

Ah, To Ascend With Perfect Timing: The analysis of a Rolex advertisement



FOUR DAYS WITHOUT SLEEP, NO OXYGEN
AND A BLIZZARD IS COMING.
LIFE IS GOOD.

Jean Troillet's philosophy is simple: climb the highest summits without oxygen, as rapidly as possible, with a minimum of equipment. And, when possible, take a route nobody's ever taken. Incredibly, this plan has taken him to the peaks of Everest, K2, Kanchenjunga, Lhotse and many of the world's other highest peaks. However, his zest for challenge is not limited to mountains. He's attempted to cross the Arctic Circle on skis pulled by reindeer. And he's proved himself a champion sailor. In Jean Troillet's own words: "You cannot be cured of a passion, you would like it to be contagious."



ROLEX

OYSTER PERPETUAL EXPLORER - WWW.ROLEX.COM
FOR AN OFFICIAL ROLEX JEWELER CALL 1-800-367-6539. ROLEX, OYSTER PERPETUAL AND EXPLORER ARE TRADEMARKS.
NEW YORK

"Life is good." These three words, the largest typeface in this full-page advertisement, appearing below the image of the triumphant mountaineer and above the image of the Rolex watch, draws the reader's eye to the center of the page. It is a grand statement, a bold statement; especially since, having read the smaller type directly above it, we find that the mountaineer is testing his limits under the direst of circumstances. The smaller type reads, "four days without sleep, no oxygen and a blizzard is coming." It is not quite a sentence, but it dramatically affects the meaning of the bold type that exclaims, "Life is good." The image that is suggested is that of

a mountain climber, delirious from sleep deprivation and altitude sickness, pushing himself further and further up a mountain, despite an approaching blizzard; yet, for a man of danger and endurance, life is good, not despite his circumstance, but because he has chosen his circumstances.

Wait; is this not an advertisement about a watch? You would not know from reading the verbiage, the smaller, justified paragraph of type just above the image of the watch. This paragraph is devoted to the man in the photo at the summit of a mountain, Jean Troillet, a man of adventure, who has climbed the world's highest peaks without bottled oxygen. Not once does the text indicate that he used or even wore a Rolex watch during his climbs; nor is he quoted about the product. What he says relates to his love of life: "You cannot be cured of a passion, you would like it to be contagious."

Although there is no literal connection between the virtuous explorer, Jean Troillet, and the Rolex watch, the metaphoric association is both subtly apparent and sublime. The advertisement does not imply that the explorer wears the watch, but that the explorer is like the watch; or rather that the watch is like the explorer—in that it is made for strength and endurance, for accuracy and for reliable performance even at high altitude. Therefore, it is not surprising to learn that the name of the watch is the Oyster Perpetual Explorer, which is unexpectedly and unceremoniously displayed in the smallest type, consigned with the image of the product and the logo to the bottom fifth of the page.

Why is there such little space for the product? Primarily, it is because the photo of the adventurous man, standing at the summit of some unknown mountain, fills the top third of the page. Through the thin, crisp layers of the upper atmosphere, the flawless sky above him fades from a rich purple, through a deep indigo, to a lovely cerulean blue. Jean Troillet, in a bright red parka, stretches his arms out—raising them only slightly under the crushing weight of exhaustion—in triumph of his achievement. He stands at the zenith overlooking the snow-capped mountains, the clouds below, and the whole rest of the world beyond.

With this image in mind, the reader, then noticing the image of the watch at the bottom of

the page, associates the Rolex Oyster Perpetual Explorer with the triumphant explorer, Jean Troillet. Not only does he climb the tallest peaks, but also he climbs them quickly—and without oxygen! Therefore, not only is the Oyster Perpetual Explorer a reliable timepiece, but it is also reliable under the most extreme conditions. It seems that the writers of this advertisement assume that the reader is somewhat educated—at the very least familiar with science and the rigors of exploration—because one further connection between the man and the watch is implied but not stated. For a mountain climber, timing is everything. Ascending a mountain, like Mount Everest, is an event undertaken across the span of many months. One must spend several weeks at increasing altitudes in order to acclimatize the body to the thinning atmosphere. Moreover, sensory disruptions from altitude sickness and lack of oxygen make the final ascent to the summit the most demanding and dangerous part of the climb. It is important to time the ascent perfectly, lest the mountaineer find himself without shelter through the long cold night, or worse, through a raging, unceasing blizzard.

"A blizzard is coming," announces this ad. Yet, "Life is good." On the world's tallest peaks a blizzard is always looming. It takes courage, endurance, and perfect timing to thwart the coming storm and stand triumphant at the pinnacle of our achievements.

Waiting for Godot: Metaphor and the Life Absurd

Whether Godot as a metaphor symbolizes, as has been suggested, God, death, or meaning, we can but only conjecture. Revealing the identity of Godot is not as important as discovering why we wait for him. Briefly, as to the question of Godot, I say what difference does it make what name you give to the symbol? Godot is God. God is death. Death is meaning. Meaning is God. All four terms indicate a singular idea, the end of life. God is only truly discovered after life, and so only has meaning in death. But I reject that the search is for death—that Gogo and Didi are waiting for God. I say that Godot is life! That these two men were cast into a world that they can neither escape nor understand is symbolic not of life in general, but the life of a religious person who cannot recognize the spiritual aspect of the world that we inhabit. In my interpretation, therefore, the characters are sheer idiots, because where they find only a tree, a road, a rock and the hill, I find life.

Before I begin my tirade on the significance of accepting one's life, I would like to briefly summarize the ideas of literary critics. Most criticism of *Waiting for Godot* indicates that Samuel Beckett finds the meaning of existence to be absurd. The bleak landscape in the play is symbolic of the bleakness of human existence. Still other critics point to the themes of most of Beckett's works as dealing with "the end". The playwright asks the question: what happens to us at death? By interpreting it as such, the audience believes that the play is a mere study of the absurd, showing a pointless world inhabited by two bumbling fools. Because nothing of consequence happens to the players during the course of the play, one may get the feeling that the day which unfolds therein could be any day of the characters life. Standard interpretation suggests that Godot is a savior, the one who will give meaning and purpose to the empty lives of the two vagabonds.

But what if Godot were different than God? What if Godot were life itself? Then Gogo and Didi are not waiting for the end; they are waiting for the beginning. The play therefore is

symbolic of the unwillingness of most men to say yes to the journey, to start at the beginning. It is true that the world, on its face, can seem empty and pointless, especially since modern science has discovered laws and phenomena but has failed to find its underlying meaning. Didi and Gogo have failed to find meaning not because there is no God, but because they are waiting for him to show. Although they appear to be stuck in one place, their prison is not guarded by an overlord; it is created by their own desires for some one to help them. The characters feel that their world is empty of both substance and meaning.

What they are ignorant of is that the things that do exist (the tree, the rock, the road, the hill, and, most importantly, themselves) are what is the most precious and enlightening of all. Without the rock, they would have no place to sit, without a tree, there would be nothing to eat, without a road, there would be no place to dream about, and without a hill there would be nothing to which they could aspire. As for themselves, their bodies are the bodies of gods, and they can be nourished not only from the great breast of the deity, but from the very core of their individual being.

Life, you see, is a gift that is given twice. Once by the ultimate source of all being, and again by the individual that says yes to his life. Life itself is reason enough to participate in the chaotic absurdity of the world in which we arrive. Gogo and Didi do not say yes to their lives, and as a result, cannot escape the repetitious nonsense of the play. Beckett indicates this by refusing to allow the action to climax or to resolve. The characters remain in Limbo, unable to escape from performance to performance. What Didi and Gogo need to do is to say yes to their lives, say yes to the world, and say yes to the tree, to the rock, and the road. And when Godot appears, as some critics suggest, in the guise of Pozzo, Gogo should kill him in the road and strangle his companion, Lucky. Then the two bumbling fools should pick themselves up and head for the hill. They have the ability, as do we all, to raise themselves above the absurdity, and to stare into the face of God and see themselves.