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The Existence and the Time in Samuel Beckett's

Waiting for Godot

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Bakalářská práce

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The Existence and the Time in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot

VEDOUcí PRÁCE:

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ZÁSADY PRO VYPRACOVÁNÍ:

V této bakalářské práci se budeme nejprve zabývat životem a literární tvorbou Irského autora Samuela Becketta. Dále budeme rozebírat každou postavu a prostředí ve kterém žije. Zmíníme i důležitost obsažených témat, motivy a styl autora. V závěru eseje vyzdvihneme důležitost motivu času a absurdnosti.

SEZNAM DOPORUČENÉ LITERATURY:

Waiting for Godot (A tragicomedy in two acts) - Samuel Beckett
Čekání na Godota - Městské divadlo Brno, překlad Karel Kraus včetně sekundárních zdrojů
Theatre of the Absurd - Martin Esslin
A Casebook on Waiting for Godot - Ruby Cohn
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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracoval samostatně pod vedením vedoucího bakalářské práce a s použitím odborné literatury a dalších informačních zdrojů. Jako autorka uvedené bakalářské práce dále prohlašuji, že jsem v souvislosti s jejím vytvořením neporušila autorská práva třetích osob.

V Olomouci dne

Podpis

Poděkování

Chtěla bych poděkovat vedoucímu mé bakalářské práce PhDr. Matthew Sweneymu za cenné rady, připomínky vedoucí ke konečné podobě této práce a čas, který mi věnoval při řešení dané problematiky. Také chci poděkovat mé rodině, za její podporu a trpělivost.

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1 Introduction

Samuel Beckett was one of the twentieth century's most important Irish writers of novels, essays, poems, playwrights and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. He lived in France for a long period of his life where he wrote his book both in English and French. Samuel Beckett is highly regarded as one of the most influential authors. He was emphatically influenced by his beloved friend, James Joyce, who was an important English author and also considered one of the early postmodernists. His writings offered a wide and tragicomic, as he always emphasized, outlook on human nature and existence often mingled with humor and black comedy. According to Martin Esslin, his production occupies a very important place in the Theatre of the Absurd. Some of his books possess, even though obliquely, several autobiographical features from his own life.

Between his prosaic creations, dominate titles such as *Murphy* (1938), *Watt* (1945; published 1953), *Mercier and Camier* (1964; published 1974) or *Malone dies* (1951) exist. Samuel Beckett is a man of many styles and therefore we can enjoy reading from his poetry collections such as *Whoroscope* (1930), *Collected poems in English and French* (1977), *What is the word* (1989) and more. Regarding his non-fiction, I should mention *Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce* (1929) and his book named *Proust* (1931).

Samuel Beckett was a marvelous playwright and, in this work I will be concentrating on the analysis of, is one of his most noticeable plays titled *Waiting for Godot*. *En Attendant Godot* (Waiting for Godot) was originally written in French in 1949 and firstly published in English in 1954. The tragi-comedy opened at the Théâtre de Babylone on January 5, 1953 and was very well received. This brought Beckett international fame and integrated him between leading personas of The Theatre of the Absurd. A very significant production of the play took place in Lüttringhausen Prison in Germany. "You will be surprised to be receiving a letter about your play *Waiting for Godot*, from a prison where so many thieves, forgers, toughs, homos, crazy men and killers spend this bitch of a life waiting...and waiting...and waiting. Waiting for what? Godot?"¹ The performance in prison

¹ Bear. "From a Catastrophe to a Mistake: Beckett and Havel." *Irishtimes*, Irishtimes, 2011.

deserved a very big applause and then the longtime relationship between Beckett and prisoners began.

Waiting for Godot is a play in two acts where not many characters appear. The book is focused on two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, who are waiting for Godot and carrying the boredom of their lives. Now and then they are thinking of committing suicide, meet Pozzo and Lucky and have conversations that absolutely lack logic. The only meaningful thing for them is their existence and waiting to see Godot.

The main aim of my essay is to analyze characteristic features that appear in the book, *Waiting for Godot*. I will be dealing with the characterization of each character, whether protagonists or secondary characters, and then I will study their environment where they are situated. As is well known about Samuel Beckett, his books contain questions of human existence and the importance of human being. Out of this reason, I will emphasize the concept of time and the absurdity of their existence.

Afterwards, I will incorporate into my work the themes of the play, the style of the author as for the language, motifs and irony and I will be trying to decipher the reasons for its incorporation.

2 Life and production of Samuel Beckett

Samuel Barclay Beckett was one of the most influential Irish novelists of the 20th century. As well as novels, he wrote essays, poems and playwrights. He was born on 13th April 1906 in Foxrock, Dublin. He has an older brother. His father worked as a civil engineer and his mother was a housewife. Both of them were strict Protestants. At age 17 in 1906 S. Beckett enters Trinity College where he studied French and Italian. In his latest month of studying at Trinity College he met Alfred Perón. Both men became very good friends. Perón helped him intensively with his studying of French, as well he helped him to improve his speaking skills. “Péron was responsible for recruiting his Irish friend into the Resistance movement. Beckett needed little persuading. He had followed the rise of Nazism in the 1930s with fascination, growing disgust, and finally, horror.”²

One of the crucial factors of Beckett’s joining the Resistance movement was the arrest and departure of his friends to the concentration camp. Thus he intended to live and write quietly to see if he could help his friends. In 1926 He began suffering from insomnia and depression. Soon after, he also suffered heart palpitations which lead to night sweats. Two years later he traveled to Paris where he worked as a lecturer of English language at École Normale Supérieure. Soon after his arrival, he started to drink heavily, but only in the evening after 5 o’clock. This custom survived with him all his life. In Paris he also met one of the most influential people in his life, James Joyce. Samuel Beckett admired him. Many critics say that J.Joyce made slaves of his admirers and took advantages only for himself.

Beckett’s first short story was titled ‘Assumption’ and later on he published his poem “Whoroscope”, which won an award in a poetry competition. Shortly afterwards he finished his novel *Proust*. After that, he returned to Dublin where he taught at the Trinity College for a brief period of time. Because of his frustration of being a teacher, he resigned from his position at Trinity College and returned to France. In 1932, he completed his novel , *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, t which was not very well received by the publishers. After many rejections, the book was finally published in 1993. After a time, Beckett’s health worsened, his

² Delacour, Jonathon. “Why Samuel joined the Resistance.” *Jonathon Delacour the heart of things*. 15. Apr. 2002.

depression grew after his father's death. His father passed away from a heart attack in 1933. Somewhere around 1935, Beckett began studying German and decided to write essays in German and later on short stories, too. In 1936, he visited Germany where he took a more profound look at Nazis practices. Beckett settled permanently in Paris in 1937, where he was almost killed. He was transferred to a hospital where his novel, *Molloy*, was published. After being discharged from the hospital, he had a brief relationship with Peggy Gugenheim. He realized that this is was not going to work and therefore he turned her down. His true love, that will continue throughout his life, is Suzzane Deschevaux-Dusmensil.

In 194?, the occupation of Paris broke out and Samuel and Suzzane were recruited to the French Resistance. However the association was infiltrated by Nazis and many of the members were arrested. Suzzane and Beckett are forced to escape. They managed to leave their apartment a few hours before the German Gestapo arrived. Forthcoming experiences of their journey to the south of France are also pictured in *Waiting for Godot*. The journey itself was very long and exhausting. Both of them needed to somehow entertain themselves just like the main characters, from *Waiting for Godot*, Didi and Gogo. After long waiting for the liberation of Paris, Beckett and Suzzane finally returned to Paris in 1945. Again we encounter something that comprises an inseparable part of the book itself. Didi and Gogo are waiting for their liberation too. Life itself is endless waiting for them.

In 1946, he completes *Mercier et Camier*, his first book written in French. He also publishes various articles in magazines and finishes the first play *Elutheria*. But he does not want it to be published during his lifetime. In 1948, he writes, *En Attendant Godot*, and two years after that his mother dies from Parkinson's disease. Very soon after, his older brother dies also. In 1956, he writes, *Act without Words*, and in 1961 is awarded a honorary degree of Doctor of Letters at Trinity College. In 1969, Samuel Beckett is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, but did take part in the ceremony.

Beckett's health started to decline throughout the 1980's and was diagnosed with emphysema. While staying in the nursing home, he finished his last work, the poem "What is the Word". Samuel Beckett died on 22 of December in 1989 and together with his wife are buried in Paris at Montparnasse Cemetery. Many of his friends such as Jocelyn Herbert, commemorate Beckett as a beautiful person with a sense of humor, which loved rugby, golf and Schubert's compositions.

3 Historical Context

Samuel Beckett wrote one of his most celebrated works, *Waiting for Godot*, on January 5, 1948, after liberation of France from German occupation. The book was at first written in French and carried the title *En attendant Godot*. For the first time, the play was presented in 1953 at the Theatre de Babylone in Paris. Beckett subsequently translated the book into English himself. This book commenced Beckett's associations with the theatre of the absurd. Some intellectuals suggest that the misery, the consequences and his experiences of war have influenced the book overall. The play slowly became famous within the public. The unusual format of the play allowed Beckett to more intensively dramatize the themes he had already discussed before in his other writings. Beckett usually focused on the struggles of survival and the suffering of being, therefore it is often considered an existential play. The fact that none of the characters realize the flow of time and tend to forget things, means that they are always trying to prove their existence. Nevertheless, the boy and other characters who repeatedly fail to recognize Vladimir and Estragon, cast the misgivings of their life and existence. Both characters are waiting for Godot without hesitation, because they are convinced he brings them something that will change their life. Is very possible that after Godot's arrival, nothing will change and both Didi and Gogo will fall into their usual routines. There are many literary critics and scholars who manifested their ideas that *Waiting for Godot* is a highly philosophical play. The play contains many Christian allusions and features, however others think otherwise, even Beckett himself. "With the play's success Beckett finally commented that Godot had been misunderstood, that there was no allegory or symbolism, no definition of anything."³ According to Beckett's own words, he did not go to see any performances of theatre; he did not know how to compose and write theatrical script. He said that he was simply trying to write such a play without any deep idea or philosophy in it. He was furious about the omnipresent references that pointed out to this play as a philosophical masterpiece, full of deep thoughts and religious concepts.

³ Machosky, Brenda. "Samuel Beckett's waiting for Godot: Walking out on Godot." *University of Hawai'i, Manga*.

As I mentioned in the previous page, the play was influenced by the period of the German occupation in France. After his getaway with his wife, the German Gestapo arrived at his apartment. They had to walk many miles to safety. In the day time, they devised various conversations or plays to shorten their journey. This is very similar to the content of the play. There are two tramps as well, who want to entertain themselves during their waiting.

In my opinion, another remembrance of war and its consequences are the dead voices from which both tramps hear all at once. It carries a considerable amount of mystery.

VLADIMIR: “What do they say?”

ESTRAGON: “They talk about their lives.”

VLADIMIR: “To have lived is not enough for them.”

ESTRAGON: “They have to talk about it.”

VLADIMIR: “To be death is not enough for them.”⁴

The voices might be those of all the dead and suffering men during this time in France. Waiting itself, is like waiting for relief and liberty of the French people. Samuel Beckett had certainly embraced such thoughts into the play *Waiting for Godot*.

⁴ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1965. p.63

4 Plot of the play

The plot of this play was written by Samuel Beckett. The plot, all in all, is very simple to relate to. Two middle-aged tramps named Estragon and Vladimir are waiting on a country road by a tree, with no leaves, for a man named Godot. They call themselves by different names, Gogo and Didi, and they have nothing to do, therefore they try to invent some funny things to amuse them. They have a conversation about many things such as what they are going to eat. While Estragon struggles to put his boots on his feet, Vladimir tells a story about two thieves in the Gospels. Estragon wants to leave but Vladimir reminds him that they can not simply leave because they are waiting for Godot, to whom they are supposed to meet there. While they are waiting, Estragon falls asleep but is abruptly awoken by Vladimir, because he feels very lonely. Gogo, which is a nickname of Estragon, wants to tell him the dream he dreamt, but Vladimir does not want to hear any piece of it. To shorten their waiting, Estragon suggests hanging themselves on the tree near them; however they decide to keep waiting and see what Godot is going to say.

In the first act of the play there are many sections where one of the main characters repeats the same thing the other has already said, as we can see in the quotation below. This may symbolize the repetition and invariance of their lives and the lack of forceful action.

ESTRAGON: What did we do yesterday?

VLADIMIR: What did we do yesterday?

ESTRAGON: Yes.⁵

In the forward section of Act I, two other characters, Pozzo and his slave Lucky, appear in the scene. Pozzo is a wealthy man and wants to sell Lucky in the market. Lucky has many skills and entertains all three men by dancing and also thinking. The very interesting fact about Lucky is that he can not think without his hat.

Vladimir and Estragon want to give Lucky some bones and when they ask if he wants them he does not reply. Pozzo is the one who gives them the answer that

⁵ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p. 14

he can not have the bones. Due to the cruelty of Pozzo against Lucky, Vladimir suddenly explodes, but the very next moment he feels very embarrassed for his outburst. “(stutteringly resolute). To treat a man... (gesture towards Lucky)...like that...I think that...no...a human being...no...it’s scandal.”⁶

Pozzo tells them that Lucky has served him for almost sixty years and that he learnt so much from him. When Pozzo and Lucky leave, a young boy appears on the road. The boy tells the men that Mr. Godot can not come today but he certainly will come tomorrow. Both men ask the boy several things such as what he is doing at the Godot’s house. He says that he has a younger brother whom Godot is sometimes beating. When the messenger leaves, the first act is ceased.

The second act is the repetition of the first. Vladimir is singing a weird song and the environment that surrounds them is also the same. There is the country road by a tree, which now has a few leaves on it. This time, Gogo and Didi argue whether they are waiting in the right place or not. Estragon has a bad memory and has doubts about the place, but Vladimir is almost certain that this is the place where they had waited the other day. Vladimir suggests that things have changed since yesterday, but Estragon does not remember any of these. “(suddenly furious). Recognize. What is there to recognize: All my lousy life I’ve crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery!”⁷ As with the day before, Estragon says again that it should be better to part. However, Vladimir reminded him, as always, that they cannot leave each other as they are waiting for Godot. He also reminds him about the meeting with Pozzo and his dog Lucky. When he find Lucky’s hat on the ground, he feels pleasantly surprised because it could be proof that they are waiting in the right place.

As with the day before, they meet Pozzo and Lucky, but none of them remember the day before. What is even more interesting is that they find Pozzo blind and Lucky dumb. When they fall on to the ground, Pozzo starts to cry for help. Estragon wants to ignore it and leave, but Vladimir begs him to help them first. After they help him up, they begin to ask him how it is possible that he became blind. He responds that it came all of a sudden and that he does not recognize them, since he is blind.

⁶ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.27

⁷ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.61

In this part, we can notice another Biblical allusion concentrating on Cain and Abel. Estragon tells him that all human mankind is he, which means that all characters represent mankind as a whole. When Pozzo and Lucky leave for the second time, the young boy from the previous day appears again. When Vladimir asks him if he remembers them, the boy insists that he has never seen them before. He gave them the message from Godot, that says he cannot come this day, but surely will come the next day. Vladimir and Estragon want to continue in their way, but as the day before they are not able to make a simple move.

5 The characters

The characters embraced in the play “Waiting for Godot” are Vladimir, so called Didi, Estragon with his nickname Gogo. Other characters are Pozzo, Lucky and one secondary, however very important participant, a young boy whose role in the play is as a messenger between Godot and principal couple Vladimir and Estragon. There is another character that never shows up during the whole book, named Godot. As mentioned above, there are two couples in the book: Didi and Gogo, Pozzo and his servant Lucky. There are no physical descriptions of either of the characters, but one of the mentioned and more important parts of their clothing is a bowler hat. The bowler hat was very typical for male persons, in many social contexts, when Beckett was growing up. One time when Beckett came back home with his first beret on his head, his mother told him that he was disappointing all members of his family by not wearing a bowler hat.

“Vladimir actually wears a stiff collar and tie, although Estragon wears a scarf round his neck and presumably no collar, the fact that both wear intact bowler hats suggests they still have aspirations to gentility.”⁸ The bowler and other comic aspects of both characters may remind you of the famous couple, Laurel and Hardy, who from time to time, also played tramps in their films. For Lucky, whom I mentioned before, is typical that he can not think without his hat.

In the typical drama, the main characters undergo some sort of change and development, some significant and deep transformation. However, Beckett’s main characters in “Waiting for Godot”, Estragon and Vladimir, remain resolutely static and unchanging. Martin Esslin an English producer, playwright dramatist, journalist and translator mentions in one of his essays concentrating on the Theatre of the Absurd, that the characters are similar to four human qualities. Vladimir represents the reason. “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.”⁹ Estragon represents the emotion. “I remember the maps of Holy Land. Coloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue.

⁸ Mercier, Vivian: Beckett/Beckett/Vivian Mercier, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977

⁹ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.9

The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy.”¹⁰ Pozzo is presented to us as the power. “I am bringing him to the fair, where I hope to get a good price for him. The truth is you can't drive such creature away. The best thing would be to kill them.”¹¹ The last human quality is the intellectual power which is noticeable in Lucky.

5.1 Vladimir and Estragon

Vladimir is the character that really wants and needs to meet Godot. He is convinced that he will come. If he would not come, he would wait even if the end of the waiting is his death. He is more resilient than Estragon. Through the whole book, the ability of better remembering time successions is more apparent than in the case with his friend Estragon, called Didi. It seems that Estragon depends entirely on Vladimir, but the fact is that he needs Estragon just as much as he needs to meet Godot. “Vladimir, whose name means ‘ruler of the world’ and Estragon, whose name derives from the French word for herb ‘tarragon’, can be reasonably associated with qualities of a leader and feelings of bitterness or mortification respectively.”¹²

While reading, we can notice that both characters are sometimes asking the questions, such as if they are really friends. They never really come to a conclusion in the book. They also keep a distance between each other, except when Estragon falls asleep shivering. Didi then covers him with his coat and sings him a lullaby. They are too scared to leave each other, but at the same time, they are too hesitant to get closer to one another.

VLADIMIR: I'm glad to see you back. I thought you were gone forever.

ESTRAGON: Me too.

VLADIMIR: Together again at last! We'll have to celebrate this. But how?¹³

¹⁰ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.12

¹¹ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.32

¹² Swets & Zeitlinger. *English Studies*. UK : Routledge Journals 1919. p.522

¹³ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.9

Estragon is more preoccupied by mundane things than Vladimir, for example, what he should get to eat or his struggles with his boots. He is more direct. Despite this, he finds it hard to remember things, but he can recall certain memories. "That's the way I am. Either I forget immediately or I never forget."¹⁴ It seems that Estragon needs to be told "What do we do now, now that we are happy?"¹⁵ Also, he often spends a lot of time trying to fall asleep. Gogo has to be constantly reminded that they are waiting for Godot. He repeatedly asks Vladimir who Godot is and what he looks like.

On the other hand, he can speak of "the Holy Land" with a deep emotional understanding and is able to develop very intellectual thoughts.

The thing we should not forget to mention is Estragon's inability to act. When he states that he will get some carrot, he is not able to make a move. Another case is when Pozzo needs help from them, Estragon's thoughts are concentrated on why he should help him.

POZZO: Help! I'll pay you

ESTRAGON: How much?

POZZO: One hundred francs!

ESTRAGON: It's not enough¹⁶

5.2 Pozzo and Lucky

Pozzo, is presumably the most egoistic person in the play. He focuses only on himself, is tyrannical and cruel. He and his servant, Lucky, are presented to us in the first act when Estragon confounded Pozzo with Godot.

ESTRAGON: (*timidly to Pozzo*) You're not Mr. Godot, sir?

POZZO: (*terrifying voice*) I am Pozzo! (*Silence*) Pozzo! (*Silence*) Does the name mean nothing to you? (*Silence*) I say does that name mean nothing to you?¹⁷

¹⁴ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.61

¹⁵ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.60

¹⁶ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.80

¹⁷ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.22

In the case of Pozzo I would definitely agree with Mr. Esslin, because Pozzo is manipulating Lucky and has a kind of power over him. Pozzo seems sort of like a God. He has complete control over Lucky. He always shouts at him without feeling any guilt and obliges him to carry his heavy bag. He tells the man that the land is his. But, this is really a different kind of God than we would ever imagine. He is cruel and concentrates only on himself. In Act II, we notice that his behavior passes through several changes. His memory is defective. He can not remember Vladimir and Estragon when he meets them again in the same place by the tree. Another thing is the loss of his sight. Maybe this is the cause of losing his watch. He can not imagine the life without knowing the passage of time. It is possible that the fact that he can not wear his watch in his pocket anymore made him blind. "Don't question me! The blind have no notion of time. The things of time are hidden from them too"¹⁸

We could make the argument that "Lucky" is an ironic name for the slave, but Lucky really deserves his name because he has a master, Pozzo, who meticulously organizes his life. He does not have to worry what to do and what the result of the action will be, so he is quite fortunate. Vladimir and Estragon are equally enslaved. They are "slaves" of their concept of Godot, which is why they cannot leave. Otherwise they believe themselves to be free. Godot gives them the illusion that they really exist. Back to Lucky, we can see in this character a decaying and destroyed person who astonishingly feels safer with his sadomasochistic master. He can not leave him; he is very loyal to him. Lucky is his faithful slave, that carries Pozzo's bags and stool. In Act I, he is able to dance and think, but in the second act he is a dumb. Throughout the book, Lucky's suffering is much deeper than the suffering of the others because he is forced to do it in silence. He can not even ask questions if he is not allowed to.

POZZO: Stand back! (*Vladimir and Estragon move away from Lucky. Pozzo jerks the rope. Lucky looks at Pozzo.*) Think pig! (*Pause. Lucky begins to dance.*) Stop! (*Lucky stops.*) Forward (*Lucky advances.*) Stop! (*Lucky*

¹⁸ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.86

stops.)Think! Silence

LUCKY: On the other hand with regard to –

POZZO: Stop! (*Lucky stops.*) Back! (*Lucky moves back.*) Stop! (*Lucky stops.*)¹⁹

It seems that I have just argued my idea that there is no irony in the name. Well, maybe the name Lucky is both an irony and authentic term.

5.3 Young boy

In the first act of the book, a young boy meets Vladimir and Estragon. He assures Vladimir that this is the first time they have met, that he has never seen him before and that he was not in that place the previous day. He confirms that he works for Mr. Godot with his younger brother who is a victim of Mr. Godot's anger. "Whom does he beat?"²⁰, "He beats my brother, sir."²¹ The mysterious thing is that another day the same boy again reassures Vladimir that he has not seen him before in the past. When Vladimir asks the boy what Godot does he responds that he does nothing.

VLADIMIR: What does he do, Mr. Godot? (Silence) Do you hear me?

BOY: Yes, sir.

VLADIMIR: Well?

BOY: He does nothing sir²²

5.4 Godot

There have been written many philosophical and non philosophical essays and books concentrating on the question of who Godot really is and if he is a person or some eternal creature. From my opinion, Godot is certainly a very influential thing/ being, which made Estragon and Vladimir endlessly wait for him. Vladimir and Estragon wait in the hope that Godot will "save" them. This is especially true for Vladimir, who always reminds Estragon about the importance of waiting. Godot

¹⁹ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p. 42

²⁰ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.51

²¹ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.51

²² Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p. 91

never appears in the play and his name and character are often thought to refer to God. This is very obvious by the character's name. The first syllable is GOD and we should put the stress on it. Therefore, there could be something god-like about Godot.

The fact that Godot never shows up during the whole play is from one side very depressing. It is possible that Godot has already arrived and has left such a big impression in Vladimir and Estragon, that he became just part of the character's souls. The only thing about Godot which we know is that he has a long white beard. Coincidentally, Lucky himself has long, white beard.

VLADIMIR: He has a beard, Mr. Godot?

BOY: Yes, sir.

VLADIMIR: Fair or... (he hesitates)... or black?

BOY: I think it's white.²³

²³ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p. 92

6 Themes

Even though the book does not seem too long, it incorporates many interesting themes such as the themes of time, human condition, hope or struggling of the characters and many more. First of all, I would like to introduce the theme of life itself, or more precisely, the monotony of life.

For Estragon and Vladimir, life remains almost the same during their whole journey and waiting. It is stagnant and lacks any particular meaning.

“Sometimes I feel it coming all the same. Then I go all queer. (*He takes off his hat, peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, puts it on again.*) How shall I say? Relieved and at the same time...Appalled. Nothing to be done.”²⁴

Everything in the lives of both men is very uncertain, which brings them a physical suffering. They are trapped in some kind of time-gap, for which the only escape is waiting for Godot who might bring them the necessary light for the survival. Although both tramps wait and come across a few other travelers, none of them are Godot. However, both characters would not even know that fact, as they do not actually know the real appearance of Godot. They confound him with Pozzo, who is the first person they meet on the road accompanied by his loyal servant Lucky. The second day goes the same as the previous day. They meet Pozzo, Lucky and the young boy again. The only difference is the slight change in the setting and the message of the boy.

On the tree by which Didi and Gogo should wait for Godot, few fresh leaves have appeared which might be a symbol of flowing of time that is really meaningless for both characters.

The young boy, who is bringing a new message for the tramps, comes to them again. The message is the same as always, but this time he gives a hint of Godot's identity.

Vladimir: (*softly*) Has he a beard, Mr. Godot?

Boy: Yes Sir.

Vladimir: Fair or... (*he hesitates*)... or black?

Boy: I think it's white, Sir.

²⁴ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.10

Vladimir: Christ have mercy on us!²⁵

The lector or the spectator of the play performance could easily come to the conclusion that Mr. Godot is actually an allegory for God. The name seems to be inspired in the word God and the appearance. Mr. Godot likely has the appearance of God himself, but Samuel Beckett has explicitly stated that his character of Godot, in his play “Waiting for Godot”, is not an allegory to God. According to Beckett’s own words, this play is not one with deep philosophical and Christian thoughts. The only aspect which is related to Christianity is distress in his play. In terms of philosophy he once wrote that there is no key term or any problem of philosophy. If there were any, he would have no reason to write novels if he was able to explain their themes by philosophical concepts.

The concept of mortality is highly linked to the theme of life itself. Characters from this book do not brush aside the fact that death is unavoidable. In this case the death is something that the characters do not fear. Their days spent with waiting were so boring and repetitive; therefore they were struggling to kill time by finding something to do. Especially Estragon, who could not stand the boredom of their life longing for the radical change. Consequently, he gives Vladimir a proposal of hanging themselves.

ESTRAGON: Wait.

VLADIMIR: Yes, but while waiting.

ESTRAGON: What about hanging ourselves?

VLADIMIR: Hmm. It'd give us an erection. ESTRAGON: (highly excited).

An erection²⁶!

The death could mean to them the salvation from the boredom and repetitiveness of their lives, but I do not think they are thinking about it this way. It seems to me rather they are playing a sort of game to fill the gap of many others in their waiting without considering the consequences. As said before, for them nothing is certain. It may work or it may not. The reason why they are waiting for

²⁵ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts* , p.92

²⁶ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts* , p.17

Godot, instead of killing themselves, is that they are not able to die together. There is a possibility that one will die and the other will survive. In this case the lucky one, if I can say so, will be sentenced to deep loneliness. If Estragon hangs himself and dies, who will lift Vladimir up the tree to end his life? This is the reason why they can not die together. They are too dependent on one another.

ESTRAGON: All the dead voices.

VLADIMIR: They make a noise like wings.

ESTRAGON: Like leaves.

VLADIMIR: Like sand.

ESTRAGON: Like leaves.²⁷

Apart from the ubiquitous repetitions noticed in this section, through Estragon's words we can feel the sadness of this quotation. The dead voices are presumably all those victims, dead soldiers and other men whom Beckett wants to emphasize. He shows their importance and how painful death would be.

Another one of the most important and noticeable themes that will be mentioned in my essay is, dependency. Each character depends on the other one and vice versa.

Didi and Gogo, represent the main couple in this tremendous play and are dependent in every way. In the first act when they meet each other, they are reassuring themselves that the place where they are waiting is the right place. They are even dependent on the environment around them. The only thing they know is that they are supposed to wait by some tree. Therefore, the setting is actually very important. The simplicity of the setting is also very evident as the simplicity of the clothing, thinking and characters themselves. Moreover, Vladimir needs Estragon by his side because without him he feels endless loneliness.

ESTRAGON: What is it?

VLADIMIR: I don't know. A willow.

ESTRAGON: Where are the leaves?

²⁷ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.62

VLADIMIR: It must be dead.

ESTRAGON: No more weeping.

VLADIMIR: Or perhaps it's not the season.²⁸

While they are talking about the rightness of the tree by which they should be waiting, they notice that the tree does not have any leaves on it. Vladimir's response to Estragon, that maybe it is not the season, shows how little they know about the time. For them, the passage of time is meaningless because their purpose and destiny is already linked with waiting for their savior. To shorten their time waiting, they need to invent some plays, communicate with each other or develop some customs. Whichever it is, it is used to sustain their struggle to survive. For these characters nothing is certain. Estragon can freely leave whenever he wants, but the only person who could persuade him and tell not to leave is his friend and companion, Vladimir. What this means is that the whole development of the play depends on not only Estragon, but Vladimir as well. On the other side, every moment in which Estragon is convinced to leave, he is unable to act. This may be due to dependency on Vladimir, who is the character with more reasonable thinking.

At the end of each Act, another undoubtedly relevant character appears. His name is unknown to us and the author is referring to him as Boy. This boy, as mentioned several times in my essay, is the messenger between Mr. Godot and Vladimir and Estragon. Didi and Gogo, especially Didi are very dependent on him because every time they meet him, he tells them whether Godot arrived or not. The response is usually "Mr. Godot told me to tell you he won't come this evening but surely tomorrow."²⁹ Their lives, without any doubt, depend on the information the boy gives and of course on Godot himself. Godot, and it does not really matter whoever or whatever he is, can surely finish their waiting or lengthen it until the next day or more.

Taking in consideration the second couple, Pozzo and Lucky, I should say that their general relationship is that of master and his servant. Pozzo, does not call Lucky by his name. He shouts at him and calls him dog. But without him he would not have any slave to carry his baggage, nobody to entertain him and he would probably lose the possibility of getting money for the sale of Lucky at the market.

²⁸ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p. 14

²⁹ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p. 50

Pozzo does not treat Lucky with any respect or consideration, but this is the way how the relationship between slave and master works. By taking control over Lucky, he fulfills his hunger for power. This fact also shows the Pozzo's dependency on Lucky. However, their relationship is more involved than we think at first sight. "(sobbing) He used to be so kind...so helpful...and entertaining...my good angel...and now...he's killing me."³⁰

In Act II, everything gets worse for Lucky and Pozzo. Pozzo is always dependent on his watch, but now loses it and also loses his eyesight. When he falls on the ground, he has nobody to help him because his slave lucky became dumb. This is the crucial part for the development of dependency. Pozzo becomes even more dependent on Lucky than ever before and vice versa. He can not leave his master because he is too loyal and without somebody to whom he can serve, he would probably die. This is his destiny, the destiny of being a slave.

³⁰ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p. 35

7 Style of the book

Samuel Beckett's play, "Waiting for Godot", has been described as the theatre of the absurd. The play is divided in two acts. We can say that the second act is the repetition of the previous one. In both parts, the text concentrates on the endless waiting of two main protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon. The play is written as sort of a dialog between the characters. Usually the dialogs don't lead anywhere and end with the words "I do not know". The used sentences are usually very short and lack logic. Action and repetition are often intermingled with spaced and measured silence. Silence is a very typical feature of Samuel Beckett, as he was very influenced by his friend and guide James Joyce. The main exception to the lack of logic and brief conversations about nothing are occasional speeches of the characters about human conditions, nature and Biblical references. Such an example is that of Pozzo's outburst about the brevity of life. If we are longing for knowing more about the form of the book, in one of the letters addressed to Harold Pinter we can find these words of Beckett, "If you insist on finding form [for my plays] I'll describe it for you. I was in hospital once. There was a man in another ward, dying of throat cancer. In the silences I could hear his screams continually. That's the only kind of form my work has."³¹

7.1 Motifs and symbolism

7.1.1 Duality

Undoubtedly, dualism is very apparent in the play. There are two main characters Vladimir and Estragon who meet Lucky and Pozzo. The young boy, a messenger between Didi, Gogo and Mr. Godot, has a younger brother and even a nightfall and sunrise can be seen as a kind of duality. Vladimir is the one who thinks and Estragon is the man who constantly wants to leave. If they hang themselves one may die and one may be saved, just like the case of mentioned Cain and Abel in the

³¹ "Beckett reveals an inspiration for his work." *A Piece of Monologue*. A Piece of Monologue, Web. 15 Mar. 2011.

play by Vladimir. The sacrifice of Cain was not accepted without clear reasons and the sacrifice of Abel was accepted. If we read carefully the book, we can notice that the agreement and disagreement in all conversations is carried out through the whole play, which apparently, is another feature of dualism as it is formed by two almost equal acts. When the main couple meets Pozzo and Lucky, Vladimir is the one who wants to let him think whilst Estragon wants to see him dance.

As I mentioned in a previous paragraph, the night fall and the sunrise are very important impressions. Man as being active chiefly during the night tends to sleep at night. If we fall asleep we are not realizing those many things around us and therefore we have no overview of the time and action. What I am trying to say is that we are no longer waiting for something during our tranquil sleep. The fall of the night and the rise of the moon may be the signal for Didi and Gogo that their waiting is near to an end that day. This is a salvation for them for a couple of hours. There is the scene in the book when Estragon falls asleep but Vladimir tries to wake him up, because he feels desperately alone. As they are dependent on one another they have to do things together, so when one of them falls asleep the other is left alone which is not good for humans waiting nowhere and for somebody unknown. The sunrise and the fall of night is described in the book in a way that we almost don't notice it. The characters don't mention it, except Pozzo's description of the sundown. It might be due to time that is so meaningless for the characters.

7.1.2 The tree

In my opinion, the tree as a setting during the play is a symbol of solitude and salvation. There is nothing more than the tree, country road and the sky. In the first act, there are no leaves on the tree at all, but when a new day begins there are a few leaves on it. It may symbolize the hope for Vladimir and Estragon that Godot will finally come and give them the reason to their pitiful lives. Possibly, there are the leaves only to fall down again from the tree and thus bring another disappointment for Didi and Gogo. As with the whole play, this is very uncertain. The reassuring fact for Didi and Gogo is that Didi was told by Godot to wait for him by the tree and that means they are in the right place. Estragon points out that it is

not very certain if this is the right tree, but when they arrived at it they could not be sure if it was a tree, because it looked more like a shrub.

Estragon: Looks to me more like a bush.

Vladimir: A shrub.

Estragon: A bush.

Vladimir: A— . What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place?³²

Not only the existence of the tree is important to the characters, but also the question of salvation is being introduced. “While they are waiting for Godot, they wonder how the tree can help them at least survive their boredom. Estragon suggests they hang themselves on it, which they both agree is a good plan, but Vladimir insists that the tree’s boughs are not sturdy enough”³³

7.1.3 Time

As the title of one of the most interesting plays by Irish author Samuel Beckett “Waiting for Godot” underlines, this play is going to be about waiting for something or somebody that should come and change all human beings. “The main subject of the play is not ‘Godot’, as it might be deduced from the title, representing a person, thing, event, death or God...etc., but the waiting itself, which is the most evident experience of time.”³⁴ Every time there is something out there for what we should wait. The thought that comes later on into my mind after writing those words is what happens when the thing or human being really comes. Maybe nothing will change and what more, it could bring only heavy disappointment.

Towards the beginning of this two act play, the main characters Vladimir and Estragon wait on a road with a single tree. They are in no particular time or place - nowhere and everywhere and have an argument whether or not they are waiting for Godot in the right place. I should point to the fact that Estragon and Vladimir are

³² Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts* , p.

³³ Atkins, Emily. “Study that tree: the iconic stage in purgatory and waiting for Godot.” *The South Carolina Review Contents* p. 74

³⁴ Navrátilová, Eva. *V. Beckett's Absurd Characters in Time*. Eva Navrátilová, The Samuel Beckett On-Line resources and Links Page. p.8

very different characters. Vladimir is more active considering his living. He is trying to find some solution. He really wants to meet Godot whether it changes something or not. Vladimir is moving onwards to something, whilst Estragon is resigned. He only waits for something to come to him. He is more passive than Vladimir. "Once completed, an event is forgotten. It is he, Estragon, who wants to leave, but stays only because he is reminded to do so by Vladimir." ³⁵

Vladimir is the one who can not escape the progress of time. He notices the changes. He can remember what they did yesterday evening and knows that there is a future for them. The future named Godot and therefore he is always trying to remind Estragon that they can not go away and take steps backwards.

Talking about going from nowhere to somewhere, moving and waiting as human actions are, for Samuel Beckett, strongly related. You can wait for something and try to find it yourself or just wait when it comes to you. If we are active in our lives we tend to forget the flow of time, but if we are passively waiting the time has no meaning for us anymore and we tend to forget the things we have already done. This is the case of Vladimir and Estragon. Vladimir remembers the place where they were waiting the day before. While Estragon says that he does not remember this place. For Estragon it does not really matter what he had done yesterday. His life as well as Vladimir's life would have been the same if that day was forgotten.

"At one point, talking about their games, Estragon says: We always find something, eh, Didi, to give us the impression we exist"³⁶

Only while doing something concrete in their life of tramps are they able to escape the burden of life of constant waiting and thus get the feeling they really do exist.

Time as movement and change almost come to an end in this play. We can see that clearly in "Waiting for Godot" because the second act is purely the repetition of the first act. Is possible that what may follow after the second act may be another very similar act. "Vivian Mercier has summarized 'Godot' as a play in which nothing happens, twice" ³⁷

³⁵ Uceman, Judwiga. *The Problem of Time in the Plays of Samuel Beckett*. Łódź, 1987, p.18

³⁶ Uceman, Judwiga. *The Problem of Time in the Plays of Samuel Beckett*. Łódź, 1987, p.16

³⁷ Uceman, Judwiga. *The Problem of Time in the Plays of Samuel Beckett*. Łódź, 1987, p.25

The repetition of play in *Waiting for Godot* provides an unimportance of time for Estragon and Vladimir. As Estragon said in the beginning of the second day (second act): "For me it's over and done with, no matter what happens."³⁸

Each day, Estragon and Vladimir would wait for Godot until he would come or their time ended through their death. The temporal background for their life of tramps is always the same. The past, the present and even the future will be for Vladimir and Estragon the same. They are forced to wait for Godot. This is their habit they have developed through the time.

Vladimir has made the choice of waiting, without instruction or guidance, as Vladimir says: "He didn't say for sure he'd come"³⁹, but decides to "wait till we know exactly how we stand"⁴⁰. Vladimir and Estragon's lives are not aiming anywhere and there is no possibility of progress for them. Both tramps were not forced to wait (physically), however there is a moment when Estragon wants to leave Vladimir.

"The place of linear, physical time has been taken over by the cyclical repetition which is characteristic of their existence."⁴¹

"Wallace Fowlie has written that "Waiting for Godot" has given a phrase to the French language: "j'attends Godot" which means that what is going on now will continue to go on for a great unspecified length of time. As he writes: "J'attends Godot" is really equivalent to saying 'That's what it means to keep living.'⁴² It means that if to keep waiting means to keep living maybe the end of waiting is symbolically denoting the death because the only possibility of finishing waiting is to meet and see Godot.

VLADIMIR: "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."⁴³

³⁸ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p. 59

³⁹ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.14

⁴⁰ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.18

⁴¹ Uceman, Judwiga. *The Problem of Time in the Plays of Samuel Beckett*. Łódź, 1987, p.26

⁴² Uceman, Judwiga. *The Problem of Time in the Plays of Samuel Beckett*. Łódź, 1987, p. 21

⁴³ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.80

The beginning of the quotation might remind you of the famous phrase in Hamlet. For Vladimir there is no choice left. His only duty is to wait for Godot to come. On the other side, the human existences in the plays of Hamlet had the choice to leave. They can even commit suicide or continue living and suffering. This is not the case of Beckett's thinking and writing. Samuel Beckett did not share his opinion. There are some passages in Beckett's plays where he mentions the possibility of suicide, but his characters do not subject to it. This is because for Samuel Beckett the act of dying is something natural and even banal. One of the authors, who would agree with Hamlet, is Sartre. He considered a suicide as one possibility of how to escape the burden of life.

From my opinion the physical time, when you are thinking of past and future is too long if one realizes that what is waiting in the end is the death. People are escaping from this by creating habits and thus escaping the suffering of human being. Even Vladimir or Estragon does not know what or who is Godot. For both tramps these questions of death or physical time are not important. They do not know the day of week and the time they have already spent together.

There are many parts in this book when Vladimir says: "How time flies when one has fun"⁴⁴ or "Time flows again"⁴⁵ These quotations are not referred to physical time but to their psychology. This is the time that they kill by their routines, games and habits. I say habit because if it is not a habit, why do they not give up waiting and simply leave? It is peculiar that they do not follow the boy when he comes to them with new information from Godot. Vladimir and Estragon are waiting and continue to wait because this is their habit. It is their meaning of life.

While reading the book I realized that Vladimir and Estragon perpetually ask questions many of which are rhetorical and are left unanswered. People who decided to read this book like me will soon realize that the questions will gradually arisen their heads as well. Who is Godot? Who is Estragon and Vladimir? Where do they come from? These questions will also be unanswered because these are things that even Beckett himself did not know.

Two other characters in this book are Pozzo and his servant Lucky. Pozzo may seem, in the first act, as the only characters in the book that are fully realizing the passage of time. "That was nearly sixty years ago... (he consults his

⁴⁴ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.76

⁴⁵ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.77

watch)...yes nearly sixty.”⁴⁶ He has his watch in his pocket and he consults them several times in the book. Pozzo does not really understand the time. He only has what he is given by his watch. Pozzo remembers something from his past, for example what his servant Lucky taught him. He also feels that there is some future for him. For him, the characteristic feature of time is change. He is aware of it when he speaks, for example about the falling of night.

A crucial part for Pozzo is when he loses his watch. He longs to find it because without a watch he could not ensure himself that time is still passing. In this part of the book, Pozzo meets Didi and Gogo. They try to help him by looking for his lost watch. None of them can find the watch; they simply do not hear the tick-tock-like sound typical for watch. The only thing they hear is the heart beat of Pozzo’s heart. Anyway, time for Pozzo has stopped. Without his watch he can no longer say whether the time is passing or not. “(violently) Don’t question me! The blind have no notion of time. The things of time are hidden from them too.”⁴⁷

POZZO: “When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you?”⁴⁸

As mentioned in the quotation above, Pozzo becomes blind in the second act, which means that he will no longer be able to see any watch around him. Possibly these two losses, the loss of his watch and the loss of sight may symbolize the entering of a world in which time and space are meaningless things. Moreover, if you lose one of your senses the other remaining senses are strengthened. The problem is that Pozzo can not hear his watch because they are lost and therefore there are no signs that could ever ensure him about the passage of physical time.

Concentrating on this interesting couple, the master and his servant, we should have in mind that they did not change only in the fact that Pozzo can not feel the time anymore. They both changed in radical ways from act to act. We can not know if the time which passed between the acts is one day or ten days or even one year. The only thing we can notice during the reading the book is the big change.

⁴⁶ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.78

⁴⁷ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.86

⁴⁸ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.89

Pozzo in the first act telling beautiful stories is not able to speak in such beautiful way as he used to in the second act. We can say that his thoughts are confused and his mind is defective. At the beginning of the play he is presented to us as a master of Lucky. He is cruel to him and shouts at him all the time. But in the second act, Pozzo's needs are changing. He becomes blind and he needs Lucky's presence more than ever. Conditions get worse, not only for Pozzo but also for Lucky. In Act I, he is still able to communicate with the others but in Act II he is totally speechless.

It seems that everything changes from better to worse within the two acts. The reader can clearly notice it in the scene where Estragon is commenting his boots. In Act I, they are relatively fine but a little bit tight and in the second act they are too big.

ESTRAGON: Ah stop blathering and help me off this bloody thing.

VLADIMIR: Hand in hand from the tip of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were respectable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up. (*Estragon tears at his boots*) What are you doing?

ESTRAGON: Taking off my boot. Did that never happen to you?⁴⁹

The passage of time has no meaning for these enormously interesting couples. The only thing that Vladimir and Estragon can do is wait. Vladimir is psychologically forced to wait for Godot and always reminds Estragon that this is the thing that they have to do. Estragon is not too influenced by meeting Godot and in one moment he tries to leave. The fact is that if you do something repeatedly for a long period of time, it becomes your habit. The idea will develop in your head that you must do the thing until the very end.

7.2 Language

Samuel Beckett originally wrote this book in French titled "En attendant Godot". This play was revolutionary because it lacked of noticeable character development, real plot and a kind of adherence to traditional features of drama.

⁴⁹ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p. 10

We can say that everybody loves everything new and rebellious; therefore this play was very well received by public. Shortly after the publication of this book Samuel Beckett himself translated this book into his maternal language English.

Samuel Beckett loved and admired his friend and great author J. Joyce. Beckett as well as Joyce was an upholder of silence in the book. They often meet one another and their conversations were usually based on the silence addressed to the other. The book is a long dialog between the characters that lacks of logic. As I mentioned in the beginning of this paragraph the silence and the pause are the important elements. The silence breaks the stream of words and “Silence performs the structural function of integrating the dialogue; in this respect it becomes as explicit as speech itself.”⁵⁰ Back to the dialog, I think that the word proves the human existence and should be told. There is one scene when Estragon is sleeping and Vladimir is feeling very upset and lonely because he is not quite sure if Gogo is alive. Vladimir feels necessity of hearing any word and thus the word can prove Estragon’s existence. The most noticeable change in the speech is seen in Pozzo. In Act II, he is more eloquent than in Act I, where his speech possesses the poetic tint and also a little arrogance when speaking about Lucky, his slave. In the second act, he becomes blind which goes hand in hand with the loss of his articulacy. He is more furious and vigorous in his speech. “(suddenly furious) Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It’s abominable!”⁵¹

7.3 Irony and absurdity

Martin Esslin was the first to introduce the term ‘Absurd’ in his book “The Theatre of the Absurd”. Alber Camus a French philosopher in his 'Myth of Sisyphus' defined human situation as absurd and completely meaningless and the term Theatre of the Absurd is derived from it. *Waiting for Godot* is classified as a tragic comedy and is seen by Martin Esslin as part of the theatre of the absurd. The origins of the Theatre of Absurd are undoubtedly influenced by the horror experiences of the Second World War. The theatre of Absurd commenced the

⁵⁰ Velissariou, Aspasia. “Language in Waiting for Godot.” *The English Department at Florida State University*. Jobs books. p.5

⁵¹ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p. 89

creation of highly unusual an innovative form and openly rebelled against conventional theatre. One of the most important innovations is the language regarding everyday communication. For many authors of the absurd drama language had become a vehicle for meaningless and stereotyped exchanges between people. The theatre of the absurd uses innovations also in abstract scenic effects and much of its inspiration can be fined in silent film and comedy, as well as in verbal nonsense. Beckett himself was inspired by Laurel and Hardy who are very similar to Vladimir and Estragon.

As far as we are concerned, the play's actions can be described in the following way: I. "Nothing to be done"⁵² which is the very first line of the book told by Estragon. II. Nothing happens. III. Nothing is certain. We could ask if it is a coincidence that each of these quotations begins with the word nothing. Vivian Mercier has commented on the book that it is a play in which nothing happens twice.

The setting within the two acts is very simple and desolate. There is only one tree. The characters are stuck in it waiting for somebody/ something really uncertain. They find the waiting very boring and frustrating. Estragon and Vladimir always question and argue without ever finding clarity or reasonable solution. Both characters contemplate a suicide and leaving, especially Estragon. These thoughts of leaving and suicide end with the hope of Godot's arrival.

VLADIMIR: Say, I am happy.

ESTRAGON: I am happy

VLADIMIR: So am I.

ESTRAGON: So am I.⁵³

This psychological game mentioned in the quotation above is introduced by Vladimir in the second phase of the play when he tries to conceive Estragon infusing the idea of well-being and protect him from suicide. "As suicide can be thought of the ultimate conclusion to a meaningless life, Camus would respond by claiming

⁵² Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.1

⁵³ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.60

that suicide is an attempt to escape from the consciousness of absurdity.”⁵⁴ If the living conditions were good, there would be no reason to change them and hence the attempt of committing suicide would be out of question. “We nearly hanged ourselves from it. But you wouldn’t. Do you remember?”⁵⁵

To fill up the time they wait they are trying to invent meaningful games and conversations. The waiting is the hardest thing for them and they are both always questioning “What do we do now?”⁵⁶ Despite the fact that without Godot, to whom they are constantly and stubbornly waiting, their lives would lose the meaning and the only salvation is a suicide or to leave Vladimir and Estragon do not subject it and with the help of the other keep waiting.

ESTRAGON: Let’s go

VLADIMIR: We can’t

ESTRAGON: Why not?

VLADIMIR: We’re waiting for Godot.⁵⁷

In the second act Vladimir and Estragon meet Pozzo and Lucky again. Many things have changed so far. They found Pozzo blind screaming on the ground and longing for a help. Pozzo does not remember meeting them the previous day. Pozzo is broken inside because he lost his ability to control people, to control Lucky and thus he has lost his meaning of life. This brings the opportunity for Vladimir and Estragon to have someone under their control. It gives them the chance of being active, powerful and capable of making other people suffer. “Perhaps we should help him first”⁵⁸ and Estragon replies, “We should ask him for the bone first. Then if he refuses we’ll leave him there”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ HOTALING, Angela: Camus and the Absurdity of Existence in *Waiting for Godot*, SUNY Oneonta (Oneonta, NY), p.6

⁵⁵ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.61

⁵⁶ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.48

⁵⁷ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.48

⁵⁸ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.78

⁵⁹ Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*, p.78

8 Conclusion

Firstly, I have discussed the plot of the play in my bachelor thesis. The play is divided into two acts, where the second act is the repetition of the other. The main characters which appear in both acts are two middle-aged tramps Estragon and Vladimir. Both characters are waiting for Godot. Nobody can know who or what Godot is, but many a philosophical material has been written on the subject.

Certainly, Godot gives Estragon and Vladimir particular reason to live on as they believe that their salvation will come from him. They need some kind of amusement to break the boredom of their life. While they are waiting, they meet other characters such as Pozzo and Lucky.

Pozzo has power over Lucky as he is his servant. In the book we can see a kind of development of these two characters. In the Act I Pozzo was a cruel master, shouting at his servant and taking advantage of his position every time, whereas Lucky's role was only to serve and obey his master. In the forthcoming act Pozzo is blind. From his position of a dominant person he fell to the position of Lucky. He has to depend on him and needs every help of his servant because he cannot see anything around him. He does not know what time is this and what is around him. Lucky's situation does not change. He needs his master as he is used to serving. He would not survive without a person predestined to rule him.

One of the main aims of my thesis was to point out to the main themes of the play. In the first part of this chapter I was focusing on the problem of the monotony of life because there are not many changes in Vladimir and Estragon's lives. They are predestined to be waiting for Godot. Every day and every time they have to remind themselves what is the important thing in their life; apparently they remind themselves of exactly the same thing as their lives do not change very much. Nothing is certain for any of the two characters. One of the most certain things is that day will change into night and vice versa.

An equally important theme is dependency and death that is undoubtedly connected to the theme of life itself. As mentioned above, each of the characters is dependent on the other in some way. Vladimir could not survive without Estragon because he feels so lonely without him. Estragon is trying to go away in one moment but Vladimir is always reminding him that he must stay with him and keep

on waiting. While Estragon decides to leave, he is unable to make a move and this proves his dependency on Vladimir.

Taking the theme of the death into consideration, we should say that Vladimir and Estragon do not brush aside the fact that death is unavoidable. The death could mean the salvation from the boredom and monotony of their existence; however neither the death is certain for them. They want to hang themselves from the tree but they need to help each other up the tree. As they cannot survive without an attendance of the other they cannot commit a suicide because if one dies and the other survives they would suffer from horrible loneliness. This theme is highly connected to the theme of dependency.

Furthermore, the analysis of my thesis was aimed on general features of the style of Samuel Beckett which appear in the play, such as the language, irony and motifs of duality and time. It is well known that Samuel Beckett was dealing with the concept of existence in his literary production. The thing he wanted to emphasize in *Waiting for Godot* is the struggle of the personas for salvation from the boredom of life. Everybody is waiting for Godot. Sometimes the time flows very fast and sometimes is too slow, as is the case of Vladimir and Estragon. For these characters the passing of time is meaningless. They do not realize the time and they do not care about it. The only thing they know is to wait for Godot. For Samuel Beckett, moving and waiting as human activities are very important to him. We can be endlessly waiting for something that will never appear or we can try to find it ourselves. Nowadays, as we are active people we tend to forget the passing of time. Everything is happening too fast.

In the play, on the contrary, the time has almost come to an end for the protagonists. We can clearly observe it in the composition of the play where the second act is a mere repetition of the previous one. Despite the fact that there is not any chance of it progressing their being, they made a choice to wait.

Further, I have dealt with the stylistics of language in the play. The play was written in French and then translated to English by S. Beckett himself. The characters speak to one another in Irish dialect and their conversations lack logic. There are only a few complex phrases, which symbolizes the simplicity of their being. Often there is silence or a pause that breaks the stream of character's words but from my point of view a simple word, said out loud, is a proof of the human existence and should be said. If someone speaks he also lives.

Waiting for Godot is classified as a tragic comedy and Martin Esslin saw it as a part of the theatre of the absurd. One of the absurd things that appear in the play is the fact that the characters are only waiting for something or someone that might or might not come. The environment around them is very simple and they do not have many resources to amuse them. When they decide to commit a suicide they are not able to do it as they do not know if their death is guaranteed, which is a proof of the irony and absurdity as well. They cannot leave or hang themselves; they are only forced to wait. They are forced to wait psychologically, not physically by will of another human being. They simply think that they are doing the right thing.

In my thesis I tried to point out the importance of human existence and how the time is meaningless to the characters. They live only for waiting as they are convinced that it will bring a radical transition. When the characters want to leave, they cannot make a simple move and when they finally become reconcile with the image of death they are not able to take their own life only because they are predestined to wait until the very end.

9 Summary

Firstly, I have discussed the plot of the play in my bachelor thesis. The play is divided into two acts, where the second act is the repetition of the other. The main characters which appear in both acts are two middle-aged tramps Estragon and Vladimir. Both characters are waiting for Godot. Nobody can know who or what Godot is, but many a philosophical material has been written on the subject.

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One of the main aims of my thesis was to point out to the main themes of the play. In the first part of this chapter I was focusing on the problem of the monotony of life. Every day and every time Didi and Gogo have to remind themselves what is the important thing in their life; apparently they remind themselves of exactly the same thing as their lives do not change very much. Nothing is certain for any of the two characters.

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image of death they are not able to take their own life only because they are predestined to wait until the very end.

10 Resumé

První kapitola mé bakalářské práce se týká uvedením do problematiky, kterou se budu zabývat, jako je například styl díla, nebo charakteristika jednotlivých postav a jejich okolí, kterým jsou v díle Samuela Becketta ovlivňovány.

V následující kapitole zmíním život autora a jeho literární činnost. Samuel Becketta byl velmi uznávaným autorem jak v Irsku, tak i ve Francii. Z počátku psal svá díla ve francouzštině a poté, je sám překládal do anglického jazyka. Co se týče díla *Čekání na Godota*, Samuel Beckett byl znechucen nekonečnými názory ostatních kritiků, které označovaly toto dílo jako hluboce filosofické drama. Z tohoto důvodu dal S. Becketta tomuto dílu podtitul komedie. V neposlední řadě pak zmíním i dobu ve které tento autor žil a její celkový dopad na tuto divadelní hru. V mé bakalářské práci se také zaměřím na hlavní témata, jako je čas a bytí, jejich důležitost a proč jsou v díle uvedena. V sedmé kapitole se zaměřím na styl autora. Zejména pak na jazyk a styl ve kterém je dílo napsáno. Neměla bych opomenout motivy duality a motivy jak absurdní tak ironické, které podtrhují celkovou kvalitu díla. Samuel Becketta byl autorem, který se zabýval ve svých dílech důležitost bytí a uvědomování si sama sebe na tomto světě. V tomto díle uvedl dvě postavy, které si tento fakt musely stále dokazovat, aby ho neopomenuly. Vladimír a Estragon jsou postavy, pro které čas plyne velmi pomalu a není pro ně žádná šance dosažení jakékoliv změny. Avšak k tomuto osudu nebyli přinuceni, tento osud si sami zvolili. V následující a poslední kapitole jsem se snažila shrnout rozsáhlou analýzu díla *Čekání na Godota*. Snažila jsem se shrnout charakteristiku postav a vyzdvihnout jejich postavení v této hře. Také jsem shrnula témata času, života a smrti, které jsou spolu beze sporu úzce spojeny. V neposlední řadě jsem zmínila absurdní a ironické situace, ve kterých se hlavní postavy nacházejí. Z četby a detailního zkoumání jsem zjistila, že postavy v díle Samuela Becketta touží po dosažení konce jejich nekonečného čekání. Hlavní postavy Vladimír a Estragon si tento osud samy zvolili z jejich přesvědčení o blížících se změnách, kterých chtějí dosáhnout.

11 ANOTACE

Eliška Repecká

Katedra Anglistiky a Amerikanistiky

Studijní obor: anglická filologie – španělská filologie

Název : Existence a Čas v díle Samuela Becketta Čekání na Godota

Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Matthew Sweney M.A.

Počet znaků (včetně mezer): 76 473

Počet titulů použité literatury: 25

Klíčová slova: Absurdní divadlo-Samuel Beckett- čas- divadelní hra

V této bakalářské práci se budeme nejprve zabývat životem a literární tvorbou Irského autora Samuela Becketta. Dále budeme rozebírat každou postavu a prostředí ve kterém žije. Zmíníme i důležitost obsažených témat, motivy a styl autora. V závěru eseje vyzdvihneme důležitost motivu času a absurdnosti.

ABSTRACT

Eliška Repecká

The Department of English and American studies

Options: English philology – Spanish philology

Title: The Existence and the Time in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot

Chief of work: PhDr. Matthew Sweney M.A.

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Number of secondary sources: 25

Key words: The theatre of absurd – Samuel Beckett –time – playwright

Firstly, my bachelor thesis will be focused on the life and literary production of Samuel Beckett. Furthermore we will discuss each of the characters of the book and the environment they live in. We will mention the importance of the themes included in the book, style of the author and motifs and then I will be dealing with the motive of time and absurdity.

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