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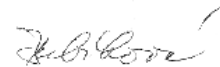
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ABSTRACT

This bachelor paper deals with Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and is divided into three main parts. The first part of this thesis briefly deals with the Czech translation of the play including its history, commentary upon problematic parts and one possible error of Patrik Ouředník's translation. The second part concerns the numerous themes and motifs such as religion, existentialism, humor, etc.; also, it concisely describes the main characters, plot, general historical context and cultural influences. The last part focuses upon the arrival of *Waiting for Godot* into Czechoslovakia, the role it played during the Velvet Revolution; it examines the ways the play is currently perceived both by the audience and the artists and, last but not least, deals with the international reception.

KEY WORDS

Waiting for Godot, Samuel Beckett, The Theatre of the Absurd, Czech translation, interpretation, reception

NÁZEV PRÁCE

Čekání na Godota od Samuela Becketta a jeho český překlad

ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá hrou Samuela Becketta *Čekání na Godota* a dělí se na tři hlavní části. První část se stručně zabývá českým překladem této divadelní hry. Zahrnuje historii českých překladů, komentář k problematickým částem překladu a jednu možnou chybu Ouředníkovy překladu. Druhá část se pak zabývá mnohými motivy a tématy hry, a to např. náboženstvím, existencialismem, humorem atd. Rovněž v krátkosti zmiňuje popis hlavních postav, zápletku, obecný historický kontext a kulturní vlivy. Poslední část se věnuje příchodu hry *Čekání na Godota* do Československa a jejímu vlivu na Sametovou revoluci, současné recepci hry v České republice a v neposlední řadě světové recepci díla.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Čekání na Godota, Samuel Beckett, absurdní drama, český překlad, interpretace, recepce

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0. Introduction

“Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness.”

Samuel Beckett (Internet 0)

Being the epitome of a playwright associated with The Theatre of the Absurd, Samuel Beckett believed that human existence has no purpose and thus all communication has no meaning. Taking this into account, he came to the conclusion that the ultimate verdict must be silence. The reality is viewed as absurd, devoid of meaning and hollow. Samuel Beckett’s well-known play *Waiting for Godot*, besides other things, deals with this issue and, at the same time, proffers an immense number of different interpretations and themes. In fact, the number is so enormous that literary critics and scholars have produced “a confusing mass of commentary which significantly outweighs Beckett’s total writings” (Innes and Nixon, 1992, p. 430)

The first part of this thesis briefly deals with the Czech translation of the play including its history, commentary upon problematic parts and one possible error of Patrik Ouředník’s translation. The second and the most extensive part concerns the numerous themes and motifs such as religion, existentialism, humor, etc.; also, it concisely describes the main characters, plot, general historical context and cultural influences. The last part focuses upon the arrival of *Waiting for Godot* into Czechoslovakia, the role it played during the Velvet Revolution and briefly describes the relationship between Havel and Beckett in order to provide the readers with a general historical context. Next, it examines how the play is currently perceived both by the audience and the artists and concerns the international reception. Lastly, conclusions will be drawn.

1. Czech translation and the questions of translations of drama

Being one of the most acclaimed and influential plays of the 20th century, hardly is it a surprise that *Waiting for Godot* has been translated into numerous languages and the Czech language is no exception. As Beckett's play enjoys enduring popularity in the Czech Republic (see 3. Reception), a number of translations have been produced. Ouředník's translation, however, is by far the most popular one and therefore this chapter focuses on it in more detail.

The chapter consists of seven subchapters that deal with the history of Czech translations, make comments upon problematic parts of translations and examine one possible mistake in Ouředník's translation.

1.1 Brief history

First and foremost, it is vitally important to realize that Beckett's play was originally written in French and, like other Beckett's translations, the English version is not only a mere translation but a significantly improved version of the original:

“Small but significant differences separate the French and English text. Some, like Vladimir's inability to remember the farmer's name, show how the translation became more indefinite, attrition and loss of memory more pronounced.” (Ackerley and Gontarski, 2006, p. 622-623)

Czech translations are traditionally based on the French version; nevertheless, Patrik Ouředník's version from 2010 takes the updated English version into consideration. Jiří Kolář¹, whose translation of the play was published as early as 1964, proved to be particularly helpful in bringing *Waiting for Godot* into Czechoslovakia. (Internet 1) It was not until 1968 that Patrik Ouředník² published his translation of *An Attendant Godot*, which, in the course of time, became increasingly widespread and highly regarded. The fact that Patrik Ouředník's translation was reissued by Větrné mlýny³ in 2005 and subsequently in 2010 bears evidence to its enduring popularity among Czech readers.

¹ A Czech translator, poet, writer and painter (1914 – 2002)

² A Czech translator and writer born in 1957

³ Czech publisher established in 1995

1.2 Commentary

First, it is crucial to highlight that not even Samuel Beckett knew who or what Godot really is (Internet 2). It is clear then, that translating *Waiting for Godot* is a challenging task for every translator as they cannot be completely sure what the meanings of different parts of the play are. They should, of course, try to understand as much as possible. Martin Esslin claims that readers should subject Beckett's play to

“careful scrutiny by isolating sets of images and by attempting to discern their structural groundwork. The results of such an examination should make it easier to follow the author's intention and to see, if not the *answers* to his questions, at least what the *questions* are that he is asking.” (Esslin, 1980, p. 45)

Since the Czech translation is based on the French version, it would be pointless to try to carry out a thorough comparison of the English and the Czech version as there are a significant number of modifications. Ergo, the goal of this chapter is to highlight certain aspects of translating of such a dramatic text that have to be dealt with. Subsequently, one aspect of Patrik Ouředník's translation will be analyzed.

1.2.1 Intelligibility

First, it should be emphasized that every dramatic text is intended not only to be read, but, more importantly, to be performed. It is, therefore, absolutely crucial that the translator determines what the structural features that make the play performable are and translates them correctly. (Bassnet, 2002, p. 126) One of such features is speakability and intelligibility of the text. Jiří Levý⁴ addressed this issue in his book *The Art of Translation*:

“Theatre dialogue is spoken text intended for oral delivery and aural reception. On the most elementary, acoustic level this means that sequences of sounds which are difficult to articulate and which the audience may mishear are unsuitable.” (Levý, 2011, p. 129)

Robert Corrigan agrees with this statement:

“At all times the translator must *hear* the voice that speaks and take into account the ‘gesture’ of the language, the cadence rhythm and pauses that occur when the written text is spoken.” (Bassnet, 2002, p. 125)

⁴ A Czech literary and translation theoretician (1926 – 1967)

Taking the aforementioned into account, it is advisable that translators use “short sentences and paratactic structures that are easier to articulate and follow rather than compound sentences with a complex hierarchy of subordinate clauses.” (Levý, 2011, p. 129) It is, nevertheless, important to discern when it was author’s intention to perhaps baffle the audience. One of the most striking examples is Lucky’s speech in the first act of *Waiting for Godot*. Samuel Beckett intentionally did not use any commas, periods, semicolons and other punctuation marks and it would be clearly a mistake to use them in translation.

1.2.2 Stage directions

Stage directions in *Waiting for Godot* play a particularly significant role and it is no secret that Samuel Beckett considered productions that ignored his stage directions completely unacceptable. (Kalb, 1991, p. 79) It is also clear that even “the slightest semantic deviation may alter the set design”. (Levý, 2011, p. 162-163) The stage directions in this play are oftentimes very precise. Actors are instructed on how to pronounce certain words and phrases (e.g. admiringly, decisively, gloomily, cheerfully, angrily, musingly, etc.). The most common stage direction, nonetheless, is “Silence”. In fact, it is such an important part of the play that, according to Fletcher (1978), the pauses consume up to twenty minutes of the play. Also, there are a substantial number of stage directions concerning actors’ movement.

Beckett’s heavy emphasis on exactitude places considerable demands on translators. Every, albeit trivial, change could ruin Beckett’s intention:

“Tight control must be exercised over the timing of every utterance and every movement in this play, and the actors, like well-trained acrobats, must rehearse each gesture until it is perfectly smooth and precise.” (Fletcher, 1978, p. 45)

Fletcher also stated that:

“The pauses and silences specified in the stage directions must be scrupulously respected. If this is done, the play’s characteristic rhythm, which consists of the alternation between a burst of speech and activity on the one hand, comes forcibly across” (Fletcher, 1978, p. 44)

Taking this into consideration, it is clear how vital it is to pay close attention to stage directions when translating any of Beckett’s plays.

1.2.3 Terse style

It appears fairly self-evident that Beckett's style, which is sometimes described as terse (Eliopoulos, 1975, p. 57), plays a prominent part in the overall impression. Such a style of writing perfectly complements the play and it is arguable that any other approach would hardly achieve the desired result. It is, thus, important that translators take this fact into account when translating and make necessary adjustments.

1.2.4 Indeterminacy of meaning

When translating Beckett's first play, it is of the utmost importance to bear in mind that every line and every word might be involved in a number of semantic contexts in the play. Individual characters of the play might interpret them in quite different ways and so can the audience. Should the translator not respect this fact, the play could easily lose its "peculiar richness":

"It is the peculiar richness of a play like *Waiting for Godot* that it opens vistas on so many different perspectives. It is open to philosophical, religious, and psychological interpretations, yet above all it is a poem on time, evanescence, and the mysteriousness of existence, the paradox of change and stability, necessity and absurdity" (Esslin, 1980, p. 60)

Therefore, "translators must select wording that may be understood in a number of different ways." (Levý, 2011, p. 143)

1.2.5 The translation of "quaquaqua"

The seemingly nonsensical sound "quaquaqua" that Lucky utters during his speech might, in fact, have an underlying meaning. First, let us compare the French, English and Czech versions:

French version

LUCKY: Etant donné l'existence telle qu'elle jaillit des récents travaux publics de Poinçon et Wattmann d'un Dieu personnel quaquaquaqua à barbe blanche quaqua hors du temps (Beckett, 2004, p. 59)

English version

LUCKY: Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time (Internet 3)

Czech version

LUCKY: Vzhledem k existenci osobního kvakva Boha jak vyplývá z nedávného veřejného průzkumu Poinçonova a Wattmannova s kvakvakvakva bílým voussem mimo čas (Beckett, 2005, 43)

Out of these three versions, the Czech one is the only one that altered the word “qua”. In the Czech language “kva” represents a rough low sound, like the a frog makes. Its English and French versions are croak and coâ respectively. Thus it is apparent that Beckett, by using the word “qua”, did not mean to imitate animal sounds. Whereas it is possible that the author’s sole intention was to create a series of nonsensical sounds, it is also possible that its meaning is somehow connected with the English word “qua” that comes from Latin. Also, “quaquaqua” is similar to the word “quaquaversal”.

Taking all this into consideration, it is arguable that Ouředník’s translation is not very precise and it would have been perhaps better not to translate the phrase “quaquaqua”.

2. Analysis

This part embraces, inter alia, a brief synopsis of the plot, a general description of the historical context, an analysis of several themes and motifs.

2.1 General historical context

Waiting for Godot was originally written in French as *En attendant Godot*. The English translation was published in 1952, whereas the French original was composed between October 9, 1948 and January 29, 1949. (Ackerley and Gontarski, 2006, p. 172) Nonetheless, the premiere did not take place until January 5, 1953. It was in the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris and it was directed by Roger Blin⁵ (Internet 4). The English premiere took place in 1955 in Cambridge, England and was directed by Peter Hall⁶. (Internet 5) Other productions quickly followed and *Waiting for Godot* gradually became internationally famous (see 3.8).

This play is traditionally considered to be a part of the Theater of the Absurd, because of its lack of chronological plot, plausible characters and meaningful dialogs. But it can also be viewed as an existentialist play because it examines questions such as meaninglessness of human existence and the meaning of God in our lives.

The Theater of the Absurd, which emerged during the 1950s in Paris, took its name from Albert Camus' existentialist description of the dilemma of modern humanity. Camus viewed people as strangers in a meaningless universe and our whole existence considered pointless. Absurdist playwrights embraced this vision. And since Samuel Beckett is oftentimes considered the epitome of absurdist playwrights, by no means is it a surprise that many existential interpretations emerged after *Waiting for Godot* was staged. Other famous playwrights are for example Jean Genet⁷, Edward Albee⁸ or Eugène Ionesco⁹.

2.2 Literary and cultural influences

Beckett said that one of the sources of inspiration for writing *Waiting for Godot* was the painting *Man and Woman Contemplating the Moon* (see appendix) by Caspar David

⁵ A French actor and director, 1907 – 1984

⁶ An English theater and film director born in 1930

⁷ A French novelist, poet, playwright, 1910 – 1986

⁸ An American playwright, born in 1928

⁹ A Romanian and French playwright, 1909 – 1994

Friedrich¹⁰. (Knowlson, 1996, p. 378) But the first impulse to write was much simpler as Beckett admits: "I began to write *Godot* as a relaxation, to get away from the awful prose I was writing at the time." (Internet 6) Since *Waiting for Godot* is strongly influenced by existentialism, it is safe to say that writers such as Ionescu, Sartre and Camus had also significant effect on Beckett's writing.

Being a very well known play, *Waiting for Godot* influenced a large number of works. One of them is an unauthorized sequel, written by Miodrag Bulatović¹¹ in 1966, *Godot Arrived*. In this play, Godot is described as a baker. (Bulatović, 1968) In late 1990s, another unauthorized sequel written by Daniel Curzon¹² and entitled *Godot Arrives* was released. (Internet 7) The last work that I would like to mention here is *The Last Godot* by Matei Vişniec¹³, in which Godot and Samuel Beckett are the two characters and talk about Beckett's work. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 7900-7902)

2.3 Plot description

Waiting for Godot is a play about two men, Vladimir and Estragon, who are waiting near a tree for someone called Godot to arrive. Waiting, they endlessly discuss various topics just to pass the time. After a while, their waiting is suddenly interrupted by Pozzo and his slave Lucky, who has a rope tied around his neck. At first they mistake Pozzo for Godot for they have never seen Godot and they do not know what he looks like. They talk and Pozzo asks who Godot is but they cannot explain. Before Pozzo leaves, he commands Lucky to dance and think in order to entertain them. At the end of the first act a boy arrives and tells them that Mr. Godot will not come today but surely tomorrow. Vladimir asks some questions about Godot and the boy leaves. The two decide to depart for the night but they do not move.

The next day they meet again and wait for Godot together. Lucky and Pozzo enter but Pozzo is now completely blind and he does not remember meeting them yesterday. Therefore he asks who they are and what time it is but they cannot answer him. Vladimir wonders whether Lucky could think and dance for them once again but Pozzo answers that his slave is dumb. When Vladimir asks when it happened, Pozzo gets angry and leaves. The boy enters again

¹⁰ An important German Romantic landscape painter, 1774 – 1840.

¹¹ A Yugoslav novelist and playwright, 1930 - 1991.

¹² An American playwright, born in 1938.

¹³ A Romanian playwright, poet and journalist, born in 1956.

and claims that he has not spoken with either of them. He gives them the same message as the day before and leaves. After that Vladimir and Estragon decide to leave, but they do not move. This is the end of the play.

2.4 Characters

There are two main characters. There is Vladimir, who seems to be cleverer and more responsible than Estragon, who is the second main character. Estragon suffers from poor memory. There are also Lucky and Pozzo. Lucky is Pozzo's slave and he speaks only twice throughout the play. Pozzo is a cruel master of his slave. He, like Estragon, cannot remember what happened to him the previous day. Finally, there is the boy who comes at the end of each act and informs that Mr. Godot is not coming.

2.5 Interpretations

“Because the play is so stripped down, so elemental, it invites all kinds of social and political and religious interpretation, with Beckett himself placed in different schools of thought, different movements and "ism"s. The attempts to pin him down have not been successful, but the desire to do so is natural when we encounter a writer whose minimalist art reaches for bedrock reality. "Less" forces us to look for "more," and the need to talk about Godot and about Beckett has resulted in a steady outpouring of books and articles.” (Internet 2)

As Norman Berlin (1999) says, many articles concerning the interpretation of *Waiting for Godot* have been published. This part elaborates upon some of these interpretations.

2.5.1 Christian interpretation

“It is true that basically the Theatre of the Absurd attacks the comfortable certainties of religious or political orthodoxy. It aims to shock its audience out of complacency, to bring it face to face with the harsh facts of the human situation as these writers see it.” (Internet 8)

Religion is undoubtedly part and parcel of every modern society. Therefore it goes without saying that many a piece of literature somehow deals with this issue, which up to some point concerns us all. Even though Samuel Beckett was not a Christian, a Jew or an atheist, (Knowlson, 1996, p. 279) he was well conversant with Christian mythology and frequently used this knowledge in his work. *Waiting for Godot* is no exception.

The play contains a number of references to the Bible, therefore it is little wonder that so

many religious interpretations have occurred. Many have, for instance, connected the word Godot with God. However, Beckett declared that he regretted choosing the name Godot, because of all the theories involving God that were created (Knowlson, 1996, p. 785). He also stated that he originally wrote the play in French and thus the similarity between God and Godot is unintentional (Blair, 1990, p. 591).

Beckett's declaration notwithstanding, it is hard to believe that the resemblance is completely unintentional since there are so many similarities. The following paragraphs point some of them out.

In western art, God is usually depicted as an old man with a long white beard and so is Godot:

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!

Silence.

(Internet 9)

Shortly after mentioning Godot's beard, Vladimir cries out Christ's name, which may imply that Beckett was well aware of this resemblance and that he wanted to emphasize it. It is also noticeable that before and after Vladimir speaks there is a moment of silence, which may be another way of emphasizing Vladimir's cry.

Another analogy between God and Godot can be found early in the first act:

ESTRAGON: What exactly did we ask him for?

VLADIMIR: Were you not there?

ESTRAGON: I can't have been listening.

VLADIMIR: Oh . . . Nothing very definite.

ESTRAGON: A kind of prayer.

VLADIMIR: Precisely.

(Internet 3)

People usually address their prayers to God, but Vladimir addressed his prayer to Godot. Therefore it is arguable that Vladimir believes that Godot wields some kind of god-like

power, which can help him to solve his problems.

When Godot is mentioned, some religious reference often follows:

VLADIMIR: (*triumphantly*). It's Godot! At last! Gogo! It's Godot! We're saved! Let's go and meet him! (*He drags Estragon towards the wings. Estragon resists, pulls himself free, exit right.*) Gogo! Come back! (*Vladimir runs to extreme left, scans the horizon. Enter Estragon right, he hastens towards Vladimir, falls into his arms.*) There you are again again!

ESTRAGON: I'm in hell!

(Internet 9)

Vladimir thinks that he sees Godot and he starts to shout that they are saved. This can be perceived as yet another resemblance between God and Godot because many Christians see salvation in God. Estragon's reaction is also a biblical reference.

Godot's resemblance to God is, in my opinion, Beckett's way of telling us that we should not rely on God in dealing with our own problems. God, as well as Godot, is not coming and if we are to wait for his coming, we are losing our time. It is also possible that Beckett did not mean to communicate such a serious notion and was only trying to be sarcastic. Either way, Godot's resemblance to God seems to be indisputable.

Next, Vladimir's story about the two thieves from Luke 23:39–43 may also be read as Samuel Beckett's criticism of orthodox Christianity:

VLADIMIR: And yet . . . (*pause*) . . . how is it –this is not boring you I hope– how is it that of the four Evangelists only one speaks of a thief being saved. The four of them were there –or thereabouts– and only one speaks of a thief being saved. (*Pause.*) Come on, Gogo, return the ball, can't you, once in a way?

[...]

VLADIMIR: But all four were there. And only one speaks of a thief being saved. Why believe him rather than the others?

[...]

ESTRAGON: People are bloody ignorant apes.

(Internet 3)

Even though only one out of four gospels claims that one thief was saved, people chose to

believe that. This is to highlight on how little information people sometimes base their beliefs and decisions. There is basically only a twenty-five percent chance that the thief survived but people still decided to believe it. The author is critical of such an approach and through the character of Estragon calls these people “ignorant apes”. The motif of chance and its absurdity is recurring in absurd plays. For example, in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, which is a play by Tom Stoppard¹⁴, characters bet on coin flips and Rosencrantz wins with heads ninety-two times in a row. That is to show how absurd chance sometimes can be.

Understandably, there are many other religious interpretations of Beckett’s first play. William R. Mueller, for example, expressed his opinion that the human predicament described is that of man living on the Saturday after the Friday of the crucifixion and not really knowing if all hope is dead. (Internet 10)

2.5.2 Existential interpretation

One of the most typical features of existential plays is the accentuation of how life is repetitive and tedious. And life is very tedious and repetitive for Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*. They meet under a tree to wait for Godot in the first act and they meet under the very same tree to do the very same thing at the beginning of the second act, they meet the same people and deal with the same problems (Estragon’s boots) every single day. This led Vivian Mercier¹⁵ to write this in his review of Beckett’s play:

“[...] a play in which nothing happens, that yet keeps audiences glued to their seats. What’s more, since the second act is a subtly different reprise of the first, he has written a play in which nothing happens, twice.”
(Internet 11)

Perhaps one of the most striking examples of repetitiveness are the two dialogs between the two main characters about hanging themselves:

ESTRAGON: What about hanging ourselves?
[...]
ESTRAGON: Let’s hang ourselves immediately!

¹⁴ A British playwright born in 1937

¹⁵ An Irish literary critic, 1919 – 1989

VLADIMIR: From a bough? (*They go towards the tree.*) I wouldn't trust it.

(Internet 3)

While in the first act they end up not hanging themselves because the bough does not seem reliable enough, in the second act, they make up a different excuse:

ESTRAGON: Why don't we hang ourselves?

VLADIMIR: With what?

ESTRAGON: You haven't got a bit of rope?

VLADIMIR: No.

ESTRAGON: Then we can't.

Silence.

(Internet 9)

Even though the situation has not changed at all; even though it is still the same tree and the very same bough, the excuse is different. However, the outcome is still the same:

VLADIMIR: We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. (*Pause.*) Unless Godot comes.

(Internet 9)

This may be Beckett's way of telling us that our words and daily actions are devoid of meaning. We do not really mean what we say and thus our words are meaningless. We are predestined to dwell in this meaninglessness and wait for something to happen the same way Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot.

Possibly the most intriguing part of *Waiting for Godot* is Lucky's speech in the first act. This seemingly meaningless 706-word-long monologue, in my view, symbolizes our inability to effectively communicate as it is virtually impossible to get the gist of what Lucky is really talking about without studying it in depth and even then it is far from being clear. It also seems that Beckett intentionally parodied the scientific language. This is achieved through the use of "big words" such as "hereinafter", repetitions of single words (much more grave than in the light the light the light of the labor), repetitions of whole phrases (reasons unknown), nonsensical sounds (quaquaquaqua). Moreover, the speech contains a number of strangely ordered subordinate clauses, some words do not even exist (athambia) and there are often two synonyms next to each other, which is rather unusual (abandoned unfinished, concurrently

simultaneously). Next, it is clear that Beckett also paid attention to how certain words sound; the names of the scholars, for instance, Fartov and Belcher were most likely created for their “tastelessness”.

As mentioned above, Lucky’s speech is only seemingly completely meaningless and random; nevertheless, it is really hard to come up with a solution. In order to get the gist of what the speech is about, I reduced it to its core and the outcome is as follows:

acknowledging the existence of a personal God, one who exists outside of time and who loves us dearly and who suffers with those who are plunged into torment, it is established beyond all doubt that man, for reasons unknown, has left his labors abandoned, unfinished

Firstly, it is important to realize that the speech is unfinished because, after some struggle between him and his three listeners, he was silenced by removing his hat. Secondly, it is apparent that Lucky was trying to make an assumption about God; nonetheless, he was stopped before reaching any logical conclusion. This may be to imply that people can never arrive at any logical conclusion about God.

2.5.3 Other interpretations

The existential and Christian interpretations are by far the most popular ones; nevertheless, it goes without saying that there are a number of other interpretations that are worth mentioning, some of them perhaps a bit bizarre. Let us take a look at two of them.

Shortly after its premier it used to be, as Peter Hall¹⁶ wrote in his article for *The Guardian*, viewed as an allegory of the Cold War: "To my amazement, Godotmania gripped London. It was discussed, praised, analyzed and abused [...] It was seen as an allegory of the Cold War. Metaphor had repossessed the theatre." (Internet 5) This notion, however, seems to have lost its popularity.

Professor Bernard Dukore, on the other hand, claims that Beckett’s play is based on "Freud’s Trinitarian description of the psyche in The Ego and the Id and the usage of onomastic techniques." He also argues that *Waiting for Godot* is a metaphor for the futility of man's

16 An English theatre and film director, born in 1930.

existence. (Internet 12)

2.6 Motifs

This chapter deals with some of many themes and motifs that can be found in *Waiting for Godot*. The first subchapter discusses how the author used humor in his play. It is explained why the play is often subtitled tragicomedy; it shows examples of humor in the play and clearly explains the elements of tragicomedy. The second subchapter elaborates upon the meaning of the tree. Next, the third subchapter describes the purpose of smells. And finally, the last subchapter concerns the meaning of night in Beckett's play.

2.6.1 Humor

Beckett did not subtitle the English version of his play “a tragicomedy in two acts” for no reason. Even though the overall tone of *Waiting for Godot* is rather skeptical and defiant, there are a number of humorous elements. How is it possible to successfully combine two seemingly utterly different genres – tragedy and comedy? How can something be both tragic and humorous at the same time? This chapter analyzes some specific humorous themes that occur throughout the play and demonstrates how accurate the term “tragicomedy” really is.

Many dialogs between Vladimir and Estragon have humorous aspects to them. And yet, they oftentimes communicate a serious message.

ESTRAGON: Let's go.

VLADIMIR: We can't.

ESTRAGON: Why not?

VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot.

ESTRAGON: (*despairingly*). Ah! (*Pause.*) You're sure it was here?

VLADIMIR: What?

ESTRAGON: That we were to wait.

VLADIMIR: He said by the tree. (*They look at the tree.*) Do you see any others?

(Internet 3)

The amusing aspect of this extract lies in the fact that after several days of waiting Estragon forgets what they are actually doing there. What is more, the couple is not even sure whether they are waiting at the right place and they are not at all exasperated that Godot did not show

up. But even this light-hearted exchange bears a serious message: perhaps if people stopped “waiting for their Godots”, they could finally move on with their lives.

Next, the characters tend to say one thing and do something different or rather do nothing at all. This contrast between what characters say and what they do provides humor. Also, it signifies how our words are meaningless and our language fails to convey any meaning (see Existential interpretation).

ESTRAGON: I'm going.
He does not move.

(Internet 3)

Vladimir and Estragon only rarely do something that could be actually described as a purposeful action. Most of the time it is quite the other way around and they are just passing the time and more often than not not very successfully:

VLADIMIR: What about trying them.
ESTRAGON: I've tried everything.
VLADIMIR: No, I mean the boots.
ESTRAGON: Would that be a good thing?
VLADIMIR: It'd pass the time. (*Estragon hesitates.*) I assure you, it'd be an occupation.

(Internet 9)

Trying on a pair of boots cannot take much time; in fact, taking into account how long they have been waiting and how long they are to wait, their action is amusingly futile and meaningless. Apart from being comical, this extract also shows the extent of their frustration and desperation. How desperate one has to be to try on boots just to pass the time?

Conversation is yet another of their ways to pass the time while waiting:

VLADIMIR: Would you like a radish?
ESTRAGON: Is that all there is?
VLADIMIR: There are radishes and turnips.
ESTRAGON: Are there no carrots?
VLADIMIR: No. Anyway you overdo it with your carrots.

ESTRAGON: Then give me a radish. (*Vladimir fumbles in his pockets, finds nothing but turnips, finally brings out a radish and hands it to Estragon who examines it, sniffs it.*) It's black!

VLADIMIR: It's a radish.

ESTRAGON: I only like the pink ones, you know that!

(Internet 9)

These lines well show that every, no matter how small, incident is a welcome opportunity to pass some time by talking about it, asking questions that have no purpose and commenting upon it. This part is amusing because, while the audience is eager to find out more about Godot and other unresolved issues of the play, Beckett makes his characters bicker over petty problems. Probably no member of the audience paid their money to listen Vladimir and Estragon squabbling about vegetable.

Probably the most evident comedic event happens when Estragon's trousers fall down:

VLADIMIR: Show me all the same. (*Estragon loosens the cord that holds up his trousers which, much too big for him, fall about his ankles. They look at the cord.*) It might do in a pinch. But is it strong enough?

ESTRAGON: We'll soon see. Here.

They each take an end of the cord and pull. It breaks. They almost fall.

[...]

ESTRAGON: Well? Shall we go?

VLADIMIR: Pull on your trousers.

ESTRAGON: What?

VLADIMIR: Pull on your trousers.

ESTRAGON: You want me to pull off my trousers?

VLADIMIR: Pull ON your trousers.

ESTRAGON: (*realizing his trousers are down*). True.
He pulls up his trousers.

(Internet 9)

By no means is this very clown-like incident untypical of Samuel Beckett. In his play *Endgame*¹⁷, for instance, the character of Clov shakes insecticide down his trousers. Whereas a normal human reaction would be laughing and making jokes revolving around the fallen trousers and the cord, neither Vladimir nor Estragon realize how comical such a situation is. What is more, Estragon does not even realize that his trousers are down.

¹⁷ Premiered on April 3, 1957 in London (Internet 13)

Samuel Beckett used humor in numerous ways. Not only does his humor make the play more amusing and keeps our attention but, more relevantly, it usually has a serious aspect to it and it is the deeper significance of the meaning of the play that makes it essential.

2.6.2 The tree

Being the only distinct piece of setting, the tree's importance is absolutely indisputable. Moreover, should you take a look at the painting that inspired Beckett, you would notice that there is a distinctly visible tree (see appendix). Vladimir says that he was told that they should wait under a tree; however, they are not sure whether it is the right tree. In fact, they are not even sure if it is a tree or a shrub. They just presume it is the right place. It might Beckett's way of telling us that there is no certitude in life and that all we can do is believe.

In the first act, the tree is bare. In the second act, nevertheless, there are a few leaves on the tree in spite of the fact that the script specifies that it is the next day and thus the season could not have possibly changed. Does this mean that the world of *Waiting for Godot* does not have any logic and even the seasons may change on a day-to-day basis? The leaves could also symbolize hope but, taking into consideration the overall mood of the play, the first explanation makes more sense.

Many critics also voiced their opinions that the tree is somehow connected with Christianity. The most frequent explanation refers to the tree of life.

2.6.3 Smell

Throughout the play various characters keep complaining about other people's odors. Estragon thinks that Vladimir reeks of garlic, Estragon finds it revolting that Pozzo farted in the second act and Pozzo claims that Lucky stinks and complains that Vladimir and Estragon smell bad:

POZZO: Which of you smells so bad?

ESTRAGON: He has stinking breath and I have stinking feet.

POZZO: I must go.

(Internet 3)

Smells in *Waiting for Godot* are repulsive and inextricably linked with human beings. They might represent the barriers between people and that people never really can establish interpersonal relationships.

2.6.3 Nightfall

As the main characters wait for Godot, they also wait for nightfall and the moon. The moon symbolizes an end of their suffering. They do not have to wait when the sun sets behind the horizon:

The light suddenly fails. In a moment it is night. The moon rises at back, mounts in the sky, stands still, shedding a pale light on the scene.

VLADIMIR: *At last! (Estragon gets up and goes towards Vladimir, a boot in each hand. He puts them down at edge of stage, straightens and contemplates the moon.)*

(Internet 3)

These lines show Vladimir's relief when he realizes that it is night already and they do not have to wait anymore. Also, the text reads: "in a moment it is night", which is very unnatural. Night does not fall all of a sudden but it is a relatively gradual process. This supports the theory that the world of *Waiting for Godot* is often illogical (see 3.6.2).

3. Reception

In terms of reception, hardly could we find any other country that experienced a similar embrace of this play as Czechoslovakia did. It is arguable that *Waiting for Godot* played a pivotal role in the cultural and political development of Czechoslovakia. The following chapter describes the circumstances under which “Godot arrived in Czechoslovakia” and provides the reader in brief with the general historical context.

The second part illustrates the current perception of the play by both critics and the audience on a number of reviews. The differences between various Czech productions and the original are described in order to demonstrate diverse approaches of modern Czech directors.

Notwithstanding the irrefutable fact that the play does not have such a shocking impact on its audience as it had at the time of its premiere (Internet 14), as the reviews show, the play still celebrates an enduring success in the Czech Republic.

3.1 Waiting of Godot in Czechoslovakia

In Czechoslovakia, people talked about *Waiting for Godot* long before its actual premiere in 1964 at Divadlo Na zábradlí¹⁸ (directed by Václav Hudeček¹⁹; with Jan Libíček²⁰ and Václav Sloup²¹ as Vladimir and Estragon respectively). (Internet 15) As the poet Josef Hiršal²² describes in his memoirs, the Iron Curtain hampered the arrival of Beckett’s play into Czechoslovakia in the 1950s. Although it was only sketchy information that got through from Paris, it was clear from the very beginning that it must be some sort of a “theater miracle”. (Internet 16) From the early 1960s, Beckett’s works were translated into Czech, which was, nevertheless, severely hindered by strict censorship (the process resumed in the late 1980s). (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 7635-7636) A few years later Václav Havel issued his play called *Zahradní slavnost* and with that The Theater of the Absurd definitely found its way to the heart of Europe.

¹⁸ A theater situated in Prague, Czech Republic; founded in 1958

¹⁹ A Czech director (1929-1991)

²⁰ A Czech actor and comedian (1931-1974)

²¹ A Czech actor born in 1936

²² A Czech poet and novelist (1920-2003)

3.2 Velvet Revolution and Waiting for Godot

Before and after the Velvet Revolution *Waiting for Godot* was perceived as a symbol of the agony of the Czech opposition as they were waiting for something that seemed as if it was never to come. When the communist government fell in 1989, two famous posters were circulated in Czechoslovakia. The first one was a picture of the gagged Beckett with the text: “If Samuel Beckett had been born in Czechoslovakia, we would be still waiting for Godot”. The other, which was placed outside the Civic Forum, read: “Godot is here”. Octavian Saiu in *The International Reception of Samuel Beckett* (2009), nonetheless, observes: “More powerful than any poster, however, was the improvised hymn intoned by the students outside Havel’s office: ‘Godot has arrived!’ This unique image of Beckett is truly unparalleled anywhere in the world. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Location 7699)

Even 3 years after the Velvet Revolution the Czech political scene bore marks of *Waiting for Godot*:

“In 1992, Václav Havel delivered a speech at the Institute de France, in which [...] Beckett’s play was employed as a possible framework of analysing and understanding the meaning of suffering, dissidence and, of course, waiting.”
(Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 7624-7626)

Should we compare the overall number of translations, performances, exhibitions, etc. with any other Eastern European country, we would learn that it significantly exceeds them. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 7634-7635) And even nowadays the popularity of Beckett’s play is almost overwhelming. There are a significant number of modern productions that celebrate success with the audience and new exhibitions (see below).

3.3 The relationship between Havel and Beckett

It was in 1982 that Samuel Beckett dedicated the play *Catastrophe* to Václav Havel, who was a political prisoner in Czechoslovakia serving a four and a half year sentence for “subversive activities” at that time. Even though Beckett and Havel had never met, the author of *Waiting for Godot* was highly concerned by the prosecution of artists in the then eastern Europe. He also perceived as horrifying that Havel had been forbidden to write in prison. James Knowlson, Beckett’s friend and biographer, declared that Beckett was deeply touched and moved by Havel’s plight. Beckett’s encouragement had real meaning for Havel as he admits:

“The fact that Samuel Beckett made himself heard in this way pleased me immensely. “He was a father of modern theatre, who dwelt somewhere up in the heavens, isolated from the hubbub down below.”

For a long time afterwards,” he wrote, “there accompanied me in the prison a great joy and emotion, [helping] me to live on amid all the dirt and baseness.”

(Internet 17)

After being released from prison, Havel wrote a short play called *Chyba* and dedicated it to Beckett. The plays were performed together in 1983 in Stockholm and published for the first time by the magazine *Index of Censorship* one year later. (Internet 17)

3.4 Michal Dočekal’s Waiting for Godot

Michal Dočekal²³ declared Beckett’s play the best play that has ever been written and considered his task of directing such a play for Nová scéna Národního divadla a great one. (Internet 18) This subchapter briefly deals with opinions of a number of Czech critics.

Michal Dočekal’s version of *Waiting for Godot*, starring David Prachař²⁴ (Vladimir), David Matásek²⁵ (Estragon), Ondřej Pavelka²⁶ (Pozzo) and Jan Kačer²⁷ (Lucky), was premiered on June 16, 2010 in Nová scéna Národního divadla. Notwithstanding the fact that Dočekal’s production is based on Ouředník’s translation, it differs markedly. (Internet 19) Arguably, the most dramatic change is the fact that the country road and the tree gave way to a desolate bus stop and a flashing billboard. Klára Kubičková in her review for *kultura.idnes.cz* describes David Marek’s stage as great and adds that it compliments the point of Beckett’s play. Kubičková also lauds actors’ performances while she criticizes somewhat slapstick humor and the fact that the second act is rather lengthy. In Kubičková’s review, this production scored passable 60 % out of 100. (Internet 20)

Marie Reslová, too, in her review for *art.ihned.cz* praises actors’ performances and criticizes the fact that the play, being almost four hours long, is at times boring and without any rhythm.

²³ A Czech director born in 1985

²⁴ A Czech actor born in 1959

²⁵ A Czech actor born in 1963

²⁶ A Czech actor born in 1955

²⁷ A Czech actor and director born in 1936

Reslová also speculates that it could, in fact, be intentional so that the audience truly realize and understand the situation. (Internet 19) Jana Soprová, who writes reviews for scena.cz, agrees with this notion. (Internet 21) Unlike Kubičková, Reslová considers the second act better. (Internet 19)

Radek Lang, in his review for topzine.cz, likens the costumes used in the play, which were prepared by Hana Fišerová, to the clothes that homeless people wear in the city of Prague. Lang also makes the observation that their behavior and bad odor also resemble homeless people and remarks that it was most likely director's intention. Even in this review, actors' performances are highly spoken of and the author mentions excessive length of the play. (Internet 22)

Roman Sikora, in his review for lidovky.cz called *Godot s Matáskem a Prachařem: degradace díla na bulvár*, which caused a staggering number of reactions and comments, voiced his opinion that the atmosphere of Dočekal's play is far removed from the atmosphere of the original play. Sikora criticizes, inter alia, how much the humor and illogical demeanor of the characters differ from Beckett's original. The changes, in author's opinion, are not thought-out, nor are they well performed. Also, Sikora expresses his belief that the production fails to convey philosophical views. (Internet 23)

As mentioned above, Sikora's review caused a number of reactions. Vladimír Just, for example, expressed his disagreement on Kritický klub Jana Rejžka on February 4, 2010. (Internet 24) Richard Erml, on the other hand, wrote an article called *Grandiózní Sikora* for divadelni-noviny.cz, in which he comments upon Sikora's review. Erml in his article states that Sikora's primary motivation when writing was not to provide the reader with an informative review of the production, but to draw attention to himself and to satisfy his own ego. Erml also suggests that Sikora might be only another unsuccessful artist that is full of complexes. (Internet 25) Furthermore, he criticizes Sikora for using too strong expressions, which the author admits in his article for denikreferendum.cz called *Čekání na Godota, sečteno a podtrženo*. (Internet 24)

Radmila Hrdinová, in her review for novinky.cz, highlights that Dočekal's production puts emphasize on passing time by the means of humor – both for the characters and the audience. She also draws a parallel between this production and variety shows. (Internet 26)

3.5 Zdeněk Černín's *Waiting for Godot*

Zdeněk Černín²⁸ casted Boleslav Polívka²⁹ as Vladimir, Jiří Pecha³⁰ as Estragon, Zdeněk Junák³¹ as Pozzo and Patrik Bořecký³² as Lucky and the premiere took place on October 4, 2003 in Městské divadlo Brno³³. (Internet 27)

Zdeněk A. Tichý, in his article for *Naše rodina*, praises especially the performances of the two main characters and voices his opinion that it is largely because Boleslav Polívka a Jiří Pecha are very good friends in real life. (Internet 28) Luboš Mareček, too, in his review for *MF Dnes* commends the actors and highlights especially Boleslav Polívka's performance, which is in a sharp contrast with his regular performances that are oftentimes full of improvisation. (Internet 29) Jaroslav Pokorný, who reviewed this production of *Waiting for Godot* for *scena.cz*, argues that there are no better actors in the Czech Republic for the roles of Vladimir and Estragon. Pokorný also describes the performance as gripping and adds that notwithstanding the fact the play is more than 50 years old, it still remains to be very attractive for broad audience. (Internet 30)

According to Jaroslav Parma, Černín's production is utterly faithful to the original with the sole exception of being slightly shortened, which, as Parma argues, makes the production even better. Parma, too, observes that the two main actors excel and that the production received a warm reception. (Internet 31)

Zdeněk Černín, on the occasion of his production of the play coming back to theaters in 2012 said that his new version significantly differs from the old one. Not only is the casting different (Boles Polívka – Vladimir, Szidi Tobias³⁴ – Estragon, Martin Hofmann³⁵ / Zdeněk Černín – Pozzo, Patrik Bořecký – Lucky) but the play itself is different. Zdeněk Černín explains:

²⁸ A Czech director and actor born in 1954

²⁹ A Czech actor, screenwriter and playwright born in 1949

³⁰ A Czech actor born in 1944

³¹ A Czech actor born in 1951

³² A Czech actor born in 1967

³³ A theater in Brno, Czech Republic; founded in 1945

³⁴ A Slovak actress and singer born in in 1967

³⁵ A Czech actor born in 1978

“Po téměř deseti letech od premiéry jsme jiní, obsazení je (až na Bolka) jiné a svět kolem nás se změnil. Beckett říká, že hra *Čekání na Godota* má tolik významů, kolik sedí v hledišti diváků. I ti jsou jiní, než byli před deseti lety.”

(Internet 32)

3.6 Juraj Herz's *Waiting for Godot*

The premiere of Juraj Herz's³⁶ production took place on October 3, 2001 starring David Suchařípa³⁷ as Vladimir, Leoš Suchařípa³⁸ as Estragon, Barbora Hrzánová³⁹ as Pozzo and Radek Holub as Lucky. The production is based on the translation by Karel Kraus. The scenographer and the costumer were Šimon Caban and Simona Rybáková respectively.

(Internet 33)

The stage is markedly dissimilar from the original – a tree and a road were replaced with a waiting room lit by fluorescent lightning with bus schedules on the walls. And by no means is it the only thing different – Estragon is depicted as an old man, whereas Vladimir is young and, at times, disrespectful (played by a father and a son); Pozzo is played by a woman but remains a man in the play (Pozzo and Lucky are played by a husband and a wife); Godot informs them not by means of sending a messenger but by sending a fax; etc. Also, while Vladimir is depicted more as a clown that still has some hope, Estragon is resigned and without hope. (Internet 33)

Jan Kábrt, in his review for kultura.idnes.cz, voices his opinion that this production is fairly “mechanical”:

“Čekání na Godota, klasika světového absurdního dramatu, klade mimořádné inscenační nároky: být maximálně věren textu, přitom nijak a v ničem se autorovi "nepodobízet", ani nic nevylehčovat divácky "vděčnými" lacinostmi. To ale neznamená, že text se víceméně mechanicky přenesse na jeviště, jak to učinil Juraj Herz. Inscenace pak tápe ve vzduchoprázdnu. Přitom Beckettův text je stále živý, vždy neuchopitelně, a přitom citelně aktuální.”

(Internet 34)

³⁶ A Czech director and screenwriter born in 1934

³⁷ A Czech actor born in 1965

³⁸ A Czech actor, translator, theater theorist (1932-2005)

³⁹ A Czech actress born in 1964

3.7 Exhibit Samuel Beckett: The Life and the Work

April 13, 2006 marked the centenary of Samuel Beckett. The Embassy of Ireland decided to mark this important anniversary by hosting an exhibition entitled Samuel Beckett: The Life and the Work. This exhibit was held in Prague, Zlín, Moscow, Budapest and other European cities. (Internet 35) Its success well illustrates how profound an impact Beckett's work has on Europe's population even nowadays and how popular Beckett became in the course of time.

3.8 International reception

This chapter deals with how *Waiting for Godot* was received in various countries and mentions the most notable or distinctive productions that took place. While reading the following lines, it is crucial to keep in mind that the aim of this chapter is not to proffer a thorough explanation of how Beckett's play became one of the most respected pieces of art in the world but to merely point out some of the most important events that led to its popularization and contrast different approaches toward the play in various countries, which convincingly shows that the play is wide open to different interpretations.

3.8.1 The reception in the USA

The first American production directed by Alan Schneider⁴⁰ and produced by Michael Myerberg took place at the Coconut Grove Playhouse in Miami Beach, Florida and was billed by its producers as "the laugh hit of two continents". To say that this description was not very precise would be an understatement: "Vacationing sun worshippers looking for easy diversion were not amused, despite the play's sure-fire headliner, Bert Lahr." (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 476-477) The production opened on Broadway in April 1956 and fared only slightly better. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 473-478)

It was seven months after the Broadway production that Mayerberg tried to save his reputation by reprising in 1957 with an all African-American cast. The show, nevertheless, closed after six performances. Shortly thereafter they opened in Boston but, once again, did not celebrate much success. The lack of thereof notwithstanding, Beckett was delighted with the gesture as America was still segregated at the time. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 492-497)

⁴⁰ An American director (1917-1984)

It should also be noted that in the USA, the play is associated with the American underclass. Possibly one of the main reasons is Herbert Blau's⁴¹ production that took place in San Quentin prison, which is a maximum security prison, in November 1957. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 483-484) This production was, for some maybe surprisingly, well received:

For them *Waiting for Godot* was pure realism. Those convicts might not have comprehended Beckett's critique of genre, Surrealist or Dada manifestoes, Existential philosophy, or Phenomenological aesthetics but they knew well the waiting game – waiting for change in their condition, waiting for appeals, for pardons, for, as it were, salvation.

(Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 486-489)

3.8.2 The reception in Great Britain

The first British production faced a number of problems, the gravest of which was the clash with the official licensor of productions, the Lord Chamberlain, who proposed a significant number of cuts. Samuel Beckett reluctantly agreed to some of these cuts but considered some other cuts preposterous as those passages were vital to the play. The production was therefore performed only privately; nonetheless Faber & Faber subsequently published a censored edition. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 513-517) The initial reaction to the first English-language production at The Arts Theatre Club in London in 1955 was, as in other countries, polarized. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 1292-1293) At the end of the day, however, *Waiting for Godot* succeeded both with critics and audiences. And Beckett's play popularity is by no means fading in Great Britain:

“In autumn 1998 the National Theatre organized a poll, in which they asked a wide selection of playwrights, journalists, directors, actors and other theatre professionals to nominate ten twentieth century plays which they considered to be ‘significant’. When the results were analysed, the play with the highest number of nominations was *Waiting for Godot*.”

(Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 1339-1342)

⁴¹ An American director born in 1926

3.8.3 The reception in France

It was not until *En attendant Godot* premiered in January 1953 at the Théâtre de Babylone that Beckett's work "came to be registered beyond 'the small circle of critics and readers of the avant-garde' in France". (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 818-819). Shortly after the premiere "Beckett was being placed in the company of a number of major modern writers, in particular Kafka, Faulkner, Sartre, Camus, Ionesco and Adamov." (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 821-822) Hardly could critics of that time know how right they actually were doing so.

3.8.4 The reception in West Germany

The premiere took place on September 8, 1953 at the Schloßpark Theatre and was put on by Karl Heinz Stroux⁴² (Alfred Schieske and Hans Hessling played Vladimir and Estragon, Walter Franck played Pozzo and Friedrich Maurer played Lucky). This production raised considerable interest. Samuel Beckett, who attended the opening night, insinuated that, in his opinion, the staging was overly "German", heavy and too serious and thus should be more relaxed (as Beckett's own Berlin productions in 1965 and 1978 were). (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 2533-2535) The production was well received by the audience and, moreover, the press, on the whole, reacted positively:

Friedrich Luft, who at the time was arguably the most widely accepted 'voice of criticism' in Berlin (even in the East), and who had been granted the privilege by (the publishers) Suhrkamp Verlag of personally meeting Beckett, was deeply impressed.

(Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 2535-2537)

Some scholars even voiced their opinions that Stroux's *Waiting for Godot* was so well received by the audience partially because it was so dark and emphasized the lack of certainty and the German audience would feel frightened and disoriented by a more stylized production. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 2544-2547)

Samuel Beckett felt quite compelled to be involved in the production of his plays and most of the times did not approve of directors' interpretations. Therefore in 1965, he accepted an invitation that was sent to him by his friend Deryk Mendel to become a consultant "authority"

⁴² A German director and screenwriter (1908 – 1985)

at the Schiller-Theater in Berlin. This production earned Beckett even more respect in West Germany. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 2642-2655)

Gerg Tabori's production from 1994 is also worth mentioning in this context because he was not entirely faithful to the script. The production was set up as a play in a play: two actors (Peter Lühr and Thomas Holtzmann) meet to rehearse *Waiting for Godot*. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 2669-2673).

3.8.5 The reception in East Germany

It was not until 1987 that *Waiting for Godot* was staged in East Germany, which is somewhat surprising as East German theater at that time enjoyed a high reputation. As the year of its first staging suggests, the play was officially banned (at that time drama was supposed to function as a moral agenda for the great work of socialism), which, paradoxically, even increased the interest among theater circles. The German edition of *Waiting for Godot* was published as early as 1953 by Shurkap⁴³. It should also be noted that Bertolt Brecht⁴⁴ made the preparations to adapt Beckett's play a few months before his death in 1956. He, among other things, planned for a documentary movie with scenes from the revolutions in various countries (including China) to be shown during the production. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 2686-2702) Additionally, he began rewriting parts of the play:

He intended to define the characters as social class types: Estragon as a 'blue collar worker', Wladimir as an 'egghead', Lucky as a stupid policeman and Pozzo as an aristocratic land-owner.

(Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 2702-2704).

It is also arguable that the motif of waiting was perceived differently by audiences in the socialist world. Waiting was an inextricable part of many lives. People had to wait to buy a car or a TV; they had to wait to read a book or see a family member from a different country. Waiting was ubiquitous.

⁴³ A German publishing house established in 1950

⁴⁴ A German poet, screenwriter, and playwright (1898-1956)

3.8.6 The reception in Australia

Before the year 1990, when there was a dramatic upsurge, interest in Beckett in Australia was sporadic and most of the productions of his work were produced at independent theaters (occasionally by students). (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 3256-3257 and 3282-3283) As in many other countries, *Waiting for Godot* is the most performed of Beckett's plays in Australia. The premiere took place in September 1957 at the Arrow Theatre, Melbourne and was produced and directed by Peter O'Shaughnessy⁴⁵, who also played Vladimir (Estragon was played by Barry Humphries, Philip Stainton played Pozzo, Sholto James was Lucky and Philip Jordan played the Boy). The production received mixed reviews. Whereas one reviewer described the play as "nearly three hours of interminable talk between two verminous hoboes" and noted that the play would appeal "mainly to intellectual snobs who profess to discover some profound meaning in its vague symbolism", H. A. Standish in *The Herald* wrote that the production was "very well done" and one Sydney reviewer called it "the most interesting and impressive item put on during the year by any theatre". (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 3296-3308)

The possibly most distinctive and definitely the most "Australian" production was *Ngundalehla Godotgai* by Bangarra Dance Theatre. The entire play was translated into the Bundjalung language of northern New South Wales and was performed with English subtitles in 1997. Another notable production took place in 1986 at Sydney's Theatre for the Deaf and was performed in sign language. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 3344-3355)

As for the approach of Australian directors and producers, Russell Smith and Chris Ackerley in *International Reception of Samuel Beckett* (2009) asserted:

Many directors of *Godot* in Australia appear to assume, perhaps correctly, that their audiences will think of Beckett as forbiddingly grim and absurdist, and so have tended to play up *Godot*'s humour, softening its expressionist elements with psychological naturalism:

3.8.7 The reception in China

In July 1965, Shi Xianrong's translation of *Waiting of Godot* with the Chinese title *Dengdai Geduo* appeared with the Chinese Drama Press. Although the reception was significantly hindered by the then regime, the play enjoyed surreptitious popularity among "a febrile

⁴⁵ An Australian director, actor and producer born in 1923

underground readership”. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 3845-3924) The following quotation of Irving Lo’s description of the stage well illustrates to what degree the Chinese premiere of the play differs from European first productions, which were usually fairly faithful to Beckett’s screenplay:

The stage for the performance was sparsely but effectively set with a stunted willow tree at one end, substantial enough to have a rope thrown across the bough later. The costumes were Western, including the tight boots and the various hats. The entrances and exits for Pozzo, the elaborate gestures with the whip, the bustle with the bags and basket were all staged in the grand manner, which, together with the music and even the appearance of dancers, betrayed an unmistakable affinity to the tradition of the Peking Opera. In this sense the Chinese *Godot*, while presented as a work set in the Western world, was at least partially assimilated into the Chinese cultural orbit.

(Lo, 1989, p. 237-238)

It is reasonably arguable that Samuel Beckett would not have liked this production of his play as the author did not approve of his script becoming a mere playground for other people’s interpretations. Taking this into consideration, it is hard to imagine what Beckett would think about the production from 1991. The play took place in a room that was painted in white (from floor to ceiling); in the middle of the theater, there was a tree, which was not painted and hung upside down from a white electric fan; a large black piano was also a part of the stage. The Boy was replaced by two nurses and the audience sat on the stage. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 3989-3997) It is almost inconceivable that such a production could take place on a European stage.

It is also noteworthy that all Chinese productions are based on Shi Xianrong’s translation, which, regrettably, is usually not considered as a very good one. Some critics voiced their opinions that the translation displays serious problems as the translator ignored the theatricality of Beckett’s language. . (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 4052-4054)

3.8.8 The reception in Japan

Beckett’s fame in Japan was established by academics that introduced and most importantly translated *Waiting for Godot*. However, the play was not staged until May 24, 1960 when the play premiered at Toshi Centre Hall, Tokyo. The premiere was directed by Shin’ya Ando, who, having attended the first production in Paris, was fascinated by the play. Unlike the

Chinese productions, the Japanese premiere was performed similarly to the staging in Paris and was based on a faithful translation. Still, it is improbable that Beckett would have liked the production. The play was approached naturalistically and the actors tried to give every utterance a meaning. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 4360-4518)

3.8.9 The reception in Poland

Poland poses a noteworthy exception as, unlike in other Eastern European countries, the reception of Beckett's work was not seriously hindered by the "spirit of communism" there. It was as soon as January 1957, 4 years after the first Paris production, that the premiere of *Waiting for Godot* took place at Warsaw's Contemporary Theater. The play was not officially viewed as a political play and thus was allowed. The Polish audience, nonetheless, interpreted the play as waiting in vain for true socialism. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 4822-5289)

3.8.10 The reception in Finland

Finland was the first of the Nordic countries to stage Samuel Beckett's work. The premiere of the play under the name *Huomenna hän tulee* took place in 1954, one year before the first English staging in London and two years before its first American performance in Miami, at Finnish National Theatre. The performance was considered a major event because the Paris performance had been reviewed in several main Finnish newspapers and was attended by the President's wife, Alli Paasikivi, which bears evidence to its cultural significance. The staging, of course, received mixed reception by both the audience and the critics. It is remarkable that, while in most other countries the premiere took place at rather small and less significant theaters, the Finnish premiere took place at the Finnish National Theater. What is more, this happened several years before the play became truly internationally famous and no censorship problems arose. It should be also noted that *Waiting for Godot* has been translated four times, which is truly exceptional when we take account of the fact that Finland has a relatively small population. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 6952-7013)

3.8.11 The reception in Sweden

Waiting for Godot was translated into Swedish as early as 1957. The most interesting performance, however, took place in 1984 at Kumla prison and was directed by Jan Jönson. Perhaps the most intriguing fact about this staging is that it was performed by high-security

prisoners serving drug-related sentences. The project was extensively reported in the Swedish press. Jönson informed Beckett about his production, the two met and formed a friendship that was to last until Beckett's death. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 7078-7120)

3.8.12 The reception in Spain

Trino Martínez Trives was a young student when he attended the first performance of *En attendant Godot* at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris in January 1953. Having been impressed by the play, he translated it and sent it to directors in Spain who he thought could be interested but was rejected by all of them. After the Civil War, most commercial theater performances were mild comedies that were easy to digest for the middle classes and the directors expressed their concerns that people in Spain were not ready to accept this kind of theater. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 8610-8622) Trino Martínez Trives, nevertheless, did not give up: "Martínez Trives managed to stage *Godot* thanks to a small independent group, Dido Pequeño Teatro, at the main hall of the Faculty of Arts at the Universidad Complutense in Madrid on 28 May 1955." (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 8628-8629) It was a very pleasant surprise for Trives that the general public responded positively to the play. As a result, during the 1960s Beckett's plays were frequently performed in Spain, albeit by independent companies in university theaters. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 8635-8724) Nevertheless, since then the situation has not changed much:

In recent years, Beckett has hardly escaped the confines of alternative theatres, and major productions are still absent. Lluís Pascual put on *Waiting for Godot* at the Festival de Otoño in Madrid in 1999, but this kind of production was an exception.

(Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 8801-8803)

It also should be mentioned that in Spain, too, there was a production of the play with inmates. Theater director Denis Rafter directed *Waiting for Godot* with the inmates of Aranjuez prison in Madrid on October 3, 2000. (Feldman and Nixon, 2009, Kindle Locations 8807-8808)

4. Conclusion

The first chapter dealt with Czech translation and translation of *Waiting for Godot* in general. The reader was provided with a brief description of the history of Czech translations. Next, the chapter analyzed problematic aspects that translators of *Waiting for Godot* have to overcome. It was asserted that not only do the translators need to understand the play (as much as it is possible) but, more crucially, they need to understand the mood and flow of the play. The silences and pauses are just as important as dialogs, the flow and timing are substantial, the stage directions cannot be neglected. It was proven that all these aspects have to be subjected to careful scrutiny. Should the translator fail to do so, the translation would hardly achieve the desired result. Additionally, the chapter concerned Ouředník's translation of the phrase "quaquaqua". It was established that the Czech translation might not be very precise, which well proves the point that every, albeit small, part of Beckett's text should be scrutinized when translating.

The following chapter embraced general historical context and plot description that provided the reader with basic information about the play. Next, it elaborated upon some of the play's themes and motifs. It was asserted that the play invites many Christian interpretations and, although Beckett denied acknowledging it, it was proven that Godot might represent God. As the majority of the most discussed topics and motifs were briefly explained and the notions presented were supported with citations from the play, this chapter could also serve as a helpful guideline for less experienced readers of *Waiting for Godot*.

The third chapter explored both Czech and international reception of *Waiting for Godot*. It was established that *Waiting for Godot* played a significant role in the Velvet Revolution and its popularity in the Czech Republic is by no means fading. It summarized the international reception and pointed out the most distinctive and important productions that aptly illustrated diverse approaches toward the play that invites all kinds of interpretations. This summary enabled the reader to understand and compare how the reception differed in various countries and why.

Samuel Beckett considered every word an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness and yet, it was his best known play that made people talk, analyze and discuss for several decades. Even nowadays scholars continue to produce "a confusing mass of commentary" and

audiences all over the world continue to go to theaters to wait for Godot together with Vladimir and Estragon. *Waiting for Godot* proves its timelessness every time it is staged and it is this timelessness that makes scholars produce new improved translations of the play, analyze the play and look for new meanings. Less, oftentimes, makes us look for more and such is the case with *Waiting for Godot*.

5. Resumé

Tato práce se zabývá divadelní hrou Samuela Becketta *Čekání na Godota*. Práce je rozdělena do čtyř celků, které se následně dělí na podkapitoly. Hlavním cílem práce byla komplexní analýza Beckettova díla, a je tak věnován prostor překladu a jeho historii, uvedení historického kontextu a krátkému popsání hry, analýze hlavních motivů a témat, historii příchodu *Čekání na Godota* do Československa, současné recepce díla v České republice, mezinárodní recepce díla s důrazem na nejdůležitější události, které recepci ovlivnily, a na závěr je čtenáři nabídnuto shrnutí zjištěných poznatků.

Je potřeba si uvědomit, že francouzská verze, ze které vychází nejrozšířenější český překlad od Patrika Ouředníka, se notně liší od verze anglické. Je pravdou, že Ouředníkův překlad z roku 2010 již bere změny, které sám Samuel Beckett provedl při překladu své hry do angličtiny, v úvahu. I tak je ovšem jakékoliv srovnání českého překladu s anglickou verzí hry, ze které tato práce vychází, nemyslitelné. Je zcela zřejmé, že překladatelé *Čekání na Godota* čelí velice obtížnému úkolu, a to především proto, že ani sám autor neměl zcela jasnou představu o tom, co nebo kdo Godot je. Podle Martina Esslina je tedy bezpodmínečně nutné, aby překladatel věnoval své úsilí snaze porozumět hře. Je rovněž jasné, že při překladu divadelní hry musí překladatel věnovat pozornost nejen tomu, *co* postavy ve hře říkají, ale i tomu, *jak* to říkají. Jiří Levý ve své publikaci *Umění překladu* varuje překladatele před výrazy, které je pro herce obtížné vyslovit, a kterým obecnstvo těžko porozumí. Robert Corrigan rovněž dodává, že překladatel musí dbát na rytmus a rychlost řeči. Je ovšem důležité rozlišit, kdy bylo autorovým cílem zmást své obecnstvo a snaha překladatele o zjednodušení (např. přidáním interpunkce) by byla kontraproduktivní. Práce rovněž upozorňuje překladatele, aby brali v potaz specifický Beckettův styl, ve kterém je hra napsána a v neposlední řadě i to, že každá věta a každé slovo v sobě může nést několik významů, které nemusí být na první pohled zcela jasně patrné. Překladatel tedy musí opět zvolit formulace, které umožňují stejný výklad. Poslední podkapitola se věnuje překladu fráze „quaquaqu“. Po srovnání francouzské, anglické a české verze hry autor práce dochází k závěru, že Ouředníkův překlad „kvakvakva“ není zcela vhodný a nabízí alternativu danou frází nepřekládat.

Následující kapitola, nazvaná Analysis, se zabývá především analýzou témat a motivů ve hře. V první podkapitole je čtenář seznámen s historickým kontextem vzniku Beckettovy hry. Hra *Čekání na Godota* vznikala od října roku 1948 do ledna 1949 a byla poprvé uvedena pod

vedením Rogera Blina v Théâtre de Babylone v Paříži 5. ledna 1953. Samuel Beckett uvedl, že jedním ze zdrojů inspirace při psaní byl obraz Caspara Davida *Man and Woman Contemplating the Moon*, nicméně prvotním impulzem byla snaha odpočinout si od psaní prózy. Asi jen málokoho překvapí, že nejznámější Beckettova hra se sama stala zdrojem inspirace mnoha umělcům. Můžeme jmenovat např. knihu Miodraga Bulatoviće nazvanou *Godot přišel*, která vyšla v roce 1966; dále pak *Godot Arrives* od Daniela Curzona.

Po krátkém shrnutí děje a popisu hlavních postav následuje kapitola „Interpretations“, ve které jsou čtenáři prezentovány různé výklady. Tyto výklady jsou podpořeny citováním literárních odborníků a ukázkami ze hry. Nejvíce prostoru je věnováno výkladu z pohledu křesťanství. I přes fakt, že Beckett nebyl sám křesťanem, byl s křesťanskou tematikou velice dobře obeznámen a neváhal toho ve svých dílech využít. *Čekání na Godota* nebylo výjimkou. Hra obsahuje značné množství odkazů na křesťanství. Už samotné jméno „Godot“ má velice blízko k anglickému slovu „God“ – bůh. A i přes to, že se Samuel Beckett nechal slyšet, že lituje zvolení tohoto jména, protože si ho mnoho jeho čtenářů a diváků nesprávně spojuje s bohem, je, vzhledem k vzájemné podobnosti, toto srovnání namístě. Samuel Beckett rovněž odkazuje na Lukášovo evangelium. V kapitole „Existential interpretation“ jsou popsány prvky existencialismu, které se ve hře objevují. Jedním ze základních rysů existencialismu je monotónnost života, a právě monotónnost je jedním z hlavních rysů *Čekání na Godota*. Veškeré počínání hlavních protagonistů se zdá být bezúčelné, smysluplná komunikace se jeví jako nemožná a slova tvoří pouze výplň, kterou si postavy ve hře krátí čas. Rovněž je v této kapitole rozebrán Luckyho 706 slov dlouhý monolog. Někteří odborníci ve hře rovněž spatřovali alegorii studené války, jiní pak hru spojovali s Freudovými teoriemi.

Následující kapitola se věnuje motivům ve hře. *Čekání na Godota* sám autor označil za tragikomedii. Jedna z podkapitol se tedy věnuje právě humoru. Na několika ukázkách je doloženo, jak humor ve hře funguje a rovněž i to, že každý humorný prvek ve hře s sebou nese i vážně míněné sdělení. Samuel Beckett považoval humor za velice důležitou součást své hry a produkce, které humornou stránku hry opomíjely, byly Beckettem kritizovány. Dalším důležitým motivem ve hře je strom. Jedná se o prakticky jedinou rekvizitu na jevišti, a o její důležitosti tedy nemůže být pochyb. Je pravděpodobné, že Beckettovou prvotní inspirací byl výše zmíněný obraz, jehož důležitou částí je rovněž strom. Na stromě, který je v prvním aktu holý, se na začátku druhého dějství objeví několik listů, což je pravděpodobně dáno tím, že svět *Čekání na Godota* se neřídí logikou, a i roční období se tak mohou měnit ze dne na den.

Někteří z kritiků rovněž vyjádřili domněnku, že strom je symbolem biblického stromu poznání dobra a zla. Následující podkapitola se věnuje pachům ve hře. Téměř všechny postavy se během hry stěžují na zápach, který způsobuje jiná postava. Jedním z vysvětlení může být to, že pachy ve hře symbolizují nemožnost lidí vytvořit mezi sebou silná pouta, jelikož jsou od sebe navzájem přirozeně odpuzováni. Závěrečná podkapitola se zabývá stmíváním a jeho významem ve hře. Vladimír a Estragon čekají na stmívání a vítají ho. Stmívání pro ně znamená úlevu – nemusí již déle čekat. Ve scénáři se rovněž dočteme, že stmívání ve světě *Čekání na Godota* není pozvolný proces, nýbrž je náhlé, což podporuje teorii, že ani přírodní jevy nedávají ve hře smysl.

Další kapitola se věnuje přijetí hry v České republice i ve světě. *Čekání na Godota* u nás bylo poprvé uvedeno v roce 1964 v Divadle Na zábradlí. Ačkoliv již během padesátých let se do tehdejšího Československa dostávaly kusé informace, uvedení hry bránil komunistický režim. Až postupné uvolňování poměrů v šedesátých letech umožnilo vznik českých překladů a uvedení hry. Hra byla vnímána jako symbol utrpení, kterému byli občané Československa vystaveni komunistickým režimem. To se pak plně projevilo během Sametové revoluce. Práce se rovněž stručně věnuje vztahu Havla a Becketta, neboť to byl právě tento irský dramatik, kdo prvního československého prezidenta výrazně ovlivnil. I v dnešní době se hra těší vysoké oblibě mezi divadelními fanoušky a je pravidelně uváděna na českých jevištích. Práce se dále zabývá několika moderními českými inscenacemi. Seznamuje čtenáře s jejich přijetím kritiky i veřejností a zmiňuje, v jakých ohledech se tyto inscenace liší od původního Beckettova scénáře. Rovněž upozorňuje na výstavu o životě a díle Samuela Becketta, která vznikla v roce 2006 a dokazuje, že i po uplynutí sta let od narození autora jeho sláva neupadá. Závěr kapitoly se věnuje přijetí hry v USA, Velké Británii, Francii, Západním i Východním Německu, Austrálii, Číně, Japonsku, Polsku, Finsku, Švédsku a Španělsku. Současně zmiňuje nejzajímavější produkce, které dokládají, jak širokou škálu různých interpretací hra nabízí.

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7. Appendix

Man and Woman Contemplating the Moon

