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Endgame [Review of Samuel Beckett's play "Endgame" at Theater X, Milwaukee]

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It goes a long way toward producing a meaningful evening at the theater if you have chosen a significant play and have sensitive and talented actors to deliver the performance. Theater X's production of Samuel Beckett's "Endgame" at the Coffee House has this and more.

"Endgame" is possibly the best play of the twentieth century, certainly one of the finest ever produced. It deals with profound questions of human existence: suffering and the possibility of meaningful existence.

"The game" is an intellectual one, possibly analogous to chess. It takes place in an enclosure which is isolated from the rest of the world. Perhaps it is all within the mind of one individual; it is not possible to say for certain.

Two principal characters, Hamm, played by Ric Gruszynski and Clov (Conrad Bishop) are at odds with each other about the world. Hamm, a blind invalid, sits in his chair in the center of the room,

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a whistle hanging from his neck, a carpet over his knees, totally dependent upon Clov for his physical survival. Clov, his servant or his son, moves ritualistically about in a stiff, staggering walk mainly doing the bidding of Hamm.

Nagg and Nell, the other two characters (played by John Schneider and Dianne Johnson), live in two trash barrels placed to the left of Hamm's chair. They are Hamm's parents. Their only happiness is in remembrance of the past. Dehumanized and helpless, they seem incapable of comprehending the present except in terms of their suffering, their affection for each other, and the indignities they experience in getting basic food and care.



Theatre X has proved itself very able in presenting a difficult play with sensitivity and integrity. Competent acting results in richness and depth of feeling for each character. The feelings and ideas come through to the audience with clarity and force.

The set, consisting of exposed beams in rectangular box-like form with translucent plastic walls is a study in artistic economy. It meets well Beckett's specifications for creating the desired dramatic illusions.

A relatively new company, Theatre X offers quality theater at a bargain price. Their production of "Endgame" is a viable alternative for theatergoers who expect more from the theater than merely being entertained.