

Summary and Analysis of Act 1

(Lucky and Pozzo Arrive)

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Summary:

Vladimir and Estragon run and cower when they hear a "terrible cry." Lucky arrives, loaded down with baggage and trailing a long rope, which is tied around his neck. He is followed by Pozzo, who, holding the rope and a whip, whips Lucky and jerks his rope, making him fall down. Estragon initially thinks Pozzo might be Godot, mishearing his name as such. Pozzo warns the others to stay away from Lucky because he is vicious. Then Pozzo declares that he needs company. Lucky mindlessly follows Pozzo's orders, setting up a stool for him and serving him as he eats, drinks, and smokes his pipe. Vladimir is mortified when Estragon asks for the chicken bones Pozzo has discarded.

Fascinated and disgusted, Estragon and Vladimir examine Lucky, and Estragon wonders why Lucky never puts down his bags. Pozzo makes a big production of preparing to speak, finally claiming that Lucky chooses not to put down his burdens so Pozzo won't get rid of him—they are on the way to sell him at a fair. When Pozzo says it would actually be best to kill him, Lucky weeps. Estragon tries to wipe away his tears and gets kicked viciously in the shin for his trouble. Crying that he will never walk again, Estragon begins to weep. Vladimir becomes enraged that Pozzo would use and discard Lucky but then turns on Lucky when Pozzo breaks down, crying that Lucky is driving him mad. Pozzo recovers himself, and Vladimir exits to go to the bathroom.

Analysis:

The arrival of Lucky and Pozzo finally provides Vladimir and Estragon with a distraction, but the change is not entirely welcome. When Pozzo begins speaking pompously, Vladimir wants to leave. (Of course, he never succeeds in doing so.) The two new characters are of two drastically different statuses: Pozzo seems to be wealthy and claims to own the surrounding land, whereas Lucky is a slave with no power. Pozzo and Lucky are going somewhere, in contrast to Estragon and Vladimir who are stuck in this spot, although their inability to leave seems also to temporarily infect Pozzo when he tries to depart.

Estragon asks whether Pozzo is Godot when he and Lucky first arrive. They have been waiting for an authority figure, and Pozzo appears to be one. This pompous person who treats a fellow human being so callously could be the higher authority Vladimir and Estragon have been waiting for. Vladimir is certain he is not Godot—mostly. In the confusion about Pozzo's name in Act 1, Estragon calls him "Bozzo,"

comparing him to a clown. Vladimir says he knew a Gozzo family, the mother of which had a sexually transmitted disease (gonorrhea, known as "the clap"). He offers this information to try to calm Pozzo, but the unfavorable comparisons only highlight the absurdity of Pozzo's demands for recognition and respect.

Pozzo expects his high status to be recognized, and his behavior is obviously artificial, based on how he thinks a man of his social rank should act. At one point, he struggles to find a pretext for sitting back down when he changes his mind about leaving. He cannot simply change his mind without a socially acceptable reason, revealing the absurdity of social conventions. He speaks to Vladimir and Estragon as near equals (he calls them his "likes," emphasizing their equality), although he clearly sees himself as superior, while he abuses Lucky with little regard for his feelings. Even his religious references are contrived, referring to Greek mythology rather than a living religion, as well as being incorrect (Atlas is not the son of Jupiter). Pozzo's lofty status is shown to be meaningless when he points out that his and Lucky's situations could have been reversed.

In contrast, Lucky seems completely without his own will, his only independent action being to kick Estragon when he tries to dry his tears (another example of an act of humanity being met with negativity). Both the baggage that Lucky carries and the rope Pozzo uses to control him are highly symbolic. Lucky never puts down the items he carries except when absolutely necessary to fulfill one of Pozzo's orders, always picking them up again immediately, even when there is no purpose to holding them. This echoes the human tendency to be slaves to our burdens, holding onto them even when doing so is unnecessary and doesn't serve us. Pozzo's rope physically controls and restrains Lucky, representing all the obstacles to freedom that are part of the human condition. As the play goes on, the obstacle the rope represents to Lucky's freedom proves to go beyond the physical.

As they examine Lucky, Vladimir and Estragon first notice that rubbing from the rope is causing a sore on Lucky's neck. Both, Estragon and Vladimir declare that inevitable. They speculate that he is mentally disabled. Vladimir thinks Lucky has a goiter, but Estragon says it is uncertain. Then Vladimir notices Lucky's "goggling" eyes, and Estragon says Lucky is at his "last gasp," but Vladimir calls that uncertain, too. Concluding that the sore and the slobber are inevitable is heartless; accepting Lucky's condition without question, and dismissing his signs of illness, even possible death, as "uncertain" ensures that they don't need to help him. They can continue to avoid action and resume waiting.

A motif of duality runs throughout the play. Each character has a logical counterpart. Vladimir and Estragon are two equal halves of a whole, and Pozzo and Lucky appear to be opposites. Likewise, Vladimir's biblical story features a pair of thieves. The play itself is dual in structure, with the second act mirroring the first.