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Start 1:50 pm, End 3:24 pm

TMA 202 Final Essay

Section One:

The concept behind Samuel Beckett's pieces are what make it possible for the Noh movements and Kabuki theater to become so embedded with meaning.

First we must define how Samuel Beckett's pieces show that we as humans are the ones who give meaning to movement. While anyone can take what they want from the pieces, the pieces themselves spark people to ask questions and decide their own answers. As an audience we are exposed to things that seem to have a relationship, yet we are not exposed to any motives or whys. It is this that is the implied purpose of the piece: Let the audience give answer to the question of motives/purpose/meaning. I would say that overall, this is the concept and purpose of Samuel Beckett's pieces. People create associations.

When a larger group of people associate meaning to movement we can then classify that movement in that community as being codified. In essence, communities make rules for themselves, which is an expansion on Samuel Beckett's ideas to allow the individual to create meaning. In this sense, it is a community creating meaning, rather than just the individual audience member. For instance, a community of ballet dancers know the technique required to display first position and if the body is not performing those technical requirements, then it is not in first position. Those are the rules that the ballet community decides to adhere by. In Beckett's

pieces, a person could look at his creations and decide the rules that the actors are living by, yet those rules are never said or expressed.

In Japanese theater, specifically Noh theater, movement and look is very important but only because of the importance the overall community prescribed to it. The masks are important because of who and what they symbolize. The way the feet glide, or the pacing of the steps is important. The way in which the hands move, the way in which the voice sounds, everything is very important. They each have a specific meaning it is trying to display. At first this sounds contrary to the Beckett performances yet it is not. The Beckett performances are like the philosophical precursors to understanding why movement has meaning.

In Japanese theater, as each movement has meaning. We do not ask why it has meaning yet it does. Why does covering the face mean that a person is crying? Why does fast stomps mean a person is mad or agitated? These are not questions asked, these are truths accepted. When we look at Beckett's pieces, we then understand the answers to these unasked questions. The answer is, as discussed previously, we as humans create codified movement. That is what gives Japanese theater its meaning. These codified movements, sounds, masks and emotional associations have been around for hundreds and hundreds of years. Which means that for hundreds and hundreds of years, people have been allowing themselves to prescribe to the rules made by the community of Noh players.

Overall, as we understand that the choice to prescribe ourselves to the predetermined codified movements in Japanese theater, specifically Noh theater, we understand that we are joining a cross generational community that the core of Beckett's pieces make possible. I am not saying that Samuel Beckett is the precursor to Noh theater, that would be ridiculous. I am saying that the idea behind Samuel Beckett's pieces, the idea of the audience adding meaning to

movement, is what created codified communities, and that those communities are what created Noh theater. It is interesting to think that as we learn about the rules, techniques, and intricacies of those communities, we, in a way, are connecting ourselves back to the beginning and crossing time to relate to all those who once joined in that community, a community set up by people searching for meaning.

(Word Count: 638 words)

Section Two:

Death is a human experience and people have been wrestling with death for generations. Often we try to explain death, to understand it, yet in our search to understand we may be ill equipped to fully define this phenomenon with just the incomplete version of death that we as humans are exposed to. The plays Hamilton and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern both define death as what we decide to make of it, however, this option does not truly help in defining death.

Hamilton says, "I've imagined death so many times it feels more like a memory." Here he defines death as a memory. Throughout the play it talks about death with the association of losing someone and with a lens of sadness. Through this the play captures death as an impactful, but heartbreaking event. We understand that death is loss. When Hamilton himself dies, we feel that it is Burr who has still lost in this long rivalry he has had. To Hamilton, who has lost so much in his life, he feels like death is a memory. Throughout the entire play, the characters are defining death in the ways they see fit the most.

In Rosencrantz and Guildenstern death is not a loss or an ending. They are living the experience of death. Throughout the play they continually explore death and its concepts,

associations and meanings. The play is not trying to present itself as a “this is what the afterlife is like” but rather it is more of a personification of death on the human experience. The play invites the audience to ask questions about the nature of death, yet it lacks any authority to answer those questions. In fact, the play seems to imply to the audience that they are the ones with the authority to decide the answers to such questions. Just as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern cannot totally find meaning, we as humans are in the same boat and by trying to define death, we see that it is much too big to be able to truly define.

As the character Hamilton tries to define death, his actions tell the audience that death is defined by whatever a person thinks of it. Granted, the way he and those around him think of it is beautiful, but it is still just people deciding. In Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that is the whole purpose of the play is for the audience to decide to interpret death how they see fit. Both options do not totally consider that perhaps death means more than just what people make of it.

It is a comforting thing to be able to define death, and more comforting when we get to decide what it means as then we can choose what options comfort us the most, however, death may be more complicated than that. Perhaps death is not only what we define it as. Perhaps death has facets more than what we can comprehend. Perhaps death has a purpose and meaning that we, the living, cannot authoritatively discover at this time. While these two plays help us humans wrestle with the concept, they cannot fully define the experience of death since they lack the imagination that it could be more than whatever we as humans can come up with.

(Word Count: 544)