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The Absurdity Of Human Relationships: A Critical Study Of Beckett's *Endgame*

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Abstract: Beckett's play, *Endgame*, explores the process of dying and the painful anticipation of death. The feeling of hopelessness is more strongly defined in *Endgame* than in *Waiting for Godot*. *Endgame* depicts the human situation in its most dreadful state. Mac Gown asserts, "Godot is the anguish of Waiting, *Endgame* is the anguish of going" (Reid 1968.71). The whole of the play's action illustrates the death of Western Civilization, as well as the concepts of love, faith in God, familial unity, and artistic creation. The play's action occurs in a 'Claustrophobic environment', namely a bare room featuring two windows positioned high on the rear wall. Hamm, the blind and paralyzed elderly man, unable of standing, is seated in a wheelchair. His servant's clove is unable to sit. Hamm's limbless parents, Nagg and Nell, are situated in two large ash-bins against the wall.

Index Terms – Absurdity, Human Predicament, Response Existential Anguish, Inexorable Progress, Civilization, Lost Faith in God

I. INTRODUCTION

Beckett has demonstrated the absurdity inherent in relationships between people. In this work there are two pairs of characters: Hamm and Clov, and Nagg and Nell. Nagg and Nell are the parents of Hamm. In his works, Beckett appears to mock all emotional interactions as vulgar and funny, since the family members are unable to connect with one another emotionally. Fletcher and others have adequately characterized their relationships: "The atmosphere between these four is electric and can erupt into angry rage at the slightest provocation They are not made sweet-tempered by their hadicaps.... There is little tenderness in this decaying universe" (Fletcher et al. 86). Hamm is simultaneously a victim of misery and a tormentor, displaying bizarre and horrifying sadness towards his parents. He has confined his parents, symbolic of the older generation, to ash bins and has denied them food. Nell dies, and Nagg appears mute on stage. Hamm referred to his father as "Accursed progenitor!" and "Accursed fornicator!" (R.96) and "Scoundrel!" (1t6). He criticizes his father for begetting him. Likewise, his parents had a cruel attitude towards him during childhood, since they neglected him and left him crying.

Absurdity is a prominent feature of the relationship between Hamm and Clov. Clov is only a puppet that does all the tasks for his cruel master Hamm, who, in return, provides Clov with just sufficient nourishment to prevent him "from dying" (95). Absurdity in their relationships comes from their paradoxical and contradictory personality. Certainly, Hamm exhibits cruelty; but, he also reveals moments of affection for him:

HAMM: You don't love me.

CLOV: No

HAMM: You loved me once.

CLOV: Once!

HAMM: I've made you suffer too much. [Pause]

Haven't I?... (Shocked)... Forgive me.

[Pause. Louder] | said forgive me (95).

Likewise, Clov embodies several contradictions. He want to leave Hamm, although refrains from doing so due to his inability to make solid judgments:

CLOV: So you all want me to leave you.

HAMM: Naturally.

CLOV: Then I'll leave you.

HAMM: You can't leave us.

CLOV: Then I shan't leave you (110).

He will never leave Hamm as he himself says:

I say to myself - sometimes, Clov, you must be better there than if you want them to let you go - one day. But I feel too old, and too far, to form new habits, Good, It'll never end, I'll never go (132).

In a scenario filled with suffering, anguish, and hopelessness, the primary challenge for the characters in the play is to take up their time. Time serves as their greatest rival, always reminding them of the absurdity of their existence, the folly of life, and the inevitability of death. As time progresses, Hamm gets blind, dies on stage, and everything fades away, ultimately resulting in Mother Pegg's demise and the man and his young child succumbing to starvation. Time moves slowly for each character, and they fill it with as much uniform supposition as they can. They have vague recollections, recount stories that make them feel bad about themselves, extended pauses, and no action at all. All of these things are part of their ridiculous life on Earth. A. Alvarez said in this connection. "The poignancy of the play depends on this continual tension between a lost world of feelings once known and still yearned for, and the devastated present". (90) The text provides no indication that their history was superior or more significant than their present.

To get away from the sensation of meaninglessness and absurdity, Nagg and Nell thought about their bicycle accident that left them incapacitated and their involvement and rowing experiences. This event did not occur; rather, as Nagg states, "it was my story and nothing else" (I62). Nagg tells the story of the Englishman and the tailor, as these memories of the past allow Nagg and Nell to momentarily escape their devastated present. The depth of sadness is understood by Nell. Maybe they know they're in pain and laugh about it:

NELL: Nothing is funnier than unhappiness,

I grant you that. But...

NAGG: Yes, Yes it's the most comical thing in the world... (101)

Hamm's recollections are painful as he grapples with his guilt for having been indifferent and unfeeling towards others during their moments of need, while being in a position to help them. He tries to reduce his feelings of guilt by placing excessive focus on climatic details and mockingly instructing an old man to employ his intellect. He continues narrating the story, quite ridiculously, the conclusion of which was revealed at the very outset. Thus, memory increases Hamm's misery, rendering him miserable, since it fails to assist him in overcoming the absurdity of life.

Language holds a significant role in the Theatre of the Absurd. The protagonists talk a lot in order to escape the realization that life is pointless and that they are therefore miserable. The element that binds Hamm and Clov in the play is "the dialogue" (121). Their conversations are characterized by repetition and lacking novelty, as Clov says: "All life long the same questions, the same answers" (94). Hamm also recognizes the meaninglessness and ineffectiveness of language in reducing their suffering and says, "What about having a good guffaw the two of us together?" (122). He further states, "Then babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, to be together and whisper together in the dark" (126).

Undoubtedly, the play conveys themes of sorrow, decay, and death; nonetheless, the pain is portrayed in a comedic manner. Thus, the play shows an ideal fusion of comedic and sorrowful elements, an attribute of absurdist theater. The play is filled with comical gestures and humor stemming from the actions and speeches. The play starts with Hamm and Clov depicted as circus clowns. Clov's face is "very red" (2), while Hamm has "a stiff toque on his head,... a whistle hanging from his neck" (93). Upon the opening of Nagg's bin lid, his head appears with a biscuit in his mouth. After a brief interval, the other lid is raised, revealing Nell's white face, which is similar to that of a clown's. The play has several actions that enhance its comedic quality. All elements on the horizon are null in the performance. Hamm wants to find out whether the bricks are hollow, resulting in boisterous laughter.

(Hamm leans towards wall, applies his ear to it.) Do you hear? (He strikes the wall with his Knuckles.) Do you hear? Hollow bricks! (He strikes again.) All that's hollow! (104).

After verifying the hollowness of the bricks, he asks Clov to transport him back to the middle of the room. Then Hamm's following dialogues enhance the humor.

I feel a little too far to the left. (Clov moves chair slightly.) Now I feel a little too far to the right (Clov moves chair slightly.) I feel a little too far forward. (Clov moves chair slightly.) Now I feel a little too far back. (Clov moves chair slightly.) (105).

Clov desires to gaze out of the house's windows and requires a ladder to do so. Subsequently, the situation is amusing as he "takes six steps towards the right window, goes back for the ladder... takes three steps towards the window left and goes back for ladder takes one step towards window right, goes back for ladder" (92). His preoccupation with the telescope is amusing because he observes 'nothing' in the external world through it. Clov's relocation of the alarm clock is amusing as he "removes it, surveys for a more suitable position, approaches the bins, and places it on the lid of NAGG's bin" (131). Nagg and Nell's attempt to kiss, coupled with their failure, enhances the play's humor, as their effort to lean towards one another without success is amusing.

Beckett generates comedic effect through dialogue as well. To this end, he employs incongruous statements and ironic allusions. In discussing the process of decay, the contradiction of "our ideals" is evident in the statement: "But we breathe, we change!" We lose hair, our teeth! Our bloom, our ideals! (97) imparts a comedic touch to the statement.

Hamm wants to sleep and enjoy. His dialogue:

...If I could sleep I might make love. I'd go into the words. My eyes would see... the sky, the earth. I'd run, run, they wouldn't catch me (100)

is ironic, hence it leads to boisterous laughter because a blind and lame person cannot see and run respectively.

One of the best plays in the Theatre of the Absurd is *Endgame*, which shows how absurd it is that people can't make sense of their meaningless lives. The tone of the play is undoubtedly somber; however, the comedic elements mitigate its potential to become pitiable. The Theatre of the Absurd aims to underscore the absurdity of human existence and the futility of attempts to ascribe meaning to a chaotic and enigmatic life. This objective is realized in the play, as opposed to *Waiting for Godot*, which concludes with some form of hope; in *Endgame*, Nagg and Nell consent to their circumstances, while Hamm's delusion of reducing suffering through death is dispelled by the arrival of the boy, who transforms the act of dying into a manifestation of life.

Endgame in relation to *Waiting for Godot* has a greater impact regarding the depravity of human existence. The primary source of cruelty in humanity is lack of passion; individuals are neither devoted to God nor to their fellow humans. Beckett relates it to the rationality of the age. Every era possesses its distinct depravity; the twentieth century epitomizes a period of understanding and contemplation devoid of passion. Consequently, every human endeavor is adversely affected by an unfavorable objectivity. The individual's commitment has been obscured by the mechanical leveling inherent in the mediocrity of the masses. This process subsequently engendered dispassionate reflection. Hamm personifies the spirit of the age. He asserts that there is nothing personal in the era of contemplation.

CONCLUSION

The heartbreaking portrayal of human relationships in *Endgame* highlights Beckett's critique of a passionless age. According to Beckett, a human must possess passionate dedication. What he discovers instead is that no one is prepared to commit to anything, not even familial relationships. Individuals have adopted an entirely rational existence, which has deprived them of authenticity; they have, in fact, forgotten 'how to live'. Therefore, they await the conclusion of life, as they possess no other pursuits. Rationality has condemned them all.

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