

The Luck of Slavery

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Samuel Beckett's pessimistic attitude about the existence of man lead him to write one of the best contemporary plays known to the twentieth century. Even with its bland unchanging set, clown-like characters, and seemingly meaningless theme, *Waiting for Godot*, arouses the awareness of human tragedy through characters' tragic flaws. Charles Lyons feels, "a character's attitude of the space in which he lives, shows a range of detail marking economic status, social classification, and psychology" (Lyons 19). Beckett uses the character, Lucky, as a metaphor for Man. Using physical, mental, and social blemishes, Lucky exemplifies Beckett's idea that universal man is a slave to his own being.

First Lucky symbolizes man's slavery in a physical sense. Lucky has a master that instructs him where to go and what to do. Lucky is physically tied with a rope to his master, but in a sense is also tied to him by fear of being alone. Lucky is asked by two tramps to dance, but refuses. Lucky only dances at his master's command. Lucky is also a slave to weakness. When Lucky does finally dance, he shuffles chaotically. Ramona Cormier and Janis Pallister describe Lucky's movements as "stiff" and "ungraceful". They believe it is because "he is used to being loaded down with burdens...his body is unable to move freely" (Cormier and Pallister 13). Brooks feel that age has "diminished Lucky's dance to a few ineffectual, spasmodic memories of a past ritual" (Brooks 294). Lucky calls his dance "the net" (Beckett, Act I 27). It is ironical that Lucky does not escape the net that restricts him from being independent. The last physical characteristic of slavery that Lucky exemplifies is, slavery to dumbness. His dumbness does not signify a change, but a "manifestation", since he could not speak freely until called upon (Metman 122). Thus Lucky is drawn closer to bondage—now not by choice, but by necessity. Their relationship becomes symbiotic. Just as man communally needs man to help get through rough times, Lucky needs his master to communicate for him.

The next blemish that contributes to the slavery of Lucky is his mentality. Lucky is not capable of functioning on average human mental capacities. According to Eva Metman, "Lucky allows his master to organize his life for him" (Metman 122). This makes life easier to bear because Lucky can escape the burden and consequence surrounded by decision making. Beckett portrays Lucky as a lunatic too dumb to speak or even think for himself. When Lucky finally does speak, on command, he "stutters" and

"repeats" incoherently, according to Ramona Cormier and Janis Pallister. They also feel Lucky's "disorganized sentence fragments is symbolic of the mental deterioration of man" (Cormier and Pallister 9). In addition, Iser believes, "the repetition emphasizes [Lucky's] unawareness of problems" (Iser 253). Lucky's ideas are distorted from lack of identity. He can not be his own person, thus, the broken-record-like speech symbolizes his broken spirit. Man tends to waddle through life pretending that his mental being is somewhat tainted in order to divert problems and avoid circumstance.

Finally, Beckett's universal man is conveyed through the social status Lucky upholds. Lucky is below animal level. He is referred to several times as "pig" and "hog". Lucky even takes on characteristics of an animal, such as, "panting" and "trembling" (Fletcher 243). Rosette Lamont says, "more dog-like than human, [Lucky] responds to the cracking of a whip he himself carries between his teeth until his master has need of it". She also feels "bent under his weight of burden [Lucky] resembles an ass, the most humble and useful of all creatures" (Lamont 207-208). Lucky caters to his master's needs, while ignoring his own. This is symbolic of man catering to the government's needs of taxes or religion's needs of tithes, while ignoring his own family's needs. Lucky is mere property owned by the head of his government, his god, his master. Ramona Cormier and Janis Pallister implies, "[Lucky's] role was grounded by habit and inertia...once these roles have been established, there is no way to reverse them" (Cormier and Pallister 15). In Act I, Lucky had a chance to free himself from his bondage. He does not because his life has become habit. Man is slave to the social classes he, himself, created. Brooks reveals that even though he is dumb and "loaded down with sand, [Lucky] nevertheless leads his blind master" (Brooks 298). Man attempts, daily, to upgrade from lower class to middle class and middle class to upper class. John Keats said it best when he said, "how is it that man on earth should roam and lead a life of woe, but not forsake his rugged path." Carey and Roberts say that "if one depends entirely on the society in which one lives, it is impossible to stand against that society without defeat" (Carey and Roberts 15). Man strives to get out of the rut and the dog-eat-dog world in which man lives, but with minute success.

Ultimately, Lucky is a mere metaphor of man. The tragic flaws of Lucky only reinstate the tragic flaws of man. Lucky has no sense of his own identity, but lives according to the laws of his master. Like Lucky, man is physically weak and

ineffectual compared to the forces of nature. Man is mortal and dies. Man's mentality is

thought to be above the animals, however, man displays the primal instincts of killing,

stealing, and greed. What man has is not good enough, man always wants more under the

classification of society. Finally, man is a slave of his own being because he chooses to be

dominated. Man prefers to follow the crowd and change with the times, even if it means

losing morale. Fear, love, habit, and mere instinct cause man to want to be controlled.

Men obey governmental laws out of fear, wives obey their husbands out of love, and

children obey their parents out of instinct. Obedience and submissiveness is a expectation

of our society. It is a genuine desire that is embedded in man from the dawn of creation

and will abide within us all until the end of time. Slavery is what sustains man's civility.

Without physical slavery, man never dies. Without mental slavery, man becomes too smart

for his own good. Without social slavery, man is doomed to a life of solitude. If man did

not submit to some cause, the world would live in anarchy and chaos.

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