Conclusion

Beckett’s Responsibility

Beckett once says that the western metaphysics gives reason “a responsibility which it simply cannot bear” (qtd. in Mcmullan 200). This statement tells that reason is insufficient to be accountable for the interhuman relation of the world, and implies that the responsibility overflows the capability of reason. The responsibility is otherwise than finding a reasonable answer or explanation that is to feed the self’s knowledge of self qua self. On the contrary, for the self, the responsibility is an acknowledgement of the imperative otherness, and is consequently insatiable. The sense of guilt or the torment of contrition signals that the self is unable to fulfill the responsibility, for it is belated to respond to the Other. Thus the self wastes the freedom that is given by the Other and allows it to die (Visker 251). The self becomes an expiating agent who is burdened with the responsibility for the Other.

And for Beckett’s Other, Beckett is obligated by his artistic attitude to express even though there is nothing to express. The force of creation tenaciously bites him to the degree of desiring death. For Beckett, to claim that there is nothing is a faith on which that falls beyond being, the realm that the Other inhabits. From his idea of “playing without playing,” “a play without spectators,” and “an expression of nothingness,” we try to reach a conclusion that he is humbly engaged in creation as an ethical action, the Saying. He does not presuppose a coherent structure of his work in his creation. On the reverse, he thinks that there is an incomprehensible command from the Other that challenges his subjective freedom in creation.

By admitting the limitation of the artistic expression and the power of knowledge, Beckett regards the performance as an incarnated “recurrence” for the director, the actor and the spectator who are deprived of the consciousness, being called and awakened to face the unknown otherness that seems to give the self the oppression from without but actually breaks through from within the self. Thus one is set free in this violent strain between the
selfhood and the otherness. Therefore, nothing is not only the suffocated phenomenon of Being, but much more the non-existence and non-place of the Other that constitutes the ethical foundation. In the ethical relation, Beckett is constrained in the endless tension, the living state. For him, nothingness is not suppression, but liberation.

Furthermore, we see that Beckett puts himself in the ethical action of creation, and we see his struggle between his directorial authority and his flexibility in performance, and his role as a playwright and a director. As a director, he is the ethical self that is pledged to his performance as the Other. Beckett insists on some requirements of his play and on the other hand changes himself in each different performance. He is also the author of the law he obeys. He does not think that the author is dead (non-being), neither does he approve that the author is an anchor that localizes and fixes everything (another kind of being for the director or Beckett himself to pursue after). The authorial authority is also the Other that exists otherwise than being (in the case that the director is like the self). In this sense, the author is not God-like because his authority to give a decisive meaning is undermined in Beckett’s creation.

The ethical imperative in Beckett’s world also annuls the sublimation of the aesthetic ecstasy. Beckett is like a hostage who suffers through the ethical action rather than satisfies himself by the artistic expression. Not a philosopher that endeavors to find an answer of being, not an artist that extricates people from the mundane existence, and not a preacher that harangues us about the revelation of God, he gives us a world of a kind of faithful religion that is without religion and of transcendence without transcendence. Like Levinas, he speaks to the world through the sincere exigencies of the ethical responsibility that is betrayed in the interhuman relation.

Therefore we can say that nothing in Chapter One is in fact something in Chapter Three. Both refer to the ethical structure that gets engaged in this world, wherein the horror of Being is recognized, and the goodness of the Other binds the self to being. The relation between
Being and the Other is at the same time separate and dependent to contribute to the ethical structure, which is pivoted on the notion of incarnation, the embodiment. Akin to Levinas, Beckett depicts the ethical action through the bodily sensibility, which is revealed in deed rather than in thought. In their world, the self in incarnation is recurrence that is awakened and liberated from the self-boredom, and binds to a domain outside of being. In incarnation, the self is obliged to be vigilant of the terror of Being, and is thus infinitely struggling. This is not a struggle-freed wonderland, but a worldly reality that living struggles give the self freedom. As a result, dying is a surplus that exceeds Being.

Beckett is obliged to express that there is nothing to express. He is called forth to respond. He cannot not speak. The desire to speak is accompanied with the dread of being silenced in Being. In Beckett’s creation we see that he has an infinite responsibility for the Other, that is, his unknown self, the other directors, the actors, and the spectators. In his theater, there is the living state intervolved in the asymmetrical structure manifested in both of the performance and the text. The performance and the text are bound with each other without sacrificing their singularity. It is the asymmetrical structure, specifically the diachronic temporality that intensifies the acute sense of self-awareness of watching the performance and reading the text. And this is Beckett’s response to the calling of the theatre by taking the responsibility for the otherness. Furthermore, the responsibility for the other in the interhuman relation implies his responsibility for his contemporary cultural context. The responsibility for the Other overflows the self and goes for the infinity, and this is how Beckett casts his responsibility for our present world.