Iulia LUCA

Universitatea „Lucian Blaga" din Sibiu, Administrator al Colecţiilor de Patrimoniu şi Dezvoltarea Colecţiilor de Carte
„Lucian Blaga" University from Sibiu, Administrator of the Patrimony Collections and the Book Collection Development

# The *Mirror and the Lamp* in Beckett's Environmental Vision

The paper deals with an interweaving of five stories of Samuel Beckett and the way environment matters are viewed in today's time. The approach's main concern is to realize to what an extent he perceived his environment as a better link with his origins, as a better definiton of his personality. Thus, I have referred to other studies, especiallly less known writings about his art to argue more convincingly about the main key ideas of the presented literary excerpts. The presented solutions are to be taken as a conclusion to the presented literary and critical apparatus, whence the living conditions and the problems our environment deals with are to a certain extent different than in Beckett's time.

**Keywords:** Mirror, lamp, environment, debris, culture, ecosystem

**Institution's address**: Bd-ul. Victoriei, Nr.10, Sibiu, 550024, România, tel: +40-(269) 21.79.89, Fax: +40-(269) 21.04.92, e-mail: *bcu@ulbsibiu.ro*, web: http://www.ulbsibiu.ro

**Personal e-mail**: *iulia_2depext@yahoo.com*

## The young generations' "green" voice

The following paper proposes to build its argument upon a pop up of the recurrent ideas based on a main interrelation pattern as for instance the renowned remark "divide et impera":

The rich man in his castle
The poor man at his gate;
He made them high and lowly
And ordered their estate[1].

Thus, a social inequality is being 'naturalized' that is literally, presented and perceived as nature or "god-given" when actually it is the product of a specific politics and power structure.

The political system of the left always had sustained that the invocation of nature was always a pretext that the latter was supposed to disguise the political dimension and make social inequity and injustice judicial.

Today's time is very much confronting with the amelioration and fight against the effects of globalization on the environment. By taking as a support of my debate about the sustainable development several literary texts a personal contribution to the raise of awareness of the utmost importance of the green parks and areas for the health of our citizens is offered.

## The cultural background of environmentalism

The renowned journalist and writer Robert Jungk (born in 1913) wrote:

„Die Zukunft hat schon begonnen "["The Future has already begun], „Strahlen aus der Asche"["Shining from the ashes], „Die große Neoliticum Maschine" [„The giant neolithical machine][2]

The young Stone Age period respectively the one that started in 5000 and enchanted progress until 1800 B.C. in the swishing of stone becomes representative through features as such. This is presented to recall the overall picture in which environment development was produced.

We can thus, distinguish in Europe the following main elements or periods of cultural

development:

1. the megalithic ceramics
2. the ceramics of the rope
3. the lace of ceramics
4. the ceramics of the comb
5. and the culture of the bucket globes

**The importance of the people whose name started with the letter "J" in the development of the cultural and religious milieu in the Middle and Modern Age**

We should not forget that the ninth of May is *the* European Day celebrated all over the world. This year 2009 is called symbolically: "The European Year of Creativity and Innovation" and the issue on pollution is the major issue on debate all over the planet.

Nevertheless, we can mention some guiding figures that are emblematic for Europe's culture, religion and faith.

• Julia (39 B.C.-363 A.D.) is the feminine form from Julius that was a masculine name. She was herself the daughter of Augustus, the emperor of Rome.

• Julian, the Roman emperor (361-363 A.D) called by the Christians ''The Apostata" was a divider („Der Abtrünnige")[3] Julius, the second was the friend of the arts and of the sciences and he promoted Raphael and Michelangelo to start the reconstruction of Saint Peter's Church.

• Justinian an Eastern Roman Emperor (527-565) won by the help of his fighters Belisar and Narses the regions of the Western empire occupied by the vandals and the Eastern Gots.

• And last, but not least Justitia was the Roman Goddess of fairness and objective judgement.

• Heinrich Jung-Stilling was a writer that wrote between (1740-1817) and studied with Goethe in Strassburg and became eventually an ophthalmologist:

- "The Life of Heinrich Stilling"
- "Junikäfer" or „Johanneskäfer" his pivotal work is a familiar reference to the 15 mm long hairy brown and yellow may bug; the larvae is very dangerous to the roots of the grass.

Hence, human civilization still fights against the temptation of a nuclear war. The problems of the last century are still present: material needs, violence, egocentricity, "overpopulation", social and national inequality and a very fragile equilibrium that is menaced time after time, it is only one hasty jest and the world could be transformed into crumbs.

In order to understand the current build-up of the biosphere and its functionality as a coherent organism it is necessary to understand the way how it developed across time, the same way we study, for instance, the development of man from the unique cell, the fertilized ovule up to the mature organism built up of numerous organs caught up in a complex organization.

Studies[4] have shown that the biosphere evolved by diversifying several levels from a primitive stage of Terra, on which there could be created the most varied organic substances under conditions of a reducing atmosphere, under the influence of some cosmic radiations, that was qualitatively different from the one that comes to the surface of the current soil. Research done in Germany, U.S.A. and Russia proved this. The main functions that were fulfilled by this stratum that represented a very primitive form of life were:

a.) a primitive photosynthesis and

b.) the building of a material in a colloidal state.

In this stratum appears an event, the organizing of the first living individualized organisms that raise the colloidal material to a level of bio structured material.

**What is the prize of sacrifice?**

The phenomenon of environment pollution caused a problematic debate to stir many questionings after questionings in the mid-term period of the last 20century as human society increased the variety and quantity of its waste, toxic and radioactive products which are all "released" into the air we breathe and into our homes and living environment.

However, for most chemical pollutants caused by rough industrialization, and even for radioactivity, harmful effects may be difficult to demonstrate at low concentrations so there may be passionate disputes between emitter and affected publics. Whereas acid rain became an international issue ozone depletion is truly global.

Through this retrospection into the past the predominant cultural periods of development were tackled and the descriptions of illustrious figures that marked the development of European culture were coined. Samuel Beckett is on of them, but his own vision of environment and nature was one of utmost originality and geniality.

## How does pollution affect society's behaviour?

The pollution phenomenon of the environment became problematic in the 20 century as previously stated and as long as humanity increased the variety and quantity of its waste and toxic products which affect the lives of all organisms on earth.

All cosmic elements are endangered: land, water and air are hugely affected by a variety of pollutants among which noise, heat, smoke, chemicals, sewage, manure and radioactive isotopes[5].

"The Capital of the Ruins" is a fictional story written by Samuel Beckett at the end of the World War II after he had joined the Resistance in Roussillon.

Thus, having in mind the fact that the damage inflicted by the war was huge one can only imagine how much the lost image of beautiful green landscape was present in the mind of the narrator.

On what a year ago was a grass slope, lying in the angle that the Vire and Bayeux roads make as they unite at the entrance of the town, opposite what remains of the second most important stud-farm in France, a general hospital now stands (Beckett, 275)[6].

The waste management constitutes still a big challenge, one that that has to be confronted with much seriousness and dedication, lest we should deal with a degrading situation, similar to that pictured by Beckett in 1946:

German prisoners of war, and casual laborers attracted by the relative food- plenty, but soon discouraged by housing conditions, continue, two years after the liberation, to clear away the debris, literally by hand[7]. (Beckett, 277)

Having in mind the fact that nowadays we encounter a death rate of 4% of the total population by the conditions of bad sanitation and hygiene we can only conclude that the outbreak of emergent waterborne pathogens[88] in water remains a category still to be tackled by our generation[99]; We need to create viable and clean systems from the economic point of view. That includes goods trains and an innovation in what concerns those trains that transport vehicles and ship vessels. Otherwise we might perish by choking and suffocation.

The usage of alternative and recyclable energy sources implies a change or shift of the way to consume and to produce, and an increase in the quality of the air and the reduction of noise[10]. The activation of technologies in the protection of the environment and the separation and division of waste is "highly" and badly needed.

The environment changes in accordance to people's habits and cultural traditions. Thus, the awareness of protecting our environment as it were our "daily bread" and like the air we breathe became an imperative for all European citizens. We do not need caravans or "other means" to become aware of that. The huge number in cars, the commercial naval trade and the usage of spray tubes contribute to the increase of carbo-dyoxine and of the toxic gasses responsible for the green house effects and for the depletion of the ozone layer.

"Sedendo et Quiescendo" is a "perfect" short-story that Beckett wrote in (1950-1952) and which becomes more emblematic of his green vision and voice:

J'aime et je veux paalir. Livid rapture of a Zurbaran St.Onan. Schwindsucht and pollution in a tunnel in the Thebaid. Strange exalted death. Plus precieuse que la vie, the dirty dog![11] (Beckett, 15)

As Beckett's criticism becomes evident here, we must only stress the fact that the realities rendered here are direct results of repeated contacts with several disasters and cataclysms of nature. He was probably implying that the scientific research was very much conditioned by the religious dimension in the efforts of explaining the making of the universe. He felt at this point a huge dissonance between the cultural, religious approach to seeing the universe and the scientific technical approach of appliance of the religious principles in the immediate world and environment. This piece of short prose is very much a reflection of the taste and identification with the events at that particular moment in time.

Thus, by bringing some images of our history into the present time we can only say that the lessons that we got seem not carefully and closely enough analyzed and are thus immediately erased as if by a "magic" sponge. The errors of history are repeated all over again in time like Beckett used to imply and the fact that he does not know if such a beautiful word like "ipsissimosity" ( repeat[1] by the same words all over again) exists rem puzzle and a wonder for the reader:

...whose crisis seemed to correspond
of his precious ipsissimosity if such
word may be said to exist it pleased
think of himself as a kind of eas

George at the Court of Miledendo[12]. ( Beckett , 115)

This piece of short story "A Wet Night" could be regarded as an impressive text which charms the reader instantly.

Pain and suffering become leit-motifs all throughout Beckett's work. It is a daily constant of the environment of man that could sometimes even transform itself into charity and even goodness.

He struck a match and looked at his watch. It had stopped. Patience, a public clock would oblige[13].

His feet pained him so much that he took off his perfectly good boots and threw them away, with best wishes to some early bird for a Merry Christmas. Then he set off to paddle the whole way home, his toes rejoicing in their freedom. (Beckett, 83)

We remark the tonality and intensity of the moment that in itself is crucial and debauching in the life of a man that sacrificed his life for the well-being of his family. If we are to consider that in 5 years from this point in time, the writing of "What a Misfortune", the Second World War started we must not wonder so much about our own nature and not about our own God or reflections of himself in us or others of our own "kind". The environment is our most precious thing!? But do we all have our deserved merited place on earth or within it? I do not know.

Thus, we have a perfect picture of a supreme act of sacrifice of a man for his family and a final act of release and freedom from all pain and suffering.

## Language and environment

Meticulous attention to Beckett's short-prose writings was offered by renowned critics, all the same:

It is a curious and significant fact that the *language* of imagination at this stage in Beckett's development, as it touches the environment, is not representational in the sense in which such language is said to be in some readings of Romantic poetry or the nineteenth-century novel. Having waged a war against threadbare poeticizing on the one hand and against representationalism on the other, Beckett is bound to have something new and interesting to say when he turns to the world of nature. Beckett's early works show how he scorned the habit qua habit of mentioning natural phenomena ("The pastures, in spite of the torrential rains, were exceedingly meager and strewn with boulders"), and his guarded-ness about this and about the "life in the light" in *How It Is* clearly had some influence in the extreme exercise, which I called the attrition of poetry, throughout the Rotunda cycle.[emphasis in the original] (Davies, 173)[14]

We have intentional elision of hyphenated words in the case of several short-stories:

The power of imaginative reality is such that the narrator cannot simply rid his texts of it, as though scraping away dispensable material: the language of imagination has the hidden strength of weeds that push through roads and pavements. After such rigorous attempts to test the validity of this language, Beckett gives it free play in his most recent prose, covering the decade 1973- 83. Beckett is aware that the truth of imaginative reality does lie not only in the experience of the phenomena referred to by language but also, for the artist particularly, in the iconography of language. (Albright, 173)[15]

Although other short-stories of Beckett maintain the same sad and sober tonality as it is always the case with his writing, some preserve some color as for instance blue, the symbol of purity in impressionistic paintings:

But in *Imagination Dead Imagine* and *All Strange Away,* the narrator is notably powerless to prevent the color blue from appearing and unable to counter his language's insistence on softening occasionally to make a harmonious, not dissonant, music. This applies even in the middle of *Ping:* "Only just perhaps a nature a meaning one second almost never blue and white in the wind that much memory almost never..."Davies, 173)[16]

Therefore we encounter several peculiarities which we probably do not consider of using with the same enthusiasm today:

Beckett's characters own bicycles and take the train and use the telephone, but for the most part could dwell in the fourteenth century or the twenty-fourth without seriously compromising themselves. Futurist exhilaration in technology was foreign to Beckett's temperament[17].(Albright, 1)

Beckett's relation to technology is very special and original at the same time mysterious; nevertheless he had his own personal way of

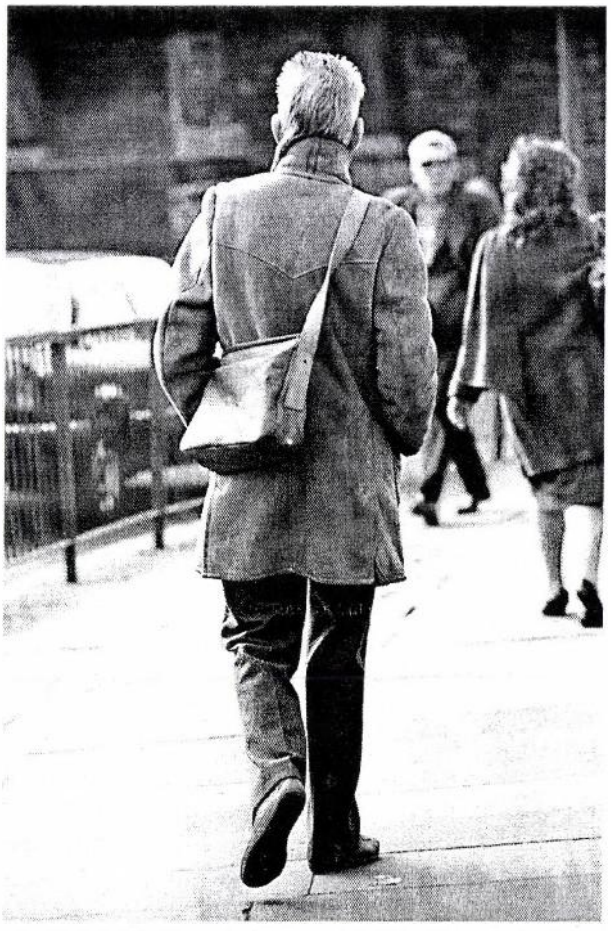
dealing with it:

Aloof, eremitical, Beckett wrote about technology as if it were somebody else's environment. In the script for *Film* (1964), he throws up his hands: "This poses a problem of images which I cannot solve without technical help ... perhaps I exaggerate its difficulty through technical ignorance." On the other hand, Beckett's collaborators often noted that he had a canny and detailed understanding of technological possibilities. This book argues [*Beckett and Asthetics*] that Beckett's whole canon is intimately engaged with technological problems: vacuum tubes, amplitude modulation, magnetizing heads, even computer programs are present either explicitly or in quasi-allegorical form. (Albright, 1)[18]

Beckett's piece, "Lessness", displays a similar "repetition-with-incrementation" progression as „For to End Yet Again". Many of Beckett's pieces, bear affinities with the dramatic monologue and thus contrast with the Language poets' concern with writing as opposed to speech. The influence of Samuel Beckett is noticeable in the work of numerous Language poets, including Bob Perelman, Michael Davidson, and Steven Rodefer, whose prose poems in *Passing Duration,* are reminiscent of the reductive and meticulously rendered landscapes that are bare, timeless and colourless.

Furthermore, the epistemological premises of many Language poets are based on a notion of the self as the product of its cultural and linguistic-environment which is largely incompatible with the subjectivist inwardness characterizing the modernist interior monologue:

There is, of course, no such thing as an abrupt shift from a self-present modernist speaker to a "self-consciously self-alienated" postmodern narrator. A more complex analysis would have to deal with (quantitative and qualitative) *degrees* of self-presence and self-alienation and would certainly bring to light a number of "postmodern" features in modernist narratives of consciousness. While James Joyce's *Ulysses,* for instance, seeks to dilute the self in the anonymous art of parody, Darl and Addie Bundren in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* are two "modernist" characters who are well aware that they "think where they are not."... Other examples of language-oriented writing subverting the technical and epistemological formulae of existing prose genres include, besides Perelman's



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"An Autobiography," Bernadette Mayer's prose journal in *Memory,* Hannah Werner's *Clairvoyant Journal,* Erica Hunt's unsigned and untitled "letters," and James Sherry's novel *In Case,* a plotless detective story aimed at exposing the tropo-logically constructed "hardware" of the traditional thriller. In these works, the notion of genre itself is once again understood as an epistemic and ideologically laden category, rather than as a set of innocent formal features. (Delville, 265)[19]

In the texts of Becketts' later short-prose there is a capture made evident that projects an intriguing and impressive picture of the surrounding landscape.

In the texts now under discussion, the *person* is more affected by grayness than the scene is: *Enough* and *From an Abandoned Work* have fertile landscapes but barren travelers.

In the three *Still* texts and in *Old Earth* (1973-74) the environment is much more intimate than in *Enough* and *From an Abandoned Work,* which relate to an earlier period in Beckett's oeuvre (1966 and

1954, respectively). The journey so crucial in those two texts is over by the time of *Still*. From this point onward the "scene" for nearly all of Beckett's prose will include a house, windows, a tree, a garden, or an open hillside. The "familiar" scene is no longer "one of grandeur and desolation" – an attitude which began with *More Pricks's* "Wicklow full of breasts with pimples" and ended in the desert waste of *For to End Yet Again* – but the familiarly familiar one of intimacy and short distances. If the circularity of the house tempts us to see it just as another rotunda, its lighted windows and wooden construction, along with the far more pervasive other differences between these texts and the Rotunda texts, should serve to dismiss the speculation. The intimacy is not of course always specifically social, since these texts all center around a person mostly alone"; out it certainly calms the panic and nervous energy of the earlier works. An intimate environment like the log cabin cannot absorb impotent anger as "vast frescoes, dashed off with loathing excellently can, and therefore such anger subsides, and other sensibilities take its place. In *Old Earth* the narrator is meditatively absorbed in the summer evening: cockchafer beetles are the immediate object of meditation. *Old Earth* shows especially clearly how an environment of the kind described in it and in the *Still* texts is essential to awakening the narrator to elevated, trancelike states and to his being "dreamt away," in the words of sounds. (Davies, 172)[20]

## Water our health

Water is an inexorable ingredient of daily life and therefore, we need to keep it clean and unpolluted. As water is a priceless resource[21] that can not be taken for granted, access to clean water is essential. At the same time human activities might influence its quality and quantity. The E. U. is putting in place a range of legislation to ensure that drinking water, bathing water, surface water and groundwater across Europe reach a high level of cleanliness in order to protect human health and the environment. Central to attaining these goals is the water framework directive, adopted in 2000 and now being implemented by member states. The E.U. has also recently published a strategy to ensure that Europe's seas and oceans are environmentally healthy by 2021. The marine environment faces many threats like pollution, over-fishing and climate change, to mention only a few. It is imperative that we protect the marine ecosystems that are not only a crucial part of the world's biodiversity, but also the resource base that underpins the economic prosperity of man by coastal regions and thus millions of jobs.

This implies a lot of work on the side of public administration (Agenda 21-for Sibiu) of our town but on the other hand a change in the mentality of citizens is sometimes also very much welcomed.

## Conclusions

The compound sentence which remains unfinished - and seems to be a possible reply to the final monologue of Joyce's "Ulysses" - does not suggest that the world is a possible incomprehensible maize, but only able to show the most various of its faces, capable to constraint and frighten us, reminding us that the ordering of the real surpasses always our logical and mental landmarks.

The work of Beckett evolves in an open way[22] between false and true, among useless people that lost their sense of life. Beyond the death of imagination there has to begin another one. But it is neither the superlatives that do have any charm any more, nor do some positive answers satisfy anymore. The myth becomes a far away remembrance, the people move exactly as some corpses or more precisely, as some bodies dispossessed of some vital organs. Beyond this world there is the nothingness. It generates fear, anxiety, and restlessness in front of the unknown. Beckett's prose was righteously given the label "surrealistic" and was said to have been inspired by painting (Bram van Velde, Malovitch, Arikha, Honthorst, Carravagio, Raffael), music (Schubert, Beethoven) and philosophy (Descartes, Geulinx, Pascal, Democritus) and therefore to possess the tonality and rhythm of music.

The nature of the ecosystem is affecting minor fluctuations that may be magnified by the interactions between species: for instance, the detrimental effect of pesticides can have on bird populations. Monitoring pollution pathways and effects is a formidable issue for environmental scientists, but solving pollution problems is more than a technical issue.

What do we choose? Is it the relative truth or the *aura mediocris* that we search for? Hopefully it is not only a single one solution that we choose. It is high time that we searched for viable solutions with a long term effect. Beckett's environmental "problems" and his way of dealing with this delicate issue were in direct relation with the war. Today we have to confront with other difficulties as for instance global warming and we would resort

to similar or alternative ways of confronting these very confusing and even controversial issues.

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