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Compiled by Hannah Brown.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Hannah Brown is the Education Projects Officers for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Hannah on hbrown@sydneytheatre.com.au

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ABOUT *ON CUE* AND STC

ABOUT ON CUE

STC Ed has developed a suite of resources located on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season. Each show will be accompanied by an On Cue e-publication which will feature all the essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and suggested learning experiences. For more in-depth digital resources surrounding the ELEMENTS OF DRAMA, DRAMATIC FORMS, STYLES, CONVENTIONS and TECHNIQUES, visit the STC Ed page on our website.

Such resources include:

- videos
- design sketchbooks
- worksheets
- posters

ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

In 1980, STC's first Artistic Director Richard Wherrett defined STC's mission as to provide "first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney – theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun."

Almost 35 years later, under the leadership of Artistic Director Andrew Upton, that ethos still rings true. STC offers a diverse program of distinctive theatre of vision and scale at its harbourside home venue, The Wharf; Sydney Theatre at Walsh Bay; and Sydney Opera House, as its resident theatre company.

STC has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre makers, developing and producing eclectic Australian works, interpretations of classic repertoire and great international writing. STC strives to create theatre experiences that reflect Sydney's distinctive personality and engage audiences.

Strongly committed to engagement in the community, STC's Education and Communities programs aim to inspire theatre appreciation and participation not only in theatres but also in schools, community halls; wherever people get together. STC offers an innovative School Drama™ program; partners with groups in metropolitan Sydney, regional centres and rural areas; and reaches

beyond NSW with touring productions throughout Australia. Through these partnerships and initiatives, STC plays a part in ensuring a creative, forward-thinking and sociable future by engaging with young people, students and teachers.

The theatre careers of many of Australia's internationally renowned artists have been launched and fostered at STC, including Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Hugo Weaving, Geoffrey Rush, Toni Collette, Rose Byrne, Benedict Andrews and Cate Blanchett.

STC often collaborates with international artists and companies and, in recent years, the company's international profile has grown significantly with productions touring extensively to great acclaim.

STC is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, by its arts funding and advisory body, and by the New South Wales Government through Arts NSW.

sydneytheatre.com.au

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

SUITABLE FOR

Students in Years 9 to 12

SUBJECTS

Drama and English

DRAMA STAGE 5

Outcome 5.3.1
Outcome 5.3.2
Outcome 5.1.1
Outcome 5.3.1
Outcome 5.3.2

DRAMA STAGE 6 (HSC PRELIMINARY)

Outcome P3.1
Outcome P3.2
Outcome P3.3
Outcome P3.4

DRAMA STAGE 6 (HSC)

Outcome H3.1
Outcome H3.2
Outcome H3.3
Outcome H3.4
Outcome H3.5



Bruce Spence in rehearsal for STC's *Endgame*, 2015. Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

ENDGAME

BY SAMUEL BECKETT

CLOV
TOM BUDGE

NELL
SARAH PEIRSE

NAGG
BRUCE SPENCE

HAMM
HUGO WEAVING

DIRECTOR
ANDREW UPTON

SET & LIGHTING DESIGNER
NICK SCHLIEPER

COSTUME DESIGNER
RENEE MULDER

COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER
MAX LYANDVERT

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
HUGO WEAVING

ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER
SIAN JAMES-HOLLAND

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
JESSICA ARTHUR

PRODUCTION MANAGER
KATE CHAPMAN

STAGE MANAGER
MINKA STEVENS

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
KATIE HANKIN

WIG, MAKE-UP & WARDROBE SUPERVISOR
LAUREN A. PROIETTI

HEAD MECHANIST
STEVE MASON

HEAD FLY OPERATOR
KANE MOTT

DEPUTY HEAD FLY OPERATOR
CHRIS FLEMING

HEAD ELECTRICIAN
ANDREW TOMPKINS

LIGHTING BOARD OPERATOR
HARRY CLEGG

HEAD SOUND
KEVIN WHITE

FOH SOUND OPERATOR
REMY WOODS

REHEARSAL/PRODUCTION
PHOTOGRAPHER
LISA TOMASETTI

1 HOUR 50 MINUTES, NO INTERVAL. THIS PRODUCTION PREMIERED AT ROSLYN PACKER THEATRE WALSH BAY ON 7 APRIL 2015



SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO

ABOUT SAMUEL BECKETT

AN UPROARIOUS PESSIMIST

“MY LIFE WAS DEVOID OF INTEREST – TO PUT IT MILDLY, AND MUCH BETTER LEFT UNWRITTEN. I KNOW I HAVE NO SAY IN THE MATTER, EXCEPT TO THE EFFECT THAT I COULD BE OF NO HELP TO MY BIOGRAPHER.” SAMUEL BECKETT

Samuel Barclay Beckett was born on Good Friday, 13 April 1906 in Dublin, Ireland, to a middle class Protestant family. Beckett's parents had wanted him to become part of the family's quantity surveying business, but Beckett had other ideas. Having studied at Portora Royal School – a boarding school also attended by Oscar Wilde – Beckett went on to major in French and Italian at Trinity College, Dublin, emerging with a BA in 1927 and an MA in 1931. He excelled as a student and in sports – rugby, swimming, boxing and cricket. During his studies at Trinity, he travelled in Europe and taught English at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. While in Paris, Beckett was introduced to James Joyce, to whom he became a close friend – reading aloud for him as Joyce's sight faded.

After spells in Dublin and London, Beckett settled in Paris towards the end of 1937. Early the following year, he was stabbed in a street altercation with the inaptly named Robert-Jules Prudent. The wound healed in time for Beckett to see *Murphy*, his first published novel, released in March of 1938. When war was declared in 1939, Beckett remained in Occupied France, and was a member of the French Resistance. In 1942, he was forced to flee to Unoccupied France, where he lived in hiding as an agricultural labourer in the Vaucluse. Beckett's nephew, Edward Beckett noted that his uncle “wouldn't talk about that [war] period. It was a painful time, one that he really didn't want to go back into.”

In a period of intense creativity (1946-50) he wrote an unpublished play (*Eleuthéria*) and *En attendant Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*; the play was not staged until 1953), as well as his famous trilogy of prose narratives, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*, all originally written in French. Among his other numerous works of prose fiction are *Watt* (1953, in English), *Sans* (1969, as *Lessness*, 1971), and *Mercier et Camier* (1970, in English 1974). He wrote the screenplay for *Film* (1965), which starred Buster Keaton.

Beckett also wrote radio and television plays, several books of poetry and translated the works of French writers into English. *Endgame* was, like much of Beckett's work, originally written in French, as *Fin de Partie* (1957), and then translated into English by Beckett himself. One of Beckett's great friends and interpreters, Irish actor Jack MacGowran, explains that Beckett wrote in French because “he was afraid of our heritage, so fond of rhetorical phrases and flowery sentences. If he would write in French, then translate it, he would write three words instead of 12 words. It was the discipline. He would have to be so concise.

He can put tragedy and comedy into one sentence, as in *Endgame*: ‘Nothing is funnier than unhappiness I'll grant you that.’ It's funny and sad, tragic and comic, in one line.” After some difficulty in finding a theatre willing to program the play, *Fin de Partie* was first performed, in French, at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on 3 April 1957, directed by renowned French director Roger Blin, who also played Hamm. Blin had previously directed the French

ABOUT SAMUEL BECKETT

AN UPROARIOUS PESSIMIST

première of *En attendant Godot* four years earlier, in which he had played Pozzo. The first anglophone *Endgame* was staged in New York, in 1958, under the direction of Alan Schneider, who had, like Blin, cut his teeth on *Godot*. The play returned to the Royal Court in London, after censorship delays (see page 22), in a new English-language production directed by George Devine, in 1958. As with *Godot*, Beckett himself directed a German language production (*Endspiel*) in Berlin in 1967 and an English-language one in London in 1980. Beckett's other dramatic works include: *Krapp's Last Tape*, which was first performed in London in 1958; *Happy Days*, written in English and first performed in New York in 1961; *Play*, first performed in German in Ulm, 1963, and in the original English in New York and London in 1964; *Breath*, a short piece lasting less than a minute, was the opening sketch of the revue *Oh! Calcutta!* in New York in 1969. Beckett won a series of awards for his works, including: the Evening Standard Award in 1955; the Obie Award in 1958, 1960, 1962, 1964; the Italia Prize, 1959; and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. He was also awarded an honorary doctorate from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1959. He died in 1989.

Sydney Theatre Company (2015). *Endgame* Program. The Roslyn Packer Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company.



Hugo Weaving and Tom Budge in STC's *Endgame*, 2015. Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©

FROM THE DIRECTOR

ANDREW UPTON

“Like him was I, these sloping shoulders, this gracelessness. My childhood bends beside me. Too far for me to lay a hand there once or lightly. Mine is far and his secret as our eyes. Secrets, silent, stony sit in the dark palaces of both our hearts: secrets weary of their tyranny: tyrants, willing to be dethroned.”

– James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Part 1: Episode 2

Sydney Theatre Company (2015). *Endgame* Program. The Roslyn Packer Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company.



FOR ALL THE BASICS ABOUT *ENDGAME* CHECK OUT OUR
PRE-SHOW IN- THE-KNOW FACT SHEET!



Sarah Peirse, Bruce Spence and Andrew Upton in rehearsal for STC's *Endgame*, 2015. Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©

CONTEXT

“YOU MUST REALISE THAT HAMM AND CLOV ARE DIDI AND GOGO AT A LATER DATE, AT THE END OF THEIR LIVES [...] ACTUALLY THEY ARE SUZANNE AND ME.” SAMUEL BECKETT

Suzanne Georgette Anna Déchevaux-Dumesnil Beckett died 17 July 1989. At her funeral in Montparnasse was her husband, Samuel.

Suzanne and Samuel first met on a Parisian tennis court in the late 1920s in a game of mixed doubles, but what brought them together was a pimp. When Samuel was stabbed by the pimp Robert-Jules Prudent in January 1938, the news made the papers. Suzanne, who recognised the stabbing victim as the tall Irishman she had once exchanged forehands with, visited Samuel at the hospital. She was single and took a keen interest. Samuel had been dating the art collector Peggy Guggenheim, but soon took up with Suzanne instead.

She was six years older than Samuel, raised in France and Tunisia. She was an accomplished pianist and musical connoisseur. Decisively left-wing in her politics, she was practical, independent and caring. One theatre maker described her as “reserved, almost cool, but friendly; austere and inward-looking, but self-possessed”. She supported Samuel economically and, convinced of his talent, provided a buffer between him and the arts industry: hawking manuscripts to publishers, writing to agents on his behalf and, later, attending the premières of his plays in order to report back to her inveterately attention-shy husband.

The significance of the relationship was not immediately apparent. Samuel neglected to mention her in letters to



Tom Budge and Hugo Weaving in STC's *Endgame*, 2015. Image: Lisa Tomasetti.

CONTEXT (CONT.)

“YOU MUST REALISE THAT HAMM AND CLOV ARE DIDI AND GOGO AT A LATER DATE, AT THE END OF THEIR LIVES [...] ACTUALLY THEY ARE SUZANNE AND ME.” SAMUEL BECKETT

friends until April 1939, when he managed a brief addendum in a letter to his friend, the poet Thomas MacGreevy, “There is a French girl also whom I am fond of, dispassionately, and who is very good to me.” Samuel was 31, Suzanne was 37. By June, with German tanks approaching Paris, Suzanne and Samuel joined the exodus from the capital. They visited James Joyce in Vichy before hiding in the back of a truck for some 500 kilometres to join Mary Reynolds and Marcel Duchamp (who Samuel repeatedly lost chess matches to) in the quiet seaside town of Arcachon, southwest of Bordeaux.

Suzanne and Samuel remained together through the war years, with Samuel narrowly avoiding arrest by the Gestapo in Paris for involvement in the Resistance. They scraped by with help from friends and menial jobs between various lodgings across France.

In the postwar years, back in their small Paris apartment at the top of 6 rue des Favorites, Suzanne supported them with dressmaking and piano lessons, while Samuel created the body of work which launched his career. But without Suzanne’s faith in the value of Samuel’s work, he may as well have been writing in a vacuum. As Samuel himself put it, “I owe everything to Suzanne. She hawked everything around trying to get someone to take all three books at the same time. That was a very pretentious thing for an unknown to want! She was the one who went to see the publishers while I used to sit in a café ‘twiddling my fingers’ or whatever it is one twiddles. [...] It was the same with Roger Blin. She was the one who saw Blin and got him interested in *Godot* and *Eleuthéria*. I kept out of the way.”

In the decades that followed, Suzanne and Samuel’s relationship weathered, amongst other things, faithlessness. Samuel had several sometimes concurrent affairs. Suzanne and Samuel’s belated marriage, in 1961, may have been a legal necessity – it assured that Suzanne would inherit his literary estate – but it also affirmed the bond between them, however complicated and conditional, at a trying time. In the 1970s, as Samuel struggled with illness, it was Suzanne who arranged their summer holidays to aid his health – acting as harbinger, she would arrive in advance of him to check that their hotel was up

to scratch. He was still reliant on her, though, by this stage, not financially. His other relationships continued, wedding ceremony or no – particularly with Englishwoman Barbara Bray who moved to Paris to be closer to him the same year that he married Suzanne. It was Barbara who typed up his final work in 1989 (an English translation of *What Is the Word*). But Samuel’s biographer, James Knowlson, noted that, following Suzanne’s funeral, he found the tall Irishman “sad and filled with remorse”. Before the year was out, Samuel had joined Suzanne at Montparnasse.

Sydney Theatre Company (2015). *Endgame* Program. The Roslyn Packer Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company.

ABOUT THE PLAY

NOTHING IS FUNNIER THAN UNHAPPINESS

Hugo Weaving returns to Sydney Theatre Company in Samuel Beckett's modern masterpiece, which takes the end of the world so seriously it makes us laugh.

Hamm is a blind tyrant, unable to stand. Clov is his son, unable to sit. Hamm's parents, Nell and Nagg, are living in bins.

Sheltering in an underground room, Hamm orders Clov about. Clov looks out the window for signs of life, but all seems lost and there is no one there. Inside, the characters pass the time, brutally toying with each other in the way only family can. These four people, perhaps the last, are playing out the game of life to its inevitable end.

What has happened outside? Will Clov leave Hamm to die?

In the mix of dark comedic repartee and distilled insight, Beckett's singular voice rings clear – absurdity in the face of meaninglessness, sorrow in the face of futility, humour in the face of mortality

With our acclaimed production of *Waiting for Godot* in 2013, Hugo Weaving and Andrew Upton began a conversation with the work of Samuel Beckett. With *Endgame*, they pick up where they left off.

The two plays are, in many respects, companion pieces – *Endgame*, completed in 1956, acts as a subterranean coda to *Godot*. Both were informed by the wholesale destruction of the Second World War and the sense of impending yet intangible doom promised by the nuclear age.

If *Godot* redefined the possibilities of theatre, *Endgame* cemented Beckett's place as the foremost playwright of his era.



Hugo Weaving and Tom Budge in STC's *Endgame*, 2015. Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©

SYNOPSIS

NOTHING TO BE SAID. NOTHING TO BE DONE.

How do you write a synopsis for a play that is famously described as being a play about nothing?

The purpose of a synopsis is to outline what happens in a play, giving insight into its plot points and dramatic action. In *Endgame*, conventional theatrical notions of narrative structure, dialogue and character journey do not exist. The play is set in a post apocalyptic world that is in a state of decline. The four characters – Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell are perhaps the last people left on the earth. What is actually happening and what it means is up for debate and interpretation by the audience. Even Beckett himself refused to

comment, saying, “I produce an object. What people make of it is not my concern [...] I’d be quite incapable of writing a critical introduction to my own works” (Worton, 1994).

So, here at STC Ed we have decided not to write a synopsis of *Endgame* because to do so would be to defy Beckett’s purpose in creating this play. Instead, think about the questions below:

TAKE YOUR CUE

- If you could draw a picture of what happens in *Endgame*, what would you draw? Why?
- After reading the Themes and Ideas section and the Elements of Drama section of this On Cue, summarise what *Endgame* is about in one sentence.
- How is audience engagement maintained throughout the play?
- Why would Beckett have created theatre like this? Think about what happened in the decades before *Endgame* was written in 1957. Think about the styles of theatre the preceded Beckett’s works.



Hamm (under cloth). Sketch by Nicholas Harding, 2015. ©

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

HAMM

Hamm can be described as a misanthrope who shows general disdain towards life and the human race. He is a master in *Endgame* and symbolic of the King piece in the game of Chess. Hamm is powerful yet also vulnerable, as he is wheelchair bound and blind, relying on Clov to take care of him. His blindness causes him to crave light in his life, despite the fact the sun no longer shines. Although he presents himself as dominant and merciless, he is petrified of being alone and continually says things so that Clov does not leave.

Hamm: You're leaving me all the same.

Clov: I'm trying.

Hamm: You don't love me.

Clov: No.

Hamm: You loved me once. (pg.14)

He barks orders at both Clov and his parents, Nagg and Nell, as a way of controlling his immediate environment, even as the world outside degenerates beyond his control. The status relationship between Hamm and Clov continuously changes. Hamm has high status when he orders Clov around and uses a whistle to summon him. This is similar to the rope used by Pozzo and Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*, although not as violent (Demleitner, 2002). In contrast, Clov has high status at certain points as he looks after Hamm by waking him up and putting him to sleep with the sheet, giving him painkillers and wheeling him around. Hamm and Clov can also be interpreted as a mutually dependant couple that rely on one another for survival. For example, Clov relies on Hamm to open the larder for food. While Hamm relies on Clov to keep him alive and also be a source of companionship.

Hamm is afraid of the flea and the rat inside the well because they may start humanity all over again when he himself is eager for death and the end. "[Exasperated.] Have you not finished? Will you never finish? [With sudden fury.] Will this never finish?" (pg.22).

The monotonous routines that fill Hamm's daily life such as fighting with Clov, being wheeled to the window and patting his (unfinished) toy dog, highlight the futility of life and only serve to pass the time before 'the end'. However, towards the end of the play it becomes clear that Hamm may be neither fully living nor approaching death but is instead trapped in a routine that repeats itself every day. (Sparknotes Editors, n.d.)

As with the name Godot, much has been made of the name Hamm. Its homonym, ham, as in meat, could readily be garnished with the complementary spice clove (Clov). There is also a town in the Picardy region north of Paris called Ham, where some of the early drafts of *Endgame* were specifically set. The renowned Frankfurt School philosopher Theodor Adorno was convinced that the name derived from Hamlet, even after Beckett promised him it did not (Beckett was reported to make the aside, "This is the progress of science that professors can proceed with their errors"). Ham is also the name of Noah's second son, one of the eight people who survived the flood in the Book of Genesis, which Beckett was reading while writing the first drafts of *Endgame*. When directing a production of the play in Berlin, Beckett described the relationship between Hamm and the other characters as that between a hammer (Hamm) and three nails: in French, clou (Clov) means nail; in German, nagel (Nagg) means nail; with Nell deriving from the English, nail (*Endgame* Program, 2015).

CHARACTER ANALYSIS (Cont.)

CLOV

Clov is Hamm's adopted son and assumes the role of Hamm's servant and carer; because of this, he can be likened to the Knight piece in a game of Chess. Knights in a game of Chess stand on either side of the King as a protector. They can move all around the board and can make the first move in the game. This is similar to Clov who is the most active in the stage space and also has the first lines of the play. Although Hamm and Clov need each other, they also each want to leave the other. Clov staggers around obeying Hamm's orders and repeatedly complaining about why he stays with Hamm.

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from the text as to why Clov stays in the service of Hamm. At first it appears to the audience that Clov stays because he does not know the combination to the larder. However, as the play continues, Clov shows a greater sense of empathy than the harsher Hamm, suggesting his reason for staying may be associated with a sense of obligation and loyalty towards his ailing master. This implies that even when trapped in a desolate post-apocalyptic world, compassion can still survive. Clov is also trapped in a repetitive cycle, where his life is ruled by the same daily routine escapable only by death. Clov's character therefore represents the theme of the 'cyclical nature of human existence'. This is prefaced by him at the beginning of the play, when he says "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished" (pg. 12). He also repeatedly states "something is taking

its course", intimating that life rolls on in a monotonous routine. Clov is reconciled with his routine existence and scoffs at the possibility that he and Hamm could be starting to mean something in their lives.

Hamm: We're not beginning to...to...mean something?

Clov: Mean something! You and I, mean something! [Brief laugh.]
Ah that's a good one! (pg. 27)

At the end of the play, Clov resolves to leave and he and Hamm graciously acknowledge their companionship. However, Clov never truly exits and there is a feeling that their lives will continue unchanged and they were play out their Endgame again tomorrow. This is echoed in Hamm's last words ('stancher' means to be faithful) - "Old Stancher! [Pause.] You...remain" (pg. 53).



Clov. Sketch by Nicholas Harding, 2015. ©

CHARACTER ANALYSIS (Cont.)

NAGG AND NELL

Nagg and Nell are Hamm's elderly father and mother. They were confined to oil barrels after they fell off their tandem bicycle and lost their legs. Both Nagg and Nell represent Pawns in a game of Chess. Pawns stand at the front and guard the King, which is fitting giving Nagg and Nell are Hamm's parents. However, Nagg and Nell are old and Hamm sees them as a dispensable burden calling Nagg "accursed progenitor" and "the old folks at home! No decency left!" (pg. 15).

Of all the characters in *Endgame*, Nell is perhaps the most connected to humanity. She is concerned with things that the others have deemed unimportant in the bleak, lifeless world they now inhabit. For example, Nell is sympathetic towards her son's troubles and also advocates for the other characters to be more accurate. (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008) When Nagg asks if her sawdust has been changed, she reminds him that it is sand, not sawdust. Nell is no longer able to laugh, and scolds Nagg for laughing at Hamm. (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008) Nell's inability to laugh shows she has lost hope and faith in life. Her need for accuracy, and sympathy and her lack of sense of humour, cause her to be in a state of despair of what has become of the world and as such she dies in her dustbin during the play.

Nagg is less aware of others' needs and is dejected about the world. He has regressed to the behaviour of a child, calling for his 'pap' (the name given to baby food or a mother's breast). Nagg cares for his wife and offers her half his biscuit and wants her to kiss him. When she dies, he retreats into his bin to cry. Nagg still has a sense of humour and tries to tell jokes; failing miserably when he leaves out important details before the punch line. (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008) When His sense of humour shows he still has some hope for the world in which they live.

Beckett referred to Nell and Nagg as les poubellards ('the garbage binners') in letters. In early drafts of the text, in which Nagg and Nell do not appear, there was a coffin onstage from which a head would appear. (*Endgame* Program, 2015).



Sarah Peirse and Bruce Spence in STC's *Endgame*, 2015. Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©

THEMES AND IDEAS

SEARCHING FOR MEANING IN *ENDGAME*

Samuel Beckett famously evaded answering questions about the meanings of his plays. He usually responded with such statements such as, “Quite alien to me, but you’re welcome” and “the key word in my plays is ‘perhaps.’” *Endgame* is often described as a play about nothing, where nothing happens. However, this is not necessarily true. Andrew Upton has said that Beckett was “very warm and generous” in what he gives directors to work with in *Endgame*. The language of the play is layered with meaning and the play is full of dramatic action and movement. The action in *Endgame* is discussed further in the Movement section of this On Cue. Further to this, Worton (1994) wonders whether nothingness can ever really exist saying - the “expression of nothingness is [...] an ambiguous recognition of the inevitability of nothing for it comes at the end of a consideration of what nothing is and whether it can exist” (Worton, 1994). Beckett challenges the audience members, as it is an unconscious and fundamental part of human nature to attempt to find meaning and decode meaning from texts, as the “...words, they say things, they have referential meaning.” (McMullan, 1994)

With this in mind, below is a deconstruction of the main themes and ideas that can ‘perhaps’ be deciphered from the play!



FIND OUT ABOUT THE STRICT GUIDELINES IMPOSED BY THE BECKETT ESTATE IN OUR CLASSROOM POSTER!



Tom Budge and Hugo Weaving in STC's *Endgame*, 2015. Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

THE CYCLICAL NATURE OF HUMAN EXISTANCE AND THE MEANINGLESSNESS OF LIFE

Interpreting the meaning in the play itself mirrors the pursuit of meaning in the routine of everyday existence in the world of *Endgame*. Routine can be defined as what humans perform to convince themselves that there is a purpose in life and that death is not imminent. Life is an infinite series of beginnings and endings, creating a cyclical human existence defined by the repetition of daily routines that only truly come to an end with death (Worton, 1994). This is communicated in Hamm's lines such as, "The end is the beginning and yet you go on" (pg. 12), "It's the end of the day like any other day, is it, Clov?" (pg. 17) and "what is this farce, day after day?" (pg. 26). Throughout the play words and phrases are repeated, further highlighting the repetitive nature of life. Such phrases include "Something is taking its course" (pg. 17) and the often repeated "Ah, yesterday". The moments that Hamm and Clov play out as part of the 'Endgame' are performed in a ritualistic manner that lead the audience to believe that perhaps the same routine is performed every day, such as Hamm being wheeled to the window by Clov, having Clov check the time or look through the telescope and patting his toy dog. At the end of the play Clov doesn't leave and instead stands listening to Hamm, suggesting that the same routine will be played out again and again.

Hamm is adamant that humanity should not regenerate and life must come to an end – including his own, as he plays out his 'Endgame' with Clov. He shows an aversion towards his parents and anything that procreates. This is communicated when he orders Clov to kill the flea and the rat, in case "...humanity might start from there all over again" (pg.27). This is also shown in Hamm's attitude to the boy, seen through the telescope, who Clov calls a "potential procreator" (pg.50). Hamm tells Clov to leave him outside as he will most likely die anyway. Hamm also asks Clov if his seeds have sprouted, another way of him ensuring new life has not been generated.

The cyclical nature of human existence is also portrayed through the character of Nagg. Nagg is elderly and has become senile; reverting back to behaving like a child. He asks for his 'pap' (a form of baby food or a woman's breast) and behaves like a petulant child when Nell tells her story and he is no longer the centre of attention, saying "It was not, it was not, it was my story and nothing else" (pg. 21).



Andrew Upton, Hugo Weaving, Tom Budge and Sarah Peirse in rehearsal for STC's *Endgame*, 2015. Image: Lisa

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

THE MOTIF OF CHESS

The title *Endgame* has often been considered as a reference to Chess. In a game of Chess, 'Endgame' refers to the final moments of the game when only a few pieces are left on the board and moves are played out to determine the winner. Sometimes in Chess a 'stalemate' occurs. (Moss, 2013) This is when a person has no legal move to make, rendering them 'stuck' and the game becomes a draw. Both the terms 'stalemate' and 'Endgame' relate to the world of the play as Hamm and Clov play out their 'Endgame' – the final moments of Hamm's life. However, the repetitive nature of the dialogue and the sense that they are trapped in a cycle and unable to leave renders them in a 'stalemate.' This is reflected in Hamm's comment, "Enough, it's time it ended, in the refuge too. [Pause]. And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to...end." (pg.12)

Each of the characters can be considered as different Chess pieces, as outlined in the character analysis section of this On Cue booklet. There are also many textual references that further the metaphor of Chess in *Endgame*. For example, at the beginning of the play Hamm says "Me – to play" (pg.12) suggesting they are playing out an 'Endgame.' Beckett himself commented: "Hamm is a king in this Chess game, lost from the start. From the start he knows he is making loud senseless moves. That he will make no progress at all with the gaff. Now at the last moments he makes a few senseless moves as only a bad player would. A good one would have given up long ago. He is only trying to delay the inevitable end" (*Endgame* Program, 2015). Hamm also cries out "my kingdom for a night-man" a reference from Shakespeare's *Richard III* which could also be interpreted as a player's exclamation when a Chess piece is captured. (Moss, 2013)



Hugo Weaving and Tom Budge in rehearsal for STC's *Endgame*, 2015. Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

ENDINGS AND A WORLD IN DECLINE

The play has been described as a diminishing spiral, where the world and the people are slowly descending and coming to an end. (Worton, 1994) There is doubt as to whether an end will ever occur as the repetition within the world of the play suggests that the diminishing spiral may go on for eternity. This is portrayed by Hamm who says “I hesitate to...to end. (pg.12)

The dystopia in which *Endgame* is set, is a world in decline. The basic necessities of life are running out including food (there are only biscuits) and medicine. Even Hamm's stuffed toy dog is unfinished and has three legs. The outside world has also degenerated leaving Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell as the final inhabitants of a post-apocalyptic world where the sun no longer shines. The characters bodies are also in a state of decline, each unable to use certain body parts with degenerated sight and hearing. Nagg and Nell portray this comically in the following exchange.

Nagg: Can you see me?

Nell: Hardly. And you?

Nagg: What?

Nell: Can you see me?

Nagg: Hardly.

Nell: So much the better, so much the better.

Nagg: Don't say that. [Pause.] Our sight has failed.

Nell: Yes.

[Pause. They turn away from each other.]

Nagg: Can you hear me?

Nell: Yes. And you?

Nagg: Yes. [Pause.] Our hearing hasn't failed.

Nell: Our what?

Nagg: Our hearing. (pg. 18)

HOPE

The cyclical nature of human existence creates an absence of hope in *Endgame*, as a life bound by repetition does not leave room for growth or change, with the only solution being death. This is because “...one day they will have to die and until their death, they are damned to exist in a kind of reality in which hope isn't possible anymore” (Demleiner, 2002). Hope is no longer possible as the characters live in a damp bunker with only two windows and a sense that perhaps the characters are the only people left on earth after the apocalypse. It is often thought that *Endgame* is a continuation of *Waiting for Godot*, where even the tree and the country road where Estragon and Vladimir met have now disappeared (Demleiner, 2002). Hamm's morbidity towards life and others indicates he has no hope, yet despite this, is afraid of the end and so repeatedly plays out his 'Endgame' with Clov. Hamm describes the outside world as being nothing but death. The gloomy atmosphere from outside also persists inside the well as what little food is left is kept locked in a larder and there is no medicine or sunlight. Furthermore, the characters all have ailments, most interestingly relating to their legs. Hamm cannot stand up, Clov has problems with his legs, Nagg and Nell have no legs and even the dog that Clov is making only has three legs. The characters' limited capacity for movement symbolises how they are trapped and unable to escape their current existence, rendering them hopeless.

Similarly, things that bring hope in life are notably absent from the world of the play. The sun has gone, plunging the world into an eternity of darkness, which also makes it difficult to gauge the passing of time. An awareness of time and time passing would create hope and an anticipation of the future. It is said that Mother Pegg died of darkness – “Clov: You know what she died of, Mother Pegg? Of Darkness” (pg. 48). As light is associated with hope, Mother Pegg's death is symbolic of a loss of hope in their meaningless world. “Hamm: Is Mother Pegg's light on? Clov: Light! How could anyone's light be on?” Hamm: Extinguished!” (pg. 31) Laughter is also a sign of hope. While alive, Nell was unable to laugh and scolded those around her for laughing at one another. (sp

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

HUMAN CONNECTION

While Beckett's work is a departure in form from the work of Russian Naturalist Anton Chekov, they are similar in that they both deal with the human need for connection. The characters in *Endgame* want to connect with each other and for various reasons fail to do so. At the beginning of the play Hamm asks Clov for a kiss, however Clov refuses to give him one. Similarly, Nagg asks Nell for a kiss and she objects saying:

Nell: What is it, my pet? [Pause.] Time for love?
Nagg: Were you asleep?
Nell: Oh no!
Nagg: Kiss me.
Nell: We can't.
Nagg: Try.
[Their heads strain towards each other, fail to meet, fall apart again.] (pg. 18)

Human Connection is also driven by the ability to listen to each other and respond to one another. Often in *Endgame* the characters do not listen to one another and in doing so a connection is unable to be made. This is portrayed when Hamm wants Nagg to hear his story.

Hamm: It's time for my story. Do you want to listen to my story?
Clov: No.
Hamm: Ask my father if he wants to listen to my story.
[Clov goes to bins, raises the lid of Nagg's, stoops, looks into it. Pause. He straightens up.]
Clov: He's asleep.
Hamm: Wake him.
[Clov stoops, wakes Nagg with the alarm. Unintelligible words. Clov straightens up.]
Clov: He doesn't want to listen to your story. (pg. 35)

These missed connections contribute to the slow spiral of descent in the world of the play as everything gradually disappears.

The language in *Endgame* has sometimes been described as an expression of "meaninglessness" or "nothingness" is actually layered with rich meaning about life and the human condition. Language can therefore be a difficult communication tool for humans to connect and understand one another. Esslin (1961) sums this up by saying that Beckett "questions the recognised instrument for the communication of meaning – language." (Esslin, 1961)



Hugo Weaving in STC's *Endgame*, 2015. Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©

THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

LANGUAGE

Hamm: *We're not beginning to...to...mean something?* (pg. 27)

In drama, ideas, feelings and needs are expressed through verbal and non-verbal language. Rhythm is the manipulation of timing through pace and tempo. It involves an awareness of the internal patterns within the performance.

At first the language in *Endgame* presents itself as nonsensical and erratic. However, upon closer analysis, the repetitive and chaotic language has meaning. The dialogue in *Endgame* shows "...how much we depend on language and of how much we need to be wary of the codifications that language imposes upon us" (Worton, 1994). This resonates with Beckett's desire for people to find meaning in his texts, without he himself saying what that meaning is. The language of *Endgame* highlights the theme of human connection and our failure to effectively communicate with each other with the only tool we have – words. This is portrayed in Clov's line. In response to Hamm saying "Yesterday! What does that mean? Yesterday!" Clov says, "I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent." (pg.32)

The language in *Endgame* also reflects the world of the play. Just as the world is barren and decayed; language has also deteriorated to repetitive words and incomplete sentences with poor syntax. Constructing the language in this manner is a poetic choice of Beckett as the playwright. The rhythm created through this language is irregular and jumps from one idea to the next. As such, *Endgame* represents an extreme departure from the comforts of Realism (Axelrod, 2014). Much of the language is hyperbaton. A hallmark of Absurdism, hyperbaton is when the normal sentence order is rearranged for poetic effect. One of many examples is Hamm's exclamation: "Accursed progenitor! The old folks at home! No decency left! Guzzle, fuzzle, that's all they think of" (pg. 15).

The dialogue of *Endgame* also features intertextual references. These are references to texts that exist in the real world. The characters often allude to the Bible. For example, the line "Lick your neighbour as yourself!" is a play on "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." However, Worton (1994) writes that the intertextual references in Beckett's works are "...essentially centrifugal. They fragment the text and send readers off on chases for meaning, for explanation, for enlightenment. Some of these may be wild-goose chases, but in order to understand how Beckett's texts work we must accept that there is always a presupposition of reference" (Worton, 1994).

The language used in *Endgame* also features many references to theatre. Hamm talks about his soliloquy, making an aside and there being an underplot. This makes *Endgame* simultaneously a piece of theatre and a comment on theatre (Worton, 1994). This metatheatricality makes the audience aware that they are watching a play and in a Brechtian manner, alienates the audience, making them think about the world of the play.

TAKE YOUR CUE

- How does the language in *Endgame* make you feel? What is it about the language that causes this?
- What effect (if any!) do you think Beckett was trying to achieve by writing in this way?
- What Shakespearean references are in the play? What is the purpose of these intertextual references?

THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA (Cont.)

MOVEMENT

It is often said that *Endgame* is a play where nothing happens. However, Martin Esslin (a Hungarian dramatist who coined the phrase ‘theatre of the absurd’) said it best when he said, “...just because the situation of the play remains static does not mean there is no movement.” (Esslin, 1961) While it is true that the play has a lot of stasis in the characters of Hamm, Nagg and Nell, there is also a lot of movement on stage and action between the characters. The movement comes from Beckett’s detailed and precise stage directions that see Clov scurry around the stage, climb up and down ladders and open and shut bin lids. Even the characters who are stationary have some movement. Sarah Peirse who plays Nell, spoke recently about how the minimal movement she has, is executed with great thought and attention to detail, right down to how her hand comes out of the bin and clasps the side. There is also a lot of action between the characters allowing lots to happen in the play. This includes the characters denying each other, sharing with each other, reaching out to one another and much more.

TAKE YOUR CUE

- Make a list of significant moments of dramatic action on the stage.
- How does movement contribute to the theme of the cyclical nature of human existence?
- How does movement contribute to the creation of time and place?



Tom Budge and Hugo Weaving in rehearsal for STC’s *Endgame*, 2015. Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©

THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA (Cont.)

TIME AND PLACE

Hamm: *Nature has forgotten us.* Clov: *There's no more nature.* (pg. 16)

All Dramatic Action occurs in Time and Place. Time refers to the period in which the Dramatic Action occurs. Time affects the place and situation that the characters find themselves in. Certain settings will intensify the action while multiple locations can help build the Dramatic Tension.

Endgame is set in a bare well that is bleak, dark and damp. There are two small windows with curtains drawn, a door, a ladder and two bins. The world outside is completely dead and there is a sense that the four characters are the only people left on earth after the apocalypse. All the earth's natural elements have disappeared. There is no more nature and new life is unable to grow. This is seen with Clov's seeds that have not sprouted and the fact that it no longer rains. There is also no sun, nor waves in the ocean. The outside world is described as neither light nor dark, but instead grey, symbolising the world in a state of ambiguity. The colour grey is also associated with boredom, decay and old age. There are also many grey images that are spoken about in the world of the play including gulls, smoke, waves and sails.

Time stands still in Beckett's *Endgame* – “what time is it? The same as usual.” (pg.13) as the characters repeat the same mechanical situations and conversations without progressing – “...if each day is like all the others, how can they then know that time is really passing?” (Worton, 1994). All the characters say “ah yesterday” with great sentimentality, however yesterday was most likely the same as today, which will be the same as tomorrow and every day after that. This is because “time does not pass in this world, rather the character have to find ways of passing the time” (Worton, 1994).

Clov with clock. Sketch by Nicholas Harding, 2015. ©



TAKE YOUR CUE

- What elements of the play give a sense of timelessness?
- How is the set a reflection of the world they now inhabit?

THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA (Cont.)

DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

Hamm: *Enough, it's time it ended, in the refuge too. [Pause. Gloomily.] And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to...to end.* (pg. 12)

The structure is the framework through which the content of the drama is presented. Structural elements such as narrative and plot can shape or order the nature of how the dramatic message is communicated. *Endgame* has only one act compared to the traditional five act structure of a play – exposition, complication, climax and denouement. The one act structure is driven by the repetitive dialogue that jumps from one idea to the next without a logical connection. Despite this, the language does have its own internal logic inside the world of the play.

Esslin describes the dramatic structure of *Endgame* as the unveiling of a large and complex poetic image. While *Endgame* does not follow the traditional structure, it is the unveiling of the image and comment on the world as constructed by Beckett that is revealed in its entirety once the lights go down.

TAKE YOUR CUE

- Do the characters in *Endgame* have a journey that the audience can follow? How does this contribute to audience engagement with the world of the play?
- How would the play change if it followed a traditional five act structure?
- What would you say is the poetic image (as described by Esslin) that is revealed at the end of the play?

DRAMATIC MEANING

Hamm: *What is this farce, day after day?* (pg. 26)

Dramatic Meaning is created through the Elements of Drama that are interrelated and interdependent. Dramatic Meaning is what is communicated between the performers, the world of the play and the audience. Dramatic Meaning is always open to interpretation and there is never one fixed meaning in a production.

TAKE YOUR CUE

- What meaning can you take from *Endgame*?
- What other Elements of Drama, themes or dialogue contribute to this conclusion?
- What message was Beckett trying to convey with his Absurdist works?

STYLE

BECKETT'S STYLE OF THEATRE

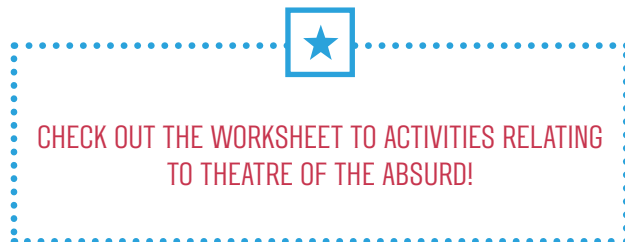
Beckett's plays were a departure from the psychological Realism of Chekhov and Ibsen, and the comic Realism of fellow Irish playwrights such as George Bernard Shaw (Axelrod, 2014). Often regarded as the turning point from Modernism to Post-Modernism, Beckett's plays broke the mould of a "...century of literal Naturalism, where a room was only considered a room if it was presented in full detail" (Hall, 2003). The departure from Naturalism and the comfortable certainties of that style meant that what is created in Theatre of the Absurd is a sense of freedom and relief that "...does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of freedom and liberation." (Esslin, 1961) Esslin was right in saying this, as Beckett's Absurdist plays are incredibly funny. Outlined in this section is an analysis of Absurdist Theatre and Comedy in *Endgame*.

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

Theatre of the Absurd is a style coined by Martin Esslin. It is a style of theatre that is grounded in Existential theory. Theatre of the Absurd often disorients and challenges accepted ideas about the existence of life and purpose of living in the world. The literal meaning of absurd means 'out of harmony,' however it can also mean without purpose, illogical, useless, devoid of reason and meaning, hopelessness and chaotic. (Cash, 2015)

Absurdist playwrights do not argue life's absurdities. Absurdist Theatre is presentational, meaning it presents life's senselessness and irrationality for the audience to watch and think about. This is in contrast to representational theatre, which is a true portrayal of the world of the play. Representational theatre visually creates the time and place and presents a performance reality on stage using the fourth wall to make the audience feel like what they are seeing is real.

Conventions of the Absurdist Theatre style include language and movement that is slow, illogical and repetitious and often presented in a ritualistic manner. The mood is typically sombre, juxtaposed with comical moments scenes are unified by theme or mood rather than the cause and effect that creates the dramatic structure of a conventional play. The language and delivery of language in Absurdist Theatre typically features long pauses and varied use of rhythm. (Cash, 2015)



STYLE (Cont.)

COMEDY

The comedy in *Endgame* is generated through several techniques. Firstly, the language of *Endgame* violates conventional audience expectations. This departure from what is expected causes the audience to laugh because they feel uneasy. Secondly, there is an element of Black Comedy in *Endgame*, where comedy is created through morbid humour. The characters in *Endgame* are morbid as they are stuck in a ritualistic and pathetic cycle of existence that is only escapable through death. This concept creates Black Comedy and is best encapsulated in Nell's lines when she talks about Nagg laughing at Hamm's misery:

Nell: [Without lowering her voice] Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I grant you that. But –

Nagg: [Shocked] Oh!

Nell: Yes, yes it's the most comical thing in the world. And we laugh, we laugh, with a will, in the beginning. But it's always the same thing. Yes, it's like the funny story we have heard too often, we still find it funny, but we don't laugh any more...
(pg.20)



Hugo Weaving and Tom Budge in rehearsal for STC's *Endgame*, 2015. Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©

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OTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR *ENDGAME*

- Classroom poster and handout about The Beckett Estate
- A worksheet with Theatre of the Absurd activities
- A Pre-Show In-the-Know fact sheet
- A Designer Sketchbook of costume designs and sketches