

The Oswald Review: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Discipline of English

Volume 18 | Issue 1


Article 3

2016

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Recommended Citation

Wright, Ryan (2016) "Gender and Power in *Waiting for Godot*," *The Oswald Review: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Discipline of English*: Vol. 18: Iss. 1, Article 3.
Available at: <http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/tor/vol18/iss1/3>

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Gender and Power in *Waiting for Godot*

Keywords

gender, power, Waiting For Godot

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In April of 1988, a Dutch theater company named De Haarlemse Toneelschuur began a production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. News spread around the city of Haarlem's theater culture of the company's decision to cast all five of the play's male characters with female actors. Beckett notoriously sued the Haarlem theater group for this decision, claiming that the company failed to disclose their intended cast to him when they requested production license. The trial was legally justified by Beckett's controversial and enigmatic position that the casting decision violated his play's artistic intent (Bordewijk 151). Beckett enforced strict directorial rules on all productions of *Godot*. Dutch theater critic Cobi Bordewijk humorously recounts in her article "The Integrity of the Playtext: Disputed Performances of *Waiting for Godot*" that Beckett spoke out against the 1955 Dublin production's choice of costume color, Peter Hall's London production for its shorter length of dialogue pauses, and "the replacement of the stone by a heap of twigs in the Berlin production, because in this way the simultaneous presence of the animal, the mineral and the vegetable was disturbed" (145).

In spite of the playwright's precise instructions, the Haarlem court judge ruled to allow the female cast performance, citing previous court rulings allowing mixed-race casting. Beckett's biographer and close friend James Knowlson writes that the judge's opinion was that, "since the play was about the human condition in general...it could be played by either men or women" (610). Beckett failed to keep this production from opening, but Knowlson recounts that Beckett's frustration over the Haarlem production caused him to call for a ban on all further productions of his plays in the Netherlands (610). Beckett vehemently insisted both during and after the trial that he did not believe women ought to perform in any role the play offered. When asked about the Haarlem controversy in an interview with theater scholar Linda Ben-Zvi, Beckett defended his position about the casting requirements by insisting "Women don't have prostates"—likely referring to the textual implication that Vladimir's

prostate is enlarged because he frequently needs to urinate (x). Beckett's specificity surrounding *Godot's* staging has induced as much uncertainty among scholars as it has frustration among theater companies. The particular vehemence with which Beckett took on the De Haarlemse Toneelschuur Company has become a significant event in the larger feminist debate addressing gender inequality in the western high arts. The controversy intersects with political-philosophical questions of gender performativity, of authorial intent and its significance, and raises pertinent questions for how to understand the role of gender in the play.

The relationship between gender and power in Beckett's works is a heavily-covered topic in feminist scholarship, and so I draw from several feminist Beckett scholars to posit a textual reading of how masculinity and power interrelate in *Waiting for Godot*. These feminist views of gender and power are employed in conjunction with R. W. Connell's thorough delineation of the various categories of masculinity because I contend that each character, at one time or another, takes on different gradations of masculinity—identities that fluctuate depending on how each character is situated in the schema of power between themselves and the other male characters. As much feminist Beckett scholarship is influenced by the work of Jacques Lacan, my model for gender power dynamics comes from Lacan's phallogocentric model of gender identity constitution. Though Lacan's model is a somewhat outdated model of power that produces only two, polar positions on the gender spectrum, it nonetheless serves as a useful tool for analyzing power dynamics in *Waiting for Godot* because of how the play presents its characters in doubled pairs (Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky, and Godot and the boy).

This inquiry does not intend to provide any defense of Beckett's exclusive casting preferences. Its intent is merely to examine how gender operates in a work that is most commonly considered, by casual theatergoers and academics alike, to be a non-gendered, existential meditation on the human condition in general. Though this inquiry's inspiration does stem from the Haarlem casting controversy, it does not presuppose that there need be any direct or corollary connection between the gender of an actor and the gender of a character they play. For my purposes here, the casting controversy is primarily useful because it suggests that *Waiting for Godot* is capable of being interpreted as having an implicit relationship to masculine gender presentations. What follows is an exploration into what that

relationship might be.

The three pairs of character relationships most informed by power dynamics in the play are Godot and the Boy (or the Boy and the tramps, as shall be argued), Pozzo and Lucky, and Vladimir and Estragon. Examining each relationship's power structure with the Lacanian model enables a new understanding of the disempowerment each character suffers. I argue here that much of *Waiting for Godot's* thematic anxiety and existential dread stem from its characters' inability to maintain stable power positions vis-à-vis the other characters. As Lacan, and many other feminist scholars since, discuss how gender differences are always constituted by—and are even synonymous with—tensions of power between differently gendered bodies, I hold that the play in part reflects an anxiety about the instability of each character's gender identity because of their instability within a complex set of power relations. Pozzo and Vladimir, specifically, experience existential dread because of their inability to rely on a stable, hegemonic masculinity. Whether rendered inferior to the titular patriarch Godot, or because each character is unable to maintain a dominant power-position, masculinity throughout this play is made atrophied and impotent—and thus each character's position within a larger framework of gender and power is consistently unstable.

Before beginning such an analysis, “masculinity” requires definition. Modern gender scholars such as R.W. Connell and Jack Halberstam have observed that there is not any singular masculinity, but a plurality of masculinities that are susceptible to change depending on race, cultural-temporal zeitgeist, social class, perceived gender, and various other facets of social power positions in which the masculine person is situated. In her sociological analysis of masculine gender operations, Connell defines a “hegemonic” genre of masculinity as such:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women... It is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony (though violence often underpins or supports authority).

(77)

This “hegemonic masculinity”—a masculinity defined by its position as an authoritative power—is the kind of masculinity *Godot’s* characters frequently pursue in a kind of Sisyphean effort that is never permanently achieved. I am interested in examining how hegemonic masculinity manifests in each character’s behavior and speech to substantiate the claims that it is drained of its power, and that this impotence is a significant source of anxiety for several of the characters.

I adopt a Lacanian interpretation of power dynamics between *Godot’s* characters for the interpretation that follows. In “The Meaning of the Phallus,” Lacan proposes a “phallogocentric” semiotic model of power dynamics, which posits that the existence of an empowered “subject” is ultimately dependent on the existence of a disempowered ‘Other,’ or “object”:

For the phallus is a signifier... [The phallus] demand constitutes this Other as already possessing the ‘privilege’ of satisfying needs, that is, the power to deprive them of the one thing by which they are satisfied. This privilege of the Other thus sketches out the radical form of the gift of something which it does not have, namely, what is called love.
(80)

The roles “subject” and “object” are only ever differentiated and constituted via a simultaneous creation and domination. The masculine subject/signified necessitates the loving dependence of a compliant feminine object/signifier to reflect back and confirm the masculine subject’s dominant status. Lacan considers the Freudian phallus as a signifier that facilitates this power structure in terms of desire for another being. The phallus is a signifier that substantiates subject-hood when the one who desires the love of another has that love reciprocated. When a masculine subject desires the love of a feminine object, she is said to be the “phallus” in the sense that she fulfills his desire. She, however, is not existing in this power structure autonomously, for she is circumscribed within the bounds of the male subject’s desire. Judith Butler elegantly summarizes Lacan’s analysis in *Gender Trouble*: “‘being’ the Phallus is always a ‘being for’ a masculine subject who seeks to reconfirm and augment his identity through the recognition of that ‘being for’” (58). However, while masculine subjects may appear to hold power over the Othered, feminized objects, the masculine subject’s status as “subject” is actually dependent on

the reciprocated desire of his love-object. By reflecting the subject's dominance back with reciprocated desire, the feminine object-made-Other is actually what creates the masculine subject's sense of dominance. The female Other is the true locus of power in Lacan's phallogocentric symbolic order. For this reason, feminist critics frequently use this model of power to interpret patriarchal power dynamics in order to deconstruct and undermine them.

Using Lacan's phallogocentric theory to examine how masculinity operates in *Waiting for Godot* enables an interpretation that examines specifically how the play's characters experience disempowerment, even as they strive to resist disempowerment by attempting, and failing, to enact hegemonic masculinity. While this method of interpretation has been used in many analyses of Beckett's female characters, it has not been used to interpret the various gradations of power and masculinity amongst the men of *Waiting for Godot*.

For instance, feminist theater critic Anna McMullan argues that Beckett constructs essentially disempowered female characters that bring the "underside[s] of power and authority" to the foreground of his dramas. By doing so, she argues, Beckett plays with the subject/object dichotomy that presupposes the phallogocentric symbolic order without attempting to destabilize or question its patriarchal underpinnings:

[Beckett's] concern with fragmentation, loss and *manque-à-être* suggests an irreparable lack of being which is always at odds with the structures of representation. These structures seem to be ordained by omnipotent patriarchal figures who condemn their creatures to impossible attempts to 'realize identity.' The figures of power and authority in Beckett's plays are almost exclusively male—Godot, Pozzo, Hamm, the Director... As numerous feminist theorists insist, issues of power and gender cannot be separated, since the Symbolic order is constructed on the repression of the feminine as maternal body and as the Other which must be excluded for the identity and voice of the One to be asserted, resulting in an imbalance between the male and the female gender in their historical relation to authority and representation. (70)

But in a play where there are no women to take the role of Other, *Godot's* characters are incapable of realizing a hegemonic masculine identity for a reason that strikes to the heart of how Connell and Lacan each outline masculinity. In lieu of any feminine alternative, each character attempts to construct disempowered—often feminized—Others out of one another. Like an existential game of King of the Hill, each character struggles toward a hegemonic masculine position, and—in so doing—inevitably undermines the dominant identity of the characters who attempts to Other them. In other words, they attempt to constitute a masculine self via the only means they know how: using other characters who are all pursuing the same dominant status, a status only one of them may hold at a time.

Though Godot is not present in the play, he emits a hegemonic masculinity that circumscribes the other characters and prevents them from assuming that status. Feminist Beckett scholar Jennifer M. Jeffers, in a textual analysis informed by biographical premises, claims that Godot's eternally deferred arrival indicates "the impossibility of a *return* of the masculine authoritative tradition" from before World War II (96-97, italics in original). She contends that the characters may at times attempt to enact an ideal masculinity, but consistently fail for the very same reason that Godot cannot arrive: the postwar condition of masculinity has rendered it disempowered and inaccessible to modern men. The scope of Jeffers' argument focuses on Beckett's membership in a generation of Anglo-Irish men who had "no way to *recover* masculine privilege and generations of hegemonic dominance in Ireland" (97, italics in original). For my textual reading of masculinity in the play, it is important to consider Godot as Jeffers considers him: a purely distilled promise of an authoritative, patriarchal essence of power. Godot's level of hegemony affects 'lesser' masculine characters like Pozzo and Vladimir such that their masculinities may (to continue borrowing terms from Connell) be considered "subordinate masculinities": "Hegemony relates to cultural dominance in the society as a whole. Within that overall framework there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men" (Connell 78). Godot's hegemonic power constructs an economy of power that dominates and subordinates the male characters who appear on stage.

This hegemonic power of Godot's, paradoxically enough, is primarily the product of Godot's absence from the stage. Godot is one of Beckett's richest paradoxes in how he enforces an authoritative

presence by providing the ever-potential hope that he *may* appear. Godot enforces his authority on the tramps and audience by holding them in a forever-deferred state of anticipating his arrival. There is a striking similarity between the metaphysical means by which Godot holds characters and audience captive by waiting, and the metaphysical operations that Judith Butler suspects occur when we perceive gendered bodies. She explains how her performative gender theory first occurred to her:

I originally took my clue on how to read the performativity of gender from Jacques Derrida's reading of Kafka's "Before the Law." There the one who waits for the law, sits before the door of the law, attributes a certain force to the law for which one waits. The anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object. I wonder whether we do not labor under a similar expectation concerning gender, that it operates as an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates...the performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself.

(xiv)

For Derrida, the deferral of the Law's disclosure imbues it with its power. Similarly, the deferral of Godot's arrival facilitates his authority. In line with Butler's textual analysis of "Before the Law," Godot's power and existence operate on the same metaphysical level that his masculinity does. Considering how Godot's absence from the stage functions in terms of power opens an interpretive avenue for examining how his hegemonic masculinity operates as a dominating force that disempowers the tramps within the phallogocentric model.

Examining how Godot's *potential* embodiment affects the tramps demonstrates that Godot's deferred arrival is simultaneously the same force that limits the tramps' agency while operating as the defining characteristic of Godot's simultaneous presence/absence. Early in the first act, the tramps reflect on their dependent position to Godot:

ESTRAGON: We've lost our rights?

VLADIMIR: (*distinctly*). We got rid of them.

Silence. They remain motionless, arms dangling, heads sunk, sagging at the knees.

ESTRAGON: (*feebly*). We're not tied? (*Pause*). We're not—

VLADIMIR: Listen!

They listen, grotesquely rigid.

ESTRAGON: I hear nothing.

VLADIMIR: Hsst!

(They listen. Estragon loses his balance, almost falls. He clutches the arm of Vladimir who totters. They listen, huddled together). Nor I.

ESTRAGON: You gave me a fright!

VLADIMIR: I thought it was he.

[...]

VLADIMIR: Tied?

ESTRAGON: Ti-ed.

VLADIMIR: How do you mean tied?

ESTRAGON: Down.

VLADIMIR: But to whom? By whom?

ESTRAGON: To your man.

VLADMIR: To Godot? Tied to Godot! What an idea! No question of it.

(Pause). For the moment. (Beckett 15-17)

Estragon's use of the word "tied" effectively explains the significance Vladimir places on the potential for Godot's arrival. Just as Estragon begins to ask if they are "tied" to, or are reliant on—are subject to—Godot, Vladimir's sudden rush of hope for Godot's appearance serves as a clear, affirmative response. Following Butler's consideration of gender, the tramps' anticipation of Godot's arrival simultaneously conjures Godot and is Godot. The word "tied" does not only speak to the tramps' relationship to

Godot, but to what Godot essentially is for these characters and even for the audience: the ‘One’ who ties, the subject who makes all Others object. This same function of Godot’s power is the defining characteristic of hegemonic masculinity within the Lacanian model. Masculine hegemony constructs itself by simultaneously differentiating itself from femininity via Othering and constructing the feminine. Godot’s power is not divorced from his masculine hegemony; it *is* his masculine hegemony, and he is his power.

As such a masculine force of power, Godot withholds any sort of empowerment from the tramps, including hegemonic masculine empowerment, while simultaneously Othering them into a power position comparable to the Lacanian feminine Other. The tramps, ironically, are the Others that substantiate the power, identity, and even the existence of the patriarch Godot via their dependent waiting for him, but they are unable to act on their position within the power structure because they are unable (or unwilling) to leave without meeting him:

ESTRAGON: [...] Let’s go

VLADIMIR: We can’t.

ESTRAGON: Why not?

VLADIMIR: We’re waiting for Godot.

ESTRAGON: (*despairingly*). Ah! (8)

The way Godot’s power operates is a necessary component of interpreting how the staged characters’ attempts at empowerment are circumscribed by Godot’s masculine power because of how it places all other masculinities in the play in subordinate roles—and makes them subordinate masculinities.

The character whose affiliation with Godot best reflects the gender disempowered position that all the other characters are put into is the Boy who appears at the end of each act. He is young, meaning he has the potential to be perceived as masculine, but is subordinate in his masculine performance to the older men who populate the stage. The very fact that language differentiates his masculinity, the French “garçon” and the English “boy,” indicates a markedly different masculinity than the kind implied in “homme” or “man.” If a hierarchical list of power dynamics among the play’s characters were made, and if each character’s influence and control over the others were ranked across the script’s

text, Godot and the Boy would bracket the list's respective beginning and end while all other characters intermittently change positions with one another over the course of the play. The Boy never leaves that bottom position. Even the more passive characters, Estragon and Lucky, at times assert masculine dominance over the Boy:

VLADIMIR: Well what is it?

ESTRAGON: What kept you so late?

The Boy looks at them in turn, not knowing to which he should reply.

VLADIMIR: *(to Estragon)*. Let him alone.

ESTRAGON: *(violently)*. You let me alone. *(Advancing, to the Boy.)* Do you know what time it is?

BOY: *(recoiling)*. It's not my fault, Sir.

ESTRAGON: And whose is it? Mine?

BOY: I was afraid, Sir.

ESTRAGON: Afraid of what? Of us? *(Pause.)* Answer me!

[...]

VLADIMIR: You were afraid of the whip?

BOY: Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR: The roars?

BOY: Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR: The two big men.

BOY: Yes Sir. (53-54)

Both "big men," including the subordinate and helpless Lucky, intimidate the necessarily subordinate child. Even Estragon suddenly takes on a position of domineering authority when speaking to the Boy, and Vladimir experiences a momentary paternal bond with him:

ESTRAGON: That's all a pack of lies. *(Shaking the Boy by the arm.)* Tell us the truth!

BOY: (*trembling*). But it is the truth, Sir!

VLADIMIR: Will you let him alone! What's the matter with you?

(*Estragon releases the boy*)

[...]

VLADIMIR: You don't know if you're unhappy or not?

BOY: No Sir.

VLADIMIR: You're as bad as myself. (54-56)

In this way the Boy is the closest thing to a consistently subordinate Other through which the other characters attempt to construct a sense of masculine subjecthood. All four of them at least implicitly use the Boy for such identity construction, even only from the audience's perspective as with Pozzo and Lucky who did not know the Boy was present. The ease with which these characters fall into the performed subject/object dichotomy of power with the Boy, however, is the counterpart to the ease with which Godot holds that power relationship with all other characters in the play.

In Lacanian terms, the Boy may be said to “be for” or “signify” the masculine subjects who use him. The tramps easily recognize the Boy as a signifier for Godot (and thus Godot's masculinity) yet not do not perceive the Boy as masculine himself. The Boy is a signifier for Godot, yet he is incapable (unlike Pozzo) of being confused for Godot:

The Boy advances timidly, halts.

VLADIMIR: What is it?

BOY: Mr. Godot...

VLADMIR: Obviously... (*Pause*). Approach. (53)

The Boy's position in the semiotics of gendered power are “obvious” to all who look upon him. The Boy stands in for Godot; he denotes his presence even though Godot himself remains absent. Vladimir and all other characters, however, fail to consciously recognize how their disempowered position is much closer to the Boy's than it ever could be to Godot's since, as will soon be argued, they all have moments of attempting to dominate one another to achieve a sense of Godot-esque masculine subjecthood. The Boy, as a phallogocentric signifier, is the only member of the cast fit to deliver the only bodily descriptor

of Godot in the play. The boy delivers a descriptor that signifies (like the Boy's own Object-ified presence) Godot's authoritative masculinity:

VLADIMIR: (*softly*). Has he a beard, Mr. Godot?

BOY: Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR: Fair or... (*he hesitates*)...or black?

BOY: I think it's white, Sir.

Silence.

VLADIMIR: Christ have mercy on us! (106)

The Boy facilitates a layering of power: he is made Other by the four primary characters, who are in turn made Other by the supreme force of masculine hegemony that is Godot. Within the bounds of Godot's hegemonic masculinity, the other characters attempt to enact hegemonic masculinities, but these are necessarily subordinate to Godot because (as argued by Connell) hegemony may only be maintained by a single group holding that singular, dominant power-position.

Perhaps the character that is most affected by this hegemonic ceiling that Godot creates is the tyrannical Pozzo. As he comes on stage for the first time, Pozzo exudes a natural sense of authority that puts all other characters on stage in a subordinate position to him. His introductory stage directions delineate these power positions before he even walks on stage:

A terrible cry, close at hand [...] Huddled together, shoulders hunched, cringing away from the menace, [the tramps] wait. Enter Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo drives Lucky by means of a rope passed around his neck, so that Lucky is the first to enter, followed by the rope which is long enough to let him reach the middle of the stage before Pozzo appears. (18)

Pozzo's introduction is marked by the tramps' fear and confusion and then by Lucky's status as Pozzo's slave. In agreement with the Lacanian model, it is the slave who appears first on stage as the dominated who enables the identity of the master. Lucky must both physically and metaphysically appear on stage before Pozzo in order to substantiate (and create) Pozzo's masculine subjecthood. The rope around Lucky's neck serves as a visual drum-roll that prefaces Pozzo's entrance, and simultaneously embeds

the pair in a similar signifying relationship to the Boy's and Godot's. The Boy and Lucky each serve to denote their empowered subjects—each are seen by the tramps and audience as representative of some other, more powerful, being. Taking a similar power-position to Godot, Pozzo manages to reach toward a comparable hegemonic masculine status. Startled, Vladimir and Estragon are temporarily no longer waiting for Godot, but “they wait” for the origin of the cry. In this moment, the locus of power over the tramps briefly shifts from Godot to Pozzo. Pozzo dominates the attention of both characters and audience with the same tool he uses to dominate Lucky: the taut, even phallic, rope enables a violent domination of Lucky such that Pozzo attains the subject status of ‘signified’ in the phallogocentric model. Didi, Gogo, Lucky, and the audience are all aligned in this moment while waiting for Pozzo's entrance vis-à-vis Lucky and the attention-binding rope.

Though emulating a Godot-like authority, Pozzo's masculinity ultimately fails to maintain a consistent hegemonic status because of the matrix of power that forces all within it beneath Godot in the hierarchy. Pozzo emulates this Godot-esque authority by imperfectly attempting to metatheatrically dominate both the events of the play and the focus of the audience such that those who gaze upon him take an ‘Object’ position to substantiate Pozzo's empowerment. The phonetic harshness of his name, for instance, is used to silence any other character's speech and even evokes an exaggerated first syllable in its articulation:

ESTRAGON: (*timidly, to Pozzo*). You're not Mr. Godot,

Sir?

POZZO: (*terrifying voice*). I am Pozzo! (*Silence*). Pozzo! Does that name mean nothing to you? (*Silence*). I say does that name mean nothing to you?

Vladimir and Estragon look at each other questioningly.

ESTRAGON: (*pretending to search*). Bozzo... Bozzo...

VLADIMIR: (*ditto*). Pozzo... Pozzo...

POZZO: PPPOZZZO! (19)

Pozzo attempts to imbue the sound of his name with an affective power to control the tramps'

behavior, but Vladimir and Estragon unintentionally undermine this reach for power when they fail to recognize Pozzo's name. Pozzo's hegemony, here, determinately pales in comparison to Godot's. Pozzo is necessarily less impressive, important, and less powerful than Godot if the mere fact of him not being Godot is enough to devolve his authority into shouted demands. Pozzo's masculine authority—unstable in both Lacan and Connell's theories—requires that he place the onus on Others, here Vladimir and Estragon, to substantiate it. Pozzo performs important signs of autonomy when contrasted with the tramps. For instance, unlike Vladimir, for whom laughter is “prohibited,” Pozzo is able to laugh with what the stage directions describe as “*an enormous laugh*” (19, italics in original).

Nonetheless, Pozzo inevitably fails where Godot succeeds in maintaining a hegemonic masculinity because Pozzo's presence on stage falls short of the unyielding, hegemonic authority of which Godot is composed. Jeffers refers to the imperfections of Pozzo's masculinity represented in the play's language, calling him an “imposter to the throne of Godot” (19). Interpreting Godot as an emblem of prewar, Western patriarchy, Jeffers argues that Pozzo represents an imperfect double of Godot's patriarchal hegemony since he is initially mistaken for Godot by both the tramps and first-time audience members. Their flawed double relationship, she contends, foregrounds Pozzo's masculine imperfections, the most damning of which is an implied homosexuality between himself and Lucky:

Critics always avoid the sexually sadomasochistic possibilities that [Pozzo and Lucky] present.... The fact that Pozzo is authoritative, yet effeminate, is overlooked. Pozzo is the pretender to the throne of Godot—so why is it not conceivable that he is also pretender to the throne of masculine-heterosexuality? Nothing explicitly sexual occurs in the play, and yet, Pozzo forcefully controls his partner's body through bondage. Beckett may be presenting something darker and more deeply disturbing to Western masculine heterosexuality than critics wish to acknowledge. (98-99)

Pozzo's possible homosexual masculinity can only be judged as a subordinate masculinity to Godot's hegemony in the context of Western hetero-patriarchal power dynamics. Indeed, Connell even refers to contemporary Western homosexual man as “the most important case in contemporary European/

American society” of subordinate masculinity when she first defines the term (78). Jeffers’ interpretation of Pozzo’s character in this way signals that Pozzo’s masculinity fails to maintain the heteronormative, hegemonic base of patriarchal subjecthood if such a subordinate masculinity can even be sensed in his presentation.

Perhaps consistent with Jeffers’ suspicions are my observations that Pozzo defends his authority by devoting his time to keeping others in a submissive position. When asked why Lucky does not put down his bags, Pozzo’s response is prolonged and peppered with violent tugs at Lucky’s rope:

Pozzo: Good. Is everybody ready? Is everybody looking at me? (*He looks at Lucky, jerks the rope [...] Lucky looks at him.*) Good. [...] I am ready. Is everybody listening? Is everybody ready? (*He looks at them all in turn, jerks the rope.*) Hog! (*Lucky raises his head.*) I don’t like talking in a vacuum.
Good. Let me see.

He reflects. (28)

Pozzo’s masculine authority demands this consistent level of maintenance. Unlike the tramps, who earn the audience’s attention passively at the play’s beginning (as there is no alternative), Pozzo *actively* acquires the audience and tramps’ attention with forced and prolonged demands for it. Pozzo forcibly drains any other presence on stage from having the potential to distract from his. In spite of this effort, Pozzo can only temporarily manage to distract from Godot’s unyielding presence/absence. Pozzo is free to do very little besides maintain his sense of authority, while Godot’s perfect masculine hegemony effortlessly subdues the tramps and audience solely with his absence and anticipated arrival.

The second act reveals the deep extent to which Pozzo as a character is defined by constantly maintaining his authority. Pozzo’s blindness is linked primarily to his fall from authoritative masculine privilege, but simultaneously expresses the instability and loss of how he defines himself in relation to power. Contrasting Pozzo’s and Lucky’s aforementioned entrance stage directions from act one with their entrance directions in act two suggests an interpretation of the rope as flaccidly phallic, indicating the fragility of Pozzo’s authority: “*Enter Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo is blind. Lucky burdened as before. Rope as before, but much shorter, so that Pozzo may follow more easily*” (Beckett 87). The rope has become

necessary for Pozzo to move at all, not the same image of dominating masculine subjecthood from the first act. Its shortness simultaneously articulates Pozzo's reliance on Lucky, "*so that Pozzo may follow more easily,*" and tethers his blindness to his loss of personal autonomy. This loss of autonomy does not merely indicate Pozzo's fall from power, but may even be considered a kind of emasculation. He falls to the level of Lucky, a character that is measurably subordinate in the masculine hierarchies outlined by Connell, and even marked as a more feminine presence in the play by the two tramps:

VLADIMIR: (*grudgingly*). He's not bad looking.

ESTRAGON: (*shrugging his shoulders, wry face*). Would you say so?

VLADIMIR: A trifle effeminate. (23)

Affiliating Pozzo with Lucky's subordinate masculinity is a significant component of what his fall from power is composed of. While in the first act Pozzo does an enormous amount of work to differentiate himself from Lucky and the tramps' power-position, the stage directions of the second act indicate that now the two are more similar in terms of power. Pozzo obstinately binds himself to hegemonic power in the first act such that his loss of it disrupts and destroys the means by which Pozzo orients himself in the world around him. While the first act's Pozzo knows the time of day by looking at his watch (allowing him an awareness of time that the tramps are consistently uncertain of), his loss of sight has left him entirely dependent on Lucky and the tramps for orienting himself temporally or spatially. Pozzo allegorizes the Lacanian model of power with how deeply his hegemony relies on a disempowered Other. Any existential dread the play might suggest about its characters' various masculinities is most pronounced in Pozzo's character because of the extent of his dramatic fall.

Though Pozzo, in my view, is the best example of this disparity of masculine power that I see the play grappling with, Vladimir and Estragon's relationship is the most frequent site of this theme in the script. Vladimir and Estragon unsuccessfully attempt to achieve hegemonic masculinity by controlling and limiting one another's sense of independence. In so doing, they consistently cause one another profound grief and anxiety. The two tramps take turns upsetting one another's attempts at achieving a dominant power position by two primary means: 1) each of them (but primarily Vladimir)

have a tendency to argue that the other is in a more effeminate position in their partnership, and suggest that the more feminine partner requires the more masculine partner as a matter of necessity; 2) each of them, in the process of attempting to use the other as such, asserts himself as more independent than the other—thus destabilizing the other’s illusions of autonomy and subjecthood. For instance, it is often unclear whether Estragon genuinely needs Vladimir for personal support and guidance, or whether Vladimir needs Estragon to need him. Vladimir repeatedly asserts that he is responsible for protecting Estragon from the strangers who beat him:

VLADIMIR: When I think of it... all these years... but for me... where would you be... (*Decisively.*) You’d be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute, no doubt about it.

ESTRAGON: And what of it?

VLADIMIR (*gloomily*): It’s too much for one man.... (3)

Vladimir’s alleged responsibility for Estragon’s safety demonstrates how Vladimir attempts to construct a sense of independent authority via his responsibility for Estragon. Vladimir’s attempts to construct authority are recognizably similar in kind, yet weaker in degree, to the two more markedly patriarchal characters: Godot and Pozzo. Vladimir may prey on what he perceives to be Estragon’s dependence in order to substantiate a personal sense of masculine hegemony, but, unlike Pozzo and Godot, Vladimir is frequently willing to admit his personal feelings of need for Estragon. Vladimir repeatedly and openly expresses to Estragon that without him Vladimir is prone to experience anxiety:

VLADIMIR: ... (*Estragon falls asleep. Vladimir halts finally before Estragon.*) Gogo! ... Gogo! ... GOGO!

Estragon wakes with a start.

ESTRAGON: (*restored to the horror of his situation.*) I was asleep!

(*Despairingly.*) Why will you never let me sleep?

VLADIMIR: I felt lonely. (10)

Vladimir’s willingness to admit his reliance on Estragon makes hegemonic masculinity inaccessible to him in these moments because hegemonic masculinity requires the illusion of autonomous authority. The moment this illusion is interrupted, the true nature of the feminine object’s power to substantiate

the masculine subject is revealed. With its visibility, the system that enables masculine empowerment fails. In contrast to Pozzo, Vladimir does not rush to defend his masculinity when his reliance on his partner is acknowledged:

POZZO. [Lucky] used to be so kind... so helpful... and entertaining... my good angel... and now... he's killing me. [...] Gentlemen, I don't know what came over me. Forgive me. Forget all I said. (*More and more his old self.*) I don't remember exactly what it was, but you may be sure there wasn't a word of truth in it. (*Drawing himself up, striking his chest.*) Do I look like a man that can be made to suffer? (34)

Unlike Pozzo, Vladimir does not tether successfully achieving masculine hegemony to his deeper sense of self. When Pozzo's power is disrupted, he could be said to become an entirely different character, requiring, as the stage directions here indicate, that he become "*more and more his old self*" after he reorients himself to presenting himself as autonomous. Vladimir's character, however, appears consistent even though he oscillates along various levels of semi-empowered subordinate masculinities.

Vladimir and Estragon's wavering dependence on one another is a paradigmatic example of how power relates to gender in the play. When Vladimir begins wearing Lucky's hat after the vaudeville-esque hat exchange, Vladimir playfully takes on an aestheticized, feminized, and vaguely sexualized role by asking Estragon to comment on how he looks with a new hat:

VLADIMIR: [...] How does it fit me?
 ESTRAGON: How would I know?
 VLADIMIR: No, but how do I look in it?
He turns his head coquettishly to and fro, minces like a mannequin.
 ESTRAGON: Hideous. (81)

Here, Vladimir intentionally invites Estragon to perform a kind of ironic male gaze, playfully allowing Estragon to take the role of masculine subject to Vladimir's feminized object. Vladimir appears to understand, here, that there is a relationship between gender and power, and that he and Estragon are

implicated in their power dynamics. Estragon, however, is recurrently ignorant of Vladimir's various attempts at gender play. When Vladimir asks Estragon to play roles that mimic Pozzo and Lucky, Estragon is unable to understand how to take on the different power roles that Vladimir mimics:

VLADIMIR: Will you not play?

ESTRAGON: Play what?

VLADIMIR: We could play at Pozzo and Lucky.

ESTRAGON: Never heard of it.

VLADIMIR: I'll do Lucky, you do Pozzo. (*He imitates Lucky sagging under the weight of his baggage. Estragon looks at him with stupefaction.*) Go on.

ESTRAGON: What am I to do?

VLADIMIR: Curse me! (82)

The tramps cyclically confuse and frustrate one another in such moments because Vladimir is aware of the power dynamics between the two that Estragon frequently fails to recognize. It may even be that such power dynamics might even not exist at all between the tramps were it not for Vladimir's insistence on repeating them and play-acting them.

When the duo play-act their routine of arguing—threatening to leave one another, making amends, and continuing to wait together—they encapsulate a summary of their relationship and the oscillating power dynamics between them:

VLADIMIR: Moron!

ESTRAGON: That's the idea, let's abuse each other.

They turn, move apart, turn again and face each other.

VLADIMIR: Moron!

ESTRAGON: Vermin!

[...]

ESTRAGON: Now let's make it up.

VLADIMIR: Gogo!

ESTRAGON: Didi!

VLADIMIR: Your hand!

ESTRAGON: Take it!

VLADIMIR: Come to my arms! (85)

This parody of their dynamic demonstrates how the frustrations that build between the two devolve into power struggles before reverting back to their normal placidity. Their tension recurs because they are “tied” via patriarchal hegemony to Godot, while simultaneously relying on each other for validation and calm. Vladimir struggles with an anxiety surrounding his dominant position over Estragon, and is terrified of Estragon leaving him alone. Estragon likely fails to recognize how his threat to leave Vladimir destabilizes Vladimir’s sense of authority for the very same reasons that Estragon fails to understand the power dynamics that Vladimir presumes operate in their relationship: Estragon is simply ignorant of them in spite of the fact that they are there. If they were not, there would be nothing for Vladimir to play *with* in these moments. The anxiety and pain that the two cause one another cannot be separated from each of their brief attempts at masculine hegemony because, as McMullan reminds us, issues of gender and power cannot be separated.

The purpose of this essay has been to outline a network of power dynamics in *Waiting for Godot* that are embedded in a larger culture that recognizes those power dynamics as having gendered undertones. I contend that these power dynamics are significant components of Pozzo’s, Vladimir’s, and Estragon’s existential dread, and that these dynamics provide useful language for Godot’s influence over the characters and audience. Though what I have described here focuses on *Waiting for Godot’s* characters as specifically masculine characters, this in no way runs counter to my political stance that anybody, regardless of gender, ought to be able to perform any of the play’s characters. Not only does Butler’s gender performativity theory substantiate a philosophical position that bodies perceived as one kind of gender are very capable of successfully performing another gender such that they are another gender, but even if these characters were performed as female *characters* (not merely by non-male actors) this network of power I have described would not be ignored, or even violated. Playing any of these characters as women would certainly augment and develop each character’s position in this power

hierarchy because this hierarchy is composed of the power necessarily present in gender differences. These power relations are a deep component of this play, and would not disappear, become irrelevant, or in any way be lost to such an artistic decision. They would instead mold to become a component of how such a performance with female characters operates thematically. In fact, such a performance would be incredibly useful for better understanding the limits and properties of this network of power. Played differently, experimental performances such as the De Haarlemse Toneelschuur production contribute to a collective understanding of what the play is and does. What I have described here is necessarily incomplete without such experimental productions, and without the freedom to have them. ✨

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