

## A Chronology of Preserving (Impossible) Love

– Patrice Pavis’s Play *Vania and Her*

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“Odysseus sighting his island after years of wandering;  
the return, the return, the great magic of the return.”\*\*

### [Abstract]

This article examines the feature of love in Patrice Pavis’s play *Vania and Her* from the perspective of psychoanalysis. Dealing with two central characters’ lifelong relationship, the play centres on Vania and Elena’s annual reunion for twenty years. In this context, this article first shows what the act of annual meeting means for Vania and Elena. This article also argues how love is generated by Vania’s trees and photos throughout the play, in the knowledge that Vania takes photos of trees, which is deemed as his act of love. In dealing with these issues, we could encounter how Elena could be regarded as a silent siren, thereby making a distinction between Vania and her in terms of the way in which they exist in the context of their love relationship. In doing so, this article underlines how the play epitomises a chronology of preserving (impossible) love.

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\*\* Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*, trans. Linda Asher (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 5.

주제어: 증상으로서의 사랑, 강박적인 주체, 『마냐와 그녀』, 향유, 침묵하는 사이렌  
Love as symptom, obsessional subject, *Vania and Her*, jouissance, a silent siren.

## 1. Introduction

Patrice Pavis's play *Vania and Her* was published in 2009 and first staged in Seoul, South Korea in 2013.<sup>1)</sup> The main motif of this work is based on Anton Chekhov's play, *Uncle Vanya*, and poses the question: What would happen if Vanya and Elena, the two characters of Chekhov's play, fell in love with each other? Chekhov describes Vanya as filled with regret, mourning his unfulfilled love for Elena: "I met her first ten years ago, at her sister's house, when she was seventeen and I was thirty-seven. Why did I not fall in love with her then and propose to her? It would have been so easy! And now she would have been my wife" (Act II).

Pavis's play focuses on the relationship between Vanya and Elena from Chekhov's work and part of Vanya's dialogue can be heard in the voice of Pavis's protagonist, Vania (p.157).<sup>2)</sup> The author recreates Vanya's desperate love for Elena by winding the clock back to the past when they both were young and creating a new love story. Through flashbacks by 77 year-old Vania's on his life, the reader comes to understand that the central characters' relationship lasted for 40 years.

The play starts with the section entitled "the end of the journey" and ends

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1) This play was premiered by Korean theatre director, Jun-Hee, Lee on January 16 and 17 2013, at Arko Theatre in Seoul. Cast: Vania (Sung-Ho, Son); Elena (Kwang-Duk, Kim).

2) All quotations from the play will hereafter be cited by page number in the text: the play is written in French and translated into English and Spanish, so these three versions of the play are put together in one volume, published in Patrice Pavis, *Vania Y Ella*, (Madrid: Catedra Vale-Inclan Olmo Colecion Textos/Obras. n.12, 2009), Edicion y introduccio, de Carlos Alba Peinado. Of these I used the English version of the text by Joel Anderson and Patrice Pavis.

with “return to the start.”<sup>3)</sup> Old Vania’s reflection on his memories of love opens and closes the play and through those depictions. *Vania and Her* is presented as a story of the journey to love. The lovers repeat their meetings annually and then live apart. Vania and Elena have their own married lives but continue their relationship by reuniting with each other once a year, only for that week. The lovers’ annual meetings become a ritualistic ceremony and give a particular rhythm to the play in terms of developing the narrative. In the play, Elena defines and gives a special meaning to this annual event: “Our solemn communion is what matters: to save our souls, absolute love” (p. 182). Admittedly, while seeing each other, at least they seem to exist as “those who believe that the purpose, the function, the bass pedal and principal melody of life is love, and that everything else - *everything* else - is merely an etc.”<sup>4)</sup>

Yet their journey to love is not that simple, because their secret and life-long relationship does not guarantee a romantic nature to love. Given that Vania’s flashback is filled with a diverse range of feelings such as despair and pain, the journey to love reifies how he endures Elena’s absence in his daily life and accepts her presence during the meetings. Though the love of Vania and Elena is grounded in the repetition of their annual reunion, in order to understand the nature of their love, it begs us to contemplate not with *how* they continue to maintain their relationship through their annual meetings, but with *why* they continue to meet. Regardless of the fact that “[t]he enigma in thinking about love is the duration of time necessary for it to flourish,”<sup>5)</sup>

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3) The play consists of a prologue entitled “The End of the Journey” and five sections entitled “I. Brief Encounter”, “II. Ten Ways not To Seduce a Woman”, “III. Ten Objects for Setting up House”, “IV. Wanderings”, and “V. Return to the Start.”

4) Julian Barnes, *Talking It Over* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), 139. [Italics in original].

5) Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, trans. Peter Bush (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2012), 31-32.

the cause of both characters' reunion on an annual basis is the overarching point that remains unspoken about their love story. The reason Vania and Elena keep meeting each other for such a long time is omitted in the play, as if the play seems to place much more emphasis on the duration of, rather than on the motivation for, their lifelong relationship. Thus, it would be interesting to explore the characteristic of their love from the perspective of psychoanalysis. We can connect this perspective with the characters' motivation of love as linked to Lacan's concept of "the real."<sup>6)</sup> Bruce Fink explains:

The real is essentially that which resists symbolization and thus resists the dialectization characteristic of the symbolic order, in which one thing can be substituted for another. Not everything is fungible; certain things are not interchangeable for the simple reason that they cannot be "signifierized" They cannot be found elsewhere, as they have a Thing-like quality, requiring the subject to come back to them over and over again.<sup>7)</sup>

We can apply the concept of "the real" to how Vania and Elena expresses their love each other. This article will focus on Vania and Elena's love through notions of - drive, *jouissance* and symptom, notions which feature the real. With these concepts in mind, we first need to explore what the act of the annual meeting means for both lovers and then how their love emerges and is generated throughout the play via his trees and photos. This is in the knowledge that Vania takes photos of trees, which is deemed as his act of love. In dealing with these issues, we could encounter how Elena could be regarded as a silent siren, thereby making a distinction between Vania and her

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6) Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton; New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 92.

7) Ibid.

in terms of the way in which they exist in the context of their love relationship. These points allow us to envision the play through the lens of preserving a seemingly - impossible - love between both characters.

## 2. Going to the Little Retreat as Symptom

In *Vania and Her*, it is in Vania's retreat where these two lovers hold their reunion once a year. This fact prompts us to ask what the meaning of this place is for them, because defining the characteristic of the place may provide us with a sense of the essence of their love. Vania explains:

My mother would send me there for several weeks each year, so I could rest in absolute quiet, in the middle of the forest. She thought I had weak lungs and she had brought me this small house so I could go and recover by getting some rest. I would drink ewe's milk, I would sleep, I would read. After two or three weeks, I would be back in form and would return to town. This little retreat was so isolated that mother ended up forgetting the address: I was the only one who knew it, and how knew the way there.  
(p. 151)

This quotation reveals how Vania's retreat is surrounded by trees which serves as a metaphor for a life, totally isolated from reality, particularly when we notice that Vania describes himself as "Robinson Crusoe". However, this is all we know about Vania's cabin from this play. Although Vania's retreat is described as a kind of place for repose and healing, it is impossible to define, especially in the context of their annual reunion. For this reason Vania's

retreat serves to underline that “It [love] is an event that can’t be predicted or calculated in terms of the world’s laws.”<sup>8)</sup> However, the citation cannot fully answer why this place is meaningful and worthy for Vania and Elena, particularly in relation to their annual reunion. After 20 years of meetings, Vania reflects on how their reunion is “not really” “happy” (p. 192). While meeting each other during one retreat, Elena says to Vania: “I am suffocating, at home and now here as well” (p. 162). Then, why do they continue to meet, year after year, as if it is absolutely necessary? Why could not they stop meeting each other, in spite of the fact that neither was really happy to meet? Indeed, this question helps us frame Vania’s and Elena’s love story.

When Vania says, “I don’t even know myself” (p. 161), he is saying, in other words, that he does not know why he has been stuck in the cabin in order to wait for Elena for most of the time. The situation in which Vania finds himself - in that he has no idea of himself - is not different from Elena’s position. She echoes his sentiment by stating that, “I didn’t know what Vania actually wanted, nor what I wanted for that matter, but just in case I went to the cabin in the forest” (p. 158). Even while continuing their annual meeting, Elena ponders that she “was not sure that he would want to see his little savage again” (p. 160). These examples reveal how both lovers are uncertain of what constitutes as their relationship is, how long it will last, and of whether it might come to an end at one of their annual meetings.

Bruce Fink contends that it is common in reality constituted by language that we lead our lives on the ground of “a knowledge” we do “not know”, “of which” we are “unaware.”<sup>9)</sup> And such a subject is viewed as “the subject

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8) Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 31.

9) Bruce Fink, “Knowledge and Jouissance”, in *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan’s Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (New

of the signifier” according to Jacques Lacan.<sup>10)</sup> In this respect, both characters’ ambiguous attitude indicates that it is necessary to explore unconscious aspects of their love concomitant with the repetitive act of retreating together, year after year. The recurring act of visiting each other at the same place for 20 years stems from a fear of falling apart, never to be together again. Nevertheless, Vania desperately waits for Elena over and again: “For a long time he remained still, as if dead [in the retreat]” (p. 161). Elena doubts whether he wants to see her, but would go there anyway.

Both lovers’ attitude is also similar with regards to the unconscious feature of ‘drive.’ As such, that they see each other no matter what uncertain feeling they have. Using Lacan’s definition of drive, Renata Salecl articulates that drive is “something left over after the subject becomes the subject of the signifier<sup>11)</sup> and is incorporated into a symbolic structure.”<sup>12)</sup> It thus remains unspoken and unsignified in reality, but embodies “a force that essentially marks the subject by imposing constant pressure on him or her.”<sup>13)</sup> She goes on to argue that: “Drive’s logic is: ‘I do not want to do this, but I am nonetheless doing it’ [...] when the subject does not desire to do something, but nonetheless enjoys doing exactly that.”<sup>14)</sup> In this sense, what compels Vania and Elena to maintain their love comes from the fact that they do not want to know what they want - so they continue their meetings. This unconscious act by

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York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 22.

10) Ibid., 23.

11) According to Lacan, the concept of ‘the subject of the signifier’ means “beings of language” (Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 74); “it is the signifier to which all other signifiers represent a subject.”(Ibid.).

12) Renata Salecl, *(Per)versions of Love and Hate* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 48.

13) Ibid.

14) Ibid., 50.

both characters can be explained with the use of the term ‘symptom.’ Slavoj Žižek defines the concept of symptom: “Symptoms are meaningless traces; their meaning is not discovered, excavated from the hidden depth of the past, but constructed retroactively [...]”<sup>15)</sup> In other words, although both characters repeat their meetings on an annual basis, Vania and Elena neither stop nor increase the frequency of their meetings and they do not want to cure or stop their symptom. By repeating their meetings annually, Vania and Elena want to re-activate their symptom<sup>16)</sup>of love. Moreover, given how the symptoms of their love are unarticulated in the play, it may indicate how subjective it is for Vania to “organise[s] his enjoyment,”<sup>17)</sup> by sticking to their annual reunion with no other motive beyond that. The pleasure of their meeting consists of mixed feelings. Elena says: “The more I gave free reign to my feelings, the more I understood what a trap we had both fallen into. We parted like two war prisoners, happy to be free, but sad to go home” (p. 163). In addition, Vania confesses his feeling to her: “When I’m with you my desires and fears rise up” (p. 152). Such mixed feelings could be regarded as *jouissance*. By connecting the feature of drive to the concept of *jouissance*, Salecl points out that, “Drive is thus a constant pressure, a circulation around the object *a*, which produces *jouissance* - a painful satisfaction.”<sup>18)</sup> For this reason, Vania and Elena enjoy their *jouissance* by constantly repeating their reunion, regardless of how difficult it is for them to go back to reality after each meeting.

15) Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime of Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), 58.

16) With regard to the term symptom/sinthome, see Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 136-140; with regard to the relation between the Lacanian analyst and the analysand in the context of curing the subject’s symptom, see Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 61-68.

17) Žižek, *The Sublime of Object of Ideology*, 80.

18) Salecl, *(Per)versions of Love and Hate*, 50.

And in this respect, both characters are “the subject of the drives (or the subject as *jouissance*).”<sup>19)</sup> It is noticeable that Vania and Elena have transformed into ‘the subjects of the drives’ in their meeting venue. Vania’s little cabin serves as a space of generating drive, - one where both lovers exist as the subject of their respective drives. Thus, we can describe their love as a journey to symptom. In essence, the journey to love created by Vania and Elena is equal to producing or inventing their symptom of love, which reveals that both characters position themselves as the subjects of drive in a repetitive manner. Given that this journey is grounded on the uncertainty of whether they could meet each other this time or not, Vania’s cabin, as a space of generating drive, is a quasi-utopia. Despite Vania’s cabin functioning as a place for actualising their annual meeting, it does not provide any confirmed sense of everlasting love between them. In other words, Vania’s cabin does not debunk its meaning as a kind of utopian space for both lovers, nor fully confirm it as a utopian space in the sense that their meetings cause the uncertainty for continuing their love. If Vania’s cabin could be regarded as a quasi-utopia, that is because of Elena, who will be discussed in the following section.

### 3. The Genealogy of Love: His Trees and Photos

As discussed earlier, a remarkable element of Vania’s retreat is the presence of trees surrounding it. What makes this so significant is that the trees are connected to generating and dominating a feminine atmosphere around the retreat. This is in the knowledge that they are portrayed as Elena’s black hair.

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19) Bruce Fink, “Knowledge and Jouissance”, 23.

Furthermore, the idea that the trees play a central role in shaping the feminine atmosphere is coupled by the fact that Vania's mother was the one to compel him to go and stay there to recover from poor health. Just as his mother enables him to stay in the cabin for a while every year, Elena is the one to make him stay and wait for her there. The trees indicate what Elena means for Vania and vice versa. Let's expand upon this connection further.

Vania's profession is that of a photographer, whose work is mainly based on trees. Particularly, Elena likes Vania's photographs. Vania confesses that, "I will love you each time I hear the trees" (p. 167). When Vania encounters Elena at his photo exhibition, he describes "her hair" as "the Black Forest" and says that, "I've loved you since you noticed the trees and discovered me like one of them" (p. 164). For him, Elena is the one who discovers his presence as well as his trees. She knows how to look at him: "Probably because I knew how to look at you, you and your trees" (p. 164). This is especially poignant when Elena exclaims, "So, he listened to the trees and thus never stopped loving me" (p. 155). Just as the trees are always green in the cabin, the trees imply an eternal and unchangeable love. Therefore, the words "Close your eyes and listen to the wind in the trees" (p. 155) could be regarded as their confession of love. This is where their love emerges. In the play, the trees are not only important in showing visual signs of the unchangeable and everlasting love between them but also; they shape the framework of their love. This is why the photographs become significant in the play; with the understanding that Vania's trees could achieve significance only through the photographs he takes and Elena discovers. The opportunity for Vania and Elena to initiate their relationship presents itself at Vania's photograph exhibition. After encountering her at the exhibition, Vania says, "You should come to my studio: I could take your photo, analyse your smile, I could pre-

dict your future by just looking at you for an instant” (p. 152). Promising to meet Vania, Elena replies, “I turn up wherever I can. Plus I like you, because your photos are never blurred” (p. 154). Vania explains the value of the photographs:

Just watch what you want to keep. You take what you want to frame in the viewfinder and leave the rest out. And, above all, you must love what you have chosen. You must rediscover it each time and let yourself be surprised. (p. 171)

This phrase alludes to how the photographs serve to function as a frame. Thus, it can be argued that Vania’s photographs play a pivotal role in shaping a fantasy in the play in terms of the development and continuation of his relationship with Elena. However, from the viewpoint of Lacan, fantasy does not mean the fulfilment of one’s desire. Rather, it functions as a kind of frame that allows a person to express desire for something or someone.<sup>20)</sup> Lacan notes that man builds up his relationship to woman as long as she enters into his fantasy frame.<sup>21)</sup> The same goes for the relationship between Vania and Elena. Vania’s photographs encourage Elena to be invited into his fantasy frame. As long as he posits himself as a photographer whose work is obviously grounded on trees, the fantasy frame that generates their love is maintained. Again, by using trees as a medium between Vania and Elena, the photograph creates the fantasy that allows them to maintain their love relationship. Through the shaping of fantasy, the subject comes to know what the other wants and the fantasy gives Vania the answer for that.<sup>22)</sup> From this per-

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20) Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 6.

21) Genevieve Morel, “Feminine Conditions of Jouissance”, in *Reading Seminar XX*, 80.

spective, what does Elena want? How do Vania and Elena exist in the context of their love and ongoing relationship? How would they act and respond to each other in terms of continuing their relationship? The next section will answer these questions.

#### 4. Vania and Her or Vania and a Silent Siren

In the cabin surrounded by the trees, Vania meets Elena. He calls her a siren: “[Y]ou are nothing but a ghost, a nomad, a witch, a siren” (p. 194). This statement leads us to the way in which we understand Elena in the context of their relationship. In Greek mythology, Sirens are fatal creatures that seduce and kill seamen though the intoxicating allure of their sing to them. Sirens present “a danger to particular men’s lives, while they also challenge the social order as such, especially the family structure.”<sup>23)</sup> As Martin Ruther argues, sirens imply “forbidden objects of love.”<sup>24)</sup>

However, in *Vania and Her* Elena is rather close to being a ‘silent’ siren. As Kafka contends, the sirens’s “silence” is a “more fatal weapon than their song” because “it is conceivable that someone might possibly have escaped from their singing; but from their silence certainly never.”<sup>25)</sup> In a literal sense,

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22) Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 6; 154-157.

23) Salecl, *(Per)versions of Love and Hate*, 59.

24) Ruth Martin, “Love at a Distance: Kafka and the Sirens”, 1, accessed Feb 12 2014 <http://www.interdisciplinary.net/ci/transformations/sexualities/s2/martin%20paper.pdf>

25) Franz Kafka, “The Silence of the Sirens”, accessed on August 5 2014 <http://www.google.ie/url?sa=t&rc=t=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&sqi=2&ved=0CCsQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fisites.harvard.edu%2Ffs%2Fdocs%2Ficb.topic1116379.files%2FKafka%2520%2520Silence%2520of%2520the%2520Sirens.docx&ei=pJXVOXMJLjLY7AbkhYDIBw>

Elena does not sing any (love) songs. The songs related to their love just appear in the form of music that is inserted at the end of parts of the play, for example, “Falling in Love” (p. 171) and “*Ce Jour La*” (p. 156), as if the songs serve as footnotes to their love relationship. In the play Elena gave a CD about “piano music” to Vania. She says to him that “Listen to it: I burned it just for you. Listen to it when you want to hear me speak to you. If you listen carefully, you will see the trees better” (p. 167). Admittedly, even Elena burned the music CD for Vania, she does not make any attempt to sing a song for him. The fact that Elena remains silent is also highlighted in the scene when she does not answer properly when Vania makes multiple phone calls to her. She does not deliver any sweet words to him. Instead, sometimes her words merely remain murmured during the phone calls-, such as sounds of “Errr ... ”(p. 165). But, of course, Elena’s silence does not mean that she does not seduce Vania or that she does not suffer from his absence after the meetings. Portraying her pain for Vania’s absence, she states, “I would need months to recover and to get used to silence again” (p. 161). Here being silent means that “no news is good news” (p. 158). Yet, given that Vania is always the one who cannot bear Elena’s absence, writing 360 letters and 850 e-mails to her, Elena’s silence seems somewhat ambiguous in terms of revealing her attitude to love. Unlike Vania, who suffers her absence and constantly wants to fill it, - which makes him live isolated from the world - , Elena at least seems to lead her daily life in her own way. This is why Vania yells at her: “You leave me in this cabin for a year, and you tell me to be quiet, you wander around with your lovers, and you want me to feel good?” (p. 160). Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that their love depends upon Elena’s

whim and will, on the grounds that she has an initiative to develop and maintain their love. When they first met in the little retreat, she says, “I feel that I was right to come that you could love me in the end.” (p. 154). According to her, she loves Vania in a “different way”:

Vania: How come you loved me, and don't love me anymore?

Elena: I still love you, but in a different way, and not the way you would like (p. 164).

Elena says that she loves her husband, too: “I love him. I love him like a brother. I never had a brother.” (p. 161). Elena is somewhat self-sufficient in terms of maintaining their love relationship, because she claims that “I am neither your toy nor your thing” (p. 161), thereby being able to manage her daily role as a wife and mother in reality. Outside the cabin she does not attempt to reconfirm whether or not she is his object of love, or vice versa. This becomes apparent especially when we find out that Elena responds to Vania in an instant message saying, “LIVE YOUR LIFE” or “DON'T SPEND ALL YOUR TIME WRITING TO ME” (p. 176). This is the point at which Vania and Elena are very different from each other in terms of managing their love relationship. With regard to the difference between man and woman, Lacan points out that from the psychoanalytical perspective, gender difference does not relate to biological sex. Rather, it is determined by the kind of *jouissance* the subject has.<sup>26)</sup> According to Lacan, instead of a biological difference between female and masculine, there exists the difference between ‘a phallic *jouissance*’ and ‘feminine *jouissance*.’<sup>27)</sup> While a phallic *jouissance* is always con-

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26) Bruce Fink, “Knowledge and Jouissance”, 36.

27) Ibid., 38-40.

cerned with the other's presence, feminine *jouissance* does not always require this. While Elena experiences her *jouissance* in her own way - in which she loves both Vania and her husband at the same time - Vania cannot do so. He makes attempts to connect with Elena after their meeting has ended. In other words, Vania cannot separate himself from his love for her in his daily life; he does not seem to exist in reality. After a 40 year-long relationship with Elena, the play ends with Vania staying in a retirement home which is another version of his retreat.

However, such a difference between Vania and Elena is universal from the perspective of the psychoanalysis. As Bruce Fink argues, phallic *jouissance* "reduces our partner, as Other, to what Lacan refers to as object *a*, that partial object that serves as the cause of desire: our partner's voice or gaze that turns us on, or that body part we enjoy in our partner."<sup>28)</sup> "[T]he *jouissance* of the Other" is caused by "his or her voice, smell, smile, laughter, etc"<sup>29)</sup> in the name of love/hate. Such a structural way of experiencing a phallic *jouissance* resembles a man's.<sup>30)</sup> In a similar manner, the reason why Vania endlessly pursues a connection with Elena is linked to how he enjoys *jouissance* on his own. To be specific, reducing Elena to her voice: "Your voice is the first thing you took back from me when you left" (p. 165), or "her breast, her soft skin" (p. 198) helps him to manage his love relationship with Elena on his own. Yet, as long as Elena exists for Vania - as such a partial object a voice or breast etc., he remains unsatisfied, thereby being obsessed with maintaining their love in order to fill her absence. This is emphasised by Vania's persistence through multiple letters and emails to Elena. Salecl de-

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28) Ibid., 37.

29) Salecl, *(Per)versions of Love and Hate*, 64.

30) Bruce Fink, "Knowledge and Jouissance", 37.

scribes this feature of the obsessional subject:

... the obsessional maintains his desire as impossible and does so in order to negate the Other's desire. The obsessional wants to be in charge of the situation; he plans his activities in detail. An encounter with the woman who is the object of his desire will be thought out well in advance; everything will be programmed and organized, all to prevent something unexpected from happening. The unexpected here concerns desire and *jouissance*. The obsessional tries to master his desire and desire of the Other [...] <sup>31)</sup>

It is thought that the obsessional subject is a common example of how the male exists in the context of love.<sup>32)</sup> The same applies to Vania. In the play Vania can be understood as an obsessional subject. As Salecl points out, the obsessional subject thinks that if he faces the Other's *jouissance*, he will vanish. Thus, he desperately tries to control his *jouissance*, and for this reason, his central concerns lie in whether or not he is alive or dead.<sup>33)</sup> This explains why Vania says to Elena that "I worried myself to death. I hardly leave my retreat" (p. 167) and tries to shoot and hang himself while meeting with Elena in the cabin. In essence, Vania's suicidal act shows the way in which he controls his *jouissance* in an obsessive manner. He knows that if he encounters Elena's *jouissance* and absorbs himself into it, he will die. The fact that he saves himself from committing suicide is rooted in his residence in the cabin - place that is isolated from the real world and regarded as a space for generating drive (*jouissance*), as we discussed earlier. Again, in order to protect

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31) Salecl, (*Per*)versions of Love and Hate, 65.

32) Ibid.

33) Ibid., 66.

himself from his 'Siren', Vania has to stay away from reality and meet her only once a year in his own place. For Vania, staying in the cabin allows him to maintain and control his *jouissance* at the same time. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that Vania is the one who plans and organises their annual meetings. He even sets up their meeting date as Elena's birthday, "on November 27th, Saint Severin's day" (p. 158): If we agree with the idea that Vania performs his repetitive acts - such as writing multiple emails to her - in order to defend his *jouissance* from Elena's, it is ironic that one of the titles in the play is "Ten Ways Not To Seduce a Woman." Although this title highlights Vania's obsessive acts of as a product of his purely absolute love, not caring much about Elena's feelings, it reveals Vania as the obsessional subject. Just as Sirens remaining silent allows seamen passing by their island to stay alive, Vania can maintain and defend his *jouissance* as long as Elena is silent when she gets back to her daily life. Vania also needs to create Elena's song on his own, as if the lyrics to the songs that appeared in the play are sung by her. Through creating fantasy in Vania's photographs, both lovers need to imagine that their love is everlasting 'not blurred photos.' Elena is regarded as a Siren, but she does not have to sing a song in an attempt to seduce Vania. By not knowing exactly how much she loves him, Vania can desire her and preserve his *jouissance* in a safe manner, meaning he does not kill himself for 'love'. From this perspective, one can interpret Roland Barthes's definition of lovers in a different way: "The lover's fatal identity is precisely: *I am the one who waits.*"<sup>34</sup>) In the context of the love relationship between Vania and Elena, it would be understood as: 'I am the one who enjoys *jouissance* in terms of waiting for our reunion'. This is why Vania

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34) Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage Books, 2001), 40. [Italics in original].

and Elena's reunion is held only once a year and why they do not try to increase the number of times they reunite. This regular pattern of reunion enables both lovers to enjoy their own *jouissance* in their own way, thereby helping to preserve their love for a long time: "I have always loved you and I have no intention of stopping on the way" (p. 199).

## 5. The Leftover from Love ...

After 20 years, the journey to love made by both lovers is converged on their permanent combination, namely, marriage. It is due to each of their spouses dying all of a sudden. Elena explains that "My husband died suddenly [due to his old age], when I happened to be at home between two of his tours" (p. 191); Vania says that "My wife took her own life for reasons that remain mysterious"(p. 191).

However, as the play reveals, the end of their journey to love does not seem quite joyful, because old Vania relocates to a retirement home and their cabin becomes useless. According to Vania: "The forest house is invaded by weeds and shoots, and my head is too. The domestic appliances don't work anymore. Nature has taken back control. The forest has taken back its territory." (p. 197) The ruin of the forest house poses as visual evidence of what is left for their long love relationship. Though the love between Vania and Elena generates from "the desire for an unknown duration,"<sup>35)</sup> which is demonstrated by their long-term relationship, - the play concludes that what is left over from love, - after it has gone or ended, - is the truth that love

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35) Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 33.

“cannot be simulated,” no matter how long one’s relationship lasts. Even though Vania is called “a simulator” who performs dementia at the nursery home and says to Elena that, “[w]e will see in ten years” (p. 201), he could not “start over again” with his love. This is demonstrated by how he wants to perform the scene in which he becomes a 7 year-old boy in order to create “the first meeting between two children: the first time I noticed a girl and fell in love,” (p. 204) as if he wants to reproduce his love for Elena. Because the play is grounded on Vania’s flashback, thereby representing that both lovers constantly transform their role as ‘lovers’ into those of narrators or other characters, like children and a nurse, as the play develops the distance between their fantasy (annual meetings) and daily life (represented by Elena’s marriage and by old Vania’s life in a nursing home) is maintained. Such distance is highlighted by Vania: “My non-life with you, the life that drips away next to yours like a rail opposite the other parallel rail on a train track. They carry heavy loads, but they never exchange caresses” (p. 167). This confirms that love can be sustained and preserved at a distance and explains how *Vania and Her* is epitomised by a chronology of preserving (impossible) love.

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## 국문초록

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### (불가능한) 사랑에 관한 연대기

- 『바냐와 그녀』

황 유 정\*

본 연구는 정신분석학 관점에서 파트리스 파비스의 희곡 『바냐와 그녀』에 나타난 사랑의 특징에 대해 고찰하는 것을 그 목적으로 삼는다. 이 극은 두 명의 주인공들, 바냐와 엘레나의 관계를 주축으로 이들 사이에서 벌어지는 20년간의 만남을 다루고 있다. 1년에 일주일간, 바냐의 오두막에서 이루어지는 이들의 만남은 증상으로서의 사랑의 양상을 보여준다는 점에서 특징적이다. 또한, 이 극에서 바냐의 오두막 주변을 둘러싸고 있는 나무들과 그가 찍은 이들 나무에 관한 사진들은 두 명의 주인공들의 사랑을 발생하게 하는 주된 요인이 된다. 이들의 20년간에 걸쳐 진행되는 만남은 바냐로 하여금 스스로의 향유를 통제하고 보존하려는 강박적인 노력을 강구하게 한다는 점에서 그를 강박적인 남성 주체로 이해하게 한다. 한편, 이들의 관계에서, 엘레나는 스스로의 향유에 대해 자기 충족적이라는 점에서 침묵하는 사이렌으로 간주될 수 있다. 이러한 남녀 주체들의 서로 다른 존재 양상들은 이 극에 나타난 주인공들의 사랑의 특징을 (불가능한) 사랑의 연대기와 동궐로 이해하게 한다.

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