



## **SAMUEL BECKETT AND THE CULT OF VIOLENCE IN *WAITING FOR GODOT***

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The cult of violence in the writing of Beckett who joined the second world war on grounds that "I couldn't stand with my arms folded" his characters are targets and sources of violence. In Waiting for Godot, unidentified people frequently beat Estragon for no apparent reason. As if to be resigned to his fate, he tells Vladimir: "certainly they beat me".*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In Estragon's second assault, he tells Vladimir that it is difficult to prevent his aggressors from beating him:

*Vladimir: (vexed). Then why do you always come crawling back?*

*Estragon: I don't know.*

*Vladimir: no, but I do. It's because you don't know how to defend yourself. Wouldn't have let them beat you.*

*Estragon: you couldn't have stopped them.*

*Vladimir: why not?*

*-Estragon: there were ten of them.*

*Vladimir: no, no mean before they beat you. I would have stopped you from doing whatever it was you were doing.*

*Estragon: I wasn't doing anything."*

**DR. D. PARAMESHWARI**

1Page



This dialogue demonstrates the insecurity and aggression in the world, a world where one needs to know how to defend oneself, especially as violence is random and unexplained. The fact that Estragon always crawls back shows the extremity of the beatings he experiences. This implies that the world is a jungle. Given the growing doctrine of pre-emptive military strikes and the propensity for the acquisition of nuclear arsenal as deterrence in our world today, Vladimir may be right to say that one's survival in our contemporary world depends on the ability of self-defense.

Once more, Estragon experiences violence when he gets a severe kick for his kindness as he tries to wipe Lucky's tears. He staggers and howls as he bleeds. This instantly reminds us of Beckett who, as stated in *Landmarks of World Literature: Beckett's waiting for Godot*, was stabbed by a pimp on a Paris street in 1937. The world is indeed a brutal place. Estragon however shows the vindictiveness that characterizes our present day world by seeking revenge on Lucky. He kicks Lucky furiously when Vladimir assures him that he will come to his rescue if Lucky fights back. Estragon ends up hurting his foot, limping and groaning. He is constantly in pain. The fact that Vladimir advises Estragon to retaliate: "you see, you have nothing to be afraid of. It's even an opportunity to take revenge on you..... Let him have it" shows that the extent to which conflict and violence are encouraged in the contemporary world.

Vladimir, in general sense, plays the role of a superpower by encouraging conflict and promising to assist Estragon in the fight. This is reminiscent of President Richard Milhous Nixon of the United States of America who, in announcing the invasion of Cambodia said: "if when the chips are down, the world's most powerful nation... acts like a pitiful, helpless giant, the forces of totalitarianism and anarchy will threaten free nations and free institutions throughout the world."

Although Vladimir claims that he is defending a weak person, he is merely encouraging and enjoying animosity and violence. He professes to be defending Estragon but ironically, he resorts to exerting violence on him: "he shoulders Estragon out of his way, kicks over the tool..." we are therefore tempted to infer that Vladimir encourages Estragon to kick Lucky because he likes violence and not because he pities Estragon. Similarly, it seems Nixon's invasion of Cambodia was because he wanted to demonstrate the might of "the world's most powerful nation" and not because he had pity on the assaulted. Vladimir, like Nixon, does not reconcile the conflicting parties; he joins the fight thus enhancing conflict and violence. One, of course understands why Fredrick Busi insists in the transformations of *Godot* that "Waiting for Godot is above a play that aspires universality, but was not created in a vacuum; to a certain extent it is a reflection of the civilization that produced it."

**DR. D. PARAMESHWARI**

2P a g e



Lucky, a part from suffering from Estrgon's kicks, also experiences a new wave of violence from Pozzo who uses the rope he tries around his neck to violently jerk him. Like Estragon whose sleep is interrupted twice by Vladimir, Pozzo whips Lucky when he falls asleep. Moreover, Pozzo, Estragon and Vladimir all press Lucky on the ground and he shouts and struggles. Pozzo further advises Estragon to pull Lucky with the rope as violently a possible provided Lucky is not strangled. To show his cruelty and passion for violence, Pozzo tells Estragon to "give him a taste of his boots to the face and the privates as far as possible". This violence shows the bestial nature of modern man. This is probably why Estragon requests Vladimir to kill him "like billions of others". To him, it is better to die than to live in constant aggression and pain.

The bellicose of modern man is again discerned in Vladimir's song. The idea of violence and its consequences are portrayed in this song. The killing of a dog is far too severe to be fitting response to the theft of a crust of bread and its attendant punishment is a reflection of the extreme force modern man uses in response to minute issues.

Therefore, to conclude David I. Grossvogel says in Beckett's characters "spend the night apart and are certain only of intervening beatings, since they are breathing and life is an endless rain of blows".

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