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Modernism and Multiplicity of Meaning in *Endgame*

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Abstract

Needless to remind the reader that Samuel Beckett is an avant-garde playwright in the Modernist movement. However, this article is an attempt first to demonstrate and elaborate on Beckett's contribution to this movement in the realm of drama: the fact that he constantly explores the human character by permeating their consciousnesses and states of mind. To achieve this purpose, Beckett establishes a paradoxically "expressionless art" which communicates a world of meaning through silences and pauses. Second, the present article is going to deal with multiplicity of meaning in *Endgame*: This demands an approach in a modernist sense—namely the study of motifs, patterns and binary oppositions—and also reading through the blanks and between the lines in a post-modernist deconstructionist manner – namely the reversal of the established binary oppositions. This is both challenging and simultaneously enjoyable for the reader since the play is structured so subtly that it endows the reader with the chance to discover and elicit a variety of interpretations from the text. Therefore, in this study, the writer, benefiting from the critics' views, will tackle a humble attempt to deal with the above-mentioned interpretations without any claim of exhausting the meanings of this multi-layered text from which many other interpretations may boil out.

Keywords: 1. Beckett's "Expressionless" Art 2. Modernism 3. Avant-Garde Playwrights 4. Motifs and Patterns of *Endgame* 5. Religious Pattern 6. Binary Oppositions 7. A Deconstructionist Approach to *Endgame*.

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1. INTRODUCTION: BECKETT'S MODERNISM

One of the outstanding figures associated with Modern Drama, and specifically with the Theatre of the Absurd, is Samuel Beckett. Despite Beckett's own disavowal of any deep interest in the theatre, he has continued to write plays which are all recognized as works central to the "Theatre of Absurd" (Block and Shedd, 1962, 1102. All the quotations will be from this text hereafter). Childs defines "modernism" as a term associated with "avant-garde, radical, progressive or even revolutionary side to the modern which was the catalyst for the coinage 'modernism'" (2001, 12). Although in order to prove Beckett's modernism Childs refers to Beckett's novel *Murphy* as evidence, one can detect the very same characteristics in Beckett's plays as well. Going through an extract from this novel and commenting on its philosophical and psychological implications, Childs calls Beckett "the first post-modernist" (2001, 6-8).

Childs argues in favor of the way Beckett is concerned with the simultaneous function of body and mind, the same concern which we will find in the play *Endgame*:

Beckett's interest is in the Cartesian problem of dualism: how do the mind and the body interact? They co-exist together like the yolk and albumen sealed within an egg, but no one knows how they are connected Such concerns, though flavored by Beckett's peculiar preoccupations, exemplify modernism's fascination with the way the mind processes or projects a reality which surrounds the individual but which is always alienating and oppressing (2001, 7).

Childs also reminds us that the modernist writer "plunges' the reader into a confusing and difficult mental landscape which cannot be immediately understood but which must be moved through and mapped by the reader in order to understand its limits and meanings" (4).

Moreover, Fletcher and McFarlane introduce two figures as different as Ibsen and Beckett as the two poles of Modernism: "That Ibsen and Beckett represent the poles of Modernism, in time and in spirit, is precisely the difficulty. How to define an aesthetic which needs to embrace two such disparate figures, two giants (in their very different ways) of modern dramaturgy?" (1978, 506). Hunter stresses Beckett's modernism and his affinity with great modern geniuses like James Joyce. She points out to John. P. Harrington's comment about Beckett whom he sees as the "epigone of Joyce" (2001, 230). In the first dialogue of the three dialogues with Duthuit, concerning "Tal-Coat," which is frequently quoted by the critics,

Beckett offers an expressionless art of the future: “The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express” (Beckett and Duthuit, 1987, 17). Hunter refers to Beckett’s phrase about Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* that one has to treat the text’s ellipses, not as a partial object, but as a “total object, complete with missing parts.” She believes that Beckett’s phrase offers a useful formula for viewing Joyce’s stories, because “it treats reticence and fragmentariness as ‘positive’ and not as an obstacle to satisfactory interpretation. It suggests that we should frankly acknowledge the disruptive effects of what is missing from the stories, rather than try to gloss what isn’t there”(231). Thus Beckett is one of the main heralds of a modern style and an “expressionless art.” Selden also refers to the disparity between Beckett’s style and that of previously adopted naturalistic contexts:

When Clov in *Endgame* says, ‘something is taking its course’, the audience cannot locate this ‘something’ in any naturalistic context established by the play. The characters do not speak as real people or express coherent and continuous psychological states of mind. Hamm’s emotions (‘Anguished’, ‘with emotion’, ‘vehemently’) are abruptly shifting states which suggest no continuity of personality. The audience cannot *identify* with the characters as people. The focus is rather on the human predicament—the sense of meaninglessness, the fading but persisting sense that there should be a meaning in life, the absurdity of human existence (‘this farce’). (Selden, 1989, 131).

The above statement not only verifies Beckett’s novelty of style but also confirms the present hypothesis that a play like *Endgame* can be an appropriate case for modern approaches from a post-structuralist point of view according to which the critic has to find meaning (‘presence’) in the absence of meaning and fill out the gaps of the fragments and blanks (‘reticence’) in a ‘writerly’ manner.

2. MAIN DISCUSSION: THEMES, MOTIFS AND BINARY OPPOSITIONS

2.1. Nihilistic Theme of *Endgame*

As for our concern with Beckett’s modernism, the focal tension is representative of modern man’s tension: the clash between the individual’s consciousness and the decaying material world, Consciousness cannot conceive of itself as nonexistent and is therefore conceivable as unlimited,

without end. "The more the material world envelops decay and is stripped away, the more painful becomes the tension between temporal and the infinite" (Esslin, 1987, Introduction 7). Beckett's characters may lose their physical abilities and their senses may decay, but the consciousness of their selves relentlessly continues and time can never cease. Esslin maintains that Beckett's critics are strongly impressed by a profound experience of insight offered by Beckett's work which endows them with an exhilarating effect no matter from which perspective—aesthetic, philosophical, psychological or sociological—they treat his works. This exhilarating effect caused paradoxically by the ultimate void in all its grotesque derision and despair is capable to produce an effect akin to catharsis of great tragedy (Esslin, 1987, Introduction 14).

This derision and this "farce," as Clov says in *Endgame*, and this feeling that the whole life, world and nature reduce to a state of blank nullity is what imbues Beckett's works with a black humor—an amalgam of tragedy and comedy—which labels his works as "nihilistic." Nell in the play declares this nihilistic view:

Yes, yes, it's the most comical thing in the world. But it's always the same thing. Yes, it's like the funny story we have heard too often, we still find it funny, but we don't laugh anymore. (From Block and Shedd's text, 1107).

The nihilistic mode of Beckett's plays, of course, harmonizes with the theme of meaninglessness of human life. Esslin believes that "nihilism" is a cliché tag attached to Beckett's plays; it is because Beckett refuses to deal in generalization and abstract truths and is concerned with the concrete rather than the abstract. It is only that Beckett, like many of his contemporaries, has reached a state of doubt and agnosticism about the world itself which, "reflected as it must be within the existential experience of the individual, has lost its reassuringly positive and generally accepted outlines" (8-9). Then what remains is the individual's experience of his own consciousness which is in constant flux and change and therefore negative rather than positive, "the empty space through which the fleeting images pass"(9). Therefore, it is a vain and awkward task on the part of critics to reduce Beckett's work to neatly wrapped up lessons or meaning (2). Only that "the existential experience is thus felt as a succession of attempts to give shape to the void" (Introduction 9). When there is no way to reach a final definitive reality, we get involved in a series of games and arbitrary actions to give the illusion of reality.

However, what Beckett renders does not necessarily present these games void of value. It is the reader and the way he perceives the work which matters in analyzing Beckett's works. Thus, Esslin somehow suggests a reader response theory through which the work of the writer may be interpreted to achieve readings "beyond its author's conscious intentions" (1987, Introduction 12). Consequently, a reader with a positive view may deduce quite a positive interpretation from Beckett's works according to his/her own consciousness and perception and vice versa (Block and Shedd, 1962, 1103). According to Esslin the richer a literary work and the more deeply rooted it is in genuine human experience, the more differentiated responses it may elicit from its reader: "It is the existential experience in a literary work, as distinct from its purely descriptive, ideological, and polemical content, that, in evoking a direct, existential human response in the readers, will ensure its continued impact on succeeding generations" (13). It is then the quality of experience of the play, not what it says, which is communicated. The result of this communication is elaborated as follows:

[Communication with] a mind of such merciless integrity, of such uncompromising determination to face the stark reality of the human situation and to confront the worst without being in danger of yielding to any superficial consolations that have clouded man's self-awareness in the past; to be in contact with a human being utterly free from self-pity utterly oblivious to the pitfalls of vanity or self-glorification. . . , the illusion of being able to lighten one's anguish by sharing with others . . . cannot but evoke a feeling of emotional excitement, exhilaration. (Esslin, 1987, Introduction 14)

Thus, the uglier the reality confronted, the more exhilarating it is.

If one agrees with what Esslin asserts, then one can approach the work from different angles to explore the richness of the play *Endgame* to reach multiple interpretations. The most conspicuous view supported by the explicit details of the play is the nihilistic one, which is contradicted by Esslin and confirmed by many others. However, as Esslin himself admits, one has to accept that many critics have considered the play with a "negative" point of view, which is one of the possibilities. Thus from this stand point, the setting, the characters, themes and motifs all contribute to the development of a nihilistic perspective.

The setting from the very outset builds up the gloomy world of the play where man is alone and bereft of God; he is also bereft of the world. The whole world and action of the play takes place in a small room with two

high-up windows. The light is gray and the whole place smells of corpses and is filled with rats, flies and filth. Hamm is alarmed that humanity might start from a fly and forces Clov to insecticide the whole place. The hilarious scene of Clov loosening the top of his trousers and powdering himself with insecticide adds to the nihilistic ludicrousness of the play.

Besides the setting, the characters intensify the absurdity of the world of the play. Hamm is blind and paralyzed; Clov is also lame; the toy-dog lacks a leg; and even the wheels of the bicycle are disintegrating the same way that everything falls apart. Hamm constantly asks for pain-killers and does not feel like laughing either. Hamm's telling stories to himself may imply his fear and emptiness of life. Hamm's being confined to a wheel-chair is just like man's search for a shelter, a return to mother's womb: waiting rooms where man seeks to compose himself before he is decomposed (Kenner, 1987, 52). Nagg and Nell, Hamm's parents, are separate from each other in an ashbin and when they want to kiss each other, they cannot. Clov also confesses that he is dead "In spirit only." Besides, Hamm starts the play with this paradoxical statement that "the bigger a man is, the fuller he is. (*Pause. Gloomily*) and the emptier" (1104).

2.2. Motif of Progress

In addition to the bizarre setting and characters, the themes and motifs of the play contribute to the grave atmosphere of *Endgame*. The most curious one is the reiteration of the words which imply progress and truth like "go on," "I have things to do" at the same time that practically nothing is done. Thus, as Kenner maintains, "whenever Beckett uses the words progress or truth, there is satire in the air" (86). Cohn comments on the play:

The title succinctly summarizes the action: The process of ending as a process of playing. The difficulty of filling the stage time is more arduous in *Endgame* because the characters are in a more advanced state of decay. Since Clov alone is mobile, they have fewer resources with which to propel the action forward. Hamm asserts three times: 'We're getting on', but the very repetition paradoxically undermines the assertion. More anxious are the separate, identically worded pleas of Hamm and Clov: 'keep going, can't you keep going?' (1995, 95)

2.3. The Motif of Child-parent

The next motif is the motif of child-parent. This motif presides in the relationship of Hamm/Clov, Hamm/Nell and Nagg, the father/child relationship in Hamm's story. But these relationships are all unhealthy relationships based on enthrallment, humiliation and misery. Although

rejecting his own parents, Hamm likes to be Clov's father:

HAMM. . . . (*Pause*) It was I was a father to you.

CLOV. Yes. (*He looks at Hamm fixedly*) You were that to me.

HAMM. My house a home for you.

CLOV. Yes. (*He looks about him*) This was that for me. (1110)

However, the relationship between Hamm and Clov is a sick relationship whose result is torture and spiritual disturbance. First of all, the symbolic names—Hamm for Hammer and Clov, in French, meaning nail—represent the type of relationship. Hamm rejoices in torturing Clov:

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. (*Shocked*) I haven't made you suffer too much?

CLOV. Yes!

HAMM. (*Relieved*) Ah you gave me a fright! (1105)

Hamm's ordering Clov around who is himself lame and has "bad" eyesight does indeed seem like the blows of hammer on Clov, who figuratively functions as a nail for him.

Neither is the relationship between Hamm and his parents any better and healthier. The pun-names, Nagg and Nell—in German Naegel, the sources of Clov and Nell, an abbreviation of Italian "Nello", which echoes the same "nail" (Leventhal, 1987, 50)—are representative enough of the nature of the relationship. The conversation between Nagg and Nell displays their misery. They are both confined to ashbins and are hardly visible.

Hamm's horrible and abusive language calling Nagg "Accursed fornicator" and his frequent threats that he will "chuck [them] in the sea" signify the disintegration of family cohesion, filial and parental respect. Nagg's craving for a time that Hamm would be hopeless and would desperately need them the same way he was a little helpless child conveys Nagg's desire to find a chance to revenge Hamm and his overt despise:

It's natural. After all I'm your father. It's true if it hadn't been me it would have been someone else. . . . I hope the day will come when you'll really need to have me listen to you, and need to hear my voice, any voice. (*Pause*) Yes, I hope I'll live till then, to hear you calling me like when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark, and I was your only hope.

(1113)

Now this is Nagg who needs his son speak to him and fulfill his needs; what he receives instead is curse and humiliation. Probably Nagg realizes that only mutual need will keep them together. Now all Hamm is doing is to listen to their moan and cries to see whether they are dead or alive; when Nell's voice is not heard anymore and he finds out that she is dead, he very coolly orders Clov to put the lid and bury her there.

The next case of parent-child relationship involves Hamm's narration of the story of a father who asks Hamm for some bread for his child. The case, being sympathetic, is based on need and starvation. The setting that Hamm gives for the story is the setting of storm, desert, draught and hunger. The last scene that Hamm portrays is the image of the father on his knees begging him to take him (probably Clov's father) and his hungry child to his service. In other words, the desperate father yields to slavery for a piece of bread for his child whom he is ready to barter.

2.4. Religious Patterns

The third pattern in the play is a religious pattern which is reflected in the frequent use of references to crime, punishment, reckoning, etc. along with the present Biblical allusions. The first line of the play renders the image of Doomsday and the Day of Judgment. The beginning thus starts with the concept of the destruction of the world:

CLOV. ... Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished.... I can't be punished anymore. (*Pause*) I'll go now to my kitchen, ten feet by ten feet, and wait for him [Hamm] to whistle me. (1104)

The echo of the whistle throughout the play reminds one of the clarion and the siren before the Resurrection Day. Immediately after Clov's speech, Hamm is heard talking about suffering: "Can there be misery loftier than mine? ... But does that mean their sufferings equal mine?" At the end of the play, Clov still harps on the matter of suffering and punishment: "I say to myself— sometimes, Clov, you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you—one day" (1117). Moreover, Hamm in his last speech declares: "Moments for nothing, now as always, time was never and time is over, *reckoning* closed and story ended" [my emphasis] (1117). Hamm in his story about the tailor refers to God's creation of the world in six days. There is also a reference to the Book of Daniel, 5:26: "God hath numbered thy kingdom, and brought it to an end."

The above evidences make the ground for Hamm as a parody of a

prophet. We remember he has worn a cardinal-like garment and a skull cap. Beckett, in the stage directions, refers to Hamm's "prophetic" tone and 'relish.' His being asked by the father for some bread reminds one of Jesus Christ being asked by his hungry followers for some bread and his providing them with hundred loaves of bread through his miraculous act. However, Hamm is unable to comply with the father's request. His absurd declaration "All those I might have helped. (*Pause*) Helped! (*Pause*) saved. (*Pause*) Saved!" or his ludicrous statement "Get out of here and love one another! Lick your neighbour as yourself!" (1115) all seem to be the mock-echo of Christ's advice to his disciples to love one another and to love their neighbors as they love themselves. Hamm thus turns to a mock-savior who injects his followers not hope and promise but despair and frustration:

(*Violently*) Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there is no cure for that! . . . But 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? That there is manna in heaven still for imbeciles like you?
(1112)

These words, which all contradict divine promises, defy God's benevolence and resurrection. Furthermore, one cannot ignore the possibility that Hamm's blindness makes another Teiresias like the one in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, but this one witnesses human misery without the former Teiresias' hope for rain and fertility. In fact, Hamm foresees nothing except physical and spiritual aridity and finds "no cure for that." Relevant to this notion is Leventhal's word on the similarity of Hamm and the northern god, Thor, as wielding his hammer, he commands the kids of bins to be shut down on his truncated parents or whistles for attention from Clov (1987, 50).

2.5. Motif of Writing

Another pattern to be considered is the play as a parody of a creative artist, namely an author. As Hunter in studying Beckett's stories *More Pricks Than Kicks* discusses the critics' comments about Beckett's debt to Joyce and portrays him as "epigone of Joyce" (2001, 230), one cannot ignore the probability of Joyce's influence on Beckett's drama either. One, in other words, cannot help considering Hamm in *Endgame* as the parody of Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Hamm is a story teller, but his motivation in story telling seems to be protecting himself against fear and despair. He himself confesses: "Then babble, babble, words like the

solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together, in the dark” (1115). Moreover, his creative energy seems to have exhausted. In response to Clov’s comment that if Hamm’s story ends, he will start another one, Hamm answers: “I don’t know. *(Pause)* I feel rather drained. *(Pause)* the prolonged creative effort” (1114).

However, Hamm sounds quite committed to his art. He resumes making stories non-stop: “Perhaps I could go on with my story, end it and begin another” (1115). Hamm believes “dialogue” is what keeps Clov there:

CLOV. What is there to keep me here?

HAMM. The dialogue. *(Pause)* I’ve got on with my story.
(Pause) I’ve got on with it well.

CLOV. You’ve got on with it, I hope. (1113)

Thus, Clov seems to be quite dependent on Hamm’s story-telling to the point that Hamm believes that the end of the world occurs with the end of speech: “It’s finished, we’re finished. *(Pause)* Nearly finished. *(Pause)* There’ll be no speech” (1112). Therefore, Hamm goes on talking about artistic inspiration and the art of fiction:

There are days like that, one isn’t inspired. *(Pause)* Nothing you can do about it, just wait for it to come. *(Pause)* No forcing, no forcing, it’s fatal. (1113)

He is then obsessed with starting another story: “Perhaps I could go on with my story, end it and begin another” (1115).

Cohn, in the same regard, refers to the indistinguishability of reality and fiction in *Endgame* and the fact that the actors seem to be conscious of their acting; Hamm seems to direct the play: In answer to Clov, who asks what is going to impel him to stay with Hamm, Hamm retorts “the dialogue.” He also informs Clov that he is uttering an “aside” and that he is preparing his last soliloquy. Moreover, when Clov sees the small child, Hamm hopes that it is not a subplot; in abandoning Hamm at the end, Clov explains that this is what they call an “exit” (1117). Finally, at the end, Hamm throws his whistle to the audience “commenting like an appreciative spectator, ‘With my compliments’” (1971, 226-7).

Yet Hamm’s fiction is imbued with misery and starvation; no hope arises from his stories. The setting of his story is Christmas Eve, a “howling” and tempestuous “wild day” when the sun is sinking. His protagonist has a black face in which “dirt and tears” are mingled; he is

starved and begs the narrator for some “bread for brat.” The whole narrative renders the message of misfortune and mishap.

2.6. Subversion of Binary Oppositions

Nevertheless, despite what has been discussed so far with emphasis on somber and nihilistic nature of the play, with a little scrutiny, one can perceive that the world of *Endgame* is not totally dark. Again, the play leaves enough chinks from which emanate some rays of hope and this is what allows for the subversion of the dominant hierarchies. The dominant binary oppositions can be listed as follows:

Life	Death
Inside	Outside
Master	Servant
Independence	Dependence
Potency	Impotency
Blindness	Sight
Parents	Child
Hope	Despair
Destruction	Resurrection

In fact the BOs of life/death and inside/outside are associated with each other, one representing the theme and the other the place. From the beginning of the play, we see Hamm constantly announcing that outside is death: “Outside of here it’s death. (*Pause*) All right, be off. (*Exit Clove. Pause*) We’re getting on” (1105). The sentence “Outside here it’s death” is frequently reiterated throughout the play and Hamm claims that inside things are “going”; Clov also reports the world “without” as “zero” (1109). On the contrary, as discussed before, the atmosphere inside is associated with filth, sickness, decay, rats and flies: “The whole place stinks of corpses” (1111). Thus it is actually the inside which is associated with death. That is why Hamm is in fright that “humanity might start from [a fly] all over again!” (1109). This means that humanity is already dead “inside.” And this inside can symbolically signify the characters’ internal and spiritual state which is also rotten. Hamm tells Clov, “Last night I saw inside my breast. There was a big sore” (1109). Therefore, contrary to Hamm’s illusion, outside is not that moribund. The last time Clov looks outside, he suddenly sees a small boy whom Hamm recognizes as a “potential procreator” and whose presence marks the end for Hamm: “It’s the end, Clov, we’ve come to an end. I don’t need you anymore” (1117).

The child is the sign of a new beginning and the birth of life outside, whereas Hamm finds no motivation for life inside. This is the way the dichotomy of inside-life/outside-death is practically subverted.

The very prominent opposition in the play is master/servant one reflected in Hamm and Clov's relationship. Derived from this opposition are the oppositions of independence/dependence and potency/impotency. We have also elaborated on the symbolic names of Hamm and Clov as hammer and nail and on Clov's apparent slavery to and dependence on Hamm. However, in a careful reading, one can see that this relationship can be reinterpreted. It is true that throughout the play it is the echo of Hamm's voice and orders which is heard and it is Clov who is constantly running around like a slave doing idle errands for Hamm, but Clov is not that tongue-tied and submissive either. On the contrary, this is Clov who plays with Hamm and even disguises the truth to provide Hamm with what he likes to hear to the point that Hamm sometimes suspects and distrusts his reports. But Hamm is helpless—blind and paralyzed—and has to yield to Clov's comments. Thus, one cannot neglect the fact that sometimes Clov is the authority and Hamm the subject. Clov's constant threats that he will leave Hamm and his unclear and indifferent answers ("as usual") to his questions are enough to upset and irritate Hamm. He answers Hamm "irritably" and "violently" to make Hamm feel imposed and unwanted. As a result, Hamm off and on asks Clov what has kept him there. There are times that Clov yells at Hamm: "If I could kill him I'd die happy" (1108). Hamm has to ask forgiveness over and over again. Therefore, Clov's one-word and short answers reflect his boredom with and disinterest in Hamm's questions; this reaction disappoints Hamm's anxiety to discover what is going on around him. But note Clov's indifferent and occasionally sarcastic tone:

HAMM (*Violently*). Wait till you're spoken to! (*Normal voice*) All is . . .
. . . all is . . . all is what? (*Violently*) All is what?

CLOV. What all is? In a word? Is that what you want to know? Just a moment. (*He turns the telescope on the without, looks, lowers the telescope, turns toward Hamm*) Corpsed. (*Pause*) Well? Content?

HAMM. Look at the sea.

.....

CLOV. It's the same.

HAMM. Gulls?

CLOV (*Looking*). Gulls!

HAMM. And the horizon? Nothing on the horizon?

CLOV. (*Lowering the telescope, turning toward Hamm, exasperated*)

What in God's name could there be on the horizon? (*Pause*). (1109)

Such questions and answers go on incessantly. Therefore, Hamm, who likes to be absolute authority and always be at the center—as he asks Clov to move him right to the center—sometimes likes to revenge Clov. With a “prophetic relish” he tells Clov “One day you’ll be blind, like me. You be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like I’ll sit down, and you’ll go and sit down” (1110). Hence sometimes it is the nail—Clov—which exhausts the hammer—Hamm.

Another subvertible binary opposition is the dichotomy of blindness/sight one. On the surface this is Hamm who is physically blind and Clov functions as his eyes and sees for him. However, we hear Clov’s complaining of his bad eyes and his weak sight. It is through a telescope that Clov is able to report the outside world for Hamm; without it, he would be as blind as Hamm. Something very curious that happens is that Clov’s answers are all based on Hamm’s interrogations just to satisfy his curiosity. Then one wonders if Clov does see anything at all and if his answers are just as the routine dictates him since he tells Hamm, “You’ve asked me these questions million of times” (1110). Therefore, since the questions and ideas all come from Hamm and are just repeated by Clov, it seems that Clov just sees what Hamm likes him to *see*. Once when Hamm asks Clov the meaning of “yesterday,” he violently replies, “I use the words you taught me. If they don’t mean any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent” (1111). Then Hamm immediately tells Clov about a madman who could see nothing but ashes. One wonders then, is Hamm blind and Clov well-sighted or vice versa? One has also to bear in mind that all the comments about life and death come from Hamm and this is Hamm who has the vision of a “writer” too.

In the binary opposition of parents/child, the place of parents and child is conspicuously altered and reversed: parents act like children and Hamm, the child, treats his parents with a parental authority holding the rod against them. The parents—Nagg and Nell—with their symbolic names as “nail”—are under the dominion of Hamm—their child. They are just like naughty children confined to ashbins. As soon as they are allowed to be visible, they either ask for biscuits or sugar-plums or are already nibbling at some. Their childish language, their constant nagging and moaning and Hamm’s asking Clov to bottle them are all evidences to render them as children and enhance the theme of the loss of parental reverence. Hamm constantly calls his parents bad names for having begotten him. In this way it seems that Hamm has held the rod of authority punishing his parents for engendering him and

the parents are reduced to faulty children who deserve severe retribution!

Furthermore, the dominant paradox of the play allows for the inversion of destruction/resurrection binary opposition. Chambers fully elaborates on this subject in his readable essay "Beckett's Brinkmanship." Chambers stresses the fact that what we see at the end of the play is not absolute darkness and destruction, but it is an "interminable twilight existence on the threshold that we see in *Fin de Partie* (Endgame), which has as its subject the infinite process of approaching infinity in time. In this play, everything is over from the curtain-rise, but nothing ever manages to stop" (1987, 158). Chambers also sees the ending as another beginning:

I do not agree with those who suggest that at the end of the play, all is consummated, with the death of Hamm and his parents, and the departure of Clov. On the contrary, when the curtain falls, the characters are still as they have always been, that is, only *about to* die or leave. They have moved slightly closer to their goal: Hamm has taken process of abstraction from the world a stage further by throwing away his whistle and his dog, Clov has got as far as putting on his panama and bringing in his suitcase, and when last observed Nell *seems to be* dead while Nagg *seems to be* alive. But as the play ends, there is nothing to indicate that the curtain could not rise again on a scene in all essentials the same as the opening of the play, thus setting the whole play moving again. . . . (160)

Metman in a different way confirms the ending as "resurrective" when she emphasizes the last promise of the advent of a "child-god" which she considers as symbolic of inner liberation. The small boy is called "potential procreator" who is described as contemplating his navel (1987, 134). Therefore, although there is no confrontation between Clov and the small boy, it is possible that someone would take pity on the "small boy" the same way that long ago Hamm took pity on Clov as a child (1987, 136).

Exactly related to the above view is the subversion of despair/hope opposition. At the beginning of this study, the despairing and nihilistic view confirmed by many critics was considered. However, the play is not totally void of hope. By reconsidering the play optimistically, one is able to discover details which eventually change despair to hope; the nature of interpretation only depends on the reader's perspective. The most obvious evidence is that the setting is Christmas time, the time of rebirth and celebration, not death and devastation. Moreover, according to Metman, blind Hamm who refused to save the hungry child and let Mother Pegg die of darkness (by refusing to give her oil for her lamp) dies at the end, but Clov (the once "small boy") and the small boy of the end of the play remain.

Thus the carriers of life triumph over those of negation, despair and defeat (Metman, 1987, 139).

Consequently, the character of Clov is associated with hope. Clov is associated with “love of order”: “I love order. It’s my dream.” And then he continues “I’m doing my best to create a little order” (1113). Hamm also thinks the reason why Clov has stayed with him is compassion, what Hamm has proved to lack. Moreover, once Hamm asks Clov to speak a few words of his heart Clov answers with what proves crucial for the turn that readers’ interpretations might take at the end: “They said to me, That’s love, yes, yes, not a doubt. . . . 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!” (1117). This hopeful tone is also followed by his final liberation and his leaving Hamm forever and letting him die gradually in his armchair.

3. CONCLUSION

The fore-going analyses, of course, will not exhaust the multiple meanings that the *Endgame* offers. Reading the critiques concerned with the thematic aspect of the play, one can see that many critics have debated over the nihilistic view of *Endgame*, an attitude which can be very well reflected in and confirmed by Beckett’s use of character, setting, themes and motifs of the play. To detect the above notion in the play, a critical reader is required to scrutinize Beckett’s language and diction which is meticulously employed to deflate and deride the concept of “progress” in the play. The motif of child-parent relationship also intensifies the frustrating relationship between the characters, each of whom suffers from a kind of physical defect. Likewise, the Biblical allusions in such a seemingly morbid and somber atmosphere contribute to the development of another parody which further besmears the already absurd and grotesque world of the play. Moreover, there is in turn sufficient evidence in the play to convince the reader that Hamm, besides a mock-prophet, can represent a mock-artist to convert the play to the travesty of Joyce’s *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

However, as the play proceeds, one cannot overlook the nature of the play out of which other patterns seethe which are controversial with and contradictory to the previous ones. Thus, through the lines and the silences of the play, the alert reader may discover the possibility of the reversion of the binary oppositions, which previously seemed deep-rooted and established in the texture and overall structure of the play. This is when

through a deconstructive reading, the reader may overturn and violate many of the patterns and hierarchies and thus trace a new order that originates from the very same texture.

Probably what Esslin tells us about the task of a critic dealing with Beckett's work can somehow verify the present writer's assertion as to how generative this multi-faceted work is:

... the function of criticism is of particular importance for a writer like Beckett who is not trying to communicate anything beyond the quality of his own experience of being; the quality of such a body of work, its very existence, will be determined by the quality of its reception, or by the sum total of all individual experiences it provokes in individual readers. That is why a great writer's oeuvre can acquire a life of its own, that may well go beyond its author's conscious intentions and expand by gaining layer after layer of new meaning through the experience it evokes in the minds and emotions of succeeding generations. (1987, Introduction 12)

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