Chapter Three

The Ethical Subjectivity in Endgame

In this chapter, I’d like to investigate the characters’ oscillation between the love for life and the drive to death. Not allowed to make sense of their world, they are baffled by the question such as what’s happening. Despite some liminal perceptions of the ambivalent feelings, there is the call of the other that outweighs the characters’ intentionality. The call of the other serves to be the ethical imperative as the ultimate judgment on their lives. Reading the play with Levinasian ethics in mind, we are able to view the play as a dramatization of Levinasian ethics. The chapter is mainly divided into two parts. First, I account for the characters’ endeavor to preserve their subjective freedom as being employed against the totalitarian ideology that seemingly structures the play. Second, viewing from Levinas’s thought, the play is itself a deployment of the ethical performance, whether it is viewed from the philosophical interpretation or from the expression of its language.

“We Do What We Can” ¹

In the traditional sense, the notion of the independent will is ascribed to the essence of subjectivity. The subject is deemed as a free agent who possesses an absolute independence from the others. Such a construction leads to an egoistic subjectivity, and such kind of freedom is spontaneous and reconciles the other’s freedom in order to ensure its own autonomy. As Levinas pinpoints: “[I]n it [the spontaneous freedom] the shock of the encounter of the same with the other is deadened” (TI 42). The freedom of the will for itself is “arbitrary and violent” (TI 84), and is the testimony of the self-justified concept.

This concept is incarnated in the self’s body whose senses contact with the world and makes possible the self as an existent. On the one hand, the body practices the self’s will “for itself” to obtain the need of satisfaction in order to postpone the threat of hunger and death. In

¹ This phrase is derived from Endgame (Faber and Faber: London, 1958), 16.
addition, with the body, the self is able to separate itself from the anonymous Being because the body “constitutes the present or the ‘I’” (Frank 23). Thus the body enables the self to participate in the world and to acquire a position. In this way the self possesses, represents, dominates and extends itself by exerting the absolute freedom on what is not itself in order to master the world as its own (identity).

The promotion of freedom for itself is characteristic of the ideology of the sameness (TI 42). In other words, this “imperialism” of the self auto-identification can be regarded as “the egology of presence” (TO 99), which is constituted by intentionality, intelligibility, vision, knowledge, and language—“the monopoly of representational thinking” or “the model of knowing” (Peperzak 214). “[T]he gathering of all alterity into presence” (TO 100) is the reduction of the Other to the same. As a result, the present is brought to the fore because the otherness of the past and the future is thematized in the notion of “I remember” or “I think.” In Levinas’s sense, “To comprehend the alteration of presence in the past and future would be a matter of reducing and bring back the past and future to presence—that is, representing them” (TO 99, my emphasis).

In Endgame the characters protect their subjectivity by asserting their free will in various ways. Hamm pursues his freedom by exerting the will “for itself” in two aspects: language and body. As for Nagg, he retains his subjectivity by means of monopolizing the past memory. About Clov, he makes way for his subjective freedom by keeping distance from Hamm’s domain. The purpose of maintaining the subjectivity is to fabricate the myth of the I, the illusion of the self. To take Hamm as the first example, the room he inhabits is confined and demarcated, signaling his intention to draw a line between the inside and the outside. For him the outside is a perilous terra incognita fraught with indeterminateness, a moribund world. He proclaims that “Outside of here it’s death” (E 15). The announcement simultaneously indicates that the place is the last and the only area in which humans exist, and expresses Hamm’s intention to name the unknowable dimension “death,” which is an enemy that dwells
outside of Hamm’s domain. In virtue of naming, the outside is catalogued under Hamm’s knowledge, thus an understandable foe against which Hamm can fight back. Separating himself from the outside, he retains a private space to sustain his subjectivity and, most importantly, he has time (in this case, the space interposes a distance for Hamm to delay the immediate threat from the outside and thus the space can be accounted for by the notion of time) to know the external world in order to further dominate it. Commanding Clov as his servant who has his eyes on the enemy, Hamm plays the role of king who makes every effort to protect his kingdom. His action is thus invested by the human’s heroic will and symbolically his role-play as a king expresses his subjective freedom and sovereignty.

Hamm’s egoistic subjectivity is revealed in another case. Assuming himself as a king, he orders Clov to wheel him around the place to feel the boundary made by the wall. If he is unable to touch the wall, he would be exacerbated and anxious. The sense of touching, in particular that by hand, is of importance for Hamm’s configuration of his self-enclosed territory because he has lost his vision so that he cannot maintain a secure distance from the object (the enemy) to ensure his subjective sovereignty. In consequence, it is via the action of touching by hand that Hamm “represents” things in the kingdom of his mind-reflection. Touching is one of his tools to control his world. To speak otherwise, through touching the body enacts as an agent that occupies and dominates the world. Moreover, the sense of self-centeredness makes Hamm the subject who is a synthesis of gathering and absorbing the others into its own use. Hamm requires Clov to take him back to the central position of his kingdom after making a complete circuit, which denotes his fear of being marginalized and marks Hamm’s painstaking endeavor to assure sovereignty. Hamm inquires: “I’m more or less in the center?” (E 24), and strictly demands the exact position in the center (ibid.). He makes Clov incessantly alter the wheelchair’s position in order to achieve what he “thinks” as the center.

In the case above, the body is subsidiary to the soul. The traditional dualism considers
the soul as the autonomous consciousness and the body as a subordinate in opposition to the soul. That is, the body is the physical image of the soul, under which the body is reined. The self, whose essence is the soul and whose mastery is over the body, is considered the body-master. For in sleep, the self suspends the working of consciousness, and the rest guarantees the private reclusion of its soul, benefits the soul a sound body and enables the self to be the body-master with the soul-body integration. To fall asleep indicates that the self is able to exert its will. In addition, since to lie in sleep means to occupy a position for the self in the world, it is a substantial exemplar that the self’s will satisfies its needs of peace in rest. In other words, the self’s will for itself acquires its privileged position through the body (Franck 21).

This is the reason that Hamm pines for sleeping for a while after Clov departs from him. Hamm needs a rest to restore his physical energy and revive the ability of consciousness. He states: “If I could sleep I might make love. I’d go into the woods. My eyes would see…the sky, the earth. I’d run […]” (E 19). The scene appearing in Hamm’s dream conveys the wish for being a body-master who appropriates and enjoys the world. Blind and handicapped, Hamm in the dream rejoices in a sound body nourished by Nature. For him sleeping proves to be not only a lieu that the self’s will and body fit with each other, but also a panacea for soothing the sense of frustration in the reality. Being able to fall asleep helps to recall and reconstruct his memory which enables him to enact an autonomous self. Consequently the ability of sleeping does not deprive Hamm of his consciousness as it obviously seems to do. On the contrary, it presupposes the existence of self-consciousness and approves of the subjective freedom. To sleep is to take a rest. From Levinas’s critical point, an existent that is at a rest is still in activity—“the upsurge of an existent into existence” (qtd. in Chanter 150)—a subject in a moment of mastery and virility (TO 74). Hamm tries to substitute his dream for the reality in order to stay behind the screen of the illusive dream (provided by sleep) to which he withdraws into a private region called the selfhood.
What we see above also implies the significance of using language as an instrument for Hamm to represent and settle down the things (through ordering Clov). Behind his appliance of language are the legitimate claims on rationality and intentionality that contribute to the validity of language. Even though he is handicapped, through language he seems to maintain the integrity of soul, i.e., the self’s essence, which is grounded on rationality and intentionality. For example, he orders Clov to deal with trivia for him and in a sense he is still movable as an autonomous self for Clov is his alter ego in servitude to his needs. By language the problematic disjunction between the will to power and the handicapped body is relegated to the minor position in contrast to the majesty of the immanent soul.

In addition, Hamm creates his chronology by language. He speaks: “It’s story time, where was I?” (E 35), and then continues telling his story, which gives him a sense of being located in a specific spot. In telling his story he retrieves the past, presenting himself. In a sense chronology serves to be a totalizing power that collapses the past into the present, and projects meaning unto the future so that the future is anticipated. Thereby chronology exists in the synthesizing progress that synchronizes the past and the future in the present. This is a recycling process of auto-identification. Hamm consistently returns to and reorders his story to encapsulate the past in the present. And it seems that Hamm’s future is a predictability of recapturing what is left and preserved in the present. Thus language endorses Hamm a fixated, in a sense, a secured identity.

Although Hamm is the most prominent figure on behalf of the notion of the self-autonomy, the other characters also strive to preserve their subjective freedom. For example, under Hamm’s imperial empire of selfhood, Clov has his own kitchen where he can “lean on the table, [and] look at the wall” (E 12). That is, he is able to lean for some rest (which guarantees the subject a moment of mastery and virility), and look at the wall (which is an action that signals his visual ability, implying a precedence over Hamm who is blind) instead of coping with trifles for Hamm. The kitchen belongs to his private domain that
separates from Hamm’s territory and is no longer regulated by Hamm’s order. In addition, he once claims that if he could kill Hamm, he would be happy. To kill the other in this case aims to view the other as something destructible, thus can be annihilated or assimilated. Hence killing is understood as the violence imposed upon the other that intends to expel or reduce the other in order to solidify the self’s mastery. As for Nagg, he lays claim on the monopoly of the past memory to establish his selfhood. Asserting that the past is his own story (E 21), he prioritizes a non-sharable memory as his property (even Nell is excluded from the ownership of the memory). Moreover, as Nagg speaks to Hamm, he also makes appeal to Hamm for listening to his story (E 38), from which he maintains his dignity of a father, a man of power.

All the cases above orient us to view the play as an unfurling succession of human’s struggle for a self-independent existence. The self-autonomy leads the self to an arbitrary freedom of identifying what is other than the self with the self, no matter from the physical enjoyment or from the imperative power of language. Such an auto-identification forms a self-embracing territory. However, apart from the characters’ endeavor to confirm the self-autonomy, the relations in the play are muddled and complicated for there are always contentious discordances that disrupt the self-enclosed totality. In the following sections, I’d like to discuss to what extent the fissures occur in the ostensible wholeness.

From the Same to the Other: the Ethical Imperative in Endgame

In the previous section we see that Hamm and Nagg try to protect their subjective freedom and transform the others into a reflection of themselves. Viewing the other from a totalizing perspective of self-interestedness, they transcribe the other into another version of themselves. As for Clov, even though he is submissive, he is inclined to sustain his subjective freedom by killing the other (Hamm). All in all, we see that the self wants to separate itself from the other in order to ensure “a tranquil possession of the world” (Davis 44).
From Levinas’s viewpoint, it is no accident that one thinks of the other things via thematization and intentionality, which structure the conducts of humans under the rein of totality. Yet, it is an action of reduction that things are transmitted to an identifiable plane to be known and thought by the impersonal rules of totality against which Levinas disagrees. Thus Levinas further argues that the relation between one and another is nowise a subsidiary to this kind of rational discourse, in which the self regards the other as an object of knowledge to be thematized and interpreted by an “ideal principle” (OB 99). Likewise, in *Endgame*, the intentionality to dominate the other results in a failure. The self-assured identity is disproved. Although the play seems to take on the totalizing ideology that the self intends to overpower the other, there are contradictions which prevent the other from being absorbed.

As we see, something unknowable in the play interrupts the self-assurance (for Hamm in particular), and arouses the feeling of anxiety and hesitation. According to some readings of the play, it is said that the fear of death, of non-being, stirs up the sense of anxiety and hesitation. This kind of reading seems to be tenable because Hamm’s shelter is straightly considered a fortifying zone of self-preservation, keeping Hamm from the intrusion of the outside—the death realm. Yet on the contrary, it is not a strong argument for Hamm once seeks to die by asking Clov to “finish” him (E 29). In such a case, Hamm desires rather than declines death. Therefore there would be a discrepancy in reading the play merely as a process struggling against death for fear of being nothingness.

Accordingly, to claim that something unknowable is death is a facile success that downplays the paradoxical intricacy in the play. Nevertheless, the involved relation between the something and death cannot be denied. There is similarity between the something and death in the play—they both go beyond the characters’ comprehension, and are non-representational by human’s knowledge. Given this, it is insufficient to regard death as non-being (nothingness) in the traditional binary dyad between life (being) and death.
(non-being), for death in the play is not in the horizon of the characters’ ability to know.

The characters in the play are obliged to sustain their lives by abdicating the right to die. Their lives are not at their will, but are in pledge of something unknowable. In the play the self-assured autonomy as well as the totalizing power, are dwindling to the minimum while the play is proceeding to the end. The characters’ obsession with and confusion of the something unknowable are ascending so that their consciousness is not qualified to be the privileged mode that accounts for their relation with the physical reality. In the play, the something unknowable is elusive, absent, and cannot be put into words. Because of its absence, the characters face a predicament imposed on them as an onus of the unsolvable enigma which goes beyond rational debates. The idea of subjectivity is at stake in the tension between the annulment of intentionality and the irremissibility of “being there” in this enigmatic reality.

Geoff Hamilton argues that this sense of absurdity comes from the lack of link between humans and nature. He typifies Endgame as an “anti-pastoral elegy” because the consolation from Nature in the pastoral tradition disappears in the play (611). In Endgame, the idea of Nature reminds the characters of a sense of permanent loss, and they cannot rally themselves from the state of loss in virtue of the consolation nourished from the regenerating cycle of Nature. The worst thing is that the recycling route of Nature here indicates an implacable drive to mourn for the loss, which implies that it is nothing more than a wistful thinking to end. The recycling process ruthlessly proceeds on, and leaves room for human’s interminable mourning. From this perspective, Hamilton delineates something in the play as the force of Nature. Human’s failure to be concordant with nature compels Hamm to constantly shape the sense of loss into “consoling fictions” (620). Yet, he is unable to search for an integral whole from Nature.

K. Jeevan Kumar casts a similar point as Hamilton, but names something as the structure of time. He suggests that something in the play signals the infinity of time, which plays a
game of chess with humans. The unpredictability of time makes it an unfathomable enemy who always moves beyond humans’ comprehension. Thus life is a chess game in the absurd universe wherein humans are destined to fail but are made to go on notwithstanding. Kumar depicts Hamm as an existential hero who is fully responsible for his every move in this game, and argues that the play metaphorically presents the angst of human in the absurd world in which the “essence of existence is a void or Nothingness” (550).

Hamilton and Kumar share the common interest that *Endgame* portrays an absurd worldview that rationality is superseded by irrationality as the mode that shapes the relation between humans and the universe. The only way against the sense of impotence is to keep on endlessly. Meanwhile, they point out that the so-called existent entity of selfhood is anything but an integral whole, and there is no existent central self in the absurd world. In a nutshell, both they conclude that in the play a stable identity is unattainable, and the search for self is the faint hope for the characters to assume their state of being. After all, the sense of self-consciousness justifies the human existence.

Nevertheless, there remains much to say about something in the play. Instead of delineating something as an adversary that mars the identity or subjectivity of human, it maybe noteworthy to focus our attention more on the interrelationship between the characters and something there, and to envision something as an evocation rather than an evil eye. In doing this, probably we are able to eschew the tenacious tendency to declare the destruction of subjectivity, and recover another avenue to seeing how the subjectivity renders itself in the play without referring to the sovereign subjectivity. I suggest that the idea of subjectivity discussed in Levinas’s ethics may serve as a feasible way for us to further account for something there in the play.

From Levinas’s perspective, the modality of the characters’ existence is an obsession that breaks up the self’s serenity of consciousness and its equality with the other objects intentionally understood. In other words, in the play there is an absence of horizon against
which the intentionality cannot reach. The meaning of their lives is irreducible to the characters’ consciousness as the self-interested investment. Therefore the cognitive mode of interaction with the world is not empowered. For example, the vision, whose primacy in the physical senses, traditionally refers to the model of consuming, devouring or incorporating the other into the self; yet in Hamm’s case, as we see, his blindness implies the play’s subversion of the cognitive primacy of vision.

Unable to apply rationality to this world, Hamm inquires about “what’s happening” incessantly, and seems to resist something in his self-contained domain. Deducing from Hamm’s words that “Outside of here it’s death” (E 15, 45), we know that the play delineates Hamm’s complex and paradoxical reaction to the outside world named death. Hamm leads a life in the mode of being-against-death in the postponement (from death). For Hamm, the everyday life is a procrastination of putting off death’s visitation. “The end of the day” is like “any other day” and “something is taking its course” (E 17).

The struggle with the death realm structures the development of the play and thus the crux of the matter here is the notion of mortality itself. The idea of incarnation will be the pivot of my argument in this chapter. It is by way of incarnation that time and nature have their meaning on human whose corporeality is mortal, and thus they are connected with the notion of death. In brief, Hamm undergoes a physical degeneration that is a natural procedure of which he cannot lay hold—he is even forbidden to commit suicide for time is not decidable by human. No matter from the perspective of time or nature, the something refers to the ungraspableness beyond human’s knowledge: we are unable to know time and nature, and thus we cannot control them. Throughout the play, human’s impotence is everywhere. Hamm and the other characters are earthbound so that they cannot get rid of the fate of mortality. “You are on earth, there’s no cure for that!” says Hamm hopelessly (E 45). Hence in the play, time, nature, and death are intertwined, revolving around the notion of the incarnation.
Then how can we account for the relation with the something, if the characters’
consciousness cannot take cognizance of it? Since the play downgrades the abstract notions
attributed to the self, such as consciousness or intentionality, the manifestation of the self as
autonomy is hallucinatory, non-affirmed and thus inauthentic. The relation of the self with the
surrounding things is transfigured into the uncontrolled mode of contiguity with the unknown.
What is it, then, in the play which seeks to present by the abdication of the autonomous
subjectivity? How to give an account of the relation that the self is fascinated with an alien
thing which is elusive to be understood? Isn’t the non-sensical relation meaningful to the
characters? To examine the unknowable dimension of the play and in order to avoid falling
prey to the approach of the absurdism, which remains an exaltation the characters’ heroic will,
it comes to our aid to turn to Levinas’s notion of the ethical relation which aims to speak the
unknown as the other who inspires the incarnated self, and through the discussion of
incarnation we are able to see the play as a deployment marking the contradictory tension
between the self and the other.

Incarnation: the Tension between the Pursuit for Life and the Drive to Death

In the very beginning of the play, during his pantomimic action Clov removes the sheet
covering on Hamm and thus discovers him. Before Clov removes the sheet, Hamm is like a
piece of artistic work on exhibition—a thing without real life. After being uncovered, Hamm
is inspired and stirred to life. Then Hamm yawns and unmasks the handkerchief on his
face—he greets the world by being awakened from the slumber. Since the mask symbolizes a
superficial identity made by norms, to remove it implies that Hamm gets rid of the forms in
the human society. Therefore, this animation “incarnates” Hamm and makes him a living
subject in the world. Given the mortality, Hamm is incarnated to say “Me” in order to play (E
12). From Levinas’s perspective, the incarnation implicates that the Other has been within
Hamm for it is the inspiration from the Other\textsuperscript{2} that Hamm is awakened to play. Levinas describes this as “the other in the same, where inspiration arouses respiration” (\textit{OB} 116).

Symbolically speaking, Hamm is like a frustrated king who loses his sovereignty in the self-claimed territory and stands forth as a human who undergoes the tight balance barely offset by the confrontation between the other and the self. Hamm’s first soliloquy reveals the understatement of the tension between the self and the other. He remarks:

\begin{quote}
Can there be misery—\textit{(he yawns)}— loftier than mine? No doubt. Formerly. But now? […] Oh I am willing to believe they suffer as much as such creatures can suffer. But does that mean their sufferings equal mine? No doubt. (\textit{Pause.}) No, all is a—\textit{(he yawns)}— absolute, (\textit{proudly}) the bigger a man is the fuller he is. (\textit{Pause. Gloomily.}) And the emptier. […] Enough, it’s time it ended, in the refuge too. (\textit{Pause.}) And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to … to end.
\end{quote}

\textit{(E 12)}

Hamm inaugurates his performance by pointing out his condition of suffering and his unwilling hesitation to end. Many critics have observed that the play unfurls the essential mode of being of life, in which the characters demand the heroic will to repel death, and thus they’re able to preserve the sovereign free will. This sort of reading exalts the human’s will to be the ultimate judgment on every issue, even on human’s choice of death. However, after carefully reading the play, we find that Hamm’s hesitation to end concerns not only his free will, but also the inexplicable imperative that prolongs the suffering without his control. Thus the reading above is relatively insufficient to explain the play when the issue comes to Hamm’s indeterminant condition. It is necessary for us to further examine what kind of hesitative vacillation that Hamm experiences.

Let us return to the block quoted above. Hamm at first seems to justify the suffering he

\textsuperscript{2} From the outset of the play, there is a broad hint that Clov serves as the Other to Hamm as the Same. I will account for Clov as the Other in the latter part of this chapter.
endures, but afterwards he adds that all the suffering is absolute, unable to make comparison. He continues saying a contradictory sentence such as: the bigger and fuller man is relatively emptier. This paradoxical announcement stimulates us to reconsider how to define a man of fullness. Obviously, Hamm does not think that a man is full because he is satiated or his lack is filled up. Instead, he denotes that the fuller a man is, the emptier he becomes. In other words, as a man much more expands his life, he becomes less self-possessive.

This mode of being accords with Levinas’s idea that the subjectivity is in the self’s dispossession to the extent that the self is a hostage of the other. According to Levinas, because Hamm does not define a man’s life by stressing his self-possessiveness, he leads a mode of being that avoids aiming at annihilating the other. He does not take on his own being based on a self-unitary and self-autonomous system wherein the other is reduced to the same, which in a sense the other is suppressed and marginalized by the self-sufficiency, as if the other is reduced to be nothingness. On the contrary, Hamm has a sense that being is deficient so that the self co-exists with the other that the former is exposed to the latter without distance or reserve. To speak otherwise, for the other is non-assimilable to the sameness of the self-empire, it is his otherness to which Hamm is exposed in such a way that he is entrusted with the burden of the other, and his immanent being is questioned.

Being incarnated, Hamm is a mortal being whose life is an endless contestation between the self and the other from the very outset. Being born on earth is to oscillate in the consubstantial relation of the love for life and the drive to death. In the case of the incarnation the self-complacency is merely an illusion. Levinas draws on body to account for the encounter with the other as a mode of sensibility. The sensibility has two types: one is to be sensitive to the other and to be manipulated; another is to appropriate the other in order to acquire the self-satisfaction that preserves the self-wholeness. Sensibility is itself a controversial mode of life that the self is not fully possessive of self-autonomy and

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3 See my previous chapter, 55-63.
self-affection. Rather, the self in incarnation is a non-lieu that the so-called recurrence of the self as the auto-identification is turned to be the significance of the self-for-the-other because the other has been in the self without being subsumed to the sameness. In the play, Hamm’s encounter with the ungraspable other is portrayed as a suffering by the bodily degeneration—a traumatic relation befell Hamm from the immemorial time anterior to his consciousness. Beckett accounts for the traumatic relation with bodily sensible terms. He describes Hamm’s suffering or pain as a “given” that traumatizes the self. Profoundly bewildered, Hamm speaks of his headache as “something dripping in my head, ever since the fontanelles” and suspects that it might be a “heart” in his head (E 19); or in another case, he says that the pain is “perhaps” dropped on “a little vein” of “a little artery” (E 20). These cases indicate that Hamm is unable to make sense of his perception in the system of the self-affection. He is confused and made to get changed through the hetero-affection that incisively intrudes and contacts his body without being discovered what it is. Pain or suffering is inassimilable to Hamm’s subjective mastery. Hamm is a body-slave rather than a body-master. His body is not for enjoyment but is “animated and inspired by the orientation of the ‘One-for-the-Other” (Peperzak 222).

The hetero-affection sets limit of Hamm’s self-autonomous freedom and makes him an insomniac. The molestation of the hetero-affection is as disquieting as the old couple’s blathering that stirs Hamm to stay in vigilant wakefulness. It is the dislocated “heart,” “the little vein” and “the little artery” that prevent Hamm from being a body-master. Hamm is debilitated with the contiguity by the other, thus a patient undergoing the suffering given by the other. Unable to locate the disturbance, Hamm cannot lay hold of its recurrence. Hamm’s body as the non-lieu is not a stabilized refuge that guarantees the return of the self as the auto-identification. Without knowing where the pain is, he has been traumatized before his consciousness, and suffers in the passivity that any activity of consciousness is annulled. His corporeal substance shows signs of an encounter with the demand of the other from which
any circumvention cannot be successful.

Hamm says that something has happened without his being there (E 47). If incarnation provides the spurious self a position, Hamm’s absence from the moment which something occurred implies that even prior to the incarnation, there is a contact bound the self by the other. Such kind of traumatic relation is witnessed in the unknown pain which puts Hamm in the oscillation between the awareness of the otherness and the inability of knowing where it happened. The only thing he can do is to ask for painkillers—a requirement that is always refuted. There is little the medication system can work. In a sense, the play shows that the essential part of the incarnated life is suffering without the possibility of being assuaged. It is more than human to exert power on controlling the pain in the purpose of resisting the natural inclination for the traumatized self to be the self-for-the-other. Max Scheler observes that in Beckettian canon, the pain is in its specific mode of being that it has its own time and place on the body and cannot be understood (qtd. in Levy 272-73). If one tries to understand the meaning of pain, the intensity of pain wanes and thus becomes “less relevant to its victim” because the more one can make sense of pain, the less meaning pain has (qtd. in Levy 273). In the case of Hamm, the pain is like a restless disequilibrium placed on his body to the extent that it cannot be dispelled or assimilated. Hamm’s consciousness can only do him a favor to pretend that pain is not there, but pain is such a concrete incursion which always reminds Hamm the possibility of corruption and calls into question his self-autonomous certitude.

Therefore, Hamm plays an “old game” that “lost of old, [and humans] play and lose and have done with losing” (E 51). Here Hamm refers to the bodily senescence in aging, declining, and dying. The bodily degeneration proceeds on by losing everything that the body may claim to be its property, such as the vitality or the health. Hamm presages the permanent loss in this game that he is destined to endure because he is incapable of stopping or facilitating its procession. Herein the permanent loss also refers to the irretrievable by
memory. Since the body, both in Levinas’s thought and in Beckett’s Endgame, is animated by
the other, the incarnation is to give, to offer, and to suffer. Thus the bodily loss is beyond the
consciousness field and makes the self the one-for-the-other. Just as Paul Sheehan avers:
“The...loss of bodiliness contains a hint of potential terror. For there is in Beckett’s work
mind-body discontinuity, but not hierarchy; cerebration cannot compensate for the frailties of
the flesh” (157, my emphasis). In this way we are likely to say that the self and the other do
not occupy the same temporality in synchrony. In the play the incarnated self cannot
synthesize the past material into concocting the present I. What is lost cannot be reclaimed.
Thus the play is a process of losing everything that is regarded as the self’s property, such as
memory, body-mastery, or a unified temporality. In the case of Hamm most conspicuously,
the play shows that being in incarnation is a de-phasing process by being deprived of all it
possesses. In the incarnation, what matters is the contestation between the love for life (the
self for itself) and the drive to death (the self for the other). These two forces will not be
assembled and will confront each other all the time. Therefore the self in incarnation is
restless because any force stronger than another will break down the balance of life. In this
way the self cannot hide in its self-claimed integrity, but is forced to expose itself, to be
awakening. In a word, Hamm is forbidden to hide “in the old refuge” in which he is “alone
against the silence” or “the stillness” (E 45). He cannot hold such a peace because he is no
longer a solitary soul after being incarnated in the earthbound world, the physical reality
(ibid.).

In another case, we see how far Hamm has been pushed to the extreme that even the
ability of dreaming is deprived. Being an insomniac, Hamm’s soberness in the reality
prevents his making dream of the bodily integration that he can run or see, escaping the catch
of nature (E 19). Hamm, whose sleep is disquieted, is not allowed to lead an immanent being
so that he cannot make a dream to put up a screen that embellishes the reality which the body
is so vulnerable and inexorably exposed to the other without dissimulation. Hamm’s
condition is an ethical appealing that the immanence of being is only a mirage arising from the falsifying authenticity of the existence of soul, and is thus never attuned to the mundane reality as the play shows. Like Levinas who explicates the ethical relation with the notion of incarnation, Beckett in the play delineates the natural degeneration of human body as the way to touch the issue of the meaning of incarnation.

Therefore in the play the incarnation indicates that the self is by nature in the time of postponement from death. For Hamm, time exists in his encounter with the unknowable otherness (the natural force or the pain). For the other cannot be reduced to the self’s knowledge, it is beyond being and tests the limitation of Hamm’s life. In other words, responding to the other, Hamm desires the “beyond being” which may probably bring him to death. Thus his time is a temporization that the contestation between the self and the other makes the postponement of death. He once complains that “why it [the finality, the death] was so long coming” (E 45). Hamm is not allowed to have the absolute freedom to rein his body, and his life time is not destined by himself. To die or not is no longer his choice. With death he has no power. That is also the reason why Clov cannot kill Hamm, no matter from Hamm’s suicidal request or Clov’s own desire to commit murder. It is the other who exceeds the worldly rules that decides on the self’s time. Thus no one can be so rude to be the executive who ends his or another’s life. To speak more precisely, the self’s death is already related to the other and always a death-for-the-other.

In the play, Beckett does not show so much concern for anticipating the afterlife as he concentrates on the characters’ endurance in the time with endless contestations between the self and the other. Hamm’s hesitation to end (to end the play and to end his life) expresses his vacillation between the intrinsic love for life and the drive to death. In consequence, for the future is so long coming that it cannot be expected, on the earth the future is a hope short of the achievable fulfillment—a hope that is no longer permitted, forever infinite, and thus meaningful. The suffering for the other in the irrecusable loss does not present any rule, and
thus won’t guarantee the characters a reasonable explanation, a promised salvation or a merit of repayment. For the suffering is beyond the self’s knowledge, it is gratuitous beyond the reciprocally compensational system. Thus Beckett implies that the way to escape the ineluctable fate of being born unto the world is to endure the irrecusable loss of the dying process. In dying the significance of the self-for-the-other is uprooted from the earthbound ineluctable absurdity. He stimulates us to rethink the process of dying as an infinite search for the other without repressing the otherness to the worldly religiosity and morality.

Thus in incarnation, the soul does not lay hold of the body; instead, the body jeopardizes the sacredness of the soul as an unquestionable being in immanence. In incarnation, the precedence of the soul over the body, which pictures the self as an autonomous free agent, is superseded by the irreducibility of the body that turns over the loftiness of the soul. In the play, the self is incarnated with the animation by the other who slips into the self as a spiritual giving. In this way, the traditional conception of the soul becomes an inauthentic existence that results from human’s imaginary self-autonomy, or from the so-called humanity. In the play, humanity is degraded to merely an epithet of the intrinsic pursuit for life, not about the qualities to be human. For example, Hamm demands Clov to kill the flea for fear that humanity might start from this ignoble insect (E 27). Hamm’s reaction to the flea implies that human is de facto insect-like, so it is a saucy retort against the assurance of the so-called humanity which vouches for the significance of the mighty and graceful soul. On the other hand, the flea, which may become the origin of humanity, implies that humanity is like a parasite living on the corporal and sucking the body’s blood to boost itself. Beckett, like Levinas, shows that it is the corporeality that matters rather than the false imagination of a sacred soul ruling over the profane body. In Beckett the soul is not a mythic conception involved in the field of mysticism, thus unaccountable. On the reverse, the soul is ineffable because it is related to the other as an incomprehensive otherness. Thus the soul is the other inspiring the self in the incarnation without alienating the sameness. In other words, the soul
and the body cannot be separated in a binary opposition such as the subject and the object. The soul and the body are inalienable and unassumable, paralleling the relation between the self and the other.

Therefore we can say that Beckett addresses the notion of humanity, or the image of human being, by leveling down the soul on the plane of the physical reality, breaking up the hierarchy of mind-body, saint-layman or sacredness-profanity. Beckett conflates the opposites into the only authentic existence of the physical reality we live. As Levinas says, the body, as irreducibility, is being itself. Therefore, while Beckett depicts a world where a human is insect-like, crawling on the earth, digging his nails into the cracks of the ground (E 35, 45), he recreates humanity as an ineluctable suffering for being on earth in a non-prerogative sense. Yet Beckett does not intend to disparage humanity. All he tries to do is to take into account the individual uniqueness in the corporeal materialization to breach the universal or the institutional order that judges the self as a product of the so-called humanity. Like Levinas, Beckett seeks to lay the ultimate judgment in the intersubjective relation between the self and the other, instead of under the visible laws of the world. Humanity is not human enough if it ceases thinking what humanity is, as Levinas says. Humanity cannot be a self-complacent idea. Thus instead of thinking humanity as an innate essence of the self’s soul, Beckett places humanity on the responsibility for the other in incarnation. That is, the incarnation, as the singularization and materialization of the self, gives rise to humanity as an infinite responsibility for the other which contests the self’s love for life. The vile and indecent human images in the play tell that the self, with the earthbound corporeality, is not allowed to sublimate itself into the outwardly soul; rather, if one wants to speak of the self as if it has the soul, the way he can say is that the soul is effulgent only when the self takes its responsibility for the other in the corporeal way. Clov, who is as clumsy as a mechanical robot and whose voice is toneless without emotion, is probably considered a lifeless thing. In this sense, he doesn’t seem to have the soul. Yet his existence is so prerequisite for Hamm that Hamm says
to Clov: “I can’t leave you” (E 33). Hamm regards Clov’s devotion as a kind of “compassion” that is difficult to hold on (E 48). Here compassion does not refer to the empathy with Hamm’s suffering, because his suffering is immeasurable and every man has his specificity beyond comparison. The compassion refers to the openness to the other even to the degree that the self is hetero-affected, without autonomous freedom. Clov, who is like a robot, is endowed with the compassion so graceful that even a human may probably fail to achieve. His compassion to Hamm signals his “humanity” in this case. It is his obligation to Hamm as an irrecusable responsibility that enables him to be a human. In other words, to be a human with humanity is to take the responsibility without escape. It is the responsibility rather than other qualities to invest the subject the subjectivity taking on humanity. As Levinas says that the antecedent of responsibility to freedom might link up with the goodness that makes “things” human. We recognize Clov as a human being because of his adherence to his responsibility.

Therefore, in the play humanity renders in the ‘bowed head” and the “crawling body” (E 51, 35). By doing this the self endures the otherness, bearing the other’s burden. In incarnation, the self is like the hostage of the other, undergoing the endless contestation of the will for itself and the will for the other. In humanity, the essential part is not to adorn the sacred soul, but to acknowledge one’s responsibility for the other in the mundane world. Similarly, the subject is aware of its subjectivity not in claiming the rights of its own, but in the service for the other as a responsible subject. The subjectivity is a sub-jectum, “under the weight of universe, responsible for everything” (OB 116).

Beckett depicts the subjectivity akin to that of Levinasian ethics. This sort of subjectivity is also presented in the interactions between Hamm and Clov. Many interpretations account for their interactions as the master-slave relationship. Hamm evinces his sovereignty in his high-handed manner. Clov is considered the slave who is potential of betrayal, and thus is likely to subvert this inequality. Undoubtedly the reading uncovers that the master-slave
relationship is not as strong and stable as it seems to be, and Clov’s underlying perfidy shows that the disequilibrium of the subordinate position is not able to be quelled. Now based on this master-slave relation, I’d like to analyze their relation with recourse to the notion of incarnation mentioned above in the hope to transcend the master-slave structure.

As witnessed before, that Clov uncovers Hamm implies the inspiration of the other in the same. Thus initially Clov plays the role of the other. In their interaction, even though Hamm is handicapped and immobile, he commands Clov as his movable body to do things for him. Thereby we can treat Hamm as the one who plays the role of the soul and Clov the body. In other words, Hamm is like a body-master whose will tends to work for itself, whereas Clov is like body-slave whose will is for the other. However, the distinction is not absolute. Hamm, who is blind and handicapped, symbolizes the soul far from autonomous and free. Due to Clov’s “potential betrayal,” the body-master is reverted to the body-slave. For example, Clov investigates the external world and makes report on it so that Hamm is capable of imagining the whole panorama of the outside as if he could catch sight of it. Despite this, Hamm is threatened by Clov who may serve as an external view that has his eyes on Hamm. Hamm once asks Clov that whether Clov is itching to remove his glasses in order to see what is hidden underside, which reveals Hamm’s qualm about his being watched. Besides, Clov is likely to invent the content of the report on the outside, and brings to Hamm the incorrect fact (E 50). Here, the vision as a mode of being belonging to the self-autonomy, is deeply questioned not only by Hamm’s blindness, but also by Clov’s untrustworthy vision ability (Clov, as the body, is thus uncontrollable. It hints that the body is itself irreducibility.). We can say that Hamm is the subject who is disconcerted for all time. Hamm’s blindness implies that the soul is devoid of vision, and so is the ego of which its essence lies in the immanent soul. Being blind, the soul is exposed to the other in passivity. Clov, as the other, who informs Hamm (the soul; the egoistic being) the “fact” of the outside, enables Hamm to have a sense of intactness as if he could “see” the others from the internal world in which he
withdraws himself from the outside. Yet Clov also makes Hamm aware of his being looked
from the outside. In consequence, the self, while is the being in itself, is “backed up against
oneself” and lies itself “beyond essence” (OB 116). Seeing that the so-called essence of the
self is a blind soul which presupposes the external view from the other, the self cannot remain
an imperturbable identity which sets up a unity of the universe under its gaze that “embraces
in its unity of apperception” (ibid.). The mind’s eye is open due to the other’s gaze.

In addition, the soul is handicapped, captured, and thus non-free. Hamm can only sit,
whereas Clov can only stand. “Every man his speciality,” says Hamm (E 16). Here we see
that the immanent soul, which belongs to the autonomous being, is problematical. This
ingrained singularity of each individual limits the self from being an autonomous
body-master, and thus links one another in the responsibility for the other to such an extent
that all the characters in the play do not have the self-complacent being, but are “obliged to
each other” (E 51) without choice. Here again Beckett draws on the bodily sensibility to
stress the intersubjective relation of which the subjectivity is in the self’s individual
singularity bound up in the responsibility for the other. Each singularity owes its existence to
another and takes on meaning by being hold to the other, uniting the self and the other as the
authentic life mode in the reality.

Back to the conception of incarnation, we regard Hamm as a handicapped soul which
manipulates Clov, the moveable body, to wheel him around in order to touch his fortress
made by the wall. Herein, Hamm fervently conceives his domestic domain through Clov, who
must obey him and even pretend that the fake dog is as servile and affectionate as a living pet
(E 30-31). Yet at the same time Hamm is threatened by the sense of incertitude that he cannot
return to the central point as he was situated. Two inquiries arise in this case. First, does the
center originally exist? Second, is the self-domain securely limited by the wall? The answers
to these questions would be negative. As noted, Hamm does not in the center from the very
beginning since he is unable to imagine what Clov’s kitchen would be like, least of how far
the range of his territory. Therefore, his obsession to be in the centre is a self-illusion from the start. He can only gauge his location by where Clov stands. It is through Clov that Hamm makes difference between right or left, front or back, and center or periphery (E 23-24). Moreover, he is frightened when Clov is standing behind him (E 24, 43). All in all Hamm is not a free agent that holds Clov in full control. He is disabled from being the synthesis of the body and the soul. This disintegration produces the “potential terror” proposed by Sheehan. This sense of terror calls into question Hamm’s self-consciousness as the self for itself. At the core of the terror, we discern Hamm’s love for life, which is the source of his hope to be in the center for fear of being marginalized. The otherness of Clov and the “calling” from the outside (E 46) unbalance Hamm’s stable identity on “the hither side” of the wall. As we see, the wall is hollow, crisp, and maybe porous. It is not a refractory surface that is impassive to the temptation of the external otherness. In fact, despite the vocation of the outside, the internal contestation is also too bloated to be subdued (Clov, Nell, and even Hamm yearn to leave for the outside). The wall cannot spare the craving for the outside.4

What Beckett shows here, like Levinas, is that the self, who intends to grasp its

4 Even though Hamm withdraws to the bleak space in order to withstand the threat from the outside, he cannot draw a distinct line between the internal world and the external one. The two small windows of Hamm’s room serve to be the most conspicuous trait of the potential blurring between these two areas. The meaning of the two windows is double-edged. It marks a limit and also functions like a crack of exposure of one to another. Both the meaning of constriction and openness pertain to the window’s implication. Through the window Clov investigates the external world and exposes himself to its threat. Through the window Hamm perceives the ray of sunshine or the smoothness of wind (but he is disappointed to find that the outside is grey with no light the ocean is calm with no wind), and is called to set forth an adventurous safari outside. Ordering Clov to look into the external world, Hamm expresses his interest in the unknown area. He asks Clov to do the investigation; once Clov inquires the reason of overlooking the outside, Hamm answers, “Since it’s [the external world] calling to you” (E 46). To some extent, for Clov is manipulated by Hamm as an alter ego, the calling is de facto not so much to Clov as to Hamm himself. The internal world is simultaneously confined and open.

Apart from the external realm that calls into question Hamm’s self-claimed domain, the kitchen Clov mentions is also a place inconceivable for Hamm. In addition, the rat, appearing in the kitchen and coming from somewhere unknown, surprises Hamm and harasses Clov. At the point, Mary Bryden suggests that the rat us associated with death due to its vileness and baseness that bring forth plague. Moreover, she also points out that Clov cannot dispel the rat “with a single blow” but can only half-kill it (133, 135-36). In such cases the rat symbolizes the threat of death, implies its coming from the outside (the unknown terrain) and is unable to be annihilated (Clov can only half kill it). Hence symbolically speaking there is hiatus in the self-enclosed domain. The absolute subjective freedom cannot take the role as the primary ground of human existence. It is unconvinving for Hamm and Clov to define their world in light of the other world because the external world at the same time maintains in and out of the internal world. In this sense, that Hamm wants to be at the central point is a bogus fiction of selfhood. The place Hamm inhabits is far from his configuration, no matter due to the existence of Clov’s kitchen or the rat’s appearance.
self-enclosed intactness, discovers the other in the empire of the sameness. The calling from the outside, whose entry into Hamm’s domestic region as a vocation that exceeds the self-confined domain, introduces a hetero-affection without his choice, and sets limit of the freedom of Hamm and Clov. Since the outside is called a death realm, its calling requires the response that goes beyond the limit of being towards the “otherwise than being”—to test the limitation of one’s life. Therefore, the self’s life is no longer confined within the being for itself, but is transformed to aspire for the disinterestedness from being, which is called responsibility. As Levinas says, this mode of being is “an openness in which being’s essence is surpassed in inspiration” (OB 115), and is turned into “the for-the-other proper to responsibility” (OB 119). As a result, in the relation between Hamm and Clov, as that between the sameness and the otherness, witnesses the confrontation that the narcissistic love for life is at odds with the drive to death.

Thus the subject Beckett wants to propose is the vicarious subject whose sameness is stuffed, alienated and superseded by the otherness “on the hither side of the autonomy of auto-affection and identity resting on itself” (OB 118). Both Hamm and Clov are belated to understand the world which has not issued from their project and thus goes beyond their intentionality to make any sense of it. The world, disproportionate to their freedom, is that which they are forbidden to make choice about the faults, the merits or the sanctions. They can never know what’s going on in the world, and thus “the rational being” is an infertile conception in the play (E 27). The ultimate distinction between body-master and body-slave is not based on the bipolar couple of freedom and non-freedom.

The body, as the irreducibility, has been incarnated by the other prior to any auto-identification or auto-affection as a sovereign ego. Therefore, the responsible self undergoes the weight of the other from an irrepresentable past. In this way, the subjectivity no longer belongs to the order of the worldly morality or humanity. Being subjected to the weight of the other, the self comes into being by acknowledging “the possibility of putting
oneself in the place of the other” (OB 117), the substitution. Far from the spiritual empathy with the other, the substitution is the giving of oneself to the other in the corporeal way by offering one’s bread from its own mouth in order to give it to the other.

We can deduce from Hamm’s story the teaching of the other who appeals for the giving of the self in the corporeal way. A racking headache, as we see in the play, prepares for Hamm’s creation. Seeing that the headache is the traumatic relation with the other, his story is inspired by the other as a teaching (Levinas says that the other can only teach because it is not in the horizon of the self’s knowledge). The content of the story hinges on the main issues we’ve been discussed here: the “hunger,” the “cold,” and the “death” of the other whose physical distress has been calling for the self’s response (E 52). For example, the man crawling to Hamm is old, fatigued, wretched, and almost speechless. Hamm speaks to him “There’s English for you” in order to compel the old man to utter. Inferring from Hamm’s response to the old man, we see that the old man can only speak simple words. From this point, the man is inclined to be considered a foreigner. The man’s alienage reminds us the defenseless other in Levinas’s theory. Thus, his face is the face of the other whose defenseless eyes appeal for help. Hamm is obsessed by this man and many other people that he “might have helped” (E 44). “The place was crawling with them,” says Hamm, scourged with remorse. The grievous tone connotes Hamm’s mental suffering by the other’s death. Among the anonymous “they,” Hamm is particularly perturbed by the death of the old doctor, the shadow-figured Nell and the poor Mother Pegg. For him, the earth conveys the demise of all manly rules, and stinks of corpses (E 33). To focus on the definite identity of the doctor and to mention the names of Nell and Mother Pegg are ways to specify the people with the purpose of ringing the deep intervolvement in those people with whom Hamm is familiar, and drawing his attention to the interpersonal relationship. From another aspect, since Beckett depicts the world as though the characters are the only survivors (E 28), they are on behalf of all humans. Thus by analogy with “the deep intervolvement,” we can amplify the
intersubjective relation to all sorts of social relationship that the self and the other are intertwined and inalienable. In this way the significance of the self’s uniqueness that bears the other as its responsibility is reemphasized.

Devoid of any institutional rules, Beckett accounts for the issue of death based on the “interpersonal” relationship as Levinas argues. In Levinas’s sense, death is an unforeseeable enemy approaching the self without being comprehended. Death is the impossibility that goes beyond the self’s knowledge of being and non-being. It is not a conception of non-being that one is murdered and becomes nothingness. Instead, death is related to the other, bound to the other, and thus for the other. Likewise, the other’s death also concerns the self to the extent that his death announces that part of the self is dead as well. As a result, the other’s death inflicts the self as if the other traumatizes the self. The self, being traumatized, is also obliged to take responsibility for the other’s death. At this point, Hamm is bound to bear the other’s death as his responsibility. Yet the other’s death overflows Hamm’s comprehension so that he can never be responsible enough for the other. Thus Hamm cannot help but feel guilty. In his remorseful announcement, we discover the collision between his love for life and his drive to death (for the other). The other’s death always haunts him, disturbing his stable identity and enforcing him to mourn for those people who are dead. No matter it is a natural death (in case of the death of the doctor [E 23]), or the death caused by his selfishness (in case of the death of Mother Pegg [E 48]), Hamm is obsessed to endure the loss caused by the others’ demise under the ethical imperative. Therefore, when Clov (as Hamm’s movable body) seeks to kill the boy appearing in the outside (maybe arises from the intention of self-protection or just from the self’s innate impetus to murder), Hamm forbids Clov from killing the boy because he has perceived that the ultimate judgment on death is by the other rather than by himself (E 50). The boy, as the “potential procreator” (ibid.), symbolizes the possibility of renewal and rebirth. For the boy emerges from the unknown realm as an other, Hamm is passively exposed (to the interdiction that forbids him to commit murder) rather than actively reacts to
the boy’s appearance. In this point, Hamm is made to slough off the sovereign egoism, being
turned to the self-dispossession by taking the responsibility for the other. In this case, Hamm
is ready to sacrifice himself to the other. Thus at this moment Hamm is able to leave Clov by
saying to Clov that “I don’t need you any more” (ibid.) because the incarnation is in the
significance for the other, not in the self-appropriation. Insofar as Hamm is like a hostage of
the other, he is asked to be responsible, even to be persecuted and inflicted by the other to the
extent of being engaged in the expiations for the other, including the other’s fault. That is, the
self is responsible for the other, even for the other’s responsibility. Therefore in the end of the
play when Hamm says that “It’s I put him before his responsibilities! Well, there we are, there
I am” (E 52), this announcement expounds that Hamm has been responsible even for the
other’s responsibility so that he dares to say words such as “here I am.”

Being subjected to the other, Hamm says that he has been “watched” by a “rat” and the
“steps” (E 45). The rat may refer to the approach of death (as mentioned before), and the
steps should belong to Clov, who clumps up the ground, supervising Hamm in a sense. Hamm is in custody. Under the probation from death, mortality in the play is to some extent a
kind of punishment. Punishment, as Levinas points out, presupposes the subjectivity of the
eo (OB 117). Thus we uncover in Hamm’s and Clov’s grievance their being punished by
their being stuck to the love for life (E 12). On the other hand, to be punished infers the
exertion of the ultimate judgment that exceeds the worldly morality by putting Hamm and
Clov under the judgment of the other so that they are not free initially, but are endowed with
the finite freedom in service for the other during the tenure of their life. Thus we can
understand why Hamm and Clov cannot give their lives a definite meaning because they are
called to be on the trial as the first persona—to announce I, even to be accused. Their
meaning comes from the other, effusive of a messianic openness of which the play is also
characteristic.

However, while being encouraged by Hamm’s transformation (or the possibility of
Hamm’s transformation), we have to bear in mind that the play does not provide a definite and final answer. In the end of the play Hamm still tries to call Clov, and Clov remains in Hamm’s domain without an actual departure. As we show, Beckett fixes his attention on the life in the physical reality rather than in the afterlife, so the ending reminds us that not until the actual death overcomes the self in that exact moment, the self has to go through the endless contestation and oscillation between the love for life and the drive to death. In the being-against-death, life is “nearly finished” (E 12, 35) without finality for the actual death can never be experienced.

Therefore, Beckett does not provide an appeased death (there is even no coffin for Hamm which can help placate his restless and exposed being when he’s dead [E 49]) because he wants to show that the dichotomy of being and non-being (nothingness) is nowise the ultimate judgment. Hamm and Clov are keen to alert that to live is to suffer the punishment, and they are humorous enough to make fun of life by calling it a play or a game. The game is reined by time and nature—but not under God’s providence because God is absent (E 38). Hamm says: “He [God] doesn’t exist,” and Clov answers: “Not yet” (ibid.). Clov’s response implies that God is not there to guarantee humans against loss. That is, God is not a petrified image who is inscribed in the religious law as an evidence of the theodicy.\footnote{Mary Bryden also speaks of Beckett’s oeuvre as that which declines the “organized religion” (2).} Humans cannot talk their way out of the punishment by imputing the responsibility to God. Like Levinas, this is what Beckett wants to tell: God may reveal himself in the intersubjective relation between humans, rather than is sanctified in heaven. Goodness prevails over the mundane world instead of being held in God’s sanctuary. Thus the characters are destined to lose as well as to be humble. Nell, a person of humility, gives an edifying advice to Nagg, who laughs at Hamm’s eerie calm before the inspired creativity takes Hamm: “One mustn’t laugh at those things” because she knows that “Nothing is funnier than unhappiness” (E 20). This is a moving appeal to evoke pity on Hamm’s suffering that is given by the other and for the other.
By doing this, Nell places herself in line with Hamm as a guilty and accused human. In a sense, Nell reminds Nagg that everyone is guilty\(^6\) and thus must be humble to the others. In this way, humanity may be reborn in the humble gesture, in acknowledging the self as a guilty I, in bearing the responsibility for the universe without reducing it to the self’s knowledge. Only in this sense can the expiation be taken into account because the responsible self imbeds itself in the goodness of God without demanding on being absolved.

In the next section, with the purpose to expound the expiation revealed in the play, I’d like to discuss the mode of the ethical language through Hamm’s story-telling, the dialogue between Hamm and Clov and the continual interruptions of silence, of which the indecisiveness deters Hamm and Clov from the self-assurance to approach God.

**The Ethical Language: the Expiation for Being**

As we see, in the play the subjectivity is in the self’s responsibility for the other by bearing his burden. In the same way, the relation between Hamm and Clov is an ethical relation that the other is within the sameness without alienating it. After accounting for the subject as the hostage of the other, Levinas speaks of the expiation as “uniting identity [self-identification] and alterity [otherness]” (\textit{OB} 118). That is, the guilty self is infinitely responsible for the other by bearing the otherness within the sameness. Thus the essential part of the expiation is “an expiating for being” (ibid.), because there’s possibility that the self’s being will “accomplish of violence and murder” on the other (\textit{FFL} 38). In the expiation, the self is restless without rejoining itself (i.e., in the traditional sense, the obsolete one in the past or the expectative one in the future) in freedom. Expiation is “voluntary, for it is prior to the will’s initiative” (\textit{OB} 118). In this way, the self is regarded as a unity only if the self, demanded by the other as the unique individual, already holds on itself of “the gravity of the other” (ibid.) by responding to the call of the other. Thus the expiation does not consider the

\(^6\) The concept of guilt will be accounted in detail in the next section.
self “an entity ‘capable’ of expiating for the others” because the self is the original expiation—the self is not allowed to escape the weight of the other (ibid.). The expiating self is goodness, which undergoes the deprivation of all forms of “having” attributed to one’s own, to the extent of being the substitution for the other, even for the other’s death. Therefore, in the expiating self, the goodness won’t impose a superficial egoism on the self, and never tends to totalize the self to be the One. The self is not an existence of the multiplicity of attributes. Its subjectivity comes into being as the goodness invests the self in its responsibility for the other, divesting everything that may manacle the self.

Hamm and Clov lead an expiating life by being endlessly punished in the oscillation between the will for the self and the will for the other. Bearing the inexplicable and ineffable otherness, they are not permitted to hold peace in the self-composedness. Despite the ethical relation referred to above, I want to discuss the dialogue between Hamm and Clov as an access to accounting for Hamm’s incessant acts of going on creating his story (E 18, 30, 39-40, 44, 49, 52-53). The imperative of creation serves as the expiation for his being, in which he is not allowed to choose to stop or begin—the only way is to go on telling without the possibility of saying no.

Levinas says that in the speech there is possibility for the self to speak and to kill. Here, to speak refers to the possibility of expression, whereas to kill alludes to the ineluctable subversion that the expression would be eroded and unsaid, thus in need of incessant re-saying. As we shall see later, Hamm undergoes “the pain of expression” (OB 194 n. 4) because he is tortured with the incapability of expressing the ineffable otherness, but is held to express by being inspired by the foreign will. Levinas says that “the other is exercised upon the same to the point of interrupting it, leaving it speechless,” and that the other is like “the defecting from consciousness” (OB 101). Since the other divests the self rather than superimposes it with accumulative experiences, the other is beyond the self’s knowledge and cannot be catalogued.
Let me first of all introduce the relation between Hamm’s story-telling and his dialogue with Clov. Hamm teaches Clov to learn words. Originally Hamm intends to make his words understandable to Clov so that he can command Clov to do things for him. But the word dislodges from its original meaning (from Hamm’s order). For example, while Clov speaks of the word “yesterday,” Hamm inquires what it means. Yesterday originally refers to the day before today, and it is a term used in a coherent temporal line in which yesterday, today and tomorrow are arrayed in sequence. This linear temporality enables the subject to converge the past and the future in the present to constitute a convincible personal history and to define a stable identity. Recalling yesterday, i.e., the memory, the present self “assumes the passivity of the past and masters it” (TI 56). Therefore, in this case, that Hamm initiates to question the meaning of yesterday can be considered his loss of control over the past. Deprived of the memory, Hamm is unable to complete his “chronicle” (E 40). In a sense, he is incessantly erased from his history.

On the other hand, Hamm is constantly grilled by Clov in the “well-harrowed conversation” (Hamilton 612). Clov unremittingly interrogates Hamm about his story with words such as “who,” “when,” “what” or “where” (E 39-40). That is, whereas Hamm builds up his identity through the act of the story-telling, Clov, ostensibly obedient, is potentially rebellious and challenges Hamm’s subjective sovereignty through the interrogation. However, the inquiry actually does not aim to annihilate Hamm’s subjectivity. On the contrary, the persistent questions goad Hamm into answering and continually making up his story. At this point, Clov’s interrogation is like the critique of the other, who puts into question Hamm’s narcissistically self-embracing myth of the “I.” That is, Clov’s interpellation prevents Hamm from fabricating his chronicle as a personal history hinging on the solipsistic exploration.

Furthermore, Hamm and Clov are susceptible of each other’s words. They repeat each other’s sentences, which blurs out the line between the speaking subject and its echo. In this way Clov’s words (un)anticipatively breach Hamm’s rein on him. For example, to “keep
going” is Hamm’s adage, and Clov repeats it to propel Hamm to go on his story-telling (E 41).

The contradiction and discordance occurring in the dialogue between Hamm and Clov reorient us to see their language as Saying instead of Said. Hamm intends to establish the system of Said in which the words’ meanings are defined according to his order. But Clov uses the words learned from Hamm to criticize, interrogate, interrupt and sometimes make fun of Hamm in order to break with Hamm’s totalizing system.

Hamm says that he feels rather drained of the creative power, and might stop creation sooner or later, but actually he continues telling his story nonetheless. Hamm himself admits that to invent story is to live in a spirit “better than nothing” (E 40). We can infer from Hamm’s story that this nothing refers to the state of void in the dark, in which Hamm is like a speck in the steppe and is threatened by the infinite emptiness (E 28). To go on story-telling rescues him from the state of being enmeshed in the dark void. What he has been telling, as we see, is nothing more than the announcement of his subjectivity in order to avoid the threat of being diminished to the state of being nothing.

Yet what he expresses recedes before the full presence of himself. He cannot construct his subjectivity with recourse to the creation of his chronicle. As noted, in the process of creating his story, he is simultaneously and constantly disturbed by Clov’s words, which are taught by Hamm. Thus Hamm’s words are themselves contradictory, not solid enough to build up his chronicle. Hamm’s will is not the initiative to create; rather, it is the calling of the otherness that holds on his creative energy. That is why Hamm is always threatened by the nightmare in which his creative power is drained and leaves him in the dark void. He says to Nagg: “I’ll soon have finished with this story. (Pause.) Unless I bring in other characters. (Pause.) But where would I find them? (Pause. He whistles. Enter Clov.) Let us pray to God” (E 37). In another case, he speaks of the impotence of expressing: “Nothing you can do about it, just wait for it to come. No forcing, no forcing, it’s fatal. I’ve got on with it a little all the same” (E 40). Hamm does not know where his characters come from, and there’s nothing for
it but to wait. During the waiting, he prays to God for being inspired to tell. As evinced previously, God is goodness in the self’s openness to the other in taking the responsibility. In this case, to pray to God is to sacrifice the subjectivity of the ego and to be transformed to the substitution for the other in passivity. In this way, while Hamm is made to speak, he speaks God’s teaching which is revealed in the intersubjective relation with the other. Thus to speak is to go for the goodness, to be open to the other, to be interrogated, and to defect from the self-consciousness. It is in the responsibility for the other that Hamm lies his subjectivity. Since the other characters visit Hamm without his control and beyond his comprehension, his creation is prolonged as an endless suffering for the other. Hamm cannot help but endure this suffering without knowing its meaning. Therefore, Hamm’s story-telling does not evince so much the validity and transparency of language that are thought to fully present the speaking subject. Rather, it is Saying that keeps saying the unsaid and unsaying the said—a painful torture for Hamm because what he seeks to tell always overflows what he is able to do, and because he can never know “what happened.” Just like Levinas says that in Saying the structure of signification is unsettled (FFL 60), and “identity recedes before its affirmation” (FFL 37).

In the latter part of the play, instead of calling his story a chronicle, he speaks of the story as an anthology of “[a]ll kind of fantasies” (E 45), which seems to be regarded as a non-sensical wordplay in accordance with the old Greek allusion (E 12, 45): the heap of grains shows that the words, like “heap,” are in fact empty of meaning (Hugh Kenner 123). James Acheson also comments that “a heap of millet seed can never be formed, so, as Hamm says, it would seem impossible for the millions of the moments in a lifetime to amount to

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7 In addition, “the heap,” according to Michael Worton, has two related allusions: (1) It is an allusion to Zeno’s millet-seed paradox, in which the main idea is “a grain of millet falling makes no sound; how can a bushel therefore make a sound?” (2) It also refers to Eubulides of Miletus, whose heap paradox argues that “there can be no such thing as a heap of sand, since one grain does not make a heap and adding one grain is never enough to convert a non-heap into a heap.” These interpretations of the paradox of the heap reveal Beckett’s suspicious response to the logical corollary and empirical experiences.
anything significant” (160). Even though Hamm, with the heroic effort, keeps his life journey and says no to the nothingness by the story-telling (Katherine Worth 84), he remains threatened to be encapsulated in nothingness. This tells the fact: Hamm’s heroic will does not vouch for a meaningful life. Instead, it is the will held on the other that grounds this life-long quest for meaning. Therefore, the fantasies obsess Hamm, breeding the fear of and desire for the unknown by removing the spurious egoity. In the openness to the other, Hamm envisions words in the dark (no longer the dark void), babbling like children whispering together (E 45).

The child image is crucial in the play. First, it refers to Hamm as a “little boy” (E 38). In Nagg’s memory, the little Hamm responds to Nagg in “kindness.” Besides, as a tiny boy, Hamm is usually frightened in the dark and calls for help from Nagg (his father), yet is refuted and discarded out of Nagg’s earshot. In another case, while Nagg is asked to listen to Hamm’s story, he is called the “accursed progenitor” by Hamm (E 15). That is, Nagg, who is too callous to respond the child’s cry, is accused for his narcissistic being. In this case, the child is offenseless for his kindness, defenseless for going through the misery of being discarded, and accusing the self-composed being—the child is the other.

Second, the child refers to Clov, Hamm’s heir (E 29). Hamm says that his house is a home for Clov; but as for himself, there’s no home and no father. Yet even though Clov is invested a house, he says to Hamm that he will take his leave instead of staying home (E 30). Clov is potential of betrayal, and uncontrollable, just like the other. Thus, in the play the father-son relationship is like the relation between the self and the other: they are intersubjective to each other, inalienable and incommensurate. In such a case, the child symbolizes the other’s resistance of being reduced to the totalizing sameness of the symbolic order.

Third, the child may refer to the poor man’s little boy or the boy emerging from the death realm. The poor man’s boy with his defying glare calls into question Hamm’s
self-interested being. And the boy in the outside is the incomprehensible other. As a result, in
the play the child signifies the resistance against reduction, the otherness. The child is the
other who is defenseless, kind, but accusatory. Their whispering is like the other’s speech that
 teaches, questions, and inspires Hamm, who is in search for the unknown.  

As a consequence, the language of the play (the story-telling or the dialogue) is Saying,
which is “the birth of language” given to the self who cannot help but “have to speak, to have
to say “I,” to be in the first person, to be precisely me” (FFL 38). Yet in affirming the
subjectivity, the self has to “respond to its right be”—“not by reference to the abstraction of
some anonymous law, some juridicial entity, but in fear for the Other” (ibid., my emphasis).
In Saying, the fear rises up when there are qualms of becoming Said, a rude reduction of the
otherness into the sameness. This is the situation that Hamm and Clov are obligated to
undergo. Hamm asks several times: “What’s happening?” or “Had you not have enough […]
of this […] thing?” which are questions of no answer because the otherness cannot be
thematized to a reasonable explanation.

The pause, which occurs many times, speaks the unanswerable answer by the language
of silence. E. V. Calin observes that in Beckett’s work the silence is considered “an
incomprehensible universe’s answer to the quires of human conscience” (qtd. in Adelman, n.9,
105). In other words, silence is like the other’s address on the self who is required to go for
goodness. And as Levinas also argues that the silence in the relation between the self and the
other does not fail to come to the self as a speech because the silence itself is founded on
speech—the interlocution between the self and the other is prior to Said, unable to be put into
words (PL 28). Thus as Wyschogrod remarks: “That which is absent is the presence of the
infinite” (153). The silence is an absence on the verge of nothingness, but is also the
interruption of the other presented in Said. The silence is itself an interlocution in which the

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8 In a sense, to regard the child image or the word as the Other reveals that the language is itself skeptical,
which limits and frees Hamm in the meantime.
The breaking from the imperious totalitarianism by way of indicating the ethical imperative constitutes the self-interrupting nature of the play. A number of things around the question of being have been underscored as they are considered from Levinas’s perspective. Beckett draws on the bodily degeneration to be a portrayal of the traumatic relation with the Other to which the characters are beholden. The confusion of something that might have taken place but without the intellectual understanding signals that the Other has passed by without return, and therefore is irrepresentable. In the dying process, Hamm’s suffering or pain cannot be relieved for they are given by the Other who has persecuted Hamm to be a victim, who has been contagious in an anarchic time prior to the exertion of consciousness. The pain or suffering cannot recall or represent the Other in the present moment. Rather, the Other intrudes the present, directly befalls Hamm, leaves him no time of consideration, terrifies Hamm from non-where and non-when, annoys him with a sense of discomfort, and puts him on the rack for his headache. Since Hamm cannot localize the Other in the spatial-temporal order, he feels dislocated and loses himself in the non-place that has been hollowed out by the Other’s intrusion. The Other’s interruption makes open the self and binds the self to the infinite that falls out of its spatial-temporal structure, the being.

In a sense, Hamm is dispossessed of his mastery in his suffering of physical degeneration. Through the de-phasing process of Hamm’s subjective freedom, we see the blurring of the bipolarity of subject/object, soul/body, master/slave, and sacredness/profanity. In the encounter with the other, the self is not to annihilate the other’s otherness and reduce it to the empire of sameness. Rather, the encounter elicits the response from the self, which escapes its conscious comprehension and is a response from the unknown otherness that has been within the self but without reorganization. In a sense, the unknown part of the self,
simultaneously without and within the self, is awakened to be.

Thus the self bears the otherness in itself before its initiative exertion of will. And the response is incalculable, unpredictable, ungraspable, and thus infinite. In this way, as Levinas says, the self is obliged to be responsible for the Other. More importantly, the responsibility always comes too late for the Other has passed by without return. Hence the responsibility is directed to the Other who does not exist in the horizon of being—the responsibility is for the otherwise than being. In consequence, the responsibility for the Other is like an infinite desire to go outside being.

As noted, we see that the Other has traumatized the self without the self’s conscious recognition, and has slipped into the self to the extent of dispossessing and disinteresting the self. The Other passes by in an unnoticed encounter, and is a past that eludes the self’s intention to make presence (Visker 270). Levinas discusses the traumatic relation in the notion of incarnation, which is thought as “recurrence.” The recurrence is not a recuperation of a definite origin or a return of a memory that can be traced back into the presence. Recurrence is indeed an effect without a cause, or the evidence that something has taken place but is “out of place.” For example, as inquiring into what the “whole thing” is (the characters have been obsessed by something that arouses a sense of confusion and disturbance), Hamm says to Clov that he was not there as something happened. Hamm groans: “Absent, always. It all happened without me. I don’t know what’s happened” (E 47). Hamm’s tenacious attitude of inquisition is counteracted as Clov asks him whether that conviction (to make sure whether he was there or not) matters at all. Then Clov further inquires Hamm of the misery that happened to Mother Pegg whose requirement was turned down by Hamm before her death. This episode underlines the significance of the interhuman relation that is ought to be accentuated anterior to the question of finding the meaning of being.

Therefore, for Hamm the embodiment is not for self-enjoyment, much less self-mastery. His case sets up the example that the body is given and traumatized rather than self-possessed.
To speak otherwise, on the one hand recurrence is a witness to the Other who is there but does not exist if the self is not embodied or recognized as an existent. Yet on the other hand, the Other is there only when he is beyond being and exceeds the self’s knowledge, which is thus non-present, i.e., in a sense, non-existent (Visker 270).

To speak more precise, the self is not an autonomous agent veered by a centripetal force to egotism or is self-contained as an intact whole. For Levinas, self-preservation is not a proper word to describe the self for the self is always already infused with the otherness before its consciousness. That is, the self is awakened and comes into being in virtue of the given otherness when encountering the Other. It is not constituted as a conscious being that restores experiences claimed to be its property—a possession of interiority opposed to the exteriority, or an inner selfhood against the exterior otherness. On the reverse, it is self-depleting in Levinas’s sense.

Likewise, Beckett thinks of the self from the similar point of Levinas. In his works, he depicts the self as self-subtraction rather than self-addition. Through the interhuman relation, the otherness in the self is stimulated and inspired to the extent of forgoing the self-sovereignty. For example, in *Endgame*, Hamm describes his suffering as a process that the self-fullness is as much as the self-emptiness. In Hamm’s case, the bodily sensibility, as portrayed by the torment of pain or the debilitation of dying, signals a recurrence of an immemorial Other who has traumatized the self and passed by.

This kind of self is seemingly constrained by the Other, but in fact it is liberated by the Other. Rudi Visker, in his analysis of Levinas’s subjectivity, comments that since there is no interiority, the Other does not oppress the self by suffocating it in Being, wherein the self is swallowed up in a state of existence without existent (Visker 267-68). Therefore, in the ethical subjectivity, the self-delimitation is indeed a self-liberation so that the self can reach across its self-boredom, which is symbolically dead. In this way, the interruption of the Other binds the self to being and extricates it from the devouring phenomenon of “there is.”
Other is not something that can be known or represented and is not anything that appears as a thematization (Caputo 303). It is otherwise than being and presents himself as nothing happens in his first encounter with the self (for the encounter is beyond the self’s knowledge). The encounter has taken place in the anarchic as though nothing happened. But something has taken place as a command for the self to obey. That is why Hamm keeps asking what is going on and is answered that something has taken its course. He cannot know something but he is commanded as if something is there.

The interruption of the Other is neither negative nor affirmative in *Endgame*. In *Endgame* this intriguing relation with the Other is soberly displayed through language. As noted in the previous section of this chapter, Hamm uses language as a tool that enables him to keep Clov in control. We say that Clov is as the Other when he uses the words learned form Hamm to interrogate and question Hamm’s mastery. Moreover, the action of Hamm’s incessant telling is considered to be an ethical saying that is responsible for the Other. In fact, it is in this ethical saying that is accountable for the infinite responsibility for the Other. The ethical saying challenges the idea that the invention emerges from the exertion of the self’s will. It does not say that the invention is a realization of the self as a fully autonomous and free agent.

In the case of Hamm, he becomes a hostage committed to the ethical command. Yet paradoxically, he is the author of the law with which he abides. As John D. Caputo says, the self is “the author of what he received” (Caputo 303). In the discussion of Levinas’s theory, Caputo demonstrates that the Other “finds words only in the one who is commanded, sounds forth only in my [the self’s] saying, for my saying is the very way the Infinite passes by, my words are the only way it is given utterance, and my obedience the only way the order is known” (ibid.).

In consequence, Hamm’s ethical action as Saying enforces him to utter “here I am” to respond to the other in the interhuman relation. In fact, the senses of contrition, guilt, or
discomfort seem to be affects without a definable origin. Therefore there is something as a surplus that binds up the characters to being. Visker, in his analysis of Levinasian ethical relation, suggests: “Between cause and effect, there is a hiatus by which the cause frees itself from its effect and thus also sets the effect free” (Visker 269). We can further account that the bodily sensibility which befalls Hamm is the incarnation as recurrence put to the proof in the ethical imperative. The dislocated pain and headache take place within the body in the intramural non-place, out of the intimate knowledge of the self qua self. “Maybe,” as Hamm says, is a crucial word in *Endgame*. It implies the ethical subject’s witness to the Other, as if there is an ethical command outside of being. Thus to be “me” is to be pledged to and responsible for the Other/other.

In the beginning of the play, Hamm says “me” after being unraveled by Clov. The play has hinted that Clov is the Other whose uncovering Hamm is an action of awakening, which is an ethical evocation in Levinas’s sense. The action becomes an event of surplus that exceeds Hamm’s capability of comprehension. This unraveling action traumatizes Hamm without a memorable origin, but only leaves Hamm in the condition as if something has taken its course without a decidable cause and a definite effect. Clov serves as the Other who is there anterior to Hamm’s consciousness and who also exists posterior to Hamm’s consciousness through the ethical saying. As noted, Hamm intends to establish the system of Said but Clov, as he uses the words learned from Hamm to interrogate Hamm, breaks through the totalizing imperialism by the ethical order of Saying. Therefore, the repetition of words between Clov and Hamm is only the echo of what has passed by. Hamm’s words, while learned and repeated by Clov, display the ethical saying through which the Other (Clov) is revealed. For Clov is the Other, his existence acts like a terror brewing which is beyond the spatial-temporal order but binds Hamm to the state of being (as we prove that it is through Clov that Hamm is able to locate himself). At this point, we know why Clov does not leave at the end of the play for the Other is always already there, with or without Hamm’s permission.
As the above shows, the encounter with the Other is simultaneously anterior to and posterior to being. The encounter is an event that the Other has been always already there, having nothing to do with one’s knowledge. Moreover, the Other is non-representational and immemorial, only revealed through the ethical action. That Hamm constitutes his subjectivity in Saying is the very voice that the Other is uttered. But we have to keep in mind that it is not the so-called original scene or the first time encounter that is recuperated or remembered in Saying. Rather, we are supposed to regard the “second” encounter as that freed from the first. There is a hiatus between the origin and the recurrence, and the otherness given by the Other in the immemorial time has to be awakened and stimulated in order to come to being, but the recurrence is not an effect of its cause, because there is no cause. The origin is a non-ground site.

What is showed above helps us discuss Beckett’s ideas of death and God that have been mentioned. In *Endgame*, death is simultaneously desired and dreaded. Hence it arouses feelings more than the angst of death as non-being for the death wish remains. On the other hand, it exceeds the idea of afterlife that symbolizes another kind of being for there is a resistance to demise. As for Hamm’s case in particular, as he is obliged to respond to the Other, he is pledged to the Other. The Other dwells in the same domain as death for they both fall outside of the category of being. Death, like the Other, refers to neither another kind of being nor non-being. Thus death binds the self to being not because it convinces the self of its authentic being by setting opposition between being and non-being; but because it is the relation that the self is by and for the other.

Hamm, in the ethical action of Saying, says that his life is always “in the life to come” (*E 35*), which is the life produced and prolonged in the future yet to come. Thus he keeps telling his stories. Hamm lives in a world without God who promises redemption from this life. He cannot say yes to life by the blessing of God, nor can he say no by the assertion of nihilism. As we see above, death does not guarantee the peace of afterlife or that of non-being.
Death is not a limitation that annihilates the self’s being in this life, but a limitation that liberates the self to stay living by encountering the Other through the interhuman relation (in which there engenders the characters of Hamm’s stories who enable the going-on process of story-telling). Therefore God cannot be defined from the redemptive point. In *Endgame*, the belief in God is negated by Hamm, but Clov says that the existence of God is not a question of being, but that of not yet being. The characters still pray in the uncertain world without God’s promise. The gesture of pray is their response to something outside of their knowledge. Thus it is a pray to the Other who exists outside of being. Beckett redefines God in this event. God is not an idea that is existent for the self’s being, pro or con. Like Levinas, Beckett talks about God through the interhuman relation rather than through a theological affirmation that verifies the existence of God. Both of them think of God as he is absent. The pray, as a gesture of humility, is a deed that is enacted even though God is perhaps not there. This is an ethical action that is potentially auto-deconstructive. But this is the way that the characters are showed the access to God. To approach God by negating his existence is to let God go beyond being, thus a potential transcendence.

In this way, Levinas and Beckett approach God through the interhuman relation, in which the humanity is debased. “One does not transcend being by way of infinite being” (301), Caputo says. Rather, the possibility of transcendence lies in the other who exists in infinity. The ethical relation is in deed, rather than in thought. Through the ethical saying, the sustaining struggle in living, and the humble gesture of praying, Hamm is the author of the law he obeys. It is possible for the ethical imperative to be evinced through Hamm’s saying “me.” Thus the access to goodness is found and made known in the ethical relation.

In consequence, no matter from the corporeal sensibility or from the moral sensibility (the moral exigency), the play provides no determinate finality, and renders as Beckett’s

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9 The wordings “moral sensibility” and “moral exigency” are terms derived from the foreword of *Otherwise Than Being* which is written by Richard A. Cohen.
ethical writing. Beckett expresses his ethical concern for addressing the notion of subjectivity by transcending the institutional laws. The play portrays Levinasian subjectivity in various ways: through the multifarious debates of many critical issues, such as soul, body, time, nature, language, God, etc.—some arguments are obviously presented, whereas some are understated. But from the content and the language of the play, we see that Beckett, like Levinas, truly concerns the relation between the self and the other as a bound with the obliged responsibility for each other. Beckett seems to agree that the absolute freedom is an over-claimed right, which is thus inappreciably discerned in the play. Like Levinas, Beckett also seeks for the freedom both confined and unlimited by the other. Maybe this is why Beckett is called a man of compassion on the question of liberty (Gussow 62)—despite his seemingly bleak world, in which humans are dethroned, the crowning glory goes to the finite freedom that is difficult to defend and forever suspends between the will for the self and the will for the other.