

Comparative Essay Outline

I. In both texts the authors' ironic use of hell reveals the unreliability and uncertainty in the characters, suggesting that man has been conditioned to turn to others not only to confirm but to dictate his existence, resulting in a cycle of inauthenticity.

II. Sartre uses Estelle's dependency on mirrors to reaffirm her existence to highlight how man often looks at himself through the eyes of others, even when looking at his own reflection, because he feels the need to appeal to the dictators of his life.

A. "When I talked to people I always made sure there was [a mirror] nearby in which I could see myself. I watched myself talking. And somehow it kept me alert, seeing myself as others saw me..." (Sartre 19).

1. Using a mirror to reaffirm her existence → how can she really rely on a mirror to justify her existence when she really is just looking at herself and judging herself?
2. She cares about how others see her so she relies on mirrors to make sure she the way she sees herself through the mirror is how the people she is with want her to be. So, not only does she see herself through the mirror, but she sees herself through others because how she looks at herself is based on how she wants to be seen by *others*. It's a cycle.
3. If man cannot see himself, he begins to question his existence. He turns to mirrors for existential comfort. They remind him that he is physically there. But without mirrors, this comfort is taken away and desperate for a reminder that they do exist, the characters turn to other humans. This suggests that because man is so desperate for some form of existential comfort, something to remind him that he exists and that his existence is important, he turns to other people. But this results, Sartre argues, in a living hell.
4. When people become the mirror, it becomes impossible to deceive oneself. The other person's opinion is all one can know to be true. And the other could be lying or telling the truth, but that is the only thing in the world they have to base their existence on. (*This connects to the thieves story in a way?*) As the characters use each other as mirrors they begin to see themselves as others see them and start to fill those shoes created by the people around you. Sartre sets the play in hell ironically to say that man already does this. It is not some crazy torture tactic that one would only experience in hell, but is something man has been conditioned to do. It results in inauthenticity because when how others see man his how he begins to see himself, he steps away from who he truly is.

I. Through the Godot's uncertainty in his decision-making, Beckett suggests that every man is waiting for answers to how he should live his life from another man who does not have them and no one truly knows what they want nor what they are doing.

A. "Estragon: And what did he reply?"

Vladimir: That he'd see.

Estragon: That he couldn't promise anything.

Vladimir: That he'd have to think it over.

Estragon: In the quiet of his home

Vladimir: Consult his family.

Estragon: His friends.

Vladimir: His agents.

Estragon: His correspondents.

Vladimir: His books.

Estragon: His bank account.

Vladimir: Before taking a decision" (Beckett 14).

1. Vladimir and Estragon have been waiting for Godot for at least fifty years. They're not even sure what they asked him for at this point, they just know it's "a kind of prayer"... "a vague supplication." They have asked him for something to which they still lack an answer, so they live their lives in waiting. They think that when the answer does come, they will be saved. So, in the meantime, they are left living an inauthentic and meaningless life because they take no action to make anything of themselves. Meanwhile, the man they have been waiting their entire lives for has to consult all these different people. They don't know what they're doing with their lives other than waiting, and they're waiting for someone who also does not know what he's doing because he has to consult all these other people in order to formulate his answer. It's a cycle of unreliability that results in Vladimir and Estragon's inauthenticity.

I. Through Beckett's ironic use of the biblical story of the two thieves, which implies that nobody, including God, can be relied on, he suggests that everything man knows to be true is questionable, therefore man's existence is questionable.

A. "Vladimir: Our Savior. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other... (*he searches for the contrary of saved*) ... damned.

Estragon: Saved from what?

Vladimir: Hell...and yet...how is it - this not boring you I hope - how is it that of the four Evangelists only one speaks of a thief being saved. The four of them were there - or thereabouts - and only one speaks of a thief being saved...One out of four. Of the other three two don't mention any thieves at all and the third says that both of them abused him.

Estragon: Who?

Vladimir: What?

Estragon: What's this all about? Abused who?

Vladimir: The Saviour.

Estragon: Why?

Vladimir: Because he wouldn't save them.

Estragon: From hell?

Vladimir: Imbecile! From death.

Estragon: I thought you said hell.

Vladimir: From death, from death.

Estragon: Well what of it?

Vladimir: Then the two of them must have been damned.

Estragon: And why not?

Vladimir: But one of the four says that one of the two was saved.

Estragon: Well? They don't agree and that's all there is to it.

Vladimir: But all four were there. And only one speaks of a thief being saved. Why believe him rather than the others?

Estragon: Who believes him?

Vladimir: Everybody. It's the only version they know" (Beckett 6).

1. First of all, Vladimir is not even completely reliable in this scene as he goes from saying it was hell they were being saved from to saying it was death.
2. Through having Vladimir be unsure about whether they were being saved from hell or death, Beckett is saying that the two are synonymous. Or maybe he is saying that they are opposite and hell is life and death ends life or hell.
3. There is a story that everyone believes while there are three other versions that no one even knows. Because they are ignorant to the other stories, they automatically believe the one about salvation. This story makes God look better because he saved one of them. It is another example of how God himself is unreliable. Also, Vladimir goes from saying the thieves were being damned to hell to saying they were being damned to death. He himself, the man who is telling this story, does not even know what he is talking about.

II. The absence of God in *Waiting for Godot* and the absence of a stereotypically torturous image of hell in *No Exit* suggests that God and hell are antonyms because man lives his life in accordance to those them, when in reality, they are absent. So, man lets his life be dictated by beings that are not even there.

- A. "Lucky: Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqu with white beard quaquaquaqu outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly for reasons unknown but time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment plunged in fire whose fire flames if that continues..." (Beckett 45).

1. The beginning of Lucky's monologue suggests that even if there is a God, he does not care about us. He is saying that the divine (God) does not care about human suffering, he is inactive, he lacks the ability to understand humans, yet man often lives an entire life devoted to this God who, through this monologue, Beckett is not only mocking but possibly suggesting that if this is the God man bows down to and praises, he might as well not exist, because what good is he really doing? This is an example of uncertainty in the being who the majority of the human population turns to when they are uncertain or unsure of themselves.

2. As Lucky continues, he suggests that (and this kind of goes back to the thieves story) humans are sent to hell for reasons unknown. He is suggesting that there is only hell, no heaven, and that hell is on earth and it is as inevitable as death.

B. "Garcin: I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the 'burning marl.' Old wives' tales! There's no need for red-hot pokers. Hell is – other people!" (Sarte 45)

1. Similarly to how God is absent in *Godot*, an official torturer is absent in *No Exit*. While one might consider God and a torturer in hell antonyms, in this case they can be seen as synonymous. Because if someone relies their entire life on God to make their decisions, to tell them what is right or wrong, to dictate their life, they are, in a way, living in hell. In hell, there is nothing to do but sit around and torture each other by simply looking at each other and studying each other. To come across a certain way, as all three characters do try to do at first, one must take into consideration the way others view them. People do this in relation to God as well. So, as hell is other people, man lives inauthentically in order to please others, resulting in a hell. In which case if man lives with the sole purpose of pleasing, he too lives inauthentically. In this way, hell and God are antonyms.

2. It is also ironic that in both situations, the being that creates the general idea of the situation (aka God = salvation/religion and torturers = hell) is absent. *Godot* is also absent throughout the entire play; he never arrives. This is because *Godot* does not exist. He too is absent. *Godot* is not God, but the two are very alike because as many devoutly religious people do, Vladimir and Estragon spend their entire lives in hopes that some man they have never met will appear with an answer to their prayers. Both of them are, at this point, not so sure that *Godot* is even coming. They are uncertain of this man yet they are certain they want to spend their entire lives waiting for him to never come.

I. In both plays, motif of the characters' ignorance to how quickly time passes suggests that man has been conditioned to be oblivious to the briefness of life because he spends its entirety looking towards others.

A. "Estelle: That's so. Olga's undressing; it must be after midnight. How quickly the time passes, on earth!" (13)

1. In *No Exit* they never know what time of day it is because they have no way of seeing the changes that help remind humans that time is passing like day turning to night, the seasons changing, ect. Also, once they are in hell, they begin to recognize how quickly time passes. But at this point it is too late to do anything about it because they are dead. What Sarte is saying is that man only recognizes the passing of time through physical changes and actions. Very rarely is he constantly aware of passing time because he distracts himself. On some level everyone knows that life is short and every day is a day closer to death, but man has been programmed to ignore this thought and instead fill up his numbered days with meaningless distractions. Man is unaware and uncertain of his purpose because he does not have one so he creates distractions.

B. "*They look at the tree.*

Estragon: I see nothing.

Vladimir: But yesterday evening it was all black and bare. And now it's covered with leaves.

Estragon: Leaves?

Vladimir: In a single night.

Estragon: It must be spring!

Vladimir: But in a single night!

1. Vladimir is more shocked because he does not live in the moment the way Estragon does. Vladimir is more focused on the big picture, the arrival of Godot, while Estragon lives his life day to day. Especially in the second act he becomes more aware of how they are wasting their lives away. They both needed this physical change to remind them that time has passed. Man relies on physical changes because he cannot rely on himself. In a way, man's ignorance to the briefness of his own life has a similar affect on him as Sarte's depiction of hell. He lives unconsciously and inauthentically and then, when there are unexpected changes that remind him of time's passing, such as a death or sudden sickness, he is briefly reminded to his inauthenticity. However this notion is usually ignored because he has been conditioned to want time to pass quickly, to always be looking forward or towards others for his life to be dictated.