

Satire and Irony in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

R. Pavithra, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Assistant Professor of English

Adhiyaman Arts and Science College for Women, Uthangarai

pavithraravindran2011@gmail.com

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Abstract

Waiting for Godot is steeped in satire and irony. Irony is not here and there but it is everywhere in the play. It can be seen in the title, situations, dialogue, characterization, motif of the play, and in the meaning of the play. The play shows the irony of human fate. Though a man is an intellectual having the best brain amongst all the creatures of the world, yet is the most miserable of the creatures. He comes on the earth not to enjoy life but to suffer various kinds of misery, God's ill treatment of man. In this paper the researcher wants to discuss about satire and irony which has used by the author.

Keywords: Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, Satire and Irony.

The two tramps in the play, with their boredom, their fear of pain, their shreds of love and hate, are a surprisingly effective version of the whole human condition- condition for which action is no answer, chiefly because there is no obvious action to be taken, nothing to be done. Beckett comes to a nihilistic conclusion. Thus the whole meaning of the play is covered in the shroud of irony.

Waiting for Godot is full of ironical situations. The waiting by the tramps itself is an ironical situation. They wait and wait and yet Godot does not arrive. Probably he would never arrive. Their situation is our situation. We also go on waiting for something or the other in our lives. Estragon is trying to take off his boot, saying "Nothing to be done", ironically referring to the actionless and meaningless lives of the people of this world. People do not do anything worthwhile despite their tall claims of activities and actions. They gather and squander, eat and drink, sleep and wake, and then they die without a purpose. The other situation which is ironical is the play with the hates by Pozzo and Lucky.

The play is full of verbal irony, too. There are numerous instances of it. For example,

Vladimir: Do you remember the Gospels?

Estragon: I remember the maps of the Holy land. Coloured they were very pretty. The dead sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy.

Then they hint at ironical situation of Christ's crucifixion. He was hanged along with two thieves.

Satire is the main weapon for correction, reformation and improvement in the eighteenth century which was an age of prose and reason. Hence satire has become a major tool not only in the hands of novelists and poets but also the dramatists. The Theater of Absurd, which is attempted by Beckett, is satirical when it criticizes a society that is petty and dishonest. In it man is "stripped of the accidental circumstances of social position of historical context, confronted with basic choices, the basic situation of his existence" (Dan Davin).

Serious subject matter has been treated under a farcical surface. The genuine concern of one tramp with the possibility of salvation is constantly broken into by the other with remarks like, "I find this most extraordinarily interesting," and the discussion follows a carefully constructed comic pattern, with Vladimir's logic steadily frightening only to be punctured by Estragon's final People are bloody ignorant apes. This tug between subject- matter and form runs through the whole play. Much of the surface is taken up with farcical satire of conventional social behavior. Pozzo, for example, is unable to take a simple action like sitting down without attendant paraphernalia of ceremony; and the two tramps are always trying to strike up what will pass for a polite conversation, using catch-phrases like Vladimir's "this is not boring you, I hope?" But the satire is not mere incidental comedy. The emphasis on the surface aspects of life has its part in the meaning of the play. At one point fat Pozzo is lying on the ground, unable to get up. Spasmodically he shouts Help. Vladimir, glad of this chance to be useful for once, says: "Let us not waste our time in idle discourse" and launches into a long speech. This is a typical Beckett scene. The situation itself is farcical and yet has serious implications; and Vladimir's speech, though mock-pompous in tone, contains the real meaning of the play. He says: "What are we doing here, that is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come." (H. Philip, Bagby).

And later he says:

All I know is that the hours are long, under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which- how shall I say- which may at first sight seem reasonable, until they become a habit. You may say it is to prevent our reason from foundering".

The surface proceedings of life, of which the play is made up, keep mankind's attention off the despair beneath it all. For Beckett it is a relief because he does not have an optimistic Christian faith in redemption beyond the despair.

Beckett uses words very economically. Yet he is able to make his satire more meaningful. For example, mark the following satiric utterance against the Englishmen:

Estragon: an Englishman having drunk a little more than usual goes to a brothel. The bawd asks him if he wants a fair one, a dark one, or a red-haired one.

The satiric tone of his dramas is general. He does not attack individuals. Paradoxically, however, Beckett's refusal to be more than a painstaking recorder of his modes of existence, his categorical refusal to allow any philosophical meaning or thesis to be attributed to his work, makes his satire and irony much more meaningful. (Martin, Esslin)

Beckett's writings are more than mere illustrations of the point-of-view of existentialist philosophers like Heidegger and Sartre; they constitute the culmination of existential thought itself, precisely because they are free of any abstract concepts of general ideas, and thus escape the inner contradiction of existentialist statements that are couched in the form of generalizations.

The general features of Beckett's satire are mild tone, understatement, brevity and objectivity. He is never bitter, harsh or personal. He exposes not the individual but the existence; he satirizes not character but his situation. In *Waiting for Godot*, satire is against man's tendency to false hope and vain glories. He attacks falsity of life. He also shows the conflict and tension between the temporal and the infinite. (Dennis, Douglas)

Beckett's says, "an art ... weary of its puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary soul... and preferring the expression that there is nothing to express, nor power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express." Hence instead of including in generalizations and abstract truths, Beckett uses the weapons of satire and irony to make us realize and experience our own consciousness, which in turn is constantly in flux and ever changing and therefore negative rather than positive, the empty space through which the fleeting images pass. The existential experience is thus felt as a succession of attempts to give shape to the void; when nothing can lay claim to final, definitive reality, we enter a world of games, of arbitrary actions structured to give the illusion of reality. So Vladimir and Estragon think up their ways to pass the time; Murphy finds illumination in a game of chess; Hamm and Clov are pieces in such a game; Molloy painstakingly constructs a system of sucking stones. Watt works out his

strings of permutations of the series of dogs, the series of men, the series of pictures, his system of the Krak! Krek! And Krik! of frogs. Thus, irony in Beckett's plays is a tool of fulfilling the obligation to express his experience of being, in trying to communicate his existential experience.

Beckett does all this with skill and sense of style of a highly conscious craftsman, using the full discriminatory faculty of a skilled literary artist. Beckett shows through his satire and irony that the world is absurd, that man is alone and in despair. (Curtis M., Brooks).

And later he says:

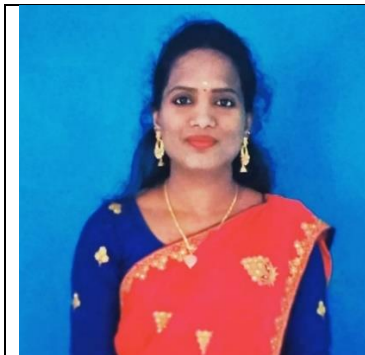
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R. Pavithra, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.
Assistant Professor of English
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Women, Uthangarai
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