

Sterility Relationship in Samuel Beckett's Endgame

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"Endgame" is one of Samuel Beckett's well-known dramas in addition to "Waiting for Godot". It is described as a complex voyage that is written before we may understand the way to read or criticize such drama. Attempting to comprehend "Endgame" means comprehending its mystery. "Endgame" is an experience through which man lives an isolation while he misses the lost past to have a sense of meaning and identity. Isolation, sterility relations and death result in pain and worry in the environment the characters live in. The play opens with a silent show, no words at all. The setting is a small room with two small windows, two covered dustbins, a chair in the centre, and a door. The light in the room is grey. The chair in the middle is covered by a sheet. Clov, one of the characters, holds the ladder, moves from one window to the other to open the arras. Then, he removes the sheet from the only chair that lies in the middle of the room to wake up Hamm, the main character or one can say the master of the game. The main event in the play is the relationship between Hamm and Clov and whether Clov is going to leave Hamm or not. Hamm provides shelter and food, while Clov provides his services through his legs and eyes. The current research addresses the Sterility Relationship between the characters of "Endgame".

Keywords: sterility, relationship, trash, tragedy, comedy, chair, window.

Introduction:

The nineteenth century witnessed the peak of the Industrial Revolution begun in the eighteenth century, yet the alteration created by steel, the steam power, machine-made textiles, and railway communications was just a start. However, some more fast and amazing changes came with additional progresses and advances in the field of science and technology⁽¹⁾. During this period of time and in most European countries, education was given and expanded to an increased number of population and to a bigger age altogether, as well as an increased number of people entering higher education. Also, women started to have access to the opportunities which were confined to men before. The same progresses and advances started to affect social classes, too. As the European society stayed more hierarchical than the American society, there were greater social mobility and fewer sharp class differences as shown in clothes, speech and behavior. A mass community started to share mass delights⁽²⁾. Evident symmetry vertically and horizontally within societies and between individuals was accelerated by radio, TV, and cinema, each having attractive role models to be imitated or denounced by older generations. This process is referred to as "the Americanization of Europe."⁽³⁾ World War II was more brutal, and bloodier than any other war for it resulted in the deaths of almost sixty million soldiers and civilians. It took the lives of more civilians than soldiers and witnessed the terror of the first genocide in modern history. Also, a lot of cities and villages all around Europe were fully ruined by aerial bombing and heavy artillery. Thus, the meaningless devastation of homes produced thousands of refugees and homeless people as well as the families were torn apart. Hence, nearly everyone in Europe was influenced by this war⁽⁴⁾. The war effects were not confined to adults, but they also included children in different ways. First, the children were dependent on the adults' love, empathy, care and attention. So, in the wartime, their attachments were often torn and ruptured because of the loss of their parents, the parents' extreme preoccupation in protecting and finding breadwinner for the family, and the emotional non-availability of miserable or confused and distracted parents. Consequently, war caused the loss of education during war and the years of families living in miserable circumstances in camps until the end of war, in addition to the loss of limb, sight, cognitive capacity and social life. Even after the end of the war, the families lives would never return back as they were before the impact of war⁽⁵⁾.

Section One

The Writer's Life

Samuel Beckett was born near Dublin in Ireland in 1906. He was a playwright, novelist, short story writers, poet and theatre director. He spent his youth in Paris and wrote his works in English and French languages. He is widely regarded as one of the most outstanding authors of the 20th century⁽⁶⁾. He was brought up in a middle class protestant family, his father was a quantity surveyor and his mother was a nurse. At the age of fourteen, he was sent to attend Portora Royal School in Enniskillen. In the school, he excelled at sport and languages. Later on, he studied French and Italian at Trinity College in Dublin. Looking back at his childhood, he once said, "I had little talent for happiness."⁽⁷⁾ Beckett passed through Ireland, France, UK & Germany, composing poems, novels and dramas and making peculiar jobs to get by⁽⁸⁾.

"In the path of his voyages, he undoubtedly came into contact with a lot of vagabonds and travelers, and these relationships would afterward translate into some of his most excellent characters. Whenever he happened to pass through Paris, he would call on Joyce, and they would have lengthy visits, though it was rumored that they frequently sit in silence, both submersed with grief"⁽⁹⁾. During the second World War, Beckett remained in Paris even after its occupation by the Germans. He fought for resistance, so he joined the secret movement until 1942 when many members of his group were arrested, and then forced to flee with his French wife to an uninhabited area⁽¹⁰⁾. Beckett was the first of the world's most famous absurdist. His works have been translated into more than twenty languages. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969 and continued to write until his death in 1989, but the task became more difficult with each action until he finally said that each word seemed "an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness."⁽¹¹⁾

Section Two

Sterility Relationships within *Endgame* between Characters

In the play "*Endgame*", four characters are positioned within "a triple-walled, minimalist stage"⁽¹²⁾. Though the characters appear to be the last people remaining on earth except the young boy who appears outside of the walled center, they all look as if resisting any physical human contact with each other. Each possible interaction and touch between the characters is interceded by a support, so that each point of contact occurs only when two characters touch the same barrier lies between them. It looks as if Beckett intentionally removes any body contact so as to additionally stress and solidify the sterility existent within this environment⁽¹³⁾. The place in which the characters live in does not look much different from the outside in which all nature seems to be motionless and dead. Hamm comments that Clov "stink[s] already. The whole place stinks of corpses,"⁽¹⁴⁾ suggesting that the population of this area are no more alive or fruitful than the Clov's seeds which reject to vegetate. The distinction between the inside and outside is consequently vague, when Hamm affirms that, "Beyond [the wall] is the...other hell."⁽¹⁵⁾ To reside within the walls is as terrifying as venturing and wandering out far from the walls. The nothingness that overcomes the outside has penetrated this home and continues to be an empty "claustrophobic interior," as Martin Esslin termed. The walls in which the characters are confined to a certain space concurrently isolate them from the exterior world in that when the young boy is noticed outside, the opportunity of connecting with him implies that Clov would have to adventure out from his walled field which is something he will never do⁽¹⁶⁾. In spite of the rather bewildering aspect of the walls, Hamm still senses the need to touch them so as to familiarize himself within the space and also identify the limits of his interior. Once Hamm can not any more see the walls, he should confirm that they still live through their tangibility⁽¹⁷⁾. Clov is asked by Hamm to take him "**for a little turn**"⁽¹⁸⁾ by the walls and after placing his ear against the walls, he notices there are just "**Hollow bricks! [...] All that's hollow!**"⁽¹⁹⁾ Just as the walls that include the set space are empty, so are the bodies that include the non-existent souls of the characters. All is "corpsed." Bodies are made up of hollow frames just as the walls are built by hollow bricks. Separate from the walls⁽²⁰⁾, Nagg and Nell's presence in their own trashcans yet represents another level of barriers separating the characters from each other. When Nagg asks for a kiss from Nell, Beckett marks in the stage directions that, "**Their heads strain towards each other, fail to meet, fall apart again.**"⁽²¹⁾ No one of the characters is able to creep out of their cases and move towards each other, as they both miss their legs, and besides their dysfunctional bodies, the trashcans that contain them also prevent them from contacting with each other⁽²²⁾. The characters of Beckett's play are incomplete characters and consequently their need to sense another person is anything but visible to them. It appears that since they both miss an essential part of their body, the idea that they might miss something else is eventually disregarded. The characters in "*Endgame*" are "**all trapped in patterns of frustration and decay and although they mourn for the days of the past, they do nothing to restore the emptiness that now exists except talk. Language becomes the only proof of reality and existence in "*Endgame*."**"⁽²³⁾ As Beckett once said, "If nothing is more real than nothing,"⁽²⁴⁾ in that case we the audience may obviously see that these relations have got worse into something similar to "nothing."⁽²⁵⁾ In the play, the characters become no more than pests to each other and seem to lack the sense of true concern for their companions. The stress that Beckett puts on the existence of pests looks as if it harken back to the deep-rooted fact that pests like cockroaches appear to be capable to outlive even the deadliest disasters. A rat and a flea both are viewed as Beckett ridicules the evolution theory. When Clov refers to the prospect that the "flea" might be a crablouse, Hamm exclaims⁽²⁶⁾ "**But humanity might start**

from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of God!" The idea that Beckett is ridiculing here is the notion that the human race can totally regenerate from rodents or insects. Likewise, Beckett defines his characters as pests in relation to others. Nagg and Nell for instance became pests to their son "Hamm", and Hamm became a troublesome pest for Clov to handle. Hamm would like to disregard and escape his parents as much as Clov would like to escape Hamm. For the characters to feel as if their relevant "pests" are out of their lives, Hamm makes Clov "bottle" his parents in their trashcans and Clov frequently threatens to leave Hamm. Just like the handkerchief that emerges at the end of the play, these acts simply "staunch" or cover-up the gloomy reality at hand⁽²⁷⁾. There is no possibility or desire in the world that Beckett has created for direct physical human contact. The solitary female character "Nell" that could promise the regeneration and restoration of human population is aged, feeble and dead at the end of the play. Beckett ends his play in a deadlock and dilemma since the three existing chess pieces or characters carry on dancing around each other while evading any physical touch simultaneously. When Clov at last chooses to leave Hamm, he stays instead within the limits of the stage room. Hamm, blind and covered with a handkerchief that he recognizes as an "old stancher," sits ignorant of the fact that Clov stays. The lack of human touch has developed into the absence of being capable to admit the other person's existence. Beckett hints that both will stay frozen in time in this situation: both removed from the reality of the situation and simultaneously removed emotionally and physically from one another. The absence of human touch and human recognition of one another signify that no more progress may be made in this universe. The play continuity is in its stasis, and at the end of the play Beckett clarifies that the characters are no longer getting on.⁽²⁸⁾ In this interaction between Hamm and Clov, we notice the tragic and the comic and strange. Hamm goes from self-pitying with "You don't love me," to self-accusing with "I've made you suffer too much," to self-doubting when he asks (*shocked*), "I haven't made you suffer too much?"⁽²⁹⁾ This does not only mean that you need to watch out for Hamm's mood swings. Interactions like this prove the tortured relation between Hamm and Clov: certainly, Hamm bosses Clov around a lot, yet as he depends on Clov in everything, there is also an element of care in that relation, and the way Beckett emphasizes that tension demonstrates how absurd it actually is. Since Beckett affiliates to a dramatic group called the Theatre of the Absurd because he is so smart in showing the failures of human rationality⁽³⁰⁾. However, nothing goes logically from the characters' round discussions to their presence in a dusty gray room that may be the sole place left in the world. That absurdity lies in why the play is a tragicomedy. It is so sad and so funny all at once which may tell us something about all the plays of this type⁽³¹⁾.

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?

CLOV: It's not that.

HAMM: I haven't made you suffer too much?

CLOV: Yes!

HAMM (relieved): Ah, you gave me a fright! (Pause. Coldly) Forgive me. (Pause. Louder.) I said, Forgive me.

CLOV: I heard you. (Pause.) Have you bled?

HAMM: Less. (Pause.) Is it not time for my pain-killer?

CLOV: No. (Pause.)

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 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.

HAMM: Why don't you kill me?

CLOV: I don't know the combination of the cupboard. (Pause.)

HAMM: Go and get two bicycle-wheels.

CLOV: There are no more bicycle-wheels.

HAMM: What have you done with your bicycle?

CLOV: I never had a bicycle.

HAMM: The thing is impossible.

CLOV: When there were still bicycles I wept to have one. I crawled at your feet. You told me to go to hell. Now there are none.

HAMM: And your rounds? When you inspected my paupers. Always on foot?

CLOV: Sometimes on horse. (The lid of one of the bins lifts and the hands of Nagg appear, gripping the rim. Then his head emerges.

Nightcap. Very white face.

Nagg yawns, then listens.) I'll leave you, I have things to do. HAMM: In your kitchen?

CLOV: Yes.

HAMM: Outside of here it's death.⁽³²⁾

Conclusion

Many consider "Endgame" to be the greatest play by Samuel Beckett. It consists of (4) chief characters: Hamm blind and can not stand up, Clov who can bear whatever he wants but can not sit, Nagg and Nell who can not move at all because they do not have legs and live in the trash. In any case, this cheerful crew is stuck in a small house they never left. Outside there is a gray landscape. Everything has died. It is quite possible to have a kind of end-of-the-world, and these happy few are the last survivors. Not much happens in the play. It consists of a series of interactions between Hamm, Clov, Nell and Nagg. In the exterior, there's a gray scenery. Everything is dead. It's rather probable that there's been some kind of an apocalypse, and these happy small number of people are the final survivors. Nothing much occurs in the drama. It is composed of a sequence of interactions between Hamm, Clov, Nell and Nagg. The drama is a tragedy. It's also a comedy. In other words, it is a tragic comedy. Beckett sticks to many of his characters in hopeless situations, but gives them really funny conversations, making his work tragic. The play is a tragedy and a comedy as well. It is, in other words, a tragicomedy. Beckett sticks a lot of his characters in desperate conditions, yet presents them with actually comical conversations, which makes his work tragicomic. As in his well-known drama "Waiting for Godot", where characters wait for someone who never appears. In "Endgame", they live their lives in a dead world, where there are no changes and can not find any sense, whether you are chasing a room or chilling in the trash. So what's the deal with a play that's bleak, but also funny? Even though most plays have a few more characters who can walk and have names that are more than one syllable, this play can tell you something about the structure of all plays.

Endnotes

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