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Nothing to be Done in *Waiting For Godot*

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The first statement in *Waiting For Godot* is Estragon's pessimistic conclusion that there is 'Nothing to be done'. Much of the play suggests that there is 'nothing to be done'. Practically nothing happens nothing is done no development is discernible and there is no beginning and no end. The entire action boils down to this; in a place where there is nothing but a tree, two tramps dawdle away their time waiting for a rescuer from to save them from miseries of life. Two strangers a cruel master and his half-demented serf cross their path and leave again. At the end of the first act, messenger from the rescuer arrives and promises that he will come tomorrow. In the second act waiting goes on; the other couple pass by once more but the master is now blind and the slave is dumb. Both stumble and fall. The tramps help them on their way. The messenger appears again with the same promise. Everything as it was in the beginning. Vivian Merciers summaries the acts as 'Nothing happens, twice'.

Thus, in *Waiting For Godot* nothing has happened. There has been no plot, no dialogue as we understand it, no movement and a play has just been enacted. This is the climax of anti-theatre or it could be said that this is a theatre pure and simple, theatre stripped off everything but its essence, theatre without form, theatre without content, theatre without reason yet the theater which in the very breaking down (which allows illogical and irrational things to happen on stage) of these values emerges as theatre of truth, theatre of intuitions in which language plays but a very minimal role. It is precisely this contraction, this minimisation which gives the play its impact and power. However to say that nothing has happened in the play would be an understatement. Here less than nothing happens.

The play establishes the essence of what Martin Esslin would later call "Absurd Drama". A well made play is expected to have a beginning, middle and a neatly tied up ending. The 'Theatre of Absurd' presents isolation between actors and the setting because it projects the universal condition of nothingness in life and to that end it does away with realistic settings or coherently evolving plot. As Albert Camus explains in *The Myth Of Sisyphus*, "...in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity." The concept of the alienation of man in a hostile universe dictates both the content and method of an absurdist play.

Beckett gives us nothing we can envy or we can admire, no courage, no gallantry, no glamorous lovers, beautiful costumes handsome setting or desirable furniture. There is no possibility for tragedy even when the Vladimir and Estragon consider suicide. There is not much theatrical illusion and very little suspense. It is even difficult to admire acting. There is no heroism, nothing to do and admire and not many illusions, everything seems uncertain and

doubtful. They are Waiting for Godot, for Godot's arrival alone can terminate their helplessness, despair and inaction. But Godot does not come in spite of his unwritten message that he will. The boy brings a message, but that does not raise any hope. He presents an image of Godot - an image that is not cheering or heartening. For Godot, before coming, will have to "consult his family", "his friends", "his agents", "his bank account", "his correspondents", and even "his books"

Beckett has reached a position of doubt of agnosticism about the external world itself, which reflect as it must be within the existential experience of an individual, has lost its reassuringly positive and generally accepted outlines. That is why there is nothing to express in the last. The existential experience is felt as a succession of attempts to give shape to the void, when nothing can be a lay claim to a final, definitive reality, we enter into a world of games, of orbitary actions, structure to give the illusion of reality. Therefore Vladimir and Estragon thing up their ways to pass the time. They are incapable of anything more than merely beginning of impulse, desires, thought, moods, memories and impressions and everything that arises in them sinks back into oblivion before it arrives anywhere. They live, to a large extent, in a twilight state and though one of them, Vladimire, is more aware of the situation than his companion Estragon, inertia prevails throughout. Then incapability to live or to end life, the opening and concluding theme of the play, is intimately linked with their love of helplessness and of wish dreams which they make no attempt to realize. Altogether their wish dreaming and their playfulness blot out whatever serious moods come over them,-

VLADIMIR:

Suppose we repented.

ESTRAGON:

Repented what?

VLADIMIR:

Oh . . . (*He reflects.*) We wouldn't have to go into the details.

ESTRAGON:

Our being born?

Vladimir breaks into a hearty laugh which he immediately stifles, his hand pressed to his pubis, his face contorted.

VLADIMIR:

One daren't even laugh any more.

ESTRAGON:

Dreadful privation.

VLADIMIR:

Merely smile. (*He smiles suddenly from ear to ear, keeps smiling, ceases as suddenly.*) It's not the same thing. Nothing to be done. (*Pause.*) Gogo.

ESTRAGON:

(*irritably*). What is it?

VLADIMIR:

Did you ever read the Bible?

ESTRAGON:

The Bible . . . (*He reflects.*) I must have taken a look at it.

VLADIMIR:

Do you remember the Gospels?

ESTRAGON:

I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Coloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy.

VLADIMIR: You should have been a poet.

ESTRAGON:

I was. (*Gesture towards his rags.*) Isn't that obvious?

(Act 1)

Though the ancient criteria of tragedy are not found in *Waiting for Godot*, it is a tragedy. The heroes of the play, Vladimir and Estragon, have been together for fifty years. They were once on the top of the Eiffel tower, which is the symbol of happiness and prosperity. But they are two ill-clad tramps with no roof over their heads, hunger gnawing them at their entrails. They evoke pity and fear. They are shrouded in mystery, and yet the readers and the audience do not experience any Catharsis, which is not mere tragic relief but emotional equilibrium. We leave the auditorium in a state of despair. The two tramps wait, knowing full well that it is an exercise in futility.

They are full of frustration and resentment and cling together with a mixture of interdependence and affection. The problem of Vladimir and Estragon is that they are alive. Like, everyone and everyman they are trapped between birth and death. Everything has become uncertain, doubtful and dark. The same character, Lucky, who has entered in the play burst into incoherent eloquence when commanded by Pozzo to think, "... is now become dumb." "Dumb?" asks Vladimir "since when?"

And Pozzo who has become blind replies.

POZZO:

(*suddenly furious.*) Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (*Calmer.*) **They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more.** (Act II)

Pozzo loses all his prospective. Night has fallen upon him. It is the darkness that exists in a womb; it is the darkness which descends in death. That is why he does not remember anything is between-all time is contained in the moment-all time is a moment and the darkness of the womb and the darkness of death are same.

Uncertainty of identification is on all sides. Estragon's boots were black, when he threw them away, but are now brown.

VLADIMIR:

(*stupefied.*) Not yours!

ESTRAGON:

Mine were black. These are brown.

VLADIMIR:

You're sure yours were black?

ESTRAGON:

Well they were a kind of gray.

VLADIMIR:

And these are brown. Show me.

ESTRAGON:

(*picking up a boot*). Well they're a kind of green.

This could be said the worst situation of life where persons are not sure even about the previous day's incident. Examples abound in the work of unreality of the real. If anything exist it cannot be known. And Beckett shows the universal quality of this "nothingness."

Let us look at the names of the characters in *Waiting for Godot*. Estragon, Vladinir, Pozzo and Lucky, Estragon is French. Vladinir, Russian, Pozzo, Italian, Lucky, English. We feel that apart from the ironic naming of Lucky, there must be some design in assigning names to characters drawn from different nationalists. Obviously, it has nothing to do with characteristics of these nations. It occurs that if names are not adventitious (and Beckett weighs all his words) it means that we are asked to think of this play not as an isolated piece of inaction, in a corner of France, or if you like Italy, but as a cosmic state, a world condition in which all humanity is involved.

There is little doubt that such a sense of disillusionment, such a collapse of all beliefs, which Beckett wants to show in *Waiting For Godot*, is a characteristic feature of the post World War times. Beckett does not intend to tell a story, he does not want the audience to go home satisfied that they know the solution to the problem poured in the play.

They play in which nothing happens is designed to show that nothing even happens in human life. The world itself is absurd which has no sense. Tendency to search for meaning leads to "nothing". Exactly Estragon and Vladinir have no choice but to wait in order to get fulfillment which cannot be gotten. That is the tragic aspect of the play as well as the life. Buddha says that the world is tragic. And here is the tragedy of humanity, tragedy of having no choice, waiting for destiny, for course of belonging, problem of identity. Estragon and Vladinir are worse than Lucky and Pozzo because they have choice and this choice of waiting leads them to such sufferings. It shows their purposelessness and hopelessness for Lucky who is fully dependent on Pozzo, so he does not need to think or to struggle. For Estragon and Vladinir, there is a vague route, different from the ordinary path of main-stream, but where it leads is unknown. They are not a part of the "system" as Lucky and Pozzo. They are thrown out from the "society" because they do not follow any route.

Vladimir and Estragon are the representatives of the suffering humanity, travailing in a hostile universe. The play presents conflict between living by religious and spiritual beliefs, and living by an existential philosophy, which asserts that it is up to the individual to discover the meaning of life through personal experience in the earthly world. Vladimir represents the portion of humanity who trusts in religion and spiritual beliefs to guide them, and that Estragon represents the more ideal existentialist portion of humanity who chooses to stop waiting and construct the meaning of life based on experience in the tangible and physical world around them.

Pozzo and Lucky present similar picture of despair and helplessness. They deepen and heighten the tragedy of a man and suggest that helplessness is not the destiny of the two tramps alone, but of all beings. Lucky is treated by his master as an animal. Once graceful and beautiful, he has now fallen upon evil days. He has lost all human dignity. He is taken to the fair for sale, his neck tied with a string. Pozzo is so heartless that on seeing Lucky weeping bitterly, he simply says: "Old dogs have more dignity." The master is power-mad, and as if by an act of Nemesis, he becomes blind. The word 'blind' may be taken figuratively also. He is blind, for he has not the patience to appreciate the other man's point of view. But as he becomes blind, he is as helpless as the rest. Lucky becomes dumb, and is yet made to think on behalf of his master.

The tragic refrain of the two tramps is: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes; it's awful." Vladimir says: "There's nothing we can do " And Estragon says: "All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery! You and your landscapes! Tell me about the worms!"

What we see is that Vladimir is depending on Godot to tell him what he needs to know regarding his existence, while Estragon asserts that they do not have the time to wait and that they should take action on their own before it is too late. The metaphor of the cooling iron suggests that humanity does not have enough time to wait for their spiritual ponderings to offer them enlightenment, that the chance will pass, and their efforts will not take effect once it does. Therefore, it can be concluded from this that Estragon's suggestion that he and Vladimir make their own way now, before it is too late, is the more ideal course of action advocated by the play. It is Estragon who follows the notion of no longer waiting on religion for answers and going to the philosophy of existentialism.

The same existential problem is faced by Lucky and Pozzo, but they are more skeptic. They always are together but they don't have any gift of sharing time. They are proper examples of Cartesian skepticism (methodic doubt or methodological skepticism) universal doubt, systematic doubt or hyperbolic doubt.. In case of Vladimir and Estragon the proximity of situation works and a kind of empathy develop between them. Here we can see that all the doors are not closed for Vladimir and Estragon. There is a slight ray of hope of qualitative achievement in contrast with the quantitative achievement of Lucky and Pozzo.

So, in spite of all meaninglessness, purposelessness and nothingness there is a corner for "something could be done". In the parts of the Play Vladimir and Estragon suggests that certain things can be done. The clearest example of this sentiment is Vladimir's statement "Let us do something" in ActII, when he tries to help the fallen Pozzo. Estragon suggests "Let's contradict each other" and they can do something to keep them away from thinking about the reality of their tragic condition.

It is, therefore, clear that *Waiting for Godot* does not simply suggests that there is "nothing to be done". Rather the play suggests that there is something to be done. Elsewhere the play's action remains extremely ambiguous and its character seem utterly confused regarding the best thing to do. This ambiguity, appears to be characteristic of the entire play because Beckett does not want to present any solution to the audience.

Some Notes on *Waiting for Godot*

Facts to be remembered

- Sensitive human being in the Western world of the mid 20th century had lost its meaning and had simply ceased to make sense.
- Written- 1948
- First staged in 1953 in a small theatre of Paris.
- Form is content, content is form.
- Beckett is akin to Nietzsche's belief that "... he who hath to be a creator ... he hath first to be a destroyer, and break values in pieces". *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, "34. Self- Surpassing"
- Absurd- out of harmony in a musical context, ridiculous in common context.
 - Here absurd is that which is devoid of purpose, cut off from roots, all his action become senseless, useless, absurd.
 - Theatre of the absurd stresses to express its sense of senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of human action.
- Theatre of the Absurd- the term was coined by Martin Esslin in his 1960 essay by the same title. Commenting on the plays of Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, and Eugene Ionesco he observes and explains this phenomena of absurdity in their dramas:

At first sight these plays do, indeed, confront their public with a bewildering experience, a veritable barrage of wildly irrational, often nonsensical goings-on that seem to go counter to all accepted standards of stage convention. In these plays, some of which are labeled "anti-plays," neither the time nor the place of the action are ever clearly stated. ... The characters hardly have any individuality and often even lack a name; moreover, halfway through the action they tend to change their nature completely. The laws of probability as well as those of physics are suspended Above all, everything that happens seems to be beyond rational motivation, happening at random or through the demented caprice of an unaccountable idiot fate. Yet, these wildly extravagant tragic farces and farcical tragedies, although they have suffered their share of protests and scandals, do arouse interest and are received with laughter and thoughtful respect. (3-4)

- "The Theatre of the Absurd", *The Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (May, 1960), pp. 3-15.
- Theme- metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of human condition. In Beckett absurdity is melancholic, colored by a feeling of futility born from the disillusionment of old age and chronic hopelessness.

- It is in the act of waiting that we experience the flow of time (or rather the action of time which keeps on constantly changing) in its purest most evident form. Waiting is the movement of the play.

- The ceaseless action of time is self-defeating, purposeless, and therefore null and void.

Causes:

1. Waning of religious beliefs
2. Inevitable development after I WW.
3. Disillusionment after Stalin turned USSR into a tyrannical State.
4. Broken values and disorder after II WW.

Comparing *LBA* and *WFG*

Sr.	<i>Look Back in Anger</i>	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>
1	Tries to overcome problem in positive manner.	Desensitized, dehumanized, let-anything-happen- attitude.
2	J. P. always tries to make things happen and does not reject marriage.	No real world and character just try to figure out meaning, but to no purpose.
3	Effort at rededication. A ting of hope (at least physical) that now things may be better.	Hopelessness is much more in <i>WFG</i>
4	There is a story pattern, world is real.	No story. Symbolic world. View has changed from sequential world. Fragmented pieces have been put together.