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A Voyage Round the World in Beckett's *Endgame*

Yuka KAKIGUCHI

Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (1958) shows a close association with the sea and has an abundance of marine imagery. The characters confined within the small house called 'the old shelter' (69) or 'the cell' (81) often utter the words related to the sea: a 'raft' (34, 5), a 'gaff' (42), the 'tide' (61, 2) and so on. The interpretations of the play in relation to the sea have been already attempted, and most of them are derived from the biblical narrative of Noah's ark. For example, Jane Alison Hale points out the possibility of the 'interpretation of *Endgame* as a perverted parody of the Noah's ark myth' (48).¹⁾

Although there is no doubt that Beckett incorporates the Noah's ark myth into *Endgame*, which counterpoints the apocalyptic situation of depopulation in the play, it is not enough only to refer to the myth. Yoshiyuki Inoue, who analyzes this play from Beckett's typed papers and notes for *Endgame*, develops the interpretation in the light of the sea and discuss 'the image of the inside of the ship' which the stage space itself has (106).²⁾

Their arguments convince us of the validity of connecting the play with marine affairs, and then I would like to follow their approach and introduce into criticism of the play another point of view concerned with the sea. That is to say 'a voyage round the world.' Speaking of 'a voyage round the world,' we may recall firstly that of Ferdinand Magellan: it was accomplished for the first time in the world in 1522 by returning to the home country of the Victoria, one of the five sails of his expedition, though Magellan himself was killed in action in Cebu islands in 1521; since Magellan's glorious achievement, the thought of 'a voyage round the world' had captivated adventurous daring voyagers in European countries for centuries and not a few of

them had embarked on a voyage. We could mention the names of the notable navigators who fulfilled a voyage round the world: in England Sir Francis Drake (who made a passage between 1577 and 1580), William Dampier (between 1679 and 1691) and James Cook (who made three voyages between 1768 and 1771, 1772 and 1775, and 1776 and 1779); in France Louis Antoine de Bougainville (between 1766 and 69) and Comte de La Pérouse (between 1785 and 1788).³⁾

In this paper I would like to prove that Hamm is a parody of not only Noah in the ark myth but also such once voyagers who had the heart to aim to attain a voyage round the world, and to consider what kind of voyage Hamm takes and what kind of world he voyages round in the play. I am convinced that the discussion shows us Beckett's view of the world and the peculiar features of his age different from the old epoch of the great voyagers.

1. *Endgame* and the Voyage in the 18th Century

I will cite here the scene where a voyage round the world is acted out in *Endgame*.

Hamm. [to Clov] Take me for a little turn.

(*Clov goes behind the chair and pushes it forward.*)

Not too fast!

(*Clov pushes chair.*)

Right round the world!

(*Clov pushes chair.*)

Hug the walls, then back to the centre again.

(*Clov pushes chair.*)

I was right in the centre, wasn't I? (25)

Hamm in an armchair on casters orders his servant Clov to take him for a voyage round the world, and Clov pushes the chair at Hamm's command. This is a voyage round the world for Hamm. Although it is a mimetic or fictitious one and the world is diminished to just their house that is equivalent to the space of the stage, he certainly describes in mind a round voyage from the centre of the stage through

the walls to the centre again as his sea road, which may remind us of the old voyagers' sailing routes starting in their home countries as the centre of the world, traversing the Pacific Ocean and returning to the centre again.

Hamm, in another part of the play, refers to the direction of the south, imagining an escape from the house by raft: 'Let's go from here, the two of us [Hamm and Clov]! South! You can make a raft and the currents will carry us away, far away, to other . . . mammals!' (34).⁴ Eventually the escape has not been realized because of an trivial reason that there will be sharks, but what is significant in this citation is the direction of the south.

According to Yasunori Ishihara, the Pacific coastal waters of Central and South America were called the South Seas, *El Mar del Sur* in Spanish, and were the important sea areas which Spain had claimed sovereignty over. From the 16th century to the latter part of the 18th century many English navigators had plunged into the South Seas and disputed with the Spanish their supremacy. In the end of the 18th century the area of the struggle for supremacy shifted to the South Pacific Ocean, where English and French navigators had embarked in order to discover the unknown southern land, *Terra Australis Incognita* (21-30). As it turned out, the direction of the south Hamm indicates in *Endgame* reminds us of the old great voyages.

Now that we can establish the connection between the old voyages round the world and *Endgame*, the question we have to ask here is what kind of voyage Hamm makes. As I have pointed out in the light of the meaning of the south, the old voyages in different centuries were not the same in some regards. J. C. Beaglehole, who is a writer of Captain James Cook's biography, writes:

[A]fter him [Magellan] three centuries of agitation, elucidation, and verification. Agitation certainly there was, because no process produced problems, sometimes, more easily than it solved them; verification, because in a day before men could navigate scientifically, no geographical statement could be accepted at its

face value. (108-9)

As to the 18th century, Beaglehole sums its features up clearly:

It was a busy century, in science and speculation and writing, in economic expansion and war, in building and art; a revolutionary century, far beyond the confines of politics and social relations. Mathematical physics and chemistry made immense steps; botany, zoology, physiology, astronomy, geography, were all in movement. . . . Navigation could not fail to be affected. (114)

The voyage which reflects most the peculiar features of the century is that by Captain Cook, who made three voyages in the 18th century. The purposes of his first voyage in 1768-71 were the observation of the transit of Venus on the South Pacific Ocean and the discovery of Terra Australis though the continent was denied by Cook himself later; to accomplish these goals, his first ship, the Endeavour, was loaded with various kinds of scientific instruments such as a chronometer, a theodolite, a pair of compass, a telescope, a micrometer and so on (Beaglehole 136); Cook was also accompanied by an astronomer, Charles Green, naturalists including Joseph Banks, and painters to record the landscape or flora and fauna.⁶⁾ To put it simply, science and discovery were the key components.

I think that Hamm's voyage has such features as those of the voyages in the 18th century. For one thing, we can see a lot of scientific instruments in *Endgame*: measurements in Nagg's story, Clov's telescope, a microscope; the thermometer, the heliometer, the anemometer [sic] and the hygrometer in Hamm's story.⁷⁾ The appearance of Clov's looking through a telescope out of the window looks like a sailor who are searching for something worth discovering. For another, there is a scene where Hamm's words evoke a naturalist who is on an unknown land:

Hamm. But beyond the hill? Eh? Perhaps it's still green. Eh?

(Pause.)

Flora! Pomona!

(*Ecstatically.*)

Ceres! (39)

Hamm's story of the man with a little boy takes a form of ship's journals in that the observations of weather are made with the measuring instruments:

Hamm. It was an extra-ordinary bitter day, I remember, zero by the thermometer. But considering it was Christmas Eve there was nothing ... extra-ordinary about that. Seasonable weather, for once in a way It was a glorious bright day, I remember, fifty by the heliometer, but already the sun was sinking down into the ... down among the dead.... It was a howling wild day, I remember, a hundred by the anemometer [sic]. The wind was tearing up the dead pines and sweeping them ... away.... It was an exceedingly dry day, I remember, zero by the hygrometer. Ideal weather, for my lumbago. (51-3)

Hamm, near the end of the play, refers to his story as 'chronicle' (58), which has the meaning of journal. It is the 18th century that a lot of ship's journals were written and published and a literary genre of travels was created.

The close connection between *Endgame* and the 18th century can be assured from another aspect: Beckett and Jonathan Swift. They are both Irish and share a scatological character, and James Knowlson reports Beckett 'had read *Gulliver's Travels* as a child' and 'he read it again' in 1932 (735). Therefore it is no wonder that comparative studies are made by critics like Edith Kern or Frederik N. Smith. In *Endgame* we can notice the influence of *Gulliver's Travels*: the windows placed too high to open without a ladder and Hamm's question to Clov 'Have you shrunk?' (28) are associated with Gulliver in Brobdingnag.

2. The Parodied Voyage

As has been noted, Hamm's voyage round the world and those accomplished in the 18th century share a plenty of features in common.

However, there is an interval of about two hundred years between these two voyages. Hamm longingly recalls the old turn with Clov:

Hamm. Do you [Clov] remember, in the beginning, when you took me for a turn? You used to hold the chair too high. At every step you nearly tipped me out.

(With senile quaver.)

Ah great fun, we had, the two of us, great fun.

(Gloomily.)

And then we got into the way of it. (63)

There seems to be a tinge of nostalgia in Hamm's memory; he may feel nostalgia for the old voyage two hundred years ago. I would like to examine here the difference between two voyages.

The voyage in the 18th century is, in a word, the scientific voyage of discovery. Science not only changed the navigation system and distinguished the voyage at that time from the former ones, but played an important role in discovering and observing. For scientific instruments enabled the seamen and the scientists in those days to discover and observe the unknown.

What role does science play in *Endgame*? While scientific instruments were valuable and innovative for the voyage in the 18th century to objectively observe and discover curious things, science in *Endgame* is of no use. There are various kinds of measuring instruments in Hamm's story about the man with a little boy I have quoted above, but they, even if they show the accurate figures, do not give us the sense of the weather condition of the Christmas eve: was it 'an extra-ordinary bitter day' judging from the figure 'zero by the thermometer' or 'a glorious bright day' from 'fifty by the heliometer?'; was it 'a howling wild day' according to 'the anemometer [sic]' which shows 'a hundred'? Or was it 'an exceedingly dry day' because of 'zero by the hygrometer' (51-3)? The scientific observations never reach the scientific fact and make it more difficult to depict the weather of the day. What is worse, they confuse our perception enough to make us doubt whether the results of measuring show the same day. As a result, the authenticity

of Hamm's story is vanishing.

In addition, science in the play is always shadowed by death, which seems the farthest from the objectivity of science. In the case of the alarm-clock, Clov conceives an idea to tell Hamm whether he himself just leaves or is dead. Clov says, 'You [Hamm] whistle me. I don't come. The alarm rings. I'm gone. It doesn't ring. I'm dead' (47). The alarm is set to tell not the hour of rising but the hour of death. The linkage of the mechanical tool and death happens again:

Clov. I'll go and see.

(Exit Clov. Brief ring of alarm off. Enter Clov with alarm-clock. He holds it against Hamm's ear and releases alarm. They listen to it ringing to the end. Pause.)

Fit to wake the dead! Did you hear it? (48)

Thus, in the play, the accuracy or objectivity of science is denied thoroughly.

Now, turn to the other feature of the voyage in the 18th century, that is discovery. It was a national project for expanding the world and a preliminary step toward colonialism at that time.⁸) In the play Clov often looks out of the window as if he were a sailor who is searching for the earth on the ship. However, what is quite different from the 18th century is that he has nothing to discover: out of the window is 'zero' (4). And while the painters in the past voyage used to sketch the landscape, the native people, and the rare and unknown plants, all that the madman in Hamm's story who 'was a painter—an engraver' saw out of the window of the asylum was 'ashes' (44). Even if he uses a telescope, Clov has nothing to discover:

Clov. *(He gets up on ladder, turns the telescope on the without.)*

Let's see.

(He looks, moving the telescope)

Zero ...

(he looks)

... zero ...

(he looks)

... and zero. (29)

After that Clov, being urged by Hamm, looks through the telescope out of the window again and answers, 'Corpsed' (30). The word 'corpsed' evokes a heap of corpses out of the window in us. We can also see here the linkage of science and death.

However, it is not only the disability of the equipment but Clov's eye itself looking into the telescope that matters here:

Hamm. How are your eyes?

Clov. Bad.

Hamm. But you can see.

Clov. All I want. (35)

We know from here that Clov's eyes are arbitrary ones that can see all he wants to. They function not to discover the unknown but to vision non-thing. I will quote another dialogue:

Hamm. Have you had your visions?

Clov. Less. (41)

The dialogue sounds like about Clov's visual acuity, but the word 'visions' has the meaning of 'apparition' or 'illusion.' These suggest that the eyes of the subject of discovery have something wrong. While there is nothing to discover, the eyes see something not actually present. The eyes which function as a navigator for Hamm are unreliable. This instability of the relation between the subject and the object is characteristic of the voyage in the 20th century.

As I have already cited, Hamm says to Clov, 'Have you shrunk?' (28). Although the telescope is an instrument to magnify the object, there is a possibility in *Endgame* that the subject might shrink instead. The subject and the object reverse their positions; the subject can not observe the object or give it any more meaning. Hamm, who is in the position of the subject, depicts the situation to be observed:

Hamm. We're not beginning to ... to ... mean something?

Clov. Mean something! You and I, mean something!

(Brief laugh.)

Ah that's a good one!

Hamm. I wonder.

(Pause.)

Imagine if a rational being came back to earth, wouldn't he be liable to get ideas into his head if he observed us long enough.

(33)

From this dialogue, we know that the subject can not sustain its existence without being given the meaning of its *raison d'être*.

This absence of the subject in a strict sense seems to cause the incompleteness of Hamm's voyage round the world. For the voyage lacks in the centre of the world as the place of departure and the end of the course as well as the subject of discovery. Hamm, interrupting the voyage, turns back to the departing point, but he can not return to the point:

Hamm. I feel a little too far to the left.

(Clov moves chair slightly.)

Now I feel a little too far to the right.

(Clov moves chair slightly.)

I feel a little too far forward.

(Clov moves chair slightly.)

Now I feel a little too far back.

(Clov moves chair slightly.) (27)

For the voyagers in the 18th century their home countries were the centres of the world, but for Hamm there is no centre. Therefore his voyage in *Endgame* has never finished and their ship is lost in the sea.

In concluding, I should note that Hamm's voyage is a parody of the voyagers' in the 18th century. Beckett, taking the form of the voyage in the 18th century, demystifies its heroism and expansionism, and represents the voyage in the 20th century. The characters in *Endgame*

voyage in '[i]nfinite emptiness' (36), losing their power of eyes with which they could discover the unknown, give themselves the meanings and expand the world in the previous centuries.

Notes

- 1) Hale writes further, 'The nobility of Noah's mission to save human and animal life is savagely parodied in Beckett's version of the story, where the animals chosen to inhabit the refuge represent the lowest, dirtiest, most useless, annoying, or comical forms of life: a rat, a flea, and an artificial dog with three legs and no sex' (49). See also Ruby Cohn (229).
- 2) Inoue's study is made in relation to Pascal's *Pensées*.
- 3) For the great voyages I refer to Ishihara, J.C. Beaglehole and Alan Frost.
- 4) This proposal for going makes us envision Hamm who is trying to escape from the wrecked ship by raft, which reinforces Inoue's reading that the stage space is 'the inside of the ship'.
- 5) For Terra Australis Incognita, see Beaglehole (107).
- 6) Yoshio Masuda writes in his translation of *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyage of Discovery* that 'Cook's first voyage bequeathed more valuable scientific data than ever before' (524).
- 7) See Giuseppina Restivo. He discusses science in *Endgame* in comparison with Walther, Dürer and Musil.
- 8) See Koji Taki.

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