

# What does 'godot' signify in samuel beckett's "waiting for godot" essay sample

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Waiting for Godot embodies no story; it explores a static situation in which the two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, endlessly wait for someone called ' Godot', who eventually fails his appointment. The identity of ' Godot' has posed a question, yet to be answered; it is the most intriguing puzzle of the play. Superficially, we can say that ' Godot' is that ideal power outside the two tramps, which they believe will solve their problems.

But the interpretation regarding the identification of ' Godot' differs from reader to reader depending on how much history and psychology he knows, how he defines religion and God, and how he feels about the human condition. ' Godot' can be seen as a traditional Deity whose ' Second Coming' is awaited by man; or as an Ideal Prince who has promised an Utopian State; or as any force, any bolt out of the blue, that mankind looks to for salvation and that hence prevents man from talking his destiny un his own hands.

If I know, I would have said so in this play" - was Beckett's own response when asked about the identity of ' Godot'. Though critics and public alike tend to impose an allegorical or symbolic explanation of ' Godot', ' Godot' remains an enigma. If we turn to the description of the absent but ubiquitous ' Godot', we find that the two tramps wait for ' Godot' in a state of twilight, occasionally lit up by a fleeting vision of the rescuer.

They have vague fantasies of being taken to his farm and being able to " sleep, warm and dry, with a full stomach - on straw. But in the play, ' Godot' seems to be a kind of distant mirage. At the end of each day, a boy messenger arrives in his stead with the promise he will definitely come to-

morrow. In the first Act, we learn that he does not beat the boy-messenger, who is a goatherd, but that he beats his brother who is a shepherd. The two friends feel uneasy about him. They are in an ambivalent condition concerning the fulfillment of promise from ' Godot' s part. They cannot recall if they had made a prayer or a supplication; there was no definite promise regarding ' Godot'.

When they meet him, they will have to approach him " on their hands and knees" and if they stopped waiting he would punish them. From the dialogue of the two tramps we learn that ' Godot' wanted to think " in the quiet of his home", " consult his family", " his friends", " his agents", " his correspondents", " his books", and " even his bank account". The dialogue, a fairly long one, does not throw any light on the identity of the ' Godot'. At the end of the second Act, ' Godot' is described as being with white beard.

It is significant to note that Pozzo, who owns all the surrounding land, seems to live in total ignorance of ' Godot'. ' Godot' seems to exist only in the minds of his followers. Right upto the end of the play ' Godot' remains a mysterious figure. If we regard Waiting for Godot as Christian play or a Morality play, ' Godot' may stand for God. Martin Esslin lends supports to this view. In the play we notice that ' Godot' has several traits in common with the image of God as we know it from the Old and New Testament. His white beard reminds one of the images of God's old-father aspect.

His irrational and arbitrary preference for one brother recalls Jehovah's treatment of Cain and Abel; so does his power to punish those who would

prop him. The discrimination between goatherd and shepherd is reminiscent of the Son of God as the ultimate judge, as a savior for whom man wait and wait, he might well be meant as cynical comment on the second coming of Christ; while his doing nothing might be an equally cynical reflection concerning man's forlorn state. All these similarities contribute to the idea of ' Godot' as God. W. J.

Miller comments that " If ' Godot' is Deity, then the play says that man is waiting for a god who is neither dead, has abandoned his folk, or is strictly a human concept. " But in the play, there are sufficient argument that go against the supposition of ' Godot' as God. ' Godot' s behavior, as we learn about it from the first Boy, is at odds with the usual concept of God, for ' Godot' beats the boys who tend the sheep and yet is good to the boy who looks after the goats. This is puzzling behavior when we compare it with the Gospel record: " And he (Christ) shall set the seep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. - Mathew In this context, the sheep are the righteous, those who have found favor with God, while the goats are unrighteous, those who do not enjoy God's favor.

Thus ' Godot' offers us a reversal of what might reasonably expect of God. A central concept pf Christianity is the paradox of finding freedom in bondage. The Christian welcomes the captivity, which God exercises upon him, for in that lies his ultimate freedom. He prays - Make me a captive, Lord And then I shall be free. The idea of common bondage under God and to God leads to the Christian idea of brotherhood.

Moreover, the sense of being bound to God implies salvation, for the disciples are given power to "bind on earth" those who will be "bound to heaven" (Mathew). Yet Vladimir and Estragon reject the idea of being tied to 'Godot'. "What an idea!" cries Vladimir. "No question of it." And the bondage is burlesqued in the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky. Finally, it is significant that 'Godot' never does come to visit the two tramps. In contrast to the orthodox Christian's idea of the in-breaking of God, in the world of Waiting for Godot "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful.

There is then no exact correspondence between 'Godot' and God. The closest equation we can make between the two is to say that 'Godot' is a parody of the concept of God. He is the vague powerless figure from the common man's charade of religion. In Waiting for Godot 'Godot' signifies as empty promise in a meaningless life. We hear that once Vladimir and Estragon had seen 'Godot', but they do not remember him quite clearly, and the vague promises he gave them are treated by them with a lightheartedness born of doubt and despair.

In fact, it seems to them as if 'Godot' and Pozzo were sometimes merging into one blurred picture. When in Act - II, they talk of 'Godot', Pozzo appears and is mistaken by Estragon for 'Godot'. 'Godot' is explicitly vague, merely an empty promise corresponding to lukewarm piety and absence of suffering in the tramps. Waiting for 'Godot' has become a habit with them, a habit, which is an adaptation to the meaninglessness and pointlessness of life. 'Godot's function in the play seems to keep his dependants ignorant.

His boy-messenger, for instance, does not have much knowledge about whether he is unhappy or not; he does not know why ' Godot' is kinder to him and not to his brother; he is not certain whether ' Godot's beard is white; he even fails to recognize the tramps he had seen on the previous day. The uncertainty and unreliability with which ' Godot' surrounds himself reveal him as highly ambivalent. The unconsciousness and ambivalence appear in his promise to rescue the tramps and in his preventing them from becoming conscious. Some interpret ' Godot' as a symbol of death.

The tramps wait for him endlessly, but death does not come on the final appointed hour. One has to wait for death forgetting relief from pain and misery. But this would be too existential an interpretation of the play to accept ' Godot' as merely nothing but death. Again, because Didi and Gogo are landless, poor and migratory, and because Didi is indignant at the exploitation of the weak and seems concerned about the way of life that ' Godot' provides for his people, we could see ' Godot' as some great social leader who promises liberation for the oppressed.

Some critics have also suggested that ' Godot' resembles Aristotle's Unmover Mover, who moves the Universe the way the beloved moves the lover. The subject of Waiting for Godot is not ' Godot', but waiting, the act of waiting as an essential and characteristic aspect of human condition and in the play ' Godot' simply represents the object of our waiting. Perhaps ' Godot' means only something for which one waits vainly, some promise that remains unfulfilled, some development that does not occur, some hope that does not materialize.

In other words, waiting for ' Godot' means waiting for something to turn up which does not really turn up. The two tramps hope that ' Godot' will come and rescue them from the insoluble problems they face in their everyday existence. But ' Godot' is not supposed to come at all. Actually, ' Godot' cannot be made to represent any one idea, ideal or person, precisely because he represents an absence, like " the boy" in Endgame; he is the absent figure whose non-presence is the play's center.