

Dislocation of Temporality as a Fractured Dramatic Space in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* and Harold Pinter's *Old Times*

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Abstract

After reading the two fine plays *Endgame* by Samuel Beckett and *Old Times* by Harold Pinter, one sees that the two depicts modern man who turned to the most passive of all, bewildered, disillusioned, purposeless and dislocated. A man who is bewildered of simple questions: who am I? what am I? what will be the end? They are endless questions in an attempt to assert himself in a dislocated temporality. Temporality is a direct echo of the existential impasse of the modern world. Both plays assert that selfhood is fragmented and fashioned by this impasse. Hence dislocation of the temporal is an assertion of the fragmented self of their vanishing characters.

مخلص البحث :

تصور مسرحية "نهاية اللعبة" لسامويل بيكت و "الازمنة القديمة" لهارولد بنتر الانسان المعاصر في اقسى حالاته، فهو انسان يائس وضائع ومضطرب يعيش في دوامة من الاسئلة المحيرة، من اكون؟ ومادا اكون؟ وكيف ستكون النهاية؟ كلها اسئلة في محاولة منه لاثبات وجوده في عالم زمني مضطرب. لكلا الكاتبين فلسفتهم في التعامل مع فكرة الزمن فهما يعتبران الزمن هو المشكلة وهو الحل.

Some critics in the sixties pointed out to the danger arising when the writers break totally away from tradition particularly from naturalistic and realistic one, and have something that is so abstract as action, painting as is the case with Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter's plays. They, as such, doubted that Beckett and Pinter's work will not live for long time.<sup>(1)</sup> It was said that people go to see Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* merely because it had become fashionable to express outrage. The critic Martin Esslin said that this explanation could not apply to more than one or two plays of this kind. And the success of a whole row of similarly unconventional works became more and more manifest. He added that if the critical touchstone of conventional drama did not apply to these plays,

this must be due to a difference in objective and the use of different artistic means. They were creating and applying a different “convention”<sup>(2)</sup> of drama. Beckett and Pinter are placed among those successful playwrights who have made “an international mark...”<sup>(3)</sup> Their plays have a suggestive power which is missed in the work of many contemporary dramatists. Their plays have had a fascination of their own. Beckett and Pinter have given a new shape and direction to the contemporary drama.

Consequently, many critics have investigated Pinter’s drama in relation to the work of Beckett. Many scholars have argued that to understand Pinter’s work, one must have a general knowledge of Beckett’s themes and techniques. They have noted an aesthetic affinity between the two. Pinter himself has recognized the influence of Beckett on him:

Beckett was an absolute knockout for me. It wasn’t a matter of saying I see. This is something quite new. This is something I must attend to.

It was the most terrible chord struck in meat the time, I was about nineteen I think. It was terrible, terrible business to read that fragment but I went on to read Beckett a great deal.<sup>(4)</sup>

Beckett’s plays attack the realist tradition. They focus on human condition and the search for identity in a world in which everything is uncertain. Pinter has taken the Beckettian model of presenting the suffering of the human condition. Judith Roof in his essay *The Absent One: Harold Pinter Influence of Samuel Beckett* has argued that Beckett’s influence on Pinter is indirect and unconscious. Even if Pinter admired Beckett, such admiration does not always mean imitation. Instead, works by artists engaged in a common project or world view may share some qualities and diverge in others, not as imitator but as a significant difference in practice.<sup>(5)</sup> Beckett and Pinter share the same dream. They dream of a world better than that they depict in their plays. In their plays, they depict the suffering of the individual of a world in which everything is uncertain even time, man in such a world is in a perpetual struggle with time to assert himself. The problem of time and the mystery of the past have always played role in Beckett and Pinter’s theatre. This is apparent in Beckett’s *Endgame* and Pinter’s *Old Times*. In these two plays, the playwrights tackle the same problem of time but in their own ways. These two plays show

their authors obsession with time. They actually highlighted new uses of temporality as an existential force in the dramatic worlds of their plays. They prefigure time as a dislocated temporality that operate as a fractured dramatic space where their characters interact negatively.

*Endgame* was originally written in French entitled *Fin de Partie*. As was his custom, Beckett himself translated it into English. The play was first performed in a French language production at the Royal Court Theatre. It was considered along with such work as *Waiting For Godot*, to be among Beckett's most important works. It was written in a style which associated with the theatre of Absurd.<sup>(6)</sup> It is a one- act play with four characters. It is opened in a bare interior with gray lighting. There are two small windows with drawn curtains, a door and two ashbins covered by an old sheet in them Nagg and Nell who are Hamm's parents. Hamm sits on armchair with wheels covered by an old sheet. He sits motionless with handkerchief over his face. Hamm is an aged master who is blind and unable to stand. His servant Clov cannot sit down. The location seems to be by the sea, although the dialogue suggests that there is nothing left outside, no sea, no sun, no clouds. Ruby Colon has suggested that the setting is none other than earth upon which "there's no more nature, in which nature is destroyed and after which nothing grows any longer."<sup>(7)</sup> The two characters are mutually dependents. They have been fighting for years and continue to do so as the play progresses. Clov always wants to leave but never seems to be able. The play's end is as the same as it's beginning, Hamm sits motionless with a handkerchief over his face, and nothing is changed. It seems that the characters are imprisoned in time.

In *Endgame*, Beckett focuses on the idea of time he is like Zeno,<sup>\*</sup> is concerned with the quarrel between mortal microcosm and immortal macrocosm and by the permanent separation of a finite being in time and space from the surrounding universe. Zeno does not see the essence of reality as infinity. He demonstrates that by means of a heap of millet. If one takes a finite quantity of millet and first pours half of it into a heap; then takes half of what remains, add that to the heap, and continues in this way until all the millet is brought into a single pile once again. One will discover that although in an infinite universe the heap could be completed, this will never happen within the limitations of the finite.<sup>(8)</sup> This is obvious

material for Beckett which provides him with analogy for his search for an end. In the opening words of the play Clove turns towards the audience and promises that: “Finished, it’s finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. (Pause) grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly there’s a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap”<sup>(9)</sup> *Endgame* depicts the last stage of this struggle with time. The universe seems to be destroyed, the world rolls through nothing towards nothing the only witnesses of its past are those who are in the room on the stage. They wait for an end, longing to know where would time lead them to. The characters of *Endgame* realize that they are mortal. The repetitions and routines throughout the play represent the habitual nature of man and imply that these habits are to kill one’s awareness, that death is certain and life is mysterious.

Clove and Hamm serve the formal function of prologue to *Endgame*; they explain the situational context to the audience. Beckett’s indirect use of a prologue reflects a theatrical introduction convention which began in early Greek drama. The prologue presents the audience with a situation to be critically observed. So to judge *Endgame* the reader must be aware of its central dilemma, which is time.<sup>(10)</sup> Hamm addresses at the close of the prologue: “It’s time it ended ...and yet I hesitate to [he yawns]- to end.”<sup>(11)</sup> Though Hamm and Glov pass their present time in talking and joking, there is a necessity that presses itself toward the end of time. The events and the characters’ behavior never change. Hamm and Glove pass their time without any change “time is the same as usual”<sup>(12)</sup>. Each time contain the action and reaction of the day before, until each event becomes ritualistic act.

Theodor W Adorno says that “time is lost to his antipodes because it might signify hope.”<sup>(13)</sup> Hamm and Glov pass their time as a mere rehearsals performance for one another, a way to combat the boredom in a world outside of it there is nothing:

Hamm: And the horizon? Nothing on the horizon?

Clov: [lowering the telescope, turning towards Ham, exasperated]. What in God’s name could there be on the horizon? [Pause]

Hamm: The waves how are the waves?

Clov: The waves? [Turns the telescope on the waves .]lead.

Hamm: And the sun?

Clov: [looking] zero.<sup>(14)</sup>

Time is disabled. Hamm and Clov wait a change in time as a way of consolation in a world where there is no one outside of it. Bell Gale Chevigny says that the deep change they wait is simultaneously a death of divisive consciousness and a berth into whole selfhood. But the prospective change to being and the void is remote and it fades.<sup>(15)</sup> They wait and go on looking for resolution “the end is in the beginning and yet you go on .”<sup>(16)</sup> This is Ham’s hopeless knowledge. There is no hope and no help; everything is a zero even time. Beckett reveals the sense of the tragic difficulty of becoming aware of one’s own self in a hopeless process of everyday, of beginning and end . He expresses the deep depression and hopelessness, as time passes the world outside goes dead but inside human mind there is ceaseless struggle in an attempt to assert himself. Clov reflects that when he says:

“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.”<sup>(17)</sup>

Clov describes that time passes and there is a change that has occurred without understanding what precisely has transpired.

As time passes and everything stays the same, there is still a transformation of the physical body that takes shape. Physical changes through old age and disabilities like blindness and paralysis are no doubt tragic but they are not supposed to be underlying meaning of the play. Therefore, Beckett shows no regret in the place of suffering and emphasizes it grotesquely by degrading the human body into its decaying components.<sup>(18)</sup> This is seen in Nell and Nagg who wait their death. It seems that they have sustained their misery as Nell puts it clearly when commenting on how “nothing is funnier than happiness...it’s like a funny story we heard too often , we still find it funny, but we don’t laugh anymore.”<sup>(19)</sup> In other words, the characters have been suffering for a long time that it is commonplace and accepted.

Hamm has not accepted what Nell and Nagg already have. This is why, from time to time, he asks Clov, "is it time for my painkiller?"<sup>(20)</sup> He is avoiding time by wanting to exist without painful knowledge of his misery. On the other hand, Clov knows that it is almost time "nearly finished, must be nearly finished."<sup>(21)</sup> It is time to move on before time itself physically breaks him down. Clov is looking for what Hamm was looking for. They both look for a hope, a hope of another life. In *Endgame*, there are three generations of old people who are unable to reach their goals, they can only wait. Ross Chamber has suggested that *Endgame* is a kind of time world in which this desperate situation occurs, a world in which it is possible to edge nearer and nearer to the goal without ever attaining it. He believed that the reason for this impossibility lies in the definition of the goal. He says:

If in, the attempt to reach the self is like trying to become the center of a circle., a place outside of space, the attempt of time is equivalent to seeking a time outside temporality. For it is only outside time and space that the self may exist free from contingency. But the attempt to reach eternity, like the attempt to reach the center, is an infinite process.<sup>(22)</sup>

Time appears to be a stop, so that when Hamm asks the hour Clov replies, "The same as usual."<sup>(23)</sup> But in fact time has not stopped. It passes desperately slowly. Therefore, all the characters, at the end of the play, have moved routinely closer to the end. Clov is ready to depart; Hamm has thrown away his gaff, his whistle and his dog; Nell and Nagg are much feebler than before. Time is not experienced as a linear development towards a goal, but as a deep emptiness.

Beckett uses chess as a way to play out of this human predicament. He uses chess as the play controlling metaphor. The idea of life as a game to be played and passed by inventing an opponent or telling stories has been common to Beckett. The characters not only play but are played with. Hamm is both player and chess piece. He dominates the action from his throne in the center of the room. But he is hopeless in his chair. He relies on Clov to push him round his kingdom. Hamm is guarded by his attendant pieces. Nagg and Nell in their dust bins appear to represent imprisoned pawns, while Clov with his restricted movement resembles the knight. To move beyond the inner boundaries, the room, exposes Hamm

to danger. Hamm lives in anxiety, concerned for his security and reliant upon Clov to protect him against a sudden attack. At the end the board is almost empty, like the world of Hamm. Hamm's challenger is not human but time and against time he seeks to lose not to win and to continue without hope. At the end of the play, the game is not in fact over. Hamm has lost his attempt to lose everything to time but not the game as a game of chess. The end is not checkmate but stalemate which means that no one can win. Hamm is unable to go on and unable to finish it. It is a game one cannot leave it in the middle. Hamm can neither lose nor win.<sup>(24)</sup> Towards the end of the play, something important has happened when Glov distinguishes a small boy out of the room, but Hamm refuses to investigate further:

Hamm: If he exists he'll die there or he he'll come here. And if he doesn't...

(pause)

Glov: You don't believe me? You think I'm inventing?

(pause)

Hamm: it's the end, Glov, we've come to the end I don't need you.<sup>(25)</sup>

Perhaps Hamm is accepting defeat here, accepting that Glov's strong card is his ability to dominate Hamm's experience even by inventing strangers. Whether there is a small boy or not whether Glov is inventing or not, Hamm has no means of knowing. If the boy exists he will die and the remaining piece, Clov is at the door therefore, he makes a temporary close by reversing the opening. He covers his face with the large handkerchief and remains motionless.

Richard M. Goldman has argued that Beckett's plays forces us to modify our notion of the drama. There is no rising action, no falling action and there is no linear movement. The first scene is the last scene except that Clov is at the end dressed for a trip, it may take place or not.<sup>(26)</sup> The play begins and ends and that no events fall between them. There has not been a change of heart, mind or situation. Time in *Endgame* has no structure. Structure is imposed through routine and through playing games. Hamm and Clov play a futile game. The dramatic tension of the play is derived from Clov's threatening to stop playing in order to upset Hamm:

Clov: I'll leav you.

Hamm: No!

Clov: What is there to keep me here?

Hamm: The dialogue.(pause) I've got on with my story.(pause) I've got on with it well.(pause)....<sup>(27)</sup>

Conversation in the play is a rule to govern each other . Some critics argues that "Beckett's characters often try words out for size , put words as one would put on a new pair of shoes, to see if they feel comfortable in them."<sup>(28)</sup> In Clov's line:"the one you've been telling yourself all...your days,"<sup>(29)</sup> Beckett uses the word day instead of the word life to say that Hamm and Clov do not posses anything meaningful as a life, they possess an empty days only. Following this line , Hamm's "Ah you mean my chronicle?"<sup>(30)</sup> He uses the word chronicle instead of story. The word chronicle refers to history, it does not necessarily have an end. It is a record of passing time. Hamm tries to tell Clov that the conversations, like the one they are having, that they have had so many times in the past, will happen again in the future. By Hamm's words, Beckett emphasizes "the uniform grayness of all time- past, present or to come."<sup>(31)</sup> The implication of the play is that the characters live in an unchanging state. It expresses the grim confirmation that nothing has changed since the time before. Each time contains the actions and reactions of the time before. In *Endgame* repetition in language and circumstances articulates the human condition, as we repeat our mistakes all the time. It is made clear that the characters have a past but there is no indication that they have a future.

Such tactics of temporality are even more boldly employed by Pinter. Like *Endgame*, *Old Times* begins in a dim light which reflects the dim of time. In *Old Times*, the dim light is the "smokescreen of time...."<sup>(32)</sup> It is the myster of time which gets in the eyes of all it's characters , Deeley, Kate, and Anna. The play starts in a mid conversation between Deeley and his wife Kate about a letter of old friend, Anna , whose arrival is clearly expected at any moment. Reminiscences about old times become a matter for sexual combat. The three characters reenact a problematic scene from their past time.



The contradictory statements, the characters make about each other, and the varying descriptions of the past have led to endless speculations among commentators. Some critics have mentioned that *Old Times* is a meditation of memory. It is a play in which past time is no more fixed or certain than the present or the future. All its characters create the past time according to reality, one is never quite sure at what point vivid memory shades into spontaneous creation.<sup>(33)</sup> Pinter sets out this theme clearly in the opening exchange where Kate and Deeley discuss Anna even as she stands up stage in semidarkness. She is clearly present in their imagination before she appears:

Kate: (reflectively)Dark.

(pause)

Deeley: fat or thin?

Kate: Fuller than me. I think.

(pause)

Deeley: She was then?

Kate:I think so.

Deeley: she was not be now.

(pause)

Was she your best friend?<sup>(34)</sup>

The pauses and, silences and repetition are Pinter's distinctive linguistic elements. The pauses here reflect the sense of Deeley's insecurity of Kate's answers. Even the seeming facts established in the opening scene are contradicted . At the beginning, Kate observes that she had no friends, later she says that she and Anna launch into communal companion.

In a world where memory is hazy, the past time can be used to gain dominance over other people. In the battle between Anna and Deeley to possess Anna, the past time becomes a "weapon of psychological domination."<sup>(35)</sup> The competition between Anna and Deeley is centered on two anecdotes; the first is concerning the film *Odd Man Out*, the second is about the *Wayfarers Tavern*. Deeley remembers walking aimlessly in an area known to him while Anna remembers travelling

purposely to a “totally unfamiliar district....”<sup>(36)</sup> Anna in her description of rushing off with Kate to unfamiliar area to see Odd Mann Out, gains advantage over Deeley and reinvents the past to suit her own purpose. More significantly, both remember seeing Kate in the cinema but neither acknowledges the presence of the other. Both of them remember the same incident very differently. As Anna states in her crucial remark, “there are things I remember which may never have happened but as I recall them so they take place.”<sup>(37)</sup> This line has often been used by critics to justify that past time in *Old Times* is “a thing to be manipulated independently of chronicle and history....”<sup>(38)</sup> The characters recreate it to suit their own aims. The same is applied to the incident in the Wayfarer Tavern. Deeley says that he remembers Anna from a tavern a long time ago. He describes his memory of her clothes and her escorts, but Anna denies that. He expands the tale, adding a gathering at a flat, where he spent the evening gazing up her skirt. Anna changes the subject, turning back to Kate. Deeley begins to talk about Kate’s bathing habits in another challenge of who know Kate better. Here Deeley and Anna talking about the past and creating it to gain control of Kate. Pinter wants to say that Anna and Deeley’s talk about past time whether it is true or not is unimportant because time past is past and its important depends on its influence on the present. What take place in the present is determining and worth dealing with.

The conversation between Deeley and Anna show how the language and speech of one mirrors the other. Deeley comments on taking Kate’s face in his hand and looking at it as if he wants to see himself in it. Anna remembers a few minutes later time when she used to “look at her face [although]she was quite unaware of my gaze....”<sup>(39)</sup> The two sing in an attempt to attract Kate’s attention, while Kate still sits silent. They fight by words to acknowledge their possession of Kate’s past time. Deeley sings “all the thing you are, are mine....”<sup>(40)</sup> And Anna sings “they can’t take that from me....”<sup>(41)</sup> Deeley and Anna attempt to claim ownership over Kate. During the course of the play, it becomes clear that Deeley and Anna’s identities depend on the past time they share with Kate. Both wish to dominate her to possess her past. Sidney Homan has suggested

that Anna fights to keep her own psyche intact through other's experience of her and with her. Homan believed that

we really only exist as a reflection in the eyes of others, and that their remembrances of [old times ] are what define us. We are in constant battle for a definition of self and yet we can't battle alone . Even if we could, we don't want. Sometimes we are in control of our memories, just as often another will take control.  
(42)

Anna and Deeley give themselves up completely in this desperate struggle for definition. They try to find themselves by visiting the past time, hoping that they come out of it whole and intact.

Lucina Pquet Gabbard argued that *Old Times* by its very title emphasizes the important of past time in "propelling man into misbegotten alliance."<sup>(43)</sup> However, it also shows that if man is given another chance, he will repeat his mistake just as innocently as he made them the first time. The ironic element is in man's striving to gain the goal that will commit him to emptiness and loss of love. Deeley struggles against Anna to win Kate but he only wins Kate's self withdrawal. Moreover , Deeley had already known dissatisfaction with Kate's nature , but he still fought to keep her from Anna, to keep her for him. Once he defeated Anna, he suffers again his own loss.

*Old Times* like *Endgame*, is a game . Deeley and Kate like Hamm and Clov, cannot truly connect with each other and this game of dominance is their way to intimacy. They play this game their entire marriage. But when a visitor from the past ,Anna, joins it Kate realizes that she is fed up with it. She struggles to end it for good. Although some critics think that Kate has triumphed because she proves that she is unpossessable and "serenely confident"<sup>(44)</sup> But it is a temporal triumph, in this game no one is a winner because the opponent is not human , it is time. The final scene is of Deeley in armchair, Anna lying on divan and Kate is sitting on another. This contain a reenactment of the bedroom scene which is described in the first act. All the three characters are locked into a condition of frozen and permanent isolation. *Old Times* refers to man who is trapped inside himself, and the linear time is an

artificial construct. Past time is created in response to the needs of the present.

The first reaction when one reads the *Old Times*, feels the influence of Beckett but the final impression is that they are very much Pinter's territory, and his use of language reminds the reader that from the beginning. Pinter's characters assumption about world closely resemble those of Beckett's characters, there is no real identity, history or meaning, but only that they construct for themselves. Beckett and Pinter portray human condition in its wider view, with all its uncertainty. The human condition is not rendered as miserable as it is by Beckett but Pinter shows unsatisfactory creatures enveloped in uncertainties. Both Beckett and Pinter's characters are plucked out of time. *Endgame* and *Old Times* show a lack of plot and also in the conventional sense of characters. Time and personality are questioned in the plays. It seems that both Beckett and Pinter are obsessed of what Beckett called "double-headed monster of domination and salvation-Time."<sup>(45)</sup>

Ultimately, it is the way time is presented as a purely existential force that characterizes these two plays outlook on the nature of life and the meaning of existence. The dislocation of the temporal axel of actionality in these two plays is meant to reflect the twisted existence of the characters who people the textual spaces of the plays.

## Notes

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- ✚ Zeno of Elea is a Greek philosopher . almost everything known about him is to be found in the opening pages of Plato’s *Parmenides*. Most of his books are not survived , what is known of his arguments is second- hand, principally through Aristotle and his commentators. See: Plato, *Parmenides*. [classics.mit.edu/plato/parmenides.html](http://classics.mit.edu/plato/parmenides.html). Jim Loy, *Zeno’s Paradoxes: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. [www.Jimloy.com/physics/zeno.htm](http://www.Jimloy.com/physics/zeno.htm). retrieved in 3-7-2010.
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