Endgame

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SAMUEL BECKETT

Samuel Beckett grew up in Dublin and attended Trinity College, Dublin, where he studied French, English, and Italian. After graduating, he taught in Paris, where he met fellow modernist Irish writer James Joyce and worked on both critical and creative writings. Beckett moved back to Ireland in 1930, when he took up a job as a lecturer at Trinity College. He soon quit the job, though, in 1931, and traveled around Europe, continuing to write. He moved to Paris in 1937, stayed there when World War II began in 1939, and joined French Resistance forces when the Nazis occupied the country. Meanwhile, Beckett continued to write, including a trilogy of well-known novels (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*). But it was for his experimental plays that he would become best known, especially *Waiting for Godot*, which premiered in Paris (in its original French) in 1953. This was followed by more plays, including the equally experimental *Endgame*. Beckett's literary reputation and acclaim steadily improved in the 1960s, and he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969 (he gave away the prize money). Beckett died in 1989 and was buried in Paris along with his wife.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Beckett never clarifies the greater setting in which *Endgame* takes place. The only thing the audience knows for sure is that the play unfolds in a room with very little furniture and two windows, which look out onto a vast expanse of greyish blackness. Furthermore, Hamm and Clov intimate that life and the world at large have ended, at least beyond the walls of this room. For this reason, *Endgame* is largely dislocated from both time and place, making it quite difficult to tie it to any significant historical events. Having said that, though, Beckett wrote the play just over a decade after World War II and the Holocaust. Given that these events ravaged the entire world—and especially Europe, where Beckett lived and worked—it's not unreasonable to suggest that Beckett was influenced by the horror that the Holocaust proved humans were capable of. Indeed, this is perhaps why there is so little hope in *Endgame*, especially when it comes to humanity achieving any kind of progress. In fact, the vast majority of human life seems to have ended in *Endgame*, a fact that possibly symbolizes Beckett's dim view of humankind's future in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

It is helpful to consider *Endgame* alongside Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, his most famous work of absurdist theater. Like the characters in *Endgame*, the protagonists of *Waiting for Godot* spend the entire play waiting for something to happen. Unlike in *Endgame*, though, there is a bit more context surrounding their actions, since audiences understand that they're waiting for a man named Godot to visit them. In contrast, *Endgame* features characters who wait in vain for something to end without knowing—or at least without revealing—*what*, exactly, they want to end. In this sense, the play lacks much in the way of a plot, thereby linking it to Beckett's well-known experimental novel called *The Unnamable*, a book in which an unknown voice narrates its existence while trying to withhold plot, characterization, and context. It's also worth mentioning that Beckett worked with James Joyce as a young man, aiding the older writer in his composition of *Finnegans Wake*, which relied upon Joyce's virtuosic use of language. By the time Beckett fully committed himself to his own work, he took Joyce's examination of excess and language in a new direction, deciding to more thoroughly explore nothingness and the *emptiness* of words—a vision that *Endgame* mines with its lack of contextual information and logical, coherent dialogue. Furthermore, Beckett's absurdist approach was informed by the work of existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre (*Nausea*) and Albert Camus (*The Stranger*), both of whom paved the way for his explorations of nothingness.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Endgame
- **When Published:** Premiered on April 3rd, 1957.
- **Literary Period:** Modernism, Existentialism
- **Genre:** Drama, Theatre of the Absurd, Tragicomedy
- **Setting:** A room with only two windows, which is possibly the only place in the world where humans—or anything—still exist.
- **Climax:** *Endgame* evades meaning and interpretation because nothing truly happens to change the circumstances of the play from beginning to end. For this reason, it's difficult to pinpoint a climax, though it could be argued that Nell's sudden death is the most significant thing to happen and, therefore, the most transformative moment in the play. However, it is more likely that the climax is Clov's inability to leave Hamm at the end of the play, when he's dressed for departure but can't bring himself to turn away from Hamm.
- **Antagonist:** The misery and agony of existence

EXTRA CREDIT

Head-Scratcher. Readers who find themselves exasperated by how difficult it is to understand *Endgame* should take solace in

the knowledge that simply trying to comprehend the play has preoccupied even the sharpest intellectuals. In fact, the respected and prolific philosopher Theodor Adorno even wrote an essay entitled "Trying to Understand *Endgame*"—an indication that even the 20th century's best thinkers struggled to grasp the import of Beckett's play.

Pardon My French. Like many of his plays and novels, Beckett first wrote *Endgame* in French, titling it *Fin de partie*. The reason he worked this way was because his French was worse than his English, and he liked the effect this had on his writing. He translated *Endgame* into English himself in 1957, the same year it premiered in French. The first English production opened in New York in 1958.

PLOT SUMMARY

A man named Clov walks stiffly around a room with two windows set high on opposite walls. At the center of the room sits Hamm, a blind man confined to a wheeled armchair. Clov walks between the windows, climbing a small ladder to peer through each one. After looking for a moment, he lets out a sharp laugh before falling silent, at which point he walks to the two trashcans next to Hamm's chair and opens them, laughing when he looks inside. He then uncovers Hamm, who has been sitting underneath a large sheet. With a bloodied handkerchief draped over his face, Hamm sleeps while Clov laughs and then, emotionlessly, says, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished." Having said this, he decides to retreat to the kitchen connected to this room, where he'll wait for Hamm to summon him with a whistle.

When Clov exits, Hamm wakes up and takes off his bloody handkerchief, using it to wipe his glasses before putting them on again and wondering aloud if misery greater than his could possibly exist in the world. Considering this for a moment, he decides that his mother, father, and dog must certainly experience the same level of suffering as him. He also decides it's time for things—it's unclear what, exactly—to end, though he admits that he himself "hesitate[s] […] to end. He then calls Clov, wanting to be put to bed. Entering, Clov points out that he just roused Hamm, insisting that he can't spend his entire time getting him up and then putting him to bed over and over. After all, Clov says, he has things to do. This doesn't bother Hamm, who asks Clov what time it is. "The same as usual," Clov replies. Hamm asks if Clov has looked out the window. Clov assures him that he has, and when Hamm asks what he saw, he says, "Zero."

As their discursive conversation continues, Hamm and Clov agree that they've "had enough." Suddenly, Hamm turns on Clov and threatens to starve him to death, but Clov reminds him that this would cause both of them to die. Taking this into account, Hamm decides to give Clov just one biscuit every day, thereby keeping him alive but in a constant state of hunger. This doesn't bother Clov, who turns to fetch the sheet to cover Hamm. Before he does, though, Hamm asks why he stays with him, and Clov responds by asking why Hamm lets him stay. "There's no one else," Hamm says, to which Clov adds, "There's nowhere else." Still, Hamm points out that Clov is going to leave him, and Clov admits that he's attempting to do so.

At one point, Hamm asks Clov if he can take his painkiller, but Clov says it's not yet time. Moving on, Hamm asks why Clov won't simply kill him, and Clov says he doesn't know the combination of the cupboard (never making clear what this cupboard contains). Allowing Clov to finally retreat to the kitchen, Hamm remarks that everything is death outside of this room.

Just before Clov goes into the kitchen, one of the trash cans next to Hamm opens, and Nagg's head appears. He listens to their conversation for a moment, and when Clov leaves, he asks for pap (a soft food often fed to babies). "Accursed progenitor!" Hamm swears, blowing his whistle to summon Clov, who says there's no more pap. Nagg complains about this, so Hamm tells Clov to give him a biscuit. Once he has this biscuit, Nagg protests, saying it's too hard for him to eat. Annoyed, Hamm orders Clov to close the lid of Nagg's trash can. He then tells Clov to sit on the lid, but Clov reminds him that he's incapable of sitting. "True," Hamm says. "And I can't stand." Both men then reflect upon the state of nature, asserting not only that nature has forgotten them, but that there *is* no more nature—though they take this back when Hamm points out that they continue to age and decay, meaning that nature hasn't forgotten them.

Clov says he has things to do, maintaining that he must go back to the kitchen to continue staring at the wall. Once again, Nagg pops up, this time sucking on the biscuit. Hamm declares that he's not having any fun, though he concedes that this is always the case, especially at the end of a day. Suddenly, though, he asks Clov what is happening, and Clov says, "Something is taking its course." Agreeing, Hamm tells Clov to leave, and Clov says that he's been trying to for a long time.

Nagg raps his hand against the trashcan next to him, and a woman named Nell pops up from within it, asking what he wants and if it's "time for love." They then try to kiss, but their heads won't reach each other. Nagg launches into a memory about when he and Nell—his wife—lost their legs in a tandem bike crash. Moving on, Nagg offers Nell half of his biscuit, but she's uninterested. Meanwhile, Hamm tells them to be quiet, complaining that their conversation is keeping him from falling asleep and dreaming of running freely into the woods. He also says there's a heart inside of his head that is dripping—a statement that makes Nagg laugh, though Nell scolds him, saying he shouldn't laugh at such things. However, she also says there's nothing funnier than unhappiness, though she sees no reason to laugh, since misery is so common that it's like a funny joke one has heard many times—there is, she says, no point in

laughing, since the joke has been told time and again, though it's still funny.

Nagg asks Nell if she's going to leave him, and she assures him that she will, but first Nagg insists upon telling a funny story. Nell doesn't want to listen, but Nagg forces her, reminding her that she used to love this story. Going on, he delivers a joke about a man who brings his suit to a tailor, who keeps delaying the final product because of the mistakes he makes along the way. Once he finishes, he laughs at his own strange tale, at which point Hamm shouts at him to be quiet. Nagg sinks back into his trashcan and closes the lid, and Nell begins to speak nonsensically about deserts, so Clov feels her pulse, declaring as he pushes her back into her trashcan and closes the lid that she doesn't have a heartbeat.

Hamm asks again for his painkiller, but Clov doesn't give it to him. Turning his attention to other matters, Hamm makes Clov push his chair around the room in a large circle before setting him back in the center. As a casual aside, Clov remarks that he would be happy if only he could kill Hamm, but this comment doesn't bother Hamm, who continues to ask seemingly random questions about the outside world, forcing Clov to look out the window with a telescope. Again, he describes what he sees as "zero," adding that it's nothing but a wash of greyness. After he says this, Hamm asks once more what's happening, and Clov responds again by saying that "something is taking its course." In response, Hamm asks if he and Clov are beginning to "mean something," but Clov dismisses this as a ludicrous idea. All the same, Hamm urges Clov to imagine what it would be like if a "rational being came back to earth" and observed them. This being, Hamm says, might try to draw certain ideas about what Hamm and Clov are doing.

Interrupting Hamm, Clov looks down his own pants and declares that he has a flea. This astounds Hamm, who's surprised to hear that fleas still exist. He orders Clov to sprinkle insecticide down his pants to ensure that the flea dies, worrying that humanity might begin all over again if he doesn't kill the flea. Once this ordeal is settled, Hamm says that Clov will one day become like him, deciding to rest and then finding that he can't move anymore. Clov agrees that this might happen, but he reminds Hamm that he can't sit down, so Hamm revises his prediction by saying that Clov will simply remain on his feet, upholding that the effect will be the same. Once again, they talk about whether or not Clov will leave, and then Hamm suggests that he should "finish" them both, saying that he'll tell him the combination to the cupboard. In response, Clov says that he couldn't possibly finish Hamm. Continuing their conversation, Hamm talks about when Clov first arrived—a time Clov himself can't remember because he was too young.

Hamm then asks for his dog, so Clov brings him a stuffed animal with only three legs. Hamm doesn't seem to understand that the dog isn't real, treating it as if it's alive. As the day passes, Hamm and Clov continue their discussion about whether or not Clov will leave, alternating between wanting this to happen and wanting it not to happen. At one point, Hamm wonders how he'll know whether or not Clov has left or died when he one day calls for him and he doesn't come. To solve this problem, Clov says he will set an alarm clock if he ever leaves. If Hamm calls him and he doesn't come *and* the alarm clock goes off, Hamm will know he left. If he calls him and he doesn't come but the alarm clock doesn't go off, he'll know Clov died in the kitchen.

Abruptly, Hamm says it's time for him to tell a story, forcing Clov to wake up Nagg to listen. When Nagg pops up, Hamm curses him, asking why he decided to give him life (it becomes clear here that Nagg and Nell are Hamm's parents). Then, commenting on his own style of narration as he goes, Hamm tells a story about a man coming to him on Christmas Eve and asking for help. The man explained that he and his son were starving to death. He told Hamm that he left his son at home, and asked if Hamm would take them both in. After a moment of deliberation, Hamm agreed, though not before disparaging the man for thinking that he could ever do anything to make life better. "Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that!" he yelled. As he concludes his story, it becomes obvious that Clov is the young boy whose father asked Hamm for help.

Hamm and Clov keep talking about how everything will soon end. Eventually, they discover that Nell has died in her trashcan, but they don't make a big deal of the matter. Instead, they focus on their disjointed conversations. Clov, for his part, wonders aloud why he always does what Hamm tells him to, and Hamm suggests that perhaps he feels compassion toward him. Looking out the window, Clov thinks he sees a young boy, but both he and Hamm agree that it doesn't matter even if what he has seen is real.

Clov finally decides to leave, and Hamm asks him to say something before departing. Clov speaks abstractly about friendship, suffering, and the strange passage of time. Hamm thanks Clov for all of his help, and Clov thanks Hamm in return. Clov then stops answering Hamm, stepping into the kitchen to collect his things before going. When he returns, Hamm is still speaking, and he watches with his coat folded over his arm, apparently unable to tear himself away. Unsure whether or not Clov is still there, Hamm addresses his bloody handkerchief, remarking that it has remained with him. He then drapes it over his face and stops speaking.

CHARACTERS

Hamm – Hamm is an old blind man who is unable to move from his wheeled armchair, which sits at the center of a room with two high windows. A cantankerous man whose mind rarely settles on one topic for very long, Hamm lives with his

caretaker, Clov, and his two elderly parents, Nagg and Nell, both of whom he keeps in trashcans next to his chair. The first time the audience sees Hamm, he's covered in a large sheet, which Clov removes, revealing that Hamm is asleep with a bloody handkerchief draped over his face. Throughout the play, Hamm talks about waiting for an "end" of sorts, perhaps thinking that this end—whatever it is—will stop his suffering and misery, which he recognizes as inherent to life itself. Despite his wish for finality, though, Hamm never finds himself capable of fully embracing his own end (or, for that matter, any kind of end). He sometimes asks Clov to kill him, but this never transpires. In general, he mainly focuses on talking to Clov about whether or not the young man will finally leave him. He also often asks questions about what the world outside looks like, conversing with Clov about the fact that everything outside of his room is "death." At one point, he tells a story, saying that a man came to him once and asked for his help, explaining that he and his ailing son needed shelter and food. Hamm decided to take them in, and this, it seems, is how Clov came to be his caretaker. In this capacity, Clov obeys Hamm's orders, though he never gives him painkillers, which Hamm asks for multiple times. By the end of the play, Hamm's mother, Nell, has died, but he hardly pays attention to the matter, too preoccupied with his odd and halting monologues about suffering and time. The play ends with Hamm putting the bloody handkerchief back on his face, returning to the state of rest he was in at the very beginning of the piece.

Clov – A young man unable to sit down, Clov is Hamm's caretaker. Although he spends most of his time conversing with Hamm, Nagg, and Nell, Clov sometimes goes into the kitchen to be alone. In fact, he seemingly wants to spend as much time there as possible. But when Hamm finally asks what, exactly, he does in there, he says that he simply stares at the wall and watches his own "light" die away. Like Hamm, Clov is eager to reach an "end" of sorts, though it's not clear what this means. And yet, unlike Hamm, he has the option to leave this place—a fact that weighs heavily on his mind, as he tries to decide if he's going to depart. Whether or not Clov will actually follow through with this serves as the play's central conflict, especially since Hamm would die without Clov to care for him. What's strange, though, is that Clov seems to think he wouldn't be able to survive without Hamm either, since he agrees when Hamm points out that he wouldn't last on his own in the outside world. This is perhaps because Clov has been with Hamm since he was a small child, when his own father begged Hamm to take them in. Clov doesn't remember this, nor does he remember his father, but he sees Hamm as a father figure of sorts, even if he feels disdainful toward him and wishes he could kill him. A submissive person, Clov never manages to tear himself away from Hamm, apparently too attached or enticed by the old man to strike out on his own. Although he comes close and even gathers his things as if to leave, he stands in the room at the end of the play and silently watches as Hamm delivers his closing monologue, and it becomes clear that he most likely won't have the courage to finally leave. By staying, though, Clov ultimately preserves his only shred of power, since Hamm's continued dependency on Clov proves that Clov isn't as weak or unimportant as he might seem.

Nagg – An elderly man who lost his legs years ago in a tandem bike-riding accident with his wife, Nell, Nagg lives in a trashcan that remains stationed next to Hamm's chair. He periodically pops his head out of this trashcan to listen to and converse with Hamm and Clov, depending on them to feed him pap (a kind of mush) or biscuits. It eventually emerges that Nagg is Hamm's father, a fact that Hamm holds against him, cursing him for giving him life. Unlike Hamm and Clov, though, Nagg is somewhat good-spirited, even if he often complains about hunger. When he converses with Nell, he reminisces about their old life before launching into a joke about a tailor. He is the only person to find this joke funny, but this doesn't deter him from having a hearty laugh. Throughout the play, Hamm orders Clov to shut Nagg back in his garbage bin, and Nagg eventually says that he hopes he grows old enough to see Hamm regress to his childlike ways, when he used to call out for his father in the night—a sentiment that seems endearing at first but ultimately suggests that Nagg wants to witness his son become helpless and frightened. After Nagg does go back into his trashcan, Nell falls into a sort of delirium and passes away. At the end of the play, Nagg remains shut inside his trashcan, weeping because Nell has died.

Nell – Along with her husband, Nagg, Nell lost her legs in a tandem bike-riding accident many years ago. She now lives in a trashcan that sits next to Hamm's chair. When she pokes her head out of the bin, she talks to Nagg, indulging him by trying to kiss him even though she knows they won't be able to reach each other from their separate trashcans. When Nagg laughs at their son, Hamm, because he's miserable, Nell tells him not to laugh at such things, though she goes on to assert that unhappiness is the funniest thing in the world. Still, though, she says it's not worth laughing at suffering because such misery is like an old joke—it's still funny, but one need not actually laugh at it. Like the other characters in *Endgame*, Nell is displeased with her circumstances and sees her everyday life as a "farce," but she also approaches this with a sense of acceptance. It is perhaps for this reason that she is the only one to escape life's misery by dying—after Nagg goes back into his trashcan, Nell falls into a kind of delirium state and Clov declares that she has no pulse before shutting her inside her trashcan. In this way, Nell is the only person in the entire play to experience an ending, though her death hardly affects Hamm and Clov, who barely register her passing, though Nagg—for his part—descends into his trashcan and weeps for the remainder of the play after she dies.

Mother Pegg – A woman who never appears on stage, Mother Pegg is somebody whom Clov and Hamm reference several

times in the play. According to Clov, Mother Pegg died "of darkness" because Hamm refused to give her oil for her lamp. Hamm, for his part, claims he didn't have any oil to spare, but Clov doesn't believe him.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

MEANING, NARRATIVE, AND ENGAGEMENT

By any measure, Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* is a confounding piece of theater. The actual events that take place in the play are very limited, since the entire production is confined to a single room in which a blind and wheelchair-bound man named Hamm has abstract, strange dialogue with his caretaker, Clov. Because little else happens, audience members find themselves searching for meaning in Hamm and Clov's rambling conversations, which often allude to the fact that the world outside Hamm's room has ended or turned to nothing. And yet, the stories and asides that each of these characters offer up never actually lead to a greater sense of meaning. In this regard, Beckett invites audience members to piece together an overarching narrative that simply doesn't exist in the world of the play, since none of Hamm or Clov's stories cohere in meaningful, cogent ways. In turn, audience members are left with nothing but the simple—but exceedingly strange—interactions that take place onstage. This then forces them to more directly interface with the play on its own terms, finding meaning or purpose only in what happens before them. Unable to cobble together a dominant message or even an understanding of the play's context, there's nothing to do but focus on what the characters experience line by line, moment by moment. Interestingly enough, then, Beckett's refusal to build meaning and narrative in *Endgame* doesn't necessarily estrange audiences from the play, but actually enables them to engage with it more immediately.

From the start of the play, Beckett presents the plot with no meaningful context or exposition, intentionally forcing the audience to engage with the play and derive meaning from it on their own terms as the plot progresses. While the play's plot remains intentionally vague, though, it's worth reviewing the bare facts of what happens. Hamm, a blind man who spends his time in a wheeled chair placed at the center of a bare room with two high windows, orders his caretaker, Clov, to complete various tasks for him, frequently disparaging him. As the play progresses, there emerges no clear reason why these characters—along with Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell, who live in trash bins beside his chair—are in this room, even if both Hamm and Clov often allude to the fact that the outside world has become nothing but a wash of blackish-greyness that is completely void of life. In this absence of context or meaning, the central conflict of the play becomes whether or not Clov will leave Hamm, a prospect that simultaneously entices and horrifies both characters; Clov constantly says, "I'll leave you" without ever actually doing so, and Hamm fluctuates between convincing him to stay and telling him to depart. And yet, despite how much they talk about Clov leaving, neither of them—nor, of course, the audience—knows what it would even *mean* for Clov to leave, since it's unclear what, exactly, lies beyond the confines of Hamm's room. At one point, Hamm says, "Outside of here it's death," but he later observes that his own abode "stinks of corpses," so it's hard to say what difference it would make to Clov if he left or stayed. The only thing that remains indisputably clear is that Clov has been with Hamm for quite some time but might, at some point, leave. Everything else is left purposefully uncertain and ambiguous.

As *Endgame* progresses, it becomes obvious that Beckett has intentionally crafted a play that evades simple interpretation. And yet, he *does* make several narrative gestures, as if to inspire viewers not to give up the search for meaning altogether. For instance, Hamm tells a story that functions as a possible explanation for why Clov is in his service, saying that a man came to him many years ago and asked him to take in his son, who was sick and dying. However, Hamm never actually finishes his story, leaving audience members to infer that Clov was the sick boy, since Clov has already revealed that he first came to Hamm as a youngster. This is the only kind of "story" that Beckett lets creep into the narrative framework of *Endgame*, and though it does little to explain what has happened to the outside world or why Hamm and Clov are confined to Hamm's bizarre abode, it gives viewers just enough information to make them reach for more. With little else to go on, though, they're forced to pay close attention to the characters' discursive conversations—conversations that might otherwise seem pointless to scrutinize.

To that end, Hamm and Clov often wonder about the purpose of their existence, as they wait around for something to happen—something that even they don't seem to understand. When Hamm asks Clov what's "happening," Clov responds by saying, "Something is taking its course." This answer is interesting because it infuses the play with a feeling of progression without actually specifying what this progression is. In other words, it builds the *feeling* of meaning without actually meaning anything at all. Indeed, the play is about nothing other than what the characters experience, even if they don't firmly grasp what it is that they're going through. In many ways, then, Beckett is stripping the art of theater down to its most basic parts. Because it is a representational artform,

audience members expect actors and playwrights to convey an entire imaginative world using nothing but words and physical embodiment. Beckett, however, refuses to fully build this kind of world, thereby inviting—or forcing—viewers to actively participate in the meaning-making of the play. Consequently, *Endgame* is a thoroughly experiential play, one that can only be understood through its very meaninglessness, as it encourages viewers to invest themselves in a world that—much like the real world—they will never fully comprehend.

TIME, PROGRESS, AND STASIS

In Beckett's *Endgame*, time passes without a sense of progress or change, even though the entire play is predicated on the idea that Hamm and Clov are waiting for something to end. Of course, *what* they want to end never becomes entirely clear, but Hamm asserts early in the play that "it's time it ended." No matter how much Hamm insists throughout the piece that things are "nearly finished," there is no true progress toward *anything*. In fact, the interactions he has with Clov, Nagg, and Nell are in and of themselves quite repetitive, as if these characters are doomed to perpetuate the same patterns over and over again. This sense of futile repetition is also evident in the way Clov serves Hamm, often carrying out the same rote tasks that ultimately do nothing for Hamm, who continues to shout orders without ever benefitting from Clov's efforts. This makes a certain amount of sense, since Hamm views continuity and progression unfavorably—he curses "progenitors" (people who reproduce) and constantly yearns for an ending. And yet, Hamm also can't bring himself to embrace finality, admitting that he finds himself "hesitating" to "end." It is this tension between progression and stasis that defines *Endgame*: whatever happens, it seems, won't matter, since the only thing that will actually end is the play itself, and even this ending lacks any sense of conclusion. And though this dim view of progression could *possibly* reflect the belief that humanity (or perhaps society) is incapable of genuine advancement, the play's overarching theory remains vague, turning the entire piece into little more than a meditation on the way humans experience the passage of time.

One of the reasons that the literal ending of *Endgame* doesn't feel like a conclusion is that there has been absolutely no progress throughout the play. This is somewhat unsurprising, considering that the first line of the entire piece comes when Clov says, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished." If whatever the play is about has already finished at the very outset, then there's nowhere for it to go, no chance that it will progress in any meaningful way. This accords with Hamm's later assertion that "the end is in the beginning and yet you go on." In this moment, Beckett basically tells the audience that they have already seen everything that will take place in this play, even though the play itself hasn't yet ended. Indeed, what Hamm says about the end being in the beginning is perhaps the best possible way to describe *Endgame*, since Hamm and Clov undergo almost no change whatsoever despite the fact that they apparently try to "go on" in various ways. For example, Clov finally decides that he's going to leave Hamm once and for all, even dressing for the journey and preparing to set out. However, he never departs, instead watching in silence as Hamm babbles on and on about waiting for an end. Together, it seems, these two men are going to wait for eternity, longing for a conclusion without doing anything to embrace finality.

Perhaps the one character who actually breaks out of the cyclical stasis of Hamm and Clov's world is Hamm's mother, Nell, who dies in her trash bin near the end of the play. This event is the only thing that takes place in *Endgame* that changes the circumstances from the beginning of the play to the end. However, Nell plays a very minor roll, so the effect of her death on the overall narrative is still quite minute. In keeping with this, Hamm isn't even remotely impacted by his mother's death, immediately moving on to talk to Clov about the nature of happiness and, when that conversation fizzles, asking him to push his chair beneath the window—something he has already requested several times. That Hamm so quickly reverts to his normal patterns in the aftermath of his mother's death is significant, since it suggests that even if some kind of change *were* to take place in his immediate environment, it would hardly influence or change the general circumstances of his life or, for that matter, the play.

Extrapolating the way that time works in *Endgame* into a larger idea or theory is quite difficult, because the context in which the characters exist is so abstract and unlike real life. All the same, there are several possible interpretations that can be drawn from Beckett's examination of pointless repetition and endless waiting. First, the comments that Hamm and Clov make about working their way toward some sort of ending could potentially be understood as metanarrative comments about the actual play. After all, the play is the only tangible thing that ends, and Hamm even says things like, "I'm warming up for my last soliloquy"—assertions that suggest Hamm is aware of his status as character and call attention to the way the play is unfolding, informing viewers that it will soon be over. Furthermore, it's worth considering that Beckett wrote *Endgame* in the aftermath of the Holocaust and World War II, two of the greatest travesties of the 20th century. Bearing this in mind, the fact that the play contains no sense of progression intimates that Beckett views society at large as incapable of moving beyond its vast failures. This, however, is a historical superimposition that—while valid in its attempt to connect the play to real-world events—only appears as a vague metaphor, since *Endgame* is altogether too abstract and vague to address such concerns with specificity. In turn, readers are simply invited to consider the fact that the passage of time doesn't always lead to meaningful change.

MISERY AND SUFFERING

Although it's not always entirely clear what the characters in Beckett's *Endgame* suffer from, it's overwhelmingly apparent that they are miserable. Hamm, in particular, considers the nature of his own suffering, wondering at the beginning of the play if other people could possibly suffer as much as he himself suffers, eventually deciding that they must indeed experience misery as acutely as he does. Of course, it's not hard to discern why he's in agony—after all, when the audience first sees him, he has a **bloody handkerchief** covering his face. A blind man unable to move on his own, he sits in a bare room and depends entirely upon Clov, frequently asking for a **painkiller** that Clov never lets him have. This suggests that Hamm is in a constant state of pain, ostensibly explaining why he thinks of himself as suffering. However, Clov also upholds that he himself miserable, telling Hamm at one point that he has never experienced even a moment of happiness. Unlike Hamm, though, Clov doesn't suffer from any readily apparent afflictions, though he seems to suffer all the same. This is because the kind of suffering that takes place in *Endgame* has little to do with physical pain or discomfort. Rather, it has to do with what Beckett sees as the inherent painfulness of the human condition, something Hamm insists cannot be cured. Accordingly, *Endgame* is a play that frames misery and suffering as integral to the human experience.

Hamm believes that all living beings are inherently miserable, and he yearns to find an end to the suffering that comes with existence. His preoccupation with misery emerges early in the play, when he first wakes up and removes a bloodied handkerchief from his face. Yawning, he asks himself if there could possibly be misery greater than his, wondering if his father, mother, or dog experiences the same amount of suffering as him. Thinking for a moment, he concedes that they must "suffer as much as such creatures can suffer," going on to add that this must mean their suffering is equal to his own. This illustrates that Hamm thinks all living "creatures" are equally miserable. And since a human and a dog undoubtedly experience life differently, it follows that life itself must be the very thing that causes their suffering, since existence is the only thing that *all* living "creatures" have in common. This, perhaps, is why Hamm is so eager throughout the play to reach some kind of ending. "Have you not had enough?" he asks Clov, implying that Hamm sees death or change as the only ways to escape misery and suffering.

Whereas Hamm intuits that suffering is part of existence but constantly complains about it, his mother, Nell, also accepts suffering as integral to the human experience, but embraces it. "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness," she tells her husband, Nagg. This, however, doesn't mean that she laughs at sorrow. Rather, she registers misery as deeply funny without feeling the need to laugh. "Yes," she says to Nagg, "it's like the funny story we have heard too often, we still find it funny, but we don't laugh any more." In this moment, it becomes clear that Nell is perhaps the only person in *Endgame* who makes peace with suffering, since everybody else rails against it in one way or another: Hamm hopes it will end, Clov thinks he can escape it by striking out on his own, and Nagg seeks comfort in worldly delights. Interestingly enough, Nell is also the only person who manages to unburden herself of life's miseries by dying. Indeed, Hamm and the other characters are left to continue their struggles with life's wretchedness. And even though Hamm knows that suffering is unavoidable—at one point exclaiming to no one in particular, "[…] you're on earth, there's no cure for that!"—he fails to fully reconcile himself with this unfortunate condition in the pragmatic yet good-humored way that Nell does. Hamm therefore represents one of life's inherent dilemmas, as he wants his suffering to end but also wants to continue living in order to experience life without suffering—something Beckett intimates is impossible, since misery is unavoidably part of existence. This means, unfortunately, that one can never actually experience the absence of suffering.

COMPANIONSHIP, DEPENDENCY, AND COMPASSION

Unlike the contextual and plot-related details of *Endgame*, the relational dynamics between the characters are fairly self-evident, even if they're still complicated and strange. This is because the play is largely about companionship and the limits of empathy or compassion. At first glance, it seems as if each character exists in his or her own little world, since they rarely converse with one another in ways that give viewers the impression that they're connecting on a meaningful level. In fact, Nell and Nagg even live in separate trash cans, suggesting that they're isolated from each other even though they're married. As the play progresses, though, a network of dependency slowly emerges. First, the audience begins to understand that Hamm relies upon Clov as his caretaker, since he is unwell and needs quite a bit of assistance. Then, later in the play, Hamm reveals—or rather insinuates—that he took Clov in as a boy, when Clov was ill, starving, and in need of Hamm's help. It's also evident that Nagg and Nell depend upon both Hamm and Clov to feed them, since Hamm decides when they can eat and Clov is the one to actually bring them food. At the same time, though, none of this codependency contains much in the way of true empathy, as the characters yell, insult, vow to leave, and even threaten to kill one another. By the end of the play, then, what may have seemed at one point like compassionate companionship seems more like begrudging reliance, suggesting that depending on another person as a caretaker doesn't always guarantee an empathic, mutually beneficial relationship.

Hamm and Clov's relationship quickly reveals itself to be one of

interdependence and not much more. Hamm, for his part, demands things from Clov at a rapid pace, often contradicting himself and making it difficult for Clov to complete what he's already been told to do. In a moment of frustration that takes place early in the play, Hamm threatens to starve Clov, and Clov's response provides valuable insight into their relational dynamic. "Then we'll die," he says, thereby implying that Hamm would also die if Clov starved to death, since Clov is the one who helps Hamm survive. In response, Hamm says that, in that case, he'll give Clov just one biscuit per day, keeping him alive but ensuring that he remains hungry. This interaction—and the mere fact that Hamm threatens Clov in the first place—is a perfect representation not only of the lack of genuine compassion in Hamm and Clov's relationship, but also of the odd power dynamic that exists between them. Although Hamm plays the role of the dominant, merciless master (an archetype that surfaces time and again in Beckett's work), he doesn't actually hold all of the power in their relationship, since he himself depends upon Clov's wellbeing, meaning that anything he does to harm Clov will vicariously harm him, too—thereby granting Clov a certain amount of power.

It is possibly because Hamm so thoroughly depends upon Clov that he sometimes exhibits something that almost seems like fondness for the young man. "Why do you stay with me?" he asks immediately after threatening Clov, a question that gives one the impression that Hamm is cognizant of the ways in which he mistreats Clov. Clov returns this fleeting affection by asking, "Why do you keep me?" This question gets at the heart of the relational dynamics at play in *Endgame*, since it's not particularly clear why any of these characters have holed up with one another—except, that is, for the allusions that Hamm and Clov make about human life having vanished or ended in the outside world. "There's no one else," Hamm says, answering Clov's question about why he "keeps" him. "There's nowhere else," Clov adds. In this moment, the audience sees that these two men have been thrown together by little more than simple necessity, since extenuating circumstances that are never made clear have forced them into a strangely symbiotic relationship. As a result, their bond has nothing to do with emotion or empathy, even if compassion sometimes creeps into their conversations.

Indeed, instead of compassion, Hamm and Clov's relationship is predicated on necessity and survival. At the same time, though, it's worth noting that Hamm doesn't actually physically *do* anything to sustain Clov. In fact, Clov could simply stop caring for Hamm and let him die, and he himself would—or should—be able to survive just fine. Yet, he clearly sees his own fate as tied to Hamm's, as evidenced by the fact that he agrees when Hamm says, "Gone from me you'd be dead." In a strange way, then, there possibly *is* something about their relationship that isn't merely tied to survival—it's not compassion or empathy, necessarily, but a simple form of companionship, as if Clov needs Hamm only to have another human presence in his life. In this regard, Beckett presents a portrait of a relationship that, though it's full of bitterness and utterly lacks any kind of true compassion, buoys two people who know that to be alone would be worse than to be together.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

HAMM'S PAINKILLERS

The painkillers that Hamm asks Clov to give him throughout the play are an embodiment of the fact that Hamm is waiting in vain for something to happen that will ease his misery. In this case, he wants the painkillers because he hopes to decrease his physical suffering, but Clov repeatedly tells him that it isn't time for him to take the medication yet. Then, when Clov finally agrees that it's time for the painkillers, he informs Hamm that there *are* no more painkillers. Consequently, Hamm is forced to continue waiting for something to ease his pain, though now there is no hope that anything in his immediate environment will help him do this. In this sense, then, the painkillers—and the eventual reveal of their nonexistence—represent the notion that it's impossible to escape suffering, which is an integral and unavoidable part of being alive.

THE BLOODY HANDKERCHIEF

The bloody handkerchief that Hamm wears over his face at the beginning and end of the play is a representation of the futile ways that he tries to avoid suffering even though he knows that such misery is inevitable. As soon as the audience sees Hamm, they are met with the image of this handkerchief, which is covered in blood. However, it is never made clear where this blood has come from, though it's obvious that it's Hamm's. What's interesting, though, is that Hamm primarily uses the handkerchief throughout the play to wipe his glasses, never actually using it to wipe away any blood. In this regard, it becomes part of the odd routine he follows, as he takes off his black glasses, wipes them, and then puts them on again. This is bizarre considering that Hamm is blind and cannot see out of his eyeglasses regardless of if they're clean—given this, using the handkerchief seems to be a habit that reminds him of when he *could* see, rather than a practical action. And, for whatever reason, Hamm seems to have a certain fondness for the handkerchief, affectionately calling it "old stancher" (presumably because it has stanched the flow of blood from his body at one point or another). In fact, he addresses the handkerchief at the very end of the play, saying, "Old stancher!

[*Pause.*] You…remain." In this way, Hamm develops an attachment to the handkerchief. In turn, the handkerchief symbolizes not only his desperate attempt to keep suffering at bay (effectively "stanching" it), but also his desire to have something upon which he can rely.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Grove edition of *Endgame and Act Without Words* published in 2009.

Endgame Quotes

CLOV: [*fixed gaze, tonelessly*] Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished.

[*Pause.*]

Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap.

Related Characters: Clov (speaker), Nell, Nagg, Hamm

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

Clov speaks these words at the very beginning of the play, just after he has looked out both windows, peered inside Nagg and Nell's trashcans, and taken the sheet off of Hamm, who is still sleeping. It's interesting that the very first word of a play called *Endgame* is "finished," since this invites audiences to consider one of the play's primary obsessions: namely, finality and the passage of time. Rather than delivering an opening monologue that jumpstarts the events that are assumingly about to take place, Clov speaks as if everything important has already happened and now he is simply waiting for the play to be over. In keeping with this, he turns his attention to the strange way that time passes, likening this to the piling up of grain. Although one grain doesn't make a notable difference, the eventual amassing of "grain upon grain" creates a "heap" that is "suddenly" perceptible. The word "suddenly" is important here, since it perfectly captures the way the passage (or accumulation) of time feels—it's not actually *sudden*, but the realization that time has passed is almost always abrupt, since humans are apparently incapable of sensing small increments of change. This is perhaps what the audience members will feel by the time the play finally ends. They will, it seems, feel that the play's end is "sudden" even though they'll have been waiting for it throughout.

HAMM: […] Can there be misery—

[*he yawns*]

—loftier than mine? No doubt. Formerly. But now?

[*Pause.*]

My father?

[*Pause.*]

My mother?

[*Pause.*]

My…dog?

[*Pause.*]

Oh I am willing to believe they suffer as much as such creatures can suffer. But does that mean their sufferings equal mine? No doubt.

Related Characters: Hamm (speaker), Clov

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Hamm says this during his opening monologue, shortly after he wakes up and takes his bloody handkerchief off his face. His interest in misery and suffering is telling, alerting audience members to the fact that he is preoccupied by bleak, dismal thoughts. Of course, it makes sense that he would have suffering on his mind, considering that he has just removed a bloody handkerchief from his face—an indication that he knows what it's like to undergo physical pain. More importantly, though, Hamm's consideration of suffering extends to the other people in his life. The fact that he doesn't already know whether or not their misery is as intense as his own implies that he thinks (at least at first) that his agony is unmatched, thereby hinting that he has trouble empathizing with others. However, he eventually decides that any living being is capable of suffering to its full capacity. And if everyone is suffering as much as they possibly can, then that suffering must be equal. Interestingly enough, this line of thought intimates that Hamm thinks all living beings have one thing in common: misery. Accordingly, he sees this kind of anguish as an integral part of being alive.

HAMM: [...] Enough, it's time it ended, in the shelter too.

[*Pause.*]

And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to...to end. Yes, there it is, it's time it ended and yet I hesitate to—

[*he yawns*]

—to end.

Related Characters: Hamm (speaker), Clov

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Hamm says this to himself in the beginning of the play, echoing Clov's sentiment that everything is "nearly finished." Of course, it's not exactly clear what he wants to "end." When he says that he himself "hesitate[s] to...to end," it seems as if he's referring to his own life, asserting that he wants to die but can't bring himself to embrace death. This tension—between wanting to go on and wanting to die—will follow Hamm throughout the play, as will the ambiguity surrounding whether or not he's actually talking about life and death. After all, he could very well be making a metanarrative comment about the play itself. Most confusingly, Hamm says that it's "time it ended, in the shelter too." Presumably, he is referring to the room in which he himself exists, thereby indicating that the room is a haven of sorts that separates him and the others from the rest of the world—a world audience members later learn may have turned to nothingness and extinction. And yet, despite this interpretation, the meaning of the world "shelter" never becomes clear, nor does seemingly anything else about what Hamm says in this moment. Therefore, viewers are forced to simply experience his words as detached from meaning, even as they try desperately to cobble together an understanding of what's happening.

CLOV: Yes!

[*Pause.*]

Of what?

HAMM: Of this...this...thing.

CLOV: I always had.

[*Pause.*]

Not you?

HAMM: [*gloomily*] Then there's no reason for it to change.

Related Characters: Clov, Hamm (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

HAMM: Have you not had enough?

In this exchange, Hamm and Clov talk about whether or not they've had "enough" of "this thing," but they never clarify the "thing" to which they're referring. To make matters more confusing, Beckett never gives audience members a chance to fully interpret what, exactly, Hamm and Clov are talking about, since the entire setting in which *Endgame* takes place remains abstract and ambiguous. In the absence of context or background information, then, there is nothing to do but focus on Hamm and Clov's strange interactions. If they are referring to their lives, then it seems as if they want to die and have never appreciated the experience of being alive—an interpretation that, at the very least, accords with the idea that Hamm sees suffering and misery as integral to the experience of being alive. On the other hand, though, Hamm and Clov could be talking about the play itself, expressing their eagerness for it to finish. Considering that the play has just started, this would be quite strange, but it would also align with Clov's assertion at the very beginning that everything must already be "nearly finished." Of course, Beckett never enables audience members to decide one way or another what's happening, so it's reasonable to say that Hamm and Clov could be talking both about their own lives ending *and* the play coming to a close.

HAMM: [...] Why do you stay with me?

CLOV: Why do you keep me?

HAMM: There's no one else.

CLOV: There's nowhere else.

Related Characters: Clov, Hamm (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hamm asks Clov why he stays with him. This is a fair question, and one that audience members are no doubt eager to hear Clov answer, since it's not immediately apparent why Clov continues to serve Hamm, especially

considering the fact that Hamm is cantankerous and rather cruel. Unfortunately for the audience, though, Clov declines to answer, instead turning the question on Hamm by asking him why he agrees to "keep" him. That they ask each other these questions implies that they both feel as if they're at the mercy of the other person—Hamm thinks Clov has the power to leave, and Clov thinks Hamm has the power to dismiss him. This is a perfect representation of their odd companionship, the power dynamics of which never become fully clear, though it's certain that Hamm technically functions as the duo's dominant figure even if he is at Clov's mercy in terms of whether or not he will continue to survive. What's more, when they decide that there's both no one and no*where* else, the audience learns that these men have no other options; they are together out of necessity and circumstance, not because they feel compassion for each other, though it will later become clear that each one of them sometimes *does* feel fondly for the other.

CLOV: […] I'll leave you, I have things to do.

HAMM: In your kitchen?

CLOV: Yes.

HAMM: What, I'd like to know.

CLOV: I look at the wall.

HAMM: The wall! And what do you see on your wall? Mene, mene? Naked bodies?

CLOV: I see my light dying.

Related Characters: Hamm, Clov (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Clov tells Hamm that he has things to do in his kitchen—a claim he makes quite often throughout the play, frequently wanting to remove himself from Hamm's room because he has other matters to attend to. Of course, this seems highly unlikely, since the characters in *Endgame* seem to be doing little more than simply waiting for something to happen. Perhaps because of this, Hamm asks Clov what he does when he sits in the kitchen, and when Clov says that he stares at the wall, Hamm wonders what he sees. When he wonders if Clov sees the words "Mene, mene," he references The Book of Daniel in the Bible, in which the words "MENE MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN" are found inscribed on a wall. The word "mene"—from the early Semitic language Aramaic—means "God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end." Interestingly enough, this biblical story is where the phrase "the writing on the wall" comes from. In turn, Hamm suggests that Clov might derive a sense of foreboding inevitability when he looks at his wall—an idea that Clov actually confirms when he says that he sees his "light dying" upon the wall. In this way, Beckett calls attention to the inevitability of death, even if both Hamm and Clov yearn for an end without ever reaching one. No matter how much it might feel like they will simply exist forever, there is no avoiding the fact that their days are "numbered." Or, at least, this is what Hamm suggests (somewhat optimistically, perhaps) in this scene.

HAMM: [*anguished*] What's happening, what's happening?

CLOV: Something is taking its course.

Related Characters: Clov, Hamm (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

In this exchange, Hamm desperately asks Clov "what's happening," signaling to the audience that even he is unable to track the events of the play (if the play can even be said to have *events* at all). Although he speaks and interacts with Clov, he doesn't seem to understand the significance or importance of what's taking place. In this moment, this lack of understanding upsets him, but Clov's reaction is quite different. Rather than worrying about whether or not he comprehends the implications of whatever's taking place—or even whether or not he's managing to follow along in the first place—Clov relaxes into his own ignorance, calmly saying, "Something is taking its course." Needless to say, this answer does nothing to address Hamm's question. And yet, it *is* an answer, since it would be impossible to disprove Clov's claim that "something" is happening. After all, even their conversation about what's happening constitutes as "something" happening. And if this all feels unfathomably circular, repetitive, and illogical, that's because it is: *Endgame* is not a play that is meant to be understood. Instead, it's a play that provokes viewers to think about meaning and nothingness in a more engaged way than they normally would.

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.

Related Characters: Nell (speaker), Hamm, Nagg

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Nell says this to Nagg after he laughs at Hamm for saying he feels like there's a heart in his head. At first, Nell scolds him, saying he shouldn't laugh at such things. However, she goes on to say that unhappiness is the funniest thing in the world, though she doesn't think this means people need to actually laugh at misery or sorrow. After all, this kind of agony is like "the funny story we have heard too often." When Nell says this, she reveals that she's able to approach suffering with levity and good humor. At the same time, though, she also indicates that she's so used to misery that she doesn't even feel the need to fully react to it. In turn, it becomes clear that she's especially well-equipped to withstand hardship, which she thinks is both tolerable and commonplace. This ultimately foregrounds Hamm's later assertions about suffering and misery, preparing audience members to see agony as inherent to the human condition and relatively unextraordinary.

CLOV: […] [*He gets down, picks up the telescope, turns it on auditorium.*] I see…a multitude…in transports…of joy.

[*Pause.*]

That's what I call a magnifier.

Related Characters: Clov (speaker), Hamm

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

After Hamm tells Clov to look out the window with a telescope, Clov accidentally drops the instrument on the ground. Upon picking it up, he turns it on the audience and says that he sees a "multitude" in "transports" of "joy." When he says this, he means that the audience members themselves are experiencing the joy of getting swept away by this moving play—an absurd notion, since *Endgame* is a slow, bleak play that makes it utterly impossible to immerse oneself in what's happening. After all, not even the characters know what's happening, let alone the audience members. When Clov adds, "That's what I call a magnifier," it becomes clear that he's joking, since he's implying that any traces of "joy" in the audience are so miniscule that one would need an impressive telescope just to see them. In this moment, Beckett lets viewers know that he understands just how difficult it is to watch and understand this play, ultimately making fun of himself while also reminding everyone who's watching that this is, in many ways, a play about itself. This, in turn, is one of the only analytical approaches people can take to *Endgame*, though Beckett often makes even this interpretive slant impossible to follow.

HAMM: We're not beginning to…to…meaning something?

CLOV: Mean something! You and I, mean something!

[*Brief laugh.*]

Ah that's a good one!

HAMM: I wonder.

[*Pause.*]

Imagine if a rational being came back to earth, wouldn't he be liable to get ideas into his head if he observed us long enough.

[*Voice of rational being.*]

Ah, good, now I see what it is, yes, now I understand what they're at!

[*Clov starts, drops the telescope and begins to scratch his belly with both hands. Normal voice.*]

And without going so far as that, we ourselves…

[*with emotion*]

…we ourselves…at certain moments…

Related Characters: Clov, Hamm (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

In this exchange, Hamm suddenly worries that he and Clov are beginning to "mean something." This suggests that he's well aware of the fact that the play has, until this point, evaded meaning altogether. Now, though, he wonders what

would happen if "a rational being came back to earth" and watched them. Of course, this implies that "rational being[s]" no longer exist, which is an interesting claim in and of itself in terms of how it influences the audience's understanding of Hamm and Clov's world. But more importantly, Hamm's thought experiment isn't actually all that hypothetical, since there is presumably an entire auditorium of "rational beings" observing Hamm and Clov and trying desperately to wring a sense of meaning out of their behavior. Hamm comments on this very attempt to comprehend, saying that a "rational being" would most likely become convinced that Hamm and Clov truly are involved in some kind of process of meaning-making. This idea overwhelms him so much that he finds it impossible to continue speaking in a coherent manner, repeating the words "we ourselves" and trailing off in a way that perfectly demonstrates why it's impossible to derive meaning from the play.

> HAMM: I once knew a madman who thought the end of the world had come. He was a painter—and engraver. I had a great fondness for him. I used to go and see him, in the asylum. I'd take him by the hand and drag him to the window. Look! There! All that rising com! And there! Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All that loveliness!
>
> [*Pause.*]
>
> He'd snatch away his hand and go back into his comer. Appalled. All he had seen was ashes.
>
> [*Pause.*]
>
> He alone had been spared.
>
> [*Pause.*]
>
> Forgotten.
>
> [*Pause.*]
>
> It appears the case is…was not so…so unusual.

Related Characters: Hamm (speaker), Clov

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

Hamm says this to Clov at one point, explaining that he used to know a "madman" who thought the world had effectively ended. During this time, apparently, Hamm himself was not only mobile and capable of seeing (as evidenced by the fact that he visited the "madman" and pointed out a number of visual wonders beyond the window), but didn't think that the world had truly come to an end. However, it's worth noting that the "madman" was unable to see what Hamm saw, and vice versa. Rather than seeing "rising corn" and "loveliness," the painter saw nothing but cindered destruction. Upon telling this story, Hamm suggests that the painter was "spared," implying that it's worse to be under the impression that the world is beautiful when it is, in fact, full of horror. Given that he says the painter's predicament isn't so "unusual," it's clear that Hamm now shares the same worldview as the man he formerly thought was "mad," having apparently lost his ability to see "loveliness" in the world or, perhaps, *gained* the ability to see horror.

> HAMM: […] Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that!
>
> […]
>
> But what in God's name do you imagine? That the earth will awake in spring? That the rivers and seas will run with fish again? That there's manna in heaven still for imbeciles like you?

Related Characters: Hamm (speaker), Clov

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

Hamm repeats these words while telling his story about the man who came to ask him for help years ago on Christmas Eve. After listening to the man explain that he had a sick and dying boy at home, Hamm suddenly erupted in exasperation, finding it ridiculous that the man would ever think that he—Hamm—would be capable of helping him. This, of course, is because Hamm believes that suffering lies at the very heart of existence. According to this viewpoint, nothing would ever save this man from misery, even if Hamm helped him. Going on, Hamm asked him how he could possibly think that there's still "manna" (a word for food and sustenance used in the Bible) in heaven, disparaging him for having such an optimistic outlook on life and existence. And though Hamm later calmed down and agreed to employ the man and give his son shelter, he retains his believe that "there's no cure" for being alive, an idea that is woven throughout *Endgame*.

NAGG: [...] Yes, I hope I'll live till then, to hear you calling me like when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark, and I was your only hope.

Related Characters: Nagg (speaker), Hamm

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

Nagg says this to Hamm after talking about what Hamm was like as a child. He explains that Hamm used to cry out for him in the middle of the night, frightened and alone, though neither Nagg nor Nell ever went to him when he called. In fact, they moved him farther away from their bedroom, wanting to rest undisturbed by his incessant screaming. Now, Nagg says, he hopes he lives to see the day when Hamm once more calls his name like a helpless child. He wants, he says, to hear how much Hamm needs him, yearning to hear his son in a state of fright. Although the fact that he reminisces about Hamm's childhood might make it seem like this is an endearing moment in which a father speaks fondly of his son, Nagg is actually expressing a rather bitter sentiment, since he's basically saying that he not only wants Hamm to be frightened and alone, but also wants him to regress to the helplessness of a child. Given that Nagg himself now depends upon Hamm to survive, this makes a certain amount of sense. In the same way that Hamm wants his fake dog to need him, Nagg wants Hamm to rely upon him once more. Unfortunately for Nagg, though, he's the one trapped in a trashcan, finding himself completely at Hamm's mercy.

HAMM: [...] Did you never hear an aside before? [*Pause.*]

I'm warming up for my last soliloquy.

Related Characters: Hamm (speaker), Clov

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

Hamm says this to Clov after Clov responds to something that wasn't directed at him. Frustrated that Clov has heard what he said, Hamm tells him that his words were meant as an "aside," using a theater term that refers to statements that only the audience—and not the other characters onstage—are supposed to hear. When he says this, then, he draws attention to the fact that they are both in a play, demonstrating that he's well aware of his role as a character in *Endgame*. In keeping with this, he also informs Clov that he's "warming up for his last soliloquy," indicating that he will soon deliver a monologue in which he expresses his thoughts. The definition of the word "soliloquy" is worth considering here, since it sheds light on Hamm's recent interaction with Clov. Indeed, a soliloquy is defined as "an act of speaking one's thoughts aloud when by oneself or regardless of any hearers." The last part of this definition is noteworthy, since Hamm has just insisted that he doesn't want Clov to listen to his asides. Now, it seems, he doesn't care whether or not Clov listens to his soliloquy, perhaps because he's so committed to his role as a character in the play that he's willing to pretend that he—like an unaware character in a straightforward play—doesn't know that Clov will be able to overhear him. Regardless of what Hamm thinks, though, what becomes overwhelmingly apparent during this exchange is that part of understanding *Endgame* is understanding that neither Hamm nor Clov function like the average character in the average play—instead, they test the boundaries of their own circumstances, often stepping out of their own contexts in order to address the broader context of the play (which is, to be fair, the only tangible context that exists in *Endgame*).

HAMM: [...] Moments for nothing, now as always, time was never and time is over, reckoning closed and story ended.

Related Characters: Hamm (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

These are among the last words that Hamm speaks in *Endgame*. It is difficult to put them into a broader context, since the things he says surrounding this statement are disparate, abstract, and seemingly unrelated. However, this strange sentence contains a certain impressionistic kind of meaning, as Hamm strings together fragments that address the play's engagement with time, finality, and progression. When he says, "moments for nothing," for example, one might argue that he's referencing the anticlimactic way that time has passed throughout the play. Indeed, the "moments" that have elapsed have truly been "for nothing," since nothing tangible has actually taken place. And yet, this is

exactly what the play aimed to do, wanting to deconstruct the mere notion of time—which apparently never existed in the first place—to challenge any sense of conclusion or ending. In this way, the play finishes without actually ending, since it was, according to Hamm and Clov at various points throughout, already over when it first began. Of course, this is a very circular and difficult concept to grasp, but this is exactly the point: Beckett wants viewers to step into these discursive and abstract thoughts, knowing that the only way to get them to fully engage with a philosophy of nothingness is to force them to reach for meaning in the complete absence of logic.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ENDGAME

Clov, a man with a rigid walk, enters a sparsely furnished room, which has two high windows on opposing walls, a wheeled armchair at the center, and two trashcans covered in a sheet. Standing near the door, Clov stares at Hamm, who sits in the armchair and is, like the trashcans, covered in a sheet. After a moment, Clov walks to one wall and looks up at the window. He looks at the window on the other wall, exits the room, and returns with a ladder that puts it under one of the windows climbs up. Peering out the window, Clov lets out a short laugh. He then descends the ladder, walks to the other wall, looks up at the window, walks back to the ladder and folds it up. He brings the ladder to the other wall, climbs it, peers out, and laughs again before cutting to silence.

The opening moments of any play are often difficult to track, since audience members must not only acquaint themselves with the setting, but also interpret the actions or words of characters they don't yet know. This confusion normally subsides as the play progresses, though, since viewers quickly gain a sense of understanding. This is not necessarily the case in Endgame. *In fact, Clov's seemingly nonsensical patterns of repetition foreground the play's lack of meaning, representing just how difficult it is to piece together why, exactly, the characters do what they do or say what they say. The only thing that Clov's actions point toward in this moment is the fact that Beckett is interested in ceaseless repetition, though it's not yet clear why this is the case.*

Dismounting the ladder, Clov goes to the trashcans and takes the sheet off of them. He opens each lid, looks inside, laughs, and closes them again. Finally, he takes the sheet off of Hamm, who is sitting in an apparent state of sleep with a **bloodied handkerchief** draped over his face. Hamm wears a dressing-gown, a hat, and a whistle that hangs from his neck. Rugs are spread over his body. Looking at him, Clov laughs once more before moving toward the door, at which point he stops and emotionlessly says, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished." After a short pause, he adds, "Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap."

Clov and Hamm's relationship is still unclear, as is the broader context or setting of the play. However, when Clov says that "it's nearly finished," he calls attention to the play's examination of time and progress—although audience members don't know what he's referring to in this moment, there emerges a sense that the most important events pertaining to these characters have perhaps already taken place, thereby making the rest of their actions seem rather pointless. Furthermore, when Clov talks about grain piling up, he gives an interesting account of the way time passes. Of course, one hardly registers the accumulation of small amounts of grain, but when a pile forms, one "suddenly" sees that time has elapsed. This, perhaps, is a good way to look at the way Endgame *progresses: nothing in the way of plot will unfold, and then it will "suddenly" be over.*

Still speaking to himself, Clov declares that he won't stand for more punishment, deciding to retreat into his kitchen, where he'll wait for Hamm to summon him with the whistle. Upon exiting, though, he rushes back to collect the ladder, which he carries away. As soon as Clov is gone, Hamm yawns and takes the **handkerchief** off his face, affectionately calling it "old stancher" and using it to wipe his black glasses. When he finishes, he wonders aloud if misery greater than his could possibly exist. Considering this, he thinks about his father, mother, and dog, wanting to know if their suffering is as intense as his own. After a moment, he concludes that they all must suffer "as much as such creatures can suffer," meaning that their misery is equal to his.

Hamm's thoughts in this moment are worth noting, since they call attention to Beckett's interest in misery and suffering. That Hamm wants to know if others suffer as intensely as he does suggests that he's inclined to think of his own misery as particularly pronounced. However, he ultimately decides that every single being most likely suffers as much as is possible, thereby suggesting not only that all living things are capable *of suffering, but that they* are *suffering. This, in turn, implies that it's impossible to exist without experiencing agony, which is a fundamental part of life.*

Hamm continues to speak in stops and starts, saying nothing in particular that gives the scene any sense of context. At one point, he says that it's "time it ended," though he doesn't specify what he's referring to, instead going on to point out that, although he himself wants to "end," he hesitates to do so. Yawning once more, he decides that he'd like to go to bed, so he summons Clov, but Clov refuses to put Hamm to bed because he has just roused him from sleep. This frustrates Hamm, but Clov insists that he can't spend all his time getting Hamm up just to put him to bed again, claiming that he's quite busy.

When Hamm talks about something ending without specifying what he's referring to, audience members naturally reach for some kind of meaning—meaning that hasn't been made available to them. Because almost nothing has been established except for the fact that Hamm and Clov are simply there (wherever there *is), it's impossible to extract definite meaning from what Hamm says. He could be referring to his own life ending, but he could also be metafictionally referring to the play itself, hoping that it will soon be over. When he says that he himself hesitates to end, it sounds as if he's talking about committing suicide, but he might also be suggesting that he has the power to end the play. On another note, the relational dynamics between Clov and Hamm remain mostly unclear, though it becomes obvious here that Clov is Hamm's caretaker.*

Dropping the idea of going to bed, Hamm—who is blind—asks if Clov has ever looked at his eyes while he's sleeping. When Clov assures him that he hasn't, Hamm says that his eyes have apparently become completely white. Switching tracks yet again, he asks Clov what time it is, and Clov says, "The same as usual." Hearing this, Hamm asks if Clov has looked out the window recently. Clov says that he has, so Hamm asks what he saw. "Zero," Clov says.

The lack of meaning in Endgame *is interesting because it forces audience members to pay close attention to what happens in order to gain some kind of analytical understanding. And yet, Beckett toys with this very impulse, infusing the play with an utter lack of logic. This is the case when Hamm tells Clov that his eyes appear to have gone completely white, since this isn't something he—as a blind man unable to look at anything, let alone his own eyes—would know. Similarly, Clov says that it is the same time "as usual," thereby rendering the entire concept of time irrelevant and once more plunging the play into ambiguity. When he says that everything outside was "zero" when he last looked, he implies that nothing exists beyond the confines of this building, making it even harder to parse out the broader context of the play.*

Hamm and Clov's disjointed conversation continues, and Hamm asks if he's had enough. At first, Clov insists that he has, indeed, had enough, but then he asks what, exactly, Hamm is referring to. Hamm responds that he's referring to "this thing," and Clov declares that he has *always* had enough of it. In response, Hamm dejectedly guesses that, if Clov has always had enough of this thing, then it probably won't ever change, though Clov suggests that it might end at some point.

Again, it remains unclear what Hamm and Clov are talking about when they discuss whether or not "this thing" will end. In turn, the audience members are left to grasp for meaning, wondering if the characters are talking about life ending, the play ending, or something else that hasn't yet been introduced into the narrative—and yet, there is *no narrative. Or, if there is a narrative, it is nothing but this very conversation.*

Abruptly, Hamm instructs Clov to get him "ready" and to put the sheet back on him, but Clov does nothing, so Hamm threatens to stop giving him food. In that case, Clov points out, they'll both die. Considering this, Hamm decides to give Clov one biscuit per day, thereby ensuring that he won't die but keeping him in a perpetual state of hunger. Unbothered, Clov casually remarks that neither of them will die if Hamm does this. He then says that he'll go fetch the sheet (which is now in the kitchen), but Hamm tells him not to do this, at which point he asks Clov why he stays with him. In turn, Clov asks why Hamm keeps him around, to which Hamm replies, "There's no one else." Agreeing with this sentiment, Clov adds, "There's nowhere else."

Although nothing about the circumstances surrounding Hamm and Clov's relationship has become clear, it is now at least evident that Hamm depends upon Clov. After all, if he starves Clov, he himself will die, since Clov is his caretaker. In this way, they are linked to each other, especially because there is apparently "no one else," though whether this means nobody else exists in the entire world is still unknown. In addition, it seems as if there might not even be anywhere else for other people to exist in the first place. All in all, then, Beckett has managed to slightly illuminate Hamm and Clov's relational dynamic without clarifying the context in which that dynamic exists.

Despite the fact that nobody else exists and there's nowhere else to go, Hamm notes that Clov is going to leave him, and Clov admits that he is indeed "trying" to do this. This prompts Hamm to remark that Clov doesn't love him, and when Clov confirms this, Hamm says that there was once a time when he did. He wonders if he has forced Clov to suffer too much, thinking that perhaps this is the reason that Clov no longer loves him. However, Clov dispels this idea, saying that this isn't the reason he doesn't love him. Momentarily appalled, Hamm asks if he truly hasn't made Clov suffer, and Clov assures him that he has, instantly setting Hamm at ease, since Hamm was beginning to worry that he hadn't made Clov suffer enough.

If there is any discernable plot in Endgame, *it has to do with whether or not Clov will leave Hamm. This is the only tangible sense of conflict in the entire play, though even this isn't quite as simple as it seems. After all, Clov says that he's "trying" to leave Hamm, thereby implying that something is keeping him from doing so. In addition, viewers witness the strange dynamics at play in Hamm and Clov's relationship, as they both seem to yearn for separation without actually knowing how to embrace it. And yet, their failure to divest themselves from each other isn't necessarily because they feel compassion for each other, as evidenced by the fact that Hamm actively wants Clov to suffer (though, in the bizarre world of this play, this actually might be a twisted form of compassion since it would mean that at least Clov would feel something). Instead, they remain together because they seem to depend upon each other, though it's unclear what exactly Clov gets from his relationship with Hamm.*

Clov asks Hamm if he has bled, and Hamm says that he has only bled a little bit. Hamm then asks if it's time for him to take his **painkiller**, but Clov says no. Going on, Hamm wonders why Clov doesn't kill him, and Clov tells him it's because he doesn't know the combination to get into a certain cupboard, the contents of which remain unknown. Addressing this, Hamm suggests that Clov could get two bicycle wheels to kill him, but Clov tells him that there are no more bicycles. Hearing this, Hamm asks what Clov has done with his bicycle, but Clov insists that he's never had one. "When there were still bicycles I wept to have one," Clov says, reminding Hamm that he refused to give Clov one. "Now there are none," Clov adds.

It's interesting that Hamm wants Clov to give him a painkiller, since he has just implied that all humans must suffer and that it would be a bad thing if Clov hadn't suffered while in his service. Now, though, Hamm seems to want to dull his own suffering by taking medication. However, Clov doesn't let him, telling him that it isn't yet time for him to have the painkiller, thereby forcing him to wait in the same way that he's waiting for something—whatever it is—to end. There is, it seems, no escape from pain and misery—at least not yet. On another note, Hamm's odd suggestion that Clov could kill him with two bicycle wheels illustrates Beckett's penchant for nonsense, which only adds to the play's overall lack of tangible meaning.

The lack (or nonexistence) of bicycles confuses Hamm, who is surprised to hear that Clov never had one. He asks how Clov got around when he used to do "rounds" to inspect Hamm's "paupers," and Clov tells Hamm that he either walked or rode a horse.

When Hamm alludes to a time in which Clov used to do "rounds" to check in on Hamm's "paupers," he gives a very small amount of background information about their relationship, suggesting that Clov hasn't always been just his caretaker, but his employee, too. This reference also intimates that Hamm possibly used to be some kind of wealthy landlord. What's funny about this development, though, is that it does almost nothing to add meaning to the play. Simply put, it is useless information.

As Hamm and Clov talk, the lid of one of the trashcans opens and Nagg, a very old man wearing a nightcap, pops his head out of the bin, yawning and listening, though the other two pay no attention to him. Instead, Clov says he has things to do in his kitchen, to which Hamm says, "Outside of here it's death." As soon as Clov leaves, Nagg yells out, saying that he wants his "pap" (a mushy food given to infants or elderly people). "Accursed progenitor!" Hamm shouts at him, but this does nothing to deter Nagg from begging for his food. Clov reenters, and Hamm says he thought he was leaving, but Clov tells him that he isn't going just yet. He then informs Nagg that there is no more pap.

It's worth recalling that Hamm recently said that there is no one else other than him and Clov. Now, though, Nagg pops up out of trashcan, proving this to be untrue. Given Hamm's unreliability, then, it's difficult to know what to do with his newest assertion, which is that "it" (whatever that may be) is "death" outside of this room. In and of itself, this is already a fairly vague idea, but it's especially hard to interpret with the knowledge that Hamm isn't a reliable source of information. Once again, then, the audience is forced to simply focus on what's most tangible: the relational dynamics between the characters. Accordingly, viewers note Hamm's scorn for Nagg, as well as the fact that he angrily calls him a "progenitor," as if Nagg should be ashamed because he is somebody from whom other people have (or could) descend. Once again, it's unclear what to make of this, meaning that even the most tangible element of the play (the relational dynamics) is capable of completely evading interpretation.

Hamm gloats over Nagg, shouting that he'll never have pap again. However, he tells Clov to fetch Nagg a biscuit, turning to the old man and calling him an "accursed fornicator" before asking him how his "stumps" are doing—a question Nagg declines to answer. When Clov gives Nagg his biscuit, the old man asks what it is, and Clov says, "Spratt's medium." Trying to bite it, Nagg complains that it's too hard for him to eat, but Hamm orders Clov to shut the old man back into his trashcan by closing the lid. When Clov obeys, Hamm tells him to sit on the lid, but Clov reminds him that he's incapable of sitting. "True," Hamm says. "And I can't stand."

Once more, it's not readily apparent why Hamm is so upset by the idea that Nagg can—like any human—"fornicate" or produce offspring. The only explanation is seemingly that Hamm likes the idea that there are very few people left in the world. All the same, though, he allows Nagg to eat, but Clov feeds him "Spratt's medium," which is a kind of dog biscuit. What's more, the audience receives another strange piece of information when Clov admits that he's incapable of sitting. Since Hamm can't stand, the two men serve as counterpoints to one another—something that might make it seem as if they are even more dependent upon each other, though a reason why Clov needs Hamm has yet to emerge. Hamm, on the other hand, has come to depend upon the mobile Clov to help him through life.

Hamm suggests that nature has forgotten about him and Clov, but Clov says there *is* no more nature—a statement that Hamm thinks is an exaggeration. After all, he points out, they are both constantly changing, losing their hair, teeth, and ideals. This, Clov agrees, is evidence that nature hasn't forgotten them after all. Hamm then asks once more if it's time for him to take his **painkiller**, and Clov says no before announcing that he has things to do in his kitchen. When Hamm asks what he does in there, he says that he stares at the wall, upon which he sees his own "light" dying away. Finding this ridiculous, Hamm says that Clov might as well watch his light die in this room instead of the kitchen.

As the play progresses, it begins to seem as if something has happened to the outside world. After all, there's no other reason Clov would suggest that nature no longer exists. Unsurprisingly, though, Beckett doesn't give the audience much information about this, instead merely using it as a strange backdrop as Hamm and Clov go about their lives together. Once more, Hamm asks for his painkiller, implying that he wants to escape his own suffering. Clov, on the other hand, is focused on his own form of misery, which is, it seems, purely existential, as he feels as if his "light"—a possible representation of his soul or capacity to feel happiness—is dying.

Nagg pops up once more from his trashcan, this time with the biscuit in his mouth. He listens as Hamm says, "This is not much fun." After a short pause, Hamm adds that it's *never* fun at the end of a day. He then asks Clov if it is, in fact, the end of the day—"like any other day"—and Clov says that it seems to be. In an agonized voice, Hamm suddenly asks what's happening, and Clov calmly assures him that something is "taking its course." This seems to satisfy Hamm, who tells Clov to go.

Again, there's no way to know what Hamm and Clov are talking about when they say things like, "This is not much fun." Because there is so little for audience members to grasp, it's reasonable to say that statements like these could be applied to the play itself, which is—aside from Hamm and Clov's relationship—the only tangible thing that viewers could possibly analyze. In turn, Hamm might be commenting on the fact that Endgame *isn't very fun to watch, or that it isn't fun to be in the play. At the same time, though, he relates this statement to his ideas about progression and finality, implying that all endings are miserable. More importantly, he asks Clov what's happening, which suggests that he is just as confused as the audience members.*

When Clov retreats to the kitchen, Nagg knocks on the lid of the second trashcan, and Nell's head emerges. She asks if it's "time for love," but when they try to kiss, they can't reach each other from their trashcans. Giving up, Nell asks, "Why this farce, day after day?" Failing to answer, Nagg informs her that he lost his tooth, though he had it yesterday—a statement that has a strong effect on Nell, who wistfully says, "Ah yesterday!" Making conversation, Nagg asks if Nell remembers when they lost their legs in a tandem bike accident—a memory that throws them both into a fit of laughter. When they stop laughing, Nagg senses that Nell is cold and wants to shut herself back in the trashcan. He tells her to do so, but she doesn't move, so Nagg offers her half of the biscuit, which he's saved for her.

It's worth noting that Nagg and Nell are insurmountably separated from one another even though their trashcans sit side by side. This is a perfect representation of the odd way that companionship functions in Endgame, *a play in which no two characters ever become fully sentimental or compassionate with one another. In addition, Nell's strange reaction to the word "yesterday" makes it seem as if she can hardly remember a time before this specific moment. In this way, all sense of time is completely destabilized and uncertain except for the present—a principle that applies to seemingly every interaction that takes place in the play.*

Nell declines the biscuit, so Nagg asks if she's feeling unwell. Interrupting, Hamm tells them both to speak quietly because they're keeping him awake, interrupting his dreams of making love and running in the woods. After waxing poetic about this for a moment, Hamm says that something is dripping inside of his head, identifying it as a heart. This makes Nagg laugh, but Nell tells him to stop, saying that he shouldn't laugh at such things. However, she goes on to admit that unhappiness is the funniest thing of all. Nevertheless, she says, this doesn't mean that one needs to actually laugh at misery, since it is like an old joke—it's still funny, but people don't need to laugh every time they hear it repeated.

What Nell has to say about unhappiness is worth keeping in mind as the play progresses, since it not only frames sorrow as an inherent part of being alive, but also suggests that people should view such misery in good humor. At the same time, though, she also believes that accepting misery as part of the human condition and viewing it as funny doesn't mean that people shouldn't take it seriously. Rather, she upholds that people should strike a balance between seriousness and lightheartedness—a balance that perhaps none of the characters in Endgame *have managed to find.*

Nell says she's going to leave Nagg, but she doesn't move. Before Nell goes, Nagg asks her to scratch his back, but she tells him to use the rim of the trashcan. However, Nagg says he wants Nell to scratch lower than that, in the "hollow." Nell refuses, even after he reminds her that she scratched him there yesterday. "Ah yesterday!" she says. Nagg then announces he's going to tell a story about a tailor to cheer Nell up, but she doesn't want to listen, claiming it isn't funny. Still, Nagg says the story always used to make her laugh, and together they remember the first time he told it to her, when they were rowing on a lake the day after their wedding engagement. Nell laughed so hard, Nagg reminds her, that he thought she'd die. This, she says, was because she was happy, not because of the story.

When Nell says she's going to leave Nagg, the audience sees that Clov and Hamm aren't the only ones in the play who are obsessed with whether or not they will remain together. Indeed, whether a person stays or leaves is the central drama of Endgame, *as the characters frequently threaten to abandon one another. Furthermore, when Nagg claims that his story used to make Nell laugh so hard he thought she'd die, viewers will recall Nell's recent assertion that nothing is funnier than unhappiness. This, perhaps, is why she doesn't want to hear the story—it used to make her so unhappy that she nearly laughed herself to death. And yet, she says that she laughed because she was happy, effectively ruining this analytic interpretation and once more ensuring that the audience members will have virtually no chance of deriving meaning from the play.*

Nagg tells his story, in which a British man takes his pants to a tailor, who tells him to come back in four days. When he returns, though, the tailor tells him to come back in a week because he's made a mistake. After a week, the man returns, but the tailor asks him to come back in 10 days because he's made a *new* mistake. Ten days later, the man once more visits the tailor, who tells him to come back in two weeks. This time, though, the customer refuses, saying that the tailor has only six more days to complete the job, reminding him that God made the entire world in the same amount of time. In response, the tailor haughtily implies that the world is wretched in comparison to how lovely the pants will be when he finishes with them.

Despite what Nagg claims, this story is not particularly funny. The only vaguely humorous thing about it is the tailor's suggestion that the entire world is uglier and more awful than a botched pair of pants. All the same, this story touches upon the play's interest in time and repetition, as the man comes to the tailor four times and is ultimately forced to continue waiting. In this way, then, the story relates to Hamm and Clov's ceaseless waiting—the main difference, it seems, is that the story about the tailor actually makes sense, whereas viewers still don't know what, exactly, Clov and Hamm are waiting for.

Nagg laughs heartily at his own story, though Nell remains quiet. From his chair, Hamm yells at him to be quiet, going on to ask why he isn't finished yet. "Will you never finish?" he asks. "Will this never finish?" He then calls Clov and tells him to shove Nagg back into his bin. As Clov does this, Nell speaks nonsensically about the desert. Before he pushes her back into her trashcan, he takes her wrist and feels her pulse. After pushing Nell down, he returns to Hamm's side and says that Nell has no heartbeat. This doesn't bother Hamm, who simply tells Clov to fasten the lids on the trashcans. Then, without waiting for Clov to follow his instructions, Hamm asks for his **painkiller**, but Clov doesn't give it to him.

Once more, Hamm waits for the end of something without clarifying what that thing is. Nothing, it seems, will change as the play progresses, since even the strangest and most alarming things (like Nell having no heartbeat) hardly attract any attention at all. Instead of looking into why Nell has no pulse, Hamm focuses on the way time passes (or fails to pass), too caught up in this preoccupation to think about anything else.

Hamm asks Clov if a man he refers to only as "that old doctor" is dead, and Clov says, "Naturally." Hamm then orders Clov to push his chair around the room, telling him to keep close to the walls. As Clov obeys, Hamm tells him to stop so he can feel the wall, saying there's another hell on the other side of it. He then instructs Clov to bring him back to the center, and though he says that he doesn't have to be exactly in the middle, he immediately asks if Clov has placed him in the exact center of the room. When Clov says that he'll fetch some measuring tape to make sure, Hamm once again says that he only needs to be "more or less in the center." This back and forth continues until Clov says that he would die happy if he could only kill Hamm.

Hamm's question about "that old doctor" suggests that he's not entirely sure whether or not other people still exist. This contrasts with his previous assertion that "there is no one else," once again destabilizing even the smallest sense of certainty that might have crept into the otherwise abstract landscape of the play. Furthermore, when Hamm says that there is another *hell on the other side of the wall, he implies that the inside of the room is hell, too, or at least some version of it. And yet, he has already proven his unreliability when it comes to making such declarations. Indeed, viewers most likely understand by this point that trying to attach meaning to Hamm's assertions about the surrounding environment or context is quite futile, though this doesn't mean that Beckett doesn't want the audience to continue* trying *to grasp this kind of meaning. Lastly, what Clov says about killing Hamm is worth noting, since it suggests that their companionship is void of true compassion for each other. However, his statement also implies that he's incapable of killing Hamm, perhaps because Clov depends upon Hamm, too (though it's not apparent why this would be the case).*

Unbothered by Clov's desire to kill him, Hamm asks what the weather is like, and Clov says that it's how it always is. Still, Hamm tells him to get a telescope to look out the window, though when Clov goes to get the telescope, Hamm says there's no need for it. Again, they go back and forth, this time talking about whether or not Clov needs the telescope. Finally, Clov gets the ladder and the telescope, climbs up to the window, but then drops the telescope. When he retrieves it, he picks it up and points it at the audience, saying, "I see…a multitude…in transports…of joy." Then, after a pause, Clov adds, "That's what I call a magnifier." He then mounts the ladder and uses the telescope to peer outside, saying that he sees "zero." Clov also says that everything is "corpsed."

Although Endgame *is a fairly inscrutable play, Beckett includes a number of jokes to keep the audience engaged. For example, when Clov looks at the audience with a telescope and says that he sees many people experiencing "joy," he pauses and says that the telescope must be magnifying this image—effectively implying that any "joy" the audience is experiencing must be quite undetectable or perhaps nonexistent. This is a tongue-in-cheek way of acknowledging just how arduous it is to watch a play that purposefully evades meaning. And yet, this joke is evidence of the fact that there truly are moments of joy in* Endgame*, despite its bleakness. After all, according to Nell, there is nothing funnier than unhappiness, which is on prominent display seemingly at all times throughout the play.*

Clov tells Hamm that the light outside has diminished. In fact, he tells him that it's completely gone. Everything outside, Clov says, is grey and black. "Why this farce, day after day?" Clov asks after looking outside for a while. Hamm answers by saying, "Routine. One never knows." Then, once more, Hamm asks what's happening, and Clov says that something is "taking its course." Suddenly, Hamm asks if he and Clov are beginning to "mean something," but Clov dismisses this, laughing at what he sees as a preposterous idea. Still, Hamm continues by imagining what would happen if a "rational being came back to earth" and observed them. This being, Hamm posits, might start to think he understood them based on their behavior. This momentarily causes Hamm to reflect upon what it would be like if everything wasn't all for nothing.

When Clov asks, "Why this farce, day after day?" he speaks the same exact words that Nell said after she and Nagg tried and failed to kiss. This suggests that the characters share a sense of futility and fatigue, as if they are excruciatingly aware that they are characters trapped in a play and, therefore, forced to carry out the same mindless routines time after time. However, perhaps because this kind of metanarrative approach might lead audience members to think they finally understand Endgame *in an analytical sense, Hamm disdainfully comments on how odd it would be for a "rational being" to observe him and Clov and superimpose meaning onto their actions—a sentiment that implies that assigning meaning to what takes place in this play is a fruitless effort. Interestingly enough, though, this very comment reinforces the value of approaching* Endgame *as a metanarrative work, since the audience members themselves are "rational beings" who have come to observe Hamm and Clov and interpret their behavior.*

Paying no heed to Hamm, Clov yells out that he's found a flea on himself. This startles Hamm, who's surprised to hear that fleas still exist and worries that humankind might somehow begin again from this single flea. With this in mind, Clov fetches some insecticide and pours the powder down his pants, killing the flea.

Although Hamm's worry that humanity will start all over again because of the existence of this single flea makes no sense and is left unexplained, it once more suggests that something has happened to humanity—something, it seems, akin to extinction. Rather than wanting to regenerate humankind, Hamm wants to ensure that this doesn't happen. This aligns with the scorn he has for "fornicators" and "progenitors," perhaps because he sees life as full of suffering and, therefore, has disdain for anyone who forces it upon others by reproducing (though it's still baffling why he would think this flea could possibly restart humanity).

Briefly, Hamm considers leaving this place on a raft with Clov, though he worries that sharks—if they still exist—will cause them trouble. He then decides to go on his own, ordering Clov to make him a raft. Moving on, Hamm says that Clov will one day be like him—Clov will, he says, decide to sit down for a rest and will never get up, at which point he'll go to sleep and be surrounded by a vast emptiness when he wakes up. The only thing that will make Clov different from Hamm himself, Hamm says, is that Clov won't have anyone with him. Undisturbed, Clov remarks that this could well happen, though he reminds Hamm that he can't sit down. All the same, Hamm says that this will all still happen, but Clov will be on his feet the whole time.

Yet again, Hamm and Clov discuss leaving, and though at first they consider departing together, Hamm quickly decides that he'll go on his own. Hamm then seems to take a certain amount of delight in the idea that Clov will one day become unable to move like him—a notion which underlines the impossibility of Hamm's plan to set out on his own, since it reminds viewers that he's incapable of moving without Clov's help. In this way, it becomes clear once more that he depends upon Clov.

After listening to what Hamm has to say, Clov says that he'll leave, but Hamm says that Clov can't. In that case, Clov says, he won't. After a pause, Hamm asks why Clov doesn't "finish" them all, agreeing to give him the combination to the cupboard as long as Clov promises to finish him. However, Clov admits that he couldn't possibly do this. Trying to return to his kitchen once more, Clov stops when Hamm asks if he remembers when he first came here. In response, Clov says he was too young to remember. Hearing this, Hamm asks if he remembers his father, and Clov repeats his answer, pointing out that Hamm has asked him these questions many times. This, Hamm says, is because he loves "the old questions." He also notes that he has acted as a father to Clov, and Clov agrees.

It's not evident why Clov can't leave Hamm, nor is apparent why he couldn't bring himself to "finish" Hamm. Even though he has spoken about wanting to kill Hamm, he now says that he could never do such a thing, implying that he feels something like compassion toward Hamm. This aligns with the idea that Hamm has acted as Clov's father figure. Indeed, the strange bond between these two men takes on a tenderness in this moment, as it emerges that Clov is connected to Hamm, who, in turn, depends upon him.

Hamm asks Clov if his dog his ready, and Clov tells him it's missing a leg. Nonetheless, Hamm asks for the dog, so Clov fetches a stuffed black dog with three legs. When Hamm guesses that the dog is white, Clov says, "Nearly." This annoys Hamm, who tells him to be specific, so Clov admits that the dog isn't white. Hamm then asks if the dog can stand, ordering Clov to try to set him up before Hamm. When Clov puts the dog on the floor, the stuffed animal falls, but Clov says he's standing. Clov also assures Hamm (when the old man asks) that the dog is looking at him as if he wants Hamm to take him for a walk. Finally, Hamm tells Clov to leave the dog like this, liking the idea of the animal wanting something from him.

It's very hard to know what to make of this bizarre interlude with the stuffed dog, except to conclude that Hamm likes the idea of another being depending upon him. Because he relies so heavily upon Clov, it pleases him to think that this dog—whom he doesn't seem to understand isn't real—needs him. This is why Hamm wants Clov to position the dog as if he is beseeching Hamm to take him for a walk.

Changing the subject, Hamm asks Clov about a woman named Mother Pegg, wondering if her light is on. This question baffles Clov, who asks how *anyone's* light could be on. He then makes it clear that Mother Pegg herself has "extinguished," though he admits that he hasn't buried her. This perturbs Hamm, who asks if Clov will bury *him*. Clov says he will not, but Hamm is too busy thinking about Mother Pegg again to notice, remembering how youthful she used to be. This, Clov notes, isn't all that remarkable, since everybody is youthful at some point in their lives.

It's worth remembering that Clov has already suggested that his own "light" is dying. Given that Mother Pegg's light is no longer on, it's reasonable to assume that light in general is tied to life and existence in Endgame, *though it remains unclear why or how, exactly, Clov's is dying. And yet, Clov's comment about the natural process of aging serves as a possible explanation for why his light is fading, ultimately implying that there's nothing people can do to stop time. This, he intimates, is the incontrovertible fact of life—it goes on no matter what, and people waste away regardless of what they do.*

Hamm orders Clov to bring him his "gaff," a hooked spear used by fishermen. As he does this, Clov wonders aloud why he never refuses Hamm's orders, and Hamm says that it's because he's unable to disobey him. When Hamm has his gaff, he tries and fails to use it to move his chair. Frustrated, he throws the gaff and tells Clov to oil the chair's wheels, but Clov protests by saying that he did this yesterday. "Yesterday!" Hamm erupts. "What does that mean?" Clov then complains that he's only using the words Hamm taught him, saying that Hamm should teach him new words or let him be silent if these words no longer mean anything.

Hamm's role as Clov's master or superior is especially pronounced in this moment, since Clov proves himself incapable of going against the old man's wishes. Also, Hamm finds it hard to conceptualize the meaning of the word "yesterday," once more indicating that the characters in this play have a tenuous, strange relationship with the passage of time. Instead of trying to clear this matter up, though, Clov answers by complaining that Hamm was the one to teach him the word "yesterday" in the first place, again emphasizing the extent to which Hamm has control over him, this time suggesting that the old man has shaped his entire worldview.

Paying no attention to Clov, Hamm remembers a "madman" he used to know. When Hamm would visit him, the man would insist that the world was ending, so Hamm would take him to the window and show him all of the life teeming outside, but the "madman" was unable to see it. All he would see, Hamm asserts, was destruction. Now, he says, he feels as if the man's state of mind wasn't all that uncommon.

At first, Hamm's story about this "madman" might seem like evidence that the surrounding world hasn't always been the wasteland that it is now. However, Hamm then implies that he has come to understand why the "madman" felt the way he felt, indicating that he—not the "madman"—might have been the one who was failing to recognize reality. Again, this does little to help clarify the surrounding circumstances of the play, though it at least proves that Hamm hasn't always been the way he is now.

Hamm asks how he'll know if Clov ever leaves him, and Clov tells him that he'll simply know—after all, Clov won't come running to him when he blows his whistle. However, Hamm points out that Clov might die in his kitchen, rendering it impossible for Hamm to know if he's gone or dead. Thinking this over, Clov says that his body would begin to smell if he died, but Hamm notes that he *already* smells. In fact, he says, the entire place smells like corpses. "The whole universe," Clov adds.

It's reasonable to wonder if Hamm and Clov are dead. Indeed, their strange surroundings could be part of the afterlife, perhaps someplace like purgatory. In some ways, this would align with the notion that everything smells like corpses, as death exists all around them. However, it's unlikely that purgatory—or any other place in the afterlife—would actually smell like dead people, since the scent of rotting bodies is a very corporeal, earthly thing, something that would most likely only exist in the world of the living. Consequently, it's impossible to conclude that Hamm and Clov are dead, though it remains an interesting possibility.

Clov begins to pace the room, trying to think about a way to ensure that Hamm will know if he has left or died. As he does so, he complains about a pain in his legs, prompting Hamm to worry that he won't be able to leave. Soon enough, Clov comes up with an idea: he will set an alarm clock if he chooses to leave. That way, if Clov disappears and the alarm clock rings, Hamm will know he has departed. If, on the other hand, Clov disappears and the alarm clock *doesn't* ring, Hamm will know he has died. The two men then test the alarm clock, with Clov holding it up to Hamm's ear as it rings.

Again, whether or not Clov will leave Hamm emerges as the play's primary source of conflict. In this moment, though, Hamm briefly worries that Clov won't be able to leave, as if he wants *the young man to depart. Setting these strange relational dynamics aside, though, their decision to use an alarm clock to announce whether Clov has left or died connects their bizarre companionship to their approach to time—in this way, they both tensely wait for the day (or moment) that the clock will finally toll out and announce the end of their connection to each other.*

Clov declares that the end is "terrific," but Hamm says he likes the middle better. He then asks for his **painkiller**, but Clov says it's not yet time for him to take it. Switching subjects, Hamm announces that it's time for him to tell a story, instructing Clov to wake up his father, Nagg, so that he can listen. When Nagg rises, he demands a sugar plum in exchange for listening, and Hamm agrees to the terms of this deal. He then calls Nagg a "scoundrel" and asks him why he "engender[ed]" Hamm. In response, Nagg says that he didn't know. When Hamm asks what, exactly, Nagg didn't know, his father says, "That it'd be you."

It isn't until this exchange between Nagg and Hamm that viewers learn that Nagg and Nell are Hamm's parents. This, perhaps, is why Hamm has continued to curse Nagg for being a "progenitor" and a "fornicator." Knowing that existence is nothing but suffering, he resents his parents for giving him life in the first place. On another note, Hamm's desire to tell a story indicates that he—like the audience members—yearns for some kind of narrative in the midst of this otherwise abstract play.

Hamm notes that he's had something dripping in his head ever since he had "fontanelles" (the areas of an infant's skull where the bone hasn't yet fully fused). Going on, he says that a man crawled toward him one day, looking at him with a very white face. As Hamm tells his story, he frequently interrupts himself to comment on his narrative style. Overall, though, he says that a man came to him on a very cold, bright, windy, Christmas Eve and told Hamm that he and his son lived in a far-off hole and needed help. The young boy, apparently, was sick, and the man had left him in order to seek help. For this reason, he asked Hamm to give them some food. Hamm listened to this and then told the man, "Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that!"

Hamm's story is the most straightforward thing in the entire play, since he tells an actual tale, though his narrative style is still rather confusing. All the same, he relates a story about a man asking him for help, thereby giving the audience members something to latch onto as they try to follow along. Indeed, this is perhaps the only moment throughout the entire play that something like a tangible narrative emerges, even if it is only a brief interlude in an otherwise inscrutable progression of events.

Hamm tells Nagg that, despite his outburst, he agreed to employ the man, who asked him to take in his ailing son. This, Hamm says, was the moment he'd been waiting for. Before he finishes the story, though, he comments that it will soon be over—that is, unless he introduces new characters, though he doesn't know where he would find such characters in the first place. He then abruptly whistles for Clov and suggests that they should all pray. Clov, for his part, announces that he found a rat in the kitchen, and Hamm is surprised to learn that rats still exist. Clov says that the rat is half dead and waiting in the kitchen, but Hamm tells him to kill it later. He, Nagg, and Clov then try to pray, but they give up almost immediately, and Hamm angrily says that God doesn't exist. "Not yet," replies Clov.

As quickly as it began, Hamm's moment of clarity all but vanishes. However, viewers might find themselves capable of piecing together one important narrative detail, which is that it's quite possible that Clov is the young boy whose father asked Hamm to take him in. After all, Clov has already revealed that he came to Hamm when he was quite young and that he no longer remembers his real father. Even with this potential background information, though, audience members are left to grasp for meaning once more when Hamm abruptly stops his story and focuses on praying. When Clov says that God doesn't exist "yet," he further complicates the idea that he and the other characters are alive in the aftermath of the world's end and human extinction, since he implies in this moment that they might actually exist before *the creation of humanity. Once more, then, Beckett makes it impossible to formulate definitive analytical claims about Hamm and Clov's surrounding circumstances.*

Nagg demands his sugar plum, but Hamm says there are none. Nagg then launches into a monologue about his role as Hamm's father, saying that Hamm used to call out for him in the night when he was a frightened child. Because of this, Nagg and Nell moved farther away so they could sleep unbothered by his screams. Nagg then says that he hopes he'll live long enough to witness the day when Hamm calls out his name like he did when he was a little boy, wanting badly to hear his son's frightened voice once more. After saying this, Nagg knocks on Nell's trashcan, but she doesn't stir. Discouraged, he lowers himself back into his own bin and closes the lid.

At first, what Nagg says here might seem endearing, since he wants to return to the innocent relationship he used to have with Hamm. However, what he's really saying is that he wants to witness his son return to the frightened and helpless agony of childhood—a sentiment that isn't very kind. Rather than hoping to recapture the beauty of their relationship, Nagg wants to feel a sense of power over Hamm. Unfortunately for Nagg, though, he's the one who has to call out for his son, relying upon him for food and sustenance.

Clov tries to tidy up, saying he likes order, but Hamm forces him to stop. On Clov's way toward his kitchen, he wonders aloud what's keeping him here, and Hamm suggests that it's the conversation. Hamm then talks about the story he was telling before, saying he hasn't gotten very far in it, though he posits that what he's said so far is better than nothing. "Better than nothing!" Clov gasps. "Is it possible?" Ignoring him, Hamm continues his story, saying that he gave the man who came crawling to him a job as a gardener. Clov starts laughing, and Hamm agrees that the entire thing is rather comedic. Going on, he reiterates that the man asked him to take in his son, but then he stops once more. Clov speculates that the story must almost be over, though he says that Hamm will soon come up with another one.

When Hamm returns to his story, he once more gives the audience a chance to cling to something that actually makes sense. However, he fails once again to actually finish the tale—a failure that is emblematic of the entire play, since Hamm and Clov have seemingly been waiting in vain for Endgame *to finish ever since it began.*

Hamm says that he's tired from the "creative effort" of telling his story. He then tells Clov to check to see if Nell is dead. Clov obliges and then announces that she has, indeed, died. After checking on Nagg, Clov reports that he's weeping. This, Hamm points out, means Nagg is alive. There follows a short pause, after which Hamm asks if Clov has ever experienced a moment of happiness, and Clov says that, to the best of his knowledge, he has not.

When Hamm says that he's fatigued from the "creative effort," viewers get the sense that the play itself is exhausting him—an idea that once again suggests that Endgame *is, in many ways, a play about itself. Moving on, though, Hamm spares no emotion upon hearing that his mother has died, thereby demonstrating how little the characters of this play care about one another, though this isn't always the case (considering the fact that Hamm and Clov can't bring themselves to separate from each other). Furthermore, Hamm's statement that Nagg must be alive because he's weeping is an obvious one, but it also underlines his belief that suffering is an integral part of existence. Any evidence of this suffering, then, is evidence that a person is alive.*

Hamm makes Clov push him beneath the window, saying that he wants to feel the light on his face. As he does this, Hamm nostalgically recalls the fun times he and Clov used to have, when Clov would hold Hamm's chair high in the air and walk around. Hamm then sadly makes it clear that those days are over. Momentarily, he thinks he feels the sun on his face, but Clov assures him that this is impossible, since everything is grey outside. Saying that he wants to listen to the ocean, Hamm makes Clov open the window, but no sound comes through, so Clov closes it and returns Hamm to the center of the room.

While nothing happens here that clarifies the context of the play, Hamm's nostalgic thoughts about his history with Clov suggests that—despite their frequent scorn for each other—they are quite close. The question is, of course, whether or not this connection will stop Clov from eventually leaving Hamm.

After calling out to Nagg, Hamm tells Clov to check on his father. Clov then reports that Nagg is no longer weeping, but sucking on his biscuit. This prompts Hamm to note that the dead fade away quickly and life goes on. Suddenly, then, he asks Clov to kiss him, but Clov refuses, saying he won't touch Hamm in any way. Instead, Clov says again that he's going to leave, walking toward the kitchen.

As someone interested in the passage of time, Hamm notes that Nagg quickly gets over the sorrow of losing Nell. It is perhaps because this emphasizes how little everyone cares about each other in Endgame *that Hamm then asks Clov to kiss him. But because Clov is uninfluenced by this kind of sentimentality, he refuses, instead vowing to leave Hamm once and for all.*

When Clov exits, Hamm refolds his **handkerchief**, saying that things are progressing toward an end. Putting the handkerchief in his pocket, he briefly thinks about all of the people he could have "helped" or "saved," though his voice becomes angry and he repeats the notion that there's no cure for existing on earth. Speaking to nobody in particular, Hamm says, "Get out of here and love one another!" He also says, "The end is in the beginning and yet you go on." Briefly, Hamm considers trying to fling himself out of his chair, thinking that perhaps this would precipitate his end, especially if Clov truly did leave. However, he ultimately dismisses these ideas as fantasies.

Unsurprisingly, it's unclear who Hamm could have "helped" or "saved," or how he would have done this—or, for that matter, why it would have been necessary. Still, that he says this indicates that he has turned people away many times before, ultimately proving how little he cares about showing others compassion. It's possible that this makes Hamm feel guilty, which might be why he shouts out to "get out of here and love one another," a sentiment that he himself has apparently never embraced. On another note, his assertion that "the end is in the beginning and yet you go on" aligns with the idea that everything of importance has already happened at the outset of the play, meaning that the entire production is full of nothing but waiting (or waiting for nothing).

Hamm summons Clov with his whistle, and Clov enters holding the alarm clock. Hamm remarks that Clov would be dead if he left him, and Clov responds by saying that the opposite is also true. Hamm then asks if it's time for his **painkiller**, and Clov finally says that it is, but he also says that there *is* no more painkiller. Upon saying this, he takes the only picture on the wall down and hangs the alarm clock on it.

When Hamm says that Clov would die without him, viewers see that Clov is just as dependent upon Hamm as Hamm is upon him. There is, however, no clear reason why this is the case, since Clov should ostensibly be able to take care of himself, since he's able to take care of Hamm. Nonetheless, it becomes clear in this moment that these two characters are mutually bound to each other. In addition, Clov finally tells Hamm that he can have the long-awaited painkiller, but then immediately informs him that there aren't any painkillers left. Consequently, Hamm must continue to experience his own misery and suffering without any relief—the natural state of existence, according to Hamm himself.

Hamm asks Clov to look out the window again. While the younger man looks out, Hamm asks if he knows what has happened, but Clov asks why it matters. In turn, Hamm says he doesn't know. After a moment, Clov asks Hamm if he knew what was happening when he told Mother Pegg to go to hell after she came to him asking for oil for her lamp. When Hamm doesn't respond, Clov reminds him that Mother Pegg died "of darkness," at which point Hamm claims that he didn't have any oil at the time—a fact that Clov disputes. Changing the subject, Hamm tells Clov to get the telescope, and Clov wonders why he always follows Hamm's orders. Maybe, Hamm suggests, Clov does it out of "compassion."

Yet again, Hamm and Clov talk about light as if it is a source of sustenance. In keeping with this, Clov reveals that Mother Pegg died "of darkness"—an important piece of information, since Clov claims that he has recently been watching his own light die. In fact, Hamm might have something to do with this, since he's the one who denied Mother Pegg extra oil for her lamp, thereby ensuring her demise. What's interesting, of course, is that analyzing this in this way almost makes it seem as if these notions actually make sense. When one stops to truly think about it, though, it's evident that the screwy logic of Endgame *has taken over, leading to nowhere even as audience members desperately follow along and search for meaning.*

Forgetting about the telescope, Hamm asks for his dog, so Clov picks it up and hits him in the head with it, saying that Hamm is driving him crazy. In response, Hamm tells Clov to hit him with an axe or with the gaff if he's going to hit him. He wants, he says, for Clov to put him in his coffin, though Clov informs him that there are no coffins anymore. This frustrates Hamm, who asks if anyone has ever felt pity for him. When Clov asks if Hamm is talking to him, Hamm angrily says that his comment was meant as an "aside." He then informs Clov that he's preparing to deliver his "last soliloquy."

The metanarrative aspect of Endgame *comes to the forefront of the play in this moment, as Hamm criticizes Clov for not understanding that he was making an "aside," which is a term in the theater for when a character makes a remark that is intended to be heard by the audience but not by the other characters. In this sense, Hamm acknowledges that he exists in a play, while Clov actively defies the conventional rules of the theater. Nonetheless, Hamm insists upon focusing on his role as a character in the theater, saying that he is warming up for his "last soliloquy." In turn, viewers get the sense that* Endgame *really is a play about a play, though it's worth remembering that there are other moments in which this interpretation fails to explain what's happening onstage.*

Clov focuses on looking out the window like Hamm instructed him to do. At first he sees nothing, but then something catches his attention. Hamm, for his part, hopes that Clov hasn't spotted an "underplot," but Clov pays no attention, saying that he thinks he sees a boy. This surprises Hamm, but he tells Clov not to go outside, saying that if the boy actually exists, he'll either die or come to them.

When Hamm hopes that Clov hasn't seen an "underplot" approaching them from outside, he doubles down on his metanarrative approach to what's happening. This time, he worries that some new element will emerge that will ultimately delay the end of the play, for which he has been waiting since the very beginning. Clov, for his part, focuses on the fact that he has spied a small boy on the horizon—a vision that contradicts Hamm's previous assertion that there is nobody else left in the world. What's funny about this development, of course, is that if the boy is real, then he actually will *be an "underplot," since introducing him to the play will change the circumstances and possibly clarify what it's like beyond the confines of Hamm and Clov's immediate environment.*

Clov says he's going to leave Hamm, who asks Clov to say something before he departs. Although Clov claims there's nothing for him to say, Hamm implores him to leave him with something to "ponder." After some initial hesitation, Clov launches into a strange address, in which he talks about love and friendship without actually defining either of these things or saying what they mean to him. He also says that he sometimes tells himself that he should learn how to suffer, or else nobody will ever tire of punishing him. Going on, he talks about his constant inability to leave, though now he says that he will finally strike out. Just before he exits, Hamm thanks him for his "services," and Clov, in turn, thanks Hamm.

It's noteworthy that neither Hamm nor Clov say anything else about the boy Clov spotted out the window. As a result, Beckett once more dismisses a possible way of interpreting the play, letting go of the idea that Endgame *is a play about a play and that the boy is an "underplot." Instead of following this thread, Beckett embraces an utter lack of meaning, which Clov exemplifies when he delivers his strange speech, the details of which barely cohere even though he touches upon the play's central concerns—compassion, suffering, and the possibility of departure or separation from Hamm.*

Hamm asks Clov to cover him with the sheet, but Clov has already gone into his kitchen. Speaking to himself, then, Hamm says that it's better this way, and he tries to move his chair, though he quickly gives up. Unbeknownst to him, Clov reenters, this time wearing a hat and carrying a bag. From the door, he silently watches Hamm, who goes through a routine of taking off his hat, putting it on again, taking off his glasses, wiping them with his **handkerchief**, and putting them on again. He then tosses his dog (which he has been holding since Clov last gave it to him) onto the floor. He also calls out for Nagg and is pleased when the old man doesn't respond. "Clov!" he shouts, then says, "No? Good," when there comes no response. Picking up his handkerchief, Hamm drapes it over his face and stops moving.

The ending of Endgame *provides nothing in the way of conclusion, except for the fact that it mirrors the beginning. When Hamm wipes his glasses, puts them on again, and then puts the handkerchief over his face, he reverses the same routine he went through when he first woke up. And though it might seem like things are about to change because Clov has dressed himself to leave, he hasn't set the alarm clock, thereby indicating that he's not actually about to strike out on his own. Consequently, almost nothing (except Nell's death, which hardly affects Hamm and Clov) has really changed throughout the course of the entire play, making it hard to know what Beckett hopes viewers will take away from the experience of watching it unfold. Above all, then, this is a play about the absence of meaning, which ultimately forces audience members to simply experience the play as it is, accepting the meaninglessness in the same way that people must accept the fact that the meaning of life itself is inscrutable.*

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