

WAITING FOR GODOT

- Samuel Beckett

Introduction:

The Theatre of Absurd literally means “out of harmony”. Ionesco, who is considered as one of the major dramatists of the school of the absurd, defines, the ‘Absurd’ as that “which is devoid of purpose.... cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost, all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless”. In Beckett’s words, human life is the endurance and tolerance to “the boredom of living” “replaced by the suffering of being”.

Samuel Beckett’s first play, *Waiting for Godot* (1948) written originally in French is a play in two Acts, in which two characters wait for someone named Godot, who never arrives.

It does not tell a story, and it does not have a plot. Instead, it explores a static situation where nothing happens, nobody comes and nobody goes. It represents an ‘awful’ human condition.

The play has a symmetrical structure. There are two Acts, two messenger boys, and two sets of characters, that is Vladimir and Estragon, and Pozzo and Lucky. It appears to have been structured on sets of binaries. It is considered that the structural pattern of the play is both parallel and circular. The two acts, each made up of four identical sections.

Analysis:

In this play, the situation is *Godot* is one of monotonous sameness, and perpetual recurrence, indicating that this cyclic pattern will continue like an unbroken circle till the end of time. ‘We are *waiting for Godot*’ is an endless refrain that occurs in both acts. The futility and the monotony of such a wait is the link that holds both Acts together. This is heightened by the sparse stage decor. There is only an open country road with a leafless tree. Beckett has not placed his characters in a ‘specific’ place or time. He thus lends his play a universal dimension in terms of time and space.

Vladimir, who is one of the two main characters of the play seems to be more responsible and mature. He is addressed as Didi by Estragon and as Mr. Albert by the boy. While Estragon, the second of the two main characters, is called as Gogo by Vladimir. Estragon seems to be weak, helpless and always looking for Vladimir's protection. The next set of characters are Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo is the person who passes by the spot, where Vladimir and Estragon are waiting beside a leafless tree. However, Pozzo becomes blind in the second act and does not remember meeting Vladimir and Estragon. Lucky is the next character represented as slave to Pozzo. He carries Pozzo's bags and stool. In the first act, he entertains by 'dancing' and 'thinking aloud'. However, in the second act he is found dumb. And, the next important characters are the boy who acts as a messenger to Godot. He appears at the end of each act to inform Vladimir that Godot is going to come on the next day. Godot, is the man for whom Vladimir and Estragon are waiting unendingly. Godot never appears, his name is often thought to refer to God, who does not arrive in the play.

In Act I, the two Tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, wait beside a leafless tree for Godot passing time in verbal games. The play follows two consecutive days in the lives of a pair of men who divert themselves while they wait expectantly and unsuccessfully for someone named Godot who never arrives. They claim that they know him, but in fact they have no acquaintance with him as they admit that they would not recognise him if seen. To engage themselves, they sing, play games, eat, talk, sleep and contemplate suicide—anything "to hold the terrible silence at bay".

Two characters, Pozzo and his slave Lucky arrive on the scene. Pozzo treats his slave rather horribly. Lucky has to 'dance' and 'think aloud' to entertain his master and the tramps. After sometime they leave and a boy arrives. The boy, obviously a messenger from Godot, informs the tramps that Godot will definitely come the next day.

In Act II, there is no change in the scene. Continuing to wait, Pozzo and Lucky enter again. Pozzo is now blind and Lucky is dumb. Once again they leave, and the boy arrives with the same message. Though determined to leave, the tramps do not move. Only the tree has a few leaves in Act II, otherwise there is no change in the act.

Act I

The play opens with the character Estragon struggling to remove his boot from his foot. Estragon eventually gives up, muttering, "Nothing to be done." His friend Vladimir takes up the thought and muses on it, the implication being that nothing is a thing that has to be done and this pair is going to have to spend the rest of the play doing it. When Estragon finally succeeds in removing his boot, he looks and feels inside but finds nothing. Just prior to this, Vladimir peers into his hat. The motif recurs throughout in the play.

Their waiting is interrupted by the passing through of Pozzo and his heavily-laden slave Lucky, who may, according to Beckett, "shatter the space of the play". Pozzo and Lucky have been seen to represent a sort of double of Vladimir and Estragon, with similar roles, anxieties and uncertainties. At one point, Vladimir observes that they are "tied to Godot" as Lucky is tied to Pozzo. Vladimir also refers to Estragon as a "pig" several times later in the play, echoing Pozzo's abuse of Lucky.

Act II

Act II opens with Vladimir singing a round about a dog which serves to illustrate the cyclical nature of the play's universe, and also points toward the play's debt to the carnivalesque, music hall traditions and vaudeville comedy (this is only one of a number of canine references and allusions in the play). There is a bit of realization on Vladimir's part that the world they are trapped in evinces convoluted progression (or lack thereof) of time. He begins to see that although there is notional evidence of linear progression, basically he is living the same day over and over. Eugene Webb writes of Vladimir's song that "Time in the song is not a linear sequence, but an endlessly reiterated moment, the content of which is only one eternal event: death."

Pozzo and Lucky then arrive, with Pozzo now blind and insisting that Lucky is dumb. The rope is now much shorter and Lucky – who has acquired a new hat – leads Pozzo, rather than being driven by him. Pozzo has lost all notion of time, and assures

them he cannot remember meeting them the day before, and that he does not expect to remember the current day's events when they are over

Lucky and Pozzo depart. The same boy returns to inform them not to expect Godot today, but he would arrive the next day. The two again consider suicide but their rope, Estragon's belt, breaks in two when they tug on it. Estragon's trousers fall down, but he doesn't notice till Vladimir tells him to pull them up. They resolve to bring a more suitable piece and hang themselves the next day, if Godot fails to arrive.

Again, they agree to leave but neither of them make any move to go.

Throughout the work one can find religious, philosophical, classical, psychoanalytical and biographical – especially wartime – references, there are ritualistic aspects and elements literally lifted from vaudeville and there is a danger in making more of these than what they are: that is, merely structural conveniences, avatars into which the writer places his fictional characters. The play “exploits several archetypal forms and situations, all of which lend themselves to both comedy and pathos.”

Waiting for Godot also illustrates an attitude toward man's experience on earth: the poignancy, oppression, camaraderie, hope, corruption, and bewilderment of human experience that can only be reconciled in mind and art of the absurdist. If Godot is God, then Didi and Gogo's (mankind's) faith in God is not only subject to doubt, but may also have almost entirely disappeared. Yet the illusion of faith—that deeply embedded hope that Godot might come—still flickers in the minds of Vladimir and Estragon. It is almost as if the faith of these two men has been tested to such extremes that they can perfectly well see the logic of renouncing it—but they cannot completely

Political: “It was seen as an allegory of the cold war,” or of French resistance to the Germans. Graham Hassell writes, “[T]he intrusion of Pozzo and Lucky ... seems like nothing more than a metaphor for Ireland's view of mainland Britain,

where society has ever been blighted by a greedy ruling élite keeping the working classes passive and ignorant by whatever means.” The pair are often played with Irish accents, an inevitable consequence, some feel, of Beckett's rhythms and phraseology, but this is not stipulated in the text.

Existentialist: Broadly speaking existentialists hold there are certain questions that everyone must deal with (if they are to take human life seriously), questions such as death, the meaning of human existence and the place of God in human existence. By and large they believe that life is very difficult and that it doesn't have an "objective" or universally known value, but that the individual must create value by affirming it and living it, not by talking about it. The play touches upon all of these issues.

Conclusion:

All pairs in the play exercise lack of compassion—sometimes brutally, as when the main characters, always looking at the advantage to themselves, seek to kick, instead of help, Pozzo, who is calling out piteously for pity over and over again. Is the island with the single tree a place of purgatory in which pairs eternally await an expression of compassion for their fellow, as one evildoer expresses toward the Christ on the Cross? Is Godot in fact not a man but personification of compassion that only arrives when created in the breast of man himself? The boy comes to say Godot is not coming just after the pair in focus are particularly selfish and callous. The pair of boys referenced in the play are surely representing meekness and hope before compassion is consciously excluded by an evolving personality and character, and may be the youthful Pozzo and Lucky; in which case, Lucky would be the brother allegedly beaten by Godot. That would make Pozzo Godot, but also, since both main characters beat Lucky, they are also Godot.