

TRAPPED IN TIME: IMMOBILITY AS TRAGEDY IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S WAITING FOR GODOT

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ABSTRACT

The burden of Beckett's characters in Waiting for Godot lies in their inability to make progress and in the elevated state of despair that this engenders. They represent the fallen state of man and His struggle to uplift himself to a more respectable circumstance. This paper interrogates Beckett's concept of time and how this constitutes the major source of his characters' malaise and tragedy. The concept of time as linear progression is the lie in which Beckett's characters is trapped. Rather than act as a vehicle of mobility, Time is the penultimate source of immobility. It is the tragic reflection of the fallen state of man, exalted paradoxically by debasement and disenfranchisement. Beckett turns Time, which is a measurement of human evolution into a symbol of hopelessness. Vladimir and Estragon are representations of defiled hope, who incarnate a besieged humanity caught in the throes of finitude, where expectation is aborted by an uncanny abstraction couched as Godot. This, Beckett seems to say is the source of our modern or rather postmodern anguish and anxiety, whose only resolution lies in human ability to be resilient and to choose. It is only in making a choice, that Vladimir and Estragon can mitigate their anguish and avert the tragedy of infinite wait.

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INTRODUCTION

Samuel Beckett, whose plays and prose exalt the fallen state of Man and portray His most existential angst, remains the most enigmatic playwright of the twentieth century. *Waiting for Godot*, probably his most important work, is the hallmark of that exaltation of human suffering. Beckett constructs his protagonists' anxiety around their degraded nature and their desire to rise above the fray. A closer reading of the play reveals the complicity of time and fate in the sufferings of mankind, represented by the four characters-Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky.

Mary M. F. Massoud has argued that *Waiting for Godot* (Henceforth WFG) is a play about "an exile from meaningful life" (42). The present paper looks at the characters in the play as victims of time and immobility, resulting in their permanent anguish and anxiety and thereby defining their existence as tragic. The question of the meaning of time has been an age long source of scientific and philosophical discussions¹. Judeo-Christian philosophy constructs time as finite,

¹The Bible sets the tone for the vision of time as finite for humans even though infinite for God. Such books as Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* (Bantam, 1988); Craig Bourne's, *A Future for Presentism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press,

resulting in the presence of a messianic figure whose determination of good and evil will end Man's existence on earth, creating a sinless society perpetuating eternal life for good people. The great disappointment in *WFG* is therefore the result of the recognition of Time's infinitude, as the protagonists come to the realization that they are trapped in this bubble. The play elicits the tough question of existential morality that defines the very essence of choice upon which depends the mental survival of his characters. Chaos is everywhere and according to Lawrence Graver while directing the play for the stage in Berlin, Beckett is noted to have told the actors that it should be "done very simply and that the essential aim was 'to give confusion a shape...'" (33).

Waiting is a political statement on the uncertainty of our actions and the moral debasement of our generation. The play speaks truth to power, questioning assumed notions of the essence of life on earth. It raises questions about the validity of our daily actions and of our time and how well as a people we are ready to confront our own fears of finitude. Tragedy, for Beckett becomes not the high-strung sequences of a gracious life, not the fall from grace of the rich and powerful in society, not even the deep feelings of regrets that animate Shakespearean tragic heroes, but rather and perhaps most importantly Mankind's inability to recognize the limits of their own desires. The Wait in *Waiting* is a serious statement on the existential burden of being human. Beckett crafts characters whose main faults, it seems, is their inability to come to grips with reality-the reality of finitude; their inability to make a choice or to know when to do it. Hana F. Khasawneh in discussing some of Beckett's texts in relation to their textual dynamism argues that as artist, Beckett 'attacks the inability of man to know himself' (31) a job she believes naturally falls to the artist who is involved in self-exploration. This is a fundamental weakness of Vladimir and Estragon.

Choice is not as simple as the common imagination would want to think it to be. The four characters in the play reflect the psychological burden of co-existence and the difficulty of choosing not to do so. Beckett sets the play in a void of nothingness and ends it in a void of nothingness. The time sequence is neither linear nor cyclical. The playwright is dealing with a world trapped in its own beginning and end where the characters are caught in the infinitesimal abyss of occluded time. The beginning and end of the play is a realistic reflection of its gyrated void. It is the struggle of fallen man to rise to any form of dignity. Whether or not Beckett succeeds in this is precisely the reason why this play stands out in the century in which it was written and beyond. The play reflects the anxiety of the age, the uncertainty of its end and most importantly the refusal of the characters to lend meaning to their own minds and to create new possibilities for themselves. It is a comic rendition of the debased nature of Mankind's loss of self-esteem and his toxic dependence on Godot-this ephemeral formless avatar. Even though Beckett refuted allegations² that he had religious feelings, yet as Chris Ackerley has indicated, there is sufficient evidence that he had quite a good knowledge of the bible, having read it. And that evidence is subtle in his normalization of Vladimir and Estragon's waiting process. The waiting process can equally be defined as the process of hope, which is positive as it carries with it the anomalies of a never-ending anxiety.

Godot is the ice breaker. His presence will eviscerate the psychological numbness of the characters and will release them from the burden of uncertainty and the tragedy of formless time. Vladimir, Estragon, Lucky and Pozzo, and it seems the playwright, are trapped in the miasma of time. Beckett portrays Manas a victim of uncanny forces symbolized by

2006), Barry, Dainton. *Time and Space*, (Chesham: Acumen, 2000) and R.E Ornstein, *On the Experience of Time*, (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1969), are interesting titles to consider.

² He is quoted as having told Tom Driver in 1961 that the only religious emotion he ever had was when he had his First Holy Communion. See Chris Ackerley's article "The Bible" in Anthony Uhlmann, Ed. *Samuel Beckett in Context*. Cambridge University Press, 2013. P.324

Godot. Man is a sorrowful sight, the victim, perhaps of his own gullibility and fears. He has created a dependence on external forces that eventually define his life and determine his mode of survival. Beckett paints him as a pure victim of fate contrived by forces determined to undermine his abilities and to force him into servitude. His subjugation, Beckett believes, is complete once he subverts his own ability to even think. The weight of time and uncertainty are his undoing. Man is helpless even though he appears as God's foremost creature. Natural and existential factors militate against him eventually creating a chasm between him and his desires. Perhaps it is in this context that Gale Schricker's description of the play as an "anti-quest" (124) is relevant. Schricker contends that in *Waiting*, Beckett's characters are "pathetic", the play's plot is "static and self-mirroring", all characterised by a "thematic pointlessness" (124). Nothing is meaningful, chaos is the bubble from which Godot must extricate Vladimir and Estragon.

In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Time is an essential element in the construction and understanding of the tragedy of mankind. Beckett is one in a long series of writers who have either decried the passage of, or immobility of time. The very existence of man is tied to a memorable beginning rooted in the biblical assumption of a beginning and an end, where time is sanctioned by an All-knowing essence. This has shaped and fashioned western imagination, resulting over the ages in Man's struggle to understand his place in the great wheel of time. Alfred de Vigny, a great French Romantic poet would capture the nefarious effects of time on emotional relations of humans when he asked time to suspend its movement³. That is a statement on the ineluctability of human existence. In the context of Vigny's poem, time dictates the trajectory of human emotional progress. It becomes the determinant of human happiness. The rational that time is the determinant of progress has not been the preserve of French poets. Many English writers have equally seen the notion of time as being at the centre of human progress⁴. In numerous poems among which is "Ode: Intimations on Immortality", growth is a vital sign of time's play in human life. William Wordsworth's evolving thoughts on the passage of time are all within the general design of progression. This of course is a romantic or essentialist attitude towards time which is contrary to the conception of time by philosophers at the end of the twentieth century especially after the Second World War

Beckett's play is within the scope of a new conception of time and man's place in the new universe. *Waiting for Godot* fits into that mould at the time it was written and today. Man, the prime creation of God is captured or portrayed as a shadow of this. Beckett's characters are traumatized by void and the beleaguered uncertainty resulting from the knowledge that Godot, through his boy's statements, may not even be a reality after all. They are trapped in the non-sequential and non-progressive time but also in the understanding that there is no reprieve from this. Eternity is elusive and the wait might just have been an illusion. The play as John Robert Keller argues, reflects "the internal world of a self-struggling to integrate in the face of disintegration anxieties triggered by separation from a loving, primary object." (133). The burden of inseparability is attributed to the "terrors of psychic annihilation" (135).

The Burden of Time

The play begins with the most powerful statement that captures its essence: "Nothing to be done" (Act 1 sc1) and it will end on the same note of nothingness. In those words, is the reflection of the passage of time and its accompanying uselessness? In giving up on trying to undo his shoes, Estragon reveals the effect of time on his psychology. He is fatigued

³Very suggestive of the effect of the passage of time by the French poet, Alfred Victor, Comte de Vigny. He was an early leader of French Romanticism. His poem "Le Lac" celebrates love but regrets the inevitability of time, which is the source of anguish for those who want to enjoying life.

⁴Forbearers of this are John Milton in *Samson Agonistes* (1671) and William Wordsworth in "Ode on Intimations of Immortality"

and apparently betrayed by the fact of his having made futile efforts over time. It is a feeling common to his partner Vladimir who concurs that efforts made through his life have been in vain. His sense of regret is Beckett's ultimate statement on the recognition that nothing can be done about time wasted or about time lost. Vladimir expresses this same regret in echoing Estragon's first statement in the opening of the play "Nothing to be done" (1.1.1). Both Vladimir and Estragon are in a state of constant immobility because of the fear of uncertainty and the passage of time. Godot's injunction that he/she/it is coming reflects the pressure put on the two men. Time is static to them because it does not, in any way bring the purported relief, they so desire. Lack of knowledge on the appropriate time of Godot's arrival is a greater burden than the expected result of his coming.

Beckett portrays one of the most difficult psychological traumas affecting humans-the fear of separation and the inability to ascertain whether their messiah-Godot- will come to their rescue. The conversation below reflects that pain:

ESTRAGON: Let's go

VLADIMIR: We can't

ESTRAGON: Why not

VLADIMIR: Were waiting for Godot

ESTRAGON: And if he doesn't come?

VLADIMIR: We'll come back tomorrow

ESTRAGON: And then the day after tomorrow

VLADIMIR: Possibly

ESTRAGON: And so on

VLADIMIR: The point is-

ESTRAGON: Until he comes

VLADIMIR: You're merciless.

(1.1.6)

The conversation betrays the anguish, the despair, and the lack of trust, yet they are forced by an essentialist believe in the supremacy of an Omnipresent God to wait for Godot. The cruelty of waiting is characterized by Vladimir's description of it as "merciless". They are in a state of endless immobility, a condition that is not in consonant with meaningful life. There is no room for self-improvement because that is dependent on Godot's appearance. The world of the play displays a sense of lack of time. The characters cannot say whether they have been at the same spot or even at the right spot waiting for Godot because it seems an eternity. The inability to ascertain when last they were at that same spot speaks to the depth of the psychological trauma.

Time has ceased to have meaning in a world where humans like Estragon and Vladimir cannot make a distinction as to when the wait for Godot started and when it will even end. The lack of unanimity between Vladimir and Estragon as to the time frame of their waiting reveals Beckett's anguish about man's inability to understand the circumstances of his life. They cannot make the difference between yesterday and today and whether they have been here on Saturday or Thursday or any day at all. Time has blown off the roof. Estragon confesses his confusion when he ruminates on the day:

“[very insidious] But what Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? [Pause.] Or Monday? [Pause.] Or Friday?” (1.1.7). Beckett projects through Estragon the sense of timelessness in the search for salvation, but perhaps more eloquently the betrayal of personal and human agony as to the fate of mankind. Thomas Postlewait ascertains in his discussions of the nature of mind, memory and time that “The inner chronology of time in Beckett’s art functions not as an escape from the present by means of the fullness of memory, but as a sad reminder of the present moment cut off from past experience” (474).

The repeated consensus by Estragon and Vladimir that there is nothing to be done is the ultimate recognition that they are doomed yet they do not give up on themselves. The eventuality resulting from this is the affirmation by both Vladimir and Estragon about the determination that we are done.

VLADIMIR: Nothing you can do about it.

ESTRAGON: No use struggling.

VLADIMIR: One is what one is.

ESTRAGON: No use wriggling.

VLADIMIR: The essential doesn’t change.

ESTRAGON: Nothing to be done. (1.1.13)

Vladimir and Estragon establish in the above discussion the fundamental tragedy of man. His fate is pre-determined, and he can do nothing about it but wait and wait. Man is doomed, yet even in the knowledge of that he must hope in the coming of Godot. Vladimir’s pessimism above rings an essentialist note. The condition of man is pre-determined, yet he is forced to hope. Both characters recognize that they have no part to play in their own evolution because that has been pre-determined. Their playful attitude is therefore the only possibility to assuage their condition.

Written in post war era, *Waiting* celebrates man as a victim of essentialist doctrine about which he has no control. He has been dethroned from his sense of rationality and his notion of time has vaporized. He is the victim of a tyranny, determined to undermine his humanity and immobilize him. Even the newcomers to the scene, Pozzo and Lucky cannot make sense of the debased condition. Pozzo who flaunts an apparent bourgeois life is unable to depart from Lucky and the rest of the group in the same way Vladimir and Estragon cannot. Pozzo recognizes that “I don’t seem to be... [long hesitation]...to depart.” (1.1.38). And Estragon’s retort that “such is life” (1.1.38) is a statement on their resigned fate. Godot is a deception with no real plans for humans. He is faceless and mindless and even his boy who represents him only accentuates this picture of evanescence by not giving any concrete description of who he is or what he does. The appearance of the boy, an envoy with no message is the more damning evidence of Godot’s cruelty to man. The characters still do have to wait another eternity with the hope that Godot will ultimately come. They continue to suffer from the scourge of waiting. In the word “waiting” is all their tragedy and the essence of Beckett’s sympathy for mankind. Mankind is a subjugated entity at the mercy of forces such as time on which he has no control.

The characters are psychologically immobile. There is no progression from act one to act two. They are caught in the same time frame and harbour the same desires. They are not tainted by the possibility that Godot will not come even when in the first act his boy gives a grim picture of him. There is apparently no difference to them between yesterday and today. Vladimir’s emphasis on the waiting is everywhere in the play. The following response is indicative of that emphasis.

Vladimir ‘Wait we embraced we were happy what do we do now that we’re happy go on waiting let me think...it’s coming go on waiting now that we’re happy let me see ah! The tree!’ (2.1.56). The numerous ellipses in the speech is the mirror of the doubts and confusion surrounding the belief in what they are waiting for. The multiple times the speaker uses the word “wait” exemplifies the burden of time and the burden of immobility on them.

Estragon is perhaps the one who makes one of the most meaningful statements in the play by inadvertently justifying why they must wait when he says: “We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?” (Act 2.sc 1.P.59). Estragon’s statement is a scathing criticism of their immobility and despair. It projects his disbelief in the search for a messiah and psychologically foreshadows their own tragedy. Godot seems to be a creation of their own imagination with the purpose of defining and giving meaning to their existence. Life would not have meaning if they do not find one.

Vladimir and Estragon are apprehensive of solitude, reason for which even when they express the desire to separate, they just cannot do so. Vladimir, the great philosopher, is apt to recognize this fact and to find ways of justification. He understands that,

VLADIMIR: “We are no longer alone, waiting for the night, waiting for Godot, waiting for waiting. All evening we have struggled, unassisted. Now it’s over. It’s already tomorrow.”

POZZO: Help!

VLADIMIR: Time flows again already. The sun will set, the moon rise, and we away from here. (2.1.67-68)

The sequence of time leads to the eventuality of nullity. The cycle of sunrise to sunset is repetitive producing nothing tangible except for the realisation as Vladimir would quip: “Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come- (2.1.70). The four characters in the play have lost a sense of time simply because everything is the same as yesterday and tomorrow. Vladimir’s inability to recognize Pozzo betrays that lack of recognition of time. Both he and Pozzo cannot remember each other. Rather than see this as a source of mere memory loss, Beckett intends to capture the non-recognition of time in the realm of their actions. The fact that even when the Boy comes a second time, he does not recognize Vladimir speaks to the uncertainty and futility of their efforts. The Boy’s message not only adds to the enigma of Godot, but it is a sad realization of the emptiness of their wait and the burden that weighs them down.

Godot’s outrageous undermining of these characters is Beckett’s statement on the suffering of humanity. The play ends in a presentation of utter dismay-the silence of time. Time has lost its meaning; creating a vacuum in which emotions and desires navigate blindly. There is no time progression and there is no physical movement. The play predicated on silence and stagnant time portraying how humans are victims of this malignity. The play begins and ends with the characters not figuring out the essence of their wait and the relevance of the passage of time. Time is elusive and Godot is a thought in time evanescent and deceptive. Overall, therefore, time which is supposed to be the essence of life and the gauge of progress is rather the very source of pain and anxiety. It is a combination of this and the burden of waiting for nullity that constitutes human tragedy in the age of Beckett.

The Tragedy of Uncertainty

Beckett constructs this comic representation of mankind's predicament on the platform of uncertainty. His characters exhibit a strong sense of purpose but have no sense of direction. Their purpose is to wait for Godot but whether he/she will come has become, in the reading of *Waiting for Godot*, the hallmark of their anxiety and their debasement. Beckett does not deliver tragedy in the strict Shakespearean or Greco-Roman conception of it, but rather by presenting man as the victim of vicious forces. Man is the victim of the original lie -that of the coming of a messiah to save him from his ability to make choices. Beckett's characters are caught between the inevitable choices made for them and the uncertainty that comes with making a choice to wait for Godot. Aubrey D. Kubiak attributes this to the absurdity of modern man whose existence is beyond an era of God and who has "no recourse to a metaphysical foundation upon which they can build a meaningful understanding of life" (396). Even though waiting in *WFG* is a Sisyphean experience, Kubiak does not subscribe to the tendency that the work is pessimistic.

The uncertainty of the choice that all the characters in the play are involved in is the particular reason why they are in so much psychological pain, and more especially why they are in such debased circumstances. Greco-Roman tragedy⁵ built on self-realization references an irreversible state of being that comes to grips with the inevitability of its own demise. Such high-strung conception of man's fall denies the basic humanity of the ordinary person; this has been the shortfall of modern-day tragedy which anchors on the ordinary man's attempts to find his own space and security within the multitude of his coruscating psychic world. Beckett dramatizes the voiceless spirit of the ordinary man and his unspoken pain. Uncertainty is precisely the source of that pain and in keeping Vladimir and Estragon waiting without any sense of direction; Beckett shows the level of their misery, the intensity of the pain and of their inextricability.

The heightened sense of anxiety and uncertainty sets the tone for the drama that unfolds in the whole play as Estragon's keynote statement "Nothing to be done" (1.1.1) is made. Both him and Vladimir come to that inevitable conclusion but are unable to wrestle themselves from it. The recurrence of the recognition that there is nothing to be done all along the play is Beckett's statement on the nullity of human effort. The incapacitation of Vladimir and Estragon to move beyond their inabilities is the burden that helps perpetuate their pain. The following conversation is an exemplification of that pain: Vladimir worries that "We'll come back tomorrow", and Estragon adds "And then the day after tomorrow" (1.1.6). This is a fascinating reflection of their hopelessness. Reading down the line, Estragon and Vladimir continue a conversation in which they are not certain about when Godot will come and whether he will even come. This is the most strenuous thing on their conscience and on their mind. They must go along with a system of doing that they neither understand nor can control. There can be no greater anguish than this. No surprise therefore when Christopher Murray says of Beckett that "Existentialism was his savage god." (435).

The determination that "The essential doesn't change" (1.1.13) as proffered by Estragon is pessimism at its ultimate. Further in the first act of the play Vladimir and Estragon will express profound distress at not even knowing the person they are waiting for. The conversation below is revelatory of the extent of the incomprehensible nature of their wait.

⁵ Such high-strung tragedies as Homer's *The Odyssey*, Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* (458 BC) or even Euripides' *The Bacchae* (405BC)

POZZO: Who is he?

VLADIMIR: Oh he's a he's a kind of acquaintance

ESTRAGON: Nothing of the Kind, we hardly know him.

VLADIMIR: True we don't know him very well but all the same

ESTRAGON: Personally I wouldn't even know him if I saw him

POZZO: You took me for him.

ESTRAGON: (recoiling before Pozzo) That's to say ... you understand the strain waiting I confess I imagined for a second (1.1.15)

They are conscious of the lie inherent in the waiting but cannot do anything about it. Do they have a choice, probably yes, probably no. In acknowledging that they do not even know the person they are waiting for, Beckett's characters inadvertently recognize their personal distress and the eternal tragedy. This is a lamentation of their state of being and this will continue till the end of the play. In wondering "Will night never come?" (1.1.27) and looking up at the sky, Vladimir consents to his own suffering. He has given up any chances of additional personal effort to release himself from the grips of an entity about which they know nothing. Estragon will further express this distress when he says, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful" (1.1.32). Their personal frustration does not translate into any meaningful action simply because they are unable to do so.

The most difficult state of existence confronting Beckett's characters is their inability to move symbolically and literarily. They are stuck psychologically and spiritually. There is no evolution on both their mental and their emotional state. Their desire to separate always ends in the inability not to. Man is stuck despite his desire to move forward; and the single most important factor that has held them together is Godot. In a Court of law, Godot is the most important source of danger, but rather not guilty because throughout the play, he does not make a statement, does not make an appearance and does not send any messages. The conclusion to this is that man is solely responsible for this creation and only he can rid himself of it. The lack of movement and the absence of progression in thought capture the tragic sense of immobility that Beckett captures in most of his works. Throughout the first act of the play, the characters' fear of separation is the dominant concern of the playwright. The presence of Godot's boy does not give any assurance of better days ahead, but they are still incapable of dissociating from him. It is a choice albeit one that makes them stand still. They are gripped by an existential angst justified by the recognition that there is no other alternative.

The question of inseparability from each other is fundamental to the existence of Beckett's characters, yet the desire to separate is also fundamental to their mental health. In the second act of the play, Estragon says "You see, you feel worse when I'm with you. I feel better alone too." (2.1.49), yet when the opportunity to separate presents itself, they are both unable and unwilling to go their different paths. They are both trapped by a sense of the unknown symbolized by Godot and the fear of solitude. It is a pervasive nihilism couched in Vladimir's recognition that "[Sententiously.] To every man his little cross. [He sighs.] Till he dies. [Afterthought.] And is forgotten." (2.1.52).

Beckett's characters are confronted with or create a sense of both physical and mental immobility. They cannot think and they cannot move either. They are frozen by a lack of ideological consensus on the meaning of their lives. Their present circumstance is an inquisition on the mercilessness of the unknown to which their fate is tied and the psychological

burden it entails on them. However pitiful their circumstances may be, Godot is the creation they invented to justify their lives. In the frustration of a routine life and the desperation of being in the mould of nothingness, mankind must create something to justify their existence. Estragon: "We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?" (2.1.59). Godot is the monster in their minds and therefore the source of their torment and their undoing. It is a figment of their imagination and therefore a source of their existential danger. However, as Anurag Sharma has indicated, Vladimir and Estragon consider waiting as "a process of becoming" (277) which gives them the satisfaction that they exist but does not in any way alleviate their burden.

The possibility of Godot's coming to see Vladimir and Estragon is experienced only once, and it is a disappointment. When in the second act of the play Godot is thought to be around, which is generally a false flag, the anxiety and anticipation is heightened. The characters appear to us as toys with which Godot plays and about which he amuses himself. The realization that he is not coming and may never come does not disengage them from the illusion of his imminent presence. Vladimir, the more philosophical of the characters turns inwards into a combative self-argument. His diatribe below is fraught with anger, despair and the sense of urgency about the meaning of life and the reason for being:

VLADIMIR: Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! [Pause vehemently.] Let us do something while we have the chance!

Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for Once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us!

It is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons We are no less a credit to our species. The tiger bounds to the help of his Congeners without the least reflexion, or else he slinks away into the depths of the thickets. But that is not the question. What are we doing here, that is the Question. And we are blessed in this that we happen to know the answer. Yes, In this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come—

ESTRAGON: Ah!

POZZO: Help!

VLADMIR: Or for night to fall. [pause.] We have kept our appointment and that's an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?

ESTRAGON: Billions.

VLADIMIR: You think so?

ESTRAGON: I don't know.

VLADIMIR: You may be right. (2.1.70)

The above conversation is the hallmark of humanity's predicament and Beckett's statement on the dangers of waiting and the frustrations thereof. Vladimir asks fundamental questions to which he does not have fundamental answers. It seems to him and probably to Estragon that the fundamental reason for which humanity is created is to wait for Godot. Vladimir will come to the agreement with Estragon that billions of humans have as sole purpose, waiting for Godot. The characters recognize that in some ways life is essentially futile.

More than a question of choice, a matter of duty or fear of dereliction of duty is the genuine concern with retribution if Estragon and Vladimir do not wait for Godot. They are fooled a second time, yet they insist on waiting for him. It is an eternal condemnation built on the consciousness of their insistence to give meaning to their lives. They are prisoners of their conscience, of their own creation, of their own ideas and their views. In discussing the seeming relationship between Albert Camus', *The Myth of Sisyphus* and Beckett's *WFG*, Richard Durand argues that, Beckett's protagonists are confronted in their wait with physical and philosophical suicide and unlike Sisyphus, they lack the courage to "confront their fate honestly and live their lives accordingly" (991). In both acts of the play, Godot's boy comes twice and at each time he tells a different story, each different from the previous one. There is therefore no certainty as to what Godot really is nor his motives. This is part of the reason, *WFG* is tragic. Ramona Cormier and Janis L. Pallister considered it "an ultra-modern tragedy" (47). It is a summary of the totality of modern tragedy as conceived by Raymond Williams⁶. Uncertainty and fear linger permanently in the world of Beckett's characters like in ours. There is no doubt to Vladimir and Estragon that Godot is a figment of their imagination, and possibly his boy exists in their minds, that he is only as much as they want him to exist. He cannot by himself attest to Godot's existence or even physical appearance. Both times he comes to Vladimir and Estragon, he gives contradictory accounts of his master's appearance. His accounts are built on probabilities. None of Beckett's characters in the text, the Boy included, has any clue about the certainty and the fact of Godot as a physical reality. He is an idea created to give life meaning, but in so doing his very psychological existence creates a schism between reality and illusion and that is what makes the difference in Beckett's vision of the predicament of post-World War II search for meaning. And more importantly his universality as Enoch Brater chronicles in his discussion of the globalization of Beckett's "Godot", where he acknowledges that Beckett's characters move "deftly" from their "local situation to the global" (146). Beyond the global stage, *WFG* took in terms of performance as Brater chronicles, the play's global appeal can be attributed to the question of time and the universality thereof.

CONCLUSIONS

It is unanimously acknowledged that post World War II Europe was a combination of total disillusionment, the playground for all sorts of theories of man's predicament, but perhaps more than anything else a complete loss of faith in the possibility for anyone out of oneself to liberate mankind from doom. Man was now the centre of his own survival and that survival depended more on his personal effort than anything else. Post-World War II writers such as T.S. Elliot chronicled this acute sense of loss in such high-strung poetry that it became the normal in human collective consciousness. The works of Samuel Beckett follow on the heels of this paradigm. But in *WFG*, Beckett raises Man's predicament to an Olympian height. Even though Eric P. Levy contends that Vladimir and Estragon's primary action is to "focus upon the impossibility of action, so that the problems of decision and choice can never arise", yet the issue of choice tacit as it maybe is present everywhere in the text.

Beckett's characters earn our sympathy as they are trapped in the nexus of time and immobility. They are the victims of their own consciousness and that is Beckett's ultimate message. Their inability to separate from each other at any time that the opportunity presents itself is their inability to separate from their own consciousness or rather from the consciousness of their creation. Vladimir and Estragon are trapped in their own mind set, they cannot escape from themselves, and until they do that, they will be stuck to each other. The commonest expressions in the play are 'we can't'

⁶ See his thesis found in *Modern Tragedy* (Stanford 1966) which elucidates the tragedy of the total condition of man (P.153) as he will out it.

and 'nothing to be done'. These are expressions that betray the common sentiments of frustrations and want. This notwithstanding, Hannah Simpson in her study of laughter in Beckett's works, indicates that there is laughter which is both human and monstrous (16) albeit parochial in the play. The comic strain of the play does not in any way undermine the morbid sense of endless psychological pain the characters undergo.

WFG anchors on Beckett's perception of the moral debacle associated with the feeling of unjustified guilt. Vladimir and Estragon are immobilised by an apparent natural consensus that not waiting for Godot is a crime. The play exhibits the same structure in both acts, as it starts and ends at the same point. The fact that both acts start and end with the characters not knowing what to do and not being able to separate from each other even when they must, is a clear indication of their inability to progress. The lack of progression is revealed both in their mental ability to do so and in their physical ability to find a saner and more humane environment.

The discourse of immobility is intertwined in that of Time. There is no specific Time sequencing in the play, precisely because Vladimir and Estragon have lost the sense of time. If as indicated, the characters have lost the sense of time, it is because the only factor meaningful in their existence is Godot and the waiting thereof. Time is therefore of no value as it does not advance the cause of waiting. It is not in their world view a symbol of change and progress and as Pozzo says "The blind have no notion of time. The things of time are hidden from them too." (2.1.77).

WFG is most likely, Beckett's statement on the moral outrage associated with man's blind quest for an infinite truth. It is nihilism at its ultimate where the playwright dominates the readers' consciousness with the same affability as his characters. The play speaks to us now in the same way it spoke to readers of the time it was written. It is a display of how we are all trapped in our mindset, the victims of our grand expectations for the promise of a historical bliss. It is a play that displays our pathetic destiny as we wait in anguished and a historical hope. This is the tragedy of man's inability to affirm self-contentment and his acceptance of the great lie-the Wait.

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