

### Beckett's treatment of time in *Waiting for Godot*

Time has been a significant subtext in Beckett's writings, including *Waiting for Godot*. The original French title of the play, *En attendant Godot* or 'While Waiting for Godot', is less ambiguous. Telling us about what happens during the period of waiting, it thus covers a linear time span. While translating the play into English, Beckett brought in a significant ambiguity by dropping the initial 'While' from the title. He thus puts the action of his play nowhere in the linear timeline, thus problematizing the established concepts about it.

The only note about time in the initial stage direction says that it is an evening. As a transitional moment, it symbolises the switchovers in a number of subtextual binaries: comedy and tragedy, hope and despair, sanity and insanity, male and female, master and slave, actor and spectator, kinetic and static. Both Vladimir and Estragon talk of time in various contexts, but most of the time it is vague and unidentified. This theme is more explicit with the tramps' bafflement in deciding whether they were at the same place yesterday. They also do not know what day it is, as Estragon wonders: "But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? Or Monday? Or Friday?" To add to the apparent comedy, Vladimir looks about wildly, as though the date is inscribed in the landscape. On a deeper level, it presents the futility of human existence and endeavours in a universe where nothing has a meaning, not even time. The tramps even do not if Godot will come, at least in future as the Boy would later inform; yet they keep waiting, for there is "Nothing to be done" except it.

In a world where actions are meaningless and talks are refrains, time is also cyclic and repetitive: present here is an identical replica of the past and a model for the future. The two Acts, supposedly the actions of two consecutive days, are almost identical. Hence there is nothing as yesterday or today or tomorrow, and no use of dividing time in weeks or months or years. In fact, they have no harm in forgetting what day of the week it is or whether they were here the previous day, for they would hardly be any better even if they had remembered them. Since there is nothing meaningful to do and little hope for a different tomorrow, time also loses its significance. Vladimir truly observes that "time has stopped." "There is no escape from yesterday", Beckett wrote in his essay on Proust. In *Waiting for Godot*, it is the present which entraps. The characters got to be contempt with the present, as Pozzo rebukes the tramps: "One day, is not that enough for you..."

It is interesting that the characters have their own ways of relating to time. Vladimir and Estragon are bored of waiting for Godot; the soon the time passes, the better for them. It is tragic that they neither have anything else to do nor are capable of doing them. Even for hanging themselves to death from the tree, they require Godot's opinion. Their silly pastimes fail them to get rid of the boredom. The Pozzo-Lucky episode seems to be a pleasant diversion, when the tramps imagine they are in a theatre and Vladimir even asks Estragon to keep his seat while going to the toilet. Still this is only a diversion which comes to an end some time or other, leaving the tramps with their futile waiting once again. The idle time comes round and round for them.

Things are initially different for Pozzo who clings to his watch. If he wants to conduct his business efficiently, he must assure that he controls and regulates time. His description of the scenic beauty of twilight is punctuated by references to the time on his watch. Losing it becomes a catastrophe for him, paradoxically foreshadowing his blindness. When he returns visionless in Act II, he fails like Estragon to recognise the time and place.

Vladimir is quite interested in nostalgic and sadistic rumination of the past. He cannot forget those days when they were, as he puts it, presentable. Estragon on the other hand has no interest in the bygone days: "I'm not a historian." Either little is worth remembering in their meaningless lives, or it seems wiser not to look back in a static universe. Estragon raises a little protest: "Recognize! What is there to recognize? All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery!" Once reduced to the state of worm, it is better to see things as worms should see. There is no use of the bitter recollection of bygone glory. Estragon remembers what is worth remembering for him: the satisfaction of basic needs and the physical sensations of pleasure and pain. He may have forgotten trying to drown himself in the Rhone, but he remembers the bliss of returning to life in the hot sun.

Thus, what Beckett observes in *Proust* turns out to be equally true for *Waiting for Godot*: "Time – a condition of resurrection become an instrument of death; Habit – an infliction in so far as it opposes the dangerous exaltation of the one and a blessing in so far as it palliates the cruelty of the other; Memory – a clinical laboratory stocked with poison and remedy, stimulant and sedative."