



# STURUA'S INTERPRETATION OF BECKETT'S ENDGAME

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### Abstract

Robert Sturua accomplished his vision of Beckett's two plays at the Rustaveli Theater in XXI century. *Waiting for Godot* was staged in 2002, and the premiere of *Endgame* took place at the end of February 2020.

Robert Sturua always begins his work with in-depth analysis, development, editing of a text. The *Endgame* has been implemented by the same principle and the director created the stage text. In the performance one may recognize phrases from *the Book of Revelation*, from *Waiting for Godot*, and sometimes the phrases of Sturua himself. Despite of changes, Sturua presented on the stage a deep, philosophically existential farce, morality play, and sometimes a carnival atmosphere. There are not so many such Beckett's staging in the theater world by its meaning, form or structure.

While carrying out changes, Sturua retained the rhythm, musicality, and rhythmic sound of Beckett's text. In the performance the same texts, the same actions are not repeated with the same frequency as in Beckett's play. In Sturua's performance the sense of destruction and the apocalypse is more tangible and frightening. The interpretation of *Endgame* by Robert Sturua is an apocalypse, the end of the world, a warning to humanity... And the form goes beyond morality play, carnivalism, interactivity, epic and non-epic, and even beyond the maestro's theatrical language itself.

**Keywords:** Beckett, Sturua, Theatre of absurd, Interpretation, Theatrical language.

### Introduction

The Theatre of the Absurd, as a term and direction in theatrical art, was first

defined by Martin Esslin in his book "The Theatre of the Absurd". In his opinion, absurdist playwrights should not be

considered as representatives of any direction or school. They combine a mature perception of existence, life and history. The absurdists have mastered and used all the genres, forms or methods that have existed in the history of drama since ancient period and created their original direction [1]. In Georgia, interest in “absurdists” or other contemporary direction dates back to the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Samuel Beckett definitely was among them.

Samuel Beckett’s drama gives variety of interpretations. In XXI century Robert Sturua carried out his vision of two plays by Samuel Beckett at the Rustaveli Theatre (Tbilisi). “Waiting for Godot” premiered in 2002, and the premiere of “Endgame” was held in late February 2020. The director dedicated the play to the memory of his childhood friend and creative collaborator, composer Gia Kancheli.

“Waiting for Godot” is one of Robert Sturua’s masterpieces. It was a play that will never be forgotten, both by form, mannerisms, content, directing vision, as well as the acting mastery that accurately expressed the director’s concept.

The “Endgame”, of course, is staged in Sturua’s theatrical language, stylistics, form. The theatrical language created by Sturua remains unique among the styles on the contemporary world theatre map. And in this play, there is a lot of findings in terms of the director’s theatrical language.

The director always starts working on the play with in-depth analysis and editing of the text. He also put “Endgame” on the same principle. He translated the play together with Nino Kantidze, created a stage text in which you can read the phrases from: St. Johns Revelation (Apocalypse), “Waiting for Godot”, and can directly recognize Sturua’s discourse. Despite the movement,

additions, abbreviations of the phrases, Sturua presented a Beckettian in-depth, philosophically-existentially-absurd farce, moralite, and even sometimes a carnival atmosphere on stage. There is not so much such a stagings of Beckett in the world theatre in terms of content, form and structure.

Along with the changes, Sturua retained the musical and rhythmic sound of Beckett’s text. The same phrases and the same action in the play are not repeated as often, as at Beckett’s. Sturua made the breathtaking, inexhaustible, uninterrupted sense of infinity more accentuated in his staging, and the feeling of the shaking, destroy, world apocalypse - even more apparent and horrible. It is noteworthy that, unlike the Beckettian finale, Sturua’s ending is relatively “brighter” and “hopeful.”

## **Methods**

As soon as Beckett’s “Endgame” is over, the reader has a lot of questions, the author asks himself. That’s why Beckett is a great playwright - he lets you stay with a choice. Will Clov even be strong enough to leave Hamm, to abandon him? I will borrow Esslin’s thought and say that this is what creates the dramatic tension in the play [2]. If Clov leaves, Hamm will die, actually no one is alive except Clov, so who will take care of him? Food supplies are also ending. If Clov goes, he will not only kill Hamm by it, but also commit suicide.

Sturua interpreted “Endgame” as an apocalypse, the end of the world, a warning to human race. The form transcends monodrama, moralite, carnival, intertextuality, epic and non-epic, as well as the theatrical language of Maestro himself. The stage director pushed biblical, Holy Writ references in Beckett’s play while editing the text, shifted the

accents, and made his concept and saying clearer. By the end of the play, a little boy appears on the far horizon, leaning to a rock and looking at his own belly button. In the French edition (Beckett first wrote the play in French, then in English), in dialogue between Hamm and Clov, Clov informs Hamm that he sees the little boy in the telescope. In a desolate, lifeless environment, where time stood still, appears a little boy - a spark of hope for the future life...

The starting point of Sturua's concept is this episode. Stage director turned the hopeful future into a boy dressed in a white shirt as Christ. The play began and ended with the advent of Christ. Hamm orders Clov to execute: Clov shoots Christ with the gun, which Hamm previously wanted to kill himself with. Mankind, again doomed the Son of God, who was to save it.

## **Results**

Regardless of age, Robert Sturua is a young creator. He is in a constant improvement and search of an expression form or method. In the "Endgame", director, along with others (editing, far and close views), used the "set shot" method and "darkening". The frozen images, figures evoked in me the association of inhabitants from Pompeii, a dead city covered with lava.

An interesting fact is that director never "betrays" the playwright. He will thoroughly understand the author's text and will highlight what ordinary readers cannot "see". Robert Sturua did not change the cast image - Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell, and left them as at Beckett's. By replacing textual accents, with small changes, he made it more comprehensible to the viewer. Sturua's Hamm and Clov are clowns, which can also be read at Beckett. While creating Nell and Nagg characters on

stage, director made changes. At Beckett, they are grotesque-sentimental, oafish scum. Sturua shortened Nells and Nagg's text, left the characters grotesque, but overall gave them more romantic touch, especially to Nell.

Miron Shvelidze's stage design blends harmoniously with Sturua's concept. At the poster and program, director and designer used Goya's famous cycle "Caprichos" etching "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters". This way the audience is been informed before entering the theatre: neglect of the mind and thinking by a man raises monsters and causes an apocalypse... Remarks are most important in Beckett's plays, which is foreseen by director and set designer. The description of set design, shown by Beckett is preserved, with only one detail added. In the depths of the stage, a grey gate erects, with an angel on top, holding a trumpet in his hand. "At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it." [3]. The gate is perceived as a gateway to hell or paradise. Beyond it, through the shadows and light, there is paradise or hell shown, from which mankind (the spectators) sometimes see, Christ, and sometimes, the satanic ghosts appear. The director and designer turned the window from Beckett's play, from which Clov uses a telescope to monitor the world and then destroy the even spark of life on the earth or water, into a gateway. The trumpet angel is also from Beckett's play.

Stage lighting has a major significance in Robert Sturua's plays. The lighting created by director reminds you of a painting, in which the gradation of colors, tones, lights and shadows accentuate the viewer, making the saying as clear as possible.

For years, Gia Kancheli have been

creating music for Robert Sturua. The music for the performance, dedicated to the memory of friend, was selected by Maestro himself. In order to express the inner, spiritual world of the characters of Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell, to emphasize the different episodes, Sturua selected musical fragments from Schumann ("Album for the Young", "Carnival"), Tchaikovsky ("Old French Song"), Greek chants "Kyrie eleison", musical phrases from Bach, Schubert, Elgar and Gershwin.

### **Discussion**

Painting, lighting and music are the most important components of Robert Sturua's theatrical language. I will make a paraphrase of Peter Brook [4. 165.] and say that lighting and music at Sturua are neither superfluous nor less, just as much as it takes to express a concept. The lighting in the play matches the feeling of the apocalypse, foreshadowing evil, horrible, shocking mood. By color gradation, focusing on the specifics of the scenery, director imagines an infinite cosmos – with the moon and stars (planets), or paints the atmosphere of the prison, or raises a huge wave of the ocean on the stage. The sense of gloom in Beckett's play is outstandingly reflected in the set design and lighting of the performance.

In one scene, at the sound of an alarm clock ringing, Clov tells Hamm: It will be useful to replace the trumpet at the Second Advent. At Beckett these words sound ironic, but director has given a completely different sense to it. Moreover, at the very beginning of the play, Sturua inserted a phrase from - *St. John's Revelation*: "After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come

up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."... [5] And, he told us directly that what happens in the world today is apocalypse, the end of the world...

The scenography preserves description of Beckett's remarks. Black and white old phone devices was added to the scenery (there is also notifications about the phone call in the play). Ironically, Beckett talks that Hamm and Clov have a mission to destroy life on Earth. Sturua concretizes Beckett's generalized philosophical view of choice and mission, making it more grotesque. Hamm and Clov by Sturua twice contact "supervisors" (or superior) by phone. The director has assigned a double task to Hamm and Clov in expressing their fear and anxieties about the "supervisor". Actors have to play how they are really scared by supervisor, and at the same time, show ironically-sarcastic attitude. The phone will be acting for the second time, almost at the culmination. Hamm calls the "supervisor" and asks for a blast – What a problem is one blast!

Dressed in a black smoking in Sturua's performance, "blind" Hamm in the dark glasses is so-called Senior Clown. Clov is "junior" - enslaved by the "senior" clown. Close to the ending, Clov, who loves order in everything, appears in a long robe, a hat, leather boots and a cane, trying to protect himself from Hamm's "slavery", reminds of a secret service agent from the 1940s-50s of XX century. In the finale, he again is in a straw hat with red and yellow clothes. Their "clownery" nature comes from Beckett's play as well. Despot Hamm and his order-loving servant are not only subservient to each other, but also obey to the will of "supervisor", both at Beckett and Sturua. They both are slaves by nature. They both want to escape from this slavery. The solution is one - complete extinction of life in the world. They have been left no

other choice. They even immediately kill the flea in Clov's pants, as it can become a precursor to prolonging life.

The director added one episode to the play – “Once at the Cemetery”, the burial of Clov's girlfriend. The mourning clown, like the whole episode, is romantically-grotesque. Director exaggerates Clov's love for order. Order first and foremost! Became Clov's motto. In one episode, Sturua turns Clov into dictator-usurpers servant. Moreover, Clov himself had been transformed into a clown with these qualities. With a background of Sarah Leanders, Goebbels' favorite singer, song “Avon Gehat Diet Celt Nietzsche Unter” Clov marches like a soldier! Order first and foremost! - says Clov-clown. He jumps up, squirms, and strikes the trumpet angel with a cane. The director's reference is clear and understandable – “That's where mankind aspires”! At this time, the sound of grunts is heard - frightened Clov runs to Hamm, jumps on his knees and hugs him. He asks for help to the oppressor. Hamm asks, “Just tell me, what you want?” Clov: “I know that order will be established anyway”. Hamm: “Freedom doesn't get used to order!” Clov: “People, people, you see!”... The sound of applause. The director made it clear to us in this episode: both order-loving Hitler and Stalin, were applauded, by people, who are the crowd, echoing what you shout to it. Hamm and his parents couldn't stand each other. Especially father and son. Despot (Hamm) is more loyal to his mother. However, such behavior in infancy and childhood is due to the attitude of the parents towards Hamm (Freud). At Sturua's staging Nagg is a clochard, ragged, the result of Hamm's revenge. They don't change the sand, or give him porridge, just “throw up” the petrous cracker, as if he is as a stray dog. Nagg has made a great contribution to

Hamm becoming a despot. Nagg and Clov complot against Hamm by the final, e.g. organizing a riot. They recall to the story of Peggy to remorse Hamm. Peggy, who probably was Hamm's girlfriend. According to Sturua, Peggy is a prostitute who goes to Hamm asking for a lamp. But uncompromising Hamm refuses.

### **Conclusion**

Beckett, who was Irish with a good Catholic education, rejected the faith of God. Nietzsche's thesis (then developed and still relevant and popular today) “God is dead!” became acceptable for playwright as well. The modern era (after the existentialists to the present day) has said nothing new. The world that remains without God, impersonal, suffering from “mass psychosis” will die! Beckett wanted to say that too, as did Sturua, but unlike Beckett, Robert Sturua believes in the existence of God's goodness.

Sturua began and ended the play with the advent of Christ. Together with other, it encapsulates the form of expression, the form of representation, the structure. Clov shoots Christ with the gun, which Hamm previously wanted to kill himself with. Mankind, again doomed the Son of God, who was to save it. At the Greek chant “Kyrie eleison”, a boy-Christ enters in white clothes, and takes a Bible, which he put on the proscenium at the beginning of the play. Hamm angrily orders Clov - Shoot, kill him, they'll spawn, and than nothing helps us! Clov scruples, but as part of a “true” colorless mass, he still is a slave, and so he shoots – to love, kindness, purity, the future of mankind and the world. The little boy-Christ, seems to give up. Through the darkening, director creates the impression of a gloom, the music sounds up to crescendo, and an amazing and terrifying picture emerges for the viewer at

the same time. A huge wave is rising on the proscenium. Behind the wave, the ghosts of Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell can be shaped ... Again, darkening, than lighting, and all the characters of the play appear on stage. The game is over ... The “apocalypse of our days” is over...

P. S. The premiere of the play took place on 21.03.20, when Covid19 virus already existed in different countries, but has not yet been declared a pandemic.

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#### «КОНЕЦ ИГРЫ» БЕККЕТА В ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИИ РОБЕРТА СТУРУА

##### Аннотация

В XXI веке в Театре Руставели Роберт Стуруа дважды осуществил свою интерпретацию Сэмюэля Беккета. Пьеса «В ожидании Годо» была поставлена в 2002 году, а премьера пьесы «Конец игры» состоялась в конце февраля 2020 года. Стуруа всегда начинает свою работу с углубленного анализа, разработки, редактирования текста. «Конец игры» («Эндшпиль») был реализован по тому же принципу, и режиссер создал сценический текст. В спектакле можно узнать фразы из *Книги Откровения*, «В ожидании Годо», а иногда и фразы самого Стуруа. Несмотря на изменения, режиссёр представил на сцене глубокий, философски экзистенциальный фарс, абсурд, моралите, а иногда и карнавальную атмосферу. Таких постановок Беккета по своему значению, форме или структуре в мировом театральном пространстве очень мало. Режиссёр сохранил рифму, музыкальность и ритмику текста Беккета. В постановке один и тот же текст и одно и то же действие не повторяются с той же частотой, как у Беккета. Но в спектакле чувство разрушения и апокалипсиса более ощутимо и более пугающе. Интерпретация Стуруа «Конца игры» – это апокалипсис, конец света, предупреждение человечеству... А форма спектакля выходит за рамки моралите, карнавализма, интерактивности, эпичности и неэпичности и даже выходит за рамки театрального языка самого Стуруа.

**Ключевые слова:** Японская культура, японизм, британский дизайн XIX века, Резерфорд Алкок, Всемирная Выставка в Лондоне.

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## **БЕККЕТТІҢ «ОЙЫННЫҢ СОҒЫ» ШЫҒАРМАСЫ РОБЕРТ СТУРУА ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯСЫНДА**

### **Аннотация**

XXI ғасырда Руставели театрында Роберт Стуруа Сэмюэл Бекетті сахналауда екі рет өзінің интерпретациясын жүзеге асырды. «Годоны күту» спектаклі 2002 жылы қойылып, ал «Ойынның соңы» спектаклінің премьерасы 2020 жылдың ақпан айының соңында шықты. Стуруа әрқашан өз жұмысын мәтінді терең талдаудан және өңдеуден бастайды. Ойынның соңы («Эндшпиль») дәл сол принцип бойынша жүзеге асырылып, режиссер онда сахна мәтінін жасады. Спектакльден *Аян кітабынан*, «Годоны күту» және кейде Стуруаның өз сөздерін біле аласыз. Өзгерістерге қарамастан, режиссер сахнаға терең, философиялық экзистенциалды фарс, абсурд, мораль, кейде карнавал атмосферасын ұсынды. Әлемдік театр кеңістігінде құндылық, форма немесе құрылым тұрғысынан Бекеттің мұндай туындылары өте аз. Режиссер Бекетт мәтініндегі рифмді, музыкалық және ырғақты сақтады. Өндірісте бірдей мәтін мен бірдей әрекет Бекеттегі жиілікпен қайталанбайды. Бірақ пьесада жойылу сезімі мен апокалипсис анағұрлым айқын және қорқынышты болады. Стуруаның «Ойынның соңы» түсіндірмесі апокалипсис, ақыр заман, адамзат үшін ескерту... Ал қойылым формасы мораль, карнавализм, интерактивтілік, эпикалық және эпикалық емес, тіпті Стуруаның өзіндік театр тілінен де асып түседі.

**Түйінді сөздер:** Бекетт, Стуруа, абсурд театры, интерпретация, театр тілі.

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