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INFLUENCE OF SHAKESPEARE IN OUR AGE

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Research Question: To what extent are the portrayal of the characters Clov and Hamm, in the play *The Endgame* by Samuel Beckett, influenced by the characters Prospero, Miranda, Caliban and Ariel in the play *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare?

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ABSTRACT

Many critics believe that William Shakespeare's relevance is due to conveying timeless and universal messages about human nature and condition through his characters. This study analyzes the extent of the reflection of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* on the play *Endgame* by Samuel Beckett written in the recent history of literature, and thus attempts to answer the following research question: *To what extent are the portrayal of the characters Clov and Hamm, in the play The Endgame by Samuel Beckett, influenced by the characters Prospero, Miranda, Caliban and Ariel in the play The Tempest by William Shakespeare?*

Through the investigation of the research question, it is aimed to provide the answer whether the characters portrayed in *The Tempest* are still relevant or not. To enable better comparison of the characters, the study encompasses the analysis of the effect of settings on determining the identities of the characters by shaping the concepts, which are power, dependence, and miscommunication, shared in both of the plays. Aspects that give universal appeal to the characters are also considered in order to reach a conclusion.

Throughout the study, it is revealed that both of the protagonists, Hamm and Prospero, have the ability to control all the characters on the stage. Although Clov and Caliban were treated as family members in the past, the predominance of Hamm and Prospero makes it turn into a slave-master relationship which results in hatred towards their roles as 'masters'. Besides, both Prospero and Hamm depend on the characters they control while maintaining their lives, which emphasizes the limitations of their power.

In the conclusion part of the study, it is stressed that *Endgame* includes allusions to the lines of *The Tempest* uttered by the characters with similar identities, and therefore, the influence of William Shakespeare on *Endgame* cannot be ignored.

Word Count: 299

*“He was not of an age but for all times!”*¹

Ben Jonson

¹ Jonson, Ben. “To The Memory Of My Beloved Master, William Shakespeare .” *Litscape*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 June 2011.
<http://www.litscape.com/author/Ben_Jonson/To_The_Memory_Of_My_Beloved_Master_William_Shakespeare.html>.

I. Introduction

The Tempest, by William Shakespeare, was first performed in 1611 and its success is based on dealing with the human condition by exploring the themes “*usurpation, nature versus nurture, imprisonment and freedom, colonialism, illusion and magic, forgiveness and reconciliation, sleep and dreams, transformation*”² reflected through the characters which are given realistic identities due to being portrayed in depth with their struggles and conflicts. As they have succeeded in existing for centuries, his characters influenced lots of authors. Samuel Beckett, whose work *Endgame* includes textual references to *The Tempest*, is no exception.

In his work *Endgame*, which was first performed in 1957, Beckett portrayed characters that are similar to the ones in *The Tempest*. The scope of this study, therefore, is the comparison of the characters Prospero, Miranda, Ariel, and Caliban in the play *The Tempest* with the characters Hamm and Clov in the play *Endgame* and the analysis of the extent to which Beckett’s characters are influenced by Shakespeare’s in order to investigate the relevance of the characters portrayed in *The Tempest*.

² Gibson, Rex. *Teaching Shakespeare*. 5th ed. 1998. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. Print. Cambridge School Shakespeare. p. 135

II. Effect of Setting on the Characters

Settings, which have significant influences on the identity of the characters, resemble each other in both of the plays. As settings of the plays are isolated, they initiate alienation of the characters emphasized with their ignorance or lack of information about the outer world which ends up with leading them to repetitive and motionless lives.

In *The Tempest*, Miranda, who is the daughter of the protagonist Prospero, is alienated from 'mankind' due to being brought up in an isolated island in which the play takes place. "*O, wonder!/(...)/How beauteous mankind is!*" (Shakespeare:V.i,1157) Similarly, *Endgame* takes place in a room which is only connected to the outside by its two windows that Clov can 'barely' reach. "*The size of windows and the protagonist's vain efforts to reach them place him in the problematic situation of striving against the odds to peep at new horizons.*"³ Although Hamm frequently orders Clov to look outside because of being blind, they do not know what has happened around them. "*It all happened without me. I don't know what's happened.*" (Beckett,74) As Hamm needs Clov to get information about the outside, the descriptions about the outer world are provided to the audience and to Hamm by Clov. According to Clov, nothing changes in the nature. Therefore, Hamm and Clov believe that "*There's no more nature*" (Beckett,11), yet they only know about "*the vicinity*" which stresses their ignorance about the outside. Their alienation from the nature is also emphasized with the line; "*Nature has forgotten us*". (Beckett,11) In other words, the nature is blamed for the main characters' alienation. On the contrary, in *The Tempest*, Prospero accuses himself for his alienation from the society in Italy. Thus, he is more aware of himself compared to the characters in *Endgame*. "*And to my state grew stranger, being transported/ And rapt in secret studies.*" (Shakespeare:I.ii,1137)

³ Karic, Pol P. *Ironic Samuel Becket; Samuel Beckett's Life and Drama: Waiting for Godot, Endgame, and Happy Days*. Oxford: UP of America, 2007. Print. p. 89

Throughout the play *Endgame*, repetition of the action of Clov looking outside and the impossibility of a change in nature are also stressed by the usage of the words “zero” and “*the same as usual*” that often appear. For Clov to describe the scene as ‘good’ shows that the characters have got used to the nature being stable for a long time. The repetition of the days and repetition of the actions prevent characters from distinguishing the concept of time which is illustrated with the constant “gray” colour of the sky.

HAMM: *Get me ready, I'm going to bed.*

CLOV: *I've just got you up.* (Beckett,3)

The Tempest includes repetitive actions as well since each character goes through similar experiences with the others. It is known that Ariel used to serve Sycorax and in the time of the play he serves Prospero. Sycorax, just like Prospero, is left in the island and gains power through controlling the spirits on the isle. Before the time of the play, Prospero loses his power in Italy and Caliban loses his power in the isle as he is forced to serve Prospero. After the shipwreck, Caliban accepts Stephano as his king and promises to show the natural resources of the island just like what he did for Prospero. Then, he regrets accepting Stephano as his king, and it is also implied that he has been unhappy to serve Prospero. Prospero usurps the power of Stephano, just like he has done to Caliban when he arrived in the island. In the end, Prospero gains back his power in Italy and leaves the isle so Caliban becomes his “king” again. Although the actions are repeated, time is clear in *The Tempest*. “*How thou hast met us here, who three hours since/ Were wrack'd upon this shore; where I have lost—*” (Shakespeare:V.i,1157) In addition, it is clear that Prospero and Miranda have spent twelve years on the island but in *Endgame* it is only evinced that they have spent a long time in the room.

In *Endgame*, days being the same prevents characters from having an aim which results in the characters being unable to find a reason for their existence. “*Mean something! You and I,*

mean something!” (Beckett,32) As a result, during the whole play the characters are only waiting for the end of their lives. Motionlessness of the characters is also given with the stage direction “*doesn’t move*”. However, in *The Tempest*, Prospero, Sebastian and Antonio have the exact purpose which is to gain power. Ariel wants to gain his liberty and Caliban wants to get rid of Prospero through murder. Nevertheless, at the end of the play, Prospero states that he will be waiting for his death. “*And thence retire me to my Milan, where/ Every third thought shall be my grave.*” (Shakespeare:V.i,1159) Therefore, it is implied that there won’t be any action in Prospero’s life. It is also known that the lives of the characters in *Endgame* were different in the past from their memories which are revealed with the stories they tell. In the time of the play, although they are trapped in monotonous lives, they are aging and their supplies are running out. In other words, only negative changes occur in their lives. “*But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!*” (Beckett,32) Motionlessness and repetitiveness of the life result in loss of hopes and expectations for the characters. Since God does not help them, they believe that “*he doesn’t exist*”. (Beckett,55) The end of the life is described as an “*impossible heap*” in the play because of coming too slow which results in making the characters tired of living. “*Put me in my coffin.*” (Beckett,77) Ceres, who is the goddess of agriculture in mythology, also appears as a character in *The Tempest* symbolising the only hope of Hamm about the existence of nature rather than himself. “*That here we’re down in a hole.(...)/ But beyond the hills? Eh? Perhaps it’s still green.*” (Beckett,39) However, in *The Tempest*, the characters are not hopeless about the future.

The mime, at the end of the play *Endgame*, concretises their situation. Throughout the mime, whenever the actor tries to take action, he fails. Therefore, “*he gives up the struggle and lies*

*down motionless on the ground(...). His final gesture is to look his hands, those tools which at first seemed to promise so much but in the event have proved useless.”*⁴

⁴ Barnard, G.C. *Samuel Beckett a New Approach*. 1970. New York: Dodd, Mead&Company, 1971. Print. p. 109

III. Miscommunication and Its Echoes on Language

In both of the plays, although the characters spend most of their time by talking, they do not succeed in communicating with each other. Instead having conversations is perceived as a way of consuming time which is highlighted with the simplified language in *Endgame* and the contrast of the characteristics of Caliban with his usage of language in *The Tempest*.

In *Endgame*, the lack of communication between the characters is initiated by their desire to consume time since their existence is meaningless. As the characters have been having the same conversations for a long time, each side knows all the questions and answers. “*All life long the same questions, the same answers.*” (Beckett,5) As a result, they are losing their ability to communicate stressed with Hamm being unable to find the appropriate words to finish his story and Nagg claiming that he tells the story of the tailor worse in each time. Likewise, in *The Tempest* Prospero’s lines also suggest that talking is used in order to kill time, yet it is not related with the flaws of their lives. “*(...)I’ll waste/ With such discourse as, I doubt not, shall make it/ Go quick away; the story of my life,(...)*” (Shakespeare:V.i,1159) In *The Tempest*, the lack of communication is also seen between the characters Miranda and Prospero. Although they have spent twelve years on the island, Miranda does not know Prospero’s story until the beginning of the play. Prospero tells the story because he thinks that it is the right time and when Miranda asks the reason of the storm, Prospero only reveals a small part of his reason. “*Know thus far forth.*” (Shakespeare:I.ii,1138)

In *Endgame*, the reduction of the language is parallel with the miscommunication which is accented through the repetition of the dialogues and words foreshadowed in the opening scene of the play with Clov’s soliloquy through the repetition of the word “*finished*”, one of the words dominating the play. In the play, miscommunication is also emphasized with presence

of incomplete sentences, pauses between the lines and characters interrupting each other's speeches.

HAMM: Nothing stirs. All is—

CLOV: Zer—

HAMM (violently): Wait till you're spoken to!

(Normal voice.)

All is... all is... all is what? (Beckett,29)

In contrast, language used in *The Tempest* is rather complex, the play is more poetic and includes a wider range of vocabulary. Although the play includes repetitions as well, they are not as explicit as the ones in *Endgame*, and none of the dialogues are repeated in the play.

“*Twelve year since, Miranda, twelve year since, (...)*” (Shakespeare:I.ii,1136)

In *The Tempest*, language includes words that are associated with theatre and art therefore, the diction confirms supernatural identity of the characters Prospero, Ariel, Caliban, Sycorax and other spirits living on the isle. Similarly, words related with chess game and acting, as a metaphor of the characters' lives, disconnect the play *Endgame* with the reality which supports characters' doubts about their existence.

HAMM: Last night I saw inside my breast. There was a big sore.

CLOV: Pah! You saw your heart.

HAMM: No, it was living. (Beckett,32)

In *The Tempest*, Prospero's teaching Caliban the words that he wants, not the ones Caliban actually desires to use, may also be interpreted as miscommunication. Despite of being referred as a slave by Prospero, Caliban generally uses blank verse, in the same way with the upper class which is a contradiction with Caliban's identity. Usage of blank verse in the lines of Caliban may be related with the language he learned from Prospero. “*You taught me language; and my profit on't/ Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you/ For learning me your language!*” (Shakespeare:I.ii,1140) *Endgame* includes an allusion to Caliban's lines

which suggests that Hamm also teaches Clov language. “(...)before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent.” (Beckett,43-44) However, the words that Clov use do not have any significance on his identity.

IV. Power

Power stands out as a major theme in both of the plays in terms of the dominance of the main characters, Hamm and Prospero, over the others and the limitations of their power covered through their struggles. Although it is concreted on master-slave relationship in the plays, the theme of power is also explored through the characters' desire to obtain it.

In *The Tempest*, Prospero maintains his power by controlling Ariel which enables him to raise a storm in the beginning of the play, makes Miranda, Alonso, and Gonzalo fall into sleep, prevents Ferdinand and Caliban from rebelling against him. "*Prospero is the principal link in a chain of domination and subservience, which shackles every figure in his programmed universe to him(...).*"⁵ In a similar way, Clov provides power to control Nagg and Nell for Hamm just like Ariel in *The Tempest*.

HAMM: Are they both bottled?

CLOV: Yes. (Beckett,24)

Through controlling Ariel, Prospero also gains power to change the plot. He brings Alonso, Sebastian and others to the island and plans the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand to acquire power. Likewise, Hamm has the ability to "*bring in other characters*" (Beckett,54) to the story and he is also shown as responsible of the destruction of the nature which is emphasized with Hamm's blood-stained handkerchief. He gives Clov order to kill flea, by claiming that "*(...)humanity might start from there all over again!*". (Beckett,33) Similarly, Prospero's controlling the natural sources also gives him an identity as a colonist. Resemblance of Prospero and Hamm is also emphasized with the line spoken by both of the characters. "*Our revels now are ended.*" In addition, whenever he tries to rebel, Ariel is reminded about his obligation to Prospero, avoiding him from acting against the authority of Prospero just like

⁵ Ryan, Kiernan. *Shakespeare*. 3rd ed. 1989. New York: Palgrave, 2002. Print. p. 153

Clov being obliged to Hamm. Similar to Ariel being imprisoned by Sycorax, Clov compares the room with a “*cell*”.

In *The Tempest*, Ariel is controlled by the promise of freedom and the threatening of twelve years of more imprisonment which is similar to the situation in *Endgame* as Hamm controls Clov by threatening. “*I’ll give you nothing more to eat.*” (Beckett,5) In addition, Hamm promises to give biscuit to Clov and sugar-plum to Nagg in return for his demands, yet Nagg is aware of the fact that Hamm will break his promise. “*Turkish Delight, for example, which no longer exists, (...)one day I’ll ask you for some, in return for a kindness, and you’ll promise it to me.*” (Beckett,56) In contrast, in *The Tempest*, Ariel is given his liberty at the end of the play.

Although Hamm needs Clov to reach the food supply, Clov is made to believe that he does not know the combination of the cupboard. Similarly, Prospero tells his story in a biased way to Miranda. “*(...)a brother should/ Be so perfidious!*” (Shakespeare:I.ii,1136) In other words, Hamm and Prospero manage to control the knowledge of the characters avoiding them to gain awareness. Although Clov questions the reason of his services for Hamm, he is unable to find a logical explanation. “*Why I always obey you.*” (Beckett,56) Similarly, Caliban questions the actual owner of the isle. “*This island’s mine,(...)/ Which thou takest from me.*” (Shakespeare:I.ii,1140) However, the characters Clov and Caliban do not succeed in standing against their ‘masters’ as their awareness fades away due to the lack of power to rebel. At the end of *Endgame*, Clov does not leave Hamm. At the end of *The Tempest*, Caliban accepts Prospero’s power by regretting for his betrayal.

Since there is always someone or something more powerful, even the most powerful characters on the stage have concerns about life. In *Endgame*, just like other characters, Hamm is unhappy because of living and his power over the others does not provide an escape

nor helps him to find the reason of his existence. “*Why did you engender me?*” (Beckett,49) In *The Tempest*, just like Sebastian, Antonio and Stephano, Prospero tries to gain the power which he lost in Italy.

V. Dependence

Despite of the presence of miscommunication and hatred among the characters, they are unable to leave each other or the settings because of being obliged to another. Therefore, dependence acts as the basis of master-slave relationship in each play as it prevents Clov and Caliban from rebelling against the protagonists.

In *Endgame*, the dependence between the characters is caused by the long time they spend together which prevents Clov from leaving the setting. “(...) *I feel too old, and too far, to form new habits. Good, it'll never end, I'll never go.*” (Beckett,81) Therefore, the only action mentioned in the play is Clov’s departure which does not take place in the time of the play. As he is unable to leave, Clov wants to get rid of Hamm. “*If I could kill him I'd die happy.*” (Beckett,27) In a similar way, in *The Tempest*, Caliban attempts to kill Prospero by using Stephano. It is also known that Caliban tried to rape Miranda before the time of the play. However, Prospero is aware of the fact that Caliban is required to provide his fundamental needs. “(...) *We cannot miss him: he does make our fire,/ Fetch in our wood and serves in offices/ That profit us.*” (Shakespeare:I.ii,1139) In the same way, Hamm is not able to leave Clov not only due to the lack of information about the outside but also his fear of loneliness. “*There's no one else.*” (Beckett,6) The interdependence of Clov and Hamm is also caused by their only solution to consume the time which is to retell the same stories and speeches.

CLOV: *What is there to keep me here?*

HAMM: *The dialogue.* (Beckett,58)

Hamm also tries to ensure his existence through his dialogues with Clov. The dialogues between Hamm and Clov suggest that Hamm comprehends existence as suffering. Therefore, he asks for pain killers and carries a handkerchief throughout the play.

CLOV: *He's crying.(...)*

HAMM: *Then he's living.* (Beckett,62)

In addition, in *The Tempest*, Ariel provides information to Prospero about what is happening on the island. Similarly, in *Endgame*, Hamm needs Clov to be certain about his social status, which is illustrated with being in the centre of the stage, in others' eyes.

HAMM: Am I right in the center?

CLOV: I'll measure it.(...)

*HAMM: (...)*Put me right in the center! (Beckett,26-27)

In *Endgame*, the monologue of Clov suggests that Clov also needs Hamm to have an aim. “*Nice dimensions, nice proportions, I'll lean on the table, and look at the wall, and wait for him to whistle me.*” (Beckett,2) Likewise, Miranda also needs Prospero since she has no knowledge about the world. Prospero needs Miranda in order to gain power from her marriage to Ferdinand and he also needs Miranda's opinion so he reveals his story. Caliban says that he was happy before Prospero came to the isle. However, Caliban's accepting Stephano, who is from lower class as well, as his king suggests that Caliban also needs other characters to have an aim. Hatred also triggers the loss of trust between Hamm and Clov. “*Don't stay there./(...)/ you give me the shivers.*” (Beckett,27) Likewise, Prospero labels him as Caliban “*most lying slave*”. (Shakespeare:I.ii,1140)

Besides, in *Endgame*, although Clov wants to leave Hamm, Hamm is not able to imagine a life without Clov. “*Let's go from here, the two of us!*” (Beckett,27) Similarly, the dialogue between Hamm and Clov indicates that Clov does not have an identity of his own.

HAMM: I'll give you nothing more to eat.

CLOV: Then we'll die. (Beckett,5)

Not only Clov but also Hamm is unable to separate himself from Clov. “*You can't leave us.*” (Beckett,37) Therefore, Hamm does not have an identity himself either. That Hamm is not able to stand and Clov is not able sit also emphasizes the fact that they symbolise one individual. Furthermore, a similar version of the dialogue of Hamm and Clov is repeated by Nell and Nagg about leaving each other which also suggests that all the characters, in *Endgame*, are interchangeable. Similarly, Prospero

does not say farewell to Caliban in the end of *The Tempest*, and considers Miranda as a part of his life. “At the end of *The Tempest*, Prospero says of Caliban ‘This thing of darkness I/ Acknowledge mine’(...). This might be taken as an admission that his slave is not merely his possession but has become(...) a part of himself.”⁶ In addition, in spite of saying good-bye to Ariel, Prospero continues to give orders and calls Ariel “my spirit”. Furthermore, although, each line is written with iambic pentameter, lines of Prospero and Caliban include ten syllables together. However, the only connection between the identities of Caliban and Ariel is Prospero.

⁶ Egan, Gabriel. *Shakespeare*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007. Print. Edinburgh Critical Guides to Literature. p. 203

VI. Universal Appeal of the Characters

The relevance of each play is mainly initiated with the presence of realistic characterizations from various social classes and observations about human nature. However, the world-wide success of the plays or the characters are ensured by the exclusion of an exact setting and time which enables their applicability to audiences in distinct time sharing different languages ending up with making them timeless and universal.

In *Endgame*, the concept of time is obscure for both the characters and the audience due to repetitive actions. In addition, as they are not mentioned in the play, the time and the location in which the play takes place are also unknown. In *The Tempest*, although the location of the island is not clear, universality of the characters are stressed through where the characters are from. Sycorax comes to the isle from Argier, Prospero and Miranda were previously settled in Italy. In a similar way, in *Endgame*, it is emphasized that the characters were not in the room in the past. For instance, Nagg and Nell were used to be in Lake Como. As the location is unclear and there is no exact time, the stories displayed in the plays can be applied to anyone through the settings. Furthermore, as the power of Prospero is given to the audience in the epilogue of *The Tempest*, the story of Prospero can be applied to anyone as well.

Astro states that the names Nagg, Nell and Clov all resemble “nail” respectively in German, in English and in French. The statement suggests that through appointing names to the characters chosen from different languages not only emphasizes the status of the characters but also gives a universal appeal to the characters of the play *Endgame* by giving them identities from separate countries. Besides, both of the plays include statements about universal human values. Hamm says “*the bigger a man is the fuller he is./ (...) / And the emptier.*” (Beckett,3) Similarly Prospero states that “*We are such stuff/ As dreams are made on; and our little life/ Is rounded with a sleep.*” (Shakespeare:IV.i,1154)

VII. Conclusion

In this study, the research question: *To what extent are the portrayal of the characters Clov and Hamm, in the play The Endgame by Samuel Beckett influenced by the characters Prospero, Miranda, Caliban and Ariel in the play The Tempest by William Shakespeare?*, has been investigated. Through the investigation of the research question, it has been revealed that the protagonists Prospero and Hamm share a similar role in each play due to their power to control other characters and the plot. However, the basis of their power is the other characters who are unable to rebel or leave the setting. In both the plays, the characters lose fundamental human values such as love and respect in order to gain power and they lose their ability to communicate. The characters controlled in both of the plays have awareness which does not result in any change. It is also stated that although Clov directly reflects the characteristics of Caliban due to his role in the master-slave relationship, from time to time he also echoes Miranda and Ariel. Endgame includes allusions to The Tempest, which highlights the similarities between the characters as the lines are uttered by the characters with similar characteristics. Furthermore, in Endgame Hamm recalls Ceres who appears in the banquet in The Tempest. Thus, it can be said that due to their resemblance influence of the characters of The Tempest on the ones that are portrayed by Beckett cannot be ignored.

Therefore, due its significant effect on the portrayal of the characters even in recent history, it can be concluded that The Tempest is still relevant. “*Shakespeare continues to speak to people across a kaleidoscope of cultures with undiminished vitality and relevance...*”⁷ Then, it might be questioned why Shakespeare, who retells familiar stories centring around timeless and universal human values, continues to be relevant while others are being forgotten.

⁷ *Sclqld*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Aug. 2011. <http://www.sclqld.org.au/schp/exhibitions/shakespeare/international_shakespeare.pdf>.

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