

Deconstructing the Archetypal Mirror of Godot in Ali Abdul-Nabi Al-Zaidi's "A Second Death"

Asst. Prof. Enas Jaafar Jawad
Department of English
College of Education for Women
University of Baghdad
Email: enasjafar@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Copyright (c) 2025 Asst. Prof. Enas Jaafar Jawad (PhD)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31973/eba1ew98>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Abstract:

People's waiting, which is related essentially to the idea of a Savior, is part of the collective consciousness that has developed itself to an archetype, and this archetype has become like a mirror against which people measure their chances of survival. In the twentieth century theatre, the process of waiting rarely spares Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as an emblematic example, though the character of Godot has become prone to be manipulated into different characterizations that are basically deconstructing the idea of waiting. Therefore, the aim becomes how to excavate man's ability to make some change by one's own self through paths than passive waiting even if this aspiration for change was within the realm of death. The Iraqi playwright, Ali Abdul-Nabi Al-Zaidi employs in his play *A Second Death*, a similar dramatic archetypal inheritance. His use of archetypes cluster to constitute a Lacanian mirror through which humanity alludes itself for salvation. Al-Zaidi tries to smash this archetypal mirror, helping his audience to reconstruct themselves away from waiting for a savior.

Keywords: archetype, collective consciousness, deconstruction, Lacan, Mawlai, mirror stage

I. An Introduction

The idea of the "mirror stage" is an important early component in Lacan's critical reinterpretation of the work of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) proposes that human infants pass through a stage in which an external image of the body (reflected in a mirror, or represented to the infant through the mother or primary caregiver) produces a psychic response that gives rise to the mental representation of the "I" (Richter 2007, p. 1123). The infant goes through this stage because it feels nostalgic to the original union of the mother during an earlier stage which Lacan designates as the Real. During the stage of the Real, the infant's union used to stand for its own perception of its existence as part of the mother. After being separated from the mother, first in body, and then under the repressive role of the father, the infant tries to configure its existence through this mirror, which is totally constructed by patriarchy and societal laws the father stands for. The infant gains an image for itself that is essentially illusory, because it starts to hold the social opinion as the mirror through which he perceives itself. In this way, the image gained in this stage is not the 'real' entity that the infant is constituted of, and according to this image the child will be necessitated to spend his life in search for an "other" to be the guide for its own identity (Dobie 2012, p. 53). From this starting point on, the infant will grow into a man whose causes of existence are drawn by the hands of somebody else. This idea has been evolving through the ages rooted in the Christian and Islamic literatures and real life, let alone mostly all worldwide literatures that deal with man's spiritual bondages with the idea of the Savior.

I. The Archetype of Waiting a 'Savior' in Modern Drama

In his play *Waiting for Godot* (1953), Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) employs the Christian archetype of the inferno-like waste land which is always in need for a Savior. People are waiting to be salvaged and this archetype is part of the collective consciousness that is constructed due to man's need to find a sense of his existence. especially after times of crises and wars. The gratification of this need seems to be in the image of a Savior.

In Beckett's play, the two exhausted tramps, Estragon and Vladimir are waiting for the figure of Godot who promised to find an end to their misery. After war, the misery they suffer is unspeakable and hardly definable to an extent that makes them sure they are unable to encounter any more hurting conditions and announce their inability to take an action but to wait. This makes them completely convinced that they are in great need for Godot to save them. Psychologically

and spiritually, they make of Godot a mirror reflecting the cause of their existence without which they would never survive.

II. The Theoretical Basis: Deconstructing The Lacanian Mirror of the Savior

In a deconstructive mode, Ali Abdul-Nabi Al-Zaidi (b.1965), the Iraqi playwright and theatre director, revives the image of the Savior in an adaptational process of Beckett's play with the intention of breaking the archetype of waiting as a mirror that reflects man's only choice for survival. Al-Zaidi studied Iraqi, Arabic and Western theater in the College of Fine Arts. He started writing plays in 1984, and in this way his writing was created under the burning tenet of war and crises. In this point, Al-Zaidi meets Beckett in his depiction of the post-war human experiences.

In his play, *A Second Death* (2022), Al-Zaidi employs the Islamic archetypal inheritance on which he was brought up in the creation of the character of Mawlai, which depicts the Muslims' and specially Iraqis' waiting for the 'Awaited' to spread justice among people of the whole universe. Archetypes for Al-Zaidi wavered between the purely secular to the essentially celestial, and his voice becomes clear against the archetype of passive waiting rather than the celestial ground of the Islamic archetype. The Christ-figure characters as 'Godot' and 'Mawlai' in *A Second Death*, alongside with the secular mythologies, all cluster to constitute a Lacanian mirror through which humanity alludes itself for salvation.

III. Intertextual Emblems in Al-Zaidi's *A Second Death*

Al-Zaidi employs a direct intertextual employment of Beckett's play, yet the social and cultural milieu flavors his work with local archetypes. In their framework, both plays seem identical in the theatrical, characterization, and thematic dimensions, yet Al-Zaidi dried the archetype by putting an end to Beckett's waiting by death which he sees as a positive choice in comparison to passive waiting. Al-Zaidi introduces multi-cultural backgrounds residing in the Christian and Islamic archetypes through the two characters of 'He1' and 'He 2'. Both characters have been revived from a supposed previous death, after "ten centuries and more" *A Second Death*, p. 158), aspiring that they would meet the person they have been long waiting for even in their death. The death of the two characters has not been identified in the play, because they are originally are not identified fully as exemplary of godly figures or humans. They do not know each other but when conversing they reveal themselves identical in their waiting. Both have already tried to overcome their entrapment in their misery but they proved themselves a failure, therefore they

chose to wait for a 'savior.' The main predicament of the two characters is that both are no more able to recognize their real identity because of the too long waiting. They feel like a floating unidentified entity in need for a center to be linked to and to be accordingly signified. They have written letters of love and solicitude for the person they are waiting for. Both characters are voicing other miserable people who lost their limbs in war and waiting for their Savior to make them restore their complete bodies and strength and hopes. The characters as well as the other people who are reported by He1 and He2 as being waiting in ques, all impudent and disabled by the injuries of the too many wars, see their awaited hope in the emergence of a Savior. They believe that they will regain what they have lost. They find in waiting a glimpse of hope. The hope of the characters and those off-stage people whom they exemplify, is signified by the bunch of letters written to the presence of HE Savior. He 2 declares that that he is waiting for HIM to come because among other hopes, "(feeling pain of his paralyzed leg) Ooooooh The moment HE puts his hand on my leg, it will awake" (*A Second Death*, p. 152). Yet, still this hope is definitely declared to be interwoven with death as reciprocal and not contrastive, only when the matter is related to the Awaited. He2, in his anxiety to meet the Awaited, fears that his pacing "heart beats would disturb HIM as He is coming I wish I had no heart" (*A Second Death*, p. 152). Furthermore, Al-Zaidi's innovation of making abstracts and objects become dealt with as subjective entities to work and act by their own, participates in the way the audience conceives the idea of death. Death seems to be self-generating. This technique of including auto-death and self-regeneration mechanism is originated because the identity of the characters themselves is not a clear cut defined one. It tends to be presented as illusory and non-configurative, whether the characters are ordinary people or celestial figures. This confusion is depicted when the writer the He1 and He2 declare that they are not the only ones who are awaiting but other people follow them in waiting in the darkness unseen for "a thousand years and more" (*A Second Death*, p.152). There is a great amount of intertextuality made primarily evidential through the bare setting, characterization (tramps and worn-out-gowned corpses), the bleak atmosphere, the broken and repetitive language, and above all the existentialist philosophy and motif of waiting.

IV. Decentralizing Waiting as a Signifier of Existence.

A Second Death starts with a Beckettian barren landscape overwhelmed by

the breath of death of two a thousand-year-old tramps awakened recently from death. The two corpses of 'He1' and 'He2', whom the audience know later as 'Godot', and 'Mawlai' respectively, are wreathing under pain and covered with dust and have both been resurrected by the blower of the "cleaning man" trying to clean the train station and the crumbling benches on which the two had been long sitting awaiting. The conversation starts under a war-alarm and with a comment that tells the Iraqi social collectiveness exemplified by He 1's saying, "I have turned into a bench by waiting" (*A Second Death*, p. 151). The two men are asking each other about who had awakened them, hoping the HE had come and is calling them for the aspired meeting. Alas, their hopes have gone wrong.

The question, "Did you awaken me" and its answer "I don't know you," (*A Second Death*, p. 51), set the main issue in the play, that is, configuring one's existence through asserting the existence of the other. The triviality and uselessness of waiting has been well exemplified by Al-Zaidi when he unites the Savors, the existent into the non-existent. Both Godot and Mawlai discover that they are waiting for each other. The pictures they hold for their 'Savior' is illusory and frustrating. The moment the Savior's photo is revealed they realize their disillusionment. None of the two is typified to his photo. They feel a devastating chaos (*translation mine*):

To find yourself waiting and waited at the same moment, Chaos... is that you toil and be exhausted and feel pain to live and die and you find out that you did not live. Chaos... is to live amidst the ruin and you think it is the life you came for, yet without a prior written consent! (*A Second Death*, p. 177).

Al-Zaidi's use of juxtapositions, of affirmation and negation, necessitates death. The gratification of the characters' desire for salvation is assumed to be in death only. And this will be the only way that people lose their notion of a Savior that resides away from their own self. AL-Zaidi is faced by an audience of different loyalties. This demands him that he puts diverse boundaries for his borrowed text that may cope with all, himself as a writer and a director, his audience, and the fictional world of the play itself (Al-Safi). He differs from Beckett in the focal point he tries to substantialize. Beckett presented the idea of 'waiting,' as a symbolic activity standing for the futility of man's efforts to find meaning or a goal to his life. Therefore, Beckett's thesis statement of existentialism always ends in an

inevitable failure. This failure makes waiting an absurd attempt as far as it is accompanied by man's sterility and stagnation even if it was accompanied by humility and cruelty as it appears in the relation between Pozzo and Lucky, the other two characters in Beckett's play. While for Al-Zaidi, in his employment of Beckett's play, his concern with the issue of waiting is not reckoned on to emphasize the futility of man's efforts and existence, as much as he is concerned in discarding and breaking altogether the archetypal idea of the Savior. His aim is to deconstruct the ultimate mirror of the 'Savior,' local or universal, to which people allude themselves, and according to which they measure their existence and their attempts for a decent living.

Passive waiting includes stagnancy and absence of action. Al-Zaidi injects the sphere with pregnant expressions that give no pace for the need of activity or movement. Al-Zaidi indulges his characters in a complete sterility. When they try to exchange their benches, the decision is articulated to seem "a revolutionary idea" (*A Second Death*, p. 154). This is intentionally done in the sense it develops in the characters a fear to change their places, similar to Estragon's fear of losing his way back if he and Vladimir go away from the place which they think would gather them with Godot. Al-Zaidi's discussion of the character of the Savior is based on the way that man de-structures the idea of waiting in passivity, because this passive waiting will surely result in futility. As depicted in Islam and Christianity the saviors are not giving ready-made solution. Rather, the saviors need people work actively to reach the step at which the Savior help them. The archetypal image of the Savior is approached by people within the sphere of passivity. This is why the play starts and ends with this intention of activating the "revolutionary idea," which proves to bring hope and sense of beauty to the characters when each sit on the other's bench (*translation mine*):

He 1: What do you think if we change?

He 2: How?

He 1: You sit on my bench and I sit on yours?

He 2: A revolutionary idea.

(*They arise with difficulty. Exchange places. They sit.*)

He 1: Allah... What a wonderful place!

He 2: Allah.... And what a wonderful place you have! (*A Second Death*, p. 154)

Yet, this revolutionary act did not last but for a moment. They could recognize that changing their places led to the emergence of an ability to converse and to gain a sense of beauty. They have become open to each other and reveal details about the reason behind their

waiting. They start to read the letters they wrote and were intended to recite at HIS presence. But, after all they give up waiting the moment they are revealed to have been awaiting each other unconsciously. Therefore, they know that they have lost all that time only in sitting and dying for a “thousand years and more,” uselessly. Their and people’s Savior will never come. None will be saved from misery (*translation mine*):

He 2: I am not the only one who is waiting. (*points backwards*) They are sitting on the benches there, behind me, endlessly.

He 1: None is behind you.

He2: Look with your yearning, with your anxiety to meet the beloved, and your soul will see them all clearly.

He1: A thousand years have you been waiting here for Godot? What a fool you are!

He2: All of us were waiting. (*A Second Death*, p. 157)

As the conversation continues, it is well established that the process of waiting has become long a recurrent process by the two characters and the people standing, like other ghosts, behind them and who cannot be seen but through the yearning, anxiety and only by the soul. When Godot and Mawlai fail to continue this centuries-lasting-waiting, they decide to die better than remaining stagnant and staying there as representatives of the archetype of the people’s Savior. They simply decide to die. They break the mirror by returning to death, but now with the intention of terminating all types of waiting.

Al-Zaidi reveals bare facts in his audience’s face, all at once and in a repetitive discourse that it becomes difficult for the audience to overlook these facts. The audience are already prone to search for a solution through a Savior, finding their aspirations within the messages prepared identically by Godot and Mawlai to their Savior (*translation mine*):

He 1: Hey... your beard is so white... your beard... your beard is so white.

He 2: It is dyed by the color of wars.

He 1: You know! I’ve written him a letter. I am intended to read it in his Majesty’s presence.

He 2: I’m eager to listen.

He 1: where to find it now. They are so many... (*reads*) At last you come my love.

He 2: Where is he?

He 1: You come to give another meaning to love.

He 2: I will read you the letter I prepared to read in his Majesty's presence... At last, you've come to give a new meaning to our blood (*A Second Death*, 156-159).

Here, mentioning 'blood' triggers in He 1's mind an inquiry about the identity of the Savior for whom He 2 is waiting. Similarly, an inquiry is aroused in He 2's mind. The answer will be the devastating tool of revelation that both are waiting for each other, discovering that Godot was waiting for Mawlai to save him, and Mawlai was waiting these "twenty centuries or more" to be saved by Godot. There is created a point at which the process of waiting is devastatingly smashed and the archetype of the Savior is to be deconstructed (*translation mine*):

He 1: Blood!?!.... But who is he that you wait for?

He 2: You don't know him.

He 1: Just curious.

He 2: A very important one.... He is called 'Godot'.

He 1: (Surprised) Godot!? (Harshly coughs and takes a drowse of medicine)

He 2: I'm not the only one who is waiting, (pointing backwards) they are all sitting on benches there endlessly behind.

He 1: There is no one behind you.

He 2: Look by your eagerness and longing for the beloved and you will see them clearly by your soul. (*A Second Death*, p. 157)

Man's eagerness and longing hides from him the fact that he is following a mirage that cannot be configured or gained in reality. Al-Zaidi reveals the disappointment of both characters in a poetic language yet with a devastating cruelty. By this revelation there creeps the dark humorous soul into the tragic conclusion the characters will reach; they are illusively and unknowingly waiting for each other. They continued for centuries spending their time in passive waiting to the extent that they have gained an illusory memory of themselves, a memory that has terminated and threatened their own existence and the existence of humanity (Al-Safi). The characters in *A Second Death* lost their ability to configure the purpose of their existence the moment they chose waiting for a savior. Too much waiting led them to forget their message in life and eventually their worth as human being, as they represent humanity when they are dramatized as figures to be followed by the endless queues of disabled impotent people. The meaning of the archetype has been smashed by the revelations they go through when conversing to each other.

Within the Lacanian terms, the archetype of the Savior is part of the symbolic system of “meaning-making,” according to which man perceives his existence, the mirror (Tyson, 2006, p. 28). The Savior symbolizes the Centre in the human universal mentality, according to which ‘the saved’ recognizes his existence and distinguishes a “subject-position,” where one can find a place in the “chain of discourse” in which he finds himself (Seldon, 1988, p. 223). By having the Savior decentered, as it happens in Al-Zaidi’s *A Second Death*, where the Savior is himself the Saved, the idea of having a central power that brings hope which requires waiting, is completely denied and therefore deconstructed. By presenting Godot and Mawlai as both waiting for a Savior, the central idea of salvation that is gained from an outside source has been completely defeated. Therefore, Al-Zaidi smashes such a choice by adopting the idea of Godot and Mawlai choosing death by their own will, in order to stop the waiting process. The two characters are standing as representative for the process of passive waiting. By their decision to re-die, they make those who are waiting for them stop waiting and thus incite the people queues standing behind them to think of changing their position. They try to disappear and put those people on the front to face reality and discard illusory protection and salvation by the process of waiting.

The most important manipulation that Al-Zaidi does to Beckett’s play is reversing the waiting motif by ending the span of life of the Savior Archetype. He approaches the end of the play by smashing the mirror and stopping the very process of waiting. He renders his awaited and awaiting characters, Godot and Mawlai, into a conversation on matters as revolution, surrender, rebellion ending with a state of depression that makes them give up their role of the “Awaited Savior.” They themselves are shown as psychologically repressed and confused by the people’s and their own sterility. The conscious and the subconscious are overlapping (*translation mine*):

He 1: Where have you long been? ... I have been imprisoned in your promised cell Your Majesty.

He 2: How can I imprison you and I am your prisoner... Oh Godot.

He 1: Then! who is our jailor?

He 2: Fear....

He 1: But I was created with two wings!

He 2: Broken ones...

He 1: What a disappointment! (*A Second Death*, p. 163)

With this disappointment the “Saviors” need to be saved from man’s sterility. With the characters’ decision to go through a second death, Al-Zaidi puts an end to the idea of ‘existence’ by means of

passive waiting. The celestial image of the Savior has been long distorted by humanity when man related this sacred idea to the state of man's stagnancy. The portrait that Godot and Mawlai kept, thinking of it representing their Savior, serves as the mirror reflecting their existence causes. The mirror has been broken with the discovery that the portrait is for some unknown identity. The illusory nature of waiting is depicted by the characters' inability to recognize themselves, a matter that necessitates their death. Their distorted idea of the Savior has distorted their own identification of themselves. They reach a point of recognition that instead of making a change they spent their youth and old age in waiting without even turning their faces toward each other to recognize the disillusionment they have put themselves into (*translation mine*):

He 1: I awaited you with my long black hair, and awaited after my heart turned white, and awaited with my head getting bold losing my hair one after one. I awaited you with a head where nothing left but 'disappointment.' While you could only turn your face and know me and all this farce ends" (*A Second Death*, p. 166).

The chance that both characters have missed is the recognition of their own selves and what they can do instead of waiting. Al-Zaidi insists that his characters could have turned their faces away from the mirror and configure the option they have to change their position. The play ends by the two characters' decision to stop this process of waiting not only to help themselves, but for those who are unseen in the darkness, all crumbling standing behind them and who have been long handicapped by "authorities ... who created 'waiting,' (*"A Second Death"* 173), to keep them consolidated to the presence of a 'Savior.'

The Conclusion

Ali Abdul-Nabi Al-Zaidi ventured a link between the Beckettian Absurdity of Waiting for Godot and the Iraqi theater through his play, "*A Second Death*." The very title of Al-Zaidi's play is treading on the issue of the paradox implemented in some of the archetypal images of the Savior, whether they be celestial or secular. Al-Zaidi's intention, unlike Beckett, reckoned on the issue of the creation of a yardstick against which man tended and intended to measure his existence. The trodden man, who has been long suppressed psychologically and physically, could never give up nor attempted to go out of his mirror stage through which he used to conceive himself. The archetypes have been constructed by man's sterility and sometimes unwillingness for change. The passive waiting for a better tomorrow to come may have led humans to forget how to live the present and resulted in the

extinction of man's potentiality to make a change. The two characters have revealed in their conversation that hope has been long confiscated by means of wars, political games, and diseases that make pills and medicines become man's sole companion. In such unbearable and hard-to-change-circumstances, man grows to think that no other choice other than waiting would be at hand. Such a waiting has turned life to a vacant sphere void of meaning and value. Life's value has become clinging only to the coming of a Savior, an outside force, to make the aspired change to the life of a people who lost their faith in themselves.

Following Derrida's deconstructive methos, Ali Abdul-Nabi Al-Zaidi has decentralized the main idea of waiting by the process of incursion of death into the process of waiting and subsequently ending it. Waiting, as a signifier of man's salvation has been deceased and becomes a floating force that cannot continue its (waiting) influence on both characters, Godot and Mawlai, eventually on those and those who are waiting for them to find solutions. The two characters' decision decentered the power that waiting could have on the populace. The way the two characters chose to live and first die with is now discovered to be the wrong way. Mawlai and Godot are depicted by Al-Zaidi as representatives of all what the sacred Savior is against, that ids for humanity to be stagnant and passive. By their death, the writer puts the end to such exemplary of the Savior to be followed.

Reference List

Richter, David H. Ed. (2007). *The critical tradition: Classic texts and contemporary trends*. Bedford St. Martin's.

Tyson, Lois. (2006). *Critical theory: A user-friendly guide*. (2nd ed). Taylor & Francis Group.

Al-Zaidi, Ali Abdul-Nabi. (2022). *A Second Death*. In *Scripts of the corrupted city*.
Writers' Union Publications.

Seldon, Roman. (1988). *The theory of criticism: From Plato to the present*. Longman Group UK. Limited.

Musa 'ad, Husam Al-Din. (August 7, 2021). "A second death: The omen of idols awaiting salvation". <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=727455>.

Al-Safi, Jasim. (2021). "A second death: The dichotomy of waiting and death." *Al-Furjah Journal*. The Arabic Centre of Fine Arts. <https://www.alfurja.com/?p=44294>.

Dobie, Ann B. (2012). *Theory into practice: An introduction to literary criticism*. (3rd ed.) Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

تفكيك المرأة النمطية لغودو في مسرحية علي عبد النبي الزيدي "ميت مات"

المستخلص:

لطالما كان انتظار المأل للخلّاص والتي ترتبط بشكل أساسي بال "منتظر" أو ال "مخلص" جزءاً من الوعي الجمعي الذي تطور ليكون مرتبطاً بالنمط البدائي والذي بدوره أصبح مرآة تنعكس على أساسها فرص الإنسان نحو النجاة. في مسرح القرن العشرين، لم تنفك فكرة الانتظار ان ترتبط بمسرحية صاموئيل بيكيت العبثية " في انتظار غودو" كونها مثالاً رمزياً بالرغم من انه تجسيد شخصية "غودو" وقعت تحت وطأة الكثير من عمليات التحوير والتغيير في إطارها الفلسفي بما يتلائم مع اختلاف الأطر الفلسفية والتي في الأساس اطر مناقضة حطمت فكرة الانتظار. بالتالي الهدف من الدراسة هنا يدور حول كيفية استخلاص قدرة الإنسان على انتاج بعض التغيير بيد الإنسان فقط بدون الحاجة الى شق دروب آملّة مبنية على الترقب السلبي وإن كانت هذه الآمال للتغيير متجهة نحو مسارات الموت والفناء.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التفكيك، الصورة النمطية، طور المرأة، الوعي الجمعي، لاكان، مولاي