



The passage to Nowhere in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

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Abstract

*This research paper targets at representing the traumatic human condition of post world war era in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. A new genre of the absurd drama is pioneered by Samuel Beckett, who focuses the representation of facts in a ridiculous, yet intriguing style. *Waiting for Godot* is literary and critically analyzed to sort out the purposelessness of life, that is unwanted by ludicrous characters who endure hardship, in an absurd way to reach nothing. *Waiting* is part of the plot in the play where the expectations decline to meet Godot. One of the main research finding highlights that Sarcasm and absurdism are crucial features of the play which marks the life of man. Humans feel lonely and desperate, in an irrational and meaningless universe.*

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1. Introduction

Beckett intends to express the human condition in its absurdist position, where human beings endure monotonous lifeless time. The play resumes the declined expectations of travellers who wait long times to live a prosperous tomorrow, in vain. Yet; deterioration and lack of confidence spread in an absurd time and place. Hope is lost to attain any better life through the expression: "nothing can be done". Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is considered as absurd drama inspired from Post-World War, marked by the bleak, the impersonal, the sarcastic and the ironic humour. The play covers the cruel blowout of capitalism, widespread individualism and the resulting damage of public existence; plus scarring destruction of the whole world under the perils of the World-War. This leads to the downfall of communities where a set of values were forgotten, goodness has no more consideration, loss of traditions, and standards of life, under the menace of nuclear holocaust.

2. Beckett's Literary Profile

Samuel Beckett is a postmodernist writer who explores the human condition and echoes the world absurdity of the modern era. He is the particular writer who declines public speeches, but echoes voices with absurdity in the theatre. He is often compared to genius and incongruent thinkers of the time as Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, and Jean-Paul Sartre, being the first modernist writer who masters the theatre of the absurd. He is both the philosopher and the thinker, who discusses the nature of existence, and meticulously overshadows life in his odd and dark humour. He is the unusual innovator who creates theatrical scenes infrequent on ordinary stage, and the critic who outlooks with fervour the relationship of art to life into unusual theatrical images in order to fetch human beings' inner world in their experience of consciousness. The Irish novelist, playwright, short story writer, theatre director, poet and translator, Beckett is the most philosophical of twentieth-century writers, who focuses on the predicament of humans. He had resided in France for a long time, which enables him to acquire both English and French. Beckett was firstly awarded Saoi title, honoured by a state-supported Irish association of creative artists in 1984; then he won the Nobel Prize of literature in 1962. His dramatic works, distinguished by conventions, traditions and borrowed new techniques, target a talented public endowed in artistic and intellectual experience. Beckett is multidisciplinary who covers various sources of art in different genres of poetry, novel and drama. He entertains readers, spectators and listeners since he wrote drama for, theatre, television, radio, and cinema. Irony melted with sarcasm and bleakness with melancholy boost his works which attract the interest of his receivers, often faced with facts that are inevitable, hard to bear but foretell the future of a dark prospect. His influential writings are written in French and English like in short fiction : *More Pricks than Kicks*, 1934; *Nouvelles et textes pour rien*, 1955 (*Stories and Texts for Nothing*, 1967); *Pour finir encore et autres foirades*, 1976 (*For to end yet again and other fizzles*, 1976); and *Collected Short Prose*, 1991. He produces fiction over almost a half century, in a highly rhetorical and intellectual order. He is as excellent in fiction as in drama by his works which resist explanation like: *En attendant Godot*, 1952 (*Waiting for Godot*, 1954); "Fin de partie," "Acte sans paroles," 1957. "Endgame: A Play in One Act," Followed by "Act Without Words: A Mime for One Player," 1958); *Krapp's Last Tape*, 1958; *Act Without Words II*, 1960 (one-act mime); *Not I*, 1972; *Ends and Odds*, 1976; *Footfalls*, 1976; *That Time*, 1976; *A Piece of Monologue*, 1979; *Ohio Impromptu*, 1981; *Company*, 1983; *Collected Shorter Plays*, 1984; *Complete Dramatic Works*, 1986; and *Eleutheria*, 1995. This amazing selection reflects the excellent relevant literary career of Beckett who describes life in an innovative literary text filled with philosophical assumptions about human condition. Beckett pioneered varied artistic expression in poetry in English and French as well, in addition to nonfiction works like: *Proust*, 1931 and *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1929-1940*, 2009.

Beckett is complicated to understand, but he is very important to read as a good reference for anyone interested in Modern era: "Samuel Beckett's work has extended the possibilities of drama and fiction in unprecedented ways, bringing to the theatre and the novel an acute awareness of the absurdity of human existence – our desperate search for meaning, our individual isolation, and the gulf between our desires and the language in which they find expression." (www.litencyc.com). He uses contemporary literary theories such as structuralism and deconstruction in his novels and plays,

which may seem thorny but they remain redoubtable. Despite their formidable difficulties, then, Beckett's novels have an indisputable importance to anyone seriously interested in the intellectual climate of the twentieth century. His most critical novels and plays are shrewdly set in the minds of his contemplators from the intellectual stream, as highly aesthetical on their own structure, suggesting recurring images, premeditated mystery, unusual sarcasm, and intricate satirical axioms. His works are provocative for critics, because he wanders far away in his imaginative space where he tries to arrive at the unreachable, no matter how anarchic and disordered his structure looks like, because this is the great art of the absurd that plunges the reader or the spectator in inspirational and uplifting wonder. Beckett's writings are characterised by "a kind of arbitrary collection or bricolage of philosophical ideas. His characters exult in endless, pointless, yet entertaining, metaphysical arguments. His work exudes an atmosphere of existential Angst, hopelessness and human abandonment to the relentless course of the world. Beckett's characters portray a rootless, homeless, alienated humanity. » (Moran 2006: 93)

Beckett's writings are parodies of the real, even by remaining metaphysical and transcendental; he feels helpless but easily gained intellectual triumph; he is conscious of the human experience but destroys it by nature without consciousness. Beckett's works are paradoxical in the sense that brought admiration and entertainment. In his diagnosis of human life, the literary world becomes Beckettian which requires philosophical interpretation, because it looks so void, pointless and worthless about humanity in homelessness. He exploits ideas with discretion, doubt, and amusing unacquainted correlation. His ideas are represented as a new creation to a monotonous and miserable human condition. The "Ideas console, edify, bemuse and entertain, but they are always also misrepresentations, illusions, exaggerations, blinkers, detours that take us blithely beyond the real and pathetic circumstances of our own condition" (Moran 2006: 94). The four enigmatically influential stage plays that are famous by Samuel Beckett are: *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, and *Happy Days*. They are masterpieces that draw critical attention, especially in *Waiting for Godot* where few characters play on the stage composed of a boy, two travellers and two vagabonds, plus Godot who never comes.

3. Literary Analysis in Beckett's Waiting for Godot

The events are plotted about two characters wasting time in waiting hopelessly, and this is a good representation of the Theatre of the Absurd, which occurs between the 1950s and 1960s. *Waiting for Godot* looks absurd, tragicomic and puzzling, which covers the confusing and the ridiculous dilemmas of the humanity as a whole, in post world war.

3.1 Summary of Beckett's Waiting for Godot

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett is a two act play catalogued as the absurd drama. It is a legendary uncommon doubled tragic- comic play, about two friends, Vladimir (Didi) and Estragon (Gogo) who wait for Godot; the character who, seemingly will never come. The play was first published in 1952 in French language and performed in 1953 at the Theatre de Babylone, Paris.

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Then, it was translated to the English language and appeared in 1955 in London. The play was described as one of the most popular and the first successful play from the Theatre of the Absurd movement, it was considered as the mainly noteworthy English language play of the 20th century. This theater piece took place in a side of a barren road, near a lifeless tree in an unspecified period of time, but it was represented in the era following the Second World War, and was determined by a new sensibility that drew attention and brought consciousness to the disposability of the human life. The play rejects all the religious beliefs and moral principles thinking that life is meaningless. This nihilism drawn in the story supported the humorist side and thrust it to the extreme comic direction. The play is defined by several conversations between Vladimir and Estragon who waited for the coming of Godot. The latter gives them fake promises by sending words frequently in which he states that he will appear but who never does. They spend time under a bare tree waiting for Godot. They dialogue, converse, move with no purpose. They even think to hang themselves but also this decision could never be accomplished, and each time the idea of waiting for Godot centers the whole stage as showed in act1:

ESTRAGON: Wait.

VLADIMIR: Yes, but while waiting.

ESTRAGON: What about hanging ourselves?

VLADIMIR: Hmm. It'd give us an erection.

ESTRAGON : (Highly excited).An erection!

VLADIMIR: With all that follows. Where it falls mandrakes grow. That's why they shriek when you pull them up. Did you not know that?

ESTRAGON: Who?

VLADIMIR: Godot.

ESTRAGON: Good idea

The acts started by the scene in which Estragon tried to pull off his shoes and confesses that he spent the night beaten up in the ditch; while Vladimir talks about the thieves who were consolidated. Meanwhile, they subtend Lucky and Pozzo; the latter was described as the master and Lucky was the slave. Vladimir and Estragon talk about their miserable life and they were thinking of hanging themselves from the tree; but they still wait for Godot at the same time.

The character Godot who never comes, while the spectators and the tramps all wait for him especially that the boy (Godot's messenger) consoles them about his coming whenever they are nearly certain that he will never make a sign. Godot is the unknown, the long awaited, the hopeful tomorrow, the bleak future, and the broken promise who never comes. Every one is confused, agitated and ridiculous in continuous search for someone who is assured to arrive and join them. Through time they learn to be patient to wait longer than expected, so they pamper and entertain themselves by funny movement in a leisure time, hoping for the man they wait to come to them. So, they play games, dance, sing, exchange hats, and seek refuge in suicide that they never dare to commit. In the course of consequential events processing, appear another master- slave couple represented in Pozzo who tries to drag Lucky as he is trapped in a rope around his neck. The scene is powerfully set in a mixture of confusion and wonder. Pozzo and Lucky exchange

incomprehensible dialogues together that summarize the pitiful state of life endured in the absurdist era. The absurdity of human condition is abridged in Act 1, as follows:

VLADIMIR:

Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON:

Yes, let's go.

They do not move. (Curtains)

Again the bare tree appears in the second act, with Didi and Gogo who just wake up. Without understanding the full details, a full reversed action from act1 where the master used to pull his slave takes place. The audience is shaken by the dragging of Lucky dragging Pozzo, who has a rope around his neck. This unexpected scene reveals that Pozzo turns blind and to his unfortunate end Lucky turns to be his master. We see a reversal of action where Pozzo is having a rope around his neck and Lucky dragging him. For twice, the boy comes to promise the coming of Godot for the next day; however, everyone should keep waiting longer than expected, since Godot will never come.

The play designs many powerful themes including uncertainty and nothingness basing on the lack of a good sense in life. This pushed Vladimir and Estragon to the search for a reason to remain alive. The latter was described by several sufferings that were highly shown in the play. Although, both of them are totally desperate to the point that they have already decided to suicide, they still wait for Godot who never arrives, but they cling to the rope of hope to find a meaning to their existence. Thus, Beckett gives the name of Lucky to show that he is really lucky to have something to do and to work for. In the same way, Vladimir and Estragon believed that there is an aim to their existence; they assume that there must be some point or a goal that defines their life. Substantially, this was the purpose from their unrealized meeting with Godot; they linked their existence to his arrival, and they consider him as a key for their enlightenment.

3.2 Six Characters

The characters in the play are distinctively put to symbolise the fate of the human condition in a world which waits for salvation but in vain. First of all, Vladimir and Estragon who act as important characters. Initially Vladimir is one of the two protagonists of the play. He is called Didi by Estragon, and Mr Albert by the boy. Standing all the time and feeling restless. He act as wise, matured and in charge of responsibilities that he seems achieving them without being faulty. He claims that "it is not everyday that we are needed . . . but at this place, at this moment in time," (act 2). Differently, Estragon is the next introduced and one of the two main characters. He is called Gogo by Vladimir and he is weaker than him. He sits all the time and falls asleep many times. He often seeks refuge and protection from Vladimir who always supports him in his helpless moments. Often forgetting things, even shortly for events that just occurred, and Vladimir interferes to stir his poor memory as comments the critic: "but perhaps Estragon's forgetfulness is the cement binding their relationship together. He continually forgets, Vladimir continually reminds him; between them they pass the time." (Al Alvarez, 1992: 89). Vladimir and Estragon are totally different characters

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and this is a literary tradition in comic and burlesque act where one acts as the orderly right man accompanied by the other as the fall guy.

Pozzo and Lucky : Pozzo is helpless, forgetting who he meets and sees. He provides entertainment in company of Vladimir and Estragon. Yet, he forgets them the night after and becomes blind in the second act. "Pozzo is a character who has to overcompensate. That's why he overdoes things ... and his overcompensation has to do with a deep insecurity in him. These were things Beckett said, psychological terms he used." (Kalb, 1989: 175) **Lucky :** he is the servant who is in charge of carrying bags and stool for his master Pozzo. He also entertains the public by dancing and thinking; but becomes dumb soon in act two. In Act one, he entertains by dancing and thinking. However, in Act II, he is dumb. The two characters appear in traps' costume on the stage. It has been asserted that "[Pozzo](#) and Lucky are simply Didi and Gogo writ large" (Friedman: 1989: 277)

Boy: by the end of each act, the boy appears to claim the arrival of Godot who will never comes that night. The boy is unnamed character, who shows out of nowhere, in the two acts. In the play who is supposed to bring messages from Godot, he says: "Mr. Godot told me to tell you he won't come this evening, but surely to-morrow." (Act1). Vladimir and Estragon wait each time the forthcoming of Godot and it is the boy who promises them that his coming is postponed for the next night. Sometimes it is not the boy who comes but his brother but neither the reader nor is the spectator sure about having the same person or two distinct characters. The boy is a particular personality who comes by the closure of the first act and then he appears in the id of the second act to mean that hope is restrained by total illusion.

Godot: he is the responsible for letting the other characters wait for long time. He is the one who is acclaimed to come each night and make Vladimir and Estragon pass the time waiting unendingly. Godot certainly does not appear in the play. His name and character are considered as a direct reference to God. Bair concedes that "it would be fatuous of me to pretend that I am not aware of the meanings attached to the word 'Godot', and the opinion of many that it means 'God'. But you must remember – I wrote the play in French, and if I did have that meaning in my mind, it was somewhere in my unconscious and I was not overtly aware of it." (Bair, 1980: 591). Godot is the most important example to evoke religious issues related to salvation which is thought to never come.

Estragon (called Gogo) and Vladimir (called Didi) are the two protagonists who are tramps. Put in clownish skits, the characters are compelled to suffer and undergo hardships even if unconsciously. They occupy themselves by redundant repetitive plays while waiting for a man they do not know and only introduced to him by his name Godot. The latter is long awaited for but in vain; he never arrives whatever time is spent. Another two characters come into sight in the first act: Pozzo who appears helping his servant Lucky by a cord. Then again they appear in in the second act, these two reappear, in a pitiful state because Pozzo becomes blind and Lucky is dumb. Whenever an act is in its end, Gogo and Didi warn to disconnect, to go away—but in each act, they do not leave as the curtain falls down on them. Indeed, beckett's characters "exult in endless, pointless, yet entertaining, metaphysical arguments. Beckett's characters portray a rootless, homeless, alienated humanity. One no longer at home in the world; one lost in a meaningless void." (Moran 2006: 93). The two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, spend their time playing word games, and think for suicide which they

consider pleasurable; yet, never committed. By the end of each act, the boy announces the arrival of Godot who never comes which means that waiting is an inevitable destiny, in human condition.

The characters are portrayed in his play as droll, clumsy, and ponderous involved in a comic absurdity causing amusement in chess of diction resembling word games. Intertwined mockery with incongruity, his theatrical works easily drive his public to burst into laughter.

4. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*: Critical Analysis

The nothingness and absurdity of life are expressed by Samuel Beckett in his famous quote: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful." Act 1. The play is considered as Absurd drama about that old age full of bombs that turn ears deaf, smokes that cause blindness, suicide and death. The plot has no sequential logic, events are not ordered nor are they connected, characters are so few waiting for others never coming. The absurd in the play has no beginning, no ending, and no characterization, which questions highly philosophical issues about community life. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* reports a dreadful and dramatic scene about a wrecked humanity. The human being turned to an abyss of non existence and a decline of the person to nothingness. The play is an absurd discourse of human life in the span of time and space where dispersion and disillusionment vanquish the power of man who looks desperate, helpless and gloomy. The play describes how disappointment comes out of empty promise, when the boy recalls for the coming of Godot who never appears. Everyone waits in vain because Godot never comes physically on stage. The decline of future events is clear in the play where Godot's arrival is not achieved; a hopeful optimistic future also is never realized; and the promise of a restored society will not be fulfilled. Philosophical inquiries entail the existence of the human being as the ape, where the existence of man as a universal condition is put into question, "Waiting for Godot. But why Godot? A play that begins with the line, "Nothing to be done" and concludes both of its acts in abject paralysis "They do not move", hardly recommends itself as a lightning rod for political activism." (Graley Herren, 2013:1) Varied topics of mythology; ontology, philosophy, history, metaphysics and the politics of identification are discussed. In this drama man's identity has been challenged, his position in space and time has been questioned. Man's life is oppressive marked by the unreasonableness, brutality and inhumanness. The words selected are homogenized to compose an excellent exegesis about a masterpiece. The artist and activist Chan Paul opinioned that: "the stage for a play I have seen many times. It was unmistakable. The empty road. The bare tree leaning precariously to one side with just enough leaves to make it respectable. The silence. [...] It was uncanny. Standing there at the intersection of North Prieur and Reynes, I suddenly found myself in the middle of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting/or Godot*." (2008 : 2). No hope, despair, ravages, all lead to futility of existence, as Jon Erickson dismally spots from the play, "Suffering, whether of the New Testament poor or of the contemporary proletariat, is not redeemed here, certainly not by any human effort (and, in light of what one assumes to be Beckett's belief, not by anything else either)." (2007: 261). The play is a parody of Sarajevo, where people feel depressed, melancholic and scarred as commented the American art critic Susan Sontag: "Beckett's play, seems written for, and about, Sarajevo" (2001: 300). Sontag concedes that Beckett suggests no political solution in the play, that hope is meaningless and power is synonymous with defeat in which "Culture, serious culture, is an expression of human dignity which is what people in Sarajevo feel they have lost, even when they

know themselves to be brave, or stoical, or angry. For they also know themselves to be terminally weak: waiting, hoping, not wanting to hope, knowing that they aren't going to be saved" (2001: 304). Post war disillusionment is described to show uncertainty and unreliability, vacuum and the quest for survival.

5. Conclusion

War trauma and absurdity of existence control over the type of society humans are compelled to admit. They feel helpless, vanquished, lost, and devastated by new economic and political powers ruled by capitalism and socialism. The play absurdly reflects the psychological aches and the deformation of the modern man. A pessimistic play where the world turns to non-existence, and men lose the refuge to safety.

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