

Waiting for godot as a tragicomedy

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Samuel Beckett described his *Waiting for Godot* as a tragicomedy. To what extent is this an accurate description? Would you say there is more tragedy than comedy or a mixture of both? Through the use of many linguistic, structural and comic features, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* successfully places a wayfaring line between the two genres of tragedy and comedy. With the opening showing the two main characters Vladimir (Didi) and Estragon (Gogo) in a barren setting with useless props such as Gogo's boot and Didi's hat and a leafless tree, there is an instant confusion created with a question as to whether this is truly a comedy at all.

Estragon's statement 'Nothing to be done' starts the production off very cleverly as it is a true concept through the play; there is actually nothing being done by any character. It all seems to be useless rambling in the wilderness. There is no control in Didi and Gogo's lives due to the obsession with waiting for Godot. Because of this they never bring themselves to leave. This leads the audience to ask the question. 'Is this really a tragicomedy or just a Tragedy? Seeing these men are obviously wasting their lives'.

Undoubtedly, *Godot* has comical elements with classic comedic actions such as trousers falling down and the struggle to take off a boot. With events like these in the play it is seen as direct, classic, light-hearted humour but with a deeper understanding we see this light-hearted humour with dark tragedy. The two however placed together do unarguably play essential roles in completing the play. Tragedy is evident in the play but undeniably there comedy, Comedy that maybe even encourages the tragedy? 'What about hanging ourselves?' 'Hmm.

It'd give us an erection! ' here there is definite sexual comedy; the idea of getting an erection would have been uncomfortable yet comical at the time and even now. However, although there is humour in the topic, there are too tragic concepts with the results of the hanging being getting an erection or death. There is a heavy sense of satire comedy through the play Godot; the high ridicule of social class is endless with Gogo and Didi as the unwise, dirty tramps that live in ditches and Pozzo as the foolish, stuck up rich ruler with Lucky the animal like slave.

The sense of satire causes the Superiority effect which is the idea we laugh because we feel superior to those in the play. We see this where Estragon tells Vladimir he spent the night in a ditch and was beaten up. ESTRAGON: in a ditch. VLADIMIR: A ditch! Where? ESTRAGON: Over there. ... ESTRAGON: Beat me? Certainly they beat me Here it's taken very lightly that Estragon was attacked while trying to sleep in a ditch. Michael Lindsay-Hogg's version of the play shows them to act and talk about this incident in a quite jokingly way and don't actually pay too much attention to the seriousness of him sleeping in the ditch.

Here the audience laugh because they possibly feel superior to the idea of someone sleeping in a ditch while they sleep in their houses especially since the majority of the audience was wealthy enough to attend the theatre as it was a luxury in the 1950's; They would have had the time and themoneyto go and watch plays after the war seeing as rationing did not end until the 60's. This made it easier to create the feeling of Superiority Beckett has provided through the two personae of Didi and Gogo.

So even though it was comical, one cannot deny that sleeping in a ditch and getting attacked is also tragic. Ian Mackean said ' Samuel Beckett's plays contain many comic features but are not comedies in the usual sense, and it is unlikely that an audience would actually laugh at them. Often our laughter at a comedy involves a feeling of release in response to the transgression of some rule of social conduct acted out by the performer. ' This is very true in the sense that the characters we find funny are not in funny situations.

For example the character Lucky is drawn from Tragedy. Being treated as a literal animal because he is a servant, Lucky not only supports the tragic concept but contributes to the stock character of the silly old fool being played by Pozzo. The stage directions for Pozzo and Lucky's entrance are very important in getting the idea of a slave and master across in the first appearance. Lucky is the first to appear followed by the rope around his neck and then Pozzo. ' Enter Pozzo and Lucky.

Pozzo drives Lucky by means of a rope passed round his neck, so that Lucky is the first to enter, followed by the rope which is long enough to let him reach the middle of the stage before Pozzo...'this is where tragedy takes place the most as Lucky's character is quickly shown to be animalistic and neglected with nohuman rights. He's then spoken to in a neglectful, demining way and is made to tend to Pozzo's every need. ' On! ' ' Back' with one worded instructions the audience is made to feel sorry for Lucky and sympathise with him.

But for some reason, Lucky's misfortune also brings humour to the play, the audience sympathise with his character only because they feel bad for finding his situation funny which supports Ian Mackean's theory. We laugh at

Pozzo because of his foolishness, ignorance and over-exaggeration. ' I must be getting on...unless I smoke another pipe before I go. What do you say? I'm not in the habit of smoking two pipes one on top of the other, it makes my heart go [hand on heart, sighing] pit-a-pat' the over acting of putting his hand on his heart makes the audience as said before laugh at his ignorance.

It's as if he has no idea how desperate he is to stay and talk to Didi and Gogo so unconsciously makes up an excuse of smoking a pipe to stay longer. It can be assumed that Pozzo is lonely. Whatever it is Pozzo takes a while before leaving making up a number of reasons why he should stay. It may even be questioned ' is this in itself tragic? ' If he is lonely and seeks friendship from two tramps even though he is rich it makes the audience and those who study the play think what has happened to Pozzo in his past to bring him into this situation.

It causes confusion as to whether Pozzo's character is a source of comedy or tragedy. I would suggest that there is a definite source of both genres however his character is used more for the comic feel. Beckett's use of leitmotifs in the play is another element that contributes to the idea of comedy and tragedy being paired once again. Every once in a while throughout the comedy, Estragon will suggest they leave and the answer ' we can't' when asked why, Vladimir replies with ' we're waiting for Godot' or Estragon will ask ' what do we do now? and Vladimir will reply with ' wait for Godot. ' As an audience we laugh or see this feature as being comical because Estragon is forgetful and seems very stupid. It's almost like it's a pantomime; the audience knows the obvious answer but the character doesn't. Yet looking at the use of repetition in depth brings forth the idea of

Gogo's frustration in their situation in life. Maybe the constant questioning of what to do is because unconsciously is saying he doesn't want to wait for Godot that he in fact wants to do something else in life.

Gogo's memory is a certain source of comedy throughout the play but it's possible his forgetting is not due to bad memory but it is motivated. He forgets that they were there yesterday because he doesn't want to admit he spends his life on repeat waiting for Godot on an empty promise from his one and only friend Vladimir. This again suggests the play is tragic. In the end, the men talk again about hanging themselves. This time there is no mention of an erection and the reason they don't do it because they don't have a rope. 'with what?' 'you haven't got a bit of rope?' this suggests a more serious thought of suicide. There is no comic language connected unlike the first time mentioned sending the idea they are truly frustrated. The audience at this point actually stop to think and realise the seriousness of the suggestion of hanging whereas before it was ignored because of the sexual language. This again fundamentally contributes to the idea the play is a tragedy. Beckett's additional use of structure again helps identify the significant genre of the play.

He used formal symmetry where each act ends the same with a slight difference, the end of act one ends in this manner: ESTRAGON: Well, Shall we go? VLADIMIR: Yes, let's go. [They do not move] Whereas act 2 ends like this: VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go? ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go. [They do not move] Apart from the slight change in punctuation and who says which line, the endings are almost identical insinuating the feeling of forever waiting

and frustration along with the idea of being stuck in limbo as things repeat themselves.

The change in character in asking ' shall we go? ' can be interpreted as both men having their doubts as to if what they are waiting for is worth it and the fact that they do not move shows they are not entirely sure as to if they will miss out if they move so they end up never leaving. The question mark that appears after well at the end of the second act could suggest that Vladimir is trying more to leave wherever they are and in his conscience is really frustrated knowing that Godot is not coming.

Therefore he tries to persuade Estragon; however it was not enough for them to let go of the fear of missing Godot. This again provides the idea that Beckett's play is tragic. The views throughout the play are very nihilistic. As he metaphorically rejects social conventions like religion, the play can be interpreted as the total criticism of Christian beliefs like the second coming of Christ. Godot (possibly representing Christ) never comes however they dedicate their lives to waiting for his appearance.

This ridicules Christians telling them life is pointless and there is in fact no God, No eternal life, no Jesus and no meaning. Showing this in the form of a comedy Beckett almost mocks those who are still foolish enough to believe in these non-existent deities. Therefore instead of Tragedy, it's a purely comic view of religion. This is understandable as society had witnessed and heard of traumatic events after the world war and the questioning of God was inevitably going to raise discussion. To conclude, Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot has somewhat been inappropriately titled as a tragicomedy.

It has combined the comic and tragic elements together but has tragedy as a dominant aspect throughout the play as a whole has with Vladimir and Estragon's vain wait for something that never comes. For the play, Beckett has focused his attention on the suffering of others. It's evident that the majority of the play relies on Vladimir and Estragon waiting for something to come and alleviate them of their boredom. There is a mixture of both genres but it is an unequal one- With tragedy under toning the play throughout even within the humour. Tunrayo Sadiq Word count: 1, 899