

Binary, Structure, and Free Play in Samuel Becket's *Waiting for Godot*

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Abstract:

The present research aims to investigate and explore various threads of deconstruction available in *Waiting for Godot*. Moreover, the researcher attempts to unravel 'deconstructive' tendencies embedded in the text by giving appropriate examples of characters, events implications and 'empty slots.'

Keywords: reading as strategy, other of philosophy, *difference*, violent hierarchy supplement, With the upcoming of literary theories in the later part of the 20th century the perception of reading has drastically changed. The critics began to look at the text from different points of view, from different critical approaches. The readers' response theory gave the reader an increased freedom to interpret the text as per his / her own understanding. It seems that the freedom of reading was constitutionalized in the constitution of literature. As Derrida put it in *Acts of Literature* the text can be read in every way and any way. This attitude is best represented in an essay the Death of the Author (1966) by Roland Barthes. He rejects the traditional view that the author is the origin of the text, the source of meaning, and the only austerity for interpretation.

Take an incident from the Marathi movie 'Deol' means the temple, as an example. In a significant incident, a person who is talking on the phone scribbles something unconsciously. The next day the villagers realize these three markers of on a tree. Each of them tries to interpret these three marks independently. For some, the marks look like lord Datta (Indian God) with three heads. For another, those are like a cow, the vehicle of lord Datta and so on. For me, those are nothing, but three stupid lines produced unconsciously by that fellow. These interpretations are tailored as per their competence and understanding not the ultimate or authentic. Others may and they should give other interpretations. In the deconstruction vein, everything can be put in question. If language, text and consciousness are really structured by *difference*, then there can be no solid foundation, no fixed point of reference, no authority or certainty either ontological or interpretative.

Paul De Man, the American deconstructionist and the follower of Derrida, in his magnum opus *Blindness and Insight* (1971) puts: "Critic only achieves insight through certain blindness." In my attempt to read Samuel Becket's *Waiting for Godot*. From a deconstructive approach, I would employ the modus operandi of Paul de Man. I would 'look closely' at the text as any critics do in applying any particular theory would be some 'imposition'.

The task of deconstruction says Derrida "is to identify the other of philosophy." Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (WFG) is full of this 'other,' as I perceive it. The title of the play itself is very dubious, the ambiguous. 'Waiting' is one of the features of deconstruction. The 'Waiting' in the title signifies uncertainty. Vladimir and Estragon, two tramps and also the protagonists of the play, are waiting for something to happen. They are, as they say, waiting for Godot. But *'nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes.* But is not awful; it's awesome. The waiting differed the meeting between Godot and two tramps Vladimir and Estragon. It is awesome in the sense that it facilitates a free play of meaning. This denied the ultimate transcendental signified. It touches the signified for

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moments like a pendulum and creates thousands of other signifiers to use Barthes's term again it is a 'galaxy of signifiers.' It differs and postpones the meaning. In the play, nothing happens. The play is all about the activity for the ultimate signified is delightful. Because it is untested and therefore more delicious than the truth itself. As John Keats says, "Heard melodies are sweet but unheard are sweeter."

The identity of Godot is a much-discussed and widely theorized issue in this play. For some Godot is a God; for others, he is a well-wisher. Vladimir and Estragon consider Godot to be someone who will end the misery of their lives. If Godot is taken as diminutive of God then the crud who stands for authority is not present. The authority is constantly denied in the play. This denial of authority is one of the hallmarks of deconstruction. Since Godot never arrives, the readers are unable to reach the final conclusion of the whereabouts of Godot. He remains an extremely vague character. Vladimir tells Estragon that Godot did not say for sure Re would come and they requested 'nothing very definite from him. This nothing very definite is at the heart of deconstruction. The identity of Godot is 'deferred'.

The identity of Godot is always projected into the future. The text is unable to reach the final meaning. The meaning is always ahead of the readers and seems closer but always 'deferred'. It goes beyond the scope of time and space. As Jeremy Hawthorne says, "For Derrida, the meaning of a text is always unfolding ahead of the interpreter unrolling in front of him like never-ending carpet w Rose final edge never reveals itself."

Godot as a structure of the play escapes the structurality of structure. The whole play is about Godot but he is never in the frame of text, physically. As Derrida, in *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences* says: "*The centre is at the centre of the totality, and yet since the centre does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality). The totality has its centre elsewhere. The centre is not the centre. The concept of structure----- is contradictorily coherent.*" WFG as a play can be occupied by different individual readers as one chair is occupied by different people whose points of view may be different. Aniket Jaaware, the author of *Simplifications* has given an example of a railway track in the book. In railway tracks, there are gaps for future arrangements as they become narrower during winter. This gap in railway tracks facilitates the arrangement as per the situation. Similarly, textual traces or 'gaps' in the text facilitate the free play of meaning. The identity of Godot is a 'gap' in the play arranged for the free play of meaning, the language game. This language game denies any kind of 'closure' of meaning to Godot in a sense, leaving the readers with a sense of absence. The concept of Godot can be put under 'erasure'. The concept of Godot can be put in 'erasure'. The Godot-like centre is unavailable and unavoidable. This is what M. H. Abrams calls a negative centre.

Another aspect of the play that can be studied from a deconstructive point of view is the relationship between Estragon and Vladimir. Their identities are vague. The readers are not sure whether they are friends, gay or something different. If we consider them as gay, then one has to be active and another to be passive. It seems that Estragon is passive since he speaks less and Vladimir is active because he speaks a lot. This is possible when one adopts a yardstick of behaviour to judge a personality. This coupling of two contrary things speech and writing, presents what Derrida calls a 'violent hierarchy. Vladimir has a full presence while Estragon is secondary and threatens to contaminate Vladimir with its materiality.

This hierarchy can be easily undone. Derrida uses the term 'supplement' to convey the unstable relationship between contrary couplets such as writing and speech. In WEG, when Pozzo and Lucky, first appear on the stage Pozzo is shown as a master who beats Lucky severely. Lucky as a servant carries all their belonging and mutely bares ill-treatment. He has a rope around his neck whose other edge is in the hand of Pozzo. When Pozzo and Lucky reappear again on the stage, the picture changes. Now Lucky is dominant. The rope is around Pozzo's neck and Lucky treats like a dog. This shows that hierarchy is easily undone and subverted.

At the beginning of the Second Act, the tree proliferates. The proliferation may indicate optimism but one cannot be sure about that. It is a matter of interpretation. The interpretation of literary text

will never lead to a final, definitive result. Like structures, interpretations are mere freeze-frames in a flow of signification, the 'proliferation' of the evening.

The text in post-structuralism is no longer a fixed parcel of the author's creativity. Every reader became independent. It entertained individuality. This individuality produced the 'galaxy of signifiers' (Barthes' term) of different individual readers. Now the reader can take any path to keep in the text. All paths are equally valid, says Barthes. The phenomenologists believed that '*we see in things what we give*'. The perception of the reader has to be different and this variety of perception produces the 'galaxy of signifiers' denied of the ultimate, final meaning. *Waiting for Godot* carries in its womb the possibility of delivering interpretations desired by the modern scripters. Would it be an exaggeration to call it a dream writable text of the post-structural tendencies?

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