
Exploring the Self Through Habit and Memory

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Abstract: Throughout his career, Beckett's characters are, in a perpetual exploration of their inner world, for they begin to realize that knowledge of the self is just as elusive as knowledge of the outside world. This loss of self, which marks all of Beckett's characters deeply, leaves them in a kind of no man's-land between an unknowable external world and an untraceable self. Without a solid foundation for their beliefs, whether in the outer world of objects or the inner world of the self. Hence, Beckett's characters find themselves in a position of extreme epistemological weakness. Without a doubt, Beckett's most enduring contribution to world literature is his portrayal of this interstitial zone of uncertainty between subject and object. In dealing with the outside world, the Beckettian character adopts a habit that serves as both protector and prisoner. This habit refers to a set of thoughts, strategies, and (re)actions that memory calls upon throughout the attempts to make sense of and negotiate the world. Through these habitual adjustment processes, time divides self from self and subject from object, ensuring that we neither remain the same nor grasp the dynamic object-in-itself. However, habit distorts this temporal dynamism, suggesting that subjects and objects are fundamentally unchanged from one moment to the next. By using psychological research methodology as well as Proust's concept of habit, which examines the relationship between voluntary and involuntary memory and the ego's surface, This paper is twofold: first, to explore Beckett's use of habit and memory in his controversial play *Waiting for Godot* to discover his self-identity, and second to demonstrate how Beckett's characters eventually fail in achieving their authentic selves.

Keywords: Beckett, Habit, Memory, Proust, Self-Identity, Time, *Waiting for Godot*

1. Introduction

Throughout his career, Beckett's characters are constantly exploring their inner world as they come to understand that knowing oneself is just as elusive as knowing the outside world. This loss of self, which marks all of Beckett's characters deeply, leaves them in a kind of no man's-land between an unknowable external world and an untraceable self. Without a solid foundation for their beliefs, whether in the outer world of objects or the inner world of the self.

Beckett's characters find themselves in a position of extreme epistemological weakness. Beckett's depiction of this interstitial zone of ambiguity between subject and objects, without a doubt, is his most enduring contribution to world literature.

The Beckettian character adopts a habit that serves as both a prisoner and a protector when interacting with the outside world. This controversial play *Waiting for Godot* is supposed

to be off-balance, with question marks preceding and following nothing but to create tension. The play's texture is enhanced by time, habit, memory, and games which provide literary and theatrical interest. Proust's ideas and works greatly influenced Beckett, especially his concept of habit, which can be found in many of Beckett's writings, most notably in *Waiting for Godot*. This concept examines memory from voluntary to involuntary states beneath the ego's surface. The psychological research strategy should be included as the study of self and ego are the main concepts used by Beckett in this play.

2. Beckett and Self-Identity

With the advent of new scientific revolutionary influences, previously accepted a priori categories of time and space have been replaced by new definitions that take into account the spatiotemporal coordinates and the individual qualities of the observer who thus enters the field of the observed and so,

the logic of the human consciousness loses its formerly privileged position as observer and reality decoder, resulting in a complex interplay between the conscious and unconscious.

Space, time, and identity, not only, are the three questions to which narrative discourse feels most obliged to respond yet, they are crucial reference points for the human subject; when trying to situate himself in the world.

The Beckettian vision of the world doesn't focus on identity, the other elusive self as many authors would say, but it conveys a valiant attempt at a new strategy, which is the quest for the real self-based on a solid detachment, this sum of mnemonic experiences lived through time and space, which in turn impacts the identity of the individual. However, Beckett's self fought hard to maintain identity to prevent immersion in nonentity. Therefore, Beckett recognizes the Proustian purpose as the ego's sustenance, keeping it above the flux of ordinary time and enclosing it within crucial cages of memory.

3. Beckett's Psychological Quest

While Descartes concludes by translating doubt into thought as an affirmation of self-existence, Beckett's self continues to doubt, turning skepticism into pessimism. In Beckett's world, the self never achieves personal identity as defined by Locke, Hume, and others. The self takes on a variety of names until it has none, but it is never fully grasped and thus remains elusive. [9] Nevertheless, the self speaks for itself. This existentialist and philosophical motif led Beckett to delve deeper into the human psyche, combining the fractured and suffering self that emerges in his play *Waiting for Godot* with an obsessive intensity in which characters strive to redeem themselves through absolute detachment and inaction negate to escape being rocked by the devastating pull of the outside world that shatters the characters' selves.

Beckett's characters are puzzled over the question of the identity of created things as they are engaged in the bewildering process of defining objects as individually and separate objects or as extensions of the self. All of these facts about Beckett's world set it off from that of his contemporaries. Beckett is not concerned with demonstrating illogicality or absurdity since they have been already assumed. Instead, his writings are meaning attenuations that echo logical questions and precise definitions in an endless, loud, and repetitive manner.

According to Kalb, Beckett insists, on encouraging performances that limit the external physical techniques and work toward inward psychological centres [14] he also points that "it is Beckett's protagonists' disempowerment, removed from the sphere of active engagement in the world, is what guarantees their integrity." [14]. At the same time, McMullan evaluates Beckett's art of staging and argues that Beckett's actors, like Lois Overbeck, describe their experience of being locked in a "straitjacket making their bodies and senses cut off" [2].

Beckett's characters exhibit this kind of inward quest in their "eventful immobility or movement around a still center" [12]. They are crushed by the weight of consciousness, which occurs with the self-responsibility they wish to avoid but cannot. Therefore, the Beckett hero flees rather than seeks out his identity; his quest is for obscurity and self-annihilation. How is then the relationship between this self and Beckett's Time?

To shield themselves from the destructive allure of the outside world, Beckett's characters attempt to negate themselves through inaction and total detachment, which alienates them from trying to start a new beginning, a return to the essence of being. They perceive a world where the distinction between living and having lived fades into a constant oscillation. This concept expresses a valiant effort toward a new approach to the quest for an authentic self founded on direct disconnection.

4. The Self and the Theory of Habit

Proust's ideas and works strongly impacted Beckett, especially his concept of habit, which can be found in many of Beckett's works, most notably in *Waiting for Godot*. Habit is an obstacle to knowledge and a method of deadening the senses.; it is the "ballast that chains the dog to its vomit," [4] as Beckett defines.

Andrews states that from the point of view of psychology, "habit is a more-or-less fixed way of thinking, wanting or feeling acquired by prior repetition of mental experience. [1] He continues, saying that habit "lies outside consciousness "and is "the more or less fixed course of consciousness with repeated experiences; the formation of familiar consciousness rather than that consciousness itself" [1].

After the general statements on time, in the first chapter of his book, Beckett presents the theory of habit to interpret Proust's well-known distinction between his two kinds of memory.

When discussing the concepts of "habit and memory," Beckett closely follows Proust's original text. He just seems to defend them with philosophical content from Schopenhauer.

As mentioned in his Proust essay, he describes habit as a paralyzing force that pushes attention further inward and protects the fundamental quality of human essence: "Habit drugs those handmaidens of a perception whose cooperation is unnecessary and paralyzed our attention [6].

Habit thus looks behind the ego's surface and behind voluntary to involuntary memory, as Proust mirrored. Memory and habit are what Beckett calls "attributes of the time cancer," [5] the former being subject to the more general laws of the latter and the latter, in turn, is a function of the subject's desire to escape the reality of the world in which he or, she has to live: "habit is a compromise reached between the individual and his or her environment or between the individual and his or her organic eccentricities, the assurance of solid inviolability and the lightning rod of his or her existence." [8]

Therefore, Habit is not a condition but an active agent, and as such, it operates as a strategy. Routine is a habit, and when waiting is filled with routine, it is also a habit. But when habit breaks down, the individual suffers: "the periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptations... represent the perilous zones in the life of the individual." [6]

According to Beckett, the need for renewal necessitates periods of transition wherein the protective function of habit may be broken down, and the picture of genuine reality emerges. This "adventure of being" presumably provides the occasion for precise identification of self in Beckett's work, yet habit is also a challenging resource of being for the Beckett hero.

In his Proust, Beckett describes periods of transition between an old self and a new one as follows:

When for a moment, the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being ... that is when every faculty is free to play. Because the pernicious devotion of habit paralyzes our attention... our current habit of living is... unable to deal with the mystery of a strange sky or a strange room, or with any unexpected situation in her curriculum... But when the atrophied faculties step in to save the day... the maximum value of our being is restored." [7]

However, the self of yesterday is not the same as the self of today because, as we now understand, during growth, each cell that makes up the body is replaced and renewed. [10] These characters most definitely do not experience a rebirth of the self. All of Beckett's characters are locked into an old self; they are all "prisoners of habit," to use Beckett's phrase from Proust's book. [11] When they suffer, it is because they have temporarily succeeded in becoming aware of their suffering; the release is not, as in Proust, an uncontrollable memory; it is a fleeting awareness of their nothingness through the habitual world's structured framework. The same emptiness results from giving up one's identity; this is not a rebirth..

4.1. *The Passage of Time in Waiting for Godot*

In *Waiting for Godot*, the two acts are repetitive but not identical, similar but different, in which the characters strive to remember past events, rejecting not only contemporary doubts about the stability of human identity but also, in a broader sense, distrust of empiricism itself, the belief that the tangible elements of this world are ultimately insignificant, that they have faded into insubstantiality as individuals seek global sense beyond the purely tactile, beyond the mundane reality that has become increasingly insignificant about fundamental questions about man's role in the universe and the ultimate purpose of life.

Time is the burden in Beckett's plays—both as a chronic endurance and as a common theme. His characters suffer time and consciousness without being able to form them into satisfying designs. Additionally, Beckett asserts that we exist throughout time rather than just in the present, indicating that the past is an integral part of who we are. So in his plays, Beckett is concerned with the passage of time or refusal of time to pass. In all of his works, Beckett reminds us that there

are two ways in which man can relate to time: first, as a temporal measuring system that allows him to easily classify things as past, present, and future; and second, as the essential substance of life, because man develops to be (creates his essence) in the world of Time rather than the realm of Space.

Therefore, in *Waiting for Godot*, space is nothing more than a reflection of what Time and man have created. Vladimir and Estragon are more concerned with the waiting fact—a temporal experience than with where they are waiting.

Despite Pozzo's unreliable explanation that he is taking Lucky to be sold at the "Marché de Saint-Sauveur" [21], Pozzo and Lucky's journey is never explicitly described in terms of where they are coming from or going to. Their journey is a means for them to fill the empty hours and days. It is a momentary experience that symbolizes the meaningless, aimless wandering of the unreal existent.

In the opening pages of his essay Proust, Beckett quotes Proust's statement about Time:

But were I granted time to accomplish my work, I would not fail to stamp it with the seal of that Time, now so forcibly present to my mind, and in it, I would describe men, even at the risk of giving them the appearance of monstrous beings, as occupying in Time a much greater place than that so sparingly conceded to them in Space, a place indeed extended beyond measure, because, like, giants plunged in the years, they touch at once those periods of their lives—separated by so many days—so far apart in Time. [18]

Beckett explains his concept of man as an atemporal being whose past is not only present but is constantly shaping it, and whose future is likewise present in his finitude—his being toward death:

Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a day-stone on the beaten track of the year and irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. We are not merely wearier, because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday." [14]

The world that Beckett creates for his characters has been described as "an eternity of stagnation," Estragon and Vladimir continue to wait, putting on hats, taking off shoes, and eating carrots and turnips. Pozzo and Lucky resume their journey, pausing every now and then for Pozzo to eat his chicken, smoke his pipe, check his watch, and sit on his camp stool as if this were a world of habit, of relatively fixed behavioral patterns.

In terms of dealing with the outside world, the Beckettian character adopts a habit that serves as both protector and prisoner. As Beckett puts it in his Proust, a protector is "[a]utomatic adaptation of the human organism to the conditions of its existence." [6] Then, he continues, "Habit is the infinite number of agreements reached between the infinite number of subjects that comprise the individual and their infinite number of correlative objects" [6].

According to Beckett, the term "habit" refers to a collection of ideas, plans, and (re)actions that memory uses as we try to comprehend and navigate the outside world.

Time separates self from self and subject from the object through these routine adjustment processes, ensuring that we neither remain the same nor understand the dynamic object-in-itself. However, habit distorts this temporal dynamism, leading us to think that we and the objects around us are essentially constant over time.

4.2. *The Self Across Time and Space*

The self is many selves, and the problem is to assert a continuous self-identity. In Habit, this identity is maintained at the expense of distinction. Beckett defines Habit as "the generic term for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects" [17].

This statement admirably defines the condition of the Beckett hero, who strives loudly and desperately to "count himself in" as a self; he undergoes elaborate routines of repetition, draws up fantastically intricate charts of possibilities inherent in habitual decision and action. Beckett's character is always changing, his moods going back and forth across the spectrum of feelings. And, as Proust claims, knowing oneself or the other is difficult due to the endless series of moi's that inhabit each of us: "Ces êtres, s'ils changent par rapport à nous, changent aussi en eux-mêmes" [20] It is clear then that according to Proust the universe is seen differently by each of us and changes daily its aspects, as we change within ourselves: "L'univers est vrai pour tous et dissemblable pour chacun...ce n'est pas un univers, c'est des millions, Presque autant qu'il existe des prunelles et d'intelligences humaines, qui s'éveillent tous les matins." [20]

In his essay on Proust, Beckett emphasizes the turmoil of the subject as a barrier to perception: "The observer infects the observed with his own mobility" [5] and this is well defined in Beckett's drama where art is the ultimate expression of human impotence, whereas for Proust it represents a triumph over the fragmented universe created by the passage of time and the variation of perceptions from one person to another: "l'oeuvre d'art était le seul moyen de retrouver le Temps perdu" [19]. There is still change, which is something that happens in time. However, the way the characters experience change is usually such that the occurring events cannot be properly arranged in the temporal order. This is also why the characters cannot utilize the experience of change to secure the passage of time. The tree grows leaves without transition. Pozzo and Lucky, on their second appearance, are blind or dumb, respectively, without transition. Pozzo denies a well-ordered succession to the process of his going blind. He even concentrates on a single moment, all those events which are normally separated in time. This means that he considers time as a basic structure of the empirical world to be null. [13]

POZZO: (*suddenly furious*). Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one

day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you?(*Calmer.*) They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (*He jerks the rope.*) On! [3]

The characters neither possess some kind of mental device which could be used as the source of a reliable orientation in time nor are they in contact with a stable, objective world structure from which such an orientation could be derived. [9]

The characters in *Waiting for Godot* continually strive to find a secure notion of yesterday, tomorrow, and sometimes even today. Similar issues occur when it comes to their location in space. Their insecurity over their place in space; is exacerbated by their persistent loss of memory. The issue with memory is that "reference [in memory narrative] is never to events of the past but to memories of those events," [16] which is something that Beckett constantly brings up by developing characters who ultimately are incapable of remembering or, if they are, immediately undermine memory's validity. The past is unknowable and irreversible in Beckett's eyes. This is a crucial temporal inversion used by Beckett in his plays: the past, though already lived, cannot be known; the future, though not lived, remains certain -we will die.

Beckett's inverted sense of time is evident in *Waiting for Godot*, and because the characters have no basis for their experiences, they seem to exist from the start in a setting dictated by the loss of the real.

The central characters of *Waiting for Godot* are always wondering where they are, where they were yesterday, and where they will be tomorrow. They also keep thinking about what happened the day before and if there seems to be any memory of what this may have been, whether their memory belongs to yesterday or to some other strange moment in time if there is any trustworthy memory at all. Vladimir and Estragon are aware of their "going" (nowhere in that they will continue to wait for Mr. Godot), but they are unaware of their past. Early in Act I, Vladimir and Estragon make an unsuccessful attempt to explain what they did yesterday. They are unable to determine whether; the place where they find themselves is the same as the one where they were last night. Space is experienced in time if it is large enough to require successive experiencing; if there is no longer certainty regarding temporal relations, there is also no longer certainty regarding spatial relations.

ESTRAGON: We came here yesterday.

VLADIMIR: Ah no, there you're mistaken.

ESTRAGON: What did we do yesterday?

VLADIMIR: What did we do yesterday?

ESTRAGON: Yes. [3]

Such a conversation implies that Beckett is unable to know the past. Vladimir and Estragon are unable to recall their actions from yesterday because they are unable to claim or re-enact the past. Godot's future is definite, no this past. Vladimir and Estragon make vain attempts to create reality by remembering a past they forgot. But again, Estragon cannot remember yesterday in the exchange that follows in Act II when Vladimir tries to persuade him that things have changed since yesterday.

VLADIMIR: The tree, look at the tree.

Estragon looks at the tree.

ESTRAGON: Was it not there yesterday?

VLADIMIR: Yes, of course, it was there. Do you not remember? We nearly hanged ourselves from it. But you wouldn't. Do you not remember?

ESTRAGON: You dreamt it.

VLADIMIR: Is it possible that you've forgotten already?

ESTRAGON: That's the way I am. Either I forget immediately or I never forget.

VLADIMIR: And Pozzo and Lucky, have you forgotten them too?

ESTRAGON: Pozzo and Lucky?

VLADIMIR: He's forgotten everything! [3]

As Olney points out, the characters in this instance contest the truth of the statement "I remember." [16]

Gogo resists being persuaded to make such a statement by Didi. Gogo will eventually claim that he remembers getting "kicked in the shins" by "a lunatic who played the fool" [4], but trying to pinpoint the time and location of the incident is futile. We have thus left an occurrence without a specific relationship to time or space, making it impossible to determine its causality or origin. Such actions underline the absence of a real rather than allowing for its creation or even its simulation. The lack of a past prevents Beckett's characters from having a defined time and place. In Act I, Vladimir and Estragon struggle to remember which day they are and which day they are supposed to wait for Mr. Godot.

ESTRAGON: In my opinion we were here.

VLADIMIR: (*looking round*). You recognize the place?

ESTRAGON: I didn't say that.

VLADIMIR: Well?

ESTRAGON: That makes no difference.

VLADIMIR: All the same ... that tree ... (*turning towards the auditorium*) ... that bog.

ESTRAGON: You're sure it was this evening?

VLADIMIR: What?

ESTRAGON: That we were to wait.

VLADIMIR: He said Saturday. (*Pause.*) I think.

ESTRAGON: You think.

VLADIMIR: I must have made a note of it.

He fumbles in his pockets, bursting with miscellaneous rubbish.

ESTRAGON: (*very insidious*). But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? (*Pause.*) Or Monday? (*Pause.*) Or Friday?

VLADIMIR: (*looking wildly about him, as though the date was inscribed in the landscape*). It's not possible!

ESTRAGON: Or Thursday?

VLADIMIR: What'll we do?

ESTRAGON: If he came yesterday and we weren't here you may be sure he won't come again today.

VLADIMIR: But you say we were here yesterday.

ESTRAGON: I may be mistaken. (*Pause.*) Let's stop talking for a minute, do you mind? [3]

In this passage, the problem of the past is spread upon and its significance for providing context for understanding the present is emphasized. If the characters are unable to recall

the past, they will also be unable to establish the present because the unfathomable past has seeped into it and replaced the certainty of time and space. Hence the importance of the play's non-specific setting: 'A country road. Atree. Evening' [4].

5. Beckett's Character's 'Framed Memories'

The memories of Vladimir and Estragon are questioned, in the dialogue, with no clear answer as to which version is true. Indeed, everything about the time frame shifts in *Waiting for Godot*, including "yesterday." Because Vladimir can preserve fragments of his past despite his sporadic memory, we can assume that he did meet with Godot at some point and that their agreements were straightforward: "Nothing very definite," [4] indicating that the reason for his haziness regarding Godot is that he has forgotten the majority of the specifics of their encounter. [4] Of course, memory is the basis of identity because it enables us to recall the past events that shaped who we are today. On the other hand, Vladimir's internal memory system is flawed because he, the doubting being, has rejected the unquestioning acceptance of the memories' perceptions. Samuel Beckett depicted the chasm between interior and exterior reality in his play as a physical manifestation, denying the audience the chance to compare their assumptions about the lives of those on stage with those of the "outside world."

6. Conclusion

In Waiting for Godot, an acknowledgment of temporality is experienced by the characters who are unable to comprehend themselves through cause and effect—via past and present, this is what seems to happen outside of time and space..

The methods that were once used to secure oneself a firm foothold in time are no longer effective. Memory, the most essential of these instruments, has lost its ability to offer a stable point from which even the present moment could be accurately identified. The existence of Gogo and Didi (Vladimir and Estragon) is such that there is no secure temporal orientation for them. They lack a reliable memory and any other resources that could allow them to orient themselves. Moreover, the self is multifaceted because states of existence change over time. This compromises the self's capacity for self-control and implies that Beckett's characters' desires cannot be satisfied because they alter over time. An older self that no longer exists can frequently be brought back by involuntary memory. The realization of the non-reproducibility of the personality then becomes painful, as evidenced by Vladimir and Estragon's memories of a time when they were respectable.

Memory-driven repeated synthesis blends the past and the present, but it also encourages difference, preventing the development of a complete being. The self, on the other hand, is stabilized by repetition; as a habit, the self shields it from

the formless and helps it control itself and the world.

The search for the self outside of time becomes an endless and hopeless task because time does not stand still. Although Beckett's characters eventually fail to fulfill their true selves, they impressively manifest the "existence of the individual as well as the absurdity of the human condition." [14] They get close to the self, to that infinite reality, that inner life, and can never attain it. Beckett's characters spend their time talking, dancing, singing, a kind of routine to forget that they are waiting for Godot, who may never come, and this has become a habit that Beckett describes as 'the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects' [6].

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