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## Explication of Events and Dialogues in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

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Erick Verran

## 1. Argument

Samuel Beckett's once spurned existential tragicomedy *Waiting for Godot* has received its critical due some order of magnitude over. Its dialogical prose withstands the regular prod and likely occasions enough these each semester to rival Andrew Marvell. However, the play's more mundane articles continue to elude the attention of commentators, and I suspect this variety of neglect peculiar to Beckett alone. Much allusive pleasantry abounds yet a missing watch is consigned to the jurisdiction of metaphor (viz., lost time). But where did it go?—the question is simply not brought up.

Irish literary critic Vivian Mercier's well-known, in fact laudatory summation, "[H]e has written a play in which nothing happens, twice," of course concedes *things happen*. Rather, Mercier's contention is that nothing especially occurs and, unless one is willing to drape grander tableaux of myth upon the text, I find myself in agreement. Indeed the miracle is that stage direction, in conjunction with minute passages of speech, too clearly spells out the humdrum goings-on contained between its acts. Meanwhile, evidence planted before the reader is passed over and not comprehended.

Dutifully intending to keep an ironic eye out for the playwright's mirth risks evading dirty potholes of detail. Such an approach to texts seems to me entirely suitable to fiction, which superficially delights in metaphysical themes of damnation and self-knowledge, the building blocks of who, what, and where almost without exception laid neatly before us and speedily traversed. In this drama there is no purposeful obfuscation nor symbol where none intended. Ultimately, it is all too loathsome an endorsement of *l'esprit poétique* to scratch one's head in flattering ponder, pleased at least for having taken part in the collective puzzlement.

It is exactly because the reader is accustomed to declaring comprehension of a tale upon breaching its metonymic stratum that he or she fails to address baser articles, such as Estragon's dreams and Vladimir's bladder. Gaining the symbolic high ground typically indicates one has finished with plot, having climbed by aid of its sequence of broad rungs. Because Beckett's literature *begins* with the symbolic, readers are enabled to browse as if allegory were a skin stretched over rough incident, on which otherwise we snag and fight for understanding. Suffice it to say this primacy of parable in *Waiting for Godot* dissuades investigation, so you believe yourself underground when but kneeling in ash.

## 2. Questions

### *Who beats Estragon?*

Vladimir's urinary incontinence necessitates sleepwalking to relieve himself. He tramples Estragon in doing so and refuses knowledge of his dreams lest the tormentor be known.

ESTRAGON. Who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can't tell them to you?  
VLADIMIR. Let them remain private. You know I can't bear that.[1]

POZZO. Help!  
ESTRAGON. And suppose we gave him a good beating, the two of us.  
VLADIMIR. You mean if we fell on him in his sleep?[2]

### *Who is Godot?*

A resultant neologism of the double misapprehension of "Pozzo." Immigrant farmers, Vladimir and Estragon seek employment with Pozzo. Unfortunately he has forgotten their appointment.

POZZO. I present myself: Pozzo.

ESTRAGON. He said Godot.

VLADIMIR. (*conciliating*). I once knew a family called Gozzo.

POZZO. Waiting? So you were waiting for him?  
VLADIMIR. Well you see—  
POZZO. Here? On my land?[3]

### *Has time stopped?*

An immobile stage light is mistaken for the sun. Given the material luxury of timekeeping a clock remains the source of Pozzo's authority.

VLADIMIR. Time has stopped.  
POZZO. (*cuddling his watch to his ear*). Don't you believe it, Sir, don't you believe it.[4]

*Silence. Vladimir and Estragon scrutinize the sunset.*

VLADIMIR. Anyway it hasn't moved.[5]

### *What happens to Pozzo's watch?*

It is concealed beneath Lucky's hat inadvertently and destroyed. Beckett's delight of Vaudevillian irony is obvious here.

POZZO. Give me that! (*He snatches the hat from Vladimir, throws it on the ground, tramples on it.*)

POZZO. [W]hat have I done with my watch? . . . (*He searches on the ground, Vladimir and Estragon likewise. Pozzo turns over with his foot the remains of Lucky's hat.*) Well now isn't that just—[6]

### *What about the boy?*

Eavesdropping the jumble of names and other conversation from off-stage this character's bogus account substantiates a Godot, tragically perpetuating the tramps' plight.

ESTRAGON. How long have you been here?  
BOY. A good while, Sir.

BOY. (*in a rush*). Mr. Godot told me to tell you he won't come this evening but surely tomorrow.[7]

LUCKY. Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqu with white beard quaquaquaqu[8]

VLADIMIR. (*softly*). Has he a beard, Mr. Godot?  
BOY. Yes Sir.  
VLADIMIR. Fair or . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . or black?  
BOY. I think it's white, Sir.[9]

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## Endnotes

[1] Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1982), pp. 10-11; [2] p. 90; [3] pp. 19-20; [4] p. 37; [5] p. 98; [6] pp. 48-49; [7] pp. 53-55; [8] p. 45; [9] p. 106.

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