# Ibsen, Beckett, and Shepard: The Power of Triangles

# İbsen, Beckett ve Shepard: Üçgenlerin Gücü

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**Abstract**

*I am interested in the function of triangles in drama. Although drama opens up the possibility of seeing triangles in scenic space in terms of the positioning of characters and objects on the stage itself, here I will on the whole be exploring the potential of the triangle as a means of representing relationships between characters and the objects with which they are associated both on and off the stage. I will ask questions like: Is the triangle simply a structural device intended to help audiences to understand the plot or is it an epistemological device capable of lifting audiences to a higher state of cultural awareness.*

*Drama is full of love triangles. Here, however, we are to discuss Ibsen and Beckett. For good measure and in keeping with the focus on triangles, I include a third playwright, "the poet laureate of the American West," Sam Shepard.*

*Ibsen, Beckett, and Shepard have all written plays involving love triangles. Such triangles appear, for example, in Ibsen's Ghosts (1881), Hedda Gabbler (1890), and The Lady from the Sea (1891), and, in Beckett's Play (1963), and in Shepard's Fool for Love (1983). I will examine the love triangles in as many of these plays as time permits and will try to unearth other triangles to help us to understand the function of the triangle in drama as a bridge between mathematics and culture or between geometry and emotion.*

**Özet**

*Oyun metinlerinde üçgenlerin işlevi ilgimi çekiyor. Gerçi oyun metinleri karakterlerin ve nesnelerin sahne üzerindeki konumlanışlarındaki üçgenlerin görülmesini sağlamaktadır ama ben burada bütünüyle karakterlerin ve nesnelerin sahne üzerinde ve sahnedışında kurdukları ilişkileri temsil eden üçgen potansiyeli üzerinde duracağım.*

*Şu tür sorular üzerinde düşünüyorum: Üçgen izleyicinin öyküyü anlamasına yardımcı olmak niyetiyle kullanılan yapısal bir araç mıdır yoksa izleyiciyi daha yüksek bir kültürel farkındalık düzeyine çıkaracak epistemolojik bir araç mıdır?*

*Oyun metinlerinde pek çok aşk üçgeni var. Ama burada biz Ibsen ve Beckett'den konuşuyoruz. Ek olarak ve üçgenler odağıyla ilişkisi nedeniyle bir üçüncü yazarı da ekliyorum; "Batı Amerika'nın büyük şairi" Sam Shepard. Ibsen, Beckett ve Shepard aşk üçgenleri içeren oyunlar yazmışlardır. Bu tür üçgenleri Ibsen'in Hortlaklar'ında (1881), Hedda Gabler'inde(1890), ve Denizden Gelen Kadın'da (1891), ve Beckett'in Oyun'unda (1963), ve Shepard'ın Aşk Delisi'nde (1983) görmek mümkün. Zamanın elverdiği ölçüde bu oyunlardaki aşk üçgenleri üzerinde dururken üçgenlerin oyun metinlerindeki işlevini matematik ile kültür, geometri ile duygu arasında köprü olma özellikleriyle açımlamaya çalışacağım.*

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Famously, Ezra Pound describes poetry as "a sort of inspired mathematics which gives us equations for human emotions." He goes on, "If one has a mind which inclines to magic rather than science, one will prefer to speak of these equations as spells or incantations."[1] In a similar vein, T.S.Eliot draws on the language of science when he describes the artist's need to find an "objective correlative," that is "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula for that particular emotion..."[2] Pound and Eliot seem, then, to be suggesting that in order to understand how an artist or work of art impacts our emotions or how our emotions influence our response to a work of art, we may need the vocabulary of mathematics and science. The feelings associated with a work of art may be triggered and repeatedly rekindled by something as empirical as a mathematical sign or symbol.[3]

Here, I will be focusing on a fundamental geometrical shape—the triangle. Part of the beauty of the triangle is that it has the potential to free us from the tyranny of binary oppositions and open up possibilities for thinking outside of either/or logic. For philosophers the figure of the triangle may be invoked to represent the shift from Two-valued to Three-valued logic. The triangle, then, has been a particularly apt cross-disciplinary tool for thinkers trying to find a way out of the straightjacket of simple binary oppositions—absolute alternatives like Scylla and Carbides. The power of the triangle may indeed be so awesome that it can even provide us with a way of describing states of consciousness, allowing us to conceive of triangular minds while we do not necessarily have to accept that the triangle is a product of mind alone.

In literature we can use the triangle to diagram the relationships between characters as happens most obviously in the love triangle--perhaps the most easily graspable combination of the mathematical and the emotional. We can also think of the triangle as a formula for other kinds of relationships.

[1] My emphasis; qtd. in Gray 398.

[2] My emphasis; "Hamlet and His Problems," Selected Essays 144-45

[3] The notion that emotions can be circumscribed like this is suggested in the title of a recent novel—The Mathematics of Love by Emma Darwin.



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I am interested in the function of triangles in drama. Although drama opens up the possibility of seeing triangles in scenic space in terms of the positioning of characters and/or objects on the stage itself, here I will on the whole be exploring the potential of the triangle as a means of representing relationships between characters and/or the objects with which they are associated both on and off the stage. If each vertex (the point of intersection of the two sides of an angle) is associated with a person, the feelings of each person should be taken into account, and if triangles involve power relations, we can always ask at any given time, which vertex seems to be wielding the most power. The shape of the triangle, then, may vary according to power relations and the emotional closeness or distance between the characters. I am interested in asking questions like: In drama is the triangle simply a structural device intended to help audiences to understand the plot or is the triangle an epistemological device—capable of lifting audiences, for example, to a higher state of cultural awareness.

Drama is full of love triangles. In the twentieth century, for example, currently being revived on the London stage is James Joyce's Exiles (1918). Another outstanding example occurs in Pinter's Betrayed (1998). Here, however, my focus is on Ibsen and Beckett, and, for good measure and in keeping with the focus on triangles, I include a third playwright, "the poet laureate of the American West," Sam Shepard. Ibsen, Beckett, and Shepard have all written plays involving love triangles.[4] Such triangles appear, for example, in Ibsen's Hedda Gabbler (1890), Beckett's Play (1963), and in Shepard's Fool for Love (1983). I will examine these and other triangles in these and other plays by these three playwrights to help us understand the function of the triangle in drama as a bridge between mathematics and emotion or between geometry and culture.

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[4] The quotation is from Coe 122

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Generally speaking triangles in drama are non-linguistic. A major exception is Ibsen's Hedda Gabbler, especially in act two when Hedda confides in Judge Brack concerning the tedium of her honeymoon and expresses her horror at the thought of "having to spend every minute of one's life with – with the same person" (PT 275) and gives him an opportunity to voice his formula for the good life:

BRACK All I want is to have a circle of friends whom I can trust . . . and into whose houses I may come and go as a--trusted friend.

HEDDA Of the husband?

BRACK (bows) Preferably, to be frank, of the wife. And of the husband too, of course. Yes, you know, this kind of triangle is a delightful arrangement for all parties concerned.

HEDDA Yes, I often longed for a third person while I was away. Oh, those hours we spent alone in railway compartments -- (PT 277)

Hedda and Brack are kindred spirits in that they think in terms of and want their lives to be shaped in terms of triangular arrangement. Hedda can only feel comfortable in the train compartment with one other person if there is another person on the platform to admire her legs, or better still, if there is another person ready to board the train so that in Brack's words "the triangle is completed" (PT 278). Brack's bond with Hedda makes him part of a triangle—Brack/Hedda/George Tesman—which we can represent, for now as an equilateral triangle:

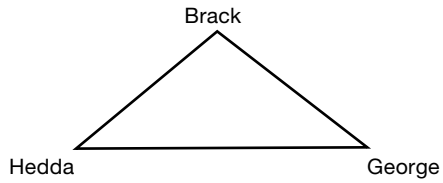


Fig.1



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Brack says later quite explicitly in act 3 that he would not want another man (specifically Eilert Loveborg) to displace him as part of this triangle (PT 310). Whereas Tesman is unaware of any triangles, Brack and Hedda even agree on the need for the participants in a triangle to be willing to defend it. "In the creation of a triangle-and its continuance," says Brack, "the question of compulsion should never arise" (PT 311). Brack and Hedda, then, share an emotional commitment to maintaining the existence of the triangle. Brack is horrified by the idea of losing his place in the triangle, but if at any time he feels the need to leave a triangle he may do so, for he prides himself on his freedom to relinquish his place in one triangle and move to take up a position in another. Perhaps we should represent the Brack/Hedda/George triangle differently, putting Brack and Hedda closer to each other because they have a mutual understanding and see the world in similar ways:

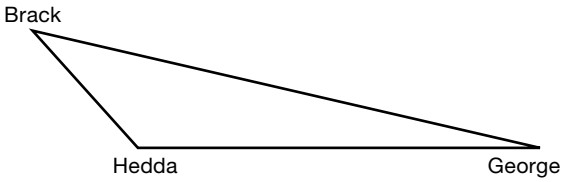


Fig.2

In this triangle the line connecting George to Hedda is long because of her emotional distance from him. The line between him and Brack would perhaps be even longer as Brack has very little if any genuine concern for George and is only interested in Hedda.

Joan Templeton suggests that Ibsen's preference is for the "female protagonist placed between two opposing men."[5] This fits the Brack/Hedda/George triangle as well as the Eilert Loverborg/Thea/Sherrif Elvsted triangles, but Hedda Gabler also contains triangles with two women and a man as in the Thea/Eilert Loveborg/ Hedda love triangle. In act 2 when Thea joins Hedda and Eilert in Hedda's dining room, Thea enters the triangle, and this is emphasized when Hedda insists, "No, Thea darling not there. Come over and sit beside me. I want to be

[5] Ibsen's Women 220

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in the middle" (PT 293). Hedda is insanely jealous of Thea who has been Eilert's lover and muse. "Oh, Hedda, I'm so happy. Imagine – he says I've inspired him!" (PT 294), declares Thea. Thea, however, is seemingly unaware of the importance of Hedda for Eilert and mistakenly identifies the third vertex of the triangle as the red-haired singer.

Thea and Eilert are described as giving birth to a manuscript/ child.

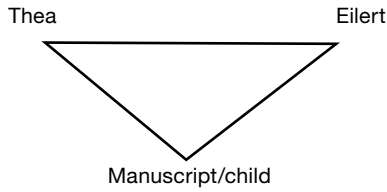


Fig.3

Incapable of producing anything herself or participating in a triangle which has as one of its vertices a manuscript (child), Hedda can only destroy or attempt to destroy—manuscript, child, and triangle. Audiences will understand that as Hedda burns Loveborg's manuscript, it is as if she is burning their child, but the idea that the manuscript (child) is part of a triangle is less obvious. With the loss of that part of the triangle (Eilert thinks it is lost; we know Hedda burned it), the relationship between Eilert and Thea must end: Eilert says, " you must also understand that she and I cannot possibly ever see each other again" (PT 316). In other words if there is no triangle, there is no relationship. Almost miraculously, however, at the end of the play, following Eilert's death, another triangle forms, consisting of Thea again, her notes from which she hopes to be able to reconstruct the manuscript, and George, who was always more of an editor of other people's work than a creator of his own. Such is the power of the triangle that Phoenix-like, it is able to rise again from its ashes and reassert itself.

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If Ibsen is like a late-Victorian writing in an essentially realistic tradition, Beckett is a modernist or postmodernist, soaked in for example, dada, surrealism, theatre of the absurd, and existentialism. Despite these differences, we can again detect the power of the triangle.

Beckett's play that most clearly involves love triangles is appropriately entitled.

Play. Instead of Ibsen's typical pattern of "female protagonist placed between two opposing men," Beckett opts for the male (M) (like Loveborg) placed between two women (W1 and W2). No elaborate costumes here or grand entrances or exits, we see only the three characters' heads protruding from their respective urns, as they reminisce about their sometime distinct but often intertwined pasts, generally taking turns to speak but sometimes (most notably at the beginning and the end) all speaking at the same time and being illuminated at the same time.

In a sense these characters are already dead. Beckett's initial stage directions specify that their faces are "impassive throughout" and their "Faces [are] so lost to age and aspect as to seem part of urns" (CSP 147). Beckett also indicates that in some productions there will be a separate spot light for each face so that when it comes to lighting all three faces at the same time, "they [the three spots] should be as a single spot branching into three" although he prefers the "single mobile spot which is more expressive of a unique inquisitor" (CSP 158).

The urns, Beckett specifies, "face undeviatingly front throughout the play" (CSP 147), but there is no indication that they have to be in a straight line. On the contrary, surely, it is almost inevitable that they form some kind of triangle, mirroring the characters' love triangle. The detailed attention to the lighting of the different characters or vertices of the triangle is of course absent from Ibsen.

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One interesting aspect of the love triangle in Play is its tendency to break up and then reestablish itself later. It is not static—starting one day and then finishing on another. It always seems to be in a state of flux. So, according to M, when W1 on the pillow made the "rather uncalled for" remark—"you're well out of that" (suggesting that his relationship with W2 has come to an end), we cannot be sure that at that particular point M and W2 are really no longer seeing each other. W1's "So he was mine again. All mine. I was happy again" is soon followed by "Then I began to smell her off him again" and "Before I could do anything he disappeared. That meant she had won. That slut!" (CSP 151). The relationship between M and W2 may well have been off for a while—W2 says, "When he stopped coming I was prepared" and "I made a bundle of his things and burnt them" (CSP 151) but W2 had just spoken about "carry[ing] on as before" and W1 speculates: "Perhaps she has taken him away to live . . . somewhere in the sun" (CSP 155). As we saw in Ibsen's plays, the power of the triangle cannot be easily countered. The flames may die down for a while but the fire/triangle always has the potential to be rekindled.

When W2 said to M, "Some day you will tire of me" and "Give me up, as a bad job. Go away and start poking and pecking at someone else" (CSP 152) we can think of M as similar to Brack in Hedda Gabbler or perhaps the Stranger in The Lady from the Sea. Men like these characters may be able to relinquish their roles in one triangle and go off and become a part of another. I say "men" but this ability is not restricted to male characters, for especially in Beckett's Play the woman, W2, seems to celebrate her own independence when she voices her pity for the other two locked into their one-on-one relationship. W2 expresses a degree of freedom not usually available to Ibsen's late nineteenth century heroines. Although W2 imagines M and W1 feeling pity for her--"that poor creature" (CSP 154)--she insists, "They might even feel sorry for me, if they could see me. But never so sorry as I for them" (CSP 155). She, then, has the freedom to move into and out of relationships/triangles while she regards M and W1 as stuck with a monogamous routine—"sour kisses" (CSP 155).



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In most productions M's urn will I think be placed between the other two as he is the male moving back and forth from one woman to another. There is also, however, a hint of rapprochement between the two women. Despite W1's visits to W2, screaming things like "Give him up . . . he's mine" (CSP 148) and possibly threatening to kill W2 (CSP 149) M imagines the two women getting together: "Perhaps they have become friends" (CSP 153), "Perhaps they meet, and sit, over a cup of that green tea . . . ," "Meet, and sit, now in one dear place, now in the other, and sorrow together . . ." (CSP 155). It's all speculation of course, but at such moments we can imagine variations in the length of the sides of the triangle as we saw in the Brack/Hedda/George triangle in Hedda Gabler. Once again we can appreciate the versatility of the triangle in terms of its ability to assume a tremendous variety of shapes within the confines of the three vertices and three straight lines polygon form. Thus, putting M on top, as M feels far from the two women the triangle would look like this:

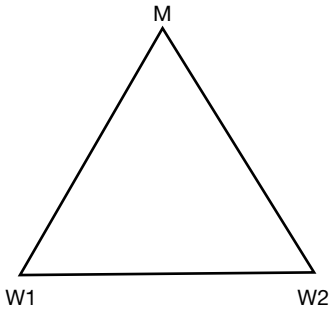


Fig.4

And clearly when he feels close to them, the two sides of the isosceles triangle would be much shorter. The distance between M and each woman varies, then, depending on his closeness to each of them both physically and emotionally. When he says, for example, "God what vermin women" (CSP 151) he is a long way from either of them. When he daydreams about waking up together—"the first to wake to wake the other two" and fantasizes about "A little dinghy on the river, I resting on my oars, they lolling on air-pillows in the stern" (CSP 156) the size of the (love) triangle diminishes as he feels himself closer to both of them. The variations in the distance between W1 and W2 may also be reflected by differing lengths of the base of the triangle.

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I am tempted to say that Beckett's Play's use of the triangle is much richer and more rewarding than Ibsen's, but that might be to impose too much meaning on Beckett's play. Relationships in Beckett's Play are in a much greater state of flux than those in a play by Ibsen. Perhaps Play reflects our more postmodern condition. Audiences will frequently find it difficult to grasp exactly what is happening. The written and performance text are marked by a far greater degree of undecidability. The nature of time and memory is far more problematized as Beckett's characters' ability to recall words and events play tricks with them. "There was no answer . . ." says M, "so I took her in my arms and swore I could not live without her. I meant it what is more. Yes, I'm sure I did" (CSP 149). Why does he have to say, "I'm sure"? And what is the reference? What exactly is he sure or not sure about? Is he sure he could not live without her or is he sure he meant what he said? Perhaps he is not sure about anything? Certainly in performance most audiences will not be able to identify with certainty which character is being referred to in certain statements. Even the characters themselves are sometimes bemused as when M reports how W2 burst in on W1 and threatened to kill her, but M says "she [W2?] threatens to take her own [life] . . . Not yours [M's?] she said. We had fun trying to work this out" (CSP 150). When W2 says, "He has told me all about it, she said," W2 continues, "Who he I said . . . and what it? (CSP 150). M's next interjection contains the abjuration, "Adulterers, take warning, never admit" (CSP 150). Of course W2 certainly knew who "he" was and probably guessed immediately what "it" was. She was toying with W1—and this is the point—just as his characters toy with each other, Beckett's Play plays with, toys with its audience. Ibsen's Hedda also likes to play as she does with Georges's aunt, pretending that her precious hat belongs to the maid, or teasing Brack as she plays with her father's pistols, but actions in Ibsen's plays unlike in Beckett's, tend to have fatal consequences—for example, Loverborg's and later Hedda's suicide.

Beckett's characters do not even trust their own words—W1 asks, "Is it that I do not tell the truth . . . ?" (CSP 153) and after W2 talks about one of the others exploding and "blazing [her]


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clean out of her wits," M states that "I know now, all that was just . . . play. And all this? When will all this- . . . All this, when will all this have been . . . just play?" (CSP 153). The past flows into the present. The suicide and other death threats turn out to be empty—attention-seeking devices. The characters were playing with each other and perhaps they are still doing so? The triangles in Play are perhaps more for playful purposes than those in Ibsen, but near the end of Play the stage direction "Repeat play" (CSP 157) perhaps meaning "repeat the play exactly as it has been up to this point" may have the effect of moving the play away from triangles in the direction of circularity.

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Sam Shepard's Fool for Love involves distinct traces of Ibsen's triangles, especially as they appear in Ghosts where Alving forms a triangle with his wife, Helene, with Oswald, their son as the third part of the triangle, and Alving also forms a triangle with Johanna (the former governess) and offspring, Regina:

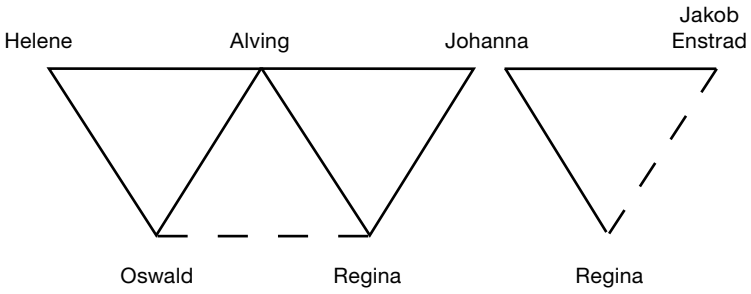


Fig.5

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Alving's position in relation to these triangles is strikingly similar to the position of the Old Man in Fool for Love:

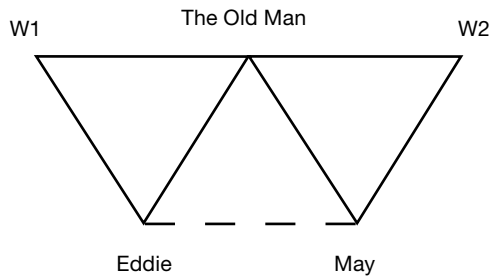


Fig.6

The Old Man from the West Coast of the U.S. also sires two offsprings from different women—one of the women is Eddie's mother who apparently "blew her brains out"; the other is May's mother, "the pretty red-haired woman" (73). Whereas Beckett's W1 and W2 may be seen to be taking on something of the characteristics of wife (W1) and mistress (W2), the two women in Fool for Love seem equal in terms of status. Eddie claims that both were wives and implies that they were equally loved—the Old Man "fell in love twice" (63). For convenience though let us label them W1 and W2. When the red-haired woman realized that the man was leading two separate lives—one with her, one with another woman/wife, she went on a rampage and "hounded him for years" (70).

She is much more active than her counterpart, Johanna, in Ghosts, for the latter accepts that her liason with Alving has to be kept a secret, even agreeing to marry another man (Jakob Enstrad) who will pretend to be Regina's father. Whereas Johanna, the other woman in Ghosts, presumably does not try to enter the other triangle--the Alving/Helene/Oswald triangle--and seems to accept that the identity of her daughter's father has to remain under wraps, in Fool for Love May's mother makes a strenuous effort to have an impact on her man's life with the other woman. In seeking out the Old Man when he is with his


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other woman and other child , May's mother is described as "trespassing" or as "crossing this forbidden zone" (71). We can think of her as moving into the other triangle.

Although the Old Man, at least according to Eddie, went for a walk with his son to actually show him the other family, generally "the closer these two separate lives draw together, these two separate women, these two separate kids, the more nervous he [the Old Man] got" (71). We can argue that in Fool for Love the coming together of the two triangles leads to the suicide of Eddie's mother. According to Eddie, she "blew her brains out," but in Ghosts Johanna and Enstad's willingness to live out the lie that Enstad was Regina's father keeps the Johanna/Alving/Regina and the Johanna/Enstad/Regina triangles separate.

In mapping the triangles that constitute the essential relationships in Fool for Love, I have put the offsprings at the base of two adjoining triangles. Just as in representing relationships in Ghosts we should put a dotted line between Oswald and Regina, we can represent Eddie and May in Fool for Love in exactly the same fashion. I suggest a dotted line because in both cases (especially the latter) the brother-sister relationship is, shall we say, a special one. In Fool for Love legitimacy is not the issue that it is in Ghosts, for Eddie claims, as I indicated above, that the Old Man was married to both women and also that he loved both of them. The lines of the triangles, then, can be solid. The dotted line is reserved for Eddie and May.

Like Oswald and Regina, May and Eddie are half-siblings. May and Eddie's relationship is far more developed and intense and more clearly incestuous than the relationship of their forerunners, Oswald and Regina. May and Eddie's relationship is terribly ambiguous—May will say, for example, "I don't need you!" and then with her next breath—"Don't go!" (18). She will cling to him one moment and then punch him the next, kiss him and then kick him in the crotch.

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Like Waiting for Godot's Vladimir and Estragon, May and Eddie seem fated to always be together. Eddie says, "You'll never get rid of me" (49). He also says, "We'll always be connected. That was decided a long time ago" (34) and "I was gone. . . . But I wasn't disconnected" (74). They seem to have, as Stephen J. Bottoms explains, "a kind of supranormal, telepathic understanding."[6] This means of course that even if one of them may appear to form a one-on-one relationship with another person, this can only result in another triangle in which they are still connected.

Like Vladimir and Estragon's relationship which always involves Godot, that between May and Eddie can never be simply one-on-one. Thus, they form a triangle with an unseen "other" woman, the Countess. Whether Eddie and the Countess have been lovers or not may be less important than May's idea that Eddie can never really have the Countess because she, May, will always be in the way. May believes that she will always be part of any other relationship that Eddie tries to form unless, as she says, Eddie "erases [her] or has [her] erased" (19). Similarly even though May is waiting for her gentleman caller/date (Martin) she cannot form another relationship and leave Eddie completely behind. We can imagine another triangle then with Eddie and May and as the third vertex, either the Countess (unseen) or Martin (seen; he will form a triangle with Eddie and May in the physical space of the stage). Eddie says, "You'll never replace me and you know it!" (35) and he claims that she'll never be free of him. "I'll track you down no matter where you go. I know exactly how your mind works. I've been right every time" (49). The only way that May might be able to free herself from Eddie and these triangular relationships is by killing the other woman. She talks about "tear[ing] her damn head off" and says, "I'm gonna wipe her out!" (50).

The fantasy of revenge on the other woman is, of course, shared by W1 in Beckett's Play. In both cases there are echoes of Hedda Gabbler who also fantasized about doing terrible things to Thea—burning her rival's hair, for example. All three women try to eliminate the real or potential third vertex of the triangle.

[6] The Theatre of Sam Shepard 191.



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At the beginning of Fool for Love there are basically three key areas of the stage: a four poster single bed on which May sits, a table and chairs one of which Eddie is sitting one "by the table facing MAY" and a rocking chair occupied by the Old Man "facing right so he's just slightly profile to the audience" (15). There three basic areas form a triangle like, for example, stone/tree/stool in Godot. The three characters, May, Eddie, and the Old Man also form a triangle. Although unlike Beckett's Godot, the Old Man is clearly visible on stage and interacts with the two main characters, the Old Man resembles Godot in that he is to some extent a phenomenon of the mind.

We are told at the beginning that "he exists only in the minds of MAY and EDDIE" (15). The Old Man speaks the last line of the play and remains on stage after the two main characters have left. Perhaps rather than existing in the minds of May and Eddie, May and Eddie exist in his mind, and the whole play is the product of his consciousness. For a playwright who is often labeled a cowboy, it is understandable that control/power would tend to be in the hands of men. Wade calls Shepard "a cowboy playwright of high testosterone."[7] Nevertheless, Shepard insists that Fool for Love is "really more about a woman than any play I've written, it's from her point-of-view pretty much."[8] As we have seen, one way to represent the power struggles involved in these plays is by mapping triangles. So, in the Old Man/Eddie/May triangle where does the power lie? There is a power struggle going on between the Old Man and Eddie, father and son, on the one hand and May and Eddie, half-sister and half-brother on the other. The Old Man hates to think of the connection between May and Eddie as being more powerful than the connection between father and son, but, as Bottoms points out, May is able to conjure up "moments of resistance" to the "patriarchal status quo." [9]

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[7] "Sam Shepard and the American Sunset" 29.

[8] Qtd. in Bottoms 196

[9] Ibid., 212.

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Brian Rotman describes one of the effects of Platonism which "holds that mathematical objects are mentally apprehensible and yet owe nothing to human culture" as being "denying or marginalizing to the point of travesty the ways in which mathematical signs are the means by which communication, significance, and semiosis are brought about."[10] In the theater not all plays are going to establish a link between mathematical objects and human culture as clearly as Hedda Gabbler does where characters refer to triangles in order to communicate with each other. Brack and Hedda see relationships in the form of triangles. I believe, however, that triangles invoked in Hedda Gabbler reflect the way that many people see the world. Perhaps it is possible to describe such people as possessing triangular minds.

Although the triangle is not mentioned explicitly in either Beckett's Play or Shepard's Fool for Love, its presence is nonetheless palpable. In Play, for example, there is the same tension as in Hedda Gabbler between the excitement of the love triangle and the monotony of the one-on-one. With Beckett's stage direction, "Repeat play," near the end of Play there is a circularity to compete with the power of the triangle. In Ibsen perhaps the circularity is less obvious although in Ghosts, for example, the repetition of actions carried out by one generation by the next generation—especially the Oswald-Regina relationship mirroring the Alving-Johanna one—"the sins of the fathers" provides another kind of circularity, a circularity with is also a feature of Fool for Love where May, for instance, accuses Eddie of merely repeating himself: "That's all you do," she says, "You just go in a big circle" (67).

In Fool for Love as in Waiting for Godot there are two principle characters, chronically dependent upon one another. There is also an obvious third element—the Old Man. Whereas Godot is always absent, the former, the Old Man, has a kind of postmodern marginalized existence—that is both inside and outside the play. At times he is a character physically in a triangle with May and Eddie (to mention but one triangle) talking to them, insisting,

[10] "Thinking Dia-Grams" 391.



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for example, that Eddie tells his side of the story accurately. At other times he is a silent spectator, like an audience member, observing other people's triangles—for example, Eddie/May/Martin. With this play between presence and absence Shepard introduces a new twist on the triangle inherited from Ibsen and coming through Beckett.

I believe that we all have some intuition of mathematical shapes and that the theatre, especially the theater of these three playwrights, is a fine place to demonstrate this. Although on stage we may see three objects--say a rock, a tree, and a moon--these objects will always have signifying potential.[11] Triangles in the theater, whether linguistic or non-linguistic, invariably have some relation to the interhuman. Whether our view of the world is dominated, in Pound's terms, by either magic or science, however, we may still be left wondering whether on the stage or in our everyday world power resides in one of the vertices or sides of the triangle or within the triangle itself.

[11] I am in disagreement here with Thomas Cousineau who although he has diligently unearthed many triangles in Wating for Godot claims that the triangles in performances of Godot are "non-signifying" and that the play encourages us to see "the world in terms of shapes without bothering to ask their meanings." See Waiting for Godot: Form in Movement 93.

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