**Workshop № 02: Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*:**

**Major Themes and Stylistic Features**

**A. Major Themes**

**1. Absurdity of Existence**

One of the most noticeable features of the play is utter absurdity: [Vladimir](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Waiting-for-Godot/character-analysis/#Vladimir) and [Estragon](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Waiting-for-Godot/character-analysis/#Estragon) dress shabbily, engage in physically inept actions, and partake in clownish nonsensical conversations. They absurdly wait endlessly for an unchanging situation to change when it is clear Godot will never come. They occasionally discuss ending their wait by hanging themselves or simply leaving, but absurdly, they never take any action. Although they agree there is "nothing to be done," they work absurdly hard to fill the time while they wait. The unavoidable conclusion is that human existence itself is absurd. [Beckett](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Waiting-for-Godot/author/)'s emphasis on the absurdity of human behaviour shows both the tragic and comedic sides of the existential crises.

**2. Purposelessness of Life**

None of the characters in *Waiting for Godot* has a meaningful purpose. *Waiting for Godot* might seem to give [Vladimir](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Waiting-for-Godot/character-analysis/#Vladimir) and [Estragon](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Waiting-for-Godot/character-analysis/#Estragon) a purpose, but the fact that Godot never arrives renders their waiting meaningless. Likewise, [Pozzo](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Waiting-for-Godot/character-analysis/#Pozzo) and [Lucky](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Waiting-for-Godot/character-analysis/#Lucky) might seem to be traveling toward something, but their travels are ultimately shown to be equally purposeless. Pozzo initially professes to be taking Lucky to the fair to sell him, but this purpose is never fulfilled. The second time they pass by, they express no purpose at all—they are simply moving from one place to another. Their traveling may even be counterproductive because they cannot seem to go any distance without falling down. The messages from Godot delivered by the boy are equally purposeless. Godot will never come, and it is not at all clear the messages are even meant for Vladimir and Estragon—the boy calls Vladimir "Albert." All the characters seem to be trapped in their purposeless roles by little more than habit, which Vladimir calls "a great deadener." The idea that life has no purpose is a recurring theme in the Theater of the Absurd, which *Waiting for Godot* helped define.

**3. Folly of Seeking Meaning**

Although it is unclear who or what Godot represents, by waiting for him, [Vladimir](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Waiting-for-Godot/character-analysis/#Vladimir) and [Estragon](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Waiting-for-Godot/character-analysis/#Estragon) are clearly seeking some type of meaning outside themselves. In Act 1, they remember making a "kind of prayer" to Godot, expecting it to give them some direction, and they decide it is safer to wait and see what Godot says rather than die by hanging themselves. Godot, however, never comes, representing the futility and folly of such a search for meaning in an inherently meaningless existence.

**4. Uncertainty of Time**

Time is a slippery thing in *Waiting for Godot*. It seems to pass normally during the period the characters are on the stage, with predictable milestones, such as the sunset and moonrise, although the characters are sometimes confused about it. But the intervals between the two acts and various events are wildly uncertain. When [Vladimir](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Waiting-for-Godot/character-analysis/#Vladimir) and [Estragon](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Waiting-for-Godot/character-analysis/#Estragon) return at the beginning of Act 2, the growth of leaves on the tree suggests a longer period of time has passed than the one day Vladimir claims it has been. Estragon and [Pozzo](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Waiting-for-Godot/character-analysis/#Pozzo) retain little or no memory of their encounter the "previous" day, and other changes have mysteriously occurred "overnight." Estragon and Vladimir have no firm idea of how long they have been together or how long ago they did other things, such as climb the Eiffel Tower or pick grapes in Macon country. The characters also seem to be trapped by time, endlessly repeating essentially the same day again and again. This creates a despair that leads them to repeatedly contemplate suicide, although they never remember to bring the rope they would need to actually hang themselves. Time is one of the main ways people organize their lives and memories, so the uncertainty of time in the play contributes to the feeling of meaninglessness.

**5. Relationship**

Relationship and Friendship is one of the major themes of *Waiting for Godot*. The writer explores and portrays different types of relationships ranging from friendship to slave and ownership. Of course, they are different entities with different physical as well as mental problems but on combining they play a big role in the play. Three types of associations portray the theme of relationship in *Waiting for Godot*.

1. Relationship between Estragon and Vladimir

2. Association of Pozzo and Lucky

3. Association of the Boy and Godot.

**6. Existentialism**

Both characters, Vladimir and Estragon, put themselves into an absurd situation just like humans have been put in the world without any motivation. The question of existence is revolving around the play. Throughout the play, they are restricted to change their miserable and extremely tormenting condition of life. Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* exposes that it is up to the individual to change the meaning of life through personal experience in the earthly world and make it better. In very simple words the philosophy of existentialism means that every person is responsible for his actions and no second person is pulling his strings or controlling his fate. Every character in the play never wants to improve their lives. The solution (which none of the characters take) would seem to be action and choice despite the ever-presence of uncertainty, and an awareness of one’s surroundings and past actions.

**7. Religion**

Religion is incompatible, against reason in *waiting for Godot*. As characters are waiting for Godot, It shows their blind faith in God without performing anything. They cannot understand Religion logically and are left in dark absurd banalities such as switching bowler hats or taking a boot on and off. There is uncertainty and no way of knowing what is true in the domain of faith. The main question that arises is: Should we consider religion as religion without presence of rationality or should we reject religion if there is no reason?

**8. Disintegration of Language**

Disintegration of language is achieved through various methods in Absurd drama: The use of meaningless words uttered mechanically with no logical links or grammatical structure occurs in absurdists’ plays. These dramatists make little use of language as a means of influence. Language which seeks to present a meaning, characterization is hardly achieved. Furthermore, the absurdists usually show their disbelief in language as an instrument of communication in the employment of purely theatrical effects. Beckett occupied with the failure of language to communicate the menaces of life and its meaninglessness. Consequently he uses language as an atmosphere of entrapment. His endless, futile speech is the history of the human spirit. He replaces customary plot, structure and language with fragmentary, contradictory and often nonsensical dialogue in order to present a world of chaos that mocks established institution and conformity. Beckett used the language of gesture and movements to make inanimate things play their action, and to relegate dialogue. He reduced language to a very subordinate role. His language becomes the adequate representation of stagnant life and meaninglessness – it relates to life without action, describes man deprived of history.

**B. Stylistic Features**

**1. Dialogue and Language**

The language in an absurdist drama often goes nowhere. Characters misunderstand or misinterpret one another, frequently responding to a statement or a question with a non sequitur or a ludicrous comment. The dialogue sometimes resembles the give-and-take. Beckett opens *Waiting for Godot* this way. Estragon, who has a sore foot, is attempting to remove his boot. Though he tugs hard, it won't come off. In frustration, he says, "Nothing to be done." Vladimir replies, "I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle." In Act 2, the two men agree that they are happy in spite of their problems. The absurdity of the dialogue is the author’s way of calling attention to the seeming absurdity of life. For Samuel Beckett, the world wobbles on its axis, and the people who inhabit it do not always think logically or or talk sensibly.

**2. Repetition**

The structure of *Waiting for Godot*, as we mentioned before, is a firm structure based on repetition, the return of the leading motifs and on the exact balancing of variable elements.

The play is in two acts, both of which is set in the same place and begins at the same time “early evening.” The use of repetition can be illustrated with an example of Pozzo having eaten his meal and lit his pipe, then says with evident satisfaction: “Ah, that's better.” Two pages later Estragon makes precisely the same comment having just gnawed the remaining flesh of Pozzo's discarded chicken bones. Yet, the circumstances, though similar, are not identical for Pozzo has eaten to his full while Estragon has had a meager something. The repetition of the words is therefore an ironical device for pointing a contrast like that between Pozzo's selfish order to Lucky to give him his coat in act I and Vladimir's selfless spreading of his own coat round Estragon's shoulders in act 2.

In addition, we witness Vladimir's song at the beginning of act 2 is just a life example, as the entire structure of the play is repetition and circular in nature. Let us together examine the song:

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| A dog came in the kitchenAnd stole a crust of breadThen cook up with a ladleAnd beat him till he was deadThen all the dogs came runningAnd dug the dog a tombHe stops, broads, resumes:Then all the dogs came runningAnd dug the dog a tombAnd wrote upon the tombstoneFor the eyes of dogs to come | A dog came in the kitchenAnd stole a crust of breadThen cook up with a ladleAnd beat him till he was deadThen all the dogs came runningAnd dug the dog a tombHe stops broads, resumes:Then all the dogs came runningAnd dug the dog a tombHe stops, broads, softlyAnd dug the dog a tomb |

Therefore, Vladimir’s song is circular and repetitive. In addition, we notice that its ominous theme is death.

Both acts of the play take place in the same setting; there is simply a country road, which is not given a specific location with a single tree. The audience is never transferred to another location; all of the action takes place within one setting. In addition, both acts unfold at the same time of the day, in the evening. Time in act 2 is supposed to be the next day but as we witness that, there is no essential difference between that day and the day in the first act. The same tendency towards repetition can be served in the action of the play. Both acts have the same kind of similarities in the sequence of action happened to the characters. Let us examine them together:

**1.** In both acts, the action begins with the same situation: in act 1, Vladimir enters and Estragon observes, “so there you are again.” In act 2, on meeting Estragon, Vladimir exclaims: “you again!” And a little later, he said: “there you are again.”

**2.** Both acts feature a discussion of beating Estragon.

**3.** In both acts, there is a concern over Estragon’s feet and boots.

**4.** In both acts, we listened to a discussion of Vladimir’s difficulties with urination.

**5.** In both acts, there is a comic conversation involving carrots, radishes and turnips.

**6.** In both acts, Vladimir and Estragon contemplate the possibility of committing suicide by hanging.

**7.** In both acts, the only visitors upon the scene are Pozzo, Lucky and a boy.