Endgame Study Guide

Endgame by Samuel Beckett

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Endgame is Samuel Beckett's second published play. The plot is continuous, unbroken by separate scenes or acts. Roger Blin first produced this play in France at the Royal Court, in 1957, and later Blin and Georges Devine produced it again in an English production. Both were badly received by almost all London critics. Only after the now famous Paris production of 1964, starring Patrick Magee and Jack Macgowran in the roles of Hamm and Clov, was *Endgame* recognized as a masterpiece.

As the play opens, Hamm is dying in a world that seems to be coming to an end. Hamm takes satisfaction in knowing that all of existence may fade to nothing. Hamm is confined to a chair, and throughout the play he discards, reluctantly, the continuing prospects of life: food; painkillers; his servant Clov, on whom he is totally dependent; the pole that enables him to move his wheelchair; and holding the dog, on which he lavishes his affection.

Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell, having lost their legs many years ago in a bicycle accident, live in ashbins from which they occasionally emerge only to be cursed by their son. His mother dies and Hamm, knowing that Clov is leaving him, prepares for his last battle, first to outlive his father and then to face inevitable death without the help of the few objects that have given him comfort in his final days. Hamm soliloquizes in terms of the last moves in chess, a king evading checkmate as long as possible with stern asides on religion, "Get out of here and love one another! Lick your neighbor as yourself!" He echoes Pozzo's gravedigger aphorism in *Waiting for Godot* when he says, "The end is in the beginning and yet you go on." Clov prepares to leave, hating Hamm for past wrongs, yet now without pity for Hamm.

Author Biography

Samuel Barclay Beckett was born in Foxrock County, Dublin, Ireland, on April 13, 1906. He was the second of two sons of a Protestant Anglo-Irish couple. As a young boy, he was quite energetic and excelled at sports such as cricket, tennis, and boxing. He studied at Earlsfort House in Dublin and then at Portora Royal School in Enniskillen, the same school Oscar Wilde had attended. It was here that he first began to learn French, one of the two languages in which he would write.

He received a degree in romance languages from Trinity College, Dublin. He taught in Belfast before going to Paris as *lecteur d'anglais* at the École Normale Supérieure; there, in 1928, he met fellow Dubliner James Joyce, with whom he formed a lasting friendship. Beckett was one of Joyce's assistants in the construction of *Work in Progress,* later titled *Finnegan's Wake.* Inspired by the Parisian literary scene, Beckett began writing. His first published writing was an essay on Joyce (1929). His first story, "Assumption," appeared in *Transition* in 1929, and in 1930 he returned as lecturer to Trinity College, Dublin.

In 1930, Beckett published his first poem, "Whoroscope." Shortly thereafter, he published a study of the recently deceased Proust, an author Beckett admired tremendously. Beckett quickly realized the academic life was not for him and left Trinity College to become a full-time writer. He then embarked on five unsettled, solitary years in Germany, France, Ireland, and London before settling permanently in France in 1937. A collection of stories, *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934) was followed by a number of full-length novels, including the comic novel *Murphy* (1938) and *Watt* (1953), both written in English.

Walking home late one night with friends, Beckett was stabbed and nearly killed. Recuperating, Beckett received attention from a French acquaintance, Suzanne Deschevaux Dusmesnil, who would become his life companion and wife, though they would not marry until 1961. Beckett and Suzanne worked for the French Resistance, narrowly escaped the Gestapo, and then moved to unoccupied France, where Beckett worked on a farm in exchange for room and board and wrote his novel *Watt*.

Many consider the beginning of his writing in French (1947-1950) his most prolific creative period. Beckett's trilogy—*Molloy* (1951), *Mallone Dies* (1951), and *The Unnamable* (1953)—were all originally written in French and all three are interior monologues or soliloquies. His first French novel, *Mercier et Camier*, predicts the form of *Waiting for Godot*, with its wandering duo, minimalist style and repetition, but was not published until years later. Also in 1947, he wrote his first play, *Eleutheria*, which he would not allow to be published during his lifetime and which, after his death, became a cause of great controversy when Beckett's American publisher, Barney Rosset, released an English translation against the wishes of the Beckett estate. In 1948-1949, Beckett wrote *En attendant Godot* or *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett's highly distinctive, despairing, yet curiously exhilarating voice reached a wide audience and won public acclaim with the Paris performance in 1953 of *En attendant Godot*. Beckett became widely known as

a playwright associated with the theater of the absurd, whose use of the stage and of dramatic narrative and symbolism revolutionized drama in England and deeply influenced later playwrights.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Beckett's playwriting continued with a series of masterworks including *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, and *Happy Days*. He wrote his first radio plays and created innovative prose fiction, including *How It Is* (1961) and *The Lost Ones* (1970).

In the 1970s, Beckett continued to interest himself in the productions of his plays, wrote television plays for the BBC, and began the autobiographical novel *Company*. In the 1980s, he crafted more prose works (*Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Westward Ho*) and more plays (including *Rockaby* and *Ohio Impromptu*). His last major work was *Stirrings Still* (1986).

In 1986, Beckett began to suffer from emphysema. After his first hospitalization, he wrote in bed, producing his final work, the poem "What is the Word." After moving into the nursing home Le Tiers Temps, Beckett's deteriorating health prevented him from new writing, but he continued to translate previous works. Suzanne died on July 17, 1989, and Beckett died on December 22 of the same year. He is buried in Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris.

Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1969 but did not attend the presentation ceremony.

Plot Summary

The play opens by establishing the only *mise-en-scéne* of the play. Clov begins his daily ritual of drawing back the curtains of two windows (first the sea window and then the earth window). He uncovers two ashbins and then Hamm, who is still asleep. Clov delivers the play's opening soliloquy, setting up the thematic tension between characters that seek an ending, either to life or their habitual lifestyles, and their impotency in activating the means to that end. Clov states, "I can't be punished anymore," which reinforces his discontent as Hamm's servant and expresses his desire to leave Hamm altogether.

Hamm delivers his first soliloquy and we are introduced to the master-servant relationship between Hamm and Clov. Hamm addresses his bloodstained handkerchief as "Old Stancher" and is convinced that his suffering is greater than all others and establishes the dual metaphor throughout the play: the rhetoric of chess strategy and drama as game and competition. The play's dialogue begins with the word "finished" and Hamm expresses his wish to begin the day by going to bed. Hamm is terrified of being left alone and will do anything to keep Clov with him. Hamm asks Clov for his painkiller and Clov denies him. This is the first of six times that Hamm will ask Clov for his painkiller throughout the play. Later, when Hamm asks Clov why he does not kill him, Clov tells him that it is because he does not know the combination of the cupboard where the food supply is stored. Hamm dismisses Clov to the kitchen and then chastises his father, Nagg, who has emerged from one of the ashbins, demanding food. Hamm whistles Clov in to feed Nagg, and then Hamm orders Clov to push Nagg back into the bin and close the lid. Hamm continues to try to draw Clov into conversation but fails.

Nell, Hamm's mother, is now introduced. Both she and Nagg, the two elderly characters of the play, are in ashbins, and although they are confined to these ashbins, they still strive for love and romance:

NELL: What is it, my pet? (Pause.) Time for love?
NAGG: Were you asleep?
NELL: Oh, no! NAGG: Kiss me!
NELL: We can't.
NAGG: Try. (Their heads strain towards each other,
fail to meet, fall apart again.)
NELL: Why this farce, day after day?

Nagg and Nell discuss their loss of sight, hearing, and teeth, raging against Hamm for not providing them with adequate food and a regular change of sawdust in their ashbins. They tell each other jokes and reminisce over their romantic youth. One of the jokes Nagg tells is of an old Jewish tailor who took more than three months to make a decent pair of trousers, the results of which were more satisfactory than God's six-day effort to create the world.

Hamm, annoyed by their nostalgia, interrupts his parents to tell them that he is experiencing physical distress. Nagg chuckles at Hamm's pain. Nell concedes that "nothing is truly funnier than unhappiness." Hamm demands silence and pleads for an end to his torment: "Will this never finish?" Nagg disappears into the ashbin, but Nell remains. Hamm shouts, "My kingdom for a nightman!" (a play on Shakepeare's *Richard III's* "My kingdom for a horse!" speech) and beckons Clov to rid him of Nagg and Nell.

Next is extended dialogue between Hamm and Clov. Hamm demonstrates that he is the center of attention. Clov again refuses Hamm his painkiller (for the third time), and Hamm demands that Clov take him for a spin around the room in his armchair, after which he ends up in the exact center of the room. While on the tour, Hamm lays his hand against the wall and says, "Beyond is the . . . other hell."

Hamm tells Clov to observe the weather conditions outside through the earth window and the sea widow via the telescope. What follows could be out of a Charlie Chaplin movie for Beckett inserts slapstick antics in Clov's confusion about getting the ladder or the telescope first. Hamm demands the weather report, and Clov, moving about with the ladder and telescope at Hamm's command, is eventually able to inform him that both the earth and sea windows are "corpsed." This insight confirms Hamm's worst fears that nothing exists outside their shelter. For Hamm, there is nothing in the world, and the only conclusion is death and extinction.

Hamm continues to interrogate Clov, who tries to change the discussion by announcing that he has found a flea in his trousers. This sign of life upsets Hamm, who directs Clov, "But humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of God!" Clov continues in a Chaplin-like scenario, trying to rid himself of the flea before they continue:

HAMM: Did you get him?
CLOV: Looks like it. (He drops the tin and adjusts his trousers.) Unless he's laying doggo.
HAMM: Laying! Lying you mean. Unless he's lying doggo. . . . Use your head, can't you. If he was laying we'd be [b——]ed.

While bleak, Beckett combines the elements of tragedy and comedy flawlessly. Hamm and Clov discuss their possibilities of escape from their situation. They discuss the possibility of using a raft to go south through what may be shark-infested waters. Hamm asks Clov for his painkiller for the fourth time, and Clov refuses once again. Hamm tells Clov, "One day you'll be blind, like me. You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, forever, like me. . . . Yes, one day you'll know what it is, you'll be like me, except that you won't have had pity on anyone and because there won't be anyone left to pity you." Hamm hopes to discourage Clov's leaving and reminds him that he took him in when he was a child and took care of him as a father would take care of his own child. While that may be true, Clov again threatens to leave. Hamm asks Clov to fetch him the toy dog that Clov has been making.

Clov brings out the toy dog, which has only three legs. Like the characters of the play, the toy dog is also crippled. Hamm happily takes the dog. This portion is dominated by discussion of what "goes on in the end."

The next section develops Clov's rebellion against Hamm. Hamm demands his gaff but is unable to move without Clov's assistance. Hamm tells a story of a mad painter who, believing the end of the world had come, was assigned to an insane asylum. Hamm would visit him and lead him to the window to show him the bountiful world outside, but the painter would retreat to his corner because "all he had seen was ashes."

Questioned by Hamm whether or not "this thing has gone on long enough," Clov agrees that it has, and while Hamm is stuck, Clov can leave Hamm. Hamm asks for a good-bye kiss, but Clov refuses. Hamm asks how he will know whether or not Clov has left or died in his kitchen, since the stench of rotting corpses is throughout the place. Clov's answer is to set the alarm clock: if it rings he has gone, if it does not he is dead. Clov sets the alarm clock up and it rings:

CLOV: The end is terrific!
HAMM: I prefer the middle.

Hamm, for the fifth time, requests his painkiller and again Clov denies him. Hamm asks Clov to wake up Nagg. Hamm promises Nagg a sugarplum if he will listen to a story Hamm would like to tell. Nagg agrees. Next is a long monologue by Hamm. Hamm recalls a poor man and his baby who on Christmas Eve had once sought Hamm's kindness. Hamm tells the story with zeal, remembering his eventual agreement to take the man into his service and provide for his son. It becomes clear that the story Hamm is telling is that of Clov's father and how Clov came to be with Hamm. Hamm relishes his power over the others.

Hamm prays to God for salvation. Hamm orders both Clov and Nagg to pray to God, but Hamm cries in agony, "The bastard! He doesn't exist!" Nagg curses Hamm: "Yes, I hope I'll live till then, to hear you calling me like when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark, and I was your only hope." Nagg, unable to get Nell to respond to his knocks on her ashbin lid, goes back into his ashbin and closes the lid.

Hamm continues to tell his story. Hamm sends Clov to see if Nell is dead. Clov replies, "Looks like it." Hamm asks Clov to check and see if Nagg is dead. Clov raises Nagg's ashbin lid and says, "Doesn't look like it." Hamm asks what he is doing, and Clov replies, "He's crying," to which Hamm says, "Then he's living."

Hamm goes again for a spin around the room. Again, there is no light from the earth, and the sea is calm. Hamm accepts the world's condition and asks for his father but receives no response. Clov is sent to see if Nagg has heard either of Hamm's two calls. Clov reports that Nagg has heard only one call but is not certain if it was Hamm's first or second call.

Hamm asks for a lap rug, which Clov does not provide. Clov refuses to show Hamm any affection when Hamm asks for a kiss. Hamm asks for his toy dog but then changes his mind. Clov goes to the kitchen to kill the rat he has discovered there before it dies.

Hamm's next monologue begins calmly and nostalgically and builds feelings of guilt as well as curiosity about what happens after the end of the play.

HAMM: There I'll be, in the old shelter, alone against
my silence and . . . (he hesitates) . . . the stillness.
If I can hold my peace, and sit quiet, it will be all over
with sound, motion, all over and done with.

Clov was unable to kill the rat in the kitchen and the time for Hamm's painkiller has finally arrived. Clov now tells Hamm, after all of his requests, that the supply has been depleted. Clov seriously considers leaving Hamm. Hamm tells Clov to look at the world outside "Since it's calling you."

Clov delivers his final monologue and realizes that he must learn to suffer. He and Hamm debate the state of the outside world and Hamm protests that he does not care what has happened. Clov reminds Hamm that he refused to provide Mother Pegg oil for her lamp and continues to tell Hamm harshly that Mother Pegg died of darkness. And so we believe that Mother Pegg's death was in part due to Hamm.

Hamm asks for the toy dog and Clov hits him on the head with it. Hamm pleads that Clov use an axe or gaff. When Clov announces that there are no more coffins, Hamm says, "Then let it end!" Hamm and Clov end their relationship and agree to go their separate ways.

Hamm's final monologue begins, "Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and have done with losing." Clov, dressed for his departure, enters and watches Hamm. After his monologue, Hamm calls twice for his father. There is no answer. Hamm then throws away the toy dog and his whistle and calls for Clov, who does not respond. Hamm covers his face with "Old Stancher," the bloodstained handkerchief. Hamm, blind and paralyzed, seems to have chosen against life. Clov, standing in his travel clothes, is confronted with the choice to remain or walk out and live in an unknown world. Whether this will work out or not, Clov does not know nor does the audience.

Summary

"Endgame" is Samuel Beckett's one-act play about the futility of life, the inevitability of death, and the lack of control each individual has over his or her own existence. The Endgame is the final play to outwit death, which no one ultimately wins.

The play opens on a stark, grey-lit room with two high windows in one wall. Against the wall sit two trashcans, and in the center of the room sits a blind man named Hamm. Another man named Clov moves back and forth in the room looking into the trashcans, pulling back the curtains, and eventually pulling back the white sheet covering Hamm.

Clov, who is Hamm's servant, begins to speak to himself in a measured tone about the end of something and that he cannot be punished anymore. Clov walks toward the kitchen and is interrupted by Hamm's waking and calling out about his misery and the misery of his parents. Hamm calls for Clov to get him ready for bed although it is morning and Hamm has just awakened. Hamm then questions Clov about his curiosity about Hamm's life and whether Clov has ever looked at Hamm's eyes while he is asleep.

Hamm questions Clov about whether he has had enough and when Clov answers affirmatively, Hamm agrees and tells Clov to get the white sheet. Hamm threatens that if Clov does not obey, he will keep him in a semi-starvation mode, near death but not completely finished. Despite Hamm's cruel irritability, Clov remains with Hamm who is afraid to be left alone. Hamm's mood softens and he asks Clov for his pain pill and tells him that Clov is the lucky one to still be able to walk.

Hamm toys with the idea of suicide to end his misery and orders Clov to retrieve two bicycle wheels; but there are no more wheels. As Clov and Hamm discuss bicycles, one of the lids of the trashcans lifts slightly and a hand belonging to a man named Nagg appears, followed shortly by his head. As Hamm and Clov continue their conversation about death outside this room, Nagg interrupts demanding a pap. Hamm instructs Clov to give Nagg a biscuit and Hamm verbally berates Nagg, who is his father.

Hamm and Clov return to their conversation about the ravages of old age and the decline of nature. Hamm asks again for a pain pill and prevents Clov from working in the kitchen so that he will not have to be alone. In the background, Nagg knocks on the lid of the other trashcan and his wife, Nell, rises up. The elderly couple attempts to kiss but cannot due to their positions in the cans.

Nell and Nagg bemoan the loss of their physical beauty and their amputations due to a bicycle accident in the Ardennes. Hamm ignores his parents and they berate him for not changing the sand in their cans or for providing adequate food. In spite of their dire situation, Nagg and Nell reminisce about their young love and Nagg tells jokes, which he knows will humor his wife.

Hamm instructs his parents to speak more quietly because he is experiencing a dripping in his head, and Nell chastises Nagg when he laughs at Hamm. Nell does agree, however, that nothing is truly funnier than unhappiness. Nell is ready to sit back down inside her can and asks Nagg if he could scratch her lower back but he cannot stand to reach her. Hamm wearies of their pointless dialogue and orders Nagg and Nell to be quiet. He then directs Clov to put the lids on the cans to silence the two old people.

Hamm asks again for his pain pill. It is not yet time, so he asks Clov to push him around the room where he demands to be positioned in the exact center of the room when finished. After this exercise, Hamm tells Clov to get the ladder and look out one of the windows to look at the planet Earth. Clov reports that earth's land and waters are dead and the sun is gray. This bleak report confirms Hamm's fears that the world has ended; but Hamm tells Clov that he dreamed of his own heart last night, which must be a positive sign that he and Clov are beginning to mean something.

Hamm hopes that his life has not been lived in vain and Clov interrupts to tell Hamm that he has found a flea in his pants. Hamm is adamant that Clov destroy the flea on the off chance that humanity may spring from it again in some odd way. After shaking flea powder down his pants, Clov is relatively certain that the flea has been annihilated.

Satisfied that the flea has met its demise, Hamm and Clov discuss the option of escape from their predicament and Hamm suggests that Clov could build a raft that could float them away. However the thought of shark-infested water ends that discussion. Hamm again asks for a pain pill and Clov tells him it is still not yet time.

Hamm is envious that Clov can still walk, so he berates Clov for living off Hamm's graciousness for so many years. Hamm tells Clov that one day, he too, will suffer the ravages of old age and will be alone when everyone else has gone. Clov offers to leave if he has become a drain on Hamm's hospitality and Hamm tells him that he cannot leave because there is no one else to finish them. Clov is not capable of finishing Hamm especially when Hamm reminds him of how he had taken him in and cared for him as if Clov had been Hamm's own child.

Hamm offers the idea that it is possible that they are just in a big hole and that there may be evidence of life beyond it. He then quickly demands that Clov bring his toy dog to him. Clov cautions Hamm that the dog is not yet finished and lacks a leg and a bow, but Hamm demands that the dog stand and look admiringly at Hamm as if he is taking him for a walk.

Hamm's mood abruptly changes again and he muses about whether everything has gone on long enough. Clov affirms Hamm's' thoughts. Clov has the advantage of being able to walk away while Hamm is confined to his chair, a fact which brings out Hamm's cruelty saying that the only way Hamm will know if Clov is really gone is if he does not smell Clov's rotting corpse in the kitchen. Clov has another idea. He could set an alarm, and if he does not come when the alarm rings, it means that he has gone. If, however, the alarm does not ring, that will be the signal that Clov is dead.

Hamm dismisses this idea and asks for a painkiller but Clov will not give it to him and threatens to leave again. Hamm hurriedly asks if Clov wants to hear a story. Clov does not, so Hamm tells him to rouse Nagg to listen. Nagg is not interested until Clov promises him a sugarplum. Clov leaves the room to get the sweet and Hamm asks Nagg why he fathered him. Nagg replies that he did not know his progeny would be Hamm.

Hamm begins his monologue about encountering a man and his sick infant escaping from a land that had been destroyed. Hamm remembers being annoyed at the intrusion of this man while hanging his Christmas holly. The man needs food for his hungry child and Hamm chastises him for still believing that there is still evidence that life will continue, but takes pity on the begging man and hires him. That infant grows up to be Clov, a fact that secures Hamm's feelings of superiority over the younger man.

Clov announces the sighting of a rat in the kitchen and Nagg whines for his sugarplum, but Hamm insists that they pray before doing anything else. Hamm worries that God does not exist and Nagg temporarily enjoys his son's personal anguish because of the cruelties Hamm has inflicted on his parents. Nagg taps on the lid of Nell's trashcan, but when she does not respond he sinks back down into his own.

Hamm instructs Clov to look into Nell's can and he can see that Nell has died. Nagg is crying softly in his own can and Hamm knows then that his father is still alive. Clov pushes Hamm around the room in his chair again so that he can be closer to the windows and feel the warmth of the sunlight; but there is no more sun and Hamm returns to his original position. Hamm asks Clov to check once more on Nagg who has died in his trashcan.

Hamm asks for rug to warm him but Clov contends that there are no more. Hamm then asks Clov to kiss him but Clov declines prompting Hamm to understand that all forms of comfort have vanished. Even the toy dog offers no source of consolation, so Hamm changes his mind about playing with it. Clov returns to the kitchen to kill the rat and Hamm launches into a monologue about the guilt he feels for not helping more people while earth was still alive. Hamm wonders about the end and hopes that it will come quietly and quickly.

Clov returns and Hamm once more asks if it is time for his pain pill. This time Clov tells Hamm that it is time, but that there are no more pain pills. Clov threatens to leave again but cannot bring himself to do so. Hamm demands to play with the toy dog again and Clov throws it at him and Hamm's irritation prompts him to throw an axe the next time. Hamm asks Clov to put him in his coffin but Clov replies that there are no more coffins and Hamm declares that he wants everything to end.

Clov is intent on leaving this time and Hamm asks Clov to say something kind that Hamm may remember and Clov makes a brief statement about friendship and love and thanks Hamm for all he has done before he leaves for good. Hamm calls for his father, who of course does not answer, and calls out futilely for Clov who is gone. Hamm accepts his fate, throws away the toy dog, and covers his face with his handkerchief.

Analysis

Beckett is known for creating in the drama genre called 'theatre of the absurd,' which means that the content focuses on the negative and fatalistic side of life. Appropriately bleak staging in a grey room supports the futile plot line of this play with grey light filtering through two small windows. The exact location is not defined, but the four characters appear to be the last of a dying universe. Beckett's flair for the absurd places Nagg and Nell in trashcans while the blind Hamm cruelly torments his devoted servant, Clov, and plays with a three-legged toy dog.

Beckett provides foreshadowing in the first words uttered in the play when Clov says, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished." By the end of the play, the reader understands that the universe has ended, earth is destroyed, and these four characters cling to the last semblance of life. As the play progresses, Nell and Nagg die, Hamm prepares for the end, and Clov prepares to leave the room although it is not clear if he chooses to stay or risk the unknown outside the room. At any rate, the end of the play signifies life, as it has been known, bringing Clov's words into poignant meaning.

If these four characters represent the last of their kind, Beckett creates them to symbolize the end of civilization. Hamm, now blind and unable to walk, was once a powerful force but cannot see the harm he has done and is unable to move to rectify any situation. Hamm's parents, Nell and Nagg, represent love and affection, which has been tossed away as symbolized by their living in trashcans. Clov, Hamm's minion, is ironically the only one who can still walk and can theoretically leave the desolate room. Beckett does not confirm that Clov leaves at the end, leaving his fate up to the reader to determine whether Clov is resigned to extinction in the room or risks walking outside to the possibility that some new life that may be beginning.

Beckett addresses the important themes of parent and child relationships, the existence of God, and individual choice - mostly through the character of Hamm who seemingly controls the fate of all in the room. There are points in the play when Hamm raises a wisp of hope that the end is not imminent, but these are quickly replaced by his dark vision.

There is much symbolism in the play. The most apparent symbolism occurs in Hamm's repeated requests for painkillers, which is his term for death. Hamm does not have the courage to kill himself and asks Clov to do it, but Clov is not capable. Finally, after all of Hamm and Clov's antagonistic dialogue, the death of the Nell and Nagg, and the atrophy of the earth, the play's title becomes clear. Endgame is the point in a chess game when there are few options remaining due to the lack of pieces on the game board. Unfortunately, Beckett does not provide any ray of hope that there will come a chance to play another game.

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Characters

Clov

Clov is Hamm's servant, and he follows his master's wishes, despite being treated horribly. Crippled but not incapacitated, Clov is capable of leaving the shelter he has known his entire life and of taking his chances in the "other hell" beyond the walls. Clov shows that he is capable of handling tasks and life, and at the end of the play he prepares to leave Hamm and take his chances in the outside world.

Hamm

Hamm is dying in a world that seems to be ending. Hamm is blind and confined to a wheelchair. He is selfish and wants always to be the center of attention and considers himself something of a god-like character. He berates his servant Clov, upon whom he is completely dependent. His parents, Nagg and Nell, live in ashbins and occasionally emerge only to be berated by their son. Though the world may be coming to an end, Hamm takes satisfaction in knowing that perhaps all existence may fade to extinction. He hopes to exist long enough only to outlive his father.

Nagg

Nagg is Hamm's father. He and his wife now live in ashbins, having lost their legs in a bicycling accident years ago. Although their current situation is bleak, there are moments in the play where we understand that in their youth, Nagg and Nell had a great and wondrous love. They still reach for that love, despite the horrid conditions and their ungrateful son.

Nell

Nell is Hamm's mother. She, like Nagg, lives in an ashbin, also having lost her legs in the bicycling accident years ago. She dies in the play to the great distress of Nagg.

Themes

Live or Die?

The characters, trapped in their single room occupy themselves with routines and tasks. Hamm is paralyzed and blind, Nagg and Nell cannot leave their ashbins, and the action of the play occurs in a single room, outside of which life evidently cannot survive. These characters struggle to move on or take action, and the actions they do take are often stagnant and nondescript. Each is dependent upon another for his or her very survival and Hamm questions the benefit of continuing life at all, often pestering nag for the ultimate painkiller—death.

The existence of God is also questioned and indirectly denied, painting a bleak picture of life as hard and without redemption, directed by the needs of handicapped tyrants like Hamm. When Hamm orders both Clov and Nagg to pray to God, Hamm cries in agony, "The bastard! He doesn't exist!" Hamm and the other characters, in their stagnant misery and frustrations, lack faith in a benevolent promise of God to reprieve or redeem their anguish. Life seems a merciless cycle of desire and grief, of handicaps and ashbins, and, to these characters, death is no reward for enduring that cycle. The characters of *Endgame* maneuver through lives of emotional strife that anticipate death, though they lack the means to achieve it on their own.

Interdependence

One of the most obvious themes of *Endgame* is the necessity of interdependence, even if the relationship is one of hate. Clov, for example, depends on Hamm for food since Hamm is the only one who knows the combination to the cupboard. Hamm relies completely on Clov for movement and vision. Critics often compare *Endgame* to Beckett's previous drama *Waiting for Godot*, noting that characters in both plays are grouped in pairs. *Endgame* is bleaker and more perplexing because it lacks the hope for redemption that *Waiting for Godot* contains.

Generational Conflict

Generational conflict, particularly between father and son, also emerges as a prominent theme. Hamm twice tells a story about a father and son and seems to view parent-child relationships only in terms of power and resentment. Critics have argued that Hamm resents Nagg, his father, for not being kind to him when he was young, whereas Hamm resents Clov, his son, for being young at a time when his own life is in decline. *Endgame* has also been interpreted as a depiction of humanity's denial of such life processes as death and procreation.

Artistry

Endgame is a self-reflexive work in which the hand of Beckett can often be seen. For example, Hamm's narration is at once taking its own course in developing his personality while it also comments on the idea of creation, alluding to the creative process of an author. At the end of the story Hamm talks about the difficulty of creation:

CLOV: Will it end soon?
HAMM: I'm afraid it will.
CLOV: Pah! You'll make up another.
HAMM: I don't know. (Pause.) I feel rather drained.
The prolonged creative effort.

The characters make numerous, explicit references throughout *Endgame* to their roles as characters in a play. Hamm at one-point states: "I'm warming up for my last soliloquy." Clov, at another instance, announces: "This is what we call making an exit." Such self-reflexive references to the action of the play are representative of modernism and also suggest humankind's inclination for dramatization to assign meaning in life and help understand the world.

Humor

"Nothing is funnier than unhappiness." Though *Endgame* is dark, there is humor in the play. Clov's confusion over which items to fetch first and his antics with the ladder could be directly out of a film starring Charlie Chaplin, whom Beckett admired. Commenting on *Endgame* himself, Beckett identified the phrase "nothing is funnier than unhappiness" as key to the play's interpretation and performance.

Style

Words and Stage Directions

Endgame's visual performance and self-reflexive dialogue constantly remind the audience that they are watching a performance by actors. Hamm broods: "All kinds of fantasies! That I'm being watched!" This tells the audience that they are part of the structure of the play, just as words, physical movement, lighting, whistles, dogs, ladders, windows, and silence play their roles. Beckett uses stage directions to create dynamic relationships between characters and the things they require to live: Hamm needs his armchair, and Nagg and Nell require their ashbins. Beckett creates a vivid physical world to complement the powerful and stripped-down dialogue.

Beckett presents the characters' inability to understand through abstract language and stagnant dramatic structure. Beckett has stripped down and broken apart his words and sentences. Words are able to contradict each other and are often elliptic. Clov utters the first line of the play: "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished." By beginning the play with the word "Finished," Beckett directs our attention toward endings. As Beckett's characters search themselves and the world around them, language reflects the precarious balance between understanding and confusion.

Beckett's Minor Plot

Samuel Beckett's plots are notable for their lack of the classical dramatic structure. The minor plot line of *Endgame* is that of Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell. It is clear that they had a romantic love in their youth, but they now live in ashbins and are not well-taken-care-of by their son. The end of the play finds both Nagg and Nell dead, without having experienced much satisfaction throughout the play. Indeed, most of their interactions are attempts to recall their past happiness or to endure their current helpless situation.

Theater of the Absurd

Drama known as the theater of the absurd begins in the 1950s. *Endgame*, Beckett's first play after *Waiting for Godot*, continues in the tradition that *Waiting for Godot* established.

Historical Context

Nuclear Capability

Although Beckett does not place the characters and actions of *Endgame* in a specific time and place, the play's only set can be viewed as a bomb shelter after a nuclear bomb has detonated and destroyed much, if not all, life outside the shelter. This was certainly a looming fear when Beckett wrote the play and when it was performed in 1957. Although today this fear is still present, in 1957 the fear was at an all-time high, and the likelihood of such an event seemed all too possible and near.

The Cold War

The late 1950s and the 1960s were dominated by the cold war, an intense rivalry between the United States and its allies against the Soviet Union. After World War II, Europe was divided into two zones of power, a capitalist west and a socialist east. The rivalry soon became worldwide, and there was always a threat that it could have developed into full-scale nuclear war. The struggle did become violent in 1950 when communist North Korea invaded South Korea, beginning the Korean War, which ended with the country divided.

The Eisenhower Doctrine

The Eisenhower Doctrine, announced by United States President Dwight D. Eisenhower on January 5, 1957, pledged military and economic support to any Middle Eastern country needing help in resisting communist aggression. Marking another escalation in the cold war, the doctrine was intended to check the increase of Soviet influence in the Middle East and the increasingly strong Soviet support given the Arab states.

The Absurdists

Of the French writers known as the absurdists, Arthur Adamov, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Samuel Beckett were the most significant. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, writers were trying to overthrow dramatic conventions and wanted to challenge audiences with something new. Antonin Artaud wrote *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938), which advocated a "theatre of cruelty," and in 1943 Jean Paul Sartre wrote *Being and Nothingness* and *No Exit,* which dramatize Sartre's existentialist viewpoint. Sartre's viewpoint, combined with Albert Camus's writings, provided the building blocks for the absurdist movement, which began to take shape in the early 1950s.

In 1952, Ionesco premiered his play *The Chairs,* which is an excellent example of the theater of the absurd. However, it was not until 1953 and the premiere of *En Attendant*

Godot, or *Waiting for Godot*, that absurdism reached a popular and international audience.

Waiting for Godot is perhaps the best-known work from the absurdist movement. The two-act tragicomedy tells the story of two old men, Vladimir and Estragon, who cannot decide if they should leave or stay and wait for Godot, who may or may not arrive and rescue them from their desperate situation. *Endgame* takes this struggle to the next level as Hamm and Clov struggle with the meaning, if there is any, of living at all. Beckett's importance to the absurdist movement is obvious, but saying that he is an absurdist writer is not giving full credit to his wide range of work. Beckett's writing stands out above the other absurdist works in its ingenuity, universality, and humanity.

Critical Overview

When *Endgame* opened in 1957, Beckett described the event as "rather grim, like playing to mahogany, or rather teak." Indeed, most critics found the play bewildering or they disliked it. Kenneth Tynan in the *Observer* said that Beckett's new play made it "clear that his purpose is neither to move nor to help us. For him, man is a pygmy who connives at his own inevitable degradation." Marc Bernard in *Nouvelles litteraires* said that he constantly had the impression that he was listening to a medieval fantasy or comic poem in which allegorical characters, fake scholasticism, and Aristotelian reasoning were made into a mixture in which metaphysics suddenly took on a farcical tone. He considered Hamm "the intellectual, paralysed, blind as talkative as a fourteenth century doctor. He is waited upon by the Common Man, half way between man and beast" who "has been given a simian appearance: long, dangling arms, curved spine. The intellectual's father and mother are stuffed into two dustbins; from time to time a lid is lifted and one of the parents begins to talk." T. C. Worsley in the *Listener* said of *Waiting for Godot*, "Mr. Beckett's neurosis and mine were for quite long stretches on the same theme; in *Endgame* they never tangled. He has, in *Endgame*, . . . expanded not the public but the private images. He has concentrated not on what is common between his audiences and him but on what is private in himself."

When *Endgame* was produced on Broadway in 1980, directed by Jopseh Chaikin and starring Daniel Setzer as Hamm and Michael Gross as Clov, it had become considered a classic. Mel Gussow, wrote in the *New York Times* that "Mr. Chaikin and Mr. Setzer never forget the play's portent, but neither do they shortchange its mordant humor. The director approaches *Endgame* as a gem to be played, as a piece to be performed. Mr. Chaikin is an experimental artist who is scrupulous when dealing with classics." He concludes, "the play is profound. The acting is prodigious."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
- Critical Essay #5

Critical Essay #1

McDaniel is a writer with a bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan. In the following essay, McDaniel discusses Beckett's Endgame.

Samuel Beckett's writing can be something of a puzzle. There are no final positions or absolute interpretations. *Endgame* is, however, a unique masterpiece with an intricate dramatic structure that runs contrary to traditional theatrical structure.

Endgame was groundbreaking because it dared not to adhere to accepted dramatic rules. Beckett uses circular dialogue, refuses to accessorize the play or its characters with anything but the bare minimum, yet he creates a complex fictional and highly theatrical world for his characters to inhabit. Beckett chooses his words carefully, and the nature of the dialogue is circular, for example in Hamm's opening soliloquy: "And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to . . . to end. Yes, there it is, it's time it ended and yet I hesitate to —(he yawns)—to end." The language Beckett uses demonstrates the precarious balance between cognition and bewilderment. The breakdown of language reflects the breakdown of the characters' ability to perceive the world around them. His use of self-reflexive dialogue informs the audience that they are sitting in a theater watching a play, alluding to the play as a "game." Just as the words Beckett uses are few, he removes all extraneous material from his play. *Endgame*'s structure breaks from the theory that shaped centuries of dramas and tragedies. Aristotle wrote that tragedy is "an imitation of an action." Beckett is not concerned with trying to create and maintain an imitation or illusion of reality. Beckett strips bare all detail except the necessary minimum, and the detail he does provide is often vague. Beckett's use of dramatic motivation is also minimal. In traditional drama, a character's motivations are made clear to the audience, but the character's actions in *Endgame* are peculiar. One may wish to go to the theater to come away with conclusions and answers, but Beckett presents a fictional world as complex as the real world, where conclusions are uncertain and answers not easily defined. *Endgame* can be seen as the highest sort of theater, where events take place in the midst of the life of the audience, and it is the audience's responsibility to take what it can from what is presented rather than being force fed easily discernible plots. Despite flying in the face of recognized theatrical devices, there is an innovative dramatist at work, who decides to use chess as a way to play out this human predicament.

Beckett uses chess as the play's controlling metaphor, and he explores the human dilemma, mortality, and God's existence, without providing simple answers, as his characters, and the audience, move through an uncertain existence. The game of chess becomes the metaphor that gives a seemingly structureless play a dramatic scheme. 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. In *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist,* Anthony Cronin writes:

When it was produced in Berlin in 1967 Beckett told
one of the actors, 'Hamm is a king in this chess game

lost from the start . . . Now at the last he makes a few senseless moves as only a bad player would . . . He is only trying to delay the inevitable end . . . He's a bad player.'

And the audience can see the moves of the king once the game has been set up. Hamm and Clov can be viewed as king and knight, and Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell, function as pawns. Beckett further emphasizes this by using two different colors to describe his characters. When introduced, Hamm and Clov both have a "very red face." Nagg and Nell both have a "very white face." Though his characters have two differing colors, they do not perform as contrasting pieces would in a standard game of chess played between two opponents. In chess, each piece is moved according to specific rules and is removed from the board when it is captured by the move of one of the opposing pieces into its square. The king is the focus of the game as each player tries to checkmate the other player's king. The king can move one square in any direction but only one square at a time and cannot move into check. Hamm, *Endgame*'s crippled king, can only move with the aid of Clov, the play's knight, which ultimately leads to Hamm's demise. The move of the knight in chess resembles a capital *L* (two squares vertically followed by one to the side, or two to the side and one up or down). In literary lore, the knight is often the king's most ardent protector—or deceiver. Beckett uses both of these ideas with Clov, who exists in a master-servant relationship with Hamm. Clov eventually leaves Hamm (if the audience believes Clov does leave at the play's end), which brings about Hamm's death. The least valuable of all the chess pieces is the pawn. Pawns can move only one square, straight ahead, except for its first move, which can be two squares straight ahead. It is the only chess piece that may never move backwards. Pawns have special privileges; other pieces do not. Beckett's pawns are of the sort that is unable to progress in the battlefield that is their shelter. Contained in ashbins, they are powerless to promote their own agenda and are trapped and dependent upon their son, Hamm.

Hamm, the king, for the purpose of the drama, is the center of all activity. Hamm is all too aware of his limited mortal power and abilities, and he struggles to survive the chess game by trying to dominate the other characters on stage. Afraid of losing what little control he does have, Hamm tells Clov to take him for a spin around the room in his wheelchair. As Clov, the obedient knight in service of his king, moves him, Hamm complains about the slightest inaccuracy of his desired position and yells to Clov that he has moved him a "little too far to the left" or a "little too far to the right." Hamm tries to assert his dominance whenever he can. Beckett's purposeful use of chess as the play's central metaphor augments the dramatic maneuvers both Hamm and Clov contrive in their daily games with each other as they struggle with the purpose of going on at all. In his desperate requests for painkillers, Hamm creates devices that enable him to continue on for another day. Clov, on the other hand, exercises his love-hate relationship with Hamm by his committed performance of daily routines. Much of their dialogue implies an inner debate of each character vying for control of the other, such as when Clov asks, "Why do you keep me?" and Hamm answers, "There's no one else." Clov responds, "There's nowhere else." Hamm asserts, "You're leaving me all the

same." Clov, answers honestly, "I'm trying." The king, knight, pawn scenario can also be seen at work when Hamm chastises his father, Nagg, when he comes out from his ashbin demanding food. Hamm whistles Clov in to feed Nagg, and then Hamm orders Clov to push Nagg back into the bin and close the lid. In the game of chess, pawns are typically the first to lose their lives, and so it is in *Endgame*. Both Nagg and Nell expire before the king; only the knight survives.

The setting of *Endgame* has similar restrictions in time and space, as does chess. *Endgame* is set in a single room that may or may not be a bomb shelter after a nuclear war has devastated the earth. Beckett's characters exist in a world that seems to be coming to an end, and here the audience can see Beckett's characters' actions and ideas in comparison to an endgame in chess. P. H. Clarke notes in the translator's forward to *Chess Endings: Essential Knowledge,* by Y. Averbakh:

> Any deficiencies in positional judgment and technique which may have remained unnoticed amidst the complexities of the openings and middlegame are here ruthlessly revealed; errors stand out in greater relief and, what is worse, generally have more serious consequences.

Beckett's characters know that the world and all of life outside their known shelter may have been destroyed—they are aware of the serious consequences facing them, yet they feel somewhat safe in the small room they inhabit (the game space or game board). Hamm describes the world that exists outside the known shelter as an "outer hell." Like the king in a chess game, Hamm does not want to be taken off the game board, for if he is, he knows he has lost the battle. Thought and choice are the determining factors in any chess game. For the master player of chess, moves are planned in advance, and it takes time to set up strategy and position. The master player moves beyond tactics to strategy—long-term planning in preparation for later action. None of Beckett's characters, like most people in real life, are master players. The chess metaphor is not simply an exercise but a way of coherently presenting the incoherent ideas of how humanity reconciles itself to itself. Just as the chess player is plagued by limitations, so are the characters in *Endgame*.

Beckett's characters search for an understanding of themselves as Beckett explores human limitations and mortality—all the while continuing to move towards the question of a person's significance in what may be a Godless world. Just as the king in chess can only move one space at a time, Hamm wonders why he is so limited. Through this game of chess Beckett examines the personal struggle and often the inability to understand one's own self. In looking to the future, the characters encounter a complexity of strategy and movement as real in life as it is in chess. Transformation can be difficult to pinpoint. Beckett does not provide easily defined dramatic moments when change does happen, and discernment is slippery at best. Clov describes a change that has occurred without completely understanding what precisely has transpired:

Then one day, suddenly, it ends, it changes. I don't understand, it dies, or it's me. I don't understand, that either. I ask the words that remain—sleeping, waking, morning, evening. They have nothing to say.

Hamm also acknowledges this phenomenon: "Absent always. It all happened without me. I don't know what's happened." Just as a bad player in chess suddenly finds the endgame and potential victory slipping from his grasp, so do Beckett's characters. As the endgame begins to slip from grasp, the characters' thoughts fall to mortality.

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 palliative to our awareness that death is certain and life mysterious. The characters discuss what may give life meaning and make it worth living. Experience in life should add up to a meaningful existence. Clov, in the second line of the play, describes what should be the accumulation of experiences that produce meaning: "Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap." This idea is again articulated by Hamm near the end of the play: "Moment by moment, pattering down like the millet grains of . . . (He hesitates) . . . that Old Greek, and all life long you wait for that to mount up to a life." In examining their lives thus far, the characters, and the audience, must determine their futures. For Clov, the decision is to take his chances in the "outer hell," leaving the safety of the only playing field he has known. As Clov prepares to leave Hamm, Hamm admits defeat. Hamm throws his worldly possessions towards the audience and places his handkerchief over his face, an act of the king giving up the game.

Despite his eventual loss, throughout the play Hamm desires personal significance. Beckett's play culminates in the most universal question of all: is there a God and do we matter to Him? Beckett asks the audience to consider if God does exist or if he is a myth made up by man to allow man to ease his fear of death and his fear of insignificance. In one scene, Hamm orders both Clov and Nagg to pray to God, but Hamm cries in agony, "The bastard! He doesn't exist!" Hamm and the other characters solemnly question the existence of God. One of the comedic moments of the play is when Nagg and Nell discuss the joke about an Old Jewish tailor who took more than three months to make a decent pair of trousers, the results of which were more satisfactory than God's six-day effort to create the world. Beckett raises these questions, but he does not provide easy answers. For the believer, perhaps Beckett is saying that only God has complete knowledge of the world and that human ideas are limited. Such is not the case for Hamm, who seriously doubts the existence of God. Hamm says that it would seem impossible for the millions of moments in a lifetime to amount to anything significant. Do any actions or relationships in life bring anything but pain, suffering, and insignificance? In Beckett's work, one cannot take things at face value. Each person must rise to Beckett's challenge and search himself or herself for the answers and solutions to these universal and timeless questions.

The fact that Beckett finds an unconventional yet successful way to address these weighty questions of life in an hour-and-a-half play is what distinguishes it as great drama. Beckett succeeds by exploding the paradigms of traditional drama. He uses allusions to, and forms resembling, chess in order to create structure where there initially seems to be none. Beckett treats his audience with the utmost respect by investigating the human condition without allowing for the hope of an absolute answer to life's biggest puzzles. Beckett's *Endgame*, though a labyrinth in its complex construction, is an extraordinary work of twentieth-century art.

Source: Daryl McDaniel, Critical Essay on *Endgame,* in *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Kenner discusses the elements of the game of chess found in Endgame *and how the physical dimensions of the stage contribute to the play's focus.*

The stage is a place to wait. The place itself waits, when no one is in it. When the curtain rises on *Endgame*, sheets drape all visible objects as in a furniture warehouse. Clov's first act is to uncurtain the two high windows and inspect the universe; his second is to remove the sheets and fold them carefully over his arm, disclosing two ash cans and a figure in an armchair. This is so plainly a metaphor for waking up that we fancy the stage, with its high peepholes, to be the inside of an immense skull. It is also a ritual for starting the play; Yeats arranged such a ritual for *At the Hawk's Well,* and specified a black cloth and a symbolic song. It is finally a removal from symbolic storage of the objects that will be needed during the course of the performance. When the theater is empty it is sensible to keep them covered against dust. So we are reminded at the outset that what we are to witness is a dusty dramatic exhibition, repeated and repeatable. The necessary objects include three additional players (two of them in ash cans). Since none of them will move from his station we can think of them after the performance as being kept permanently on stage, and covered with their dust cloths again until tomorrow night.

The rising of the curtain disclosed these sheeted forms; the removal of the sheets disclosed the protagonist and his ash cans; the next stage is for the protagonist to uncover his own face, which he does with a yawn, culminating this three-phase strip tease with the revelation of a very red face and black glasses. His name, we gather from the program, is Hamm, a name for an actor. He is also Hamlet, bounded in a nutshell, fancying himself king of infinite space, but troubled by bad dreams; he is also "a toppled Prospero," remarking partway through the play, with judicious pedantry, "our revels now are ended"; he is also the Hammer to which Clov, Nagg and Nell (Fr. *clou,* Ger. *Nagel,* Eng. *nail*) stand in passive relationship; by extension, a chess player ("Me—[*he yawns*]—to play"); but also (since Clov must wheel him about) himself a chess-man, probably the imperiled King.

Nagg and Nell in their dustbins appear to be pawns; Clov, with his arbitrarily restricted movements ("I can't sit") and his equestrian background ("And your rounds? Always on foot?" "Sometimes on horse") resembles the Knight, and his perfectly cubical kitchen ("ten feet by ten feet by ten feet, nice dimensions, nice proportions") resembles a square on the chessboard translated into three dimensions. He moves back and forth, into it and out of it, coming to the succor of Hamm and then retreating. At the endgame's end the pawns are forever immobile and Clov is poised for a last departure from the board, the status quo forever menaced by an expected piece glimpsed through the window, and King Hamm abandoned in check:

Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and have done
with losing. . . Since that's the way we're playing it,

let's play it that way . . . and speak no more about it ...
speak no more.

Even if we had not the information that the author of this work has been known to spend hours playing chess with himself (a game at which you always lose), we should have been alerted to his long-standing interest in its strategy by the eleventh chapter of *Murphy*, where Murphy's first move against Mr. Endon, the standard P—K4, is described as "the primary cause of all [his] subsequent difficulties." (The same might be said of getting born, an equally conventional opening.) Chess has several peculiarities which lend themselves to the metaphors of this jagged play. It is a game of leverage, in which the significance of a move may be out of all proportion to the local disturbance it effects ("A flea! This is awful! What a day!"). It is a game of silences, in which new situations are appraised: hence Beckett's most frequent stage direction, "*Pause.*" It is a game of steady attrition; by the time we reach the endgame the board is nearly bare, as bare as Hamm's world where there are no more bicycle wheels, sugarplums, painkillers, or coffins, let alone people. And it is a game which by the successive removal of screening pieces constantly extends the range of lethal forces, until at the endgame peril from a key piece sweeps down whole ranks and files. The king is hobbled by the rule which allows him to move in any direction but only one square at a time; Hamm's circuit of the stage and return to center perhaps exhibits him patrolling the inner boundaries of the little nine-square territory he commands. To venture further will evidently expose him to check. ("Outside of here it's death.") His knight shuttles to and fro, his pawns are pinned. No threat is anticipated from the auditorium, which is presumably off the board; and a periodic reconnaissance downfield through the windows discloses nothing but desolation until very near the end. But on his last inspection of the field Clov is dismayed. Here the English text is inexplicably sketchy; in the French one we have,

CLOV: Aïeaïeaïe!
HAMM: C'est une feuille? Une fleur? Une toma—(*il bâille*)—te? CLOV (*regardant*): Je t'en foutrai des tomates! Quelqu'un! C'est quelqu'un!
HAMM: Eh bien, va l'exterminer. (*Clov descend de l'escabeau.*) Quelqu'un! (*Vibrant.*) Fais ton devoir!

In the subsequent interrogatory we learn the distance of this threat (fifteen meters or so), its state of rest or motion (motionless), its sex (presumably a boy), its occupation (sitting on the ground as if leaning on something). Hamm, perhaps thinking of the resurrected Jesus, murmurs "La pierre levée," then on reflection changes the image to constitute himself proprietor of the Promised Land: "Il regarde la maison sans doute, avec les yeux de Moïse mourant." It is doing, however, nothing of the kind; it is gazing at its navel. There is no use, Hamm decides, in running out to exterminate it: "If he exists he'll die there or he'll come here. And if he doesn't . . ." And a few seconds later he has conceded the game:

It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I don't need
you any more.

He sacrifices his last mobile piece, discards his staff and whistle, summons for the last time a resourceless Knight and an unanswering Pawn, and covers his face once more with the handkerchief: somehow in check.

Not that all this is likely to be yielded up with clarity by any conceivable performance. It represents however a structure which, however we glimpse it, serves to refrigerate the incidental passions of a play about, it would seem, the end of humanity. It is not for nothing that the place within which the frigid events are transacted is more than once called "the shelter," outside of which is death; nor that the human race is at present reduced to two disabled parents, a macabre blind son, and an acathisiac servant. Around this shelter the universe crumbles away like an immense dry biscuit: no more rugs, no more tide, no more coffins. We hear of particular deaths:

CLOV (*harshly*): When old Mother Pegg asked you
for oil for her lamp and you told her to get out to hell,
you knew what was happening then, no? (*Pause.*) You
know what she died of, Mother Pegg? Of darkness.
HAMM (*feebly*): I hadn't any.
CLOV (*as before*): Yes, you had.

We observe particular brutalities: Hamm, of his parents: "Have you bottled her?" "Yes." "Are they both bottled?" "Yes." "Screw down the lids." What has shrunken the formerly ample world is perhaps Hamm's withdrawal of love; the great skull-like setting suggests a solipsist's universe. "I was never there," he says. "Absent, always. It all happened without me. I don't know what's happened." He has been in "the shelter"; he has also been dosed within himself. It is barely possible that the desolation is not universal:

HAMM: Did you ever think of one thing?
CLOV: Never.
HAMM: That here we're down in a hole. (*Pause.*) But
beyond the hills? Eh? Perhaps it's still green. Eh?
(*Pause.*) Flora! Pomona! (*Ecstatically.*) Ceres! (*Pause.*)
Perhaps you won't need to go very far.
CLOV: I can't go very far. (*Pause.*) I'll leave you.

As Hamm is both chessman and chess player, so it is conceivable that destruction is not screened off by the shelter but radiates from it for a certain distance. Zero, zero, words we hear so often in the dialogue, these are the Cartesian coordinates of the origin.

Bounded in a nutshell yet king of infinite space, Hamm articulates the racking ambiguity of the play by means of his dominance over its most persuasive metaphor, the play

itself. If he is Prospero with staff and revels, if he is Richard III bloodsmeared and crying "My kingdom for a nightman!" if he is also perhaps Richard II, within whose hollow crown

Keeps Death his court, and there the Antic sits,
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
Allowing him a breath, a little scene
To monarchize, be feared, and kill with looks—

these roles do not exhaust his repertoire. He is (his name tells us) the generic Actor, a creature all circumference and no center. As master of the revels, he himself attends to the last unveiling of the opening ritual:

(*Pause. Hamm stirs. He yawns under the handkerchief.*
He removes the handkerchief from his face.
Very red face, black glasses.
HAMM: Me—(*he yawns*)—to play. (*He holds the handkerchief spread out before him.*) Old stancher!
(*. . . He clears his throat, joins the tips of his fingers.*)
Can there be misery—(*he yawns*)—loftier than mine?

The play ended, he ceremoniously unfolds the handkerchief once more (five separate stage directions governing his tempo) and covers his face as it was in the beginning. "Old Stancher! (*Pause.*) You . . . remain." What remains, in the final brief tableau specified by the author, is the immobile figure with a bloodied Veronica's veil in place of a face: the actor having superintended his own Passion and translated himself into an ultimate abstraction of masked agony.

Between these termini he animates everything, ordering the coming and going of Clov and the capping and uncapping of the cans. When Clov asks, "What is there to keep me here?" he answers sharply, "The dialogue." A particularly futile bit of business with the spyglass and the steps elicits from him an aesthetic judgment, "This is deadly." When it is time for the introduction of the stuffed dog, he notes, "We're getting on," and a few minutes later, "Do you not think this has gone on long enough?" These, like comparable details in *Godot*, are sardonic authorizations for a disquiet that is certainly stirring in the auditorium. No one understands better than Beckett, nor exploits more boldly, the kind of fatalistic attention an audience trained on films is accustomed to place at the dramatist's disposal. The cinema has taught us to suppose that a dramatic presentation moves inexorably as the reels unwind or the studio clock creeps, until it has consumed precisely its allotted time which nothing, no restlessness in the pit, no sirens, no mass exodus can hurry. "Something is taking its course," that suffices us. Hence the vast leisure in which the minimal business of *Godot* and *Endgame* is transacted; hence (transposing into dramatic terms the author's characteristic pedantry of means) the occasional lingering over points of technique, secure in the knowledge that the clock-bound patience of a twentieth-century audience will expect no inner urgency, nothing in

fact but the actual time events consume, to determine the pace of the exhibition. Clov asks, "Why this farce, day after day?" and it is sufficient for Hamm to reply, "Routine. One never knows." It is the answer of an actor in an age of films and long runs. In *Endgame* (which here differs radically from *Godot*) no one is supposed to be improvising; the script has been well committed to memory and well rehearsed. By this means doom is caused to penetrate the most intimate crevices of the play. "I'm tired of going on," says Clov late in the play, "very tired," and then, "Let's stop playing!" (if there is one thing that modern acting is not it is playing). In the final moments theatrical technique, under Hamm's sponsorship, rises into savage prominence.

HAMM: . . . And me? Did anyone ever have
pity on me?
CLOV (*lowering the telescope, turning towards
Hamm*): What? (*Pause.*) Is it me you're referring to?
HAMM (*angrily*): An aside, ape! Did you never hear
an aside before? (*Pause.*) I'm warming up for my last
soliloquy.

Ten seconds later he glosses "More complications!" as a technical term: "Not an underplot, I trust." It is Clov who has the last word in this vein:

HAMM: Clov! (*Clov halts, without turning,*) Nothing.
(*Clov moves on.*) Clov! (*Clov halts, without
turning.*) CLOV: This is what we call making an exit.

By this reiterated stress on the actors as professional men, and so on the play as an occasion within which they operate, Beckett transforms Hamm's last soliloquy into a performance, his desolation into something prepared by the dramatic machine, his abandoning of gaff, dog, and whistle into a necessary discarding of props, and the terminal business with the handkerchief into, quite literally, a curtain speech. *Endgame* ends with an unexpected lightness, a death rather mimed than experienced; if it is "Hamm as stated, and Clov as stated, together as stated," the mode of statement has more salience than a paraphrase of the play's situation would lead one to expect.

The professionalism also saves the play from an essentially sentimental commitment to simpliste "destiny." Much of its gloomy power it derives from contact with such notions as T. H. Huxley's view of man as an irrelevance whom day by day an indifferent universe engages in chess. We do not belong here, runs a strain of Western thought which became especially articulate in France after the War; we belong nowhere; we are all surds, absurd. There is nothing on which to ground our right to exist, and we need not be especially surprised one day to find ourselves nearly extinct. (On such a despair Cartesian logic converges, as surely as the arithmetic of Pythagoras wedged itself fast in the irrationality of Ö2.) Whatever we do, then, since it can obtain no grip on our radically pointless situation, is *behavior* pure and simple; it is play acting, and may yield us the satisfaction, if satisfaction there be, of playing well, of uttering our *cris du coeur*

with style and some sense of timing. We do not trouble deaf heaven, for there is only the sky ("Rien," reports Clov, gazing through his telescope; and again, "Zéro.") We stir and thrill, at best, ourselves. From such a climate, miscalled existentialist, Beckett wrings every available *frisson* without quite delivering the play into its keeping; for its credibility is not a principle the play postulates but an idea the play contains, an idea of which it works out the moral and spiritual consequences. The despair in which he traffics is a conviction, not a philosophy. He will even set it spinning like a catharine wheel about a wild point of logic, as when he has Hamm require that God be prayed to in silence ("Where are your manners?") and then berate him ("The bastard!") for not existing.

The play contains whatever ideas we discern inside it; no idea contains the play. The play contains, moreover, two narrative intervals, performances within the performance. The first, Nagg's story about the trousers, is explicitly a recitation; Nell has heard it often, and so, probably, has the audience; it is a vaudeville standby. Nagg's performance, like a production of *King Lear,* whose story we know, must therefore be judged solely as a performance. Its quality, alas, discourages even him ("I tell this story worse and worse"), and Nell too is not amused, being occupied with thoughts of her own, about the sand at the bottom of Lake Como. The other is Hamm's huffesnuffe narrative, also a recitation, since we are to gather that he has been composing it beforehand, in his head. This time we do not know the substance of the tale, but contemplate in diminishing perspective an actor who has memorized a script which enjoins him to imitate a man who has devised and memorized a script:

> The man came crawling towards me, on his belly.
> Pale, wonderfully pale and thin, he seemed on the
> point of—(*Pause. Normal tone.*) No, I've done that bit.

Later on he incorporates a few critical reflections: "Nicely put, that," or "There's English for you." This technician's narcissism somewhat disinfects the dreadful tale. All Hamm's satisfactions come from dramatic self-contemplation, and as he towers before us, devoid of mercy, it is to some ludicrous stage villain that he assimilates himself, there on the stage, striking a stage-Barabbas pose ("Sometimes I go about and poison wells"). It is to this that life as play-acting comes.

> 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. (*Pause.*) Would I consent
> to take in the child . . . (*Pause.*) I can see him still,
> down on his knees, his hands flat on the ground,
> glaring at me with his mad eyes, in defiance of
> my wishes.

"It was the moment I was waiting for": the satisfaction this exudes is considerably less

sadistic than dramatic, and the anticlimax into which the long performance immediately topples would try a creator's soul, not a maniac's:

I'll soon have finished with this story. (*Pause.*) Unless
I bring in other characters. (*Pause.*) But where would I
find them? (*Pause.*) Where would I look for them?
(*Pause. He whistles. Enter Clov.*) Let us pray to God.

So the hooks go in. There is no denying what Beckett called in a letter to Alan Schneider "the power of the text to claw." It strikes, however, its unique precarious balance between rage and art, immobilizing all characters but one, rotating before us for ninety unbroken minutes the surfaces of Nothing, always designedly faltering on the brink of utter insignificance into which nevertheless we cannot but project so many awful significances: theater reduced to its elements in order that theatricalism may explore without mediation its own boundaries: a bleak unforgettable tour de force and probably its author's single most remarkable work.

Source: Hugh Kenner, "Life in the Box," in *Samuel Beckett's "Endgame,"* edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 1988, pp. 41-48.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay excerpt, Homan examines Hamm's "creation."

A common practice in the theater is to cover the set once the play is over so that it will be the same set, "virginal" if you will, at the next performance, not changed by the dust and dirt that make their way into the playhouse. *Endgame* opens with the figurative "birth" of its playwright as the servant Clov "*goes to Hamm, removes sheet covering him, folds it over his arms.*" To use the technical term from the Elizabethan stage, Hamm is "discovered," though for a time he is stationary while Clov holds the stage.

Some critics have seen in Clov's opening lines, "Finished, it's nearly finished, it must be nearly finished," echoes of the creation story, though the lines themselves are ambiguous: is the creation (Hamm?) nearly finished and therefore soon to blossom in its own right? Or is the world about to end, "finished?" Clov then departs for the kitchen, his own orderly offstage world ("Nice dimensions, nice proportions").

On Clov's departure, Hamm himself completes the discovery, first yawning under the handkerchief that covers his head and then removing it to reveal a "*Very red face. Black glasses.*" Hamm's opening line, "Me," may suggest a tremendous ego, though, as we will see, an ego quite appropriate if we think of him as the play's lead actor, its ham or Hamlet, or perhaps the playwright himself, the creative force behind the stage world. A second yawn introduces the next suggestive line, actually a continuation of "Me": "to play." We might take the word *play* either as a verb—meaning "now I will play"—or as a noun, a compression of "to the play": Hamm will now get to his play. We have heard the phrase before in Beckett: Malone speaks of "play" and the *Unnamable* directs "Worm to play." If, to echo Hamm himself, we would allow "every man his speciality," then I believe that Hamm's *speciality* creation itself, however bleak the created world of this play may seem.

Critical Essay #4

Hamm's creation here seems to be an internal one, that inner world peopled by the imagination of a blind man. Whereas Clov is concerned with the external, with the one physical setting itself—he speculates that "There's nowhere else"—Hamm's concern is that of "Text 2": "Perhaps we're in a head." Deprived of a sense of perspective by his blindness, he can only think of man and, more specifically, of himself as the macrocosm. Appropriately, his speculation is that there is "no one else." For Hamm the external world *is* the illusion, in the most negative sense of that word: "Outside of here it's death."

At the start Hamm is asleep, his power of creation dormant. He may well be dreaming, for several times during the play he makes reference to the pleasures of this state. As in the medieval dream vision, he moves, after Clov's discovery, from sleep to waking, from dreams to the *informing* of his dreams. The source of that informing, as it was for the medievalist, is not ultimately the external world, for the vision, thus formed, is only an approximation of an internal state that, without art, cannot be known.

There is a falling off, a loss of clarity as one moves from the dream vision to the waking reality. If Hamm could continue sleeping he "might make love"; he might "go into the woods . . . and [his] eyes would see . . . the sky, the earth." His vision here is one of absolute freedom, of a world where one can move, "run"—ironic for an invalid confined to a wheelchair. Still, this idyllic world conjured by the dreamer's fancy is irrelevant to the present play, whose concern, as Hamm immediately qualifies the vision, is the "Nature" of his own "head" and "heart." If that idyllic world, where one is free in space and time, *is* reality, it represents an external force that, later made manifest in the figure of the small boy, would intrude on and ultimately destroy the artist's fictive inscape.

This inner space, the single stage set before us, is the artist's domain, the "now" informed by the narrative itself, with a past that is either irrelevant or tragic (sometime in the past Nagg and Nell lost their legs) and a future that is either irrelevant or potentially tragic (the boy who threatens to unravel Hamm's creation). In an extraordinary compression of the body's two most vital organs, Hamm finds his "heart in his head" (the line is repeated by Nagg), thereby reversing the cliché about thinking with one's heart. The playwright's internal process is a rational one: the feelings of the heart, those emotions allowing him to react positively or negatively to life, are given form in the head. By a sort of reverse gravity the juices of the heart flow upward to the head; Hamm confesses that there is something "dripping" in his head.

We have made a quantum leap from *Godot.* There the set, while clearly external, was sparsely populated, and so the impoverished tree and rock only underscored the barren outer world that, given the intellectual and imaginative capacities of Vladimir and Estragon, served as an appropriate stage for their waiting. Here the set is an inner one, a room, but it is heavily populated with ashbins, a ladder, windows, a picture, numerous props, and with the suggestion of a kitchen just offstage. However, this relatively lavish set, if taken literally, seems an inadequate correlative for the world Hamm struggles to

define. Clov, who dons a traveler's costume in the play's final moments, may be a holdover from *Godot.* If this is so, then Hamm, while not Godot himself, is a dominant force, a master or godlike figure who, more than the relatively shallow Pozzo, might be a suitable object for the tramps' quest in the earlier play.

Hamm is physically blind, and Clov must serve as his eyes. Still, the inner eye, the "mind's eye" as Hamlet would have it, works overtime here. That eye sees not objective reality, nor is it subject to the historic materialism that confirmed existence for those eighteenth-century philosophers like Berkeley whom Beckett studied and in part rejected. Instead, Hamm's "eye" views only an "infinite emptiness" that is "all around." The trick in *Endgame* is to "play" on that infinite emptiness, to give it form through words, even though words themselves are ultimately only empty abstractions. The "game," in the sense that word is used in "Enueg I," is to make something—however meager—out of nothing. Hamm's prediction is that Clov will someday experience that same emptiness, seeing, like the painter-engraver, the apparent something of the external world for what it truly is.

That engraver, surely, is a surrogate for the central character, because Hamm has no other source of reference than himself and yet finds it too painful, as well as inappropriate by the rules of this endgame, to reveal himself too completely too soon. For the engraver the entire physical world, from rising corn to the sails of the herring fleet, all that "loveliness" as bounded by land and sea, was nothing—"ashes." Even the possibility of an external world subject to the engraver's or—as Hamm alters it—painter's interpretation no longer exists, for that was "way back," during a time "in the land of the living." Clov delivers the benediction to a reality that is no more: "God be with the days." When he complains that today, in contrast, "There are so many terrible things," he errs not so much in the adjective "terrible" as he does in the assumption that there are still "things." Hamm cautiously corrects him: "No, no, there are not so many now." That correction allows for the more proper definition of the present world, a world of theater or play, an artifice created by Hamm: "Do you not think this has gone on long enough?" It is the play world, then, that is "this . . . this . . . thing." Hamm doubts that Clov will be equal to the task of giving form to nothing or this inner world of artifice, doubting that his actor can turn playwright. (As we shall see, the play itself, *Endgame,* partially disproves this gloomy assessment, but then Hamm has an image to protect.)

Hamm's play thereby becomes the informing of his "misery"—of himself, to be more exact. Whereas Clov has "nothing to say," Hamm has a "few words" to "ponder" in his heart, the heart that, we know, leads to the head. For him the greater his suffering the "emptier" he must become: the resulting form has an inverse correlation to its origin. Lesser men—if we can stand Hamm's arrogant pronouncement at the opening of the play—can hold a greater portion of their suffering. Hamm's lot, the playwright's lot—and the very condition about which Shakespeare complains in his Sonnets—is to express everything, to prostitute inner emotions before an audience. The artistic fate is analogous, as several contemporary artists have observed, to the act of masturbation, a metaphor Beckett will revisit in *Eh Joe.* It must be complete, not half-hearted; and once started, there is no turning back. The act is intimate and pleasurable—yet sterile in any biological sense. Hence the bleak bomb shelter of Hamm's world is also the hive of

great imaginative activity. Once this inner world is "peopled," given form, the tragedy itself is not resolved but rather is made public. The tragedy remains gruesome, yet there is an aesthetic pleasure in the form, and hence we applaud, rather than weep, at its conclusion. This informing is essentially comic, and while parents may die in Beckett's plays and novels (in *Malone Dies*, for example), the lead characters do not. In Beckett the lead characters informing of their tragedies, whether it be Malone on his deathbed or Winnie in her earthly prison, depends on their own consciousness of their creation. Malone has a pad and a pencil, however much they have deteriorated; and Winnie has props galore, plus half-remembered snatches from songs, proverbs and poetry. Aesthetic "life" springs from thematic "death," and in *Endgame* death, though ever-present, does not touch Hamm. Similarly, Vladimir and Estragon, though only dim creators when compared with Hamm, cannot die: the suicide tree is inadequate and the belt breaks.

As a creator Hamm craves rain, since its nourishment is necessary for the seeds of his mind; Clov is equally positive that it won't rain. Eager for Clov's seeds to sprout, Hamm is distressed when Clov contends that they won't. He then suggests that Clov might do well to scratch about a bit more; perhaps they were planted too early.

If Hamm opens the play by enumerating his miseries, it is still true that he, as opposed to Nagg whom he dismisses as an "accursed progenitor," is the blessed progenitor of *Endgame* and is strangely optimistic, despite those miseries, whereas Clov, the son, is the pessimist. Old-fashioned in such optimism, Hamm is the sometimes benevolent god or the playwright as god to his little world. Positioned at its center, given to surveying the walls defining its circumference, attended by his not always obedient Ariel—who, like his Shakespearean prototype, also yearns for freedom—Hamm is a jealous god, fearful of having any other god raised before him, whether it be in the person of a small boy or a flea. Like Prospero, he is a word-giver, both father and teacher to Clov. And he is egocentric, as gods are wont to be, just as Vladimir and Estragon are ego-deficient, as true subjects are wont to be. The single set of *Endgame*, the shabby room, *is* the world, the theater of the world both literal and figurative that the father, the playwright, offers his adopted son, Clov. "You can't leave us," he explains ruthlessly, for Clov is an inseparable part of Hamm's world.

Again, Kenner's hypothesis, that the set of *Endgame* resembles the inside of a human skull, with the two rear windows serving as eyes, is especially relevant here. For when the generation of the 1970s spoke of "blowing the mind," that phrase only implied a readjustment in the mind's link to external reality. But "outside of here," outside *Endgame*'s set, outside the mind that is being informed through the artistic process, it is clearly "death." Life, in Beckett's definition here, is not a fact but rather a process involving conscious creation through words, and also actions, as in the two mimes. By such creation one gives the "illusion" of existence, a conscious artifice to be set against the misguided assumption of reality held by those outside *Endgame*'s single stage set. I think it is his avoidance of death, of nothingness, an avoidance not studied but inevitable, that makes Beckett, like Shaw's hero in *Arms and the Man,* the "true romantic."

Hamm as god, Hamm as artist—the ascription seems to work both ways. If he is a god, his world is horribly shrunken, yet, however shrunken that world, Hamm guards it jealously against the rival, outside world of earth, water, color, and light that he knows only through his servant's reports. Omniscient on the stage set, his knowledge of this outside "set" is fully dependent on Clov's eyes. In the several drafts of *Endgame*, Beckett pared away at the description of that rival world, particularly as embodied in the young boy. Yet the mere suggestion of its existence terrifies Hamm, even though for us, as audience, the poverty of reality only accents the richness of the ever-present "little room" before us.

Conversely, we may see Hamm as the artist, his world limitless, eternally growing in his head and heart. Waiting for the painkiller may be only a comic bow in the direction of *Godot.* In point of fact, Hamm as artist uses words as productively in informing his suffering as Vladimir and Estragon used words unproductively in waiting for what they imagine will be their savior, rather than their painkiller or terminus.

Given to stories, Hamm is his own story and storyteller, the narrator/narrated, spinning his tales spiderlike from within himself. Beckett's artists, such as Words in *Words and Music*, protest that the stories do not come from inside them, but I think that by such assertions they only call attention to the ultimate end, the informing or "publication" of an inner vision. All begins from within, from "Me" (again, Hamm's first word), from precisely that acute consciousness that Clov for the most part lacks and that Vladimir and Estragon experience only in dream lapses, or when Lucky and Pozzo provide a mirror image of their own condition. As we shall see, the story of the man begging alms for his son is only superficially about someone else. As Hamm says, "There's no one else," and in his way Hamm embodies all people: he is the man seeking bread, and the object of that charity, and the stern judge who denies succor, and Mother Pegg who, like Socrates, seeks truth with her light, as well as Mother Pegg barely existing in her final days with that light extinguished. In a sense the play is one large monologue parading as a four-character drama. Like Shakespeare's Richard II in his cell, Hamm peoples his little world through this union of heart and head—his equivalent for that coupling of mind and soul in his royal counterpart.

Thus constricted, Hamm sets about creating, or "we do what we can"; it is "slow" and, I would add, painful "work." For that story actors are required—and hence Clov. The playwright also needs an audience; unlike the theoretical audience for those novels with which Beckett began his career, the audience here is actual. So dependent, the artist's inner vision relies for its informing on the collective abilities and consciousness of a host of people. The play is a public testament to an inner world. Krapp's one book was a failure—*Effie* sold only thirteen copies—whereas his tape recordings are overheard by a real audience.

If such publication of an inner state can "mean something," then perhaps it "won't all have been for nothing." Given this pragmatic, even didactic sense of mission, I find it misguided, though natural, to say that Beckett has nothing to say. Hamm's struggle to make or to mean something, "to say" himself—to borrow a favorite infinitive from

Beckett—separates him as playwright light years from writers of the so-called absurdist theater.

Source: Sidney Homan, "*Endgame:* The Playwright Completes Himself," in *Samuel Beckett's "Endgame,"* edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 1988, pp. 123-46.

Critical Essay #5

In the following essay excerpt, Fletcher and Spurling identify the structure of Endgame, *then examine how its various elements such as subject matter and physical objects fit into that structure.*

Endgame is constructed in more or less clearly defined sections which are 'played without a break'; the sections being frequently marked off by pauses but never by an interval as significant as that between the movements in a piece of music. Hamm and Clov correspond constructionally less to the 'characters' in a traditional play than to musical instruments. Their special characteristics are not used in the development of a plot, but to carry as it were pitch and timbre, to give off matching or dissonant tones and colours. If we think of Hamm and Clov in the first instance as, for example, 'cello and violin instead of as two people that we might see walking the streets; if we think of Nell and Nagg as, say, a pair of flutes; we are already closer to understanding the construction of the play. This can be summarized as follows: short solo prologues for Clov and Hamm lead into an extended duo for both which is joined briefly by Nagg. Then comes a duo for Nagg and Nell, with occasional interjections from Hamm and a solo passage for Nagg. A second long duo for Hamm and Clov, including two solo flourishes for Hamm, is broken by a short recitative for Hamm and Nagg before Hamm embarks on his central cadenza. A short trio for Hamm, Nagg and Clov ends with Nagg's second and last solo passage. At this point, with Hamm's stolen words 'Our revels now are ended', the play seems to embark on its finale, a duo for Hamm and Clov, punctuated by a solo passage for each and finishing with an epilogue for Hamm.

Within these main sections of the play scraps of material are introduced which are sometimes stated simply in a single line, sometimes tossed from one character-instrument to another over several lines of dialogue between two pauses, but which almost always recur throughout the play. The second sentence of Clov's solo prologue is: 'Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap.' This material only recurs directly once more, when it is given to Hamm, in his solo passage during the finale: 'Moment upon moment, pattering down, like the millet grains of . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . that old Greek, and all life long you wait for that to mount up to a life.' The identity of the old Greek—Beckett himself only remembers him to be one of the pre-Socratic philosophers, but not Zeno—is less germane than the fact that his image re-echoes across thirty-odd pages of the text and between Hamm and Clov, with perhaps half-heard reminders at other points in the play: during the first duo when Hamm asks Clov 'Did your seeds come up?' and in Hamm's cadenza (his 'story'), 'Corn, yes, I have corn, it's true, in my granaries.'

The 'pain-killer' which Hamm asks for during his first duo with Clov recurs in the same duo, three times in their second duo and again in the finale. But the form of its final recurrence, in Clov's words 'There's no more pain-killer,' links it to several other diverse strands of material: 'There are no more bicycle-wheels' and 'There's no more pap' in the first duo, 'There are no more sugar-plums' in the trio, 'There's no more tide', 'There are no more rugs', 'There are no more coffins' in the finale.

In addition to this type of material—the subject-matter of conversation—there are the physical objects, the stage-properties, such as the telescope, the gaff, the toy dog with three legs, the step-ladder, which also recur from one section of the play to another. Then there are catch-phrases, such as Clov's constantly repeated 'I'll leave you' and 'I have things to do' or Hamm's 'Me to play' and 'We're getting on' which recall the little windings up or windings down with which composers cross from one musical plateau to another.

More remarkable still are the longer passages which seem to reflect one another across the play, but elusively, with certain distortions, as though refracted in water. In his central cadenza Hamm tells a story, complete with embellishments in a 'narrative tone', about a man who 'came crawling towards me, on his belly', his face 'black with mingled dirt and tears' and who asked for bread to take back to his little boy, 'as if the sex mattered.' Hamm tells how he offered to take the man into his service, since 'he had touched a chord', but leaves it doubtful whether he consented to take in the boy too. Earlier in the play Hamm has said to Clov: 'It was I was a father to you' and 'My house a home for you', while just before the end Clov sees through one of the windows, with the aid of the telescope, what he says 'Looks like a small boy!' Whether or not these three elements can be made to bear a rational concatenation is an open question. Their function in the play is to lack definition when placed one on top of the other, while remaining, each in itself, as clear as glass; and in this way they create an effect of mystery, a situation comparable to life itself in which, as Beckett said in an interview with Tom Driver, we are aware simultaneously of things that are obscure and things that are clear.

In one of Hamm's solo flourishes we are given what seems to be a reflection of the whole play, but seen in miniature from a long way off, as though at the wrong end of a telescope:

I once knew a madman who thought the end of the world had come. He was a painter—and engraver. I had a great fondness for him. I used to go and see him, in the asylum. I'd take him by the hand and drag him to the window. Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring-fleet! All that loveliness! (*Pause.*) He'd snatch away his hand and go back into his corner. Appalled. All he had seen was ashes. (*Pause.*) He alone had been spared. (*Pause.*) Forgotten. (*Pause.*) It appears the case is . . . was not so . . . so unusual.

In his final solo passage Clov seems to be seeing the same reflection, though with the eyes of the painter-engraver and so of course with all the pictorial elements burned away:

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 . . . I open the door of the cell and go. I am so bowed I only see my feet, if I open my eyes, and between my legs a little trail of black dust. I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit.

This complex web of references, recurrences, reflections might easily turn into a mere tangle. It is given coherence by the play's dominant and almost absurdly simple theme, which is stated in the opening sentence of Clov's prologue: 'Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished.' Two sentences later Clov gives the theme his own thin timbre—'I can't be punished any more'—and five sentences after that Hamm plays it with a kind of hollow, if mellow, grandeur: 'Can there be misery—(*be yawns*)—loftier than mine?' Nagg's laconic opening squeak is "Me pap!" and Nell, perhaps more of an oboe than a flute, having failed to kiss Nagg, says: 'Why this farce, day after day?' Then, discarding almost immediately this bold, practical tone in favour of another, which Beckett characterizes as 'elegiac', she restates the theme: 'Ah yesterday!' Thereafter she alternates between the practical and the elegiac.

The whole play is in effect a mass of variations on the theme, variations of material, variations between solo, duo and ensemble, variations of tone between one character and another and within a single character, variations of pace and mood (comic, tragic, bombastic, maudlin, etc.). There could hardly be an easier play to grasp the drift of—the title alone tells all. If it is, as Beckett says it is, 'more difficult . . . more inhuman than *Godot*,' the difficulty is emotional, aesthetic. *Endgame* can only be enjoyed, understood in the emotional sense, through its presentation, which is as complex, as many-layered and multiple, as its theme is simple and single. And when Beckett uses the word 'inhuman', which might tend to confirm the worst prejudices of those for whom the word 'human' has become as much a moral cliché as 'gentleman' once was, we should perhaps take it in the rather Wildean sense suggested by M Krap in *Eleuthéria:*

MME PIOUK. You used to be natural.
M KRAP. By dint of what artifice!

The four character-instruments of *Endgame* have given much food for thought to Beckett's commentators. Hamm is Hamlet and a ham-actor and the son of Noah, also the ham that comes from a pig and Clov his clove; Hamm is the hammer, Clov the French nail (*clou*), Nagg the German nail (*Nagel*), Nell the English nail. Bearing in mind Beckett's remark in *Proust* that 'name is an example of a barbarous society's primitivism, and as conventionally inadequate as "Homer" or "sea"', we would probably do best to look upon the characters' names as deliberately blurred labels, more succinctly blurred than, for example, Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot,* who is called 'Didi' by his companion and 'Mr. Albert' by Godot's messenger-boy. As to who the characters

may be and what their relationship with each other, no commentator has better expressed the matter than H.R.H. The Duke of Windsor:

Sometimes when my father admonished me for something
that I had done with 'My dear boy, you must
always remember who you are,' I used to think: Now,
who am I? No answer.
Interview with Kenneth Harris

Just as the construction of *Endgame* can be most easily understood by analogy with music, so the characters lend themselves to an analogy with painting. Their special characteristics as well as the relationships between them are like layers of different-coloured pigment superimposed on one another, set off against one another, to produce a rich texture and a balanced composition. Unlike the sections into which the play as a whole is divided, and the sections within sections, all of which are clearly marked off by pauses, the superimposed elements which make up the characters constantly blend into one another, so that it is quite often difficult to tell which characteristic is uppermost, which relationship operating. . . .

In addition to playing Hamm's long-suffering author, Clov has the further misfortune to be on stage with him in the role of straight man and confidant—a situation which he supports only with incessant complaint and a whole repertoire of naked contempt for his principal. And just as this relationship of actor to actor is superimposed on the basic one of author to character, so other relationships are superimposed in their turn: servant and master, son and father, nurse and invalid. Sometimes Hamm and Clov seem to be the survivors of some global disaster. They often speak as if all life beyond their 'refuge' had ended, they are alarmed at the appearance of a rat in Clov's kitchen and a flea in Clov's trousers (though this rat and flea also bring us back to Clov's authorship and Hamm's actorship, with their reference, taken together, to the drinking scene in Goethe's *Faust*). The little boy whom Clov sees through the window near the end of the play is perhaps another, unexpected, survivor, though he may also be ('potential procreator', as Clov calls him) an enemy pawn crawling towards the back line to become a Queen, since Hamm and Clov are apt to look like chesspieces in some lights and the whole affair quite literally an endgame on a chequered board. Then again it could be the love-affair of Hamm and his handkerchief ('old stancher') or of Clov and the contents of his own head, with Hamm representing Clov himself in more imaginative guise and the two windows Clov's eyes which see the 'big world' outside only as a double desolation of earth and water.

To attempt to force the whole play into any one of these 'meanings' would be as meaningless as to try to force a painting into the meaning of one of its many layers of paint. Nevertheless there is one enigma which requires an answer, since it concerns the effect of the play on its audience. Why, when every prospect within the play has been so devastatingly bleak, when, whatever else we cannot say about it, we can undoubtedly say we have witnessed an endgame, something attempting to coil itself to a close and

just failing (as Mr Endon's King just failed to step back into his own square), why do we feel so exhilarated as we leave the theatre?

In his study of Proust, Beckett discusses Habit and writes:

> The pendulum oscillates between these two terms: Suffering—that opens a window on the real and is the main condition of the artistic experience, and Boredom—with its host of top-hatted and hygienic ministers, Boredom that must be considered as the most tolerable because the most durable of human evils.

And he goes on:

> I draw the conclusion of this matter from Proust's treasury of nutshell phrases: 'If there were no such thing as Habit, Life would of necessity appear delicious to all those whom Death would threaten at every moment, that is to say, to all Mankind.'

In *Endgame,* we have participated with Clov in his suffering and Hamm in his boredom, with Clov in his boredom and Hamm very occasionally in his suffering ('no more painkiller'), but we have also, after the curious fashion of a theatrical experience, been all the time in our seats and received with our own senses the unique shape that Beckett has made. Within the play we have experienced Habit, but in a manner the very reverse of habitual. So unhabitual has it been that we have actually confronted the banal certainty of death as though for the first time. No wonder that, if only for a moment, life appears delicious.

Source: John Fletcher and John Spurling, "Son of Oedipus," in *Beckett: The Playwright,* Hill and Wang, 1985, pp. 69-81.

Adaptations

Released by Ambrose Video on DVD in 2002, the *Beckett on Film* DVD set is the first ever cinematic screening of all nineteen of Samuel Beckett's plays. The acclaimed *Beckett on Film* project brings together some of the most distinguished directors and actors working today. Directors include Atom Egoyan, Damien Hirst, Neil Jordan, Conor McPherson, Damien O'Donnell, David Mamet, Anthony Minghella, Karel Reisz, and Patricia Rozema. The exceptional acting talent involved includes Michael Gambon, the late Sir John Gielgud, John Hurt, Jeremy Irons, Julianne Moore, Harold Pinter, Alan Rickman, and Kristen Scott Thomas. Several of the films from the Beckett on Film project have been exhibited at international film festivals around the world including New York, Toronto, and Venice.

Topics for Further Study

Beckett is often considered a forerunner to the absurdist movement in theater. Read Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* and David Mamet's *Glengarry, Glen Ross,* and write an essay on how you think their writing has been influenced by Samuel Beckett.

Nagg and Nell, Hamm's parents, are in ashbins throughout the play. What comment does this make on society and our ideas and treatment of the elderly?

Beckett's plays are filled with rituals. What rituals does Clov perform for Hamm, and what does this say about the master-servant relationship they are in?

Endgame contains several elements of comedy. How do you feel these elements work in regard to the overall tone of the play? Why does Beckett make use of comedy in this manner? What is Beckett saying about life and the nature of comedy?

Compare and Contrast

1950s: The United States and the Soviet Union are split over Middle East loyalties and support. Fear of a nuclear war increases.

Today: The United States and England engage in war with Iraq. The United States wages war on terrorism throughout the world. North Korea possesses nuclear weapons, and the potential for nuclear war again seems all too possible.

1950s: Russian scientists launch Sputnik into orbit, initiating the space race between the United States and Russia.

Today: Beginning in the 1990s, Russian cosmonauts worked together with American astronauts on the space station Mir. The United States and Russia continue to have cooperative working efforts in space exploration and research.

1950s: Eugene O'Neill is posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize in drama for *Long Day's Journey into Night.*

Today: *Topdog/Underdog* by Suzan Lori Parks wins the Pulitzer Prize for drama.

1950s: Albert Camus receives the Nobel Prize for literature "for his important literary production, which with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problems of the human conscience in our times."

Today: Imre Kertsz (Hungary) receives the Nobel Prize for literature "for writing that upholds the fragile experience of the individual against the barbaric arbitrariness of history."

What Do I Read Next?

Waiting for Godot (1953) is Samuel Beckett's best-known play about two tramps waiting for the elusive Godot.

The Unnamable (1953) is the third novel of Beckett's trilogy, including *Molloy* (1951) and *Malone Dies* (1951). All three novels, which were originally written in French, are interior monologues containing flashes of dark humor.

Krapp's Last Tape (1958) is another of Beckett's stage plays. It consists of a monologue in which the aged Krapp attempts to recapture the intensity of days long passed by listening to recordings of his younger self.

Eugène Ionseco's play *The Chairs* (1958) is about a man who had opportunities to lead a great life but led a simple life with his wife instead. After many years, he decides to tell society his secret. The only characters in the play are the old man, the woman, and the person the old man hires to tell the world his secret. This play is a staple work of the theater of the absurd.

David Mamet's *Glengarry Glenn Ross* (1983) is an excellent example of the influence Beckett has had on the craft of writing plays. Mamet was highly influenced by Harold Pinter, to whom *Glengarry Glenn Ross* is dedicated, and Pinter was highly influenced by Beckett.

Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1958) follows Stanley, an out-of-work pianist in a seaside boarding house. Stanley is mysteriously threatened and taken over by two intruders, who present him with a bizarre indictment of unexplained crimes.

Anthony Cronin's *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (1997) is an ambitious and well-written biography of Samuel Beckett the writer, artist, and person.

Further Study

Abbott, H. Porter, *The Fiction of Samuel Beckett: Form and Effect,* University of California Press, 1973.

This book contains chapters on Beckett's early short fiction and the relationship between his stories and novels.

Bair, Deidre, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.

This biography about the reclusive Samuel Beckett is broad in scope and understandably flawed.

Ben Zvi, Linda, *Samuel Beckett,* Twayne Publishers, 1986.

Because of the large scope of Beckett's writings, this study of Beckett's complete works has necessitated a brief coverage of each work.

Bloom, Harold, ed., *Samuel Beckett's "Endgame,"* Modern Critical Interpretations series, Chelsea House Publishers, 1988.

Bloom brings together a representative selection of what many consider to be the best eight critical interpretations of the play.

Coe, Richard, *Samuel Beckett,* Grove Press, 1964.

Coe's study of Beckett focuses on his philosophical background.

Cohn, Ruby, *Back to Beckett,* Princeton University Press, 1973.

Cohn presents a detailed study of Beckett's fiction and drama.

Zurbrugg, Nicholas, "*Ill Seen Ill Said* and the Sense of an Ending," in *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company,* edited by James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur, Macmillan Press, 1987.

Zurbrugg asserts that *Ill Seen Ill Said* is not so much a story as a poetic evocation of those rituals by which the living and the dead within Beckett's fiction endlessly, and quite ineffectively, strive to attain a definitive "sense of an ending."

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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