

Waiting for Godot: Time Torments the Human Beings

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Abstract: *Samuel Barclay Beckett's Waiting for Godot is a famous postmodern masterpiece of English Literature. The main dominating notion of the play is the concept of time as a tormenting tool in postmodern society. The unsuccessful utilization of it makes life hellish and drives postmodern individuals towards self-destruction. Though it is the essential quality of human beings that they evoke hope in the most pessimistic situations in order to survive. Vladimir and Estragon are the two prime victims of it in the play. The subplot of Pozzo and Lucky also highlights the issues.*

Keywords: *time, will, torment, message, survive, waiting, optimism, pessimism.*

Analysis:

The way of God is reexamined, the common traits of life are revalued, and the conventional paths of thinking, philosophical values, morality, and ethics are justified by Beckett in *Waiting for Godot*. The title itself holds the perplexing and confusing tone of post-modernity because the term 'Godot' does not signify any fixed meaning, object, value, entity or person. What Godot is-- it could be anything, as well as, it could be nothing. It may signify God, a prophet, desired object, freedom, death, time, end of universe or anything that we willfully desire or does not desire in our earthen life. Audience can never ensure the identity of Godot, can never learn who Godot is. As a proper noun, the name "Godot" may derive from any number of French verbs, and Beckett stated it might be a derivative of *godillot*, a French slang for "boot". The title, in this interpretation, could be seen as suggesting that the characters are "waiting for the boot". The name also forms a pun on the Irish phrase "go deo" meaning "eternity." Another interpretation is that Godot is simply God. The characters wait for god, receiving messages from a middle man (The church or bible), and God never comes. Whatever it is, the idea of 'Godot' is juxtaposed with the idea of waiting, that means, we must wait for this Godot, we should sit for the coming of Godot, we must not leave the place, because Godot may come, we must obey the order that we have to wait for someone or none. Godot is someone who never comes. Lucky and Pozzo could be Godot, if they did not come. Primary confusion of Estragon and Vladimir regarding the identity of Lucky and Pozzo signifies the criterion of Godot, and the latent message is Godot is someone to be waited for, not someone who comes, who is reachable and reasonable, who is familiar to us. The conspicuous feature of Godot is that Godot is desired, Whether we like it or not, whether we want it or not, whether it comes or not, whether we expects it or not, we should

wait for it, we must want it and feel a desire for it, and we must learn to wait for this Godot.

The "Theme of Waiting" juxtaposes some successive questions in *Waiting for Godot*. What is waiting, why should we wait, what for we are waiting, when the waiting will end, who is coming to end the waiting, how the waiting will come to an end, what we will do during our waiting, why we have no power to end this waiting, who asked us to wait--all these basic questions are raised in the play, and 'waiting' appears to be a central theme of the play. Beckett told the painful saga of perpetual waiting and the saddening, disheartening edge of fancy dreaming of the end of this waiting; but his play contains an untold suggestion that "no suggestion is there". *Silence motif* is repeatedly used in the play, and it suggests the lack of expression, the lack of manifestation in the way of waiting. When we know that nothing can be said, nothing to be known, and nothing to get out of this world, silence comes painfully. The monosyllabic words of the characters, their baby-like gestures, their inconsistency and their waiting --all these events indicate towards the agonized effects of perpetual waiting.

Waiting is painful. It hurts. Time is greatest tormentor, and we can not renounce the negative facets of time. In Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress", "idea of tormentor time" is presented :

"But at my back I always hear

Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near

And yonder all before us lie

Deserts of vast eternity" (Literature for Writing, 506)

Beckett deals with this tormenting, torturous time; nothingness, and this hollowness of life is illustrated with painful tell of two tramps who have nothing to do, to say, to show or to get, but to wait for an airy Godot. Beckett says there is a ditch over there, but he does not suggest that we can stay outside the ditch, wherever we live, even if we stay over the mound, it makes no difference that we have to stay in a hollow ditch that encircles us with its airy depthless. What we can do at best is to know the painful fact of life that Godot never comes, and we are perpetually and eternally entrapped here, in this ditch, to stay, to remain and to wait for someone who never feels a need to come, though there is no essential sign or prove that someone is there or we are ordered to do so.

We can break away the circle, we can get out of the ditch, and we can cease the unbearable presence of waiting. But can we really? We are trapped. We are trapped to see our own doom, our own failure, our projected downfall. Most interestingly, waiting is signified also with a stronger theme of immobility. We can not go, we can not move. Gogo and Didi never move. They always stick to the place with the dimmed hope that Godot may come. Here a suggestion

overwhelms that we are trapped in such a way that we can never go out of this hollow ditch. Knowingly or unknowingly we have to stay and to wait for creeping death. Vladimir and Estragon want to commit suicide, but they fail. Estragon's clothing goes down when he profoundly and seriously thinks about a suicidal attempt. It is ridiculous, and noteworthy. These ridiculous aspects of life, the mockery of life, the absurdity of human life are projected along with the Estragon and Vladimir's waiting. What for we are waiting, Beckett raises this question and suggests that life is a joke, a great joke, where we have nothing to but to wait for nothing. Here, to pass the time gets the ultimate priority of life rather than other significant facets of life.

ESTRAGON *Let's go.*

VLADIMIR *We can't.*

ESTRAGON *Why not?*

VLADIMIR *We're waiting for Godot. (Waiting for Godot, ActI, 44)*

We are living in a material world having some material desire along with our material body. We can not ignore the material world or the materialized immateriality. God is something immaterial, but to us, we can only understand the existence of God in the context of material. So we say God is someone who created both--material and immaterial. If Godot is considered to be an immaterial existence, Godot will never come and can never come to this material world. Lucky and Pozzo are a part of this material world, because they are touchable and reachable; but if they do not come, they would have been considered and worshipped as Godot, an immaterial and non-existent entity. In every moment of our life, we are facing our Godots, but the waiting never ends because we can never touch the locus or the periphery of immaterial. So waiting seems ridiculous, because if Godot comes, we will fail to recognize due to our preoccupations of materiality.

Why waiting is in question? Form the very beginning of the civilization, mankind has learnt to wait for golden days of future, to create Utopia for all; but in 20th century, this waiting is in question because of the wars, catastrophic destruction and downfall of human values built upon the ideologies of “European Enlightenment”. Picasso’s Guernica truthfully has been memorialized the tragedy of human civilization. The shattered human bodies, the fanatics, the screams, death and destruction of the illustration are not only a truthful account of the destroyed Spanish city (in Spanish Civil War, between 1936-39), but also of the whole mankind. The inner cruelties of human mind, the lack of human values, hypocrisy, contradictions, and evil of inside—all these issues are projected in the picture; thus it points out towards a newer truth of life that nothing is true, nothing could be true. Man evolved from a mere hairy ape and performed his success by building a civilization full of dazzling pompousness, great technological developments, better way of life, newer ways of happiness and more; but all these efforts are now in question due to the devastating fall down of human civilization in WWI and

WWII. Beckett portrays this painful account of human hope, the shattered high expectations of human civilization in his play by putting the image of waiting. Nothing happens, because it is our inward cruelties of life that we are not able to take the changes to come, we are pervert, debased and dehumanized in such a extent that the golden days can never come. Utopian vision of human mind will never end because of our failures. We have created a civilization, but we are also the demolisher of our own homeland, Frankenstein of our own will.

Sartre, an explicitly atheistic and pessimistic philosopher, also declared that human beings require a rational basis for their lives but are unable to achieve one, and thus human life is a “futile passion.” Sartre’s existentialism is a form of humanism, and he strongly emphasized human freedom, choice, and responsibility. He eventually tried to reconcile these existentialist concepts with a Marxist analysis of society and history. In the treatise Being and Nothingness, French writer Jean-Paul Sartre presents his existential philosophical framework. He reasons that the essential nothingness of human existence leaves individuals to take sole responsibility for their own actions. Shunning the morality and constraints of society, individuals must embrace personal responsibility to craft a world for themselves. Along with focusing on the importance of exercising individual responsibility, Sartre stresses that the understanding of freedom of choice is the only means of authenticating human existence. Beckett also deals with these ideas when he placed the concept of ‘mistaken identity, place and time’. We are living in a world that is full of hollowness, cruelty, rudeness, repetition, monotony, mistrust, misconception, misunderstanding, misleading beliefs, misjudgment, mismatched procedures of life and maladjustment. Thus, in Beckett and Sartre, life is confusing, chaotic, cripple and full of dull connotations and contradictions. For these reasons, in Beckettian writing we can trace the charismatic manifestation of waiting, every character of the play wait for something to happen, something to come, something to be gone; but nothing happens, none comes and nothing is explored. It suggests existential feeling of human life that life is nothing but a monotonous waiting for nothing. As we can see, Vladimir and Estragon are trapped in a painful, void-like existence in which suffering is commonplace and death (comparable to escape perhaps?) an impossibility:

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. (Waiting for Godot, Act II, 123)

If you live in life, then you die in life, too. And, in the same way, the pain of living is equated with the pain of dying, as we can observe it in Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale”:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget

What thou among the leaves hast never known,

The weariness, the fever, and the fret

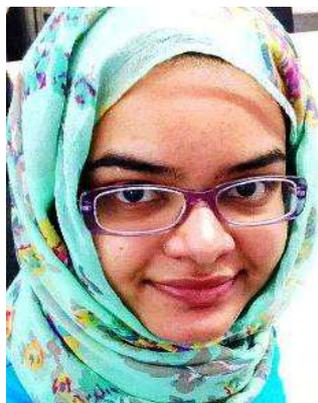
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan; (Literature for Writing, 598)

The inaction, naivety, death, decay, stagnant and deceased life is portrayed in these lines; and we can certainly notice the Beckettian tone of the poem that we are left to a rude, filthy, decaying world and we can move nowhere, we can go nowhere, but we have to wait and to embrace death and its consequences. We should wait, we must wait, we must learn to wait, we have to know how to wait and we cannot but wait to live the life though it is painful. Like Beckettian life, this inadequacy never ends and is interminable pain and suffering. Yet these suffering characters go on enduring the unbearable. They keep going on for two reasons: one is time, which is forever shifting them towards something that they will never achieve; the other is because they must go on, regardless. Since Time is two dimensional, it can only push its recipient on, whether wanted or not ("time devours on) The further we go in life towards death, argues Beckett, the more we are guilty of the sinful act of living a deathly and deadened existence, artificially sweetened by relative pleasures which are not really pleasures at all. Life is habitual, and "habit is a great deadener". With regards to 'going on', it is clear in Beckett's literature that his characters have no alternative but to 'go on'. They are driven forward in a torturous existence for no other reason than that they have no alternative but to do as the author decrees 'death in life, and life in death'. We all fail in life, yet despite the fact that Beckett offers no hope of release from this everlasting torture, perhaps we can look for some kind of salvation. So Beckett gives us a scenario in which people live because they cannot die. Beckett would have easily allowed them to hang and die but he did not because he knows that the quintessential feature of human beings is optimism. Even in the gross pessimistic situation, human beings find hope that triggers them to fight and survive for the future. Therefore, Estragon and Vladimir avoids suicide and keep themselves busy in waiting for Godot no matter how tormenting that waiting is.

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