

English journal analysis



The grammar of absurdity in *Waiting for Godot* From a normal point of view, *Waiting for Godot* remains an important work in the field of absurdist fiction. However, from an absurdist point of view, it is as insignificant as any other attempt to understand the complexity works of the machinery of the universe. In his attempt at analyzing the play from a linguistic point of view, Hammond (1979) quotes Sir Tom Stoppard, the British playwright, praising Samuel Beckett for the minimalist approach using which he presented the play. At the time when *Godot* was first done, it liberated something for anybody writing plays. It redefined the minima of theatrical certainty. It was simple as that. He got away. He won by twenty-eight lengths, and he'd done it with so little—and I mean that as an enormous compliment. There they all were, busting a gut with great monologues and fireworks, and this extraordinary genius just put this play together with enormous refinement, and then with two completely unprecedented and unique bursts of architecture in the middle—terrible metaphor—and there it was, theatre. Though scholars and enthusiasts have speculated on the form and structure of the play, not many have managed to grasp the influence of the play over the linguistic characteristics of theatre. Contrary to the earlier attempts to construct a play using carefully chosen dialogues, Beckett liberated dramatic speech from the clutches of rhetoric and replaced it with his unique choice of words which contradict the foundations of conventional grammar. Most importantly, he strips words of their literal or contextual interpretations in an attempt to prove it being ineffective of trying to find sense inherent in the universe. When Vladimir and Estragon end the two acts by saying “ Yes, let’s go” respectively without moving an inch, the characters suggest their acceptance of absurdity with calm counters whereas the placement of this

statement at the end of play evokes a feeling of astonishment from the audience. However, both these statements aptly support the opening of the play where Estragon says ‘ Nothing to be done’. While drawing heavily from Bible, the play also retains the doubtfulness and insufficiency of words from the Bible. This creates a minimalist work of art which, like the surrounding reality, can be interpreted in numerous ways. For instance, the incomplete narration of the story of the Englishman in the brothel by Estragon can be seen as pointing to nothing significant as well as to the incomplete conversations of everyday life. Moreover, the play breaks the tradition of constructing carefully constructed dialogues by using doublets and triplets during conversation. The repeated and somewhat irritating use of ‘ Yes, yes’ and ‘ No, no’ by the characters is a far cry from conventional dialogues. The characters also speak of researchers and food in pairs seemingly indicating the duality prevalent in nature. In the first act, turnip and carrot, both of which have a similar form, are used. Coming from an absurdist, this theme of duality may sound ironic. However, these minute details enhance the absurdist experience of realizing that reality, in its entirety, cannot be realized using the limited senses of humans. It is important to note that, with the exception of the tree, there is almost no importance attached to the setting or the locale. Most of the plot is entirely dependent on the conversation of the characters. However, while using the dialogue to take the narrative forward, he uses a unique form of speech without caring to imitate conversations of the real world. He also strips speech of its formal structure. When Estragon and Vladimir plan to hang themselves and Estragon suggests Vladimir to try it first, he states “ If it hangs you, it’ll hang everything”. However, before the audience can believe that Vladimir is

heavier than Estragon, the latter contradicts his earlier statement by saying that there is an even chance of either of them being heavier than the other. The general axiom (rule), 'If x, then y' fails here since we are not able to determine the heavier among the two characters. The futility of trying to find a purpose along with their persistence exists simultaneously in the world of Godot. When Vladimir suggests that they have to come back on the next day to wait for Godot, Estragon asks 'He didn't come?' in spite of being with Vladimir all the while. This conversation evokes questions about the true nature of 'coming' of Godot and the characters' perception of Godot. Finally, during the first act, when Estragon asks "We've no rights anymore?" Vladimir commits the prohibited action of laughter and says "We got rid of them." In this seemingly confusing conversation, Beckett indicates the gradual downfall of human existence and how we have surrendered our rights in exchange to achieving our cravings.

Works Cited BS

Hammond, "Beckett and Pinter: Towards a Grammar of the Absurd," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4 (1979): 42. 89. Diamond, *Comic Play*, p. 177.

<http://www.english.fsu.edu/jobs/num04/Num4Hammond.htm>