesn't.' Being in this world is already painful enough and idea of staying alive or going through the whole past events torments him immensely. He asks about it to Clov and when Clov begins to tell, it is clear that outer world is as bare as inside.

Clov: Let's see. (*He looks, moving the telescope.*) Zero. . . (*he looks*) zero... (*he looks*) and zero. Hamm: Nothing stirs. All is – Clov: Zer – (*violently*): wait till you're spoken to! (*Normal voice*) All is ... all is ... Hamm: all is what? (*Violently.*) All is what? Clov: What all is? In a word? Is that what you want to know? Just a moment (*He turns the telescope, turns the telescope, turns towards Hamm*)
Corpsed.

For Clov, there is nothing worth seeing outside. Ironically, Hamm is blind while for Clov there is hardly anything out there to see. As such, there is no difference between their visions. As the characters appear on stage already wounded, it refers to the fact that they are 'almost finished' or 'at the end.' But that end is painful and not likely to come in the near future.

As the last survivors of catastrophic event, the characters are wounded physically and emotionally. Clov says, 'I can't be punished any more.' Hamm asks, 'Can there be misery loftier than mine.' They believe their punishment is already worst of all and cannot be any worse than what it is now. On top of the fact that they are handicapped, endless wait becomes even more torturous. While Hamm is blind and unable to walk Clov is unable to sit. On the other hand, Nagg and Nell are missing legs, and lost their hearing and sight. What one character lacks the other has it. Beckett implies that no one has all faculties intact upon this catastrophe; they depend and take it out on each other at the same time. When Clov says that there is no more nature, Hamm mentions: 'We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!'. His statement is an indication to the loss of forests and plants. As CLOV states: If they were going to sprout they would have sprouted. [*Violently*] They'll never sprout.". So the decay will continue without a proper end, because, everything has lost its meaning one way or the other.

The loss of meaning is demonstrated in the play either words lose their meaning, or the characters perceive their lives as meaningless, or the characters mean something to each other. For instance:

HAMM: We're not beginning to... to... mean something?

CLOV: Mean something! You and I, mean something! [*Brief laugh.*] Ah that's a good one.

HAMM: I wonder. (*Pause.*) Imagine if a rational being came back to earth, wouldn't he be liable to get ideas into his head if he observed us long enough. (*Voice of rational being.*) Ah, good, now I see what it is, yes, now I understand what they're at! (*Clov starts, drops the telescope and begins to scratch his belly with both hands. Normal voice.*) And without going so far as that, we ourselves ... (*with emotion*) ... we ourselves ... at certain moments ... (*Vehemently.*) To think perhaps it won't all have been for nothing!

Hamm imagines what would happen if a rational man observe them. They are lost in oblivion and far from making sense even to themselves. This above statement indicates the desire for a meaning and demonstrates the inadequacy of words as it is experienced by their psyche.

Clov's mentions the inadequacy of words:

'I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent.' The characters' inability to have a proper a connection with each other illustrates their deformed psychic condition.

The characters' psychological condition displayed through their interaction with each other. Clov threatens to leave Hamm and does on a few occasions, but he is never able to do it completely. Similarly Hamm constantly demands Clov to leave him alone but pulls him back before he does so. Both put up with each other. Thus, their empty lives are filled with unyielding pain. The fear of loneliness and abandonment scares them both, especially Hamm. Although he constantly demands Clov to leave, his dependence on him is obvious. He needs him to push his wheelchair or listen to his stories and even check on his parents at times. He cannot survive and he has no one else but him. His dependence also stems from Hamm's childhood. "NAGG ...Whom did you call when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark? Your mother? No. Me. We let you cry. Then we moved you out of earshot, so that we might sleep in peace..." .The relationship between Hamm and his father is of hatred. Hamm calls Nagg 'accursed progenitor' 'accursed fornicator' and 'Scoundrel! Why did you engender me?' blaming his father for his existence. His resentment towards being alive and going through this pain is channeled at his father. As Lawley mentions,

Endgame represents parenting or "whelping" as an appalling act that perpetuates the suffering of human existence, whereas adoption is a voluntary relationship that may beget a sense of gratitude, not resentment, in the child. Horror at natural reproduction haunts the play: for example, the deeply enigmatic ending, which leaves Clov onstage but apparently preparing to depart, seems to be prompted by the appearance of a small

boy in the wasteland outside, a “potential procreator.” (50).

As Hamm scorns and blames Nagg for bringing him to life, he holds him responsible for bringing him to this unbearable life. All these accusation stem from the fact that he feels the burden of life in this impossible life. Yet, the relationship between mother and son appears to be dead. Upon Nell’s death, Hamm does not mourn or show any sign of remorse. He says ‘the dead go fast, life goes on’. The relationship between mother and Hamm brings in mind the Oedipal complex, which claims that a son has a latent desire to kill father and marry his mother. Hamm’s hatred towards his father could be explained by the disappointment he had towards seeing his mother married to his father.

In the play, suffering itself is treated as a game or a joke. Nell says, ‘Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I’ll grant you that. Yes, yes, it’s the most comical thing in the world’. The romantic escape to nature is absurd in essence. Nagg and Nell laugh at having lost their legs in an accident. Hamm finds pleasure in the story of the father who came begging for food for his starving boy and he considers the story to be entertaining. Finally, when Clov turns his telescope on them and tells Hamm: ‘I see... a multitude... in transports... of joy.’ Grieving itself is associated with laughter, which shows how characters’ psyche is devastated. In Freud’s terminology, repression is a defensive mechanism in which painful memories or forbidden desires cannot be accessed easily and it is kept in unconscious part. ‘An operation whereby the subject repels, or confines to the unconscious, a desire that cannot be satisfied because of the requirements of reality or of the conscience.’ (Turchwell, 25). The undesirable feelings and memories have been buried in the unconscious.

HAMM: [Wearily.] Quiet, quiet, you’re keeping me awake. [Pause.] Talk softer.

[Pause.] If I could sleep I might make love. I’d go into the woods. My eyes would see... the sky, the earth. I’d run, run, they wouldn’t catch me. [Pause.] Nature! [Pause.]

There’s something dripping in my head. [Pause.] A heart, a heart in my head. [Pause.]

NAGG: [Soft.] Do you hear him? A heart in his head!

Despite the desire for an end and peace, the play suggests the impossibility of both under the circumstances. Clov's declares his desire for order: ‘ a world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust.’ The only desired way out is death. And by the end of the play, Hamm says that the story has ended: ‘Moments for nothing, now as always, time was never, and time is over, reckoning closed and story ended.’ However, *Endgame* comes to a temporary end; as it suggests a re-beginning. As Hamm states, ‘The end is in the beginning and yet you go on’. The absence of an ending shows that the process will

begin again gives the sense that a proper end is never possible.

In conclusion, characters are trapped in vicious cycle of torture and do not have the capacity to change it. They keep busy to pass the time, without a real purpose, and without the ability to show any remorse over losses or form a meaningful connections with others as a result of an unnamed catastrophe. Since nature has a profound effect on human psyche and well – being, all characters are moody, and unhappy. Throughout the play, Hamm and Clov indicate their desire for an end. And yet, they are far from being able to do it. At the end of the play, Clov is about to leave but he remains frozen, stands motionless just like he was at the beginning of the play. Their final dialogues point to another vicious cycle as the ending suggests that it will begin again, and it will go on and on. As it was mentioned earlier, in psychoanalytical point of view, characters bring surface their suppressed feeling or bury undesired ones.

Conclusion

God's object of wrath and blessing, the fertile ground is destroyed in the play. Although it is implicitly mentioned, the catastrophic event has devastated the land, nature, and living organisms. The play also plays with the idea of great flood and Second Creation. When great flood was over, Noah had to wait for 40 days before leaving the ark. When the land was dry and fertile, he was able to leave and start the second creation. Hamm, son of Noah, was the second regenerator of humanity. Yet, bible refers to him as cursed for his indiscretion towards his father. The curse manifests itself in Beckett's play Endgame. The curse is realized by his being sterile and there is no possible regeneration upon this catastrophe. The sole survivor of the event has crippled them in many ways, but above all the nature's fertility has stopped along with human capacity to reproduce. The apocalyptic ending has had devastating results on character's psyche. Character is deprived of their inner peace eternally. As such Beckett relays the message that World Wars, atrocities of Nazi camps, use of atomic bomb has brought the world to its end. Human capacity of destruction through science has led the way to loose faith in religion. Because of the total destruction of environment, mankind is going through a wide despair and hopelessness, and conditions cast a gloom on people's inner peace. The source of human being's unhappiness, despair and hopelessness is in parallel with the disharmony between human and destruction of nature.

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