

Traces of Greek Mythology in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

Ali Ravari

E-mail: ali_ravari8@yahoo.com

Islamic Azad University, Karaj Branch

Abstract

This study addresses Samuel Beckett's most celebrated play, *Waiting for Godot*, in an effort to analyze its characters from a novel perspective. Since Greek mythology has been undisputedly influential on Western culture and literature, the researcher attempts to investigate a connection between Greek mythology and the play. This study aims to reveal that even after more than fifty seven years of writing criticisms, analyses, interpretations, and reviews on Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* there are still some new points in this masterpiece that have not been found. Godot can be interpreted as Zeus, Pozzo as the disguised Zeus, Lucky and the Boy as Atlas and Hermes, and finally Vladimir and Estragon as the human beings living in the last years of the Golden Age. Although Beckett has not directly pronounced to be influenced by Greek Mythology, traces of mythological characters, as the researcher examines, are seen in *Waiting for Godot*.

Keywords: *Greek Mythology, Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot, Hubris, Golden Age, Apollonian and Dionysian*

1. Introduction

The mythology of any civilization is, quite generally, supposed to demonstrate the untold ways the human beings of that culture thought and felt. The ancient Greeks, like any other primitive society, once lived as savage barbarians but their myths show how elevated they grew in the ancient ages and how they became one of the most sophisticated ancient civilizations ever. The first traces of Greek mythology date back to 6000 B.C when the first farmers settled in ancient Greece worshiped a Mother Goddess in whom were united all the attributes and functions of divinity. Above all, she symbolized fertility and they believed that she would bring fertility to their lands. Although the exact time of the emergence of mythological stories in their present shape is unknown, Greek mythology, actually, began with

Homer's *The Iliad* since it is the first written record of Greece. Moreover, it is generally believed that Homer was not earlier than a thousand years before Christ.

In general, Greek mythology explains the origin of the world and the lives and adventures of [gods](#), [goddesses](#), [heroes](#), [heroines](#), and other [mythological creatures](#). It is universally acknowledged that Greek mythology has largely influenced European culture and literature. Therefore, drama has not been able to resist the influence. Western drama is based upon classical Greek drama, and Greek drama is based upon Greek mythology.

On the other hand, Samuel Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*, originally written in French as *En attendant Godot*, is an indisputably important and influential dramatic text and a crucial landmark in the twentieth-century theatre. This study tries to investigate a connection between Greek mythology and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* by comparing Greek deities with the characters of the play.

2. Three Greek Mythological Characters

2.1 Zeus

Zeus was the supreme ruler of Greek deities and was known as Jupiter or Jove by the Romans. He seized the throne of the universe by revolting against his father, Cronus, in a war called Titanomachy. Zeus then established his court on the apex of Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece, which is placed on the borders of Thessaly and Macedonia. Because of its height, Olympus is usually swathed in clouds. Homer in his *The Odyssey* describes Olympus as:

... Olympus,
where, they say, the gods' eternal mansion stands unmoved,
never rocked by gale winds, never drenched by rains,
nor do the drifting snows assail it, no, the clear air
stretches away without a cloud, and a great radiance
plays across that world where the blithe gods
live all their days in bliss. (1996, p. 169-170)

There, Zeus lived in a marvelous palace along with other deities: Poseidon, Ares, Apollo, Hephaestus, Hermes, Hera, Athena, Artemis, Aphrodite, Hestia and Demeter. These gods and goddesses are known as the twelve Olympians. As the ruler of the universe, Zeus did not tolerate any transgressions and punished his offenders relentlessly and with no discriminations. Once, Hera, his wife, in collaboration with Poseidon and Apollo tried to challenge his authority. "This revolt was successful in putting Zeus in chains, but he was

freed by Briareus and Thetis, and he punished Hera, hanging her by the wrists to the sky, an anvil on each ankle. Apollo and Poseidon were sent to serve King Laomedon as bondsmen, and there they built the great, unbreachable walls of Troy” (Dixon-Kennedy 1998, p. 327).

One of the best known examples of Zeus’ wrath is his conflict with Prometheus, the Titan who created the race of mankind. According to an ancient tale, Prometheus had cheated Zeus in a sacrifice in Mecone and due to this deceit, men kept the best meat for themselves, not the Olympians, at their sacrificial banquets. Zeus became resentful of both Prometheus and mankind and as a punishment for mankind, he deprived them of fire. Prometheus then stole fire either from heaven or, according to Aeschylus, the forge of Hephaestus, god of fire and metal working, and carried it in a fennel stalk and gave it to men. After this, Prometheus brought Zeus’ vengeance upon both himself and mankind. Zeus punished mankind by creating the very first woman, Pandora. Zeus considered an extreme punishment for Prometheus: “he had him chained to a cliff in the Caucasian Mountains and sent an eagle, offspring of the monsters Typhon and Echidna, to prey on him. Everyday the eagle tore out Prometheus’ liver, which every night grew whole again so that his torment might continue” (March 2001, p. 665).

Moreover, Ixion, Tityus, Tantalus, and Sisyphus are known as the four great sinners in Greek mythology who received severer and ruthless punishments from Zeus. But along with all of his punishments and wraths, Zeus was frequently, especially by Homer, referred to as father of gods and men thus he was called Soter which means protector or saviour. Zeus presided over human destiny: he tested the fates of men by holding up a pair of scales and ensured when a man was doomed to die. There is no doubt that he was the absolute or as Sophocles mentioned: “he watches and governs all things” (2001, p. 57).

Zeus wanted all men to be friends with each other. Therefore, he was also the patron of hospitality and guests and he had the epithet of Zeus Xenios. He once decided to wander upon earth to test the hospitality of men. Hermes also accompanied him in this journey. They disguised as travelers and visited a thousand homes but all doors were closed to them but one, the cottage of aged Philemon and his wife Baucis on the side of a mountain in Phrygia. Although they were poor, the couple did their best and welcomed the gods warmly. In return, Zeus turned their house into a temple. Zeus then granted Philemon’s wish and allowed he and his wife be the keepers of Zeus’ temple for the rest of their lives and to die at the same time.

Zeus granted their wish and at the moment of their death turned them simultaneously into trees, the oak and the lime, which often

grow together. Passing strangers hung wreaths on them in memory of their piety to their divine visitors (Grant & Hazel 2002, p. 97).

In another journey, Zeus, Hermes and Poseidon, as disguised travelers, once visited Hyrieus, the founder and king of Hyria, who had no children. When Hyrieus hospitably welcomed them, Zeus offered to fulfill a wish as a reward. He “was advised by Zeus that if he wished for a child he should urinate on a bull hide. He did so, and Hermes and Poseidon buried it. Nine months later, a boy was born from the hide. This was Orion” (Room 2003, p. 223).

Accordingly, Zeus saved his obedient followers and punished his disobedient offenders with no discriminations. He, as the authority, managed everything and decided upon the damnation or the salvation of other creatures. Thus he was both a chastener and a saviour.

2.2 Atlas

Atlas, the son of Iapetus and Clymene or in some traditions Asia, was one of the four second-generation Titans. He was the brother of Prometheus, who created the race of men from clay, and Epimetheus, the Titan who married Pandora. Atlas is often depicted in art kneeling on one knee and holding a gargantuan globe on his shoulders. This depiction is associated to his punishment for leading the Titans in a war against Zeus and the Olympian, which is known as Titanomachy. After his victory, Zeus hurled the Titans into Tartarus. But he considered the greatest punishment for the leader of the Titans; “Atlas was condemned to carry the sky on his shoulders as his punishment while his name means ‘bearer’ or ‘endurer’” (Lindemans 1997, Par. 2).

Throughout his condemnation, Atlas encountered Heracles while he was doing his own condemnation, which was the quest for the golden apples of the [Hesperides](#). Heracles offered Atlas that if he fetched three golden apples from the garden, he would take the burden from his shoulders and Atlas, thinking this an easy way to free himself of his weighty load, agreed. Therefore, Heracles bore Atlas’s burden and Atlas “happy to be released from his exertions for a while, set off on his way, procured three apples from the Hesperides, and brought them back to Heracles; but he was understandably reluctant to return to his arduous duty, and asked Heracles to continue to hold the sky for the present, saying that he himself would take the apples to Eurystheus” (Hard 2004, p. 272) for he intended to leave Heracles supporting the sky forever. But Heracles pretended that he needed to adjust the weight on his shoulder and asked Atlas to hold it for just a moment. Once the Titan held the sky, Heracles took the apples and ran away. Thus Atlas lost his chance to be relieved of his burden forever.

Many different stories have been told about the Titan Atlas varying from bearer of the sky, or nowadays earth, upon his shoulders to a mountain in North Africa or, according to Homer, a marine who supported the pillars that divided Heaven and Earth. But it is mostly believed that he was the leader of The Titans in Titanomachy and he was doomed to carry the sky on his shoulders and enduring, as his name implies, is the eminent feature of this Titan. "Any person who has to bear a heavy burden may be dubbed an Atlas or said to have Atlantean shoulders" (Manser 2003, p. 31). Because of his never-ending burden, Atlas is considered as a symbol of endurance.

2.3 Hermes

Hermes, Mercurius in Roman mythology, was the son of Maia, daughter of Atlas, and Zeus. Hermes was one of the most loved of all the Olympian deities since he was, generally, considered as a helper and protector god. But along with his good deeds, he was the god of trickery and thieves. Therefore, "Hermes represents transition, movement, change, the connecting link between oppositions" (Powell 2002, p. 42-43).

Hermes was a multifaceted deity: the god of intelligence, athletics, flocks, shepherds, luck, language, commerce, merchants, roads, travelers, fertility, and feasting. He was also the divine escort of souls, guide of selected mortals, and the herald of the gods. Hermes is associated with sports because of inventing boxing and gymnastics and also his ability of running fast. "Hermes was popular among athletes and the statues representing him as an athletic young man (ephebos) were commonly to be seen in ancient sports grounds" (Grant & Hazel 2002, p. 265).

Hermes protected men's flocks and since Zeus gave him a superlative power over wild animals, he was the god of flocks and herds and because of this he had the epithet Nomios. As the god of shepherds, "he was said to protect shepherds and was often shown carrying a lamb on his shoulders; it was this which earned him the title Hermes Criophorus, 'Bearing a Ram'" (Grimal 1990, p. 198-199). Hermes also guided mankind on their voyages, and that is the reason he was considered as the god of roads and travelers. "heaps of stones were often piled in his honor at crossroads and other points by travelers, and the square stone pillars called herms are no doubt related to this practice" (Kirkwood 1995, p. 55). A possible etymology of his name is that which connects it with rock, stone, and ballast. "For in ancient Greece, as in many other countries, piles of stone were common objects on a roadside, not to supply road-metal, but to mark holy spots, where a kindly or dangerous power dwelt" (Rose 2005, p. 120).

Albeit Hermes was a multifunctional god "Hermes is perhaps best known as the divine messenger, often delivering the dictates of Zeus himself;

as such he wears a traveler's hat (petasus) and carries a herald's wand (caduceus), which sometimes bears two snakes entwined. Wings may be depicted on his hat, his sandals, and even his wand" (Morford & Lenardon 1985, p. 192). Hermes had the epithet of Diaktoros, which means the messenger.

3. Characters of *Waiting for Godot*

3.1 Godot

Godot is the absent and mysterious character in *Waiting for Godot* and the one for whom Vladimir and Estragon are waiting. Although Godot is an off-stage character, he is present from the very first moments of the play. He is perceived in every word and every move of the two friends. But Godot's identity is obscure and this has been the subject of much debate. Beckett did not actually help a lot in finding the ultimate response to the inquiry of who or what Godot is. His answer was "If I knew, I would have said so in the play" (Calder 1967, p. 38) as he replied to his American director and friend Alan Schneider.

He is interpreted at moments as God, Pozzo, the lord of manor, a liberator, and even death. In any case, Vladimir and Estragon remain faithful to him and Godot remains their only hope. But the more they talk and think about Godot, the more he becomes obscure. But "in any case, this myth hasn't the same form the same qualities, for each of them. It might be happiness, eternal life, the ideal and unattainable quest of all men-which they wait for and which gives them the strength to live on" (Zegel 1997, p. 96) however they know salvation is not granted; Godot might be a brute since he beats the Boy's brother and this "testifies to his capacity for brutal and capricious practices" (Merriman 2010, p. 117). He may just save one of them according to the story of the two thieves. He did not promise anything in their previous meeting. "Alternate theories would hold that Godot is the absent artist, the God of Bishop Berkeley who — here with vengeance — does not ratify the existence of man by constant surveillance. Godot may be the nineteenth-century God as watchmaker, who sets his creation moving and then retires the wings" (Homan 1984, p. 51). At any rate, Godot represents the authority and he is a superlative creature who can save or punish the two protagonists.

3.2 Pozzo

Pozzo is the landowner in *Waiting for Godot* who comes across in both Acts with his servant Lucky. His name is Italian and means well. Pozzo is completely bald. Sometimes he is considered as the antagonist of the play; however he is not technically in opposition to the two Protagonists. He, just

like Vladimir and Estragon, wears a bowler hat and suit but his clothes are in better condition. Pozzo carries a [whip](#), a [pipe](#), a vaporizer, and a [pocket watch](#) and his greatcoat and other stuffs are carried by Lucky, who has a rope tied around his neck, the other end of which is held by Pozzo.

Pozzo is a self-centered imperialist/capitalist figure. Many critics and dramatists, including [Vivian Mercier](#), equate Pozzo with Godot. They are both masters who beat their servant, their names rhyme, and on Pozzo's first entrance, Vladimir and Estragon mistake him for Godot. However, "if Pozzo is Godot, or a surrogate, he is also a parody of idealized god, a petty god given to things of the flesh (chicken, wine, physical force) rather than of the spirit. Ultimately, "...he is a fallen or dying god" (Homan 1984, p. 51).

3.3 Lucky

Lucky is Pozzo's slave. His dressing is more similar to the two tramps than Pozzo. He has a long white hair which falls about his face when he takes off his hat. There is a rope tied around his neck the end of which is held by Pozzo. He carries Pozzo's coat, basket, stool, and a suitcase full of sand. Lucky's name is Anglo-American rather elusive while he is being cruelly exploited by his master. But he is indeed, compared with Estragon and Vladimir, a lucky one because he has found his Godot and does not have to search and wait for him anymore. Pozzo orders him and he always, except for once, obeys with no excuse. On the other hand, it seems that Lucky was the luckiest character in the play for Beckett since he told Colin Duckworth why he was named so: "I suppose he is lucky to have no more expectations" (1996, p. lxiii).

His thought/speech shakes the stage and indeed flabbergasts the audience since the shocking words come out from a character that has been silent from the moment of his entrance. "Everything about Lucky's tirade suggests uncertainty, ambiguity, and doubt. Lucky has no more beliefs, and the monologue systematically undermines the efficacy of a number of ways of knowing, understanding or explaining the world ('grand narratives'), whether they be religious, scientific, or philosophical" (Taylor-Batty & Taylor-Batty 2008, p. 43). Lucky is a submissive slave who obeys all of Pozzo's commands albeit most of them seem to be unreasonable. Lucky, as Pozzo claims, has the right to free himself but he would never do that since this slave needs his master without whom his life would be even more miserable. Lucky is once called Atlas by Pozzo due to his submission and carrying the heavy burden.

3.4 *The Boy(s)*

The Boy is Godot's messenger and the author "wished him to look as angelic (Greek angelos, a messenger) as possible" (Ackerley & Gontarski 2004, p. 72). Although there are, as the play mentions, two boys in each Act, the cast list specifies only one boy. Whatever the case may be, the character of the Boy is so considerable in the play for he brings "the first external verification of the existence of Godot" (Graver 2004, p. 50). He enters almost at the end of each Act and delivers the message that Godot won't come this evening but surely tomorrow. The Boy's entrance terminates the Acts but it also has a reviving function in the play; Beckett gives the dead landscape some life by sending Pozzo and Lucky along with "the leaves that appear overnight on the once-dead tree, by providing the agonized Estragon with new boots that fit better, a minor miracle in a world of decay and loss, and above all by sending the messenger boy in with Godot's message of promised future arrival" (Burkman 2008, p. 45).

The Boy, as he claims, is Godot's shepherd and minds the goats. He, actually, connects two worlds; Godot's place and the deserted country road upon which Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for Godot. He enters at the end of each Act and claims he does not recognize Vladimir, it was not him who came yesterday, this is his first time, and he came to pass a message from Godot that he will not come this evening but surely tomorrow. The Boy, at the same time, both terminates the waiting of that day and also initiates tomorrow's waiting for Vladimir and Estragon.

3.5 *Vladimir and Estragon*

Vladimir and Estragon are the two protagonists. Estragon's name is French and means [tarragon](#) and Vladimir simply calls him Gogo while Vladimir's name is Russian and Estragon simply calls him Didi. Although there are no stage directions suggesting the clothing of Vladimir and Estragon, Beckett's description of their appearance is remarkable; He once describe them to Roger Blin as: "The only thing I'm sure of is that they're wearing [bowlers](#)" (Cohn 1998, p. 150). But bowler hats seem to be more than just clothes to him since it was "of course [de rigueur](#) for male persons in many social contexts when Beckett was growing up in [Foxrock](#). "When he first came back with his [beret](#) ... his mother suggested that he was letting the family down by not wearing a bowler" (Cronin 1997, p. 382). The clothing of the characters has become more detailed in the next productions of the play. This concept was noticeably demonstrated in the Berlin production in which Vladimir wears "black and grey striped trousers which fit him, with a black jacket, which is too small for him; the jacket belonged originally to Estragon.

Estragon, on the other hand, wears black trousers which fit him, with a striped jacket which is too big for him; it originally belonged to Vladimir” (McMillan & Fehsenfeld 1988, p. 137).

Albeit they seem to be halves of some whole there are fundamental dissimilarities between them. As Beckett remarked, “Estragon is on the ground; he belongs to the stone. Vladimir is light; he is oriented towards the sky. He belongs to the tree” (Asmus 1975, p. 21). Estragon is pessimistic and he is suspicious about Godot. His negative viewpoints on life are clearly demonstrated in his first line of the play: “Nothing to be done” (Beckett 1954, p. 2). From the very first moments of the play, the audience finds him struggling with his boots. He is foot centered, instinctive and he is always concerned about earthly stuff and his own bodily functions. On the other hand, Vladimir is an [optimist](#) and he is head centered. The notion of pairs is a crucial element in Beckett’s works and these two protagonists are not an exception. When Peter Woodthorpe, the first English Estragon, asked Beckett what the play was really about he answered: “It’s all [symbiosis](#)” (Knowlson 1996, p. 417).

Vladimir and Estragon wait and wait but Godot will never come. Although they know he is a false god to wait for, they come back to the country road the next day. “Whether Godot is God or a wealthy landowner, they hope that he will save them, but the expectation of some form of salvation has only enfeebled them and led to their present state of paralysis” (Cousineau 1990, p. 29-30). Moreover, it is not even granted that “the play’s two days are successive; “there are many days like these, that all waiting is endless, and all journeying” (Kenner 1996, p. 37). Vladimir and Estragon, as the representatives of human beings, keep coming the next day to wait for Godot habitually.

4. Waiting for Zeus

4.1 Zeus/Godot: The Superlatives

The major similarity that both Zeus and Godot hold in common is the state of being the absolute power. It is so inquiring that they are the superlatives while they are unseen. In any case, what emerges to be so crucial here is the relationship of these gods with their believers. There is a mutual relationship that as much as the existence of the followers of these gods depends on them, their existence is also dependent of the existence of their followers. That is to say, the survival of Zeus is depending on his followers and without his believers he would vanish, for a god without prayers means nothing. In the same way, the existence of the absent Godot depends on the waiting of the two tramps and though he never comes he sends the Boy, his

messenger, to make Vladimir and Estragon return and wait upon that country road the following day.

However, what keeps the waiting of the two tramps alive is not only habit or hope but also fear. It is the fright of being punished that keeps Vladimir and Estragon in the track since they know if they drop Godot there would be a severe punishment. They also know that Godot, like Zeus, will not tolerate any transgressions and has the power to punish them:

ESTRAGON: And if we dropped him? (*Pause.*) If we dropped him?

VLADIMIR: He'd punish us. (Beckett 1954, p. 107)

Therefore, Godot, like Zeus, saves his obedient followers and punishes his disobedient offenders and here, dropping Godot is considered as their hubris. They know Godot is a brute since he beats the Boy's brother but they still consider him as their saviour. In the same fashion, the Greeks who were clearly aware of Zeus' wrath remained faithful believers in him. Zeus was, by no means, a forgiver and by no discrimination smited his offenders with his immense power. And this personality is demonstrated in Godot as well. For the zero tolerance of Zeus, only the punishments of Ixion, Tityus, Tantalus, Sisyphus and above all the four great sinners, Prometheus would suffice.

By describing the Godot's house, Vladimir and Estragon are, clearly, referring to Olympus. When they talk about where Zeus would think about their longings:

ESTRAGON: In the quiet of his home.

VLADIMIR: Consult his family.

ESTRAGON: His friends.

VLADIMIR: His agents.

ESTRAGON: His correspondents. (Beckett 1954, p. 14)

Olympus is where Zeus lived, a marvelous palace beyond the clouds (quiet home) along with other Olympians: Poseidon, Ares, Apollo, Hephaestus, Hermes, Hera, Athena, Artemis, and Aphrodite (his family, agents, and correspondents).

4.2 Pozzo: *The Disguised Zeus*

Pozzo can be interpreted as Godot; not actually Godot himself, but the disguised Godot. The notion of disguising is very common in the stories of Greek deities, and Zeus is one of the deities who, above all, appeared to many of his mistresses in disguise. He turned himself to a cloud, a shower of gold, a flame, a mortal man, a shepherd, a spotted serpent, a white bull, a satyr, a

cuckoo, a swan or an eagle to deceive mortal and immortal women. But the notion of disguising is far more important than Zeus' love affairs. As it was mentioned in the second chapter Zeus wandered upon earth to test the hospitality of men and, in these journeys, he and his companion(s) disguised themselves as travelers. Zeus always rewarded those who welcomed him hospitably like Hyrieus, the founder and king of Hyria or Philemon and his wife Baucis. In *Waiting for Godot*, Pozzo rewards Vladimir and Estragon but in his own specific ways:

POZZO: Gentlemen, you have
been civil to me.

ESTRAGON: Not at all!

VLADIMIR: What an idea!

POZZO: Yes yes, you have been
correct. So that I ask myself
is there anything I can do in
my turn for these honest
fellows who are having
such a dull, dull time.

(Beckett 1954, p. 40)

At last, Pozzo rewards the two tramps by ordering Lucky to think aloud. Moreover, the piece of chicken that Pozzo eats and the wine he drinks alone without bothering himself to offer them to the two tramps or Lucky, is particularly, echoing ambrosia and nectar which Zeus deprived human beings of. As it was mentioned earlier, men of the Golden Age were allowed to dine with the gods, but Zeus forbade it however in the sacrificial meeting held at Mecone. Also there is the case of Sicyon who he was cheated by Prometheus so men took the portion of meat and gods' bones. Now it seems that he is taking revenge by giving men the bones. Therefore, one possible interpretation could include Pozzo as the disguised Godot/Zeus who is a traveler and is accompanied by his servant Lucky/Atlas.

4.3 *Lucky/Atlas: The Endurers*

In the play, Pozzo directly refers to Lucky as Atlas. The main reason for this equation is the enduring function of the two. Pozzo tells Vladimir and Estragon: "He imagines that when I see him indefatigable I'll regret my decision. Such is his miserable scheme. As though I were short of slaves! (*All three look at Lucky.*) Atlas, son of Jupiter!" (Beckett 1954, p. 30). But Pozzo adds more details in the following lines of the play which testify the equation

of Lucky and Atlas. For instance when Estragon asks Pozzo if Lucky ever refused, Pozzo's answer is remarkable:

ESTRAGON: He never refuses?
POZZO: He refused once. (Beckett 1954, p. 41)

Here, Pozzo, the disguised Zeus, is referring to Titanomachy in which Atlas took sides with the Titans and led their army against Zeus. The war has ended and Atlas and other Titans are defeated and now Atlas is receiving his punishment to carry the sky upon his shoulders for eternity. It seems that Beckett depicted Atlas' punishment as the common contemporary interpretation that Atlas was forced to hold the Earth upon his shoulders:

VLADIMIR: What is there in the bag?
POZZO: Sand. (Beckett 1954, p. 102)

Lucky's refusal to get up and take the bag after his collapse in the first Act is also significant:

POZZO: Raise him up!
Vladimir and Estragon hoist Lucky to his feet, support him an instant, then let him go. He falls.
ESTRAGON: He's doing it on purpose! (Beckett 1954, p. 48)

After Vladimir and Estragon raise him up again, Lucky drops the bag at the moment when Pozzo puts it in his hand. This refusal echoes Atlas' encounter with Heracles. In the same fashion that Atlas tried to free himself from the condemnation, Lucky refuses to take the bag and tries to trick Pozzo to free himself from the burden. First he lies motionless as if he is dead and the credulous Estragon indeed thinks he might be dead. On the other hand, the cruel Pozzo orders the two tramps to raise Lucky up but as soon as they let him go he falls again. Vladimir and Estragon raise him up and as Pozzo puts the bag in Lucky's hand he drops it but there is no escape for Lucky since he finally takes the burden and continues his punishment for eternity.

4.4 Hermes/The Boy: The Messengers

Hermes is best known for being the divine messenger of Zeus and he could freely roam between Olympus and earth. Thus, Hermes is the connection between the worlds. In a same way, the Boy is the only character who can move between Godot's unknown place and the deserted country road upon which Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for Godot and he

actually connects these two opposite worlds. Moreover, Hermes in Art was, mostly, depicted as an athletic young man, known as ephebos, and choosing a boy for being the messenger of Godot is so significant. Furthermore, the Boy, as he claims, is also Godot's shepherd:

VLADIMIR: You work for Mr. Godot?

BOY: Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR: What do you do?

BOY: I mind the goats, Sir. (Beckett 1954, p. 55)

And likewise Hermes is Zeus' shepherd and is also the god of flocks and shepherds and bears the epithet of Criophorus, which means 'Bearing a Ram'. It is so attention-grabbing that Hermes is also the god of roads and travelers and it was so common that ancient Greeks piled heaps of stone in his honor on the roadsides in order to act as signs for travelers. Moreover, the etymology of his name connects it with rock, stone, and ballast. Therefore, the mound, or the stone in French script, on which Estragon is sitting on, is one of those piles of stone and the Boy/Hermes who is the god of roads and travelers has been sent by Godot/Zeus to the two vagabonds on that country road.

It is so considerable that Hermes who is always known as a helper god and a bringer of luck, does not serve as a luck bringer here in any sense, but his helping function needs more attention; first, when he passes Godot's message to Vladimir and Estragon, he outlines their despair of having waited for nothing on that day; therefore, he is not a helper. Second, he can be a helper since he makes it clear to Vladimir and Estragon that Godot would not come that day and their habit of waiting, which makes them satisfied, goes on and on, and the possibility of punishment is postponed at least for another day.

4.5 Vladimir and Estragon: The Golden Age is Over

Vladimir and Estragon can stand for the humans from the last years of the Golden Age. As Vladimir claims, they have not been just two hapless tramps in the past. They were actually happy in those days. Vladimir states that:

VLADIMIR: Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were respectable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up. (Beckett 1954, p. 3)

Vladimir is reliving the memories of their good old days when they lived happily and were respectable, when they were free from labor, worry, fatigue, and age under the reign of Cronus. But now everything has changed with the coming of Zeus since he asserts his divine supremacy over men. Here Eiffel Tower has the status of Olympus because men were allowed to enter it in the Golden Age and they even sat down with gods together and ate. Zeus also forbade the dining of gods and men so it being agreed that men should sacrifice to the gods and share it with them but there remained a simple question that which portion should be for men and which for the gods. Therefore, a meeting of gods and men was held at Mecone or Sicyon to determine which portion of victims offered in sacrifice belonged to the gods. Prometheus, who was in charge of the partition, cheated Zeus in the sacrifice. "He arranged the flesh, the entrails and the most succulent morsels in the skin and placed them on one side; on the other side he perfidiously laid the fleshless bones which he had covered with a rich layer of fat. Zeus chose the bones; but when he had removed the white, gleaming fat and discovered nothing but the animal's bones he fell into a rage" (Guirand 1968, p. 93). Therefore, men kept the best meat for themselves at their sacrificial banquets. Zeus became resentful of both Prometheus and mankind, and as a punishment for mankind, he first deprived them of fire, but Prometheus stole fire either from heaven or, according to Aeschylus, the forge of Hephaestus, god of fire and metal working, and carried it in a fennel stalk and gave it to men. Furious at the theft, Zeus ordered Hephaestus to create Pandora, the first woman. Then Aphrodite granted her with beauty, Athena breathed life into her, and Hermes taught her cunning and deceit. She was given a box and was told never to open it. Zeus then sent her to Prometheus' bother Epimetheus who, unlike his brother, was not so bright and albeit Prometheus had warned Epimetheus not to marry her, he made Pandora his wife. It did not take a long time for her to conceal her curiosity. She opened the casket and all the ills that plague mankind were unleashed and only hope remained in the box. In this fashion, the happy lives of the Golden Age humans demolished, and wretchedness took the place of happiness. Consequently, wretchedness is now the miserable condition of the two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon. But what makes their lives more despondent is waiting for a saviour to come. The saviour is Godot or as the Greeks would say Zeus the soter who will never come.

Vladimir and Estragon, as Beckett wishes, represent all mankind: "at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not" (Beckett 1954, p. 90). However, the two protagonists are in sharp contrast with each other and their differences are actually a way to complete each other. In proportion to their characteristics, Vladimir represents an

Apollonian figure and Estragon represents a Dionysian figure. As Nietzsche explicates, an Apollonian character is optimist, self-controlled, rational, logical, and ordered while a Dionysian character is pessimist, passionate, irrational, instinctual, and chaotic. "These two very different drives [Apollonian and Dionysian] run in parallel with one another, for the most part diverging openly with one another" (Nietzsche 2000, p. 19).

By taking advantage of the two major prototypical characteristics, Beckett emphasizes the universal function of *Waiting for Godot*. "Beckett also effectively reduced any ability easily to locate the play, suggesting instead a generic wilderness that was at once Slavic (Vladimir), Gallic (Estragon), Anglo-Saxon (Lucky) and Roman (Pozzo)" (Taylor-Batty & Taylor-Batty 2007, p. 25). The location of the road which Vladimir and Estragon are waiting upon remains murky. The utmost information apprehended by the spectators is that the country road is located somewhere that leads to a fair where Pozzo is bringing Lucky to and nothing more. The stage is nowhere, but is at the same time everywhere, and since Vladimir and Estragon represent all mankind, the road, consequently, stands for the world.

5. Conclusion

As it was investigated in this study, Godot has been interpreted as Zeus, Pozzo as the disguised Zeus, Lucky and the Boy as Atlas and Hermes, and finally Vladimir and Estragon as the human beings from the final years of the Golden Age. However, *Waiting for Godot*, according to the Vladimir and Estragon section, is not based upon Godot but on human condition. As the French title suggests the play is named 'while waiting for Godot', thus what happens in the meantime is far more important than Godot himself whether he be God, Zeus, or any other superlative creature. In his masterpiece, Beckett demonstrates how human beings are wasting their lives waiting for a saviour who will never come.

References

- Ackerley, C., & Gontarski, S. E. (2004). *The grove companion to Samuel Beckett: A reader's guide to his works, life, and thought*. New York: Grove Press.
- Asmus, W. (1975). Beckett directs Godot. *Theatre Quarterly*, 5(19), 19-26.
- Beckett, S. (1954). *Waiting for Godot: Tragicomedy in two acts*. New York: Grove Press.
- Burkman, K. H. (2008). The non-arrival of Godot: Initiation into the sacred void. In H. Bloom (Ed.), *Bloom's modern critical interpretations: Samuel Beckett's waiting for Godot* (pp. 33-53). New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism.

- Calder, J. (1967). *Beckett at sixty: A festschrift*. London: Calder and Boyars.
- Cohn, R. (1998). *From desire to Godot*. New York: Riverrun Press.
- Cousineau, J. T. (1990). *Waiting for Godot: Form in movement*. Boston: Twayne.
- Cronin, A. (1997). *Samuel Beckett, The Last Modernist*. London: Flamingo.
- Dixon-Kennedy, M. (1998). *Encyclopedia of Greco-Roman mythology*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.
- Duckworth, C. (1996). *Samuel Beckett: En attendant Godot*. London: Nelson.
- Grant, M, & Hazel, J. (2002). *Who's who in classical mythology*. New York: Routledge.
- Graver, L. (2004). *Samuel Beckett, waiting for Godot*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grimal, P. (1990). *The concise dictionary of classical mythology*. Trans. A. R. Maxwell-Hyslop & S. Kershaw (Ed.). Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.
- Guirand, F. (1968). Greek mythology. Trans. R. Aldington & D. Ames. In F. Guirand (Ed.), *New Larousse encyclopedia of mythology* (pp. 85-199). London: Hamlyn.
- Hard, R. (2004). *The Routledge handbook of Greek mythology*. London: Routledge.
- Homan, S. (1984). *Beckett's theatres: Interpretations for performance*. Cranbury: Bucknell University Press.
- Homer. (1996). *The Odyssey*. Trans. R. Fagles & B. Knox (Ed.). New York: Viking.
- Kenner, H. (1996). *A reader's guide to Samuel Beckett*. New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Kirkwood, G. M. (1995). *A short guide to classical mythology*. Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers.
- Knowlson, J. (1996). *Damned to fame: The life of Samuel Beckett*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Lindemans, M. F. (1997), Atlas. [Online] Available: <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/atlas.html> (July 7, 2009)
- Manser, M. H. (2003). *The facts on file dictionary of classical and biblical allusions*. D. H. Pickering (Ed.). New York: Facts On File.
- March, J. (2001). *Cassell's dictionary of classical mythology*. London: Cassell & Co.
- McMillan, D, & Fehsenfeld, M. (1988). *Beckett in the theatre: From waiting for Godot to Krapp's Last Tape*. London: John Calder.
- Merriman, V. (2010). Postcolonial parables: Repositioning *waiting for Godot*. In S. Kennedy (Ed.), *Beckett and Ireland* (pp. 114-130). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Morford, M. P. O., & Lenardon, R. J. (1985). *Classical mythology*. (3rd ed.). New York: Longman.
- Nietzsche, F. W. (2000). *The birth of tragedy*. Trans. Douglas Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Powell, B. B. (2002). *A short introduction to classical myth*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.
- Room, A. (2003). *Who's who in classical mythology*. New York: Gramercy Books.
- Rose, H. J. (2005). *A handbook of Greek mythology*. London: Routledge.
- Sophocles. *Electra*. (2001). Trans. A. Carson, P. Burian & A. Shapiro (Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor-Batty, M., & Taylor-Batty, E. (2008). *Samuel Beckett's waiting for Godot*. London: Continuum.
- Zegel, S. (1997). Sylvain Zegel in Libération 1953. Trans. R. Cohn. In L. Graver & R. Federman (Eds.), *Samuel Beckett: The critical heritage*. (pp. 95-96), London: Routledge.
-

Ali Ravari has received an MA from the Faculty of Literature and Foreign Languages of Islamic Azad University, Karaj Branch. His area of interest includes Drama.