A Psychoanalytic Reading of Vladimir and Estragon in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consciousness in Relation to Waiting</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty and Waiting</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Mechanisms in Relation to Waiting</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways of Waiting</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Much has been written about Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, but as far as I am aware no one has compared the two characters of Vladimir and Estragon in order to analyse what makes Vladimir more willing to wait than Estragon. Vladimir is content with waiting – he is determined to wait, while the waiting seems to make the other character, Estragon, frustrated – he forgets that they are waiting, forgets why they wait and who they are waiting for. These two characters act differently from each other in their waiting, and therein lies the interest in looking into what is different between them – that is: What makes Vladimir more willing to wait than Estragon? These two characters put their whole existence into waiting. Estragon, who is called Gogo by Vladimir, calls himself “Adam” (30), while Vladimir is called Didi by Estragon and “Mister Albert” (42) by “the boy”, another character in the play. The boy is a messenger sent by Godot, and he shows up to inform Vladimir that Godot “won’t come this evening but surely tomorrow” (44).

There are many factors to observe when viewing how someone is effected (and affected) by waiting. However, this essay will focus on four such aspects: consciousness, uncertainty, coping mechanisms, and ways of waiting. These aspects have been chosen because I view these as the most relevant for dealing with answering my key question of what makes Vladimir more willing to wait than Estragon. This essay claims that Vladimir is more willing to wait because he cannot deal with the fact that they might be waiting in vain and he involves himself more in his surrounding than Estragon. Furthermore, it is Vladimir who waits for Godot, not Estragon, and Vladimir believes that Godot will have
all the answers. These differences between the two characters will be explored by examining the four topics mentioned above, which will be dealt with from a psychoanalytical point of view and in relation to waiting. Consciousness will be examined in relation to the decision to wait; uncertainty in relation to the unknown outcome of waiting, the unknown waiting-time and the unknown circumstances while waiting; coping mechanisms will be focused on in relation to ways of dealing with waiting. Finally, ways of waiting will deal with waiting-time, waiting as an investment and two kinds of waiting-characters. We will begin by looking at consciousness since this is needed for making any kind of decision, and it is thus of importance in relation to the decision to wait.

Consciousness in Relation to Waiting

A psychoanalytical reading, as Peter Barry puts it, aims at curing mental disorders by looking into the conscious and unconscious behaviour and paying “close attention to unconscious motives and feelings […] of the characters depicted in the work” (105). Furthermore, Barry writes that Lankanian critics believe that when unconscious behaviour is verbalised it becomes conscious – and therefore mental health is restored, since repressed memory is disempowered. The spoken word is therefore of great importance for Lankanians. In my view, this is of great importance when exploring Vladimir and Estragon’s situation and their interaction. In his text on Waiting ‘with’ Godot, Paul E. Corcoran writes that “[t]he most important questions for students of the
mind and human values in this century have to do with consciousness” (339). Corcoran continues by stating: “In one way or another we are all waiting. Questions of meaning, whether mundane and urgent or philosophically abstract, often have the quality of attendance” (340). There is a place we need to be at at a certain time. Harold Schweizer proposes, in a general discussion about waiting, that waiting is a conscious engagement that we temporarily enter into, and that it is different from the daily strive to accomplish our tasks and meet our appointments because “we awaken to the repressed rhythms of duration and thus also to the deeper dimensions of our being” (778). In discussing Waiting for Godot from a Hindu point of view, Ranjan Ghosh writes: “It needs to be understood that, in Hindu philosophy, ‘waiting’ is the unity of existence, the inspiration to reorient the undertow of moral slackness and other entropic forces” (308). This, according to Ghosh, can provide a clear understanding of the self and its relation to the situation, thus freeing one’s mind for a while, and bringing waiting into a positive light. Ghosh writes that waiting is a state of consciousness, and he continues to state that waiting is a performance “which implies that one cannot move away but simply wait” (309). He believes that the “arrival of the boy bearing a message from Godot is a simulation to initiate, or rather manifest, ‘action’” (310). He suggests that this shows that there is a decision to act made because there is an “action,” as he points out: “no action can take place unless there is a decision to act” (310). Since Ghosh claims to be able to ascribe ends to most of the actions of the play and that most of the consequences are meaningful he believes that the play is not absurd. “The frustration and resistance involved in the temporal situation of Vladimir and Estragon is integral to the very ontology and teleology of the ‘waiting’” (319). Waiting, in general, does not have an end
in itself, it launches into the task that follows it. I agree with Corcoran in this matter. Waiting is a conscious state of mind. Vladimir and Estragon are *attending* at a place at a certain time, so there has to be a *meaning* for them to be there.

Dreams seem to be of importance for Vladimir and Estragon and the unconscious mind consists of repressed memories and fears. I believe that sometimes when Estragon is dreaming his repressed memories and fears surface, and therefore it feels important for him to tell Vladimir about them. However, in Act 1 Vladimir does not want to hear about what Estragon dreamt and he gets very irritated when Estragon tries to tell him about his nightmare. In Act 2, Vladimir consolidates Estragon when he wakes up even though he still does not want to hear what he dreamt about, as is shown in the discussion below:

VLADIMIR: [Softly.]
Bye bye bye bye
Bye bye bye bye
Bye bye bye bye
Bye bye…

[ESTRAGON *sleeps*. VLADIMIR *gets up softly, takes off his coat and lays it across ESTRAGON’s shoulders, then starts walking up and down, swinging his arms to keep himself warm*. ESTRAGON *wakes with a start, jumps up, casts about wildly*. VLADIMIR *runs to him, puts his arms round him*.] There…there…Didi is there…don’t be afraid…

ESTRAGON: Ah!
VLADIMIR: There…there…it’s all over.

ESTRAGON: I was falling –

VLADIMIR: It’s all over, it’s all over.

ESTRAGON: I was on a top of a –

VLADIMIR: Don’t tell me! Come, we’ll walk it off.

(62)

Vladimir’s or Estragon’s unconscious feelings are never brought to light because they do not discuss their dreams, and since their unconscious behaviours are not verbalised their mental health cannot be restored. Therefore, Vladimir and Estragon continue to repress their fear – which I suggest is their repressed fear of waiting in vain. Estragon is waiting for Vladimir and Vladimir is waiting for Godot and he definitely does not want to confront the possibility that Godot might never appear. While Vladimir’s repressed fear is that Godot might never come, Estragon’s repressed fear is that they might never leave. Estragon is very absent-minded, while Vladimir does stay focused on his task – which is waiting (for Godot). However, I would not go as far as calling Vladimir clear-minded in contrast to Estragon’s absentness – Estragon stays focused on leaving. Throughout the play it seems as if Godot does not matter to Estragon, since he constantly forgets about him. He even doubts Godot’s name: “His name is Godot?” (13). This happens in one of the endless discussions he has with Vladimir. Estragon is asking Vladimir if they have lost their rights and are tied down:

ESTRAGON: [Chews, swallows.] I’m asking you if we’re tied.
VLADIMIR: Tied?

ESTRAGON: Ti-ed.

VLADIMIR: How do you mean, tied?

ESTRAGON: Down.

VLADIMIR: But to whom. By whom?

ESTRAGON: To your man.

VLADIMIR: To Godot? Tied to Godot? What an idea! No question of it. [Pause.] For the moment.

ESTRAGON: His name is Godot?

(13)

Waiting is a temporarily engagement, as Schweizer and Corcoran suggest. Vladimir and Estragon also know this, but somehow their waiting continues – without an end, it seems. They seem to have been waiting so long that the actual waiting has turned into their goal, not what will come after their waiting. They are waiting “for Godot to come […] Or for night to fall” (72). Either way, the waiting will be over for that day and they will continue their wait the next, or the next, day. In Act 2, Vladimir is proud of his achievements:

We are waiting for Godot to come […] Or for night to fall.

[Pause.] We have kept our appointments, and that’s an end to that. We are no saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?

(72).
All they can do is to wait, because if they do not wait they will miss their appointment with Godot and therefore they have to stay and wait. It is a decision they have to make – to stay and wait or to skip the appointment and leave. Thus, Vladimir has made the decision to wait and he is more determined to wait because he cannot deal with the fact that they might be waiting in vain. Vladimir is very focused on waiting for Godot, while Estragon has not made any decision to wait. Due to their appointment with Godot, the two characters’ situation consists of uncertainty and therefore I will continue by turning to the uncertainty of waiting.

Uncertainty and Waiting

Vladimir and Estragon’s situation is filled with uncertainty and their attendance is important since their existence is the whole situation. William Hutchings writes about their existence in this way:

But was it then, for reasons unknown (a punishment, perhaps?), sent into the world at a particular place and time as a test (on which how and where one spends eternity may depend) or for no particular reason at all? While here, like Beckett’s tramps beside the tree, we wait, hoping for deliverance, for understanding, for relief from suffering, but forbidden to leave (although, as shown
by the hanging that Didi and Gogo consider, leaving is not impossible either)

(29)

Even though I agree with Hutchings about the possibility that there might not be any particular reason for where and when one spends eternity, some things in the play seem to be set. Vladimir and Estragon have no way out of the waiting. Hanging is impossible for them because the tree, or rather the branch, is too weak to hold them and they had no rope. Right before the end of the play, Vladimir says that they will hang themselves the following day if Godot does not come, but still they have nothing to hang themselves with and nowhere to do it.

While they wait they engage themselves in different activities, mainly discussions. James L. Calderwood writes about the difficulty to define when someone is waiting, since waiting in itself is “not doing” (366). He states: “waiting is a self-erasing nonactivity, since it negates the transient activities we engage in while waiting. Jumping, whittling, reading, even staring in annoyance at our watch – whatever we’re doing is nullified by virtue of our waiting” (366). The difficulty to define if someone is waiting is remarkable. Other activities can be defined by the way of doing them but, as Calderwood points out, waiting is difficult to describe since it is not doing anything – and while doing that (i.e. nothing) one can do other things, for example, read. Nothing is actually done while waiting, the actions done while waiting is “nullified” (366), as Calderwood calls it, since it is what comes after the wait that matters. In the play, Estragon actually despairs: “Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it’s awful!” (34). This statement is very
true of the play, since Pozzo does not “seem to be able … [Long hesitation] … to depart” (40), and Godot never appears. Furthermore, in Act 2, Estragon believes that he sees a lot of people coming (66), and in Act 1, Vladimir believes that he hears someone coming (12). Nobody arrives in any of these cases:

VLADIMIR: Listen!

[They listen, grotesquely rigid.]

ESTRAGON: I hear nothing.

VLADIMIR: Hssst! [They listen. ESTRAGON loses his balance, almost falls. He clutches the arm of VLADIMIR, who totters. They listen, huddled together.] Nor I. [Sighs of relief. They relax and separate.]

ESTRAGON: You gave me a fright.

VLADIMIR: I thought it was he.

ESTRAGON: Who?

VLADIMIR: Godot.

ESTRAGON: Pah! The wind in the reeds.

VLADIMIR: I could have sworn I heard shouts.

ESTRAGON: And why would he shout?

VLADIMIR: At his horse.

(12)
The uncertainty about waiting in general is that we cannot foresee the future, just as Vladimir and Estragon do not know what their future holds even though they can wish intensely to hear and see people come. Their intense wish for wanting someone to come is reflected in their behaviour. They fear who might come and they are uncertain about what will happen. But they never really speak about this with each other. Calderwood writes: “To wait for the future is to wait also for the unknown” (367), and according to Corcoran, waiting includes some level of uncertainty. Corcoran writes: “Yet we wait, committed more or less gracefully to it” (342). He argues that the waiting can be more interesting than the end sometimes: “Waiting is, after all, doing something” (344). “To wait is to be conscious of a relationship between oneself, others and time. It is a temporal consideration of immediate, mid-range and long-term interests” (Corcoran, 344). We all wait for the end, and to all waiting there is an end – even though it is unknown to us sometimes. Waiting cannot be seen as “a ‘break’ in time” (345), as Corcoran puts it, since it involves issues which are not absurd or meaningless, “even if–perhaps especially if–the end, as Beckett reminds us, is frightfully uncertain” (345).

The whole play can be seen as frightfully uncertain since, as Calderwood suggests, both the title of the play and the text form a circle “like the synecdochic ‘round’ with which Didi begins Act II” (364). Vladimir seems to be aware of the never-ending circle he is in, which is shown by this “round.” Calderwood continues: “The play, like the round, has neither beginning nor end” (365) and even the characters’ names, Didi and Gogo, are similar to a circle – since these names “end where they begin” (365). Furthermore, Calderwood suggests that not even the past and the present can be told apart, as with carrots and turnips. He further suggests that the characters live almost entirely in the
present because of their “absences and uncertainties of memory” (368). In Act 2, it is only Vladimir who remembers the characters from the day before. Pozzy does not remember having met anyone (81) and the boy does not recognise Vladimir (84). Vladimir asks about Godot this time around, but he still does not send any message back to Godot. Vladimir seems to be very aware of the fact that everything seems to be going in a circle – the same things repeating themselves from day to day, and Vladimir only wants the boy to remember tomorrow that he had seen him today (85). Since Vladimir believes, in Act 2, that every day repeats itself somehow he says: “We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. [He listens.] But habit is a great deadener” (83).

The outcome is unknown for those who wait. Even though we commit ourselves to waiting we do not always have the patience with it, we might feel very frustrated and annoyed – we are committed more or less gracefully to the wait, as Corcoran points out (342). Vladimir seems more content and secure in his waiting than Estragon. Vladimir is certain that Godot will come, and Estragon is doubtful. Vladimir is constantly waiting for tomorrow, with great anticipation (69). He is very much caught up in his waiting. When Pozzy and Lucky show up in Act 2 he says: “We are no longer alone, waiting for the night, waiting for Godot, waiting for … waiting. All evening we have struggled, unassisted. Now it’s over. It’s already tomorrow” (69). Estragon wants to pick up and leave; he does not want to wait. But due to Vladimir’s determination Estragon resigns and he waits together with Vladimir. Even though Estragon seems to forget constantly that they wait for Godot he confesses once, in Act 2, that he is waiting for Godot (80). Estragon is very sceptical, and uncertain, about Godot’s arrival. He doubts the time and place to meet him and finally he says: “If he came yesterday and we weren’t here you
may be sure he won’t come again today” (7). Vladimir is sure about Godot’s arrival at the present time and place, even though he cannot answer Estragon what day it is, or exactly where they are (6-7). In Act 1, Vladimir does not remember that they were at the same place the day before, instead it is Estragon who remember that they were at the same place. In Act 1, Estragon says: “We came here yesterday” (7), but in Act 2, he says: “I tell you we weren’t here yesterday” (57). While being sure of their whereabouts the day before, Estragon is the one doubting their presence at the particular place the day before in Act 2. Waiting is not meaningless since it involves a meaningful goal, at least meaningful to the individual who waits. Vladimir and Estragon honestly believe that Godot could help them, and they want his aid. They believe that they need guidance from Godot and they seem unable to make decisions on their own, which is shown by this discussion:

VLADIMIR: Well? What do we do?

ESTRAGON: Don’t let’s do nothing. It’s safer.

VLADIMIR: Let’s wait and see what he says.

ESTRAGON: Who?

VLADIMIR: Godot.

ESTRAGON: Good idea.

(10)
It seems as if Vladimir has a more active mind that Estragon, since Vladimir is more involved in his surrounding. Vladimir is exited about a bible text (4-5) but Estragon does not want to listen to it – he is not interested in the contradictory information about the thieves hanging on the crosses together with Jesus. Estragon does not care: “They don’t agree, and that’s all there is to it” (5), but Vladimir wants an answer as to which information is correct: “But all four were there. And only one speaks of a thief being saved. Why believe him rather than the others?” (5). Vladimir’s active mind is also shown when Estragon does not seem to mind Pozzo’s treatment of Lucky, but Vladimir gets very upset and explodes: “It’s a scandal!” (20). Furthermore, Vladimir is scared of loosing his ability to think, but Estragon believes that this can not happen since one thinks whether one wants to or not:

VLADIMIR: That prevents you from thinking.

ESTRAGON: You think all the same.

(55)

Vladimir seems to be affected by the coming and going of people – he really wants to see Pozzo and Lucky leave. This is shown in his way of wishing for the day to be over, and also how he threatens to leave himself in order to get rid of Pozzy and Lucky. However, Vladimir views Pozzo and Lucky’s visit as a good thing, when they finally depart. When they leave he says: “That passed the time” (41) and Estragon replies: “It would have passed in any case.” This implies that Estragon is more pessimistic than Vladimir and that he does not involve himself in his surrounding as Vladimir does. Thus, Vladimir
feels confident and secure in his wait for Godot. Estragon feels uncertain about the arrival of Godot and he seems to just wait for Vladimir to be done waiting – so that they may leave. The meeting with Pozzy and Lucky makes Vladimir upset because of Pozzy’s treatment of Lucky, while Estragon does not seem to care. This uncertainty means that the two characters need to develop coping mechanisms to deal with their waiting, therefore we will now look into how coping mechanisms can have an effect on waiting.

Coping Mechanisms in Relation to Waiting

Since the outcome of waiting in Waiting for Godot is unknown (Calderwood, Corcoran, Hutchings) waiting can be a stressful situation. Drew Western writes that there are three different strategies to use in stressful situations. One strategy aims at changing the situation producing the stress, which is a problem focused strategy. He writes that there are two other types of strategy, these are the efforts to alter thoughts about the situation, and efforts to alter the unpleasant emotional consequences of stress – these are called emotion focused strategies. “Coping mechanisms are the ways people deal with stressful events. Problem-focused coping involves changing the situation. Emotion-focused coping aims to regulate the emotion generated by a stressful situation” (398). Vladimir and Estragon have been waiting for such a long time that they sometimes seem to be listless, but they try to alter the situation, for example in their attempt to hang themselves. At first glance, neither of them seem to alter any thoughts about the situation.
However, Estragon ignores the wait completely, which is a way to alter thoughts by repressing them. This might be the reason why he is having nightmares. Vladimir represses emotional consequences by not wanting to hear about Estragon’s dreams, which implies that he alters thoughts by not creating any emotional bond and therefore does not have to confront any feelings. But they never speak about this with each other, and it is important to bring fears into light, by expressing them in words, in order to restore mental health, according to Lancanians. The outcome of waiting is unknown and this might be a stressful situation, but Vladimir and Estragon have each other and therefore they have social support in their waiting-situation. There is a hypothesis suggesting “that social support is a continuously positive force that makes the person less susceptible to stress” (Western 399), but, as Western points out, sometimes the person responds with anger and helplessness, in which case the social support is lost. However, Estragon believes that it would be better if they parted and he suggests this twice in Act 1 (8 and 47) and twice in Act 2 (53 and 87). The first time Estragon suggests this he is feeling hurt because Vladimir does not want to hear about his dream; Estragon says coldly: “There are times when I wonder if it wouldn’t be better for us to part” (8), and right at the end of the play Estragon says:

ESTRAGON: I can’t go on like this.

VLADIMIR: That’s what you think.

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

(87)
At the beginning of Act 2, Vladimir and Estragon discuss their night, which they somehow spent apart (as in Act 1). Even though Estragon seems to have had a troublesome time without Vladimir – apparently he is being beaten every night – he still claims that he feels better when he is not in Vladimir’s company (50). They discuss that Estragon had to have done something in order to be beaten:

ESTRAGON: I tell you I wasn’t doing anything.

VLADIMIR: Perhaps you weren’t. But it’s the way of doing it that counts, the way of doing it, if you want to go on living”

(51)

Perhaps Vladimir’s awareness of “the way of doing“ (51) nothing gives him extra energy to wait. Somehow, his way of thinking feeds his mind and his desire to wait.

However, the situation feels hopeless sometimes, especially for Estragon, but Vladimir and Estragon are not helpless. Vladimir feels confident about the wait and about the arrival of Godot. Vladimir leads Estragon towards waiting. He has been dragging Estragon around with him for many years (1). Vladimir is the one who waits for Godot; this is shown by the boy asking only for him. However, without Estragon to keep him company, Vladimir might not continue his wait for Godot. Estragon’s presence seems to encourage Vladimir to go on waiting. In Act 1, Vladimir does not want Estragon to sleep, and therefore he wakes him up – because he feels lonely (8):
[ESTRAGON sits down on the mound. VLADIMIR paces agitatedly to and fro, halting from time to time to gaze into the distance off. ESTRAGON falls asleep. VLADIMIR halts before ESTRAGON.] Gogo!...Gogo!...GOGO! [ESTRAGON wakes with a start.]

ESTRAGON: [Restored to horror of his situation.] I was asleep!

[Despairingly.] Why will you never let me sleep?

VLADIMIR: I felt lonely.

(8)

In Act 2 Vladimir helps Estragon to go to sleep (62). As in Act 1, Vladimir wakes Estragon up again because he feels lonely (82). Thus, Estragon alters his thoughts about the situation by totally ignoring the fact that he waits, while Vladimir alters his thoughts about the situation by repressing emotional consequences. Estragon believes that they would be better off alone, but it is the social support that Vladimir gets from Estragon that makes him go on waiting. Vladimir makes Estragon wait with him and without Estragon he might not continue his wait. It is Vladimir who has the appointment with Godot, not Estragon. Thus it might also be that Vladimir has some awareness of “the way of doing“ (51) nothing that gives him extra energy to wait. Coping mechanisms are used in all kinds of stressful situations and knowing when the situation will be over can help us feel more at ease. But waiting in the way that Vladimir and Estragon do – without knowing when the wait will be over – needs commitment. I will now turn to that, and start by discussing the difficulty to determine the time of waiting.
Ways of Waiting

The length of time is difficult to define when it comes to waiting in general, according to Schweizer. He writes: “To reduce waiting to purely quantifiable terms is not to suppress its qualitative temporal consciousness; it is to reduce waiting to nothing but a certain amount of time” (780). He believes that waiting cannot be understood only by its length in time even though it “can only be defined in measurable terms” (780). Waiting in general can be seen as a timelessness signified by “a spiritual longing, it reduces to abstraction the hope, the monotonies, the slowness, the impatient by which such longing must be endured in time” (787). We have no control over the time it takes to wait and, as Corcoran puts it, “the significance of waiting depends upon the occurrence of this end, but rather that waiting is subordinate or prepositionally meaningful (i.e. not an end in itself) to another” (349). It is what comes after the waiting that determines if the waiting is meaningful or not; the waiting in itself has no goal. Corcoran writes that “waiting is how we invest time with meaning and commit ourselves to things worth waiting for. It is not usually a happy, much less free, condition” (341). Since the condition of waiting is apposed upon us by others we have no choice but to wait, but the decision to wait is ours since it is made by our conscious mind. Ghosh writes that Vladimir and Estragon’s waiting is mandatory because it is Godot who bears upon their consciousness, the constituent atoms of their being” (312). Ghosh writes that waiting is a performance “which implies that one cannot move away but simply wait” (309). Schweizer writes that “[t]he time of boredom is empty, it has neither object nor end; its temporality is vague,
but its vagueness and its immanence make it a poetic trope” (777). He continues that waiting is situated between boredom and desire, but that it has the charms of neither.

Schweizer describes two kinds of characters when it comes to waiting; those are “the patient waiter” and “the impatient waiter” (780-81). The patient waiter spends time, he does not simply wait – for him it is not a kind of passivity to wait. While the impatient waiter believes that “time remains his unwanted gift” (781) and he simply waits. Waiting cannot be measured in time because we do not always know how long we will have to wait. Because the goal is not the actual wait, but what comes after, the time is not questionable – waiting is a “timelessness,” as Schweizer calls it. Whether the waiting is meaningful or not can only be determined after the wait is over. Therefore (since the outcome of the waiting is unknown) we cannot know whether Vladimir and Estragon’s wait is meaningful or not. But since the meeting with Godot is very important to Vladimir, it is important to him to keep his appointment, and therefore the endless waiting is meaningful to him. People in general are committed to the wait if they believe that what they wait for is worth waiting for, and therefore they do not wish to miss their appointment. So everyone can be in a situation of only waiting and waiting and waiting, just as Vladimir and Estragon – endlessly, if that is what it takes. Vladimir is determined to wait for Godot, since he believes that all his questions could be answered by Godot, who will have all the answers and after the meeting with him Vladimir will be able to make decisions and get on with his life. He fears that Godot might not come, but he never speaks about this. There is no way for him to restore mental health, as the Lancanians would put it, in the way he keeps his fears locked inside, and he will not be able to make any decision.
Vladimir and Estragon cannot do anything but wait. They desire to meet Godot and they are bored with the wait, but in order to meet their appointment with Godot they have to continue waiting. As Ghosh states, Vladimir and Estragon’s waiting is mandatory since they need to meet Godot – he needs to help them make decisions. Estragon is very impatient with the wait and he wants to leave, but Vladimir constantly reminds him of the important task of waiting for Godot to arrive (6, 41, 59, 63, 70, 77, 85). Vladimir does not fit the description of Schweizer’s “patient waiter” (781) but he is extremely determined to wait. Vladimir actually fits the description of an “impatient waiter” (781), since it seems that time is unwanted to him, and he simply waits. In Act 2, Vladimir seems impatient – walking “to and fro” (84) several times. Estragon does not actually seem to be waiting at all, he constantly forgets that they wait and he just wants to leave. Estragon wants to go far away from that place, but Vladimir says that they have to come back the next day, to wait for Godot (85). In Act 2 Vladimir promises Estragon that they will leave and never come back, if he helps him up (73-74). Vladimir falls when Pozzo and Lucky slip and fall at their arrival, and here follows the conversation when Vladimir promises Estragon that they will leave – just so that Estragon will help him up:

VLADIMIR: Help!

ESTRAGON: I’m going.

VLADIMIR: Help me up first. Then we’ll go together.

ESTRAGON: You promise?

VLADIMIR: I swear it!

ESTRAGON: And we’ll never come back?
But once again, Vladimir says to stay and wait for Godot (76-77). When the boy appears, Vladimir is more interested in how Godot treats the boy than asking questions about Godot himself. Vladimir is not sad about the boy’s message that Godot “won’t come this evening but surely tomorrow” (44), which shows that he is very much into waiting and does not care so much about the result of the wait. Vladimir is happy when the day is over (45) and he looks forward to the next day. He says to Estragon: “Tomorrow everything will be better” (46) and he has renewed hope about the arrival of Godot. Vladimir is so extremely concerned with waiting that it almost seems as if he waits for the wait, instead of the end of the waiting. The waiting is very meaningful to Vladimir because he believes that Godot will have all the answers and after meeting him he could make decisions and get on with his life. He has invested so much time and hope into the wait that he simply cannot give up waiting. Time seems to be unwanted for Vladimir, he simply waits – which makes him an impatient waiter. Vladimir keeps his spirit up and he is constantly looking forward until the next day – when Godot will come. Estragon does not seem to be waiting at all. He doubts that Godot will come and wants to leave.
Conclusion

This essay began by asking what makes Vladimir in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* more willing to wait than Estragon. It was stated that the decision to wait is a conscious decision. As we have seen, Vladimir is more willing to wait because he cannot deal with the fact that they might be waiting in vain. Vladimir has made a conscious decision to wait, something which Estragon has not. Furthermore, it is Vladimir who waits for Godot, not Estragon, and Vladimir believes that Godot will have all the answers. Vladimir and Estragon’s unconscious feelings have never been verbalised and this suggests that their mental health is not restored. Vladimir and Estragon know that waiting is a temporarily engagement but somehow their waiting continues without end. It is what comes after the wait that matters, but for Vladimir and Estragon this is not the case. They simply wait. They seem to have been waiting so long that the actual *waiting* has turned into their goal. The road they are on is their destination.

Contrasts between Vladimir and Estragon contribute to the plot of the play because Estragon does wait for Godot even though he does not have any appointment with him. Existential knowledge about waiting can be seen in the contrasts between Vladimir’s and Estragon’s ways of waiting. The difference between the two characters is their interest in waiting, the feeling of importance to wait for Godot. For Vladimir the waiting is of tremendous importance while the appointment that Vladimir has with Godot is of little importance to Estragon. Vladimir is more content and secure in his wait than Estragon. He is certain that Godot will come, while Estragon is doubtful. Estragon wants to pack up and leave, he does not want to wait. But due to Vladimir’s determination Estragon resigns
and he waits together with Vladimir. Both Vladimir and Estragon have social support in their waiting-situation and therefore the waiting is less stressful, and the outcome does not matter as much. Estragon believes that they would be better off alone but this implies that Estragon has a weak mind since he does not leave – even though he claims that he feels worse in Vladimir’s company, and on top of that he has no appointment with Godot. There is no reason for him to wait and still he waits for Vladimir – in whose company he feels worse than being beaten. But somehow Vladimir’s presence is preferred to being alone since he stays with him. However, Estragon’s presence is crucial to Vladimir – without Estragon it is very doubtful that Vladimir would wait.

Vladimir waits for Godot. Estragon waits for Vladimir. Estragon is able to speak to the one he is waiting for – and he is trying to convince him to leave. Vladimir cannot speak to the one he is waiting for – and since he does not send any messages to Godot through the boy, Vladimir does not even have the means to communicate word of his appointment. Since the boy does not remember Vladimir from one day to another it would be pointless to send any messages through him. Vladimir is determined to wait for Godot since he believes that all his questions could be answered, and he could get on with his life. Since the meeting with Godot is very important to Vladimir it is important to him to keep his appointment and therefore the endless waiting is meaningful to him. Estragon does not seem to be waiting at all. He doubts that Godot will come and he wants to leave. Actually, Estragon ignores the wait in total – he represses all thoughts about the wait. This might be the reason why he is having nightmares, since the repressed thoughts cause disturbance in his mind. Vladimir represses emotional consequences by not wanting to hear about Estragon’s dreams, which implies that he alters thoughts by not
creating any emotional bond and therefore not having to confront any feelings. Vladimir seems to be very aware of the fact that everything seems to be going in a circle – the same things repeating themselves from day to day. Vladimir seems to have an awareness of the way to be doing nothing that gives him extra energy to wait. This might be part of his more active mind and him being more involved in his surrounding than Estragon. Estragon claims that he does not do anything to cause him being beaten every night but Vladimir believes that the way he does it matters, and as this essay shows doing *nothing* is doing *something*.
Works Cited

Primary Source

Secondary Sources


