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### **Freudian Overtones: A Comparative Study of Beckett's Endgame and Pinter's The Caretaker**

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#### **Abstract**

Psychoanalysis is one of the most controversial and critical approaches to literature. Psychological evaluation of literary texts developed simply as modern psychology commenced its development at some point of the early 20th century by the Austrian Neurologist Sigmund (Freud, 2015). Psychoanalysis is embedded in the idea that humans have unconscious yearnings and assumes that characters are the outcome of different forces correlating their unconscious drives and their suppressed feelings, apart from the manipulation of different social and cultural conditions. Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter are of the most highly regarded and widely performed playwrights who have captured the anxiety and ambiguity of life in the second half of the 20th century. The Nobel laureates are two major proponents of the 'Theater of Absurd', an avant-garde theatre movement in the middle of the 20th century which underscored the absurdity and bewilderment of human existence in the post-World War II era. The destruction brought about by the war affected the personal, social and political life of millions of people all over Europe and created a sense of severe depression, self-fragmentation, and mental conflicts within human beings. This paper approaches (Beckett, 1958) and Pinter's Pinter et al. (2006) from a psychological perspective as it provides a perception of human nature, its anxieties, cravings, conflicting impulses, and hidden motivation. The paper includes a brief reference to the 'Theater of Absurd' movement to which the plays belong, to set the basis for the review of the plays understudy; then it touches shortly upon the Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory. Afterwards, the study dwells on the evaluation of the plays through the lens of Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory. Finally, the study reaches a conclusion that contributes to our perception of psychological theories and allows us to better understand our complex psyche and

experiences of the world.

### **Keywords**

Psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, Samuel Beckett, Endgame, Harold Pinter, The Caretaker

**JEL Classifications:** J11, F43

### **1. Introduction**

Freud's theories, which gave birth to psychoanalysis and which have contributed to a school of literary theory known as psychoanalytic theory, provide rich material through which to analyze literary characters and dramatic works. In this paper, several key theories from Freud will be applied thoroughly to two plays: (Beckett, 1958) by (Pinter et al., 2006) by Harold Pinter. Both have been labelled as existential dramas, and both lend themselves to a Freudian reading because of the way they present key themes and ideas. In particular, *The Caretaker* will be examined from the perspective of neurosis in Freud's understanding, looking at how mental disorders are presented as a form of alienation. In this play and in *Endgame*, Freud's ideas relating to the subconscious, repression, dreams and the role played by melancholia will all be analyzed. In particular, the paper will examine the tension between the life drive and the death drive evoked by Beckett's characterization. The eschatological mode of *Endgame* will be explored with reference to Freud's theory of melancholia and the idea of loss.

It will be argued, following Freud, that Beckett and Pinter both evoke the idea of characters struggling to marshal primal and unconscious thoughts and feelings which threaten to overwhelm them and which they struggle to make sense of. Freud's theory of the Ego and the Id distinguished between the rational, conscious and controlling elements of the personality (the Ego), and the subconscious, primal and instinctive parts of what make up the human character (the Id) (Storr, 2001). The tension between these two is explored in both plays, and in particular the thoughts and feelings which are conjured up by the Id provoke responses of repression in the characters who are not able to deal with them. In both plays, mental disorders and vulnerability are foregrounded. Both Pinter and Beckett are concerned with individuals who are physically and mentally weak. In both plays, coping strategies to deal with these weaknesses and the problems of their situations are employed in a way which has Freudian overtones.

Moreover, melancholia emerges as the recognition that there is something lost or incomplete in their characters but the inability to deal with this effectively. This informs the nostalgic tone of both texts. Finally, the inability to confront repressed and buried psychic trauma leads to manipulation, coercion and abuse in both texts. This is seen in Mike's attitude to Davies in *The Caretaker*, as well as in the central relationship between Clov and Hamm in *Endgame*. The redirection of psychic trauma towards the other, who is made to suffer as a means of repressing

one's own inner rage and suffering, is a central concern of both playwrights, and contributes to the sense of helplessness which pervades both texts.

## 2. Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*

The *Caretaker* presents characters who are oppressed by their circumstances and struggling to manage psychic problems which can be well understood through the lens of Freudian neuroses. As (KIRMIZI & YILDIZ) have noted, characters' 'personality disorders imprison them in an alienated and isolated world since they are trapped in a repressive society.' Pinter employs repetition to demonstrate the neurotic nature of his characters' interior world. Their obsession with certain ideas manifests itself as repeated speech, in which they often employ the exact same words or phrases multiple times. At the very start of *The Caretaker*, Davies complains about how 'all them aliens had it,' 'Poles, Greeks, Blacks, the lot of them', only to repeat himself shortly afterwards: 'Blacks, Greeks, Poles, the lot of them' (Pinter et al., 2006). The slight reordering of the phrase does not conceal the neurotic fixation that he has with this idea of the threatening alien, and Pinter's use of repetition evokes the extent to which this has become obsessive *idée fixe* for Davies. Part of the characters' alienation in the play derives from their inability to understand each other's neuroses and obsessions. When Davies talks about 'Blacks' and his need for new 'shoes' at the start of the play, Aston fails to respond to him directly or asks about something else. The talking at cross purposes and Davies's long monologues contrasted with Aston's short, even monosyllabic responses, create a theatrical sense of misunderstanding. Pinter's characters are highly troubled, highly neurotic in Freudian terms, but singularly incapable of helping one another.

In addition to repetition, Pinter evokes the neurotic or obsessive side of his characters through the technique of *non sequitur*. Thus, dialogue in *The Caretaker* does not always follow a dialogic logic, but instead involves two characters effectively talking at one another. They do not so much respond to each other's comments as wait for the other person to finish commenting before adding their own remarks, which often have little connection to what has just been said. This is combined with bathos in Pinter's dramaturgy to evoke the neurotic obsessions that characters have with seemingly innocuous or banal facts. Thus, at the start of the play Davies boasts to Aston about how he left his wife shortly after they were married, 'no more than a week' (Pinter et al., 2006), and offers the following information by way of explanation: 'I took the lid off a saucepan, you know what was in it? A pile of her underclothing, unwashed. The pan for the vegetables, it was. The vegetable pan. That's when I left her and I haven't seen her since' (Pinter et al., 2006). No explanation is offered as to the connection between the vegetable pan incident and his leaving his wife after one week of marriage. The anecdote is offered tangentially and Aston does not comment on it. The bathetic image of soiled underclothes and the incongruence of their being placed in a saucepan evoke the neurotic and bizarre nature of Davies's inner life. His decision to mention this story

when it has nothing to do with the rest of what he is talking about is equally revealing of neurosis.

In Freudian terms, the obliquely sexual image of women's underclothes may also gesture towards some repressed feelings about his wife or about women more generally, but because these incidents are narrated tangentially and as *non sequiturs*, this possibility is not explored further. Pinter's attention to minor but insignificant details, such as the fact that the saucepan was a vegetable pan, is a comic evocation of the neurotic obsessiveness of the narrative. Davies remembers little details like this and presents them as if they provide the full explanation and justification for his actions. Not being privy to his own neurotic concerns, the audience and Aston both fail to understand why he should have left his wife because of this incident.

Aston, who does little to quiz him further and only responds to direct questions or answers in monosyllables like 'Uh' (Pinter et al., 2006), provides the role of the analyst to Davies's role as the one being analyzed in the opening of *The Caretaker*. Thus, Davies does most of the speaking and Aston provides short responses or questions. Largely, the two do not speak to other but rather Davies tells stories or speaks about his neuroses and Aston provides short and unrelated comments. Pinter seems to subvert the role of the psychoanalyst by having Aston disconnected from what Davies is saying. Far from analyzing him or seeking to penetrate into his consciousness, Aston is detached from Davies's words and able to offer only monosyllabic responses to his statements. Pinter foregrounds the difficulty of effective Freudian psychoanalysis by demonstrating how difficult it is for two people to truly communicate with one another. Characters in *The Caretaker* talk at cross purposes to one another and Pinter demonstrates repeatedly how difficult it is to have meaningful conversation by focusing instead on *non sequitur* and misunderstanding. The Freudian subconscious looms large in the text, as characters repeatedly fail to appreciate each other's complex neuroses, and understand what the other truly thinks and feels. Indeed, part of the neurosis of Pinter's characters lies in their inability or refusal to address one another directly. This is seen most explicitly in questions which are not merely unanswered but ignored altogether:

Davies: You know what that bastard monk said to me? *Pause*. How many more Blacks you got round here then?

Aston: What?

Davies: You got any more Blacks around here?

Aston: (*holding out the shoes*). See if these are ay good.

Davies: You know what that bastard monk said to me? (*He looks over to the shoes.*) (Pinter et al., 2006).

Pinter evokes the alienation of his characters by having them so obviously fail to communicate with one another. The self is cut off from the social world in Pinter's play by these barriers to communication. Three times in this short exchange Davies asks a question which Aston not only does not respond to but

completely ignores. Two different processes seem to be taking place in this exchange: Davies is asking about the neighbors, having just observed that there is an Indian family living next door, and the two of them are inspecting the new shoes which Aston is handing to Davies. The questions become merely filler dialogue which is said but not answered, and there is perhaps a low level of expectation on Davies's part that the questions he poses will even be addressed by Aston. The effect is to alienate the two characters from one another, and to demonstrate the gulf between the individual and the social world which he tries to connect to. This failure to truly speak to one another, the stilted, repetitive and unanswered dialogue, evokes the psychoanalytic concept, addressed only indirectly by Freud, of the alienation of the self from the social world.

Like Beckett, Pinter presents characters who have been in some sense stripped of their social status and bourgeois living. Instead, his characters are often working class, down and out or in some sense deprived individuals. When Davies asks Aston at the start of the play, 'I'll tell you what, mate, you haven't got a spare pair of shoes?' (Pinter et al., 2006), he responds with another question, 'Shoes?' and the question is abandoned. The request demonstrates Davies's status as a tramp without any possessions which he has left behind in the job from which he has just been let go, mirroring the presence of tramps and homeless characters in Beckett's texts, not only *Endgame* but also Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*.

From a Freudian perspective, such characters are interesting because they have been stripped of all the bourgeois accoutrements which make up the defense of the ego against the outside world. In this sense, they are psychically more vulnerable as they do not have the protective mechanisms of a job, family, home and so on to protect them against their own consciousness. Their neuroses are therefore exposed in a more essential manner than would be the case if they had a number of possessions and inhabited a complex social milieu. Both Pinter and Beckett are therefore concerned with presenting individuals in their psychic essence, stripped to just their egos and the subconscious which shapes them. The figure of the tramp evokes the idea of the neurotic individual translated out of the comfortable, domestic social setting which might mask his neuroses.

As (Jamil, 2014) has noted, 'the failure of characters against the powerful society and system results in shattered and disordered personalities.' Both writers present dramatic situations which throw those neuroses into relief, by removing any of the masking devices which might conceal them. Thus, when Davies laments the bad weather and his inability to travel to Sidcup, the audience is left with the impression that he plans to walk there: 'If only the weather would break! Then I'd be able to get down to Sidcup!' (Pinter et al., 2006). The image of the tramp travelling great distances on foot, like Vladimir and Estragon tramping back to the same spot on the path to wait for Godot, evokes the raw psychic condition of man stripped of his social comforts (D'Amato, 2014). In Freudian terms, both Beckett

and Pinter remove what Freud identified as civilization, revealing man as isolated and neurotic in the absence of these masking devices.

This exposure of bare consciousness is mirrored in the minimalist stage design and settings for both plays. Beckett's drama in particular foregrounds the absence of social comforts and exposes individual consciousness in increasing isolation. In *Happy Days*, the setting is just one character on stage buried up to her waist, and then neck, in sand. In *Play*, three heads speak on stage and spotlights move from one to the other (Eastman, 1964).

In *Endgame*, characters are simply located in dustbins. This reduction to the minimum of the stage setting and social world of the drama is a device used by Beckett, and to a lesser extent by Pinter, to expose the ego on stage. The tragic tone of the texts derives from the pettiness and smallness of man's ego thus exposed, and the weaknesses, neuroses and experiences of alienation that are so starkly presented when characters are stripped of the bourgeois, social trappings which make up civilization. The non-civilized settings and characters in the two texts thus enable Pinter and Beckett to evoke these Freudian ideas of the ego and alienation more explicitly. It also means the Freudian subconscious is closer to the surface. The devices and stratagems that characters might use in the social world to repress certain neuroses and obsessions are less available to them in the socially minimalist dramatic constructs that are the Beckettian and Pinteresque dramatic universes.

In this minimalist, exposed condition, the neuroses that characters carry around with them are more evident, often to the point of a comic bathos. This is seen in Davies's tale of his wife's undergarments, but also in the fact that he is unable to wear good shoes because he considers his feet too pointed, or in Aston's obsessive attention to detail which prevents him from living a full life. This is seen most notably in his tale of drinking in the pub, where he ordered a Guinness but received it in a thick mug: 'I sat down but I couldn't drink it. I can't drink Guinness from a thick mug. I only like it out of a think glass. I had a few sips but I couldn't finish it' (Pinter et al., 2006). In Freudian terms, neuroses are those things in one's subconscious which emerge to prevent one from living a full life; they hold people back from fuller and richer experiences. In the case of Aston, his obsessive concern for the thickness of glass, an entirely banal detail such as the vegetable saucepan that Davies identifies with his leaving his wife, prevents him from enjoying a drink at the pub. In the theoretical framework of Freud, it can be said of Aston that his neuroses contribute to his alienation. Davies also experiences alienation as a perceived loss of self. Neurotically, he fixates on things which he believes give him identity.

In Freudian terms, it can be said that he fetishizes certain objects which he considers to impart to him a significance and a meaningful identity. The first of these is the shoes, which symbolizes his social existence and his membership of the working classes, as opposed to his outcast status as a tramp. In this formulation, a tramp with good shoes is no longer a tramp, and Pinter also critiques

some of the bourgeois expectations which equate identity with possessions. Davies's ego is supported by the idea of his papers, which he fetishizes as something which will provide him with his identity, reduce his sense of alienation: 'I left them with him. You, see? They prove who I am! I can't move without them papers. They tell you who I am. You see! I'm stuck without them' (Pinter et al., 2006). The fact that Davies has been going under an assumed name also evokes the tension between the ego and the Id, the idea that he can control his identity by imposing something rational and empirical on the top of it - a new name - but that the Id, the primitive self, is something which cannot be fully repressed and which will naturally resurface in the future. This tension gives rise to his defensiveness in the face of the innocuous question of where he was born: 'I was ...u...oh, it's a bit hard, like, to set your mind back...see what I mean' (Pinter et al., 2006). This threat of the primal self is something which hangs over Davies, and which he pathetically believes he can rationalize and control simply if he is able to walk to Sidcup in his good shoes and collect the papers that say who he really is.

The product of the neurotic tension between the Ego and the Id in both plays is absurdity, which Pinter renders through *non sequitur* and comic misunderstanding, as well as through illogical reasoning and bizarre conclusions, especially those drawn by Davies. He thus tells Aston that he needs to get to Sidcup to collect his papers, as his real name is Bernard Jenkins, 'That's my name. That's the name I'm known, anyway' (Pinter et al., 2006). These qualifications change the meaning of what he is saying to an absurd degree, such that it seems that neither he nor the reader ultimately knows who he really is, nor why he has to travel to Sidcup. This sense of fragile or absent identity is evoked most notably in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, where the arrival of the eponymous character is expected in both the first and the second acts, arriving ultimately in neither. Who Godot is, or whether he is in some sense a symbol or a metaphor, is never made clear.

Beckett's resistance to interpretation creates the sense of absurdity which informs the idea of names and naming in Pinter's play. The effect in Freudian terms is a conflict of identity between the Ego - the rational part, concerned with naming and identity - and the Id, the more primal self, concerned with who one is in essence, one's drives and instincts. Davies's privileging of something like identity papers as a means of effecting the triumph of the Ego over the Id is so naive as to result in moments of comic absurdity. His fetishization of document papers is the fragile attempt of the Ego to control his absent identity, and to repress neuroses which forever threaten to rise to the surface of his character. Indeed, repression is one of the ways characters cope with this fear of discovering who they really are, of their Id rising to the surface. Freudian ideas of the unconscious emerging in dreams are denied by both Davies and Aston when they wake on the second day: 'Were you dreaming or something?' 'Dreaming?' 'Yes.' 'I don't dream. I've never dreamed.' 'No, nor have I' (Pinter, 1960, p.22). The 'jabbering' and 'groaning' noises, however, give the lie to this idea that the primal or the Id elements in the consciousness can simply be denied in this way. The animalistic language suggests



dreams in the Freudian sense of manifestations of the Id. The irony of Davies dismissing the possibility as nonsensical provides a moment of humor: 'I mean, where's the sense in it?' (Pinter et al., 2006). Given the non-sensical nature of much of his waking speech, the denial of dream behaviors on the grounds that they would be non-sensical betrays his false privileging of the Ego over the Id. Indeed, his neurosis derives, in Freudian terms, from the ways he represses this burgeoning tension between the two.

The triangular relationship which emerges between Davies, Aston and his brother Mick thus becomes one of manipulation and oppression, in which neuroses threaten to come to the surface but are redirected or manipulated through the influence of one character over another. Mick is the most manipulative of the three, while Aston has been reduced by the electroshock therapy he received for his teenage mental disorders. Pinter comments on the effects of such treatments which try to impose right behavior on individuals who deviate from such norms, but the kindness and meekness of Aston in comparison to Mick suggests that the socially determined distinction between mentally well and mentally unwell is a precarious one.

By the end of the play, madness and neuroses have become a tool through which characters seek to manipulate and abuse one another. In a cruel inversion of the role of the Freudian psychoanalyst, Mick does not attempt to rid Davies of his neuroses but rather to highlight them and wield them against him, focusing repeatedly on how it is Davies, and not Aston, who is strange: 'Did you call my brother nutty?' (Pinter et al., 2006) and 'What a strange man you are. Aren't you? You're really strange' (Pinter et al., 2006). Strangeness, because it exists in the repressed elements of these characters' identities, is resistant to definition in *The Caretaker*. Although Aston is perhaps ostensibly the most psychologically troubled of the characters, and has undergone electroshock therapy for precisely that reason, in the Pinteresque world of repression and the unsaid, where the Id lies buried a little beneath the surface, what is strange is open to interpretation and misinterpretation. Indeed, the dramatic world that Pinter creates is one which creates a sense of alienation precisely by making the strange seem mundane, and the mundane seem strange.

### **3. Samuel Beckett's Endgame**

If the primal drives and forces of the Id are repressed with difficulty in Pinter's text, Beckett creates an even more abstract and minimalist theatre through which to expose the consciousness of his central characters. The setting for *Endgame* is a 'bare interior' with 'grey light,' and the two main characters are confined to ashbins. The suggestion that human life is detritus is impossible to ignore, and fits in with Beckett's deep pessimistic theatre with the experience of melancholy frequently on display. At the center of Beckett's depiction of mental disorders is something akin to what would be called today severe depression: 'You cried for night; it falls: now cry in darkness' (Beckett, 1958). The melancholy sense



that these characters are placed in situations they cannot extricate themselves from is evoked by the staging, with the minimalist stage and the dustbins suggesting confinement, and the physically disabled state of the characters symbolizing the same idea, evoked in Pinter, of being somehow prevented from living one's full life. Mental disorders are a kind of restricting force in both plays, and characters construct lies and fantasies as a means of managing their own disorders, neuroses and melancholia.

The idea that the central neurosis in Beckett's text is melancholia is suggested by its emphasis on stasis, alienation and the eschatological tone of the play's title and content: 'Can there be misery (he yawns) - loftier than mine?' (Beckett, 1958). This bathetic yawn shares with Pinter the undermining of the empathetic with the banal and the everyday: he speaks of loftiness and of the elevated status of his melancholy, elevating his neurosis to something like art, but then undermines his own claim with a yawn that reveals his essential boredom with his own words. Beckett's theatre is innovative for the space that it gives to boredom, with silences, *non sequiturs*, pauses and inaction being perhaps more important than characterization and plot.

Beckett's evocation of a tragic existence which is determined less by drama than by boredom and *ennui* provides an ironic literary comment on the tragic genre. Freud, who made Greek tragedy a part of his analysis of the psyche in his studies of *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, is being modernized by Beckett, who instead presents his tragic heroes not as fallen kings but as ordinary, unpleasant and flawed individuals. His modern tragedies therefore undermine some of the elevated psychic processes described by Freud, or reconstitute them with an emphasis on the banal, the tedious and the ordinary: 'I can't be getting you up and putting you to bed every five minutes, I have things to do' (Beckett, 1958). This stop and start rhythm in the play is one which connects to Freud's idea of the death drive, which he describes in terms of hesitation and the presence of inertia, exactly as defines the lives of the characters in *Endgame*: 'It is as though the life of the organism moved with a vacillating rhythm. One group of instincts rushes forward so as to reach the final aim of life as swiftly as possible; but when a particular stage in the advance has been reached, the other group jerks back to a certain point to make a fresh start and so prolong the journey' (Royle, 2003).

The compulsion to repeat is identified by Freud as a symbolic coping mechanism in the case of post-traumatic distress. Repetition compulsion is also part of what Freud identifies as the death drive. Both Pinter's and Beckett's characters suggest, if not explicitly state, that they have experienced trauma in the past. In both Pinter and Beckett, this is associated with dreaming and the night, a period which brings out the repressed memories and allows the primal Id to dominate over the rationalizing ego.

For Freud, 'dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright' (Freud, 2015). Hamm begins the play

dwelling on his dreams, and the symbol of the forest evokes the primal Id, the pre-civilization landscape inhabited by the primal nature: 'What dreams! Those forests!' (Beckett, 1958). The image of the dreamed forest contrasts in its richness and wildness with the barren landscape which Beckett's characters inhabit. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a greater contrast than that which exists between a forest and one of Beckett's play settings. Clove's dream of order, paradoxically, suggests less the primal world of the forest and more the barren world of the ordered, minimalist desert landscape: 'I love order. It's my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust.' This dream again evokes an end state ('the last dust'), and represents in one possible reading the death drive toward destruction and effacement rising up from Clove's unconscious. Beckett avoids description or details of the dreams he evokes, suggesting their elusiveness and the inability of the conscious mind to make sense of them.

The image of dreams evokes Freud's theory of the unconscious, where in all thoughts are first formulated in the unconscious before they can be given conscious expression, with dreams being a landscape unmediated by the conscious mind and allowing some of these forms to rise up to the surface (Jiji, 1978). In *Endgame*, the tension between the reality and the perception of it by the mind - both consciously and unconsciously - is an important one. Dreams, hallucinations and madness emerge as important themes which evoke Freud's idea of the unconscious. Hamm describes a madman he knew in the asylum, who had apocalyptic visions of destruction and the end of the world: 'I once knew a madman who thought the end of the world had come. [...] He'd snatch away his hand and go back into his corner. Appalled. All he had seen was ashes' (Beckett, 1958). The madman here may have been less mad than in touch with his unconscious mind. Moreover, in the context of what has since happened in the play, he may have demonstrated some sort of prophetic ability, as just such a post-apocalyptic landscape seems to exist outside. Indeed, when Hamm notes that the case is not so unusual, he seems to demonstrate the degree to which such manifestations of the unconscious, far from being a sign of madness, are common features of the human experience. The unconscious mind produces these visions and the primal experience is presented here by Beckett as one of fear and suffering. The veneer of civilization easily rubs off when the unconscious mind confronts the problems of fear, suffering, death and decline. Indeed, the death drive emerges in the story of the mad man who looks out of the window and sees the world coming to an end. His fear and uncertainty in the face of his unconscious vision is the fear and uncertainty in the tension between the life drive and the death drive.

Indeed, Freud identifies the death drive as one of the fundamental primal forces motivating human nature, and exists in opposition to Eros and the life drive, which motivates procreation, sex and so on. The images of decay and destruction that permeate the play lend it to such a Freudian reading. As (Ghaderi & Heidari, 2016) note, 'the degenerated state of the world and the mental and physical infirmities of the characters place a high priority for us to analyze this Beckettian

world on the basis of Freud's theory of life drive and death drive.' The tension between the two drives is one of the psychic battles undergone in Beckett's plays. In *Waiting for Godot*, the tree and staging evoke the idea of hanging oneself, ending the endless wait, but characters find they are unable to take this decisive step to carry out the death drive (Smith, 1980). The death drive is the urge to self-destruction, but Beckett's characters lack the courage to kill themselves. Instead, they exist in this hesitant, paradoxical interspace between action and inaction exemplified by the end of Beckett's novel *The Unnamable*: 'I can't go on. I'll go on' (Beckett, 2012). In *Endgame*, the characters exist in this tension between the death drive, the urge to end their lives, and the kind of persistent stasis which allows them to continue in their unpleasant existence one day after another: 'And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to ... to end. Yes, there it is, it's time it ended and yet I hesitate to' (Beckett, 1958). This hesitation evokes the battle between the death drive and the life drive; the hesitancy expresses the inability of Beckett's characters to take decisive action to change their circumstances. As was noted above, images of constraint and confinement abound in Beckett's plays. The characters are placed in a dustbin in a way which not only evokes the refuse which their lives have become, it illustrates their incapacity and inability to take action which will free them from their own circumstances. This places them in Camus's existential quandary, the essential fact of which is the debate about whether or not to kill oneself (Wolfs, 2010). Beckett's characters seem to wish for the end, and the very title of the play evokes these ideas of eschatology and finality, without being able to be overcome by the death drive, to take the decisive step towards self-destruction.

Indeed, *Endgame* is perhaps Beckett's most eschatological play. There is something apocalyptic in the dialogue as well as the setting, which hints at a descent into a kind of end times. The characters speak about a time when they would travel on horse and when there were bicycles, and now these are no more. The context could be a post-apocalyptic event such as nuclear war, but this is never made clear. Instead, a tension emerges between the setting as being once refuge and prison. In one sense, the characters are confined there against their will; in another, it seems to be a place of refuge against the outside world which is even more unpleasant. In this sense, trauma hangs over the play, and the melancholy of the characters can be understood as informed by the awareness of this situation and the suffering that has gone on as a result. The death drive and the life drive battle in this tension between the monotony of the characters' existence and the alternative which may be even worse: 'Outside of here it's death' (Beckett, 1958). Beckett puns on the idea that there is 'No more nature' (Beckett, 1958), which may refer to the state of the world after this implied apocalyptic event, or to the fact that the characters have been so reduced and diminished that they no longer have capacity, no longer have their physical nature and instincts. Again, this can be understood in Freudian terms as the triumph of the death drive over the life drive. Indeed, Hamm's lament that his physical problems prevent him from expressing

Eros evokes the way that waste and decay charts the prominence of the death drive as something which suppresses the life drive: 'If I could sleep, I might make love' (Beckett, 1958). Characters are notable de-vitalized in the play: they have stumps, they bleed, they are unable to get up and move around independently. The emphasis on the horrors of physical decline evokes the death drive towards in-animation and physical destruction, in contrast with the life drive, Eros, sexual reproduction and the idea of *élan vital*.

In *Endgame*, the idea of procreation is completely excluded by the condition of both the characters and the world they inhabit. The 'nature' which has vanished is also the Freudian sexual nature which might give rise to something like the Oedipus Complex. Here it is made impossible by the lack of any vital force. The suffering of Beckett's characters derives in part from not only this fact but the fact that they remember a time when it was not the case, and are able to understand and lament what they have lost: 'But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!' (Beckett, 1958).

(Mansuri et al., 2013) identify repression in the play in the Freudian sense of the term especially in the discussion of the accident that Nagg and Nell suffered. As was noted above, the play is clouded by memories of injuries, physical suffering and decline, and pain. Beckett, who did not enjoy excellent health for much of his life, evokes the torment and suffering involved in physical decline: ageing, injury and disease. When Nagg and Nell discuss the accident which resulted in their being maimed and disabled, they laugh ironically and seem to be content to talk about it, but this feigned indifference or even pleasure disguises the fact that they are hurt and traumatized by the experience: 'When we crashed on our tandem and lost our shanks' (Beckett, 1958). The stage directions which state that they 'laugh heartily' after this statement is made highlight the repression which is in operation. For Freud, the ego attempts to marshal some of the traumatic and unconscious thoughts and feelings which would otherwise impinge on our daily activity and make it difficult to function in civil society.

In *Endgame*, as the setting is one increasingly denuded of the trappings of civilization, it becomes harder and harder to control these thoughts and traumas which threaten to break through the surface of the conscious mind. As such, a concerted effort at repression is needed, evidenced in the false but hearty laugh at their suffering, in order to prevent these traumas from becoming too much. The recurring question whether it is time for painkillers is one which functions as a kind of chorus of repression in Beckett's play. Painkillers, which numb physical pain through their analgesic effect, are the medicinal equivalent of the psychic act of repression, which seeks to overcome psychic pain by burying deep in the unconscious those thoughts and feelings which might bring one distress.

The presence of Freudian melancholia haunts the text. The traumas of the past, physical injury, suffering and so on are prominent throughout, and hang over the characters and haunt their unconscious minds. The characters even seem to take pride in their suffering and the suffering that they inflict. Freud's theory of

melancholia is based on the idea of unsuccessful mourning, it is, as (Boulter, 2013) notes, 'the inability to mourn, the inability to separate oneself from the loss, from the past: the melancholic thus is continually haunted by loss, by history.' The constant laments for the past, for a time when they were healthy, when there existed such things as bicycles and horses, imbue the play with this Freudian sense of melancholia. The eschatological theme in the play derives in part from this sense of incomplete mourning; there is a feeling that there has been a dramatic event, a dramatic loss, which the characters are constantly aware of but which they are unable to address explicitly. As such, Freudian ideas of melancholia and repression coalesce in Beckett's portrayal, and characters repress the tragic loss and the past which they are unable to properly mourn. As (Boulter, 2013) contends, 'certainly Hamm's central narrative, the keystone of the play, is a study in both nostalgia and melancholy, a return to a past which continually haunts the present moment.' Nell's elegiac lament 'Ah yesterday!' (Beckett, 1958) expresses this constant sense that one is mourning something lost. Beckett materializes this loss in the form of physical things which have gone: teeth, hair, the ability to use one's legs. These physical losses serve metaphorically for a wider sense of trauma and suffering, and the inability to confront this directly, the dark humor and the evasions of the text, constitutes the Freudian sense of melancholia which runs through the play. Characters are sometimes blunt, but more often they use evasion and distraction to avoid confronting head on the issues which they would rather suppress. Thoughts of the past, and a nostalgic connection to the things lost, thus allow for this melancholia to contribute to their characterization, but it is ultimately Freudian repression which triumphs, as characters bury these ideas and these thoughts in the symbolic dustbins that they find themselves living in.

#### **4. Conclusion**

To conclude, it is evident that Freudian psychoanalytic theory sheds a great deal of light on both plays, and draws out points of comparison and difference between these two modern existential dramas. In particular, a valuable contribution to the literature has been made by showing how Pinter employs neurosis, and Beckett the idea of repression, dreams and the death drive, to achieve similar effects. Although very different plays in very different settings, both create the sense of existential fear and despair in ways which can be understood through Freud. In both, dark humor becomes the foil for an exploration of the ways in which trauma and fear emerge from the Id, and the dramatic tension in both texts is the tension of the Ego trying to control and manage the Id. In both Pinter and Beckett, characters seek to exist in social worlds which challenge and threaten them. By considering these challenges in terms of Freudian theories of the subconscious, it is possible to see how struggles between characters mirror internal struggles which are going on in the characters' own heads. This reading therefore has much to offer in terms of understanding dramatic tension in these plays, and in particular for refuting the claim that the two plays are ones with little dramatic

action. Although external circumstances change little in both plays, Beckett and Pinter are more concerned with the Freudian sense of interior change and dramatic tension.

By analyzing the ways in which repression, failed mourning, the death drive and other Freudian ideas complicate and problematize any stable psychology, the dramatic tension in both plays is revealed to be central. As such, this reading re-situates Beckett and Pinter as highly dramatic playwrights, concerned with character and its inherent tensions and exploring how it develops over the course of a play. The past and its traumas emerges as a principal element in both texts, and this Freudian reading contributes an understanding of how time is employed to connect characters' present to the past. Although Pinter and Beckett reduce their action to a single place and a short period of time, in fact this reading demonstrates that the past is ever-present and of central importance in both texts. The theories of neurosis and melancholia demonstrate how characters attempt, and often fail, to confront the past, and how past suffering hangs over the present. It becomes evident, when applying Freud to these two texts, that even more important than the tension between the characters is the tension within the characters' own psyches.

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