

Themes in samuel beckett's 'waiting for godot



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Themes in Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot'. Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' is a typical example of what is referred to in literary terms as 'Absurd Theatre', a phrase referring to 20th century works that depict the absurdity of modern human creation, often with implicit reference to humanity's loss or lack of religious, philosophical or cultural roots. Such works depict the individual as essentially isolated and alone, even when surrounded by other people and things. Many modern comic dramatists however are concerned to present credible characters.

Recognizing the social order is an illusion and believing that the world is absurd, they can as in the theatre of the absurd present bizarre characters in bizarre situations. In works of Beckett for example comic laughter is replaced by a grimmer sort of humor including farce and sick jokes. Samuel Beckett has written in genres including fiction, poetry and criticism and is considered the pioneer of the absurdist tradition. Some of the themes that occur and 'reoccur' in Beckett's works are, the search of self, the absurdity of man in the world, the dedication to artistic failure, the erosive force of time, the bankruptcy of the western cultural tradition, the encroachment of nothingness on being, the treacherous slippage of language, the wavering eye of hovering object etc. Waiting for Godot, considered universally a masterpiece and a contemporary classic was written in 1948, the period of high modernism.

Translated into over a dozen languages, it has been performed in theatres, both small and large, by amateurs and professionals, on radio and on television. The plot of Beckett's play is simple to relate. Two tramps are waiting by a sickly looking tree for the arrival of a certain 'Godot'. While

waiting they indulge in a plethora of activities, they fight, make up, eat a carrot and gnaw on some bones.

Two other characters appear, a master and a slave, who perform a grotesque scene in the middle of the play. A young boy arrives to say that Godot is not going to come today but tomorrow. The day is a development on the title 'Waiting for Godot'. He does not come and the tramps resume their vigil by the tree, which between the first and the second scene has sprouted leaves, the only symbol of possible order in a thoroughly alienated world.

The play revolves around certain themes. The most important of them being 'waiting'. The play is about waiting, for Godot who doesn't appear even once in the play and the two tramps Vladimir and Estragon are kept waiting till the play ends. The readers are informed that they are waiting at a place, a place best suited as any place and a place where most likely Godot is not. The wait for Godot can be interpreted in many ways.

Godot is nothing particular. For symbol seekers though, Godot could mean God, Christianity, rebirth redemption, hope, despair, eternal life, anything. The most accepted interpretation though seems to be God, which according to critics can be called an immature interpretation. Even though on being pressed on an answer for who or what is Godot, Beckett had once snapped and said, "if I knew who Godot was, I would have said so in the play." It is thus completely left to the readers' imagination, who according to their degree of perception can interpret who or what Godot is. The waiting on the

other hand could be anything from mundane life, god salvation, death or even an ordinary person.

“ The waiting could be the height of foolishness or the extreme of virtue. But man no matter how tattered and inarticulate, is still there, he has not walked off and not left the stage to darkness,” says a critic. Though between the two acts the tree has sprouted leaves which could signify the coming of something, maybe Godot, and going away unnoticed. Waiting for Godot also gets into the readers or audiences an aura of loneliness, The loneliness not just in the physical being of man but a kind of internal solitude and reasserting that man is but alone in the world .

Vladimir and Estragon's loneliness can be considered to that of a modern character, Santiago's loneliness (ref. Old Man and The Sea) though the two work on a completely different scale altogether. An insight into the characters and situations brings into the reader's imagination a sense of loneliness as inevitable human destiny and cause of misery. The absurdity of the play is perhaps its most important theme or idea which gets perpetuated through the play. The absurdity of the play is comparable to that of modern life.

A certain critic mentions, “ In an absurd drama such as ' Waiting for Godot' there is often no plot, in as far as nothing at all seems to happen. Here the implication is that the characters are stuck in an endless world where there is no cause and effect and where everything is unpredictable. The absence of plot is an effective way of indicating that we live in a world that is coherent, where there is no meaning or pattern. “ Nothing to be done,” says Estragon

in the beginning of the play and this is often repeated through the course of the play.

The characters continuously amuse themselves with futile activities like taking off a boot, eating a carrot etc. Everything in the play is rather symbolic of the meaninglessness of existence. The rigorous use of unities is demanded by the impeccable interpretation of human life. The denouement of the play is another beginning, Vladimir asks Estragon, " Well, shall we go?" and Estragon answers " yes, lets go". But neither moves. In scene after scene the permanent absurdity of life is stressed.

It is, rather the, " mysterious inner obligation to express nothing, with nothing and from nothing, that seems to be at work in ' Waiting for Godot' "