Play of Pauses in Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame*: A Postmodern Threshold

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Abstract
This paper focuses on the enigmatic use of pauses in Samuel Beckett’s Endgame. The frequent occurrence of pauses within the body of language challenges to ask for their existence. Based on the theoretical concerns of postmodern theorists Jacques Derrida and Ihab Hassan, the main concern of the discussion concentrates on the idea of ‘going beyond’ language in the form of introducing ‘play’ of pauses in Endgame with its aim to display the tendencies of postmodernism through a literary text. This article asks how pauses become significant in Beckett’s Endgame and how this literary event has invoked the urgency of postmodern threshold. It aims to reflect on the significance of pauses to articulate the postmodern voices i.e. Derrida’s ‘Différance’ and Hassan’s ‘Indetermanence’. To listen to these voices in the ‘silent mark’ of Beckett’s text the methodology I seek for this research paper is Hermeneutics that helps this interpretation of pauses with the conceptual framework postmodern theory. The practice of using pauses in a literary text of Beckett is deeply concerned with the development of a notion of ‘silence’ in postmodern perspective where it leads to an ‘endless play of meanings’ and continuous induction of indeterminacies inherent in language and meaning and that at the end are immanently discernable through the unspoken mark ‘pause’.

Key Words: Postmodernism; Text; Pause; Différance; Indetermanence

1. Introduction

This paper looks into the relationship between incorporation of pauses in the literary text of Samuel Beckett and theoretical concerns of postmodernism. It aims to investigate the significance of the existence of pauses in Beckett’s play Endgame to dismantle the notion of stable, fixed and unified meaning through the medium of language. This going beyond language does not lead to annihilation of meaning rather it invokes the representation of theoretical assumptions of postmodernism about language and meaning. Beckett’s writing concerns itself with the exploration of the borders of silence in literature that continues to develop the significance of unsayable. Molly has mentioned that his story would open in silence. It provides a kind of ‘gap’ to ‘go on’ in the unfamiliar, unknown, unsaid and yet representable. It is only the silent gap that carries a confrontation with never knowing and never fixing the reality as Beckett has pointed out: “In silence you don’t know, you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on” (as cited in Hassan, 1967, p.166). This ‘vast will of unmaking’
disrupts the boundaries of language as a unified medium to convey meaning and speaks for the possibilities of endlessness of representation and interpretations. The celebration of inconsistencies and contradictions in postmodern text entirely displaces the function of language to represent a final reality.

Postmodernism proclaims a profound inconsistency and uncertainty by foregrounding contradictions and displays a dissolution of reality and meaning. As heterogeneous and “gnarled body of theories” (Nash, 2001, p.1) postmodernism sounds increasingly suggestive to live with the wide range of assumptions. This popularity of voices of postmodernism in Beckett’s text rests on the idea of positive existence of ‘pause’ or in Derridian phrase a “wordless word” (Derrida, 2000, p. 101). The text in this way becomes a platform to speak of disruption of language and meaning in postmodernism. This celebration of unmaking and resistance to traditional form of closure rehearses Hassan’s notion of ‘Indeterminance’. The ‘pause’ paradoxically expresses the obscurity and postmodern indeterminacy and introduces new and contradictory strategies to develop in postmodern text which might be unfamiliar and as Belsey (2001) has pointed out “initially difficult discourses” (p.5).

Samuel Beckett in his plays concerns himself with the use and function of language. His text becomes a critique of language that deconstructs the systematic unity of spoken words and reach to the reality of ‘Other’ by demystifying the logocentrism through a “different form of utterance, a further remove from spoken language” (Budick&Iser, 1996, p.7). The pauses then give a sense of continuity of language not fully exhausted but arduously calculating postmodern fragmentation together ‘with the obligation to express’. The foreshadowing of postmodern discourse in Beckett’s dramatic work ascertains the urgency of speaking ‘pause’ to communicate the limitations of language itself. Locatelli (2001) has reflected:

Fragmentation through silence and pauses works there as more than a suspension of the linguistic or representation continuum. It works as a re-contextualizing semiotic device that creates the horizon for systemic signification of both language and silence. In other words, fragmentation in discourse, that is, within the verbal chain, constitutes a way of expressing the limits of language as context, and allude silence as another possible context, comparable to language in this respect. (p.25)
Endgame celebrates this postmodern fragmentation in its powerful sense of breaking the boundaries of language by dramatizing the existence of pauses within the dialogues of characters. The diminishing art of Beckett in one act of Endgame reveals the stratagem of breathlessly identifying the postmodern philosophy through a form about which Beckett himself has said: “a form that accommodates the mess” (as cited in Worton, p.9). Beckett’s promotion of pauses in his play leads to interminable process of generating postmodern utterances. It provides a ‘space’ that paradoxically integrates the state of undecidability of meaning in a text. It significantly features the inescapable free play of signifiers in a literary text. It invokes a rejection of “final and unquestioned division” and has precisely decentered the “ultimate determinable meanings and transcendent signified” (Belsey, 2001, p.145).

The practice of using pauses has rediscovered the representation of postmodern theoretical tendency of Derrida’s ‘différance’ that is the “non-full, non-simple, structured differentiating origin of differences” (Derrida, 1982, p.11). It has thus become a necessary condition to revitalize the effect of language to release it from the bonds of transcendent. It also signifies the constant condition of indeterminacy that has actively prevailed to reinterpret the disparate tendencies of postmodern ‘Indeterminance’.

2. Margins of Postmodern Philosophy
Postmodernists have challenged all existing systems and radically decentered the standards of reality. They have signaled the indeterminacy and uncertainty of meanings in a text. They have championed the diversity of forms of representation to disavow the “logocentric implications which are susceptible to transcendent trap of representation” (Locatelli, 2001, p.22). They have impelled the radical silence of all conventional methods and introduced an active engagement with the tendencies of fragmentation, dissolution of categories and disruption to defy the stability of all modes of fixity. By undermining the principle of unity the postmodern critics celebrate “multiplicity, heterogeneity, difference. Undecidability splits the text, disorders it. Undecidability dislodges the principle of a single final meaning in a literary text” (Bennett & Royale, 2004, p.249).

The pauses in Endgame may appear to reinterpret the awakening of postmodernism and can reclaim and retell the story of Derrida’s critique of ‘metaphysics of presence’ in
favour of the shifting and ongoing production of *différance*. The distinctive feature of *différance* heralds a subtle displacement of meanings by incessant process of differences and unrelenting deferring of ultimate meanings. As Derrida (1982) has put:

A *différance* which belongs neither to the voice nor to writing in the usual sense, and which is located, as the strange space that will keep us together here for an hour, between speech and writing, and beyond the tranquil familiarity which links us to one and the other, occasionally reassuring us in our illusion that they are two. (p.5)

There is not final and pure name for the concept of *différance*. Like the ‘pause’ within language it remains unceasingly displaced in a ‘chain of differing and deferring substitutions’. The pause in the literary text of Beckett acts to dislocate the origin of meaning and its own existence. It exhibits the kind of ‘gap’ that like *différance* is constantly open to undecidability of meanings and admits for ‘free play’ of significations. This strategy refers back to potential of Derridian *différance* as ‘temporization’ and ‘spacing’. As “*Différance* (as a word) is a play on the French verb *différer* meaning both ‘to differ’ and ‘to defer’. *Différance* that involves an action of time (deferral) and action of spacing (differing) and what Derrida calls the becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time” (McQuillan, 2000, p.17).

The borderless concept of *différance* expands itself to make the function of pauses in Endgame of Beckett as a postmodern utterance that strives to signify the indeterminacies with multiplying and unending condition of impossibility. This seamless fabric of indeterminacies draws into focus the neologism of Ihab Hassan’s ‘Indetermanence’, a term he used to propose the two distinctive tendencies of postmodernism. He strikingly broadcasts the development of these categories of ‘indeterminacy’ and ‘immanence’. The indeterminacy of which Hassan (1982) has pointed out accounts for discreet concepts of postmodernism” “ambiguity, discontinuity, heterodoxy, pluralism, randomness, revolt, perversion, deformation”. These problematic dimensions of indeterminacy detect a host of “current terms of unmaking, decreation, disintegration … disjunction, disappearance, de-definition, demystification, detotalization, deligitimation” (P.269).

The postmodernism continues to display this impossible system by governing an ontological existence of indeterminacies and thus corporates ‘immanence’ a subtle generalization of symbols that “becomes increasingly, immediately its own environment”.

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The immanence vibrantly manages to invoke the categories of extravagant concepts of “diffusion, dissemination, pulsion, interplay, communication and interdependence” (p.270). The pauses in Beckett’s Endgame have significantly rehearsed and apprehended the affinity with these postmodern theoretical concepts. The frequent encounters with these pauses necessarily account for their existence and becomes a potential site to explore the theory behind their play in the literary text.

3. Endgame

Beckett conceives pauses in Endgame to extend the discontinuity of language. The involvement of them retracts the supremacy of presence of words and makes absent as present on paper and in dialogues. The concept of no voice and yet to speak has become a liability to present the impossibility of Beckett’s art that sustains the difficult play of endlessness of meanings. The pauses Beckett proposes in Endgame are hints of defiance against the sole sovereignty of language as unified authority to establish the extreme end of game. The pauses don not leave us in this ineffectual state of language but they offer a suggestion to go beyond language and ‘decreate’ the order of fixity. Throughout the play pauses originate vehemently to retreat the crippled spirit of consolidation of meanings and language that carries a pattern of persistent philosophical inquiry in postmodern perspective.

The play of pauses immediately becomes compelling when Clov starts his dialogue. The agonizing beginning of the play with the words of Clov anticipates the desperation with the current state of affairs along with the aspiration for freedom that is not without apprehensive disorder. It contains pauses as an important event within the text.

CLOV: ……… Finished, it is finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. [Pause.] Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there’s a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap. [Pause.] I can’t be punished any more. [Pause.] (Beckett, 1986, p. 93)

The emergence of pauses in that dialogue helps to dismember the body of ‘logos’ and announces the dissolution of fixed reality. The entitled presence of ending everything is inverted by the presence of an alternate, a slight stop among this crushing annihilation. It makes the end delayed and develops the opposite of ‘finished’ in its emergence that sounds the beginning of another, another world of Clov that is “taking its course” (p.98), where the
burden of ‘impossible heap’ is buried and a peace to be found out of this agony, where the burden of word and medium of communication can no longer haunt the memory of Clov.

The pause arguments to tell the untold story of Clov. It gives a chance to pursue the series of struggle with his words before going to total obliteration. But it rests on the idea of no wording and by keeping silence does not allow the recognition of any form of reality. Like a postmodern différance it abounds and increasingly advances the means of production of meaning by calling a number of different situations and significations to Clov’s version of the story. But by observing silence and occupying the position of ‘The Unnamable’, it upholds the category of delay and exhaustion of meaning to postpone the earnestness of totality of truth.

Hamm’s “Me – to play” narrates the story of miseries, a long story of anguish over the predetermined fate. But the appearance of pauses in the dialogue has disparaged the mechanical recounting of his miserable predicament. The formation of the dialogue is:


The pauses indicates the trouble in the narrative discourse of Hamm. The ambiguous emptiness of words has converted to the elucidation of Hamm’s statements. The recurrence of pauses in the dialogue provides a postmodern address of différance with its impossibility of ultimate knowable. They are possibly without any origin and are “constantly deferred and always out of reach” (McQuillan, 2000, p.18). The drama of Hamm’s life would be played through the tenacious identity of language but the ‘fuller’ identity of such ‘bigger’ totalistic certainty meets its end in ‘pause’ that utters the radical indeterminacies. The ‘disjunction’ from language disregards the trap of determinacy of linguistic truth. Hamm disjoins himself from words and pursues refuge in pauses, yet the promise of refuge is constantly forsaken: “Enough, it’s time, it ended, in the refuge too. [Pause.]” (p.93). This deconstructionist impulse releases the text from the false realities of individual observation depended on the impulsion of system of language. The blunt execution of pauses creates a place of salvation for Hamm to reconstruct the paradoxical reality that hesitates to ends: “I hesitate, I hesitate to …….. To
end” (p.93). The suspension of finality has arisen out of the unspoken yet immanent plan of extensive use of pauses in the text.

Hamm and Clav are unable to determine the nature of their relationship. They continue with the conditions of defining this relation and inability of separation by considering the non-availability of an alternative. For Hamm: “there is no one else” and Clav finds: “there is nowhere else [Pause.]”(p.95). The pause arrives as an intruder and ameliorates the derision of linguistic determinacy that reinforces the futility of language. The distancing from language has become a way of communication between two characters that ultimately throws them in the unending process of dramatizing pauses in their conversation.

HAMM: [Relieved.] Ah you gave me a fright! [Pause. Coldly.] Forgive me. [Pause. Louder.] I said, forgive me.
CLOV: I heard you. [Pause.] Have you bled?
HAMM: Less. [Pause.] Is it not time for my pain-killer?
CLOV: No. [Pause.] (Beckett, 1986, p. 95)

The entertainment of ‘inaudible mark’ entitles a profound extension of ‘Indetermanence’, Ihab Hassan’s definition of postmodernism. Not only the verbal utterances are deconstructed but they also immanently pronounce the indeterminacies. Hamm is afraid of loss of his being in the silent state of pause. He asks Clav: “forgive me”. The creation of ‘me’ as what Hamm perceives about him or Clav’s recognition of Hamm is instituted in his utterance yet it is immediately lost in the pause that comes after it. Hamm’s repetition becomes louder and the pause penetrates within the conscious agitation of words to dissolve the identity of Hamm. It also originates as a window to see through long history of Hamm’s pain where the desire for the pain-killer is often ignored and ardently defied by Clav. The pause echoes the disclosure of finality and proposes meaning in the sheer proliferation of significances with its proposition of indeterminacy.

The phenomenal diffusion of pauses in the dialogues of Nell and Nagg enterprises detotalization of interpretation and understanding of their existence. Nell and Nagg as the figures of “sedulous and obsolete past” (Hassan, 1967, p.185) are struggling with their physical disabilities as of sight and hearing. They can sooth themselves with the idea of not losing their hearing completely. What they are listening to is concerned with silence. Nagg
can see Nell ‘hardly’ as the seeing things through a transcendent signified has failed them and it is ‘pause’ now that they are hearing.

NAGG: ….. Our sight has failed.
NELL: Yes. [Pause.]
NAGG: Can you hear me?
NELL: Yes. And you?
NAGG: Yes. [Pause.] Our hearing hasn’t failed.
NELL: Our what?
NAGG: Our hearing.
NELL: No. [Pause.] Have you something else to say to me? (Beckett, 1986, p.99)

In this moment of pause Nagg experiences an adventure of hearing to the multiple voices in connection to endless significations which relieved him from the dread of rhetorical totality. The ineffectiveness of language has been unleashed by the response of Nell ‘our what’? The pause upholds the dramatization of ‘yet ask again’ after the verbalization of characters’ statements.

Specifically recognizable are the dialogues of Hamm who is gathering the discordant images of reality. The ‘mute irony’ of pauses is smashing both to the stereotyped determinism of meaning in language and indiscreet recognition of pauses as ineffectual and meaningless.

“HAMM: [Wearily] Quite, quite, you are keeping me awake. [Pause] Talk softer. [Pause]” (Beckett, 1986, p. 100). Hamm wants to engender quietness and an end of meanings but pauses are endlessly yelling. In the limitlessness of ‘woods’, ‘sky’ and ‘earth’, Hamm can find the glimpse of endlessness of reality. The ends of things would be obliterated in the fragmentation of origins and awakening of play of pauses that is ‘dripping’ in his head. The pause as ‘différance’ is “an interlacing which permits the different threads and lines of meaning” (Derrida, 1982, p.3). Nell and Nagg become conscious to listen to the silence of Hamm and it is only through pauses that they can respond to each other inquiries. The words has become ‘hollow’ and yesterday is too far to relive in language. Nagg asks Nell: “Are you crying again? She replies: “I was trying. [Pause]” (p.101). The equivocal positioning of pause is refashioning the indecisive neutral indulgence that ‘means nothing’. It bears the potential defeat of the desire of Nagg to create a center of nothingness. The boundaries of
understanding the notion of nothingness and irrational presence of pauses are diffused with the corresponding ‘play of significations’. The ‘disjunction’ these pauses assume vibrantly put postmodern ‘aura’ of ‘Indeterminance’ that Hassan has so emphatically attached to the postmodernized forms of art.

Hamm though sick of conversation engages himself and Clovin the practice of fiery utterances about the ‘end’ of things, “one day you’ll say, I’m tired, I’ll stop. What does the attitude matter? [Pause.]” (Beckett, 1986, p. 110). The pause rejoins this curious obsession of speaking and stresses that it can not end the abounding constitution of meanings and ‘new’ meanings, infinite opening of significances with their deranged origin and identity. The pause works to stop the action of determinism of meanings and produces an impression of emancipation from the tyranny of ‘logos’. The jubilation of this freedom advocates the never ending relation of Hamm and Clov as of words and pauses.

Hamm proclaims: “It was the moment I was waiting for. [Pause.] …… We’re coming. [Pause.] And to end with? [Pause.]” (Beckett, 1986, p. 133). The perpetual intrusion of pauses in the dialogues of Hamm has changed his position constantly with differing alternatives. To live in the speaking ‘void’ has brought a disintegration of authority of single voice and announced a gathering of disparate voices with the infinite propagation of meanings. The
penetration of pauses in the language has disavow the boundaries of linguistic determinacy by enacting ‘différance’, a persistent discourse of postmodernism.

4. Conclusion

In an effort to look for the significance of pauses in Beckett’s Endgame one can actually make a choice to unfold vigour energies of postmodernism. The pauses explore the procedure for the liberation of language in postmodern text. The incessant styles of postmodernism are enormously spoken through the unique play pauses in the text. The formidable benevolence of the ‘moment of diffusion’ has got its complication through the happening of pauses. The unfixity of text’s final meaning is continued through the creation of unspoken mark and by decentering the authority of transcendental signified. The pauses occur to propose significations and ultimately deferring their presence to establish a condition of self-reflexivity by sticking to the state of failing centers to continue an interminable process of negotiation. The unfamiliar discourse of pauses is baffling and like Derrida’s ‘différance’ is ineluctably precarious. It engages itself in declaring the tendencies of postmodernism by invigorating the neologism of Ihab Hassan i.e. ‘Indeterminance’, an attempt of theoretical definition of postmodernism.
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