

Modern & Postmodern Drama

Arms and the Man & Waiting for Godot

Written and Edited by:
Asst. Lect. Karrar H.

In this document, you will find everything we had discussed during the first and second course of Modern Drama. Happy Reading!

First Semester: 19th century Drama

Introduction to Modernism

According to Abrams and Harpham's *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Modernism denotes "new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, and styles of literature and the other arts" (226). It designates the broad literary and cultural movement that involves a deliberate and radical break with the traditional aspects of the Western art and its culture as a whole (226, Galens 175).

During Modernism, music, painting, science, religion, literature, politics, society, philosophy, technology, aesthetic and anthropology are all experienced gradual but noticeable shift.

J. J. Cuddon, in his book *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* states that Modernism started in 1890 and ended 1945 (442).

J. J. Cuddon, in his book *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* states that Modernism started in 1890 and ended 1945 (442).

Why Modernism appeared?

Many of society's certainties were shaken and undermined due to the intellectual thinkers who had doubted "the traditional modes of social organization, religion, and morality, and also traditional ways of conceiving the human-self" (Abrams and Harpham 226).

'Modernism' appeared as a reaction against both Realism and Naturalism. The accelerating progress of technology was seen as a threat that might destabilize the human-self and make individuals detached from the social values.

Major Thinkers who Changed History:

Karl Marx 1818-1883

Marx's writings highlighted how industrial capitalism created alienation, instability and crisis—themes that became central to Modernist literature.

Charles Darwin 1809-1882

Darwin suggested that humanity was not a special creation in God's image but an animal driven by primal forces like sexual and natural selection, not reason or spirit.

Sigmund Freud 1856-1939

Freud developed a philosophy centered on the idea that human behavior is largely determined by unconscious drives and early childhood experiences. These influence our personalities through the dynamic interplay of the Id, Ego and Superego.

Friedrich Nietzsche 1844-1900

His writings dealt with: truth, morality, language, cultural theory, history, nihilism, power, consciousness, and the meaning of existence . He spoke of “the death of God” and foresaw the dissolution of traditional religion and metaphysics.

What are the Characteristics of Modernism?

“It is experimental, formally complex, elliptical, contains elements of de-creation as well as creation, and tends to associate notions of the artist’s freedom from realism, materialism, traditional genre and form, with notions of cultural apocalypse and disaster” (Childs 1-2).

Modernists writings were characterized by “philosophical speculation, loss of faith, deep self-awareness . . . cultural exhaustion, contradictions and paradoxes (5).

The term ‘modernism’ is applied to various experimental movements and trends. These include: Symbolism, Imagism, Futurism, Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Impressionism, and Existentialism (Yeganeh 234-235).

George Bernard Shaw: A Brief Biography

George Bernard Shaw was born in Ireland, Dublin on 26 July 1856 to a drunkard father who failed in providing his family with the necessities of life, and to a mother who valued her splendid voice over her Shaw and his two sisters. **The first influence that shaped Shaw as a music critic was the Operatic music. The second was his parents' lifestyle.** Due to the reasons mentioned earlier, Shaw developed that extraordinary independence of mind and spirit which enabled him to look upon mankind and its affairs without being swayed either by custom or by other people's conventional ideas.

He worked as a music critic on the *Star*, a London evening newspaper, and as a critic of plays for the *Saturday Review*, a weekly periodical. He wrote essays of very high quality; **his sentences consequently run with a rhythmical ease that makes them easy and pleasant to speak and hear.** His style combines both wit and irony.

The third influence was both societal and political. He attended the lectures of the American economist George Henry, who talked about the national revenue that should be raised by a single tax on land values. This converted Shaw to **socialism**¹ and later joined **the Fabian Society**².

As a social reformer, Shaw saw seeds of hope in elevating the society by a legislation aiming at equality but his efforts were not looked up to. What he believed in was that good people would make good laws, not otherwise. Though he had abandoned the Christian religion, but many of his strongest convictions and most personal conduct were those of a religious man. His sense of the sacredness of life, his purity of living, his kindness and generosity to his fellows, his insistence for a better world, all these beliefs were so powerful in him as a guide to conduct that they had the force of religion.

The fourth influence was literary, after reading Shelley, Byron and Pushkin. He wrote about human problems such as **prostitution** (in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*), **war** (in *Arms and the Man*), **religious intolerance** (in *The Devil's Disciple*), **revenge** (in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*), and **correct pronunciation** (in *Pygmalion*).

¹ **Socialism:** political theory advocating the collective ownership and administration of the production and distribution of goods by the government.

² **The Fabian Society:** The Fabian Society: was a group of socialists who wanted to bring about a gradual evolutionary change (not a sudden or violent revolutionary one) from capitalism to socialism.

***Arms and the Man* by G. B. Shaw**

Significance of the Title:

The title, *Arms and the Man*, comes from a line in Roman poet Virgil's (70–19 BCE) epic poem *Aeneid* (c. 30 BCE) about the founding of Rome: "I sing of arms and the man who first from the shores of Troy came destined an exile to Italy and the Lavinian beaches." As *Arms and the Man* satirizes or ridicules the sort of nationalistic military heroism portrayed in the *Aeneid*, the title is meant ironically or contrastingly.

Genre: Satirical Comedy

Literary Period: Transitional period (end of Romanticism, beginning with Modernism).

Important dates: written in 1890s and published/performed in 1984.

Setting: Bulgaria

Historical Context:

The late 1800s marked the rise of socialism, Marxism, and worsening class divisions as well as a shift in literature and art away from Romanticism, which no longer seemed suited to describe or make sense of reality. This was the beginning of the Modernist period, where various forms of art would innovate rapidly in an attempt to describe and depict a more complicated reality, show various sides of things at once, and somehow capture the nuances of human life and experience.

Summary:

The play consists of Three Acts

The play is set in Bulgaria and set during the brief Bulgarian-Serbian war in the 1880s. It opens with the young romantic Raina Petkoff and her mother Catherine talking excitedly about a successful cavalry charge led by the handsome and heroic Sergius, to whom Raina is betrothed. They are thrilled at his success. Their defiant young servant Louka comes in and tells them that there will be fighting in the streets soon, and that they should lock all of their windows.

Raina's shutters do not lock, and shortly after the gunshots start that night, she hears a man climb onto her balcony and into her room. He is a Swiss professional soldier fighting for Serbia. Though he fights for the enemy and is not in the least heroic (he fears for his life, threatens to cry, and carries chocolates instead of ammo) Raina is touched by his plight. He angers her when he tells her that the man who led the cavalry charge against them only succeeded because he got extremely lucky—the Servians were not equipped with the right ammo. Raina indignantly says that that commander is her betrothed, and the man apologizes, holding back laughter. Raina nevertheless agrees to keep the man safe, saying that her family is one of the most powerful and wealthy in Bulgaria, and that his safety will be ensured as their guest. She goes to get her mother and when they return he has fallen asleep on Raina's bed.

In the next act the war has ended, and Major Petkoff (Raina's father) arrives home, and Sergius and Raina are reunited. They speak lovingly to one another about how perfect their romance is. But when Raina goes inside, Sergius holds Louka in his arms, clearly lusting after her. Louka believes he is taking advantage of her because she is a servant, and tells him she does not believe she and he are any different simply because he is rich and she is poor. They part just as Raina returns. Then, to make things more complicated, the man from Raina's balcony, announcing himself as Captain Bluntschli, arrives, to return a coat he was loaned the morning after he rested at the house. Catherine tries to keep him from being seen, but Major Petkoff recognizes him, and invites him inside to help with some of the last remaining military orders.

In the final act, in the library, it comes out that Louka, though she had been assumed to be engaged to the head servant Nicola, is in love with Sergius, and he is in love with her. Raina eventually admits she has fallen for Bluntschli, who is at first hesitant, believing her to be much younger than she is. When he finds out her real age (23 rather than the 17 he had thought she was), he declares his affection for her. The play ends happily, with two new couples.

Characters:

Raina: is a sympathetic young woman. Raina is the play's protagonist, a 23-year-old Bulgarian woman who is betrothed to the "heroic" Sergius, and who speaks in a dramatic, affected manner and (for much of the play) sing Sergius's praises. The Petkoffs are an affluent, powerful family in Bulgaria and Raina works hard to maintain the kind of dignified air that (she imagines) befits her

status. She acts like a hopeless romantic, often clutching a novel and staring dreamily out the window. But when she meets Bluntschli, after he crawls onto her balcony while fleeing battle, it becomes clear she is not what she seems. Though Bluntschli is the opposite of everything Raina professes to want, she is intrigued by him, and eventually falls for him. She admits to him later that she speaks with such passion and drama not because she feels such things but because she notices it often has an effect and people admire her for it. She eventually agrees to court Bluntschli and breaks off her engagement with Sergius

Captain Bluntschli: is a Swiss professional soldier who fights with the Servians during the war. He has none of Raina or Sergius's romantic notions about war. He thinks courage is overrated and that war is more often ugly than noble. He carries sweets with him rather than extra weapons, which leads Raina to (affectionately) call him the "chocolate cream soldier." He is an excellent soldier, much more sensible and experienced than Sergius or Major Petkoff, and seems as sensible and cynical as Raina is romantic. However, he is touched by the fact that she takes care of him when he climbs up her balcony, and eventually admits that he is also somewhat of a romantic, and declares his affection for Raina at the end of the play.

Sergius: Sergius is a typical "Byronic Hero" according to the stage directions, and everything about him seems perfectly suited to a kind of romantic ideal. He is tall, handsome, wealthy, well-spoken, and seems to be deeply in love with Raina. However, though Catherine and Raina believe him to be a heroic soldier, he is in fact a foolish, reckless fighter and his only success so far has come from luck. Sergius eventually also reveals that he is not so genteel as he seems, lusting passionately after Raina's servant, Louka, to whom is betrothed by the end of the play.

Catherine: Raina's mother

Petkoff: Raina's father (and A Bulgarian major)

Louka: is an opinionated, beautiful young servant working for the Petkoffs . She is expected to settle down with and marry Nicola, the family's head servant. However, she rejects the idea that her being born into a poorer family means she must live as servant to the rich her whole life. At first she rejects Sergius's advances believing he is simply using her because he thinks she is beneath him.

When she realizes Sergius disdains his own wealth and “nobility” she admits she has fallen for him.

Nicola: is a sensible manservant of Petkoff’s family. He is mistreated by the Petkoffs but never talks back or objects. He believes he was born to be a servant and does not question the class system of social norms.

Important Quotations:

The following quote is extracted from the setting of the act:

“On the balcony a young lady, intensely conscious of the romantic beauty of the night, and of the fact that her own youth and beauty are part of it, is gazing at the snowy Balkans”

Shaw shows us a clear portrait of a true 19th century romantic lady, Rania. The lady is gazing at the beauty of the natural elements outside, neglecting the suffering caused by the Bulgarian-Serbian war. These lines reflect her own youthful idealism as well as the preoccupations of Romantic Literature which oversimplifies and obscures the realities of life.

Act One

Raina: “But no matter: I am so happy! So proud! . . . It proves that all our ideas were real after all”

Raina tells her mother that she feels happy just because her hero (Sergius) had a successful cavalry charge against the Serbs. Also, she declares that such news proves the stories she heard before about Sergius. This declaration makes Raina quite childlike and naïve. The success of one battle is not enough to prove any idea about war or bravery; if anything, the reality of war is one of severe violence, suffering and death.

Rania: “. . . the world is really glorious world for women who can see its glory and men who can act its romance!”

Since the reality of war is interpreted incorrectly by Rania, so refers to the idea of gender discrepancies. As a woman, she considers herself a spectator: her role is to see the glory of the world. In this sense, she views the world as a romantic novel. While men’s role is to act its romance. She is sheltered safely while men are struggling to survive the cruelty of war.

The Man: “—nine soldiers out of ten are born fools” p. 22

The Man and Raina are talking about soldiership the night he climbed her balcony. The Man (later known as Bluntschli) admits that the majority of soldiers are unaware of the act of war and its consequences. They act without thinking; they follow orders blindly. They are victims of romantic illusions about glory and patriotism. The fools are the ones who neglect the brutality of warfare.

Act Two

Nicola: “Be warned in time, Louka: mend your manners. I know the mistress. She is so grand that she never dreams that any servant could dare be disrespectful to her; but if she once suspects that you are defying her, out you go”

Act two starts sharply in declaring the rising action of the play (the return of Petkoff and Sergius). Before their arrival, Nicola, the manservant of the family is chatting with Louka, the maiden, about manners. First of all, a servant lecturing another: this is a sign of subdivision within the lower classes. Secondly, as woman servant, she should be pious, not reckless and stubborn. Her stubbornness and disrespectfulness may cause firing her at once. Moreover, Nicola suggests that the rich have blinded themselves to the reality of life with their privilege/ wealth, but this blindness cannot last forever.

Louka: “You have the soul of a servant. Nicola”

Louka is addressing Nicola as having the soul of servants. Again, she proves herself as a naïve and disdainful of Nicola’s previous warnings. Her words reveal her hatred of her luck in life. At the same time, she considers herself equal to the family she serves. For Louka, being a servant should never be the defining aspect of one’s identity. Her language and way of thinking emphasize her will to be free.

This quote is extracted from Shaw’s description of Sergius’s character:

“The result is precisely what the advent of nineteenth century thought first produced in England: to wit, Byronism”

Shaw describes Sergius's character as a nineteenth century hero, full of outward wit and high spirit. Although, this description may seem positive, Petkoff has another opinion about that. Petkoff, when he has come back from war, he has told Catherine, his wife, that Sergius's character and courageousness are merely an act, and do not reflect his actual skills as a soldier. The fact that he has a Byronic spirit is truly ironic. Heroism is not measured by words and appearances.

Act Three

Raina: “I want to be perfect with Sergius: no meanness, no smallness, no deceit. My relation to him is the only really beautiful and noble part of my life.”

After the departure of Paul Petkoff and Sergius, Raina and Sergius are left alone. She tells him that if Sergius finds out the truth, he would kill him. She adds that a prestigious lady like her hates to lie. Bluntschli reacts normally, saying that she tells lies all the time. **Raina admits that telling lies is her nobility, reflecting her attitude towards everyone.** Moreover, she is terribly ironical; contradicting herself: she admires Bluntschli for his charisma and rationality but still acts like she cares for Sergius; while in fact they both have been lying to each other. If her “relation to him ... (is) noble” as she declares, she would never show affection for Bluntschli. Both are acting out; if both Sergius and Raina dropped the act, they might live happily ever after. However, class expectations make this impossible. The situation is different with Bluntschli, being so real and straightforward.

Bluntschli: “When you strike that noble attitude and speak in that thrilling voice, I admire you; but I find it impossible to believe a single word you say”

Bluntschli and Raina talk about the night she hid him in her room, admitting she had to lie, and a prestigious like her should never do that. For Bluntschli, she saved his life during the time of war, and this is part of being a soldier. So, his reaction is normal because he knows this upper class type of people, who cares for their reputation and status of well-being but they are hollow from the inside. She is thrilled by Bluntschli's logical reaction. She has been told by people that she has to be perfect to be good enough. Part of being perfect is

never lie. That is why she does not want to hurt Sergius about her little secret. She wears a mask, representing an archetype of how an upper-class Bulgarian lady should be.

Louka: “You don’t know what true courage is ... I would marry the man I loved, which no other queen in Europe has the courage to do ... You dare not: you would marry a rich man’s daughter because you would be afraid of what other people would say of you.”

On the other hand, Sergius and Louka converse about what courage really means. In her perspective, courage is marrying the one she loves no matter which class he belongs to. **For Sergius, a high-class member should appeal to the society’s expectation.** He lacks the courage Louka possesses; means he would not marry her, but rather would choose a daughter of a rich man instead. Sergius recognizes that the idealized image of the Byronic hero is misleading. Louka, representing the issue of 18th century class relations; where bravery is feeling free to love anyone in a society that divides people sharply into categories based on their wealth and status. In her statement and belief, she reflects the socialist view that Shaw adopted in his life: that courage is acting realistically and having the dare spirit to get what you want.

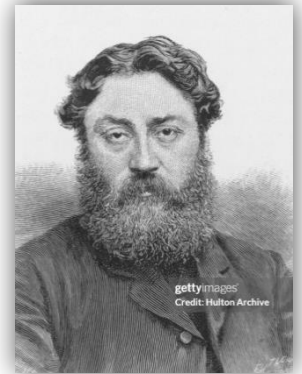
Questions to consider:

1. Why do you think that appearances are more important than morality?
2. Describe the relationship between Sergius and Bluntschli?
3. In *Arms and the Man*, Sergius and Bluntschli are socially unequal, Raina and Louka too. Explain how this social division influence the relationship between such characters.
4. Bluntschli grasps the concept of war differently than Sergius, how?
5. Louka, as we have seen in Act One, resists to submit her will to the traditional notion of slavery. Describe her character.
6. Do you think there is a kind of similarity between Bluntschli and G. B. Shaw in terms of thinking and acting? Discuss.

Second Semester: Postmodern Drama (20th century)

Introduction to Modern Drama

What dominated the 19th c. drama was the moralistic, often sensational, melodramatic fare. But late 19th c., there was a departure toward Realism. This tendency was brought by T. W. Robertson and 1865 was the year that witnessed his plays' performance. Robertson introduced individual men and women, who were people with of flesh and blood, instead of stock characters. He discarded blank verse and rhetoric in favour of natural and human speech, hence modernizing form and technique.



How did Modern Drama start?

Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, and George Bernard Shaw decided to break the chain and introduced realism to the stage, and added to the concept of the “well-made play” with its tidy denouement, the possibility of the more open-ended “discussion play”. Plays in which a discussion, often unresolved, superseded the plot, were preferable because they allowed audiences to judge events for themselves, thus making them an active part of the theatrical experience rather than merely passive viewers.

What is Modern Drama?

Modern drama is a literary and theatrical movement that emerged late 19th c. and continued to the half of the 20th c. It was marked by significant departures from traditional dramatic conventions towards the experimental; focusing on realism, ordinary people and their psychological struggles, and societal issues.

What characterizes Modern Drama?

- Influenced by various artistic movements (Expressionism, Surrealism, Dadaism, Impressionism, etc.)
- Emphasized the subjective experience of the individual
- Explored the subconscious mind
- Used fragmented or episodic structures and stream-of-consciousness narratives, and used monologues, soliloquies
- Often portrayed characters as isolated individuals, struggling to find meaning and connection in a fragmented and alienating world

There are plenty of Trends appeared in the 20th c.; these in one way or another shape the Modern Drama. We are going to discuss one only due to the lack of time. The trend is *Realism*.

Realism

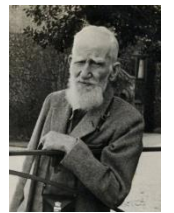
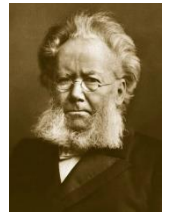
Realism was a literary movement, originated in France. It has established itself in the late 19th c. and early 20th c. in the plays written by Ibsen (in Norway), Chekov (in Russia), Shaw (England). Ibsen attacked social values. Chekov is known for psychological reality, failure and hope in hopeless situation. And Shaw attempted to reform the moral side of English society with his witty writings.

Characteristics of Realism:

- It was an attempt to portray life as it is.
- It focuses on the character more than on action and plot.
- Diction (choice of words) is natural, not poetic.
- Realists concerned themselves with ethical issues and social plights.

What are the most common themes of Modern Drama?

- **Death**
 - ✓ John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904)
 - ✓ Irwin Shaw's *Bury the Dead* (1936)
- **The "Life-Lie"**
 - ✓ Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* (1884)
- **Religion**
 - ✓ George Bernard Shaw's *St. Joan* (1923)
- **War and Violence**
 - ✓ George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (1894)
- **Women's Issues**
 - ✓ Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* (1916)



What is Existentialism?

It is a philosophical tendency associated with the 20th c. thinker Jean Paul Sartre and it goes back to the 19th c, Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. It holds that human existence comes before any fixed essence. Existentialists viewed the human being as an isolated existent who is cast into an alien universe; to conceive the human world as possessing no inherent truth, value or meaning. Moreover, existentialists argue that human beings must create their own meaning through free choice, responsibility and lived experience, rather than relying on predetermined truths, religious doctrines, or universal moral laws.

Why did Existentialism appear?

- Loss of faith in reason, progress and humanism
- Human suffering (mental and physical)
- Crisis of religious beliefs (Nietzsche's idea of the death of God)
- Failure of the Enlightenment rationalism
- Anxiety, despair, death,...

What is meant by Absurdism?

It is the belief that human beings exist in an irrational, purposeless, and chaotic universe. Eugene Ionesco, a French writer, points out that absurdism has cut man from his attachments. He says: "cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless."

Theatre of the Absurd:

The title was coined by Martin Esslin in his book *Theatre of the Absurd* (1961). This form of drama originated in France after WWII. Playwrights of this form were engaged in creating extremely grotesque plays. It is a dramatic movement that emphasizes the meaninglessness and irrationality of human existence through plays with distorted plots, illogical dialogue, and a lack of clear resolution.

What are the characteristics of the Absurd Theatre?

- Characters are disordered and lack reason. Their sentences are always interrupted and sound illogical.
- Language seems incoherent, vague, and difficult.
- Plot is fractured and random.
- Resists rules.
- Themes include: dissimulation of society, futility, isolation, absurdity, miscommunication, loose ends, lack of religion, etc.

Compare between Modernist plays and Postmodernist ones?

Modernist plays	Postmodernist plays
Creating new styles	Multiple styles
Stream of Consciousness style	Fragmented style
First-person narrator	Multiple, often unreliable narrators
Deviation from traditional plots	No plot
Focus on the alienation and loneliness of the individual	Focus on the plight of our existence which possess no coherent meaning

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)

Beckett is an Irish playwright, novelist, poet and a poet. Beckett was influenced by Dante (Italian poet), Rene Descartes (French Philosopher), and James Joyce (Irish novelist). He used interior monologue to convey his sense of a bleak world in which all are isolated. Beckett's themes include: absurdity, isolation, passage of time, disjointed reality, depravity, emotional crisis, loss, etc. His style of writing is characterized by repetition, dark humor, impersonal and tragicomic episodes of life, and nonsensical dialogue. Among his plays are: *Endgame* (1957), *Krapp's Lost Tape* (1958), and *Happy Days* (1951) among many.

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett

- Its full title: *Waiting for Godot: A Tragedy in Two Acts*
- Written by Samuel Beckett in *1948-1949*.
- Written in *Paris* and first performed in *1952*.
- Written originally in *French*, then in *English*.
- Published in *1954*.
- Its genre is *tragicomedy*.
- The play contains references to *the Bible*, *Shakespeare*, and *ancient Greek Mythology*, as well as a number of allusions to *Christianity*.
- Themes include: *absurdity of existence*, *uncertainty of time*, *folly of seeking meaning*.
- Symbols include: *Leafless tree*, *Lucky's baggage*, *Pozzoe's Rope*, *Time*, *Hats and Boots*, *Raw Vegetables*.

The Importance of the Title:

The title suggests the main idea of the play: waiting for nothing. The word "Godot" has been interpreted vaguely as "God" but it means "forever" in the Irish Gaelic language.

What are the Influences that inspired Beckett to write the play?

- Berenice, a 17th c. French writer who was interested in writing interesting plays out of little action.
- Sartre, an existentialist philosopher who wrote *No Exist*, a play where two characters are trapped in one location.
- The consequences of the WWII when he was in Paris struggling to witness the brutality of the Nazi army.

Waiting for Godot consists of two Acts

∞ Overview: Act One

Estragon and Vladimir (1:00-15:30)

The play consists of two acts. Act one begins with two shabby men (ordinary men) meet each other. Estragon is sitting on a low mound, struggling with his boot. His simple character obscures his sight. It seems difficult for him to follow the logical flow of Vladimir's mentality. He represents the body. In addition, he receives beatings from the lot (group of people, whom we do not know their whereabouts). Those beatings reflect the agony of human beings who are stuck in time and place. His old friend, Vladimir represents the mind. He possesses what Estragon misses: the logical and philosophical mind. Yet, neither helps Vladimir in navigating life and its pathetic dilemma.

The two men are waiting for Godot, who stands as a divine figure meant to uplifts them from their misery. To pass time, they converse over many things because, apparently, there is "nothing to be done". This absurd view urges them to repent but repentance elevates none. Instead, in a comic scene, Estragon suggests hanging themselves but no action takes place. Beckett shows the absurdity of human beings, who carries noting but ideas. For Estragon and Vladimir, waiting Godot is a useless attempt to find meaning.

Estragon's memory is terrible unlike Vladimir's. Even though, both of them are confused whether this country road is the place where Godot will show up. Estragon feels exhausted and sleeps a bit, but Vladimir awakens him just because he was lonely. Loneliness does not afflict the individual and the collective alike. Previously, Vladimir says that they have lost their presentable outlook and now Estragon says that they have lost their rights. These ideas emphasize the absurdity of humanity.

Estragon & Vladimir are accompanied by Pozzo & Lucky (15:30-34:00)

While Estragon and Vladimir are waiting, they hear someone shouting from a far, they believed that Godot shows up. They started looking for a place somewhere but they are trapped, there is no place to shelter them, metaphorically speaking, there is no way to go.

Two characters are introduced, Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo is a wealthy and powerful man who sees Estragon and Vladimir as no equal, yet he decides to

talk with them anyway. He cares for his appearance and social status. Lucky, on the other hand, is merely a slave who obeys his master and powerless. He appears loaded with baggage and trailing a long rope, which is tied around his neck. Pozzo holds that rope along with a whip. He pulls the rope, making Lucky fall down on his back. Lucky who possesses nor identity, neither dignity, gets along with Pozzo's orders. The baggage he holds represents the burdens that are not his own. He is a slave to our burdens.

Pozzo struggles with two things, time and leaving. When he keeps on checking his watch, this suggests that time for him passes while nothing happens. And when he attempts to depart, he goes back and sit, signaling that leaving his new assumed fellows is unavoidable for the time being. His references to the dead Greek Mythology hints at his disbelief in living religion. Atlas is not the son of Jupiter.

Moreover, Pozzo says that such creatures (like Lucky) should be killed, not tamed or preserve. Lucky weeps. He stands as a disgrace to humanity, or as the Nietzschean-image of worthless human beings.

Estragon tries to comfort Lucky, but Lucky kicks his swelling foot. What Estragon did is humane being confronted with negativity.

Pozzo stresses a point when he says that when one stops weeping, another stops, as if our existence in this world is meant to live in a cycle of daily routine. Then, he acts like he is hurt by Lucky and start crying.

Continues 34:00-1:00 act one ends

In a moment, Vladimir is irritated and kicks Pozzo's stool and when he calms down, he situates it in its place. Pozzo comments that Vladimir subsides now, that it is all subsides just as if Pan is here.

Vladimir, the thoughtful man, realizes that "time has stopped" (33). This means that it seems everyone loses track of time. They are not sure of how much time they have spent waiting for Godot, maybe days, months, or years. Time has stopped for Pozzo.

Pozzo finds it interesting to amuse his fellows. He makes Lucky dance and think. Estragon and Vladimir are watching: the silent slave who obeys orders, now functions.

The speech Lucky provides seems incoherent. It is all about repeating sentences and follows no logical arguments. Yet has mentioned something satirical. He describes the Christian God as “divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia” (40). Lucky, most likely, parodies the traditional qualities of the Christian God as Omniscience (knowing all), Omnipotence (being all powerful), and Omnipresence (being everywhere).

Later, a boy suddenly appears with a message from Godot. His arrival makes things more complicated. He calls Vladimir as Mr. Albert, a name that belongs to nobody. This indicates that either the message delivered is not meant for Vladimir and Estragon, or the real name of Vladimir is Albert.

Vladimir’s questions to the boy reveal his absent knowledge of who Godot is; thus raising the uncertainty to a much deeper inquiry.

The boy’s brother minds Godot’s sheep, while the boy himself minds the goats. This stands as a reference to the New Testament of the Bible, in which Christ separates the sheep from the goats.

The sheep = represents the people who will be saved

(the boy’s brother is beaten)

The goats = represent the people who will be damned

(the boy is not)

The allegory hinted above may suggest that Godot is the opposite of God. He neither shows up, nor has the ability to prove them that they exist.

The boy’s answers complicates the situation more further. When Vladimir asks him that he has seen them, he runs away, confirming that their existence is questionable until Godot materializes. Vladimir and Estragon are trapped by their own expectations.

Curtains

∞ Overview: Act Two

Estragon and Vladimir again (01:00 – 01:15)

The act begins in another day but the setting is the same. Vladimir is alone signing a song about a dog that is beaten to death. The song reflects his feelings about Estragon being beaten over and over again.

Estragon does not recognize the place, the tree, Lucky, Pozzo, nor does he remember his old days when he and Vladimir picking up grapes in the area of Macon (France). Out of boredom, he asks Vladimir to kill him “like the other.” He probably refers to the billions of dead people who died for nothing. Or, his statement suggests that only death can separate them. They talk to fill time and not hear the dead voices.

They are troubled by the massacre of the WWI and exhibit a gruesome perspective about life.

1:15 – 1:32

Vladimir and Estragon continue their pointless chat over what to do while waiting for Godot. Estragon tries to sleep and Vladimir starts to wander here and there just because the compartment seems void. Estragon wakes up disturbed by a nightmare and then weeps due to his pain of waiting day and night.

The two, in a comic scene, start to exchange hats. Then, they act like Pozzo and Lucky. Their mimicry stands as a reflection of inhumanity and disrespect. Estragon says he is “cursed” and “in hell,” reflecting his sense of aimless existence. Estragon is the cause of his pain, that is why he cannot release it no matter what. After a while he prays for God to have pity on him, and rather see him how miserable he is.

Then Pozzo and Lucky appear again. Pozzo has become blind and Lucky is speechless. Pozzo calls for help while Vladimir and Estragon are discussing over helping them or taking advantage of Pozzo’s newfound condition. All mankind is Vladimir and Estragon, meaning that all humans wait heaven and hell, neglecting their destined fate: meaninglessness.

All of a sudden, they fall down and cannot move. This scene is absurd, reflecting the fact that no godly help comes. But this is not the question, What are we doing here, that is the question

Curtains

Questions to consider:

1. How time functions in the *Waiting for Godot*?
2. What connection you can find in the parody Lucky provides and the three qualities of the Christian God “divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia”?
3. Analyze the character of Lucky. How do his roles as a silent slave, his “think” speech and the burden he carries function as a critique of societal structures, religion and the human condition?
4. The theme of Absurdity (whether of life in general or of humanity) is highlighted in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. Explain.
5. The boy’s arrival and his message create more confusion than clarity, particularly when he calls Vladimir as “Mr. Albert” and the allegory of the sheep and goat. How does this scene reinforce the play’s central theme of uncertainty and the character’s futile search for meaning.

References:

- *Literary Schools: A Reader* by Farah Yeganeh.
- *Literary Schools & Movements for the Students of English Literature* by Alireza Farahbakhsh.
- *Thematic Guide to Modern Drama* by Susan C. W. Abbotson.