



# The Image of The Tramps' Suffering in Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot"

**Lecturer. Ahmed Yasir Dhain**

Dept. of English. College of Education for Humanities, Univ. of Thi-Qar

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.37648/ijrssh.v11i01.003>

**Paper Received:**

15<sup>th</sup> December, 2020

**Paper Accepted:**

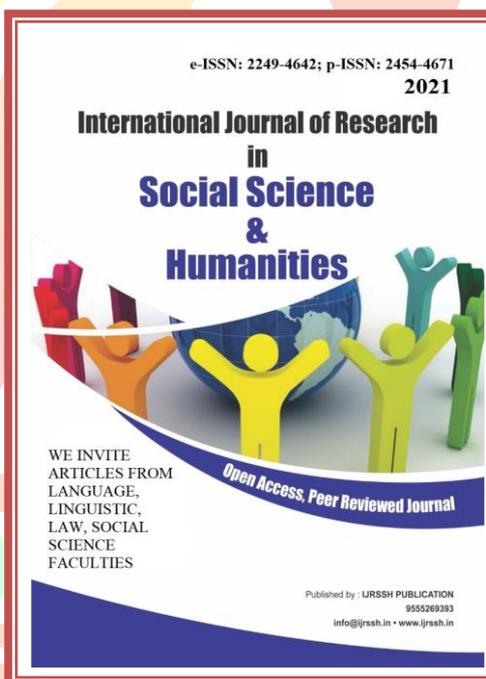
02<sup>nd</sup> January, 2021

**Paper Received After Correction:**

06<sup>th</sup> January, 2021

**Paper Published:**

11<sup>th</sup> January, 2021

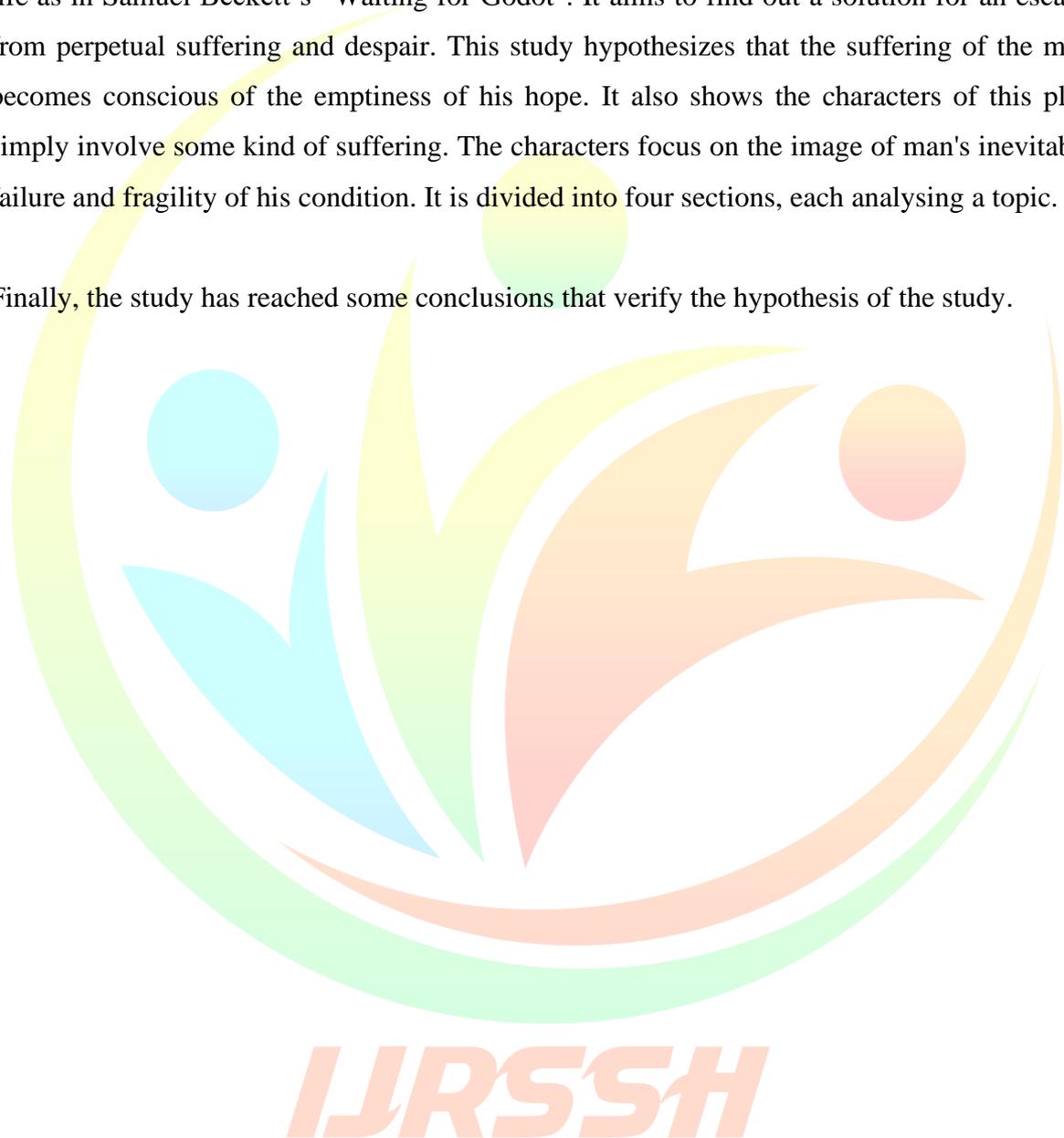


**How to cite the article:** Ahmed Yasir Dhain, The Image of The Tramps' Suffering in Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot", IJRSSH, January-March 2021 Vol 11, Issue 1; 26-35, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.37648/ijrssh.v11i01.003>

## ABSTRACT

This study is distinctively restricted to the study of the image of the tramps' suffering in investigating the relationship between the character and its destiny in the meaninglessness of life as in Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot". It aims to find out a solution for an escape from perpetual suffering and despair. This study hypothesizes that the suffering of the man becomes conscious of the emptiness of his hope. It also shows the characters of this play simply involve some kind of suffering. The characters focus on the image of man's inevitable failure and fragility of his condition. It is divided into four sections, each analysing a topic.

Finally, the study has reached some conclusions that verify the hypothesis of the study.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett shows a great deal of concern about human condition. Through the characters of Estragon and Vladimir, Beckett presents the unbearable condition of man becoming conscious of his existential predicament, helplessness and isolation. This play is an attempt at depicting man's failure to find an escape from the twist of life and his failure to put an end to the suffering and frustration ensuing such a failure.

### 1.1 Beckett's Style

Beckett's style is characterized by the use of ordinary words and short sentences. His characters do not indulge in philosophical or moral arguments but they seldom soliloquize and they never preach. It focuses on movement as much as speech that is one of his main element in his plays by which Beckett keeps his characters busy. Beckett presents an experience not an argument, truth not a statement. Beckett reduces the specific to a minimum in plot and characterization. Beckett changes between the acts that do not produce a new situation. His plays are full of despair, pessimism, misery and the unnecessary complexity.

Beckett's style is shown in *Waiting for Godot*:-

Vladimir: What do you do when you fall far from help?

Pozzo: We wait till we can get up. Then we can go on.

### 1.2 *Waiting for Godot*: Plot

In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon – two vagabonds, have been brought on the stage to wait, which is probably the only thing they are able to do. They, however, are conscious of their inability to do anything, as is clear in the following dialogue which runs on as a refrain throughout the play

Estragon: ... let's go,

Vladimir: we can't.

Estragon: why not ?

Vladimir: we're waiting for Godot. (Beckett, 1978)

The identity of the ' Godot' they are waiting for is ambiguous and there are many interpretations concerning his character. ( Chiari, 1965) However, Godot could be anything one is living for, or, in the case of the tramps, waiting for. Waiting; then, is more essential to the subject of the play than ' Godot'. Rolf Breuer maintains that: " the attitude of waiting becomes an inevitable life style and an end in itself." ( Breuer, 1976) It is through waiting that man becomes conscious of himself, or rather in confrontation with himself. By the act of waiting the two tramps suffer despair, dull

anguish, boredom, and isolation. They think of committing suicide, either by throwing themselves from " the top of Eiffel Tower", which is " too late", or by hanging themselves from a bough, which they fail to do:

Estragon: You could hang on to my legs.

Vladimir: And who'd hang on to mine ?

Estragon: True.

Vladimir: Show all the same. ( Estragon loosens the cord that holds up his trousers which, much too big for him, fall about his ankles.

They

look at the cord. ) It might do at a pinch.

But it is

strong enough.

Estragon: we' ll soon see. Here.

( They each take an end of the cord and pull,

it breaks. They almost fall. )

Vladimir: Not worth a curse.

( silence)

Estragon: You say we have to come back tomorrow?

Vladimir: Yes.

Estragon: Then we can bring a good bit of rope.

Their situation is helpless. They believe that death might be an escape from this

intolerable state, but they fail to attain even this. They are denied any opportunity, and any means, to get rid of this state of waiting and enduring.

### 1.3 The Image of The Tramps' Suffering in Beckett's Waiting for Godot

Suffering is a part of human life. Hence, Vladimir and Estragon are constantly shown to suffer intensely. They have no place to rest or relax in. Estragon is all along tortured by his feet beaten by the ruffians for no reason. During their waiting, Vladimir and estragon talk about their redemption. They indulge themselves in speculations about the possibility that even when Godot comes, he may not save them: " Our Saviour. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other .... Damned. " this shows man's doubt, and consequently his suffering due to his mysterious relationship with the ' awaited Saviour'. This results in man's fear of the unknown, of the uncertainty. This uncertainty shows the vagueness of man's spiritual quests. Another side of suffering is that of Lucky's who reflects the human condition by dancing what Pozzo calls " the dance of the net". Lucky is obliged to dance it though he does not seem to want to.

The state of despair that characterizes this play 'waiting for Godot' is probably is the absence of religious perspective. The setting is bare and frighteningly empty which gives the impression of homelessness. To alleviate the boredom of their situation, the tramps try to busy themselves with different movements, gestures, and responses. To break the monotony of their universe, they carry on talking:

" That's the idea, let's make a little conversation"

or

" That's the idea, let's contradict each other. "

This, in fact, indicates the emptiness of their hope. To fill this nothingness of their life, they turn to trivial activities. They either quarrel, make jokes, eat carrots and radishes or play with hats or shoes. Their simple belongings serve " as a means of exteriorizing their feelings and the awareness of their condition." (Chiari, 1965) Their understanding of reality is, however, not the same.

#### 1.4 The Tramps: Vladimir and Estragon

The two heroes in 'Waiting for Godot', are frequently referred to as tramps. They have no identity. One feels sympathetic for

them. They are seen as fools and tramps and as having inadequate power. However, they may be doing a heroic deed by endlessly waiting for someone they do not know. Vladimir represents the intellectual side of man, while Estragon represents the material one. Vladimir is always busy with thoughts, estragon with carrots, radishes and bones. Vladimir is always busy with his hat:

(He takes off his hat again, peers inside it, feels about

inside it, knocks on the crown, blows into it, puts it on again)

Estragon with his shoes:

(Estragon with a supreme effort succeeds in pulling off his boot. He looks inside it, feels about inside it, turns it upside down, shakes it, looks on the ground to see if anything has fallen out, finds nothing, feels inside it again, staring sightlessly before him).

This explains, why, on the other hand, Vladimir is always meditating (He is constantly looking for explanations to grasp a sort of meaning for their situation) and why Estragon, on the other, deals with his material desires. When Vladimir asks him whether he remembers any past events, he answers: " I am not a historian ". Estragon, A. Alvarez says, " behaves more or less as though brain- damaged. (Alvarez, 1975) He fails to remember

events from the nearest past. He insists on answering Vladimir: " I don't know". He finds comfort in ignorance. Estragon is " everyman or rather the majority of people who need blind faith to make life worth living". (Metwally, 1971) So the situation is less intolerable to him than to Vladimir. Despite the discrepancy of their awareness, both are trying to know, that is to search reassurance for their existence, or to give their life what Webb calls, " the meaningful patterns". (Webb, 1972) But their attempts begin and develop, and then suddenly evanesce, and as these attempts have no motivation, they cannot put an end to the tramps' s state of helplessness.

The course of their conversation shows that Vladimir and estragon undergo – a sort of mental depression. So many times in the play it occurs that while one of them is talking about a certain topic we see the other's mind occupied with its own indifferent series of thoughts.

When Pozzo asks them for help, Vladimir sinks in his own reflection:

Pozzo : Help !

Estragon : is it Godot?

Vladimir : we were beginning to weaken.  
Now

We're sure to see the evening out.

Pozzo: Help!

Estragon: Do you hear him?

Vladimir: We are no longer alone, waiting  
for the night,

Waiting for godot, waiting for ----,  
waiting. All evening

We have struggled, unassisted now it is  
over.

It's already tomorrow.

Pozzo: Help!

Vladimir: Time flows again already. The  
sun will set,

the moon will rise, and we away... from  
here.

This piece shows the working of the mind under depressed circumstances. It reveals also man's isolation in a situation as that of the tramps, one in which communication is difficult if not impossible. And since Vladimir represents the mental aspect of man, it suggests the failure of the human mind to grasp any sort of order when it is under the stress of intense suffering.

The decline of the mental power and the lack of freedom of the tramps are better reflected through the relationship of Pozzo, the master, and Lucky, his servant. Lucky can dance to , think for and amuse Pozzo, but because he is bound to Pozzo. This kind, helpful and entertaining " good angel", as Pozzo himself calls him, becomes " killing". His dancing and killing changes into meaningless gibberish:

The practice of sports such as tennis  
football running

cycling swimming flying floating riding  
gliding conating  
camogie skating tennis of all kinds dying  
flying sports  
of all sorts autumn summer winter tennis  
of all kinds  
hockey of all sorts penicillin.

Lucky's speech shows, that it could have emanated from nowhere but a distracted mind, a mind which has lost its control. It shows the disconnection of thought within Lucky's mind.

Vladimir' s and Estragon' s relationship with Godot is as that of lucky and pozzo. As Lucky's slavery to Pozzo deprives him of his freedom as well as his faculties. The two tramps face the same end we have just seen: Vladimir' s breakdown of mental power and estragon's forgetfulness.

While the tramps are undergoing this terrible life, the boy messenger comes to tell them that Godot will not come " this evening" but he will come " tomorrow." So they are ' tied' to this promise, but in Act II, the boy comes again to tell them that Godot will not come " this evening" but he will come "tomorrow". And the play ends with the feeling that tomorrow the boy will come to tell them the same thing, leaving them living in despair and frustration.

The philosopher Thomas Reid once said that " When a man is racked with pain, or with expectation, he can hardly think of anything but his distress and the more his mind is occupied by that sole object, the longer the time appears". ( Whitrow, 1980) This statement serves best as a true description of the situation of the tramps. Since the individual feels the movement of time only when he is trying to satisfy his own desires, that is when he is living for certain aims, and since the tramps' universe denies them any satisfaction, so time is slowing down toward a halt, but does not actually grind to a halt. The tramps are waiting but they cannot end their waiting. Beckett dramatizes Vladimir' consciousness when he makes him aware of the heaviness of time:

All I know is that the hours are long under  
these conditions, and constrain us to  
beguile  
them with proceeding which – how shall I  
say  
which may at first seem reasonable, until  
they  
become a habit.

In such a world in which what is happening is a ' habit', change is impossible. There is no hope for the renewal of life. Life becomes a mere repetition. When Vladimir asks Pozzo to tell lucky to sing , Pozzo answers that

lucky is dumb; Vladimir inquires; Dumb?  
 Since when? Pozzo is evoked by the word '  
 when' "

Pozzo: ( suddenly furious). Have you not  
 done tome-

ning me with your accursed time! It's  
 abominable!

when! When ! One day, is that not enough  
 for you,

One day like any other day....

Pozzo's speech emphasizes the recurrence  
 of human misery. Life is no more than a  
 monotonous note. Dramatically speaking,  
 the audience expect that some change will  
 happen. But till the end of the play this  
 change never occurs. The lack of change is  
 carried further by the language of the play  
 as well as its structure. Lucky 's  
 nonsensical speech lacks the much needed  
 element- proper pauses. Such as :

The practice of sports such as tennis  
 football running

cycling swimming flying floating riding  
 gliding conating

camogie skating tennis of all kinds dying  
 flying sports

of all sorts autumn summer winter tennis  
 of all kinds

hockey of all sorts penicillin.

This shows Beckett's distrust of the  
 adequacy of language as a means of  
 communication. His belief springs from  
 his philosophy of life in general. He thinks  
 that life is meaningless, so there is no need  
 for the meaningless artificiality of  
 language. As for the structure, the second  
 act is a mere repetition of the first. '  
 Nothing' happens twice in the play. The  
 curtain falls and the audience is sure that  
 even if there were a third act, there would  
 be " nothing to be done ". This nothingness  
 reflects Beckett's idea that nothing in life is  
 worth presenting. The repetition of the  
 same situation in both acts shows the  
 vanity of the tramps' waiting. In so doing  
 Beckett wants to give vladimir's and  
 estragon's experience a universal  
 dimension emphasizing the fact that this  
 same situation " will for ever repeat  
 [itself]". (Esslin, 1968)

The life of Vladimir and estragon lead is  
 meaningless and since they lack the power  
 to end their desperate condition, so there is  
 no choice but to go on living though  
 painfully and aimlessly.

#### CONCLUSION

In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett reveals the  
 emptiness of our life and the  
 meaninglessness of our destiny. This play  
 explores man's attempts to liberate himself  
 from his endless misery, and the fatality of

his failure to evade it. The situation of Vladimir and Estragon is that of man searching for an escape from perpetual suffering and despair, and who, at the end, becomes conscious of the emptiness of his hope. There is no choice but to wait and

suffer. Through the characters of waiting for Godot, Beckett portrays an image of man's inevitable failure and fragility of his condition. So the hypothesis of this study is accepted.



## REFERENCES

1. Alvarez, A. (1975). Beckett. Fontana: Collins.
2. Beckett, S. ( 1978). Waiting for Godot. London: Faber and Faber.
3. Breuer, R. ( 1976). The Solution As problem : Beckett' s Waiting for Godot in Modern Drama. Vol. XIX.
4. Chiari, J. ( 1965). The Landmarks of Contemporary Drama. London : Herbert Jenking.
5. Esslin, M. ( 1968). The Theatre of the Absurd. London: Eyre & Spottiswoods.
6. Metwally, A. ( 1971). Studies in Modern Drama. Beirut: Bouheiry Brotuers.
7. Webb, E. ( 1972). The plays of Samuel Beckett. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
8. Whitrow, G. ( 1980). The Natural Philosophy of Time. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

