

**Trapped in the Echoes of the Void: Deconstructing  
Meaning through Kowzan's Signs and Grice's  
Maxims in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame***

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**Abstract**

This paper examines Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (1958) as a key work of Absurd theatre, which has its own conventions in depicting the world and the lives of people. It also has its own way of representing that world. Through language and other elements that find their place on the stage, Absurd dramatists like Samuel Beckett present plays that are characterised by this manner. His play, *Endgame*, is considered as the most pessimistic of his literary productions. Through an analysis that includes a textual and visual inspection, this paper employs a multimodal approach. The aim is to show how *Endgame* is, in fact, a play of the Absurd theatre, as it embodies themes of decay, isolation, and futility. Therefore, by applying Tadeusz Kowzan's framework of the system of signs, adapted for this analysis, and Grice's conversational maxims, the research investigates how Beckett deconstructs both meaning and communication. This analysis, therefore, unfolds over two stages: the first, a visual analysis focusing on the four systems of sound, decoration, design, and kinetics, followed by a second stage of text-level analysis that inspects the intrinsic features of the text. This paper demonstrates how the characters find themselves in a trapped world, with repetitive existence where

life's meanings are trivialised and reduced to "the itch of a fly" as epitomised by Hamm's reference. Therefore, this study highlights how Beckett is actually critiquing the human communication and meaning-making process in an absurd universe, presenting *Endgame* as a reflective exploration of existential despair.

**Keywords:** Absurd Theatre, Existential Fragmentation, Textual Analysis, Visual Analysis.

### المخلص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية مسرحية "نهاية اللعبة" لصمويل بيكيت كعمل رئيسي في المسرح العبثي و الذي يتميز بقواعده الخاصة في تصوير العالم وحياة الناس، وله أسلوبه الفريد في التعبير عن ذلك. من خلال اللغة وعناصر أخرى تتواجد على المسرح، يقدم كتاب المسرح العبثي مثل صمويل بيكيت مسرحيات تتسم بهذه الخصائص. تعتبر "نهاية اللعبة" الأكثر تشاؤماً بين أعماله. تهدف هذه الدراسة، من خلال تحليل نصي وبصري، إلى إظهار كيف أن "نهاية اللعبة" هي في الواقع مسرحية من المسرح العبثي، حيث تجسد موضوعات الانحلال والعزلة والعبثية. لذلك، من خلال تطبيق إطار كوزان لنظام العلامات وماكسيمات غرايس الحوارية، تبحث الدراسة في كيفية تفكيك بيكيت لكل من المعنى وامكانية التواصل عن طريق الحوار. يتضمن هذا التحليل مرحلتين: الأولى تحليل بصري وتتركز على أربعة أنظمة: الصوت، الديكور، التصميم، والحركة، تليها مرحلة التحليل النصي للخصائص اللغوية حيث تظهر انتهاكات لماكسيمات غرايس. تهدف الورقة إلى إظهار كيف يجد الشخصيات أنفسهم في عالم محاصر، حيث يتم تقليل معاني الحياة إلى "حكة ذبابة" كما تشيّر شخصية "هام". لذلك، تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على كيفية نقد بيكيت لعملية التواصل الإنساني وصناعة المعنى في كون عبثي، مقدماً "نهاية اللعبة" كاستكشاف عاكس لليأس الوجودي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المسرح العبثي، التفكك الوجودي، التحليل النصي، التحليل البصري.

## 1. Introduction

In the modern theatre, Samuel Beckett is a dramatist who presented a different picture of the world, where every condition is viewed as fragmentary and disordered; presenting in his work a pioneering type of literature which, in

“parodies”, captures the “pointlessness” of mere human existence (Motiee & Sheikhzadeh, 2015, p. 28). An Irish novelist and playwright, Beckett is considered a key figure in the theatre of the Absurd, as his works are known for a style characterised with minimalism and repetition, offering a bleak and equally tragicomic outlook on human existence (Allison, 2005, p. 64).

Moreover, his style is often coupled with black comedy and gallows humour, and became increasingly minimalist in the writer's later career. In other words, his work provides the view shared by most minimalists, which is a movement in art that derives from the reductive aspects of modernism and at the same time, it enhances features of repetition and gradual variation. He is, therefore, considered one of the last modernist writers and one of the key figures in the Theatre of the Absurd (Allison, 2005, p. 64).

This new dramatic style of Beckett shows the kind of literary attitude of Modernism itself, which further shows how “the modern world is irrational and incoherent”. Beckett was able to maintain this through making use of the concept of disability in composing his characters and the concept of minimalism in developing them to a reduction of a state, through presenting them in a limited space on the stage. This can be shown through an inspection of the features of his theatre and through analysing his play *Endgame* (1957) in which he creates characters that are “stuck in a lifelong suspicious [state] about the Self”, which is maintained through their disability in his plays (Motiee & Sheikhzadeh, 2015, p. 28).

## **2. The Literature Review and the Theoretical Framework: Distinguishing the What and the How**

The engagement of the scholarly field within the works of Beckett, as *Endgame*, is vast and increasing. The main focus of these works is the philosophy

of existentialism within this theatre (Esslin, 1961, p. 3; Bloom, 2010, p. 108). Other critics have broadly analysed the themes of such works, resulting in a spitting image of decay, futility, and the collapse of verbal communication (Sikorska, 1994, p. 195; Weiss, 2012, p. 26).

Within this rich corpus, the different approaches of the semiotic analysis have been applied, which helps in unpacking the stage craft of Beckett. Scholars like Elam (2002) and others have employed the taxonomy of signs by Kowzan (1968) to catalogue the performative elements of the play, for instance, examining the systems of sound, decor, and movement independently (e.g., Mansell, 2007; Rodriguez-Gago, 2007). Furthermore, a pragmatic linguistic analysis that invokes Grice's (1975) conversational maxims can properly demonstrate the systematic failure of language and dialogue as used in the play (Sikorska, 1994).

This current study aims to link the performative, semiotic analysis (the visual, aural, and kinetic realm) and the linguistic, pragmatic analysis (the textual/dialogic realm) in order to capture the holistic fall of meaning. Through the integration of these two frameworks into one multimodal methodology, the paper argues that the absurdist void in the play is constructed at the same time through the failure of both of the performative signs and conversational logic.

The paper analyses the play through building on two conceptual pillars. The first is the object of this study, which is the Theatre of the Absurd, providing the philosophical context and literary setting of the play. As described by Martin Esslin, it defines that dramatic worldview which has the present mark of every meaningless and irrational act and where communication never makes sense (Esslin, 1961, p. 3). It therefore provides the "what" of the existential condition in *Endgame* that this paper investigates. Secondly, this paper builds on the method of analysis, which is the Semiotic and Pragmatic Theory, providing the tools for

analysis. As described by Tadeusz Kowzan's (1968, p. 61), the semiotic analysis offers a framework that deconstructs the "how" the play delivers that aural and visual world. Paul Grice's (1975, p. 47), theory of conversational implicature offers a framework that deconstructs the "how" of the play's linguistic failure. Together, they propose a dual-framework methodology that investigates how Beckett's absurd world is manufactured both semiotically and linguistically.

### 3. Beckettian Absurd Theatre

The term 'Theatre of the Absurd' was first coined by Martin Esslin, who chose it as the proper term to name the works of some dramatists that have a special quality (that of absurdity) in their works. These works suggest that the human condition on earth is essentially and absolutely absurd, as they provide an experience that "go[es] counter to all accepted standards of stage convention", calling them as "anti-plays" rather than (fully) plays, Esslin, however, provides some characteristics that stand with his point, for instance, these plays are said to be presented with not the time nor the place of action that can be clearly stated (Esslin, 1960, p. 3).

In fact, one result of that is the fact that the plays are perceived with an unclear perspective as far as the action is concerned, that is to say, the action being presented is a mere nightmare that questions whether what is offered is of real and physical world events, therefore, Beckett's quality in this kind of theatre is especially "melancholic"; achieved through an innovative staging, where what is presented shows the world as that "incomprehensible place" where the effect, that is wanted to be maintained, is the lack of full understanding of the odd outline of events which results in confusion and lack of full comprehension on the part of the audience as far as receiving emotions and anticipating them in the play, creating, hence a gap between the audience and the actor which makes the process of trying

to be identified with the stage characters to be rather impossible, which is found under Brecht's famous term of the "Alienation Effect" (Esslin, 1960, p. 4, 5).

Bloom, on the other hand characterizes Beckett as an "ironist" in the second place who has an ability of providing plays of much "tragicomedy", not only that, but Bloom states that life is being presented not as a present but as labor, in which the aim of living proves to be that of maintaining the tortured people by the course of a life that is brief and fleeting, where they are suffering mentally and physically, and if there was to be a case of someone fulfilling it with pleasure the end result would be accompanied with a state of "ennui", which is a deep existential boredom with life itself, proving that hope, to Beckett hope is just strange and "[n]othing is got for nothing ... [as he is the] greatest master of nothing[ness]" (Bloom, 2010, p. 4).

Nevertheless, the most apparent symbol in the "Beckettian art" is that of the lessening of life to nothing but an "automatism", and by doing so, Beckett made use of various devices and techniques that characterize him, and in addition to the aforementioned techniques he, as well, made use of different objects that refer to time for instance, like a watch, a clock, or a timer-bell, just as in the act of hanging an "alarm-clock" on the wall (Bloom, 2010, p. 108).

#### 4. *Endgame*

*Endgame* is Beckett's second stage drama. It is a one-act play with four characters that has been translated from French by Beckett himself, in which four characters are living a depressed existence in a "basement room", where the most active character is called "Hamm" who has lost his sight and is a wheelchair man, who bosses around another character named "Clov", being the servant and the only companion of Hamm, yet although Clov is the only character who is free to move around the stage, but he is worthless for he can never sit, only moves and works

almost non-stopping on the stage, either goes to fetch items from the kitchen or looking out of the windows using a ladder (Weiss, 2012, p. 26).

Finally, the two other characters are Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell, who are decayed and old as they live inside ashbins that stand to represent both the burial place and the mother's womb, thus are unable to move themselves and walk away and who are similar to Clov in being unloved by Hamm, yet are "enslaved" by the two aforementioned characters, while all four are enslaved by their own suffering and mere existence (Cavill et al., 2007, p. 390).

Considering the props of the play, this play is believed to be the "least minimalist play" produced by Beckett, as it shows a lot of props (Weiss, 2012, p. 26). Commenting on the props appearing on the stage and those that actually belong to certain characters, Libera & Pyda (2019, p. 30), draw attention to the significance of the reoccurrences of number four as in, four characters, four main props on the stage (e.g. sheets, ladder, an alarm, and a telescope), four props for Hamm (head piece, glasses, whistle, and a handkerchief), other four associated with Clov (e.g. umbrella, suitcase, hat, coat), and finally other minor ones (a toy dog lacking one leg, a stick, biscuits, flea-powder). Additionally, these characters have each four letters in the transcription of their names, which collectively proves that the number four is not haphazardly maintained but hints at the cycle of life or the seasons (Atwater, 1875/2025, p. 195).

These props, therefore, exist for a reason, the Alarm, for instance, is brought out by Clov at the end of the play, making its appearance reverberate with the main themes of the play, like the emphasis on the never-ending time, which resonates with Hamm's earlier attempt to pass the time through telling stories (Weiss, 2012, p. 26).

Due to the special style of Beckett in his *Endgame*, the play can be analysed through a semiotic approach that looks at the play's theatrical performance and the inherent characteristics of the play's text. Or as Keir Elam suggests, the play will be considered according to its "Theatrical Communication" and its "Dramatic Discourse" (Elam, 2002, p. i).

### 5. Semiotics of Performance in *Endgame*

To have the performance text analyzed means that the theatrical semiotics and whole performance would provide a carnival of objects that have fixed values to be assigned to, and has its own representational role, that communicates a specific meaning to the audience, therefore, the "communication model", with its focus on the performance side of a play will hence be used in the analysis of *Endgame* (Elam, 2002, p. 29).

In fact, considering the performance side of the play and analysing the semiotics of performance means to consider all the props and items that exist on the stage and on the characters as well. Keir Elam mentions that theatrical performance includes a variety of codes that operate within a society. Although little investigation has been conducted towards the theatrical systems, but the preliminary systems that exist within this main system have been identified by Tadeusz Kowzan (1968) as he provided some thirteen systems.

The main props of *Endgame* will thus be considered according to his views on the systems that exist within this system of performance. However, it is worthy to mention that Kowzan has not included the "architectural factors" (i.e., the arrangement of the stage and theatre). Yet, his work provides a substantial analysis towards the major "systemic" groupings that he identifies (Elam, 2002, p. 45).

Kowzan identifies almost thirteen systems for the sign in the performative side of the play; they include word, tone, facial mime, gesture, the actor's movement on the stage, make-up, hair-style, costume, accessory, décor, lighting, music, and sound effects. Kowzan's aim behind his classification of systems is to provide a "temporary tool" that can help in such kind of analysis. However, he states that his system can be reduced into five or six basic systems, according to this; the analysis of *Endgame* will consider its 'sound' (including tone and music and sound effects if any), 'decoration' (including make-up, hair-style, costume, accessory) 'design' (including décor, lighting) and 'kinetics' (including facial mime, gesture, and the actor's movement on the stage). This classification of the systems is based on the resembling nature of each. That is to say, the first system of sound includes all the systems that pertain to the same nature and effect, which is the audible one. The second system of 'decoration' includes all the visual aspects that add to the inherent visual characteristics of the object. The third system of 'design' includes those visual aspects that add to the whole perception of the stage itself. While the system of the 'kinetics' includes all the movable signals within the stage, starting from the dance to the slightest twitching on an actor's face (Kowzan, 1968, p. 61).

The original system of Kowzan (1968) of thirteen signs, while is in fact comprehensive, but it contains overlaps and for the purposes of this current analysis, they would be consolidated into four core categories that are based according to sensory perception and similarity in functions (i.e. whether of personal ornamentation, auditory, environmental setting and movement) providing thus an efficient framework suited specifically to the minimalist style and dens language of theatre that Beckett uses.

### 5.1 Sound

On this level, the tone is the first aspect to be considered, and since it includes the paralinguistic elements of pitch and intonation, these elements can not only change the way a word is spoken but the meaning behind it as well. Thus, the way words are said holds a lot of meaning behind them. For instance, the voices of Nagg and Nell are found to be blended into one singular narratorial sound, highlighting their interdependence and isolation since they are articulated out of recollections; therefore, their laughter, which is fading, represents their disengagement from the present and their immersion in a subjected shared memory of nothingness (Guest, 2007, p. 74).

The play shows how the yesteryears of characters are remembered and longed for, especially by Nagg and Nell, the parents. For instance, during their only exchange of dialogue, Nell is set to repeat the words “Ah yesterday!” whenever the word “yesterday” is mentioned by Nagg. In the direction notes of the stage, Nell is obliged to speak her line in a complete “elegiac” manner with exclamatory "ah", where the "nostalgia" of a past time is emphasised (Gatewood, 2007, p. 55).

In fact, one of the characteristics of Beckett’s plays, as far as voicing is concerned, is its recurrent employment of the sound of the sea and the sound of the alarm, which are examples of the “hard and soft sounds” in the play. In that, the sound of the sea is attributed to “pleasing softness”, while the sound of the “alarm” is associated with an “unpleasant hardness”. Hence, there is a lot of mentioning of such sounds in the play (Mansell, 2007, p. 8).

One of the exchanges between Hamm and Clov is concerned with the sound of the sea where Hamm is violently ordering Clov to open a window so that the former listens to a sea that makes no sound while the latter's take on such matter is one of pragmatic nihilism, for he sees the futility of the action to be done very

clearly yet he recuse to do it anyway; an act which further embodies the play's theme of being captured in a meaningless universe where futile rituals must be repeated (Beckett, 1958).

Hearing the sound of the waves from over the window suggests that Hamm attributes violence to the sound. This reversal act of qualities is also found in regard to the sound of the alarm, which means that the 'hardness' of the alarm is transformed to the 'softness' of sound. Thus, the alarm is received in an unusual manner by both Hamm and Clov, as when the latter holds the alarm so close to Hamm's parents in an attempt to wake them up.

(Exit CLOV. Brief ring of alarm off. Enter CLOV with alarm-clock. He holds it against HAMM's ear and releases alarm. They listen to it ringing to the end. Pause.)

[CLOV:] Fit to wake the dead! Did you hear it?

HAMM: Vaguely.

CLOV: The end is terrific!

HAMM: I prefer the middle. (Pause.) (Beckett, 1958, p. 34).

This short exchange shows how these two characters react to the loud and annoying sound of alarm in a strangely positive way, where Hamm's reaction is proven the strangest as he acts like some snobby music critic, declaring what piece he likes the most, as if the alarm stimulates delight and aesthetic sense in those who listen to it, which is within the world of *Endgame*, and treating such harsh sounds as if they were beautiful compositions, which altogether shows how messed up their world has become as they have reversed the aesthetics of what is considered pleasant and associated it with annoyance, that is because all of these

sounds, be it the soothing sea or the jarring alarm, are meaningless to them (Mansell, 2007, p. 9).

However, in both of these cases, the audience is never able to hear exactly what Hamm is hearing. Questions are not only raised towards Hamm's awareness of sounds that are harsh and gentle, but the experience of the audience themselves is being questioned, and here, estrangement is found. This is as well found in another part of the play when another "unheard sound" is being talked about, but which is never heard by the audience, only by Hamm, who hears it in his head, thinking it being an artery or some vein (Mansell, 2007, pp. 14-15).

In addition to sound, the lack of sound is a crucial signifier as well, as it is often implied when identifying the void and in the breakdown of every communication, thus contributing to that lurking atmosphere of despair and meaninglessness. In this play, the existence of silence is as important as the inevitability of sound, where the frequent and heavy silent moments and pauses are used to highlight the complete breakdown of communication on the one hand, and intensifying the sensation of hollow despair

Two striking samples are captured with of course Hamm, at the center, the first is being the scene where Nell dies, which occurs off-stage and is marked by a profound lack of sound or any drama that usually accompanies the death of a mother as Clove simply looks inside her bin and in a flat attitude states "Looks like it", with no rattle of death, no final words and lack of any emotional music, thus, the nothingness of sound that accompanies her death reflects how that in this world, the most significant moments in life are reduced to meaninglessness and utter silence (Beckett, 1958, p. 41).

The other outstanding occasion is at the finale where the ending of the play takes place as it ends with Clov who appears to be standing by the door ready to depart Hamm and standing motionless and silent watching Hamm whose final monologue is followed by complete stillness and silence which is ironically the best communication achieved as it does not provide an answer but is the answer by itself for it reflect how these characters operate with the lack of meaning since meaning becomes silence itself. Therefore, for Beckett, the absence of sound is not a lack but an active theatrical sign that is so powerful where the pauses and silence become the punctuation marks that add meaning to bleak words.

## 5.2 Decoration

On the second level of the decoration system, the visual aspects of objects are considered. For instance, the make-up a certain character wears can be indicative of so many things; as it can indicate the gender attributes of a character (female or masculine male) or it can show what the creature resembles (a wicked witch or an evil vampire) (Kowzan, 1968, p. 66).

Other than the face, the body of a character can also bear some decorations like the costume they might wear, their hairstyle and the accessory they are to possess. On a general level, the hair-style and the costume are similar to make-up in the sense that they are indicative of the main characteristics of the character itself, in other words, the costume or the hairstyle can express what kind of character is being presented, whether a king or a beggar, or even a mad man (Kowzan, 1968, pp. 66-68).

In *Endgame*, the characters as well as the accessories hold meanings that are not only inherent to the context of the text but to the effect of performance as well. In its French production, the French actor Georges Adet wore his dentures or false teeth throughout the rehearsals for his role of Nagg, but in the actual performance, he removed his false teeth, and by this act, there was a drastic change on the way he appeared on the stage, he truly fitted the role he was playing of an old haggard father living his final days in an ashbin while all his teeth are falling down. The act of removing his dentures caused his face to sink in down into the skull, which further showed him to be older than his true age. Thus, through the change of decoration of the face, the actor was successful in making an illusion that fits the character well (Knowlson 2004, pp. 390-391).

Hamm's superior character is maintained not only through his demanding words that set him as a boss over Clov, the servant, but this is as well maintained through the decorations that are attributed to him only. Thus, his emotions are delineated in terms of the social image of the mask, which is never to be removed from Hamm. The mask assigns a special identity to Hamm, a public one which goes alongside his private one. For instance, the blood-stained handkerchief that covers Hamm's face and the shady spectacles that cover his eyes suggest an "image of a hero, [or] a wounded warrior or a martyr [where] the blood [is] representing scars [that are] earned on the mythic battlefield". Moreover, Hamm's toque is presented to look like the crown of a king. The attribute of a king that is attached to Hamm is further maintained through the rug that appears on his knees, not to mention that his very wheelchair resembles a throne of a king. This is, in fact, maintained in one of the performances that featured Hamm's chair as a throne and even attributed his hat to a Crown-like shape (Catanzaro, 2007, p. 169).

Moreover, the masking and the way the body is constructed show the relationship that exists between the appearance and the reality. Throughout the play, Hamm appears to be seated on his throne-like wheelchair, in a manner that presents him to be a statue. The way he looks through his dark glasses sets him to be staring into the distance, without seeing a particular thing. The way his face is presented “resembles one of those ancient busts with blank spots for eyes”. Thus, the face provides a specific idea, for the empty eye or, in this case, the emptiness of the eyes that are covered by the dark glasses, suggests a “half-doddering despot who can still give a signal of acquiescence or refusal” (Catanzaro, 2007, p. 177).

Peggy Phelan considered the sense of appearance and disappearance of sight in Beckett’s drama. According to her, Beckett is dramatising the sense of looking as the one who fluctuates between the ability to see and suffering complete blindness. Thus, it is the “psychological force” of seeing the “unsighted Hamm” that allows the audience to see the drama from Hamm’s own “un-seeing sight”. His “unsighted gaze” calls fantasy out of its deep, buried history of the past. The fantastic moments in Hamm’s history correlate with other moments in the current present of the play (Catanzaro, 2007, p. 178).

However, the audience acknowledges that Clov is distant from Hamm as the former shows a critical stance towards the latter’s demands; however, this time it is depicted not in a verbal refusal but in a treatment of one of ‘Hamm’s accessories’, namely, the toy of the dog. Freud describes that there exists an inherent connection between the “sexual development in the child and the development of the instinct of scotophilia and cruelty”. He provides that children who have a special kind of “cruelty towards animals” initiate a rising “sexual activity arising from erotogenic zones”. Therefore, the dog (be it a toy or not, still it represents an animal) is used by Clov to represent the cruel manner of behaviour toward Hamm. Earlier in the

play, Clov expresses his concern towards serving Hamm, saying that he will never be able to understand: “Why I always obey you”, after which Hamm asks for his dog, which is delivered then in a violent manner by the servant (Catanzaro, 2007, pp. 180-181).

In fact, the objects and decorations not only show the relationship inside their habitation area (on the stage) but also to what lies out of the stage. For instance, the long paddle used by Hamm as he sits on his chair and other objects and references like the telescope glasses, gaff and navigators alongside other “ambiguous references to the sea and land outside” suggest their current “shelter” to be either floating or sinking or even “semi-submerged vessel run aground”. One such case is when Clov uses “the maritime female pronoun” as he watches from the window, under the misunderstanding that this female is sinking: “Christ, she’s under water!”. In fact, other objects call the attention not to what lies outside the shelter but to the outside of the four walls of the stage, just as the telescope. The function of the telescope is to bring closer the “impression of distance, in contrast to the nearness of the characters and the watcher in “real” space”, which underlies the “temporal distance” of the work (Guest, 2007, p. 92).

Thus, these accessories of Hamm and his stage put an image inside the minds of the spectators, prompting them to consider all these objects and attribute them to Hamm. Mary F. Catanzaro describes how there is a “quicksilver intelligence at work in Hamm”, for this character with all its items and associations of “wheelchair and the parental ashbins imply [both] vulnerability and impotence”. Barthes further shows how the image of Hamm seeps into the brain, living there forever with a clear uneasiness accompanied by that lethargic state (Catanzaro, 2007, p. 185).

### 5.3 Design

On the third level of analysis, the system of design is to be considered. It includes all the visual aspects of décor and lighting, which add to the whole perception of the stage. First, however, it is most suitable to mention one of the things that characterise Beckett's stage directions, which is its rigidity and the inflexibility of the author's judgments. The year 1984 witnessed Beckett's use of "legal injunction" that aided him to stop certain performances of his play, made by the American Repertory Theatre (Cambridge, MA), since they changed the text and the setting. After this, Beckett revised the contract of his plays, adding that when the play is produced, no changes are acceptable to the text, setting or even stage direction to the extent that whatever changes that occur to the play will result in making a parody out of it. Beckett was not tolerant of even a slight change or omission of windows in his play. Everything should be presented as it is; he was not that flexible, especially in his later years (Bianchini, 2007, p. 275).

Before any character is set to speak in the play, "memory" permeates the whole stage. The directions of the stage describe one "bare interior", and "grey light"; with two windows that exist on "left and right back, high up". In fact, this "bare interior", is not only the setting, but it stands for the absence of comfort, lack of hope and lifelessness.

Later on, Clov is seen to enter and goes to each of the windows standing below them, then looks up. Then he goes off-stage and immediately re-enters with a ladder in his hands, which would help him to see out of one window. Yet when he transfers to the second window, he disremembers the bringing of the ladder and returns to bring it with him. He keeps on repeating this procedure; he as well repeats the act of forgetting the ladder as he moves from one window to the other. However, "each time the space between forgetting and remembering diminishes, linking the physical space of the stage with the mental space of memory". This

initial act in the play forefronts the function, or rather the dysfunction, “of memory, revealing disruptions and disjunctions which occur when present circumstances are met and aided by memory” (Gatewood, 2007, p. 49).

One of Beckett’s aims in this play is to locate the “inner realm of consciousness”, which is maintained through the interior design of the stage, which shows the linkage between the “inner and outer worlds”. For instance, the whole room, which looks like a “bunker”, “evokes a sense of retreat to the core of the earth, and the ashbins that contain Nagg and Nell and their memories further this sense of interiority” (Gatewood, 2007, p. 50).

One of the basic characteristics in Beckett’s stage directions is simplicity, since it never attracts the attention away from this theme of memory, and the suggestion of the inner reality (Bianchini, 2007, p. 123). *Endgame* presents “three generations” that appear to be “isolated” and with a relationship that “deteriorate[s], little by little, creating a situation of growing tension and violence”. To emphasise these ideas, one designer of the stage, called Cesar Ocho, constructed some kind of “metallic closed structure which looked like the interior of a submarine, or a nuclear refuge, with two very high and small rectangular windows”. This design achieved the aim of showing the stage as a “hard, cold and claustrophobic space” that suits the play and its colour of grey (Rodríguez-Gago, 2007, p. 151).

On the other hand, the stage space that was made for the production of *Castronuovo*, alongside its suggestion of “a nuclear refuge”, it also presented “a prison cell”. A cell that was made best through “Clov’s costume: his striped black and white t-shirt and dirty black trousers” that gave him the look of the criminal needed for such a depiction of the stage. In this production, the designing of the stage was made completely out of metal, thus leading objects to create a sound

which is “strong and unpleasant” when objects are to hit the ground, which had one of the “disturbing effects” on the viewers. For instance, Nagg and Nell’s appearance suggests them to show up of the trash cans, which was “emphasized by the fact that the lids of their house like receptacles fell on the ground, making a very loud clang”. This production of the play, highly correlates the relationship between sound effect and visual effect, as

[a] deliberate contrast was established between moments of silence and stillness, and moments of sounds and noises, and also between the different tones of voice of the different characters. All of these visual and aural effects contributed to the surprising and discontinuous rhythm of this production of *Endgame*. (Rodríguez-Gago, 2007, p. 153).

Thus, Beckett has created “a small world with its own laws”, a world which he never wished to interpret, but only to be presented on stage. Of course, the design helped to fully understand the play with all its items and accessories (Campbell, 2007, p. 264).

#### **5.4 Kinetics:**

The effect of the stage is as well maintained through the fourth and last level of this analysis, which is found under the system of signs that attaches itself only to movement or ‘kinetics’. The first movement that audience are to be familiar with in the production of the stage is Clov’s “robot-like movement” making a rhythm of his own, for instance, at times he “ascended the steps ... very slowly and then descended very quickly, or vice versa”. Hamm, on the other hand, had a artificial gestures as “he moved his arms very slowly and at others with exaggerated symbolic gestures, especially when he is (or pretends to be) furious with Nagg or

Clov.” In the production of Castronuovo, Hamm was presented to make his voice loud and use full gestures as he says (Rodríguez-Gago, 2007, p. 151).

Other characters as well make exaggerated gestures like Nagg, when he tells his story of “the world and the pair of trousers.” One of the consequent acts of his exaggerated gestures is to make the story funnier as he “underlined the verbal comedy”. In fact, this production by Castronuovo received an affecting result on the audience who liked the “little act” of Nagg that can be said to have the characteristics of the “burlesque” acting. However, on a much general level, the characters of Nagg and Nell are advised to have a much “limited physical appearance” since it is known that what appears of them is only their hands and heads (Rodríguez-Gago, 2007, p. 152).

In fact, one of the resulting effects of Clov’s movement is his distraction of Hamm’s speech and the attraction he receives from the audience due to his movement. For instance, Clov is seen to destroy any attempt of “sentiment” initiated by Hamm. Thus, Clov’s movement on stage distracts the viewers from Hamm’s speech. Clov’s elaborative comic moves as he goes up and down the ladder, make him set the atmosphere in a way that gets him the absolute attention (Dorney, 2007, p. 242).

Moreover, the way a move is maintained reflects the kind of feeling the one who made the move has towards that which his move was headed to. For instance, Beckett changes the stage directions for Clov from “CLOV pushes chair” into “[CLOV] moves chair slightly”, which shows the attitude of Clov at that moment (Mansell, 2007, p. 14; Beckett, 1958, pp. 22-23).

In fact, to hear these harsh sounds is in interaction with what is seen in the claustrophobic design and what is preserved of the restricted kinetics in order to

create one united experience and feel of the entrapment, for instance the kinetic imprisonment of characters like the way Hamm is viewed as paralyzed and the way Clove is presented to walk in a stiff way, all is mirrored acoustically by the domineering lack of voice which is interrupted by the meaningless noise of the alarm, and is equally reflected through the visual decorations of the decay as preserved by the blood handkerchief, a sign for the decay of the body, and the throne look like chair (and sometimes wheelchair), as a sign for a power parody, within the blunt design of the stage as the cell. Thus, proving how all these systems join together to suggest a world where movement, sound, and sight have all failed, causing hence meaning to collapse, leaving the characters to grapple with what they have resulting in them becoming disabled from moving beyond their scene and their language to be the only means to pass the time regardless of how unproductive and meaningless it could be

### 6. Text Level Analysis

To be able to grasp the failure in the system of Kowzan in depth, now it is compulsory to turn to the text itself. According to Kowzan, the word is to be found almost in all theatrical performances (except for the ballet and the pantomime). It has a role that relates to “signs of the other systems”; thus, it differs according to “dramatic genres, the literary or theatrical fashions, the styles of the stage setting”. In other words, considering the signs in their linguistic form means to accept them as signs relating to actors as they perform their roles. Due to the fact that the theory of the “linguistic semiology” is more advanced than other theories of other sign systems, it is a “must” to mention the work of those specialists in that field in order to better “elaborate [on] the bases of a semiology of the word” (Kowzan, 1968, p. 62).

Therefore, Kowzan acknowledges this system to be on a “different level”. In addition to the “semantic level”, he recognises the “phonological, syntactic, prosodic etc... levels”. According to him, how words are ordered can show whether a speaker is of an older historical period or of modern times, while the choice of sounds, whether “hissing and hushing [like] (s, z, sh, j,)” can be expressive of “anger and irritation” in the way a character speaks. Also, a change in the rhythm or meter means a “[change] of feelings or mood” (Kowzan, 1968, p. 62).

Thus, the word level is going to be analysed within the text level rather than the performance. That is in order to get the full meaning of the analysis; however, it is not going to be distinct from the performance level since in both cases of performance and the text level, the same context rules the text, not to mention that the same text is used in both. This level, hence, analyses the “dramatic communication” of the character’s verbal exchange. Therefore, the notions of the dramatic discourse are to be considered and applied, they include diexis and contextual elements (of the speaker, addressee, location and time). Also, since the discourse is said to be that which “enact” the events that make up the drama, the theory of speech acts is to be considered. Moreover, to further ensure that the speech is being best communicated, the theory of Grice’s Maxims is to be considered (Elam, 2002, p. 121).

Beckett’s *Endgame* shows a “divergence between Word and Idea”, which results in “the inefficiency of the language of modern drama”. This is, of course, the result of the existential philosophy that has been adopted as one of the conventions within this Theatre of the Absurd. Thus, a suitable pragmatic analysis would show how the whole “functioning of language” in this play has been interrupted, making a “disorder in the chain of messages” (Sikorska, 1994, p. 195).

In the opening scene of the play, the scenography is described with many details. Clov is introduced in the scene, he inspects everything and takes over the sheets and glances at Hamm. The whole atmosphere, as described by the text, is built up through images that the reader needs to conceptualise; furthermore, the reader is to infer that something is terribly going wrong due to the stiffness and immobility depicted through the text. This vision is strengthened by Clov's speech as he repeats the word "finished" more than one time. His fate in his life is approaching, as the description suggests that a grain over a grain is stacking, thus as if he is having a "burden that a man can no longer carry" (Sikorska, 1994, p. 199).

In his speech, he talks about going to the kitchen (his working place). This act is "felicitous" (i.e., has a relevant and is true). The kitchen is viewed as "an off-stage shelter ... to which he escapes several times during the play". Moreover, the mentioning of a whistle suggests a master/slave kind of relationship (Sikorska, 1994, p. 199).

However, in a monologue by Hamm, where considers the possibility of making an end to his life, but his acts are never quite fulfilled; he starts to make an act, but he never does. He describes that there is a "double context to what he says" since he is both an actor and a character (Beckett 1958, p.12). This is mainly due to his paralysis state, being bounded to a chair and never capable of moving. On the other hand, his words are depicted as "simply misfires" since his acts are never completed, nor are they correct. In this play, the characters are found to be playing and being played with (Sikorska, 1994, p. 200).

They talk about the role of nature in all of this, whether it still cares for them or they have been forgotten. However, their inability to show relaxation stresses the fact that nature is dying. The character of Hamm talks about the loss of both

ideals and hair, and he says that in a single breath. Thus, Beckett shows how “the deterioration of the human body concurs with the degradation of beliefs”. The structure of their speech, in fact, is similar to nature itself, as their speech is found in a cyclical construction. One mark of Beckett is that his characters repeat what they say, but they switch roles as they continue to do that (Sikorska, 1994, p. 201).

The following parts of the play capture multiple scenes of “disagreement and misunderstanding”, for which the reason is “the breakdown of communication”. However, there are two reasons for misunderstanding: the first is when the other party shows a contrastive point of view; in this case, it is “intentional”. The second reason is when the different viewpoint is “caused by the external condition of life”. In this case, it is non-intentional. Thus, there occurs a lot of violation to Grice’s four maxims of quantity (i.e., where one tries to be as informative as possible), quality (i.e., where one tries to be truthful), relation (i.e., where one tries to be relevant) and manner (i.e., when one tries to be as clear, as brief, and as orderly as one can in what one says, and where one avoids obscurity and ambiguity). The reason behind this is mainly to “while away time” (Sikorska, 1994, p. 201).

At one point, Hamm is brutally interrupting the nostalgic memory of his mother. He demands that she become silent while ordering Clov to literary "bottle" the mother away in her ashbin. By this, he reduces this moment of human remembrance to a mere image of garbage disposal (Beckett 1958, p. 22).

This dialogue shows how Hamm is irritated with both of his parents, which results in further irritation for Hamm and Clov. This tension is rendered through the type of language they maintain to use. In fact, the word that Hamm uses to lock his mother away is “to bottle”, which is a verb used with objects, not with humans. Thus, a lack of sympathy is noted. Also, the constant use of “she” and “her” in front of his own mother when he wants to refer to her marks a sign of rudeness and

disrespect towards her. Moreover, this shows rage inside him towards the fact that his mother is still alive (Sikorska, 1994, p. 202).

In fact, another means for miscommunication is the fact that both characters are losing each other's track when one is making a serious speech while the other is making a joke out of that speech as a reply. Thus, a "character appears genuinely concerned about advancing an idea of magnitude [, but] [i]n the face of greatness, his counterpart always interrupts his attempts ... with dry banality, comic routine, or some trivial gesture" that consequently makes up a dialogue (Sikorska, 1994, p. 203).

For instance, the fleeting hope of Hamm that maybe their existence might "mean something" is immediately ruined by Clov, in an absurd manner, as the latter is frantically discovering a flea. Thereby, the grand question of what is the purpose of existing is comically reduced to that hysterical parasitic hunt (Beckett 1958, p. 27).

The play keeps showing such meaningless exchanges between the characters, as it is one of the characteristics of the theatre of the Absurd to reject almost all the conventional devices of theatricality. There is no "logical consequence" of any exchange; therefore, there is no solving type of denouement. In a sense, "the end of the play might have served as an end for it" since there exists no meaning in both beginning and end, hence there exists no purpose. The circular structure of the play reverberates on the linguistic level and all its devices. At the termination of the play, Clov is determined to departure his master. Their exchange of farewell is having a formal undertone, yet Hamm shifts to another topic, which reminds the reader of the inside incidents of the play. Then Hamm shifts his attention back to Clov, asking him a favour, which is to stay, but Clov is

determined, and thus, Hamm repeats the words at the beginning of the play as he says “me to play” (Sikorska, 1994, p. 205).

HAMM: I'm obliged to you, Clov. For your services.

CLOV (turning sharply): Ah pardon, it's I am obliged to you.

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 (Beckett 1958, p. 51).

The characters' violations of Grice's maxims is snowballing not only to while away the time but to systematically destroy any likelihood of a cooperative dialogue and any human connection that is meaningful, instead, all characters are actively engaged in a sort of communication where there are no communication rules, thus creating a linguistic endgame that is in par with the physical, performative one, where the physical actions are deliberately and visually interrupting and sabotaging the speech, hence proving that these characters are bad at communication, connection and delivering of truth, but good at only producing empty noise that stands at mere reminder of them being only alive. Moreover, this failure of speech is mirrored by a failure of their body, as seen in Clov's act of ignoring Hamm's speech about the flea, which resembles the same dismissible act when the former physically turns away so that he climbs the ladder, resulting in sabotaging any chance for a real contact to prove that in such an endgame neither language nor movement can create meaning. And here we find the interplay of all the levels.

## 7. Conclusion

Beckett's theatre of the Absurd attempts to show how reality is reflected in the mirror of drama in a horrified and pessimistic manner. This sense is best maintained through his play of *Endgame*. In the play, Beckett used almost all the sources of theatricality, starting from text, stage directions, design, and ending with the smallest details like accessories and the sound of a breath. Moreover, throughout a methodical deconstruction of both the semiotic norms and the conversational ones, the playwright does not only present a world of decay, but he further forces his audience to actually live the experience and have the understanding of having all meaning to crumble away.

*Endgame* analysis as a play belonging to the Theatre of the Absurd, to show how it has the inherent features of being Absurd, has been maintained through the use of textual analysis and an analysis based on performance. The textual analysis, which concerns itself with the representative characteristics of the text and the words that compose it, resulted in the findings that show how speech is not maintained for its main purpose of communication, and how this results in much difficulty and misunderstandings. Moreover, a clear inspection of the language shows how Beckett uses harsh words rather than intimate ones, not only with his slave but with his mother as well. This further strengthens Beckett's view of life through Hamm and his stories, monologues and words.

The visual inspection of the play considered the thematic analysis of the different systems of signs that are stated by Tadeusz Kowzan. The division of his sign system to the four parts that I have maintained throughout the analysis process proved successful in the sense of grouping together the systems of signs to a unified gathering. Thus, through the sign system of sound, the effect of the nature and atmosphere around the characters proved to be a tool to show the reversal

effect of the 'soft' and 'harsh' sounds, which further suggests the impairment of the characters' senses. The sign system of decoration inspected the whole design of the stage and characters in a way that showed them prisoners, but with hierarchies of relationship between considering Clov as a slave and a prisoner and Hamm as a blind king who is the last ruler. The sign system of design shows the stage as representing a destroyed building. The sign system of kinetics emphasises not only the impairment of the senses but the impairment of the whole individual, like the parents, or Hamm himself. Clov, on the other hand, though is able to walk, but his movement is also limited as he keeps going and coming to the kitchen and going and coming between the right and left windows, following Hamm's orders.

The characters prove to be disabled from moving away from their scene, and language proves to be their only way of passing the time, however meaningless and unproductive it may be. The duality of this framework reveals that characters of *Endgame* are not only trapped in a room but in the failing mechanics of meaning making itself, thus resulting in the stage becoming bare of any conventional signs, and the dialogue becomes bare of any cooperative purposes and altogether becomes a site for the futility of existence.

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