

# The absurd as reflected in the time, language and characters of S. Beckett's Endgame.

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ROMINA RABAK

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Potpis

Romina Rabak

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores Samuel Beckett's identity as a playwright who exposes the meaningless and absurd nature of human existence through the unconventional structure and dialogues in his play *Endgame*. The study aims to delve into Beckett's philosophical view on life, focusing on both the thematic and technical aspects of his drama. By closely examining various dimensions of the play, the study reveals how *Endgame* serves as a warning of an unspecified catastrophe and portrays the harsh realities of human existence. This chapter shows the link between Samuel Beckett and Existentialism as well as his existentialist stand as well and his impact on the Theatre of the Absurd. of plays. Beckett adopted Sartre's existentialism as the philosophical foundation for his The Theatre of the Absurd, influenced by existential philosophy, sought to capture the sense of alienation, disconnection, and purposelessness. Beckett, a prominent figure within this movement, became celebrated for his unique ability to explore the complexities of the human psyche and the absurdity of life through the lens of theater. As a response to the anguish and despair of post-war Europe, Beckett sought to categorize theatrical conventions and expose the absurdity of human existence. Samuel Beckett's works are analyzed within an existentialist framework because he is widely regarded as one of the pioneering playwrights of twentieth-century drama, known for his radical departure from conventional writing, representation, and direction artistic approach, which became evident in the creation of his masterpieces. This connection with existentialism led Beckett to be considered the founding figure of Absurd Drama in British literature. Initially, when Beckett's plays were first performed, they faced hostility from audiences accustomed to traditional theatre. However, after World War II, people's experiences of loss and fear brought them closer to Beckett's characters. The themes of existential despair, meaninglessness, and the human struggle for significance resonated deeply with post-war audiences, making Beckett's works more relatable and meaningful to them. Time serves as an essential dimension in *Endgame*, acting as both a consistent force and an enigmatic puzzle throughout the play. Beckett's manipulation of time disrupts traditional chronological order, putting the audience into a cyclical and timeless narrative. The setting itself, a desolate room with windows showing nothing but darkness, suggests an eternal state of stagnation. The play's opening lines, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished," set an immediate tone of futility, where the characters seem trapped in an endless loop of existence.

Beckett's use of time is also evident in the characters' reflections on their past and their anticipation of an uncertain future. The characters' memories are fragmented, often unreliable, mirroring the human struggle to grasp the fleeting moments of life. Furthermore, language in *Endgame* is not a means of connection, instead, it intensifies the character's isolation. The characters engage in repetitive dialogues, emphasizing the futility of their efforts to reach a mutual understanding. The inability to communicate effectively serves as a metaphor for the human condition, where individuals are faced with the difficulty of connecting with others and expressing their feelings even though the play shows the importance of relationships. *Endgame* centers around four characters: Hamm, Clov, Nagg, and Nell isolated in a room and struggling to find purpose and connection. Their interactions and dialogues reflect an existential crisis that echoes throughout the play. Moreover, the manipulation of time and language in *Endgame* creates an atmosphere of perpetual stagnation further emphasizing the absurdity of their existence. The primary objective of this thesis is to explore how Samuel Beckett employs the elements of time, language, and characters in *Endgame* to convey the notion of the absurd. By examining the interplay between these elements, we aim to discover Beckett's message about the human condition and the intrinsic struggle for meaning and identity in an existence that appears devoid of significance. Beckett's interest in mental disorders and the exploration of feelings of anxiety becomes evident in the portrayal of his fictional and dramatic characters who symbolize the journey of self-discovery.

## **Samuel Beckett and Existentialism**

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that centers around individual existence and rejects the notion of absolute reason. The emergence of existentialism can be attributed to the decline in people's belief in the existence of God, brought about by the experiences of wars and losses. In the past, God served as a reference point, but with the disappearance of this belief, people lost their primary source of meaning. This loss led to a blurred understanding of the world and a shift in the perception of language. It was commonly held that words had transparent meanings, directly representing thoughts. However, in the context of existentialism and postmodernism, language is seen differently—words are considered mere representations with no function beyond that. Modern societies relied on the idea that words always referred to stable meanings or realities (signifieds). However, postmodern thought challenges this notion, suggesting that there are only signifiers, and the concept of any stable or permanent reality



disappears, along with the idea of signifieds that signifiers point to. According to the existentialist view, only surfaces exist without depth, and language loses its traditional function of conveying meaning and communication. Consequently, individuals are left without a reliable basis for their search for meaning and being. Existentialism places the individual at the center, questioning their existence in the absence of a certain signified or ultimate source of meaning. Sartre's frequently repeated statement, "Existence precedes essence", forms the fundamental basis of Existentialist thought. "What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world —and defines himself afterward" (Sartre, 1948, p.28). This quote, highlighted in Sartre's work *Existentialism and Humanism*, asserts that individuals first exist and then define their essence or identity based on their lived experiences. Sartre explains that man is essentially a blank slate at birth and becomes something meaningful through the choices and actions he takes throughout life. He emphasizes that individuals are not predestined to be a certain way; instead, they have the freedom to shape their own identities and meanings. "Life has no meaning a priori. Before you come alive, life is nothing" (Sartre, 1948, p.49).

Sartre's concept of being for itself is characterized as a form of nothingness, a void within existence that introduces negation into the world. This notion suggests that through absolute nothingness, the silence of being is disrupted or broken. In existentialism, nothingness is seen as a necessary element that constitutes being. Human consciousness, according to Sartre, can also be understood as a form of nothingness surrounded by the density of existence. This perspective portrays human consciousness as a kind of emptiness or lack, which sets it apart from the determinism that governs other aspects of the world. However, this nothingness within human consciousness brings about a challenging situation, as it leads to the concept of radical freedom. In existentialism, individuals are liberated from any predetermined essence or fixed nature, and this freedom places an immense burden of responsibility on them. They are ultimately responsible for creating their own lives and defining their essence, which can be an overwhelming realization, "Man is condemned to be free" (Sartre, 1948, p.34). In the absence of a predetermined purpose or guidance, individuals are left to navigate their existence without any external support. This existential condition of radical freedom can lead to a sense of unbearable pain, as individuals grapple with the weight of their choices and the responsibility of self-creation. Existentialism recognizes that both being thrust into the world and facing death are not matters of choice for individuals. However, existentialists emphasize the theme of death because they believe that confronting mortality is crucial for understanding life fully. When a

person becomes aware of their mortality, their initial response might be to distract themselves with daily routines to avoid thinking about death. On the other hand, evading the reality of death also means evading the true essence of life.

The themes and concepts of existentialism are deeply intertwined with Samuel Beckett's drama. Beckett's works often center around existential themes such as despair, bad faith, and authenticity. His plays aim to bring the audience face-to-face with the realities of existence and prompt them to search for their sense of meaning in life. One of the central aspects of existentialism is the concept of authenticity, which involves individuals being true to themselves, embracing their freedom, and taking responsibility for their choices. In Beckett's plays, characters often grapple with their authenticity, reflecting the existential anguish inherent in the human condition. This struggle for authenticity is portrayed on the stage, allowing the audience to connect with the characters' existential dilemmas. Through his characters and narratives, Beckett masterfully captures the essence of existential anguish, encouraging the audience to confront their existential questions and engage in an introspective exploration of their existence. This alignment with existentialism makes Beckett's works thought-provoking and resonant with those who contemplate the complexities and uncertainties of human life. Samuel Beckett's literary works portray the human condition as absurd and marked by a profound sense of emptiness. His characters are faced with a lack of meaning at the core of their existence, desperately seeking purpose in an irrational world. The elusive search for explanations leaves them in a state of uncertainty, blurring the lines between reality and imagination. Beckett's view of human life centers on pain and suffering. Success and failure appear insignificant in the face of life's harshness. This existential perspective aligns Beckett with the idea of nothingness, where meaning and explanations are absent. In his plays, human relationships are depicted as a mix of cruelty, hope, frustration, and disillusionment, revolving around universal themes of birth, death, and the complexities of human emotions and obstacles.

Existentialism emerged as a reaction against the conventional philosophies of its time. Similarly, Beckett's plays stand in contrast to the mainstream drama of his era by rejecting realism in settings, characters, situations, and the conventional flow of logic. Instead, Beckett's works present themes of meaninglessness, isolation, and the breakdown of language. The mainstream realistic drama that Beckett opposes aims to depict life as it is or as it should be. It focuses on reproducing life as perceived by the senses, emphasizing didactic and entertaining elements with ordinary characters in ordinary situations. Realistic plays prioritize realistic settings and characterization, with linear plot structures. Indeed, Beckett can be seen as a

playwright committed to presenting a reactionary drama that aligns with his view of the human condition. This genre of drama is commonly referred to as the Theatre of the Absurd. Beckett's works fit into the Theatre of the Absurd as they embrace the elements of absurdity and meaninglessness prevalent in existentialist thought. Through his plays, Beckett emphasizes the sense of futility and disconnection experienced by his characters, reflecting the existential notion of a purposeless world. By rejecting conventional forms of drama and adopting an existentialist lens, Beckett's plays delve into the complexities of the human condition and portray a universe that often seems devoid of traditional meaning.

### **The Theatre of the Absurd**

According to Camus, the term "absurd" refers to something that is not only impossible but also contradictory. It encompasses situations or experiences that defy logical understanding and rational explanation, leading to a sense of paradox. Camus argues that the experience of the absurd arises when humans, with their innate desire for coherence, meaning, and unity, confront all in the opposite. Camus characterizes the rejection of the absurd as a state of being asleep, drawing parallels between willful ignorance and unconsciousness, both involving a denial of reality. Denying the absurd also entails denying a fundamental aspect of human consciousness. On the other hand, embracing the absurd situation represents awakening, when one encounters the absurd, it becomes a moment of profound clarity "The purest of joys" (Camus, 1991, p.63). The consequence of accepting the absurd leads to the will to live in the present moment and the will to experience the world. The world, as perceived through the human mind, remains elusive and incomprehensible; its true nature is beyond our grasp, and any attempt to fully understand it is futile. It appears as if everything has lost its significance, and every explanation offered only masks the void of uncertainty that lies beneath. The absurd exposes the inhuman aspect of a world that was once made intelligible by imposing human thought upon it. However, the absurd strips away this imposed meaning, leaving us with an unexplainable reality devoid of meaning and false clarity. The human mind, often unconscious of the absurd, seeks to make sense of the world by imposing its system of interpretation and meaning onto it, attempting to find unity in the face of the absurdity that surrounds us. "If I try to seize this self of which I feel sure, if I try to define and to summarize it, it is nothing but water slipping through my fingers" (Camus, 1991, pp.19-20).

During the mid-twentieth century, many writers utilized the term "absurdity" in literature to highlight the perplexing issues present in the world, which lead to uncertainty in human life.

Absurdist writers such as Beckett, Ionesco, and Sartre focused on contemporary humanity and explored themes such as the meaningless and futile actions of individuals, their anxiety, and their relentless quest for a singular meaning in life. Esslin (1960) refers to Ionesco's interpretation of the term "absurd" stating that it signifies something devoid of purpose, detached from religious, metaphysical, and transcendental foundations. The world's crisis has had a detrimental physical and psychological impact on societies. When people face threats to their lives and the foundations of human existence crumble, it leads to a series of negative emotions and experiences. Individuals become hesitant, confused, helpless, and hopeless. They may feel lost and without purpose, eventually losing faith in the meaning of life. These distressing realities, marked by anxiety and a sense of life's senselessness, play a significant role in giving rise to the philosophy of absurdism.

The Theatre of the Absurd is a form of drama that portrays the irrationality of the human condition. It combines various elements such as moments of silence, repetitions, unconventional dialogue, lack of recognizable scenery, absence of a coherent plot, absence of progress, and absence of resolution. The term "The Theatre of the Absurd" was coined by Martin Esslin in his book of the same name. According to Esslin, absurd plays embody Albert Camus's philosophy and his concept of the Absurd as reflected in his work "The Myth of Sisyphus." Esslin suggests that by 1942 Camus had calmly questioned why, in a world devoid of meaning, one should not consider suicide as an escape. In that same work, Camus explains that in a universe stripped of illusions and light, humans feel like strangers and experience a sense of alienation, a detachment from their own lives, akin to the feeling of absurdity. This sentiment of absurdity is closely tied to the aftermath of the Second World War, with its widespread destruction and the resulting sense of meaninglessness. Camus's existentialist perspective views human beings as moving from the nothingness they emerged from to the nothingness in which they will ultimately end, with their existence marked by anguish and absurdity. This philosophical foundation serves as the basis for absurdism. Consequently, the Theatre of the Absurd plays explore despair and disillusionment with established values and beliefs and depict the journey through nothingness and an incomprehensible existence. The themes explored in Absurd Theatre are portrayed dramatically and are regarded as central in the plays of Beckett but also in other playwrights who share a common perspective known as the absurd. Therefore, it can be argued that the theatre of the absurd is the authentic and characteristic theatre of our era because it delves deeply into our inner world. According to Esslin (1960), "The Theatre of the Absurd can be seen as a reflection of the attitude that appears

to be most genuinely representative of our present time” (Esslin, 1960, p. 22). The Theatre of the Absurd is often characterized by its shocking and confusing plays, revealing both the rejection and success of its dramatic works. Styan offers a commentary on Absurd Theatre, stating that in such dramas, “every signal from the stage is a representation of irrationality designed to surprise and shock” (Styan, 1981, p.125). While these plays are highly interested in depicting reality, they remain enigmatic and as ambiguous as life itself. Their objective is to confront the audience with an experience akin to their own, exposing the sense of absurdity that permeates these works, which is connected to the writers’ understanding of life’s absurdity — an understanding already encountered beyond the realm of the theater. These plays do not aim to present a new life experience or engage in discussions related to human existence. Rather, they strive to provide a fresh theatrical experience and shed light on the external world. They are crafted to shock readers and spectators, to awaken their awareness, and to reveal the paradoxical and absurd side of our world. These plays aim to portray vivid images of lives and act as a warning rather than an attempt to deceive.

The development of the Absurd Theatre is credited to several authors, including Beckett, who come from diverse cultural origins and came from various locations. The authors all share a pessimistic outlook on life. This might be the case because, as Kaufmann puts it, “man’s situation is absurd and tragic” (Kaufmann, 1975, p.47). Styan further stresses the similarity of absurdist and existentialist viewpoints by stating that “they share a common starting point. All seem to agree that the world they see, the world they are concerned to depict, shows little sense of direction” (Styan,1981, p.218). Many of their works reflect this fundamental worry as they attempt to depict Man’s unrelenting search to comprehend or even find himself in this chaotic, fruitless, and pointless world. The authors of Theatre of the Absurd and Existentialist Theater differ in how they communicate ideas and viewpoints, even though their subjects are similar. The plays that are produced by Theatre of the Absurd’s writers are written in direct opposition to all established dramatic conventions. In other words, the theatre itself and what takes place on stage are as nonsensical and illogical as life itself, and the arguments and aesthetics are absurd. While dramatists like Sartre and Camus use the traditional theatrical rules of logical portrayal, sequences of events, and rational speech to convey their sense of real absurdity, Esslin makes a criticism regarding this assertion that existentialist theatre dramatists:

“present their sense of the irrationality of the human condition in the form of highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning, while the Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational

approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought.” (Esslin, 1960, p.24).

Styan claims that the “Theatre of the Absurd revealed the negative side of Sartre’s existentialism and expressed the helplessness and futility of a world which seemed to have no purpose” (Styan, 1981, p.125). Following in the footsteps of his forebears Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, Sartre, who was a prisoner of war in Germany, presents his perspective on man and his life in each of his plays. He believes that the universe is completely ludicrous, and that man is an anxious depressed being that exists in a chaotic, absurd, and pointless environment. Beckett, a prominent figure in the Theater of the Absurd movement, draws significant inspiration from Schopenhauer’s gloomy perspective on the human condition. According to Buttner (2001), Beckett closely aligns with Schopenhauer’s pessimistic outlook and embraces the three methods proposed by Schopenhauer for enduring the misery of existence: artistic contemplation, compassion, and resignation. Beckett’s profound connection with Schopenhauer’s ideas, views, and pessimism resonates with his own inner emotions and melancholic temperament. Consequently, many of Beckett’s works evoke a comparable sense of compassion and resignation within the audience. Both Beckett and Schopenhauer employ resignation as an indication of man’s rejection of life. In contrast to Schopenhauer’s belief that the only way to escape the pain and suffering of existence is through complete resignation of life, Beckett’s resignation does not only imply a desire to end life altogether. In works like *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett’s protagonists, such as Estragon and Vladimir, endure significant hardships but do not resort to suicide. Their contemplation of suicide can be seen as a commentary on society’s preoccupation with the idea of a peaceful death. However, Buttner argues that Beckett’s plays offer glimpses of hope, suggesting that his characters still possess a small measure of optimism for the future. This inclination towards hope leads them to delay complete resignation, which is more evident in *Waiting for Godot* than in *Endgame*. Indeed, there is a notable contrast between *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* regarding the characters’ attitude towards waiting. In *Waiting for Godot*, the characters are waiting for the arrival of Godot, whom they perceive as a potential savior or source of salvation. Their hope lies in the belief that Godot’s arrival will bring about some form of deliverance or improvement in their circumstances. This expectation of higher power’s intervention infuses the play with a sense of hope and the possibility of survival. On the other hand, in *Endgame*, the characters are not waiting for anyone to come. They hold the conviction that no one can truly help them in their predicament. The waiting in *Endgame* takes on a different meaning—it becomes a waiting for death or the end of their existence. The characters’ belief in the futility of external aid

contributes to a sense of resignation and acceptance of their inevitable fate. Therefore, while *Waiting for Godot* conveys a glimmer of hope through the anticipation for a savior, *Endgame* emphasizes the characters' belief in the absence of external help, accentuating their acceptance of impending demise.

## HELL À LA BECKETT

Samuel Beckett, an Irish playwright, novelist, theatre director, and poet, is widely recognized as a prominent figure in absurdist theatre. His works have been translated into numerous languages. Beckett's plays often revolve around themes of human suffering, despair, and survival, with his characters struggling to find meaning in an incomprehensible world. "Characters engage in dialogue or dialectical monologues that go nowhere. There is no progression, no development, no resolution" (Greenblatt, 2006, p.2438). According to Beckett, absurdity is the fundamental essence of human existence, and he employs it as a primary tool to portray the feelings of emptiness and alienation prevalent in the modern world. Beckett's writing style is characterized by not following the traditional theatrical form.

"Instead of following the tradition that demands that a play have an exposition, a climax, and a denouement, Beckett's plays have a cyclical structure that might indeed be better described as a diminishing spiral. In this spiral descending towards a final closure that can never be found in the Beckettian universe, the characters take refuge in repetition, repeating their actions and words- often those of others – to pass the time." (Worton, 1994, p. 69).

Beckett's approach to drama aims to transcend traditional forms and reach a higher level of consciousness. He discards the once-dynamic systems of drama and instead employs innovative techniques, such as illogical situations, unconventional dialogue, minimal plots, and unusual settings. By stripping his scenes down to their bare basics, as seen in *Endgame*, Beckett effectively expresses the absurdity of human existence. This departure from conventional drama renders traditional judgments invalid, as absurdist plays can only be understood within the context of the Theatre of the Absurd. Beckett's works have the power to shock audiences, awakening them to the horror of the human condition. His plays vividly depict his vision of the human situation, immersing the actual audience experience in dramatic fiction. Critics, such as Hobson, note that Beckett's plays are infused with terror and horror, representing the search for a central self, while revealing themes of human alienation, and pain, and leaving audiences pondering on the paradoxical nature of the world. Moreover, Beckett's work presents a horrific vision of humanity's present and potential future, although not explicitly defined. His world

offers various versions of a dystopian future. These elements invite audiences to not merely imagine but experience these themes viscerally. Beckett's drama presents a haunting portrayal of existence; "...a portrayal of desolation, lovelessness, boredom, ruthlessness, sorrow, nothingness."(Atkinson, 1958, p.32). Norrish (1998, p.63) offers insights into Beckett's plays, asserting that all of them revolve around the struggle to endure the painful realities of human existence, despite constant frustrations. Beckett's characterization is ruthlessly realistic, and the impact of his plays lies in their capacity to horrify the audience, making them acutely aware of the harsh truths they portray. The essence of absurdity, according to Beckett, is the divorce between individuals and their lives, actors, and their settings, which finds dramatic representation in the Theatre of the Absurd.

The silent moments and actions on stage mirror the real-life situations that people must grapple with. Beckett's plays serve as a reflection of the human condition, compelling audiences to confront the unsettling truths and uncertainties that characterize existence. Beckett embodies a high seriousness, maintaining coherence between his artistic vision and its form. This integration allows him to craft a powerful tragic vision. While his plays may include moments of laughter, they are far from being comical. This darkly comic element is characteristic of the Theatre of the Absurd, where the absurdity of life and the human experience is depicted in a way that blends the tragic and the humorous. Instead, they delve into the painful realities of human life. Beckett's plays may not immediately evoke catharsis during their course, but the spectator's sense of relief or emotional release can occur afterward, as a delayed reaction to the experience. This suggests that catharsis is not essential to take place during the performance but can manifest itself later. In essence, Beckett's drama challenges conventional notions of tragedy and catharsis, focusing on the raw, painful aspects of human existence without seeking to offer easy emotional relief to the audience. Indeed, Beckett's theatre can be described as a theatre of consciousness, as it delves into the depths of human thought and awareness. His vision is marked by a unique blend of seriousness, aiming to caution and enlighten the audience rather than deceive or provide escapism. It does so without any sympathy, presenting the reality that seems to be stuck in an endless loop, never making any real progress, whether in its setting or its characters. The distinctiveness of Beckett's drama lies in its ability to portray a sense of absurdity, where characters engage in dialogue that lacks any solid meaning.

In *Endgame*, he emphasizes the significance of portraying existence with minimal words and actions, especially in an era where the value of life is continuously questioned. The recognition that human life can end at any moment renders individual lives seemingly insignificant and



devoid of meaning. Beckett's dramatic works create a universe, with characters placed into what can be described as the Beckettian stage. This unique theatrical world is often called a "Beckettian hell" where characters grapple with the harsh and absurd realities of existence. To convey this "hell" to the audience and make them confront their existence and the meaning of life, Beckett employs various theatrical elements. These include the setting, which can create an atmosphere of desolation and hopelessness, and the manipulation of time to add to the sense of disorientation. However, the primary means through which Beckett brings about the harmony of nothingness in *Endgame* is through the characters and their language mirroring the struggle to communicate in a world that seems void of meaning. Through these various artistic elements, Beckett masterfully constructs a theatrical experience that immerses the audience in his unique vision of the human condition, prompting introspection and reflection on the nature of life and existence. The hell *a là* Beckett challenges conventional perceptions of theatre and confronts viewers with the complexities of human existence:

"Beckett leaves his audiences with no real message but rather a picture of a helpless man struggling in an absurd universe; no plan of escape from our doom is outlined by the playwright; perhaps he is still searching for one himself." (Grattan, 1965, p. 106.)

Samuel Beckett's literary works are characterized by the interplay of the absurd and tragic, showcasing the profound emptiness of the human condition. His drama revolves around a central absence of meaning, leaving his characters in desperate pursuit of purpose and significance. They find themselves in an irrational world, where they live their lives searching for explanations, leaving uncertainty as to whether these explanations even exist or are merely products of their imaginations. Beckett's perception of the human condition is one of pain, suffering, and a short, harsh existence. The unity in all of Beckett's works lies in expressing certain attitudes with great force and rare imagination: life is cruel and painful, and success and failure are equal. For Beckett, there is no inherent meaning or explanation; all that remains is nothingness, aligning him closely with existentialist ideas. In this context, human relationships in his plays are reduced to cycles of cruelty, hope, and frustration. These recurring themes revolve around the profound aspects of human existence, including birth, death, despair, and the physical barriers and severe that define the human experience. Beckett's works present a powerful portrayal of the human struggle amidst a seemingly meaningless and absurd world.

## The meaning behind the title

It is important to acknowledge Beckett's intelligence, as the titles of his plays offer readers a glimpse into the content and anticipate the outcome even before delving into the play itself. *Endgame* possesses a profound suggestion of negativity in life, portrays the decline of the external world, and serves as a warning of a possible unspecified catastrophe. There are four disabled characters, but the play does not reveal the reasons behind their disabilities. This mirrors the concept that humans often feel abandoned and thrust into an unpredictable world. Like the Beckettian world, the characters in the play are not in a typical setting and must confront their situations in solitude. In one scene, Hamm asks Clov and Nagg to pray together, but immediately afterward, he exclaims, "The bastard! He doesn't exist" (Beckett, 1957, p.55). His anger stems from the realization that they are alone. Furthermore, the title *Endgame* carries a sense of reality by alluding to the game of chess. In chess, the players know that a single misstep can lead to their ultimate defeat, as each move is interconnected. Beckett views life as an ancient game that has already reached its conclusion, as Hamm states, "lost of old" (Beckett, 1957, p.82), tracing back to the moment of human birth or existence on Earth. Despite the characters and players anticipating their eventual end from the beginning, they persist, emphasizing that life is a waiting game. When comparing the title *Endgame* to chess, Beckett describes it as follows:

"Hamm is a king in this chess game lost from the start. From the start, he knows he is making loud senseless moves. That he will make no progress at all with the gaff, now at last he makes a few senseless moves as only a bad player would. A good one would have given up long ago. He is only trying to delay the inevitable end. Each of his gestures is one of the last useless moves which put off the end. He is a bad player." (qtd. in Pilling, 1994, p.71).

In this passage, Beckett presents two contrasting individuals. The first person is depicted as a poor player who recognizes the meaninglessness of their actions but continues, nonetheless. On the other hand, the second person is more aware that life is not worth living, leading them to accept the painful reality without wasting time or effort. This concept is also explored in Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, where he examines our encounter with the Absurd and how we deal with or live with it. The title of the play holds significant symbolism as it draws a parallel between living life and playing chess. In a chess game, players anticipate its conclusion, just as the characters await their death. The consciousness of death permeates the entire play, highlighting the helplessness inherent in all human beings. From the outset, the players are aware that their actions are pointless and monotonous, yet they are compelled to continue until

the end. Every aspect of the play can be viewed as obligatory moves that ultimately conclude the game—the game of life. The presence of the chess board in the play further amplifies the existential unease surrounding human existence. The absence of a central field on the chessboard symbolizes the void at the core of being. By incorporating the chessboard, Beckett accentuates humanity's quest to discover its true self and its continuous efforts and failures in finding the center or the essence of existence on Earth. This unrelenting pursuit of a central identity is particularly evident in Hamm's words and actions, notably when he requests Clov to position his wheelchair in the middle of the room.

HAMM: Am I right in the center?

CLOVV: I'll measure it.

HAMM: More or less! More or less!

CLOV: There!

HAMM: I'm more or less in the center?

CLOV: I'd say so.

HAMM: You'd say so! Put me right in the center! (Beckett, 1957, p.26).

Indeed, Hamm's quest in the play reflects mankind's search for meaning and purpose in existence. It unveils the profound yearning for a sense of being. The absence of a central field on the chessboard symbolizes the lack of a definitive center in the world. It signifies the absence of the essence of human existence and the metaphysical powers that could bring order to life, which incites anger in the characters throughout the play. In essence, the chess game can be interpreted as a metaphor for the chaotic nature of the human world.

CLOV: I love order. It's my dream.

HAMM: What in God's name do you think you are doing?

CLOV: I'm doing my best to create a little order. (Beckett, 1957, p.57).

Biographer Bair said:

“Much has been speculated about the meaning of *Fin de Partie*, or *Endgame*, but one thing is certain: when Beckett told some English-speaking friends that he had written a play

called *Fin de Partie*, they translated it as *End of the Game*. “No,” Beckett replied emphatically. “It is *Endgame*, as in chess.” (Bair, 1990, p.467).

## 2. BECKETT ON THE CONCEPT OF TIME IN ENDGAME

“There is no escape from the hours and the days. Neither from tomorrow nor yesterday because yesterday has deformed us or been deformed by us Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a day stone on the beaten track of the years, and irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. We are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday.” (Beckett, 1931, p. 2).

Samuel Beckett declares that time is a “double-headed monster” explaining that we can pass the time or time can pass us by making us his victims. (Postlewait, 1978, pp.474-475). People are always waiting for something throughout life, and we can say that an essential characteristic of the human condition is the act of waiting. Samuel Beckett’s plays seem to be preoccupied with time and its passing. Beckett describes the passage of time as a delusion that can never be reversed or avoided. *Endgame* emphasizes the fact that a man’s life can end anytime, but before “ending” we are captured in time and space just like Hamm and Clov. At the same time, time continues to flow and stands still by looking in retrospect just like when Hamm remembers the moments “in the beginning” but soon after is awakened by the reality that is present. Time is the agent of death and death is the solution for agony called life. But what time brings with its passing are different versions of the subjects that have and keep only the same name but not the personality. On the other hand, time passing instills profound fear within people. No matter the fact that we cannot control time, time can control us by simply hurrying us to actively spend it. Beckett portrays time as an oppressive force that weighs heavily on the characters’ lives. The characters are burdened by their mortality and the inescapable march of time toward death. The character of Hamm, who is in a wheelchair, represents a personification of time’s physical and emotional limitations. His reliance on Clov and his constant need for reassurance reflects the fear and anxiety associated with time. On the other hand, anxiety could be provoked also in the audience because of the frozen time of the play indicating that there is no hope on the stage. Ham and Clov are seemingly trapped in a perpetual state of waiting. This cyclical repetition reflects the eternal nature of time, emphasizing the characters’ inability to escape the clutches of time. Each day in the play seems indistinguishable from the last, reinforcing the sense of monotony and the inescapable burden of time that weighs upon the characters.

HAMM: Yesterday! What does that mean? Yesterday!

CLOV: [Violently.] That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. (Beckett, 1957, p, 32).

In *Endgame* time intertwines with memory, blurring the boundaries between past, present, and future. The characters' recollections of the past are often unreliable, further emphasizing the disintegration of time. Hamm and Clov's conversations frequently delve into memories, reflecting their attempts to grasp onto moments that have slipped away. Clov laments, "Memory! Useless, no use, so many years, so many memories, it's useless" (Beckett, 1957, p.29), illustrating the characters' struggle to reconcile their memories with the disorienting passage of time. Beckett employs time as a tool to highlight the absurdity of waiting and the resulting sense of hopelessness. This waiting becomes an allegory for the human condition, where individuals often cling to false hopes and expectations. "...time can be lost because time would contain hope" (Adorno, 1956, p.46). This explanation of time and Beckett's portrayal of time as an endless cycle of waiting emphasizes the futility of these expectations, leaving the characters trapped in a state of despair and hopelessness. Even though Hamm wishes to end the time he has, he hesitates, which shows that he has some hope:

And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to...to end.  
Yes, there it is. It's time it ended and yet I  
hesitate to—

(He yawns.)

—to end.

(Yawns.) (Beckett 1957, p. 3).

Although Beckett presents time as a paralyzing force that traps the characters in the present, we confront the resistance to change that reflects the existential struggle and struggle against the inevitability of transformation, as Hamm said: "But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!" (Beckett, 1957, p. 11).

"Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. (Pause.) Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap." (Beckett, 1957, p. 6) This quote emphasizes the never-ending nature of waiting and the character's inability to break free from the cycle of waiting and hopelessness. While *Endgame* primarily presents time as a destructive force, it also serves as a means for self-reflection and

contemplation. As they grapple with their mortality and the passage of time, they confront profound existential questions about the meaning and purpose of life. “We are not beginning to... to mean something?” (Beckett, 1957, p. 61). This captures the characters’ yearning to find meaning and purpose in their existence. Time is also portrayed as an opportunity for individuals to confront their existence and seek meaning. The play setting, an isolated room, represents the human condition itself – a place where individuals are confined by time and forced to confront their mortality. According to the philosopher Martin Heidegger, human existence is defined by the awareness of one’s finitude and the recognition that time is limited. The characters in *Endgame* grapple with this awareness, reflecting Heidegger’s notion that authentic existence arises from facing the inevitability of death and the cyclical nature of time. Beckett emphasizes the repetitive nature of time to highlight the absurdity of existence. The characters engage in recurring routines, such as Hamm’s insistence on ringing a bell or Clov’s repetitive observations of their surroundings. The philosopher Albert Camus’s concept of the absurd can shed light on Beckett’s exploration of time in *Endgame*. Camus argues that human existence is characterized by a fundamental tension between the human need for meaning and the universe’s inherent lack of meaning. The cyclical nature of time in the play reinforces the absurdity of this existential predicament, as the characters engage in repetitive actions that offer no escape from the absurdity of their existence. Beckett uses time as a motif to emphasize the fragile nature of human life and aligns with the philosophical concept of the absurd where human existence is characterized by the absence of meaning. In *Endgame*, Beckett incorporates the concept of time playing with its existence of absence throughout the play. The notion of time, as commonly understood in the worldly sense, is notably absent. It could be argued that the time no longer exists.

HAMM: One of these days I’ll show them  
to you.

(Pause.)

It seems they’ve gone all white.

(Pause.)

What time is it?

CLOV: The same as usual. (Beckett,  
1957, p, 4).

The exchange between the characters below exemplifies the absence of change in *Endgame*, ranging from the weather conditions to the consistent color of Hamm’s face.

HAMM: What's the weather like?

CLOV: As usual. (p, 27).

Furthermore,

HAMM: Am I very white?

(Pause. Angrily.)

I'm asking you am I very white?

CLOV: Not more so than usual. (Beckett, 1957, p.64).

Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* explores the concept of time from an existential perspective. Through the portrayal of time as temporal disorientation the illusion of progress, and the quest for meaning, Beckett delves into the profound implications of time on human existence. By confronting the limitations of time, Beckett prompts audiences to contemplate their relationship with time and the existential challenges it presents.

## 2.1. The Routine

The theme of routine is central to *Endgame* as the characters engage in repetitive actions and rituals that contribute to a sense of monotony and existential stagnation. Scholarly research by Steven Connor highlights Beckett's use of routine to convey a sense of existential imprisonment. The characters' repetitive actions mirror a sense of monotony and their inability to break free from their predicament. The routine becomes a metaphor for the characters' entrapment within their limited existence and the absurdity of their circumstances. The characters in *Endgame* cling to their routines as a means of establishing some structure in their lives. Additionally, the characters are trapped in a state of monotony, time, and their habits. *Endgame* revolves around passing the time without taking any notable activities. "There are no accidents in *Fin de Partie*. Everything is based on analogy and repetition" (Bair, 1990, p.467). The relationship between Hamm and Clov corresponds to the Beckett theory of habit defined by Proust as "An automatic adjustment of the human organism to the conditions of its existence" (Beckett, 1978, p.20), and according to Beckett, "Life is habit" (Beckett, 1931, p.19). Thus, in *Endgame*, automatism does not simply follow its natural course, once it reaches its conclusion, it must restart. Beckett introduces the idea of redundant automatism, which modifies the concept of habits as described in Proust; "Life is a succession of habits since the individual is a succession of individuals [each defined through the habits proper to him]" (Beckett, 1978, p.19).

However, in *Endgame*, Beckett implies that transitioning now only serves as the initiation of a new automatism or renewal of an existing one. Hamm and Clov are imprisoned in a single point of time in the drama, their lives remain the same and everything appears to be repetitive and useless. The repetition of events and the absence of progress contribute to a sense of meaninglessness. Hamm, as the central figure, maintains strict control over the routine, giving the illusion of power and authority. The repetition of actions provides a sense of order and stability in their bleak world. The repetitious nature of the character's actions serves as a metaphor for the larger human tendency to cling to routines and rituals to establish order stability and control. However, the routines prove to be empty rituals, incapable of offering true meaning. The repetition becomes a coping mechanism, allowing the characters to even a semblance of control. Beckett's *Endgame* deviates from the conventions of traditional well-made drama, lacking a clear beginning or end. In the play, everything is portrayed as nearing its conclusion since everything "is nearly finished" (Beckett, 1957, p.1), and time and life are presented as an illusion. Consequently, the characters have no choice but to play routine because it is the only thing they can do. Their anxieties prevent them from going beyond the confines of the room, compelling them to persist in their routines and habits as a means of distraction. The repetitive nature of their actions throughout the plays serves Beckett to show the boredom and reality of human life, as Clov says "All life long the same questions, the same answers" (Beckett, 1957, p.5), and "the same inanities" (Beckett, 1957, p.45) that persist throughout a lifetime. These repetitions show the absurdity of life, the habitual nature of man, and the sense of helplessness as well as the failure to achieve meaningful progress. In our own lives, we often encounter similar experiences. We may struggle to differentiate between days and dates, differ right from wrong, or determine what is truly beneficial for us. There are moments when we hesitate and feel a sense of helplessness, especially when facing crucial decisions that impact our future. Fear of failure and the unknown can hold us back, leaving us hesitant. These are common experiences that reflect the complexities of real life presented in *Endgame*.

CLOV: Why this farce, day after day?

HAMM: Routine. One never knows.  
(Beckett, 1957, p.32).

The repetitive action performed by Hamm and Clov in *Endgame* serves as a manifestation of their existential emptiness and nothingness in life. Despite the monotony and boredom associated with these repetitive actions, they play a significant role. They help to alleviate the overwhelming void that surrounds the characters and offer them a small semblance of comfort



and relief. The characters, constantly gripped by fear of the unknown, are driven to avoid any sudden action that might bring them further pain and suffering. This fear-based avoidance contributes to their refusal to make any progress or change. Hamm's demand to be returned to his sport reflects his need and reliance on the familiar and his resistance to change. The routine symbolizes the characters' fear of change because characters find comfort in the familiarity of their routines, as they provide a sense of security in the face of the unfamiliar. But why do we tend to find a routine in life? Maybe the reason would be what routine brings us; a defense mechanism against the anxiety and despair that accompany the contemplation of a life without a routine.

CLOV: "I'll leave you."

HAMM: "What for?"

CLOV: "I'm not needed here."

HAMM: "I need you" (Beckett, 1957, p. 1).

The characters created habitual behavioral patterns that keep them safe from reality, tucked away in a comfortable setting where they preserved the appearance of having control over the future, by viewing the world through their self-afflicted prism. While routine dominates the lives of the characters, Beckett introduces moments of disruption from their established patterns. These disruptions, such as Clov's contemplation of leaving or Hamm's occasional vulnerability, offer glimpses of potential change and escape from the monotony. However, these moments are short-lived and ultimately fail to bring any change but prove their strong routine-bound existence.

### 3. THE MEANINGLESS CONDITION

In *Endgame* Samuel Beckett presents the final phase of humanity's ongoing battle against time. The play portrays a universe that seems to be destroyed, the world rolls toward a state of nothingness and the only witnesses to its past are those in the room on the stage. Their inability of any personal growth or the ability to change their present demonstrates their helplessness. Beckett tried to reveal man's condition after World War II and highlighted the static and meaningless nature of the world. The characters are depicted as waiting aimlessly, living without purpose or possessions, waiting for nothing and there is no importance, and all their efforts are pointless, and producing no developments, they have lost the actual meaning of time. The characters' state of helplessness due to their inability to grasp the true essence of time, they are unable to notice, distinguish, and feel the passing days, as each day blends into the next in a monotonous cycle; today is just like yesterday and tomorrow is just like today, which is expressed in Hamm's final soliloquy, "Moments for nothing, now as always, time was never and time is over" (Beckett, 1957, p.83). They wait for an end, longing to know where time will ultimately lead them. The characters realize that they are mortal. The repetitive actions and routines depicted throughout the play symbolize the habitual nature of man, which, in turn, implies one's awareness that death is certain, and life is a mystery. According to Hamm's hopelessness knowledge, there is no hope because "The end is in the beginning and yet you go on." (Beckett, 1957, p.16). Beckett expresses deep depression and hopelessness, and, in the end, everything is reduced to nothingness, including time itself:

"Then one day, suddenly, it ends, it changes. I don't understand, it dies, or it's me, I don't understand, that either. I ask the words that remain- sleeping, waking, morning, evening."  
(Beckett, 1957, p. 17).

Clov observes the passage of time and acknowledges a change that has occurred and that there is still a transformation of nature. Furthermore, Beckett avoids expressing regret in the face of suffering and instead highlights it grotesquely by depicting the human body in its decaying components. This is evident in the characters of Nell and Nagg, who patiently wait for their death. Their prolonged misery has become ingrained and accepted as Nell puts it clearly when commenting on how "nothing is funnier than happiness...it's like a funny story we heard why this too often, we still find it funny, but we don't laugh anymore" (Beckett, 1957, p.19). Hamm has not embraced the same acceptance that Nell and Nagg have. This is evident as he periodically asks Clov, "Is it time for my painkiller?" (Beckett, 1957, p.20). By seeking relief

from his suffering, he tries to evade the passage of time and exist without the burden of acknowledging his misery. In contrast, Clov recognizes that the end is near, “nearly finished, must be nearly finished.” (Beckett, 1957, p.21). They both are looking for hope of another life beyond their current ones. In the context of Beckett’s work, life itself becomes the central problem.

The question arises of how complex life can be constructed from the fragmented elements that both Clov and Hamm mention. In such circumstances, where the meaningless accumulation of temporal fragments negates the concept of a unified whole, life can no longer be seen as a continuous process of personal growth, where an individual progressively unfolds their significance. The idea of meaning something becomes ironic: “Mean something! You and I, mean something! Ah that’s a good one!” (Beckett, 1957, p.33). If life is composed of meaningless fragments, referred to by Hamm as “Moments for nothing” then the passage of time, in which life persists or passes, cannot be defined as a sequential progression of consecutive moments (Beckett, 1957, p.83). Instead of a cumulative sequence leading from the past to the future, time paradoxically perpetuates its insignificance: “The end is in the beginning and yet you go on” (Beckett, 1957, p.69). Eventually, as Hamm predicts there will be “infinite emptiness” (Beckett, 1957, p.36). However, the emptiness being referred to here does not relate to the external world, but rather to the internal. The absurdity of life is evident from the beginning of the play, as illustrated by Clov’s assertion that he has nothing to do except wait for Hamm to call him.

“I’ll go now to my kitchen, ten feet by ten feet by ten feet, and wait for him to whistle me.  
(pause.) Nice dimensions, nice proportions, I’ll lean on the table, look at the wall, and wait for him to whistle me.” (Beckett, 1957, p.2).

This reflects that Clov’s existence seems to revolve around serving and waiting on Hamm, highlighting the lack of meaningful activity in their lives.

### **3.1. The Sense of Nothingness**

Beckett depicts life as an inescapable confinement, devoid of any exit. Individuals lack autonomy in this cycle; they are thrust into life, experience, fate, work, dream, and illness, form attachments, and endure for a time before succumbing to death. Death represents the conclusion for all creatures, and there is not any way to escape the trap of life except death. The characters in the play view themselves as trapped in an unchanging world, paralyzed by the fears that

prevent them from escaping the dark, harsh, and absurd reality of the outside world. Despite its pessimism, sickness, and darkness, this familiar world provides them with a sense of security, leading them to prefer staying within the room, or “cell” as Clov describes it, rather than venturing into an unknown world that may hold even greater pain and devastation as Hamm warned “Outside of here it’s death” (Beckett, 1957, p.9). The characters have no other option, in other words, there is no hope, no escape, and they are destined to live in a circle of nothingness despite knowing that the self-enclosed room they live in is unsafe, they remain unsatisfied because they have escaped from one trap to another, and they expect to find the same absurdity outside and then get the same result.

HAMM: Why do you stay with me?

CLOV: Why do you keep me?

HAMM: There’s no one else.

CLOV: There’s nowhere else.

HAMM: You’re leaving me all the same.

CLOV: I’m trying. (Beckett, 1957, p.6).

The characters have nothing to do and nowhere to go since the world outside offers nothing more than pain due to the devastating impact of the Second World War and humanity’s cruelty. In this bleak landscape, they find themselves without purpose or direction. They are bound to each other by necessity, as they see no other refuge and recognize that separating from one another would offer no advantage. The war resulted in many negative effects on people’s lives; the war left a lasting impact on people’s well-being, causing immense physical and psychological pain, and fostering hatred, and depression. The weight of these experiences left individuals feeling unable to carry on or comprehend life as they once did, as Clov expresses “I feel too old, and too far, to form new habits” (Beckett, 1957, p.81).

Beckett’s intention in *Endgame* is indeed to reflect the painful reality of war and its profound impact on people during that era. The play portrays the miserable state of humanity on Earth, highlighting the contradictions between human expectations and the harsh truth. There exists a fundamental conflict between what humans desire from the universe – friendship, love, justice, and peace – and what they encounter. This is particularly evident in the play’s conclusion, where Hamm asks Clov to speak sincerely from his heart:

They said to me, That's love, yes, yes, not  
a doubt, now

you see how\_\_ How easy it is. They said  
to me, That's friendship,

yes, yes, no question, you've found it.  
They said to me, Here's the

place, stop, raise your head, and look at all  
that beauty. That order!

They said to me, Come now, you're not a  
brute beast, think upon

these things and you'll see how all  
becomes clear. And simple!

They said to me, What skilled attention  
they get, all these dying of

their wounds. (Beckett, 1957, p.80).

The complete absence of nature serves to intensify the pessimistic atmosphere in the play as if nature has itself died along with the other things that have died within the play.

CLOV: (He gets up on a ladder, and turns  
the telescope on the window.)

Let's see.

Zero. . . Zero . . . and . . . Zero... (Beckett,  
1957, p.29).

Nature suggests that regardless of personal feelings about it, whether we like it or not, including both people and nature they will all come to an end. The disappearance of nature signifies the vanishing of life. Beckett used the theme of nature to raise the play's realism since the presence of nature represents life, existence, happiness, and survival, which are contrary to the motifs of the play. The disappearance of nature in *Endgame* serves as a symbolic representation of Clov and Hamm's isolation. Hamm, who is blind, is unable to experience the natural elements. Both characters have become disconnected from life, nature, and human contact. Their apprehension compels them to isolate themselves within the bleak emptiness of their room. Even the windows, meant to offer a view of the outside, present no signs of nature. Beckett by using the non-existing nature only emphasizes their imprisonment. Clov admits that he sees nothing beyond the windows, and this is a confirmation that life does not exist in general. There is no ship, fish, light, and even no tree growing. On the other hand, the characters are afraid of any

sign of life, even if it's a rat, it makes them feel uncomfortable, as Hamm tells Clov "Humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of God!" (Beckett, 1957, p.33). Nevertheless, he says "What in God's name do you imagine? That the earth will awake in spring? That the rivers and seas will run with fish again?" (Beckett, 1957, p.53). He is longing for it and wishes he could see the little life happening.

HAMM: Quiet, quiet, you're keeping me  
awake.

Talk softer.

If I could sleep I might make love. I'd go  
into the woods.

My eyes would see...the sky, the earth.  
I'd run, run, they wouldn't catch me.  
(pause.)

Nature! (Beckett, 1957, p.18).

To find solace and escape from his harsh reality, Hamm longs for moments of happiness and yearns to witness the beauty of the natural world. Through his dream, he seeks to recapture the moments of a time when he witnessed the young earth. By drowning in his imagination, he tries to forget the devastation that surrounds him and finds comfort in envisioning what he cannot experience but could offer him relief while he suffers.

### **3.2. Repetition and Existential Exploration**

Beckett's plays provoke and examine the concepts of difference and repetition. Repetition repeats the original, yet it always possesses an element of distinctiveness from its initial form. As someone who has devoted himself to discovering the essence of existence and identity, Beckett is preoccupied with repetition. Linguistic repetition often finds reinforcement in bodily gestures, and at times, repetition assumes a thematic role, with familiar questions and answers echoing themselves. Beckett used the language to explore its potential for conveying the elusive nature of Being and the constant evolution of human reality. According to Connor (1988, pp.45-47), Beckett regards Being as the foundation from which everything originates. The self comes into existence through its presence in time and is subject to change as time passes. Furthermore, Beckett insists that we exist in all moments, not only in the present, which implies that the past is a part of us. Consequently, Beckett employs language to portray an eternal present, a continuum where the present, past, and future blend. As transitions occur between states of

existence, the self becomes multiple. The present self is continually being replaced, which jeopardizes its ability to maintain control, and as a result, the desires of Beckett's characters remain unfulfilled since their desires change at different stages. Sometimes memories can revive a previous self that can no longer exist; as seen in Hamm's recollection of being a landlord. But this kind of act is and becomes painful. However, repetition, in the form of habits, serves as a mechanism to stabilize the self, shielding it from formlessness, and empowering it to maintain control over itself and the world. The present self is a repetition of the past self with a variation. In Beckett's works, both linear and circular repetition can be found. Linear repetition signifies a gradual decline into entropy, while circular repetition suggests the impossibility of a stable present. The circularity of repetition brings everything back to its initial state. The first occurrence may appear as new, and the second one might seem derived from the first, but the ubiquity of repetition robs us of any sense of priority or finality. All days blend into sameness; they exist within a repetitive chain, mirroring and parodying one another. As we listen to the formulaic exchanges being repeated, we begin to realize that the characters, lacking anything new to say, rely on what they have said before (Connor, 1988, p.126). While repeating oneself may suggest reduced content, in Beckett's works, it paradoxically involves saying more. Repetition frequently builds up the significance of the original and unveils the hidden meaning of the work. In *Endgame*, the act of bringing about an end is explored to such an extent that nearly every page evokes an image of an "ending". The repetitions in the play not only emphasize the idea of the exhaustion of physical and psychological resources but also highlight that the notion of "ending" is an unending process. The play opens with Clov's words: "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished" (Beckett, 1957, p.12). Since it lacks a specific referent, *it* can signify Clov's life, Hamm's life, their shared life, life in a general sense, or even the performance itself. Given that waiting for the end of things implies waiting for a new beginning, the end of Hamm and Clov's relationship appears impossible. The circular structure of the one-act play embodies a sense of an everlasting day, where gestures, phrases, and emotions are repeated endlessly. The characters in Beckett's work are confronted with the uncomfortable truth through repetition in a circular time: death will never arrive. Therefore, while *Endgame* portrays the act of reaching an end through a repetitive series, it also exemplifies the unavoidable continuity of repetition (Connor, 1988, p.124).

HAMM: Can there be misery —

He yawns.

—loftier than mine? No doubt. (Beckett, 1957, p.12).

Hamm continues to undermine his performance with ironic responses to his rhetorical questions, while his yawning suggests a sense of boredom. In *Endgame*, there are instances where Clov provides the same answers in both the affirmative and negative. This rapid oscillation between opposites, delivered in the same tone, suggests that there is no distinction between living and dying, leaving and staying:

HAMM: I'll give you nothing more to eat.

CLOV: Then we'll die.

HAMM: I'll give you just enough to keep you from dying.

CLOV: Then we shan't die. (Beckett, 1957, p.14).

CLOV: Then I'll leave you.

HAMM: You can't leave us.

CLOV: Then I shan't leave you. (Beckett, 1957, p.29).

It implies a view of humanity as anonymous individuals trapped within a senseless and repetitive cycle of suffering. Beckett's vision portrays mankind as mere links in this chain of anguish, devoid of meaning. As can be seen in the lives of Beckett's characters, by resigning with a habit, man can replace the suffering of being with the boredom of being. Ultimately, Beckett's characters can only evade the torment of their existence by surrendering themselves to repetitive routines. In Beckett's world, nothing significant occurs, and nothing truly concludes, as time operates circularly. The use of repetitive devices serves to reinforce the absurdity of their existence, their powerlessness, and their overwhelming sense of desolation.



#### 4. THE USE OF LANGUAGE

The choice of language in the play further emphasizes the emptiness and lack of meaningful existence for Hamm and Clov. While the characterization in *Endgame* is close to nothing, offering little detail and clues about the characters, language acts as a complement to the characters, revealing the existentialist tendencies of the playwright. “Shape without form, shade without color, Paralysed force, gesture without motion” (Eliot, 1925, *The Hollow Men*). Like the characters themselves, the language used in the play appears paralyzed, immobile and, purposeless. While communication is hindered and interpretation becomes challenging, the lack of action in *Endgame* intensifies the significance of the dialogues between the characters. In his essay *Beckett and Freud*, Raymond T. Riva suggests that Beckett communicates through symbolic language, capable of conveying meaning while seemingly saying nothing and going nowhere (Riva, 1993, p.160). This notion encapsulates the essence of Beckett’s language in the play – a form of communication that exists within nothingness, conveying something meaningful through its apparent lack.

The Beckettian use of language in *Endgame* is characterized by several key elements. These include repetitive dialogue, sudden shifts in topics, trivial conversations, lack of clear purpose of meaning, associative chains of thought, short sentences, frequent pauses, and the deliberate use of the third person plural by Clov. These linguistic elements serve two important functions in the play. Firstly, language often determines the characters’ perception of reality and becomes a tool for constructing their reality. What they say has the power to shape the world they live in and define their interactions with objects and surroundings, even though communication itself may not be the main purpose. Secondly, language acts as a way for the characters to affirm their existence. By speaking and engaging in dialogue, they seek to convince themselves that they are still alive. In a world that appears devoid of purpose, their words serve as a means of self-validation and a reminder of their presence. As an instrument, language has likewise lost all meaning. The devaluation of language, which Beckett refers to as the deadliest of habits, is carried as far as it can go by him. Words can only show how hollow they are and keep us from understanding who/what we are. Clov’s reduction of paternity and home to meaningless pronouns is another illustration of language becoming incapable of capturing the depth of these essential ideas.

HAMM: I was a father to you.

CLOV: Yes. You were that to me.

HAMM: My home a home for you.

CLOV: Yes. This was that for me.  
(Beckett, 1957, p.29).

Beckett employs the word “days” instead of “life”, illustrating the characters’ possession of empty and repetitive cycles rather than a purposeful existence. Instead of using the word “story”, Beckett uses the word “chronicle” which implies an ongoing record of passing time without a definite end. Language plays a crucial role in Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame*. Through the fragmented and repetitive use of words, the characters’ struggle to communicate, and the exploration of the limitations of language, Beckett highlights the challenges and absurdity of human expression. Beckett delves into the multifaceted role of language. Ritualized language serves to emphasize the breakdown of meaningful communication. Their repetitive conversations mirror the repetition of their routines. Their short conversations, disconnected phrases, or interrupted pauses exemplify the difficulty of expressing coherent thoughts in a chaotic and absurd world. Beckett presents *Endgame* and its characters in a minimalistic manner, mirroring his intention to depict the outside world in a similar image. The very incoherence of language used in the play serves as a reflection of the characters’ limited perception of their surroundings. Beckett also succeeds in capturing the maximum of reality with the minimal use of language.

#### **4.1. The Role of Language**

Esslin (1968) described Beckett’s characters as mechanical talkers lacking clear identity, partially mad and their speech irrational and nonsensical. The ambiguity and disorder present in Beckett’s theater serve as a reflection of the chaotic nature of the world that we see. The repetitive and cyclical nature of expression in the play represents a linear progression toward nothingness. It is evident in the dialogue that the characters resist or avoid change. Hamm’s repeated phrase, often in the form of a question, regarding his painkiller is always answered negatively by Clov. Even though Hamm knows the answer to his rhetorical question, he reassures himself that he is still existing.<sup>1</sup> The phrases are articulated one after another, but they lack meaningful connection. This independence of language reflects the characters’ lack of

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<sup>1</sup> The repetition of this question suggests that there is a constant state of pain, the pain of existence but with no medicine available.

intent in expressing themselves or communicating with others. Since their actions have no aim, they indeed do not need the words or at least the will to have a seemingly worthy conversation.

HAMM: Father!

(Pause. Louder.)

Father!

(Pause.)

Go and see did he heard me.

(Clov goes to Nagg's bin, raises the lid, and stoops. Unintelligible words. Clov straightens up.)

CLOV: Yes.

HAMM: Both times?

(Clov stoops. As before.)

CLOV: Once only.

HAMM: The first time or the second?

(Clov stoops. As before.)

CLOV: He doesn't know.

HAMM: It must have been the second.

CLOV: We'll never know.

(He closes lid.) (Beckett, 1957, pp.65-66).

The conversation between Hamm and Clov in the given passage lacks a clear purpose or goal. They jump from one topic to another and focus on unimportant details and questions that have no impact on anything. Their words serve only to pass the time. The characters' lack of reaction to each other's words is presented as normal behavior, further emphasizing the meaninglessness of their communication. As a result, language in *Endgame* loses its meaning and purpose. It no longer fulfills its traditional role. The dialogue reflects the overall sense of emptiness and futility in the play. In other words, the conversation between them is purposeless and devoid of meaning because it does not exist anything worth communicating. In addition to this, the characters utilize language that holds no meaning and phrases that lead nowhere. This particular use of language shows its demolished purpose. Language seems to serve only one function: to confirm that the characters are still alive and capable of exchanging fragments of an

uncommunicative language. Among the characters, Nell is the sole individual who questions the existence of language and its necessity. When Nagg inquires if he should recount the story of the tailor, she refuses it and asks: “What for?” (Beckett, 1957, p. 20). This moment reveals Beckett’s questioning through Nell. By asking what for, Nell raises doubt regarding the proper utilization of language, indicating its powerlessness. The repetition in Beckett’s world can be also viewed as a form of communication. Despite its apparent meaninglessness, repetition serves as a unifying factor that brings the characters together and allows them to continue their dialogue, habits, and stories. Without this repetition, the characters would be left in silence, as everything else in their surroundings.

CLOV: What is there to keep me here?

HAMM: The dialogue. (Beckett, 1957, p.58).

In *Endgame*, the language is characterized by its brevity, with short sentences and a limited number of words being used.

HAMM: How are your eyes?

CLOV: Bad.

HAMM: How are your legs?

CLOV: Bad.

HAMM: But you can move.

CLOV: Yes.

HAMM: (violently) Then move!

(Clov goes to the back wall, leans against it with his forehead and hands.)

Where are you?

CLOV: Here.

HAMM: Come back!

(Clov returns to his place beside the chair.)

Where are you?

CLOV: Here. (Beckett, 1957, p.7-8).

The questions in *Endgame* are structured as one-sentence formations, and their answers are often even shorter, consisting of just a single word. This condensed form of language reflects the overall economy of words present in the play, like the minimalistic stage design and a

limited number of acts and movements. Indeed, the confinement of meaning to single-world explanations in *Endgame* restricts real communication between the characters. This limitation is evident in a scene where Clov looks out of the window and says what he sees. When Hamm tries to find the right word to describe the external space, Clov responds with the question, “What all is? In a word?” and eventually answers with the word “Corpsed” (Beckett, 1957, p.30). Beckett’s obsession with one-word explanations results in the use of compressed language throughout the play. Beckett deliberately limits the number of words used in *Endgame*, which results in each word carrying a significant burden.

In *Endgame*, Beckett utilizes pauses to break the flow of language and create a sense of emptiness and despair. These breaks between speeches are employed to amplify the pain of waiting, the hollowness of existence, and the expectation of collapse. The numerous pauses, particularly during periods of silence on the stage, underscore the characters’ anguish and the lack of substance in their spoken words. The pauses serve as a significant moment, where characters struggle to find the right words to express themselves, where characters are speechless due to their interlocutor’s attitude, or where characters anxiously await the response of others, seeking a fleeting sense of validation and existence. The strategic use of pauses in *Endgame* serves as a reminder of the power of silence and the profound effects of the absence of words. Beckett skillfully created an atmosphere in the play that goes beyond the limitations of words. Using pauses, silences, and interrupted sentences, he effectively expresses emotions and experiences that cannot be fully captured by language alone. This atmosphere evokes a sense of emptiness and reflects the confusion experienced by the characters. Moreover, these artistic tools provide the audience with time to contemplate and reflect on the various phrases and themes presented in the play.

Overall, Beckett portrays language as a powerful force that not only communicates but also constructs and determines the characters’ reality. Beckett does not believe that language is the only means of expression. Beckett explores the notion that language, while a tool for communicating, can also become an influential force that shapes and determines the characters’ perception of what is real, in other words with language we can manipulate each other. For example, when Clov gets up on the ladder, raises the telescope, and falls on the ground, he tells Hamm “I did it on purpose” (Beckett, 1957, p.29) to avoid the punishment. By manipulating Hamm’s reaction through his explanation, Clov controlled what was real in that situation, in this case for Hamm. Beckett is aware that there are other factors, such as gestures, visible images, pauses, and silences that have deeper meanings and communicate more effectively than

language. Gestures, for instance, can communicate profound emotions and intentions that words may fail to capture. The physical movements and actions of the characters can reveal their inner desires, or frustrations, adding layers of meaning to the overall performance. These gestures serve as a visual language that can evoke powerful mental images that contribute to the overall atmosphere and themes. Through vivid and symbolic visuals, Beckett creates a rich and evocative world that stimulates the audience's imagination and enhances the understanding of the narrative and the character's experiences. Pauses and silences, as mentioned earlier, can be rich with meaning and allow for introspection and reflection.

## 4.2. Beckett and Humor

Beckett employs humor as a technique in his works, including *Endgame*, to expose the tragic circumstances of the characters. The humor in the play serves as a gesture of despair, with the characters laughing helplessly at their fates, even though their memories and experiences are filled with pain. Despite facing old age, chronic hopelessness, and physical deformities, the characters find a cure in laughter as a response to the absurd and chaotic nature of their world. Beckett suggests that laughter may be the only sane response to the incomprehensible and tragic aspects of life. By juxtaposing humor and tragedy, Beckett explores the deep complexities of human existence and invites the audience to reflect on the paradoxes of life. The fusion of comedy and tragedy is notable in the play. Beckett's humor serves as a palliative, offering respite from the overwhelming tension, confusion, and anxiety present in his theater. Humor functions as a strategy to alleviate the hysterical atmosphere and through the blending of comedy and tragedy crafts a theater of laughter amidst the darkest circumstances. As Nell declares, "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness" (Beckett, 1957, p.18). They laugh in the face of the tragedy of their lives. The characters adopt a similar perspective toward their tragicomic existence. According to Foely (2010), Beckett's protagonist often assumes a comedic role within a world that is tragic, absurd, and beyond comprehension, where they are denied dignity, meaning, and any chance of escape. As Beckett says in the play, "Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that" (Beckett, 1957, p.68).

To cope with their spiritual and physical anguish, the characters resort to gestures and speech that appear humorous. They seek moments of comedy to temporarily forget or postpone their pain. The characters in *Endgame*, particularly Hamm and Clov, spend their time in a state of

waiting, fully aware deep down that their task is impossible. Hamm, who is blind, cleans his sunglasses, while Clov, a prisoner, is physically capable of leaving but remains bound to Hamm and fears the outside world. The father and mother, sitting in trash cans, behave mechanically, even their supposed love for each other is seen as a dark comedy. We may find amusement in their foolishness, and irrational behaviors, and even mock their mannerisms. However, what unfolds on stage is only a parody of life. Styan (1968) suggests that we laugh at the characters' mental and physical antics, but as we realize that their actions are a modest reflection of our own, our laughter turns bittersweet. We come to understand that we are not merely observers sitting comfortably in our seats, but rather, we are akin to the tramps themselves. Laughter and sorrow become intertwined as we recognize the futility of our existence. Furthermore, the actions of Hamm and Clov, as well as those of the parents, serve to emphasize the worthlessness of both the world and human life.

“Beckett’s characters may be foreigners who talk in a language we hardly comprehend but we can sense the intensity and variety of their emotional life. Their strange humor makes us laugh, their resignation we admire and their desolate anguish brings us to despair. Above all, we recognize ourselves in them and we dimly perceive that in another time, another place, we might well be like them.” (Scott, 2013, p.450).

On the other hand, irony plays a prominent role in Beckett’s plays as well. Huang (2011) explores this aspect in a paper titled *A Pragmatic Study of Irony in Samuel Beckett’s Plays*. The paper aims to uncover the implied subjects within Beckett’s plays and reveal that Beckett employs ironic techniques to establish his unique narrative style, allowing characters to detach themselves from painful memories. Huang suggests that “the use of ironic discourse helps us to get rid of miserable memories with absent self-image in the past” (Huang, 2011, p.27). In other words, irony becomes a tool for Beckett’s characters to cope with their past by creating a sense of detachment and perspective.

NAGG: Do you remember \_\_\_

NELL: No.

NAGG: When we crashed on our tandem and lost our shanks.

(They laugh heartily.)

NELL: It was in the Ardennes. (They laugh less heartily.)

NAGG: On the road to Sedan. (They laugh still less heartily) (Beckett, 1957, p.16).

While Beckett's characters may exhibit comedic behavior at times, it would be incorrect to label them as clowns. Valency (1980) argues that Beckett's tramps are not genuine clowns, despite occasionally adopting clown-like actions. They are aware that human existence is filled with absurdity and meaninglessness. Humor in Beckett's play serves as a sedative for the characters. They laugh at the absurdity and cruelty of their world, finding some relief from their pain through laughter. It is a strategy they use to combat feelings of despair and helplessness. Their actions and attempts may be futile, but laughter provides a temporary escape and cathartic release. The characters understand that they cannot change their situation, and laughter becomes a way to face the inevitable. In essence, humor serves not only as an expression of despair but also as a mechanism for the characters to endure their incomprehensible and agonizing existence or seek temporary escape from it.

## **5. THE ABSURD CHARACTER**

### **5.1. Absurdity in Companionship**

Another purpose of repetition is to emphasize the contrast between surrender and control. As the material is repeated, the relationship between the elements changes, highlighting a relationship is not simply one of opposition but rather one of mutual dependence. The couples in Beckett's plays rely on each other like a form of bondage rather than love. The presence of couples is necessary because the characters' existence relies on another individual who acts as a witness and serves as a barrier against emptiness. They all seek companionship despite it limits their freedom. Hamm and Clov find themselves bound together, where each person becomes a victim of the other. One's separation will bring death to all.

HAMM: Gone from me you'd be dead.

CLOV: And vice versa. (Beckett, 1957, p.45).

Hugh Kenner commented that *Endgame* is a "play about a solipsist's world". This leads us to the term solipsism.<sup>2</sup> Solipsism in *Endgame* is evident in Hamm's domination and possession of Clov, which reflects a disregard for others and a self-centered focus.

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<sup>2</sup> A theory holding that the self can know nothing but its own modifications and that the self is the only existent thing, extreme egocentrism (Merriam – Webster Dictionary).



HAMM: I'm obliged to you. Clov. For your services.

CLOV: (Turning, sharply). Ah pardon me, it's I am obliged to you.

HAMM: It's we are obliged to each other. (Beckett, 1957, p.51).

Although it is a master-slave relationship they indeed depend on each other; Hamm for Clov's help, and Clov for Hamm's shelter. The characters are primarily characterized by their interdependence, and a little hope of survival lies in their togetherness. They long for peace, love, and care, as they navigate the challenges of life and endure suffering. Deep down they understand that they can only endure if they stay in partnership despite mutual dislike. In this way, Beckett manages to capture the importance of togetherness on the path of survival. Moreover, Clov being hesitant to leave and Hamm being hesitant to send him away, show the acknowledgment that neither can abandon the other and find salvation alone. Their actions and dialogues illustrate how confused and tired Modern man is. The confusion is present in not knowing why they are staying together when they don't even like nor respect each other.

CLOV: There's one thing I'll never understand.

Why do I always obey you? Can you explain that to me?

HAMM: No...perhaps it's compassion. (pause)

A kind of great compassion. (pause) (Beckett, 1957, p.75-76).

Maybe one of the main reasons why they are staying together is the fear of loneliness and abandonment. Through their interactions, Beckett captures the universal human desire for connection, even amidst feelings of bitterness. In addition, Hamm faced the fear of abandonment as a child and that confirms Nagg's speech:

Whom did you call when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark? Your mother? No. Me. We let you cry. Then we moved you out of earshot so that we might sleep in peace (Beckett, 1957, p.56).

While *Endgame* features a multitude of relationships among individuals, the most prominent ones revolve around the relationship between parents and children, with a particular focus on father and son. In the Beckettian universe, the prevailing desire of the mind shaped by feelings

of abandonment and neglect endured by “the solitary child” is to uphold the condition of isolation. This resulted in no additional rejection that can ever intrude as we can see in Hamm’s behavior when left alone. Hamm, whenever he directs Clov to move and Clov is out of his reach, he instinctively calls out to reassure himself of Clov’s presence. This behavior reflects the concept of anxious attachment, where a child experiences distress when their caregiver is not present. Nagg’s neglect of Hamm displays a pattern in Hamm’s treatment of Clov. This pattern is described by Eric P. Levy, it lies in the “problematics of love”, or in this case the lack of it. The problem of love is intercourse with “the problem of God”. (Levy, 2002, p.274). God often portrayed as a father figure, remains unresponsive to prayers, evident in repetitive meaningless prayers of Nagg, just like Nagg remains deaf to Hamm’s crying as a child. According to Levy’s perspective, the automatic and emotionless interactions depicted in *Endgame* serve as a source of comfort. Levy argues that when a child no longer requires a parental lover that may never be reciprocated, they reach a state of autonomy. This sense of self-independence becomes more comforting than experiencing the constant need for love and validation. In the context of the play, the character’s interactions can be seen as a defense mechanism against pain and unfulfilled emotional needs.

By minimizing their expectations and suppressing their desires for connection, they find solace in the semblance of self-reliance. Levy’s viewpoint sheds light on the psychological dynamics in the play, where the characters, through their emotionless interactions, seek a sense of comfort and stability in the absence of fulfilling emotional connections. The numbness of emotions can be felt in the scene where Nagg asks if Nell can scratch his back and she is unable to do so, he asks if she is crying again, to which she responds: “I was trying” (Beckett, 1957, p.27). If we consider that Nell was trying to cry, it implies that her ability to express emotions, such as sadness, is impaired. Moreover, if Nell was trying to scratch Nagg but failed, her response still highlights a lack of emotional resonance. Instead of expressing frustration at her inability to fulfill his request, she simply states that she was trying, without showing any visible emotional response. This reinforces the theme of emotional detachment and the characters’ struggle to connect on a deeper emotional level. Hamm’s primary emotional focus is directed toward his feelings, and he exhibits a strong sense of self-pity. This is evident when he declares that he has “no father” and “no home” (Beckett, 1957, p.46). It raises the question of whether he is denying the actual existence of Nagg and the roof over his head or simply asserting that they do not hold significance in his perception. As for Clov, he acknowledges that Hamm was like a father to

him and that the house served as a home. However, he does not show any emotion, giving the impression that he is stating what is expected of him.

Since the play provides limited information about the “outside world” scholars commonly assert suggesting that Beckett’s settings, including the indistinct room with two windows in *Endgame*, could symbolize a skull or head. This interpretation emphasizes the focus on the psychological landscape rather than the external reality. Considering this context, it becomes apparent that the outside world in *Endgame* could symbolize other individuals, as well as thoughts and emotions beyond one’s own. Hamm’s description of everything outside as “zero” and “however” can be interpreted as his refusal to acknowledge the feelings of others. When Hamm expresses his desire to hear the sea through one of the windows, Clov informs him that he would not be able to hear it. Nevertheless, Hamm insists that Clov open the window, only to hear nothing (Beckett, 1957, p.73). This scene can imply that even if there were something to hear, Hamm might choose to ignore it. This portrayal highlights Hamm’s lack of interest in others. It reinforces the notion that the outside world represents a reality that he isolated himself from. In *Endgame*, the repetition of stories, the narratives are shared repeatedly among the characters and with the audience. However, there is no familiar fact about when and who began this storytelling. But there is a “solitary child” who transforms into children, a child who whispers stories to himself in the darkness, creating characters and dialogues to avoid the feeling of being alone (Beckett, 1957, p.78). The act of storytelling becomes a coping mechanism for the solitary child, enabling them to create a fictional world where they can find companionship and escape from their solitude. This imaginative process allows the child to transcend their lonely reality, just as found in the play, The repetition of stories reflects the characters’ need to recreate that sense of connection and by retelling these tales, they attempt to momentarily fill the void of loneliness and establish a temporary bond with others. The boundaries between imagination and existence in *Endgame* brought more intriguing questions. Hamm’s introspection about the origin of his storytelling habit invites speculation regarding the nature of the characters and their relationships. It raises the possibility that everything is unfolding within Hamm’s mind and that his parents and Clov may be creations that he uses for companionship. When Hamm contemplates the presence of a “rational being” observing him, he could be addressing both Clov and the audience. This question raises the broader existential query of whether anything or anyone holds significance if it goes unnoticed by others. It makes us consider the significance and validity of the existence of external observation and recognition. Clov’s remark about

Hamm's autobiographical tale being the "one you've been telling yourself all your days" (Beckett, 1957, p.67). But the question hanging in the air is who is that story really for?

## 6. CONCLUSION

This research aimed to explore how Samuel Beckett portrays existentialist concepts such as despair, nothingness, and authenticity in his play *Endgame* through characterization, setting, and language. The study argued that Beckett's incorporation of these elements in his play aligns with the existentialist ideas that gained prominence in post-World War II in Europe. Both Beckett and prominent existentialists like Sartre depict individuals in a state of despair and struggle, grappling with various losses, including the loss of God, in a world perceived as devoid of essential attributes. Characters in Beckett's plays, like existentialist themes, yearn for their existence to constitute their being. However, it is notable that there exists a distinction between Beckett's universe and the existentialist world, as his characters do not achieve perfect authenticity or self-invention. Nevertheless, Beckett seems to strive to create characters who pursue their essence, even if they fall short of becoming fully authentic individuals. The question of the purpose of existence lies at the heart of Beckett's works, and it serves as a fundamental and recurring theme throughout his plays. The characters in Beckett's drama seem to lack clear meaning or purpose, and this very absence becomes a central dilemma. The play presents an enigmatic and self-referential quality, with the question of existence's purpose serving as both the problem and the solution. Behind the seemingly banal and purposeless actions of Beckett's characters, there is a profound sense of emptiness and the pain that comes with the realization of it. This feeling emerges quietly from the mundane repetitiveness of life, highlighting the existential anguish and the struggle to find significance or meaning in a seemingly meaningless world. Beckett's work provokes introspection and contemplation, inviting the audience to confront the emptiness. The ambiguity and depth of his plays leave a lasting impact on the viewer, as they grapple with the profound questions about the essence and purpose of life. The Introduction chapter of the thesis provided an overview of Existentialism as a philosophical movement, but also Samuel Beckett's existentialist stand, revealing several parallels between his viewpoint and major existentialist thinkers. Firstly, Beckett perceives individuals as lacking inherent meaning, leading them to experience a sense of desperation as they confront their existence, emerge in the world, and define themselves, as said by Sartre (1948, p.28) "existence precedes essence" this aligns with Beckett's portrayal of man's continuous search of purpose and identity. The Meaningless Condition chapter illustrated the

absurdity of being a Beckettian character, bound to endure life only in sharing misfortune. In *Endgame* Beckett's characters demonstrate a unique form of authenticity by refusing to end or quit their actions despite their purposelessness. Living in desperation, they seem to have centered their lives around embracing the meaninglessness and confronting the burden of anxiety. This display of authenticity, however, differs from the traditional existentialist perspective, which involves accepting the meaninglessness of life without giving in to despair. Beckett's characters may be seen as authentic in their resistance, but their authenticity is characterized by a profound sense of despair. Instead of accepting the absurdity of existence without yielding to despair, they persist in their meaningless actions, finding purpose in their very purposelessness. Nevertheless, Beckett does manage to create somewhat authentic characters in Nell and Nagg, despite their dreadful situation of being confined in Ashbins, they strive to live as happily as possible. Their ability to find happiness amidst their challenging circumstances shows Beckett's skill in crafting complex characters who cope with their realities in different ways. Furthermore, Beckett's representation of the stage and characters in *Endgame* reflects a sense of the end of the world. The outbreak of war, which Beckett experienced, left a profound impact on his worldview so that could be also the reason for the absence of nature. *Endgame* serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring nature of existential questions and the quest for meaning amidst the chaotic and unpredictable nature of existence. "It's my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust" (Beckett, 1957, p. 57). The characters dream about happiness, love, and order but their dreams are shattered by the reality of sadness, emptiness, and chaos. They are torn between fearing death as an unknown experience and desiring it at the same time. Their yearning for an end does not arise from hatred of life, but rather from their deep understanding of the meaninglessness and nothingness of life. These characters, caught in the absurdity, embody the universal human struggle to find purpose and meaning in a world that appears devoid of both. The play invites the audience to confront these existential questions. *Endgame* indeed presents a realistic and pessimistic view of life, portraying it as an illusion, a nightmare, and an endless game where humans are forced to play without any meaningful outcomes. The play emphasizes that life lacks significance, and the beginning and end of existence share the same elements of misery, suffering, pain, and monotony. To reinforce this, Beckett structures the play with the repetition of scenes and boredom at the beginning and end. *Endgame* reflects the absurdity of life, where actions and events are as meaningless as the world and human life itself. Beckett's work provides a thought-provoking examination of the human condition, encouraging audiences to contemplate the sense of purpose and significance within their own lives.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how Samuel Beckett's iconic play *Endgame* depicts his character's struggle with existential questions, such as the overwhelming sense of despair and hopelessness. Within the context of Theatre of the Absurd, *Endgame* represents a profound reflection on the human condition. The study examines the interplay of time, language, and characters to reveal the existential absurdity. It also examines the character's experiences of fear, particularly in the context of their uncertain and unpredictable existence. In addition, Beckett uses the setting to reinforce the theme of nothingness will be explored. The setting will be examined for its ability to create an atmosphere of isolation that contributes to the character's sense of being trapped. A significant aspect of the thesis is devoted to the study of Beckett's use of language, which reflects the absurdity and meaninglessness of life. His unique style of language reveals the character's struggle for authenticity amidst the existential challenges they face. This thesis aims to illuminate Beckett's invitation to the reader to reflect on the meaning of life. His study reveals a profound meditation on the human condition and the paradoxical nature of the human spirit. By embracing the ambiguity and complexity of Beckett's masterpiece, this investigation offers a profound journey into the enigmatic beauty of the absurd as manifest in the dimensions of *Endgame*.

**Keywords:** absurd, existentialism, repetition, nothingness, language



## SAŽETAK

Ovaj rad istražuje načine na koje autor Samuel Beckett u djelu *Endgame* prikazuje borbu svojih likova sa egzistencijalnim problemima, poput osjećaja beznada i očaja. U okvirima Kazališta Apsurda, drama prikazuje duboki odraz ljudskog stanja. Rad ujedno istražuje kako vrijeme, jezik i likovi utječu na razotkrivanje apsurdnog ljudskog postojanja. Rad uključuje istraživanje o tjeskobi s kojom se likovi susreću posebice zbog nepredvidive i neizvjesne egzistencije. Nadalje, rad istražuje kako autorov odabir okruženja i prirode naglašava temu ništavila i kako okruženje kao takvo stvara izoliranu atmosferu koja pridonosi osjećaju zarobljenosti samih likova. Značajan aspekt rada posvećen je Beckettovoj upotrebi jezika i njegovoj ulozi u izražavanju besmisla i apsurdnog života. Njegov jedinstveni jezični izražaj otkriva borbu likova za autentičnošću unatoč egzistencijalnim problemima s kojima se susreću. Cilj ovog rada je analizirati i prikazati Beckettov poziv čitateljima na promišljanje o smislu života. Rad otkriva duboku meditaciju o ljudskom stanju i paradoksalnoj prirodi ljudskog uma. Prihvaćajući višeznačnost i složenost Beckettovog remek-djela ovo istraživanje nudi putovanje u zagonetnost apsurdnog koja postoji u dimenzijama *Endgamea*.

**Ključne riječi:** apsurd, egzistencijalizam, ponavljanje, ništavilo, jezik

## RIASSUNTO

Questa tesi esamina il modo in cui l'iconica opera teatrale di Samuel Beckett *Endgame* descrive la lotta dei suoi personaggi con domande esistenziali, come il travolgente senso di disperazione. Nel contesto del Teatro dell'Assurdo, *Endgame* rappresenta una profonda riflessione sulla condizione umana. Lo studio esamina l'interazione tra tempo, linguaggio e personaggi per rivelare l'assurdità esistenziale. Esamina anche le esperienze di paura dei personaggi, in particolare nel contesto della loro esistenza incerta e imprevedibile. Inoltre, verrà esplorato il modo in cui *Beckett* utilizza l'ambientazione per rafforzare il tema del nichilismo. L'ambientazione viene esaminata per la sua capacità di creare un'atmosfera d'isolamento che contribuisce a dare al personaggio la sensazione di essere intrappolato. Un aspetto significativo della tesi viene dedicato allo studio dell'uso del linguaggio da parte di *Beckett*, che riflette l'assurdità e l'insensatezza della vita. Il suo stile di linguaggio unico rivela la lotta dei personaggi per l'autenticità in mezzo alle sfide esistenziali che devono affrontare. Lo scopo di

questa tesi e quello d'illuminare l'appello di *Beckett* al lettore a riflettere sul significativo della vita. Lo studio rivela una profonda meditazione sulla condizione umana e sulla natura paradossale dello spirito umano. Abbracciando l'ambiguità e la complessità del capolavoro di *Beckett*, questa indagine offre un viaggio profondo nell'enigmatica bellezza dell'assurdo manifestato nelle dimensioni di *Endgame*.

**Parole chiave: l'assurdo, esistenzialismo, ripetizione, nulla, linguaggio**