

Importance of metaphor in 'endgame'



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

It's impossible to analyse Beckett without struggling with his work's abstract, surreal nature; the typical minimalist language mixed with abnormal premises make it difficult to find comprehensible meaning. Due to this universal difficulty Beckett deliberately creates, his plays become open to freeform interpretation. 'Endgame' is the pinnacle of Beckett's abstract style; to understand it in the usual sense is made purposefully awkward by Beckett so that each individual symbol, allusion and metaphor must be minutely explored. It's the audience's experience of these details, which hold immense depth, that forms 'Endgame's' meaning. The play effortlessly transcends many aspects of human life, from faith to death, and Beckett forces the audience to reflect on their lives due to his completely open play, which contains many relatable fragments of life for them, that they must understand what each metaphor means. It remains debatable whether Beckett actually had strong opinions on Endgame's subjects or whether he explores each concept simply because it's interesting; Beckett once wrote 'I take no sides. I am interested in the shape of ideas.'⁽ⁱ⁾ which suggests any worth audiences find in 'Endgame' simply arises from their own personal experience and Beckett has only slightly inspired them. However, to accept everything Beckett says about his plays is naïve. Elements of 'Endgame' and 'Waiting for Godot' can be recognised from Beckett's life which implies that parts of the plays do have profound meaning for him. Therefore, Beckett does intend to make his audience re-examine their own lives, so I believe the statement is true.

Beckett branches into so many features of the audience's life using metaphor that I will only look into the major metaphors and how they

interact with the audience. One of the most common readings of Endgame is that it's a single individual's narrative and the stage is their head. This view can be easily backed up; the windows are eyes, the room is the brain and the bins are memories. The stage being a metaphor for a head has implications that hold resonance for the audience. The constant bickering between Clov and Hamm may be the internal struggle of the conscience or even the battle of super-ego and ego (Hamm being the super-ego and Clov the ego). Internal conflicts affect everyone and Beckett is reflecting them back to the audience. This may be because Beckett wants the audience to evaluate how they live; which part of their mind do they cave into? The rational Clov, who states that ' I love order. It's my dream.', or the wildly emotional Hamm, who ponders, ' Is there any misery loftier than mine?' Beckett has no preference but simply implores the audience to understand themselves; if this theory is true then ' Endgame' is about an individual in complete turmoil, each character is physically injured showing how erosive internal struggle can be. The individual also loses touch with their reality; Clov describes the outside beyond the windows, the realm through the eyes, and ' The light is sunk.' Meaning that for the individual the tangible world has nothing to offer them, it's dead to them because they've become obsessed with their own mind. Beckett warns the audience of this complete introspection as he proposes that the individual goes mad at the end of the play because Clov, a part of the mind, may leave and leave Hamm ' crying out' due to the ' Infinite emptiness'.

Beckett then shows the audience that not only internal fixation leads to madness but also isolation can have similar effects. The staging has a very

circular theme; the room is claustrophobic and enclosed as well as the stage being symmetrical. At one point Hamm demands to be moved around in a circle and then requests to be exactly in the stage's centre emphasising the symmetrical, circular nature of the play. This cyclical pattern mirrors how an individual survives when faced with severe isolation, the mundane routine repeated endlessly. The characters experience this just as Beckett did during WWII when he spent huge periods in bleak, abandoned trenches. This is also the time when he suffered severe depression. This is one of Beckett's clearest messages to the audience, it's not an ambiguous symbol, he is stating with clarity that a person mustn't be alone. Beckett even emphasises this by referencing 'Dante's Inferno'; as Hamm listens through the wall he describes it as 'the other hell' which has allusions to the cyclical qualities of the 9 stages of Hell. Being alone, for Beckett, is Hell.

The main source of dramatic tension in the play is whether Clov will leave Hamm. He's told to 'desert' by Nell and constantly threatens Hamm by asserting 'I'll leave you.' Even at the play's end it's unclear whether Clov leaves; the choice defines the play's movement for the audience. This may seem as if Beckett puts choice high in human priorities, however, one line enlightens us on his true thoughts. When a rat enters the room Clov says, 'If I don't kill that rat he'll die'; Beckett makes it clear to the audience that Clov is the rat. Clov may leave the room but then he'll die as Hamm has the only food source but if he stays the food will run out and he'll die anyway. Beckett is presenting us with the view that choice is an illusion, in a way the whole play is a farce because the dramatic tension is objectively flawed. Beckett forces audiences to assess the importance of choice in their lives and

whether it adds meaning or by accepting determinism they will actually feel less responsibility and pressure, which result in the obsessive introspection, and become happier.

The characters in 'Endgame' provide a wealth of metaphorical possibilities, one major theme which Beckett scrutinises is the concept of memory, more specifically whether memory holds any value for an audience. The general opinion of memory, in a non-logistical form, is that it's pleasant. Beckett uses Nagg and Nell to force audiences to re-examine this view. Both characters are consumed by their memories of 'The Ardennes' or on a 'rowing boat' except each time they reminisce they 'laugh less heartily'. Their appearance is laughable; they are pale, old, broken and they're located in trash bins as if they're literally rubbish. They are gripped by memory and have lost reality; they have no influence in reality all they desire is 'Me pap!' They cannot even kiss anymore. Beckett sets up the clash between reality and memory using Nagg and Nell, making ultimately pathetic. Beckett believes less emphasis is needed on memory and more of life should be living the now.

The inter-dependency of Clov and Hamm is obvious from the outset, when Clov leaves the room Hamm shouts 'Come back!' and Clov understands that 'There is nowhere else.' What is very interesting about this relationship is Hamm's main argument for their continued relationship is to 'keep up the dialogue' and Hamm even becomes annoyed when Clov doesn't do this. The language is often overtly theatrical and non-naturalistic, this is because they're trying to 'keep up the dialogue'. When this forced language appears on stage it appears odd and uncomfortable. Beckett has created a mirror onstage; what Hamm and Clov are playing out, because they know they're

under inspection, is everyday small-talk which audiences can relate to. These conversations hold no meaning, they add nothing to our lives. In fact they're a barrier to protect us from real meaning, which may be scary or unwelcome. Beckett is asking the audience through this phrase: 'keep up the dialogue' why we insist on small-talk, he's shown them it's actually just as painful as silence. Hamm and Clov actually move through the process of small-talk:

'Imagine if a rational being came back to earth, wouldn't he be liable to get ideas into his head if he observed us long enough.'

This firstly is a challenge from Beckett to audiences to understand 'Endgame', but also has much ideological weight behind it, then Clov replies to this poetry 'I have a flea!' Beckett produces a parallel for the audience to their life, at first the meaningful language, then the fear of what if it actually has meaning shown by the ellipses, and then finally the return to safe mundane conversation.

Beckett's play forces us to examine one of the most concrete assumptions for humanity; that existing is good. Beckett forces us to do this by retracing the creation story, Beckett crafts the anti-creation story. The characters in 'Endgame' are obsessed with the end; they crave it and overall hate existence. 'Endgame' descends into nothing just as Genesis describes everything from nothing. The first allusion to Creation is when Hamm mentions Clov's father was a gardener, God Eden's creator, and that Hamm took Clov (who may represent Adam) away. Light is also constantly fading, Mother Pegg died from 'darkness' this is opposite to Genesis when God famously said 'let there be light'. Hamm tells Clov that in the end there will

be 'infinite emptiness' just like the world when it was 'formless'. The anti-creation story of 'Endgame' asks us whether existence is actually innately good as we all assume; maybe there would be less pain and sorrow if nothing existed.