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# POSTMODERN INTERPRETATIONS OF SAMUEL BECKETT'S WAITING FOR GODOT: JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD'S POSTMODERN CONDITION WITH REFERENCES

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## Abstract

Using Jean-François Lyotard's ideas from *The Postmodern Condition* as a starting point, this study examines the postmodern elements in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The themes and structure of Beckett's work are consistent with Lyotard's rejection of big narratives and postmodern knowledge's decentralized, fragmented character. An embodiment of Lyotard's skepticism and celebration of the "incredulity towards metanarratives" is *Waiting for Godot*, with its circular narrative, enigmatic characters, and existential reflections. This research shows how Beckett's portrayal of waiting, uncertainty, and the quest for meaning resonates with the postmodern state by looking at the play's artistic choices and thematic aspects. The character's words and deeds or lack thereof reflect the play's postmodernist alignment with meaning instability and the deconstruction of conventional storytelling. Viewed through this prism, Lyotard's *Waiting for Godot* becomes the prototypical postmodern work, summarising his theoretical claims.

**Keywords** Skepticism and celebration, Postmodern Condition, postmodern elements.

## INTRODUCTION

Open Jean-François Lyotard's view of the postmodern in terms of the liberal metanarrative and their contradiction, which he discusses in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), regarded as the most accessible of his writings, is used as a new approach to the play *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett. The contradiction between the local and the universal urges us to resort to the parergon altogether. Emphasizing the postmodern in Beckett's text reveals an intriguing critical potential. By gaining insight into the play on the level of the condition post-modernum, I am indicating the capacity of poststructuralism to show the way out of the mercantile society and its interpretive practices by linking the Cartesian subject with *jouissance*.

The central aim of this contribution is to point to the tension between Beckett's adherence to modernist conventions and his interest in poststructuralist innovation in general. By gaining insight into the play on the level of the condition post-modernum, I am indicating the capacity of poststructuralism to show the way out of the mercantile society and its interpretive practices by linking the Cartesian subject with *jouissance*. The postmodern interpretation follows Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*. Many readers of poststructuralist writers, such as Lyotard, would continue to argue the case for poststructuralism as dislocated and uncohesive, or that it destabilizes the self through initiating the movement of *jouissance*, and they are less likely than traditionalist alternatives to serve the

interests of dominant ideological cultures, such as many feminist readers.

### **Samuel Beckett and Waiting for Godot: A Brief Overview**

In this section, I have attempted to present an analysis of Jean-François Lyotard's critiques in his book 'Postmodern Condition' and the main points being advanced by the author according to my understanding. However, in so doing, I have had to make various simplifications which intersect the arguments posed in the monograph. These analyses are mainly found in the final chapter and define certain respects in which the so-called postmodern condition may be said to differ from modernism.

There are, in fact, different manifestations of the postmodern. The arguments that Lyotard delivers also take different variations. My decision to concentrate basically on the work of one author is a kind of homage merely to his pioneering contribution. It is also a very modest attempt to provide a flexible frame within which the interdisciplinary and polymath exploration that Samuel Beckett's work permits is not impoverished by my limited scholarly background. The current study uses Beckett, as well as the multiplicities constituting Samuel Beckett indeed, in order to demonstrate the force of Lyotard's endeavors. It may be said that I have, after much exegesis, also with very respectful apologies for the inevitable distortions, managed to reread *Waiting for Godot* in terms of the dilemmas whereby Lyotard's postmodern condition is composed.

### **Understanding Postmodernism and Jean-François Lyotard's Postmodern Condition**

Postmodern interpretations of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*: Jean-François Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition*

III. Understanding postmodernism and Jean-

François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*

Let us begin with Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition*, in which the word "postmodern" features as much in the phrase "post-modern science" as "post" does in the phrase "society." Lyotard gives, in clear terms, the definition of the postmodern condition in the contemporary setting and connects the increasing difficulty in validating knowledge or belief systems to the question of legitimation in the larger sense. The technological advancement, scientific progress, and high degree of involvement of societies in information technology and media have increased our understanding and, in turn, our questions and concerns as well.

Lyotard thought that the scientific, political, and art media are significant sectors, often called "producers," who have been monopolizing but have no real control over either the production, distribution, or use of transmodern resources, namely, narrative knowledge (such as collective plots), specialty (such as military service), and aesthetic knowledge. The major groups, information societies, and new subjectivity are those interested in increasing the control of this type of activity, but they are now justified not by grand teachings, such as Marxism or historical materialism, but by obtaining good results.

### **Key Concepts in Jean-François Lyotard's Postmodern Condition**

Building on these opening gambits, I set forth the following as key concepts in developing Lyotard's postmodern condition. Each author pursues his own goal, playing his own game, by his own rules and with his own equipment. There are as many myths as there are authors. In our world, entertainment is mostly tales, novels, historical and biographical, aural, and visual, all perpetrated by specialists of things believable, wringing true.

Despite these adolescent activities of instauration, after at least one century of sound elaboration,

despite the curiosity of recent narravolumes, the strange and progressive obsolescence of the know that is employed by makers of tales has not been scientifically recognized. And this is serious business. After all, it is impossible to conceive of a college and university education that could ignore these narratives. Since, in that case, from what other source would the school derive its credentials?

All these readings, interpretations, these hermeneutics become illegitimate and lose their meaning. Our testimony becomes forever suspect once it is determined by our covers. We confess to artificially maintaining within ourselves the present and the future, if and to the extent of a virtual return to this desuetude, this atavistic possession, this almost paranoiac hypnagogia.

No one will deny anymore that the principal belongings of art, including intellectual productions - literature, painting, etc. - are incompatible with simple cultural development. Is it the spirit of contradiction that has impelled specialists of mammals to state without complexities, as soon as possible, and in principle only for the sciences, that every truth has to be scientifically verified? And thereby to deprive themselves of their confusing recruitment by acknowledgements that they cannot contribute in principle, and for reasons which do not disgrace them, with the laboratory evidence that would save us from the credibility stakes?

### **Application of Postmodern Theory to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot***

The ways in which postmodernism pertains to literature are multi-faceted, requiring numerous and sometimes distinct forms. These forms are determinable by the style of the literary work. However, identifying some approaches that different forms of literature employ is ironic. The activities in existentialism tend not towards activity but suspension and non-being, yet they do

possess a form of passivity. Beckett himself states in Proust that time is employed to account for this lack of action, of saying nothing, one of the traditional activities of storytelling. Into, separating, speech-making, let him fall once more, when of him say the end word, one word only I beg of you. Then...Ithaca. The same speechlessness occurs in the 'how to I repeat form of the practice of expressing the unsayable, the futility of language to express the inexpressible. What relationships are available except for activity and passivity with which to end and achieve these ends and time? Not symbolic of their meaninglessness. However, ultimately time is also in control in *Waiting for Godot*, not man. "The action is subjected to time, not the reverse," but names for one and Mercurial mercuriallac this enterprise? More waiting, more time, more suspension, and this is the essence of Beckett. *Waiting for Godot* characterizes *Waiting for Godot*, which also characterizes modern identity portrayed by Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*.

### **Interpretations and Analysis of *Waiting for Godot* Through a Postmodern Lens**

Consequently, the tramps are waiting in vain for something that will never come. Beckett's is a postmodernist outlook. His skill as a postmodernist is in exposing what François Lyotard calls modern society's post over-narrations. Beckett disengages from modernity by deviating his narrative from an overarching meta-narrative or grand inte-narrative. That is to say, if oil is the 'overall schema' then man would be the 'particular narrations' the two boys stuck under the tree over the duration of the play. By the twentieth century, however, with the rate of change and advances in technology and communicative techniques, the world's width and breadth of potentiality of achieving one final ideal narrowed and frustrated the man's sense of direction. The enlightenment is the period, which

Lyotard notes as crucial in his Postmodern Condition, where the concept of oil, or the all-encompassing Over-Narrative had legitimacy.

The great narratives of The Enlightenment have become part of everyday discourse and highly susceptible to being critiqued through implementation. Lyotard, who defined the postmodern condition of 'incredulity towards metanarratives', says the 'grand narrative' had legitimate expression until 1848. Postmodernity is defined by Jean-François Lyotard as 'incredulity towards metanarratives'. The two characters in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* have hope and are waiting for something that never comes. They represent man's state of hope generated again and then frustrated by the perfidious overflow of telecommunications or as Lyotard propounds. The world has no more grand narratives. The modern era was set into 1848 in the French Fourth Republic.

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