

BEYOND OBJECT AND LETTER: AN ANALYSIS OF SAMUEL BECKETT'S *ENDGAME* IN THE CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE AND SIGNS

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Abstract

This article explores how Samuel Beckett's play *Endgame* exemplifies the principles of absurd theatre by demonstrating that objects and symbols can deliver meaning more effectively than words. Drawing on Martin Esslin's definition of absurd theatre, the article examines the core elements present in *Endgame*, such as the absurdity of life, the failure of language and communication, anti-realism, isolation and alienation, archetypal characters, and the use of metaphors and symbols. The analysis highlights the inadequacy of language in conveying meaning and how Beckett uses symbols and décor to represent deeper existential themes. Key symbols like Hamm's chair, Clov's ladder, and the two windows convey complex meanings of hope, despair, and the search for meaning more powerfully than spoken dialogue. These objects also facilitate stronger communication between the characters and between the play and its audience, bridging gaps that words cannot. The metaphor of the chess endgame is particularly significant, illustrating the constrained and repetitive nature of the characters' existence. The study emphasizes the superior role of objects and symbols in communicating the profound themes of absurd theatre, demonstrating how *Endgame* transcends conventional storytelling to delve into the human condition, making it a profound work in both existential philosophy and absurdist theatre.

Keywords: *Endgame*, Absurd Theatre, Existentialism, Symbolism, Semiotic Approach.

NESNENİN VE HARFİN ÖTESİNDE: SAMUEL BECKETT'İN *ENDGAME* TİYATRO OYUNUNUN DİL VE GÖSTERGE KAPSAMINDA ANALİZİ

Öz

Bu makale, Samuel Beckett'in *Endgame* adlı oyununun, nesnelerin ve sembollerin sözlerden daha etkili bir şekilde anlam iletebileceğini göstererek absürd tiyatro ilkelerini nasıl örneklediğini araştırıyor. Martin Esslin'in Absürd Tiyatro tanımına dayanarak, *Endgame*'deki yaşamın absürlüğü, dilin ve iletişimin başarısızlığı, anti-realizm, yalnızlık ve yabancılaşma, arketip karakterler, metaforlar ve sembollerin kullanımı gibi temel unsurlar incelenmektedir. Analiz, dilin anlam

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iletmedeki yetersizliğini ve Beckett'in daha derin ve karmaşık varoluşsal temaları temsil etmek için semboller ve dekorları nasıl kullandığını vurgular. Hamm'ın sandalyesi, Clov'un merdiveni ve iki pencere gibi önemli semboller, umudu, umutsuzluğu ve anlam arayışını sözlü diyalogdan daha güçlü bir şekilde ifade eder. Bu nesnelere, karakterlerin kendi aralarındaki ve oyun ile izleyici arasındaki iletişimi de güçlendirir, kelimelerin yapamayacağı boşlukları doldurur. Satranç oyununun sonuna dair metafor, karakterlerin varoluşlarının sınırlı ve tekrarlayıcı doğasını özellikle belirgin bir şekilde ortaya koyar. Bu çalışma, Endgame'in geleneksel anlatıların ötesine geçerek insan durumunu derinlemesine inceleyen, hem varoluş felsefesi hem de absürd tiyatrodaki objelerin birer sembol olarak dil kullanımı ile kıyaslandığında varoluşçu ve absürdist fikirleri aktarmada daha başarılı olduğunu vurgulayarak literatüre katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Endgame, Absürdist Tiyatro, Varoluşçuluk, Sembolizm, Göstergebilimsel Yaklaşım.

Introduction

Samuel Beckett, a prominent playwright in the literary world who dealt with vast themes in the context of postmodern ideals and irrational philosophy, was born on April 13, 1906, in the suburbs of Dublin, Ireland. His upbringing as a Protestant provided him with a diverse perspective, rich in dealing with dichotomies and challenges (Bair, 1978, pp. 7-8). His academic journey started at the Portora Royal School, but the most important aspect of his academic pursuits was at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. This marked a significant point in his career, laying the foundation for the legendary literary figure James Joyce. Beckett's literary prowess began to emerge in his early writings; his most popular play, *Waiting for Godot*, was published and staged in 1952. Over the years, Beckett's style evolved towards minimalism, blending dark comedy with experimental linguistic exercises. Ultimately, all his contributions to philosophy and literature were recognized when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969 for his work described as "in new forms for the novel and drama — in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation" His contributions to the French Resistance during the Second World War were also recognized, and he was awarded the Croix de Guerre. Beckett died in Paris on December 22, 1989. His work is still recognized worldwide, and he is celebrated as one of the fathers of absurd drama.

Before diving into the *Theatre of the Absurd* by Martin Esslin, it is necessary to understand the existential background of the term absurd. Absurd indicates the conflict between the inherent search for meaning by human beings and the chaotic, apathetic nature of the material world. The concept was coined by one of the most valuable existentialist philosophers, Albert Camus, in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (Camus, 1942, pp. 3-4). Camus argues that the only result humans can achieve from the desire and search for meaning is absurdity (Camus, 1942, pp. 23-24). He also adds that human

beings are innately driven to search for meaning and significance, but this desire is ultimately defeated by the meaninglessness of the universe (Camus, 1942, p. 24). Thus, the result of this search is bound to be disappointing, futile, and absurd. Jean-Paul Sartre, another prominent figure of existential philosophy, defined absurdity in his 1943 essay "Existentialism is a Humanism," stating, "existence precedes essence." (Sartre, 1943, p. 28). In other words, the human condition exists before any inherent meaning or purpose; however, that does not mean that individuals cannot create their own purpose. It is the individual's responsibility to create his or her own meaning and purpose in life. Absurd theatre, then, is closely connected to the existential philosophy of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre.

1. ELEMENTS OF ABSURDITY IN LITERATURE

To understand how language and words seem inferior to conveying the message of the play against objects and symbols as signs, one needs to be familiar with how absurd theatre generally operates. The common characteristics of absurd theatre are foregrounded by Martin Esslin, a scholar who deals with existential philosophy and theatre, analyzing the relationship between existential philosophy and theatre along with the plays of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Harold Pinter in his work titled *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Esslin quotes Eugene Ionesco for the depiction of the term absurd: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose... Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless." (Ionesco, as quoted in Esslin, 2004, p. 21). Esslin highlights and explores the aforementioned playwrights, analyzing the common themes and motifs dealing with the human condition in their works. Esslin states that all these playwrights emphasize the meaninglessness and absurdity of life by using tropes such as irrational plots, fragmented language, and the futility of actions (Esslin, 2004, pp. 10-15). These themes and motifs are strongly influenced by the philosophy of Albert Camus. To reflect absurdity, these playwrights break away from conventional structures of drama, opting for a circular form to reflect the chaotic nature of life and characters who are in despair (Esslin, 2004, pp. 20-25). Being an absurdist play, *Endgame* fits well into the comprehensive understanding of Esslin's work, providing an excellent example of the philosophical underpinnings and the formal breakdown of conventional theatre. The aforementioned playwrights deal with abstract concepts about the human condition instead of providing logical examples to undermine the essentialist Cartesian understanding of objective truth.

1.1 Absurdity of Life

Esslin emphasizes the nature of life as absurd, lacking inherent order and purpose. This approach underlines the dichotomy between humanity's

aspiration to find significance in life and the indifference of the chaotic, material world. Esslin suggests that this view towards life is reflected in absurd theatre by stating, "The Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought." (Esslin, 2004, p. 24). The works of absurd theatre tend to bend the rational understanding of the world by using unconventional devices such as fragmented plot structure to reflect the chaotic nature of life. This preference for structural deconstruction in literature has grown in popularity since the Second World War, when the disillusionment of existential quests along with religious beliefs were questioned (Heinemann, 1979, pp. 70-75).

1.2 Inability of Language and Communication

Esslin argues that the ability to communicate between humans is also undermined in the works of absurd theatre. Indeed, it is futile to use language as an apparatus to convey meaning and significance in the chaotic life that we live in. This argument is reflected by fragmented speech between the characters, repetitions, and uncanny misunderstandings. Esslin states, "In absurdist drama, language often disintegrates into a series of meaningless clichés and empty phrases, revealing the inadequacy of verbal communication to express the deeper truths of the human condition." (Esslin, 2004, p. 396). The dialogue of the characters often appears as a series of irrelevant platitudes and repetitive phrases, illustrating the failure of language to communicate (Esslin, 2004, p. 401). This inability of language also deconstructs the essentialist understanding of objective truth, creating different realities for different people and characters. As a particular signifier signifies different concepts to every other person, it can be observed that reality is nothing more than a social construct. The deterioration of language and communication in absurdist drama outlines the breakdown of coherent and important interaction, emphasizing the existential separation of the characters (Trunilina & Pitelina, 2020).

1.3 Anti-Realism

Absurdist plays reject traditional realism in relation to the denial of objective reality. Traditional realism often tries to achieve verisimilitude, which is defined as describing the world as it really is. However, this phenomenon assumes an objective reality that it tries to describe. To undermine this, absurdist playwrights use surreal, fantastical, and illogical elements to describe how subjective and chaotic life is. Absurdist playwrights utilize non-naturalistic components such as unique settings, irrational arrangements, and typical characters to communicate the disarranged and inconceivable reality of the modern world (Henry, 2021).

Anti-Realism is also used to reverse the expectations of the audience, provoking a deeper understanding of the existential themes. By creating a difference from traditional drama, absurdist playwrights manage to create an argument that is impactful enough to challenge the audience's previous assumptions about life. With these many uses of it, Anti-Realism comes forth as a powerful tool for absurdist playwrights to convey their meaning.

1.4 Isolation and Alienation

In the works of absurd theatre, another common theme is alienation and isolation. The concept of alienation is not only the alienation between the characters but also from the society the characters live in. In other words, the isolation is doubled: on the one hand, the individual is isolated in his/her search for meaning; on the other, a group is also isolated from mainstream society. Randell describes this alienation of characters as "Isolation and alienation are recurring topics within the *Theatre of the Absurd*, reflecting the existential idea that people are fundamentally alone in their search for meaning." (Randell, 2014, pp. 455-475). This loneliness is a core component of absurd theatre as well as existential philosophy, connecting isolation to the philosophy of Albert Camus.

1.5 Usage of Symbols and Metaphors

Symbols and metaphors act as tools for absurdist playwrights since the conventional use of language fails. They are more complex and deep when compared to traditional language, reflecting the complexity and chaos once again. The symbols mostly express emotions of despair, loss, and loneliness (Esslin, 2004, p. 45). Carter explains the significance of metaphors in absurdist theatre: "In the Theatre of the Absurd, metaphors and symbols serve as essential tools for conveying the underlying existentialist themes, allowing playwrights to explore the depths of human experience beyond the literal level." (Carter, 2015, p. 316). In other words, objects as symbols hold significance, reflecting memories, untold stories, and even primary questions of philosophy such as death and life.

1.6 Characters as Archetypes

Esslin argues that the characters in absurdist plays are not fully developed; they are left as abstracts to embody the common struggles and anxieties of mankind (Esslin, 2004, p. 25). Misra adds that these intentionally abstract characters lack personal histories to strengthen the archetypal effect, stating that absurdist characters are habitually stripped of detailed individual histories, working instead as symbols of broader existential subjects and universal human conditions (Misra, 2015, pp. 169-175). By presenting characters as archetypes, absurdist playwrights emphasize the collective

human experience in a meaningless universe, highlighting existential themes of alienation and despair (Murray, 2021).

2. ANALYSIS OF *ENDGAME* AS A WORK OF ABSURD THEATRE

Understanding the elements of absurdist theatre is crucial to explain how *Endgame* delivers its message via objects as symbols rather than language and words. *Endgame*, by its core, emphasizes how absurdist drama operates, revealing the intertwined relationship between the play and the genre. Roche argues that Beckett's minimalist plays, such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, reveal the impact of the world of literature along with drama (2010, p. 139). Esslin discusses many themes and characteristics in his work *Theatre of the Absurd*, and many of these characteristics are seen in Beckett's works. In the introductory part of his work, Esslin states that communication in absurd plays is undermined to represent the isolation and meaninglessness of life. "In the Theatre of the Absurd, communication between characters often breaks down completely, leaving them isolated and unable to connect in any meaningful way." (Esslin, 2004, p. 19). In *Endgame*, the language is fragmented. Characters keep repeating sentences or phrases such as "What" and "Why." They struggle to remember and express their memories, repeating their actions without any purpose, revealing one of the most important characteristics of absurd theatre and *Endgame*: the dysfunctionality of language. Beckett expresses a similar argument by stating, "every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness." (Beckett in Esslin, 2004, p. 25). Thus, in *Endgame*, characters talk, but their ability to communicate is very limited. They often misunderstand each other or fail to understand at all. A stark instance of this dysfunctionality is seen in the dialogue between Clov and Hamm:

Clov: Who?

Hamm: What?

Clov: Who do you mean, he?

Hamm: Who do I mean! Yet another.

Clov: Ah him! I wasn't sure. (Beckett, 1957, p. 127).

Another instance of dialogue is:

Hamm: Answer me first.

Clov: What?

Hamm: Do you know what's happened?

Clov: When? Where? Hamm: (Violently.)

When! What's happened?

Use your head, can't you!

What has happened?

Clov: What, for Christ's sake, does it matter? (He looks out of the window.)

Hamm: I don't know." (Beckett, 1957, pp. 128-129)

Both Hamm and Clov fail to express themselves. Something that is of importance to one is not to the other, resulting in a vicious circle in conversations. Clov realizes this inability of language and protests, "I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything anymore, teach me others. Or let me be silent." (Beckett, 1957, p. 113). Clov's protest here is loaded with such despair that he does not want to try to communicate at all. The language is degraded to a level in which the absurdity is exposed.

The dialogue does not seem to have any intelligent properties. It does not fulfill its essential function of communication. Furthermore, it is impossible for the characters in the play to communicate properly. While language fails, silence starts to become a more important property and motif for absurdist theatre. In the context of *Endgame*, silences and pauses are present to help the audience understand the message, which words often fail to convey. Therefore, the dysfunctional language becomes nothing but an annoying, faulty experiment against the sublime silence. Despite being annoying, the will to communicate is still present, as the pursuit of essence also is.

This repetition and silence also signify another key element of Esslin's analysis of absurd theatre: the nonsensical nature of the world itself. All the characters in the play know that their lives serve no purpose and that whatever they do will be futile against the nonsensical nature of the world they live in. The world is represented as the house or the room they live in, and they all accept their fate to live and die there without any intervention in its nature. Lyons argues that the characters in *Endgame* are "existential performances" (Lyons, 1993, p. 68). Especially Hamm, who is not able to control the words he utters and the meanings he tries to convey, yet tries to control everyone. He is also unable to see and walk. Hamm's control over his parents is obvious in the play; when they attempt to talk, he silences them quickly and violently. However, although he appears powerful, he is dependent on his servant—or son figure—which contradicts the power he holds, creating an existential question. Clov's character also shows existential dilemmas and absurdities; he obeys Hamm, the authority figure, and follows instructions to the letter. However, he feels resistant and even utters his resistance and opposition to Hamm. He cannot leave Hamm's side and the shelter since he believes that there is nowhere left to go. In line with that, Hamm cannot get rid of him since there is no one else left. As seen in the dialogue:

"Clov: Why do you keep me?

Hamm: There's no one else.

Clov: There's nowhere else." (Beckett, 1957, p. 95)

Both characters are dependent on each other since they do not have any other choice. This reflects the isolation part of the absurdity; even though the characters are together, they don't have a sense of unity either in themselves or in their small community. Combined with the isolated setting, the aforementioned dialogue not only describes isolation but also a lack of choice. The lack of choice and autonomy may be Beckett's way to discuss the futility and despair of humanity against the meaninglessness of life. Nell and Nagg are also dependent on Hamm since he provides food; on the other hand, Hamm is also dependent on them as he needs people to prove his existence:

“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.

Hamm: I'll give him a bon-bon. (Clov stoops. As before.)

Clov: He wants a sugar-plum. Hamm: He'll get a sugar-plum.”
(Beckett, 1957, p. 60)

As the part suggests, when Clov rejects listening, Hamm needs his parents to listen to him. These dichotomies and oppositions are abundant in the play since they reflect the “existential” and “absurd” tendencies of modern life. This interplay of language between Clov and Hamm also resembles the end of Beckett's popular play “Waiting for Godot.” In “Waiting for Godot,” the human condition is represented by Vladimir and Estragon, two protagonists who wait for a man named Godot who never shows up. Just like Clov and Hamm, they also try to leave their spots but cannot achieve it.

“Vladimir: We will hang ourselves tomorrow. (Pause.) Unless Godot comes.

Estragon: And if he comes?

Vladimir: We will be saved. Vladimir takes off his hat (Lucky's), peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, knocks on the crown, puts it on again.

Estragon: Well? Shall we go?

Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.

Estragon: What?

Vladimir: Put on your trousers.

Estragon: You want me to pull off my trousers?

Vladimir: Put ON your trousers.

Estragon: (realising his trousers are down). True. He pulls up his trousers.

Vladimir: Well? Shall we go?

Estragon: Yes, let's go. They do not move." (Beckett, 2010, p. 94)

Clov's "there is nowhere else" is the answer to Vladimir's "Shall we go?" in the grim desperation of life that is inescapable. The reason for Vladimir and Estragon's immobility is their fear of a world without the hope of Godot, even though they know in their hearts the wait is futile. In line with Vladimir and Estragon, Clov's always being ready to leave by wearing a coat, a hat, and carrying an umbrella symbolizes the same hope.

The undermining of existence and the nonsensical nature of the world are not only seen in terms of characters in the play but also in the plot structure. The conventional plot structure that can be summarized as the introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement is abandoned in absurd theatre, and thus in *Endgame*. Esslin argues, "Traditional plot structures are often abandoned in the *Theatre of the Absurd*, replaced by a series of disjointed episodic scenes that reflect the chaos and unpredictability of life." The plot also lacks any kind of decorum, structure, and linear development. The cyclical, illogical events followed by fragmented actions achieve a post-modernist and post-structuralist argument of existentialism. The essence that is searched for is not there.

All these elements mentioned above serve one last argument in Esslin's work: the ultimate existential pursuit of essence and the inevitable futility of this search. Beckett's emphasis on the individuals' internal state and absurdity of human existence is in accordance with the essence of absurd theatre (Girola, 2011, p. 33). Even though humans theoretically know that the essence is not there to begin with, the resistance to stop looking for it is also futile. This Kafkaesque irony creates a vicious circle of absurdity that post-modern thinkers also argue. As Esslin points out, "At its core, the *Theatre of the Absurd* is concerned with existential questions and the human condition, exploring themes of meaning, identity, and the search for purpose in an indifferent universe." *Endgame* parodies this pursuit of essence by all the tropes and characteristics it uses.

The futile yet never-ending search for meaning and essence is also demanding in terms of literary figures. Sometimes this feeling of meaninglessness is overcome—or at least attempted to be—by the art itself. As the prominent philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche argues, "Existence and the world seem justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon" (Ridley, 2007, p. 32). Thus, the aesthetic and art itself can be considered the closest thing to "inherent meaning" since we—humans—give it the value it holds. In line with this understanding, Beckett masterfully crafts an extended metaphor in the title *Endgame*. The characters in the play represent chess pieces left on the

table at the very end of a game of chess. The metaphor is deeper than most critics realize, as it does not only include characters but life itself.

In the Endgame of chess, the moves are mostly limited, with the same maneuvers repeated again and again to gain certain advantages over the opponent. In line with that, in the play *Endgame*, repetition is at the forefront, shown in the routines, events, and dialogues. However, while a chess game has clear instructions and objectives, the lives of the characters lack any of them, making the moves they make futile and absurd. Additionally, their constant repeating actions—like Clov using the ladder and staring out the window or Hamm contacting Clov—can be compared to a chess player's approximate movements toward the end of the game. Hamm may be likened to the King in a chess game, as he controls the food supply and the ability to dominate. Similarly, Clov may be thought of as the Queen, with the ability to move more effectively than Hamm and the other two characters. However, Clov can also represent the Knight, because his motions are limited to one direction and repeat vertically. Nagg and Nell are comparable to pawns, confined to their bins and only allowed to raise their heads (İplikçi, 2020, p. 307). İplikçi's views on how these metaphors affect the context of *Endgame* act as additional evidence of how the play reflects absurdism.

The similarities between the Endgame of chess and the Endgame of life are also relevant in the plotline and the décor of *Endgame*. The plot reveals the inevitability of death with its symbols. The trash bins and the toy dog, along with the name of the play itself, represent the inescapable decay and death that surround all of them.

The chess example, along with the other analyses in this part of the article, serves the ultimate conclusion of how objects as symbols create a superior alternative to spoken words. By creating a metaphor, Beckett constructs a relationship between the characters and chess pieces that only individuals who are interested in chess would understand. This metaphor proves more effective for sending the message that words fail to send. Therefore, characters themselves are turned into abstract concepts, objects on the chess board, archetypal-relatable figures that are universally known, both complex but easy to understand.

3. DÉCOR AS SYMBOLS IN *ENDGAME*

The décor of the play is not only important for the argument of how language fails to convey a message to the audience, but it is also significant for Beckett's existential arguments, which correlate with *Endgame*. In absurd theatre, décor is mostly undefinable and unrecognizable. Ultimately, *Endgame* also does not present a proper décor. A room with two windows, a door, and a picture is all the audience sees (İplikçi, 2020, p. 308). The depiction of the setting at the beginning of the text is remarkable: "Bare interior. Grey light. Left and right back, high up, two small windows, curtains drawn. Front right, a door. Hanging near the door, its face to the wall, a picture" (İplikçi, 2020, p.

92). Smith also points out that "The exaggerated and often grotesque décor in absurdist theatre reflects the inner turmoil and existential despair of the characters, enhancing the overall impact of the narrative." (Smith, 2015, p. 175). So, the décor is also used to convey existential desperation. Fisher adds, "Décor in absurdist theatre often functions as an extension of the characters' psychological states, symbolizing their inner conflicts and existential anxieties." (Fisher, 2014, p. 203). Overall, the décor, intermingled with the storytelling technique, becomes another topos of narrative. Hale suggests that the décor in *Endgame* is very connected to the message:

"The decor of *Endgame* [...] contributes to the impression of a world coming to its end. [...] and its bareness, grey light, and the grey nothingness of the barren uninhabited world outside the windows all point to the distinct possibility that Hamm, Clov, Nell, and Nagg may be the last survivors of some dreadful catastrophe. [...] Even though a picture remains on the wall of the room, it is turned over so its decorative function is no longer served." (Hale, 1979, pp. 72-73)

In other words, Hale points out that the décor in the play *Endgame* contributes to the philosophical message of the play, unlike the conventional usage of it. In addition to Hale's ideas, the décor is also a way to express the Endgame of a chess game. The empty room and isolated environment await closure. With the final touch of the décor, the play can be considered an "anti-play," a core idea in absurd theatre.

The décor is used to emphasize the psychological state of the characters. The gray light represents the mundanity and repetitiveness of their lives. The bare interior also represents emptiness, lack of purpose, and joy. All characters in the play experience the same issues, and their consciousness is reflected. Nell and Nagg living in the trash cans represent degradation and grotesque imagery. Hamm's chair, being the central piece of the room, is significant for understanding the hierarchy in the setting, symbolizing that he is the king of this very bare "castle." Clov's ladder, however, can be interpreted differently, as it is a very subjective piece of spectacle. One may interpret it sociologically, as an apparatus for climbing in terms of hierarchy. Alternatively, it can be seen as a symbol of freedom, as Clov uses it to climb to the windows in the house. The windows symbolize hope for all the characters, but they are blocked by curtains that limit interaction with the outside world. Another important piece of the décor is the door. In *Endgame*, the door is present throughout the play but never used. It can be seen as a metaphor for Clov's inability to leave the house, but it can also symbolize humanity's inability to find meaning. Therefore, the décor, as a symbol, creates a better alternative for communication compared to words.

4. SYMBOLS PREVAIL, WORDS FAIL

In theatre, the argument that objects as symbols are very significant has always been studied, especially by contemporary scholars. It is an interdisciplinary concept that has drawn the attention of many departments, from interior design to literature, as the performance of theatre is a holistic action (Russell, 1976). Accordingly, Bulhaz argues that the props and décor have been crucial since the days of classical ancient theatre to this day, claiming that the masks used in ancient Greek plays are the symbols of the human soul (Bulhaz & Anteplioğlu, 2021). This importance is compounded in the modern–postmodern era, as words start to lose their alleged inherent meaning, leaving the audience relying on objects and symbols. Bulhaz’s study supports that objects ultimately create their own narratives, enhancing the narrative more than dialogue. Hussein raises a similar point, stating that simple objects can create archetypical illusions so strong that they often surpass the importance of the dialogue (Hussein, 2021).

The importance of objects as symbols is not exclusive to European theatre, nor is it exclusive to absurd theatre. Behzadi’s study, *An Overview of the Most Important Theaters in Eastern Countries*, proves that objects as symbols, along with motion and gestures, create a better narrative compared to dialogue (Behzadi, 2016).

In absurdist theatre, as in post-modernist theatre, objects are commonly used to challenge conventional symbolism (Lipshits, 2013). Everyday objects are turned into literary metaphors and symbols that resonate with the audience, often at a subconscious level (Urazymbetov & Tsoy, 2020). Even though the objects are superior to words, they still cannot transfer meaning as fixed, since such a message would imply the existence of an objective reality. The audience’s reception of the play changes accordingly, breaking the conventional understanding of reality and truth. In line with these supportive arguments, one must also analyze the objects of *Endgame* in light of the aforementioned statements.

When one considers the décor of *Endgame* along with the dialogue, it can be said that the symbols and metaphors are superior in significance compared to the dialogue and language itself. This creates an important correlation between the plot in the play, in which language fails, and the performance of the play, in which language also fails. Both in the plot and performance, things are better seen than heard. In other words, Beckett intentionally undermines conventional understanding of theatre and logocentricism by failing the language in his play. As Clov talks about desperation, he still tries to do the daily chores, showing the audience that he still carries hope. Clov can also be seen looking out of the window, which supports the argument of hope. The audience can observe Hamm’s loneliness as he gives food to his parents when he needs social interaction. Even the name of the play is a metaphor for chess, and the characters for pieces, mere objects on the board, creating a complex interrelation between signifier and signified.

No matter how little spectacle the play has, symbols prevail as the superior way of communication. In line with this, one can clearly observe that the symbolic objects in the play act as signs, universal metaphors that are accessible to people who have a similar cultural lexicon. As “[...] theatre sign does not only function as the sign of the sign which is represented materially, but also functions as signifying the sign of a sign that can be random with other sign systems” (Sahid, 2013), the superiority of the objects in the play in terms of communication does not only undermine the understanding of words in the play but also the words that are heard by the audience. As Clov’s ladder and the two small windows represent, there is still hope of communication and freedom for humanity in his/her quest for meaning, even though never stable.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* is a significant example illustrating the connection between existentialism and absurd theatre, demonstrating how objects as symbols deliver meaning more effectively than words. The play embodies the core elements of absurdist theatre, such as the absurdity of life, the failure of language and communication, anti-realism, isolation and alienation, archetypal characters, and the extensive use of metaphors. These characteristics, identified by Martin Esslin, are evident both in the play's plot and form. The absurdity of life is portrayed through the characters' repetitive, purposeless actions, highlighting the existential futility of their search for meaning. Language fails as a communication tool, with dialogue often fragmented and nonsensical, leading to isolation and misunderstandings among characters. The anti-realism in *Endgame* challenges traditional realism by presenting a surreal, illogical setting that underscores the chaotic nature of existence. The isolation and alienation of characters, both from each other and from society, reflect existential themes of loneliness and disconnection. Symbols and metaphors, such as Hamm’s chair, Clov’s ladder, and the two windows, are more effective than words in conveying deeper, complex meanings, representing hope, despair, and the search for freedom. The play's décor, minimal yet symbolically rich, enhances the narrative, emphasizing the psychological states of the characters and the bleak, desolate environment they inhabit. The extended metaphor of the chess *Endgame* further deepens the play's exploration of existential themes, with characters akin to chess pieces trapped in repetitive, futile movements, symbolizing the constrained and predetermined nature of their existence. By integrating these elements, *Endgame* successfully illustrates the limitations of language and the power of symbols in conveying the human condition, making it a profound contribution to both existential philosophy and absurdist theatre. This analysis, drawing on Esslin’s work and other scholarly perspectives, aims to demonstrate how Beckett's play transcends conventional storytelling to explore the depths of human experience through its unique use of symbols and metaphors.

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