

Human condition in
samuel beckett's
"waiting for godot"
essay sample



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" But the main thing for me, having read and seen the play many times since its appearance about fifty years ago, is that it is about waiting, about unending expectation, about the moment that comes before something which itself never comes, but which in the process reduces everyone to a frozen state of clown-like, pathetic, banality in which only limited motion is possible in virtually the same places." - (Edward Said: ' Waiting for the Change')

Indeed, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* presents the nightmare of waiting without time. The subject of the play is not ' Godot' but waiting, the act of waiting as an essential and characteristic aspect of the human condition. Throughout our life we always wait for something and ' Godot' simply represents the object of our waiting - an event, a thing, a person, death.

Waiting for Godot is a play, which seems to refuse any attempt to impose meaning systematically, and it is a vision of irrational and unrationalisable process - sheer waiting without end or outcome, pure decay without the possibility of dearth. The situation or condition that the play exhibits is a universal one. It is a story of two vagabonds who desperately plunge into a futile pattern: waiting. The ' Godot' they wait for is a vague figure and would probably be a disappointment to them if he came, but as long as they can make themselves believe that he will someday come and that he offers some kind of hope, they can comfort themselves with the thought that - " in this

immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come.”

Waiting is what really matters in *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett's emphasis is not 'Godot' but waiting. And in this play, the pattern of waiting is an ingenious combination of expectations and let-downs of uncertainty and of gradual run-down without end. The expectations of Vladimir and Estragon seem to be both limitless and irrational; and the various climaxes and pseudo-climaxes or non-arrivals, do not change their condition. But the protagonists are being “kept going” by playful variations in the pattern of waiting with uncertainties of meaning and destination. Estragon's 'ifs' ('And if he doesn't come?' 'If he came yesterday and we weren't here you may be sure he won't come again today.') and his 'until' ('until he comes') present the anxieties and uncertainties within this act of waiting at an early stage. The risk of waiting in vain is also emphasized early in the play by the failure attempt to clarify the inexorable conditions supposedly set by the supposed 'Godot'. In the course of a long dialogue concerning 'Godot', Vladimir admits that they no longer have any 'rights' - “We got rid of them.”

In the first Act, the arrival of Pozzo-Lucky pair suspends the act of waiting-attention shifts to the doings of Pozzo and Lucky [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksL_7WrhWOc], the lord of the waste and his shriveled carrier, dancer, thinker and speaker. During their presence the compulsions of the long process of waiting are almost forgotten despite Pozzo's occasional speculations about the identity and demands of this personage: “Godet.....Godot.....Godin.”

The second Act, with its cycle of repetitions and variations, dramatizes the ultimate problem of waiting. The act of waiting becomes both more playful and more desperate in the second Act.

Waiting, being an abstract idea and indefinable, is inexplicable, and it is not what a man is doing while waiting, but what he is not doing that constitutes waiting. So, waiting, which implies the absence of the waited for, is itself mysteriously absent. Moreover, waiting is a self-erasing non-activity since it negates the transient activities we engage in while waiting. Jumping, whittling, reading, even staring in annoyance at our watch - whatever we are doing is nullified by virtue of our waiting. Although those activities are undeniably occurring, they are rendered meaningless to what we are really doing, i. e., waiting. Thus Gogo & Didi struggle with their boots and their hats, engage in greeting ceremonies, ponder the mysteries of the Crucifixion and the enigmas of suicide, eat carrots and turnips, talk with Pozzo and listen to Lucky, but they always come back to the nullifying words:

Let's go.

We can't.

Why not?

We're waiting for Godot.

The overriding importance of waiting nullifies not only what we are doing but also the time in which we are doing it. Waiting erases the past and diminishes the present but apparently aggrandizes the future in which the waited for will appear. To wait for the future is to wait also for the unknown,
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and then to put oneself at risk. When Didi says - " We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?" Gogo deflates him by saying that " Billions". But the fact that they have kept their appointment lends both merit and desperation to their waiting. That is, in a mutable world, appointments, vows, contracts, promises, and so forth are attempts to control time and give shape to one's life to escape the uncertainties of an unknowable future. However, the fact that the two tramps have kept their end of the bargain without Godot putting in an appearance implies that in their world time refuses to be stayed. Thus it is rather heroically pathetic that they wait for a future that has failed them, if not once, always.

In *Waiting for Godot* Beckett presents waiting as a painful slow crucifixion. Though Gogo says " All my life I've compared myself to him", it does not associate Gogo and Didi presumptuously with Christ but rather with the two thieves who shared his agony. Since one of the thieves was saved and the other damned, we could argue that what Didi and Gogo wait is neither damnation nor salvation, but merely an outcome an " Endgame". Waiting in the play becomes a pointless habit, as Didi implies when Pozzo and Lucky stumble upon the scene in Act - II: " We are no longer alone, waiting for the night, waiting for Godot, waiting forwaiting." Instead of waiting for we have merely waiting. Even the apparent ending of the play is merely a state of incompleteness, a still-waiting:

Well? Shall we go?

Yes. Let's go.

[They do not move.]

Waiting for Godot is a baffling combination of presence and absence. The action of the play is waiting, and waiting cannot be dramatized. What is present, then, is not waiting, but only the irrelevancies Gogo and Didi engage in while waiting, the shaped foolery with which Beckett beguiles our passing of the time. As the two tramps wait and we watch, we learn something about how man behaves under such circumstances. We see them devising, with diminishing success, games to play to pass the time; we see them try again and again to understand the unintelligible; we see them discuss committing suicide, but never without finding an excuse to put it off; we see them cling to each other for company while continually bickering and talking about how much better off they would be apart.

Waiting for Godot, by means of numerous irrelevancies, and by exploring a static situation, and by its repetitive structure, leads us to expect that Godot will not come, and then it presents us with Godot's climactic not-coming. When the play is over, we are left no longer waiting for it. Though the tension of waiting is relieved, but, of course, what the play has forced upon us is the realization that not merely our time in the theatre but our lives are consumed in waiting for a Godot who will never come. Death will come but not Godot. Meanwhile, we eat carrots on good days and turnips on bad ones, complain of our kidneys and of our feet, contradict one another, get annoyed with one another, test the strength of free limbs and belts, reason like Lucky, own and domineer and ultimately fall like Pozzo and wait.

In *Waiting for Godot* the theme of waiting is closely connected to the theme of imprisonment. The protagonists without knowing the reason feel obliged to wait. In this endless process of waiting, which no doubt makes them miserable, they contrive various games and engage themselves in meaningless talk to spend the time. But, Godot, the only but irredeemably absent possibility of escape from this existential crisis, never comes. The tramps feel trapped, "We're not tied?" and find themselves "entangled in a net." The powerful image of the net poignantly exposes the human predicament of imprisonment within themselves and in the society as well. The tramps have full freedom to do whatever they like except the one most crucial freedom: the freedom to leave.

Sleep offers no relief because the nightmarish world of dream only re-enacts the terrors of the waiting life. Death is no solution either. They contemplate suicide, even "play" on hanging themselves but cannot really do it and this serves to show mankind's stubbornness in enduring. Both Vladimir and Estragon realize the utter futility of their endeavors, that it is pointless to "struggle" or "wriggle" because "the essential does not change" and most importantly "Nothing can be done." The only comfort seems to be habit, which is "a great deadener".

Again the most striking feature of their waiting is boredom; their long wait makes them bored - "we are bored to death." Beckett shows the utter helplessness of boredom which reflects the condition of modern man.

Boredom in life is partly due to the continuous cycle of the same thing "night'll falllike yesterday.....then it'll be day again." In fine, the way the tramps pass time while engaged in waiting, is indicative of the boredom
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and triviality of human activities, the lack of significance of life and the constant suffering while existence is.

Waiting for Godot is a parable of modern man's existence. He is faced with a world in which he can no longer rely in the traditional "props" to his existence; society is non-existent; brotherhood is meaningless; and religion brings on fulfillment. And so he does all he can. He passes the time. He hopes for something new, though the hope is dispirited and lifeless. He simply waits. What it is he waits, he is not sure. But he feels compelled to wait. Waiting turns out to be a deadening habit.