

“Waiting for Godot” by Samuel Beckett [B2]

La profondità filosofica e metafisica di questa ‘tragicommedia in due atti’, considerata un capolavoro del teatro dell’assurdo, è inversamente proporzionale all’azione in scena.

Waiting for Godot is a [play](#) by Irish author Samuel Beckett, written [in the late 1940s](#) and first performed in 1953. The work is a tragicomedy in the absurdist genre. It explores the human condition, the search for meaning in life, the cyclical nature of time, and the futility of existence.

WAITING

Performed in two acts, Beckett’s first professionally-produced [play](#) is about two apparently homeless men, Vladimir and Estragon, who wait by a tree in a deserted location for a mysterious man named Godot. But who or what is Godot, and why are the men waiting for him? “VLADIMIR: Let’s wait and see what he says. ESTRAGON: Who? VLADIMIR: Godot. ESTRAGON: Good idea. [...] What exactly did we ask him for? [...] VLADIMIR: Oh... nothing very definite. ESTRAGON: A kind of prayer. VLADIMIR: Precisely. ESTRAGON: A vague supplication. VLADIMIR: Exactly. ESTRAGON: And what did he reply? VLADIMIR: That he’d see.” “VLADIMIR: Esperemos a ver qué nos dice. ESTRAGÓN: ¿Quién? Vladimiro: Sentiamo prima cosa ci dirà. Estragone: Chi? Vladimiro: Godot. Estragone: Giusto.[...] Cos’è più che gli abbiamo chiesto esattamente? [...] Vladimiro: Be’... ecco... niente di preciso. Estragone: Una specie di preghiera. Vladimiro: Ecco. Estragone: Una vaga supplica. Vladimiro: Press’a poco. Estragone: E lui, che cosa ha risposto? Vladimiro: Che si sarebbe visto.”

EXISTENTIALISM

As Vladimir and Estragon continue to wait, two new characters arrive: Pozzo and his [mistreated](#) slave, Lucky. While the characters seem to inhabit a confusing and imaginary world, the dialogue and word [play](#) are magical and

poetic. Originally written in French — Beckett lived in France for most of his adult life — the minimalist script captures the existential angst of post-World War Two Europe. “POZZO: The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh. (He laughs.) Let us not speak ill of our generation, it is not unhappier than its predecessors. (Pause.) Let us not speak well of it either. (Pause.) Let us not speak of it at all.” “Pozzo: Le lacrime del mondo sono immutabili. Non appena qualcuno si mette a piangere, un altro, chi sa dove, smette. E così per il riso. (Ride) Non diciamo troppo male, perciò, della nostra epoca; non è più disgraziata delle precedenti. (Pausa). Ma non diciamone neanche troppo bene. (Pausa). Non parliamone affatto.”

PASSING TIME

In Act II, with Vladimir and Estragon looking to Godot as an embodiment of hope or salvation, a boy delivers a message that Godot has been delayed. Vladimir suggests that the boy has been here before, with a similar message, in Act I. But no one seems to remember. Nothing is certain, least of all the movement of time. “POZZO: (suddenly furious) Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It’s abominable! 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’ll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you?” “POZZO (con ira improvvisa): Ma la volete finire con le vostre storie di tempo? È grottesco! Quando! Quando! Un giorno, non vi basta, un giorno come tutti gli altri, è diventato muto, un giorno io sono diventato cieco, un giorno diventeremo sordi, un giorno siamo nati, un giorno moriremo, lo stesso giorno, lo stesso istante, non vi basta?”

REPETITION

Throughout Waiting for Godot, all of the characters are stuck in a seemingly pointless cycle of waiting. Rather than taking action — doing something — they are disabled by a sense of hopelessness. Passive and accepting of their fate, Vladimir and Estragon await the vague promise of

external redemption in the shape of Godot to provide meaning and purpose to their lives. Life is symbolised by a circular and repetitive refrain:

“ESTRAGON: Let’s go. VLADIMIR: We can’t. ESTRAGON: Why not? VLADIMIR: We’re waiting for Godot. ESTRAGON: Ah! (Despairing.) What’ll we do, what’ll we do?” “Estragone: Andiamocene. Vladimiro: Non si può. Estragone: Perché? Vladimiro: Aspettiamo Godot. Estragone: Già, è vero. (Pausa). Che fare?”

KNOWING GODOT

Waiting for Godot initially received mixed reviews, with critics and audiences hostile to its nihilism, nonsense and depiction of life’s meaninglessness. It has since become one of the theatre’s best-loved and most-analysed productions. Beckett himself remained tight-lipped about the meaning of his drama, preferring to let the work speak for itself. However, in letters to friends written in the 1950s, he wrote, “I do not know who Godot is. I do not even know if he exists.” One of the most influential writers of the 20th century, Beckett was awarded the 1969 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Glossary

- **mistreated** = maltrattare
- **least of all** = tanto meno
- **seemingly** = apparentemente
- **play** = opera teatrale
- **in the late 1940s** = alla fine degli anni Quaranta
- **purpose** = scopo
- **refrain** = ritornello, espressione ricorrente
- **delayed** = ritardare
- **hopelessness** = mancanza di speranza
- **mixed reviews** = recensioni discordanti
- **meaninglessness** = insensatezza
- **disabled** = rendere incapace
- **fate** = destino
- **Throughout** = per tutto il tempo
- **stuck** = atrapados
- **pointless** = privo di senso
- **nonsense** = assurdità
- **angst** = angoscia, inquietudine
- **embodiment** = incarnazione