

Power and Domination

A Reciprocal Process in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

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Power is at the core of every relation. In fact, no relation is possible without the interplay of power and domination. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* have some striking instances of this motif. In the above mentioned texts this motif is very significant in so far that the function of power over the other is predominant, though the interplay of power is so subtle and complex that we are, sometimes, confused to get a trace of it. Moreover, at times the power relationship in the mentioned texts is intertwined with other relationships. In these plays, though the characters are committed to each other, their position as the oppressor and oppressed is fickle. Their position is deconstructed by change their individual standpoint.

The treatment of power and domination and its application in these texts may be approached from several viewpoints. First of all, in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, there are some pairs of characters. Each character of a pair has amazing commitment to the others. On the other way round one pair of characters is dependent on some others. In this way, every individual identification is constituted through the consciousness of exercising power over the other. One fears existential crises without the other. Thus they re-establish Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic.

From the opening of the play, *Waiting for Godot* we see, Estragon plays with his boots and Vladimir with his hat. Though they are friends, they are very opposite and complementary to each other, body and mind, matter and spirit. Vladimir fits the stereotype of intellect, restlessly articulating, questioning and analysing. When Estragon forgets anything, it is Vladimir who reminds him. On intellectual level Vladimir beats him. Estragon who declares himself closest to sweet mother earth is passive, slower and drawn to silence and sleep rather than speech. Estragon is almost completely dependent on the activity of the mind for his nourishment and guidance on his master Vladimir hoards his food in his pockets. When Estragon is hungry and needs food he delivers him. That's why Vladimir is angry he feels uneasy and is afraid of losing him:

Estragon : [*Step forward.*] You're angry? [*Silence. Step forward.*]
Forgive me. [*Silence. Step forward. EATRAGON lays his
hand on VLADIMIR's shoulder.*] Come, Didi. [*Silence.*] Give
me your hand. [*VLADIMIR half turns.*] Embrace me!
[*VLADIMIR stiffen*] Don't be stubborn! [*VLADIMIR
softens. They embrace. EATRAGON recoils.*] (13)

Human identity is not a matter of fixed relationships between an unknown 'self' and other points 'outside'. On psychological level Estragon beats Vladimir. A solitary existence

is a material impassibility hence when Estragon falls asleep; Vladimir awakes him as he feels lonely. In the act ii as Estragon wants to sleep and as Estragon sleeps he gets up softly, takes off his coat and lays it across Estragon's shoulder. Vladimir cares him more than himself as in his conversation he once says "you are my only hope" (14). As Lucky kicks at Estragon's leg we see Vladimir mentally suffers more than what Estragon suffers physically. Estragon tenderly consoles him saying that 'I will carry you'. As they are waiting for Godot to come, Vladimir to pass the time needs his speech, his companionship:

Vladimir : Say something!

Estragon : I am trying. (58)

Or

Vladimir : Help me!

Estragon : I am trying. (59)

Though Estragon wants to leave the place Vladimir insists him to remain. Moreover, Vladimir's position is clear in Act II at their playing the 'Pozzo-Lucky' role Vladimir situates himself as Lucky and Estragon as Pozzo, and Estragon orders him 'think pig'.

At the enter of Pozzo and Lucky we see Pozzo – the master with a whip in his hand drives his slave Lucky by means of a rope passed round his neck. While Lucky carries a heavy bag, a picnic basket and a great coat – belonging to Pozzo ; Pozzo carries a whip with which he beats Lucky if he is disobedient. Pozzo, a local landowner has all the basics for survival; rich food, drink, coat, a throat spray to make up for his physical deficiency, a pipe for dragged pleasure. That is why Lucky deserves his name because he has a master who, however, cruelly organizes his life for him. At the course of the play we also see Pozzo provides him bones. It might be said he is Lucky's Godot for he serves the same function as Godot does for Vladimir and Estragon. Pozzo is a kind of ringmaster who cracks his whip and commands the show while he is 'on', so Lucky pleases his master by his dance, by his uplifting, beautiful ideas. Pozzo addresses his slave as 'pig', 'dog'. Even he doesn't bother anything insulting him before other.

As a most obedient slave Lucky has sacrificed everything, even his soul. Pozzo commenting upon Lucky's voluntary slavery says:

Pozzo : But instead of driving him away as I might have done. I mean instead of simply kicking him out on his backside, in the goodness of my heart I am bring him away to the fair where I hope to get a good price for him the truth is you can't drive such creatures away . The best thing would be to kill those (Lucky weeps)

Estragon : It's crying.

Pozzo : Old dogs have more dignity. (28-29)

Pozzo's treatment of Lucky is expressed in Vladimir's words : 'After having sucked all the good out of him you chuck him away like a . . . like a banana skin' (30).

Again though they sometimes beat each other in different way, they depend on each other. Without one the other is incomplete, that's why in spite of their desire to leave each

other they can't leave, even cannot suicide. Though Vladimir and Estragon are committed to each other, their position as the oppressor is fickle. Their position is deconstructed by changing their individual standpoint. Again once we are told, Lucky could, by dancing and thinking, amuse, and inspire Pozzo, but his state of slavery has gradually put an end to all that. Though Pozzo bullies Lucky, is also made to weep by him.

I think we are justified in interpreting Pozzo as a gruesome product of the modern age. This small bundle of subjective feeling and responses may sometimes indulge in self-pity but represses its fear with narcotic pomposity: 'Do I look like a man who can be made to suffer?' But deeply hidden under the mask of hardness there lies an unconscious nostalgia for lost values.

In Lucky, on the other hand, we can see the destroyed contact with the creative sauces of the psyche. It becomes more and more evident in the causes of the play that Lucky takes it for granted that only within the pattern of a mutual sado-masochistic relationship between himself and Pozzo can there be any safety for him. In first act Pozzo reveals this mutual torture in words,

I can't bear it . . . any longer (groaning, clutching his head) the way he goes on . . . you have no idea . . . It's terrible! . . . he must of . . . (He brandishes his arm) . . . I am going mad . . . (he collapses his head in his hands) . . . I can't bear it . . . any longer . . . (30-31)

and later,

He used to be so kind . . . so helpful . . . and entertaining . . . my good angel . . . and now . . . he's killing me. (31)

Pozzo-Lucky couple is comparable to the collective pseudo-ego. He hoards his food in the picnic basket, giving away only the bones. He isn't self – possessed infect, for he depends on Lucky for his place in the world. In the act ii we see Pozzo who comes back bereft of sight is dragged by a Lucky – bereft of speech, like the carrot which as if in mockery has dwindled by second act into a radish. Though there is a rope which has a slice knit between the two as before, in act ii it is much shorter so that Pozzo may follow him more easily and during going back at the end of the play we see Pozzo can't leave the stage without Lucky to pull him.

Pozzo is independent and his essential nature is to be for itself hence he fries Lucky for his services, makes him to obey him and thus keeps up his authority on the other hand since Lucky is dependent and his essence is life of existence for Pozzo, he is obedient to his master's orders. During their going back at the end of the play Pozzo orders:

Whip! [Lucky puts everything down, looks for whip, finds it, puts it into Pozzo's hand, takes up everything again.] Rope! [Lucky puts everything down, puts end of the rope into Pozzo's hand, takes up everything again.] (85)

If the slave services for master then master can retain his existence.

Pozzo is powerful because he assumes power, because he acts powerful and because he knows how to wheedle others into his drama, whether by force or flattery. He wants servants

and an audience to ratify his every move, walking, standing or sitting, to make his figure into the natural centre of the landscape (is everybody looking at me ?) for if he is not perceived, he will not feel certain that he exists. He puts Vladimir and Estragon in their places with his laughter and his magnanimous concession that they may walk along the road. He needs, nevertheless, as he admits the company of others: 'I cannot go for long without the society of my likes'; 'I don't like talking in a vacuum.' He enjoys bending others to the service of his law and order. He knows very well other's weaknesses and how to play on them. In Act I, Pozzo after sucking the chicken offers the bones to Lucky, and while Lucky refuses to take it, Estragon feels himself very 'lucky' getting the bones – from this it is clear that while Pozzo and Lucky easily show themselves as independent, masters, Estragon shows that he is dependent on them. Again in Act II Pozzo offers money to Vladimir and Estragon. Lucky's first direct communication with what he seems to regard as a new and inferior brand of tormentors takes the form of a violent kick in Estragon's shine. Vladimir, the intellectual and would be authority, tries to model himself imitating, in the game of playing Pozzo and Lucky.

The two friends Vladimir and Estragon need someone to break the monotony of their waiting. Hence both eventually dominate Pozzo-Lucky at their own valuation:

Vladimir : That passed the time.

Estragon : It would have passed in any case

Vladimir: Yes, but not so rapidly. (45)

In Act I they want to enjoy Lucky forced to perform for them. In act II Pozzo is almost unrecognizable, blind, and vulnerable and Lucky, dumb where Vladimir urged by Estragon can cheerfully kick them. Pozzo depends on them more than Lucky. Now Pozzo and Lucky both crippled, have fallen in the middle of the road and can't get up hence need their 'help'. They are now totally at the mercy of Vladimir and Estragon. If they did not help Pozzo and Lucky never get up. In act I Didi and Gogo set Lucky on his feet and in act II they do same for Pozzo. The truth of the dominator's consciousness is accordingly the consciousness of the dominated. Through getting the help of dominated person becomes conscious of his place and, by helping the dominator accordingly attains by this means the direct apprehension of his place.

Again Godot like God who stand always behind the material universe, silently dominate Vladimir and Estragon. The two clochards are waiting for Godot, the rescuer to come, and with them we also have all waited perhaps not by a tree at evening or a country road but waited. It is not clear why we wait except that we said would and there are hints that he has it in his power to make a difference 'Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand.' They are there from beginning to end of the first act. Though they are ready about to leave the

Godot's boy-messenger appears and reactivates Didi's faith in him and the entire illusion. Didi regresses and succumbs for the most ignoble of reasons: that if he didn't, he might be punished and we see that when the curtain comes down it falls in spite of their announced departure, on two men still waiting. They are there again in the second act and again in spite of the announcement of their going, they are still on the stage when the curtain falls they will be there again the next day, and next and the day after that- 'Tomorrow' and tomorrow and

tomorrow' - standing alone on the stage, superfluous without future, without past, irremediably there.

From the opening of the play we see that they never see him, even they never know what they expect from him, except that they expect something. Godot has a superior power in him. He thinks that if he meets them perhaps they will be satisfied with him and will never wait with such satisfaction. Though there is a lack of communication between Godot and Vladimir, Estragon but it strengthens the bondage.

At the end of each day, a boy from Godot arrives to perform his function as a messenger that "Godot will not come today but surely tomorrow." From his own words to Vladimir and Estragon we come to know that both he and his brother work for Godot who does not beat the boy-messenger – a goatherd but his brother – a shepherd. "The master gets his recognition through the slave's consciousness. What is done by the bondsmen is properly an action on the part of the master. For recognition there is needed the moment that what the master does to the slave he should also do to himself, he should do to the master also. On that account a form of recognition has arisen that is one sided and unequal." Godot's treatment to the brothers shows his power that though he is a tormentor to the people who dare to drop him but at the same time have pity, sympathy in him for the obedient people.

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Susmita Paul is very much interested in research and writing research papers.