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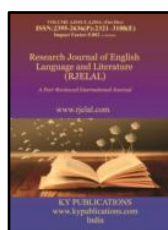
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## SAMUEL BECKETT'S VISION OF LIFE: A STUDY OF HIS PLAY *ENDGAME*

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### ABSTRACT

The theme of Samuel Beckett's plays is isolation. His hero is a sisyphusean type of man awaiting his destiny. The cyclic incidents in 'Endgame' remind us one of Beckett's preoccupations with 'routine' of life. The setting for 'Endgame' is a bare and partially underground room sheltering the four characters. Hamm, an aged master who is blind and paralytic; Clov, his servant who cannot sit and Hamm's legless parents. The play projects human condition. A sense of dead existence pervades throughout the play. The play suggests purgatory. The sin was their birth and the window in the play suggests hope for salvation. Repetition in Beckett's plays is not only a technique but a theme as well. Besides representing a recurring pattern of life, 'Endgame' shows an unavoidable linear progression towards nothingness. There is a dismal pointlessness throughout the play. The title 'Endgame' depicts the moves in the game of chess where the end result is already known. In the game either white wins and black loses or black wins and white loses. But in the play, every one dies longing for death.

Keywords: isolation, cyclic incidents, repetition, nothingness, death.

### Introduction

Samuel Beckett's plays are marked by the artist's vision of the world into which his characters are placed. He deals with the position and the situation of Man in his surrounding world, which is a major and always recurring theme in all his plays. Beckett's hero is a sisyphusean type of man waiting for the fulfillment of his fate, which seems to be eternal through his suffering and hope. He is alienated from the world, which is unknown, remote, and indifferent, and from which he is isolated by the walls of his self. The conflict between two different substances - the world and the human subject, leads to the feelings of Absurdity and to fundamental existential questions about the meaning of human life in a world where he lives as a stranger.

Every age has a common aspect which makes the most divergent elements of the epoch instantly recognizable as stemming from it. So it is natural that all most all or at least a group of playwrights of every age, wish to express the common aspect of the society. So the expression of "Nothingness" and "Meaninglessness" of life is not the common aspect of the modern world alone, but playwrights and even poets like Wordsworth (driven by the French Revolution) have expressed these feelings, whenever they felt desperate. May be the modern man, after the Great wars, would have felt it more. Shakespeare has most brilliantly expressed the "grotesqueness" in most of his plays. It is reasonable, if someone suggest Shakespeare as the pioneer of modern Absurd theatre. He was as poetic as Beckett and was more profound and philosophic than modern Absurdist. In expressing

the internal realities, fantasies, dreams, fears etc, the Absurdist have merely enlarged a long-established practice.

### **The Philosophy of Absurd**

The Theatre Of The Absurd has its roots in the existentialist philosophy of twentieth century. Yet this existentialism is based on old principles with a renounced philosophical ancestry, reaching back to the Either-or of Kierkegaard, the Voluntarism of Nietzsche, and the Phenomenology of Husserl up to the Anxiety and Anguish of Heidegger and the irresolvable Antinomies of Karl Jaspers. It is concerned with two major criteria, that of (i) revolt of the individual (ii) an assured freedom to the individual. The primary motive of the existentialist philosophy is to affirm the individual's unconditional freedom from "systems", "essences" and any type of organized control there by to accept the resulting "homelessness" and anguish as ultimate outcome. There is no exploration of this homelessness. So the existentialism cannot and does not ask the question of rehabilitation. When classic myth relates the ego's rebellion (individual protest) to the common ground of things, existentialism would relate it to the groundlessness of things to "nothing". It begins with "nothing" and its "goal" at least with some is the nothingness of death.

The prime intention of Beckett's plays is to show "man" as threatened by isolation. Cut off from his fellow beings by the difficulties of communication, his action is futile and his condition is irremediable. They provide us with a concrete and photographically correct re-construction of real life and much more interestingly with the vast field of internal reality, the fantasies, dreams, hallucinations, secret longings, and fears of mankind. What the writer expresses is not an ideological position, but rather their bewilderment at the absence of the coherent and generally accepted integrating principle, ideology, ethical system in our world.

### **The Game of Chess**

Samuel Beckett's second play, *Endgame* indicates the approach to "the end" which indeed is the principal theme of all Beckett's plays. The idea of the "Endgame" is taken from the game of chess

where the concept designates the last and entirely predictable stage of game, when there are very few pieces left. (The French title can be applied to games besides chess, and Beckett lamented the fact that there was no precise English equivalent). Beckett himself was known to be an avid chess player; the struggle of Hamm to accept the end can be compared to the refusal of novice players to admit defeat, whereas experts normally resign after a serious blunder or setback. It was perhaps chosen for its indeterminateness, for its capacity to designate the end of many things, the end of life itself. The approach to "the end" is indeed the principal theme of all of Beckett's writings.

The principal characters of the play are Hamm, an aged master who is blind and not able to stand up, and his servant Clov, who cannot sit down. They exist in a tiny house by the sea; although the dialogue suggests that, "there is nothing left outside- no sea, no sun, no clouds" (114). The two characters, mutually dependent, have been fighting for years and continue to do so as the play progresses. Clov always wants to leave but never seems to be able. Also present are Hamm's legless parents Nagg and Nell, who live in rubbish bins upstage and initially request food or argue in vain. Even more than *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett in *Endgame* indicates with great precision, the effect of painfulness of waiting, the emptiness of existence, the expectancy of collapse, of a manifestation of total despair. The innumerable pauses between speeches underscore the anguish in each of the four characters and the nudity of the words themselves when they are spoken.

Clov, throughout the action of *Endgame*, constantly expresses a desire to leave. In the first play, the principal characters expect the arrival of Godot, in the second play; they anticipate the departure of Clov. He is terrorized by the thought of being left alone, of being the last man on the earth. This is a familiar fantasy of terror which most men have felt at sometime or other in their existence, and which Beckett has succeeded in casting into the reality of the play although it bears the unmistakable mark of Beckett's style and manner of thinking. While *Godot* was concerned with the theme of waiting, *Endgame* is on the subject of

leaving, on the necessity of reaching the door. One has the impression of watching the end of something, the end possibly of the human race. All movement has slowed down. Hamm is paralyzed and confined to his chair. Clov walks with difficulty, Nagg and Nell are legless and occupy little space in their ash cans.

The setting vaguely resembles a womb and the ash cans are wombs within the womb. The two-window look out onto the sea and the earth, which are without trace of mankind. No affection joins the four characters. Nagg and Nell depend on Hamm for food. Clov, the son-slave, would fill Hamm if he knew the combination to the buffet where the last crackers are stored. Each has the remains of a kind of dream or aspiration that he tries vainly to communicate to the others. Whether it is about the narration of a boat ride on Lake Como or their meeting with an accident or any other incident for that matter, Nagg and Nell's expressions are examples of failed communication. Hamm recites from time to time a literary story. Clov expresses his desire to leave the place, which he really knows is impossible. These incidents occur repeatedly, thus reminding one of Beckett's preoccupations with 'routine' of life.

This is the game that man constantly plays and in which he is always checkmated. The fundamental tragedy or hopelessness of the situation is set by a fairly steady tone of burlesque and farce. The text is full of surprises and formulas that keep it moving ahead toward its conclusion - the metaphysical conclusion of the play - and this is the same in *Waiting for Godot*, where each individual spectator will interpret it in accordance with his own sensitivity and his own philosophy. In Beckett's art the elements of time and reason are rejected so that the playwright will be free to exploit the impotency of man. The drama with its lack of meaning provides the spectators seated in the theater to supply meaning on different levels to contemplate the mystery of life.

The setting for *Endgame* is a bare, partially underground room, serving as shelter for the four characters: Hamm the master, Clov his servant, and Hamm's father and mother, Nagg and Nell (who live in garbage cans). Hamm is in a wheelchair and

makes Clov move him around the room, fetch objects, and look into the window for signs of life. Outside all seems dead and nothing happens, inside, the characters pass by mortifying and toying with fears and illusions of a possible change, all along sensing the inevitability of their end.

This play portrays a universe which is nearing its end but which could continue repeating itself: the end which all seem to be moving toward is both certain and elusive. The setting and situation of the play suggests an underground bomb shelter, possibly after the occurrence of a nuclear holocaust. The play has lot of literary allusions to Eliot's waste land, Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Dante's *Inferno*: which express a sense of eternal format, and the characters are doomed to restage and repeat their crime, which can be viewed as their "life". Some critics compare Hamm and Clov to Chromos and Mercury, sons of Noah after the flood, some others to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and also to Gloucester and Edgar in *King Lear*. Repetition is not only a technique in Beckett, but also a theme. Meaninglessness and absoluteness of time; past, present, and future seem to mean nothing and everything; the play represents a cyclic pattern of repetition and also an unavoidable linear progression toward nothingness.

Beckett's characters are aware of nothing but the will they have inside, which impels them to live. It is an unsurpassable instinct, a blind and groundless power, operating in them, out of time, space, and causality. They are propelled to life by unmotivated power - the will to live, which always wants to go on, to transform itself into the living or being objects. Hamm's intellect and reason are the will's servants and that is why it cannot stop his strong inclination towards being. Consciousness is only a surface of their being, because the real essence lies in the depths of human personality. The will in its core is something fundamentally useful, it is discomposure, never - ending struggle for something, need, desire, greediness, lust, it is suffering, and the world of will can be nothing but the world of pain. Clov and Hamm are suffering, persisting in their existence. They long for an end, a death, but cannot kill themselves, being driven by their nature- the will to life.

Hamm: Why don't you finish us? (Pause)  
I'll tell you the combination of the larder if  
You promise to finish me.  
Clov: couldn't finish you  
Hamm: They you shan't finish me (pause).  
(End 110)

Even Hamm's parents Nell and Nagg, can never die, although they are half-existing fragments of human beings "living buried" in their ashbins. Their suffering is their desire to die. Clov wants to leave, but cannot; Hamm is blind and wants to see ("...my eyes would see the sky, the earth. I'd run."), but cannot; and all of them want to die but cannot. Thus Beckett's characters are persisting between life and death, driven by a will to life, though physically they are dying. Although expressed in different images and symbols, all the characters are waiting for death, the end of their suffering, (*Endgame*, *Waiting for Godot* and *Krapp's Last Tape*) the end of their insoluble situation. In this play Beckett's infatuation with Schopenhauerian vision of life, as suffering and pain is touched upon on many an occasion. The will to life is infinite, and fulfillment is limited. Man is tossing aboard in a flood of instincts and desires, and never reaches satisfaction, happiness or peace. Beckett's characters in *Endgame* are aware of their fate and misery.

### Conclusion

Throughout the play, there is a sense of dismal pointlessness. However, one realizes that the characters in the play are reduced as subjects living in an alienated world of decay and awaiting death or an apocalypse with sick bodies and black humor. The first impression of the play generates the suggestive fascination of an alien or exotic world. In a gloomy room, suffused with grey light, are present the two main characters, one in his wheel chair and the other acting out a strange pantomime by trying to climb the ladder in order to look out the window, which is so high implying that the room might have been occupied previously by taller persons, or on the contrary one can supply meaning that the present characters are shrinking. A picture that hangs on the wall, which is turned towards the wall symbolically suggest that the "world is upside-down". The dustbins in which Hamm's parents Nagg

and Nell, vegetate are seen as a wicked metaphor for the generation gap.

The character's most striking attribute is their advanced state of bodily deterioration. Clov is the only one who is able to move, albeit with stiff knees. Nagg and Nell lost their legs in the famous bicycle accident in the Ardennes. Hamm is lame, blind and bleeding, needs tranquilizers, and suffers from a chronic cough. All this is so highly suggestive of symbolic meaning that one can hardly evade the atmosphere of finality, decay and apocalypse. The characters themselves suggest that they might be the last survivors of a great disaster, and the lifelessness of the world outside supports this view.

In life, we are often confronted with tasks that seem meaningless and downright cruel. *Endgame* opens with a man nonsensically laughing at his own dispositions. In a dark, lonely room, Clov recognizes that everything is the "same as usual". While he searches for meaning, he seems to discover that there is nothing more essential to his life than his life itself when he argues with Hamm about his reason for staying, as he says there's nowhere else he can go. In the play, Beckett endorses the conviction that the world and man is something that had better not have been, is of a kind to fill us with indulgence towards one another. For him the only sin is the sin of being born.

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