

## **NOTIONS OF TIME IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S WAITING FOR GODOT**

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Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* postulates the idea of time being a stagnant mush. Contrary to the usual notion of "time running out", here time has to be pushed around in order to make it pass. The main protagonists of the play engage in various routines that help them "kill time." They tell each other stories, fight and make up, and ultimately when all is said and done they return back to the all-inclusive grand narrative of "Waiting for Godot."

*Waiting For Godot* has been classified under what is known as Absurdist drama. This implies that unlike a well-made play there is no logicality in its sequencing of events. The beginnings and endings of absurd plays are never truly tied together, they often begin at an arbitrary point and end in quite an arbitrary fashion too.

According to Javed Malik, "In normal human experience, space and time are organically linked. They constitute a continuum. However in Beckett's contrapuntal dramaturgy the two coordinates of human experience seem to be in tension. Time...seems to be virtually non-existent for the space bound tramps." Hence due to the virtual non-existence of time, its function as an illuminating principle becomes nullified. Estragon's complaint that, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful." only strengthens the reader's belief that time is indeed stagnant and that there is "nothing to be done." It is only due to their "incurable and pernicious optimism" that Vladimir and Estragon cling on to the fact that with time there will come a sort of a deliverance, that the future will put an end to their misery.

Kantian philosophy of time suggests that "...Neither coexistence nor succession would be perceived by us, if a representation of time didn't exist as a foundation a priori. We cannot think of phenomena as unconnected with time, but we can present to ourselves time void of phenomena." In this play the exact opposite happens, since time has been rendered null and void, in the sense that it does not move on its own, one can actually disconnect phenomena from time. For instance, the play put on by Pozzo and Lucky, and the constant bickering of Valdimir and Estragon is something that seems to happen outside of time.

One must however remember that in the play there are instances which try to 'shape' time. The play brings in Pozzo, who is obsessed with time and is constantly looking at his watch. For him there seems to be some kind of fluidity connected with time. He can calculate the number of years he's been on the move and unlike the two tramps he has this need to know whether it is dawn or dusk, whether there's daylight and nightfall. However as the play progresses, Pozzo is rendered blind and his conceptions of time are also somewhat effaced.

According to James L.Calderwood, "...in a mutable world appointments, vows, contracts, promises, and so forth are attempts to control time and give shape to one's life, to escape the uncertainties of an unknowable future. However the fact that the two tramps have kept their end of the bargain without Godot putting in an appearance implies that in their world time refuses to be shaped."

However Estragon and Vladimir's world is immutable. For them each day is the same as the one preceding it which results in their faulty memory. There are instances in the play where the protagonists cannot distinguish one day from the other because nothing really seems to happen. The best example of this appears perhaps at the beginning of the play where in the two tramps find it hard to figure out whether or not they are waiting at the correct place and were they there before? Due to the stagnancy of time, memory seems fallible. If each day is the same as the one before it, then how is one to distinguish between the past and the present?

"Vladimir: A dog came in the kitchen  
And stole a crust of bread.  
Then cook up with a ladle  
And beat him till he was dead.  
Then all the dogs came running

And dug the dog a tomb...  
And wrote upon the tombstone  
For the eyes of dogs to come:  
A dog came into the kitchen  
And stole a crust of bread..."

The song that Vladimir sings talks about a kind of a circularity of events. It is very difficult to define a beginning, middle and an end. The same is true of the way time is posited in the play. There are two acts in play and but for a few minor exceptions, everything remains the same. What is interesting here is the idea that Pozzo and Lucky undergo a change ( Pozzo becomes blind and Lucky is dumb), even the tree sprouts a few leaves, but the there is no change in the condition of the two tramps. It is indeed how Estragon comments in the first act,

"Estragon: Very likely. They all change. Only we can't."

There is a belief that maybe "Godot" isn't really a 'somebody' but is merely an idea created by the two tramps. This idea seems highly possible as the "Waiting for Godot" gives the two tramps something to do. In an absurdist realm, where life has no meaning, their waiting gives a meaning to their existence. Perhaps this is why the tramps are so scared whenever they feel that Godot has arrived. The arrival of Godot, will take away waiting and then what are the tramps to do? There is no guarantee that the coming of Godot will pave the way to salvation for both of them as only "one of the thieves was saved." This wait for Godot is what the two tramps bank upon to kill time, to somewhere cling on to the hope that their existence isn't meaningless.

"A change of place, is possible only through and in the representation of time."

Immanuel Kant

In the play, there is no sense of time as we know and hence the characters are in a never ending stasis. According to the stage directions "[They do not move]". This is also because time as such does not move.

**Work Cited:**

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