

**The Individual's Search for Identity
In "Waiting for Godot" Samuel Beckett**

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Section One

1.1- Beckett's Life :

Samuel Beckett is the most famous of the absurdist playwrights . His dramas deal with the dullness of routine, the futility of human action, and the inability of humans to communicate; and the plots, language, and characters themselves seem absurd. Thus, his dramatic style underlines his thematic statements, he captures the ridiculous aspects of life in dramatic form. He was born on April 13,1906. The day of his birth happened to be not only Friday the thirteenth but Good Friday, and the sense of sorrow, isolation, and ill luck associated with these dates was an important concept to him.

However, for someone so obsessed with the futility of existence, Beckett had a very normal childhood in a cultured, affectionate, upper-middle class Irish family. At prep school, he was Not only brilliant scholar but an extremely popular student and an excellent athlete, particularly at cricket. He received his M.A. in modern language from the University of

Dublin in Ireland. He then taught at schools in Paris and Dublin, wandered around Europe for awhile, and finally settled in Paris in 1937.

It was during his first visit to Paris, in 1929, that Beckett became acquainted with the writer James Joyce. Joyce encouraged Beckett to write and arranged to have some of his early essays published; in turn, Beckett sometime assisted Joyce with *Finnegan's Wake*. They were drawn together by their shared Irish background, literary tastes, and tendency to depression. According to one account, they conversed mainly in silence. Beckett wrote and published essays, short stories, poetry, and novels during the 1930s and the 1940s, but his work was known only to a very small part of the avant-garde. A French translation of his novel *Murphy* sold ninety-five copies in four years. It was not until the early 1950s, with the publication of three novels and the play *Waiting for Godot* (1953), that he came to be considered one of the major writers of the post war generation. 1

Although he became very famous he stayed the same humble person. It is a strange thing to a quiet and good tempered person, as his companion say, to write about man's distemper, and inner conflicts, because he seemed not to have any inner conflicts. Beckett avoided the poetic gatherings and meetings; he was feeling comfortable among the painters. He spent his time in writing in order to answer, in his works, the question that dominated on his mind, since he caught the pen to write, who am I? And what is the meaning of saying I am? 2

Besides writing for the theatre, Beckett wrote for television and radio and also wrote a short film that starred

Buster Keaton. After a spurt of writing in the late 1950s and early 1960s, his output diminished, but his short plays of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s – including *play* (1963), *Come and Go* (1966), *Not I* (1971), *Rockaby* (1981)- showed that neither his concerns nor his dramatic powers had changed or ended. Beckett awarded Nobel Prize in 1969 but did not attend to ceremony. 3

Beckett also wrote some other plays such as *Act without Words I* (1957) and II (1960), *Endgame* (1957), *Happy Days* (1961), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and *Catastrophe* (1982) is one of Beckett's last short plays. 4

1.2. Beckett's Style :

In the face of unspeakable slaughter of World War II and the complicity of various segments of European society in the extermination of huge groups of innocent people, the playwrights of absurd found traditional value systems bankrupt. They wrote about the meaninglessness and absurdity of human existence and the inability of language to communicate in an effective way. The ultimate isolation of human beings shapes the images of futility that emerged from the absurdist movement. 5

The so-called “absurdist” theatre reflects mans' yearning for reasons in an unreasoning void of a universe. However, the absurdist writers (Beckett, Loneseo, Genet, Adamov, etc) pursue their ideas through comedy as much as tragedy. As well as being beautifully constructed, full of lyrical and poetical language, *Waiting for Godot* is a very funny play and its roots can be traced back to comedy. 6

Beckett is what in modern times we call a genius: he has built a cosmos out of the awareness of passing moment. Therefore, ambiguity is one of the keynotes of *Waiting for Godot*. When asked about its meaning, Beckett always replied that it means what it says. The play, like life, has no definitive meaning and this gives the director approaching it complete freedom of interpretation and imagination.

The play does not, as it progresses, create a context in which one can risk an interpretation: its words and actions do not grow. *Waiting for Godot* is life materialized; (one) can then discuss other "matter" of literature and drama: literary allusion, the nuances of language, rhetorical techniques, philosophical parallels, religion symbolism, lighting, staging devices. Without first grounding the play in the reader's experience, however, all these interesting avenues into the text generally lead only to some regurgitation of half remembered answers in other words, to Lucky's monologue. 7

In *Waiting for Godot* Beckett abandons conventional structure and development in both plot and dialogue in order to present a dramatic vision of human predicament in which mankind seems to have no place. 8

The so-called nihilism of Beckett can thus be seen no more than the necessary outcome of Beckett's refusal to deal in generalizations and abstract truths. The existential experience is thus felt as a succession of attempts to give shape to the void; when no thing can lay claim to final, definitive reality, we enter a world of games, of arbitrary actions structures to give the illusion of reality.

So *Vladimir* and *Estragon*, also known as *Didi* and *Gogo*, think up their ways to pass the time. It is not the content of the work, not what is said, that matters in a writer of Beckett's stamp, but the quality of the experience that is communicated. To be in communication with a mind of such merciless integrity, of such uncompromising determination to face the stark reality of the human situation and to confront the worst without being in danger of yielding to any of the superficial consolations that have clouded man's self awareness in the past; to be in contact with a human being utterly free from self-pity, utterly obvious to the pitfalls of being able to lighten one's anguish by sharing it with others; to see along figure, without hope comfort, facing the great emptiness of space and time without the possibility of miraculous rescue or salvation, in dignity, resolved to fulfil its obligation to express its own predicament –to partake of such courage and noble stoicism, however remotely, can not but evoke a feeling of emotional excitement, exhilaration. 9

The writer of the absurd theatre, as Beckett and others of playwrights, does not care of setting (time and place), but they concern on the dialogue, which is very important in absurd theatre, and this dialogue is very ambiguous. The dialogue of the writer's characters does not show any idea and it is not connected or homogenous speech, but it is a symbolic speech refers to the author's theme. Also the writers of absurd plays in order to emphasize and to show the feelings and emotion of man, as Beckett uses four main characters, in *Waiting for Godot*, to show the suffering of man and also the hopelessness of man. 10

Language in *Waiting for Godot* becomes away of shaping silence, an almost sculptural act by which the stillness of theatrical spaces alternately contained and liberated. The cross talk and routines, even Lucky's torrential monologue, are seen as defensive manoeuvres, against the perceptual weight of a silence that the audience is made to share. Forced in to an awareness of its own responses, Beckett's audience listen "Not to the play, but to itself, expressed /in an emotion as of two people, as of two /Emotion becoming one". 11

Beckett uses in writing his absurd plays indirect speech and many symbols in order to tell the people in modern age that their life is meaningless. So, we can see through his plays the meaninglessness of life and he does not want us to understand his play in order to make our thoughts about life absurd, he shows us the non sense of modern life.

Notes

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Section Two

2.1. The Background of *Waiting for Godot* :

In 1950s another dramatic style evolves in response to the devastation of modern warfare, this time World War II. Based on more philosophical or metaphysical explorations than was the overtly political German expressionist theatre, the theatre of absurd was created by a group of international playwrights who lived and wrote in Paris; like Samuel Beckett.

In 1953, author Samuel Beckett wrote the two act tragicomedy ***Waiting for Godot***, a play featuring two men, Vladimir and Estragon, who talk almost about nothing while waiting for the unknown Godot .

Twice they encounter another man, Pozzo, and his slave Lucky . The

play has received much acclaimed and been performed in many theatres. 2

When ***Waiting for Godot*** was acted in Sarajevo, all the seats

were taken and people had to be turned away . In this performance of a painful play under difficult circumstances, the relationship between theatre and the surrounding community, the society, become clearly defined. We recognize the actors needed to be in each other's presence rehearsing their parts; we also recognize that the audience members needed to gather together with each other with the actor, even in an auditorium dimly lit by candles, with sniper fire outside the theatre door.

For the audience members, watching a film recorded in another place at another time could not have equalled the experience of being with live actors, who became their companions in performance that celebrated humanity at a time when in humanity threatened to engulf their world. The sharing of the performance, the connection between actors and audience, became its own candle, lit to offset the despair dark Sarajevo. 3

Waiting for Godot was performed in most parts in the world. In spite of that the play was very successful; it is very ambiguous and

and complex. The play lacks the structures of traditional plays, but had it a very admiration of many critiques because it shows the absurdity of humanity and life.

2.2. The Plot:

Waiting for Godot is the most Beckett's famous plays. It is about two tramps who meet each day on a barren plain, hoping that an unknown figure called Godot will come. The vague expectation that somehow Godot – if ever comes-

will be able to help them; and while they wait for him, they try to break up the painful monotony of their lives with bickering and occasional vaudeville routines. The play is filled with literary and religious references. The setting is “ A country road. A tree.” The tree is leafless in Act I, but in Act II four or five leaves appear on it. The two central characters, Vladimir and Estragon –also known Didi and Gogo- are tramp like clowns. They are waiting for Godot, but Godots identity is never revealed, nor does he ever appear. Instead, a young messenger promises that he will arrive tomorrow. Godot may be God, or may not even exist. Two additional characters, Lucky and Pozzo, switch roles as master and slave in their two appearances.

Waiting for Godot epitomizes the absurdist from. The characters are absurd, clown like figures that have problems communicating and dealing with their environment. They contemplate suicide, for example, as a means of relieving their perpetual boredom. The setting represents everywhere and nowhere. Some critics have remarked that this barren, sterile world conjures up an image of the aftermath of an unclear. The language is stichomythic –that is, written in brief, alternating lines- and frequently ludicrous. As in many absurdist dramas, the plot is cyclical: the action appears to start over with nothing having

changed. The closing lines and stage direction suggest the absurdity of the universe. 4

Beckett constructed a powerful and disturbing image of life itself in his play: life is reduced to the act of waiting for

something that never comes. Beckett's plays are extremely dark in spite of their humour. 5

2.3. The Individual's Search for Identity in "*Waiting for Godot*"

Waiting for Godot indicates the empty life of modern man and leads the audience or the reader to the image of modern madness. It leads us to feel that if the man can not live with bread only, he will also enable to live with thinking or anxiety of salvation by inexistence hope. So this play shows the despair of modern literature. 6

We pass the time, Beckett tells us waiting for a meaning that will save us from pain, ugliness, emptiness and meaninglessness of existence perhaps the meaning is God, but we do not know Him. He always promised us, but He never recognizably appears. Our life is thus a constant waiting, always essentially the same, till time itself ceases to have significance or substance. "I can't go on like this" man forever cries; to which the reply is "That's what you think", "what'll we do ? What'll we do?" man repeatedly waits. The only answer given, a part from suicide, which is reticently hinted at, is to wait : "In the meantime let us try to converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent". 7

The conversation between Vladimir and Estragon the protagonists of *Waiting for Godot* seem to be void of meaning. The play begins with "nothing to be done" which is the main theme in this play. The writer tells us that there are no actions or events to happen and the characters' life is meaningless and absurd. 8

Godot, the drama of non-communication depends upon the tension that it may not always be so, that something valid will be said that will release the waiting tramps, perhaps through the interventions of Godot himself. This situation is essentially dramatic for through their demands on each other the characters existence in conflict. The pairs in the play, Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky are firmly bound to one another, and their relationship is complex, they depend on each other and none of them can go far of the other. Sometimes the eternal couple, solitude- even the lord Pozzo's companionship: "I can not go for long without the society of my like"- only to find themselves imprisoned in a natural dependency they would like desperately like to break. 9

Vladimir and Estragon, the two tramps, are speaking on a road side near a bare tree, which is empty of people. This speech does not lead to any thing or tell any thing. They are waiting for the stranger Godot to come, night after night, hoping to find the salvation by his coming, but he never comes. 10

This is a sample of a conversation:

Estragon: Let's go.

Vladimir: We can't .

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.

Estragon: Ah! You're sure it was here?

Vladimir: What?

Estragon: That we were to wait.

Vladimir: He said by the tree. Do you see any

others?

Estragon: What is it?

Vladimir: I don't know. A willow.

Estragon: Where are the leaves?

Vladimir: It must be dead.' 11

When Beckett gave us a situation of two men, who are waiting for someone or something unknown in solitude place, he wanted to show us an image of the man in modern age. Man in this age lives in absurdity and his life is meaningless like the two represented characters. Beckett wanted to reflect the modern atmosphere through this play.

The speech between Vladimir and Estragon continues, like above, page after page till the other two characters, Pozzo and Lucky, appear. Beckett described their entering in this way: Pozzo drives Lucky by means of a rope, passed around Lucky's neck, so Lucky is the first to appear, followed by the rope which is long enough to allow him to reach the middle of the stage before Pozzo appears. Lucky carries a heavy bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket and a great coat. Pozzo a whip. Pozzo cracks the whip then appears and they cross the stage. Lucky passes before Vladimir and Estragon and exits. Pozzo at the sights of Vladimir and Estragon stops short; he jerks the rope violently and says to Lucky back. Here Lucky falls with all his baggage. At this moment the two tramps turn towards Lucky, half wishing and half fearing to go and help him. Then Beckett gives us Lucky's image, he is very weak, pale face, with long hair and two feeble legs. Lucky tries to stand without putting anything of his baggage. He stands without any move, he dances when he hears Pozzo's whip or voice, while Pozzo

is busy with eating a chicken. As it is obvious Lucky is a slave of his master Pozzo, and he does what ever Pozzo orders him. When Pozzo orders him to think in a loud voice, the words come out Lucky's mouth like a flood without stopping. Here, Beckett wrote two or more pages without full stops or commas, we can also find mixing words. These words were not understood, neither by the audience nor by the characters, the words were so disturbing, that the characters went to him to make him shut up and stop thinking. This speech is like a delirium.

Through Pozzo, Beckett wanted to give us an image of authority man, who controls another man's life, Lucky who represented the weakness and sufferance from bad life. These two characters are images of power and weakness, but non of them can live far from the other, because they complete each other.

Another character, the boy, who is the messenger of the unknown Godot. This character was no less strange from the other characters. He appeared two times in the play, at the end of the act I, he tells Vladimir and Estragon that Mr. Godot will not come today and he is coming tomorrow. At the end of Act II the boy appears again to say the same thing to the same persons, only this time he denies that he met Vladimir and Estragon yesterday, when they remind him. This reflects that young people are not away from the absurdity of the modern age.

The play continues as it's beginning, the two tramps are waiting for Godot in Act II also, but Godot never comes. Pozzo appears, but this time he is blind and Lucky is leading him. So

now Pozzo depends on Lucky, he can not move or do anything without Lucky. This reflects that no one will remain as he is and time either will weaken or strengthen him in some way. This is a moral lesson to the people who have the power. Beckett wanted to say that everyone, no matter how powerful he is, needs or will need another one. In life there are no remaining roles, the wearing of the hat, in Act I, by all characters refers to the role changing, between Pozzo and Lucky, in Act II Vladimir and Estragon despair from their waiting, they go back to their meaningless conversation, which they did not get any benefit from it. At last they decide to hang themselves, they do not. 12

Here are a few lines from their conversation:

Estragon: Why don't we hang ourselves?

Vladimir: With what?

Estragon: You haven't got a bit of rope?

Vladimir: No.

Estragon: Then we can't.

Vladimir: Let's go.

Estragon: Wait there's my belt.

Vladimir: It's too short." 13

The topic of suicide arises in a fit of boredom, as the two friends (tramps) search for a way to speed up the passage of time while they wait for Godot. Suicide for them is just another diversion. Perhaps a titillating autoerotic fantasy, but a diversion nonetheless, whose consequences they do not bother to figure out. It's impossible; however, for the two to kill themselves. They first realize that the only tree in their world, a weeping willow, will not carry Vladimir's weight on

the noose and therefore; will not break his neck. The second reason they found not to hang themselves for was, Vladimir and Estragon do not have the requisite piece of rope. Thus it seems that the two tramps are using suicide for conversation, using the mere thought of an autoerotic death as an inherently pleasing ponder. 14

The two tramps did not have the will to anything. They talked more than once about leaving, but they didn't actually leave. They also talked about hanging themselves, and then they found excuses not to do it. Beckett represented the weakness of man, through them, in this age; a man who does no thing, a man who says, but does not the will to do. The conversation below, which is the end of the play, between the two tramps will show us that they did not have will to do anything:

“Estragon: I can't go like this.

Vladimir: That's what you think.

Estragon: If we parted? That might be better for us.

Vladimir: We will hang ourselves tomorrow. Unless
Godot comes.

Estragon: And if he comes?

Vladimir: We'll be saved.

Estragon: Well? Shall we go?

Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.

Estragon: What?

Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.

Estragon: You want me to pull off my trousers?

Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.

Estragon: True.

Vladimir: Well? Shall we go?

Estragon: Yes, let's go.

(They do not move)" 15

Through the four characters, Beckett gave us a symbol of modern man. The pair, Vladimir and Estragon, is symbols of all human beings in the modern age. They show through their own life; the meaninglessness of life after the second world war, when people lived without hope or aim in life. So these two characters are symbolic, to all men anywhere anytime. Pozzo is symbol of authority and power, in which he could control other man's life like Lucky. Lucky is the symbol of the man who suffered from his bad life and master, who controlled him completely, as well as he suffered from the meaningless life of modern man.

Interpersonal relationships in Beckett's Waiting for Godot are enormously important, because the interaction of dynamic characters, as they try to satiate each other; boredom is the basis of the play. Vladimir's and Estranger's interaction with Godot, which should also be seen as an interpersonal relationship among dynamic characters, from the basis for the tale's major themes. 16

The relationship among the characters is very strong and very important. As Estragon has been compared to a body without intellect, therefore he needs Vladimir to provide the intellect. Each one completes the other and they can not live far from each other, also they are forced to wait together. While the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky is different somehow, but they both depend on each other too. When Pozzo

loses his sight he depends on Lucky to lead him, while Lucky is Pozzo's slave as we know.

We can see through the characters in the play that the character Estragon completes Vladimir even if the second is more practice than the first. Estragon is a dreamer, but Vladimir does not like to hear anything about dreams and Estragon's mouth has unpleasant smell while Vladimir's feet have unpleasant smell. Estragon likes to mention astronomical stories, which disturb Vladimir. From the beginning of the play till the end, Estragon doubts that they will not be saved from their suffering even if the

stranger Godot comes, while Vladimir's heart charged with hope and salvation from suffering. Estragon is the image of weakness and every night strange forces hit him, although do not know anything about these forces, but we can realize what it does to him. In spite of this contract between those two characters, in other hand they can not live without each other.

Like Vladimir and Estragon, the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky is very strong and each one completes the other, but the relationship between them is primitive. Pozzo is the master who delights by the others pains and Lucky is obedient slave. We can see Pozzo in the first act as a very strong man, rich and depends on himself. Here, he is the symbol of a man who has power and proud by what he owns. This relationship refers to the relationship between mind and body, the material side and the spiritual side, which the desires of the body controls the mind; as Pozzo dominates Lucky. When the man becomes old, then the mind leads him and shows him the right way in the darkness of life. Godot, the

unknown character, is very ambiguous and elusive. Many critics wanted to find out the source of this name, some of them say that Beckett plays on the word "God", but some others thought that Godot is a symbol of the hope to man in modern age, which is suppose to come and save human beings from pain. This hope is the same in all men's fantasy even if the names that called the waited saver are different. So the subject of this play is waiting for rescuer, but this waiting is meaningless and absurd because the rescuer will not comes, and even if he comes; he will not change anything. Beckett wanted to tell us through this play that we are falling and we will not save ourselves and no one save us; we are nothing and going in nothing to end in nothing. This is the situation of human beings in modern age.

Beckett's characters in *Waiting for Godot* are isolated characters. In their isolation there is an image of themselves, this image is represented in there being far away of their home and ordinary life. Their conversations are like an echo that resound in a deep gap which has no end. They also showing us, in an ironical way, the absurdity of life. They also show the meaningless situation of human beings after their dispossessed of natural humanity which was providing them the reality and existence of self. 17

For Beckett's characters life without the society of others is frightening, dangerous and unthinkable miserable. It is also of necessary for us, in Beckett's universe, to affirm our existence through the witness of others, by the humanity, divine, or through abstraction. When we see this play we are brought on the stage with Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo, and

Lucky, and we are also in corporate in to there dynamic. The dramatic personae become more than two-dimensional arched type; they are resident in our own characters, we see their struggle as our own. They show us an image of our character. The play offers us no answer, but it draws our attention to problems that there are no solutions for them. 18

Vladimir and Estragon found the suicide as a solution of their problems, suffering, and their meaningless life, but this suicide could not solve their problems, because as we know that death is not found to be a solution of problems, at least in this situation. The two tramps even when they thought that suicide would be the solution; they could not do it because they did not have the will as they did not have the will to do anything, like leaving. Through the play Beckett told us that we have no solution in our life and our life is similar to the characters' life. This indicates that we have no aim in life and even death is not the solution to our endless problems in our meaningless life. Beckett's message is that our life is like a circle, it has repeated actions so there is no aim in our life, and we will die without one. This leads us to the inner deep side of the meaninglessness of life.

Through these images Beckett wanted to describe life in European society after the World War II. He told us that man's life was similar to his represented characters' life which is meaningless and absurd. So man, like Vladimir and Estragon, is waiting for an ambiguous unknown thing or person; to rescue him from the hard times which is he spending in life this is on one hand. On another hand man's life can be similar to Pozzo and Lackey's life, which is also meaningless

and absurd, but in different way. This differentiation can be stated in the relationship between characters. When we look at Vladimir and Estranger's relationship; we can see that it's a friendship, but the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky is like any bad relationship between a master and his slave. Beckett told us that man can not live far from his society and in a day he will need the others to help him to face life. He also stated that no matter how strong and independent man is, one day life or time will weaken him and make him need the others; like Pozzo in the second act.

The major themes that Beckett wanted to tell us, in *Waiting for Godot*, are the absurdity, meaninglessness and hopelessness of life in the modern age. He also told us that to die is better than to live in such a life, which people are suffering in it, in an endless way, because of the terrible war and its coasts upon every thing. People were suffering not only at the time of the war, but also at the time that followed the war for a very long time. In matter of fact the time after the war was much tougher, because everything was destroyed and needed a rebuild, even people's minds (ideas and thoughts). So, as a result of these endless problems and man's disability to solve them; man's life became a process of waiting, and this waiting process didn't lasted or ended at that time, but it still found now in most of societies. This leads us that all human beings are waiting for Godot, this Godot differs from one person to another.

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Conclusion:

The theatre of absurd, as *Waiting for Godot*, reflects that human beings are in dull, meaningless and hopeless life; like the characters of this play. So our life, as human beings, is a wasted life to an endless, ambiguous and meaningless waiting process, and we don't have an aim to achieve or a will to do anything.

The characters' multiple images did not show the external atmosphere only, but they also showed the internal one, they reflected our fears, problems and even our nightmares of dream, but these images did not give us solutions or answers to our question. The play goes on in emptiness role, it ends like its beginning; there are no action to happen and we are not able to realize what will happen, because it's circular play and everything is possible to happen in it. The most arose question is "what is the meaning of what is happen?".

Samuel Beckett gave us an important images of man in European society where man was lost and denied the society. Through the dialogues of the characters Beckett showed us the meaningless life that they live. Waiting for something unknown solve your problems is strange, but not for a man in

the circumstances that the characters lived in. Godot, the unknown thing that the characters were waiting for, did not come to rescue them; in matter of fact we do not know that will he come or if he came will he be able to rescue them.

The most important thing that we understand from this play is that we shall not depend on someone to solve our problems, and we shall solve our problems by ourselves. We shall also trust in ourselves and not lose hope, and work hard to achieve our aims, and the very important thing that we shall have beside these things is the will to do everything.

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