

Samuel Beckett's
WAITING FOR GODOT



A country road. A tree. Evening.



Nothing to be done

Two vagabonds are standing at a road side. The stage-direction says: “A country road. A tree. Evening.”

We are introduced to Vladimir and Estragon, or Didi and Gogo by nickname.

Didi walks around with stiff legs. Gogo sits on a rock trying in vain to take off his boots.

First sentence of the play is Estragon commenting on his struggle with his boots:

E: Nothing to be done!

Vladimir responds:

V: I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle.

Estragon talks about his boots, his struggle to get them off. Vladimir talks about existence, which is meaningless or where 'nothing [is] to be done' – two very different meanings of 'nothing to be done.' One talks cross purposes about old shoes and the “meaning of existence”; the lowest and the highest.

Lost in Time and Space: A Universe without Temporal and Spatial Markers

After his remark about existence, Vladimir walks a bit around, then he turns to Estragon, and this conversation follows:

V: So there you are again

E: Am I

V: I'm glad to see you back. I thought you were gone for ever.

E: Me too

V: Together again at last! We'll have to celebrate this. But how?

Later, they are waiting for a certain 'Godot'; they know he is supposed to arrive a "Saturday," but what is 'Saturday' in a world outside time:

E: But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday?

(Pause) Or Monday? (Pause) Or Friday

V: (Looking wildly about him, as though the date was inscribed in the landscape). It's not possible!

E: Or Thursday?

V: What'll we do?

E: If he came yesterday and we weren't here you may be sure he won't come again today.

V: But you say we were here yesterday

E: I may be mistaken.

Each day is a recurrence of the same. There is no significance assigned to anything. Everything is floating; there is no orientation or reference-point. Throughout the play, they desperately try to establish this reference-point, and Godot is the hope of an authority who can provide with such a reference point.

V: Well? What do we do?

E: Don't let's do anything. It's safer.

V: let's wait and see what he says.

E: Who?

V: Godot.

E: Good idea

V: Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand"

Passing/Wasting Time by Talking about Christianity

Christianity does not help to create meaning in this empty world; attempts to talk 'seriously' about orthodox Christian idioms are obviously futile, and are aborted as soon as they are introduced.

V: Suppose we repented.

E: Repented what?

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

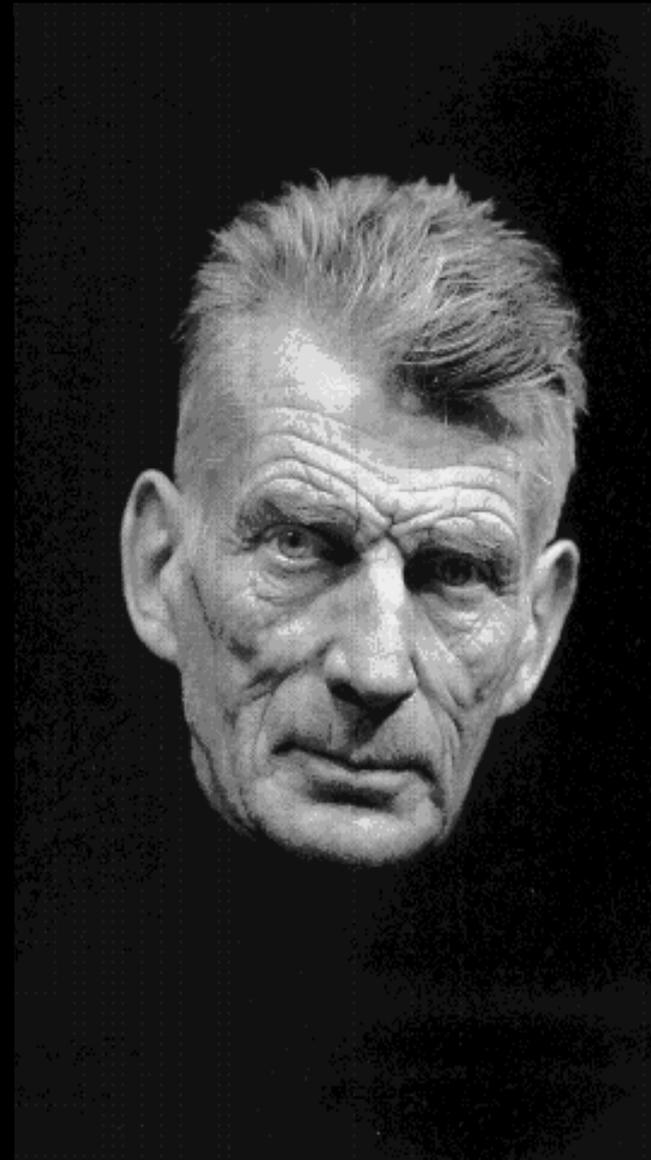
E: Our being born.

V: (Breaks into a hearty laugh which he immediately stifles, his hand pressed to his pubis, his face contorted.) One daren't even laugh any more.

E: Dreadful privation.

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

But 'repent what?' It is not possible to get into details. Since they have done nothing, they hardly have anything to repent. When Estragon suggests the orthodox Christian idea that they could repent their original sin, their being born as sinners, the suggestion is met with Vladimir's hearty laugh.



The dialogue on Christianity continues:

V: Did you ever read the bible

E: The Bible . . . (He reflects) I must have taken a look at it. I remember the maps of the Holy Land

He only remembers a map of the holy land from his schooldays. The dead sea was pale blue. It made him thirsty. The spiritual is cancelled and turned into something physiological, thirst. Vladimir tries to remember the story of the crucifixion of Christ and the two thieves. But is he seriously interested? No, but talking will pass time.

V: 'It will pass the time. (Pause) Two thieves, crucified at the same time as our Savior.

E: Our what [because we have no savior, especially he is not 'ours']

V: Our savior. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other . . . (he searches for the contrary of saved) . . . damned.

E: Saved from what? [as well as we have no savior, we are not sinful, and do not have to be saved]

V: Hell

E: I'm going (he does not move)

Vladimir remembers that one of thieves was saved and the other damned, but only according the account of one of the apostles.

V: Why believe him rather than the others

E: Who believes him

V: Everybody. Its the only version they know

E: People are bloody ignorant apes.

That ends it. Enough said. Estragon limps around. Vladimir spits. They have both lost interest in the subject.

There is 'Nothing to be Done'; Nothing Happens; Everything is Repetition of the Same

Notice the repetitious pattern of the dialogues: Vladimir says something, Estragon answers, a sentence further on Estragon says what Vladimir said and Vladimir answers what Estragon answered. For example, there are two acts in the play, the first act ends by E asking V: “well, shall we go?” and V answers “Yes, let’s go” and the stage direction says ‘(they do not move).’ Second and last act ends by V asking E: “well, shall we go?” and E answers “Yes, let’s go” and the play ends ‘(they do not move).’

Notice also that all they say are small-talk, ordinary vernacular language, often filled with idiomatic phrases that are so trivial and banal that they are essentially meaningless. In the beginning, E points to Vladimir’s fly and says:

E: You might button it all the same.

V: (stooping). True. (He buttons his fly.) Never neglect the little things of life.

E: What do you expect, you always wait till the last moment.

‘Never neglect the little things of life’, ‘you always wait till the last moment’—trivial phrases you might perhaps hear in a worn-out marriage, where the partners have nothing more to talk about. Inconsequential, meaningless. Communication with no other intention but filling the space with noise, that is, the noise of familiar sounds.

Fear of Being Alone worse than Death

Everything goes in order to escape boredom. So, what about hanging oneself? Its an interesting proposal, and they look to the lone tree on the stage.

There is a problem, however, because Estragon is lighter than Vladimir, and if he hangs himself first he will die, and if Vladimir hangs himself after, the bough might break, and he will be alone. And that is worse than death.

However, since they don't know who is the heaviest, they don't go ahead, because the result would be in any case that one of them will end up alone.

So, again the refrain: Don't let's do anything. Its safer.

E: What about hanging ourselves

V: Hmmm. It'd give us an erection!

E: (highly excited). An erection

V: With all that follows.

E: Let us hang ourselves immediately!

V: From a bough? (They go towards the tree.) I wouldn't trust it.

E: We can always try.

V: Go ahead.

E: After you.

V: No no, you first.

E: Why me?

V: you're lighter than I am.

E: Just so!

V: I don't understand.

E: Use your intelligence, can't you

V: I remain in the dark.

E: This is how it is. (He reflects). The bough . . .
The bough . . . (Angrily). Use your head, can't you?

V: You're my only hope.

E: (with effort). Gogo light – bough not break –
Godo dead. Didi heavy – bough break – Didi
alone. Whereas . . .

V: I hadn't thought of that.

E: it if hands you it'll hang anything.

V: But am I heavier than you?

E: so you tell me. I don't know. There's an even
chance. Or nearly.

V: Well? What do we do?

E: don't let's do anything. It's safer

Death of Desire

As topic of conversation, Christianity ranks on the same level as how one gets one's boots off which ranks on the same level as pondering what day it is ranking on the same level as discussing the possibility of committing suicide, and so on. This dialogue therefore is neutral regarding all possible subjects, nothing is more or less valuable.

It is safe to say that what makes issues and people more or less valuable to each other is the fact that you attach more or less desire to a person or an issue. Everything is not equal in your universe, there is something and somebody you like more or less, because you invest this something or somebody with more or less desire. Since this principle does not apply in Beckett, his universe is void of desire.

The two characters have no values, because they cannot attach desire to anything. The whole play illustrates this condition, which one might call the 'death of desire.' This attempt to find a so-called reference point is among else an attempt to attach desire to a certain issue for a while. In this they always fail, although they continuously try.

The negation of engagement, enthusiasm, excitement, which Beckett uses as a stylistic means is always a negation of 'desire'; whenever somebody gets excited about something, cut, there is nothing to be done, nothing to get excited about. What we here from a psychological point of view call 'death of desire,' could from a philosophical point of view be called 'nihilism.'

Lucky's Nonsense Monologue

Pozzo and Lucky have arrived. They are literally 'tied together.' Pozzo is the master, Lucky the slave. Lucky is treated like a dog, or, as addressed by Pozzo, a 'pig.' He is held in a leach around his neck, like you would walk a dog. At one point Pozzo commands him to entertain them.

First he is commanded to dance! Then to 'think' (absurd command because one doesn't command somebody to think since we do so all the time anyways). Lucky's thinking follows as one long nonsensical monologue – a kind of 'stream of consciousness.'

This monologue is only nonsensical on the surface, but beneath this surface about a serious matter in the Theological discussions of Augustine and Aquinas. Again, the lowest meets the highest, as it cancels out the highest as more absurd than its own 'quaquaquaqua.'

The way to read it: first blot out the worst nonsense, then piece together the pieces and reconstruct a sentence:

Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment plunged in fire . .

First blot out: Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment plunged in fire

Then piece together: Given the existence [. . .] of a personal God [. . .] outside time without extension who [. . .] loves us dearly with some exceptions [. . .] and suffers [. . .] with those who [. . .] are plunged in torment plunged in fire.

You Must be Happy . . . Deep Down . . . If only you Knew It . . .

How much sense does the idea of being happy “deep down” without knowing it make?

And how much sense does it make to declare oneself to be happy, by for example repeating: ‘I am happy.’

Language is again an empty resource; it gives us nothing. And for all their declarations, ‘I am happy, so am I, we are happy,’ that purely linguistically achieved ‘happiness’ does not change their situation.

Therefore the conclusion: ‘what do we do now, now that we are happy? Wait for Godot.’ – Nothing has changed.

V: You must be happy too, deep down,
if you only knew it

E: Happy about what?

V: To be back with me again.

E: Would you say so?

V: Say you are, even if it's not true.

E: What am I to say?

V: Say, I am happy!

E: I am happy.

V: So am I.

E: So am I.

V: We are happy

E: We are happy. (*Silence*).

What do we do now, now that we are
happy?

V: Wait for Godot.

Dead Voices like Noises

The voices are 'dead' – no passion, emotion, desire, interest, engagement, etc. So, they are 'noises.'

Metaphorically they make noises like 'wings,' like 'leaves,' like 'sand,' like 'ashes'. Metaphorically they only 'rustle,' 'murmur,' 'whisper.'

Language has meaning, because it is differentiated or segmented in various word units. A noise has no meaning because there is no differentiation or segmentation.

The metaphors of these voices characterize something indistinct and undifferentiated like what a 'noise' is.

Still waiting for Godot:

E: In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.

V: You're right, we're inexhaustible.

E: It's so we won't think.

V: We have that excuse.

E: It's so we won't hear.

V: We have our reasons.

E: All the dead voices.

V: They make a noise like wings.

E: Like leaves.

V: Like sand.

E: Like leaves. (*Silence*)

V: They all speak together.

E: Each one to itself. (*Silence*)

V: Rather they whisper.

E: They rustle.

V: They murmur.

E: They rustle. (*Silence*)

V: What do they say?

E: They talk about their lives.

V: To have lived is not enough for them.

E: They have to talk about it.

V: To be dead is not enough for them.

E: It is not sufficient. (*Silence*)

Behind the Noise lurks the Ultimate Danger, Silence

What does 'silence' signify? Probably that emptiness and nothingness that their continuous talk is meant to disguise.

Their 'voices' are nothing and talk about nothing "like leaves," but they at least distract from the absolute nothing in their silences. Silence is 'awful' because it is their reminder of nothing

V: They make a noise like feathers.

E: Like leaves.

V: Like ashes.

E: Like leaves. (*Long Silence*)

V: (in anguish). Say something

E: I'm trying. (*Long silence*).

V: (in anguish). Say anything at all!

E: What do we do now?

V: Wait for Godot.

E: Ah! (*Silence*)

V: This is awful.

Pozzo and Lucky are about to leave the stage.
The following 'adieu dialogue' follows (again, better to talk when one has nothing to say, than not to talk).

Estragon: Then adieu.

Pozzo: Adieu.

Vladimir: Adieu.

P: Adieu. (*Silence, nobody moves*)

V: Adieu.

P: Adieu.

E: Adieu. (*Silence*)

P: And thank you.

V: Thank you.

P: Not at all.

E: Yes, yes.

P: No, no.

V: Yes, yes

E. No, no. (*Silence*)

P: I don't seem to be able . . . (*long hesitation*) . . . to depart.

E: Such is life.

V: You're going the wrong way.

P: I need a running start.

P: Adieu.

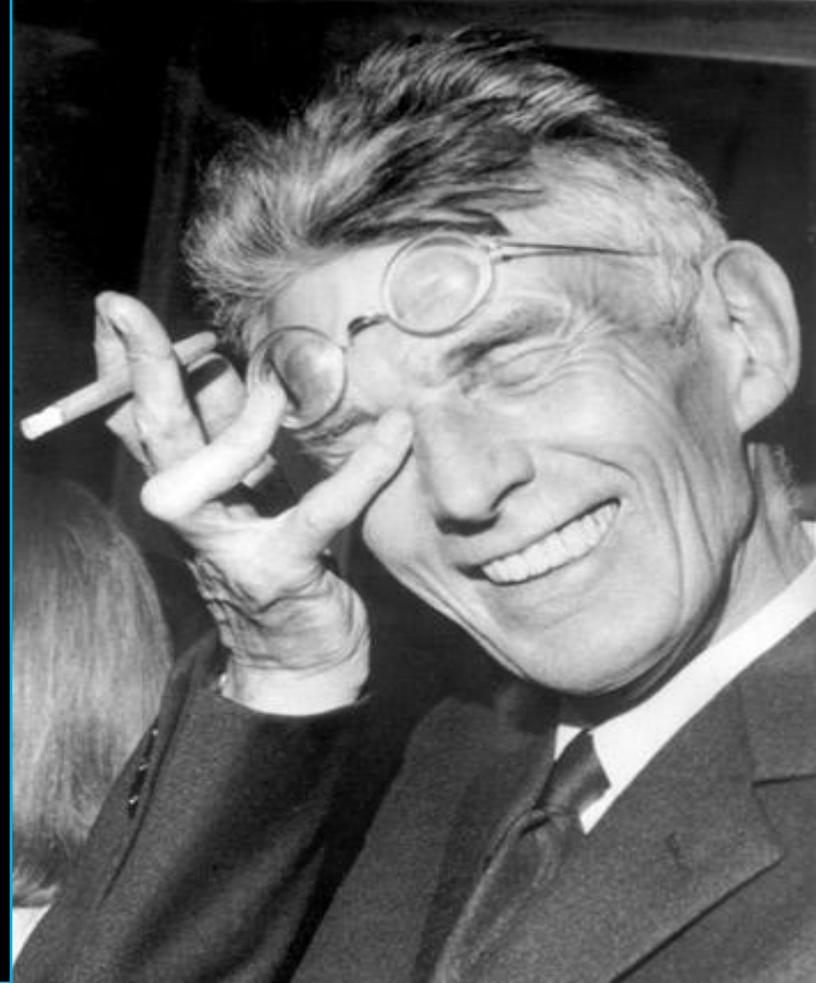
V & E (*Waving*): Adieu!

P: Up! Pig! (*noise of Lucky getting up*). On! Faster! On! Adieu!
(*Long silence*)

V: That passed time.

E: It would have passed in any case.

Is he Joking?



*Well, shall we go?
Yes, Let's go.
(They do not move)*

