MTC Education Teachers’ Notes 2015

ENDGAME
by Samuel Beckett

21 March – 25 April
Southbank Theatre,
The Sumner

Notes prepared by Meg Upton
BEFORE SEEING THE PERFORMANCE...

THE EXPERIENCE
In the theatre we share stories which differ from TV, DVD, film, books, magazines, podcasts and other media. In the theatre stories are told by real people in real time before a live audience. Each performance of a play is different to any other as it is dependent upon the time, the actors, the technical equipment and, very importantly, the audience. You can’t re-read a live theatre performance or copy it to see again and again. Each performance exists only once. The performance you will see of Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame* will differ in some way from the other performances in the season. The live nature of theatre and your role as an audience ensures its uniqueness. As students of theatre, you are advised to carefully prepare to see the production so that you can capture that unique, one-off experience and be able to reflect on it in detail.

CHARACTERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTER</th>
<th>CAST</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamm – unable to stand, blind</td>
<td>Colin Friels</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clov – servant of Hamm, unable to sit</td>
<td>Luke Mullins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagg – Hamm’s father, without legs, lives in a dustbin</td>
<td>Rhys McConnochie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nell – Hamm’s mother, without legs, lives in a dustbin</td>
<td>Julie Forsyth</td>
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Creative Team

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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
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<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Sam Strong</td>
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<tr>
<td>Set Designer</td>
<td>Callum Morton</td>
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<td>Associate Set Designer</td>
<td>Andrew Bailey</td>
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<td>Costume Designer</td>
<td>Eugyeene Teh</td>
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<td>Lighting Designer</td>
<td>Paul Jackson</td>
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<td>Sound Designer</td>
<td>Russell Goldsmith</td>
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SYNOPSIS – FROM MTC WEBSITE

Waiting for death in a world without hope has never been more hilarious than in Beckett’s renowned modern masterpiece, starring multi-award winners Colin Friels and Luke Mullins. Sheltering in a bare room, four little lives look out on a desolate world. Hamm is a blind old tyrant, immobile and unmoved. His aged parents, Nagg and Nell, live in dustbins with nothing but their fading memories, as downtrodden servant Clov hobbles about performing his ritual duties. *Endgame* was written in French in 1957. It paints a bleak portrait, but with its mix of comedy and tragedy, humanity and despair, Beckett gives us that rare theatrical experience that touches us profoundly. With a set design from eminent visual artist Callum Morton and a cast that includes MTC regulars Julie Forsyth (*Private Lives*) and Rhys McConnochie (*King Lear*), Associate Artistic Director Sam Strong’s production drives us laughing towards the dark.

SYNOPSIS - FROM STC WEBSITE (their own production of the same play)

Hugo Weaving returns to Sydney Theatre Company in Samuel Beckett’s modern masterpiece, which takes the end of the world so seriously it makes us laugh. Hamm is a blind tyrant, unable to stand. Clov is his son, unable to sit. Hamm’s parents, Nell and Nagg, are living in bins. Sheltering in an underground room, Hamm orders Clov about. Clov looks out the window for signs of life, but all seems lost and there is no one there. Inside, the characters pass the time, brutally toying with each other in the way only family can. These
four people, perhaps the last, are playing out the game of life to its inevitable end. What has happened outside? Will Clov leave Hamm to die? In the mix of dark comedic repartee and distilled insight, Beckett’s singular voice rings clear – absurdity in the face of meaninglessness, sorrow in the face of futility, humour in the face of mortality.

**CONSIDER...**
What information and images do the above descriptions offer?
In what ways do they differ? How might you account for this?
Does it accord with your reading of the script?
How difficult might it be to summarise a play for the purposes of marketing and publicity?
Discuss these synopses in terms of interpretation and meaning.

**THE SETTING AND WORLD**
*Bare interior.*
*Grey light.*
*Left and right back, high up, two small windows, curtains drawn...*  
(From opening of *Endgame*)

*Endgame* is a decaying world, a timeless world. The playscript references the lack of life and an absence of light beyond Hamm and Clov’s bunker-like existence. It is an interior setting with two small windows placed high up, and a door that leads somewhere else, such as a kitchen. There are no physical comforts in this world. It is a world built upon interdependence; between Hamm and Clov, Nell and Nagg, and arguably Hamm and his parents. The world that Beckett creates in *Endgame* may well have been influenced by his experiences as a member of the resistance in France during WWII and the politics of the Cold War period in which he was writing. Certainly the play and the characters are influenced by what he determines as being a form of ‘impoverishment’, a stripping back to life’s essential elements.
STRUCTURE

*Endgame* is a play in one act. It is a scripted work. There is a clear beginning and end to the play. Between those two points, the dialogue concerns the interactions and musings of the four characters who inhabit the world. Beckett wrote the play in French and translated it into English himself. The language suggests a time that is not the present, including the use of particular words and phrases you may not have encountered before. You may like to discuss their meaning.

- pap, progenitor, Spratt’s medium, smithereen, mene mene, elegiac, shanks, fontanelles, nightman, gaff, toque, meerschaum, lumbago.

PERFORMANCE SPACE

*Endgame* is performed in a proscenium arch configuration in The Sumner which allows both the set and the actors to be framed within the playing space. The Sumner is a very contemporary proscenium arch theatre, quite different in design and aesthetic to other proscenium arch theatres you may have been to such as The Regent, Her Majesty’s or The Princess.

*Endgame* makes use of the width, depth and height of the Sumner. The size of the stage allows for Callum Morton’s design – a large bunker-like structure – to be placed on stage and to suggest an off-stage world.

Below is a seating map of the auditorium in relation to the stage, and following that is a panoramic image of the Sumner looking towards the stage. By having some understanding of the style, size and aesthetic of the theatre, you can begin to consider how the possibilities of the space may impact on the interpretative choices and on the actor/audience relationship.

The seating bank and view of the stage in the Sumner
Watching the performance...
When you are watching the show, try to heighten your awareness of everything by watching and listening very carefully. If you have time at the end, take down some notes on:

- The things you saw; characters, action/gesture, set items, costumes, lighting states, props
- The things you heard; music, sound effects, lines of dialogue, words, songs
- How you felt at different points during the production; perhaps disturbed, threatened, amused, mystified, saddened, angry, curious, confused, other...
In theatre, contexts are generally understood to be the historical, socio-cultural, political, and philosophical conditions in which a play was written - the world of the playwright - the contexts evident in the playscript, and the contexts of the performance. For instance, Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible* in the 1950s (the playwright’s context) but he drew on the historical, socio-cultural, political and philosophical contexts of the Salem witch hunts of 1692 (the play’s contexts) in order to draw a parallel with the hysteria and persecution experienced by many people during the McCarthy era in the United States. The play was first performed during a critical time for US politics. Subsequent performances in new contexts will enable new understandings. Caryl Churchill’s *Cloud Nine*, sets some of its action in British Colonial Africa during Victorian times, juxtaposing it with characters from Churchill’s contemporary time of 1979 to make a point about gender, difference and social roles.

Of course, many plays are written for and of their time and the contexts in which the play is written are directly reflected in the script, and the performed play. The following background information may be useful in your discussions around contexts, Beckett and *Endgame*. 
CONTEXTS – THE PLAYWRIGHT
This is an excellent review of two biographies of Samuel Beckett that provide good insight into his own thoughts and decisions with regard to his literary work.
http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/03/reviews/970803.03dickstt.html

Samuel Beckett
Photo by John Haynes/Rubicon Theatre Company
(via www.latimes.com)

IMPOVERISHMENT AND IGNORANCE
The five years from the end of the war until 1950 was Beckett’s most prolific period. He wrote three novels – *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable* – and two plays – *Eleutheria*, which went unpublished and unperformed in Beckett’s lifetime, and *Waiting for Godot*, which took four years to find a production. This cloudburst of activity was preceded by a flash of revelation. Standing on a jetty during a visit to Dublin in 1946, he suddenly saw that there could be no competing with Joyce, the maximalist, who controlled his fictive worlds with absolute omnipotence and omniscience. ‘I realised that my only way was impoverishment,’ Beckett later explained, ‘in a lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than adding.’

He quickly discovered that impoverishment also suited his peculiar frame of mind. In austerity he was in his element. In his most popular works, human existence is threadbare, clothed only in worn-out ideas and memories, kept warm only by companionship, habit and sardonic humour. In order to simplify his style, he wrote in French and found that he could avoid an omniscient narrator in the novels if he went with interior monologue, one person’s bewildered, biased and ignorant perspective. Another way he found to rid himself of the panoptic view was writing plays, because action in drama is unmediated by a narrator. In his great popular plays of the fifties and early sixties, *Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Happy Days*, ignorance is the common attribute of the characters. No one knows what is going on.
EXPLANATION...
The most persistent interpretation of Beckett’s plays says he is an Absurdist. When, in his 1961 book *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Esslin wrote: ‘This sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition is, broadly speaking, the theme of the plays of Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco, Genet and the other writers discussed in this book’, he provided a simple answer for the perplexed. As a consequence, two or three generations of educated theatre-goers watched Beckett’s estivating tramps and vegetating hermits and thought they were seeing existential parables, allegories for the human condition in our post-war, post-Holocaust, post-Hiroshima world.

But there is nothing allegorical in Beckett’s plays. There are no symbols. The same goes for lessons, philosophies, politics, ethics, insights and, God forbid, answers. On the other hand, his plays do have characters and situations, actions and reactions, statements and banter, memories and jokes – lots of jokes.

Beckett refused to explain his work because he couldn’t. ‘Why?’ always left him stuck for an answer. If he had a philosophy at all, it was scepticism. His whole outlook was built on doubt. ‘The key word in my plays,’ he once said, ‘is “perhaps”.’ Any statement by his characters that gave the appearance of authority he instantly undermined. A favoured rhetorical trope was bathos, the verbal stride towards the banana skin.

While he espoused no philosophy, Beckett did seem to have what you might call a moral temperament. He was fond of the negative aspects of life. Pain, disappointment, loss, poverty and abandonment, petty irritations of every kind, brought him to good humour. The worst brought out the best in him. He felt particular tenderness towards failure.

This temperamental outlook makes its way into his plays, of course, as do certain experiences and his voluminous reading. Scattered here and there are the traces Beckett left of himself – a boon for literary investigators. Certain characters, lines and references may be followed like breadcrumbs back to their source.

Character names have been a particularly fruitful line of enquiry, packed with allusions. *Endgame*’s Hamm and Clov may bring to mind the following:

1. hammer and nail – (*clou* is French for nail);
2. Hamm as a ham actor;
3. Cloves are pressed into a ham before roasting;
4. The cloven foot of Pan;
5. Of satire;
6. Of the devil;
7. Of the pig – which (ahah!) brings us back to Hamm. And so on.

Of course, Beckett was aware of all the connotations, all the hidden references. (You don’t work for Joyce on *Finnegans Wake*, as he did, without this game becoming a reflex.) By all
means, connect these dots, but it won’t create a picture. In Beckett’s plays meaning dissipates in ever-widening ripples of little answers that are no answer at all.

**Source:** The above notes are adapted from Paul Galloway’s program notes for the MTC production of *Endgame*, 2015

**OTHER RESOURCES:**
The Samuel Beckett Online Resources and Links Page
http://www.samuel-beckett.net/speople.html

*Endgame* (2000) a film directed by Conor McPherson
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ok7Vc3jczNg

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**PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY – ANALYSIS**
After having read the above perspectives on Samuel Beckett’s work, what are your thoughts?
What does the discussion suggest is Beckett’s approach to play writing?
Discuss how these perspectives provide insight into theatrical styles and conventions.
It if took the Russian Revolution to drive theatre into Realism, then it could be argued that the dropping of the bombs Hiroshima and Nagasaki - the abdication of reason - brought Absurd Theatre to the fore. Absurd Theatre presented life as meaningless, and one that could simply end in casual slaughter. This was reflected in the society of the time where:

a) The mechanical nature of many peoples’ lives, lead them to question the purpose of their existence.
b) Time was recognised as a destructive force.
c) One had a sense of being left in an alien world. [A world that can be explained even with bad reasoning is a familiar world. But a world from which logic and insight have been removed is a strange world].
d) One sensed being isolated from other beings.

This sense of meaninglessness became a critical insight in the philosophical movement of the era “Existentialism”. Existentialists proclaimed; We are the sum of our acts. The idea that we do something because we are that sort of person, was replaced by the idea that we make ourselves that sort of person by doing such and such an act. As one of the high princes of existentialism, Jean Paul Sartre said: "We are nothing and in action become conscious of that original nothingness".

If Elizabethan Theatre [Shakespeare] explored the political and moral dilemmas of the Renaissance, and Naturalism gave expression to the ghosts which haunted the bourgeoisie of Capitalism, then Absurdism found the means of exposing the metaphysical doubts that tormented our existence. Doubts that at first surprised us then began to seem natural and inevitable.

Source: http://www.samuel-beckett.net/AbsurdAndBeck.htm

What is ‘existentialism’?
Existentialism is a philosophy that emphasizes individual existence, freedom and choice. It is the view that humans define their own meaning in life, and try to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe. It focuses on the question of human existence, and the feeling that there is no purpose or explanation at the core of existence. It holds that, as there is no God or any other transcendent force, the only way to counter this nothingness (and hence to find meaning in life) is by embracing existence.

Thus, Existentialism believes that individuals are entirely free and must take personal responsibility for themselves (although with this responsibility comes angst, a profound anguish or dread). It therefore emphasizes action, freedom and decision as fundamental, and holds that the only way to rise above the essentially absurd condition of humanity (which is characterized by suffering and inevitable death) is by exercising our personal freedom and choice.

Source: http://www.philosophybasics.com/branch_existentialism.html
CONTEX TS – Political
This site offers a timeline of world events from 1950-1959, the era in which Beckett was writing.
http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0005250.html

The Cold War
During World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union fought together as allies against the Axis powers. However, the relationship between the two nations was a tense one. Americans had long been wary of Soviet communism and concerned about Russian leader Joseph Stalin’s tyrannical, blood-thirsty rule of his own country. For their part, the Soviets resented the Americans’ decades-long refusal to treat the USSR as a legitimate part of the international community as well as their delayed entry into World War II, which resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of Russians. After the war ended, these grievances ripened into an overwhelming sense of mutual distrust and enmity. Postwar Soviet expansionism in Eastern Europe fueled many Americans’ fears of a Russian plan to control the world. Meanwhile, the USSR came to resent what they perceived as American officials’ bellicose rhetoric, arms buildup and interventionist approach to international relations. In such a hostile atmosphere, no single party was entirely to blame for the Cold War; in fact, some historians believe it was inevitable.
Read more at: http://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/cold-war-history
THEATRICAL STYLES - THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

Samuel Beckett’s plays are generally considered to sit within the theatre tradition known as ‘Theatre of the Absurd’. The following two sources seek to explain what is meant by this theatrical movement.

The “Theatre of the Absurd” is a term coined by Hungarian-born critic Martin Esslin, who made it the title of his 1962 book on the subject. The term refers to a particular type of play which first became popular during the 1950s and 1960s and which presented on stage the philosophy articulated by French philosopher Albert Camus in his 1942 essay, The Myth of Sisyphus, in which he defines the human condition as basically meaningless. Camus argued that humanity had to resign itself to recognizing that a fully satisfying rational explanation of the universe was beyond its reach; in that sense, the world must ultimately be seen as absurd.

Esslin regarded the term “Theatre of the Absurd” merely as a "device" by which he meant to bring attention to certain fundamental traits discernible in the works of a range of playwrights. The playwrights loosely grouped under the label of the absurd attempt to convey their sense of bewilderment, anxiety, and wonder in the face of an inexplicable universe. According to Esslin, the five defining playwrights of the movement are Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, and Harold Pinter, although these writers were not always comfortable with the label and sometimes preferred to use terms such as "Anti-Theater" or "New Theater".


The “Theatre of the Absurd” shows the world as an incomprehensible place. The spectators see the happenings on the stage entirely from the outside, without ever understanding the full meaning of these strange patterns of events, as newly arrived visitors might watch life in a country of which they have not yet mastered the language. The confrontation of the audience with characters and happenings which they are not quite able to comprehend makes it impossible for them to share the aspirations and emotions depicted in the play. Brecht's famous "Verfremdungseffekt" (alienation effect), the inhibition of any identification between spectator and actor, which Brecht could never successfully achieve in his own highly rational theatre, really comes into its own in the Theatre of the Absurd. It is impossible to identify oneself with characters one does not understand or whose motives remain a closed book, and so the distance between the public and the happenings on the stage can be maintained.

Emotional identification with the characters is replaced by a puzzled, critical attention. For while the happenings on the stage are absurd, they yet remain recognizable as somehow related to real life with its absurdity, so that eventually the spectators are brought face to face with the irrational side of their existence. Thus, the absurd and fantastic goings-on of the Theatre of the Absurd will, in the end, be found to reveal the irrationality of the human condition and the illusion of what we thought was its apparent logical structure.

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD - CONVENTIONS:

Voice – unusual use of silence and pause, rhythmic, monotone, a range of real and non-real vocal techniques

Movement – mix of realistic and non-realistic, precise timing, repetitive, a balance of presentational and representational

Characters – combinations of complex and simplistic characters, real and non-real

Language – often illogical, often immediate meaning only, combinations ranging from prose to poetry, philosophical, relationship to existentialism

Mood – varied, moment-to-moment, combinations of serious and comic

[Source: Crawford et al. (1995, 5th Ed.). Acting In Person and In Style, McGraw Hill, US. Print]
NAVIGATING BECKETT’S ONSTAGE WORLD...

The following is an extract from Arts Hub, Why is everyone doing Beckett? By Richard Watts, published February 17, 2015

For audiences who do find Beckett difficult or impenetrable, Sam Strong recommends yielding to the experience.

‘My advice ... is to not try and intellectually understand it but to let Beckett work upon your subconscious. Great theatrical experiences aren’t necessarily ones that you can clearly intellectually digest or articulate what your experience is. I think great theatrical experiences cut straight through to your unconscious, and Beckett can do that,’ Strong said.

‘And I think where people tend to enjoy Beckett less is where they get too caught up in trying to understand what it all means or try to intellectualise the experience. I think the duration of the experience is so important, the vividness of the images that he creates on a stage are so important, so I think try not to intellectualise it too much and yield to the theatrical experience that Beckett creates.

‘And I think part of yielding to a Beckettian experience in the theatre is actually about letting it bypass your rational mind. And another important thing is actually to ignore a lot of people who purport to be Beckett experts. I think sometimes why people don’t enjoy Beckett in the theatre is that they subscribe to that approach that he’s somehow medicinal or good for you or important or you should be seeing him because he’s great or good or important. Don’t be intimidated by Beckett as an artist and particularly by people who claim to tell you authoritatively what he’s doing or what kind of experience he’ll be creating for you,’ said Strong.

Sam why did you choose to direct Endgame? What drew you to this play?
One of the best things about my job as Associate Artistic Director is that, in consultation with Brett Sheehy (Artistic Director) and within the planning of the Company’s season, I am fortunate enough to direct some of the plays I’ve always wanted to. All directors have bucket lists and Endgame is on mine. The Crucible and Privates Lives, for example, are two plays that had been on my bucket list. The Weir (which I get to direct later in the year) is another.

To be honest I have always been a bit of a Becket nut! I think Beckett has always inspired a kind of crazy devotion in people. I’ve read most of his novels, all the short fiction, all of the drama, loads of critical material and more than one biography. It’s a while ago, but I have also directed Not I. Endgame is a quintessential Beckett work. It is reportedly his favourite piece and it’s easy to see why. It takes preoccupations and themes that you find throughout his body of work and presents them in the extreme. All those things you associate with Beckett – codependent couples, the manipulation of time on stage, specific but ultimately indeterminable locations, searingly memorable imagery, a preoccupation with bodily functions, ageing and death, a tragicomic humour in despair – are expressed in a very pure and distilled form in Endgame. Also, Endgame manages all this while still being a play written in relatively recognisable dramatic form and length, unlike Beckett’s later short work.

What attracts me most is the way Beckett puts humanity on stage. For me, no other writer does this in as naked or pure a form as Beckett does. In all his work he has a knack of presenting concrete stage images of existence - two tramps on a country road, two people in dustbins, someone who can’t sit and someone who can’t stand. He has a talent for distilling human existence down to powerful metaphors on stage.

I think that Beckett can be the subject of over-intellectualising but I believe the best experience of Beckett is in the theatre. That is part of his genius. For me Beckett writes incredibly precise, specific (and if you follow them successfully) blue prints for theatrical experiences. He understands the nature of time in a theatrical context and how to manipulate it. So the critical discourse around Beckett’s work sometimes doesn’t acknowledge that his works are best encountered in a theatre and written to be so. Yes, they are great literature but in only focusing on that you can miss the point that his plays (like all plays) are really made to be experienced in a theatre.

Sam, a clear and present focus for students studying this production of Endgame is the script. Would you comment on the translation or version of the script you will be using?
A key part of directing a Beckett play is obtaining the rights. There is a clause in the licensing agreement that protects the integrity of the text and stipulates the requirement to produce it in accordance with the standing stage directions. So, we have to perform the existing text and its accompanying stage directions, regardless of how we feel about that. The licensing agreement also ensures that you cannot add certain things, such as lines of dialogue.

So, there is an authorised version which we will be working from. There is, however, a revised text that came out of two productions directed by Beckett in Germany and London. There was considerable documenting of this process and of Beckett’s decision to use that opportunity to refine the text. So, for example, the revised script removes the red faces of Clov and Hamm, and removes the self-reflexivity i.e. turning to point the telescope at the audience. It also adds the odd extra joke, such as Clov going to get the tape and Hamm stopping him in the section about the position of the chair.

I think Beckett’s revising of his play derived from the tension that may exist between a text that is codified, set in time and the writer then returning to their work as a director. We will have a copy of the revised script in the rehearsal room to cross-reference but will be working from the licensed script.

**Sam, do you have a vision for this production of *Endgame***?

I often resist pinning down a production to a single vision, or a one-line version because it becomes too reductive. Making a work of theatre is more complex than that. I tend to ask myself what kind of experience I want to give an audience and what will be unique about that. In *Private Lives* I wanted to delight an audience. In *The Sublime* I wanted to challenge an audience. The key for me is the nature of the audience experience and the collision of artists, the text itself, and the space. If I want to speak in terms of a vision for *Endgame*, I want to make this an undiluted Beckett experience, one whereby if Beckett were a new writer and wandered into the rehearsal room he would approve of (and hopefully be occasionally surprised by) how well we had realised his intentions.

It is rare in the commercial context that is a main stage theatre company that you can create a challenging experience for an audience. *Endgame* sets out to be a work of the high modernist form. It’s funny, it’s human, it is deeply recognisable and touching but it is undeniably a difficult night in the theatre. If you have too much of an eye on making it palatable or entertaining for an audience you are better off not doing it. Beckett is best served straight or neat.

Beckett reputedly said that if *Endgame* was staged the way he wanted it to, it would empty the theatre, although the social, political and cultural landscape has fundamentally shifted since the time in which he was writing. And this does deny just how funny the play is.

In approaching Beckett you can get weighed down by the reputation of the man and the work. There is a mystic around the man. I think that as a director you need to keep a light touch, a balance between respect and reverence, respecting the text and the specificity of the text but also not being daunted or intimidated.

In terms of the stage directions in a Beckett play, you treat these as text including the pauses, and the rhythm. So you absolutely adhere to them and depart from them at your
peril. Beckett is relatively unique in this respect. But that doesn’t mean there is no room for interpretation or for a unique stamp. Once you’ve adjusted to the strictures – what we call the narrower interpretative bandwidth – there is infinite freedom within the parameters. If what we usually do in the theatre is closer to improvising in jazz, Beckett is more like playing classical music.

What is *Endgame* saying?
On one level, you can’t – and shouldn’t – pin Beckett down to a single message. This is why he has spawned such an academic industry, and why so many people purport to be Beckett experts and tell you what he’s saying. In reality, Beckett in the theatre is an experience that bypasses your conscious or rational mind. So your individual experience and point of entry is very important.

For me, at its most basic, *Endgame* puts what it means to be human on stage. We recognise in Beckett some less savoury but nevertheless very human qualities like the desire for companionship yet the tendency to mistreat that companion, the telling of stories to make sense of our world and our past, and the degeneration of our bodies over time. Beckett puts these things on stage as no other artist does. More often than not, he distills them to an image (e.g. two people in dustbins) or he presents them as metaphor. By avoiding pinning the piece down to specifics of time and place, we recognise a human essence and it becomes relevant for all times and places.

That said, the context for the work is different now to what it was when the plays were first performed. It’s not surprising that much of his work came out of a cold war context, a time when people feared the potential for a nuclear apocalyptic world. You sense that world is outside in *Endgame*. In the 21st century our understanding of apocalyptic is now environmental. There are new generations of people who can tap into a world outside that is ceasing to exist. *Endgame* is like the last bunker and that has an environmental currency even if you don’t relate it to the original cold war setting or context.

Would you say you have a particular directorial style?
Yes and no. There are qualities that unify my body of work that exist across all the shows I create. But what interests me as a director, and MTC affords me that opportunity, is the capacity to work across different styles – classics, new internationals and new Australian plays, 850 seats, 550 seats and 350 seats. I am always looking for challenges that extend me as an artist and my work. If you get stuck in a comfort zone you make boring work. Directors are generally hungry for challenges. What I think unifies my work is rhythm and a musicality of timing. This isn’t just about lines or dialogue or music, it is about the whole staging. As a director rhythm also includes when to land the next line, the moment to change the lighting state, when to introduce or end the music, in essence how to affect the audience through the rhythm of what you do on stage. The fascinating part about that is that it becomes invisible and doesn’t draw attention to itself. In *Private Lives* the amount of work that went into synchronising the stage revolve with the music, singing and actors to make it look seamless was enormous. One of the things that has always attracted me to Beckett’s writing is his sense of rhythm and patterns. As a director who enjoys rhythm and musicality you will inevitably be drawn to him because of that.
**How does pause work in Beckett?**
The quality of a pause depends on the nature of an individual moment, so sometimes where I think people go wrong is by trying to find a rule for the pauses. I don’t believe you can know how long a pause can be until you are on the floor in the rehearsal room. A pause is a living moment that exists between actors, and between actors and an audience. Certainly Beckett has them there for a reason and as a director I have to pay attention to them. The other consideration is that pauses are meaningless unless they are positioned against longer runs in the text. If there are unnecessary pauses between lines then the purposeful pauses will lose their meaning. Good directorial and performance rhythm is about closing gaps in lines and between lines so that you ‘earn’ the pauses that are scripted.

**Martin Esslin coined the termed Theatre of the Absurd in his book “Theatre of the Absurd” (1961). Would you comment on that style and how it relates to *Endgame*?**
My recollection of Esslin’s book is that he believed that that group of playwrights found a match between philosophical ideas and theatrical form. Through the use of their chosen form they found a way to represent ideas about theories of existence and the existentialism espoused in particular by Camus and Sartre. I think that Esslin’s interpretation is a strong reading of Beckett.

*Endgame* putting two characters without legs in dustbins is a concrete statement about the absurdity of existence. Locating two characters in a room that is a terminal world is, in Esslin’s terms, classic theatre of the absurd. Writers such as Beckett, Ionesco, Sartre, Adamov, Genet, Frisch and Pinter, resisted making literal sense. Beckett takes that into an abstraction of circumstance. He will keep thwarting your attempts to pin down the characters, location and time. It is important as a director not to fill in the gaps that Beckett deliberately leaves. While there are some specific references in the actual text to places – the Ardennes region in Belgium – Beckett takes you only to a point and then provides nothings more. It is classic theatre of the absurd, depicting an abstract and a non-literal universe.

**Given that we know very little about the characters, how do you cast a play like *Endgame*?**
You cast it with actors who will enjoy the style of the work. You try to get actors who will all be in the same play at the same time and comfortable in a slightly non-literal space. Actors will inhabit the style, actors who can bring a reality to the absurdity of that style. Particularly with the character of Hamm there is a danger that in the wrong hands a performance of Hamm would become too ‘hammy’ and that the actor will allow the performative aspects of the role to dominate. For instance focusing on the sound of Hamm’s voice and his proclamations but not grounding them in a reality of suffering and game playing. In portraying Hamm, Colin Friels will be able to realise beautifully the performative aspects but he also brings great authenticity. I am interested in an authenticity of suffering for all of the actors in this play. This is something that unifies my work. I am interested in substance within the style. In *Endgame*, these people, even if you don’t get full naturalistic details about them, are still real people stuck in a room. The red face mentioned in the stage directions is not a theatrical stylisation, it is concerned with someone who is exhausted, suffering or has perhaps even been burnt. So in casting you look for actors who will be able to find the reality within the style because you never want style to exist as empty shell.
What is the relationship between Hamm and Clov?
Their relationship is a classic Beckett interdependent relationship and this is why people recognise it. Hamm and Clov can’t be without one another but can’t stand to be with one another. One who can’t stand, one who can’t sit, one who can’t see, and one who can. Beckett is a genius at creating co-dependent relationships. He does it with Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*.

You said earlier that the stage directions as printed are part of the text. Will you be strictly adhering to them? For instance, in Beckett on Film’s version of *Endgame*, the opening scene with Clov is 4 minutes long
The legal answer is “yes”. The directorial answer is that the nature of Beckett as a writer is that he writes to generate a very particular experience for an audience. And he gives you a very specific and precise road map to get there. I think that you don’t follow the stage directions at your peril. It is interesting that you talk about the Beckett on Film version. Conor McPherson gives the characters Irish accents, and brings an Irish tragicomic sensibility to the work. That version feels more naturalistic without losing what it means to be human but certainly maintains its absurdism. The San Quentin production feels heavier and more abstracted in tone and form.

The MTC website describes the production as: *Samuel Beckett’s renowned black burlesque masterpiece, whose laughter at the world is always humane*. Is this an accurate description?
This piece is so black it is funny and is so bleak that it is absurd. It is a dark and pessimistic work and I don’t want to shy away from that. The burlesque thing is a reference to the vaudevillian strand that I feel always comes through Beckett’s work. For someone who captures the absurdity of existence he also sets up a pretty good joke. It is challenging in terms of tone and balance. You have to hit both those notes and be able to switch in the course of a moment. I want to push it as far it will go, push the cruelty, the humour, take it to the extreme and this will allow us to find the balance as well as finding the other manifold shades in between.

Sam, at this stage what can you say about the design?
The starting point for the design collaboration is that Callum Morton, the set designer, is a Beckett nut as well. He was always interested in the chance and there is a neat fit between his style as an artist and the demands of the piece. It is very architectural space. Designing *Endgame* is also as close as you get to creating a piece of visual art. There are functional things that must be present, and requirements in the text, but part of my brief to Callum was to make it a piece of art in its own right. This piece presents an opportunity to create a striking piece of visual art on stage.

The design process was almost a Beckettian process: a long distillation and the resisting of embellishment. We came up with ideas about extrapolating metaphors from the text into the design e.g. The entire floor space being covered in ash that tracks the characters and asks is this is what happens every day? Is it endless repetition or are we at the point where there is going to be a fundamental shift in the characters’ existence? Will Clov leave? We decided that because Beckett puts metaphors on stage through his writing you don’t need to add too many within the design.
So the design will capture the sense that the characters are trapped in kind of purgatory. At one point we contemplated a grid of fluoro lights that would gradually die across the trajectory of the show, but we let that go because we agreed you don’t need to do what is already being done; the light is already dying and this is referenced strongly in the text. Sometimes in design a metaphor can be writ large on stage. In this case it is too heavy because Beckett has done it already. That said we were keen to capture the spirit of minimalism, erasure and disappearance into nothing. We wanted to create Beckettian minimalism on stage for a 21st century.

Another thing we are trying to do is maintain the abstraction. The set is a concrete bunker and early inspirations included abandoned spaces and what a 1950s cold war bunker may look like now. But then we needed to abstract the space and ensure that it exists beyond space and time, to be a ‘no space’, and have a purgatory quality, balancing the abstract and the literal.

**What about costumes, lighting and sound?**
I am interested in Eugyeene Teh (costumes), Paul Jackson (lighting) and Russell Goldsmith (sound) bringing their individual flare to the work. In terms of the costumes, we needed to make them of no time as well as resisting unnecessary embellishment and Beckett clichés. There was a desire to balance human vulnerability, with a sense of grime and degradation, and the faded ornamentalism of some of these characters – their sense of theatricality and past grandeur.

The other thing we wanted to avoid is too intense an apocalyptic design. Having said that we have looked at the film *The Road* (based on the novel by Cormac McCarthy) and many images of abandoned spaces.

**Sam, why is Beckett relevant now?**
What Beckett achieved in the middle of the 20th century was to create timeless situations about humanity. That is always relevant.
RESOURCE:
The following is a link to the trailer of The Road based on the Pulitzer Prize winning novel by Cormac McCarthy. Set in a post-apocalyptic world, it is quite a harrowing story (to be viewed with caution) but it may be useful for you to gain insight into an imagined exterior world outside Hamm, Clove, Nell and Naggs’ present lives.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bO8EqMsxOiU

AFTER SEEING THE PERFORMANCE – Analysis and Evaluation
The following section draws you towards the Key Knowledge and Key Skills, as they relate to Outcome 3 and the end-of-year written exam. They are prompts and provocations, not an exhaustive exploration. Your class will no doubt make many discoveries. Remember that your job is to “analyse and evaluate the relationship between the written playscript and its interpretation on stage”.

THEATRE STUDIES UNIT 3: Playscript Interpretation
Outcome 3
On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse and evaluate the interpretation of a written playscript in production to an audience. To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 3.

Key knowledge
• The contexts of the interpretation of a written playscript
• Decisions taken that were evident in the production to interpret the written playscript for performance
• The application of acting and other stagecraft to develop the written playscript for performance
• Theatrical styles in the written playscript and in the play in performance
• Terminology and expressions used to describe, analyse and evaluate a theatrical production.

Key skills
• Analyse ways in which the contexts of a written playscript were interpreted through performance to an audience
• Evaluate the interpretation of the written playscript for performance
• Analyse and evaluate the application of acting and other stagecraft to develop the written playscript for performance
• Discuss similarities and differences of theatrical styles between the playscript and the play in performance
• Use appropriate theatrical terminology and expressions.
CONTEXTS and THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

From reading the playscript, what contexts are evident – culturally, historically, and geographically?

- Select three quotes from the script that provide evidence for your answers
- What is the immediate context, as suggested in the playscript? Where are the characters?

The contexts of the performance world:

- When you first saw the onstage world, what were your thoughts? Did it surprise you? Was it what you expected?
- Did the performance echo/capture the contexts evident in the playscript?
- Discuss the differences and similarities between the contexts suggested by the playscript and those in the performed work.

[Beckett] understands the nature of time in a theatrical context and how to manipulate it – Sam Strong, Director

- How does TIME work in the script? Is it real time? When was ‘yesterday’?
- How does TIME work in the performance? Is it compressed, is it real, is it timeless?
- How does TIME contribute to creating context? How does it contribute to meaning?

That said, the context for the work is different now to what it was when the plays were first performed. It’s not surprising that much of his work came out of a cold war context, a time when people feared the potential for a nuclear apocalyptic world. You sense that world is outside in Endgame – Sam Strong, Director

- Discuss the ‘exterior world’ as suggested by both the script and the characters in the performance.
- What is suggested? What do you imagine is outside? What clues does the script give you?
- What clues does the performed work provide?
- How does the action on stage reinforce, contradict or ignore your understanding of the ‘exterior world’?

In the 21st century our understanding of apocalyptic is now environmental. There are new generations of people who can tap into a world outside that is ceasing to exist. Endgame is like the last bunker and that has an environmental currency even if you don’t relate to the original cold war setting or context – Sam Strong, Director

- Analyse the director’s thinking. Do you agree with this interpretation?
- Do the contexts of the play lend themselves to new and contemporary meanings?

After seeing the performance, discuss the name of the play – Endgame – how it was referenced and signified throughout the production.
STRUCTURE and MEANING

He will keep thwarting your attempts to pin down the characters, location and time. It is important as a director not to fill in the gaps that Beckett deliberately leaves. While there are some specific references in the actual text to places – the Ardennes region in Belgium – Beckett takes you only to a point and then provides nothings more – Sam Strong, Director

- What is familiar about the world presented in *Endgame*? What is unfamiliar? Why?
- Can you imagine this world existing now? In the future? What may have caused it?

In dot point form, write down the plot of *Endgame*.

- At what point do we enter the characters’ lives?
- At what point do we exit their lives?
- What happens in between?
- What are the key moments?
- What do you imagine happens afterwards?

- Whose story is being told in *Endgame*? Is there more than one story?

Return to the synopses presented earlier in these notes from MTC and STC

- Evaluate their effectiveness in capturing what happens in the play.

*He has a talent for distilling human existence down to powerful metaphors on stage* – Sam Strong, Director

- Discuss the term metaphor.
- Discuss what might be the essence of human existence?
- What did you see, hear, and feel that could be considered a metaphor for human existence – consider use of words, silence, movement, stillness, repetition, light, sound, design?

Writer in residence at MTC, Paul Galloway, states: But there is nothing allegorical in Beckett’s plays. There are no symbols. The same goes for lessons, philosophies, politics, ethics, insights and, God forbid, answers. On the other hand, his plays do have characters and situations, actions and reactions, statements and banter, memories and jokes – lots of jokes.

- Discuss this comment and compare it to the director’s.
- Are these conflicting or contradictory comments?
- Why do you think that Samuel Beckett’s work produces differing views and interpretations?

*In reality, Beckett in the theatre is an experience that bypasses your conscious or rational mind. So your individual experience and point of entry is very important* – Sam Strong, Director

- Would you agree with this statement?

*It is undeniably a difficult night in the theatre. If you have too much of an eye on making it palatable or entertaining for an audience you are better off not doing it. Beckett is best served straight or neat* – Sam Strong, Director
bullet Discuss this comment in relation to the intention and meaning of the play.
bullet Draw out elements of the performance you felt were ‘difficult’ and ones you found ‘entertaining’ or ‘palatable’
bullet Analyse how the structure of the play enabled this.
bullet Discuss what *Endgame* offers that is **hopeful** and worthwhile about relationships and about humanity.

**THEATRICAL STYLES**

*It is classic theatre of the absurd, depicting an abstract and a non-literal universe* – Sam Strong, Director

- Discuss this comment. What specifically is *absurd*, *abstract* and *non-literal* about the play?
- Find some strong examples from the playscript.
- Find some strong examples from the performance.
- Does the *performed* work enable more moments of absurdity, abstraction and the non-literal? Why? How?

MTC’s online description of *Endgame* refers to the theatre style of ‘burlesque’. Director Sam Strong says *...the burlesque thing is a reference to the vaudevillian strand that I feel always comes through Beckett’s work. For someone who captures the absurdity of existence he also sets up a pretty good joke.*

- Discuss and analyse what aspects of the performance of *Endgame* drew on conventions of ‘burlesque’ or ‘vaudeville’.

...*putting two characters without legs in dustbins is a concrete statement about the absurdity of existence. Locating two characters in a room that is a terminal world is, in Esslin’s terms, classic theatre of the absurd* – Sam Strong, Director

- Discuss the idea that both the situation the characters find themselves in and the application of stagecraft can be absurd. Are they mutually exclusive or highly interrelated?
- Discuss recognised theatrical conventions of Theatre of the Absurd
- Carefully examine both the script and the performance in order to find clear examples of such conventions (there are some suggestions earlier in these notes) as well as others.

Comedy - ‘Nothing is funnier than unhappiness,’ says Nell musing from her dustbin in *Endgame*.

- What does Nell’s musing mean?

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1 *Burlesque* is a literary, dramatic or musical work intended to cause laughter by caricaturing the manner or spirit of serious works, or by ludicrous treatment of their subjects. The word derives from the Italian burlesco, which, in turn, is derived from the Italian burla – a joke, ridicule or mockery

2 *Vaudevville* is a theatrical genre of variety entertainment. It was especially popular in the United States and Canada from the early 1880s until the early 1930s. A typical vaudevville performance is made up of a series of separate, unrelated acts grouped together on a common bill.
CHARACTERISATION and ACTING

[Endgame is] concerned with co-dependent couples, the manipulation of time on stage, specific but ultimately indeterminable locations, searingly memorable imagery, a preoccupation with bodily functions, ageing and death, a tragicomic humour in despair – are expressed in a very pure and distilled form in Endgame – Sam Strong, Director

- Discuss each of the ideas offered by the director in this statement – co-dependency, manipulation of time etc.
- Analyse how the actors used their performance/acting skills to convey these ideas and concepts.
- You may find it useful to concentrate on Colin Friels and Luke Mullins as Hamm and Clov.
- Then discuss Julie Forsyth and Rhys McConnachie as Nell and Nagg.
- Compare short excerpts in the script with the live performance.
Director, Sam Strong, describes the characters in *Endgame* as having *very human qualities like the desire for companionship yet the tendency to mistreat that companion, the telling of stories to make sense of our world and our past, and the degeneration of our bodies over time.*

- Discuss this statement in terms of the characters in the play.
- Are they human? Are they strange? Do they exhibit recognisable human qualities?
- What does the play say about getting old?
- Why don’t the characters ever CHANGE? Why do they persist?

In responding to how he cast the actors in *Endgame*, director Sam Strong stated that he needed to consider ... *Actors who will inhabit the style, actors who can bring a reality to the absurdity of that style. Particularly with the character of Hamm there is a danger that in the wrong hands a performance of Hamm would become too ‘hammy’ and that the actor will allow the performative aspects of the role to dominate. Consider the following analysis tasks:*

**CHARACTER/ACTOR ANALYSIS: Hamm**

- Colin Friels plays the central character of Hamm, blind and unable to walk
- He interacts with Clov, who is both his servant and, arguably, his adopted son
- He listens to, reacts to and ultimately determines the fate of Nell and Nagg, his parents
- He is composing a story of his life from which we hear fragments and pontifications
- Hamm has no sight, and cannot leave his chair – arguably he now ‘lives’ in his chair.

Spend some time discussing each of the dot points above and carefully consider how the actor, Colin Friels, used acting skills and stagecraft to convey these actions, interactions, and reactions within the performance.

- Analyse then evaluate the effectiveness of Beckett’s decision to have Hamm confined to a wheel chair
- Does the character of Hamm dominate the space or is he simply one of four sad/comic souls in this world?
- How would you describe his status within this world?
- Do you find this character believable – in this world, in a larger world? Could he exist?
- How did make-up, costume, set and props contribute to or enhance Friels’ portrayal of Hamm?
- How do you feel about Hamm? Do you have empathy/sympathy? Why?

In a brief conversation with Colin Friels, the actor commented that Beckett’s work is like ‘poetry’

- Discuss this idea
- Does the script, at times, appear to read as poetic?
- Do Hamm’s stories and soliloquised speeches present as poetry?
- Does Hamm use language to philosophise, pontificate, ridicule, declare?
CHARACTER/ACTOR ANALYSIS: Clov

- Luke Mullins plays the character of Clov, who cannot sit and has a painful limp
- What other characteristics does this character have? Melancholy, agitated, hopeful, bitter?
- Clov listens to, reacts to and interacts with Hamm. Does he initiate?
- How does actor, Luke Mullins, create the character of Clov?
- Analyse and evaluate his use of movement, gesture and voice
- OPENING SCENE – discuss this in some details particularly with regard to physical attributes, rhythm, silence, repetition, status, use of stagecraft and use of space.
- How did makeup, costume, set and props contribute to or enhance Mullins’ portrayal of Clov?
- How would you describe the power relationship between the two characters?
CHARACTER/ACTOR ANALYSIS: Nell and Nagg
- Julie Forsyth plays Nell and Rhys McConnachie plays Nagg – Hamm’s ancient parents
- Discuss and analyse these characters in detail, their roles, function, relationship to each other and to Hamm and Clov
- How might the bins create both constraint and opportunity for the actors?
- How did costume, makeup and hair contribute to the creation of these characters?
- What is the relationship between Nell and Nagg? Is it a co-dependency? Is it one of love?
- Nell dies – how do you feel? How do the other characters react?
- Analyse and discuss the death of Nell and its status within the play

PAUSE:
A pause is a living moment that exists between actors, and between actors and an audience
– Sam Strong, Director
- The use of pause, silence and stillness in Endgame is significant
- Return to the script and reacquaint yourself with the way ‘pause’ is written by Beckett
- Then discuss how ‘pause’ is interpreted in the performance
- What particular moments do you recall?
- How does pause differ from silence in Endgame?
- Do you agree with the director’s statement above? Does pause only really exist in the live work?
- Analyse and evaluate: how does the use of pause impact on the actor/audience relationship, timing, rhythm, dramatic tension, narrative and meaning?
STAGECRAFT – Direction

In a letter to a director name Dr. Kleinschmidt in 1973, Samuel Beckett wrote:

Dear Dr. Kleinschmidt
Thank you for your letter.
I am totally opposed to your idea of bringing Endgame up to date in an Altersheim or other fashionable hell. This play can only function if performed strictly as written and in accordance with its stage instructions, nothing added and nothing removed. The director’s job is to ensure this, not to invent improvements. If and where such an approach is deemed incompatible with prevailing needs the play should be left in peace. There is no lack of others to fit the bill.
Yours sincerely
Samuel Beckett
24.8.1973

Discuss this letter with regard to the MTC’s production of Endgame.

- How accurately did the performance adhere to the stage directions, pauses, descriptions, exists and entrances?
- Do you agree with the premise of the letter? Is this the director’s role?

Re-read the opening stage directions to the play

- Compare and contrast them to the performance you saw
- How closely did the direction reflect the stage directions?
- What differences did you notice/remember? Why do you think there are differences?

In terms of the stage directions in a Beckett play, you treat these as text including the pauses, and the rhythm. So you absolutely adhere to them and depart from them at your peril – Sam Strong, Director

- Discuss, analyse and evaluate this statement comparing the written playscript with the directorial choices made by Sam Strong.

What I think unifies my work is rhythm and a musicality of timing. This isn’t just about lines or dialogue or music, it is about the whole staging. As a director rhythm also includes when to land the next line, the moment to change the lighting state, when to introduce or end the music, in essence how to affect the audience through the rhythm of what you do on stage – Sam Strong, Director

- Discuss how the direction of this production affected rhythm and timing.
- Were lines ‘landed’? Did the timing feel right?
- Did the direction of the performance enable you to respond to and feel affected by those decisions?

Did the direction, timing and use of space work in a complementary way? Evaluate the effectiveness of the direction in addressing timing, rhythm, and structure.
Discuss the direction of the scene where Clov has the telescope in order to look outside.
  • What else does he focus the telescope on?
  • How does this directorial choice impact on meaning? Actor/Audience relationship? Theatrical styles? Is it referenced in the script?

Actor/Audience relationship.
  • Does the script suggest there is a fourth wall? Look for specific examples.
  • Did the performance suggest a fourth wall – give examples – and was the fourth wall broken?
  • Were there moments of direct address, audience complicity, self-reference (ie the use of the telescope by Clov?)
  • Discuss, analyse and evaluate these ideas and determine how they impacted on the actor/audience relationship.
  • How did the existence or non-existence of a fourth wall enhance the theatrical styles of the performance? Did it emphasise the absurdity? The existential nature of the work? The comedy?

How did the direction of certain scenes or moments generate comedy?
  • Identify some comic moments within the performance
  • What was the relationship between direction, use of language and acting in these moments?
STAGECRAFT – Set

The set is designed by installation artist, Callum Morton (see earlier in these notes for links to Morton’s work).

Discuss your responses to the set design – its colours, shades, textures, size, overall aesthetic, function, feeling, form, the mood it generated, its contribution to the world of the play.

Compare the set design in the performance to that suggested by the script.
- What similarities and differences do you find?
- For instance the placement of the windows, the position of the door, the rubbish bins?

*The set is a concrete bunker and early inspirations included abandoned spaces and what a 1950s cold war bunker may look like now. But then we needed to abstract the space and ensure that it exists beyond space and time, to be a ‘no space’, and have a purgatory quality, balancing the abstract and the literal* – Sam Strong, Director
- Discuss this description of the set design.
- What aspects of the set do you believe resembled a bunker?
- What aspects do you feel were ‘abstracted’?
- What aspects do you feel were very literal?
- What does the director mean by a ‘no space’?
- What is ‘purgatory’ and how might the set design reflect or convey that concept?
- Does the set feel like a home?

*It is very architectural space. Designing Endgame is also as close as you get to creating a piece of visual art* – Sam Strong, Director
- Compare and contrast this comment with the one above.
- What struck you as being architectural about the design?
- Explore the images throughout these notes and consider how the set may sit as its own piece of visual art, without the play. Is this possible?
- The audience is confronted by a concrete wall as they enter the theatre. Discuss this design choice and how it relates to the performance.

*We decided that because Beckett puts metaphors on stage through his writing you don’t need to add too many within the design* – Sam Strong, Director
- Discuss this comment. What do you think it means?
- Are there aspects to the set design that you feel are symbolic or metaphoric?
- For instance compare this comment to the one above about ‘no space’ and ‘purgatory’. Are these metaphors?

How do the performers use the space? What challenges does it offer them? What opportunities?

How does the set design contribute to the theatrical styles inherent in the play as written, and as performed?
STAGECRAFT – Properties

Some of the properties used in the performance include:

- Furniture covers, a whistle, an alarm clock, a telescope, a metal ladder, a gaff or hooked stick, the wheelchair, a handkerchief, a biscuit, the stuffed dog, the flea powder
- What other properties do you recall?
- How would you describe the aesthetic of these props?
- What are their functions?
- Do the properties sit in harmony with the world of the play?
- Do they contrast or contradict it?

Discuss whether particular characters used certain props

- Is this significant?
- Are there practical reasons for this?
- Do certain props have greater meaning or symbolism?
STAGECRAFT – Costume and makeup
Throughout this resource and on the MTC website there are production photos that will allow you to recall the costumes and makeup worn by the characters, designed by Eugyene Teh.

As you have with set and properties, discuss the overall aesthetic of the costumes and the makeup – colour palette, textures, literal, abstract, familiar, unfamiliar, exaggerated, practical or other.

*There was a desire to balance human vulnerability, with a sense of grime and degradation, and the faded ornamentalism of some of these characters – their sense of theatricality and past grandeur* – Sam Strong, Director

- Discuss some of the key terms in this comment by the director
- How do the COSTUMES and/or the MAKEUP reflect some or all of these terms?
- Did Hamm’s costume suggest a past life?
- How does Clov’s costume indicate his function and role?
- Discuss the final image of Clov when he is dressed to leave.

Discuss the costumes and make-up for the characters Nagg and Nell.
- What was particular about these characters’ costumes and make-up?
- How did it contribute to their function within the performance?
- How did the costume and makeup choices contribute to the theatrical styles?

STAGECRAFT – Lighting and Sound
Lighting designer, Paul Jackson, and sound designer, Russell Goldsmith, have collaborated with the director and the design team to interpret the script for performance.

**Lighting**
While the role of lighting is to light the performers what other roles does it have in theatre?

Discuss how the lighting contributed to creating the world of *Endgame*
- For instance the opening image of light through the windows, the central ceiling light, the light in the corridor beyond the room.
- What different types of ‘lamps’ were used to create these states?
- Analyse the choices made by the lighting designer.
- What particular lighting states and changes can you remember as being significant, memorable, striking and why?

Discuss how the windows in the set design were lit or were used to allow light into the performance space.
- How did this contribute to and enhance the creation of the play’s world?
- How was SHADOW used in the play? To what effect?

Discuss how lighting was used in conjunction with the ‘door’. Was it suggestive of somewhere else beyond the room?
Did the lighting give a sense of **time** passing? Standing still? How?

Towards the end of the play the lighting gives the impression of footlights. In these last few interactions, Hamm references an ‘aside’, an ‘underplot’ and his last ‘soliloquy’, and Clov talks about ‘making an exit’.

- Discuss the idea of the characters having self-awareness; that they are playing out a story for an audience.
- Discuss how the lighting may have enhanced that idea.

**Sound**

What particular sounds or music do you recall from the performance?

- For instance, what music was present as you entered the theatre?
- How was sound used at the very opening of the play?
- What diegetic sounds were present in the performance?

Overall, how did the sound contribute to the mood of the performance and to the world of the play?

**STAGECRAFT – Stage management (SM) and Publicity**

For those students taking on SM roles or Publicity you may like to consider the following:

**Stage Management**

- What OH&S issues do you think an SM may need to consider with regard to the set design for this production?
- What do you think would be some key CUES you may need to write on the prompt script?
- How would you pre-set this show?
- What would the SM need to do at the end of the show in order to prepare for the next performance?
- What items are brought on stage during the performance? What is the SM’s role with regard to these?

**Publicity**

Explore the MTC website for marketing and media publicity approaches to this production.

- Comment on the poster design and how you feel it represents the play
- What would you tweet in order to advertise the production?
- Which creative team members do you think the media might like to chat to prior to the production opening? During the season?
- How would you advertise this show on Facebook?
- If the show wasn’t selling well, what type of publicity campaign could you devise?
**ENDGAME – THEMES AND IDEAS**

The director, Sam Strong, states that some of the ideas and themes in Endgame are – human qualities (both good and bad), desire, companionship, telling stories to make sense of our past/present/future, the degeneration of the body.

- Discuss how each of these were present in the script
- Discuss and provide examples of how they were made evident in the performance – through acting, direction, other stagecraft?
- What other enduring or key ideas do you think were being explored? Find examples.

**CONSIDER:**

What does your study of *Endgame* reveal about the production process?

How does the discussion, analysis and evaluation of *Endgame* provide an understanding of approaching unseen material in both Outcome 2 and in preparation for the end-of-year exam?

How might studying *Endgame* support your approach to the Stagecraft Examination for either acting or design?