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No Success like Failure:

Beckett's *Endgame* and the Frustration of Sonata Form

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Report

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Abstract

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Samuel Beckett's skepticism regarding language's ability to communicate effectively drives his dramas' use of formal and stylistic gestures that emphasize the musical potential of words. In this report, I analyze Beckett's play *Endgame* (1958) in light of its musical elements and their implications for performance. Critics have debated the putative presence of sonata form, a type of musical structure prevalent among classical pieces from the eighteenth century, in *Endgame*. Emmanuel Jacquart proposes that the play follows such a form, while Thomas Mansell and Catherine Laws doubt the possibility of such interdisciplinarity. Mansell wonders whether the ascription of sonata form to *Endgame*'s structure merely couches dramatic fundamentals in musical terms, while Laws argues that the lack of harmonic structure in human speech prevents a spoken medium like drama from fully absorbing the formal conventions of classical music. I explore the uncharted territory between these two critical camps, linking the implications

of Jacquart's position for the performance of *Endgame*, as well as Mansell's and Laws's reiterations of the fundamental separation of language and music, to Beckett's own preoccupation with the inability of language to express thought and emotion adequately. Ultimately, I contend that *Endgame* functions not simply as a sonata, but as a *frustrated* sonata; that is, it approximates sonata form but can never fully replicate it. As such, *Endgame* becomes a point of origin for Beckett's more experimental later plays, a concept I illustrate by demonstrating how *Play* (1963), the work commonly regarded as the turning point between Beckett's early and late dramatic styles, essentially revisits and refines the frustrated sonata.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Beckett the Musician.....	4
<i>Endgame</i> and Musical Form.....	8
Performing the Sonata.....	15
Frustrating the Sonata.....	22
<i>Endgame</i> as New Beginning.....	29
Bibliography.....	43
Vita.....	45

Introduction

“Theatre is the only thing that comes near” music, composer John Cage proclaims, extolling the experimental potential of both arts.¹ Like Cage, Samuel Beckett recognizes and capitalizes upon this interdisciplinary connection and its artistic possibilities. His dramatic writing, particularly in its use of formal and stylistic gestures that emphasize the musical potential of speech, invites contemplation of just how closely the two media can overlap. In its engagement with classical musical form, Beckett’s play *Endgame* (1958) not only illuminates structural intersections between music and drama, but also offers insight into Beckett’s belief in language’s inability to communicate effectively. This study considers *Endgame* in light of its musical elements and their implications for performance. I first survey Beckett’s musical upbringing in order to demonstrate how his classical training and proficient musicianship inform his composition of drama. I then investigate *Endgame*’s performative possibilities in light of its musical qualities and with regard to Beckett’s ruminations on language and music. Ultimately, my examination of *Endgame*, which lies at the intersection of music theory, performance criticism, and notions of audience reception, seeks to reconcile the underlying musicality of the play with the unbridgeable gap between language and music.

Endgame is replete with musical elements. The rhythm and repetition of the characters’ speech and action ascribe musicality to the play. Yet recent scholarly conversation has debated the presence of *bona fide* musical form in *Endgame*. Most notably, Emmanuel Jacquot proposes that *Endgame* adheres to sonata form—a type of musical structure prevalent among classical pieces from the eighteenth century—in its

deployment of devices that mirror that form's foundational structural divisions, illuminating Beckett's interdisciplinary dramaturgical prowess. In contrast, critics such as Thomas Mansell and Catherine Laws remain skeptical of Jacquart's analysis, arguing that the ascription of sonata form to *Endgame's* structure simply couches dramatic fundamentals in musical terms and that the lack of harmonic structure in human speech prevents a spoken medium like drama from fully absorbing the formal conventions of classical music. Both critical camps make valid assertions. Nonetheless, their arguments create space for further exploration of both longstanding intersections of music and rhetoric and the performative implications of *Endgame's* supposed sonata form. This study investigates the uncharted territory that lies between the school of thought occupied by Jacquart and that advanced by Mansell and Laws.

The legitimacy of considering *Endgame* as a sonata resides in an examination of its implications for staging, an aspect that I will investigate in depth below. Beckett's understanding of classical music informed his vision as director of his own work; his use of musical terms when staging his plays suggests that he constructed his drama within a musical frame. Moreover, the consideration of *Endgame's* purported sonata form with regard to performance heightens the play's theatrical impact, as the sonata structure provides a clear auditory and visual framework for Beckett's text in its organization of speech and gesture into distinct sections that echo and elaborate upon each other. Indeed, prioritizing the sonata components of *Endgame* in performance highlights verbal and nonverbal patterns that magnify the play's critical thematic elements. Yet Mansell's and Laws's rebuttals to Jacquart serve as reminders that no matter how close the connection

becomes between language and music, the two forms of expression can never merge. Linking Jacquart's mapping of sonata form onto *Endgame*, as well as Mansell's and Laws's assertions, to Beckett's own preoccupation with language's inability to express thought and emotion adequately, I raise critical inquiries about performance and audience reception that necessitate the reconciliation of seemingly opposed critical viewpoints. I argue that *Endgame* functions not simply as a sonata, but as a *frustrated* sonata: the play approximates sonata form but can never fully replicate it. Thinking of *Endgame* in such a manner necessitates a reevaluation of the play's status within Beckett's *oeuvre*. Considering *Endgame* as occupying the space between language and music, I aim to establish *Endgame* as a point of origin for the language-music barrier-blurring experimentation of Beckett's later plays.

Beckett the Musician

From an early age, Beckett acquired the musical training that would permeate his playwriting career. Born to a musical mother in Dublin in 1906, Beckett received piano lessons as a child and became quite skilled at the instrument, which he continued playing well into adulthood. As Alan W. Friedman explains:

Throughout his life Beckett played the piano (and even the tin whistle on which, as he put it, he ‘used to tweetle’), usually for close friends or when alone; according to [Deirdre] Bair, he sometimes used his playing to hide behind.²

That Beckett turned to music for comfort, even using it as a mask on social occasions, seems to corroborate Beckett’s belief in the superiority of music over language, which I will explore further shortly. Although Beckett familiarized himself with many musical genres, he preferred instrumental classical music to other types; though he attended performances of operas and ballets, he “was dismissive of such hybrid musical forms.”³ As his dramatic borrowings from the music hall—for instance, the physical comedy and songs of *Waiting for Godot*—demonstrate, Beckett “endorsed vaudeville over opera, which he called ‘a hideous corruption of the most immaterial of all the arts,’” and believed that “ballet degraded music by subordinating it to the visual.”⁴

Beckett’s disdain for such hybridizations of the musical and the visual is striking given his turn from writing prose to writing drama and his opinions regarding the superiority of music to language. As a playwright, Beckett primarily wrote scripts designed for the presentation of language in an audiovisual capacity.⁵ That someone who found hybrid musical forms so unsavory would try to hybridize visuality and music

himself merits further investigation. Perhaps the fact that Beckett remained dedicated to composing drama rather than musicals or operas illuminates his reasoning. Mary Bryden claims that Beckett “fears the enforced materialization of music which opera effects.”⁶ Rather than “subordinating music to the visual,” then, Beckett’s plays attempt to subordinate language to the musical—while in most cases avoiding pure music itself so as to avoid the pitfalls of opera.⁷ As such, Beckett’s plays seem to occupy varying degrees on a continuum between language and music rather than purely embodying one or the other, a notion to which I will return later.

Although most of Beckett’s plays do not attempt opera’s constant marriage of words and music found in opera, a consistent musical undercurrent pervades the playwright’s treatment of language. As his biographer James Knowlson notes, Beckett “was to draw on his knowledge of musical techniques and terminology, reshaping musical structures and working with repetition and repetition with variation, counterpoint, and changes of key, rhythm, tempo, and pitch.”⁸ Such conscious appropriation of musical forms and devices speaks to what Friedman identifies as Beckett’s “distrust of language, which pretends to be precise but is not.”⁹ Rather than mire himself in logocentric realism, Beckett chose instead to place language in the service of a superior art form: as Friedman states, “[i]n the conflict between music (or rhythm) and language in Beckett’s plays, language loses every time.”¹⁰ One means by which Beckett’s plays transgress the boundary between literature and music involves his characters, who seem to exist in a vacuum, as the playwright provides little (if any) biographical information about them and dismisses the need for backstory as critical to

the creation of character.¹¹ Friedman asserts that this draining of conventional existence from the characters renders them “script- or score-bound, like musical notes, as Beckett becomes less an author and director and more a composer and conductor.”¹² Such a dramaturgical style prioritizes rhythm and form over characterization.

Beckett’s musical shaping of his *dramatis personae* also affects actors’ performances of those characters. A common vocabulary of musicality permeates performers’ recollections of their experiences rehearsing under Beckett’s supervision. As Bryden recounts, “many actors, when directed by Beckett, have reported feeling like musical instruments or channels of resonance.”¹³ Roger Blin, one of Beckett’s preferred actors, the original performer of two of Beckett’s most formidable characters—Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot* and Hamm in *Endgame*—and director of the premier of *Endgame* in Paris in 1957, describes Beckett’s presence in and contribution to rehearsals:

The form was very important to him and we took great pains with it: for example, he asked that a certain phrase which occurs throughout the text be spoken in exactly the same way each time with the same tone, like a note of music played in an invariable way by the same instrument.¹⁴

Blin also notes that Beckett “looked on his play as a kind of musical score. When a word occurred or was repeated, when Hamm called Clov, Clov should always come in the same way every time, like a musical phrase coming from the same instrument with the same volume.”¹⁵ Blin’s repeated invocation of musical analogies to describe Beckett’s engagement with the performance of *Endgame* confirms the playwright’s commitment to the careful arrangement of the visual and auditory elements of his play just as a composer

would control the rhythm, tone, and dynamics of one of his pieces. Beckett's meticulous control over sights and sounds reached its peak in Berlin in 1967, when he directed *Endgame* at the Schiller-Theater. As Ernst Schroeder, who played Hamm in that production, recalls: "I *couldn't* do what I wanted—outside the fact that that wasn't what I had in mind—all I could do was what was musically correct."¹⁶ Such apparent loss of agency and near-dehumanization rendered actors of Beckett's work mere vessels or instruments for the playwright to conduct in whatever way he saw fit. Ultimately, then, his words became the dramatic equivalent of musical notes. As Barry McGovern, one of the consummate Beckett performers of the late twentieth century through the present, relates: "I try to find my way of playing that score just as a soloist in musical terms would. Each performance of a violin sonata or a piano concerto is very different even though the same notes are being played."¹⁷ Jack MacGowran, who played the role of Clov in *Paris* in 1964, employs similar language when describing Beckettian performance. In fact, he uses the sonata analogy to describe Beckett's compositional process, proclaiming that when staged, the playwright's work "turns into word-music as if the whole basis of a sonata was running through his mind as he wrote it."¹⁸

***Endgame* and Musical Form**

MacGowran's choice of the sonata as the type of musical piece Beckett had in mind proves fruitful for an analysis of *Endgame*, as recent critical studies have placed the deceptively simple narrative of Clov and Hamm's dysfunctional relationship in conversation with the sonata, an extremely popular type of classical musical composition. In "Beckett et la forme sonate," Emmanuel Jacquart explains the history of the form: "Sonata form, which appeared toward the middle of the eighteenth century, is founded essentially on the utilization of two opposing and contrasting themes."¹⁹ Jacquart's relation of Beckett's work to this particular form exemplifies Friedman's assertion that Beckett's work often "deploys rhetorical strategies that juxtapose contrarities and set them harshly against each other, rather than harmonize them or valorize one over the other," including the deployment of austere, rhythmic language that intensifies the thematic opposition.²⁰ As sonata form constitutes the musical equivalent of dialectics in its opposition of two divergent themes, it serves as an ideal vehicle for Beckett to advance such rhetorical strategies.

Articulating the fundamentals of sonata form, Michael W. Kaufman writes:

The essence of this musical form is the struggle between two themes. The first gravitates around the main tonal center (tonic) while a second theme is introduced and moves as far as possible from the original key to a contrasting tonality. The conflicting themes are then developed separately or in combination until the final movement where the dominating tone is reaffirmed by its recapitulation or synthesis with the contrasting melody.²¹

The musical struggle that Kaufman describes usually unfolds in three sections: exposition, which introduces the first theme; development, which poses the second theme; and recapitulation, which reintroduces the first theme and synthesizes it with the second. The exposition straightforwardly presents the two themes, the first of which centers around the tonic, or the tone that grounds the piece in its particular key (*i.e.*, the tonic of a C major sonata would be C). The second theme usually expresses the dominant tonality; Jacquard notes that next to the tonic, the dominant “possesses the principal structural role, constituting a point of departure” that enables a transition to the development section.²² As musicologists James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy explain, the rhetorical role of the exposition “is to provide a referential arrangement or layout of specialized themes and textures against which the events of the two subsequent spaces—development and recapitulation—are to be measured and understood.”²³ Upon completion of the exposition, the sonata progresses to the development phase. This second section, as the name suggests and as Jacquard explains, “develops the themes of the exposition. In addition, it *dramatizes* them—which corresponds well to the theatrical genre—and modulates them, that is, phrases them in another key.”²⁴ The recapitulation section constitutes a return to and synthesis of the two themes as originally stated in the exposition, and the coda, if present, “brings together many themes in a bouquet,” placing a final punctuation mark on the piece.²⁵

Jacquard traces these formal elements in *Endgame* in order to contend that the play follows the structure of a classical sonata. The exposition, he observes, “appears very clearly in the spatial presentation of the two clearly demarcated opening

soliloquies.”²⁶ Clov’s, which opens the play, articulates the play’s primary theme of endings and waiting for endings; Hamm’s, which follows, expresses the secondary theme of the isolated self. These themes, while distinct, prove not entirely unrelated in that humans often face endings in isolation, just as a sonata’s primary and secondary themes introduce disparate melodic ideas while maintaining a fundamental degree of musical unity. The exposition continues until the end of Hamm and Clov’s conversation, when Hamm reclines in his chair. The dialogue of Nagg and Nell, who begin speaking when Hamm and Clov leave off, initiates the development. In this section, Jacquart posits, “Beckett knowingly uses the technique of echoing,” employing phrases that not only recall moments elsewhere in the play, but also allude to other literary works, thereby expanding upon and enriching the two principal themes introduced in the exposition.²⁷ For instance, Nagg’s cry of “Nell! Nell!” resonates with Hamm’s later outburst of “Clov! Clov!”, while Hamm’s exclamation of “My kingdom for a nightman!” “sneeringly echoes Shakespeare’s *Richard III*: ‘My kingdom for a horse’.”²⁸ The recapitulation then reintroduces the themes of the exposition by having Hamm and Clov reiterate phrases that echo their opening monologues, including “It’s finished, we’re finished” and “Me to play.”²⁹ Finally, the coda unites these themes with the development’s tactic of allusion in Hamm’s final soliloquy, which he delivers after Clov, who stands unresponsive in the doorway, has finally decided to leave him.

Jacquart concludes that recognizing *Endgame* as a sonata opens a “veritable gateway to the intertextuality of music and drama,”³⁰ a thesis that has met with some criticism. Thomas Mansell questions Jacquart’s argument, wondering “whether repetition

and development could not be subsumed within the standard terminology of ‘subplot,’ and whether *Endgame*’s attribute of two strongly contrasting themes is sufficiently distinct from the kind of dramatic tension upon which any successful play depends.”³¹ Mansell raises an intriguing question, as the dramatic elements of plot and subplot, as well as the successful generation of tension required for dramaturgical efficacy, do somewhat resemble the characteristics of sonata form. Yet Beckett’s integration of musical elements into his drama exists at a deeper level. His manipulation of language, as I explain later, drives *Endgame*’s sonata architecture; the play’s performance magnifies this feature. For Beckett, then, intersections between musical form and dramatic structure encompass both thematic and linguistic content and thus merit further attention than Mansell seems willing to afford. As such, an examination of the historical relationship between music and drama offers necessary insight. While the extent of Beckett’s knowledge of music history remains uncertain, an overview of the longstanding intersection between music and rhetoric proves instructive to an understanding of why one might detect the presence of musical structures in *Endgame*. As the intersection of music and rhetoric has existed since the development of diatonic music in the seventeenth century,³² musically derived analysis of dramatic structure does not merely couch rhetorical techniques in musical terms, but rather illuminates a centuries-old symbiotic relationship.

Structural integration of music and drama became particularly pronounced in the early seventeenth century. Peter Gahan notes that the *dramma per musica*, a predecessor to opera that emerged circa 1600, led to innovations that rendered music “a language we

can understand.”³³ The wedding of music to narrative in this pre-operative genre necessitated a type of music that could express dramatic tension; hence the system of keys, also known as diatonic music, that the Western world uses today. As Gahan explains, the diatonic system “enabled music for the first time to signify, to have referential meaning analogous to that of a spoken or written language.”³⁴ Composers of diatonic music even structured their pieces according to rhetorical precepts: Johann Sebastian Bach, for instance, is thought to have integrated the rhetorician Quintilian’s principles into his compositions.³⁵ Like language, diatonic music encompasses what Gahan terms “double articulation,” meaning the simultaneous operation of two systems: the “paradigmatic (nontemporal) and nonsemantic” and the “syntagmatic (temporal) and semantic.”³⁶ The combination of these systems “allows a small number of elements...to have practically an infinite capacity of expression.”³⁷ Where letters of the alphabet and musical notes embody the nonsemantic element, both spoken and musical phrases correspond to the semantic. The linguistic implications of diatonic music culminate in the technique of modulation, which constitutes a movement from one key to another in order to effect a change in the music’s dramatic affect. According to Gahan, modulation “becomes possible by treating a note in one scale...as the keynote in a new scale.”³⁸ This technique, which constitutes the crux of sonata form, enables the articulation of the two contrasting musical themes presented, explored, reshaped, and restated in a sonata.

Gahan’s identification of the potential for music to employ rhetorical structures invites the question of whether rhetorical pursuits such as drama can enfold musical forms. While Beckett may not have known the complete details of the diatonic system’s

origins, his extensive musical training and proficiency undoubtedly left him knowledgeable of music theory and (given his experience as a pianist) particularly cognizant of the workings of sonata form. As the piano sonata dominated the classical era of music and became favored by Beckett's preferred composers Mozart and Beethoven, the playwright would likely have familiarized himself with the theoretical framework of sonata form in order to enrich his prowess and interpretive ability at the piano. Yet the critical efficacy of *Endgame's* absorption of sonata elements depends on more than just Beckett's own engagement with music theory. Rather, it hinges on the implications of such musical characteristics for the play's performance.

Catherine Laws's analysis of *Endgame*, in which she remains skeptical of the interchangeability of formal tactics between language and music, illustrates the need for a performance-based approach to the play's sonata structure. Where Mansell finds Jacquart's reading of *Endgame-as-sonata* merely a cloaking of dramatic building blocks in musical terms, Laws identifies a critical difference between classical music and speech that challenges Jacquart's thesis. She considers the reading of *Endgame* in terms of sonata form

limited by the failure to recognise [sic] both the importance of harmonic relationships to these dramatic musical forms and the fact that the semantic tensions of language are wholly different to the structural dimensions of tonality.³⁹

Laws makes a salient point: at bottom, the harmonic structures of diatonic music remain absent from human language. Yet her assertion that sonata form "only becomes a musical

form through its articulation of the tensions of the tonal system” raises the question of whether spoken, as opposed to written, language ever adopts a structural dimension like that of musical tonality.⁴⁰ Indeed, theatre’s performative foundations and Beckett’s theatrical aesthetic bear implications for Laws’s contention that to remove the harmonic element “is to leave a skeleton structure (of thesis, antithesis, development and resolution or recapitulation) which returns the form to its origins in early (non-musical) theories of good rhetorical practice.”⁴¹ While text on a page may remain devoid of a harmonic framework, language spoken in the theatre requires particular focus on tone and rhythm, as evidenced by my previous discussion of Beckett’s musically-inflected direction of his own works. Moreover, through its minute attention to actors’ every inflection and movement, Beckett’s theatrical project creates a visual and auditory equivalent of musical harmony through its unique combinations of speech, gesture, and blocking.

Performing the Sonata

As the above discussion demonstrates, the critical conversation concerning *Endgame*'s putative sonata framework invites increased attention to the play's performative possibilities. A play's interaction with musical form affects its potential staging, not in the least because both music and drama constitute performing arts constructed from—to borrow Gahan's terms—nonsemantic units (notes, words) arranged to produce semantic meaning (both verbal and musical phrases) across a measured passage of time. In what follows, I will expand upon the concept of *Endgame*-as-sonata by conducting a performance-based analysis of the elements that comprise the play's musical structure.

In her examination of Beckett's relationship to sound and music, Bryden proclaims:

[T]he aural nuances of Beckett's work are of paramount importance. For a writer immersed in the infinite gradations of tonality within his internal attunement to the text, questions of pitch, tone, duration, rhythm, and audibility were not optional extras, or embellishments available to the vocal event. Rather they *were* that meaning, that vocal event.⁴²

Bryden thus identifies the essentiality of attention to sonic subtlety and the interconnectedness of speech and sound that drive performance of Beckett's plays. As the playwright himself famously opined during rehearsals for *Endgame*'s German premiere: "There are no accidents in *Endgame*. Everything is based on analogies and repetitions."⁴³ Indeed, on a performative level, *Endgame* advances its sonata form through the repetition

and echoing of verbal and nonverbal languages. For purposes of this study, I define repetition as the recurrence of words, phrases, or gestures within a short amount of playing time and echoing as the recurrence of words, phrases, or gestures that recall moments elsewhere in the play. Beckett embeds these devices in *Endgame* on both aural and visual levels as a means of delineating the exposition, development, and recapitulation sections of his staged sonata.

The play uses repetitive language to reinforce its sonata structure by advancing and highlighting its contrasting themes. Clov's opening line inaugurates the practice of recurring language: "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished."⁴⁴ Clov's use of "finished" four times in one sentence expresses his urgent desire to complete his obligation to Hamm and creates a rhythm of speech that emphasizes the word each time Clov speaks it. Moreover, the repetition of "finished" in the play's first line forcefully states the exposition's initial theme, which represents ending as a cyclical and drawn-out process. Hamm's first speech also emphasizes the play's sonata-like structure by using repetition to highlight the exposition's second theme of isolation. When pondering whose misery might eclipse his, Hamm asks: "My father? / (*Pause.*) / My mother? / (*Pause.*) / My...dog?"⁴⁵ Despite its reference to others, Hamm's repeated use of the possessive pronoun "my" calls attention to his own persona and underscores his crisis of self. In performance, the actors' repetition of these words necessarily accentuates them, aurally alerting the audience to the introduction of the play's themes.

Such verbal markers continue throughout the exposition section. When Clov and Hamm discuss the futility of their situation, their questions and answers mirror each other in construction and content:

HAMM: Why do you stay with me?

CLOV: Why do you keep me?

HAMM: There's no one else.

CLOV: There's nowhere else.⁴⁶

These repetitions encapsulate both of the exposition's themes: Hamm's words convey his isolation, while Clov's express his sense of entrapment: he awaits for release from service, yet has nowhere to go. Later, Hamm repeats a question that reiterates the paradoxically cyclic nature of conclusion: "But that's always the way at the end of the day, isn't it, Clov? . . . It's the end of the day like any other day, isn't it, Clov?"⁴⁷ These nearly-identical questions again register the exposition's themes.

The performance of the development section also benefits from the characters' repetition of words and phrases. Nagg and Nell, whose first conversation initiates the development by providing a counterpoint to Clov and Hamm's expositional interactions, ask at least three times within the span of ten lines if they can see and hear each other.⁴⁸ Their repeated questions contrast with notions of isolation first uttered by Hamm in the exposition—actively attempting connection, they find they can hardly see or hear each other. Later, when Hamm orders Clov to look out the window with a telescope, the characters repeat the word "glass" nine times in the span of thirteen lines.⁴⁹ This extensive recurrence of the characters' substitute word for "telescope," the one object that

provides a view of the outside world, calls attention not only to the distance between the characters and the external environment, but also to the senselessness of the exercise. The performance of these developmental repetitions clearly demarcates them as indirect echoes of the exposition's themes, as they recall and elaborate upon the ideas Clov and Hamm presented initially.

Performing *Endgame* also accentuates the plethora of direct verbal echoes strewn throughout the script. Most critically, later echoes of Clov's and Hamm's opening lines indicate the return of the two themes advanced in the exposition and thus delineate the beginning of the play's recapitulation section. After silencing Nagg, Hamm restates Clov's first line: "It's finished, we're finished. / (*Pause.*) / Nearly finished."⁵⁰ Further on, Hamm repeats his own first line: "Me to play."⁵¹ Similarly, Nagg's request for "Me sugar-plum!" in the recapitulation section mirrors his demand for "Me pap!" in the exposition; Hamm twice responds that there is "no more" of what Nagg desires.⁵² Such explicit reiteration of the exposition's themes provides a resounding aural marker for the audience: it underscores the play's cyclical structure and indicates the performance's progression toward its conclusion. Moreover, certain phrases repeat and echo each other over the course of the play. Some occur only during one sonata section. For instance, the refrain word "yesterday," first uttered by Nell and later echoed by Clov and Hamm, appears only during the development, elaborating upon the exposition's themes of isolation and conclusion by evoking the idea of nostalgia.⁵³ Other refrains appear throughout all three sonata-derived sections. Such echoes include: Clov's intent to leave Hamm, which he states twelve times throughout the play; Hamm's request for his

painkiller, which occurs five times; and Hamm's declaration that he and Clov are "getting on," which appears four times.⁵⁴ These linguistic recurrences resemble the repetition of musical phrases and melodic ideas throughout a sonata, foregrounding a particular aural realm and periodically recalling the play's two dominant themes.

Endgame also manifests its sonata form in performance through the repetition and echoing of nonverbal forms of communication such as silence, gesture, and blocking. For instance, the play begins with an extended exercise in physical repetition, with Clov entering and executing a routine in which he moves back and forth between the set's two windows, repeatedly forgetting his stepladder and having to retrieve it. Clov's repetitive movement inaugurates the carefully calibrated, regimented, and structured action on which the play's structure hangs. Regarding the sonata, Jacquart notes that "the exposition can be preceded by a slow introduction which, in *Endgame*, is represented by Clov's pantomime."⁵⁵ Though Jacquart recognizes Clov's routine as analogous to the sonata's prefatory material, he fails to mention the nonverbal repetition that marks the start of the development section. After Hamm reclines in his chair, Nagg "*knocks on the lid of the other bin. Pause. He knocks harder.*"⁵⁶ Nagg's repeated knocking places considerable aural distance between Clov and Hamm's dialogue and Nagg and Nell's interaction; the result is a clear differentiation between sections of the play. In musical terms, the fact that Hamm "*leans back in his chair, remains motionless*"⁵⁷ before Nagg stirs and rouses Nell resembles the cadence, or harmonic resolution, that separates the exposition and development sections of a sonata.

Just as certain phrases echo throughout *Endgame* and reinforce its sonata form in performance, so do certain nonverbal interventions. For example, Clov twice pushes the seated Hamm around the room: first, when he wants to travel “round the world” and tells Clov to “[h]ug the walls,” and second, when he orders Clov to push him close to the window to “feel the light on [his] face.”⁵⁸ Jacquart, whose performance analysis is strongest in his identification of visual echoes, astutely observes that “Beckett deliberately opposes these revolutions, the first moving clockwise and the second moving counterclockwise.”⁵⁹ Jacquart does not mention, however, that the first rotation occurs in the development section, while the second occurs during the recapitulation; that the two revolutions move in opposite directions signals that they occur in two different segments of the piece. Jacquart also notices a visual echo that magnifies the thematic unity of the exposition and recapitulation sections: “the beginning of Hamm’s first monologue and the end of his last monologue begin and end, respectively, with business with the handkerchief.”⁶⁰ Another physical echo involves Clov’s position and appearance at both the beginning and end of the play. Clov first appears “[m]otionless by the door, his eyes fixed on Hamm.”⁶¹ No mention is made of his attire. Clov’s final position is both similar and different. After deciding to leave Hamm, Clov enters a last time. He “halts by the door and stands there, impassive and motionless, his eyes fixed on Hamm.”⁶² This time, however, Clov is “dressed for the road. Panama hat, tweed coat, raincoat over his arm, umbrella, bag.”⁶³ This entry with a difference constitutes a theatrical mirror of the synthesis achieved in a sonata’s recapitulation section, as it encapsulates ideas of isolation and conclusion within a cyclical structure, but presents them in a recognizably

different fashion than did the exposition. As Ruby Cohn states, “to the eye, Clov differentiates the end from the unveiled beginning of [*Endgame*.]”⁶⁴ By privileging these visual echoes, performers can clearly demonstrate that the play has completed its cycle, concluding with the same themes with which it began.

Thus the sonata form guides the staging and audience reception of *Endgame* by providing an aural and visual map for the play through its deployment of repetitions and echoes. Indeed, the form gives shape to the performance of the play and provides sensory signposts. Moreover, it accords with Beckett’s musical objectives, which he outlines in a letter to the director Alan Schneider: “My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them.”⁶⁵ Describing *Endgame*, Mary Bryden notes that “all that can be managed or provided for is an aural and visual event which must stand or fall in the immediacy of its theatrical performance.”⁶⁶ By acknowledging and accentuating an organizing formal principle, a performance that honors *Endgame*’s sonata form effectively reduces the potential for “headaches” and provides the performance of the aural and visual event the immediacy it requires to succeed.

Frustrating the Sonata

Examining the impact of musical form upon *Endgame*'s performative efficacy validates consideration of the play as a verbal sonata. Nonetheless, to grant credence to Mansell's and Law's skepticism concerning these purported intersections between musical and dramatic forms proves essential and productive, reiterating the fact that speech can only approximate music and can never truly become it. I therefore submit that the most productive line of thinking about *Endgame* must complicate the relationship between rhetoric and music by considering the staged play as a frustrated sonata rather than as a completely successful verbal manifestation of musical form. Supplementing an argument for *Endgame*'s sonata-like characteristics in performance by noting the frustration of the play's sonata structure may initially seem circuitous or contradictory. Yet considering the play in light of Beckett's relationship to its performance and of notions of audience reception and music cognition reveals that the dramatic efficacy of *Endgame* lies in the space between its musical framework and the linguistic and cognitive obstacles posed to that framework. Ultimately, doing so both reflects and reinforces Beckett's obsession with the failure of language and provides insight into Beckett's later dramatic work.

On one level, the performance of *Endgame* itself both highlights the work's musical inflections and complicates the play's reception as a staged sonata. Such a paradox stems from Beckett's commitment to the destabilization of conventional unity between language and gesture. As Daniel Albright explains, when directing performances of his play, "Beckett carefully instructed the actors to sever text from mime."⁶⁷ By calling

for the disruption of expected connections between speech and movement, Beckett creates dissonance amid the physical material that would normally constitute the harmonic element of the play's sonata-like structure. Capitulating to such conventional modes of staging, however, would contradict Beckett's theatrical project. According to Albright:

Endgame must, above all, not make sense; any rationalization of the actions illustrated in the play must seem flimsy; there must be a tension between the familiar sort of discourse spoken by the characters and the preposterous donnee—that is, a tension between language and spectacle.⁶⁸

Viewing *Endgame* as a neatly-crafted dramatic sonata, then, would simply superimpose an overly organized template of formal organization upon the play. While *Endgame* may recall the classical sonata on both page and stage, the intentional obfuscation of conventional modes of performance troubles the accessibility of that musical form's reception. Moreover, the possibility of limitless reconfiguration of atypical, unnatural relationships between language and gesture as the play cycles through multiple stagings begets potential for further perturbation of the dramatic sonata.

The playwright's own reaction to performances of his dramas corroborates this critical perspective. As S.E. Gontarski notes, Beckett's transition from playwright to director of his own work resulted in some discouraging revelations, as he "very quickly found that staging a play once even himself did not produce anything like what he was fond of calling (if misleadingly) a 'definitive' text."⁶⁹ On the one hand, the ephemerality of theatre—the inevitable variation between performances and productions of the same

play—undermines the idea that a text, whether written or performed, can embody a writer’s “definitive” vision, even if that vision exists. That stagings of Beckett’s work invariably depart from his previously imagined versions of the plays consequently confirms the instability and constantly shifting nature of dramatic texts and performances. Beckett acknowledges the influence of performance on his process in a 1961 letter to Grove Press concerning *Happy Days*, in which he wishes for “the text not to appear in any form before production and not in book form until I have seen some rehearsals in London. I can’t be definitive without actual work done in the theatre.”⁷⁰ Friedman observes that revision became a significant part of the playwright’s process:

Beckett, after having published his plays, became increasingly engaged with their productions, and so, as his working notebooks demonstrate, revised them (often substantially) during rehearsals, and then republished them, often, though not always, in transformed versions.⁷¹

Beckett’s repeated manipulation of both his staged and published texts indicates not only the slipperiness and malleability of dramatic structure itself, but also the impossibility of ever attaining a stable musical or even verbal framework within the ever-shifting paradigm of that form’s performance.

Beckett’s perpetual dissatisfaction with the staging of *Endgame* bespeaks his preoccupation with the play’s auditory element. In a 1977 interview with Georges Pelorson, Beckett, now twenty years beyond the composition of *Endgame* and witness to multiple productions of the work, complains: “It will never be the way I hear it. It’s a cantata for two voices.”⁷² The playwright tellingly deploys the term “cantata,” which

refers to a genre of vocal baroque or classical music that formally resembles its instrumental counterpart, the sonata. Such invocation of musical terms, coupled with the conviction that performances of *Endgame* can never wholly replicate the desired musicality, indicates the impossibility of a performance of spoken words ever attaining truly musical quality of their sung counterparts. Perhaps Beckett's statement constitutes his acknowledgement that "the way [he] hear[s]" *Endgame* ultimately proves unperformable. Furthermore, it testifies to the fact that no matter how closely they may replicate each other, drama and music remain discrete.

The seeming impossibility of performing *Endgame* to Beckett's satisfaction has implications for audience reception of the play and its supposed absorption of musical form. To a certain extent, the fact that both Jacquart and I recognize aspects of sonata form in *Endgame* and its performance testifies that at least one of Beckett's plays aligns with the playwright's famous assertion, in a letter to Jean Reavey, that "[d]rama is following music."⁷³ Yet perhaps both Jacquart's and my detection of sonata form reveals more about our reception of the piece as musically-trained readers and audience members than it does about Beckett's compositional paradigm. While those knowledgeable about classical musical form may recognize the exposition, development, and recapitulation of a sonata upon viewing a performance of *Endgame*, those without that knowledge may still detect patterns in the performance that they lack the musical vocabulary to articulate. A key component of the frustration of *Endgame*'s sonata form thus lies in variations in its audiences.

In *Proust*, Beckett exalts the art of music as “perfectly intelligible and perfectly inexplicable.”⁷⁴ Echoing Schopenhauer, Beckett describes music as “the Idea itself, unaware of the world of phenomena, existing ideally outside the universe.”⁷⁵ Bryden also sees commonalities between Beckett and Pater: the two align “in regarding the art of music as being ‘unique’ in inhabiting a zone of abstraction and immateriality.”⁷⁶ Such ultimate inexplicability and abstraction also underlie the subjectivity of audience response to *Endgame* and its musical potential. As Bryden asserts, “[b]y permeating his writing with his own sensitivity to sound and music, [Beckett] is not seeking to add an extra dimension of ‘meaning,’ but rather to enhance its ambiguity.”⁷⁷ Emphasizing the commonalities between *Endgame*’s structure and sonata form may improve the play’s performative power, but branding *Endgame* as a spoken sonata proves intellectually regressive in light of Beckett’s linguistic aims. Bryden wisely cautions that “attending to fine detail of tonal and temporal delivery is not the same as prescribing the outcome or semantic reception of that delivery.”⁷⁸ Beckett’s dedication to ambiguity and his “famously reticent”⁷⁹ stance regarding explication of his plays thus ensure that no two audience members—not even those with enough classical training to recognize *Endgame*’s musical leanings—share identical responses to a performance. Such differences signify that the play obfuscates its own potential sonata structure by existing in different unique versions in the mind of each spectator. Drama thus proves an ideal medium for Beckett’s artistic expression in that its potential for limitless representations and interpretations of a single work resides in its performance and complicates the notion of definitive explication.

This potential for wildly varied interpretations of *Endgame*'s performance demonstrates how the play remains, as Beckett wrote to Alan Schneider, a "series of sounds" that defies any attempt at formal distillation or universalizing explication. The discrepancy between the play's sonata form and its essentially verbal rather than musical content generates a space in which to explore Beckett's relationship to language in *Endgame*. In his famous study, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin avers that Beckett's drama "probes the limitations of language both as a means of communication and as a vehicle for the expression of valid statements, an instrument of thought."⁸⁰ Indeed, by working in the dialogic realm of drama, Beckett highlights his characters' utterances by removing the explicatory comfort of narration. Beyond that, Esslin contends, "his use of the dramatic medium shows that he has tried to find means of expression beyond language."⁸¹ In its perceptible yet ultimately frustrated sonata form, *Endgame* creates a space between language and music—a space where it simultaneously operates as *both* language and music and *neither* language nor music.

Describing the theatrical movement to which Beckett's work most closely corresponds, Esslin explains: "'Absurd' originally means 'out of harmony,' in a musical context. Hence its dictionary definition: 'out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical.'"⁸² By staging an ultimately irreconcilable discrepancy between musical form and linguistic content, *Endgame* engenders a dissonance emblematic of the Theatre of the Absurd and central to Beckett's literary and dramaturgical objectives. Decades after *Endgame*, Beckett articulates his artistic struggle in *Worstward Ho*: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail

better.”⁸³ This mantra of perpetual failure manifests itself in the paradoxical spoken musicality that undergirds *Endgame*. Friedman asserts that “Beckett’s failing better...ultimately seems to mean failing finally,”⁸⁴ a concept echoed in *Endgame*’s approximation of but ultimate failure completely to become a classical sonata. As such, the play becomes an ultimately *successful* failure that adheres to Beckett’s standards of linguistic denaturalization and, consequently, serves the playwright’s project of exploring the inability of language to achieve pure expression.

***Endgame* as New Beginning**

The emergence of sonata form in *Endgame*'s performance and the frustration of that form by the variety of factors discussed above prove productive when contemplating Beckett's linguistic concerns. Furthermore, such structural and performative considerations raise critical questions with regard to the place of *Endgame* within Beckett's dramatic *oeuvre*, especially its relationship to and influence upon the dramatist's later plays. Critical opinion has already located the intellectual germs of Beckett's more aggressively experimental later work in his earlier, more popular dramas; as Friedman notes, plays such as *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days* "inaugurate many of the performative themes, concerns, and devices that literally play themselves out in the dramatic works that follow."⁸⁵ Friedman's claim invites investigation of *Endgame*'s specific influence upon later Beckettian drama. To explore this question further, I will first illustrate *Endgame*'s departure from its dramatic predecessor, *Waiting for Godot* (1953), before turning to a later play that displays striking structural similarities to *Endgame*: the generically-titled *Play* (1963).

Perhaps Beckett's most famous play, *Waiting for Godot* unfolds in two acts, each depicting the tramps Vladimir and Estragon (who call each other Didi and Gogo) as they execute the titular action on a country roadside graced with a lone tree and a large stone. The two acts follow similar arcs: the pair passes time through conversation, song, consumption of food, and physical routines; Didi and Gogo's bantering is interrupted twice, first by the entrance of the histrionic Pozzo and his slave Lucky, second by the arrival of a boy who informs the tramps that Godot will come tomorrow; and each act

concludes with Didi and Gogo resolving to depart but remaining stationary. Yet Act Two inserts crucial differences into its repetition of Act One: Pozzo has gone blind, while Lucky – whose famous “think” in Act I presents a tour-de-force monologue opportunity for the actor portraying him – has become mute. Beyond the fact that *Godot*’s two-act structure renders it significantly different from *Endgame*, the mechanics of staging *Godot* demonstrate critical differences between the two plays’ text-performance relationships.

In 1975, Beckett staged a German translation of *Godot* at the Schiller-Theater in Berlin; his directorial process offers insights into the work’s structure. During the pre-production and rehearsal phases, Beckett recorded his thoughts in a *Regiebuch*, or director’s notebook. According to McMillan and Fehsenfeld:

This *Regiebuch* is Beckett’s attempt to give form to a play which he considered undisciplined. He told his production assistant, Walter D. Asmus, that the play was ‘a mess’. On the next to last page of the preliminary green notebook, he wrote in German, ‘*Der Konfusion Gestalt geben*’ (‘To give form to the confusion’).⁸⁶

In the notebook, Beckett addresses his anxiety about *Godot*’s supposed shapelessness by cataloguing what he perceives as the play’s eleven sections. He divides Act 1 into six sections and Act 2 into five; these segments highlight the structural parallels between the two acts. Asmus’ rehearsal diary shares Beckett’s preoccupation with creating form: “To give confusion a shape, [Beckett] says, a shape through visual repetition of themes.”⁸⁷ Asmus’ emphasis on visual echoes mirrors Beckett’s attention to nonverbal cues in *Endgame*, yet serves a different purpose. Indeed, the performance of *Godot* illuminates a

dramatic structure obfuscated by an “undisciplined” text; conversely, the performance of *Endgame*, as explained previously, both articulates and frustrates its text’s latent sonata form.

Much of *Godot*’s looser, more emotionally immediate structure stems from Didi and Gogo’s often amusing repartee; as Friedman states, “*Godot* alone of Beckett’s plays also depicts pleasing interchanges that produce moments of shared enjoyment.”⁸⁸ *Endgame*, as the playwright states, is “more inhuman than *Godot*.”⁸⁹ Friedman credits this decreased humanity to the fact that “Hamm and Clov lack the pleasurable rhythmic interactions” of Didi and Gogo⁹⁰; indeed, while Hamm and Clov speak rhythmically in their monologues, they do not play off one another as Didi and Gogo do. As Herbert Blau states, Didi and Gogo “live moment by moment improvising, as though time didn’t exist, astonishingly active in a static scene. In *Endgame*, time is the measure and the plague.”⁹¹ Bound to unforgiving temporality, Hamm and Clov mince no words; their dialogue, with its repetitions, echoes, and intersections with sonata form, seems more concerned with the prevailing architecture of their conversations than with the content of those conversations themselves.

If *Endgame* moves away from *Godot*’s less structured, more human mode of representation, *Play* refines *Endgame*’s starker formal and performative characteristics. This short script’s seeming absorption of *Endgame*’s sonata structure and use of repetition reflect its textual and performative considerations and the circumstances of its composition and initial performance. Where critics such as Gontarski and Friedman cite *Play* as the work that altered Beckett’s relationship to theater, I contend that *Endgame*, by

shifting away from *Godot*'s dramaturgical framework and setting the structural and performative precedent that undergirds *Play*, actually constitutes the point of origin for Beckett's shifting negotiation of theatricality.

Composed in late 1962 through early 1963 and first published in English in 1964⁹², *Play* represents three characters trapped inside “*three identical grey urns about one yard high.*”⁹³ Only the characters' heads are exposed. These *dramatis personae* – a man and two women – alternately and sometimes chorically express their points of view regarding an apparent love triangle between them. The man, ostensibly in a relationship with one of the women, seems to have had an affair with the other, whom the man's wife has confronted about the situation. The characters' “*speech is provoked by a spotlight projected on faces alone*”⁹⁴; when the spotlight shuts off, the character on whom it shone ceases talking. Critical consensus considers the composition of the notoriously technically demanding *Play* a watershed moment for Beckett. According to Gontarski, “it was the writing of *Play* that may have, finally, forced Beckett – reluctant as he was – to assume full directorial responsibility for his own works.”⁹⁵ Gontarski adds that Beckett's increased agency with regard to staging his plays resulted in that work becoming “more overtly formalist and patterned as it became more visual.”⁹⁶ Drawing upon Gontarski's assertions, Friedman concludes that “[i]f *Waiting for Godot* changed the nature of the theater it had entered, *Play*'s entry into the theater changed Beckett.”⁹⁷

Play's publication and performance, then, profoundly affected Beckett's theatrical vision. Yet *Play*'s structural similarities to the frustrated sonata form of *Endgame* suggest that the earlier play also underlies Beckett's dramatic shift, for the later play enacts a

framework evocative of *Endgame*'s exposition, development, and recapitulation. The play begins with its three characters speaking in unison, *each* rhythmically delivering a list of seemingly disjointed fragments, then beginning his or her respective narration before being silenced by a blackout. When the light returns, it illuminates one character at a time, forcing them to begin their stories individually. Where the two contrasting themes of *Endgame*'s exposition involve the act of conclusion and the isolation of the self, *Play*'s exposition presents notions of resentment and forgiveness with regard to the characters' interpersonal conflict. Resentment materializes first, with the three characters repeating phrases in a manner similar to *Endgame*'s characters cycling through the verbal "melodic ideas" of a sonata. For instance, the cry of "Give her up" (W1) / "Give him up" (W2, relating what W1 screamed at her) / "Give up that whore" (M, relating what W1 told him) echoes through the early stages of *Play*'s exposition, as does the repetition of questions such as "What are you talking about?", "What have you to complain of?", and "Why don't you get out?"⁹⁸ The second half of the exposition concerns forgiveness, as W1 explains that she later granted M clemency. Again the characters repeat certain phrases or phrase structures, including statements beginning with "When...": "When I was satisfied it was all over..." (W1), "When he came again we had it out" (W2), and "When he stopped coming" (W2).⁹⁹ Eventually, the theme of resentment reappears as W1 notes that she "began to smell her off him again,"¹⁰⁰ referring to her perceived detection of M's rekindling of his affair with W2 in a phrase that echoes her earlier accusation: "I smell you off him."¹⁰¹ The oscillation between these two themes builds until the

revelation that M has left both women, at which point a dramatic pause signals *Play*'s shift to its development section.

This second phase expands upon the themes presented in the exposition by figuring the aftermath of the love triangle. While intense, pointed emotions dominated the previous action, the development concerns the dull ache of ruefulness and futility the three characters experienced after the dissolution of their relationships. The man feels “a kind of peace”¹⁰²; his wife wonders whether his mistress “has taken him away to live”¹⁰³; and the mistress repeatedly asks, not without hope, “Am I not perhaps a little unhinged already?”¹⁰⁴ The repetition in the characters’ language in this section, particularly that of the word “perhaps,” casts a pall of speculation over the development, as the three figures contemplate each others’ possible locations and emotional states. If the exposition constitutes a frenzied, *staccato* barrage of sharp sentiments, then the development offers a mellower, *legato* counterpoint of regret and pathos. Its tone grows progressively bleaker until it concludes with the man asking, “Am I as much as...being seen?”¹⁰⁵, implying that his existence begins and ends with the turning on and off of the spotlight over his head.

After the man’s disconcerting if rhetorical inquiry, another prolonged blackout separates the development from the recapitulation. The sonata’s final section begins when Spotlights illuminate all three characters, who then repeat the play’s first words in unison “*faint, largely unintelligible*” voices.¹⁰⁶ Yet rather than including a substantial recapitulation section as in *Endgame*, *Play* manipulates its recapitulation section so as to frustrate its sonata form both textually and performatively. The script calls for the actors to repeat the entire play once they begin re-delivering their initial speeches; as such, the

recapitulation in fact becomes a second exposition, creating, if observed in staging, a cyclical performance that subverts the synthesis typical of conventional sonata recapitulation.¹⁰⁷ *Play* reaches its complete conclusion after it unfolds a second time, however: after the characters perform the “recapitulation” a second time, the man repeats his line, “We were not long together--”, echoing his first line of exposition, after which the final blackout occurs.¹⁰⁸ Though the recapitulation section of *Play* is shorter and less complex than that of *Endgame*, the return to characters’ initial lines at the end of both plays nonetheless establishes a key structural similarity.

On a performative level, *Play*’s sonata characteristics, like those of *Endgame*, both strengthen the clarity of its staging and face frustration by disjunctions between language and gesture and between language and music. The repetition of certain words and phrases and the strategic use of silence in *Endgame* provide performance-enhancing aural markers across the play’s three sonata-like sections; as the above reading demonstrates, the same notion holds true for the verbal echoes that recur throughout *Play*. In that vein, director Gerry McCarthy notes the importance of textual organization in rehearsal: “the text in *Play*, although punctuated, *must* be broken down into semantic units and groups. If these units and groups are not clear, then the rhythm will not emerge, and the text cannot be *learned* except with agonizing difficulty.”¹⁰⁹ Moreover, where a successful staging of *Endgame* fractures the sonata form that drives its performance by intentionally disrupting the unity between language and movement, a performance of *Play* magnifies this separation by eliminating the possibility of gesture. Indeed, due to their confinement in urns, the characters cannot move more than their facial features.

Furthermore, the fact that Spotlights exert complete control over their speech denies the characters' linguistic agency. This restriction of gesture and language presages the *mise-en-scene* of even later works: the disembodied mouth of *Not I* (1972), the Assistant's complete control over the Performer's body in *Catastrophe* (1983), and wordless works such as *Breath* (1969) and *Nacht und Traume* (1983) all manifest characteristics initiated in *Play*. As such, *Play* and its dramatic successors further subvert the voice-movement "harmony" that *Endgame* initially complicates. Ultimately, *Play*'s reputation as a formal pivot point between Beckett's earlier and later work results from its refinement of and elaboration upon *Endgame*'s sonata-like structure.

In addition to *Play*'s textual and performative similarities to *Endgame*, Beckett's relationship to both plays in the months preceding *Play*'s American premiere intensified the influence of the earlier work upon the later. Staged by Alan Schneider, Beckett's preeminent American director, *Play* opened in New York at the Cherry Lane Theatre on January 4, 1964; during the rehearsal process, playwright and director exchanged considerable, revealing correspondence. On December 26, 1963, Schneider wrote to Beckett of his actors: "I think you will find them about as 'toneless' as humanly possible."¹¹⁰ This remark evokes *Endgame*'s famous directive that Clov deliver his opening lines "tonelessly" and thus intensifies the connection between the two works. Besides this textual connection, a circumstantial commonality links the two plays: in a letter dated December 29, 1963, Beckett tells Schneider that he "[m]ay be going to London next month to rehearse Jack McGowran & Pat Magee in Michale Blake's production of ENDGAME opening in Paris (Studio des C.E.) Feb. 15 for a short run."¹¹¹

As it turns out, Beckett “assisted Blake for six weeks in London prior to the Paris opening.”¹¹² *Endgame* and Beckett’s upcoming involvement with its production would thus have occupied the playwright’s mind at the same time he was discussing *Play*’s staging with Schneider. It seems likely, then, that the current of Beckett’s thought process would have flowed both ways: just as communicating with Schneider about *Play* no doubt influenced Beckett’s contribution to Blake’s *Endgame*, so contemplating and preparing for the approaching rehearsals of *Endgame* probably influenced the production of *Play*.

In addressing the role of *Play* with regard to Beckett’s works and their staging, Gontarski contends:

If what we tend to call Beckett’s late style began with *Play*, then all of Beckett’s theatre works are finally ‘late plays,’ written in the ‘late style,’ that is, all of Beckett’s stage plays are ‘written’ (i.e. completed) after the publication of *Play*—even *Play* itself.¹¹³

Without undervaluing or contesting Gontarski’s claim, I contend that *Endgame* constitutes the origin of that “late style.” The sonata form legitimated by *Endgame*’s verbal and nonverbal performative cues and frustrated by perpetual disconnects between language and music and between speech and gesture lies at the heart of *Play*’s text and performance, as the above analysis has shown. Whether Beckett intentionally appropriated sonata form in composing both plays or consciously distilled *Endgame*’s structural and performative elements in writing *Play* remains inconsequential. Regardless

of Beckett's intention, in *Endgame*, he created a textual and performative template that percolates through and surfaces in the play largely considered his theatrical turning point.

When viewed in such light, *Endgame*'s frustrated sonata becomes the lynchpin upon which Beckett's experiments in denaturing language, gesture, and character turned. The tension between the emergence of sonata form in *Endgame*'s text and performance and its simultaneous complication by Beckettian acting styles and the fundamental separation of language and music illuminate Beckett's greater concern with the limits of human expression. The humanity and emotional connection Beckett established in *Waiting for Godot* disintegrate in *Endgame*, a text that claws. Musical form aims to compensate for this breakdown, yet its effective frustration reveals that aspects of the sonata, or of any other type of music, cannot successfully perform such an intervention or offer a sufficient alternative to the crumbling of communication so long as the text remains shackled to a verbal medium. *Endgame*, its manipulation of sonata form, and its dramatic inheritance—from the structure of *Play* to the musical displacement of language in such later pieces as *Ghost Trio*, *Quad*, and *Nacht und Träume*—demonstrate that, for Beckett, that failure of language resides in its failure to *be* music, that consummate expressive vehicle.

1 John Cage, "45' for a Speaker," in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1968), 189.

2 Alan W. Friedman, *Party Pieces: Oral Storytelling and Social Performance in Joyce and Beckett* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2007), 23.

3 *Ibid.*, 23.

4 *Ibid.*, 23. Beckett's disdain for ballet's subordination of music to visuality proves somewhat ironic given his foray into drama, especially considering his investment in incorporating musical elements into the visual medium of theatre.

5 I say "primarily" because Beckett's catalogue includes numerous silent works that contain no dialogue. For the plays discussed in this project, however, the audiovisual presentation of language remains a dramaturgical staple.

6 Mary Bryden, "Beckett and the Sound of Silence," in *Samuel Beckett and Music*, ed. Bryden (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 33. Rather than criticize a particular type of opera, Beckett seems to deride the entire genre, finding it "by definition" a corruption of music (Proust, 92).

7 Some of Beckett's late plays, including *Neither* and *Nacht und Träume*, do include music.

8 James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 185.

9 Friedman, *Party Pieces*, 23.

10 *Ibid.*, 23.

11 Generally, Beckett's dramas involve a steadily decreasing amount of backstory from the earlier to the later plays. For instance, *Waiting for Godot* provides minimal backstory: the play reveals that the tramps Vladimir and Estragon have been waiting for the titular character for quite some time. As time progresses, Beckett's plays concern themselves far less with the humanity of the characters. *Play*, which I will discuss later, provides one such example, as the characters' speech supposedly narrates their relationships prior to the action of the play, yet their paralysis in urns and lack of actual communication with each other evacuates their humanity and creates an ironic disconnect between any purported backstory and the onstage action.

12 *Ibid.*, 113.

13 Mary Bryden, "Introduction," in *Samuel Beckett and Music*, ed. Bryden (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 1.

14 Quoted in Dougal McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre* (London: John Calder, 1988), 171.

15 Quoted in S. E. Gontarski, "Revising Himself: Performance as Text in Samuel Beckett's Theatre," *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Autumn, 1998), 140.

16 Quoted in McMillan and Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre*, 238.

17 Barry McGovern, "They want to be entertained: Performing Beckett," in *Reflections on Beckett*, ed. Anna McMullan and S.E. Wilmer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 181.

18 "Interview with Jack MacGowran" (20 April 1971), in *Yeats, Joyce, and Beckett: New Light on Three Modern Irish Writers*, ed. Kathleen McGrory and John Unterecker (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1976), 175, quoted in Friedman, *Party Pieces*, 23.

19 Emmanuel Jacquart, "Beckett et la forme sonate," in *Samuel Beckett Aujourd'hui 8: Poesies et autres proses*, ed. Matthijs Engelberts, Marius Buning, and Sjeff Houppermans. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), 166. "*La forme sonate, qui apparaît vers le milieu du XVIIIe siècle, est fondée essentiellement sur l'utilisation de deux thèmes en opposition et en contraste.*" All excerpts from Jacquart translated by the author of this report.

20 Friedman, *Party Pieces*, 120.

21 Michael W. Kaufman, "The Dissonance of Dialectic: Shaw's Heartbreak House," *The Shaw Review*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (January 1970), 2-3.

22 Jacquart, "Beckett et la forme sonate," 168. "*...le principal rôle structurel constituant un point de départ...*"

23 James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth Century Sonata* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 16.

24 Jacquart, "Beckett et la forme sonate," 169. "*Comme son nom le suggère, le développement développe les thèmes de l'exposition. D'autre part, il les dramatise—ce qui convient bien au genre théâtral—et les module, c'est-à-dire les fait passer d'une tonalité à une autre.*"

25 *Ibid.*, 172. "*La coda rassemble ici divers thèmes en un bouquet...*"

26 *Ibid.*, 168. "*Dans Fin de partie, l'exposition apparaît très clairement dans la présentation spatiale des deux soliloques d'introduction...*"

27 *Ibid.*, 169. "*Beckett ayant sciemment recours à la technique de l'écho.*"

28 Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*, (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 23, and *Ibid.*, 170. "*...faisant dérisoirement écho à Richard III de Shakespeare: 'My kingdom for a horse.'*"

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- 29 In this case, as I indicate later, Hamm, not Clov, delivers the line “It’s finished, we’re finished” (*Endgame* 50, 68).
- 30 Jacquart, “Beckett et la forme sonate,” 160. “...véritable passerelle de l’intertextualité reliant ici la musique et l’art dramatique.”
- 31 Thomas Mansell, “Hard to Hear Music in *Endgame*,” in *Samuel Beckett’s Endgame*, ed. Mark S. Byron (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 2.
- 32 For a more detailed history, see Peter Gahan, “Shaw and Music: Meaning in a Basset Horn.” *Shaw* 29 (2009): 145-75. Gahan traces the development of the intersection of music and rhetoric to the development of the music-drama (a predecessor of opera) in the early seventeenth century and the system of tuning (equal temperament; diatonic music) that developed from that genre’s need to communicate emotion effectively. Since that time, composers have integrated rhetorical techniques into their music, while writers and rhetoricians have (consciously or unconsciously) embedded musical forms within their dramas.
- 33 Gahan, “Shaw and Music,” 146.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 159.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 146. See also Ursula Kirkendale, “The Source for Bach’s *Musical Offering*: the *Institutio oratoria* of Quintilian,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 33.1 (Spring, 1980), 88-141. Kirkendale conducts extensive analysis of the *Musical Offering*, which she believes Bach to have constructed according to Quintilian’s principles. For example, Kirkendale argues, the composer “fulfills the requirements of the *principium*, adhering throughout the three-part *ricercar* [type of baroque composition, usually resembling a prototype of the fugue] to ‘simple speech’ and ‘common usage,’ the Ovidian ‘ars est celare artem’ as understood by Quintilian” (97).
- 36 *Ibid.*, 163.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 163.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 163.
- 39 Catherine Laws, “The Music of Beckett’s Theatre,” in *Samuel Beckett Aujourd’hui: Three Dialogues Revisited*, ed. Marius Buning, Matthijs Engelberts, Sjeff Houppermans, and Daniele de Ruyter-Tognotti (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 123.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 123.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 123.
- 42 Bryden, “Beckett and the Sound of Silence,” 43.
- 43 Michael Haerdter, “Samuel Beckett inszeniert das Endspiel,” in *Materialien zu Beckett’s “Endspiel”* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), quoted in Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 230.
- 44 Beckett, *Endgame*, 1.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 13.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 50.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 68.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 55, 9.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 15, 20, 43.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 6, 9, 19, 37, 38, 39, 41, 45, 46, 58, 79; 7, 12, 24, 35, 48; 9, 14, 39, 68.
- 55 Jacquart, “Beckett et la forme sonate,” 168. “Ajoutons que l’exposition peut être précédée d’une introduction lente qui, dans Fin de partie, est représentée par la pantomime de Clov.”
- 56 Beckett, *Endgame*, 14.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 14.

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- 58 Ibid., 25, 62.
- 59 Jacquart, "Beckett et la forme sonate," 170. "*Beckett oppose volontairement ces rondes, la première étant orientée dans le sens des aiguilles d'une montre, la seconde dans le sens inverse.*"
- 60 Ibid., 170. "*Autre écho visuel: le début du premier et la fin du dernier monologue de Hamm qui s'ouvre et se ferme respectivement sur un jeu de mouchoir.*"
- 61 Beckett, *Endgame*, 1.
- 62 Ibid., 82.
- 63 Ibid., 82.
- 64 Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 226.
- 65 Samuel Beckett, Letter to Alan Schneider, 29 December 1957, quoted in Ruby Cohn, *Disjecta* (London: John Calder, 1983), 109.
- 66 Mary Bryden, "Beckett and the Sound of Silence," 45.
- 67 Daniel Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 64.
- 68 Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics*, 68.
- 69 Gontarski, "Revising Himself," 135.
- 70 Samuel Beckett, letter to Grove Press (18 May 1961), quoted in Gontarski, "Revising Himself," 134.
- 71 Friedman, *Party Pieces*, 110.
- 72 Quoted in McMillan and Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre*, 163.
- 73 Samuel Beckett, letter to Jean Reavey (August 1962), Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.
- 74 Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (London: John Calder, 1965), 92.
- 75 Ibid., 92.
- 76 Bryden, "Beckett and the Sound of Silence," 42.
- 77 Ibid., 35.
- 78 Ibid., 44.
- 79 Ibid., 44.
- 80 Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd: Revised updated edition* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1969), 62.
- 81 Ibid., 62.
- 82 Ibid., 5.
- 83 Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (London: John Calder, 1983), 7.
- 84 Friedman, *Party Pieces*, 108.
- 85 Ibid., 143.
- 86 McMillan and Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre*, 88.
- 87 Quoted in McMillan and Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre*, 139.
- 88 Ibid., 118.
- 89 Samuel Beckett, letter to Alan Schneider (21 June 1956), in *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett & Alan Schneider*, ed. Maurice Harmon (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998), 11.
- 90 Friedman, *Party Pieces*, 122.
- 91 Herbert Blau, "Notes from the Underground: Waiting for Godot and Endgame," in *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 270.
- 92 *Play* first appeared in print in German in July 1963, corresponding with its premiere at the Ulmer Theater in Ulm-Donau, Germany, on 14 June 1963.
- 93 Samuel Beckett, *Play*, in *Collected Shorter Plays* (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 147.
- 94 Ibid., 147.

95 Quoted in Friedman, *Party Pieces*, 146.

96 Quoted in Friedman, *Party Pieces*, 147.

97 Friedman, *Party Pieces*, 147.

98 Beckett, *Play*, 148-49.

99 *Ibid.*, 150-51.

100 *Ibid.*, 151.

101 *Ibid.*, 148.

102 *Ibid.*, 152.

103 *Ibid.*, 155.

104 *Ibid.*, 156.

105 *Ibid.*, 157.

106 *Ibid.*, 157.

107 Unlike *Godot's* Act II, which repeats Act I with critical textual differences, the da capo of *Play* requires exact repetition of the entire text, with optional altered delivery: as Beckett's note in the script states, "The repeat may be an exact replica of the first statement or it may present an element of variation" (160). Moreover, directors have sometimes excluded the da capo. Such was the case with Alan Schneider, who, facing "an ultimatum by his producers," chose to eliminate the repeat, a decision for which he "despised himself," as Beckett "was not pleased" (Harmon, 153n.).

108 *Ibid.*, 158.

109 Gerry McCarthy, "Emptying the Theater: On Directing the Plays of Samuel Beckett," in *Directing Beckett*, ed. Lois Oppenheim (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 257.

110 Beckett, letter to Alan Schneider (26 December 1963), in *No Author*, 149.

111 Beckett, letter to Alan Schneider (29 December 1963), in *No Author*, 150.

112 Harmon, ed., *No Author*, 154n.

113 S.E. Gontarski, "Introduction: De-theatricalizing Theatre: The Post-Play Plays," in *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Volume IV: The Shorter Plays*, ed. Gontarski (London: Faber and Faber, New York: Grove Press, 1999), xv.

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This report was typed by the author.