

The tragic circularity in *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett / *A circularidade trágica em Esperando Godot, de Samuel Beckett*

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Received: February 18th, 2020. **Approved:** March 20th, 2020.

How to cite this article:

SOUZA, Ayanne Larissa Almeida. The tragic circularity in *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett. **Revista Letras Raras**, [S.l.], v. 9, n. 1, mar. 2020. . p. Port. 55-76 / Eng. 52-74. ISSN 2317-2347. UFCG: Campina Grande, 2020.

ABSTRACT

This article aims to investigate the feeling of tragic in the play *Waiting for Godot*, by the Irish writer Samuel Beckett. Through our analysis, we propose to examine how we can understand the tragic as a *structure of feeling*, a term coined by Raymond Williams (2002; 2011), and which concerns aspects in common between writers within the same historical situation. The tragic, perceived under the sociological concept of Williams, comes to be seen as a generational convention of characteristics that, at a given time, are considered as a feeling of the tragic. In this sense, we will try to demonstrate that Beckett's work can also be understood as a symbolic form that expresses the tragic feeling of his time. In addition to Raymond Williams, who bases the work on the concept of *structure of feeling*, it serves as a theoretical contribution to contemporary philosophers to Beckett, like Albert Camus, with regard to existential absurdity.

KEYWORDS: Dramatic Literature. Structure of feeling. Samuel Beckett. *Waiting for Godot*.

RESUMO

O presente artigo objetiva investigar o trágico na peça *Esperando Godot*, do escritor irlandês Samuel Beckett. Através de nossa análise, propomo-nos examinar de que maneira podemos compreender o trágico enquanto uma estrutura de sentir, termo cunhado por Raymond Williams (2002; 2011). O trágico, percebido sob o conceito de Williams, passa a ser visto como uma convenção geracional de características que, em uma determinada época, são consideradas enquanto uma estrutura de sentimento do trágico. Nesse sentido, buscaremos demonstrar que na obra de Beckett encontramos um sentir trágico que se expressa na existência esvaziada de qualquer sentido. Além de Raymond Williams, que alicerça o trabalho sobre o conceito de estrutura de sentimento e do trágico, bem como Terry Eagleton sobre este último, serve-nos também de aporte teórico filósofos contemporâneos a Beckett, como Albert Camus, no que diz respeito ao absurdo existencial.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Literatura dramática. Estrutura de Sentimento. Samuel Beckett. *Esperando Godot*.

1 Introduction

Raymond Williams (2011) is considered the forerunner of Cultural Studies as a particularly innovative theorist whose criticism is still very relevant in contemporary cultural

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analyzes. In particular, Williams' concepts, which made him a decisive author for thinking about discursive configurations within the current Marxist analysis, are composed of *complexity*, *immanence* and the *great revolution*. Thinking of the thick material, cultural and economic condensations of our time, Williams offered the dimension of pertinent tragicity to the materialist tradition.

Williams (2002) proposes an analysis of the tragic, stripping it of its galleries and throwing it to the ground floor of historical conflicts that involve the authors' ethical and political choices. Observing the literary work as an intersection between text and context, Williams recognizes the need to think about literature as a production whose process is crossed by shifts in the social, offering a dialogue that oscillates from the individual to society and from this back to the subject.

The purpose of this article investigates the *structure* of tragic feeling in the play *Waiting for Godot*, by the Irish writer Samuel Beckett, seeking to show how the work expresses the feeling of existential absurdity, conceptualized by Albert Camus, in his most striking philosophical essay: *The myth of Sisyphus – An Absurd Reasoning*.

Waiting for Godot tells the story of two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, who are waiting for someone, Godot, a person who never appears in the play, at least on the material plane. We can consider that the work deals with existentialist philosophical themes, not only for debating the human condition in the world, but also for being part of a scenario in which the philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, among many others, were in vogue.

The plot is markedly empty and random, disturbing the audience to the point of making them wonder about the repetitive scenes in the text. The malaise caused, on purpose, by the way the play takes off on stage drags the audience into a kind of feeling of lethargy and restlessness and makes them question about a meaning for all that, or even a meaning for their own lives.

Beckett's play is part of the "theater of the absurd" and was the first play written by the author, becoming a landmark in the theater and breaking several aesthetic paradigms. Originally written in French, it debuted in 1954. The importance of *Waiting Godot* made it a watershed of 20th century theater. At a time when theater offered logical sequences, with a beginning, middle and end, specific acting and composition techniques, Beckett debuted to distort and renew the way of doing theater. This new way of seeing the theatrical montage and the dramatic text itself aims to echo the social and political relations of the time.

A generation that had lost its fixed identities, heir to the crisis of modernity, to the overthrow of supreme values as a moral compass of human action. Theodor Adorno (1985)

would question himself, in his *Dialética do Esclarecimento*, about how it was possible to experience barbarism, such as the Second World War, within a scientifically relevant society, with its universities, its progressive and universal view.

Waiting for Godot mutates the experience of everyday life, making it difficult to show the existential absurdity in the midst of a chaotic world, emptied of its values. The existential absurdity is based exactly on that reason that verified its limits, the reason instrumentalized by the Enlightenment project that, instead of taking humanity to the pinnacles of political-economic-social progress, of complete happiness for all, slipped in that which was the greatest barbarism of our century and the trivialization of evil, the death as a condition superior to life. Beckett, by breaking the traditional molds of the theater, promoting, in *Waiting for Godot*, a circularity without beginning, middle or end, manifests the sensation of his generation, the emptying of the concept of Humanity. The subject had been imploded and, consequently, reduced to nothing.

To perform our analysis, we will take into account the understanding of the term *structure of feeling*, a conceptual proposal created by Raymond Williams. We intend to reflect on this concept as a possible cultural thesis to read the tragic as a dialectical relationship between individual and society. Our analysis intends to show the tragic feeling as the manifestation of a feeling of a generation that was beginning to experience existence as an absurdity.

2 Raymond Williams' Interpretive project

The political project for an interpretation, within the thought of Raymond Williams is inscribed as a pillar of cultural materialism in contemporary times, given that a literary interpretation occurs through the dialectic of a socio-political game between the corpus of analysis and the thought about the corpus. For Williams (2011), the interpreter must analyze the theoretical work itself within the historical conditions that enable the interpretation of a work, since the new is a product of its time.

Concerned with the complex issues that involve theoretical doing within the concept of culture, Williams (2011) considers that the literary text does not come together as a monadic repository of realities, but rather as the fabric of dialectical realities. However, it should be noted that, according to him, we could not reduce the work to be a mere stronghold of a historical cause. The dialogism that is found in the questioning of the complex relationships between both projects and culture itself, relations that no longer contain the formula of classical basic

materialism and superstructure, is manifested in the dystopian, almost post-apocalyptic scenario, of *Waiting for Godot*. The structure of the text and the play can be understood not as a negative view, as if dystopia were just a negative version of utopia, but as positivity, dystopia as an attempt to escape from utopias in History.

Within this perspective, Raymond Williams' thinking dialogues with Fredric Jameson. American Marxist literary critic and theorist, Jameson (1992), in his *The Political Unconscious*, conceives the literary narrative as an ideological aesthetic act in itself and whose function would be "to invent imaginary or formal solutions to insoluble social contradictions" (JAMESON, 1992, p. 72). In other words, social contradictions, insurmountable by themselves, can find a formal scope within the aesthetic scope, formalized through artistic making.

Jameson (1992) thinks about the existing dialectic between cultural production and society, proposing an interpretation that takes into account literature as a construction of subjectivity, an elaborative confirmation of a self that thinks of itself and reality. Jameson (2006) affirms the political interpretation of literary texts must be conceived as an "absolute horizon for all reading and all interpretation" (JAMESON, 1992, p.15), given that, several historical phases produced different literary narratives. For the American thinker, this interpretive need is due precisely to the historical origins of the objects and the historicity of the concepts and categories through which we know and understand the world and the objects that compose it.

The assimilation of the literary praxis by ideologies means that the historical, economic, political and social dimensions within which it was produced can encompass literature. We would therefore need to ask to what extent we could think about the influence exerted by the social on literary praxis. How is it possible to think of literature as an expression of the society that produces it as a sphere concerned with social issues, given that it is itself a social product? For Candido (2006), Literature is configured as an expression of a reality deeply rooted in the writer himself even before being rooted in concepts, notions or theories. There is a bond that unites art and society and there is a need, on the part of the social, to recognize the position and role of Literature as well as the writer himself in his literary work. Even there are many though the social factors that act concretely in artistic making, they are not sufficient by themselves to explain the work of art:

[...] os artistas podem permanecer desligados entre si ou vincular-se, seja por meio de uma consciência comum, seja pela formação de grupos igualmente determinados pela técnica. Esta é [...] pressuposto de toda arte, envolvendo

uma série de fórmulas e modos de fazer que, uma vez estabelecidos, devem ser conservados e transmitidos. (CANDIDO, 1996, p.38-39)¹

In a dialogue with Williams and Candido, Jameson (1992) further points out that this aesthetic form of the literary text is not merely a pattern or rule. The text not be considered a canon or mold to be followed by a given generation, as a starting point, through which to initiate it making a literary, as a prescription through which each era should guide its literary praxis. As Williams (2001; 2002) proclaims, through the concept of *structure of feeling* through which we intend to read the tragic feeling in Beckett's work. We see the text as a symbolic form of the social and political relations of his time. The aesthetic form of the literary text fuses a dialectical articulation between the logic of the body and the content.

3 The tragic as a *structure of feeling* in time

The word *tragedy* comes to us through a long tradition. It has taken on connotations that range from a specific type of literary work to a structure of feeling. Raymond Williams (2002, p.29-30) stated that he had known the tragedy in the life of a silenced worker and reduced to a mere object, instrumentalized by the capitalist system and the logic of the market. In this sense he also stated that, with regard to the tragedy and the tragic, not only the nomenclature was in check, as was what, for twenty-five centuries, had been stiffened as being characteristic of the feeling of tragic and tragedy.

Analyzing the tragedy or the tragic concerns observing a set of works and thoughts, perceiving the variations within a totality. According to Williams (2002), it is to look critically and historically at ideas and works that have a certain connection with each other and that associate through the word tragedy or tragic. For Williams, there is no separation between the social and the personal, it is necessary to seek and recognize in the sensitive world, in the matter, the institutions, formations and positions, not as productions frozen in time, but rather as social productions that define the present reality.

Thus, the idea of the tragic is never found in the past, shaped by a tradition that has reached us through the contribution of Aristotle and his *Poetics*. The tragic always remains as a constitutive process immersed within a specific reality. Williams (1997) points out that the power

¹[...] artists can remain disconnected from each other or bond, either through a common conscience or through the formation of groups equally determined by technique. This is an assumption of all art, involving a series of formulas and ways of doing that, once established, must be preserved and transmitted.

of ideological systems - such as aesthetic or psychological - is itself derived from these procedural senses in which immediate experiences and feelings and, subsequently, subjectivity are generalized. Reducing the social to be merely fixed, shaped and immutable forms, remains a blunder.

Therefore, the relationships that exist between the aesthetic formalizations of artistic productions and the historical specificities of the institutions, conventions and beliefs that change and, in addition, the social relations themselves intertwined by socio-political conflicts, constitute acute historical questions. These transformations are social because they are presences and do not need previous definitions, rationalizations or conceptualizations to exercise an imperative and to establish borders and bases for these same experiences and human action.

For Williams (1997), these changes occur in the structures of feeling, using the term “feeling” as a distinguishable concept between formalized concepts and ideological concepts of the world:

En consecuencia, estamos definiendo estos elementos como una “estructura”: como un grupo con relaciones internas específicas, entrelazadas y a la vez, en tensión. Sin embargo, también estamos definiendo una experiencia social que todavía se halla en proceso, que a menudo no es reconocida verdaderamente como social, sino como privada, idiosincrática e incluso aislante, pero que en el análisis (aunque muy raramente ocurra de otro modo) tiene sus características emergentes, conectoras y dominantes y, ciertamente, sus jerarquías específicas. Estas son a menudo mejor reconocidas en un estado posterior, cuando han sido (como ocurre a menudo) formalizadas, clasificadas y en muchos casos convertidas en instituciones y formaciones. En este momento el caso es diferente; normalmente, ya habrá comenzado a formarse una nueva estructura del sentimiento dentro del verdadero presente social. (WILLIAMS, 1997, p.155)²

The structure of feeling is a cultural thesis coined by Raymond Williams as an attempt to understand the social elements and connections within a generation or historical period, making a dialectical movement, going from the social to the subjective. This cultural hypothesis has a better relevance with regard to art, more specifically to the literary, within which social content cannot be reduced to mere systems of beliefs, conventions or generalist social institutions, even if, in its scope, it includes all these instances.

² Consequently, we are defining these elements as a “structure”: as a group with specific internal relationships, intertwined and at the same time, in tension. However, we are also defining a social experience that is still in process, which is often not truly recognized as social, but as private, idiosyncratic and even insulating, but which in the analysis (although very rarely occurs otherwise) has its emerging, connecting and dominant characteristics and, certainly, its specific hierarchies. These are often better recognized at a later stage, when they have been (as often happens) formalized, classified and in many cases converted into institutions and formations. At this time, the case is different; normally, a new structure of feeling will have begun to form within the true social present.

Feeling structures can be related to the idea of the tragic, as Williams (2002, p.38) alludes, relating to the forms and conventions of literary making. Such structures can be defined as “experiencias sociales en solución, a diferencia de otras formaciones semánticas sociales que han sido precipitadas y resultan más evidentes y más inmediatamente aprovechables”. What we intend to analyze in our present work is the hypothesis of a tragic feeling structure, a tragic social mode formalized and recognized in a certain artistic production, in this case the play *Waiting for Godot*, which differentiates it from other social and semantic structures that articulate a presence of tragic.

The tragic experience, observed from the perspective of a structure of feeling, attracts beliefs and conceptions that are present in the socio-cultural relations of certain periods and generations. Therefore, through it, we can understand more deeply the conformation of a specific culture with regard to the tragic. From this point of view, as Williams (2002) points out, tragedy and tragic cease to be an essence beyond a single event to become a series of experiences, conventions and institutions of a given society at a given time. These variations of the tragic must therefore be analyzed in relation to those same conventions and institutions that are always in the process of transformation. According to Williams:

Em primeiro lugar, temos que reconhecer que não pode haver separação absoluta entre aquelas relações sociais que são evidentes, ou que se podem descobrir como condições imediatas de uma prática – os locais, ocasiões e condições sinalizados de tipos de atividade cultural especificamente indicados – e aquelas que estão tão incorporados à prática, como articulações formais particulares, que são ao mesmo tempo sociais e formais, e podem, em certo tipo de análise, ser tratadas como pouco autônomas. (WILLIAMS, 1992, p.147)³

In this sense, the tragic as being characteristic of the human condition is related to the limits humans situations, and is inherent to the human reality itself, as a social being and as an ontological being. However, according to Bornheim (2007), the individual is not tragic in itself, because the idea of the tragic is found in the sphere of values and is manifested in human choices, in human action, in the practical sphere.

The tragedy deals with themes that constitute the fabric of the subject's most primitive emotions and instincts. A certain form of expression is used which, for Williams (2002), unlike the

³ First, we have to recognize that there can be no absolute separation between those social relations that are evident, or that can be discovered as immediate conditions of a practice - the places, occasions and conditions signaled for types of cultural activity specifically indicated - and those that are so incorporated into practice, as particular formal articulations, that are both social and formal, and can, in a certain type of analysis, be treated as little autonomous.

Athenians of the 5th century BC, proceeds in another way. The tragic encompasses themes of universal values, although not absolutized or shaped, inviting the individual to reflect as a being-in-the-world and building a bridge with the present itself. As Terry Eagleton points out:

A tragédia envolve-se com o embate acalorado das conjunturas históricas, mas, visto que há aspectos do sofrimento que estão também arraigados em nosso ser genérico, ela também presta atenção a estes fatos mais naturais, mais materiais da natureza humana. Como afirma o filósofo italiano Sebastiano Timpanaro, fenômenos tais como o amor, o envelhecimento, doenças, o medo da própria morte e o sofrimento pela morte de outros, a brevidade e a fragilidade da existência humana, o contraste entre a fragilidade da humanidade e a aparente eternidade do cosmos, são traços recorrentes das culturas humanas, não importa de quantas maneiras diferentes eles possam ser representados. (EAGLETON, 2013, p.16)⁴

The tragic is responsible for the concerns and apprehensions throughout history and, through the tragic dimension, the structure of feeling that conditions a certain way of seeing, acting, feeling and thinking while tragic, we can more forcefully apprehend the contours and conformations of a given generation, within a given culture and at a given time.

In this way, the image that the tragic is restricted to being only a theory about a single and permanent fact is broken, a fact that, according to previously established criteria, we would categorize as tragic. Seen in this light, we would continue to arrive at the same metaphysical implications that these fixed premises imply, as if there were a permanent, unchanging human nature, an essence of Man to which a specific and predetermined tragic qualified existential condition was pertinent. For Williams (1992, p.70):

Tragédia passa a ser então não um tipo de acontecimento único e permanente, mas uma série de experiências, convenções e instituições. Não se trata de interpretá-las com referência a uma natureza humana permanente e imutável. Pelo contrário, as variações da experiência trágica é que devem ser interpretadas na sua relação com as convenções e as instituições em processo de transformação. O caráter universalista da maior parte das teorias sobre a tragédia localiza-se então no pólo oposto ao nosso interesse. (WILLIAMS, 1992, p.70)⁵

⁴ Tragedy is involved with the heated clash of historical circumstances, but, since there are aspects of suffering that are also ingrained in our generic being, it also pays attention to these more natural, more material facts of human nature. As the Italian philosopher Sebastiano Timpanaro states, phenomena such as love, aging, illness, fear of death itself and suffering for the death of others, the brevity and fragility of human existence, the contrast between the fragility of humanity and the apparent eternity of the cosmos, are recurrent traits of human cultures, no matter how many different ways they can be represented.

⁵ Tragedy then becomes not a single, permanent type of event, but a series of experiences, conventions and institutions. It is not about and interpreting them with reference to a permanent and immutable human nature. On the contrary, it is the variations of the tragic experience that must be interpreted in their relation to conventions and

Therefore, there is no possibility of thinking about the production of art outside the scope of the historical clashes that compose it. There is no chance to imagine an artistic event or a reaction to it as fixed rules. In the most diverse situations in which suffering is present, covering the scope of otherness, we witness, according to Williams (1992), the instance of kaleidoscopic possibilities of the varied dimensions of the tragedy. Not act, or rather, not reacting to a certain event, does not mean no reaction; indifference, relief or even contentment are also reactions. According to Eagleton, it is always necessary to remember that:

[...] sejam quais forem nossas realizações civilizadas, continuamos a ser um afloramento arbitrário da Natureza, animais monstruosos ou anfíbios escarranchados em dois domínios, que jamais se sentirão em casa em nenhum deles. [...] É verdade que não existe valor nem significado sem cultura; mas, para existir, a cultura depende de forças materiais que, por si mesmas, não têm nem significado nem valor. Esse é o “barbarismo” inumano que o modernismo detecta na raiz da civilidade; e o problema é como reconhecer essa escuridão sem sermos reclamados por ela, como confessar a fragilidade da cultura sem sermos ludibriados por seus inimigos. [...] As forças das quais a virtude cívica foi arduamente arrancada não podem ter permissão para arruinar esses valores; mas essa civilidade também não pode ter permissão para exaurir as próprias energias que a sustentam. (EAGLETON, 2013, P.388)⁶

Even with the tiniest and most illusory buildings of civilization, such as culture, the Enlightenment ideas of economic progress, absolute and general happiness, scientism and the material improvements that it brought to societies, the fact is that we continue to suffer and die. According to Williams:

Tentar negar a realidade dos tipos de realização possíveis nessas formas, mesmo sob ordens sociais repressoras, para não falar dos sistemas sociais que abrem um espaço significativo à sua realização, pode parecer um dogmatismo desesperado. [...] A tristeza profunda de nossa época se expressa de forma plena nos lembretes necessários de nossos contínuos limites físicos. No entanto, a verdadeira fonte da profundidade dessa tristeza é predominantemente histórica. Pois, nos termos físicos mais básicos, nossa

institutions in the process of transformation. The universalist character of most theories about the tragedy is then located at the opposite pole from our interest.

⁶ [...] whatever our civilized achievements, we continue to be an arbitrary outcrop of Nature, monstrous animals or amphibians straddling two domains, which will never feel at home in any of them. [...] It is true that there is no value or meaning without culture; but in order to exist, culture depends on material forces which, in themselves, have neither meaning nor value. This is the inhuman “barbarism” that modernism detects at the root of civility; and the problem is how to recognize this darkness without being claimed by it, how to confess the fragility of the culture without being deceived by its enemies. [...] The forces from which civic virtue has been hard-wrenched cannot be allowed to undermine those values; but that civility also cannot be allowed to exhaust the very energies that sustain it.

época pode ser caracterizada [...] como uma época de ampliação da felicidade: os limites da velhice, da doença e da mortalidade infantil recuaram significativamente em uma grande área da sociedade mundial. Mais pessoas estão vivendo mais, são mais saudáveis e melhor alimentadas do que em qualquer outra época da história humana. [...] Então, por que um pessimismo materialista? [porque] Uma ética materialista, como uma política materialista, deve ser então fundamentada nessas condições relacionadas e inerentes, não como relativismo, que responde apenas ao seu registro, mas como atividade – o esforço consciente para a sua realização comum como história humana. (WILLIAMS, 2011, p.156-157)⁷

Therefore, even if an accentuated historicism intends to highlight the cultural distinctions of societies, generations and times, emphasizing in an abusive way specific points, it is necessary to recognize that there is nothing exegetically nebulous for us, subjects belonging to a species, among so many others, that suffer afflictions, like no other, and that recreate the tragic art and the idea of the tragic.

Eagleton (2013) rescues precisely this dimensionality of the tragic, the instance that helps - or, better said, strength - the individual to accept his own finitude and fragility. According to Miguel de Unamuno (1993, p.20), it forces the subjects to recognize basic needs, as being social beings, they are materialness made “de carne y hueso, que nace, sufre y muere – sobretudo muere -, que come, y bebe, y juega, y duerme, y piensa, y quiere: el hombre a quien se ve y a quien se oye, el hermano, el verdadeiro hermano”.

The tragic needs to be understood, therefore, as meaning that construct human existences, independent of historical contexts, social and political conflicts, even though we should not observe the human condition as essential, immutable and permanent. The tragic can be generalized, but not as a response to death, but as a reaction to its inevitability.

4 Waiting for Godot and the tragic circularity of life - Existential absurdity as a structure of feeling

⁷ Trying to deny the reality of the types of achievements possible in these forms, even under repressive social orders, not to mention the social systems that opened up a significant space for their realization, may seem like desperate dogmatism. [...] The profound sadness of our time is fully expressed in the necessary reminders of our continuous physical limits. However, the real source of the depth of this sadness is predominantly historical. For, in the most basic physical terms, our age can be characterized [...] as an age of expansion of happiness: the limits of old age, illness and infant mortality have receded significantly in a large area of world society. More people are living longer, are healthier and better fed than at any other time in human history. [...] So, why a materialistic pessimism? [because] A materialist ethics, like a materialist policy, must then be based on these related and inherent conditions, not as relativism, which responds only to its registration, but as an activity - the conscious effort towards its common realization as human history.

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), Irish writer and playwright, one of the most influential names of the 20th century in the field of art, is considered one of the last modernists and one of the first contemporaries. Taking into account the breakthrough movements of the avant-garde at the beginning of the 20th century, all the contemporary post-war art, in which much of Beckett's dramatic work is inserted, his literary production had in these processes of breaking paradigms in force the ideal to be pursued. These same paradigmatic rupture movements opened space for new experiences that enabled the introduction of aesthetic innovations.

Beckett is one of the greatest exponents of the so-called "theater of the absurd". This term, *absurd*, refers to everything that is contrary to reason. The "theatre of absurd" descends from Surrealism. It was, so to speak, an anti-theater, with strong expressionist characteristics. Considering genre as a historical phenomenon characterized by a certain aesthetic-literary form, as emphasized by Machado and Pageaux (2001), it is imbricated in the crossing of formal and thematic criteria. As a genre of modern theater, uses the characters and the dialogue and impacting elements of the illogical to compose the plot, whose objective would be precisely to reproduce, formalize the folly and the lack of solution and perspective in which human individuals are immersed after the World War II experience.

Beckett was pessimistic, a feeling rooted in post-war generations. In addition to pessimism, there were a skepticism and an existential anguish linked to an expansion of the scope of the change in the paradigm shift from autonomy to post-autonomy. This view was as a new way of reading a world each increasingly complex in its multifaceted discursive territorialities. Beckett's rejection of Reason is absolute, and it is necessary, in order to understand this anti-reason, to perceive the connection with the real events of the society that held it.

The experience of World War II (SGM) collapsed all the bases on which the constituent values of what would be humanity were built. The individual went into a process of dissolution and this collapse of the subject was linked to social collapse - and this was linked to that. According to Williams:

Um tal modo de ver o mundo não é buscado, mas dado. Quando entra em colapso, tornando-se um modo usual de ver, parece, obviamente, ingênuo. Continuar a se utilizar de seus métodos na criação artística, então, é um ato quase sempre paradoxal. O que antes era um costume do realismo torna-se

um costume descrito em termos inteiramente opostos. (WILLIAMS, 2002, p.183-184)⁸

For Williams (2002), the key to these changes in general forms for the constitution of a genre, whose origin goes back to space and temporal aspects, are historical transformations, the emphasis on a totalizing condition. In other parts of the world, the collapse of the individual and society has led to other types of literature, such as Magic Realism, in Latin America. In post-war Europe, there was no model to be followed that could encompass and express the totality of human mutability and annihilation other than isolation and nihilism, conflicts started to be given within the individual mind, the flows of consciousness. There was no longer a fixed world, just a consciousness to which that world appeared and, therefore, was reduced to being only a perspective. There was now a human subject in the face of the world.

As Williams (2002) points out, what had previously been seen and lived as a way of life, a society has become hostile, a different flow, and a backdrop. That element of neutrality extended to other people, “que se tornaram meros objetos e um meio ambiente”⁹ (WILLIAMS, 2002, p.184). The element of hostility that is increasingly ingrained in this society, developed in this structure of feeling, makes the individual now react no longer against a condition of society, but against society itself.

In the play in question that serves as a corpus, *Waiting for Godot*, the themes of unreality, failure in communication and meaninglessness become so widespread and evident that it becomes, virtually, a dramatic convention. Beckett presents us with an absolute condition of the human individual guided by the feeling of absurdity, conceptualized by Albert Camus (2017) as being the divorce between the subject and the world.

In his most important philosophical work, *The Myth of Sisyphus - Essay on the Absurd*, Camus begins his reflection by stating that “There is only one really serious philosophical problem: suicide. To judge whether or not life is worth living is to answer the fundamental question of philosophy” (CAMUS, 2017, p.19). Therefore, judging that the meaning of life was the most pressing of all questions.

Camus takes up Greek mythology to metaphorize human existence in the skin of Sisyphus. Mythological character, Sisyphus had deceived Death (Thanatos, in Greek), for which he had been punished. The gods condemned him to push a rock uphill until it reached its peak.

⁸ Such a way of looking at the world is not sought, but given. When it collapses, making it a usual way of looking at it, it obviously seems naive. Keep using your methods of artistic creation, so it is almost always an paradoxical act. What used to be a costume of realism becomes a costume described in the opposite defined terms.

⁹ “that have become unimportant objects and an environment”

However, whenever the stone was almost reaching the top, it slid downwards, which forced Sisyphus to go down the mountain to get it to push it up again. That punishment would be for eternity. Every day, Sisyphus would have to indulge in useless work, the outcome of which he already knew beforehand.

This myth gave Camus the perfect image that would illustrate the human existential condition: immersed in existence, one day the individual asks himself “why?” and begins to be tormented by the search for a meaning for life. The useless movement of Sisyphus when rolling the stone is similar to human living. The stone metaphorizes the existence that we push uphill to see it fall apart with death. When we become aware of the finitude, that death awaits us in the end, we ask ourselves what is the meaning of existing and of all the suffering that we go through during life. It is on the return to the base of the mountain, in order to seek the stone again, that Sisyphus makes his existential reflection:

Da mesma maneira, e em todos os dias de uma vida sem brilho, o tempo nos leva. Mas sempre chega uma hora em que temos de levá-lo. Vivemos no futuro: “amanhã”, “mais tarde”, “quando você conseguir uma posição”, “com o tempo vai entender”. Estas consequências são admiráveis, porque afinal trata-se de morrer. Chega o dia em que o homem constata ou diz que tem trinta anos. Afirma assim a sua juventude. Mas, no mesmo movimento, situa-se em relação ao tempo. Ocupa nele o seu lugar. Reconhece que está num certo momento de uma curva que, admite, precisa percorrer. Pertence ao tempo e reconhece seu pior inimigo nesse horror que o invade. O amanhã, ele ansiava o amanhã, quando tudo em si deveria rejeitá-lo. Essa revolta da carne é o absurdo. (CAMUS, 2017, p.27-28)¹⁰

We realize that the metaphor of Sisyphus to mirror the human condition to the generation of Camus manifests the feeling structure of the dramaturgy of the “theater of the absurd” in postwar Europe. Extracting an excerpt from Beckett's dramatic text, we can perceive it¹¹:

One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? They give birth

¹⁰ In the same way, and in every day of a dull life, time takes us. But there always comes a time when we have to take him. We live in the future: “tomorrow”, “later”, “when you get a position”, “in time you will understand”. These consequences are admirable, because after all it is a matter of dying. The day comes when the man finds out or says he is thirty years old. It thus affirms its youth. But, in the same movement, it is situated in relation to time. It takes its place in it. He recognizes that he is at a certain moment on a curve that, he admits, needs to go. It belongs to time and recognizes its worst enemy in this horror that invades it. Tomorrow, he longed for tomorrow, when everything in itself should reject it. This revolt of the flesh is absurd.

¹¹The translations were taken from the original English text. Available in: https://www.academia.edu/4805724/Samuel_Becketts_Waiting_for_Godot

astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. On!
(Pozzo)

In another stretch:

Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. But habit is a great deadener. (Vladimir)

(BECKETT, *waiting for Godot*, 1945, s/p)

The play is built on an unusual set of antagonisms, such as tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, and travelers, Pozzo and Lucky, and within each pair, there are their own additional contrasts. It is a characteristic that goes back to expressionism whose purpose in using this opposite polarization of characters was precisely to reveal the conflicts of a single mind. In the play, we have a practically static world, in which, for any significant human action, narrow limits are established. However, there is a deep-rooted struggle for meaning in each of the two pairs, meaning sharply contrasted. We perceive a deadly game that goes from lucidity in relation to existence to an escape out of the light. As Camus (2017) points out, this divorce between the individual and his world is properly the feeling of absurdity, because a world that can be explained, even though with erroneous arguments, is a familiar world; but in an abruptly meaningless universe, the subject feels like a foreigner.

Within the scope of art, from this of the 1950s and 1960s, emerged criticism of interpretation and the hermeneutics of meaning. Susan Sontag (1987) states that to interact with art asking for it to be justified is to remove from it what is most specific: the ability to affect human sensitivity and, once removed from direct contact with the world and its objects, the individual is suffocated in his affective capacity. Taking this criticism to the existential realm, we find the absurd Camusian man, who became the tragic hero of the post-European war. The human subject's incessant search for a sense, a meaning, an interpretation of existence and the silence of the universe as an answer.

In *Waiting for Godot*, we have the act of waiting, waiting for a meeting that is not kept. Tramps are always waiting for Godot, while travelers move on, change from one act to another. According to Williams (2002) this would be the result of the different reactions they had. In the statements cited above, the first given by Pozzo, a traveler, and the second by Vladimir, a vagabond, has an equal sense of existence, but Pozzo's final word is "on the move", while Vladimir's are "but the custom calm them down". As Williams says:

Pozzo e Lucky pertencem ao mundo do esforço e da ação; Vladimir e Estragon, ao mundo da resignação e da espera. Em última instância, nenhuma das respostas é mais significativa do que a outra: os viajantes caem e os vagabundos continuam, frustrados, esperando. (WILLIAMS, 2002, p.202)¹²

In another section, we have an example of the total paralyzing condition in which Europe sank in the post-war period. The individual seeks nothing, he expects nothing but frustration; at a tragic pace, it remains stagnant in space-time:

ESTRAGON: Wait!
VLADIMIR: I'm cold!
ESTRAGON: Wait! (He moves away from Vladimir.) I sometimes wonder if we wouldn't have been better off alone, each one for himself. (He crosses the stage and sits down on the mound.) We weren't made for the same road.
VLADIMIR: (without anger). It's not certain.
ESTRAGON: No, nothing is certain.
(Vladimir slowly crosses the stage and sits down beside Estragon.)
VLADIMIR: We can still part, if you think it would be better.
ESTRAGON: It's not worthwhile now.
Silence.
VLADIMIR: No, it's not worthwhile now.
Silence.
ESTRAGON: Well, shall we go?
VLADIMIR: Yes, let's go.
They do not move.

(BECKETT, *Waiting for Godot*, 1945, s/p)

Neither progress, with all the apparatus of the Enlightenment discourse and program of collective happiness for humanity, of scientism, of late liberalism, nor of salvation, the waiting for the Messiah, could offer any escape to the reality of the human condition at that time. The circular structure of the eternal return, the heaviest of the burdens, according to Friedrich Nietzsche, has no logical solution given all the illogicity of the SGM experience. The situation is static, just as the human subject himself was, with his hands tied, unable to advance or wait, as both actions consume themselves. Nothing changes; nothing is resolved, because there is no hope for solving human problems in a world without any perspective.

Waiting for Godot is not built following traditional structural lines of exposure, development, reversal and outcome, but rather a structure that is based on repetition. Vladimir

¹² Pozzo and Lucky belong to the world of effort and action; Vladimir and Estragon, to the world of resignation and waiting. Ultimately, none of the answers is more significant than the other: travelers fall and the vagabonds continue, frustrated, waiting.

and Estragon await Godot, but only his servants, Pozzo and Lucky, appear both surreal: one, in his authoritarianism, the other, in his servility. In the second act, Pozzo, the authoritarian, goes blind and Lucky, the servant, is silent, unable to utter anything. Moreover, the bums are still waiting for Godot. Sisyphus's fate is not offered to them, as they do not even have the means to commit suicide. In addition, Godot does not appear.

The repetitive structure can be verified in the song that Vladimir sings at the beginning of the second act, which is itself an example of the human existential condition itself, at that moment, since the structure of the piece follows the human existential structure of repetition (the Camusian absurdity) and circularity:

Vladimir: A dog came in -
A dog came in the kitchen
And stole a crust of bread.
Then cook up with a ladle
And beat him till he was dead.
Then all the dogs came running
And dug the dog a tomb -
Then all the dogs came running
And dug the dog a tomb
And wrote upon the tombstone
A dog came in the kitchen
And stole a crust of bread.
Then cook up with a ladle
And beat him till he was dead.
Then all the dogs came running
And dug the dog a tomb -
Then all the dogs came running
And dug the dog a tomb -
And dug the dog a tomb...

(BECKETT, waiting for Godot, 1945, s/p)

Circular and repetitive music has as its main theme: death. This brings us to the myth of Camusian Sisyphus, an essay on the absurdity of the human existential condition. The concept of Absurd, in France, was born at the end of the 19th century, beginning of the 20th century, linked to the recognition of the intellect that the universe and everything that comprises it is not logical, intelligent or rationally configured. Behind the world, there are no universal laws that balance and make sense of the cosmos; behind the phenomena, there is only chaos. There is no absolute essence behind the relative phenomenal world.

As Barreto (1972) ascertains, instead of order the human individual is faced with chaos. The absurdity, therefore, would be the human feeling of realizing that the sense or meaning to

which one wishes to arrive, of existential order and rationality, simply does not exist. For Camus, absurdity appears as this feeling of divorce between the human individual and the world, never as a metaphysical category. Thus, Camus speaks to us:

Esse mal-estar diante da desumanidade do próprio homem, essa incalculável queda diante da imagem daquilo que somos, essa “náusea”, como diz um autor dos nossos dias, é também o absurdo. Tanto quanto o estranho que, em certos instantes, vem ao nosso encontro num espelho, o irmão familiar e no entanto inquietante que encontramos nas nossas próprias fotos também é o absurdo. (CAMUS, 2017, p.29)¹³

Absurd would be a statement of the feeling of ambiguity between human attachment to existence and the total indifference of the universe. The gratuitousness of life, the strife between the human appetite for clear and rational responses and the supreme haze of things. The Absurd would thus be “a razão lúcida que constata seus limites”¹⁴ (CAMUS, 2017, p.56), arising from the confrontation “entre o apelo humano e o silêncio irracional do mundo”¹⁵ (CAMUS, 2017, p.39). It is this sensitivity of the absurd that Camus tries to apprehend in his philosophical essay and his literature. He shows the human individual in experiences that face him to limit situations, such as fear, anguish, frustration and death, because each individual experiences these different ways trials the existence, but bringing the same anxiety before all these facets: is life worth living or not?

The two acts of Beckett's play take place in the same scenario, there is simply a secondary road, which is not situated as a specific location and contains a single tree. The public is never transferred to another location; all the action takes place within this configuration. In addition, both acts take place at the same time of day: at night. The time in act II is supposed to be close to dawn, but there is no substantial difference between that day of the second act and the day at the beginning of the first act.

The same tendency for repetition can be observed in the action of the play. Both acts have the same type of similarity in the action sequence that happens with the characters. In both acts, the action begins with the same situation: in Act I, Vladimir enters and Estragon observes: "So there you are again"; In Act II, upon encountering Estragon, Vladimir exclaims "You again!"

¹³ This malaise in the face of man's inhumanity, this incalculable fall before the image of what we are, this “nausea”, as an author of our day says, is also absurd. As much as the stranger who, at certain moments, comes to meet us in a mirror, the familiar and yet disturbing brother we find in our own photos is also absurd.

¹⁴ The lucid reason that realizes its limits.

¹⁵ Between the human appeal and the irrational silence of the world.

and, later, repeats: "There you are again". In both acts, there is a concern for Estragon's feet and shoes:

VLADIMIR: What are you doing?
ESTRAGON: Pale for weariness.
VLADIMIR: Eh?
ESTRAGON: Of climbing heaven and gazing on the likes of us.
VLADIMIR: Your boots, what are you doing with your boots?
ESTRAGON: (turning to look at the boots). I'm leaving them there. Another will come, just as... as... as me, but with smaller feet, and they'll make him happy.
VLADIMIR: But you can't go barefoot! (Act I)

[...]

VLADIMIR: (letting go the leg). Where are your boots?
ESTRAGON: I must have thrown them away.
VLADIMIR: When?
ESTRAGON: I don't know.
VLADIMIR: Why?
ESTRAGON: (exasperated). I don't know why I don't know!
VLADIMIR: No, I mean why did you throw them away?
ESTRAGON: (exasperated). Because they were hurting me! (Act II)

(BECKETT, *Waiting for Godot*, 1945, s/p)

In both acts, we heard a discussion about being waiting for Godot:

ESTRAGON: Charming spot. (He turns, advances to front, halts facing auditorium.) Inspiring prospects. (He turns to Vladimir.) 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? (Act I)

[...]

ESTRAGON: (having tried in vain to work it out). I'm tired! (Pause.) Let's go.
VLADIMIR: We can't.
ESTRAGON: Why not?
VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot.
ESTRAGON: Ah! (Pause. Despairing.) What'll we do, what'll we do!
VLADIMIR: There's nothing we can do.
(Act II)

(BECKETT, *Waiting for Godot*, 1945, s/p)

In both acts, there is a comical conversation involving carrots, radishes and turnips:

ESTRAGON: (violently). I'm hungry!

VLADIMIR: Do you want a carrot?

ESTRAGON: Is that all there is?

VLADIMIR: I might have some turnips.

ESTRAGON: Give me a carrot. (Vladimir rummages in his pockets, takes out a turnip and gives it to Estragon who takes a bite out of it. Angriily.) It's a turnip!

VLADIMIR: Oh pardon! I could have sworn it was a carrot. (He rummages again in his pockets, finds nothing but turnips.) All that's turnips. (He rummages.) You must have eaten the last. (He rummages.) Wait, I have it. (He brings out a carrot and gives it to Estragon.) There, dear fellow. (Estragon wipes the carrot on his sleeve and begins to eat it.) Make it last, that's the end of them.

(Act I)

[...]

VLADIMIR: There's nothing we can do.

ESTRAGON: But I can't go on like this!

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!

VLADIMIR: Then you don't want it?

ESTRAGON: I only like the pink ones!

VLADIMIR: Then give it back to me. Estragon gives it back.

ESTRAGON: I'll go and get a carrot.

(He does not move)

(Act II)

(BECKETT, *Waiting for Godot*, 1945, s/p)

In both acts, Vladimir and Estragon contemplate the possibility of committing suicide by hanging:

ESTRAGON: Let's hang ourselves immediately!

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

ESTRAGON: We can always try.

VLADIMIR: Go ahead.

ESTRAGON: After you.

VLADIMIR: No no, you first.

ESTRAGON: Why me?

VLADIMIR: You're lighter than I am.

(Act I)

[...]

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

ESTRAGON: And if he comes?

VLADIMIR: We'll be saved.

(Act II)

(BECKETT, *Waiting for Godot*, 1945, s/p)

In both acts, the only visitors present are Pozzo, Lucky and a boy. Both acts end with the same words:

ESTRAGON: Well, shall we go?

VLADIMIR: Yes, let's go.

(They do not move)

Curtain.

(Act I)

[...]

VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go.

(They do not move)

(Act II)

Curtain.

(BECKETT, *Waiting for Godot*, 1945, s/p)

Estragon suggests, at the end of Act I: "What! Shall we go?" At the end of Act II, Vladimir's suggestion is identical; "So let's go?". In either case they try to move. They remain paralyzed.

Existential absurdity arises from the human relationship with the world around it, the human search for an existential meaning and the irrationality of existence itself in the face of the disastrous experiences of Mundial War II. The human condition becomes the absurd and this is the existential contingency, but not its essence. Existential absurdity is unjustifiable and does not exist outside human experience, nor can it exist outside this world. For all these reasons, absurdity ends death. But, in *Waiting for Godot*, even death is denied, because it has become so common, banal, that existence from now on is exotic.

The absurd repetition present in the play is an attempt by the characters to want to prove their own existences, realities, to seek a meaning for waiting for Godot, demonstrating the total absurdity in which life had fallen. The proximity to the only scenic figure, the tree, represents exactly that vain attempt to cling to something to something that seems solid in the midst of chaos. The tree, from which Vagabonds cannot get away, symbolizes the need for certainty, for

security, for a compass that gives a purpose to human action, to life. The scene of the messenger of Godot, the little boy, is quite enlightening for this sensation of continuous repetition, days on end, without any meaning, without any perspective, eternally waiting for something that just does not come:

BOY: Mister . . . (Vladimir turns.) Mister Albert . . .
VLADIMIR: Off we go again. (Pause.) Do you not recognize me?
BOY: No Sir.
VLADIMIR: It wasn't you came yesterday.
BOY: No Sir.
VLADIMIR: This is your first time.
BOY: Yes Sir.
Silence.
VLADIMIR: You have a message from Mr. Godot.
BOY: Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR: He won't come this evening.
BOY: No Sir.
VLADIMIR: But he'll come tomorrow.
BOY: Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR: Without fail.
BOY: Yes Sir.
Silence.
VLADIMIR: Did you meet anyone?
BOY: No Sir.
VLADIMIR: Two other . . . (he hesitates) . . . men?
BOY: I didn't see anyone, Sir.
Silence.
VLADIMIR: What does he do, Mr. Godot? (Silence.) Do you hear me?
BOY: Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR: Well?
BOY: He does nothing, Sir.
(Silence)

(BECKETT, *Waiting for Godot*, 1945, s/p)

The problem that has affected the human individual and for which he tries to find an answer is precisely how to go through life, how to go on in existence after the disastrous experiences of war. The answer is simple: by virtue of habit, continuing despite pain, boredom and life without hope. In these terms, Christ, according to Vladimir, was lucky because: "It was hot there. It was a good time! Yes, and at the slightest carelessness, they crucified". The opening words of the play present this theme: the suffering of being. This becomes clear when Estragon addresses Vladimir says: "Nothing to be done" and Vladimir's suggestion is that: "I am beginning to come to that opinion". Thus, the subject of the play is how to pass the time, given the fact that the situation is hopeless. We realize that the world of *Waiting for Godot* follows its own rules, its

own system in which nothing happens, nothing is certain or lasting and there is nothing that can be done for it.

In other words, the play is a dramatization of themes that are continually repeated not only in Beckett's works, but in many authors from the same period, such as Maurice Blanchot, Atouin Artaud or Eugéne Ionescu: existential boredom and human suffering. Such themes are approaching the circular structure that we face in the play. There are many problems that everyone confront off, but it have not been solved in the end. The play, therefore, is tragic in that it portrays the human individual as a victim of himself, a victim of his own finite nature.

Conclusions

In the present work, we propose an analysis of a tragic feeling in the play *Waiting for Godot*, by Samuel Beckett, investigating the idea of the tragic from the perspective of the concept of *structure of feeling*, coined by Raymond Williams. We have seen that the author proposes an idea of tragic as a social convention, characteristics instituted within a generation as characteristic of a tragic feeling that concerns a specific time. Considering structure of feeling as certain characteristics common to a group of writers at a given time, Williams reads the tragic as being a structure of feeling that shares a dialectical relationship between social facts and literary making.

Through such a theoretical contribution, we could perceive Beckett's work as a symbolic form that manifests the social and political relations of his time through the dimension of the aesthetic. Analyzing the structure of the play's dramatic text, also taking into account the disposition of the dialogues and the discourse itself, we perceive the presence of a circularity, which we call tragic that echoes the melancholy feeling of the post-war generation. The feeling of absurdity, thought by the philosopher Albert Camus, finds a scope in Beckett's literary making or expressing himself as the split between human subject and world.

The absurd, so evident and at the same time so difficult to assimilate, invades the existence of an individual, as we have observed throughout the analysis of Beckett's text, and breaks the serene harmony that existed between being and the world. It removes from the universe that being conscious of one being and its finitude and compels it to face, with a lucid effort, what it really is: nothing. In this symbiotic relationship, the individual can find the absurdity and indifference that constitute his sovereignty.

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