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Remembering, Repeating and Working through in Psychoanalysis and Culture Today

PANEL :

Hope in a Time of Cholera. Psychoanalytic Reflections

Hope and Hopelessness in Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" and in clinical practice

Author Liliana Pedrón Martín

Note: A reedition of the film version "Waiting for Godot", including the sequences that are quoted in the paper, will be projected. (10')

Introduction

Hope and hopelessness, as all affects, are reflected through an expressive modality derived from thoughts organized from an unconscious dynamics. Hope, from a psychoanalytic perspective, may be seen as the expressive modality of the logic of pleasure and is related to the pair desire and prohibition. From the same perspective, hopelessness may be related to the pair love and hate and its purpose is to keep the relationship with an internalized primary object. This, at an early stage of psychic development, became an element of frustration for the subject and, as a consequence was turned into the negative of love. Therefore, as such it needs to be permanently underrated and devalued. This logic of hopelessness connected with displeasure appears when the void of the self is more consistent than its achievements and it can be seen in the sadomasochistic relationship. The objective of these modalities of thought intertwined with hope and hopelessness, is to avoid emptiness.

These ideas based on Freud and developed by Green enable us to widen our conception of thought which wouldn't just be attributed to a logic of secondary process. Psychic reality also works through the rules of primary process. Affect holds the belief that the wish will be fulfilled. Outside reality will not be taken into account. From this perspective, hope has a disguising effect that prevents contact with disappointment

The play "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett will be used to exemplify these processes of thought that include hope and hopelessness as affective modalities. Once more the interrelationship between literature and psychoanalysis will enable us to understand the complex range of manifestations that psychic life reveals.

Beckett created an interaction of the characters that is liable to be decoded as an oneiric structure. The play is the result of a secondary elaboration but it is also structured with elements of the primary process to express affects connected with the life and death dilemma.

Moving from this level to our clinical language we see these characteristics mainly in borderline personalities, where splitting and disavowal are basic and relevant mechanisms. This way of psychic functioning that takes place in clinical situations of difficult approach will also be seen in the psychoanalytic relationship throughout the negative therapeutic reaction.

Samuel Beckett had a brief but intense psychoanalytic experience with Wilfred Bion. The author of *Waiting for Godot* faced his own analytic process with distrust, lack of appreciation and by sinking into hopelessness.

All in all, although this situation brings about the interruption of the analysis certain vicissitudes of Beckett's analysis with Bion will allow us to work on the effect that this experience had in their creative potential.

From a literary point of view. ¹

Beckett's genius lies in his ability to express the subject's dilemmas in the language of dramatic narrative, the topic of the void of subjectivity constantly worried him and he expressed it throughout his work.

"*Waiting for Godot*" is a play that does not tell a story, as Esslin has pointed out in his essay on Beckett, it explores a static situation:

On a country road two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon are waiting. They believe they have an appointment with Mr. Godot who fails to turn up. The second act of the play repeats the same pattern, the two tramps have met another complementary pair of characters, Pozzo and Lucky, master and slave who are equally complementary but at a more primitive level. There is also a messenger who keeps on repeating: "Mr. Godot cannot come today but he will do so tomorrow"

¹ [Literary Research by Beatriz Chardon.Prof.English Literature \(National degree\)](#)

In each act Vladimir and Estragon attempt suicide but fail. There is a purpose behind all this. The idea is to emphasize the sameness of the situation. *“The more things change the more they remain the same”*. (French version)

The subject of the play is not whether Godot will finally turn up but the process of waiting. The act of waiting is an essential aspect of the human condition. It is in the act of waiting that we experience the flow of time. As Pozzo says *“one day is like another and when we die we might never have existed”*

Vladimir and Estragon live in hope because they are waiting for Godot who will bring the flow of time to a stop. Vladimir and Estragon are constantly talking. Language is used to pass the time and forget the futility of their waiting. Language loses its function and dialogue is just a game, a pastime. From a psychoanalytic point of view this can be read differently; sense can be made out of nonsense.

Vladimir expresses the hope that Godot will come and this will change their situation. Estragon remains skeptical and has to be reminded about Godot. As they have complementary personalities they depend on each other and have to stay together.

Pozzo and Lucky , the other couple in the play, are complementary in their natures as well. Pozzo is rich and powerful and Lucky is weak and poor, he dances and sings to please his master.

If we compare Pozzo and Lucky with Vladimir and Estragon we can clearly see that in Pozzo and Lucky ´s case they are on a journey with no apparent aim but in the case of Vladimir and Estragon, the act of waiting has a purpose in itself. Whether Godot is going to turn up and stop their situation is completely irrelevant . This brings us to our starting point and the prevailing theme of the play. Waiting makes them forget the passing of time and Vladimir says so *“ What´ s certain is that the hours are long and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings... which may at first sight seem reasonable until they become a habit”*. They are waiting from irrational habit and we should bear in mind that for Beckett *“habit was the cancer of time”*. It can also be said that according to Beckett *“all human beings carry the seeds of depression and disintegration within the deeper layers of their personality”*. The success of this play lies in the fact that we are confronted with concrete projections of our deepest fears and anxieties.

Eva Metman, who wrote a remarkable study of Beckett's plays, expressed:

"... the hope, the habit of hoping, that Godot might come after all, is the last illusion that keeps Vladimir and Estragon from facing the human condition and themselves in the harsh light of fully conscious awareness"

We have to mention the fact that Beckett went a step further than most existentialists writers because he had the ability to express the essence of metaphysical anguish through form. He gave it a shape.

As Beckett said: in his essay on Joyce's *Work in Progress*: "*the form, structure and mood of an artistic statement cannot be separated from its meaning, what is said in it is indissolubly linked with the manner in which it is said, and cannot be said in any other way*".

Although it cannot be said in any other way it has a multiple range of interpretations This is exactly just the point in which Beckett's genius lies. Godot has only one possible text but a thousand readings

The essence of the play according to Esslin is the ebb and flow of the uncertainty from the hope of discovering the identity of Godot to its repeated disappointment.

Hope and Hopelessness seen from the interrelationship between psychoanalysis and literature in *Waiting for Godot*

The hope that Godot may turn up goes together with hopelessness and the threat of disillusionment. When the possibility that Godot, condensation of God, may not come, disappointment is expressed through both, the tragic and the comic. Suicide, as the last resource, is planned with the humor of the clownish plot.

Literary critics emphasize the utterly comic of the plot.

From psychoanalysis we can understand that hope has a "covering" effect that prevents contact with traumatic reality. The anguish of death is undercover. The logic of hope is kept through the effect of splitting and the working of disavowal. The belief that Godot may come and the news that he will not are kept at the same time. The logic of desire ensures the permanency of hope.

Besides, the logic of hopelessness, is related to the pair “love and hate” and its main theme is the relationship with the loathed object. It is better to have a deficient internal object than to lose it forever.

From a literary point of view, we can see the affects, hope and hopelessness, working in the two couples that are composed by the main characters in the play: Vladimir and Estragon basically represent the logic of hope: that’s why they wait for Godot; Vladimir, is the one who brings optimism to Estragon. He renews his hope while listening to him.

Let’s pay attention to the characters : (Video)

Estragon: I tell you I wasn’t doing anything.

Vladimir: You must be happy, too, deep down, if you only knew it.

E.: Happy about what?

V : To be back with me again.

E : Would you say so?

V: Say you are, even, if it’s not true.(.....)

V: We are happy.

E: We are happy. ...What do we do now, now that we are happy?

V: wait for Godot. ...

Pozzo and Lucky represent the logic of hopelessness, through a sadomasochist relationship.

Pozzo: (To Lucky) ... (he jerks the rope) Up pig! Every time he drops he falls asleep. ... Up hog! (noise of Lucky getting up and picking up his baggage. Pozzo jerks the rope. Another sequences will be added in the video

And forwards we hear Pozzo’s sorrows

Pozzo: (groaning, clutching his head). I can’t bear it... any longer.. . the way he goes on... you’ve no idea ... it’s terrible ... he must go... I’m going mad .. I can’t bear it any longer ...

The logic of hopelessness carries a constant purpose: to show that the object is bad, insensitive, distant. This is kept as long as a suitable partner, who accepts the assigned role, is found. This one, as seen in *Lucky*, causes the others to reject.

I am using the word logic as a way of thinking, of reasoning, that as pointed above, heightens the mechanisms of the primary process. This logic contains both primary and secondary processes

It is a way of expression and reasoning that includes the parameters defined by Freud from the laws that rule the working of the unconscious. I mean to stress the lack of contradiction and the a temporal character in the sense of the ideas developed in the play.

The processes of displacement and condensation, which, as in dreams, conceal and transform the sense of the words in the text, are also present. Nevertheless, I want to stress the principles of non contradiction and a temporality because they show, synchronically the structure of the text as an oniric one where the processes of the dual logic originate an alternative sense.

The principle of non contradiction can be seen in the paradoxes throughout Beckett's plays. Anzieu, quoting Winnicott, takes the following paradoxes: the paradox of being alone but in somebody's presence; the paradox of creating the objects which were already there; the need of not communicating but on condition of being able to communicate; the paradox of accepting not being a person to become one.

The absence of contradiction becomes evident in the text as well

Vladimir: When you seek you hear.

Estragon: You do.

Vla.: That prevents you from finding.

E: It does

Vla. : that prevents you from thinking

E. : You think all the same

Vla. : No, no impossible.

E. : That's the idea, let's contradict each other.

Vla.: Impossible

E. : You think so?

V. : We're in no danger of ever thinking any more.

E. : Then what are we complaining about?

V. : Thinking is not the worst.

E. : Perhaps not . But at least there's that?.

The statement carries random, unintentional meanings, but by no means less revealing from a psychic point of view. However, from the perspective of conventional logic, they may seem merely contradictory. The language of dreams, as Freud described, is remarkably attracted to put together two opposite senses in a sequence or turning them into a single element. Dreams can put together purity, innocence and sexual promiscuity

The other important parameter is A temporality: The feeling of hope and hopelessness is bound to the topic of time. AMATI MEHLER and SIMONA ARGENTIERI define it perfectly well. They say: "*Hope and hopelessness are two ways of thinking about reality of times to come; two ways of thinking that are connected and intertwined in each human being and that fluctuate in a steady and natural way throughout the individual's life*".

This definition points to a possibility of projecting the future. On the other hand, as literary studies have stated, according to Beckett, the dilemma of the characters that wait for Godot is related and explores an static situation, they express " the more things change the more they remain the same".

The idea is to emphasize the sameness of the situation. Hope and hopelessness are not related with the possibility of looking and thinking the future. Hope, in the play, has a concealing objective that prevents contact with reality.

Whereas time is a main theme all through Beckett's works, the temporal sequence, is not taken into account, the same as in the unconscious dimension.

In fact, successive times may reveal they are not so. Time and space can't be defined by the conventional parameters that would be implied in a sequential logic. The past may be in the present and the present in the past. We will see how this is expressed in the play:

Estr. : We came here yesterday.

Vla. : Ah no, there you are mistaken.

Es. : What did we do yesterday?

Vla. : What did we do yesterday?

ES. : Yes.

Vla. : Why...(Angrily). Nothing is certain when you're about.

Es. : In my opinion we were here.

Vla. : (looking around). You recognize this place?

ES. : I didn't say that

Vla. : Well?

Es. : That makes no difference.

Vla. : All the same... that tree... (turning towards the auditorium)...
That bog.

Es. : You are sure it was this evening?

Vla. : What ?

Es. : That we were to wait.

Vla. : He said Saturday. (pause) I think.

Es. : you think.

Vla. : I must have made a note of it.

ES. : But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday?. Or Monday?
Or Friday?

All these examples lead us to observe in the clinical field the relevance of these logics of hope and hopelessness with a pathological intensity. This can be seen in personalities where the urgency and constant demand is to disavow the feeling of emptiness, of nothingness. The patients that present these pathologies implement extreme defence mechanisms which disrupt psychic stability and are frequently accompanied by severe somatizations. Therapeutic interventions, several times, try to reveal, the contradictions and temporal overlapping.

These patients often fall into a negative therapeutic reaction exactly when they are reaching a moment of apparent improvement. It is very eloquent to realize that

according to the information taken from Beckett's biographies he himself had lived an experience in his analytic process', determined by hopelessness, that was considered a negative therapeutic reaction.

We will see how this situation may be analysed by our psychoanalytic reading as a new path to creativity.

Beckett, the analytic experience, and the path to creativity

Between 1934 and 1935 in London, the author of "Waiting for Godot", started psychoanalysis, four sessions, per week, with Dr Wilfred Bion***. Information taken from Deidre Bair : "Samuel Beckett" 1978

After a remarkable improvement in his suffering, Beckett fell into deep hopelessness, together with worsening of his symptoms, and strong rejection for his analyst. At that time Bion was just starting his professional practice.

Anzieu, in his remarkable study of the relationship between Beckett and Bion, stresses Beckett's impossibility to accept improvement, and Bion's youth to control the situation.

Hopelessness took over the therapeutic process and brought about, at a transference level, the emergence of hatred for the analyst. They might have been caught in a negative therapeutic reaction.

Whereas it is difficult to interpret a situation that takes place in the deepest part of the analytic process, we can infer, that this experience marked both of them.

We have already seen how Beckett's expressive modality has elements of the oneiric language. Anzieu compares free association of the analytic process, with narrative style in Beckett's work. The analytic experience, may have been, one of the elements that he included when he built his code, his tone and his style. Some years after his analytic experience Beckett created the New Novel, the soliloquy technique.

As regards Bion, he conceived the concepts that would review psychoanalytic theory: the relationship container- contents, the primitive agony and the attacks against links. The experience with Beckett was not left aside by Bion either. The concept of the attack on linking is developed from the description of the experiences of negation and

negativity. As regards this point he reports on patients (Beckett might have been one of them) who display a hostile inability to tolerate the possibility of emotional links. .

Hope and hopelessness, as an affective expression that reflects a modality of thought, become evident in Beckett's artistic work and in the transference relationship with Bion. The negative therapeutic reaction, might have put an end to the psychoanalytical process but, on the other hand, it enabled both of them to implement a creative and restoring path.

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Abstract (to be read in attendance the video projection) 12'

Introduction

The play "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett will be used to exemplify the processes of thought that include hope and hopelessness as affective modalities. Once more the interrelationship between literature and psychoanalysis will enable us to understand the complex range of manifestations that psychic life reveals. Beckett created an interaction of the characters that is liable to be decoded as an oniric structure. The play is the result of a secondary elaboration but it is also structured with elements of the primary process to express affects connected with the life and death dilemma

Beckett's genius lies in his ability to express the subject's paradoxes in the language of dramatic narrative, the topic of the void of subjectivity constantly worried him and he expressed it throughout his work.

Plot

On a country road two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon are waiting. They believe they have an appointment with Mr. Godot who fails to turn up. The second act of the play repeats the same pattern, the two tramps have met another complementary pair of characters, Pozzo and Lucky, master and slave who are equally complementary but at a more primitive level. There is also a messenger who keeps on repeating: "Mr. Godot cannot come today but he will do so tomorrow"

Video (11')

From a literary point of view. ²

We can see the affects, hope and hopelessness, working in the two couples that are composed by the main characters in the play: Vladimir and Estragon basically represent the logic of hope: that's why they wait for Godot; Vladimir, is the one who brings optimism to Estragon. He renews his hope while listening to him. Vladimir and Estragon live in hope because they are waiting for Godot who will bring the flow of time to a stop. As they have complementary personalities they depend on each other and have to stay together.

Eva Metman, who wrote a remarkable study of Beckett's plays, expressed:

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Pozzo and Lucky, the other couple in the play, are complementary in their natures as well. Pozzo is rich and powerful and Lucky is weak and poor, he dances and sings to please his master. They represent a sadomasochistic relationship. Therefore they show a mutual dependency too.

Hope and Hopelessness seen from the interrelationship between psychoanalysis and literature in Waiting for Godot

Hope, from a psychoanalytic perspective, may be seen as the manifestation of the logic of pleasure and is related to the pair desire and prohibition. From the same perspective, hopelessness may be related to the pair love and hate and its purpose is to keep the relationship with an internalized primary object. This, at an early stage of psychic development, became an element of frustration for the subject and, as a consequence, was turned into the negative of love. Therefore, as such this object needs to be permanently underrated and devalued. This logic of hopelessness connected with displeasure appears when the void of the self is more consistent than its achievements and it can be seen in the sadomasochistic relationship. The logic of hopelessness carries a constant purpose: to show that the object is bad, insensitive, distant. This is kept as long as a suitable partner, who accepts the assigned role, is found, and, as seen in Lucky, causes the others reject. The objective of these modalities of thought intertwined with hope and hopelessness, is to avoid the feeling of emptiness.

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It is a way of expression and reasoning that includes the parameters defined by Freud from the laws that rule the working of the unconscious. I mean to stress the lack of contradiction and the a-temporal character in the sense of the ideas developed in the play.

The principle of non contradiction can be seen in the paradoxes throughout Beckett's plays. Anzieu, quoting Winnicott, takes some paradoxes; for instance : the need of not communicating but on condition of being able to communicate.

The absence of contradiction becomes evident in the video as well.

The dialogues seen in the video carry random, unintentional meanings, but by no means less revealing from a psychic point of view. However, from the perspective of conventional logic, they may seem merely contradictory. The language of dreams, as Freud described, is remarkably attracted to put together two opposite senses in a sequence or turning them into a single element. Dreams can put together purity, innocence and the comic and the tragic .

The other important parameter is A-temporality: The feeling of hope and hopelessness is bound to the topic of time. But in the play hope is not related with the possibility of looking and thinking the future. Hope, in the play, has a concealing objective that prevents contact with reality.

Whereas time is a main theme all through Beckett's works, the temporal sequence, is not taken into account, the same as in the unconscious dimension.

In fact, successive times may reveal they are not so. Time and space cannot be defined by the conventional parameters that would be implied in a sequential logic. The past may be in the present and the present in the past.

All these examples lead us to observe in the clinical field the relevance of these logics of hope and hopelessness with a pathological intensity. They are not only the language of dreams. This can be seen in personalities where the urgency and constant demand is to disavow the feeling of emptiness, of nothingness. The patients that present these pathologies implement extreme defence mechanisms which disrupt psychic stability and are frequently accompanied by severe somatizations. Therapeutic interventions, several times, try to reveal, the contradictions and temporal overlapping. These patients often fall into a negative therapeutic reaction exactly when they are reaching a moment of apparent improvement.

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Hope and hopelessness, become evident in Beckett's artistic work and in the transference relationship with Bion. The negative therapeutic reaction, might have put an end to the psychoanalytical process but, on the other hand, it enabled both of them to implement a creative and restoring path.