

Endgame by Samuel Beckett

The themes of human alienation and the senselessness of human existence overall has been one of the most essential concerns throughout postmodern literature. People have lost the meaning of living and are spiritually disinterested – this is a hardly consoling conclusion, which can be drawn from most contemporary art. The plays of Samuel Beckett are a striking example of this philosophy, which convey the author's message both through their unusual form and the characters' dialogues. *Endgame* focuses on the issue of human isolation and loneliness, which is derived from the loss of meaning and connection. Absurdity, as a form and essence of human existence, is Beckett's way to emphasize the emptiness and alienation, which penetrate every sphere of modern life.

Looking closely at *Endgame*, it is worth of note that metaphorical perception of life as play is not new in world culture. It was Shakespeare, who stressed on the theatrical nature of living, which makes people play the game. However, the twentieth century's interpretation of the concept is far gloomier. Not only do people have to play the game, but the game gets quite boring and even unbearable. That is why the characters of the play think about stopping it, but they lack courage to finish their senseless lives, so they are involved into this cyclic never-ending existence, which tortures them. Each time they hope that it is about to be finished and scared of it at the same time. At the very beginning, Hamm muses over the fact: "Yes, there it is, it's time it ended and yet I hesitate to end" (Beckett 3). Hamm is blind and cannot walk, so he sits in his wheelchair all day long, indulging in self-reflection.

Some researcher's think that the name Hamm is a reference to Shakespeare's Hamlet (Kenner 120). Like Hamlet, Hamm is overwhelmed by doubts and hesitations, which prevent him from any action. The difference is that he is a totally deromanticized, ironic version of Hamlet, and no prince of no kingdom by any means. His physical disability emphasizes his spiritual invalidity and decay. A remarkable phrase by him is that he feels his heart beating in

his head (Beckett 8). The idea of replacement of spiritual life for purely intellectual reflection is a kind of modern life's mind perversion, characteristic for the most of postmodern culture.

This message is even more stressed by the combination of isolation and egocentrism, which is peculiar to Hamm. He is afraid of being abandoned and suffers from isolation, but, at the same time, he takes a kind of pleasure in his tortures. "Can there be misery— (he yawns) —loftier than mine?" is a standard pattern of his narcissist speculations (Beckett 2). Indeed, he imagines himself almost equal to Hamlet in his suffering because being a tragic hero would give sense to his existence. Nevertheless, there is little hope for this. Trying to compensate his emptiness, he tries to draw attention to himself, which is why he needs Clov. "Put me right in the center!" he orders to him, but when the servant tries to settle the wheelchair in the center of the room, he finds it impossible because Hamm never feels being enough in the center. This situation symbolizes futile attempts of human beings to be the center of the Universe. Besides, it emphasizes the egocentrism of a personality, who is figuratively blind to the world.

It is easy to notice that one of the most recurrent motifs in the play is a physical handicap. Hamm is blind and cannot walk, Clov cannot sit, Nagg and Nell have no legs. This grotesque device is the author's method to imply that modern society is injured spiritually. The alienation between Hamm and his parents is striking, which is reinforced by the absurd situation of their living in trash bins. The relationship between them is tragic in its way too, revealing the lost opportunities of youth and ceased affection. They are separated from each other by the buckets, in which they live, and are always ready to be covered by tin lids to isolate themselves completely. Their gloomy cocoons, where they hide from each other, protect them from the rest of the world and its dangers. However, their existence is painful and reminds of being buried alive in ashbins like in coffins. The tragic moment about their communication is that every day Nagg tries to kiss Nell, however, it is impossible because

the distance between their ashbins. In modern society people cannot reach each other, they are totally out of touch, like they are physically out of touch in the play. This makes the metaphor of an utter alienation of the situation. Moreover, Nell is indifferent to Nagg's feelings at all, which symbolizes the way many married couple live today, being so close and, yet, total strangers to each other.

Most of the game in the play is taken by communication between Hamm and Clov. It is worth considering their unusual tandem in the context of the discussed issue. The two men seem to be tired of each other, but, nevertheless, they keep on their co-existence. Clov is irritated about the behavior of his master and threatens to leave, but something stops him from leaving each time. In his turn, Hamm constantly grumbles that he would like to get rid of Clov, however, he does not let him go. This absurd situation of the play underlines the idea of the lack of freedom. Paradoxically, people are alienated from each other, but they are not free of each other. This mutual dependence, close to addiction, is based on the fear of utter loneliness. Life is hard for Clov and Hamm, but they need each other to ascribe at least some meaning to their routine existence. Their disputes fill the empty days of the longest game on the earth, which is called human life. When life is empty, people think of emotional substitutes to make it seem brighter, to cure the feeling of loneliness with magical pills. The idea of Hamm taking a tonic, a painkiller, and then a tranquilizer is quite true about the life of humans nowadays in their desperate attempts to make their living meaningful and, yet, painless. Longing for security, they entrap themselves in their inner worlds and, just like Hamm, listen for second-hand information about the weather outside, in the world, without daring to step there on their own.

To sum up, the play *Endgame* by Samuel Beckett pictures the world, as an absurd place to live in without any possible way out. The playwright focuses on the issue of people's alienation from each other and from the sense of their own living. They are forced to play the

endless game just because they do not dare to stop it, and they get stuck in daily routine, as a result. Love and affection has been changed by painful addiction and interdependence, which still does not compensate for the feeling of loneliness and isolation. A special attention is given to the family relationship, to reveal the decay of the family as unit. Personality's disintegration causes in the break of bond between the people, even those, who must be close to each other. This pessimistic picture is drawn by the Beckett, to disclose the most relevant concerns of existence, which is especially true about the contemporary age of information and technologies.

Works Cited

Beckett, Samuel. *Endgame*. Web. May 4, 2010. retrived from <http://www.samuel-beckett.net/endgame.html>

Kenner, Hugh. *Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett*. Thames& Hundson, 1996.