

## To Leave Yourself Hanging

*Jonathan Kettle*<sup>1</sup>

Imagine you are to have an examination. This examination will shine the spotlight on what you have to say. That you have to say something is not in doubt; what is in doubt is what you have to say. What do you have that you can say? What if this examination were to ask you to say something from what you have read of a text? From where do you say something, anything, in this regard? What you can say from reading a text, can it ever be disentangled from your history, your subjection to the vicissitudes of your life?

I once had such an examination. I didn't read the text; more accurately, I read snippets, but not the entirety - a foray marked by retreat. This text was *Waiting for Godot*<sup>2</sup>. Why is *Waiting for Godot* so difficult to read? There is no answer to that question. I have only my response. Of course you may ask, and quite rightly, for what was I waiting by not reading *Waiting for Godot* and then undertaking an examination?

The text, to me, is a brutal examination of the utter agony of existence. There appears so little in it and what words are mustered are clearly not enough; but not enough for what?

Clearly Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for something – Godot? Of course they are not waiting for Godot; death – yes, perhaps, but not only. How can you wait for anything else besides death? To wait for anything else requires that anything else in life, other than death, is guaranteed, and this is the only other certainty – that there is no other certainty other than death. Despite this, Vladimir and Estragon wait. Who can claim to have never been guilty of such waiting? You can wait for something else, but it will never come. Even if the event happens, the object never arrives. And yet, people wait for many things besides death, and death too, but only death arrives.

What does this change for you, knowing this? Something? Nothing? *Waiting for Godot* is a play where, famously, nothing happens, apparently. Vladimir and Estragon talk, lyrically, maddeningly, with a canter; they fuss with their clothes; they lament; they cannot establish their orientation; they muddle; their illusion of certainty lapses; they despair; they hope; they are joyous, momentarily; they are forlorn. Throughout all this, they speak, though, unlike Lucky, not unceasingly. Vladimir and Estragon speak at several points in the play of their suicide – not Vladimir’s suicide, or Estragon’s suicide, but their suicide, together. They speak of their suicide as a relief from the agony of their existence.

What is the agony of existence? Is it that you are alone? No, the agony is not that you are alone. Is it that you are a subject divided by language? Yes, but this alone is not sufficiently agonising. The agony is that you come to find yourself returned to the same place, the divided subject that you are, alienated company to your self, not knowing how you got there or how to depart. Vladimir and Estragon are acutely aware of this. Can they assuage this agony with each other’s company? They try – they fail. They are tethered by the rope that leads them to be returned to the same place; a rope far longer than is needed to hang themselves from their tree, longer too than the one that tethers Lucky to his master, Pozzo.

Vladimir and Estragon wait for time to pass. It passes, but then comes around again to the same point: night or day, day or night. The time, in effect, does not pass, but revolves. In waiting you find yourself at the same point, fixed and returned. They wait for their appointment with Godot to return, an appointment which they keep. They also keep an appointment of a different kind. Vladimir and Estragon’s words move them, to exasperation, playfulness, fear, hope, disgust, despair, other places besides, but, amongst these movements, they find themselves returned to the same place of the futility of their words in the face of the agony of their existence. In these moments, Vladimir and Estragon keep their appointment with trying to speak again.

Vladimir and Estragon share a forlorn comradeship: quipping, quibbling, consoling, irritating; with Pozzo, Lucky, the Boy, there is obedience, envy, cruelty, dominion, disdain, many things more. But what is striking is there seems to be no love between any of them. Between Vladimir

and Estragon, a comradeship, yes, a jocular spirit, no sooner appeared than gone, even something bordering on an affection which they can never quite embrace, but not love. There are moments of concern, glimpses of tenderness, but not love. Vladimir cannot bear to listen to Estragon's dreams – he does not say that he does not want to listen to them. Estragon retorts that perhaps this universe is enough for Vladimir. On the contrary, isn't Vladimir's refusal to listen to Estragon's dreams testimony to the fact that he anticipates his comrade's universe being too much for him? Wouldn't such an engagement, if it were taken up, be for angst to mark a foray into the province of love?

For Vladimir and Estragon, it is upon their words, the words that can be uttered, the words that are their bearers of hope and despair and all in between, rather than the gnarled branch of their tree, that they hang their existence. Between the vicissitude of hope and despair, they hang on to what can come from their words together, despite the allure of what the arrival of Godot will bring. They have not concluded that it is upon waiting for Godot that they will hang themselves, for they still speak, and they hope that this will bring possibilities. At the end of the day, near their solitary tree and with Estragon's ill-fitting boots, that is all they have - their words and the hope of what they might produce. Amongst the hospital units, medications, home visit teams, friends and family, it might be said to an analyst in the face of suicide: hang onto the words spoken here. Hang onto your appointment. Hang onto hope for we are speaking.

Vladimir and Estragon share a logic in their speaking of suicide. The heavier must attempt suicide first so it will be guaranteed that one is not left alone. Should the branch break because it is unable to hold the weight of the heavier person, one will not be left alive, the other dead. One will not be left alone with the agony of his existence. Why is the possibility of suicide given consideration by Vladimir and Estragon, or anyone for that matter? Such consideration is born, in some way, from the pain of finding yourself returned to the same place, not knowing how you arrived or how to depart.

Vladimir and Estragon consider suicide, but it does not seem to reach the point of being alluring for them. What is alluring for them is waiting for Godot, their apparent saviour. How does suicide come to be imbued with an allure, something far beyond a consideration? The allure of

suicide cannot be ascribed straightforwardly to suicide being a relief from pain, for there are many ways, ever more proliferating ways, professional, licit and illicit, that you can relieve pain, dull pain, anaesthetise pain. Is an allure of suicide born, not only from the pain of finding yourself returned to the same place, but from love being concluded as a failure?

Suicide is when love is forced as a solution to the agony of existence in that I love my self. Suicide irreversibly closes the divide between the I and the self. Tragically, suicide is an attempt to effect a sexual relation – with your self. That there is no sexual relation is a brutal fact of existence - there is no correspondence, no ratio, between the signifier and signified. Vladimir and Estragon's words are testament to this, yet they continue to speak. Love exists because of the fact that there is no sexual relation, not in spite of it. Hope lies in the irrationality of love, the remainder that you are left with that cannot be completely articulated. Who on earth can furnish an answer to the question of why she loves some one? Hopefully you can't; a response, yes, but an answer, no. Tragedy lies in the ratio installed by suicide between the I and the self. I have heard a patient tell me that she is perturbed when suicide becomes a choice. By this logic, prior to that moment, despite there being more than ample ways to kill yourself, suicide cannot be chosen. When it has become a choice, it is rational, a path of all-encompassing ratio that leads to one, and only one, final possible place, with no remainder whatsoever that speaking can manufacture into possibilities.

For the rational being, life is absurd – and yet, it is precisely this rational absurdity, in that there is no sexual relation, that allows the possibility of life being lived through speaking, speaking your love, if you dare. In point of fact, there isn't always only one guarantee in life. For some, suicide breaks that long-held rule by brutally forcing another guarantee, that of love never failing. Who has not heard a person propose that loving someone else is a solution to the agony of her existence through trying to effect a sexual relation? Such love is not a solution to life but provides the possibility of living life with and through the moments of love's failing, through its perpetual inability to effect a sexual relation, without love being concluded as a failure. Love works in so far as the moments of its failing permit the continuation of its working without a conclusion. Therein lies the hope, the hope of what words can be mustered to continue love's working such that you might find yourself not always returned to the same place, but in an

other place. In an other place, who knows what you might say? Hopefully you don't. And what if love, tragically, does not fail? That is the province of suicide.

Do Vladimir and Estragon love each other? It does not seem so. What if they did? They joke, play, console, confuse, hope, despair, all without marking a foray outside the province of comradeship. Vladimir dare not hear Estragon's dreams. They do not turn to each other in love; nor do they turn to love their selves in suicide. Instead, they wait for Godot... for words of love?

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<sup>1</sup> Member of the School. The Freudian School of Melbourne, School of Lacanian Psychoanalysis.

<sup>2</sup> Beckett, S. *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*. London: Faber & Faber, 2006.