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Waiting for Godot—A Ray of Hope within The Human Condition

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Introduction

Samuel Beckett wrote *Waiting for Godot* in 1952. He was influenced by many writers including: James Joyce and Thomas MacGreevy. These writers helped Beckett shape and mold his ideas and translate them into the fascinating and unusual dialogue in his plays. The play is about two vagabonds, Gogo and Didi, living on a country road next to a lonely and bare tree. Both men are waiting for a man named Godot who never comes. They speak about a variety of topics and involve themselves with many different activities. Eventually two men, Pozzo and Lucky, arrive at the country road. Pozzo shares stories with Gogo and Didi. Lucky, Pozzo's so called slave, does not talk throughout the whole play except for a long rambling monologue in the first act. Eventually they leave and Gogo and Didi are left wondering when Godot will come.

There are many different interpretations of the play. It can be looked at as an existential piece, a religious angle.... But what about the human condition in connection with Gogo and Didi? In the play, is it safe to say that Gogo and Didi are two lost souls floating on a sea of nothingness? They try so hard to pass the time, they forget past experiences and they want to commit suicide but are unsuccessful. The human condition for most people is to experience life with all its positive and negative experiences. But for these two men the latter seems to be the norm. Gogo is always beaten by a group of men, he stinks and he doesn't walk straight. Didi is always trying to remember the positive memories of their lives but he keeps coming back to their pathetic situation. At the same time he is very frustrated that Gogo cannot remember where they have been and what they have done in their lives. Didi has stinky breath and he

has barely enough vegetables to feed both of them.

But can it be possible that there is a ray of hope in this sad and lost state of the human condition for these two men? Is there any chance that they can find peace knowing that maybe there is a small sense of normalcy and sanity in their pathetic lives? Clifford Goldstein in his book, *The Mules That Angels Ride*, states, "Yet even in the midst of anguish, injustice and sorrow, they cling to their only hope-the hope that Godot will come." Goldstein is communicating that Gogo and Didi are feeling as though their lives are filled with sadness because there is no true direction. They are both finding injustice because they keep striving toward answers that they cannot find. The one thing that is true for both men is that they have that one bit of hope that Godot will come. Throughout the whole play, both men keep coming back to the hopeful idea that Godot will come and they will have answers to their questions. They will move in the right direction and have a future. Throughout the play, both men search for something to give them peace. They look at the tree, they talk to each other about ridiculous concepts and ideas and as expected, they always wait for Godot. But can they find that hope that gives them peace of mind? *Nine plays of the modern theater* states "In the encompassing void and in the absence of meaningful event, each of the men is isolated within his own hurt; yet both feel a desperate need to cling together. Nothing is left to them but to wait for some redeeming agent, a Godot." It may be possible to state that Gogo and Didi have hope that Godot will come and their lives will be filled with contentment and satisfaction. This article analyzes the positive and hopeful aspects of the human condition in relation to two characters, Gogo and Didi. The characters and their relationships will be studied to find the good qualities of both people. Emphasis will be placed on both men and how they react to each other. In addition, dialogue will be studied which will enhance the idea of hope. Finally, focus will also be placed on specific plot sequences and situations which will again reinforce and enhance the notion that the play contains hope for mankind.

The Human Condition defined

Hope within the human condition exists in the play *Waiting for Godot* but what is meant by the phrase, the human condition? Robert G. Bednarik in his book, *The Human Condition*, states that, "The human condition is defined by the feelings and emotions associated with our existence, our conscious experience of past and future, cognizance of the passage of time and our vexed awareness of our mortality." In *Waiting for Godot*, characters and dialogue connect with emotional existence and the passage of time. The awareness of Gogo and Didi's mortality is a separate concept. The knowledge that they will eventually die is very real but they see a ray of light because they believe Godot will come and he is their salvation.

Negativity within the play

Negativity pervades just about every aspect of the play. In Act 1, Gogo complains about the fact that he cannot take off his boot. He tells Didi that the men beat him. We don't know who these men are but obviously they are included in the plot to create fear and apprehension. Gogo always feels irritated with his leg. He also reacts to Didi in a negative fashion about the religious scene in the beginning of the play. This religious scene includes Didi explaining to Gogo about two thieves and four evangelists. Didi describes two men that would be crucified and only one would be saved. Gogo reacts telling Didi that men are just stupid apes. Didi is irritated because he has to repeat information to Gogo. He doesn't like to dream and urinates very often. Didi has stinky breath and Gogo has stinky feet. The main aspect of negativity occurs when both men say, "Nothing to be done." (Beckett 2). This simple phrase is at the heart of the play. It not only comments on negativity but describes the fact that nothing happens in the play. Both men wait for someone that never comes and they involve themselves with activities that never have any real purpose.

Hope within the human condition-characters

But in this aimlessness, negativity and confusion lies a hope that something good can inevitably occur. Both men cling to that hope that something positive will happen in their lives. It occurs within the relationship between the two men and their activities. Gogo and Didi's relationship is very close even though Gogo wants to leave Didi. In the midst of their fears, they feel a very strong bond between each other. They communicate, feed each other, dance together, comment and make conclusions in many situations. Mainly, they need each other to survive. In many scenes in the play, both men try to understand difficult situations posed to them. These situations provide hope that they will solve the problems presented to them. First they try to solve Gogo's boot problem. He cannot take off his boot. Didi keeps trying to assist him and Gogo keeps pulling until he finally gets it off. This shows the beginning of some kind of accomplishment. Gogo is intent on solving his problem; he is persistent until he finally succeeds. Next, Didi often wakes Gogo from sleep because he is lonely. Didi finds a strong need to share everything he is thinking and feeling. Again, this shows that there is a strong bond between them. Didi hungers for conversation and companionship and Gogo is always near him anticipating another conversation. Finally, in the end of act one Gogo tells Didi that they should separate. He thinks it would be better if they weren't together. But then they immediately realize that it would be better to stay together because they are waiting for Godot. Time and time again, Gogo states that they should separate. Both men have a discussion about separating from each other.

Estragon: I sometimes wonder if we wouldn't have been better off alone, each one for himself. We weren't made for the same road.

Vladimir: It's not certain.

Estragon: No, nothing is certain.

Vladimir: We can still part, if you think it would be better.

Estragon: It's not worthwhile now.

Vladimir: No, it's not worthwhile now.

Estragon: Well, shall we go?

Vladimir: Yes, let's go.

The two men talk about separating but it never happens. There is an urge to make a decision to move on but they keep coming back to each other. It may be safe to say that they need each other to reach their goal. Together they have that hope that they will eventually find Godot.

Next, Didi is a form of nutrition for Gogo because he feeds him and gives him vegetables to eat. This is encouraging because this simple activity places them in a positive state of mind to keep them moving in the right direction towards their goal. Food will give them energy which in turn will help them concentrate and focus. Next, time and time again character stage directions describe relationship within character. When Didi goes offstage to urinate, Gogo roots him on until he comes back onstage. Didi feels dejected and Gogo wants to console him. He moves one step at a time closer to Didi. This simple action shows a strong bond between them. These simple steps create a feeling that they care deeply about each other and that depth of feeling can help move them into a positive direction.

Hope within the human condition-dialogue

Dialogue also adds hope that something good can inevitably occur. Both men are determined even though they keep hitting a brick wall. Didi describes his feelings to Gogo. "On the other hand what's the good of losing heart now, that's what I say." (Beckett 2). Didi is explaining to Gogo that they shouldn't give up their search for Godot. This is a powerful statement because it shows a positive outlook and direction for both men. It shows that Didi has that desire to move forward and reach their goal. While the men wait, they plan a strategy for when they meet Godot. Didi states, "I'm curious to see what he has to offer. Then we'll take it or leave it." (Beckett 7). Both men truly believe that Godot will come and they anticipate some kind of outcome. They are thinking about

responses to his possible message to them. Again, this shows that they have hope that he will come and a positive outcome will be reached. At the end of act one Didi tells Gogo, "Ah, Gogo, don't be like that. Tomorrow everything will be better." (Beckett 28). Didi is telling Godot that the future has hope and promise. He knows that even though they have had hardship and difficulties and that they don't seem to move forward in any way, he still strongly believes that tomorrow will be a new day and better days are ahead. In the beginning of Act two Didi tells Gogo, "You must be happy too deep down, if you only knew it." (Beckett 30). Again, Didi is sharing a positive feeling with Gogo. He is telling him that he can be happy if he searches inside of himself. He believes that joy can be found within yourself even if you're in a difficult situation. Next, Didi is remembering what they recently did together. He says, "Wait... we embraced...we were happy...happy...what do we do now that we're happy...go on waiting...waiting...let me think...it's coming...go on waiting... now that we're happy...let me see..ah! The tree!" (Beckett 35). Didi is thinking about the happiness that they were feeling. He is trying to recollect all the positive events that lead up to the present time. Eventually he comes to the tree. The tree is another symbol of hope for both men. Saskia Backner in her thesis, *The Omnipresent Emptiness in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot*, writes, "These leaves may be interpreted as some kind of hope in the seemingly insurmountable emptiness." Backner is stating that because the tree has grown leaves, it shows that there is life and a logical and positive change for the future. Both men understand this encouraging change and believe that it is a sign of hope for their precarious future. This is especially true in the second act because leaves have grown. This is a sign of life and a positive change. This helps the men realize that life is moving forward in a logical and natural fashion. Didi states, "But yesterday evening it was all black and bare. And now it's covered with leaves." (Beckett 35). Didi is echoing the idea that the leaves on the trees are a strong life force and this force is a good example of the natural change of the seasons. Next, Didi sings a lullaby to Gogo to help him go to sleep. This is a comfort for Gogo. It's a simple activity that provides comfort and normalcy for both men. This comforting activity will put them in

a better frame of mind to help them move forward in their quest to find Godot.

In the second act Pozzo and Lucky enter again but Pozzo is blind and Lucky becomes the master. Pozzo falls to the ground and Didi tries to help him but he too falls to the ground. Godo tries to help but he finds himself on the ground as well. Gogo and Didi have a short conversation.

Estragon: Sweet mother earth.

Vladimir: Can you get up?

Estragon: I don't know.

Vladimir: Try.

Estragon: Not now. Not now.

Clearly Gogo is finding comfort and solice on the ground. He is feeling apart of the ground and this is giving him a great deal of joy. Gogo's character is very earthy. He feels very comfortable sitting and connecting to the ground and this feeling helps find hope in his existence. He feels as though he is connected to something and that gives him hope for the future. Finally, in the end of the play, Gogo and Didi look to the future. They have one last conversation about Godot. They say to each other,

Estragon: Didi?

Vladimir: Yes.

Estragon: I can't go on like this.

Vladimir: That's what you think.

Estragon: If we parted? That might be better for us.

Vladimir: We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. Unless Godot comes.

Estragon: And if he comes?

Vladimir: We'll be saved.

This conversation clearly illustrates that the men are going through a great deal of difficulties but at the same time strongly feel that they will find Godot and be saved. They truly feel that they can see a bright spot in the future ahead of

them. They constantly state that Godot will come and this continues all the way to the end of the play. The two men once again find this strong connection and belief that something positive will happen to them.

In conclusion, a ray of hope is truly evident in the relationship and dialogue between these two men. We see this in the actions that they take and how they communicate with each other. Both men lean on each other for support so that they can move on in their quest for Godot. Their activities clearly show that they are searching for a purpose which will lead them to their destination. It is true that they have many highs and lows. They feel very joyous at one moment and then very defeated and frustrated the next. On the other hand, something occurs throughout the play that keeps them on track. This ray of hope is the positive light that will always keep these men moving and anticipating the arrival of Godot.

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