

# Optimism in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

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**ABSTRACT:** Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is an image of human condition and it is concerned with the theme of survival. The playwright wants to communicate the problematic nature of man's situation in the world. Beckett's plays are not pessimistic even though they deal with the disillusionment and despair of the modern world. What Beckett tries to communicate is not one of despair but of courage and hope to face the human condition as it is, with all its mystery. There is no cause for despondency and despair. Man should face the realities of life and he need not feel disheartened at his suffering and misery. To laugh at our own misery is the only way of coming to terms with it. This paper is an attempt to explain how the theme of existence is dealt with by the dramatist in his *Waiting for Godot*.

## I. INTRODUCTION

It is not fair to see only the negative side of Beckett's thought. As life has proved a disappointment, there is bitterness in his writings. "underlying the Beckettian man's nihilism is a frustrated hunger for the good and the poor. Beckett's writings present to us the sickness of our own times. His way of dealing with the despair of our times is unorthodox. He has created a black and formless world. He is ruthless in his insistence on the human facts of loneliness and emptiness. Darkness does not eliminate hope. In his dark world we can see a distant point of light and a dim hope.

Frustration is also a promise in Beckett's peculiar art. By abandoning hope and the quest for ultimate meaning, the absurd man realizes the meaning of his condition. If his life is hopeless, he tries to revolt against absurdity. When the absurdity of life is recognized, existence is felt as value in itself. For if life is hopeless and meaningless, he is at once liberated and put in a position to exercise his freedom in a revolt against absurdity.

Love, pity and hope are possible in the world of Beckett. Love is one of the most persistent ideals in his writings. Beckett's characters reveal unexpected virtues: charity, compassion and firm resolve to endure. In *Waiting for Godot*, Pozzo says "Let us not speak ill of our generation, it is not in any way unhappier than its predecessors."

Vladimir sees no leaf in the willow tree and thinks that it must be dead. But Estragon says "No more weeping". His statement shows that there is no use shedding tears over a dead tree. The tree which sprouts some leaves in Act II is a symbol of hope. It represents the possibility of renewal of mankind through God's grace.

The two tramps in *Waiting for Godot* live in hope and optimism. To them Godot represents hope, peace and rest. They manage to draw themselves back from despair at the end of the play and give up their attempt to commit suicide. They are waiting for Godot with some hope. "As they do not lose hope, are waiting for Godot with some hope, they are naive, incurably optimistic ideologists". Vladimir is an optimist and he is hopeful of Godot's coming. He gives hope to Estragon who doubts Godot's coming. "Ah Gogo, don't go on like that. Tomorrow everything will be better". He hopes that Godot will come and reward them. His answer is an encouraging one to Estragon. It represents the enduring hope of mankind. They hope that they are the blessed in their waiting. The tramps' waiting resembles the French resistance against the cruelty of the Nazis. The savagery and cruelty of the Nazis were absurd. But the courage and sacrifice of the group who resisted them prove man's noble faith and hope in himself. We can believe that Godot is God and they are God's messengers. It is said that Godot is a weakened form of God. As God is invisible, Godot is not seen on the stage. He has sent his messenger. Godot is man's hope. He might be "happiness, eternal life, the unattainable quest of all men."

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## II. WAITING FOR GODOT

Godot can be explained as god, love, hope etc. He has several traits in common with the image of God as depicted in the old and new testaments. His white beard reminds us of the image of the old father aspect of God. His irrational preference for one of the two brothers recalls Jehovah's treatment of Cain and Abel. The discrimination between the goatsherd and the shepherd is reminiscent of the son of god as the ultimate Judge as the Saviour for whom men wait. It may be a comment on the second coming of Christ.

The messenger boy comes with the news that Godot will come tomorrow. But Godot inspires less confidence. He has some hold over the tramps which prevents them from cancelling their appointment with him. If he comes, he may bring a change in their present meaningless condition. Godot non-arrival keeps the two tramps waiting for him and their faith in him alive. The godot fails to appear in the play, he is as real a character as other characters in the play. The tramps need godot to give a meaning to their existence. Godot's very absence demonstrated his presence and he dominates the play in which he fails to appear. Their waiting for godot seems to suggest that through the ages mankind has waited for a savior.

Lucky, in his famous speech, points out that inspite of the existence of a loving God is existence of a loving God and progress of various kinds, man is full of decline. His statement shows that God is existing and He is loving and blessing man. Lucky accepts that there are many kinds of progress in the world. Salvation is possible in the world of Beckett. We find "basic metaphysical and theological issues at the heart of all Beckett's work: suffering, death, guilty, judgement and salvstion".

The possibility of salvation is an issue of crucial importance in Beckett's plays. The seed of Waiting for Godot is Luke's account of crucifixion as summarized by St. Augustine: " don't despair: one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one o the thieves was damned". The tramps feel guilty like the thieves. Yet one the thieves was saved. The reference to salvation is found in Vladimir's mention of the two th ~~IE~~ ~~EV~~ ~~E: S~~ crucified on either side of Christ. So there is a note of hope and optimism. Vladimir says "it's a reasonable percentage".

Vladimir and Estragon represent one man. The connection between the two is a life sustaining relationsip. They are full of frustration but they never leave. There is a profound need which each feels for other. This need transforms their limitation of hatred into tenderness. It is one of genuine friendship. Vladimir as Estragon's protector sings him to sleep. As a teacher to his pupil he teaches many things. He looks after Estragon like a fond parent caring for his child. Their warmth in the middle of despair is the world's.

Pozzo and Lucky are another inseparable pair. Lucky wants to have a good relationship with Pozzo. For this he has sacrificed everything., even his creativeness. He accepts his abject misery and slavery. They represents the two complementary sides of society. They could be as parts of a divided self. They represent one way of getting through with someone else just as Vladimir and Estragon represented another way of doing so. They represented the relationship between body and mind, the relation between material and spiritual sides of man. Without Lucky, Pozzo cannot move forward. Lucky cannot move except Pozzo's orders. In fact Lucky teachers Pozzo all the higer values of life.

## III. CONCLUSION

So it's clear that Beckett's characters, despite their worries and problems want to enjoy material happiness. They are not ready to lose their hope in life and want to live life fully. They know that their life is full of misery, but they find some kind of happiness in this miserable world. They re courageous enough to face the realities of world and seem to hope that their life is worth living.

In Beckett's eye all men are like two tramps. They are the champions of the view that life must have a meaning even in a meaningless situation. They are incapable of losing hope. They hope that life itself is a value of Judgement and that



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living means choice. So they exist and find way to survive. Waiting or Godot deals with such a kind of life. The play is about mankind's attempts to fiddle its way through life.

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