

**DOKTORI DISSZERTÁCIÓ**

***TOWARDS THE CREATION OF  
ENDGAME***

**THESES**

**RÁKÓCZY ANITA**

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**DOKTORI DISSZERTÁCIÓ TÉZISEI**

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# Theses

Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. *Pause*.<sup>1</sup>

The erasure of authorial presence creates an authorial presence erasing.<sup>2</sup>

The desire closely to explore the creation process of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* raises pressing questions of time-frame, accessibility, structure, methodology and purpose.

## Time-frame

There are over fifteen preliminary versions of *Fin de partie*, including preceding fragments and manuscripts of completed works, the earliest of which, according to Stanley E. Gontarski, was written in 1952-53.<sup>3</sup> However, the genesis of the play does not culminate in the first publication of *Fin de partie* by Editions de Minuit in 1957. Beckett's English translation, *Endgame*, published by Grove Press and Faber and Faber in 1958, carries considerable revisions to the French original. Beckett did not stop there: whenever he directed his own play he introduced changes to *Endgame*, cuts, simplifications, and, at times, additions, thus rewriting it, bringing its two textual variants into life in 1967 and 1980. Later, Gontarski persuaded Beckett to help him produce a third (or nth) version of the play by revising all his previous directorial and textual changes, which Beckett agreed to do. Therefore, in 1992, the *Revised Text*<sup>4</sup> was published, containing Beckett's final modifications of the play. Thus, the genesis of *Endgame*, in my interpretation, spans from Beckett's earliest sketches that trace a search for form of what one day was to become *Fin de partie* to the posthumously published *Revised Text*. This ultimate version, however, is ultimate only by circumstance – Beckett's death ended the creative and creating process that otherwise would

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Endspiel. Fin de partie. Endgame* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974): 10.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985): 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 31. See also Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (University of Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2005): 220. In her stemma she includes two A-B exchanges from the Sam Francis Notebook; the second fragment is dated 15 September, 1950, which, based on Restivo, indicates that the genesis of *Fin de partie* might have started at a considerably earlier date than Gontarski's findings suggest. However, Knowlson and Pilling are dubious about the dating of these fragments. (Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 400.)

<sup>4</sup> The *Revised Text* was published in Stanley E. Gontarski, ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Volume II, Endgame* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1992).

have continued each time Beckett set his hand to the text again in preparation for a new theatre production.

### **Accessibility**

Although Beckett's two theatrical notebooks and the *Revised Text of Endgame* were published together in the second volume of the *Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, which is available in a number of libraries for consultation, it is considered to be a rare book. The expensive edition was both authorized and financed by Beckett himself, but at present it is a financial challenge for libraries and researchers to purchase the item, and, unfortunately, the Beckett Estate has refused permission to reprint the *Notebooks* in affordable, paperback editions or any form.<sup>5</sup> However, researchers face an even greater challenge when aiming to explore Beckett's abandoned *Fin de partie* manuscripts and typescripts, as they are unpublished, and, for the time being, only available for consultation in the libraries where they are located, under strictly controlled research conditions.

From 1970, Beckett started to generously donate manuscripts, typescripts and notebooks to university libraries where there were scholars in residence interested in his work. The starting point of this activity was an exhibition held at the library of University of Reading from May to July 1971, organized by James Knowlson, a great theatre synthesist, who became Beckett's close friend and later his official biographer. Beckett's *Fin de partie* manuscripts are scattered in various libraries around the world: the Ohio State University Library, the University of Reading's Samuel Beckett Collection, the Trinity College Library, the Baker Memorial Library, Dartmouth College and the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas.<sup>6</sup>

There are a number of crucial scholarly works that have aimed to enumerate the existing *Fin de partie* manuscripts and typescripts, create a comprehensive list of these and establish their order. The present thesis is greatly indebted to the pioneering works of Richard L. Admussen, Stanley E. Gontarski and Ruby Cohn. Admussen's *The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts* has been a reference point in Beckett-research and a prime source of information for Beckett-scholars since its publication in 1979, aiming to list "all" available Beckett manuscripts that at the time were already in public hands and available for consultation.

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<sup>5</sup> Stanley E. Gontarski, "Reinventing Beckett," *Modern Drama* 49, no. 4 (2006): 436.

<sup>6</sup> Richard L. Admussen, *The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts. A study* (Boston: G.K.Hall &CO., 1979): 5-8.

Gontarski's early work, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (1985) extensively examines a great number of the preliminary versions of Beckett's works of the dramatic genre. Both Gontarski's research results and his approach to the manuscripts, reworkings and the artistic method of "undoing" in Beckett's plays have been an invaluable help and inspiration in determining the direction of the present thesis.

There is an ongoing multinational enterprise, the Digital Manuscript Project, that aims to "reunite the manuscripts of Samuel Beckett's work in a digital way". The project, under the co-directorship of Mark Nixon and Dirk Van Hulle, is striving to collect *all* of Beckett's manuscripts from libraries all over the world, transcribe and digitalize them in cooperation with a number of research teams. Beckett's manuscripts are organized into twenty-six different modules, which will be launched on the project's website throughout the next decades, and will be made available for research for a fee. The Digital Manuscript Project module into which *Fin de partie* will be incorporated is to be launched within the next twenty years; by making available every single *Fin de partie* manuscript and preliminary version it is likely to change the related field of research significantly.<sup>7</sup>

## Structure

The thesis focuses on four antecedents of *Fin de partie*. As the Samuel Beckett Collection at the University of Reading has so far been my only accessible source of manuscripts and typescripts, the selection is based on its catalogue and available material. The four preliminary versions consulted have been chosen as four distinctly diverging phases of Beckett's composition in terms of length, form and structure: a short, untitled dialogue fragment (MS 1227/7/16/2, henceforth *Ernest & Alice Fragment*); an unfinished mime, *Mime du rêveur A* (MS 1227/7/16/1); a longer dramatic piece from the earliest stages of the creation process that Beckett labelled *Avant Fin de partie* (MS 1227/7/16/7); and finally, a full, untitled, two-act version of *Fin de partie* (MS 1660; henceforth referred to as *A&B*) that at a significantly later stage was cut back to one act before publication. At the end of each subchapter, the reader is provided with a detailed synopsis of the manuscript discussed. These synopses offer a sense of basic orientation about the *Ernest & Alice Fragment*, *Mime du rêveur A*, *Avant Fin de partie* and *A&B* that would otherwise be only obtainable through close-reading.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.beckettarchive.org/introduction.jsp>, accessed on 24 November 2014

The *Ernest & Alice Fragment* is perhaps one of the first antecedents of *Fin de partie*, in an embryonic state, carrying a great number of similarities and differences to the published version. Still, they are members of the same family, and the ties between them cannot be overlooked. The fragment is primarily a dialogue between Ernest and his wife Alice, and a third character, Mère, Ernest's mother, who appears towards the end of the typescript.

There are a great number of attributes that provide an indisputable link between the *Ernest & Alice Fragment* and *Fin de partie*. The central character's immobility and confinement to an object (a cross), and the presence of another character attending to his needs are basic coordinates of both plays. Ernest's craving for affection and its tangible proof by asking Alice for a kiss, to lie down on him, and his at times sadistic attitude of enjoying Alice's services to the degree of exploitation also echo Hamm's relationship to Clov. Ernest's concern about Alice's leaving him, making an issue of it at least twice in the play also foreshadows the Hamm and Clov affair. The exhaustion of supplies and the handkerchief covering Ernest's face are familiar patterns that further deepen the inherence of the two plays.

There is an earlier mime play by Beckett some aspects of which point towards *Endgame*. The unfinished and undated *Mime du rêveur A*, four pages long, exists only in a single version. The typescript of *Mime du rêveur A* consists of stage directions and a single character that performs a mime, following a second mime (about his dreams) that was never written. Mime A is interrupted by Mime B every time that A, the only character of *Mime du rêveur A*, falls asleep sedated. The origins of both Hamm and Clov can be detected in A, an old man who spends most of his time in a rocking chair in "dream-tormented sleep"<sup>8</sup>. Then, between craved moments of semi-consciousness, to the accompaniment of a series of repetitive actions he carries, or later drags, the rocking chair into the next location of knockout.

The structure of *Fin de partie* and *Mime du rêveur A* are fundamentally different. The same applies to their theatrical genre, as the latter is a non-verbal work, and contains only one character and no dialogue. However, there are apparent similarities in *Fin de partie* and *Mime du rêveur A* that cannot be ignored. The set is one of the main links between the two works – the skull-like interior with the two small windows. The rocking-chair in *Mime du rêveur A* becomes an armchair in *Fin de partie*, but there is a chair with a key function centre stage. A combines some main features of both Hamm and Clov: A's Clov-like staggering and

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<sup>8</sup> Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre* (London: John Calder Ltd, 1988):165.

observing the outside world; his circular stage movements from corner to corner and to the centre are reminiscent of Hamm's turns in the shelter; they both have a special desire to be in the centre of the stage; A and Hamm share their love of analgesics too. Also, in *Mime du rêveur A*, there is the notebook, the action of writing that might be the first step towards Hamm's Opus Magnum.

McMillan and Fehsenfeld give account of an event at Reading University, when Beckett called one of his experimental fragments *Avant Fin de partie*.<sup>9</sup> This text is closely related to the genesis of *Fin de partie*. There are two chief characters in the fragment, a master called X, and his factotum, F. Despite the lack of introductory stage directions, the exposition of *Avant Fin de partie* is more detailed and verbose than that of the previous preliminary versions or *Fin de partie* itself. The basic plot of *Avant Fin de partie* is that X and F are passing the time from the morning most probably till the night, though the fragment finishes before outlining a time frame.

*Avant Fin de partie* contains a great number of realistic details related to the location and other spatial aspects of the fragment that are of great importance in understanding *Endgame*. Out of all the preliminary versions and the "final" play, *Avant Fin de partie* is the most revealing source in connection with *Endgame*'s autobiographical level.

There are a great number of other features that make an apparent link between *Avant Fin de partie* and *Endgame*. X and Hamm both have a soft spot for dogs and a desire to own one, though X would prefer a real dog with fleas, ticks and worms to a toy pet or a cat, which, as X ponders, if shut in with his corpse would eat his face. X and Hamm both like taking a "walk" or a "little turn" that is, being pushed around by F or Clov in their armchairs, in turns across the interior. Besides, like Hamm, X takes great care to be in the centre, right in the middle of the room, and has developed a sensitivity to feel even a few inches of deviation. The sets of the two plays have a number of attributes in common. In X's living room, there is his armchair, and two windows, both of them bricked up in mysterious circumstances. There is a kitchen that X assigns to F in an order when he dismisses him to go back there. Regarding the stage props, both X and Hamm wear glasses; X and F do not possess a telescope but plan to have one, with which to explore the non-existent sea and the outside world.

The roots of Hamm and Clov's master-slave relationship are already present in this fragment. For quite some time, even in the *Ernest & Alice Fragment*, Beckett had been

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<sup>9</sup> Macmillan and Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre*, 165.

experimenting with the image of a man that is helpless, disabled, and/or blind but at the same time a tyrant, and his servile counterpart who, not having the guts to disobey his oppressor openly, chooses other ways to confront him, deceiving him in his disability. Although lying to a blind man about events whose validity can only be checked visually involves no direct confrontation, these private micro rebellions are essential for F and Clov's character development. They are both working themselves up to part.

The corrected, fifty-nine pages long, untitled, undated typescript of an early version of *Fin de partie* in two acts, *A&B*, consists of a dialogue between players A and B in an interior clearly related to the setting of *Fin de partie*.<sup>10</sup> A remarkable, immediately apparent attribute of *A&B* is its meta-theatrical quality. Although both *Mime du rêveur A* and *Avant Fin de partie* already show signs of awareness of the audience and some elements of burlesque comedy, the two acts of *A&B* are full of theatrical devices that are characteristic of slapstick comedies and music hall set pieces.

There are a number of disguise-scenes, at times cross-dressings, that underline the play's markedly meta-theatrical features. The roots of this experiment can be found in *Avant Fin de partie*, where F acts out X's mother in disguise towards the end of the fragment. There are four occasions when the characters in *A&B* use disguise: the beard and wig scene, where both A and B put on costumes; B's first cross-dressing – X is concerned that something is taking its course and wants to see his mother first then puts up with Sophie; B's second cross-dressing – A decides that he is going to beget and sends for Sophie; finally, the last disguise at the end when B acts out Edward, the boy.

Out of all the preliminary versions discussed in the present thesis, the theatrical space of *A&B* is the closest to the bare interior of *Endgame*. The description and history of the exact location, which is one of the main peculiarities of *Avant Fin de partie*, is absent from *A&B*, so an artistic attempt towards the universalization of space is detectable already in this preliminary version.

The conflict between A and B goes down to the core of the play. As seen in the *Ernest & Alice Fragment* and also in *Avant Fin de partie*, the components of a mutually sado-masochistic master-slave relationship are detectable in *A&B*. The most apparent development towards *Fin de partie* is the increase of aggression compared to the earlier manuscripts

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<sup>10</sup> Bryden et al., *Beckett at Reading. Catalogue of the Beckett Manuscript Collection at The University of Reading* (Reading: Whitenights Press and the Beckett International Foundation, 1998): 35.



regarding both its quantity and quality, intermingled with accusations, and subconscious feelings of guilt and remorse.

As opposed to *Endgame*, where Hamm composes one main Opus Magnum, A has two extensive stories. One of them, a strange, enigmatic monologue is about a man that A used to know from a brothel in Rue Sébastien-Bottin, he delivers in Act II. The antecedent of Hamm's story, or the "novel" as György Kurtág calls it, is located at the end of Act I in the *A&B* manuscript. It is in a highly advanced form at this relatively early stage of play development; A's Opus Magnum shares numerous common features and topics with Hamm's story, including the time aspects and weather conditions, Christmas Eve and a windy and sunny day, but sunset by the time the action takes place.

In the **conclusion**, the present thesis offers a brief outlook on the post-publication development of *Fin de partie*. The genesis of the play did not end with its publication, as Beckett, reluctantly, began to translate *Fin de partie* into English. He was given a tight deadline, as "in order to clinch a deal with George Devine for its production at the Royal Court Theatre, he had to commit himself to supplying the English version by, at the very latest, mid-August 1957."<sup>11</sup> He was dissatisfied with his efforts on the English translation of *Fin de partie*: "I find it dreadful in English, all the sharpness gone, and the rhythms. If I were not bound by contract to the Royal Court Theatre I wouldn't allow it in English at all."<sup>12</sup> Beckett introduced significant changes into the English text that designate the starting point towards the major categories of revision that he made to the play. The English translation, the "poor substitute for the original", as Beckett called it, served as a model for the alterations he carried out in the French and German texts.

The second stage of the post-publication development of *Endgame* can be detected in Beckett's two *Endgame*-directions: Schiller Theater Berlin, 1967 and San Quentin Drama Workshop, Riverside Studios, London, 1980. Concerning the textual changes that Beckett made to *Endgame*, along with the general striving for reduction, shortening, sharpening and "undoing", there are two distinguishable directions, two major tendencies in the theatrical notebooks<sup>13</sup>. First, "extraneous matter is excised."<sup>14</sup> Second, an authorial intention already

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<sup>11</sup> Knowlson, *Damned To Fame. The Life Of Samuel Beckett*, 393.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 393-4.

<sup>13</sup> Stanley E. Gontarski, ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Volume II, Endgame* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1992): xviii.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

detectable in *Avant Fin de partie* and *A&B*, the conflict between Hamm and Clov is further emphasized.

## Methodology

In terms of methodology, the present thesis offers an interpretive dramaturgical analysis of these four antecedents through close-reading, with a brief overview of the textual and directorial changes that Beckett implemented in the text before, during and after his 1967 *Endspiel* and 1980 *Endgame* directions, as a number of these revisions have a crucial impact on the play's dramaturgy. Although the manuscript versions have never been performed, they were written for the stage, with the intention of production. Therefore, in these antecedents, following Beckett's immense struggle with form, spatial relations, monologues, dialogues and their arrangement, information distribution, stage directions, character formation and various aspects of meta-theatre, enrich and deepen one's understanding of *Endgame*.

New Criticism considers textual variants preceding the publication as independent works at most (Genetic Fallacy), which are as irrelevant and incompetent when it comes to understanding, interpreting or evaluating the final text as the author's intention (Intentional Fallacy)<sup>15</sup>. However, my proposition is that *Endgame* includes all its preliminary sketches, manuscripts, textual variants and its *Revised Text*. It incorporates the constant movement, change, and interaction between these texts in every possible direction. Therefore, to make the manuscripts and certain observations concerning text and dramaturgy accessible for both the author and the reader, the present thesis follows the methodology of genetic criticism. Hans Walter Gabler argues, "no creation of the human mind springs to instant life and perfection without revision. Whether preserved or not, there must always have been discrete textual states, in temporal succession, of a literary composition. Thus the work may be said to comprise all its authorial textual states".<sup>16</sup> Genetic criticism approaches the work as the process of creation; a decentralization has taken place concerning the status and hierarchy of textual variants, and, from regarding one relevant and another less appreciated in view of

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<sup>15</sup> Dávidházi Péter, "A hatalom szétosztása. Klasszikus, modern és posztmodern a szövegkritikában," in Dávidházi Péter, *Per passivam resistentiam: Változatok hatalom és írás témájára* (Budapest: Argumentum Kiadó, 1998): 211.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Walter Gabler, "The Synchrony and Diachrony of Texts: Practice and Theory of the Critical Edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses*," in *Text. Transactions of the Society for Textual Scholarship 1*, eds. D.C. Greetham and W. Speed Hill (New York: AMS Press, 1984): 309.

regaining the ultimate, completed authorial work the attention has shifted towards the demonstration of the writing process<sup>17</sup>. The text has a diachronous structure that correlates its separate synchronous structures, of which the published work is not the ultimate but only one, “and not necessarily a privileged one. [...] The variant, far from being an extraneous irritant, becomes an integral textual element of pivotal significance in the textual totality of the work.”<sup>18</sup> Péter Dávidházi points out that reconstruction remains important for genetic criticism, but as it mainly focuses on continual formation and transformation it has ceased to exhume and embalm: “these metaphors belong to the concept of death, but the text has everlasting life, and, at best, only the snapshots of its development can be reconstructed”<sup>19</sup>.

In case of Beckett, who thus, ironically, has doomed Hamm and Clov to be immortal, the creation of *Fin de partie* is a reverse process. Beckett gradually decomposed much of the textual and dramatic material that he considered external, tasteless, or unfit for the form and content of the play. More specifically, as Gontarski points out, the most discernible pattern in Beckett’s creative process is the “intentional undoing” of the text’s origin.<sup>20</sup> As Beckett’s subject matter is mainly autobiographical<sup>21</sup>, he does his best to leach out, eliminate every personal reference and trait from *Fin de partie* and his works in general. Therefore, focusing dramaturgical and genetic research on the manuscripts and preliminary versions of *Fin de partie* is of the utmost significance. Through close-reading, it is possible to trace back some of Beckett’s sources of inspiration that otherwise would be lost forever. Also, the preceding manuscripts and later variants of *Endgame* provide the reader with the unique opportunity to explore the very process of Beckett gradually writing himself out of his own text. Although this intention is a strive towards impersonality, paradoxically, Beckett thus creates an intimate personal experience for those who follow his creating and undoing process through the genesis of *Endgame*.

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<sup>17</sup> Dávidházi, “A hatalom szétesztása. Klasszikus, modern és posztmodern a szövegkritikában,” 222.

<sup>18</sup> Gabler, “*The Synchrony and Diachrony of Texts: Practice and Theory of the Critical Edition of James Joyce’s Ulysses*,” 309.

<sup>19</sup> Dávidházi, “A hatalom szétesztása. Klasszikus, modern és posztmodern a szövegkritikában,” 222-3. Translation: Anita Rákóczy

<sup>20</sup> Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett’s Dramatic Texts*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

## Research purpose

The purpose of writing *Towards the Creation of Endgame* is threefold. First, there is a personal interest that started in 2004 by chance, when I spotted the *Theatrical Notebooks of Endgame* on a bookshelf in the Norwich University Library while looking for material on Shakespeare and film adaptations for my MA thesis during an Erasmus Scholarship to Norwich School of Art and Design. In that life-changing moment, Beckett won over Shakespeare and has preserved his priority in several domains in my life ever since.

Another motivating factor behind the present thesis is to provide background material for György Kurtág, who is currently composing his *Fin de partie* opera. Commissioned by the Salzburg Opera Festival, he began the great project in 2010. In November 2011, while I was in New York conducting basic research on *Endgame*, a request came through György Lengyel that I should help Kurtág's work with research, material collection and my own writing. The Fulbright Scholarship provided a unique opportunity to access rare books, musical scores and audiovisual material in various libraries that would otherwise have been hardly reachable. The acquaintance of György Kurtág, conversations and silences with him, and his restless devotion, full dedication to *Fin de partie* have been my prime sources of inspiration, and in the process of writing the present thesis have radically shaped and continue to shape its focus of interest and subject matter.

The final aim of the thesis is to draw the Samuel Beckett Estate's attention to the essential importance of the preliminary versions that preceded, and the textual variants that followed, the publication of *Endgame*. There is a strong emphasis on textual stability in Beckett criticism today, and it is the current standpoint of the protectors of Beckett's reputation.<sup>22</sup> As Gontarski argues, "the Beckett Estate, the legal extension of the author, remains committed to the decidedly untheatrical ideology of invariant texts, in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary [...] Theirs is an argument for a homogeneous Beckett."<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the Estate also rejects the revised texts of the plays that Beckett had directed and revised himself, from which the *Revised Text of Endgame* is just one example. In their view, these works are merely "localized variations on an invariant text as originally published (with minor subsequent corrections)"<sup>24</sup>, so they are not allowed to be reprinted or performed. The prohibition of the publication of Beckett's early manuscripts suggests a

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<sup>22</sup> Gontarski, "Reinventing Beckett," 430.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 430.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 433.

similar viewpoint concerning the early drafts of *Fin de partie* or any manuscriptal work of Beckett.

In broad terms, Beckett took over thirty-nine years to compose *Endgame*, and the creation process has grown beyond his lifetime. Hamm shapes and revises but never completes his Opus Magnum; however, finally, Hamm's story becomes the play itself.<sup>25</sup> The present thesis hopes to be an example of many to demonstrate that neither pre- nor post-publication textual variants should be ignored with respect to *Endgame*, as with all the change, interference and simplification they constitute one integral body of text that is indivisible.

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<sup>25</sup> György Kurtág in conversation, 14 May 2015