

# Patrick's Endgame When Words Fall on Deaf Ears. Edward Curtin

By [Edward Curtin](#)

Global Research, November 01, 2024

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

In-depth Report: [Nuclear War](#)

*"I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything anymore, teach me others. Or let me be silent." - Samuel Becket, Endgame*

Before he went to Rockaway Beach to bury himself in sand up to his neck, Patrick said to me: "People ask me where I've been, and I tell them I've gone within to a place that's so damn dim I can't see them anymore. Then listen up, they tell me, to what's going down these days, but my ears are blocked, yet they won't stop, their tongues just flop like socks."

He worried me, and I told him so, but he just smiled and added, "Up in the tower the cuckoo strikes his fist to stop the chiming of the bells."

I told him it was all very poetic but strange as hell. Why was he talking like that and why was he going to bury himself in sand?

He laughed and said, "Why not? There's something dripping in my head. A heart, a heart in my head. You've heard that one before?"

Inspired by his Irish compatriot, Samuel Becket, he wanted to make a point. What it was he wasn't sure, only that it required a symbolic statement fitting for this Halloween season at a time of historical grotesqueries.

In some place in his mind he thought of his Aunt Winnie, who was always saying it was too late for her to change her life. She had been saying that ever since Patrick came over from Ireland decades ago. Hearing her, Patrick would think - then what's the point of going on living, but he never said this to her.

His thinking was ambivalent, to put it mildly. He too was absolutely terrorized by the thought of death. He had these recurring dreams that he needed to use the toilet and everywhere he looked he was faced with toilets overflowing with shit. Every month or so, he would say to me, "To think, one moment you're here and the next you're not. I can't get over it." Yet he never could make the connection between his dream and his aunt's neurosis.

Patrick and I had been friends for a long time and I had never known him to act like this. He was an accomplished poet but also a very good musician. When we were in our early twenties, we had been in a band together, The Young Artists. We took the name from James Joyce's novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Patrick had been born in Cork, Ireland and moved to the Woodlawn section of the north Bronx when he was 18, just out of high school. He was living with his aunt and uncle, who were our next door neighbors, and that's how we met. He had an eye for one of my sisters, but that's a story I'd rather not touch.

We were both big fans of Joyce and fancied ourselves young artists, wild bon vivants in the mold of J.P. Donleavy's character in *The Ginger Man*, Sebastian Dangerfield. Donleavy had grown up a few blocks over in the neighborhood and we both loved his wild use of language and poetry. We also loved Guinness and the neighborhood pubs, all of them Irish, with rollicking music on the weekends and young women as crazy as we were. Our buddy Diego Sandoval, who grew up in Mexico City and whose father, a psychiatrist, knew Fidel Castro, was a member of our group. Diego loved Nietzsche and his idea of the music of forgetting. He loved to free associate, so the three of us would often improvise songs in English and Spanish with a little Gaelic thrown in. It was very Joycean, so like Leopold Bloom, and we often weren't sure what we were singing but there were times when some spot of magic seemed to touch us and everything made sense. What started as a farce ended as a feast.

Patrick says it's all a farce now, a spectral theatrical show, just look at the news, it all repeats itself and people never seem to wise up. He thinks everyone is like his Aunt Winnie now, anxiously waiting for death and disaster to strike but denying their repressed anxiety as they participate in a blatant political masquerade led by the phoniest crew of political actors who are leading the world toward nuclear annihilation. Death of the soul at the very least.

I sure as hell agree with him. As I have said before but which I think bears repeating, this waiting business is a deadly and widespread game.

I remember reading somewhere that some sullen sage once said that life is what we do while we wait for death. It's not the kind of wise-guy wisdom I would try to refute, especially with today's widespread public insouciance as our political charlatans make a mockery of the sacredness of life.

The writer William Saroyan once said that he could enjoy thinking that an exception to death would be made in his case. Now that he's dead for more than half as long as he lived, his enjoyment can be considered short-lived. Kaput.

But wishful thinking aside, there's no question but that Mr. Death knocks at everyone's door sooner or later, better never than late, to coin a phrase in reverse and revert to wishful thinking. Nevertheless, it's hard to deny the fact that he's coming and everybody's waiting for his knock. Unless, that is, you are in league with those technologists out in Silicon Valley, such as Ray Kurzweil of Google, who think they are going to employ technology to knock death dead and live forever. But even Ray is waiting for what he calls the Singularity to kick in – the day when humans and computers tie the knot and the former get uploaded or downloaded into the latter, I forget which, and death disappears as humans live in the “cloud.” In the meantime, Ray swallows a few hundred pills a day to keep chugging along until he reaches the promised land.

These artificial intelligence (AI) folks in Silicon Valley and at the World Economic Forum, all besotted on their machine dreams, seem to feel they're smarter than Plato, Jesus, Buddha, Shakespeare, and other idiots we used to think wise, but I think George Carlin meant to include the Artificial Intelligence crowd when he said:

Think of how stupid the average person is, and realize half of them are stupider than that.

Of course, rather than knock, Mr. Death just might blow the house down. Although it's a

little impersonal and there will be no introductions, a lot of people are waiting for that. Like the early Christians who were eagerly awaiting the imminent end of the world, most people today are unconsciously waiting for a nuclear holocaust – to be seen on the evening news, of course, or maybe announced by a tweet or an instant message as they scroll their little crystal rectangles to see what’s going down.

Everyone will, that’s what going down.

The general consensus seems to be it will solve all problems, which is a brilliant insight in a Humpty Dumpty sort of brillig way in a looking-glass/ technological world where our most amazing technology is the nuclear bomb, rather recently joined in conjugal bliss with the computer that will save us from death.

In any case, what’s there to do? Keep waiting, that’s all, seems to be the popular approach. If I didn’t know any better, I’d think people were looking forward to meeting Mr. Death. For why else are they waiting without raising their voices in protest against U.S. nuclear first strike policy and the [trillion-dollar modernization of American nuclear](#) weapons announced by Barack Obama and continued under Donald Trump and Joseph Biden. Why do they wait in silent fear and trembling as the United States military and CIA maraud across the planet killing and maiming to profit their capitalistic masters? How can they possibly in good conscience wait while the Israelis with full American support try to obliterate all Palestinians in their ongoing genocidal bloodbath?

That’s the big picture, so to speak, the big waiting game. Waiting in the smaller sense can also kill you, or keep you going (but don’t ask where), depending on your point of view. There are endless variations to this waiting game with the smaller joined to the larger in a powerful synergy that freezes people in their tracks.

This sense of waiting for something terrible to happen permeates the air these days. The media and government pump out incendiary reports in an endless stream of things to fear in an effort to immobilize the population. Neurotic fears have long been known to be most effective tools of social control. When these can be manufactured in great and continuous numbers, they have a cumulative effect of creating growing social anxiety, which is the case today. It is no accident that the dramatic increase in drug usage to quell anxiety, nervous stress, and depression has occurred concurrently with the mainstream media’s propagandistic outpouring of fear-mongering and the drug industries relentless advertising campaigns for their psychotropic fixes.

The news is constantly suggesting that some “apocalyptic” event is just around the corner.

Like: there will be strong thunderstorms at 4:30 PM, or at least a 58.5% chance, so wear your helmet and take shelter.

Like: a woman in South Dakota ate a cherry that had a double pit that caused her to almost choke to death, so be very careful eating cherries; “almost” might be “really” in your case.

Like: the sun is very hot this year, so never step outside unless you are sprayed with chemical sunscreen from head to toe.

Like: there is a bug or bird or some critter that has recently been detected that is carrying a disease so deadly that if it flies by you within 11 ½ inches you will die a slow tortuous death

in four days, five at the most.

Like: space aliens are coming for you if the Russians don't get you first.

All kinds of neurotic fears are endlessly broadcast to keep folks on their anxiety-ridden toes while the real dangers go unmentioned and bubble under the surface. This is the corporate media's job, of course, one they have perfected.

Wherever you go in the United States, you can see on people's faces the strain of waiting for some absurd fear to become a reality, while things they should be fearing are repressed. You can almost feel them holding their breaths in nervous anticipation. It keeps people occupied as they await every presidential election that is "the most important one in your lifetime."

Yet no one laughs.

The recently deceased wonderful essayist Lewis Lapham said it eloquently in an issue of *Lapham's Quarterly*:

In my capacity as human being, I've met with most if not all of the descriptives handed down from antiquity, but in my profession as journalist, I've encountered primarily the distinctions between what Sigmund Freud in 1917 defines as real fear and neurotic fear, the former a rational and comprehensible response to the perception of clear and present danger, the latter 'free-floating,' anxious expectation attachable to any something or nothing that catches the eye or the ear, floats the shadow on a wall or a wind in the trees. Real fear invites action, the decision to flee or fight dependent upon 'our feeling of power over the outer world'; expectant fear induces states of paralysis, interprets every coincidence as evil omen, prophesizes the most terrible of possibilities, ascribes 'a dreadful meaning to all uncertainty.'

Ironically, it was Freud's nephew, Edward Bernays, the great red, white, and blue American propagandist, who took his uncle's insights and used them in the service of corporate and government control. By inducing irrational fears of a foreign enemy - i.e. the Soviet Union in the 1950s - as he urged President Eisenhower, you could distract people from the real threat, which was their own government and the CIA with whom Bernays worked overthrowing the democratically elected president of Guatemala, among other evil projects. Fake fears large and small could paralyze the average person and create loyalty to the state and capitalism. They would wait for their protectors to tell them what to do. The present Russia bashing and fear-mongering as well as Israeli propaganda is straight from Bernays' play book.

Is it any wonder that Samuel Becket's *Waiting for Godot* was such a popular play in the 1950s? Godot never came then and he's not coming now, but waiting is still the name of the game. The character Vladimir sums up the waiting game:

Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot?

It is not just waiting that recurs to me as Patrick undertakes his novel act on the slippery sands of Rockaway. The autumnal season and especially this weekend of ghosts, the dead, and masks has me thinking once again of my own experience with acting, so I will repeat

myself as in a second coming, in the hope of a visionary breakthrough, chimerical as it may be.

Having grown up as the only brother among seven sisters, I was always my parents' favorite son. With such dumb luck, I never felt the need to be someone I wasn't and so accepted my favored fate. But from an early age I learned from my sisters what it meant to "put on your face." Like most girls in a cosmetic culture, they would stand or sit in front of a mirror dutifully applying lipstick, cover-up, and mascara (Italian, *maschera*, mask) in preparation for their entrances onto the social stage where they would face so many other faces facing and eyeing them. Mirrors meeting mirrors, the looking-glass selves. It seemed to the boy that it was an exhausting act.

At the time, I had only a dim awareness of the depth of people's playacting, although I don't think there was much playful joy in it.

I've been fascinated by masks, liars, and the role of acting on the social stage ever since I was three years-old and was posed before a large mirror for a professional photographer. Look in the mirror, son. Look at yourself looking at yourself. Pose for us. The photographer's cigarette providing the smoke.

When Patrick and I met, we realized we had a common interest in the performative nature of social life and so we fashioned our songs and performances around this theme. Diego added great spontaneity. We believed we could use words in a poetical way to reach people below their everyday consciousness.

Patrick has lost his faith in words and thinks a stunt like burying himself in sand up to his neck, like Nag and Nell in Becket's *Endgame*, both contained up to their necks in ash cans, might reach people. I don't. Becket had an actual stage and mesmerizing words to match. Even then, it took years for audiences to appreciate the play's brilliance. They at first thought he was too depressing and now probably have no idea who he is.

Today is Halloween and Patrick therefore thinks his act might resonate with the day. I told him that I think the only thing he will accomplish is to suggest to people to put their heads deeper into the sand.

As Halloween and the coming weekend transpires, enchantment only increases. I think of how all persons are, by definition, masked, the word person being derived from the Latin, *persona*, meaning mask. Another Latin word, *larva*, occurs to me, it too meaning mask, ghost, or evil spirit. The living masks light up for me as I think of ghosts, the dead, all the souls and spirits circulating through our days, like the wind blowing the dry leaves everywhere.

While etymology might seem arcane, I rather think it offers us a portal into our lives, not just personally, but politically and culturally as well. Shakespeare was right, of course, "all the world's a stage," though it's debatable whether we are "merely" players. It does often seem that way, but seeming is the essence of the actor's show and tell.

But who are we behind the masks? Who is it uttering those words coming through the masks' mouth holes (the *per-sona*, Latin, to sound through).

Halloween. The children play at scaring and being scared. Death walks among them and they scream with glee. The play is on. The grim reaper walks up and down the street. Treats

greet them. The costumes are ingenious; the masks, wild. The parents stand behind, watching, smiling. It's all great fun, the candy sweet. So what's the trick? When does the performance end?

As Halloween ends, the saints come marching in followed by the souls. All Saints. All Souls. The Days of the Dead. Spirits. Ghosts walk the streets. Dead leaves fall. The dead are everywhere, swirling through the air, drifting. We are surrounded by them. We are them. Until.

Until when? Perhaps not until we see through the charade of social life and realize the masked performers are not just the politicians and celebrities, not only the professional actors and the corporate media performers, but us.

Lying is the leading cause of living death in the United States, and the pharmaceutical companies have no prescription for this one. Not yet, anyway, as far as I care to know.

By the time you read this, Patrick's performance will be over. I hope he planned to do it at high tide. Otherwise, Patrick's endgame will be Patrick's end.

Then I too will be at a loss for words.

\*

Click the share button below to email/forward this article to your friends and colleagues. Follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and subscribe to our [Telegram Channel](#). Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

### **[Don't Miss Out on Global Research Online e-Books!](#)**

*This article was originally published on the author's blog site, [Behind the Curtain](#).*

**Edward Curtin** is a prominent author, researcher and sociologist based in Western Massachusetts. He is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG).

The original source of this article is Global Research  
Copyright © [Edward Curtin](#), Global Research, 2024

---

### **[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)**

### **[Become a Member of Global Research](#)**

Articles by: **[Edward Curtin](#)**

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in

print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)

[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)