



IRAQI
Academic Scientific Journals



العراقية
المجلات الأكاديمية العلمية



ISSN: 2663-9033 (Online) | ISSN: 2616-6224 (Print)

Journal of Language Studies

Contents available at: <http://jls.tu.edu.iq>

Slavery in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot

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| Keywords: Godot slavery waiting tramp human absurd nothing | Abstract Including two acts, Beckett's masterpiece <i>Waiting for Godot</i> is a tragicomedy through which the writer tries to throw much light on the problematic conditions of human beings. Although many studies have tackled this play, almost all of them are devoted to treat notions such as nihilism, existentialism, and life absurdity. However, no sufficient heed is donated to make concentration on one of the most important ideas stated in this play. It is of course slavery. The recent research represents an endeavour to illustrate the full extent to which this theme is dealt with in <i>Waiting for Godot</i> . The research also supplies the reader with a concise introduction that comprises some significant information about the play and its author. Followed by the endnotes and a bibliography, the conclusion occupies the termination to recapitulate that Beckett's play handles two types of bondage of which one is apparent and the other is not. |
| Article Info | |
| Article history: | |
| Received: 22-11-2020 | |
| Accepted: 13-12-2020 | |
| Available online | |

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العبودية في مسرحية صمويل بيكيت: في إنتظار غودو

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| الخلاصة: | الكلمات الدالة: - |
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| <p>في انتظار كودو هي مسرحية تتكون من فصلين حاول من خلالهما الكاتب صامويل بيكيت تسليط الكثير من الضوء على احوال الناس ومشاكلهم. لا يخفى ان هذه المسرحية كانت موضوع بحث للكثير من الدراسات لكنها في الغالب كانت تتمحور حول موضوعين وهما الوجودية وعبثية الحياة ومن دون التركيز على احد اهم الافكار التي ساهمت وبشكل كبير في تطور الاحداث في هذا العمل المسرحي الا وهو موضوع العبودية. الدراسة الحالية عبارة عن جهد لبحث موضوع العبودية بتمعن لتحديد مدى تناول هذا بدقة وقد توصل الباحث الى استنتاج مفاده ان المسرحية تناولت نوعين من العبودية احدهما ظاهر للعيان والاخر مخفي.</p> | <p>غودو العبودية الانتظار منشرد بشر العبث لاشيء</p> <p>معلومات البحث تاريخ البحث: الاستلام: 2020-11-22 القبول: 2020-12-13 التوفر على النت</p> |

A Brief Introduction

Born into an opulent family in Dublin, Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) is one of the greatest Irish dramatists. After getting education in the Portora Royal School and the Trinity College, he departed to France to reside in Paris where he closely worked with the Irish novelist James Joyce and his international circle at the end of the 1950s and as a result he became an inseparable participant in the polyglot and polyphonic of literature renovation world. Beckett "was an English-speaking, Protestant Irishman, and, as the full range of his work demonstrates, his highly literate, cricket-playing, Bible-reading, Irish background had a profound bearing on what and how he wrote."¹

He spends the majority of adult lifetime in France and that is what enables him to write his literary works using both English and French efficiently. Despite the reality that Beckett mostly writes using French language, arguably there was no other English writer had great impact upon the advancement of the post-war of English drama as this Irish dramatist has. His plays impose a deep effect on many playwrights including Harold Pinter because of their reconnaissance of human affairs. Beckett's dramatic works are disrobed "of social reference points, so that bare scenes of often grim,

unexplained lives stood symbolically for the wretched condition of human existence. His plays have often been explained in terms of existentialist explorations of the meanings of humanity shown without the trappings of civilisation and culture."²

Regarded as "one of the most innovative and difficult writers of the twentieth century,"³ Beckett doesn't like to imitate the classical form of the well-made play. He takes up writing a neoteric brand of drama. He adopts absurdism to express a melancholic viewpoint about life. He appears among the principal penmen of what is called the Theatre of the Absurd, an expression coined by the Hungarian-born British scholar Martin Julius Esslin to describe plays of specific Euro-American dramatists flourished in the 1950s and 60s.

Plays of writers; Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, Eugene Ionesco, Edward Albee along with Samuel Beckett are classified as absurdist dramas for presenting situations in which human life is meaningless. The actions are nihilistic for being purposeless and the figures are almost in a state of desperation. Impressed by the European philosophies of existence from Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Soren Kierkegaard, the absurd show focuses on the idea that man should occupy the centre of the universe where there is no part for God. Comprising no important conversations, the language is simple and is recognized by having many pauses and repetitions. Such type of plays almost needs "a linear plot or narrative, and players on stage seem to drift through rather than possess any particular role. Traditional conflicts, dramatic tensions are absent from these plays."⁴

In spite of the fact that the trilogy of Beckett's novels *Malone Dies*, *Molloy*, and *The Unnamable* uplifts him to be ranked with the esteemed Parisian authors of the 1950s who participate in bringing out quite modern literary notions, it is *Waiting for Godot* that donates this writer his favoured international fame. It is Beckett's translation into English of his own French version *Ed Attendant Godot* that has been composed between 1948-1949. Representing the best ripe work of the author, it is acted as an absurdist play with amazing prosperity all over Europe.

Waiting for Godot, which exhibits ache and trepidation of human beings using comic style, comes to be one of the marvellous plays of English modern drama. Edward Albert describes it as a balanced performance with the exclusion of structure or evolution, "using only meandering, seemingly incoherent dialogue to suggest despair of a society which is destroying itself and of mankind unsuspectingly surrendering its natural liberties."⁵ Esslin classifies this play among the optimum successful literary works "of the post-war theatre."⁶ In the words of G. C. Thornley and Gwyneth Roberts, the play "is one of the most influential works in English written this century. It takes away the surface detail from the situations it presents and shows their real nature."⁷ In his book *A Compendious History of English Literature*, R. D. Trivedi represents *Waiting for Godot* as "an absurdist play [that] explores the cause or causes of human suffering."⁸

Waiting is the central idea around which all the events as well as the dialogues are built. The play tells the story of two symbolic vagrants, Vladimir and Estragon, who are used to stand for all human beings. They have nothing to carry out but to wait for someone named Godot who tantalizes the two men by promising to show up but will never do

so. Perhaps he is not existent. They think that Godot is the rescuer they are waiting for and that is what leads them to believe that his coming will station a finale to their irksome waiting and to change their situation to be preferable. Speaking about reminiscences of the past, narrating tales, pulling out their boots and then wearing them again, each day they use to squander times setting in a bleak area near a leafless tree. At the end of both acts, Pozzo and his slave transpire and so does a lad supposed to be sent by Godot to inform the tramps that their efforts are in vain, Godot will not come today.

Every day they go on waiting endlessly though they do not have any information regarding his identity. Naught has taken place for them and nothing, of course, will take place. There are no important dissimilarities between the two acts. In the second one, Pozzo, the healthy man who has emerged guiding Lucky in act one, becomes blind for unknown causes and cannot recall any of the incidents of the previous day, and Lucky becomes mute. Showing dismal point of view with respect to the nature of human entity, the play appears "like an abstract painting very difficult to decipher."⁹

Slavery as Incarnated in *Waiting for Godot*

Found throughout history of most localities, slavery is an ancient inequitable system in conformity with which a slave is to be purchased and sold similar to any commodity. In this system, the balance between merit and retribution is lost. The imperative behests of the lord should be verbatim complied. The slave, man or a woman is to be possessed by another individual and is categorized as a private possession. The slave is obliged to achieve whatever the master wants for free. The serf who is owned for someone lifelong and whose kids should be spontaneously enslaved is called a chattel slave.

As in the whole of his plays, Beckett's characters originated in *Waiting for Godot* should suffer exceedingly and anguish is an inevitable actuality that should be accepted. They are tortured by making them intend things that they cannot gain or achieve and are paralyzed into unhappiness and immersed inside entire gloominess. Servitude is, with no doubt, a disgraceful torment and can be seen as self-inferno.

A profound glance into Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* reveals that two disparate grades of bondage are shown of which one is patent and is articulately demonstrated throughout the relation between the characters, Pozzo and Lucky, and the other is unintelligible. The most lucid slave one can identify in this play is Lucky for he faces real "physical suffering ... which is caused by man's cruelty to man."¹⁰ Employing Pozzo's bad treatment of his slave, the writer succeeds in making a good concentration on the ugliness of slavery. Created to be the victim of such a system, Lucky, on the one hand, is constrained to be pitilessly driven like an animal to the market paying no attention to his dignity as a human being and to the long years he has spent serving his master. Pozzo, on the other hand, appears as a despotic lord who uses a rope tied around the neck of the slave so as to be a means of communication. Words are replaced by jerking the rope to issue commands.

Being guided by a piece of cord that causes constant pain in the head along with the neck, Lucky, who stands for the best paragon of wretchedness and misery, is ready to execute anything to convince Pozzo to relinquish the idea of letting him be possessed by a new owner. He starts shedding tears as a result of Pozzo's loud declaration, "I hope to get a good price for him."¹¹ The master brutally insults Lucky saying, "old dogs have more dignity" (p. 32). Pozzo is accustomed to do so. It seems that it becomes a part of his daily routine that he has to humiliate the slave.

The engrossment in cruel brutality comes to be the sole incentive of Pozzo's entity. Cracking his lash, Pozzo aims to make loud and sharp sound that is at least offensive to anyone not only to the serf. Sometimes, Pozzo does not hesitate to put "the butt of his whip against Lucky's chest and pushes" (p. 24). The only option for Lucky is to be alert to proffer his master whatever he wants. Together with the whip, the master has used the rope to be an outrageous means for dealing with the slave. Pozzo hauls Lucky by drawing the harmful cord "as hard as he likes" (p. 87). In case that Lucky does not react for being exhausted, Pozzo does not vacillate to "give him a taste of his boot, in the face" (p. 87). For giving non-verbal commands, Pozzo drags the cord twelve times in order to retain Lucky heedful for carrying out what he demands. In each time, the helpless slave has no other choice but to put the heavy baggage down and to seek the object that his master wants then, "puts into Pozzo's hand, takes up everything again" (p. 89). Lucky has to be ready to implement this service several times in no more than a little of minutes.

Moreover, Lucky has to tolerate another type of insult. Pozzo calls him using animal names, "Up pig" and then "Up hog" (p. 23). Lucky even does not dare to look at Pozzo's face, "you look at me, pig" (p. 30). He has no time to get a break excluding the while during which his master is taking his meal. He usually sleeps upright. He starts sagging "slowly until bag and basket touch the ground, then straightens up with a start and begins to sag again" (p. 25).

As it is manifested in the following selected lines of a long conversation among Estragon, Vladimir, and Pozzo, the powerless bondman, who doesn't like to be sold, goes on carrying Pozzo's effects on his back while having a rest for he tries to cajole the owner so as to convince him to change his mind.

ESTRAGON: Why he doesn't put down his bags?

POZZO: He wants to impress me, so that I'll keep him.

ESTRAGON: What?

POZZO: Perhaps I haven't got it quite right. He wants to mollify me, so that I'll give up the idea of parting with him. No, that's not exactly it either.

VLADIMIR: You want to get rid of him?

POZZO: He imagines that when I see how well he carries I'll be tempted to keep him on in that capacity" (pp. 29, 31)

Although Lucky is always affronted, he refuses the thought that his tyrannical master tries to "get rid of him" (p. 32). The reasonable interpretation of such type of relevance is that the slave and his lord are inseparable. It means that one of them cannot go on existing deprived of the other. Their pertinence is specified by what is named the binary system which sometimes comes to mean the mutual reliance. G. J. V. Prasad points out that the intercourse between the preponderant lord and the feeble bondman "is a symbiotic relationship, the one needing the other to give purpose to their lives."¹²

As presented previously the realization of the unmistakable relation between a master and a slave, Pozzo and Lucky, is necessary to search for another sort of servitude that is still unseen and should be fetched into illumination. One more potent grade of slavery to be investigated in *Waiting for Godot* is the hazy one which can be elaborated by focusing on the relation among three characters; Vladimir, Estragon, and Godot. It is observed that some critics have the craving to evaluate the relevance between the elderly tramps in accordance with master-slave standard suggesting that Estragon is Vladimir's serf. The Poland philosopher Konstantine Kolenda, for example, states that Estragon is Vladimir's feeble chum who is not in a position to go on "without protection; Vladimir realizes that his very self depends on this ability to provide protection."¹³ It is unaccepted to adopt this idea simply because Vladimir does not act as a lord with Estragon. His treatment to his friend is totally dissimilar to that of Pozzo. He does not intentionally disregard or utilize Estragon's character while dealing with him as Pozzo behaves with his slave. Estragon receives no insult as Lucky does. This view point is of no avail for the reason that the play itself shows Estragon as the man who plays Pozzo's part as reflected in the following verbal game.

VLADIMIR: We could play at Pozzo and Lucky.
ESTRAGON: Never heard of it.
VLADIMIR: I'll do Lucky, you do Pozzo. (*He imitate Lucky sagging under the weight of his baggage. Estragon looks at him with stupefaction.*) Go on.
ESTRAGON: What am I to do?
VLADIMIR: Curse me!" (pp. 72-73)

Furthermore, each of Estragon and Vladimir expresses the same ratio of toil that comes as a consequence of their weary and continuous waiting. Near a country route and a bare tree, they "stay sitting on a low mound." (p. 9) They are not permitted to leave except if there is an agreement brought by a boy supposed to be sent by Godot.

In his article, *Thematic Conduciveness to the Invisible Vassalage in Waiting for Godot*, Abdul-Settar Abdul-Latif Al-Assady espouses the idea that both of the tramps behave as if they are no more than a couple of vassals who serve one lord. Vladimir and Estragon adopt a favourable reaction towards Godot similar to that of Lucky to Pozzo but no one regards attentively their slavery which remains unseen. Al-Assady states that the unstaged fear which is prevalent "in Vladimir's and Estragon's mundus and it is engendered and triggered by no one but the invisible boggle who prevails in the dark of the peripheral plot while in the nucleus plot the staged vassalage develops furrows

of fear and trepidation(on the part of the slave). It, on the reader and audience, grooves hearts with contrasted feelings of disgust and pity."¹⁴

Believing that Godot is God, others don't agree to compare Godot to an autocratic master as Al-Assady does. Eva Metman says that Godot has many characteristics "in common with the image of God as we know it from the Old and New Testament."¹⁵ R. D. Trivedi, who asserts that Godot "is no other than God,"¹⁶ believes that *Waiting for Godot* is of religious importance for Estragon and Vladimir are aware of their Bible, "I must have taken a look at it" (p. 12), and are annoyed about their deliverance, "our Saviour, two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other [is] damned" (p. 12). Sanjay Das thinks that Godot is death. He announces that we fill up our lifetime doing varying parts "imposed on us by unseen or invisible authority like Godot."¹⁷

In this context, one has to ask an important question. Is it reasonable to state that Godot is the Almighty God? The researcher deems that it is not intellectual to embrace like this idea or to believe it simply because God is not to come by himself to any passive one for feeding or putting an end to the suffering that he or she may face. All divine religions including Islam and Christianity emphasize the importance of labour rather than waiting. It is work that grants signification for our lives. It is the practice through which we render ourselves beneficial for other people. There is no exception; even the prophets and the messengers who have been sent by the Almighty God depend on their own jobs as a means of subsistence.

In the Holy Quran, the verse 11, Al-Nabaa Sura, for example, comes to incite all Muslims to look for works. Allah, in this verse, informs people that he creates the daytime to be luminous in order to empower them to go to work for getting their living. In Islam, it is mandatory to have a vocation, but "Muslims should not get a job that violates Allah's orders."¹⁸

The Christian perspective regarding the signification of work concentrates on the truth "that work is the basis for all that we put on earth to accomplish."¹⁹ moreover, as mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 3: 10, if a person who has the ability to work and hasn't the inclination to do so, "neither let him eat."²⁰

All human beings are designed by the Almighty God to work but not to take a seat waiting for somebody to improve their situation. Labour is not an imprecation that one has to bear, it is the right process that makes us subsist experiencing enjoyable life. Shunning work, definitely, represents one's inescapable way towards misery.

Other critics take up the exposition that the two bums are bondsmen of time. They stumble their path throughout living for having no opinion concerning what else they have to carry out. Comparing time to a deadly illness, cancer, Martin Stephen concentrates on this interpretation maintaining that time represents a principal factor in all of Beckett's dramatic works including *Waiting for Godot*. He annexes that humans are impotent in the clasp of time that originates and smashes us in accordance with its appetite paying no attention to our approval. Life, Stephen believes, is nothing more

than an expanded trip to the final destination, the sepulchre. It is a cruel headway to do nothing and no other choice is available but to continue "even though we have nothing to go on to."²¹

Depending on Humanism, "a theoretical orientation that emphasizes the unique qualities of humans, especially their freedom and their potential for personal growth,"²² the new opinion that the researcher wants to deal with is that each of Estragon and Vladimir are nothing else than being slaves of their ignorance. They are naive for their bid to pass lifetime, "fifty years perhaps" (p. 53), waiting for a person who will not come. They decide to keep their hope alive that he will reach them for they want to believe that he is real.

They have no certain idea about how and when to meet Godot, "You're sure it was this evening" (p. 15). As there is no work to effect, Estragon proposes, "let's hang ourselves immediately!" (p. 17) Then they change their mind, "let's wait and see what he says." (p. 18) The only job they can achieve is to wait. It is even not allowed to dream or at least to tell a dream.

ESTRAGON: I had a dream.
VLADIMIR: Don't tell me!
ESTRAGON: I dreamt that...
VLADIMIR: DON'T TELL ME! (PP. 15-16)

The following examples clarify that the repeated discussions within the play expose one fact; the two vagabonds are not competent to act or even to choose.

ESTRAGON: Let's go.
VLADIMIR: We can't.
ESTRAGON: Why not?
VLADIMIR: We are waiting for Godot. (p. 14)

At the end of Act One, when they get Godot's notification that he will not arrive, they finally reach the conclusion that they should leave. But they do not do so.

ESTRAGON: Well, shall we go?
VLADIMIR: Yes, let's go.
(They do not move) (p. 54)

Humanists lay stress on free will as well as one's faculty to select the best way to enjoy blissful life. They focus on humans' power to triumph over their vulnerability. Free will represents an inevitable ingredient of the nature of humans and the sole one who is authorized to identify one's path of living is the same person. In an agreement with Carl Rogers' Humanistic Psychology, "everyone has a need to self-actualize, which is a tendency towards growth and realization of their full potential."²³ Each individual must excavate expectations relying on his or her potential abilities and to demonstrate the potency to overthrow all problems one may face.

The most momentous tenets of Humanistic Psychology that aim to venerate human beings as powerful and perceptive to establish a meaningful life can be stated as follows:

- "A human being is more than just a sum of his or her parts.
- Human beings have free will and make conscious choice. They are not driven by instinct or impulse alone.
- Human beings have international goals and seek to create meaning in life."²⁴

In *Waiting for Godot*, wait comes out as if it is a buttress to which Estragon and Vladimir are confined. They cannot be alert to what their free will may do and that is what makes them unable to infringe this shackle. In spite of the truth that the man they are waiting for will not appear, they persist having expectation that he will come one day. They accept to be ignorant and to be doomed to the concept of being constantly waiting for nothing instead of trying to find the man somewhere. It is impossible to be restricted by Godot's arrival. They are not arrested for no one detains them. The matter is that they fail to behave as unchained men and as a result to take the initiative to solve their problems with their hands. It is impartial to elucidate that such people, who express no effort to help themselves, deserve no riddance.

Their waiting is meaningless for being fruitless. Passing life time for naught, just for having a creed within their souls that Godot is real, mutates them to be the victims of their knowledge shortage for no proof is obtainable about the actuality of whom they are waiting. Is it possible to keep waiting forever believing that someone will come to give one's life meaning and to change it to be better than the anterior period? The logical answer is, of course, no. It is not rational to stay in a bare place doing no job and the cause is a man will show up to take care of them. One has to be in a position to exploit the faculty given by God to behave as a freed person in order to be able to deal with the vicissitudes of time during the journey of life that cannot be described as meaningless or hopeless. It is correct that life is a trip towards death, but, at the same time, it is not fair to say that it is nihilistic for it consists of a lot of stations of which so many are successful, meaningful, and enjoyable. To relish life, one has to be serious rather than careless.

Conclusion

It is to sum up that Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* presents two varieties of slavery; one is visual and is represented by the pertinence between Pozzo and Lucky. There is a sheer harmony among critics concerning this type. The other class is a non-announced one. Estragon's and Vladimir's senseless waiting cannot be justified other than being slaves of their ignorance that makes two tramps isolated far from the mental arithmetic that can liberate them to be outside the limits of the idea of waiting.

Notes

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2. John Brannigan, "Twentieth Century, 1939-2004: Literary Overview," in *English Literature in Context* Ed., by Paul Poplawski (Cambridge: C. U. P., 2008), P. 629
3. Ronan Mcdonald, *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge: C. U. P., 2006), p. 6
4. Pramod K. Nayar, *A Short History of English Literature* (Cambridge: C. U. P., 2009), P. 405
5. Edward Albert, *History of English Literature* (New Delhi: O. U. P., 1979), P. 591
6. Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Penguin Books. 1980), p. 3
7. G. C. Thornley and Gwyneth Roberts, *An Outline of English Literature* (England: Longman, 1998), p. 171
8. R. D. Trivedi, *A Compendious History of English Literature* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House PVT LTD, 2010), p. 759
9. T. Singh, *A History of English Literature* (Kurukshehra: Student Store, 2008), p. 568
10. R. D. Trivedi, p. 759
11. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1965), p. 32. All subsequent references to this play will be to this edition.
12. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* Ed., G. J. V. Prasad (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. xxiv.
13. Konstantine Kolenda, *Philosophy in Literature* (London: The MacMillan Press. 1982), p. 162
14. Abdul-Settar Abdul-Latif Al-Aassady, "Thematic Conduciveness to the Invisible Vassalage in *Waiting for Godot*," URL: <https://www.academia.edu/attachments/35175057/download-file?st=MTU4NDc4...> p. 4 of 18.
15. Eva Metman, "Reflections on Samuel Beckett's Plays," in *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays* Ed., Martin Esslin (New Delhi: Prentice Hall, 1965), p. 125
16. R. D. Trivedi, p. 759
17. Sanjay Das, "We Born to Die: *Waiting for Godot* Is Actually Waiting for Death," URL: <https://www.academia.edu/28787361/WE-BORN-TO-DIE-WAITING-FOR-GODOT-IS-ACTUALLY-WAITING-FOR-DEAHT>, p. 489.
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19. Chuck Bentley, "The Importance of Work, a Christian Perspective" URL: <https://godreports.com/2012/06/the-importance-of-work-a-christian-perspective>, p. I of 3

20. ibid

21. Martin Stephen, *English Literature* (England: Longman, 2000), p. 327

22. Wayne Weiten, *Psychology: Themes and Variations* (USA: Wadsworth, 2008), p. 392

23. Parisa Shams, "Waiting for Godot and the Question of Humanism" URL: <https://www.academia.edu/3776074/waiting-for-godot-and-the-question-of-humanism>. p. 175.

24. Tiffany Frye, "Humanistic Approach in Psychology: Definition and History" URL: study.com/academy/lesson/humanistic-approach-in-psychology-definition-lesson-quiz.html p. 2 of 4 .

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