

The Deformed Image of Man in Beckett's *Endgame*

Key words: Samuel Beckett, Endgame, Deformity, Disability, Illness, Absurd, Existentialism, Suffering.

Ahmed W. Hachim, M.A

Mushtaq A. Mohammed, M.A

Department of English, College of Arts, Al-Iraqia University

Abstract

As an influential Irish playwright in twentieth century and a Nobel Prize winner for literature in 1969, Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) is known by his association with "The Theatre of the Absurd" which was initially coined by Martin Esselin's *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961) in which alienation, suffering and meaninglessness of life were stressed on. In *Endgame*, originally written in French *Fin De Partie* (1957), Beckett presents a blind, disabled, and ill man whose goal in life is disappeared. Life to that decayed and suffering man is meaningless, aimless, shapeless, and senseless. The aim of this paper is to focus on such an image, to explore the reasons behind, and to prove whether it is a real image of modern man or a reflection to psychological, sociological, or even cultural issues.

صورة المرء المشوهة في مسرحية الخطوة الاخيرة لـ صمويل بيكيت
الكلمات الرئيسية: صمويل بيكيت، مسرحية الخطوة الاخيرة، التشوه، الاعاقة،
المرض، العبث، الوجودية، المعاناة

م.م. أحمد ويس حاجم
م.م. مشتاق عبد الحليم محمد
قسم اللغة الانكليزية ، كلية الآداب ، الجامعة العراقية

المُلخَص

كونه احد المسرحيين الايرلنديين المؤثرين في القرن العشرين والحائز على جائزة نوبل في الادب لعام ١٩٦٩ عُرف صمويل بيكيت (١٩٠٦-١٩٨٩) بانتمائه لمسرح العبث الذي ذكر للمرة الاولى من قبل مارتن ايسلين في كتابه مسرح العبث (١٩٦١) ، حيث شدد هذا الكتاب على العزلة والمعاناة واللامعنى في الحياة. يقدم بيكيت في مسرحية الخطوة الاخيرة التي كتبت باللغة الفرنسية اصلاً المرء الاعمى والمعاق والمريض الذي لا يملك هدفاً في حياته. ان الحياة بالنسبة لهذا المرء المعاني والمتعفن ليست سوى بلا معنى وبلا هدف وبلا شكل وبلا احساس. ان الهدف من وراء هذا البحث هو التأكيد على هكذا صورة ولاستكشاف الاهداف من ورائها ولإثبات حقيقة

هذه الصورة من عدمها ، سواء أ كانت صورة حقيقية للمرء الحديث أم انعكاس لأمر نفسية او اجتماعية او حضارية.

Even though the deformed image could be found throughout English literature, especially in drama, it was profoundly introduced after the World War II (1939-1945) in a different and controversial way. At the same time, there were some literary movements and concepts that are expressed as the war repercussions. Among these concepts was “The Theatre of the Absurd” which is adopted in Samuel Beckett’s oeuvre, particularly in *Endgame*. In order to get a distinct idea about Beckett’s presentation to the deformed image of man in that play, it is essential to discern the definition and principles of “The Theatre of the Absurd” so that the whole topic can be clarified more.

As a literary term, “The Theatre of the Absurd,” can be found and applied to “a number of works in drama and prose fiction which have in common the view that human condition is essentially absurd, and that this condition can be adequately represented only in works of literature that are themselves absurd.”¹ The term is a part of a movement emerged in France after the horrors of World War II. It was a rebellion against specific beliefs and values which constitute writers’ denunciation and refusal in traditional culture and literature. It is believed that this concept included “the assumptions that human beings are fairly rational creatures” who live in an intelligible and indifferent universe. It is also assumed “that they are part of an ordered social structure, and that they may be capable of heroism and dignity even in defeat.”²

It is worth mentioning that the term “The Theatre of the Absurd” is derived from the existential philosophy in the forties, later on it is known as Existentialism.³ As founders of existential philosophy, the literary French thinkers and writers, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Albert

Camus (1913-1960) picture man as an isolated and cast in an alien universe; conceive human world as possessing no truth, value, and meaning; regard human life as a fruitless search for purpose and significance and both anguished and absurd.⁴

Correspondingly, in his *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) Albert Camus (1913-1960) added that man feels unfamiliar to a world full of absurdity due to various reasons:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity.⁵

Man really feels stranger, outsider, and interloper because the world is difficult to be understood in the midst of chaotic and unreligious society. Loss and suffering are predominant to a man without moral principles, religious convictions, and existential beliefs. Ultimately, all these issues make the universe aimless, purposeless, meaningless, and as a result absurd.

Not only did Camus express his opinion about absurdity, but also Eugène Ionesco (1909-1994), a well-known Romanian playwright who wrote mostly in French, discerned the term as follows: “Absurd that which is devoid of purpose. . . . Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless.”⁶ Hence, Ionesco elucidates that whenever man turns away from religion, metaphysics, and transcendence, s/he feels lost and alienated.

The most prominent and controversial writer in this respect was Samuel Beckett. Both in his plays and novels, Beckett projects irrationalism, helplessness, disability, illness, deformity, and absurdity of life in unique dramatic forms that reject realistic settings, logical reasoning, evolving plots, and human or inhuman characters—elements of absurd plays according to Essilin. For instance, Beckett structures *Endgame* in a distinctive way so that his spectators are unsure when Hamm, the major character, performs himself and when he assumes a role. Despite the fact that Hamm is a powerful and dynamic theatrical presence, the persistent speculation and doubt about the authenticity of his performance diminishes the sense of his presence as a human image.

Beckett has, of course, a philosophy of life like other existentialist and absurdist philosophers and writers, but it is an intuition rather than a systematic set of beliefs. In this sense, it is argued that

The absurdist playwrights believe that our existence is absurd because we are born without asking to be born, we die without seeking death, we live between birth and death trapped within our body and our reason, unable to conceive of a time in which we were not, or a time in which we will not be—for nothingness is very much like the concept of infinity: something we perceive only in so far as we cannot experience it.⁷

Indeed, most of the time one may notice the image of modern man reflected in the above-mentioned words for s/he is devoid of principles and morals. Religion, responsibility, peace, tranquillity, and purpose are no more existent in a society that has no estimation to man, time, or even place.

Deformity, closely related to or directly emerged from the “Theatre of the Absurd,” is defined as “a condition in which a part of the body is not the normal shape because of injury, illness, or because it has grown

wrongly.”⁸ Deformity is employed by Beckett in general sense to include disability, blindness, and illness. Beckett skilfully uses a unique setting to symbolically express these concepts. The image of man in *Endgame* relies upon “the representational power of deformity and disability to expose the bodily life repressed within classicism” and it seizes upon “disability power to disrupt and variegate the visual encounter with unblemished bodies.”⁹

Before delving into the play analysis, it is crucial to look at the meaning of its title. As a term used in chess, an endgame describes the inevitable outcome in the game in which one player is so sure of his winning after a certain number of moves. Although no real game of chess is presented in the play—this is due to their disability in a way or another—Beckett uses endgame as an impressive metaphor for life. Regardless of the moves one makes, the end is inevitable from the very beginning. Likewise, life, for the characters in *Endgame*, has ended inevitably. Another imagery taken from chess is concerned with the characters in the play. Nagg and Nell (Hamm’s legless parents) are just like the rooks, while in comparison with Hamm (the disabled and blind protagonist) and Clov (Hamm’s lame servant) are just like the king and the pawn in chess, Hamm is the most powerful, but the most vulnerable piece on the board because of his disability and blindness. Additionally, words like “Me . . . to play,”¹⁰ first mentioned by Hamm, indicate the players’ turn to move. Likewise, Clov, Nag, and Nell can only move according to Hamm’s orders.

Endgame opens with a description to a gloomy, sad, and somehow dark and dank setting. Beckett aims at showing a place devoid of life, or appearances of death. The play begins with some phrases: “Bare interior. Grey Light”(E,1), they symbolically refer to death for there is no signs of

life, particularly with the colour grey being a reference to old age, ashes, and finally death. Other phrases like “two small windows, curtains drawn” (*E*,1), give a sense of darkness, imprisonment, and illness. Beckett adds, “Hanging near door, its face to wall, a picture. Front left, touching each other, covered with an old sheet, two ashbins” (*E*,1). With no view and concealed with an old sheet, the hidden picture is an expression of deformity. Hamm’ parents dwell in the ashbins in which as it apparent nothing useful to be found.

Intentionally, Beckett has made the main room rather cold—an anti-Eden—where the couple, Hamm and Glov, has an argument. When Hamm whistles for Clov at the beginning of the play, he greets his servant with contempt: “You pollute the air!” (*E*, 3). Then, he asks: “Get me ready, I’m going to bed.” (*E*, 3). But Glov answers: “I’ve just got you up” (*E*, 3). In this manner, “the set and the ensuing dialogues give the viewer an entrée into the characters’ inner lives, lavishing special attention also on the fraught relationship” between the couple.¹¹

Not only does the single room with its small and high windows reflect passivity, but also all four characters reflect deformity and disability: “Center, in an armchair on castors, covered with an old sheet, Hamm. Motionless by the door, his eyes fixed on Hamm, Clov. Very red face” (*E*,1). With a “brief laugh” and “stiff, staggering walk” (*E*,1), Clov goes backwards and forwards in the room to check through the windows about what is outside. He then checks out the ashbins, as well as Hamm who is sitting on an armchair. Hamm is described accurately: “In a dressing-gown, a stiff toque on his head, a large blood-stained handkerchief over his face, a whistle hanging from his neck, a rug over his knees, thick socks on his feet, Hamm seems to be asleep” (*E*,1). All these descriptive issues indicate that Hamm is surrounded by deathly

atmosphere. Hamm's blindness and immobility, and Glov's re-enact and lameness reflect their tormented conditions.¹²

Glov, similarly, proclaims: "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished." Then he continues, "I can't be punished any more" (*E*, 2). The general atmosphere of immobility and stiffness signifies the deterioration of nature around. Besides, the repetition of the word "finished" is a reference to the apocalyptic vision runs throughout the play.¹³ In turn, Hamm probes: "Can there be misery---(*he yawns*)--- loftier than mine? No doubt. Formerly. But now?" (*E*, 3). Expressing suffering, Hamm represents the image of hollowed men and to prove that emptiness does exist physically and spiritually through the image of the waste land. Altogether, the disabled figures may be taken as "emblematic variants of infertility," and "as residual signifiers of ritual" for they not only linked to "natural infertility but also to emotional and spiritual sterility."¹⁴

As a commentator on the absurdity of life, Hamm accepts this as true and being a big and great is no matter for him. He says, "the bigger a man is the fuller he is. . . . And the emptier" (*E*, 2). The reference here is to knowledge and religion rather than to size and apparent greatness. Nonetheless, disability prevents Hamm from doing anything except exchanging conversation with Glov to express his ill condition:

HAMM: God, I'm tired, I'd be better off in bed. . . . Get me ready, I'm going to bed.

CLOV: I've just got you up.

HAMM: And what of it?

CLOV: I can't be getting you up and putting you to bed every five minutes, I have things to do.

(Pause.)

HAMM: Did you ever see my eyes?

CLOV: No.

HAMM: Did you never have the curiosity, while I was sleeping, to take off my glasses and look at my eyes?

CLOV: Pulling back the lids?

(Pause.)

No.

HAMM: One of these days I'll show them to you.

(Pause.)

It seems they've gone all white.

(Pause.) (*E*, 2).

In spite of being disable and sightless, Hamm is a far-sighted and thoughtful man. He asks Glov to inspect about the reasons of the former's blindness. Although all characters in *Endgame* are impaired and disabled and their inactivity and passivity are barefaced and cannot be ignored, they are read and analysed as clever and leading. Therefore, it is believed that Beckett employed

[T]he disabled, maimed, and the decaying body as a multiple referent for a variety of ideas that seem to have been at least partially triggered by encounters with others and his own personal experience of pain and temporary disability.¹⁵

In other words, Beckett put emphasis on such a use to draw attention to the comedic side of his disabled characters, on one hand, and to deflect attention from pain, shame and suffering caused by physical impairments.

Another conversation between Hamm and Glov clarifies the condition of illness. Such a condition is supposed to lead to death, a spiritual but not physical:

CLOV: Have you bled?

HAMM: Less.

(Pause.)

Is it not time for my pain-killer?

CLOV: No.
(Pause.)
HAMM: How are your eyes?
CLOV: Bad.
HAMM: How are your legs?
CLOV: Bad.
HAMM: But you can move.
CLOV: Yes.
HAMM (violently): Then move!
Where are you?
CLOV: Here.
HAMM: Come back!
Where are you?
CLOV: Here.
HAMM: Why don't you kill me? (*E*, 5-6).

It appears that there is a sympathetic cooperation from a lame slave to his disabled master. What makes Glov feel pity is Hamm's ill and inactive condition, Glov feels sorry for Hamm—despite the latter's authority—because he thinks that he is in a better condition than his master. Almost everybody and every body in *Endgame* is afflicted, at least with discomfort. Additionally, some of the bodies call attention to their handicaps, and yet this rarely takes the form of a plea for sympathy. Rather, Beckett exploits “corporeal affliction to dramatic ends, and he does so in two main modes: familiar bodies that resembles our own and fragmented bodies that are nevertheless sentient.”¹⁶

Being blind, ill, and disabled, Hamm evokes no pity and does not seek it in a way or another. Yet, disability makes all characters vulnerable; “it is presented as a sign of social dependency and physical inadequacy. In this way, physical disability reveals social anxieties about power, control, and self-worth; like the figure of the “cripple,” “freak,” and “invalid” in most literature. . . .”¹⁷

Nagg, Hamm's father who was in the ashbin—a sign for his disability and impotence—tried to converse with his son, but the latter called him by offensive words: “Accursed progenitor!” and “Accursed fornicator!” (*E*, 7) for he thinks that his father is the source behind his existence in this world. After that Glov pushed Nagg to his ashbin and is asked by Hamm to sit upon it. Here emerges the following conversation:

GLOV: I can't sit.

HAMM: True. And I can't stand.

GLOV: So it is.

HAMM: Every man his specialty. (*E*, 8)

Conscious of his and his slave's impairment and deficiency, Hamm really realizes that he is unable to change his position and condition.

Expertly, Beckett uses theatre to explicitly accentuate the influence of such a condition on the audience. He wishes to convey his message to the nondisabled through impaired, ill, and blind individuals. Theatrically speaking, as one of the prominent playwrights in the disability theatre, Beckett “challenges the culturally constructed images and meanings ascribed to disability by nondisabled people”:

The stage confronts viewers with a physical reality, asking them both to stare at the bodies on display and to see them as individuals, not objects. Through the proximity of the actors and the spontaneity of performance, audiences feel a sense of intimacy and community with those on stage. This moment—energized and made possible by live performance—can be a powerful tool for undermining stereotypes and misconceptions. When the disabled, suffering, or freakish body appears on stage, it raises certain questions (How did this happen? Is this condition permanent? Can this happen to me? Is the actor really disabled?) that challenge the audience's assumptions about and interpretations of this body.¹⁸

Hamm is not only conscious of his own disability, but also of Glov's. Hamm cares about Glov's condition because he cannot survive without his assistance. So, Hamm inquires about Glov's feeling towards his eyes and legs, then he gets the answer, "Bad." Hamm predictably proclaimed: "One day you'll be blind like me. You'll be sitting here, a speck in the void, in the dark, forever, like me." (*E*, 26). Pessimistically, Hamm asserts that Glov will become like him in the future. Focusing on blindness and injured legs in his works, Beckett accentuates "the inadequacy of our corporeal equipment for human life on this planet."¹⁹

Hamm shows his profound expectations to Glov's future and starts to impose his own pessimistic vision by saying:

One day you'll say to yourself, I'm tired, I'll sit down, and you'll go and sit down. Then you'll say, I'm hungry, I'll get up and get something to eat. But you won't get up. You'll say, I shouldn't have sat down, but since I have I'll sit on a little longer, then I'll get up and get something to eat. But you won't get up and you won't get anything to eat. (*E*, 26).

All the references in the above extract are about Glov's future disability, inactivity, and idleness. These are predicted signs from an experienced disable. He really felt every word uttered and warned his own follower to be like him although the latter had no ability to sit down because of illness.

More importantly, there is a clear reference to hunger and its repercussions throughout the play and particularly in the above lines. Impoverished conditions because of famine are illustrated in Beckett's concern with specific ailments: hunger, blindness, disease, scurvy or black leg, and a suffering body longing for recovery. It is also suggested that Beckett presents such ailments projected by victims of famine. By mentioning hunger, Beckett is "writing of a terrorized disempowerment

as close as possible to the experience of traumatized victims without presuming to be identical with it.”²⁰

Through his advice to Glov, Hamm shows no remorse or shame for he had a double role: a son with Nagg and a father-figure with Glov. It appears that each of “the males has become emasculated through disease and bodily disintegration. . . .”²¹ Hamm goes on describing the bitter feeling of blindness in which Glov will find himself:

You’ll look at the wall a while, then you’ll say, I’ll close my eyes, perhaps have a little sleep, after that I’ll feel better, and you’ll close them. And when you open them again there’ll be no wall any more. . . . Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn’t fill it, and there you’ll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe. . . . (*E*, 26)

Considerably, Hamm as Beckett’s spokesman wishes to reaffirm that disability, blindness, and deformity result in emptiness and ultimately to death.

Beckett repeats the idea of being victimized through yielding to disability, so he tries to evoke people’s or readers’ pity and sympathy. Hamm continues saying: “one day you’ll know what it is, you’ll be like me, except that you won’t have anyone with you, because you won’t have had pity on anyone and because there won’t be anyone left to have pity on you . . .” (*E*, 27). Disability theatre is emphasized again. Such an emphasis challenges people’s cultural assumptions imposed on disability, on one hand, and the readers’ or spectators’ superior look at bodily difference, on the other. Consequently, the spectators identify themselves “with the experiences of those on stage, to recognize disability as a social construct, and to acknowledge [their] own role in this phenomenon.”²²

Glov’s response to Hamm’s prediction is not surprising. But he tries to correct some information and reassert others. Glov does not get

Hamm's connoted ideas which suggest that death is the ultimate stage to the able and the disable alike, and alienation is the eventual condition to such people too. Glov unknowingly continues:

CLOV: It's not certain. (Pause.)

And there's one thing you forgot.

HAMM: Ah?

CLOV: I can't sit down.

HAMM (impatiently):

Well you'll lie down then, what the hell! Or you'll come to a standstill, simply stop and stand still, the way you are now. One day you'll say, I'm tired, I'll stop. What does the attitude matter?

(Pause.) (*E*, 27)

It might also be added that these lines show the nature of the relationship between the poor and the wealthy, the strong and the weak, though the concepts of strength and weakness are relative in this context.

It can also be inferred that both characters depend on each other bounded in a multifaceted relationship. Each one completes the other in such a relationship. Despite the fact that Hamm is shown in an unmistakable image of a wealthy landlord, he does not exemplify a wicked landlord as a blind and wheelchair-bound man. Almost all the time in the play Hamm was thoughtful, assertive and dominant, yet, he was completely helpless physically. Hamm in a chronicle about famine, disability, and death presented different images of man, whether of himself or in general:

Hamm's chronicle provides an image of a man "crawling towards" him on "Christmas Eve" (*E*, 42) begging for food for his "little boy" (*E*, 43). In between his off-handed comments on the winter weather, Hamm establishes that he is concerned about his presentation—the actual creation—of his story and compliments himself in a nice way or derides himself, "A bit feeble" (*E*, 43). In fact, the story of a famished land is not Hamm's concern at all.²³

Hamm's and Glov's primary co-dependency lies predominantly in the fact that latter cannot sit while the former cannot walk. Hamm's paralysis is emphasized here too. Readers and spectators are immediately struck by the presence of a pretentious, attractive, brilliant, authoritative and somehow cruel personality in his double faced relationship as a son within his family and a father or master with his own servant. These are signs of barely suppressed paranoia which are resulted in a fearful sense of being trapped and recurrently silent.²⁴

In the light of what is mentioned above, traces of a child abuse, effect of poverty or famine, and an anger over impotence could be found in Hamm's image as a man. These difficult situations are expressed by emotions and feelings defined in the social metaphor of the mask. A common device used by various and notable playwrights to serve different purposes socially, culturally, and politically. "All transformations," behind the mask, "are invested with something at once of profound mystery and of the shameful, since anything that is so modified as to become 'something else' while still remaining the thing that it was, must inevitably be productive of ambiguity and equivocation."²⁵ Putting a mask or a handkerchief on one's face, like Hamm, is to help "what-one-is to become what-one-would-like-to-be," and the mask is "simply as a face, comes to express the solar and energetic aspects of the life-process."²⁶

Real contradictory situations can be reflected through these meanings in which a modern man passes. In case of Hamm—psychologically devastated and philosophically exhausted—he is never without his mask. Similarly, a modern man always wear various social masks to overcome, alienation, despair and disappointment caused by

disability, blindness, illness, and deformity. In such a situation, Hamm is obliged to confess to Glov that he depends on him because of his disability; yet, Glov lacks many potentials:

HAMM: I can't leave you.

CLOV: I know. And you can't follow me. (Pause.)

HAMM: If you leave me how shall I know?

CLOV (briskly): Well you simply whistle me and if I don't come running it means I've left you. (Pause.)

HAMM: You won't come and kiss me goodbye?

CLOV: Oh I shouldn't think so. (Pause.)

HAMM: But you might be merely dead in your kitchen.

CLOV: The result would be the same.

HAMM: Yes, but how would I know, if you were merely dead in your kitchen?

CLOV: Well... sooner or later I'd start to stink.

HAMM: You stink already. The whole place stinks of corpses. . . .

CLOV: The pains in my legs! It's unbelievable! Soon I won't be able to think any more. (E, 32)

Both of them need help and support, but they have no one else except themselves. For Hamm, love and care are essential in this case because he is deprived from them as a son or at least he feels so. That is why he asks Glov for a farewell. Although the whole matter seems to be concerned with psychology, it has its physical aspects too. This is also stressed by Hamm who believes that the whole place signifies death.

Such a situation leads to death for both, however, Glov cares a little about it for he is already dead because of his physical disability and intellectual inability. Hence, Glov believes that his illness or pain in his legs is an obstacle to his thinking. Similarly, both of them seek sympathy, love, and care, but they cannot be found except in each one to another. Hamm connects death with darkness and wonders about someone's

attention, sympathy, and pity: “Of darkness! And me? Did anyone ever have pity on me?” (E, 55)

Problems of adjustment to a largely indifferent world are also apparent in Hamm’s and Clov’s worlds:

On a material plane, the disabled individual . . . is less able to adapt to the demands of his environment: he has reduced power to insulate himself from the assaults of an essentially hostile milieu. However, the disadvantage he experiences is likely to differ in relation to nature of the society in which he finds himself.²⁷

Alienated and depressed, the disabled believe that they in a constant battle with both the environment and society. In this context, physical disability including paralysis and blindness is clearly regarded as a recurrent idea that shows oppression, victimization, and entrapment.

In *Endgame* the confined power of human beings, and a general sense of entrapment prevail. This is shown clearly in the physical disabilities of all four characters. In other words, they are not only trapped in something spatial but also temporal. Clov, for instance, has no ability to leave his master while Hamm has an obsession about finding the dead centre of the room. One may connect these references to a game of chess mentioned in the title. “The action,” hence, “seems leached of human will, the characters here are chess-pieces being moved by forces outside their control.”²⁸ In this respect,

CLOV: Do this, do that, and I do it. I never refuse. Why?

HAMM: You’re not able to.

CLOV: Soon I won’t do it any more.

HAMM: You won’t be able to any more. (E, 35–6)

Each of the four characters represents an image that is different from the other. According to various interpretations—particularly that is

connected with a game of chess—Hamm is the king, Clov is the knight, and both Nagg and Nell are pawns. Yet, they have the same figure of the disabled, impotent, blind, sufferer, and victim. In this way, each one of them becomes a combination of public and private faces. Furthermore, as a king—authoritative and vulnerable—Hamm is intended through the bloody handkerchief and dark glasses covering his face to “project the image of a hero, a wounded warrior or a martyr—the blood representing scars earned on the mythic battlefield. Even his toque looks like a kind of crown; and the rug over his knees and wheelchair in which he sits throughout the play curiously resemble a mantle and a throne.”²⁹

Indeed, such an image is cleverly manipulated by Hamm to further his ambition on one hand, and to impose his domination over his caregiver and slave and his parents on the other hand. Hamm’s ambitious and dominating qualities are resulted from the paralytic, hypnotic, and entropic state which are all thought to be a product of post war crises, hysteria, and repressed anger or impotence. Hamm never put off his mask to reveal the underlying turmoil, or even the reasons behind his blindness and paralysis. Hamm’s masks are images that seem to cover different personalities. Thus, Hamm finds that the mask is the only medium which makes life bearable:

A man now merely capable yet still charismatic, Hamm is the ghost of his former self. His flighty behavior, fantastic apparel and exaggerated gestures shade in the dark edges of feeling like he’s living as a man apart—a status that might otherwise force him to admit that he is nothing but a caricature of the wounded romantic.³⁰

Hamm’s tormented relationship with his parents becomes a metaphor for his body and psyche physically and emotionally. He is forced to sit in his chair throughout the play and to wear dark glasses. Hamm’s paralysis

seems to mean more than the obvious; especially when it has been learned that both parents have no legs at all and live in dustbins.³¹

The function of seeing, and not seeing, in the work of Beckett is emphasized. To dramatize the rhythm of looking as one that “oscillates between seeing and blindness, between figuration and abstraction, between the void at the center of sight and the contour of the slender ridge that brooks it.”³² Psychologically, Hamm’s soliloquies are expressive ponderings about the pleasures of clouded vision. The deformed image resulted from the afflicted bodies and blindness offers an insightful interpretation of social ills which include: indifference to others, domestic violence, and social, cultural, and political circumstances. They are intensified in a way that provoke both the spectators’ and readers’ deepest psychological needs and vulnerabilities unconsciously.³³

The deformed image incarnated in *Endgame* is so expressive of many internal and external factors; however, one should not forget the influence of the close relationship between Hamm and Clov in expressing such an image. In an important conversation between Hamm and Clov, one can notice that Clov decides to leave Hamm, but the latter for the first time refuses for the sake of love and care:

CLOV: I’ll leave you. (He goes towards door.)

HAMM: Before you go... (Clov halts near door.) ...say something.

CLOV: There is nothing to say.

HAMM: A few words... to ponder... in my heart.

CLOV: Your heart!

HAMM: Yes. (Pause. Forcibly.) Yes! (Pause.)

CLOV (despairingly): Ah...!

HAMM: Something... from your heart.

CLOV: My heart!

HAMM: A few words... from your heart. (Pause.) (*E*, 56)

Hamm is so much in need for Clov's love and care which he lacks in his own relationship with his parents. Furthermore, being disable and blind, Hamm cannot give up his loyal servant and friend. It is also a sign for relying on each other in difficult situations, not to mention Hamm's necessary needs to be met by Clov who agrees, saying:

How easy it is. They said to me, That's friendship, yes, yes, no question, you've found it. They said to me, Here's the place, stop, raise your head and look at all that beauty. That order! They said to me, Come now, you're not a brute beast, think upon these things and you'll see how all becomes clear. And simple! They said to me, What skilled attention they get, all these dying of their wounds. (*E*, 57)

Indeed, Clov's emphasis is not only upon friendship, but upon its positive consequences; through it one can feel beauty, order, and care. It is stressed that friendship makes them forget their deformities concerning Clov's inability to sit and to walk perfectly. So, he is convinced that he is not regarded as "a brute beast . . . dying of . . . wounds" (*E*, 65). Definitely, this is how some people see the image of the disabled.

In addition, "the human body seems to be under an inexplicable attack, its form imprisoned, its parts dismembered. Just as the human form in *Endgame* is imprisoned by immobility and blindness, repetition and sterility."³⁴ Clov makes a connection between disability and suffering and punishment. He particularly claims—addressing himself with Hamm's attentive listening—that "you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them [people] to weary of punishing you. . . . [Y]ou must be better than that if you want them to let you go" (*E*, 57). Clov continues philosophizing about his own future condition, addressing Hamm: "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" (*E*, 57).

In the last conversation between Hamm and Clov, one may notice a clear similarity with the one at the beginning of the play. In a way or another, Beckett reemphasizes the recycling existence through their disintegrated relationship. Additionally, the reference to the title is repeated too. Hamm proceeds, addressing Clov who is about to leave:

HAMM: It's we are obliged to each other.
(Pause. Clov goes towards door.)
One thing more.
(Clov halts.)
A last favor.
(Exit Clov.)
Cover me with the sheet.
(Long pause.)
No? Good.
(Pause.)
Me to play.
(Pause. Warily.)
Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and have done with losing.
(Pause. More animated.)
Let me see.
(Pause.)
Ah yes!
(He tries to move the chair, using the gaff as before. Enter Clov, dressed for the road. Panama hat, tweed coat, raincoat over his arm, umbrella, bag. He halts by the door and stands there, impassive and motionless, his eyes fixed on Hamm, till the end. Hamm gives up:)
Good.
(Pause.) (*E*, 57-58)

In this long expressive conversation, Hamm is noticed to be in his initial physical position when he is first introduced on stage. He takes up his mask and covers his face with it. It is believed that "Beckett addresses

head-on the problems of men in troubled partnerships.” There would be no reference to transcendence as a last resort; yet, “[t]he ending tableau of violence becomes a human inquisition into dreams, reality, guilt, augury and terror.”³⁵ Indeed, life is just like a vicious circle. It ends where it began.

Moreover, Beckett associates the dysfunctional relationship between Hamm and Clov with their disability to do anything. In Hamm’s case, he tries to move his chair, but in vain. Clov is unable to leave Hamm; however, he is dressed for travel. *Endgame* not only ends with motionless, disabled, ill, aimless, senseless, deformed and dead images, but also with pessimistic view which can be noticed through inability to do something improving the whole circumstances.

For all the promises at the end of the play, and for all the evident physical decay, Hamm ends up with the handkerchief over his face the same way he starts and Clov seems unable to leave the stage. Hamm also starts criticizing Clov, but ironically he is criticizing himself and man in general, by saying: “He doesn’t realize, all he knows is hunger, and cold, and death to crown it all. But you! You ought to know what the earth is like, nowadays. Oh I put him before his responsibilities!” (*E*, 67) He even assures that nothing is to be changed, rather, it remains as it is, particularly with the reference to word “remain” or the situation itself in which he “remains motionless” (*E*, 68).

In conclusion, Beckett proves to be one of the most influential and controversial playwrights in English literature during the twentieth century. Based on both the Theatre of the Absurd and Existentialism, he creates and delineates characters whose existence is absurd, life is meaningless, and time is recycled. In addition, Beckett’s characters, especially in *Endgame*, are disable, blind, lame, paralyzed, impotent, and

deformed. As a result, their bodies are decayed, disintegrated and mutilated. Their apparent physical deformities are mere reflections to their spiritual, moral, and religious ones. In other words, Beckett emphasises that the deterioration of the human body is in accord with the degradation of beliefs in various perspectives.

Characters' deformed images also include the disabled, the blind, the ill, and king, servant, the submissive, and the domineering. Indeed, these images are very contradictory by themselves; however, they could be complementary simultaneously. Apparently, the reasons which lead to form deformed images certainly include war, plague, and hunger, to name few. But, Beckett seems to be not so interested in clarifying or naming them. Or he wishes to heighten suspense while watching and/or reading his play.

In *Endgame*, almost everything outside the room—the open sea and bare land—and inside—the four characters with their ill, blind, disable, impotent, and deformed images—is dying. The smell of rotting and decaying fills both the outside and inside worlds. Beckett paints a picture of desolation, lovelessness, boredom, deformity, illness, disability and sorrow. Hence, no hope, no life, and no chance are left. In this respect, a similarity between the play and the game is raised for both come to an end leaving the spectator or the reader with an image of the ineffectiveness of any human action and a deformity of human beings spiritually.

Beckett uses paralysis, deformity, illness, and confinement as governing and unifying devices through which he can expose what lay inside each character. Disability and paralysis are employed to ensure the characters' vulnerability to examination and sympathy. The characters are so restrained or bound by authority which consistently make them

engaged their self-conscious obsessions. Such obsessions are palpable in both the character's dialogues—Hamm's soliloquys—and their physical limitation. Their limited and deformed physicality make them as fragments of beings with false consciousness.

Despite the fact that the deformed image prevailed after the second World War due to political, social, and cultural reasons, it was emerged according to Beckett as a reaction to the religious and moral degeneration and deterioration which surrounds the modern man. It is also a clear mirror to the emptiness from inside rather than a mere image of sympathy and pity. The deformed image is dexterously employed by Beckett to be regarded as a source of suffering and sadness for the characters themselves as well as of reflection, sympathy, and fun for the spectators simultaneously.

Notes

¹M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 9th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), 1.

²Ibid.

³ The term “Existentialism” refers to a philosophical and literary movement emerged in the mid-twentieth century. It emphasizes that man is completely free to determine his own fate. In fact, the actions he chooses determine his existence. Existentialists believe that the individual has nothing to do with her/his conditions in which God created. To them, man is part of a great human community with common characteristics. He is an individual; he is unique and independent. His destiny is his own, his choices are his own to make, and he should make the choices that are right for him. <http://www.storybites.com/literary-terms/existentialism-in-literature.php> [accessed on March 3rd 2015].

⁴Abrams, 1.

⁵ Quoted in Martin Esslin, *The Theatre Of The Absurd* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1961), 23.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Manminder Singh Anand, “Unravelling The Myth of Absurd: A Study of the Absurdist Creed,” Vol. 02 Issue 02 International Journal of Research. Patiala: Punjabi University Neighbourhood Campus, (February 2015) <http://internationaljournalofresearch.org/>[accessed on March 25th 2015].

⁸A S Hornby, Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English, 8th ed. CD-ROM (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 399.

⁹Quoted in Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 21.

¹⁰Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 2. All subsequent quotations cited in the text are from this edition, with the abbreviation *E* and the page number(s).

¹¹Mary F. Catanzaro, "Masking and the Social Construct of the Body in Beckett's *Endgame*," in *Samuel Beckett's Endgame*, ed. Michael J. Meyer Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam 2007.), 169.

¹²Hugh Kenner, *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 123.

¹³Liliana Sikorska, "The language of entropy: A pragma-dramatic analysis of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*," Vol. XXVIII *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, Issue 28, (1994), 199. <http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/sap/files/28/13/Sikorska.pdf> [accessed on March 10th 2015].

¹⁴Quayson, 52.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 47

¹⁶Ruby Cohn, "'It Hurts?': Afflicted Bodies in Beckett's Drama," in *Peering Behind the Curtain: Disability, Illness, and the Extraordinary Body in Contemporary Theater*, eds. Thomas Fahy and Kimball King. (Routledge: New York. 2002), 47.

¹⁷Thomas Fahy and Kimball King, "Peering Behind the Curtain: An Introduction," in *Peering Behind the Curtain: Disability, Illness, and the Extraordinary Body in Contemporary Theater*, eds. Thomas Fahy and Kimball King (New York: Routledge, 2002), x.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*, xii.

²⁰Quoted in Jennifer M. Jeffers, *Beckett's Masculinity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 116.

²¹Jennifer M. Jeffers, *Beckett's Masculinity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 113.

²²Fahy and King, "Peering Behind the Curtain: An Introduction," xiii.

²³Quoted in Jeffers, 114.

²⁴F. Catanzaro, 168.

²⁵Cirlot, J. E. and Jack Sage, trans., *A Dictionary of Symbols*, 2nd ed. (New York: Dover Publications, INC., 2002), 205.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 205, 206.

²⁷Quoted in Quayson, 33.

²⁸Ronan McDonald, *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 48-49.

²⁹F. Catanzaro, 169.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 176.

³¹*Ibid.* 178.

³²Quoted in *ibid.*

³³F. Catanzaro, 185-6.

³⁴Sonya Freeman Loftis, "Shakespearian Surrogations: Modern Dramatists Rewrite Renaissance Drama" (Georgia: Georgia University, 2009), Unpublished PhD Dissertation), 117.

³⁵F. Catanzaro, 184

Bibliography

- Abrams, M. H. and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 9th ed. Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009.
- Adorno, Theodor W. "Trying to Understand Endgame," *New German Critique*, 25 (1982), pp. 119-150. https://kar.kent.ac.uk/28660/1/Weller_and_Van_Hulle_Dossier_Adorno%27s_Notes_on_Beckett.pdf [accessed on March 10th 2015].
- Anand, Manminder Singh. "Unravelling The Myth of Absurd: A Study of the Absurdist Creed," Vol. 02 Issue 02 *International Journal of Research*. Patiala: Punjabi University Neighbourhood Campus, (February 2015) <http://internationaljournalofresearch.org/>[accessed on March 25th 2015].
- Beckett, Samuel. *Endgame*. New York: Grove Press, 1958.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Samuel Beckett*. New York: Infobase Publishing 2011.
- Catanzaro, Mary F. "Masking and the Social Construct of the Body in Beckett's *Endgame*." In *Samuel Beckett's Endgame*, edited by Michael J. Meyer, 165-189. Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam 2007.
- Cirlot, J. E. and Jack Sage, trans., *A Dictionary of Symbols*, 2nd ed. New York: Dover Publications, INC., 2002.
- Cohn, Ruby "'It Hurts?': Afflicted Bodies in Beckett's Drama." In *Peering Behind the Curtain: Disability, Illness, and the Extraordinary Body in Contemporary Theater*, edited by Thomas Fahy and Kimball King, 47-55. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre Of The Absurd*. Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1961.

-
- Fahy, Thomas and Kimball King, "An Introduction." In *Peering Behind the Curtain: Disability, Illness, and the Extraordinary Body in Contemporary Theater*, edited by Thomas Fahy and Kimball King, ix-xiii. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Graver, L. and R. Federman, ed. *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge, 1979.
- Kenner, Hugh. *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973.
- Loftis, Sonya Freeman. "Shakespearian Surrogations: Modern Dramatists Rewrite Renaissance Drama." Georgia: Georgia University, 2009. Unpublished PhD Dissertation.
- McDonald, Ronan. *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- M. Jeffers, Jennifer. *Beckett's Masculinity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Phelan, Peggy. "Lessons in Blindness from Samuel Beckett" PMLA, 119, no.5 (October 2004), 1279-1288. [http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic206050.files/Visual_Studies_and_Performance_Studies/Phelan - Lessons in Blindness.pdf](http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic206050.files/Visual_Studies_and_Performance_Studies/Phelan_-_Lessons_in_Blindness.pdf) [accessed on March 15th 2015].
- Quayson, Ato. *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Sikorska, Liliana. "The language of entropy: A pragma-dramatic analysis of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*." Vol. XXVIII *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, Issue 28, (1994), 196-209. http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/sap/files/28/13_Sikorska.pdf [accessed on March 10th 2015].
- Swanson, Victoria Helen. "'—I can't be punished anymore': Exploring Incapacity and Carceral Formations in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, *Play*, *Not I*, and *Catastrophe*." Knoxville: The University of Tennessee, 2009. Unpublished MA Thesis.