

**I**f we don't find a way to construct the true illusion on the stage, there will be no theater to be found. It does not matter that this level of illusion be comprehended by our understanding, because these levels are not connected to our brain or understanding; the only thing that matters is that sensitivities get deeper and deeper in us, and that is the magic of illusion, the rituals, and the theater is just the reflection of them.

Waiting for Godot is an absurdist play by Samuel Becket in which two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, wait endlessly for the arrival of someone named Godot. Godot's absence, as well as numerous other aspects of the play, has led to many different interpretations since the play's premier. It was voted "the most significant English language play of the 20<sup>th</sup> century." Becket's translation of his own original French version, "En attendant Godot" which was composed between 9 October 1948 and 29 January 1949, is subtitled "a tragicomedy in two acts." This play follows a pair of men who divert themselves while waiting expectantly for Godot to come. They claim he is an acquaintance but in fact hardly know him, admitting that they would not recognize him when they do see him. To occupy the time they eat, sleep, converse, argue, sing, play games, exercise, swap hats, and contemplate suicide-anything "to hold the terrible silence at bay." Among the interpretations about this play, we come to most reviews and critics about this play who claim that is a play about a vain waiting, an endless one which has no purpose and no result, and emphasizes on the vanity and hopelessness of the humane life in this world, who lives on with a meaningless waiting in this life, for nothing. Here is the question that is this waiting really in vain? Is it for something or someone that never comes in the end? Or, is our life just a game to pass this endless waiting? Or most important of all, isn't the life waiting itself? If it is so, waiting for what? In this critical review of the play, we try to have a look on different critical

commentaries on this play and try to show the meaning of this waiting in life by examining different aspects of these commentaries.

The play opens with Estragon struggling to remove a boot. Estragon eventually gives up, muttering, "Nothing to be done." His friend Vladimir takes up the thought and muses on it, the implication being that nothing is a thing that has to be done and this pair is going to have to spend the rest of the play doing it. When Estragon finally succeeds in removing his boot, he looks and feels inside but finds nothing. Just prior to this, Vladimir peers into his hat.

The pair discusses repentance, particularly in relation to the two thieves crucified alongside Jesus, and that only one of the Four Evangelists mentions that one of them was saved. This is the first of numerous Biblical references in the play, which may be linked to its putative central theme of the search for and reconciliation with God, as well as salvation: "We're saved!" they cry on more than one occasion when they feel that Godot may be near.

Presently, Vladimir expresses his frustration with Estragon's limited conversational skills: "Come on, Gogo, return the ball, can't you, once in a while?" Estragon struggles with this throughout the play, and Vladimir generally takes the lead in dialogue and encounters with others. Vladimir is at times hostile towards his companion, but in general they are close, frequently embracing and supporting one another.

Estragon peers out into the audience and comments on the bleakness of his surroundings. He wants to depart but is told that they cannot because they must wait for Godot. The pair cannot agree, however, on whether or not they are in the right place or that this is the arranged day for

their meeting with Godot; they are not even sure what day it is. Throughout the play, experienced time is attenuated, fractured or eerily non-existent. The only thing that they are fairly sure about is that they are to meet at a tree: there is one nearby.

Estragon dozes off, but, after rousing him, Vladimir is not interested in hearing about his dream. Estragon wants to hear an old joke about a brothel, which Vladimir starts but cannot finish, as he is suddenly compelled to rush off and urinate. He does not finish the story when he returns, asking Estragon instead what else they might do to pass the time. Estragon suggests that they hang themselves, but they abandon the idea when it seems that they might not both die: leaving one of them alone, an intolerable notion. They decide to do nothing: "It's safer," explains Estragon, before asking what Godot is going to do for them when he arrives. For once it is Vladimir who struggles to remember: "Oh ... nothing very definite," is the best that he can manage.

When Estragon declares that he is hungry, Vladimir provides a carrot, most of which, and without much relish, the former eats. The diversion ends as Estragon announces that they still have nothing to do.

Their waiting is interrupted by the passing through of Pozzo and his heavily-laden slave Lucky. "A *terrible cry*" from the wings heralds the initial entrance of Lucky, who has a rope tied around his neck. His master appears holding the other end. Pozzo barks orders at his slave and frequently calls him a "pig", but is civil towards the other two. They mistake him at first for Godot and clearly do not recognize him for the self-proclaimed personage he is. This irks him,

but, while maintaining that the land that they are on is his, he acknowledges that "the road is free to all".

Deciding to rest for a while, Pozzo enjoys chicken and wine. Finished, he casts the bones aside, and Estragon jumps at the chance to ask for them, much to Vladimir's embarrassment, but is told that they belong to the carrier. He must first, therefore, ask Lucky if he wants them. Estragon tries, but Lucky only hangs his head, refusing to answer. Taking this as a "no", Estragon claims the bones.

Vladimir takes Pozzo to task regarding his mistreatment of his slave, but his protestations are ignored. When the original pairing tries to find out why Lucky does not put down his load (at least not unless his master is prevailing on him to do something else), Pozzo explains that Lucky is attempting to mollify him to prevent him from selling him. At this, Lucky begins to cry. Pozzo provides a handkerchief, but, when Estragon tries to wipe his tears away, Lucky kicks him.

Before he leaves, Pozzo asks if he can do anything for the pair in exchange for the company they have provided during his rest. Estragon tries to ask for some money, but Vladimir cuts him short, explaining that they are not beggars. They nevertheless accept an offer to have Lucky dance and to think.

The dance is clumsy and shuffling. Lucky's "think", induced by Vladimir's putting his hat on his head, is a lengthy and disjointed verbal stream of consciousness. The soliloquy begins relatively coherently but quickly dissolves into logorrhea and only ends when Vladimir rips off Lucky's hat.

Once Lucky has been revived, Pozzo has him pack up his things and they leave. At the end of the act (and its successor), a boy arrives, purporting to be a messenger sent from Godot, to advise the pair that he will not be coming that "evening but surely tomorrow." During Vladimir's interrogation of the boy, he asks if he came the day before, making it apparent that the two men have been waiting for an indefinite period and will likely continue to wait *ad infinitum*. After the boy departs, they decide to leave but make no attempt to do so, an action repeated in Act II, as the curtain is drawn.

Act II opens with Vladimir singing a recursive round about a dog. Once again Estragon maintains he spent the night in a ditch and was beaten – by "ten of them" this time – though he shows no sign of injury. Vladimir tries to talk to him about what appears to be a seasonal change in the tree and the proceedings of the day before, but he has only a vague recollection. Vladimir tries to get Estragon to remember Pozzo and Lucky, but all he can call to mind are the bones and getting kicked. Vladimir realises an opportunity to produce tangible evidence of the previous day's events. With some difficulty he gets Estragon to show him his leg. There is a wound which is beginning to fester. Only then Vladimir notices that Estragon is not wearing any boots.

He discovers the pair of boots, which Estragon insists are not his but nevertheless fit when he tries them on. With no carrots left, Vladimir offers Estragon the choice between a turnip and a radish. He opts for the radish but it is black and he hands it back. He decides to try to sleep again and adopts the same fetal position as the previous day. Vladimir sings him a lullaby.

Vladimir notices Lucky's hat, and tries it on. This leads to a frenetic hat-swapping scene. They play at imitating Pozzo and Lucky, but Estragon can barely remember having met them and

simply does what Vladimir asks. They fire insults at each other and then make up. After that, they attempt some physical routines which do not work out well and even attempt a single yoga position, which fails miserably.

Pozzo and Lucky arrive; with Pozzo now blind and insisting that Lucky is dumb. The rope is much shorter, and Lucky – who has acquired a new hat – leads Pozzo, rather than being driven by him. Pozzo has lost all notion of time, and assures them he cannot remember meeting them the day before, and does not expect to remember the current day's events when they are over.

They fall in a heap. Estragon sees an opportunity to extort more food or to exact revenge on Lucky for kicking him. The issue is debated. Pozzo offers them money but Vladimir sees more worth in their entertainment since they are compelled to wait to see if Godot arrives. Eventually though, they all find their way onto their feet.

Whereas Pozzo in Act I is a windbag, he now (as a blind man) appears to have gained some insight. His parting words – which Vladimir expands upon later – eloquently encapsulate the brevity of human existence: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, and then it is night once more."

Lucky and Pozzo depart. The same boy returns to inform them not to expect Godot today, but promises he will arrive the next day. The two again consider suicide but their rope, Estragon's belt, breaks in two when they tug on it. Estragon's trousers fall down, but he does not notice until Vladimir tells him to pull them up. They resolve to bring a more suitable piece and hang

themselves the next day, if Godot fails to arrive. Again, they agree to leave but neither of them makes any move to go.

Becket refrained from elaborating on the characters beyond what he had written in the play. He once recalled that when Sir Ralph Richardson “wanted the low-down on Pozzo, his home address and curriculum Vitae, and seemed to make the forthcoming of this and similar information the condition of his condescending to illustrate the part of Vladimir... I told him that all I knew about Pozzo was in the text, and that was true also of the other characters.” (Knowlson *Damned to Fame*).

As Roger Blin advises Becket heard their voices, but he couldn't describe his characters to me. He said that the only I'm sure of it is that they are wearing bowlers. The bowler hat was of course very common for male persons in many social contexts when Becket was growing up in Foxrock. “the hat passing game in this play and Lucky's inability to think without his hat on are two obvious Becket derivations from Laurel and Hardy-a substitution of form for essence, covering for reality.” (Gerald Mast *the Comic Mind*) and when he was asked why Lucky was so named, he replied: “I suppose he is lucky to have no more expectations.” (Duckworth *The Making of Godot*). The boy in Act I, a local lad, assures Vladimir that this is the first time he has seen him. He says he was not there the previous day. He confirms he works for Mr. Godot as a goatherd. His brother, whom Godot beats, is a shepherd. Godot feeds both of them and allows them to sleep in his hayloft. The boy in Act II also assures Vladimir that it was not he who called upon them the day before. He insists that this too is his first visit. When Vladimir asks what Godot does the boy tells him, "He does nothing, sir." We also learn he has a white beard –

possibly, the boy is not certain. This boy also has a brother who it seems is sick but there is no clear evidence to suggest that his brother is the boy that came in Act I or the one who came the day before that.

Dr. Kamyabi Masak in his article “Becket and Waiting for Godot” talks about the character types in this play. As he mentions, the issues related to types of characters are not normal, moreover, they are metaphysical issues. They are looking for a meaning for this daily life which is filled with intolerable situations, pain, and unexpected events. Vladimir is groping for this meaning, but does not find, so refuges in silence. These character types want to know themselves, too; most part of their search is happening inside. They are physically poor and out of the normal situation. They are living in a closed world. Moreover, they are mentally poor, too. As Mansoureh Ashrafi, in her critic named “About waiting for Godot” insists, although they are free to accept or deny the probable recommendations from Godot, but it seems as just a gesture to cover their undeniable force to accept him and to show a kind of right for themselves. Although we get the point that all their destiny and life depends on the coming of Godot and they do not have any choice other than waiting, to save their life. So, it is obvious that they have to accept anything related to Godot. As Taraneh Javanbakht claims in the article “A look at Waiting for Godot”; the important thing in this play is the dialogues among the characters, which contributes to its suspension of time, and making their waiting longer. According to Seoushita, in his article “Waiting for Godot and Samuel Becket”, this is a wonderful play which shows the shattering of humans in a post-war world. The main concern of Becket in this play is this: the human after nuclear war, the metamorphosis, humiliation, and despair of humans in a world in which they need to stick to somebody, and that somebody could be anybody... for showing this despair and



insanity of the characters, the best part of the play is the last scene, in which there is no future, and they go nowhere.

Mansoureh Ashrafi in her critic elaborates on the concept of time in the relationship between these characters, as she says, the play shows that it is a long time passed, and these two are again waiting for the character Godot, who sends messages about his coming tomorrow; their ways are not the same. Each has to go his own way, but there is just a common point between them, and that is the waiting. This waiting is endless and the point of connection between these two characters. These characters are stuck into a constancy of time, and are spinning around like an unforgiven involved in tiresome, and what gives to this play its comedy, is the hope they have toward their future, to Godot, who is going to save their lives.

The identity of Godot has been the subject of much debate. When Colin Duckworth asked Becket about whether Pozzo was Godot, the author replied: ‘No, it is just implied in the text, but it’s not true.’ (Harrap *From Desire to Godot*). When Roger Blin asked him who or what Godot stood for, Becket replied that it suggested itself to him by the slang word for boot in French, *godillot*, *godasse*, because feet play such a prominent role in the play. This is the explanation he has given more often. Becket also said to Peter Woodthorpe that he regretted calling the absent character ‘Godot’, because of all the theories involving God to which this had given rise. “I also told Richardson that if by Godot I had meant God I would have said God, and not Godot.” (Knowlson *Damned to Fame*). This seemed to disappoint him greatly. He once conceded, “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 Samuel Becket: A Biography). Becket tired quickly of “the endless misunderstanding”. As far back as 1955, he remarked, “Why people have to complicate a thing so simple I can’t make out.” (Knowlson Damned to Fame). But, as we see in the article “Becket and Waiting for Godot” by Dr. Ahmad Kamyabi Masak, this play, has the name of Godot in itself, which does not have any connection with God. Contrary to some interpretations by most critics in the time of the Cold War, this play is not vain, or even sad. Its internationality comes from the truth that in a world, full of injustice, war, suffering, lie, accusation, colonization, and exploitation humans are waiting for a savior, for a meaning for life, and they are hopeful. And this internationality is the point that has contributed to many different interpretations.

As Mansoureh Ashrafi shows, maybe Becket wanted to tell us that in the world today, you could be Master or Servant; if you are none, so you could be a human who, desperately longs for the help of Masters in power, with a destiny leading to slavery. Is life going to change after arrival of Godot? And, are they going to have a better life? Godot, who beats the messenger boy according to his own dialogues, and as they ask him if he is satisfied by his situation, he has no idea. As we read in a note written by Manizheh Shahrabi, Becket’s works are fearless, and are necessarily pessimistic about the humane situation. This feeling of pessimism becomes smoother with a sense of comedy. As we see, this sense indicates that this waiting or travel which the human owns is worthy although it bears many hardships in itself.

Vivian Mercier notes in her article in Irish Times that, this play “has achieved a theoretical impossibility- a play in which nothing happens, that yet keeps audiences glued to their seats. What’s more, since the second act is a subtly different reprise of the first, he has written a play in which nothing happens, twice.”(Mercier Beckett/Beckett).

As Erick Levi said, Becket, talks about a deadlock, which has started by the huge start of Humanism in west. From his point of view, the real descent happened, not in heaven, but in this century. As a matter of fact, the author Becket, questions everything at the place of a philosopher. These questions are fundamental questions about life, truth, and the relation of humans with these concepts. Hamed Darab in his essay “The Last History Waiting for Godot” talks about Becket as designing a revolutionary allegory of democratic people who are in the shallow and pale shadows of past.

Mostafa Abedinifar in his article named “Waiting for Godot and the vain waiting of human” tries to elaborate on the uselessness of life and vanity of human waiting. According to him, from about half a century ago, this play has been the start point of a kind of play writing named Absurd; this expression was first used by Martin Aslin, the literary critic, to describe the kind of writing and literary aspects of the plays which used to be called weird at that time, and were written mostly by writers such as Becket, Yonesco and...; there were considered by Aslin as writers who made most critics angry and most of the audiences surprised. Much of Becket’s work, including Godot, is mostly considered by literary scholars as part of this movement, that is, Theater of the Absurd. Absurdism is a branch of the traditional assertions of existentialism, pioneered by Soren Kierkegaard, and posits that, while inherent meaning might very well exist in

the universe, human beings are incapable of finding it due to some form of mental or philosophical limitation. Thus humanity is doomed to be forced with the Absurd, or the absolute absurdity of existence in lack of intrinsic purpose. Moreover, Jil Gustave, in his article named “At the Peak of Vanity” explains that Becket is one of the main pioneers of Nihilism in French Theater. As we know, the main objective of this school is to show the especial and somehow comic situations of humane life.

Broadly speaking, existentialists hold that there are fundamental questions that every human being must come to terms with if they are to take their subjective existences seriously and with intrinsic value. Questions such as death, the meaning of human existence and the place or lack of God in that existence are among them. By and large, the theories of existentialism assert that conscious reality is very complex and without an “objective” or universally known value. The individual must create value by affirming it and living it, not by simply talking about it or philosophizing it in the mind. The play may be seen to touch on all of these issues.

From ethical point of view, as Manizheh Shahrabi explains in her article, with this play on the stage, audiences have to confront with a shocking proclamation of war against God and religion. From another point of view, in each scene, the boy (or pair of boys) may be seen to represent meekness and hope before compassion is consciously excluded by an evolving personality and character, and in which case may be the youthful Pozzo and Lucky. Thus Godot is compassionate and fails to arrive every day, as he says he will. No one is concerned that a boy is beaten. In this interpretation, there is the irony that only by changing their hearts to be compassionate can the characters fixed to the tree move on and cease to have to wait for Godot.

But, in ethical semiotics, under the light of Salvation, we have ‘tree’, not as the symbol of despair in Christianity, but, as the symbol of hope and victory against the international powers. Tree, is again the symbol of hope in the play, as , especially in the second scene, there are leaves grown on it which show the coming of spring and summer, and of course, life. Because the play is so stripped down, so elemental, it invites all kinds of social and political and religious interpretations; as Normand Berlin wrote in a tribute to the play in Autumn 1999 “less forces us to look for more, and the need to talk about Godot and about Becket has resulted in a steady outpouring of books and articles.”

The idea that comes to the mind after reading or watching this play is that “the human has come to vanity, and does not know what he is waiting for.” Manizheh Shahraabi Says in her article “About Becket”. But, as we have already seen, it is a game, everything is a game. When all four of them are lying on the ground, that cannot be handled naturalistically. That has got to be done artificially, balletically. Otherwise, everything becomes an imitation, an imitation of reality. It should become clear and transparent, not dry. It is a game in order to ‘survive’.

In his article “A glance at Becket’s literary life: The Biter Comedy”, Gay Div Neport, considers that Becket’s plays start with “Waiting for Godot” and it philosophically ends with decadence, like most of his novels. After writing about ten plays, he now has come to a vacant stage, on which nothing happens-but a sad unknown yell. But, as we see in different interpretations, this yell, this sense that something is really going to happen, makes characters stay hopeful, and waiting for Godot, the savior, the end, to come. If it was talking about the issue of decadence, there would be no hope to be found, and no waiting at the end.

Mansoureh Ashrafi writes in “A Look at Waiting for Godot” that this play shows the extreme poverty of a human being and his dependence on powers which get his destiny in their own hands and feed him instead. This is the indication of the extreme poverty and vanity of any attempt to change the current situation and not reaching to any objectives in life. Maybe, she claims, Becket has wanted to tell that champions are dead. There are no saviors left and no hopes are remained. Loss is waiting at the end but, ironically there is no end. The point that there is no end is the element that makes them wait, for more. Nothing happens, and that is the point of living, this sense of constancy, this sense of arrival, and being doomed to wait for an illusion, is the main objective of life for human beings. And always pondering about some more excuses to come, much more hope that humans search for is the main reason of living, for a human being, who has to search inside for all these reasons.

The main theme of this play is the inability of human and his hope for improvement. The hope that just makes him continue his life, and bear the hardships in his life; the main picture here is the life of human beings in despair at the turn of living. People who are hopeful to make the situation better and change their lives, but they are not able to do so, and believe in an outward power, and are not to believe that their hope is vain. In a world whose structure is based on vanity, trying all the time to have hope is the main objective of living, and there is no way out of this for human. Waiting for Godot, tragically shows this hope in the destiny of human beings, on the other hand, it shows its theme in an objective way for having idealistically belief in a savior who never comes at the end, and it was not going to come from the first time, because there is no savior other than the hope and the sense of searching for an excuse.

From another point of view, Taraneh Javanbakht claims in her article “A Look at Waiting for Godot by Samuel Becket” , Vladimir and Estragon’s waiting for Godot’s arrival, comes to end, and shows one of main features of modern life which is losing the time and waiting endlessly. She elaborates in her article that Samuel Becket pictures the distress of modern human in his play, and the hope of these two characters toward the arrival of Godot, which goes on endlessly as each time they decide to forget about it, with some elements that make them not lose their hope. Of course, these elements are the main elements of living, because a human being needs to find a way to keep his hope constant all the time. With no hope, there would be no human beings alive in this world.

As a result, we come to the terms which describe hope and waiting in life in this play, as we see in the book “ A critical review of Waiting for Godot” by Aliakbar Alizad, this waiting does not show vanity, but it lives on to the end of the play. They think about suicide but they do not do it. On the other hand, we see the green tree in the second act, which indicates the continuance of life.

According to this part of the interview with Becket, done by Dr. Kamyabi Masal in 1993 in France, we get Becket’s ideas about waiting better:

“Dr. Kamyabi Masak: Were you waiting for someone or somebody?

Becket: No, (ponders) I have no idea. I give you an example. At night, a person waits for sunrise, and during the day for night and sleeping. This vain cycle exists and has no end.

Dr. Kamyabi Masak: In the English translation of the play you wrote the subtitle “Waiting for Waiting”; did you mean that this is the waiting which is sacred? Even when it is for the sake of waiting? That is, this waiting is the result of pondering and denying the current situation?

Becket: (at first he does not remember writing such a subtitle, but after some thinking accepts and answered) actually, waiting for waiting is sacred.”

Natan Leen, one of the actors who has the role of Estragon at Broadway these days, talks about the comic points of this play and its difference that interest him, “when a person gets older, this just becomes the real life, that is, it does not seem vain anymore.” This idea of sacred waiting, and waiting for waiting as the main objective of life, is somehow related to Osho’s idea of traveling for the sake of traveling, which is the sacred goal of it. Osho believes that life is always a continuance. There is no real end for going and reaching, just traveling itself means life, not coming to an exact point or an especial goal. So, the traveling is the goal, and that is the sacred thing. Each step, each moment of waiting and passing the time is sacred.

As a result, this play, is not sad, and just is a way of looking at the human being’s position in the world. It is a play without any start or even end, just like a real life, in which we are always in the middle, and, futures, and past, are always obscure, and similarly far.

Becket, was Irish, and thought in an Irish way. His life was full of adventure, travels, and hardship. He knew poverty-physically and mentally- of human beings very well. He was a patriot writer and he had his fellow-countrymen in his mind as his first audiences. He wrote for their knowledge to stop them from religious wars, and make them not wait for a political hero to save



them. He wanted them to rely on their own mind and thought to reach to their independence and the liberty they are always looking for in their country.

He was not nihilist, and his theater is not the theater of vanity or despair. He just shows boring , stressful, situations of life in a world full of injustice, wars, pains, lies , accusations, colonization, and exploitation. With the hope that in this life, which starts from mother's womb and ends to the grave, and which is really short, human beings avoid killing, torturing and hurting each other and be kind toward themselves.

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