THE WORLD CORPSED IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S ENDGAME

Nicoleta Stanca
Ovidius University Constanța

***Abstract**: The aim of this paper is to show that the key image in Beckett's play Endgame may be considered to be a decay of the body and a parallel shrinking of the entire universe. There are no more bike wheels, pap, nature, sugar-plums, tides, navigators, rugs, pain killers or coffins. The absence of the last item points to an image of a landscape of unburied corpses, Hamm remembering Mother Pegg's fear of not being buried. Characters are imprisoned in their bodies, houses and minds and there is a general state of paralysis of the body, leading to death or madness. Though the imagery in the play may be well related to the context in which it was written, i.e. the world in the aftermath of WWII, we would also like to draw attention to a more Irish background, i.e. the devastation of Ireland during the Great Famine in mid-19th century, the immediate physical consequences and the long-term trauma of the Irish psyche.*

***Keywords**: Beckett, the Great Hunger, trauma, wounded body, wounded mind, Irishness*

The aim of this essay is to show that the key images in Beckett's play *Endgame* may be considered to be a general decay of the body, wounded minds within wounded bodies of the characters and a parallel shrinking of the entire universe suggested by the play. Characters are imprisoned in their bodies, houses and minds and there is a general state of paralysis of the body, leading to death or madness. The physical disabilities of the characters mean that they are restricted in their movement, but the impression is that they are also trapped in a mechanical system. Centres are absent, hence Hamm's obsession to be placed by Clov in the centre of the room and bodies are decentered as well.

The article aims to show that though the imagery in the play may be well related to the context in which it was written, i.e. the world in the aftermath of WWII and such literary productions as the theatre of the absurd, there is a more Irish background, i.e. the devastation of Ireland during the Great Famine in mid-nineteenth century, the immediate physical consequences and the long-term trauma of the Irish psyche in a postcolonial society. Thus, the essay will attempt to show that within wounded bodies, at the intersection of memories of the Great Hunger and Irish identity, there are wounded minds (Hamm's, Clov's, Nagg's and Nell's).

The setting in *Endgame* is made up of a bare room in grey light, two small windows on the back wall, one giving onto the ocean, the other onto the land, a door to the right through which Clov enters and leaves the kitchen, a picture hanging with its face to the wall (replaced by a clock by Clov and feared by Hamm), two ashbins to the left containing the legless Nagg and Nell and in the centre an armchair on castors in which sits Hamm. Clov manages to look out of the window and sees nothing.

They live in an enclosed shelter, which is symbolical of death. Hamm assumes at the end the exact posture we found him at the beginning. The situation cannot be solved; if Clov leaves the place, he will die and the helpless Hamm will die too; if Clov stays, both will die again, only a bit later. The only change seems to be Nell's death. Uncertainty is created regarding the fate of the characters: do Nell and Nagg die or do they only hide from Hamm, who neglects them and abuses them verbally? Will Clov leave Hamm or will he stay by his

BDD-A19924 © 2014 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:53 UTC)

master as he has done before? Time and space are those of an ending, pointing to a gradual decline of the world, to a universe nearing its end and which seems unlikely to continue repeating itself. The setting is a manifestation of minimalism, reminiscent of the Japanese Noh theatre: two clowns/ tramps in a stark décor in closed spaces in an apocalyptic world, devoid of divinity and regressing towards the decrepit.

> Brief laugh. He gets down, takes one step towards the window right, goes back for ladder, carries it over and sets it down under window right, gets up on it, looks out of the window. Brief laugh. He gets down, goes with ladder towards ashbins, halts, turns, carries back ladder and sets it down under window right, goes to ashbins, removes sheet covering them, folds it over his arm. He raises the lid, stoops and looks into bin. Brief laugh. He closes lid. Same with other bin. (*Endgame* 5)

Under the influence of existentialist thinking, Beckett wants his audience to question all the so called intangible values, such as the belief in the existence of a Deity, patriotism, love, friendship, honour, power and intellectual accomplishment, which are supposed to redeem humanity in such a context. His plays are about the need for identity and the loss of it; his characters seem like survivors of a catastrophic tragedy: a nuclear war, genocide, a volcanic eruption or anything of tremendous proportions; they are humanity reduced to basics. Beckett wants us to contemplate the smallness of our lives; not even human companionship can alleviate our suffering of the wounded bodies or minds, as illustrated in *Endgame.*

Throughout Beckett's plays, characters hope for some resolution, some event that will bestow meaningfulness on their empty lives, or they just wait for death. But no closure is achieved, or can ever be achieved. Hamm and Clov are locked into some kind of interminable relationship, illustrative of their mental affliction: Hamm keeps Clov on as his servant because "There's no one else" and Clov stays on because "There's no one else" (*Endgame* 8). We are witnessing the breakdown of human body because Nagg and Nell cannot get out of their sand bins; they were crippled in an accident and have only stumps instead of legs; their sight has failed and they cannot even scratch each other and Nell is going deaf. Nagg and Nell and Hamm are going blind; Clov needs a telescope to see what happens out, he is half-crippled and cannot sit; Hamm cannot stand, suffers from chronic cough and needs tranquilizers. Even if they could escape the tiny, claustrophobic house, there is no other place of happiness or safety: "Outside of here it's death" (*Endgame* 9). There are other deaths referred to: an old doctor, Hamm's "paupers", the navigators, Mother Pegg, a painter, a man who begged Hamm for food for his child on Christmas Eve. Beckett's play illustrates his vision of decay of the body but also of the human mind in the interval between the womb and the tomb; it is the end of hope.

After WWII ended Beckett served with the Irish Red Cross in Normandy treating casualties; he was shocked to see the physical human wreckage of the war (the burned, the crippled, the blinded, the maddened victims of the war). He was also stunned, like the rest of the world, at the news about the liberated Nazi concentration camps and the unspeakable horrors threw humanity in a state of despair. Life was absurd, an idea that was to be found behind his plays. Beckett's personal experiences also grew in the fertile soil of the rapid changes in economy and society after the war coupled with the general sense of anxiety of living in an insecure world ravished by two world wars, which created the background favourable to the emergence of existentialism as philosophy and way of life. Existentialism, in its narrow meaning, refers to Sartre's works and the 1940 decade, when Sartre's works became known in Europe; in its broader meaning, nineteenth and twentieth-century thinkers focused on the "existing individual", mastering his own destiny, living an authentic life, away

BDD-A19924 © 2014 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:53 UTC)

from the "herd" and, thus experiencing anxiety and despair and questioning the existence of a divinity or predestination. The philosopher who influenced existentialist thinking by severing the relationship between man and God through the birth of the "overman" (in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra)* and by asserting the philosophy of negation (nihilism), on which Beckett also drew, was Friedrich Nietzsche (Ciugureanu, *Post-War Anxieties* 7-33).

Nietzsche's views were influential on the advent of the absurd through the use of terms, such as nothingness, despair, anxiety, the void, alienation, dread, dreadful, selfhood, freedom, related to his philosophy. The term "absurd" (form Lat. *Absurdum)* was originally used in music to express lack of harmony between sounds. Applied to language and thought, it means unreasonable, incongruous or illogical utterances. The concept of *homo absurdus* acquired a specific meaning beginning the end of the nineteenth century as an explanation of man's purposelessness in the universe and in the context of the popularity of verbal nonsense literature (Lewis Carroll), dadaism and surrealism. Sartre, like most existentialist writers, was fascinated with the absurd, which he called "nausea". The meaning of the absurd can be related to the individual's struggle to relate to an irrational world, to revolt against absolutes and to choose freedom. Camus, in his seminal essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), discusses the absurd as "the divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting", the only link between the two being hatred ("in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories, of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come" (qtd. in Ciugureanu, *Post-War Anxieties* 25). Since neither man nor the world are absurd in themselves, but the absurd is born out of the lack of communication between the two, Camus's solution points to an existence with the full realization of the futility of one's existence in the universe. Thus, existentialism and the absurd are connected in the sense that man continues to live in spite of the realization of the meaninglessness of his existence.

What Beckett shares with modernist writers are the themes of the random meaninglessness of existence, the hollowness of human relations and the blank hostility of fate, but what is different is that his themes are worked out to the point of absurdity and played for dark humour. Rather than high modernist anguish and despair, we have the flat affect, the blankness and apathy of the characters. Symbolically, *Endgame* may be seen as a representation of human consciousness, in which the scene is the interior of the human skull, the windows are the eyes, the grey light is the brain and the characters are elements of a personality – Hamm the emotional, irrational I, Clov – the rational I and Nagg and Nell – wounded memories (Hale 71-86). The external landscape may actually be an internal one. Or the characters Hamm and Clov may be portrayed as the two facets of man's duality, with Hamm as the spirit since his disabilities shut him off to the outer world and Clov the body as he is the only connection to the outside. Possibly the physical body is regarded as imprisoning for the mind; it corrupts the spirit and destroys its freedom.

The only brighter visions of nature are described by Hamm from memory as belonging to the past. The presence of any natural elements is connected to memory and to a time before something has levelled the world to utter emptiness. Decline has replaced the course of the natural world (Frawley 130):

> Hamm: [*Gesture towards window right*.] Have you looked?
> Clov: Yes.
> Hamm: Well?
> Clov: Zero.
> Hamm: It'd need to rain.
> Clov: It won't rain. (*Endgame* 7)

BDD-A19924 © 2014 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:53 UTC)

The same four people closed up together in a shabby room, performing the same activities, thinking the same thoughts again and again. The only moments of hope are provided by memories connected to the outer world. If Hamm could sleep he might make love, he would go into the woods and his eyes would see the sky, the earth. Nagg and Nell's memories are also concerned with landscapes, the Ardennes, Lake Como, the road to Sedan. "These visions of forests and lakes are juxtaposed against their living conditions: legless, unable to touch, unable even to satisfy an itch "in the hollow" they now inhibit separate (Frawley 131). The destruction of the natural world seems o have caused the impossibility of regeneration.

The play is also about waiting, waiting for Clov's leaving or waiting for the end. The characters seem to expect not only their own death but a sort of extinction of all beings; when Clov sees as flea he hurries to kill so that it will not find a mate and perpetuate the species. "But humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of God!" (*Endgame* 22). When a boy, "a potential procreator" is seen, Hamm and Clov are determined to let him perish. Relationships between father and son in *Endgame* have been affected; Hamm adopted Clov but he was a bad substitute father and Clov thinks that if he could kill Hamm he would die happy, the only moment of happiness in his life. Hamm feels equally hostile towards his natural father, Nagg. Hamm and Clov do not seem to be waiting for God, Our Father in heave, unlike Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot,* as Hamm bursts out after trying to pray "The bastard! He doesn't exist!" (*Endgame* 33).

The only progress is actually regress, physical and spiritual degeneration or involution. Hamm: "We breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!" (*Endgame* 10). Nell's death, the end of the last female, brings about symbolical sterility and the end of procreation. The shrinking of the human body has been accompanied by a parallel annihilation of the universe. "There are no more": people, stories, food, objects, weather, sun, kisses, clocks, God, sound, motion, nature, colour, sight, fleas, rats, light, day, love, meaning of words, earth and sea, laughter, beauty, order. (Ulin 197-224) If in the Genesis, Noah, father of Ham, builds an ark with a door and a window, in which he gathers representatives of all the species, Hamm makes every effort to see that his refuge will not engender future life (Ciugureanu 57). Clov chases the rat and the flea and Hamm forbids Clov to go after the boy he sees out of the window.

All the aspects mentioned previously may point to an attempt at reading the world in the aftermath of WWII. Yet, there are literary themes and interests that may be generally associated with Irish identity, such as fragmentariness, displacement, exile and alienation, homecoming and travelling, memory and suffering, which may be regarded as elements of Beckett's artistic universe as well. Some disaster – a nuclear war or an environmental catastrophe – has overtaken the world, and "there's no more nature" left. There could be the horrors of WWII but also Irish memories of past traumas, which may be revealed through a post-colonial reading of the play:

> It is true that Beckett's skeletal characters and desolate landscape are haunted by the ghosts of Auschwitz. Yet it is also the case that the fragmentary narratives, the splintered memories, and the refusal of a dominant narrative voice betoken the fractured consciousness of a country with a traumatic history of famine, displacement, persecution and lost language. (McDonald qtd. in Ulin 199)

According to Ulin, in terms of the Irishness of *Endgame*, we could trace the memory of the Great Famine and its impact on Irish identity (197-224). The Great Famine in Ireland was triggered by a failure of the potato crops between 1845 and 1851. British agricultural policies, public works schemes, soup kitchens, workhouses – all seemed to have worked against the Irish population. As a consequence, over one million people died and one million

BDD-A19924 © 2014 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:53 UTC)

and half emigrated in a time span of six years (Kinealy 7). Its effects on various aspects of the Irish life have been significant. The devastation of Ireland in the aftermath of the Famine resembles that of the landscape scrutinized by Clov through the telescope. The legacy of the Famine was summarized by a survivor from the Roses in Co. Donegal:

> The years of the Famine, of the bad life and the hunger, arrived and broke the spirit and strength of the community. People simply wanted to survive ... Recreation and leisure ceased. Poetry, music and dancing died. These things were lost and completely forgotten. When life improved in other ways, these pursuits never returned as they had been. The Famine killed everything. (Ní Grianna qtd. in Kinealy 23)

First of all, Hamm may be characterized as an absentee landlord in control of the food supply and an advocate of laissez-faire economics, responsible for starvation and deprivation. "Hamm: When you inspected my paupers" (*Endgame* 9); "Hamm: All those I might have helped. [*Pause*.] Helped! [*Pause.*] Saved. [*Pause*] Saved! [*Pause*] The place was crawling with them!" (*Endgame* 41). In his confusion, Hamm realizes that he has been an absentee landlord and that it all happened without his being there and he breaks into violent outbursts trying to understand the decimation around him. His obsession with a central position, to be moved to the centre of the room and his obsession with order and routine may be seen in the context of Irish history as the landlord's attempt to remain in control in spite of the chaos around them (Ulin 212).

Second, there is a general collapse of nature; nothing sprouts any longer in Clov's garden and Hamm tries to comfort him "perhaps it's too early" (*Endgame* 11); any crop is blighted. The people living there have also been "extinguished". The boy sighted by Clov towards the end of the play has only two possibilities: death or begging, just like the Irish poor in the 1840s. Characters are imprisoned within their own bodies. People during the Famine suffered from various affections; in the play, Hamm cannot stand or see or urinate; Clov cannot sit; Nell is freezing and Nagg has lost his teeth; Nell and Nagg will die in their dustbins, unable to scratch one another. The characters' bodies are a big wound and to Hamm's despair, there are no more pain-killers either:

> Hamm: Last night I saw inside my breast. There was a big sore.
> Clov: Pah! You saw your heart.
> Hamm: No, it was living. (*Endgame* 21)

The four characters do not have the strength to go on without the other. Paralysis, to which James Joyce also alludes in his correspondence and in *Dubliners,* is the state that characterizes both the characters' movement and the house; staying in the house will only defer the inevitable and Hamm describes Clov's eventual ending in terms of paralysis.

Furthermore, Clov describes the world as "corpsed", which may be an allusion to the proportion of the disaster and the presence of unburied corpses visible on the landscape. According to critics, Beckett is preoccupied with issues of burial and mourning (as in Phil Baker's "Ghost stories: Beckett and the literature of introjections" qtd. in Ulin 202-3); his writings are haunted by ghostly presences. When Hamm and Clov discuss Mother Pegg's death, Hamm shows his fear of not being buried. According to historians, as the Famine got worse, coffin burial became an exception. The starving families became so weak that burial rituals and funerals declined and in some places vanished. Sullivan mentions "the leveling above their corpses the sheeling in which they died, the neighbours gave them a grave" and Nicholson refers to "the more revolting sights of families found in the darkest corner of a cabin in one putrid mass, where, in many cases, the cabin was tumbled down upon them to

BDD-A19924 © 2014 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:53 UTC)

give them a burial" (qtd. in Ulin 207). The condition of Ireland during the Famine seemed to have been a general contamination and infection:

> Clov: Well ... sooner or later I'd start to stink.
> Hamm: You stink already. The whole place stinks of corpses.
> Clov: The whole universe. (*Endgame* 29)

The characters are preoccupied with rats, the scavenger animals of the Great Famine, when corpses were sometimes reported to have been found devoured by them. The rat lurks somewhere in the background:

> Clov: There's a rat in the kitchen!
> Hamm: A rat! Are there still rats?
> Clov: In the kitchen there's one.
> Hamm: And you haven't exterminated him?
> Clov: Half. You disturbed us.
> Hamm: He can't get away?
> Clov: No. (*Endgame* 33-34)

Most importantly, we should look at the centrality of food issues in the play. Food becomes an instrument of control of the others. Thus, the paralysis is the result of the continual deprivation, the characters' inability to leave the house and the waiting for "the end", like many of the victims of the Great Famine. The effects of the prolonged hunger and starvation destroy the most basic human sympathy even between family members. "Hamm: Why don't' you kill me?/ Clov: I don't' know the combination of the larder" (*Endgame* 9); You'll never get any more pap" (*Endgame* 10):

> Hamm: I'll give nothing more to eat.
> Clov: Then we'll die.
> Hamm: I'll give you just enough from keeping you dying. (*Endgame* 8)

Another consequence of the Famine troubles is madness. For instance, Clov appears to be bordering on a type of madness to which he is driven by the inability of his incessant "ordering" to combat the chaos of the outside world, by his own physical and mental suffering and the one witnessed around him. "Clov: You drive me mad, I'm mad!" (*Endgame* 45).

Besides Ulin, another critic, Pearson (215-239), considers the play from the perspective of postcoloniality and imperialism, featuring the problems of language, identity and origins. The characteristic at the core of the relationship between Hamm and Clov in Beckett's play lies in a co-dependency between the leftover participants from an imperial/ colonial situation (Pearson 216). The two maintain the roles of ruler and ruled. Thus, the play could be read against the master-slave dialectics discussed by Hegel. According to Hegel, in *Fenomenologia spiritului/ Phenomenology of Spirit,* historical existence takes place where there are bloody fights for legitimation but the battle does not end with the murder of any party, since the "master" needs the "slave" to acknowledge his power. Hegel's history, in general, comprises three stages: the fight between individuals, the dialectics master-slave and the fusion between the two. The fight is necessary because man/ any consciousness needs to be acknowledged by another man/ consciousness. As a consequence of the encounter, there are the two elements: the master, who justifies his human value and liberation from nature through fight, and the slave, who can only rise above his biological status through his work for the master (Stanca 46-7).

BDD-A19924 © 2014 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:53 UTC)

It is interesting to apply the workings of the dialectics master - slave (Hegel 112-120) to the relation between the English and the Irish. The master (the English) could not be happy once he has achieved his new status on any account: left with no occupation, he indulges in pleasure and laziness; faced with another master, who can see him as a human being, he has to kill the other or to turn him into his slave but the latter is unable to see his real value. So, whatever he does, his freedom is real but insufficient. On the other hand, the slave (the Irish) does not deny the dialectical character of his relationship with the master, justifying it through existential contradictions, and he creates another world, parallel to the real one; thus, he is not obliged to do anything to change reality, since he is free in the other world. The Irish attraction to the other world beyond the sea, popular in Irish folklore and taken over by writings later, should be remembered. Hegel considers that the slave is the real master of truth; he is satisfied through what he is, through his work for the master. He has understood human reality due to the fear of death and he is the one to accomplish history through progress, science and art (Stanca 46-7). Or the real achievement of the Irish could only take place away from home, the only means of production for the Irish artist being silence, exile and cunning, as Stephen Dedalus puts it in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* as a Young Man. According to Barbara Gluck, in her study on *Beckett and Joyce*, "Ireland ... was a spiritual assassin to its writers, whose only hope for creative achievement lay in exile" (qtd. in Pearson 236). Thus, the question remains: will Clov leave the house at the end of the play?

As far as language is concerned, Clov was taught English by Hamm; that could be seen as the language of the oppressor:

> Hamm: Yesterday! What does that mean? Yesterday!
> Clov: [*Violently.*] That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything anymore, teach me others. Or let me be silent. (*Endgame* 28)

Clov stresses that words are meaningless to him because they are inseparable from the identity of the master; for example, the British English curse word "bloody" used by Clov amounts to nothing but to curse the language of the oppressor (Pearson 218). In the absence of those words, Clov will be silent, which shows a state of frustration and paralysis.

Hamm and Clov remain locked in the same master-slave relationship, which is in general the story of the "liberated" postcolonial societies. The chronicle of how Hamm becomes a father to Clov constantly repeated by Hamm imposes the relationship between the two. Narratives about fathers and origins are linked to the relationship between the Irish and the English by two themes, the oppressive and impotent fathers (British rule and Irish progress) and storytelling (in an alien language, English). The story of Clov's adoption by Hamm is meant to remind him of his dependence on Hamm. The old questions and answers keep the two in a perpetual state of paralysis, in the past. Through the narrative, Hamm maintains control over Clov, silencing him and when asked to say something, he speaks as if through Hamm's perception, as if scarred forever, and as a spokesperson of his fellow wounded:

> Clov: [As before.] How easy it is. They said to me. That's friendship, yes yes, you've found it. They said to me, Here's the place, stop, raise your head and look at that beauty. That order! They said to me, Come now, you're not a brute beat, think upon these things and you'll see how all becomes clear. And simple! They said to me, What skilled attention they get, all these dying of their wounds. (*Endgame* 48)

BDD-A19924 © 2014 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:53 UTC)

Hamm commands Clov to examine the outside world for him; Clov's vision is limited by the telescope Hamm insists that he uses. Clov drops it on purpose and turns it to the audience in a moment of rebellion. With Hamm's telescope Clov can only confirm Hamm's desired perception. They stick to routine, Clov describing the world reduced to zero to Hamm. Both are aware of the strong relationship between them, yet they are unable to stop it:

> Hamm: Gone from me you'd be dead.
> Clov: And vice versa.
> Hamm: Outside of here it's death. (*Endgame* 42)

The only challenge to the oppressive discourse may be symbolized by the silences and pauses in Clov's discourse. Therefore, there are several levels of the postcolonial reading of *Endgame*: the story of the adopted sons of "Father England", the acceptance of the slave and master roles, Clov's constant repeating of Hamm's words, which is disempowering and the physical and spiritual scars left by the Great Famine.

Characters in Beckett's plays are usually grouped in pairs (Vladimir and Estragon, Pozo and Lucky, Hamm and Clov, Nagg and Nell) endlessly and obsessively talking on a variety of trifling subjects that point to the purposelessness of human existence. This device may be derived from the pairs of cross-talk music-hall comedians (Janik 79-85); the dialogue has the same repetitive quality and grotesque effects, used to underline the mechanical and tragic agitation of man's life; human life seems to be nothing more than a silly game that ends in death, like in *Endgame,* for instance. Silence troubles them; "Hamm: You haven't much conversation all of a sudden. Do you not feel well?" (*Endgame* 39). Sometimes death fails to come in time to relieve the suffering; Vladimir and Estragon try to commit suicide and fail; Hamm, blind and paralyzed, with his legless parents living in the dustbins, looks forward to the end of his hopeless torture but he is sentenced to live till the absurd mechanism comes to a stop. There is no future for Beckett's characters, only a perpetual repetition of the present and the past, in comparison with the present, seems happier in the character's emotional memory.

What may redeem these plays from total pessimism? The "reasonable percentage" that Godot may come and the fact that Gogo and Didi have one another. Or in *Endgame,* surprisingly, it is the two cripples, Nagg and Nell. When Clov finds the flea, Hamm cries out: "But humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of God" (22), but the love of God and as a matter of fact the love between man and woman is what is absent from the play. Yet, Nagg an Nell, in their dustbins, unable to kiss, feel tenderness for each other; when Nagg wakes Nell, she calls him "my pet"; they try to kiss, fail, try to look at each other but can barely see; Nagg saves three quarters of a biscuit for her and when she refuses to eat it he promises to keep it. She remembers being happy on their honeymoon and if she does not respond more gratefully to his offers of food and entertainment is because she is dying; when she is dead, Nagg weeps for her. Of the relationships between the characters in the play, which point either to hatred or indifference, this is the only one of love.

Even more therapeutic than laughing is making fun of oneself, in self-disparagement. When Clov complains to Hamm that he is badgering him: "You've asked me these questions millions of times", Hamm replies, "I love the old questions. Ah the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them!" (*Endgame* 25). Laughter may be the only thing left after total despair. Resembling the medieval fool, these characters are often incongruous but in their ridiculousness, they tell the truth. Beckett's characters are in general what the English call "tramps", the Americans "bums" and the Irish "travelling men" (Mercier 46). They wear bowler hat, dark jacket and walking stick and have aspirations of gentility but their ill-fitting clothing and boots give them away.

BDD-A19924 © 2014 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:53 UTC)

Moreover, the presence of the boy may signify that the outside world may not be as dead as we have believed. Hamm never finishes his storytelling, which is mostly autobiographical about the time when he was a rich master refusing to help poor creatures dependent on him and to take on a child against his will. He is afraid to reach the ending of the story, yet, he wants to finish it as it has been draining him but he may tell another story. Clov is obsessed with straightening objects in the room, establishing the order and peace necessary to the end, which is impossible to achieve, so he keeps dropping things. Though the term "endgame" refers to a game of chess, with characters, like pawns, restricted like pieces on a board, a game is also meant to create order in a confused world, by fictitious rules, tension but also joy and relaxation (Hale 71-86), which may the means through which the physically bruised men people try to save the remains of their mental health, the wounded bodies trying to preserve the wounded minds as sane as possible.

In conclusion, the article has shown the importance of the postcolonial component in what has been more often interpreted as a typical example of the theatre of the absurd. The interweaving of the postcolonial approach with an analysis of elements of the theatre of the absurd in relation to *Endgame* is justified in the context of the "wounded" bodies and minds of Beckett's characters, who may find themselves at the intersection of questions of Irish identity and memories of the Irish Great Famine.

WORKS CITED

Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*. New York: Grove Press, 1954.

---. *Endgame*. London: Faber and Faber, 2009.

Ciugureanu, Adina. *Post-War Anxieties (British Literature in the 1950s and the 1960s)*. Constanta: ExPonto, 2006.

Frawley, Oona. *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-Century Irish Literature.* Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2005.

Hale, Jane Alison. "*Endgame*: How Are Your Eyes?" *New Casebooks: Samuel Beckett - Waiting for Godot and Endgame.* Ed. Steven Connor. London: Macmillan, 1992. 71-86.

Hegel, G.W.F. *Fenomenologia spiritului.* Traducere Virgil Bogdan. Bucuresti: Iri, 1995.

Janik, Vicki, ed. *Fools, Jesters in Literature, Art and History.* Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1998.

Kinealy, Christine. "The stricken land: the Great Hunger in Ireland." Ed. George Cusak and Sarah Goss. *Hungry Words: Images of Famine in the Irish Canon.* Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006. 7-28.

Mercier, Vivian. *Beckett/ Beckett: The Classic Study of a Modern Genius.* New York: Souvenir Press, 2008.

Pearson, C. Nels. "'Outside of Here It's Death': Co-Dependency and the Ghosts of Decolonization in Beckett's *Endgame.*" *ELH*. vol. 68, N 1 (spring 2001). The John Hopkins University Press. 215-239. <http://www.jstore.org/stable/30031964/Accessed 19/04/2010, 09:00>.

Stanca, Nicoleta. *Duality of Vision in Seamus Heaney's Writings*. Constanta: ExPonto, 2009.

Ulin, Julieann. "Buried! Who would have buried her?": Famine 'ghost graves' in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame.*" Ed. George Cusak and Sarah Goss. *Hungry Words: Images of Famine in the Irish Canon.* Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006. 197-224.

BDD-A19924 © 2014 Ovidius University Press

Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:53 UTC)