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## MERGING PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE: SARTRE, CAMUS, AND BECKETT

In contrast to the fixed, positivist view of the world and humankind that flourished in the nineteenth century, the twentieth century attested to a new state of society and the individual, which responded better to characterizations such as flux, fragmentation, and pluralism. While in the social sciences psychoanalysis actively undertook the task of delving into the consciousness of the individual, philosophy attempted to examine in conceptual terms this new relationship between humankind and its environment. More specifically, philosophy tackled the re-emerging<sup>1</sup> awareness of the apparently purposeless role and position of man in a world whose existence seems futile. The principal writers who strove to represent the deceptive nature of reality and man's struggle with the irrationality of experience were Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Samuel Beckett. Examined in detail, their work proves that there has been a conscious cross-fertilization between the views expressed by the three thinkers and that Existentialism has permeated their works. While all three have often been characterized as pessimistic, a parallel study may prove that what they all insist upon is active participation. In a world where values and ideals have proved unstable, human beings, according to the existentialist belief, have to reach self-awareness and exercise free will in order to make something of themselves. Man should, thus, fashion his own *existence* and not adopt blindly whatever *essence* society or providence is supposed to have offered him.

In her book on Sartre, Iris Murdoch describes the thinker as the philosopher, politician, and novelist who stood between «three post-Hegelian movements of thought: the Marxist, the existentialist and the phenomenological». «He uses the analytical tools of the Marxists and shares their urgent passion for action». «He takes from Kierkegaard the picture of man as a lonely anguished being in an ambiguous world, but he rejects the hidden Kierkegaardian God».<sup>2</sup> Murdoch's definition immediately places Sartre at the forefront of atheistic existentialism which sought to address more than one ideology of the early twentieth

century. From phenomenology Sartre inherited the need to disclose aspects of the being of humans and their worlds, while at the same time he shared with phenomenologists the belief in the prominence of the subject at the expense of external reality. Husserl's belief that objects in the external world do not have independent existence, but are always processed and mediated through the conscious mind may be considered to be the starting point or springboard for Sartre's existentialist theories. Sartre, like other existentialists, was painfully aware of the void created in the human heart by the agnostic position that many of his contemporaries were adopting. His theory was meant to propose an alternative stance, by which humankind would draw all the consequences of such an atheistic position and use them to its advantage. Against popular belief Sartre's existentialism neither suggested quietism, nor encouraged the dwelling on human degradation: on the contrary, «by existentialism we mean a doctrine which makes human life possible and, in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity». Sartre's existentialism implied that we are directly responsible for what we make of ourselves, and therefore we should not hide behind divine causes or predetermined social roles. In order to reach his ultimate conclusion about the responsibility of the subject, Sartre had to demolish the basic essentialist belief that «everything that exists is defined by its essence, which it carries within itself and which cannot be applied to anything else».<sup>3</sup> On the contrary Sartre believes that existence precedes essence. For a paper-knife, to cite one of Sartre's famous examples, since it is produced for a specific purpose, essence precedes existence. Its function is predetermined even before it is actually manufactured. Man, however, according to atheistic existentialism,

first of all... exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself. If man is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterward will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be. Thus, there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it.<sup>4</sup>

With no pre-established definition of human nature to comfortably fit into, «Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself».<sup>5</sup> «Man is nothing else than his plan; he exists only to the extent that he fulfils himself; he is therefore nothing else than the ensemble of his acts,

nothing else than his life».<sup>6</sup> This theory presupposes the dissolution of predetermined social roles and sets a route of actions and responsibility for humankind. Sartre continues that although people like to think that a coward or a hero, for example, were born that way, in reality a coward has made himself so through his acts: «Man is responsible for what he is».<sup>7</sup>

*La Nausée* (1938) expresses Sartre's theoretical views in literary form. The writer takes a practical approach to show how his theory may affect the everyday life of an ordinary man. By thus diffusing his theory into the controlled literary form of a diary, Sartre successfully manages to explore his hero's moments of crisis, his turning points, as he gradually discovers the nature of existence. The reader is invited to probe the consciousness of a man who is about to reach the anguished realization that nothing in the world carries any inherent meaning or value. The reassuring view that everything which exists is defined by its essence is about to be shattered and replaced by the existentialist principle that existence precedes essence; things exist without explanation or reason.

From the outset of the novel, the hero, Roquentin, states that his purpose for starting a diary is «to fix the exact extent and nature of this change» (9).<sup>8</sup> The change that the hero is initially detecting is a fluctuation in the experience of perception. The example of the pebble, included in the undated sheet which introduces the diary, although explained later, is the first incident which arouses in him the bewildering feelings of alienation and disgust. Similarly, at a café, as he realizes that he has avoided looking at his glass of beer, he stresses that «the glass *itself* I don't want to see» (19). The word «itself», italicized by the diarist, indicates that the essence of the glass, the meaning that he used to attribute to it, is not there any more. Roquentin's method of perceiving from now on abandons an essentialist realistic technique and becomes impressionistic. Permeated by a pale light –which will always accompany his new experience– the cafés, for example, turn into «aquariums, ships, stars, or big wide eyes» (27). However, the transformation does not only affect the inanimate objects surrounding the hero. The most painful perception involves his own face, which, viewed in the mirror seems unrecognisable, an indiscriminate «grey thing» with no human features:

I think it is ugly, because I have been told so. But that doesn't



strike me. At heart I am indeed shocked that qualities of this sort can be applied to it, as if you called a piece of earth or a lump of rock beautiful or ugly. (30)

Not only is the physical object indescribable, but the abstract adjectives, which we generally use to modify materiality, are also arbitrary. Ultimately, in his consciousness, his face grows into an «immense pale halo», a circle of light which borders between reality and the imagination.

Moreover, just as all halos are the same, similarly his face has no distinguishing characteristic; why should it, therefore, belong to him? Divorced from its conventional name and use, a thing becomes *anything*. The instability of the world which has brought about Roquentin's nausea now becomes more familiar than its opposite. His attempt to «fix» the objects which disturb him so with their mutability is unsuccessful because now all logical suppositions, like «this is a gas-lamp, that is a drinking fountain» (115), are merely simplistic. Impeded by the burden of consciousness he is unable to fool himself by limiting his perception to the formation of conventional deductions. It becomes clear to him that «things have broken free from their names. They are there, grotesque, stubborn, gigantic, and it seems ridiculous to call them seats or say anything at all about them» (180). Objects are imposing themselves on him, freed from the reassuring immutability which guaranteed the stability of the world.

While the unidentifiable quality of physical objects and their estrangement from words have been the first factors to cause Roquentin's nausea, the nature of people, on which he ponders throughout the novel, provides him with a second source of pain. Humanity disquiets him because he sees through the duplicity of those who hide behind social conventions. His stroll in rue Tournebride is meant to comfort him because it betrays the stability of social manners; he hopes it will serve as the safety net that will rescue him from the unbalancing agitation. However, Roquentin once again discerns his own alienation from his surroundings and sets himself apart from the parade of stereotypical people, each embodying an established social role, that he witnesses. To the superficial activity of Sunday socializing he remains a passive observer, the outcast who has lost his role as a social human being. Soon he acknowledges that people have got used to blindly conforming to the pretentious trappings of the bourgeois Sunday.

Forthwith he castigates Doctor Rogé's role, which features like a «cardboard mask» on his face, hiding «the unbearable reality: that he is alone, without any attainments, without any past, with a mind which is growing duller, a body which is disintegrating» (103). Similarly, his visit to the portrait gallery reveals to him the unenlightened perpetuation of comfortable roles that people throughout time have lived up to. While society hails the subjects of the portraits as leaders of some sort, Roquentin calls them «salauds» because through their role playing they have hidden from themselves the truth, which is that they are not in reality different from the rest of humanity. Roquentin had himself attempted to achieve what the painter had accomplished in his portraits, the immortality of the role, by writing the history of Monsieur de Rollebon, thus attaching significance to the dead man's existence. This autodidact, however, as Roquentin realizes, is another example of a human being hiding his meaningless existence behind the smoke-screen of his thirst for knowledge and his optimistic love for people. Therefore, he establishes that «an existent can never justify the existence of another existent» and abandons his project (252).

Combining his knowledge of the discrepancy between words and things and the deceitfulness of social roles, Roquentin becomes capable of accounting for what has been causing him the nausea ever since he first picked up the pebble on the beach. Sitting in the park, looking at the root of a chestnut tree, he is suddenly intimidated by the strong existence of everything that surrounds him. Existence is in «rapturous abundance»; yet, if there is no connection between the objects and people—since there are no words which can describe objects any more—then existence is «Superfluous, that was the only connection I could establish between those trees, those gates, those pebbles» (185). They are all «de trop», unnecessary, contingent. Just like the chestnut tree, a physical object with no name or purpose, Roquentin himself is superfluous since he cannot explain his own existence: «contingency is not an illusion... it is absolute and consequently perfect gratuitousness. Everything is gratuitous, that park, this town and myself» (188).

In Roquentin's mind, only music can escape contingency; the song he hears early in the novel «seems inevitable, the necessity of this music is so strong: nothing can interrupt it, nothing which comes from this time in which the world is slumped» (37). In contrast to the world around him which continually changes, music presents itself as eternal

for it does not belong in the physical world, and therefore does not exist; the tune is beyond existence. Consequently, all works of art escape the limitations of the physical world, because once an artist has created them, they exist in an untouchable and unchangeable state forever. Even if the record is broken, Roquentin concludes, the music will still be because it is not superfluous. Creating a work of art exorcises superfluity out of the life of the artists as well: «they have cleansed themselves of the sin of existing» (251). Roquentin hopes that by writing a piece of fiction he will be able to give essence to his existence. As Iris Murdoch has argued, «through the book he will be able to attain to a conception of his own life as having the purity, the clarity and the necessity, which the work of art, created by him, will possess».<sup>9</sup> By accomplishing an original creation –not a history book– he will be able to recall his life «without repugnance».

Albert Camus denied that he was either a philosopher or an existentialist. However, if we acknowledge that Existentialism, in exploring the implications of existence, concentrated on the absurdity of predetermined social roles, the nauseating discovery of an alien physical world, and the lack of purpose in our mechanical, habitual actions, then we can certainly discover a close affinity between Sartre's philosophy and Camus's preoccupations in his fiction. Camus was mainly interested in finding manifestations of this new conception of existence in people and thus described the absurd in non-conceptual terms. His novels unravel considerations similar to those expounded in his mentor's essays; he presents them, however, through human testimony and experience. In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* Camus claimed that «the great novelists are philosophical-novelists» who write «in images rather than in reasoned arguments» because they are convinced of the «uselessness of any principle of explanation». The work of art is «the outcome of an often unexpressed philosophy» and «it is complete only through the implications of that philosophy».<sup>10</sup> It has been argued that his philosophical argumentation is unsatisfactory. *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* offers the spectacle of an intensely humane man attempting to face some of the most pressing problems confronting the contemporary conscience, and in this respect, as various critics have maintained, the light it sheds is ethical, not philosophical.<sup>11</sup> Sisyphus was condemned to repeating eternally the futile labour of pushing a rock up a hill and then watching it roll back down. Camus argues, however, that «one must imagine Sisyphus happy», because he has recognized the absurdity of



it all, that he is without power and hope, and therefore, can revolt against it. This insight gives him victory and makes him superior to his eternal destiny. This story reveals Camus's early optimistic stance, that the life of the individual being can transcend meaninglessness when the absurdity of the world is actually apprehended.

Written in 1956, fourteen years after *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, *La Chute* (*The Fall*) presents once again a picture of a man who has reached the painful realisation that social and moral values do nothing but perpetuate deceit and hypocrisy. This late novel, however, does not offer us the optimistic ending of the previous ones. Camus here seems to have discovered the inadequacy of his own existentialist views of the past. He suggests that even if we have discovered life's meaninglessness and contingency we cannot overcome it. The rebellion that he had taught in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L'Étranger* is now buried under the cynical knowledge that although we have acquired this insight, we cannot change or rise above our human nature. *La Chute* presents the monologue of an ex-lawyer, Jean-Baptiste Clamence, who abandoned his profitable career in Paris after experiencing a few incidents which threw light on the nature of man's existence. His personal hell started the minute he failed –or rather did not bother– to save a woman from drowning one dark night on a bridge in Paris. From then onwards, his life was accompanied by a dry metaphysical laughter, which appeared to scorn his seemingly virtuous deeds. It suddenly occurred to him that his generosity with the poor or disabled had always been a way of satisfying his selfish egocentrism, his need «to feel above» (19).<sup>12</sup> His need for superiority is intensified by his preference for high vantage points like the top deck of boats and open carriages. His own hypocrisy emerged the minute he realised the importance of public applause; his magnanimous deeds always had to be performed in front of an audience, and as soon as there was no one to compliment him, there was no need for inconveniencing himself in pursuit of an unselfish act. Clamence's fall from the state of innocence –or of wilful ignorance, as the case may be– coincided with the fall of the woman off the bridge. Unwilling to get himself wet since no one was watching, he walks away hurriedly. At this moment Clamence's facade of altruistic heroism crumbles; when no one is looking he is a coward.

What is Clamence's true nature? According to Sartre's theory that our actions make us what or who we are, it would seem that Clamence was certainly heroic until that fateful moment on the bridge, when he

exhibits a momentary lapse. As Sartre puts it in his essay «Existentialism», «What the existentialist says is that the coward makes himself cowardly, that the hero makes himself heroic. There's always a possibility for the coward not to be cowardly any more and for the hero to stop being heroic. What counts is total involvement; some one particular action or set of circumstances is not total involvement».<sup>13</sup> In *The Fall*, however, while Clamence's actions, until the bridge incident, were heroic, his motives were most certainly not. After this illuminating incident Camus's character realizes that he was not born the warm, charitable hero that he always believed he was, but that his actions could change him and make him a coward. Moreover, he grasps that his past actions were hypocritical. After this incident he strives to match his actions with his motives and denies his own innocence by assuming a position of complete guilt. If he is a mean and selfish man he might as well derive the benefits of mean and selfish acts: he behaves carelessly towards women and denounces all humanitarian causes. In other words, he changes, in accordance with Sartre's views, but for the worse. In reality he changes his actions to fit exactly the profile of the man he really is. His actions in Paris before his realization were hypocritical while now they reflect his true nature.

After moving to Amsterdam, Clamence takes up a new occupation, that of «judge-penitent». He makes a habit of relating his life story to strangers, stressing his hypocrisy and selfishness, constantly accusing himself, in order to earn the right to accuse them in return. Moreover, he hopes to provoke them into judging themselves: «the portrait I hold out to my contemporaries becomes a mirror» (102). In this way Clamence admits to having «accepted duplicity instead of being upset about it» (103). He wants the reader to believe that he is a happier man after his discovery, tasting, as he says, a «double enjoyment, first of my nature and secondly of a charming repentance» (104). However, the word «charming» suggests the superficiality of his position. Throughout the monologue he was accusing himself, taking for granted that the realisation of his flaws has now exonerated him from them. The fact is that he is now more selfish and arrogant, not to mention hypocritical, than ever. By confessing his sins, he is firstly pursuing the selfish cause of feeling better. Secondly, he is arrogant enough to believe that he is superior to the rest, while in reality he is a coward, who once again is trying to avoid full responsibility for his actions by finding other accomplices to share his burden. In his past life his arrogance



was revealed in his condescending nature towards the less privileged. His present arrogance is revealed in his belief that he has the power to judge humanity. What he really wishes is that by the end of his speech, the listeners will have forgotten his own depravities, and feel grateful to him for pointing them towards their own truth: «I pity without absolving, I understand without forgiving and above all, I feel at last that I am being adored» (105). Finally he is a hypocrite, «play-acting» in front of an audience, leading them to self-discovery, while in private he has not changed in the least. His vanity still crowns this perverse self-glorification. He has once again reached the summits that he unconsciously sought before his discovery: «I dominate at last, but for ever. Once more I have found a height to which I am the only one to climb and from which I can judge everybody» (104). Thus he is no true penitent; if he were given a second opportunity to save the woman at the bridge he would probably not have done it.

A second time, eh, what a risky suggestion! Just suppose, cher maître, that we should be taken literally? We'd have to go through with it. Brr ...! The water's so cold! But let's not worry! It's too late now. It'll always be too late. Fortunately! (108)

In reality, if he had helped the woman then, he would not have needed «saving» now, because the act of self-sacrifice would have revealed a subconscious heroism which would not require confirmation or approval. *The Fall*, therefore, discloses a pessimistic picture of man's unchanging nature. It is as if Camus is asking the question «and after Existentialism, what?». Realisation of the futility and meaninglessness of life is not anymore the key to existence.

Samuel Beckett's answer to the above question would be «nothing»; life consists of man's persistence to wait, and the gradual realization that there is nothing to wait for. It would be wrong to classify Beckett as an existentialist; he was certainly not a philosopher. However, he did concern himself with the questions that preoccupied the two previous writers and depicted them in his work. Continuous interest in the meaning of individual existence and its relation to the outer, physical world and the flux of time were the issues that constituted his existentialism. In this sense, Beckett, like Sartre, was also trying to draw all the consequences of an agnostic position. The fatherless condition, the absence of the much craved God –although not strictly in the religious sense–

intensifies the feelings of futility and purposelessness, notions represented in images of impotence, paralysis, disease, and decay in *Endgame*, age, sterility, rotting leaves, dust, and dung in *All that Fall*, and embers, a fire dying out, in the play of the same name. In *Waiting for Godot* the «action» evolves around filthiness and stench arising from unclean bodies, which are beaten every day by gangs mentioned in the beginning of both acts. The atmosphere suggests desertion: man left on his own, unable to interpret his condition— hence Didi and Gogo's incapacity to communicate any meaning, or to pass information. Beckett's plays present the frustration and anguish of the human being who recognises that he or she is a stranger in a universe that offers no definition or guidance. *Waiting for Godot* shows that all systems of knowledge— most of all those that present a divine order, the Bible being his first example— are arbitrary and unreliable. If in the Bible the Evangelists cannot agree as to whether a thief was saved during Christ's crucifixion, how can Vladimir and Estragon determine the nature of facts? The futility of existence is well summed up in Vladimir's words, «habit is a great deadener». In other words, the habit of waiting for external or divine intervention, which seems to be what Beckett's characters are doing, gives us but an illusion of purpose, thus deadening the possibility of man's making something of himself, defining his own existence.

One of the elements that accentuates the theme of futile existence in Beckett's work is the notion of time as a spiral. Events are repeated making life a monotonous compilation of meaningless and identical patterns of action and speech. For most of his protagonists it is as if time does not exist, or if it does, it is standing still since progression can only mean repetition. Since there is no time there is also no memory. Estragon cannot remember Pozzo and Lucky; he needs physical evidence to convince him, while Vladimir desperately tries to establish the memory of something in order to give meaning to their existence. If two people remember the same events then these events must in truth have taken place. They spend their time waiting for a future, their only consolation being that there is a tomorrow, not realizing that tomorrow is the same as today. In this, Beckett implies, they are like humanity, which drivels away its life postponing action and waiting for a far off event, which will alleviate the boredom. In the same way time is ambiguous in *Endgame*. Actions are repeated unintelligibly, as the characters are waiting for an end: «All life long the same questions, the same answers», moans Clov. Time has slowed to a stop because the chara-

acters are clinging to dead ideas. In *Krapp's Last Tape* past and future merge with the present as the character witnesses the delineation of both his selves at the same time and place. Through his tapes he recaptures lost moments, fragmented painful memories surviving from the wreckage of time, reminding him that what is lost is irreparable. Henry in *Embers* is haunted by a past in the form of ghosts and the sea, the sound of which is continuously piercing his head. He talks aloud in order to exorcise the past, and like Krapp he is unwilling to engage in life. In *Happy Days* Minnie is also sustained by her memories of her first ball and her first kiss. Now her life is trapped in a repetitive cycle of habitual actions, while her increasing immobility represents the futility of trying to cling to «the old style», values imposed by hollow social codes.

Immobility is another characteristic of *Waiting for Godot*. Vladimir and Estagon constantly talk of leaving, without ever moving. Their life revolves around talking and taking naps, while they avoid any sort of activity that would require strenuous effort. They babble on for four pages in the play before they are actually tempted with money to help the blinded Pozzo. Although they agree that action is the only thing that makes time go by, they are inclined to admit that «nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful»; «nothing to be done». Although Pozzo, Lucky, and the boy do come and go, the main characters' inability to remember such appearances ironically denies their presence on stage. Each act ends with the words, «Yes, let's go. *They do not move*». With his stage directions Beckett is showing that, without a definition of self and a purpose, life leads nowhere. The road, with which the playwright furnishes his stage, and which implies journeying and progress, ironically is not used by the protagonists.

In his early novel *Murphy* (1938), Beckett explores his main existential concerns by penetrating the mind of a lonely individual who wishes to be totally disconnected from the contingencies of the world. Murphy is introduced sitting naked in a rocking chair, rocking himself violently, tied up from head to toe:

He sat in his chair in this way because it gave him pleasure! First it gave his body pleasure, it appeased his body. Then it set him free in his mind. For it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in his mind. (6)<sup>14</sup>



Like Roquentin, Murphy abhors the superficial world of physical reality and wishes to free himself from the traps set by senses and desires. The world of «sights and sounds» bores him and he wishes not to belong to it. Murphy has realized that living involves repeating the same meaningless habitual acts every day. The first sentence of the novel stresses the static mode of living, where, as in Beckett's plays, «nothing happens»: «The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new» (5). Similarly, man's routine of physical activity evolves necessarily around «eating, drinking, sleeping and putting his clothes on and off» (5). What disgusts Murphy most is that to perpetuate this hated physicality he is obliged to pursue an even less meaningful everyday activity: work. However, while the sun did indeed have no alternative, man does by possessing a mind which requires intellectual, not just physical, nourishment. For Murphy, «life in his mind gave him pleasure»; he realizes, nevertheless, that the word «pleasure», being usually associated with the physical realm, «was not the word» (6). He defines pleasure as the result of one's ability to free one's mind from time and find, as Richard Coe has put it, «the timeless Void of absolute existence».<sup>15</sup> Timelessness, or «essence» as Sartre's Roquentin would define it, is achieved in the life of the mind, which in Murphy's case is depicted as a «closed system», «a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without» (76-77), to which he retires to escape the physical world. The only external equivalent to his mind that he can find is the padded cell of the lunatic asylum, the most «credible representation of what he kept on calling indefatigably, the little world» (125). In this asylum he finally finds others similarly disconnected from the outer world. He deems them lucky to be inhabiting such a «sanctuary», having «escaped from a colossal fiasco» (123). By associating with the inmates, especially during a game of chess with a schizophrenic, Murphy experiences his Roquentin-like epiphanic moment: his apprehension of nothingness. Freed from the tyranny of the senses, he welcomes his realization as if he had found the key to existence.

Although all three writers discussed were influenced by Existentialist philosophy, they dealt with it in their own individual way, attempting to find, in Beckett's own words, «a form that accommodates this mess». By exploring the influence of existentialist beliefs on various individuals, all writers demonstrated both the success but also the failure of their beliefs. If their characters seem unsatisfactory –undeveloped or

ineffectual— in certain cases, it is because they reflect the reality of their times. Twentieth century literature provides no happy endings to its readers. The above writers, together with authors like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and T. S. Eliot, being mainly concerned, among other things, with the despair of modern man and the chaos and fragmentation of consciousness and society, were impelled to search for explanations of man's mental condition by unfolding the various levels of consciousness. Existential theories and the realisation of the absurdity and superfluity of existence showed that logical deductions which until then gave order and stability to the world were no longer reliable. Man's despondency in the Twentieth Century required new forms of expression, often unrealistic, as in the works cited here, which presented in conceptual terms the inadequacy of mere existence.

## NOTES

1. «Re-emerging», because ideas about the futility of existence have flourished since the time of Aristophanes.
2. Iris Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (London: Collins, The Fontana Library, 1969) 7.
3. Brian Masters, *Sartre: A Study* (London: Heinemann, 1970) 2.
4. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, trans. Bernard Frechtman and Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Castle, n. d.) 15.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 32.
7. Ibid., 16.
8. Page numbers refer to Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Robert Baldick (1938; London: Penguin, 1965).
9. Murdoch 18.
10. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (1942; London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955) 82-83.
11. John Cruickshank, ed., *The Novelist As Philosopher* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978) 215.
12. Page numbers refer to Albert Camus, *The Fall*, trans., Justin O'Brien (1956; London: Penguin, 1963).
13. Sartre, *Existentialism* 35.
14. Page numbers refer to Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (1938; London: Calder and Boyars, 1969).
15. Richard N. Coe, *Beckett* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd. 1964) 21.



## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Άννα Δεσποτοπούλου,  
*Φιλοσοφία και Λογοτεχνία: Sartre, Camus, and Beckett*

Το γεγονός ότι ο Υπαρξισμός διαπέρασε αισθητά την λογοτεχνία του εικοστού αιώνα αποδεικνύεται από την προσπάθεια πολλών λογοτεχνών να ερμηνεύσουν τον άνθρωπο κάτω από την επίδραση της νέας θρησκευτικής, πολιτικής, και κοινωνικής συνείδησης. Σε συνδυασμό με την Φαινομενολογία που κατέρριψε τη συμβατική σχέση του φυσικού και υλικού κόσμου και την ερμηνεία τους, ο Υπαρξισμός προσπάθησε να επανεξετάσει, μεταξύ άλλων, την ουσία του ανθρώπου σε μια περίοδο που η θρησκεία δεν προσέφερε πλέον ικανοποιητική ερμηνεία. Μη έχοντας ένα προκαθορισμένο, εύκολο προσδιορισμό για την ανθρώπινη φύση, ο άνθρωπος δεν μπορεί να έχει άλλο ρόλο παρά μόνο αυτόν που του δίνει ο ίδιος ο εαυτός του. Επομένως, η βάση της φιλοσοφικής θεωρίας του Σάρτρ, ότι η ύπαρξη προηγείται της ουσίας («existence precedes essence»), είναι φανερή στο έργο του Καμύ και του Μπέκετ, όπου αναπτύσσεται με τη μορφή μυθιστοριογραφίας και δραματοουργίας.

Το άρθρο αυτό μελετά τη *Ναυτία* του Σάρτρ, τη *Πτώση* του Καμύ, και μερικά θεατρικά έργα καθώς και τον *Μέρφου* του Μπέκετ με σκοπό να δείξει ότι οι συγγραφείς αυτοί προτείνουν μια νέα στάση ζωής που πρέπει να ξεφύγει από τα συνηθισμένα πρότυπα. Τα έργα αυτά ξεσκεπάζουν τους συμβατούς κοινωνικούς ρόλους με το να παρουσιάζουν τους ήρωες χωρίς εργασία και χωρίς προκαθορισμένο σκοπό ζωής. Ο σκοπός αυτός δεν αποκτιέται με θεία παρέμβαση, ούτε με την απερίσκεπτη υιοθέτηση κοινωνικών ρόλων, αλλά με αποφασιστική και ενεργό συνειδητοποίηση και αυτοερμηνεία. Ενώ ο Ροκετέν, στο τέλος της *Ναυτίας*, ελπίζει να αποφύγει την ρευσιτότητα της ζωής του μέσω της λογοτεχνικής δημιουργίας, ο πιο κυνικός Κλαμάνς, στην *Πτώση* υιοθετεί μια διεφθαρμένη στάση ζωής με το να διεκπερεώνει καθημερινά το ρόλο που έχει διαλεξει για τον εαυτό του. Τέλος, ο Μέρφου του Μπέκετ ξεφεύγει από το «μεγάλο φιάσκο» απομονώνοντας τον εαυτό του από την κοινωνία, ενώ ο Βλάντιμιρ, στο *Περιμένοντας τον Γκοντό*, συνειδητοποιεί ότι «η συνήθεια είναι το μεγάλο αναισθητικό» («habit is a great deadener»), μία φράση που συνοψίζει και το έργο των άλλων δύο συγγραφέων, καθώς όλοι προσπάθησαν να

διαγνώσουν την απόγνωση του μοντέρνου ανθρώπου και το χάος και τον κατακερματισμό της συνείδησης και της κοινωνίας στον εικοστό αιώνα.

Catherine Papoutsas

## LE SILENCE DANS LA COMMUNICATION: MARQUEUR PRAGMATIQUE

Toute parole est issue du silence et y retourne selon P. van den Heuvel (1985, 65). C'est peut-être pour cette raison que les structuralistes considèrent les silences et les vides comme des figures de construction, comme des éléments constitutifs du discours.

Mais des questions surgissent telles que: à quoi correspondent ces «trous» discursifs –et textuels– au niveau de l'acte de parole? Quels effets leur présence vise-t-elle à obtenir sur le plan de la réception? D'où vient le sens au silence – parce que sens il ya –?

N'observant que le seul énoncé, la linguistique ne s'en est pas soucié. Mais c'est la pragmatique qui peut offrir le cadre le plus pertinent pour une approche du silence dans la communication surtout au niveau de la problématique de l'implicite et par là même de la contextualisation. Le silence y sera envisagé comme un «énoncé» qui «dit» l'essentiel sous le mode de l'implicite.

La philosophie a observé le phénomène dans une perspective métaphysique qui n'est pas la nôtre. Dans ce paradigme le silence relève de l'inexprimable, de «ce dont on ne peut parler –et qu'–il faut taire» selon Wittgenstein. Pourtant il faut noter que pour la pensée zen «le vide est le lieu du sens».

D'autres théoriciens voient surtout dans le silence une figure esthétique qui, par le recours à l'elliptique et à l'imprécis, vise à appeler le destinataire à la participation.

Les narratologues s'intéressent exclusivement au rapport que le silence entretient avec le temps dans la mesure où il constitue une accélération extrême de la durée.

Si l'on essayait de définir le silence, on dirait qu'il peut être considéré comme une opération discursive, se manifestant dans le discours et référant directement à un acte d'énonciation. Ne possédant pas de support concret sur le plan linguistique, il sera pris, en surface, dans le sens d'une non-réalisation d'un acte d'énonciation qui pourrait ou devrait avoir lieu dans une situation donnée.

Cette notion de situation, définie comme "l'ensemble des condi-



tions psychologiques, sociales et historiques qui déterminent l'émission d'un énoncé à un moment donné du temps et en un lieu donné» (J. Dubois et al, 1973; cf. Ducrot-Todorov, 1972) sert de base pour l'interlocuteur du silence. A la situation, il faudrait inclure aussi le locuteur et l'interlocuteur comme paramètres de l'acte de communication que constitue le silence. D'autre part, c'est le co-texte à savoir ce qui précède et suit un silence, qui est fondamental pour son interprétation.

Une des caractéristiques du silence est sa négativité à savoir que ce qui est à la base d'un éventuel silence c'est l'impuissance ou le refus. L'incapacité du sujet à satisfaire à la nécessité créée par la situation provient soit de l'insuffisance du langage soit de la difficulté de ce qui est à dire (critère de l'inconfort de l'acte d'énonciation). Le refus se fonde souvent sur une révolte qui se dirige contre le discours social dont le sujet récuse l'usage stéréotypé, soit contre l'interlocuteur dont il décline l'offre de communication. Mais «on ne peut ne pas communiquer» selon P. Watzlawick, ce qui signifie que la non-parole est signée au même titre que la parole: on sait bien que le silence «parle» et que son «éloquence» joue un rôle capital dans la communication.

Le silence, acte énonciatif in abstentia, inscrit dans le discours par une causalité contextuelle, produit un manque que vient couvrir la situation et le co(n)texte qui contiennent ce qu'on ne veut ou n'ose dire mais souvent aussi ce qu'on sait. Dans ce dernier cas, le silence remplit une fonction intersubjective dans la mesure où il renvoie à un univers commun à deux interlocuteurs qui rend superflue la parole et dans cette perspective renforce les liens d'une communauté. C'est pour cette raison que dans certaines sociétés, surtout nordiques, les moments de silence sont bien vus. Cette fonction apparaît notamment dans le cas de l'aposiopèse où il s'agit de la passation de la parole à l'interlocuteur supposé capable de compléter l'énoncé soit pour dire une évidence que le silence suggère soit pour verbaliser un mot tabou qui ne convient pas.

Le silence dans cette fonction semble dire «voici ce que je ne peux (veux) pas énoncer: à vous de le dire».

Ce silence se fonde indubitablement sur une vision idéaliste de la communication puisqu'il fait supposer que le destinataire est apte à réaliser, grâce à quelques références situationnelles, l'énoncé que le sujet lui-même a laissé en blanc. Le silence, marquant l'inachevé, appelle toujours à l'activité complémentaire.

En recréant l'intimité interrelationnelle de la situation interlocutive où l'altérité subjective est effacée, le discours du silence fait de l'interlocuteur l'égal du locuteur.

Cette optique optimiste oublie évidemment qu'un silence, surtout s'il est prolongé, peut «glacer» la communication et mettre en cause l'autre dans son être, notamment quand le silence n'est pas accompagné par un signe mimo-gestuel quelconque.

D'autres fonctions peuvent être attribuées au silence. R. Ingaden et W. Iser lui ont reconnu les fonctions de l'indéterminé et du secret qu'un silence implique et qui sont des structures d'appel; les variations sur le plein et la vacuité constituent des stratégies séductrices qui agissent sur l'autre. Mais c'est mettre l'accent sur la réception.

Au niveau de la production le silence a la fonction de «dire» l'essentiel parce que souvent oblige le locuteur à un feed-back, un retour sur le dit. Un silence qui suivrait une question comme «est-ce que j'ai bien agi?» obligerait certainement le locuteur à voir autrement son action. «Un silence abrupt au milieu d'une conversation, dit Cioran, nous ramène soudain à l'essentiel». Le fonctionnement de cette parole absente, tout en n'étant pas prononcée, nous renseigne sur la valeur de celles qui sont visibles, ponctue l'importance –ou l'insignifiance– du dit et dans cette fonction constitue une stratégie des orateurs –depuis les politiciens et jusqu'aux enseignants– qui veulent mettre en valeur leur discours.

Ainsi, quand la parole se retire, il ne reste que le sens plein: le silence avec tout ce qu'il comporte de vrai, ce qui ne se dit pas dans l'usage social du langage. C'est l'absentification du sujet où grâce à des stratégies spécifiques, l'instance d'énonciation s'absentifie par un désinvestissement de sa fonction et où le lieu du retrait devient ce même lieu de la monstration: en se cachant, il se montre mieux: «il y a assurément de l'inexprimable. Celui-ci se montre...» dit Wittgenstein.

Une autre fonction, majeure celle-ci, c'est la réorientation de la conversation ou la réitération d'un énoncé qui contribue à l'intensification du dialogue. Paisons deux exemples dans la pièce de Beckett «En attendant Godot» où le silence règne.

- (a) V. – Ça fait comme un bruit de plumes  
 E. – De feuilles  
 V. – De cendres  
 E. – De feuilles

Long silence

- (b) V. – Dis quelque chose!  
 V. – Dis quelque chose!  
 E. – Je cherche

Long silence

V. (angoissé) – Dis n'importe quoi.

Il est évident qu'un locuteur qui butte sur un silence comprend le plus souvent que son interlocuteur n'a pas envie de parler sur la sujet en cours et il change de sujet pour ne pas le brusquer. D'autres fois, on peut être angoissé par un silence –comme le héros de Beckett– et réitérer la demande de parole. L'une ou l'autre de deux attitudes dépendent aussi du degré d'intimité entre les interlocuteurs.

Le silence, en règle générale, transforme les droits et les obligations des interlocuteurs lors d'un échange. En tant que tel, il est institutionnel comme tout acte de langage, dans la mesure où le statut et la place des interactants dans l'édifice social règlent la poursuite de l'interaction et apportent des changements dans l'état de connaissances ou les dispositions affectives des participants à l'échange.

La théorie des actes de langage repose justement sur la notion de transformation: «L'accomplit un acte illocutoire A dans une énonciation E, si L présente E comme destinée à produire certaines transformations juridiques et les produisant» (Anscombe, 1980, 68).

Défini comme acte de langage, le silence possède une force illocutoire –sa valeur d'action– et un effet perlocutoire sur l'auditeur. Il constitue ainsi «un faire sans dire», le dire lui venant du co(n)texte. Dans un exemple comme:

- L. – Nous sortirons ce soir?  
 I. – (Silence) (allant s'installer devant la télé)



le silence équivaut, suivant le contexte extra-linguistique, à un refus («non») qui transforme le champs d'interlocution et «fait» donc quelque chose; parce que, pour qu'il y ait acte, il faut et il suffit qu'un comportement corporel ou langagier quelconque permette de changer l'état de choses existant, d'apporter une modification à l'ordre du monde, c'est-à-dire, d'obtenir un résultat.

Acte de langage donc, le silence est institutionnel et intentionnel mais non conventionnel, et est certainement non vériconditionnel, c'est-à-dire qu'on ne peut pas lui attribuer une valeur de vérité dans la mesure, où il ne décrit rien, ne rapporte rien mais «fait» quelque chose et requiert des circonstances concomitantes, à savoir, les intentions, pensées, sentiments des locuteurs pour réussir en tant qu'acte.

Mais si acte de langage il y a, il est indirect, c'est-à-dire que pour comprendre la force illocutoire effective, l'allocutaire doit la déduire au moyen d'un raisonnement avec comme règles les maximes conversationnelles de Grice. dans notre cas, un tel raisonnement, basé sur la règle de l'inconcomitance du dire pourrait être formulé de la façon suivante:

- (1) – Le se tait
- (2) – S'il se tait c'est qu'il veut dire quelque chose d'incommoder
- (3) – Vu les circonstances concomitantes, l'incommoder à dire est un refus
- (4) – Son silence donc, peut vouloir signifier un refus
- (5) – Donc, il refuse

Il apparait qu'au delà du contextuel, le silence a un caractère inférentiel et se situe dans le cadre de l'illocutoire dérivé où une ou plusieurs valeurs dérivées se surajoutent à la valeur pragmatique littérale. Seulement, dans le cas du silence, il se trouve qu'il y a absence de valeur littérale si l'on fait abstraction du contexte. Dans l'exemple suivant:

L – Est-ce que tu l'aimes?

I – (silence)

le silence, qui ne signifie littéralement rien, peut pourtant prendre l'allure de différentes actes de langage comme: le blâme («on ne pose pas de questions pareilles»), d'un aveu difficile («oui»), d'un refus («non»), d'une menace («si tu continues à me poser de telles questions, je te

mets dehors»), le co(n)texte se chargeant de sélectionner une valeur appropriée parmi les valeurs virtuelles. On a donc, des valeurs dérivées non inscrites en langue et c'est la raison pour laquelle on a parlé du caractère non conventionnel du silence.

Vu ainsi, le silence est installé dans le discours à l'aide d'un implicite, un non-dit, selon le mode du sous-entendu qui sans le dire fait comprendre quelque chose à l'interlocuteur, le locuteur faisant appel à sa faculté de déduction. Si l'on apparente le sens du silence à celui du sous-entendu c'est que celui-ci englobe toutes les informations qui sont susceptibles d'être véhiculées mais dont l'actualisation reste tributaire de certaines particularités du contexte énonciatif et qui constituent des valeurs instables dont le décryptage implique un calcul interprétatif plus ou moins sujet à caution (décodées par la compétence encyclopédique et rhetorico-pragmatique des interlocuteurs) (Orecchioni, 1986, 39).

Le nombre de supports linguistiques du sous-entendu peut être nul, ce qui est le cas du silence, et de cela dépend le degré d'évidence et sa force d'actualisation.

Le silence, en tant que sous-entendu, peut être interprété comme insinuation, manoeuvre par lequel un sujet plus ou moins mal intentionné, fait entendre quelque chose sans l'affirmer, ou comme allusion s'il fait référence à un ou plusieurs faits particuliers connus des protagonistes de l'échange verbal, d'eux seuls, d'eux surtout, ce qui établit entre eux une certaine connivence.

Mais pour extraire un sous-entendu et par suite le sens d'un silence, il faut certains principes que sont les maximes conversationnelles de Grice. Ces maximes prévoient un principe de coopération («que votre contribution à la conversation soit tel que le requiert l'objectif ou la direction acceptée de l'échange verbal dans lequel vous êtes engagé») avec comme sous-règles le principe de quantité («Donnez autant d'informations qu'il est requis»), le principe de qualité («Dites la vérité»), le principe de manière («éviter l'ambiguïté et l'obscurité»), et le principe de relation («soyez pertinent»).

Il est évident que le silence n'obéit pas à ces principes, ce qui nous amènerait à une impasse. Seulement, dans le cas du silence, il s'agit de l'exploitation des maximes où on peut violer une maxime pour ne pas violer une autre dont le respect engage davantage le locuteur: ainsi on peut se taire, se montrer non-coopératif pour ne pas violer la règle de la qualité et dire des mensonges.

Concernant le silence, on peut énoncer une loi de discours du type: ne parler d'un fait  $x$  à un auditeur  $y$ , cela peut vouloir dire, dans certaines situations, soit que l'auditeur n'a pas droit à l'information soit qu'il doit chercher dans le contexte les inférences qui s'imposent.

Le silence est en quelque sorte, un nouveau langage, la forme d'énonciation la plus pure qui fonde la communication sur une situation pleine.

Et de par son caractère contextuel et inférentiel s'inscrit dans le cadre des faits pragmatiques et constitue dans la communication un marqueur pragmatique.

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## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Catherine Papoutsas,  
*Le silence dans la communication:*  
*Marqueur pragmatique*

Η σιωπή, οριζόμενη ως λεκτική πράξη in absentia χαρακτηρίζεται αρχικά ως αδυναμία ή άρνηση λόγου.

Στερημένη εξ ορισμού της γλωσσολογικής εκφάνσεως σημασιοδοτείται από τα συμφραζόμενα ενδοκειμενικά κι εξωκειμενικά.

Με αυτά τα δεδομένα, η σιωπή εγγράφεται στα πλαίσια της έμμεσης λεκτικής πράξης που ενεργοποιεί τις επαγωγικές διαδικασίες προς ανεύρεση έννοιας.

Οι διαδικασίες αυτές δεν στηρίζονται στα συνομιλιακά αξιώματα του Grice σαν τέτοια αλλά στην επεξεργασία τους.