



**The Philosophy of Beckett's Play *Endgame*:**

**Its Vision and Apocalyptic Sides**

فلسفة بيكت في مسرحية نهاية اللعبة:

رؤيتها و جوانبها المروعة

**Prepared by:**

**Tawfeq M. al-Nabrawi**

**Supervised by:**

**Dr. Mohamad Haj Mohamad**

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**Middle East University**

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## Authorization

I, Tawfeq al-Nabrawi, authorize Middle East University to supply copies of my thesis to libraries, establishments or individuals upon request.

**Name:** Tawfeq M. al-Nabrawi

**Signature:** 

**Date:** 26 / 12 / 2015

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This thesis titled "The Philosophy of Beckett's Play Endgame: Its Vision and Apocalyptic Sides" was successfully defended and approved on 26 / 12 / 2015

#### Examination committee

#### Signature

1. Dr. Mohamad Haj Mohamad . Thesis Advisor
2. Prof. Tawfeq Ibrahim Yousef . Chairman
3. Dr. Nazmi Tawfiq Al Shalabi. External Examiner



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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents' soul. I also dedicate it to Dr. Heba M. Taqem, to all my brothers and sisters, who keep supporting me emotionally, financially and spiritually, and to my beloved country, Jordan.

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## فلسفة بيكت في مسرحية نهاية اللعبة:

### رؤيتها وجوانبها المروعة

الباحث:

توفيق محمد النبراوي

بإشراف الدكتور:

محمد حاج محمد

### ملخص الدراسة:

تقدم هذه الأطروحة صمويل بيكت بوصفه كاتباً معنياً بتسليط الضوء على غياب المعنى والعبث الموجود في حياة الإنسان من خلال حوارات الشخصيات والأسلوب غير المؤلف في مسرحية نهاية اللعبة. تهدف الدراسة إلى البحث في فلسفة بيكت عن الحياة وذلك باستعراض رؤية المؤلف ولا سيما الجوانب الموضوعية والتقنية في المسرحية. لتحقيق الغاية المقصودة ستعتمد الدراسة بشكل رئيسي على المنهج الوصفي التحليلي. من خلال التركيز على الأبعاد المختلفة لهذه المسرحية، أظهرت الدراسة أنه على الرغم من أن المسرحية تحتوي على مشاهد مفزعة وتتبنى رؤية متشائمة للعالم في كونها ترى الحياة عبثية وبلا معنى، إلا أنها واعية. فهي تسعى لتنوير وتحذير القراء والمشاهدين من خطر كارثي غير محدد، كما وأنها تلقي الضوء على بعض الحقائق المؤلمة في حياة الإنسان. تتناول المسرحية عدة قضايا تثير اهتمام الناس حول العالم وكما أنها تؤكد أيضاً على مواضيع المسرح العبثي، اللامعنى للوجود الإنساني، الإغتراب، الضياع، الموت، انعدام التواصل، ومشاعر القلق واليأس والسأم على سبيل المثال؛ لذا فالمسرح

مفتوح للتحليل من وجهات نظر مختلفة. فضلا عن ذلك فإن المسرحية تصور حالة الإنسان من خلال استخدام اللغة المهشمة والغامضة و السخرية و الأعمال العقيمة و الحبكة والزمان والمكان والشخصيات غير المألوفة. أخيرا توصلت الدراسة الى أن العمل الأدبي ما هو إلا كابوس مخيف يعكس صورة مروعة للإنسان في أعقاب الحرب العالمية الثانية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** العبثي, المروعة, العزلة, الوجودية.

# **The Philosophy of Beckett's Play *Endgame*:**

## **Its Vision and Apocalyptic Sides**

**By:**

**Tawfeq M. al-Nabrawi**

**Supervised by:**

**Dr. Mohamad Haj. Mohamad**

### **Abstract:**

This thesis presents Samuel Beckett as a playwright who prefers shedding light upon the meaninglessness and absurdity of Man's life through the unusual form and the characters' dialogues in his play *Endgame*. The present study aims to investigate Beckett's philosophy of life. It explores the vision of the author with a particular emphasis on the thematic and technical aspects of his drama. In order to achieve this purpose, the study relies mainly on both the descriptive and analytical method. By focusing on different dimensions of the play, the study shows that although Beckett's vision is pessimistic, it holds the view that life is absurd without meaning or purpose, very conscious. It enlightens, warns readers and spectators of a possible unspecified catastrophe and also highlights the painful realities of Man's life. The study also finds out that Beckett's *Endgame* addresses issues which concern all people around the world and emphasizes the absurdist themes as well, such as the meaninglessness of human existence, alienation of individuals, loss and death, lack of

communication and feelings of anxiety, hopelessness and boredom; hence the play is open to analysis from different viewpoints. Moreover, Beckett's literary work portrays the human condition through the use of language, humor, unconventional plot, setting and characters. The study at the end comes to the concrete realization that the play, though plotless and actionless and its language is broken and full of pauses and silence or interrupted sentences, is a terrible nightmare which gives a shocking picture of Man in the aftermath of the II World War.

**Key Words:** Absurd, Apocalyptic, Alienation, Existentialism.

## ***Chapter One***

### ***Introduction***

The present chapter is introductory in that it seeks to provide some essential views related to the main issue here. It begins with Beckett's biography as it partially explains his views and concepts of life. Different arguments about the intellectual context of Beckett's theatre will be raised; it is the absurd and its intellectual roots. Also it places Beckett within this broad trend in addition to his stylistic and technical innovations. The psychological and intellectual aspects of his theatre will be discussed in some detail.

#### ***1-1. Beckett's Biography:***

Samuel Beckett was born near Dublin, Ireland, in 1906, the second son of middle-class Protestant parents. He was educated at Portora Royal School and Trinity College. He studied French, Italian, and English. He was a brilliant student, and was by the end of his third year at Trinity College sufficiently advanced in his studies to have gained a foundation scholarship; the most prestigious undergraduate award at Trinity. After his graduation in 1927, Beckett went to Paris and met many literary figures. He returned to Dublin in 1930 to work as a lecturer at Trinity College, but submitted his resignation after two years, and obtained a Master of Arts degree. After his resignation, Beckett became more engaged in the literary work, and spent much of his life directing productions of his plays in many European countries. (Sternlicht,2005)

Beckett, the Irish novelist, playwright and theatre director, was generally regarded as one of the finest artists of the twentieth century. He wrote six novels, four

long plays and dozens of shorter ones, volumes of stories and narrative fragments, some of which were short novels. In addition, he wrote poetry and essays on the arts, including an essay about Marcel Proust, radio and television plays, and prose pieces. His greatest successes were in his middle years, in the 1950's with *Waiting for Godot* (1954), *Endgame* (1958) and with his trilogy of novels, *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Dies* (1951) and *The Unnameable* (1953). In 1969 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, and continued to write until his death in 1989. (Bair, 1990)

Beckett's self-exile from Ireland to a more modern world is seen as a turning point of his life, which also has a direct influence on his writing, his imagination, language and style. In Paris he wrote the trilogy and the first two plays. Critic Knowlson (2014) points out that Beckett was fortunate to meet and work closely with a number of gifted actors and also with many great academic and literary figures, such as MacGreevey, a poet as well as an academician. He was also greatly influenced by the Irish writer James Joyce, who was more than a master for Beckett. The affinity between the two men may lie in the fact that both had degrees in French and Italian languages; they shared a cultural background and pondered their role as Irishmen abroad in the larger world. They both loved manipulating words, their sounds, rhythms and shapes and had a serious interest in etymologies, histories and all forms of mysterious knowledge. Although the friendship of such people was a prize for Beckett, he was also fascinated by the thriving cultural life of the city itself, that he saw his literary future in France. Esslin (1961) asserts this saying "An Irishman, Samuel Beckett; a Rumanian, Eugene Ionesco; a Russian of Armenian origin, Arthur Adamov, not only found in Paris the atmosphere that allowed them to experiment in freedom, but they also found there the opportunities to get their work produced" (p.27).

## ***1-2. The Theatre of the Absurd:***

The term 'absurdity' in literature is used by many writers in the mid twentieth century as a vehicle in order to bring under focus those perplexing issues in the world, which may cause uncertainty in Man's life. Absurdist, like Beckett, Ionesco, and Sartre, are concerned with issues related to contemporary Man, his meaningless and futile actions, his anxiety and relentless search for a single meaning of life. In order to define the term "absurd", Esslin (1968) refers to Ionesco 's understanding of the term saying that "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose, cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots" (p.23). What happens in this world of crises and wars has a negative effect on societies both physically and psychologically. These catastrophes, besides the use of the atomic bomb and the biological weapons, which are the most dangerous, bring miseries and create a profound sense of waste and of life's absurdity. People's lives and daily existence come under threat and the very basis of human existence is destroyed. As a result, people become hesitant, confused, helpless, hopeless, homeless, aimless and eventually they may lose faith. These painful realities, which cause the sense of anxiety, futility, uncertainty and senselessness of life, have contributed greatly to the emergence of absurd philosophy. They are dramatized in Absurd Theatre, and considered to be central themes in the plays of Beckett, Ionesco, Sartre and other playwrights who share a common view known as the absurd. In this regard one can say that, the theatre of the absurd is the true and typical theatre of our time; because it is deeply concerned with our inner world, as viewed by western thinkers and artists. Esslin (1968) asserts this saying "The Theatre of the Absurd can be seen as the reflection of what seems to be the attitude most genuinely representative of our own time" (p.22). Of course, Esslin has in mind the western society and its shaky religious foundations.

The Theatre of the Absurd is often characterized by its shocking and confusing plays; which may reveal both the non-acceptance and the success of its dramas. Styan (1981) comments on the plays of the Absurd Theatre saying that in such a drama "every signal from the stage is a representation of irrationality designed to surprise and shock" (p.125). Although plays of this kind are much interested in depicting reality, they are incomprehensible; they are as ambiguous as life itself. They seek to confront audience with an experience that is similar to their own. That's to say, the sense of absurdity that pervades through these plays is intimately associated with the writers' sense of the absurdity of life; the sense which has already been experienced outside the theatre. Thus, such dramas are not meant to provide a new life experience or even discuss issues related to man's life, but rather to provide a new theatrical experience and also to highlight and portray the outside world. They are designed carefully in order to shock their readers and spectators, increase their consciousness and reveal the other hidden sides, the paradoxical and absurd side of our world. They try to convey concrete images of our life and seek to warn rather than to deceive.

Many playwrights like Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, Pinter, Camus and Sartre ,who came from different places and belong to different cultural backgrounds, contribute to the rise of the Absurd Theatre. These men have a common bleak view of life. This may be, as Kaufmann (1956) suggests, due to their belief that "man's situation is absurd and tragic" (p.47). Styan (1968) also asserts the affinity between the views of the absurdists and existentialists saying 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" (p.218). Both share the same vision and have the same interest in exploring and expressing the common problem of human life, the essence of existence, especially after the First and Second World Wars. They try to



portray Man's relentless struggle to understand or even find himself in this chaotic, futile and meaningless world; many of their works reflect this basic concern.

Although these writers have a common subject matter, there is a difference between writers of Theatre of the Absurd and of Existentialist theatre, in the way of presenting ideas and views. Writers of Theatre of the Absurd present plays which are written in defiance of all the traditional rules of the drama. They seek to make an integration, a sort of harmony between what bothers them and wish to say and the form or the way of expressing. That's to say, the arguments and aesthetics are absurd, the theatre itself and what happens on stage are just as irrational and senseless as life itself. While dramatists like Sartre and Camus present their sense of life absurdity using the old theatrical principles, which have logical portrayal, logical orders in events and rational speech. Esslin (1968) comments on this saying that dramatists of existentialist theatre

*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. (p.24)*

According to Styan (1981) 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" (p.125). Sartre, who was a prisoner of war in Germany in 1940, expresses his vision about man and his existence in each of his

plays, he considers the world to be totally absurd following the steps of his predecessors Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. In their view, man is a lonely creature of anxiety and despair living in a disordered, irrational and meaningless world. As a result, he has no choice, loses his identity and becomes helpless and purposeless.

Beckett, who is one of the representatives of the Theater of the Absurd, is heavily influenced by Schopenhauer's pessimistic vision about man's existence. Buttner (2001) asserts that "Schopenhauer's pessimism was very close to Beckett's own, he was to heed the three ways of enduring the misery of existence that Schopenhauer recommended: art or aesthetic contemplation, compassion and resignation" (p.114). Schopenhauer's views, ideas and pessimism meet with Beckett's inner feelings and melancholic mood; and many of Beckett's works have a similar feeling of compassion and resignation in the audience. Both men use resignation as an indicator of Man's refusal to live. The difference here is that Schopenhauer sees that since we live in a world full of pain, surrounded by dangers, ready to destroy us at any moment, and life is the source of our anguish, pessimism and depression can only end by the complete resignation of life. Unlike Schopenhauer, Beckett's resignation does not mean the desire to end life. Although Beckett's protagonists, especially Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*, are often suffering, they don't commit suicide; Vladimir and Estragon's dwelling on suicide is probably meant to hint at today's people's obsession with suicide and peaceful death. Anyway, Buttner explains this elsewhere saying "In Beckett's great plays there are always some glimpses of hope" (p.116). They still have a little hope of the coming future, which makes them prefer delaying to the complete resignation of life. This can be clearly seen in *Waiting for Godot* more than in *Endgame*. The characters in *Waiting for Godot* are waiting for

someone who is seen as a savior, so there is hope of survival, while in *Endgame* the characters are waiting for death; they don't wait for anybody to help, because they believe that nobody can help.

### ***1-3. Beckett and Psychology:***

Gounelas (2001) points out that Beckett's interest in psychology appeared in the thirties, especially when his father died in 1933. His father's death, in conjunction with difficulties in his relationship with his mother, drove him into psychotherapy at the Tavistock Clinic in London. Beckett admired the psychological thoughts and the way that is used in psychotherapy; how it links symptoms to causes, memories to dreams, the past to the present. After his treatment, Beckett became more interested in the field of psychology and psychoanalysis, that he used his reading in the composition of his second novel, *Murphy*, and his later works. His psychological reading of Karin Stephen's *The Wish to Fall Ill*, or *Otto Rank's The Trauma of Birth*, and other books, had a direct result of his psychotherapy and influenced his way of thinking and writing. Nixon (2011) comments on this point saying that "Beckett viewed psychology as yet another epistemological source that could potentially prove fruitful to his writing" (p.39). He took the raw materials, the actual experience and psychological readings and transformed them into a form of literary writing. His interest in mental disorders and feelings of anxiety, for example, characterizes most of his fictional and dramatic characters, who are engaged in difficult quests which represent journeys of self-discovery.

Beckett is one of those writers who have devoted their lives to portraying the paradoxes of man's life. His personal engagement with and considerable knowledge

of depth psychology provided him with a conceptual framework which helped him to reveal man's anxiety and fears through his drama. His interest in psychology, as Gounelas (2001) says, is clearly shown after his treatment from some psychological problems, caused by the mother's domination, which Gounelas also considers to be "the source of his psychosomatic ailments" (p.70); the desire to contain or control and the desire for independence appear in verbal formulations, as in the dialogues between Hamm and Clov, or in visual images or symbols, as when he puts Nagg and Nell in dustbins in *Endgame* or the three characters in urns in *play*. This debasement of Man in Beckett's world is certainly a reflection of his fundamental judgment of man and life in general.

Kenner (1973) also comments on Beckett's egocentric vision in *Endgame* saying that *Endgame* is "a play about a solipsist's world" he adds "Its world is monstrous, but so is the world we are defining, the world spun about one man who is accustomed to dominate because we can dominate our mental worlds" (p.14). The term solipsism is defined as "a theory holding that the self can know nothing but its modifications, and that the self is the only existent thing; extreme egocentrism" (Webster's Dictionary, 2005). In other words, solipsism is the blind confidence in one's self or the self-interest that denies others by lying to dominate them. This can be seen in *Endgame* through Hamm's and Clov's relationship. Hamm controls Clov, and shows a kind of ownership even toward Clov himself; and this suggests that their relationship holds a variety of socio- political and psychological dimensions.

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* had a direct effect on an audience of convicts when it was presented in 1957 at the San Quentin penitentiary. Esslin (1968) wonders about the reason behind the reception of a play that is described as a highly obscure and intellectual play saying "Why did a play of the supposedly esoteric avant-garde

make so immediate and so deep an impact on an audience of convicts?". He goes on to say that "Because, it confronted them with a situation in some ways analogous to their own" (p.21). This shows the importance of Beckett's drama, and how it is capable to contain people from various segments of society; in brief, it is universal. His drama shares audiences the desire for self-expression and displays not only their anxiety about the present situation, but also about the future; the fear of the disappointment that they may face outside the prison. His wide reading of a number of prominent figures in both spheres, from Descartes to Schopenhauer, to Freud, Jung and Rank helped him dive into the depths of the others' thoughts and reveal their fears and desires. His works are engaged in depicting man's suffering and the story of his existence on earth.

According to Wright (2013), "The plays of Samuel Beckett graphically present us with images of bodies, or parts of bodies, sometimes comically, sometimes desperately, struggling to channel their desire through speech" (p.5). To explore the human dilemma, wishes and fears common to all mankind, Beckett creates irrational, illogical and strange characters, who do seem to be deranged, and makes them speak freely and spontaneously in order to express their thoughts and fears. His use of Freud's notions about dreams, which Eagleton (1996) considers to be "The royal road to the unconscious" (p.136), in drama helps him greatly with expressing his motivations and fears more freely through the characters' speech. He uses the unconscious and dreams as a tool to reveal the feelings, memories and repressed desires in his characters, who are seen as representatives of all mankind. His drama looks like a dream or even a nightmare that embodies and expresses its fears and desires in the form of complex codes and symbols, which need to be decoded in order to arrive at the underlying latent thoughts.

Although Beckett's drama seems to be obscure and absurd with no meaning, Kenner (1973) points out that his drama is meaningful and it "has always a story" (p.9) that is well-formed to enlighten its readers and spectators, represent world's chaos and convey the sense of anxiety and agony of human life. His pessimistic view of life and depressed mood, regardless of his relationship with his mother, the death of his family and the physical illness that he suffers from, comes from his deep understanding of the miserable state of humanity, especially after the Second World War. This is quite clear in his *Endgame*, which will be explored in detail in the present study.

#### ***1-4. Beckett and Humor:***

The blend of the comic and tragic in one situation or in one character is certainly a striking feature in Beckett's drama. The comic forms in Beckett's drama are not only devised as a means of breaking down resistance to the horror of the content or to disperse the theatrical boredom, which might appear through depicting themes such as purposelessness, nothingness, hopelessness and helplessness, but they are also used as a gesture of despair and as a painkiller at the same time. Tyson and Hall (2014) comment on this saying "Beckett's humor amounted to a comedy of despair in a carnival of the absurd" adding that "humor emerges as Beckett's palliative" (p.302). Humor can be thought of as a strategy for relieving tension, confusion or anxiety. It reduces the hysterical state that pervades Beckett's theatre and makes the characters endure their painful reality. The characters are suffering from many physical deformities; they are living under continuous pressure and unspecified threat and unable to understand what is going; in short, the characters are laughing in

response to pain. Sternlicht (2005) also comments on this point saying that "Beckett wanted his tragicomedy to be played for laughs, for laughter may be all that is left after total despair (p.57). This can be clearly seen through the characters in *Endgame*, especially when Nell declares that "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness" (p.18); they laugh at the futility, the tragedy and the cruelty of their world.

A similar attitude is taken here towards the tragicomic world of Beckett's characters. Foely (2010) sees that Beckett's "protagonists often become comic figures in a tragic, absurd, or unknowable universe that denies them dignity of meaning or escape" (p.141). Although Beckett's characters are suffering a lot, unable or unwilling to escape from their miserable situation and know that there is no cure as Beckett suggests in his play saying "Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that" (p.68). Their gestures and speech seem to be very funny; they try to live moments out of comedy in order to forget or even postpone the spiritual and physical pain. In other words, humor is not only taken as a gesture of despair, but it is also used to make the characters endure in the face of incomprehensible and unbearable reality or escape from reality. This can be seen through Nagg's story about an English man who asked a tailor to make a pair of trousers in a hurry for the New Year festivities:

*God damn you to hell, Sir, no, it's indecent, there are limits! In six days, do you hear me, six days, God made the world. Yes Sir, no less Sir, the WORLD! And you are not bloody well capable of making me a pair of trousers in three months!*

*(Tailor's voice, scandalized.)*

*But my dear Sir, my dear Sir, look\_\_*

*(disdainful gesture, disgustedly)*

*\_\_\_at the world\_\_\_ (pause) and look\_\_\_*

*(loving gesture, proudly) \_\_\_*

*at my TROUSERS!. (p. 22-23)*

We may mock the absurdities of the tramps, Didi and Gogo, in *Waiting for Godot*, which has no story or plot to speak of; to reveal the chaotic world of Man. They waste their time waiting for the unknown, and know at heart that their task is impossible. A similar attitude is taken toward the tramps in *Endgame*. Hamm is blind and he cleans his sun glasses. Clov, the prisoner, can move freely but cannot sit, and he wants to leave, but he stays; he is unable to leave Hamm fearing of the outside world, which seems to be completely destroyed. The father and mother are sitting in trash cans and acting like machines; even their love which is seen as a sign of life is seen as a dark comedy. We may laugh at their foolishness, irrational behaviors, fruitless actions and even at their models. But what is presented on the stage is only a parody of life. As Styan (1968) suggests "we laugh at their antics of mind and body, but under the growing realization that what they are doing is only a modest parody of what we do ourselves; we know before the piece is done that they are ourselves" (p.259); as soon as we realize that we are not the audience who are sitting on comfortable seats but the tramps, the tears of laughter will be mingled with tears of sorrow. In brief, Hamm and Clov's actions are meant to reflect the futility of life. These actions along with the parents' are as worthless as the world and human life are.



### ***1-5. Beckett's Style and Language:***

Beckett's plays are written in defiance of all the traditional rules of drama. In this regard Styan (1981) comments on this particular point saying that "they have no logical plot or characterization in any conventional sense. Their characters lack the motivation found in realistic drama, and so emphasize their purposelessness. The absence of plot serves to reinforce the monotony and repetitiveness of time in human affairs" (p.126). For Beckett, style is much more important than any message. In trying to express the inexpressible, the pure anguish and futility of human existence, Beckett abandons style in the conventional sense and attempts to reproduce a new and mystifying one. The absence of plot and clear solutions in his drama reveals the habitual nature of life and reflects the outside absurdity, as many things happen with no clear reason or justification. Events have no logical order and end when they begin. His characters are described, by Esslin (1968), as talking machines, with no clear identity, partially mad and their speech is irrational and nonsensical. In other words, the ambiguity, incoherence and disorder in Beckett's theatre is only a representation of what we face outside it.

It is certain that abandoning the traditional way of drama and adapting a new one will affect the audience, confuse them, force them to be active participants and raise their awareness. Unlike the commonplace drama which is easy to identify characters and predict the message, Beckett's characters are very ambiguous and bewildering and so are his challenging themes. Valency (1980) describes Beckett's characters saying that they "are as ambiguous as the situation" (p.396). For example, in *Endgame* Beckett offers mysterious and sometimes interchangeable characters. It is difficult for the audience to tell who is the master or who is the slave. It is even

difficult to determine their declarations or the general problem of the play. In the first line of *Endgame* Beckett states that "It is finished", while in *Godot's* opening line is "Nothing to be done", and the characters proceed to do nothing of value. Although the characters do engage in various actions, none of those actions are connected in any meaningful way, nor do the actions develop into any sort of narrative or logical sequence of events. This may be due to the fact that Absurd Theatre is not concerned with discussing or giving solutions, but depicting reality. In such a drama, readers or spectators try to understand or find a justification but they may fail, as they do in reality.

Beckett enjoys writing drama, arguing that it is more dynamic and realistic than fiction. The reason behind this shift from fiction to drama may lie in the fact that language is no longer regarded as a vehicle for direct communication; the failure of language to convey meaning or truth, which is later taken as a theme in his drama. According to Esslin (1968) "Theatre is always more than mere language. language alone can be read, but true theatre can become manifest only in performance" (p.314). Beckett does not take language as the only instrument for the expression. He knows that there are other elements that have deep meanings and express more than language could, such as gestures, visible imageries, pauses and silences. Sternlicht (2005) also comments on this point saying that "Beckett chose drama as the genre for his greatest philosophical statement because it combines language and gesture" (p.57).

Beckett also places linguistic expression in opposition to the action on the stage. As in *Endgame*, Clov claims he is leaving Hamm but actually stays. The same in *Waiting for Godot*, the tramps intend to go but they refuse to move. The actions of the characters contradict their speech. This contradiction between speech and action helps Beckett to create the experience of helplessness. Beckett tries also to limit his

vocabulary. His is a strictly selective and restricted vocabulary, consisting of relatively few and short words, but rich and varied. As Kenner (1973) says Beckett reduces, but he never simplifies. We can clearly see how he makes his characters speak spontaneously very short sentences or even mono-syllables. These sentences and mono-syllables spoken by characters are probably intended to reflect the problem of the lack of communication.

Beckett reduces not only language, but also his characters, actions and settings as well. For instance, his characters are severely limited by their own physical disabilities as by situational and environmental constraints. They are very helpless characters waiting alone in the middle of nowhere for death or an impossible Godot. They are not seen as men, but rather as remnants of men, who represent mankind reduced to the lowest level; Man reduced to the role of helpless, homeless, and purposeless.

Like his language, Beckett's symbols are not meant to give a single meaning or concrete image. His bewildering symbols are used in order to allow audience think and participate in the interpretation process, as Pilling (1994) says "each symbol is not a specifically coded means of communicating, but a call for participation in mediation and speculation" (p.79). The tree in *Godot* and the small room or even dustbins in *Endgame* are seen by many critics not as concrete images, but rather as hints. The spectators are not sure whether it is the forbidden tree that is the cause of the fall of Adam and Eve from the garden into earth, and causes our existence or a symbol of life; whether it is the hope and inspiration in the tree's new leaves or it is a sign of new born generation. The responsibility of interpreting the intended meaning of such symbols is certainly the spectator's. Indirectly, one can subsume Beckett's theatre

within parameters of postmodernism as the author devotes a great search to the interpretations and contributions of the spectators or readers.

Repetition is another useful reductive device that Beckett employs in his drama. According to Lyons (1983), repetition of words and phrases is used as a useful strategy to avoid expansion and elaboration and help in the reduction process. The repetition of words and actions is also used in order to achieve emphasis and give a sense of reality; it stresses the cyclical nature of human life and also provides a similar sense of what we face, like the lack of communication and emptiness that pervades people's lives in modern societies. This technique helps Beckett to capture the maximum of reality with the minimal use of language as well as actions. In addition, Beckett uses repetition to underline the meaninglessness of human life in which humans keep making the same wrong choices.

### ***1-6. Statement of the Problem:***

The senselessness of human existence has been one of the most essential concerns throughout postmodern literature. Many postmodern writers believe that life is absurd, without meaning, point or purpose. Their works are seen as a reaction to a totally new world after WW II. They reflect aspects of Man's life after the War, such as loss and death, meaninglessness of human existence, memory, chaos, anxiety, uncertainty, alienation of individuals, and lack of communication. They also abandon the conventional traditions and produce new and mystifying techniques, in order to present the futility of life and reflect real life conditions in the most striking ways.

The plays of Samuel Beckett are a striking example of life's absurdity, which convey the author's message both through their unusual form and the characters' dialogues. The present study investigates the philosophy of Samuel Beckett as seen in his play *Endgame*, particularly its visionary and even apocalyptic sides about the present and future of Man on this planet.

### ***1-7. Questions of the Study:***

1. What are the central topics in Samuel Beckett's drama found in *Endgame*?
2. What are the justifications of Beckett's view about the deplorable human condition?

3. How does Beckett employ the principles of the Theatre of the Absurd in his play to reveal the human condition?

### ***1-8. Objectives of the Study:***

The current study aims to investigate the following points:

1. To show that Beckett's drama raises several topics pertaining to the human condition, such as the futility of life, its hopelessness, helplessness, nothingness, isolation, suffering, boredom, desolation and uncertainty.

2. To show the justifications behind Beckett's view about the human condition.

3. To point out that Beckett's use of the Theatre of the Absurd is of a great help in revealing the human condition.

### ***1-9. Significance of the Study:***

Although Samuel Beckett is regarded to be one of the most influential writers of the 20th century, few studies have been done on *Endgame* in this part of the world. Therefore, writing about his drama is a useful step and may fill a gap in the current studies.

### ***1-10. Limitations of the Study:***

Samuel Beckett has tackled many issues and literary trends in his work. As this task is very wide and demanding, the present study will be devoted solely to exploring the different dimensions of his play *Endgame*. Therefore, it cannot be generalized to his other works.

### ***1-11. Definition of Terms:***

1- Absurd: For the definition of absurd, Esslin turns to Ionesco. Absurd "is that which is devoid of purpose. Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless". (Esslin, p.23)

2- The term Apocalyptic is often used to describe a catastrophic, chaotic event. Apocalyptic literature is defined as a literary genre that foretells supernaturally cataclysmic events that will transpire at the end of the world. Characteristically pseudonymous, it takes narrative form, employs esoteric language, expresses a pessimistic view of the present, and treats the final events as imminent. (Stefon, p.148)

3- Alienation: It is a concept first introduced by Marx and since used in a variety of contexts. As defined in Merriam-Webster's dictionary, alienation is a sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, or cultural- or self-

estrangement brought on by the lack of harmony between individual needs or expectations and the social order. ( Merriam Webster)

4- Existentialism is a chiefly 20th century philosophical movement embracing diverse doctrines but centering on analysis of individual existence in an unfathomable universe and the plight of the individual who must assume ultimate responsibility for acts of free will without any certain knowledge of what is right or wrong or good or bad. (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, p.438)



## ***Chapter Two***

### ***Review of Related Literature***

This section is divided into two parts, theoretical literature and empirical studies. There will be some studies that tackle the drama of Samuel Beckett. The present study will benefit from these views and studies. It will be expanded to cover the topics found in this play and reveal the techniques of the theatre of the absurd and how they participated in conveying Beckett's apocalyptic vision.

#### ***2-1. Review of Theoretical Literature:***

No doubt the Theatre of the Absurd has a unique technique which characterizes its drama, gives it a new shape and makes it different. In his *Theatre of the Absurd*, Esslin (1961) emphasizes both the technical and thematic sides of the absurd theatre. He asserts that Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco and other playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd “strive to express their sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of the rational devices and discursive thought” (p.24). That’s to say, philosophy and aesthetic values are absurd; the theatre itself and what happens on stage are just as irrational and senseless as life itself. Other dramatists such as Albee, Pinter, Kafka, Camus and Sartre have also argued from the same philosophical position. These dramatists have written plays devoid of basic elements or stylistic features of Absurd Theatre, such as meaningless plot, dialogues and actions, ambiguous characters, themes and language, undetermined place and time, and lack of solutions or end; which means, exploring their basic assumptions using the traditional forms.

The theme of purposelessness and senselessness of life is considered to be predominant and controversial in the Theatre of the Absurd. However, the Theater of the Absurd is not interested in discussing or even providing rational reasons about the human condition. Instead, playwrights are involved in creating peculiar plays both in content and form, and using the stage as a mirror to reveal the conditions of human beings' existence in modern society. Although there are no solutions to offer to the human condition in their drama, they attempt to bring about greater awareness of the painful realities and uncertainties of the human condition.

Reduced language, characters which are not developed, weird setting and lack of a conventional plot are considered to be new dramatic features which characterize the Theatre of the Absurd. Such absurdist devices usually confuse audience and make them not think of what is coming next, but of what is going on the stage, yet this new technique creates a whole new stage language that enriches the stage's possibilities of expression. Although these plays are still struggling for acceptance and have been rejected by both audience and critics, Esslin (1968) prophesies that the dramatic direction they represent will become in the future a main theatrical stream.

The repetition technique is a striking feature in most of Beckett's dramas. Pilling (1994) also comments on Beckett's style, especially on his use of the cyclical structure, saying that " Instead of following the tradition which demands that a play has an exposition, a climax and a denouement, Beckett's plays have a cyclical structure", he continues "the characters take refuge in repetition, repeating their own actions and words and often those of others, in order to pass the time" (p.69). Since plot, climax and denouement are all ignored and nothing happens on his stage, actions and words tend to be repetitive. The repetition in his plays reinforces the idea of the absurdity, the cyclical nature, of life and emphasizes the failure of man's attempts in

proving his identity or essence. It can also give a sense of relief. The characters refuse to make any progression fearing of the unknown. Instead, they try to keep their daily routines, which help them to stay calm.

Beckett is widely known for his plays which are written and presented quite differently from many other plays. His unusual style confuses audiences as well as critics. Some critics consider him to be a mercurial writer because he has no clear system of rules or norms, and he even desires to write without style, which puts him apart from other writers.

According to Kennedy (1989), "Beckett has no system of belief, on the contrary, his novels and plays are all written against any system" (p.10). Beckett attempts to reach a higher level of consciousness without relying on the traditional forms of drama. The system which is used to be dynamic in the past is no longer valid in his drama and many new techniques such as illogical situations, unconventional dialogue, minimal plots and even odd settings, for example when Beckett has stripped his scenes down to the bare basics in his two plays *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, are used in order to express the absurdity of human existence. If we compare this new usage of drama with the old convention, certainly it will be invalid. That's to say, absurdist plays can only be judged under the authority of the Theatre of the Absurd.

Those who are interested in Beckett's works can clearly see how his drama tends to shock its audience into a full awareness of the horror of the human condition. His plays dramatize his vision of the human situation and fuse the actual audience experience into the dramatic fiction. According to Hobson, one of Beckett's commentators, "Beckett's plays are filled with terror and horror". He adds "They are amongst the most frightening prophecies of, and longing for, doom ever written" (qtd. in Bair, 1990, p.469). Beckett's drama is important, in that it depicts the search for the

central self which remains unidentified, unseen and unattainable. It also gives hints about the human's alienation, pain and anxiety, and leaves readers and audience searching for a single meaning in a world full of paradoxes. Moreover, it has a horrific vision about man's present and future even, although it is not clearly specified what is awaiting humanity. Anyway, in Beckett's world audience can find many versions of a future dystopia; the continuity of the futility of life, the search for meaning to one's life, cruelty and waste, the slow death of people and world, failure, isolation and suffering, which allow audience not only to imagine but also to live in all their senses.

Norrish (1988) also comments on Beckett's plays saying that all of his plays "concern the struggle to endure the painful realities of human existence in spite of constant frustrations or worse" (p.63). And he argues elsewhere that "his characterization is unsparingly realistic, and the shock we feel in his plays consists of a horrified awareness" (p.67). The helplessness, terrible loneliness, the feeling of alienation, the cruelty of man and the search for identity are the most horrified and recurrent subjects of Beckett's plays, which always shock the audiences and increase their awareness of their own present and future as well. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity, which is presented in a dramatic way on the theater of the absurd. And what happens on the stage of so many silence and actions reflect the real situation that people have to face.

Newton (2008) discusses the tragic vision of Beckett's drama saying that his drama goes "beyond the tragic, and denies the audience anything resembling catastrophe or catharsis as that would provide an inauthentic motional consolation", adding that "Beckett's vision is tragic in its pain at human suffering, in its dismay at life's brevity, in its frustration at absurdity" (p.145). The high seriousness that Beckett

desires in his drama and the coherence between vision and form are the features which enable him to form a high tragic vision. Although his drama may contain few laughs, used to forget about the past, present and future, it is far away from comic. It is concerned with the painful realities of human beings and ignores the cathartic influence from its artistic formulation; looks at things without consolation. The spectator's sense of relief after experiencing pity and fear maybe a delayed reaction; that's to say catharsis is not necessary to take place during the course of a play, it may take place afterwards.

Many literary figures such as Joyce, who was more than a master for Beckett, Synge and Yeats have a strong influence on Beckett for most of his life. Kennedy (1989) asserts this saying, "The new Irish drama of Synge and Yeats offered significant images and obsession which are echoed in Beckett's drama" (p.21). He comments elsewhere on the profound sense of loss that pervades all Beckett's work saying "Wherever we look in Beckett's drama and fiction, we see images of spiritual loss, and of human suffering and waste". (p.157). These images recurrent mostly in each play of the theatre of the absurd as well as in Synge and Yeats' plays. This affinity hints at intertextuality, which is a postmodern characteristic.

Jeffares and Bushrui (1981) also say, "Beckett had been impressed by the later plays of W.B Yeats and plays by John Synge" (p.8), especially Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904) and Beckett's *Endgame* (1958). In spite of the period that separates the two works, there are many similarities between Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and Beckett's *Endgame*. Such similarities lie in their use of the setting, the distinction between the inside and the outside, the death theme, the use of the symbolic meanings, elevated tone, and repetition technique. There are also clear affinities with some of Yeats's plays. For instance, different themes such as youth and age, barrenness and futility are

mentioned in Beckett's *Happy Days* and Yeats's *At the Hawk's Well*. The idea of child murder, and the tension between generations are also a pervasive themes in *Endgame* as in Yeats plays. The most important theme which Beckett has in common with Yeats is the obsessive reliving of the past. Furthermore, the use of the bare space or simple set, tramp characters, the economy in the use of words, the tree symbol of *Waiting for Godot* which recalls the symbolic tree of *Purgatory*, chess metaphor, masks, limitation of physical movement, and aspects of darkness and gloom are all echoed in Beckett's drama.

Fletcher and Spurling (1978) comment on Beckett's theatre saying, "Beckett's theatre is neither human nor friendly" (p.37). Beckett's theatre is a theatre of consciousness and it tackles different kinds of realism. His vision which is mixed with seriousness seeks to warn rather than to deceive. In his theatre, everything is planned and intended, even the few jokes or black humor emphasize the pain and waste of humanity. Moreover, he uses new types of plays, stage metaphors, characters and dialogues as a means of raising consciousness.

According to Jeffers (2012), "Beckett's theatre creates conflicts between the boundaries of self and other" (p.11). He argues elsewhere that "in Beckett's theatre nothing happens and nothing ever properly ends, it simply stops" (p.14). His drama is capable of portraying Man's conditions on stage. It shows no sympathy and offers no explanations or solutions to the deplorable condition of Man. The uniqueness of such drama lies in its ability in revealing the ultimate truth, representing the incomprehensible reality and predicting future without making any progress, neither in setting nor in characters. This is because its plays tend to have characters that talk a lot but without a meaning to ground it. So their talk is meaningless, basically. They

revolve around this nothingness, but in a kind of very funny way. This is because a lot of the Theater of the Absurd is darkly comic.

Failure is considered to be a central topic in most of Beckett's plays. He devoted the decade, between 1950 and 1960, to pursuing failure and pain in three stage plays, two radio plays and two mimes. Fletcher and Spurling (1978) emphasize this by saying "It is the failure, that Beckett has composed all the plays that follow *Waiting for Godot*" (p.40). The wall which is built between Man's expectations of the world surrounding him and the reality he encounters may be considered to be a main reason for Man's failure. He wants unity, yet meets diversity everywhere; he longs for happiness but confronts the unhappiness; he yearns to communicate, but there are no avenues of communication; he wants to know, but he cannot; he wants truth, but discovers a series of painful truths, and he wants life, but life is about to end and his fate brings him closer every moment to death. Beckett's plays depict the relentless search for identity and meaning in this paradoxical and absurd world, which always leads to disappointment and failure.

A thorough view of Beckett's drama clearly indicates that there are various elements in his work from different schools and movements such as realism, naturalism, existentialism and the absurd. As Kennedy (1989) states in his book "Beckett caught the fever of innovative from various avant-garde movements of the interwar period, the expressionists, surrealists and dadaists, without becoming a devotee of any one 'ism'" (p.21). The French versions of existentialist thought, especially Sartre's existentialism, which has a vision of the world that sees man thrown into life without purpose or essence, has a great impact on Beckett's vision. However, Beckett has a version, a conceptual framework, of his own already came from his profound sense of loss and his readings of the philosophical ideas, such as

those of Bishop Berkeley, Schopenhauer and Descartes. Cousineau (1990) says, "The common feature uniting Descartes and Beckett is their profound and systematic skepticism". (p.21)

Beckett is heavily influenced by Schopenhauer's bleak view of life. Janaway (1999), points out that Schopenhauer's vision is "more akin to that of existentialism or even of Samuel Beckett. Schopenhauer's world is neither rational nor good, but rather is an absurd, polymorphous, hungry thing that lacerates itself without end and suffers in each of its parts" (p.1). In other words, absurdity permeates the intellectual stands of both thinkers; in their view, the absence of certain metaphysical powers creates the sense of nothingness, chaos and absurdity of life. Like Schopenhauer, Beckett tries to find a justification or reason for our existence on this planet. His works depict man's everyday suffering and his fruitless attempts to prove himself or even to find the value or the essence of his existence.

Although Beckett, like other absurdists, has no clear-cut message, he gives hints indicating that life is nothing and that nothing is approaching its end. He is not a philosopher or even a preacher who seeks to say what is right and what is wrong. What he tries to do is to portray the deplorable situation of man. He tries to activate the smallest spots in our minds, increase our awareness of the painful realities and even warn us of an inevitable catastrophe awaiting human beings, whether by an atomic bomb, a Third World War, a biological weapon or even an ecological crisis, which may lead to genocide. Such issues have contributed to the rise of the philosophy known as absurdism, which is seen as a reaction to real happenings. As Styan (1981) says, "The sudden outburst of French absurdism may in part be explained as a nihilistic reaction to the recent atrocities, the gas-chambers and the nuclear bombs of the war" (p.125).



His work shows affinities with the modernists in Europe as well as the postmodernists in his use of the language, technique and the horror that envelopes man and the world. He presents us with universal questions, the hopelessness, the solitude and the bizarre tragicomedy of life itself. Sternlicht (2005) comments on this saying that "Under the influence of French and German existentialists, Beckett wants the audience to question all intangible values, such as belief in the existence of the Deity, patriotism, truth, love, friendship, honor, power and even intellectual accomplishment" (p.56). His drama has reduced mankind to a mere clown who, through the use of humor, jokes about the absurdity and the miserable state of humanity. His is really a very difficult and controversial drama, as will be seen when discussing the deep irrational views in his well-named play, *Endgame*. It is the last game man is forced to play without any fruitful result.

According to Henning (1988), Beckett's drama is "commonly regarded as symptomatic of Western anxiety and self-doubt in the twentieth century". He also adds that "It often has been considered representative of modern existentialist or absurdist movements" (p.1). There are clear existential links between Sartre, Camus, Beckett and Ionesco. Beckett in particular pushes the concept of the absurd to the ultimate limit. He is one of the most influential playwrights of the absurd theatre, who employs, with great success, almost all of the avant-garde notions and techniques. This is because his drama skillfully depicts the human condition and mirrors the hopelessness, helplessness, nothingness, anxiety, alienation and futility of life by using bemused characters, that are never fully realized, and odd settings.

Ambiguity and paradox are striking features in most of Beckett's drama. Jeffares and Bushrui (1981) comment on this saying "Ambiguity indeed becomes a keynote in Beckett's subsequent drama, and his work as a whole is fundamentally

characterized by paradox" (p.11). Ambiguity and paradox can be clearly seen in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. In both plays, the speech contradicts the action and no reason or justification is offered to the audience. They seem to be fruitless and offer no moral or political messages. They present no more than absurdist characters in an ambiguous and bewildering circumstances. In addition, both plays don't situate characters in a historical, social or cultural context. This lack of knowledge of one's own culture and past symbolizes the collapse of culture and tradition in the twentieth century. Their characters are thrown on the stage, as Man has been thrown into life, with no clear identity or purpose and even the general problem of the characters has no specific solution. In short, Beckett's drama seems to be demanding and tiring in that it requires that readers and spectators play an active role in offering different explanations to the paradoxical world of the characters; they are forced to think and speculate in order to see what lies beneath his drama. As Pilling (1994) suggests, "Beckett studs *Godot* and *Endgame* with references to these very texts in order to make his readers think and speculate" (p.85).

According to Beckett, "The success of *Godot* was based on a misunderstanding". He goes on to say that the play "was striving all the time to avoid definition" (Valency, 1980, p.398). What is surprising is that although Beckett's drama is very challenging, ambiguous, as life itself, or hard to define, in that it does not discuss certain problems or even provide solutions and all the declarations and actions seem to be purposeless and senseless, it achieves a great success and has been produced in many European countries. Its obscurity helps audience interpret it in many ways. That's to say, there is no one fixed definite meaning in his drama. It can be interpreted within different contexts, religious contexts, philosophical ideas such as those of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, historical events or even circumstances related

to Beckett's private life; moreover, it can be interpreted according to the reader's or spectator's own perception and experiences. Jeffares and Bushrui (1981) also comment on this saying that the attraction of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* "seems to reside in its universality; it is a play that can be interpreted by any number of readers or spectators in any number of ways" (p.56). It is an open-ended play that tackles many universal issues related to man's life, such as World War II, the problem of existence and the difficulty of perceiving the world which is discussed by many European philosophers.

All these views and statements reveal the importance of Beckett's drama. Some writers and critics believe that the use of the theatre of the absurd is behind Beckett's great success. Others believe that his greatness lies in his own creativity and capability of portraying the human situation. In fact, Beckett and the Absurd Theatre need each other since both are concerned with man and his condition on earth.

## **2-2. *Empirical literature:***

Grattan (1965) conducts a study presenting an analysis for a better understanding of Samuel Beckett's drama. He tackles several of Beckett's plays, among them are *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*. The results of the study show that Beckett's characters could all be classed under the heading of degenerate lower organisms, lacking greatly in personality, void of all emotions, and sadistically selfish. The language in Beckett's productions is reduced to the most simple construction possible. His plays are plotless, virtually without action, timeless in the sense that they take place at no special time, have no climax, and end exactly

where they began. The study concludes that Beckett's drama provides no explanations or solutions for its audience. Grattan points out:

*Beckett leaves his audiences with no real message but rather a picture of 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. (p.106)*

Esslin (1980) in his critical study also points out that Beckett's drama is not subjected to the traditional rules of drama. Instead, it destroys all the old conventions of well-made drama. His is very controversial drama. It is difficult to determine whether it is really a drama or a nightmare. Audiences are incapable to understand situations or characters he presents on his theatre. His drama is plotless, has no climax, beginning or end and offers no answers or solutions to the miserable state of his creatures. It has no progress in characters, setting or actions, which in turn increases the difficulty of the task that his drama prevents viewers, or readers, not only from expecting what is coming next, but also from understanding what happens now on the stage. The purpose of his drama is to portray the suffering, pain, disorder, chaos and nothingness that surrounds human life. Esslin comments on Beckett's masterpiece, *Waiting for Godot*, claiming:

*If in the well-made play the core of the drama is action, happenings, here the very purpose of the play is to say that nothing happens, nothing really happens in human life. Waiting for Godot is thus a living paradox; a drama, and drama means action, of inaction. (p.60)*

Mendel (1988) in her study explores the relationships between Beckett's characters in *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Happy Days*. She finds that in each play, there is a strong relationship between the characters and their past memories. They long for the past days of their life and always need to remember them. She also finds that interdependence is essential in each of the three plays. Two couples appear on the stage in each play. Their relationship is akin to a master-servant relationship; like Clov who is under the authority and control of Hamm, whom Clov is forced to obey; as Mendel says "domination and subservient roles converge and entangle in *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Happy Days*" (p.4). Interdependence is primary in the life of Beckett's characters and if there is a little hope of survival, it lies in their togetherness. They yearn for peace, love and care. They are forced to face life and endure suffering and they are fully aware that this job cannot be achieved without a partnership. Although they share a mutual dislike and cannot communicate successfully, they cannot leave each other. She concludes saying that Beckett has succeeded in making the 'subjective experience universal'; the relationships of his characters are very close to our own human relationships. Mendel points out that:

*It is their togetherness which supports the survival they crave, however grim its reality may be. Togetherness has the very essence of existence for the people of Beckett's three plays. In constant pain, Beckett's characters long for peace and refuge. It is within the strife of their relationships that they are closest to ever finding such a haven.*

She adds:

*While the characters wait for their fates to unfold, they have another who stands besides them, and it slowly becomes clear that each individual has little power of survival without his partner. (p. 4)*

The futility of life is regarded to be Beckett's universal theme, especially in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. The amount of ingratitude, anguish, and frustration in the heart of a modern man, can be clearly seen through his plays. The characters in these plays have nothing to do, except delaying their inevitable end by doing senseless and useless actions. As Beckett said to the actor who played Hamm "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". (qtd. in Pilling, 1994. P, 71)

Chon (1991) also comments on Beckett's plays saying that although Beckett's plays sometimes hover at death's threshold, he is more widely known for the theatre trilogy that is absorbed in life. In *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days* the main action is waiting. *Godot* and *Endgame* talk about useless waiting and at the end they get nothing. The difference between the first two plays is that in waiting there is a waning hope of getting, while here only the horror of the future and the painful past.

Typically, *Endgame* is impoverished in every sense, but dauntingly rich in implications and effects. It has been noted that Samuel Beckett tends to eliminate everything inessential, but in the process, he manages to introduce a multitude of mysteries. According to David Hayman (1991) in *Endgame* Beckett finds ways to imprint on minds small signs that expand in our consciousness. The characters of *Endgame* are on the very edge of mortality in the wake of an unspecified catastrophe. The action, like that of *Waiting for Godot*, is essentially devoted to killing time without performing significant actions. Beckett was profoundly aware that nothing could be funnier, more senseless, more pathetic than human existence, a life sentence that defies both words and images.

Ronald Hayman (1995), comments on *Endgame's* action saying that it is less circular than that of *Waiting for Godot*. Both plays move in the direction of an

indeterminate viewpoint situated somewhere outside space and time, but the set of *Endgame* presents an outsized visual pun that admits the possibility of equating the action with life inside the brain. Beckett refuses to provide *Endgame* or its characters with anything but the bare minimum, he wants to give a similar image of the outside world. Even the incoherence of language reflects the characters' inability to perceive the world around them.

Clark (2000) conducts a study which aims to show if alienation exists in the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd. The five selected plays are Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Endgame*, and Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* and *Rhinoceros*. Through the analysis the researcher finds many aspects of alienation, such as alienation from the society, others, nature and self. He finds many examples of alienation in the plays of both playwrights. For him, emptiness, nothingness, meaningless actions and dialogues, death, which hovers around the characters, bare setting, the character's perception of time, suffering, anguish and violence are all seen as indications of the character's alienation from the society, others, nature and self. The purpose of these dramatists is to show that our societies produce 'alienated individuals'. In addition, alienation plays a significant role in the plays of Beckett and Ionesco. It reinforces the idea of man's predicament and the absurdity of his life. Clark points out that:

*There is the stasis of Vladimir and Estragon; the constant movement of Pozzo and Lucky who go no farther than their static counterparts; the isolation of Krapp; the immobility of Hamm; the servitude of Clov; the absolute breakdown of communication of the Smith's and the Martin's; and the conformity of the town in Rhinoceros and the non-conformity of Berenger. All of these are portrayals of alienated*

*individuals who spring from a society much like our own and have no hope of escape. (p. 65)*

According to McDaniel (2003), *Endgame* explores the human dilemma, mortality, and God's existence, without providing simple answers, as its characters, and the audience, move through an uncertain existence. The characters in *Endgame* resemble chess pieces. The metaphorical king of *Endgame* is the center of attention, and the rules of chess apply to the characters, their setting, and their situation. Through this game of chess Beckett examines the personal struggle and often the inability to understand one's own self. The characters in *Endgame* realize that they are mortal. The repetitions and routines throughout the play represent the habitual nature of man and imply that these habits are meant to relieve our awareness that death is certain and life is mysterious.

Kumar's essay (2004) presents an analysis of the chess metaphor in *Endgame* and argues that the chess metaphor in *Endgame* presents the existential anxiety of man, through the uncertainty and unpredictability of the last phase of a game of chess. The essay concludes that the absolute reality or the search for the central self that Hamm, the major character in *Endgame*, strives to seek for is something that does not exist or that is simply absent; and so he is anguished. This quest of Hamm metaphorically reveals the infusion of man in the absurd world where all his attempts cause pain, frustration, and failure. The non-existent center of the chess board symbolizes the void at the center of being, as envisioned by Beckett. The essence of existence is void or nothingness. The chess metaphor in *Endgame* is, thus, a metaphor for the chaos of human existence rooted in absurdity.

Tijen Tan (2007) conducted a study which examines how Samuel Beckett's characterization, setting and use of language in his two plays, *Endgame* and *Happy*



*Days*, illustrates his tendency to apply in his plays some existentialist concepts, such as despair, nothingness and anguish. After the analysis, the researcher arrives at the conclusion that the elements that Beckett includes in his plays display similarities with the existentialist notions, which gained prominence in Europe after the Second World War in the 20th century. Consequently, both Samuel Beckett and the leading figures of Existentialism, primarily Sartre, portray man in despair and in struggle due to the fact that he is experiencing a number of losses, such as loss of God, in a world devoid of necessary attributes. He adds that Beckett seems to aim at creating characters who do their best to achieve their essence. He asserts that "Man is longing for his existence to constitute his being in both the Beckettian universe and the Existentialist world". (p.101)

Miriam Zbiralova (2010) presented an analysis of Beckett's stage plays *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Happy Days*, *Play*, and also radio plays *Embers and All That Fall*. The researcher tries to demonstrate some peculiarities in Beckett's use of the conception of time and deduce the effects these have on the overall interpretation of the plays. By its analysis she finds that the use of time in Beckett's plays has the effect of adding realism to the plays, and it also helps to depict the powerlessness of characters, lost in their world. She says:

*The characters often fail to achieve any development of their situation in the flow of time. This is expressed by their inability to bring about any change by their own activity, and by failing to fulfill the resolutions for the future. (p.40)*

She also adds that:

*The plays are made similar to reality by observing the unity of time and including pauses in the dialogue. Allusions to some future event which then actually does not come go against the conventions of dramatic pieces, but the more they make the play similar to reality, where it is frequent that something that is expected does not happen. (p.41)*

Since these plays, as life, have a cyclical nature, nothing changes or develops, the characters lost the sense of time; that is to say, the value of time lies in the progression of actions. Thus, the time feature in Beckett's plays indicates the characters' failure and helplessness to make any progression and also reveals the spiritual vacuum; which seems to be Beckett's attitude toward man and life in general.

Irony is one of the salient characteristics in Beckett's plays. Huang (2011) in a paper titled "A Pragmatic Study of Irony in Samuel Beckett's Plays", attempts to apply theories of pragmatics to analyze both "echoic mention" and "allusional pretense" ironies in order to reveal the different subjects implied in Beckett's plays. Through the analysis the paper finds that Beckett used the ironic techniques to build his own unique narrative mode; making oneself alienate himself from the past memories which are painful and unbearable. The researcher points out that "the use of ironic discourse helps us to get rid of miserable memories with absent self-image in the past". (p.27)

Shahabi and Mojdegani (2012) assert that the characters in *Endgame* appear to have suffered a loss that renders their melancholic egos incomplete and empty. They see that *Endgame* reflects Beckett's general nihilistic world view; that human life is meaningless and absurd. In their article titled "Crosbian Nihilistic Reading of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* and Sadegh Hedayat's *Three Drops of Blood*" they aim at showing the futility of life that causes hopelessness in man's life through surveying the two selected works from world literature: Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* and Sadegh

Hedayat's *Three Drops of Blood*. The works signify the internal problems, tensions, and valueless feelings of Man toward living in the world. The article shows that the two works, despite their being the products of noticeably different times, places, languages, and cultures, similarly deal with the concept of nihilism as a dominant subject matter. It also reveals that although each work tends to support nihilism through a certain set of nihilistic arguments or themes, such sets overlap some places, which further strengthen the idea of the two works thematic affinity in terms of their treatment of nihilism. The term nihilism is used to express a viewpoint that holds life to be meaningless. It is exactly defined as "a viewpoint that traditional values and beliefs are unfounded and that existence is senseless and useless" (Webster, 2005.)

Jagtap (2012) conducted a study titled "The Seen and the Unseen in Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*". The researcher emphasizes the absence of meaning and logic in our life. In this regard, she returns to the Theatre of the Absurd. She tackles three important aspects of this theatre, the characters, language and plot. According to her, the absurdist characters are miserable creatures thrown in unknown universe. They are characters with no identity or purpose, who find themselves trapped in a paradoxical world. The language of the absurdist drama is as ambiguous as life itself. Although its language is broken and full of pauses, silence and interrupted sentences, which causes misunderstanding, it "suggests profound intellectual implications" (p.31); it emphasizes Man's fruitless attempts to understand what is going on. The absence of the well-made plot is also another striking feature in the Theatre of the Absurd. Anyway, absurdist drama as a whole may be seen as a plot. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* are seen as good examples of absurdist plot structure. Both have no beginning or end, no logical order in events and mainly rely on

repetition of speech and action. The void, meaninglessness and ambiguity are also considered to be features in many absurdist plots.

In an article titled "A Desperate Comedy: Hope and alienation in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*", Scott (2013) explores the strangeness of Beckett's world and characters. She suggests that *Waiting for Godot* is the play in which Beckett attempts to portray the miserable condition of Man. He tries to convey certain truths about man's existence and his experience on this planet, the cruelty, compassion, hatred, companionship, corruption, hope, alienation, birth and death, the purpose of man's existence and his unknown destiny. Beckett's creativity lies in his ability to create a world similar to that of ours. He makes us realize that even our reality might be not a truth; it might be a game or even a nightmare like *Waiting for Godot*, which represents Beckett's attitude toward the unstable state and degradation of humanity. *Waiting for Godot* is strange in its characters, themes and style. It has no beginning or end, no clear plot or clear-cut message. The tramps Estragon and Vladimir keep an appointment with an absent-present character called Godot, who represents their freedom and salvation; although they know from the beginning he will not come and no one can rescue them or solve their problem, it is hope that keeps them going on. They are isolated characters. They live in alienation from nature, society and themselves. What Beckett has done is to link up these alienated characters with the audience. As Scott says, "if they are alienated from us as they go about their business on the stage, given the stage is a world of its own and they cannot see us, we are no longer alienated from them" (p.454); we can empathize and feel their world because we are part of it. They are trapped in one single moment in time. Nothing changes in their life and everything seems to be recurrent and meaningless. For them, time is an illusion. Estragon and Vladimir have made no progress, because they cannot feel it.

Their life is full of contradictions. Sometimes they seem to be patient and wise and sometimes they behave like idiots; they think of suicide in order to end their unhappiness, caused by the inability to perceive the world. Although their actions and speech seem to be funny and absurd, and we may laugh at their thoughts and models, we know from the beginning that they are us. Scott points out that:

*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 as them.*  
(p.450)

Most researchers who wrote about Beckett's drama were comparing two or more of his plays in order to investigate a certain theme or technique. The present study will benefit from these views and studies. It will be expanded to cover the central topics found in this play, point out the artistic features of the theatre of the absurd and show how Beckett employs them in his drama in order to depict the human condition.

## ***Chapter Three***

### ***Research Methodology***

#### ***3-1. Method of the Study:***

This chapter provides information about the methodology and the procedures of the study. It sheds light on the method that will be used throughout this study in order to achieve its goals. Then, it provides information about the procedures that the researcher will follow throughout his work.

The method that will be used throughout this study is mainly descriptive and analytic. It will be based upon the principles of the Absurd Theatre. As a prominent figure of the Absurd Theatre, Beckett is mainly interested in portraying and representing man's condition on earth and pointing out to the absurdity of life. Thus, the researcher will trace the characteristics of the Absurd Theatre and see how Beckett employs these characteristics in his play *Endgame*. The researcher will also read Beckett's biography, in particular those books which are written by famous biographers like Deirdre Bair, who traced every single detail of Beckett, Knowlson and others. He will analyze Beckett's biography, then relate some of Beckett's life incidents to those of the play *Endgame*. Moreover, commentary writings about the play, and different critical views about Beckett and the Theater of the Absurd will be all used in the analysis of the play. Reading critics' opinions and judgments about Beckett's play sheds some light on the importance of Beckett as a writer, who has dealt with universal issues such as the absurdity of Man's existence in his play. In

addition, the researcher will take into consideration Beckett's major work, *Waiting for Godot*, since the researcher will explore some common elements between the two plays, *Godot* and *Endgame*. This could shed more light on Beckett's suffering, especially during the Second World War, and also on major actual issues in life, such as the essence of man's existence, isolation of individuals, feelings of anxiety and the cyclical nature of life.

### ***3-2. Sample of the Study:***

The sample of the study will be one of Samuel Beckett's well-known plays *Endgame*. The play will be carefully read. The researcher will analyze the selected play, taking into consideration the central themes and striking features in it. In addition, quotations from different parts of the play will be cited and organized to document and justify the themes and views of the playwright.

### ***3-3. Procedures of the Study:***

In this study, the researcher aims to analyze one of the absurdist plays *Endgame* to reveal the pessimistic and apocalyptic vision of the author. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the researcher follows certain procedures. These procedures are essential for the analysis of the play. They help the researcher in identifying the themes and the playwright's method of delivering his vision with the present and future of Man on this planet. The procedures are as follows:

- 1- Reading Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*.
- 2- Reading the biography of Samuel Beckett.
- 3- Reading about the Theatre of the Absurd, its principles and major figures.
- 4- Exploring the previous studies related to the current study.
- 5- Analyzing the central topics and the technical aspects of the work.
- 6- Conclusion.



## ***Chapter Four***

Beckett's vision of life is based on his own understanding of life that is paradoxical. He holds life to be meaningless, and regards humans to be too helpless to do anything about the absurdity of life. Beckett also believes that life is certainly coming to an end, that humans' cruelty against nature and others adds up to the meaningless of life, and that humans themselves are not in a position to know anything about the way human life ends on earth. This philosophy will be discussed in more detail in the present chapter.

### ***4-1. Waiting for Godot and Endgame:***

*Waiting for Godot* is considered to be not only Beckett's masterpiece, but one of the most prominent works of the twentieth century. In this regard, Abbotson (2003) says "Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is generally considered to be at the forefront of the absurdist movement" (p.1). The play presents the hard experience of waiting and depicts Man's condition during and after the Second World War. Two homeless, helpless and hopeless characters, Estragon and Vladimir, are waiting in a bare road for Godot, who never shows up. In comparison to *Endgame*, it is worth mentioning that Beckett again devotes his experience to show the effects of war on the European societies. Kennedy (1989) asserts this saying that "the play, and much else in Beckett's work, gains some of its power 'to claw' from the dark experiences of the war years" (p.9).

The action of his next play *Endgame* relies also on waiting, but this time not for Godot, waiting for the end, the inevitable end. Hamm and Clov stay in a dark gloomy empty room. They have resigned from life. They live in isolation from

society, nature and even from themselves; though they have each other, they are at the same time isolated from one another. One indication of this is that they are never able to adequately communicate; their conversation goes in circles. They see the world as a disgusting place, filled with corpses and death. As Hamm warns Clov when he decides to leave him "*Outside of here it's death*" (p.9). Or as it is stated in the following dialogue:

*Hamm: You stink already. The whole place stinks of corpses.*

*Clov: The whole universe. (p.46)*

Anyway, both plays talk about useless waiting and at the end they get nothing. Since prolonged waiting can save characters from getting to undesirable end, waiting is a staple in both plays; in other words, the characters are trapped in waiting as well as in life. Beckett is probably trying to say that waiting consumes human life and that humans spend their lives waiting for something to happen; waiting signifies inactivity, boredom, laziness, helplessness, inability, etc. The difference between the two plays is that in *Waiting for Godot* there is a hope, while here only the painful past and the horror of the future; this can be clearly seen when Hamm predicts Clov's future saying:

*Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn't fill it, and there you'll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe. Yes, one day you'll know what it is, you'll be like me, except that you won't have anyone with you, because you won't have had pity on anyone and because there won't be anyone left to have pity on. (p.36)*

*Waiting for Godot* takes place on an empty road, which may symbolize the place of birth. *Endgame* takes place in an enclosed space; thus no escape. *Waiting for Godot* consists of two symmetrical movements, *Endgame* has only one act. However, both *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot* group their characters in pairs, Vladimir and Estragon, Didi and Gogo, Pozzo and Lucky, Hamm and Clov, and finally, Nagg and Nell. Beckett has also used things in pairs, two dustbins, two windows, and the themes that he has evoked are in contrast, waiting and going, life and death, sight and blindness, past and present.

In both plays, *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, the situation at the end remains unchanged. Most possible resolutions of the deadlock are suggested, such as Pozzo's and Lucky's suicide, Hamm's death, Clov's and Estragon's departure, but by the end of the play all of them have been rejected.

*Hamm: Let's go from here, the two of us! South! You can make a raft  
and the currents will carry us away, far away, to other...mammals!*

*Clov: God forbid. (p.34)*

The acts in both plays move in a circle, things and actions are repeated, words and sentences are the same, and characters are bored. This state forces the characters to believe in the nothingness of life. They believe that nothing is meaningful, and therefore Man and everything on this planet are nonsense; life itself is nonsense, meaningless and valueless, as Clov suggests "*As long as it lasts. All life long the same inanities*". (p.45)

In both plays words such as void, nothingness or emptiness are used to describe the general condition of the characters and the whole universe as well. Their life is filled with a terrible void. They know from the very beginning that they have

nothing to do, as Estragon says, "*Nothing to be done*" (p.9). Or as Hamm declares "*Nothing you can do about it, just wait for it to come*", "*The end is in the beginning and yet you go on*" (p. 59, 69). They pass time by playing 'routine'; sleeping waking, morning, evening, asking the same questions and answering the same answers, but without any fruitful results.

By choosing the setting of the plays, characters, the clothes, the themes, the words, the language, the silence and pauses, Beckett simplifies and clarifies understanding the world of absurdity. He helps his audience with knowing the themes of his plays although they are plot-less, and uninteresting to the many. He tries to evoke some deep feelings, anxiety and boredom, for instance, that exist mostly in all humans, focusing on some truths that other writers didn't exaggerate or write about that way. He tries to write what he believes in and thinks about life. His vision is pessimistic and sees the whole world as an absurd one. "*Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!*" (*Waiting for Godot*, p.41).

The characters in both plays use the same words to express uncertainty of their condition. It is stated by Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* "*It's not certain*" (p.53), and by Clov in *Endgame* "*It's not certain*" (p.36); the first may suggest Godot's arrival, while the second may suggest a good future for Clov away from Hamm. In other words, both characters still have a little hope of life, although all the indications say the opposite. In addition, Beckett's use of words such as 'not certain' or 'perhaps' emphasizes the aspect of ambiguity, which in turn provides further interpretations. Jeffares and Bushrui (1981) comment on this point saying "The lifeblood of Beckett's work is its ambiguity" (p.21). In short, there is no one single meaning of Beckett's drama, and this gives readers and spectators the opportunity to participate and play an active role in the interpretation process.

Contradiction is another striking feature that characterizes Beckett's plays. The characters always contradict each other and even themselves. For example, Estragon in *Godot* and Clov in *Endgame* suggest leaving, but neither of them moves. When Estragon decides to leave, Vladimir replies "*We can't... We are waiting for Godot*" (p.18). Since no one knows about the quality of their waiting or who is Godot and what he will bring to the characters. When Beckett was asked about him, he answered "If I knew, I would have said so in the play" (Kenner, 1973, p.10). The safest thing to say is that the characters are waiting for someone who may give them the impetus to continue living and waiting or may give them meaning and direction to life; he is the mysterious one who has power to make a difference. Anyway, A similar attitude of contradiction is taken by the characters in *Endgame*:

*Clov: So you all want me to leave you.*

*Hamm: Naturally.*

*Clove: Then I'll leave you.*

*Hamm: You can't leave us.*

*Clov: Then I won't leave you. (p. 37).*

In another situation, when Clov tells Hamm that he is going to leave him "*I'll leave you*", Hamm replies immediately "*No*" (p.58), but by the end he changes his mind saying "*I don't need you any more*" (p.79).

Such contradictory situations can reveal both the characters' awareness and disturbance at the same time. First, the characters know that partnership is something important for their survival. They know that one's future is conditioned by the other; so no one can leave the other and no one can be saved alone. Second, their dialogues, actions and statements show us how much hesitant, confused and tired modern man

is. This can be also clearly seen in the horrific declarations of Estragon *"You don't know if you are unhappy or not?"* (p.51), *"I don't know why I don't know!"* (p.67), *"There's nothing to do"* (p.74), *"What are we doing here, that is the question"* (p.80). He is unable or perhaps unwilling to understand or explain his condition, his feelings, desires, fears or even the reason behind his existence on this earth. The characters do not know what is going on or what they exactly want, and each day their situation gets worse; their circumstances have not improved, but declined. Pozzo becomes blind and Lucky becomes dumb; mother Nell becomes a corpse, Hamm's painkiller is no longer available, and Clov's general state is getting worse, *"The pains in my legs! It's unbelievable! soon I won't be able to think any more"* (p.46), or as he says elsewhere *"I'm tired of our goings on, very tired"* (p.76). The whole situation looks like a dream or even a nightmare; they feel that all life is nothing more than a dream, a bad dream. They cannot determine whether they are really awake, perceiving the truth, the truth of life being an illusion, or asleep. This profound sense of self-doubt is also expressed by Vladimir when he asks *"Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now?"* (p.90); and by Hamm, *"Absent, always. It all happened without me. I don't know what's happened. Do you know what's happened?"*. (p.74)

The characters in both plays are paralyzed, helpless and trapped in a static and meaningless world. They spend time searching for the meaning of life or the essence of their existence. They have no power to continue, no desire to express or to live even *"there is nothing in the world I love more"* said Nagg (p.56). They cannot make a decision about their present situation or future, fearing the unknown. They cannot think or stop complaining, even as Clov says that he does *"not complain"* (p.4). Although they act like tramps, their speech and actions seem to be useless and funny, they are very expressive. They portray the general state of Man. They convey a

similar sense of what we feel outside, the futility of life and the horror man has to face, through the use of the illogical, irrational, nonsensical and contradictory words and actions. In other words, they show us what man longs for and what he finds in reality. He longs for love, peace, happiness, company and order, but finds hatred, wars, sadness, disintegration, isolation and chaos.

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

*Clov: I'm doing my best to create a little order. (p. 57)*

Or as Hamm asks:

*Hamm: Did you ever have an instant of happiness?*

*Clov: Not to my knowledge. (p.62)*

To sum up, we can say that both plays have expressed something fundamental and profound about human life. They reveal to us the hysterical state the characters live in, and how they are confused and unable to make a decision. The two plays have many things in common, such as the repetition of words and the fruitless action; the neutral or suspended time, which serves to avoid any progress, and emphasizes the habitual nature of life; the unspecified plot and theme, the bare setting, the few number of the characters, six in *Godot* and five in *Endgame*, the boredom of man's life, the illogical and incomprehensible language, which reflects reality and man's failure to communicate and to understand himself or the world around him, and finally the suffering and endurance are all features the two plays have in common. Although the characters suffer from both physical and spiritual problems, they do not commit suicide or end their life. They endure their suffering,

the painful and the incomprehensible reality, and manage somehow to go on even as they say they cannot.

It is better to look at *Endgame* not as a continuation of *Godot*, but as the peak, both in form and content. There seems to be nothing left outside the room; there is no nature and the sunlight has been replaced by a light black. The characters are forced to challenge their situation to death. They cannot leave the room because of the decline of the world outside, and at the same time, since all the characters are suffering from physical deformities or pain, they cannot live forever in a room lacking the basic needs of life, such as food and medicine; "*There are no more sugar-plums!*" (p.55), "*There's no more pain-killer*" (p.71). Although the characters know that the vault they live in is not secure, they may face the same destiny and have the same result, they find it better than being at the mercy of the outside world; it is the characters' last chance to escape from the world outside, which seems to be static, dead, meaningless and merciless, "*Old wall! Beyond is the . . . other hell*". (p.26)

Finally, it is worth mentioning that although Beckett's *Endgame* is not as famous as *Waiting for Godot*, it is no less important than *Waiting for Godot*, and it has a deeper awareness and vision than *Godot*; it has a more bleak and black vision than *Godot*, although it is shorter. Beckett describes *Endgame* saying that it is "*more inhuman than Godot*" (Valancy, 1980, p.403). Estragon and Vladimir, the main characters in *Godot*, are waiting for Godot, who is seen as the savior; that is to say, the play is not completely hopeless. But the characters in *Endgame* are not waiting for Godot; they are waiting for the end. Beckett here tries to activate the smallest spots in our minds and increase our awareness of the painful realities and even warn us of an inevitable catastrophe awaiting human beings.



#### 4-2. *The Title: Endgame*

It is worth saying that Beckett is very smart, because the title itself gives readers an insight into the content of the play; therefore, readers can expect an end before reading the play. In comparison with his *Waiting for Godot*, it is noticeable that both titles do have a deep indication for a negative side in life. *Endgame*, for example, portrays the decline of the outer world and warns readers of a possible unspecified catastrophe, while in *Waiting for Godot*, the verb wait itself shows a kind of lack of power; the characters are waiting helplessly for Godot to come and change their reality, but Godot never shows up. Thus, Beckett has included a kind of foreshadowing about the plays deeply in his titles, and gave the chance for his readers to relate the stories of both plays to their titles; in brief, his titles are insightful.

In addition, the title of *Endgame*, with its reference to chess, gives a sense of reality. The players, the characters, know that if the first step is played wrong then the player is foredoomed to lose at the end; this is because each movement depends on another. Beckett sees life as an old game that is finished, or as Hamm says, "*lost of old*" (p.82), since man's birth or existence on earth; and although the characters and players expect their end from the beginning, they go on; this stresses that life is a matter of waiting. In comparing the title of *Endgame* and chess, the title of *Endgame* is described by Beckett 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.*  
*(Pilling, J, 1994, p.71)*

Here Beckett provides an image of two different people. The first is seen as a bad player because he knows that all of his actions and movements are useless, fruitless and yet he goes on. While the second is more conscious because he knows that life is not worth living, therefore he is ready to resign from life and accept the painful reality without wasting time or efforts; this is also discussed in Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, as he investigates our experience of the Absurd and asks how we live with it. Anyway, the title of the play is very symbolic in the sense that living life is an analogy related to playing chess. In the chess game, the players expect the end, and in the play, all the characters are waiting for the end or death. The death consciousness is alive throughout the play, which portrays the helplessness of all human beings. The players know from the beginning that their playing is fruitless and boring, but they are forced to play it to the end; everything in the play can be seen as obligatory steps that end the game, the game of life.

The chess board also reinforces the existential anxiety about the human existence. The non-existence of its center symbolizes the void at the center of being. Through the use of the chess board, Beckett stresses Man's self-search, his attempts and failure to find the center or the essence of his existence on this earth. This relentless search for the central self can be clearly seen in Hamm's words and actions, especially when he asks Clov to adjust his wheelchair into the middle of the room.

*Hamm: Am I right in the center?*

*Clov: 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! (p.26)*

This quest of Hamm depicts Man's search and longing for his existence. It also reveals the helplessness of Man and how much trapped he is in this absurd world where all his attempts cause pain, frustration and failure. So the absence of the center in the chess board represents the nothingness and the absence of the world's center. It is the absence of the essence of human existence and the metaphysical powers, which may create order in the human life; the thing which makes the characters angry and anguished throughout the play. In other words the chess game can be seen as a metaphor for the chaos of Man's 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. (p. 57)*

Knowlson (2014) points out that Beckett was a good chess player. He tries to parallel the incidents and the events of *Endgame* as the chess game. This would be a logical answer for the question why did Beckett name his play *Endgame* rather than *The End* for example. He simplified the chess game motifs and main goals into the play, such simile shows that the play *Endgame* is exactly like the game of chess where the series of moves at the end of the game, and one whose outcome is usually decided exactly before the formality of the endgame occurs. In this regard, biographer Bair says:

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)

### **4-3. *Disappearance of Nature:***

In *Endgame* there was not any natural feature at all, as if nature died with so many things that died in the play. This would be an acceptable picture shown in the play since Beckett wrote the play after World War II. As a result, and to show a kind of more pessimistic view in the play, there was not any presence of nature.

*Clov: (He gets up on ladder, turns the telescope on the window.)*

*Let's see.*

*Zero. . . Zero. . . and ... Zero. . . (p.29)*

From the above mentioned statement, we can notice that all elements of nature have disappeared. In addition, nature means rebirth and life, while Beckett's themes in the play are death, and end of everything, therefore, he doesn't mention nature to show the end of life in the play and in the outer world as well. Even when he mentions it through the dialogues of his characters, Beckett wants to show the decline of nature outside, which seems to be dead and burned out, and its negative effect on the characters; they have lost their teeth, hair, eyes, legs, youth and all powers.

*Hamm: Nature has forgotten us.*

*Clov: There's no more nature.*

*Hamm: No more nature! You exaggerate.*

*Clov: In the vicinity.*

*Hamm: But we breath, we change! We lose our hair,  
our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!*

*Clov: Then she hasn't forgotten us. (p.11)*

The setting reflects the problem that the characters, as well as audiences, have to face. It suggests that everything will come to an end, whether people like it or not; whether they are happy or not, they will all end, and even nature will vanish. So, the disappearance of nature means the disappearance of life and the beginning of ends of everything. This is an expected theme that Beckett successfully used in order to make the picture more understandable and much more realistic, since the presence of nature shows life, existence, happiness, and survival which are away from the motifs of the play. The play shows scenes where Hamm asks Clov to look out of the window into the sea, to tell him what is happening outside, but Clov usually finds nothing; everything around them is fading away. There is no ship, no sail, no fish, no light and even trees and seeds do not grow, which all in all suggest that there is no life in general, and for these two characters in particular.

*Hamm: Did your seeds come up?*

*Clov: (Violently.) They'll never sprout!*

*Hamm: What's happening, what's happening?*

*Clov: Something is taking its course. (p. 13)*

Beckett here probably wants to show the static state, the slow death of the outer world and also indicate that life is approaching its end. This idea is frequently repeated in the

play to increase our awareness of threats and dangers that are ready to destroy us at any moment and also emphasize the genuine difficulty of being alive.

*Hamm: Nothing stirs. All is\_\_*

*Clov: Zer\_\_*

*Hamm (violently): Wait till you're spoken to!*

*All is... all is... all is what? 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 towards Hamm.)*

*Corpsed. (pause) Well? Content?*

*Hamm: Look at the sea.*

*Clov: It's the same.*

*Hamm: Look at the ocean!*

*Clov: Never seen anything like that!*

*Hamm (anxious): What? A sail? A fin? Smoke?*

*Clov (looking): The light is sunk.*

*Hamm (relieved): Pah! We all knew that. (p. 29,30)*

The disappearance of nature shows that Clov and Hamm have been inside for so long. Hamm, being imprisoned in the dark room and being blind, couldn't even touch any natural feature. They are both away from life, from nature, and from people. Beckett doesn't show any signs of nature because the incidents occur inside a closed room. Beckett also wants to let the audience feel that both Clov and Hamm are afraid of the outside. Their fear of the outside world make them imprison themselves lonely

in a dark empty room. Even the two windows on the top of the two walls show nothing of nature outside. Even when looking out through the windows, Clov confesses that he could see nothing outside as if he wants Hamm to feel that everything is finished.

*Clov: I warn you. I'm going to look at this filth since it's an order.*

*But it's the last time. (He turns the telescope on the without.)*

*Let's see. (He moves the telescope.)*

*Nothing . . . nothing . . . good . . . good . . . nothing . . . goo\_\_\_*

*(He starts, lowers the telescope, examines it, turns it again on the without. Pause.)*

*Clov (dismayed): Looks like a small boy!*

*Hamm (sarcastic): A small . . . boy!*

*Clov: I'll go and see. I'll take the gaff.*

*Hamm: No!*

*Clove: No? A potential procreator?*

*Hamm: If he exists he'll die there or he'll come here. (p.78)*

The characters are even afraid of seeing or hearing about anything belonging to nature or anything that is still alive, and when they see the rat, the flea and the boy that are seen as signs of life or life continuation, they feel disturbed and try to finish them in order to end their misery, as Hamm tells Clov "*humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of God!*" (p.33).

Although Hamm declares that earth is not going to be like before and does not expect any improvement, as 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?*" (p.53), and although he does not show any interest or make any effort and he even

does not want to hear about anything that indicates life and prefers to be away from people and the destroyed nature, in fact he longs for it and wishes if he could see and walk through it. He tries to live moments out of happiness, see the beauty of earth, the greenness of nature, the blue seas and sky, through his dreams. He longs for the past memories when he was powerful and the earth was still young. He tries to escape from his painful reality where everything has been destroyed, using his imagination to see what he cannot see in real life; this may give him a sense of relief and make him endure his suffering.

*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! (p.18)*

The lack of developing in the scenes of nature ushers in the death of life, its end outside and therefore inside. There is nothing new for both Hamm and Clov, and there is nothing for them to expect or wait for except death. It is worth remembering that Second War and the use of the mass destruction weapons, besides Man's other practices against nature have contributed to the disappearance of nature. Beckett wants to picture the world outside and the life condition after the War; it had left people with both physical and psychological problems, killed nature, animals, birds, polluted air and seas and turned everything into ashes, nothingness or as Clove says "*a little heap*" (p.1).



#### ***4-4. Life as a Trap:***

Beckett depicts life as being a trap from which there is no escape. Humans have no choice; they are born into life, have their faith, work, dream, get sick, love others and hate others, stay in life for a while then they die. Death is the real end of all humans, and of all creatures, and there isn't any way to escape from the trap of life except death. Thus, humans live to die, and if they want to get away from death, they don't have any other choice except death again.

The characters in the play see themselves as being entrapped in a static world, and their fears stop them from going out of the trap and preparing them to live in the dark, ugly, absurd real world. Then, this world helps them to stay in it regardless of its pessimism, sickness, and darkness. The characters prefer staying in the room, or as Clov called it "*cell*" (p.81), to leaving for the outer world which may hold more painful and disastrous things to them. Their fear of the unknown, fear of the wars and devastation, swept almost everything outside and even crept into the inside, and their fear of death let them stay for what they already have had; as Hamm warned repeatedly "*Outside of here it's death*" (p.9). Although the characters know that the self-enclosed room they live in is not safe, they are unsatisfied because they have escaped from one trap to another, and they expect to find the same outside absurdity and then get the same result, they have no other choice; in short, there is no hope, no escape, and thus they are doomed to live in a circle of nothingness.

*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. (p.6)*

Since the world outside contains nothing more than pains, and everything is destroyed and vanished, due to the II World War and man's naivety and barbarity, the characters in the play have nothing to do and nowhere to go. They are forced to stay with each other because they find no other refuge and know that separation will not serve them.

The war had many negative effects on people's life. It had left people with problems, diseases, and debates. It killed many, and left many bad atomic and physical effects. It killed nature, polluted air and water, brought ashes, smoke and death to life at that time. It also left people with many pains and psychological problems, hard feelings, hate, and depression. They were unable to continue or understand life any more. It even left people hopeless and afraid of the coming, unable to change things around them and even unwilling to change their life or to start again, as Clov says "*I feel too old, and too far, to form new habits*" (p.81).

It is worth mentioning that Beckett himself witnessed the war. He shared an experience among survivors and lived in a hiding place in France. He was imprisoned, trapped for a long time, afraid of the dangers outside. He was shocked by the horrors, devastation, desolation, the number of victims, the blinded, the paralyzed and the other handicapped and by the genocide practiced by Germans on Jews and other people. This horrific experience of war had a great effect on Beckett. It caused a state of depression and despair and increased his sense of loss, suffering and the futility of life. Kennedy (1989) asserts this saying "the play, and much else in Beckett's work, gains some of its power 'to claw' from the dark experiences of the war years" (p.9).

In fact Beckett wants to reflect this painful experience, the reality of war and its effects on people at those times, through his *Endgame*. His play seeks to portray the miserable state of Man on earth. It reveals the contradictions between the standards of the universe or Man's expectations and the reality. In other words, there is a fundamental conflict between what we want from the universe and what we find. He expects to find friendship, love, justice and peace; he expects to see the order, the light and the beauty of earth; he wants unity and happiness, but finds hatred, chaos, wars, oppression, aggression, darkness, diversity and unhappiness. This creates a profound sense of loss and increases Man's sense of the futility of life. The play shows how Man was deceived when he was told that he is born into a good life and will live in an ideal world. This can be clearly seen at the end of the play when Hamm asks Clov to say words 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. (p.80)*

The characters are also trapped in time and routine. The action of *Endgame* is essentially devoted to kill time without performing significant actions. Beckett describes his play "There are no accidents in *Fin de Partie*. Everything is based on analogy and repetition" (Bair,D, 1990, P.467). In the play, Hamm and clov are trapped in one single moment in time. Nothing changes in their life and everything

seems to be recurrent and meaningless. They fail to achieve any development, fail to change their present and unable to plan for future; which shows their helplessness. This is a picture given by Beckett to reveal Man's condition, especially after World War II, and also to indicate the static and meaningless world he lives in. Since the characters are waiting for nothing, living for nothing, having nothing, and since nothing is important and all their actions and attempts are futile, pointless, making no achievements or progression, the characters have lost the sense, the actual meaning of time; that's to say, the significance of time lies in various developments. They cannot feel it and are even unable to distinguish days; today is like yesterday and tomorrow is like today. This is expressed in Hamm's last soliloquy, "*Moments for nothing, now as always, time was never and time is over*" (p.83), or as in the following dialogue:

*Hamm: Go and get the oilcan.*

*What for?*

*Hamm. To oil the castors.*

*Clov: I oiled them yesterday.*

*Hamm: Yesterday! What does that mean? Yesterday!*

*Clov (violently): That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent. (p.43)*

Pilling (1994) comments on Beckett's use of the cyclical structure saying that "instead of following the tradition which demands that a play have an exposition, a climax and a denouement, Beckett's plays have a cyclical structure" (p.69). Since

Beckett's *Endgame* does not follow the rules of the well-made drama, his has no beginning or end, and since everything in the play "*is nearly finished*" (p.1) and time, as well as life, is an illusion, the characters can find nothing to do, except playing routine, it is their only and favorite game. In the play the characters seem to be very confused; they are unable to continue and unable to turn back again; they cannot make a decision or change things around them; fearing the unknown. Their fears prevent them from leaving the room, and now force them to go on with their routines and habits; they try to forget their situation and move on through repetitions. The repetitions throughout the play, besides the time feature, help Beckett to portray the reality, to show the boredom of human life, as Clov says "*All life long the same questions, the same answers*" (p.5), or as he declares elsewhere "*All life long the same inanities*" (p.45). They show the habitual nature of Man and emphasize his helplessness and failure to achieve any development, and this in turn reinforces the idea of life absurdity. This is what we actually feel and face in the real life. We sometimes find it difficult to distinguish days and dates, to distinguish right from wrong, to know what is good or bad for us. We sometimes hesitate and find ourselves helpless, especially when making crucial decisions related to our life, to our future, fearing failure and the unknown. However, the repetition in Beckett's world can be also seen as a way of communication. It gathers the characters and gives them the chance to go on in their dialogue, habits and stories; otherwise the characters will be silent, as everything seems around them.

*Clov: Why this farce, day after day?*

*Hamm: Routine. One never knows. (p.32)*

Or:

*Hamm: Do you remember your father.*

*Clov (wearily): Same answer. You've asked*

*me these questions millions of times.*

*Hamm: I love the old questions. Ah the old*

*questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them! (p.38)*

Or as when Clov asks:

*Clov: What is there to keep me here?*

*Hamm: The dialogue. (p.58)*

To do what have already been done in the past actually shows the helplessness and nothingness in their lives. But these repetitive actions and words, though boring, are important. They help with filling the horrible void that surrounds the characters and also provide them a sense of relief. Since the characters fear the unknown, and live under unspecified threat, they try to avoid any sudden action that may bring them more pains and miseries; this may justify their refusal to make any progress throughout the play.

It is worth mentioning that the characters' behaviors on the stage add up to the trap they live in; they are pessimistic, unable to move and unwilling to care and help each other. In other words, they do not change the bad life in the trap but make it worse.

#### ***4-5. Cruelty and Helplessness:***

In *Endgame*, we can see many scenes that indicate both the cruelty of the world and humans. The play shows scenes where Hamm narrates the story of a poor

man who has escaped from the outside destruction and poverty. He has come into Hamm's house, the only shelter, asking for food. The story tells us how the difficulty of living and the outside dangers have forced man to offer his tiny son in exchange for food.

*I finally offered to take him into my service. He had touched a chord. In the end he asked me would I consent to take in the child as well\_\_if he were still alive. (pause). It was the moment I was waiting for. (p.53)*

This quotation reveals how the lack of basic needs can lead to a miserable life. The play shows sympathy with poor and all needy. It depicts the cruelty of the outer world and how it makes people homeless, hopeless and ready to do anything in order to survive. The play also shows how people can be cruel to each other, how Man exploits the cruelty of life against others and how he takes advantage of their bad circumstances to achieve his objectives.

*Hamm: Crawling on his belly, whining for bread for his brat.*

*He's offered a job as gardener. Before\_\_ (Clov bursts out laughing.)*

*What is there so funny about that?*

*Clov: A job as gardener!*

*Hamm: Is that what tickles you?*

*Clov: It must be that.*

*Hamm: It wouldn't be the bread?*

*Clov: Or the brat.(pause.)*

*Hamm: The whole thing is comical, I grant you that. (p.60)*

It is also noted in the play that not only this man has escaped into Hamm's house, asking for food and refuge, there are also many survivors who have come before him. Hamm might have saved large numbers of people "*The place was crawling with them!*" (p.68), but, as Clov indicates "*all these dying in their wounds*". (p.80)

Hamm shows no feelings or respect for his parents, and calls his father "*Accursed progenitor*" (p.9). He doesn't care about them; they suffer from hunger, thirst and extreme cold, and he even doesn't treat them as humans, but as animals, "*Has he changed your sawdust?*" (p.17). He doesn't like the stories of their old memories; they both remember and retell when their dustbins are open. Hamm has a deep thought that whether young or old, the end of humans is certain. He puts his parents in dustbins because he feels that they are as useless as many things that people get rid of and throw in dustbins. Since Hamm's parents' legs are lost, they can't leave the dustbins and, thus, they surrender to their fate. Hamm holds his parents to be criminals who are deserving of punishment. He blames them for his being born into existence. To him, birth is a crime.

*HAMM: Scoundrel! Why did you engender me?*

*NAGG: I didn't know.*

*HAMM: What? What didn't you know?*

*NAGG: That it'd be you. (pause)*

*You'll give me a sugar-plum?*

*HAMMM: After the audition. (p.49)*

Hamm's parents are also trapped in the dustbins. This helps depict the powerlessness of characters and also reveals the debasement of Man in Beckett's



world, which is certainly a reflection of his fundamental judgment of Man and life in general; both life and Man's existence have no value. Both Nagg and Nell have no legs to move, and when the dustbins are closed, they can do nothing. Their son, Hamm, deals with them cruelly and badly. Even when Nell died, he and Clov showed no emotions, no motion at all. Hamm behaves very badly in a manner seemingly guaranteed to ensure that no audience spectator would like him or even care about him, or what happened to him. He acts expecting that he will be alone in the world. This cruelty of Hamm, although for many it is not justified, can also be interpreted as a reaction to the bad treatments that he received when he was a child, as noted from 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" (p.56).*

*Endgame* is purely a play which discusses the helplessness of the characters, the emptiness and lack of communication with others. The constant tension in the play is exactly whether Clov will leave Hamm or not. We can notice that during watching or reading the play, Clov continually threatens Hamm that he will leave him, *"I'll leave you"* (p.48), but he is not able to take an exact clear decision about leaving. As well, Hamm tells Clov to leave him showing that he is no more in need for him, *"I don't need you anymore"* (p.79). Despite living together, Clov and Hamm don't care about each other, nor do they encourage each other to change their suffering and circumstances. They both give a kind of showing that they are under continuous pressure and an unspecified threat. This can be also related to the effects of the Second World War that left people hopeless, careless, and afraid of serious various threats whether political, social or religious. Anyway, Hamm- being paralytic and

blind shows suffering from such deformities, but shows no mercy toward Clov, toward his parents or his dog even. He represents the boss who doesn't have excuses or exceptions. Clov keeps standing and cannot sit down at all, to show commitment, obedience and loyalty to Hamm though he doesn't show that he was willing, happy or satisfied to help Hamm, "*If I could kill him I'd die happy*" (p.27), but cannot leave Hamm even at the end of the play; he was hesitant to stay or to leave, as he doesn't expect anything from the outside world, and prefers to stay with Hamm. In the play, Hamm usually commands and dominates everything in that site, while Clov serves Hamm and sees the room as a prison. In that sense the characterized image of master and slave subsumes the image of space as a whole.

*HAMM: Go and get the gaff.*

*CLOV: Do this, do that, and I do it. I never refuse. Why? (p.42-43)*

Or:

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

*Why I always obey you. Can you explain that to me?*

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

*A kind of great compassion. (pause) (p.75-76)*

Clov and Hamm's relationship isn't stable nor identified. That's to say that both Clov and Hamm live together although they don't know why they have to, and they like to separate but they are not able to nor understand why that happens. They both can't find an exact reason for their gathering, but they also can't separate. Their empty lives are filled with pains, and sadness, and this could be a reason that joins them together. They both are very pessimistic, unwilling to live, emotionless, hopeless, and lonely. The relationship between the two is like that they don't love or

respect each other, but they can't leave one another. They live in isolation from nature, people and even from themselves, as they are unable to communicate successfully; in short, they are dead alive. This may reflect the life condition of the twentieth century.

Interdependence is primary in the life of Beckett's characters and if there is a little hope of survival, it lies in their togetherness. Mendel (1988) in her study also comments on this saying "It is their togetherness which supports the survival they crave, however grim its reality may be" (p.4). Although the characters share a mutual dislike and cannot communicate successfully, they cannot leave each other because they know that no one can be saved alone; and this reveals how the characters are really trapped in their relationship. This also may justify why the characters prefer staying with each other to being separated. In the play, the two characters show a high dependence on each other, where Hamm needs Clov to help him move from one place to another, give him his painkiller on the exact time, and check on his parents in the dustbin. On the other hand, Clov finds Hamm as an old friend, or as "*a father*" as Hamm tells (p38), who keeps him in a safer place than the outside, and due to lack of communication and his extreme pessimism, Hamm is the only one who can be Clov's friend and companion to the very end. In addition, both characters, even though they are spiritually dead, know that one's departure will bring death to all.

*Hamm: What? neither gone nor dead?*

*Clov: In spirit only.*

*Hamm: Which?*

*Clov: Both.*

*Hamm: Gone from me you'd be dead.*

*Clov: And vice versa.*

*Hamm: Outside of here it's death! (p.70)*

Hamm and Clov's relationship can be also interpreted according to Beckett's own private life. Beckett, like his characters, found himself bound, trapped in his relationship with his wife Suzanne, both wanted separation, but they were unable to. Biographer Bair (1990) points out that "Hamm and Clov were actually himself and Suzanne, as they were in the 1950s, when they found it difficult to stay together but impossible to leave each other" (p.468). In fact, Beckett has succeeded in making the subjective objective; the relationships of his characters are very close to our own. He depicts, through Hamm and Clov, how we sometimes spend our lives with people whom we basically do not love or hate even; and this stresses the idea of life as a trap.

Although partnership in Beckett's world is important, that can help the characters endure their suffering, their painful and unbearable reality, it cannot be taken as a cure. They are fully aware that there is no solution to their problem, as Hamm announced, twice (p.53,68), "*Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that!*". This shows the pessimism, and helplessness of Beckett's characters. Their helplessness lies in the difficulty of perceiving the world, their inability to find the essence of their existence or a cure for their misery. In addition, the characters see that Man and the whole universe face death. There will be no light, no heat, no life at all, as we are also informed by scientists; and hence no hope, no escape. The characters believe in that and that's why they call everything as '*finished*' (p.1). They can find nothing to do about their end, except some senseless and fruitless actions, as Hamm declares "*Nothing you can do about it, just wait for it to come*" (p.59). Both Hamm and Clov are shocked by this terrifying, painful and unexpected reality. The above declarations, and so many other such as "*Something is taking its course*", "*Infinite emptiness will be all around you*", "*The end is in the*

*beginning*", "*Old endgame lost of old*" (p13, 36, 69, 82), show us the conscious and apocalyptic vision of the author about life.

## *Chapter Five*

This chapter attempts to show the justifications for Beckett's view of life. It also discusses the characteristics of Beckett's *Endgame*. It will be concluded with a brief summary of the playwright's vision and work.

### *5-1. Justifications for the Author:*

The experience of the World War II had a profound effect on Beckett's life, both as a man and as a writer, which in turn increased his awareness of human suffering, his sense of loss and of the futility of life. Sternlicht (2005) says "When France was overrun by the Germans in World War II, Beckett committed himself to France" (p.51). When World War II broke out in 1939, Beckett was in Ireland. He returned immediately to Paris, preferring France at war to Ireland at peace, where, as a citizen of a neutral country, he was permitted to stay even after German occupation. He experienced living with the survivors of the war. After joining a resistance group in Paris and escaping arrest, he lived in a hiding place in France, experiencing both danger and long periods of waiting. This terrible experience is deeply felt in his *Endgame*. In the play, Hamm and Clov are waiting helplessly in a vault. They are under continuous pressure and unspecified threat, and surrounded by many dangers ready to destroy them at any moment. They expect nothing, except the end; as Hamm says "*Nothing you can do about it, just wait for it to com*" (p.59), or as occurs in the following dialogue:

*CLOV: Will it not be the end?*

*HAMM: I'm afraid it will. (p.61)*

According to Kennedy (1989), "the play, and much else in Beckett's work, gains some of its power 'to claw' from the dark experiences of the war years (p.9). Beckett was shocked by the horrors, devastation and desolation which resulted from the war and was experienced by the victims, the blinded, the paralyzed and the handicapped. He was also shocked by the genocide practiced by Germans, which caused a state of depression and despair and reinforced the idea of life's absurdity in the European societies. Thus, he wanted to reflect his experience of the war and the conditions of others' lives in his writings. This terrible experience made Beckett think of no future, no hope or escape; "*Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that!*". (p.53)

Beckett's apocalyptic vision has been constructed not only from his experience of the war years, but also from his readings of different writers and philosophers, like Schopenhauer, Camus, Sartre and Ionesco. Sternlicht (2005) says, "Without Beckett's experiences during and after the World War II and without the influence of existentialist philosophy, *Waiting for Godot* might never have been written" (p.58). Both the existentialists and the absurdists share a common and a pessimistic view. For them, Man is a lonely, miserable and helpless creature, living in a painful, chaotic and meaningless world. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* which deal with the same themes and motifs have distinguished Beckett's drama and have made him insist on persuading his audience of the futility of life, its nothingness, hopelessness, isolation, boredom, suffering, darkness and uncertainty.

Although Beckett was greatly influenced by many philosophers and the Second World War, there were also other circumstances which contributed to the rise

of his philosophy of life. He lost his family, his father, mother, brother and his wife, Suzanne. He suffered from many physical and psychological illnesses. When he was in Paris in 1938, he was stabbed by a drunkard for no reason (Bair, 1990). These frequent miseries increased his sense of the absurdity of life, which is manifest in *Endgame*. Despite his success in writing, living in Paris, and gaining money, Beckett's harsh history, witnessing World War II and facing illnesses with his wife are considered to be important justifications and logical reasons for Beckett's writing about the absurdity of life.

### ***5-2. Artistic Features of Beckett's Endgame:***

Beckett's writing is so strange and puzzling, that there are no final positions or absolute interpretations in his drama, which makes readers and spectators speculate about what lies beneath it. His plays deviate from the traditional attractions of the well-made drama, like logical order in events, suspense and rational speech, which increases the difficulty of understanding them. McDaniel (2003) comments on this point arguing that "*Endgame* is unusual because it doesn't accept the dramatic rules" (p.1). Beckett's deviation from the standards of old drama is to depict the outside chaos and reveal the repetitiveness, and the boring cyclical nature of human life. Although the characters in *Endgame* are engaged in various actions, none of these actions are new or meaningful, which in turn reinforces the idea of life absurdity.

Beckett reduces everything in his play like setting, characters, actions and language to the level of non-existence. His setting contains no more than two



dustbins, and a wheelchair in the middle of the room. His language consists of few, but expressive, words and phrases, and often contradict the actions; which all together suggest emptiness, paradox and lack of communication in modern society. Life absurdity can be seen at the very beginning of the play, when Clov claims that he has nothing to do, except waiting 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, and look at the wall, and wait for him to whistle me. (p.2)*

Beckett purposefully repeats so many words and phrases in the play to create a feeling of boredom and stasis in its acts. This repetition is indicative of the cyclical nature of life. The words and actions are the same; they don't reflect any progress, don't hint at any positive thought and are mostly about the end of life. One of the most important words in the play is 'finished', which is repeated several times to evoke the audience's feeling of the end as a destiny for all, and also to insinuate that this end will certainly come. "*Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished*". (p.1)

Linguistically, Beckett has successfully chosen the word 'finished', since it means the end of something with no return, which in its turn indicates that Hamm is reminding Clov and others that their chances of life are nil. Dr. Ray Pritchard points out that, "when Jesus cried out 'It is finished' meaning he achieved the work that he came to do" ([www.jesus.org](http://www.jesus.org)). Beckett uses the same word here to indicate that life was finished in the past, and that it is finished in the present and future, as he declares in the last soliloquy "*Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and have done with*

*losing*" (p.82). Since the repetition of 'Finished' indicates the end, the repetition of other clauses and sentences such as "I'll leave you" and "I've things to do", which are also repeated several times by Clov, and of many futile actions, like checking on Hamm's parents and the outside world, shows the helplessness of the characters and the absurdity of their lives as well.

Beckett's *Endgame* is replete with pauses and silences, which can be seen as effective tools of conveying a certain emotion or feeling to the audience and may also suggest a temporal death. When audiences go to theatre, they expect to listen and see many things on the stage, but as soon as they arrive at the theatre they feel confused due to the number of pauses and silences. This atmosphere was successfully created by Beckett in order to express what words couldn't do, to provide a sense of emptiness, and show the confusion of the character. In addition, using such tools can give time to audience to think and know about different phrases.

*Me\_\_to play. Old stancher! Can there be misery-loftier than mine? No doubt. But now? (Pause)....My father? (Pause.) My mother? (Pause.) My.....dog? (Pause).....But does that mean their sufferings equal mine? No doubt. (Pause.) No, all is a\_\_bsolute, (proudly) the bigger a man is the fuller he is. (pause. Gloomily.) And the emptier. Clov! (pause.) No, alone. (pause.) What dreams! Those forests! (pause.) Enough, it's time it ended, in the shelter too. (p.2-3)*

Or:

*One thing more. A last favor. Cover me with the sheet. (long pause.) No? Good. (pause.) Me to play. (pause Wearily.) Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and have done with*

*losing. (pause.) Let me see. (pause.) Ah yes! Good. (pause.)  
Discard. Take it easy. (pause) (p.82)*

Using so many pauses, silences, interrupted sentences and ideas in some scenes of the play makes the play harder to understand. In addition to that, they indicate the trouble in the narrative discourse of Hamm, make him look vaguer, and his speech more ambiguous. This deliberate incoherence in Beckett's play is actually a reflection of our life. In other words, what happens with the characters of so many conflicts and confusions on the stage is exactly what happens in our minds, since the whole stage looks like a human skull.

Humor is another technique that characterizes Beckett's work. His comedy is used here to reveal the tragic situation of the characters; it is used as a gesture of despair. The characters in the play laugh helplessly at their fates when they remember their painful past. Although the characters' memories are not funny, they suffer from the disillusionment of old age, chronic hopelessness, and physical deformities; they see that the only possible way to respond to this absurd and chaotic world is laughter. As Abbotson (2003) points out "Beckett wants to suggest that since life is so tragic and impossible to comprehend, laughter might be the only sane response to it" (p.2). This is clearly seen in the dialogue between Nagg and Nell:

*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) (p.16)*

Although Beckett's characters often behave in a comic way, they cannot be seen as clowns. According to Valency (1980), "Beckett's tramps are not clowns. Occasionally they act like clowns, but these actions are deceptive" (p.396); they try to reveal their thoughts and feelings to the audience through humor. Although their actions and speech seem to be irrational, contradictory, funny and futile, they are quite eloquent and expressive; they are filled with horror, and meant to depict the tragedy and misery of Man's life and express his sense of loss. This can be seen in the characters' declarations and dialogues, such as "*the bigger a man is the fuller he is. (pause. Gloomily.) and the emptier*" (p.3); "*Nothing is funnier than unhappiness*" (p.18); the characters are fully aware that nothing can be funnier, more senseless and more pathetic than human existence; or as when Hamm asks Clove, showing his doubts:

*HAMM: Clov!*

*CLOV: What is it?*

*HAMM: We're not beginning to... to... mean something?*

*CLOV: Mean something! You and I, mean something!*

*(Brief laugh.) Ah that's a good one!. (p.33)*

Humor in Beckett's play can also serve as a sedative that makes the characters endure or escape from their unbearable reality. The characters know that their actions and attempts are useless; they cannot change anything or even help themselves. They believe in no hope, no peace or escape, and they have no dreams

and no futuristic ambitions. In other words, laughter has a cathartic effect; it relieves pain. Characters in the play laugh at the futility and cruelty of their world. Thus, laughter can be thought of as a strategy for combating despair and helplessness. It is akin to gazing which also signifies helplessness and the consciousness that nothing can be done about a certain situation; this argument is repeated many times in *Endgame*.

Light, shadows and dimensions are considered to be major elements in directing plays or movies, as such things affect the literary work, and give audience a clear idea about the theme, and the identity of the work. In Beckett's theatre, light isn't used on a wide scale; the dustbins, walls and clothes are black. Even the two windows reflect a very little amount of light which comes from outside; which is described by Clov as "gray" or "light black" (p.30, 31). This atmosphere was successfully created by Beckett in order to reflect the outer world and make the play more effective, expressive and pessimistic.

Darkness connotes death while light connotes life. The play takes place in a small empty dark room to reflect the outer world; though it is clearly stated in the play that "The light is sunk" (p.30), or as Clov says elsewhere "the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit" (p.81); that's to say, Beckett wants to reflect the outer world through both content and form. The darkness of the room represents that the characters are living in a life tomb. They are motionless, hopeless and helpless; in brief, they are the living dead. Beckett also shows his audience that the characters shouldn't appear wearing colorful clothes; thus, both Hamm and Clov wear dark colors to express their personalities to the audience even without uttering any word. In addition, the absence of the doors or exits in the play also shows how the characters

are forced to stay inside that ugly dark room, or as Hamm and Clov call it, "*a hole*" or "*cell*" (p.39,81), which may represent the whole universe; the prison of life.

Generally speaking, in order to reveal the deplorable condition of Man, Beckett designed the theater with unfamiliar setting, ambiguous themes, characters, language and plot. He made the play unusual and unfamiliar to many viewers, as he asked them not to be just listeners, but to think and participate in the interpretation process. Abbotson (2003) points out that "plays in which a discussion often unresolved, superseded the plot, were preferable because they allowed audiences to judge events for themselves, thus making them an active part of the theatrical experience rather than merely passive viewers" (vii). This would show that Beckett was very interested in engaging and persuading his audience of life's absurdity.

Beckett's drama helps with understanding the meaning and the purpose of the theater of the absurd. He deals with themes, such as nothingness, isolation, absence of nature, emptiness, boredom and uncertainty through the setting of the play, the language, the pauses, the silence and the repetition of words and trivial actions. Like many absurdists, Beckett uses his common sense and cleverness to reflect the bad conditions of life in the theater of the absurd. Such absurd theatre gave him the ability to violate the rules of old drama to reproduce new and mystifying dramatic elements, and to maintain a sort of harmony between content and form. The theater of the absurd was also enriched by writings like Beckett's since his writings hold up a mirror to reality in one way or another.

### 5-3. Conclusion:

Beckett's *Endgame* is one of the most important plays that is hard to understand. However, in order to understand the play, readers and spectators have to think, and they have to know some information about Beckett's life and works and about the absurd theatre. Reading and analyzing Beckett's plays also should link the historical events to the present.

Although Beckett's characters, themes, setting, language and symbols are all ambiguous, this does not diminish the significance of his plays; there is no doubt that his plays are meaningful. In addition, ambiguity can be seen as a primary thing in his drama or any work of art, as Valency (1980) points out "*Mystery is the essential element of every work of art*" (p.436), otherwise audience's interest may end and the work may lose its value. Obscurity is a striking feature that characterizes Beckett's work from the beginning to the end. From the first few lines of his play, or even from the title '*Endgame*' we expect to find a series of interpretations. It is not clearly stated whether the play is describing the end of a man, or the end of the world; the end of a life or the end of life. In such ambiguous situation the reader or spectator can take either interpretation or both.

Anyway, Beckett set the stage and the characters for the end of the world. He felt at the outbreak of war that the world would never be the same again. This is expressed in his *Endgame* by Clov when he asks "*Do you believe in the life to come*" (p.49), and by Hamm "*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?*" (p.53). His faith that life is approaching its end seems to be true, especially in the midst of the events at that time; as many political and economic crises, many destruction, desolation,

genocide and wars brought pains and miseries to many. These practices against both nature and humanity, besides the absence of the decent values and other things occurred, as in the play, with no clear-cut reason, or final solution, in a world based on rationality, gave a profound sense of loss and increased Man's sense of life's absurdity, which Beckett emphasizes. In addition, Beckett's vision and predictions about Man's life can be applied to our own circumstances; that's to say, absurdity still proves itself in this era, as many obstacles, wars and conflicts are still going on, which suggest the end of everything on earth.

The play can be seen as a portrayal of the last moments of Man on this planet; nature, people, food, medicine, light, seas, waves, gulls, sun and fields are all "zero". It depicts the suffering and the extreme anxiety of a man living in a self-enclosed room, as a sign of rejection of the outer world, unable to respond or understand the world or even the purpose of his existence. Hamm is blind, paralyzed, exhausted and anguished, expecting nothing except death and death only. He is fully aware that life is not worth living, and calls everything as finished. The play presents us with many deep ideas about Man's painful reality; the futility of life, its habitual nature, trap, hopelessness, helplessness, nothingness, boredom and cruelty.

The characters in the play are living in a world of extreme contradictions, where nothing comes according to plan or desire. They were dreaming of happiness, love, greenness and order, but found sadness, emptiness, darkness, ashes and chaos. Such contradictions make them think of the end. They wish to bring about the end of the world to end their suffering and misery. They seem to be very confused. They fear death, because it is unknown experience, and try to delay it, and they yearn for it at the same time, "*It's my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust*" (p.57). Their desire to see the end is not



because they hate life, but because they believe in its meaninglessness and nothingness.

Beckett believes in the futility of life, its misery and shortness. For him, whether we have a good or a bad experience, whether we live a happy or a sad life, whether we are rich or poor, healthy or ill, the result is the same, there must be a day where we will live in emptiness, in darkness, having nothing to do, except waiting helplessly for the end to come, as he himself lived, especially after the death of his family. This vision, or prophecy, can be seen through the shocking words that Beckett puts into the mouth of his character Hamm:

*(With prophetic relish.)*

*One day you'll be blind, like me. You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me", adding "Infinite emptiness will be around you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn't fill it. (p.36)*

The play is realistic and pessimistic to a point. It sees life as an illusion, a terrible nightmare, an endgame, which Man is forced to play without any fruitful results. There is nothing important in life, the beginning and the end of humans, creatures, and life in general are the same; the same misery, suffering, pains and the "same inanities" (p.45). Beckett supports this idea by having the same scenes and boredom in the beginning and at the end of the play. Many actions happen with no clear reason as in life, nothing changes, words and actions are repeated, and there is no variety of personalities of the characters of the play, which all in all show the futility of life; and this is considered, in the eyes of Beckett's characters, the "most

*comical thing in the world"* (p.19). In short, the play is meant to reflect the absurdity of the world. Its actions are as worthless as the world and human life are.

Beckett's *Endgame* represents the terrifying, apocalyptic drama. The characters are not waiting for Godot, they are waiting for the end; which is not determined whether it is by an atomic bomb, a Third World War or an ecological crisis or disaster. They are living under continuous pressure and unspecified threat and unable to grasp and respond to what is going on. Although Beckett's *Endgame* offers no clear cut message, no solutions or cure, it gives hints and leaves us to reconstruct and make a new understanding of the world. It tries to highlight the painful realities of Man's life and increase our awareness that life is nothing and that nothing is approaching its end. As Clov, the second main character in *Endgame*, states at the beginning of the play "*Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished*" (p.1), and which Hamm emphasizes in the middle "*It's finished, we're finished. Nearly finished. There'll be no more speech*" (p.50).

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