

**“The Ethics of ‘Parallel Contrasts’ in *The Glass Menagerie* and  
*Waiting for Godot*”**

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**Abstract:** This paper seeks to demonstrate the portrayal of the human condition in Tennessee William’s *The Glass Menagerie* and Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* through physical confinement and the metaphor of “all humanity”. Despite their different setting and representational dynamics, both plays display a universal definition of the confinement of Man within his environment, from which he cannot escape despite aimless struggles. This imprisonment is underlined through bodily discomfort where the means becomes the holder controlling both will and master. Camusian philosophy is employed as basic theoretical framework for the interpretation of both texts. *The Myth of Sisyphus* deals with the aspects of the absurdity of human life along with the human condition. But it does not see death through suicide as a solution for the absurd lies in the divorce between man and his world and suicide would be running away from it (Camus 6).

**Key Words:** The Absurd; the human condition; confinement; mock-hero; arbitrariness.

### **1. Introduction:**

The human condition is accentuated in *The Theatre of the Absurd*<sup>1</sup> and the philosophy of Existentialism as a continuation of what canonical characters, as King Oedipus and King

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<sup>1</sup> “The Theatre of the Absurd” is a term coined by Martin Esslin in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd* first published in 1962. By this term, he refers to a range of playwrights of the twentieth century who were mainly active after WWII and whom he groups according to the set of techniques and strategies they use in their theatre. Ionesco, Beckett, Genet, Adamov and Pinter are the first playwrights to be set in this new theatre. Esslin remarks that none of these playwrights, or those he is to categorize in the coming editions, proclaims that he belongs to this theatre. The reason behind the absence of such proclamations, as Esslin explains it, is that each of the playwrights’ feels exiled and “regards himself as a lone outsider, cut off and isolated in his private world” (*The Theatre of the Absurd* 22). But the common points between these playwrights are beyond this feeling of exile. Esslin adopts Camus’s philosophy and his representation of the human condition in a world now deprived of any sense of rationality. The crossroad lies in their use of theatre to negate it through shattering the

Lear, though highly ranked and representative of the deities on earth, suffered the absurdity of their existence and their desperate mortal souls.<sup>2</sup> If Aristotle praises Sophocles for his choice of “good people” from an elevated social hierarchy, the characters in the plays are down-to-earth but still their human condition and suffering are as significant as those of the tragic kings.<sup>3</sup> Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* deals with the human condition with regard to the absurdity of life treating several philosophers before him as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger<sup>4</sup>. He treats the human condition and the absurdity and inability to understand a meaningless world mainly through the works of Kafka and states that “[w]hoever would like to represent this absurdity must give it life in a series of parallel contrasts.”<sup>5</sup> These “parallel contrasts” are demonstrated in *The Glass Menagerie* and *Waiting for Godot* through the bodily struggles, representative of a wider metaphor of human suffering.

## 2. Bodily Confinement:

Physical discomfort is suggested through Laura’s “hardly-noticeable”<sup>6</sup> “little defect”, as Amanda calls it, and Vladimir’s kidney and Estragon’s feet problems and later on Pozzo’s blindness and Lucky’s dumbness. If in *King Oedipus* the plague that fell upon the Thebans and “[p]estilence and famine [that] brought Thebes [...] to the verge of extinction” is due to Oedipus’ hamartia by killing his father, marrying his mother and his excessive pride towards the gods<sup>7</sup>, in the plays no metaphysical reason is given behind the characters’ discomfort. This discomfort is not explained and its cause remains only theoretical mainly in *Waiting for*

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communicative purpose of language, presenting “everyman” characters and representing nothingness in a metatheatrical play. But these techniques are not only characteristic of The Theatre of the Absurd which seems to be a revolt against traditional theatre. They are adopted in Expressionism, Dadaism and Surrealism, if not since Renaissance drama, which could be regarded as roots of this theatre.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Pelican, 1980) 194.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, “*Poetics*,” *Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. Penelope Murray and T. S. Dorsch, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (London: Penguin Classics, 2000) 60.

<sup>4</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus, and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1983) 38; 137; 23.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 127.

<sup>6</sup> Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* (London: Penguin Books, 1988) 26. All future references are from this edition and will appear in parentheses in the text.

<sup>7</sup> Sophocles, “*King Oedipus*,” *The Theban Plays*, trans. E. F. Watling, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (London: Penguin Group, 1974) 24.

*Godot* for Laura's handicap is alluded to be the cause of a childhood illness. But the effect of the physical discomfort is differently put in *Waiting for Godot* and *The Glass Menagerie*. Laura's defect causes her retreat to the world of fantasies and that of Vladimir, Estragon and even Pozzo is, in a way, accepted.

### **2.1. The Mother as Figure of Handicap:**

Laura's physical condition is her first primary cause of retreat towards the world of her glass menagerie as suggested in the presentation of the characters, "Laura's separation increases till she is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf" (7). But this defect has a further significance once associated with Amanda's view. Though "hardly noticeable" according to Jim's claim and "need not be more than suggested on the stage", the defect becomes flagrant (78; 8). Through the conversation between Jim and Laura, Laura explains her malaise with the defect in high-school and how "[t]o [her] [the brace on her leg] sounded like thunder" and it being the cause of not having friends and dropping out from school, once psychologically analyzed by Jim (73; 78). The reason behind this defect being "[m]agnified thousands of time by imagination" might be Amanda. As Tischler remarks, Amanda "is both Laura's disease and her brace"<sup>8</sup> (78). Amanda makes the defect even more flagrant once she refuses to call it by its actual term. Unable to accept reality, she pushes her daughter towards the world of business while being unaware of the impossibility of her ability to integrate in the real world. Therefore, she is the disease. She is her brace in that, just like the brace, she fakes her slightly shorter leg by refusing to admit it, but is the reminder of the defect by predicting her daughter's life without a husband (24).

Amanda overdramatizes the situation predicting a 'horrible' future for southern "spinsters". Ironically, however, this situation is almost hers though she got married to Mr. Wingfield for now she needs her son to support the family, a son who will leave her in the dark. Yet, she is without "in-laws". And it is here that the need for the savior emerges, "[o]f course – some girls *do marry*" (24). The gentleman caller becomes the symbol of a better future away from homelessness and relatives' favor to survive. Yet here is where Amanda's defect lies:

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<sup>8</sup> Patterson Tischler and Nancy Marie, *Student Companion to Tennessee Williams* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000) 36.

Just as willfully, Amanda ignores present reality. Overanxious to have her daughter, Laura, securely married, she refuses to recognize the girl's painful shyness or to admit to her slightly crippled leg. She insists that Laura not refer to herself as a cripple, [...] and that she distract attraction from it by developing charm and vivacity.<sup>9</sup>

But even charm is deceitful. Mr. Wingfield had charm and he deceived his wife and family by “[falling] in love with long distances” (14). Later on, charm is presented through the “two powder puffs [stuffed] in Laura’s bosom”, what Amanda calls, “Gay Deceivers” demonstrating how charm is yet deceitful just like the world of *The Glass Menagerie* deceives the protagonists (54). Therefore Laura’s defect hides another: her mother’s. Laura is affected psychologically by this defect but it is her mother who accentuates it by pretending it does not exist. It is only in the last scene that she accepts it and thus faces the reality of her daughter’s inability to integrate the real world (*The Glass Menagerie* 91). But, as Vladimir says, “Now it’s too late” (*Waiting for Godot* 10). Thus such conclusion can be made:

[A]ll of Williams's characters are crippled in one sense or another—emotionally, spiritually—and out of that imperfection there comes a need which generates the illusions with which they fill their world, the art which they set up against reality. Like Laura's glass animals, however, those illusions and that art prove fragile.<sup>10</sup>

## **2.2. The Deterioration of the Body:**

In *Waiting for Godot*, physical discomfort is highlighted since it is one of Beckett’s best known themes: the misery of the body.<sup>11</sup> The characters’ “strong physical presence is underlined by talk of physical discomfort and pain – Estragon’s boot problem, Vladimir’s urination problem,” Pozzo’s blindness and Lucky’s dumbness and loss of their talents as entertainers.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Signi Falk, “The Southern Gentlewoman,” *Tennessee Williams’s The Glass Menagerie*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988) 81.

<sup>10</sup> C.W.E Bigsby, “Celebration of a Certain Courage,” *Tennessee Williams’s The Glass Menagerie*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988) 94.

<sup>11</sup> Jaquart states Peter Ehrard’s book *Anatomie de Samuel Beckett* stressing the excessive presence of the body in Beckett’s works. According to Jacquart, Ehrard underlines the different meaning of the degradation of the body in the Beckettian world. Emmanuel Jacquart, *Le Théâtre de Dérision : Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov* (Édition revue et augmentée Paris: Gallimard, 1998) 115.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew K. Kennedy, *Samuel Beckett*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 17.

The play opens with Estragon struggling to take off his boots<sup>13</sup>. In the second act, he struggles with Vladimir to put them on (69). Vladimir leaves the stage several times because of his kidney problem that Jacquart explains as prostate (16; 17; 35). However, Pozzo and Lucky do not only suffer when they become blind and dumb respectively, as Pozzo and Lucky's state deteriorated and the proof for that is Lucky's loss of his talent as entertainer. Old as he is now, Lucky is unable to entertain his master as he used to do. Lucky "used to dance the farandole, the fling, the brawl, the jig, the fandango, and even the hornpipe" and now all he can perform is what he calls "the Net" (40). Lucky's net might be symbolic of his master, Pozzo, or even his body that deteriorated leaving him unable to entertain. It might be representative of any kind of repression. When he thinks, Lucky annoys the protagonists and even the audience (45). But even Pozzo lost his theatrical talent since Vladimir admits, "I've been better entertained" and since he "weakened a little towards the end" (38). Later on, Pozzo becomes blind and Lucky dumb and thus their role as entertainers ends though their interdependence is stronger. This stands for the physical deterioration and its impact on the individual's life. This degradation is so persistent that these Beckettian 'creatures' seem in decomposition leading a vegetative existence.<sup>14</sup> This deterioration is also manifested through Vladimir and Estragon's unpleasant smell. "[Vladimir] has stinking breath and [Estragon] [has] stinking feet" (46). The unpleasant smell echoes this deterioration alluding to physical decomposition. With physical pain there is also spiritual pain; but whether physical or spiritual, pain remains personal.<sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> Guicharnaud explains how pain is one of the signs of man's solitude stating that:

Where sympathy is possible in the case of moral suffering, physical pain would seem to isolate the individual. When Vladimir suffers, he is no more than a spectacle to Estragon. From the very beginning of the play each tramp remains outside the other's pain:

ESTRAGON: Help me!

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<sup>13</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1965) 9. All future references are from this edition and will appear in parentheses in the text.

<sup>14</sup> Jacquart 118.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Guicharnaud, "Existence on Stage," *Modern Critical Views: Samuel Beckett*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1985) 109.

VLADIMIR: It hurts?

ESTRAGON: Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!

VLADIMIR: . . . I'd like to hear what you'd say if you had what I have.

ESTRAGON: It hurts?

VLADIMIR: Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts! (109)

Thus, solitude characterizes the human condition and deepens pain. The deterioration of the body is inevitable just like death. “[M]an betrayed by his body” is a condition to all human beings for it is ephemeral whether because of a disease or because the end is near.<sup>17</sup> But the imperfection of the body causes other kinds of defects such as Amanda who escapes to admit her daughter’s true condition. Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky suffer the deterioration of their bodies now old and almost turning them into vegetative creatures whose existence is restricted to based needs.

### **3. Representing “All Humanity”:**

Because of such conditions, the need for a hero becomes urgent and what he represents becomes broader once the characters are viewed as “all humanity”. Dealing with the characters as a representation of “all humanity” and giving them a more universal scope is not treating them as real or realistic. However, it is their condition that gives them an existential view since like “billions” they suffer and wait for a figure of hope that deceives. They represent “a slice of reality” and this slice is their absurd condition shared by others regardless of time and space. For Williams, truth is never absolute except for death: “the absurd reality”; and for Beckett, the key word is “perhaps”. Therefore, none of them can be approached realistically.<sup>18 19</sup> The protagonists in *The Glass Menagerie* and *Waiting for Godot* stand for their generation and even all human beings because of their suffering. There are several references in the plays that allow for such interpretation but that do not make it absolute mainly in the inner life accentuated in *The Glass Menagerie*. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom the narrator describes the situation of the world and of that of the United States after the war and the Great Depression presenting it as “the social background of the

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<sup>17</sup> Camus 76.

<sup>18</sup> Bigsby, “Celebration of a Certain Courage” 117.

<sup>19</sup> Jacquart states Tom Driver while noting Beckett admitting that, “Le mot-clé de mes pieces est ‘Peut-être.’” (“The key to my works is “perhaps”) Jacquart 118.

play” (13 14). In *Waiting for Godot*, several references to religious figures are mentioned while waiting, underlining the intertextuality that Beckett often uses in his work.

### 3.1. *The Glass Menagerie: A Universal Statement:*

*The Glass Menagerie* deals with the struggling of a fatherless Southern family in a world of upcoming war. Nevertheless, this does not mean that this social background is the cause behind the characters’ suffering or condition. Gilbert Debusscher, in “Tennessee Williams's Unicorn Broken Again,” denies this kind of interpretation that imposes on the play such views as “the frustration, despair and confusion of the American lower class, left stunned and bleeding in the path of the economic tornado”<sup>20</sup>. It is because Williams focuses on the psyche, intensifies feeling and approaches art emotionally that his characters represent “a more universal statement”.<sup>21</sup> It is true that the social and economic background of the characters worsens their situation; it is, however, the absurdity they face towards the world that make them rather universal. As Debusscher remarks,

The Wingfields are [...] introduced less as representatives of the lower middle class than as aliens in it, less as "petty bourgeois" than as involuntary and sometimes infuriated exiles in a petty bourgeois milieu. Objectively they may be ranked with their urban ghetto neighbours; subjectively they are miles apart from them. And this spirit of "apartness" rather than a sense of belonging is what determines their actions in the play. Had Williams wanted primarily to comment on the lower middle class he would, no doubt, have selected less objectionable representatives.<sup>22</sup>

Because none of the characters is socially integrated, the characters cannot be said to be representative of the social sphere they lived in. All of the Wingfield family members are exiled from this society. Tom the artist hates his job in the warehouse and is only accepted by Jim because he reminds him of “his former glory” (52). Amanda is still a member of the D.A.R organization, does not get along with the materialistic world and is out of her environment. Laura is the most isolated from her society since she “got sick” at the stomach

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<sup>20</sup> Gilbert Debusscher, “Tennessee Williams's Unicorn Broken Again,” *Modern Critical Interpretations: Tennessee Williams's The Glass Menagerie* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988) 48-49.

<sup>21</sup> Debusscher 51.

<sup>22</sup> Debusscher 49.

in her first speed-test, plays the Victrola and hates the music coming from the Paradise Dance Hall.<sup>23</sup> Their exile from their world underlines their absurd character since Camus stresses the feeling of being a stranger and in exile as one of the experiences of the encounter of the absurd in life.<sup>24</sup> Williams deals with another aspect stressing this exile: change. This change is not positive since it underlines the characters' feeling of absurdity through their feeling of isolation. As Tischler remarks:

Moving from individual experiences to a larger theme, this is also the story of a changing culture. Williams was deeply impressed by the difference between the traditions of the South, with its strong sense of family ties, community relationships and roles; its manners and morality; its faith and history. By contrast, he found St. Louis to be shallow, crude, and materialistic -- an image of modern urban America. The old values, undoubtedly agrarian as well as Southern, [...], were no longer practical in a busy city. People did not know these strangers, who tried with a certain comic dignity to maintain their pride, their speech, their habits. [...] [T]hese are people the world has passed by.<sup>25</sup>

Amanda tries to revive it through her speech and gestures and mainly through her clothes and memories. She still refers to slaves that used to be owned in the South as "darkey" (16). She still cares about her family to be gathered and to say grace during meals. Amanda restricts women's roles to marriage, to entertain and to be well-dressed once they are jobless. "Symbol of a dying civilization" and "[translating] a piece of the Old South", Amanda pushes Tom to escape. But though he seeks an escape, Tom gives the Old South a more elevated value appreciating its lost beauty by contradicting it to the actual world of the Dance Hall, of illusion and sex.

Therefore, restricting the protagonists of *The Glass Menagerie* to what Tom the narrator calls "the social background" diminishes further interpretations and the grandeur of the play. Tom describes the situation during the economic depression, "the thirties, when the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind. Their eyes had failed them or they had failed their eyes, and so they were having their fingers pressed

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>24</sup> Camus 6.

<sup>25</sup> Tischler 31.

forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy” (13). As Debusscher puts it, “the playwright uses the context of the aftermath of the Great Depression as an intensifying factor of the personal conflicts, creating a sense of urgency which heightens the dramatic tensions”<sup>26</sup>. It is a device that should not limit the characters and what they symbolize to specific and sole time and space. Williams presents beings that suffer because of their spiritual or physical defects whether because they are crippled, abandoned by their husband and son or seeking their dreams and artistic path. Through them, he shows the absurdity and “the tiny spasm of man in contrast to the sustained power and dignity of the Almighty” who can represent the incomprehensible and deceiving world (33). Their deception arouses compassion though their audience may not belong to the area and era they ‘live’ in. This compassion occurs because what the characters feel might be shared by any spectator: waiting for a hope for change and yet, being deceived.

### **3.2. *Waiting for Godot: An Arbitrary Representation of Sufferers:***

In *Waiting for Godot*, neither the social background nor any other background is presented. The play is timeless in that it can be anytime and is spaceless in that it can be anywhere. And it is because it is so that several interpretations have been made. Beckett’s use of intertextuality and reference from the Bible mainly, among other sources, leads to religious interpretation.<sup>27</sup> The choice of his characters’ names and their meaning combining several languages from around the world and the recurrent mentioning of Biblical figures are relevant once the characters are seen as representative of “all humanity”.

What is noted is that Beckett chooses his characters’ names from different languages around the world and not only European or Western but also Oriental origins. Jacquart traces and explains the Beckettian characters’ names in different plays. Yet, though Jacquart gives such detailed linguistic explanations<sup>28</sup>, Beckettian art is characterized by indeterminacy which explains the different other interpretations given to his characters’ names. It is mainly Godot’s name that triggers confusion and asserting that it derives from “God” would be tricky. What matters here is the diversity of the languages selected for the characters’ genuine names. Ruby Cohn gives Estragon’s name another source, “a plant of the wormwood family,

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<sup>26</sup> Debusscher 51.

<sup>27</sup> Jacquart 114.

<sup>28</sup> Jacquart 114-115.

whose name comes to European languages from the Arabic”<sup>29</sup>. By mentioning an Oriental language, Cohn helps adopting the view that the characters represent “all humanity” since they refer to the world as a whole by mingling languages in their names. After remarking the reduced and concentrated number of the Beckettian characters, Jacquart concludes, “in this theatre, the human being is first of all representative of humanity, an Everyman, the question of universality marking all of Beckett’s work” (my translation).<sup>30</sup> General and universal statements are uttered in *Waiting for Godot* underlining Beckett’s knowledge, including his linguistic one, shown through the variety of cultures integrated in his work. What is common between the references to “others” is not only religion but mainly the theme of suffering and pain. Both Christ and Cain’s murder of his brother Abel along with other allusions underline the human condition and curse of eternal suffering.

Beckett admits that he is interested in shape saying, “I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them.... That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters.”<sup>31</sup> He thus adopts the shape of the idea of St Augustine “Do not despair: one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned.”<sup>32</sup> Once said by St Augustine, the idea of “despairing” and “presuming” is different from that used in *Waiting for Godot*. “Despair” and “presumption” represent the uncertainty that characterizes life since no explanation is provided for the “saved” or “damned” adding to the meaninglessness of human existence. It is this meaninglessness that creates suffering through the feeling of the absurd and strangeness. This feeling is shared by “billions” since those who are supposed to represent man as Cain and Abel, “the first men”, are representative of this arbitrariness.

From the beginning of the play, Vladimir mentions the two thieves of whom one was saved, or so is stated by one of the four Evangelists (12). With the two thieves, there is indeterminacy since nothing is sure including history and everything is probable but death.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ruby Cohn, “Growing (Up?) with Godot,” *Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context*, ed. Enoch Brater (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 14.

<sup>30</sup> « [D]ans ce théâtre l’être humain est d’abord un représentant de l’humanité, un *Everyman*, le souci d’universalité marquant de son sceau toute l’œuvre de Beckett. » Jacquart 113.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>32</sup> qtd. in William Hutchings, *Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot: A Reference Guide* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005) 48.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Esslin, “The Search for the Self,” *Modern Critical Interpretations of Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987) 34.

Selections are “for reasons unknown”: why one of the thieves was saved and not the other or both (43). Thus, the inability to explain such ‘facts’ adds to the absurdity of existence. The “first murder”, along with that of the two thieves, is echoed in several images presented in the play. One of the boys is punished by Godot and the other is treated well (51). Martin Esslin remarks that “[t]he parallel to Cain and Abel is evident: there too the Lord’s grace fell on one rather than on the other without any rational explanation-only that Godot beats the minder of the sheep and cherishes the minder of the goats.”<sup>34</sup> Pozzo is both the murderer and the murdered, he is both Cain and Abel as he responds to both names (83). Pozzo is Lucky’s master and not the opposite. He notices, talking about Lucky, “Remark that I might just as well have been in his shoes and he in mine. If chance had not willed otherwise. To each one his due” (31). It is by chance that he is the master and Lucky the slave and it is because of chance or arbitrariness that nothing is certain. “These, after all, were not well-considered judgements, but chance exclamations uttered at a moment of supreme suffering and stress. [...] And then our shoes might fit us one day and not the next: Estragon's boots torment him in the first act; in act 2 they fit him miraculously”.<sup>35</sup>

Arbitrariness negates any kind of explanation, and thus, any will or freedom of choice. Therefore, “[t]he fortuitous bestowal of grace, which passes human understanding, divides mankind into those that will be saved and those that will be damned.” The only certainty that remains is death symbolized by “the grave” underlining the inevitable human condition. The grave is both mentioned by Pozzo then Vladimir. Both characters view death with a pessimistic asserting its duality with life. Vladimir paraphrases Pozzo’s line “[t]hey give death astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant then it’s night once more” into “[a]stride the grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries.” (89; 91). Though with different views about Time, both agree on the fact that “[d]eath is there as the only reality”.<sup>36</sup> “Death and birth. Gravedigger and obstetrician. Shovel and forceps. Tomb and womb. Cries of tormented man and innocent babe. Watchers and watched. Those awake and those asleep. A series of seeming balances and antitheses, complementarities, yet again, the emphasis is on

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Camus 57.

death.”<sup>37</sup> The world becomes dichotomous and it does not have one proper meaning but two opposite ones.

Suffering also becomes another truth. Christ, the emblem of sacrifice in Christianity, is excessively present in the play. Estragon associates himself with Christ and admits “All my life I’ve compared myself to [Christ]” (52). Like Christ, he walked bare feet; and unlike Christ, he is interpreted to be one of the two thieves that accompanied Christ in the Crucifixion.<sup>38</sup> The absence of Christ is ironic since it might refer to the uncertainty of salvation, if not its impossibility.<sup>39</sup> Estragon always refers to “others” having a sense of compassion with them for, as he claims, he was a poet and seems to be a committed one (12). He also adds that his name is “Adam”, becoming the father of mankind (37). Echoing this idea of the prelapsarian and postlapsarian world is the tree that might be seen as the Edenic tree ironically fruitless and half dead.<sup>40</sup> Estragon alludes to the murdered Abel and suffering after suggesting separation from Vladimir:

ESTRAGON. The best thing would be to kill me, like the other.

VLADIMIR. What other? (Pause.) What other?

ESTRAGON. Like billions of others.

VLADIMIR. (sententious). To every man his little cross. (He sighs.) Till he dies. (Afterthought.) And is forgotten.

“Every man” suffers the crucifixion which the “little cross” stands for.<sup>41</sup> With suffering, there are death and oblivion. Man’s existence is not only short but also meaningless since it leaves no mark whatsoever especially with the negation of life after death in the post-wars world. Thus, Estragon is not the only one who compares himself to Christ and wishes selfishly to be seen by God for salvation and “pity” as a ‘reward’ for his suffering (77). Vladimir, though he

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<sup>37</sup> Normand Berlin, “The Tragic Pleasure of Waiting for Godot,” *Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context*, ed. Enoch Brater (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 60.

<sup>38</sup> Kennedy 18.

<sup>39</sup> Kennedy states the reference to the image of the two thieves with Christ missing, “it is a haunting and universal image, like the medieval triptych of the Crucifixion with the central panel, Christ picture, missing.” *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Bert O. States, “The Language of Myth,” *Waiting for Godot and Endgame*, ed. Steven Connor (London: The Macmillan Press, 1992) 86.

<sup>41</sup> Normand Berlin, *The Secret Cause: A Discussion of Tragedy* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981) 102.

is vexed when Estragon asks God to have pity on him, seems to think the opposite once he states “(Afterthought.) And is forgotten.” The question would be forgotten by whom: by God after seeking desperately his “pity” and almost fighting for it with Gogo, or by the same “billions of others” who forget those who pass away and still suffer and have the same fate? Ironically, Pozzo and Lucky enter, one “blind as Fortune” the other dumb, underlining human suffering “of reason unknown” (77; 86; 43).

Set in a world of economic and universal crisis, *The Glass Menagerie* is thought to be concerned only with a specific generation. But Williams focuses on the human psyche in most of his writings looking for a “universal statement”. This universal statement is achieved in *The Glass Menagerie* through the loss the characters live in and their feeling of exile since they do not belong to their society though it is their milieu. Each with his/her complex, the protagonists’ struggling reflects human suffering through that feeling of absurdity. This feeling is shared by the characters of *Waiting for Godot*. Their absurdity lies in their wish to identify with religious figures alluding more frequently to “all humanity”. Christ, Adam and other religious figures stated as representative of mankind are mentioned in the play referring to the human condition. The protagonists become “everyman” or as Didi remarks while thinking about helping the blind Pozzo, “at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not” (79). They are “‘non-beings’ [for] Williams claims that such is the image of modern man-poised as he is between the contrary imperatives of his world”.<sup>42</sup> With suffering there is death, the inevitable truth that man cannot physically transcend. It is the only truth not tinged with uncertainty as Jim remarks “A world of common people! All of ‘em born and all of ‘em going to die!” (78). In both play, “The individual is but the transitory and ephemeral link in Nature's unending chain of birth, life, and death.”<sup>43</sup> Both Godot and Jim are the solution for an easier condition since their importance seems to lie in their ability to save the protagonists in *Waiting for Godot* and *The Glass Menagerie*. They are believed to be the emblem for a better change and therefore worth waiting for. Yet, they will appear to be mere concepts.

#### **4. Conclusion:**

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<sup>42</sup> Esther M. Jackson, “The Anti-Hero in the Plays of Tennessee Williams,” *Tennessee Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Stephen S. Stanton (London: Prentice-Hall, 1977) 41.

<sup>43</sup> Edith Kern, “Beckett's Modernity and Medieval Affinities,” *Samuel Beckett - humanistic Perspectives*, ed. Morris Beja, S. E. Gontarski and Pierre A. G. Astier (Columbus OH: Ohio State University Press, 1983) 112.

The absurdity of the human condition is staged in both *The Glass Menagerie* and *Waiting for Godot* within the frame of a family or a bare setting, respectively. The human condition is the sense of loss and malaise that man feels towards his world once it deceives him, leaving a deep feeling of anguish that causes suffering. Several questions as those of the inevitability of death or the uncertainty of origins cause such suffering. Hamlet's existential questions and famous monologue "to be, or not to be"<sup>44</sup> torn between suicide and life are echoed in Vladimir's parodic question "[w]hat are we doing here, *that* is the question" (80). The characters are trapped within the frame of the deceiving body. Their confinement is rendered as an expression of all humanity regardless of cultural, religious or linguistic belonging, reminiscent of the universal state after World Wars. Hope is also confined within one figure: Jim or Godot. However, neither Jim nor Godot do stay nor appear. The *ad infinitum* effect of waiting dominates the end of the plays, leaving both characters and audience perplexed by the confinement of the stage.

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<sup>44</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Shane Weller (New York: Dover Publications, 1992) 53.

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