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نموذج الوثيقة البيداغوجية لتدعيم منصة التعليم عن بعد
في اطار الوقاية من وباء كورونا

اسم ولقب الأستاذ: Dr. Belfar Boubaaya Naciera		
محاضرة	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> litteraires تطبيق	<input type="checkbox"/> Etude de textes المقياس

نوع الوثيقة – COURS – 4 lessons to cover 4 sessions		
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وصف مختصر لمفردات المحاضرات

Résumé des cours

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Etude de textes littéraires. Niveau L3.Cours. 1h30 par semaine.

On line week 1 and 2: corresponding to lessons 5 and 6 (normal classes)

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man , 29 December 1916, is the first novel of Irish writer James Joyce

In these two lessons, we will look at the following points :

- I. What does the title say ?
- II. What can be said about the narrator?
- III. Who is Daedalus ?
- IV. What kind of a work is this novel?
- V. What is the Setting of this novel?
- VI. What is the structure of the novel?
- VII. What is epiphany?
- VIII. What significance does 'Punctuation', language and style hold in the novel?
- IX. Symbolism in the novel
- X. Most dominant Themes
- XI. Significance of the characters
- XII. What are the most dominant characteristics of modernism?
- XIII. Conclusion: Joyce prefigured modernism and Virginia Wolf's definition of novel of age

I. What does the title say ?

What does the title announce ? What an unusual title for a novel? Doesn't it sound more like an article? What about the philosophical dimension/ is it an artistic achievement/ Are artists usually older men?

Possible explanation of the title:

The story presents in detail the process of Stephen Daedalus as he is growing up and contemplating what he wants to choose to become. He is described as he is cultivating an artistic aesthetic. The novel and the process trace the religious and intellectual awakening of the young man.

Stephen Daedalus is a fictional alter ego of Joyce and the main character. Growing up, Stephen goes through long phases of hedonism (pleasure seeking) and deep religiosity. He eventually adopts a philosophy of aestheticism, greatly valuing beauty and art. Many of the events of Stephen's life mirror events from Joyce's own youth. His surname is taken from the ancient Greek mythical figure Daedalus, who also engaged in a struggle for autonomy.

Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes.
("And he turned his mind to unknown arts.")

— Ovid, Epigraph to A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man^[3]

The epigraph quotes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: the inventor Daedalus, has built a labyrinth to imprison the Minotaur, but Daedalus and his son Icarus are forbidden to leave the Island of Crete by its King, Minos.

Daedalus, "turning his mind to unknown arts", fashions wings of birds' feathers and wax with which he and his son flee their island prison. Icarus flies so close to the sun that the wax on his pair melts and he plummets into the sea.

To A. Nicholas Fargnoli and Michael Patrick Gillespie the epigraph parallels the heights and depths that end and begin each chapter, and can be seen to proclaim the interpretive freedom of the text.

Biographical and auto biographical elements abound in the narrative. There is also an allusion to Daedalus in the Greek mythology. These elements contribute to the characteristics of a modern novel.

What about the role of the artist in society?

Joyce believed in "art for art's sake," and *A Portrait* reflects this belief. That is, Joyce did not feel that art was supposed to have a practical purpose. It was not the function of the artist to express a political or religious opinion in his or her work, or even to teach the reader about the society in which he or she lived. To the contrary, the artist was to remain aloof from society and devote himself to his art.

For Stephen, as for Joyce, the ability to use the language to create a work of art is its own reward. Stephen is especially sensitive to words and to sensuous phrases, such as "a day of dappled seaborne clouds" and "Madam, I never eat muscatel grapes." He is not so much concerned with what sentences mean as with how they sound and what they suggest. This musical, suggestive quality of his art comes through in the villanelle ("Are you not weary of ardent ways ...") that Stephen writes near the

end of the book. Because of his artistic temperament, Stephen feels increasingly estranged from society. He considers the vocation of the artist a sort of independent priesthood "of eternal imagination" that ultimately prevents him from serving the Catholic Church, from taking part in politics, and even from participating in ordinary Irish life

The image of the modern artist versus religious occupation:

In Chapter Four, the unnamed dean asks Stephen to consider becoming a priest. Stephen is tempted by the invitation and imagines himself leading a religious life. He decides not to join the priesthood. He wishes to maintain his independence and does not feel that he can be a part of any organization. His power, he realizes, will come not from his initiation into the priesthood but from devoting himself to his solitary art, even at the cost of losing his family, friends, nation, and God.

II. What can be said about the narrator?

In the last chapter of the book, Joyce shifts to the first person narrative which means that the writer James Joyce and the narrator Stephen Daedalus become one and the same. Stephen Daedalus is mature enough to adopt his artistic identity and he is united with Joyce, the creator of the work. Joyce treats his alter ego with a mixture of irony and sympathy. Here again, the reader can notice modern aspects with self criticism.

III. Who is Daedalus ?

The most obvious symbols in the novel are flight and birds. They reflect both the theme of freedom, and the myth of Daedalus, which meaning is perhaps related to an artistic work. The novel connotes and alludes to different aspects of the myth of the Greek hero who, in mythology, is an architect and inventor becoming trapped in a labyrinth of his own construction. He creates wings of feathers and wax for his son Icarus and for himself, in order to escape. They fly away but Icarus tries to fly higher and finally, as he flies too close to the sun, the wax melts and he falls into the sea.

This can be interpreted as Joyce's mythical representation of himself. The labyrinth is life and its difficulties and the choices one has to make in order to become successful. How can one struggle in life and be the winner over adversity and stress/ To dive into art may be an answer. The hero is representative of James Joyce and the decision he had to make in order to choose to be a writer, a novelist, a creator of art.

IV. What kind of a work is this novel?

It is a Künstlerroman, a German word that means: "artist's novel" and which belongs to the class of Bildungsroman, or apprenticeship novel. It is a novel that deals with the youth and development of an individual who could become a painter, musician, or poet.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young man*, the central conflict that the Portrait dramatizes is that of Stephen's vocation: Shall he be an artist or shall he be a priest?

V. What is the Setting of this novel?

Both indoor and outdoor settings are used. Joyce gives a minimum of external description. He is more concerned with the state of mind of his main character, Stephen Daedalus, than with the external circumstances of Stephen's situation. Here the stream of consciousness is illustrative of the modern technique that we (Students and teacher) have dealt with previously in the other works we have approached.

In terms of country, the action of the book takes place in Ireland. In terms of time, it is at the end of the nineteenth century and at the turn of the twentieth century, a span of about twenty years. (Notice the modern time that is dealt with)

Although Joyce gives specific settings for the incidents in the book, he does not give dates for the events that he is reporting.(Could we say that it is not the time that matters but rather the events?) However, critics know that the events of Stephen Daedalus's life mirror events in Joyce's own childhood and young adulthood.(Remember that we have used the terms biographical and auto biographical before).

Specific settings include various Daedalus homes, the first outside Dublin and later ones in the city, the schools that Stephen attends, Clongowes Wood College in County Kildare and Belvedere School in Dublin, without giving lengthy descriptions of a classroom. For example, Joyce is able to create the atmosphere of a school, the chapel where Father Arnall delivers his fiery sermon, and, later in the book, University College, Dublin. Stephen also visits the city of Cork in southwest Ireland with his father.

Part of the setting is also shaped by the historical background .Joyce grew up in an Ireland that constitutionally was a part of a nation formally known as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Located just to the west of the island of Great Britain, Ireland had its own distinctive customs and culture. While Protestantism was the predominant religion in Great Britain, most native Irish people were Roman Catholics. Both politically and economically, Ireland had long been dominated by Britain.

VI. What is the structure of the novel?

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young man began life in 1903 as Stephen Hero—It was projected as a 63-chapter autobiographical novel in a realistic style. But after 25 chapters, Joyce abandoned Stephen Hero in 1907 and set to reworking its themes and protagonist.

Unusual start for a novel: Opening to A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man:

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo ...

His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face.

He was baby tuckoo. The moocow came down the road where Betty Byrne lived: she sold lemon platt.

Five chapters: The novel was reworked into five chapters quite condensed. Each chapter deals with a different period in the first twenty years of the central character. The vocabulary changes as the protagonist grows, in a voice not his own but sensitive to his feelings. Each chapter addresses a specific theme related to Stephen's development as an artist.

Chapter One takes Stephen from his infancy into his first years at school. In this chapter, Stephen becomes aware of the five senses and of language itself, and he takes the first steps to assert his independence.

Chapter Two includes his awareness of his family's declining fortunes and his move from Clongowes Wood School to Belvedere School in Dublin. It ends with committing a sin.

Chapter three, Stephen is preoccupied with his sin and the possible consequences of his sin.

Chapter four takes place at Belvedere School. Stephen attempts to understand the precepts of his religion and to lead a life in accordance with those precepts. However, he recognizes that his independent nature will not allow him to serve as a priest of the Church. Instead, he will become an artist, a "priest of eternal imagination."

Chapter Five, Stephen takes further steps to formulate his aesthetic theory. He also makes a final declaration of independence from his friends, his family, his religion, and his country.

Structured structureless work. (remember what we have studied in T.S.Eliot's The Waste Land.)

plotlessness (yet we have a narrative and a story)

In literary terms, one of the revolutionary aspects of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is the fact that there is no actual plot to the book. Instead, the progress of the novel is organized around the growing consciousness of the central character, Stephen Daedalus.

Stephen's initial consciousness comes through his five senses, a theme that is introduced on the first page. Here Joyce reports Stephen's awareness of how his father's face looks, how the wet bed feels, the "queer smell" of the oilsheet and the nice smell of his mother. He sings a song and listens to his mother's piano playing.

From the beginning, Stephen is conscious of words as things in themselves. When he goes to Clongowes Wood College, he becomes conscious of what words mean—and of the fact that a word can have more than one meaning.

Open ended novel with the participation of the reader:

The final pages of the novel represent Stephen's diary for the period before leaving for Paris and it is the reader who decides whether Stephen will succeed. Like Icarus, the son of Daedalus, he may fall into the sea with melted wings. There is a close identification between the author and hero and no distinct omniscient narrator to comment on the action.

participation of the reader:

Stephen's consciousness of trouble is at first vague—he is not sure what Dante and Mr. Casey are arguing about at the Christmas dinner, but he knows that the situation is unpleasant. He is conscious of impending trouble when Father Dolan enters the classroom and threatens to "pandy" any "idle, lazy" boys.

A little later he is also conscious that his father is in trouble of some sort, but he does not know the cause of this trouble.

The reader experiences Stephen's fears and bewilderment as he comes to terms with the world in a series of disjointed episodes

Unique language. and style:

Joyce's style is uninhibited and free-flowing, following Stephen's unrestrained conscious thought. This is an essential technique of modernism as it creates a psychic reality which has little to do with the true reality.

VII. What is epiphany?

Epiphany— a moment of euphoric (overjoyed, ecstatic, excited, exhilarated) insight and understanding. In the novel, epiphany significantly contributes to Stephen's personal education. The epiphany often occurs during an otherwise trivial incident, and is the central organizing feature in Joyce's work. However, several epiphanies are undercut by "anti-epiphanies"—moments of disillusion or disappointment that bring Stephen back to earth. Each shift between epiphany and anti-epiphany is accompanied by a shift in the tone of Joyce's language. The epiphany scenes are generally written in a poetic and lofty language. By contrast, the language in the anti-epiphany scenes emphasizes less noble aspects of life. Taken together, Joyce uses the give-and-take shift between epiphany and anti-epiphany to show the paradoxes of life. This is another modern aspect in the novel.

Stephen Daedalus has an aesthetic epiphany along Dollymount Strand.

As Stephen abandons himself to sensual pleasures, his class is taken on a religious retreat, where the boys sit through sermons. Stephen pays special attention to those on pride, guilt, punishment and the Four Last Things (death, judgment, Hell, and Heaven). He feels that the words of the sermon,

describing horrific eternal punishment in hell, are directed at him and, overwhelmed, comes to desire forgiveness. Overjoyed at his return to the Church, he devotes himself to acts of ascetic repentance, though they soon devolve to mere acts of routine, as his thoughts turn elsewhere. His devotion comes to the attention of the Jesuits, and they encourage him to consider entering the priesthood. Stephen takes time to consider, but has a crisis of faith because of the conflict between his spiritual beliefs and his aesthetic ambitions. Along Dollymount Strand he spots a girl wading, and has an epiphany in which he is overcome with the desire to find a way to express her beauty in his writing.

VIII. What significance does 'Punctuation', language and style hold in the novel?

As part of his effort to create an entirely new type of novel, Joyce employed unusual punctuation (another modern aspect in the novel). Immediately noticeable in *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* is the fact that there are no quotation marks. Instead, Joyce uses a long dash at the beginning of a paragraph where he wishes to indicate speech by a character. (One effect of this technique is that the reader is not immediately able to tell what portions of a paragraph might be part of the narrative apparatus rather than the speaking voice of a particular character.) Joyce is also sparing in his use of commas. Many of his longer sentences appear to be "run-on" sentences. He does this deliberately to show the "run-on" nature of a character's thoughts—a technique known as the "stream of consciousness." (another modern aspect in the novel. We have already dealt with that previously).

Reminder: The stream of consciousness technique consists in rendering the inner life of the characters in a continuous flow of thoughts, impressions, feelings and fantasies, sometimes independently from the chronological order of events. The writer does not intervene in rearranging this flow of consciousness in a logical, coherent way. He simply renders the consciousness of his characters as it occurs and the style resembles an interior monologue.

language and style:

By mixing second and third person, the writer creates a personal reality.

Joyce's intellectualism is apparent in his mixture of mythology, history and literature used to create innovative symbols and narrative techniques.

From strict realism to extensive use of free indirect speech that allows the reader to peer into Stephen's developing consciousness.

Joyce adopts the free indirect style, a change that reflects the moving of the narrative centre of consciousness firmly and uniquely onto Stephen.

What is free indirect style?

free indirect style:

Joyce fully employs the free indirect style to demonstrate Stephen's intellectual development from his childhood, through his education, to his increasing independence and ultimate exile from Ireland as a young man.

Free indirect speech is a style of third-person narration which uses some of the characteristics of third-person along with the essence of first-person direct *speech*; it is also referred to as *free indirect discourse*, *free indirect style*. Events take their significance from Stephen, and are perceived from his point of view

The style of the work progresses through each of its five chapters, as the complexity of language and Stephen's ability to comprehend the world around him both gradually increase.

The book's opening pages communicate Stephen's first stirrings of consciousness when he is a child.

Throughout the work language is used to describe indirectly the state of mind of the protagonist and the subjective effect of the events of his life.

The writing style is notable also for Joyce's omission of quotation marks: he indicates dialogue by beginning a paragraph with a dash, as is commonly used in French, Spanish or Russian publications.

The novel, like all of Joyce's published works, is not dedicated to anyone.

IX. Symbolism in the novel

Critics have remarked on Joyce's unique combination of realism and naturalism on the one hand and symbolism on the other. Joyce's realistic and naturalistic approaches are evident in his pretense that he is presenting things as they are. At the same time, he uses symbolism extensively to suggest what things mean.

A little reminder: What are realism, naturalism and symbolism?

Realism: it attempts to represent familiar things as they are. It depicts everyday and commonplace activities and experiences, instead of using a romanticized presentation.

Naturalism: is a literary movement that started in late nineteenth century in literature and art. It is a type of extreme realism. It suggests that it is the roles of family, social conditions, and environment that shapes human characters which are doomed to be the way they are and cannot be otherwise. .

Symbolism: the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities. Symbolic meanings are different from their literal sense. Symbolism can take different forms. Generally, an object represents another, to give an entirely different meaning. The result is meaning that is much deeper and more significant.

The five senses—sight, sound, taste, smell, touch—are recurrent symbols throughout *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Stephen's reliance on the five senses is signaled in the book's first few pages.

The reader is made aware of the way his father looks to Stephen (sight), the songs that are sung to him and the clapping of Uncle Charles and Dante (sound), the feeling when he wets the bed (touch), and the reward of a "cachou" (cashew—taste and smell) from Dante. Joyce considered the five senses to be indispensable tools for the literary artist.

Of these, the sense of sight is most prominent. The importance of sight—and its fragility—is a recurring motif throughout the novel. This reliance on, and fear for, sight is embodied in the phrase "the eagles will come and pull out his eyes," which Dante says to Stephen after his mother tells him to apologize for something. Stephen makes a rhyme, "pull out his eyes / Apologise." (Significantly, Joyce suffered from eye problems later in his life, and was to undergo several eye operations.) At various points in the novel, Stephen refuses to apologize for his actions and decisions, even at the risk of perhaps losing his vision, metaphorically. For example, in Chapter One he listens to Mr. Casey's anecdote about spitting in a woman's eye. At Clongowes school, Father Dolan punishes Stephen for having broken his glasses. In Chapter Four, Stephen attempts a mortification of the senses to repent for his earlier sins.

Religious symbols abound. There are numerous references to various elements and rites of Roman Catholicism: the priest's soutane, the censor, and the sacraments of communion and confession. Bird symbolism is prominent too. In addition to the eagles mentioned above, there is Stephen's school friend and rival Heron, who is associated with the "birds of prey." Stephen later thinks of himself as a "hawk like man," a patient and solitary bird who can view society from a great height but who remains aloof from the world that he views.

X Most dominant Themes:

Universal themes developed in this novel: How does Joyce render Individual versus society?

Humanity, freedom, individualism and exile are modernist in the writer's attempt to focus on the development of the individual and not on the problems of society.

-restless quest for identity: While looking at his name and address on his geography book, Stephen ponders his place in the world. This stream of consciousness leads him to wonder about the infinity of the universe and about God

-confusions as a small boy at a strict Jesuit school,

- his discontent with his father and the financial situation of the family -growing feeling of alienation

- responding to a rapidly changing world in which institutions like religion, social order and capitalism were questioned after World War I.

- Religion and dissatisfaction with religion: Dante argues that it was right for the Church to denounce the sinful Parnell, saying that the Irish people should submit to the authority of the bishops and priests even if this means losing a chance for independence. Mr. Casey, who is also a Catholic, bitterly resents the Church's actions in the Parnell case. He argues that the clergy should stay out of politics, and says that "We have had too much God in Ireland." Simon Daedalus echoes this argument, calling the Irish "an unfortunate priestridden race.... A priestridden Godforsaken race!"

Religion—in the form of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church—forms a major theme of the novel: He goes on to consider God's name in other languages and the fact that God can understand all languages: "But though there were different names for God in all the different languages in the world and God understood what all the people who prayed said in their different languages, still God remained always the same God and God's real name was God.

As a student at University College, Dublin, Stephen grows increasingly wary of the institutions around him: Church, school, politics and family. In the midst of the disintegration of his family's fortunes his father berates him and his mother urges him to return to the Church. An increasingly dry, humourless Stephen explains his alienation from the Church and the aesthetic theory he has developed to his friends, who find that they cannot accept either of them. Stephen concludes that Ireland is too restricted to allow him to express himself fully as an artist, so he decides that he will have to leave. He sets his mind on self-imposed exile, but not without declaring in his diary his ties to his homeland:

... I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.

Loneliness and isolation:

Throughout the book, Stephen records his feelings of being different and distant from his classmates, his siblings, and even his friends. At the end of the novel, Stephen records his artistic manifesto in his diary: "I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.

XI. Significance of the characters

Simon Daedalus – Stephen's father, an impoverished former medical student with a strong sense of Irish nationalism. Sentimental about his past, Simon Daedalus frequently reminisces about his youth. Loosely based on Joyce's own father and their relationship.

Mary Daedalus - Stephen's mother who is very religious and often argues with Stephen about attending services.

Emma Clery – Stephen's beloved, the young girl to whom he is fiercely attracted over the course of many years. Stephen constructs Emma as an ideal of femininity, even though (or because) he does not know her well.

Charles Stewart Parnell – An Irish political leader who is not an actual character in the novel, but whose death influences many of its characters. Parnell had powerfully led the Irish Parliamentary Party until he was driven out of public life after his affair with a married woman was exposed.

Cranly – Stephen's best friend at university, in whom he confides some of his thoughts and feelings. In this sense Cranly represents a secular confessor for Stephen. Eventually Cranly begins to encourage Stephen to conform to the wishes of his family and to try harder to fit in with his peers, advice that Stephen fiercely resents. Towards the conclusion of the novel he bears witness to Stephen's exposition of his aesthetic philosophy. It is partly due to Cranly that Stephen decides to leave, after witnessing Cranly's budding (and reciprocated) romantic interest in Emma.

Dante (Mrs. Riordan) - The governess of the Daedalus children. She is very intense and a dedicated Catholic.

Lynch - Stephen's friend from university who has a rather dry personality.

XI. What are the most dominant characteristics of modernism?

Rather than write about ancient heroes and legends, Joyce wanted to chronicle the lives of ordinary people in his early fiction. (Realism and naturalism)

There is another notable difference between Joyce and his best-known predecessors. At a time when Protestants dominated the cultural institutions of Ireland, Joyce was the first major Irish Catholic writer. Even though he himself rejected Roman Catholicism—a process that is detailed in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*—he made his religious background an integral aspect of this novel. And although he wrote brilliantly in the English language, Joyce was keenly aware that he wrote in the language of Ireland's conquerors.

-the desire of breaking away from tradition;

-the quest for finding new ways to view man's position and function in the Universe and experiments in form and style are to be found in James Joyce's novels. Modernist novels were generally written in the first person and fragmentation was a device currently used,

The chronological order of the events are sometimes rearranged to follow the inner life of the characters. Non linear plots are a technique of modernism.

Dialogue is minimal as stream of consciousness is predominant.

Individual versus universal themes.

The —stream of consciousness technique was amply used by Modernist writers, particularly by James Joyce who preferred to write about individuality rather than society.

By using the interior monologue and the stream of consciousness, by his concern with the individual rather than the external reality, James Joyce foreshadows his later techniques in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Various 'isms' of early twentieth century are present here:

symbolism, imagism, expressionism, Marxism, existentialism and feminism.

modernism in style

plotlessness

participation of the reader

and more that you can gather in these two lessons.

XIII. Conclusion: Joyce prefigured modernism and Virginia Woolf's definition of novel of age

Joyce prefigured modernism in a response to a rapidly changing world in which institutions like religion, social order and capitalism were questioned. All the characteristics of modernism: the desire of breaking away from tradition; the quest for finding new ways to view man's position and function in the universe and experiments in form and style are to be found in James Joyce's novels. Many aspects of modernism depictable in this novel had a great influence upon the development of the modernist movement itself and turned Joyce into a prominent modernist writer. The most relevant examples of modernist techniques in *A Portrait of the Artist* are the *künstlerroman*, plot, the "stream of consciousness" literary style, individual versus universal themes, and unique language. By using the interior monologue and the stream of consciousness, by his concern with the individual rather than the external reality, James Joyce foreshadows his later techniques

Virginia Woolf's definition of novel of age

The novel of the age should combine —something of the exaltation of poetry and —much of the ordinariness of prose' as Virginia Woolf states in an essay entitled —Poetry, Fiction and the Future (reprinted as —The Narrow Bridge of Art) [1]. It will make little use of the marvelous fact recording power which is one of the attributes of fiction she says further on. It will tell us very little about the houses, incomes, occupations of its characters; it will have little kinship with the sociological novel or the novel of environments. With these limitations it will express the feelings and ideas of the characters closely and vividly but from a different angle... It will give the relations of man to Nature, to fate; his imagination, his dreams. But it will also give the sneer, the contrast, the question, the closeness and complexity of life. It will take the mould of that queer conglomeration of incongruous things- the modern mind.

Virginia Woolf seems to capture the essence of modernist writing :

—Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions-trivial, fantastic, evanescent or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old...Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. It is now the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit whatever aberration or complexity it may have with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible.

from *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol IV, ed. Andrew Mc. Neillie, London, Hogarth Press,(1986-1994),p 160

On line lessons 3 and 4, L3 level corresponding to lessons 7 and 8 (normal classes)

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)

En attendant Godot (published 1952, performed, 1953)

Vivian Mercier described Waiting for Godot as a play which "has achieved a theoretical impossibility—a play in which nothing happens, that yet keeps audiences glued to their seats. What's more, since the second act is a subtly different reprise of the first, he has written a play in which nothing happens, twice."

In lessons that deal with this famous play, there may be various ways to approach it. We propose an analysis of the following points. Students are encouraged to look for the interpretation of the play as it belongs to the 'theatre'. This is new in our lessons as we have discouraged the films for other works we have previously studied. We focus on the modernist aspects of the play and the characteristics that Samuel Beckett has emphasized.

We propose to consider ten Points in order to reach the conclusion.

- I. Getting to know the author.
- II. What is the Theatre of the Absurd ?
- III. Language and style
- IV. Themes
- V. Literary techniques and modernism
- VI. Setting
- VII. Why can we say that there is a Religious dimension in the play?
- VIII. What are some of the most Ridiculous situations?
- IX. Characters
- X. Possible Interpretations
- XI. Conclusion : How to face the Absurd ? and Quotes from the play

I. Getting to know the author.

Who is Samuel Beckett ? He is an Irish avant-garde novelist, playwright, poet, theatre director, essayist who lived in Paris for most of his adult life and wrote in both English and French. (Not from the lost generation USA) Beckett studied French, Italian, and English at Trinity College, Dublin from 1923 to 1927. Despite being a native English speaker, Beckett wrote in French because—as he himself claimed—it was easier for him thus to write "without style." Beckett translated all of his works into English himself, with the exception of *Molloy*, for which he collaborated with Patrick Bowles.

Why is he notorious in terms of modernism?

He is widely regarded as among the most influential writers of the 20th century. Beckett's work offers a bleak, tragicomic outlook on human existence, often coupled with black comedy and gallows humour, and became increasingly minimalist in his later career. He is considered one of the last modernist writers, and one of the key figures in what Martin Esslin called the "Theatre of the Absurd".

Beckett is one of the most widely discussed and highly prized of 20th-century authors, inspiring a critical industry to rival that which has sprung up around James Joyce. He has divided critical opinion. Some early philosophical critics, such as Sartre and Theodor Adorno, praised him, one for his revelation of absurdity, the other for his works' critical refusal of simplicities; others such as Georg Lukács condemned him for 'decadent' lack of realism.

Clarification of terminology:

tragicomic: the blending of aspects of both tragic and comic form.

black comedy: *is a comic work that employs black humor, which makes light of otherwise serious subject matter. Black humor corresponds to the earlier concept of gallows humor.*

gallows humour: jokes or humorous remarks that are made about unpleasant or worrying subjects such as death and illness

minimalist: The style of minimalism is an approach that is characterized by austerity and laconism in decoration. It is mainly achieved through the use of functional furniture only or geometric shapes and a combination of usually not more than two basic colors. In the case of the play under study, the setting is minimalist. Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, Beckett's works exhibited an increasing tendency towards compactness. This has led to his work sometimes being described as minimalist.

Two important events in the development of Samuel Beckett's production:

- Beckett was introduced to renowned Irish author James Joyce by Thomas MacGreevy, a poet and close confidant of Beckett. This meeting had a profound effect on the young man. Beckett assisted Joyce in various ways.

- In 1945, Beckett returned to Dublin for a brief visit. During his stay, he had a revelation in his mother's room. The entire future direction in his literary production appeared to him. Beckett had felt that he would remain forever in the shadow of Joyce, certain to never best him at his own game. His revelation prompted him to change direction and to acknowledge both his own stupidity and his interest in ignorance and impotence. The revelation "has rightly been regarded as a pivotal moment in his entire career." Beckett fictionalised the experience

"I realized that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one's material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that.

Beckett's earliest works are generally considered to have been strongly influenced by the work of his friend James Joyce. They are erudite and seem to display the author's learning merely for its own sake, resulting in several obscure passages.

But Beckett says: 'I realized that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding.' After World War II, Beckett turned definitively to the French language as a vehicle. It was this, together with the "revelation" experienced in his mother's room in Dublin—in which he realized that his art must be subjective and drawn wholly from his own inner world—that would result in the works for which Beckett is best remembered today.

Knowlson argues that "Beckett was rejecting the Joycean principle that knowing more was a way of creatively understanding the world and controlling it ... In future, his work would focus on poverty, failure, exile and loss – as he put it, on man as a 'non-knower' and as a 'non-can-er.'"

II. What is the Theatre of the Absurd ?

A form of drama that emphasizes the absurdity of human existence by employing disjointed, repetitious, and meaningless dialogue, purposeless and confusing situations, and plots that lack realistic or logical development. (pay attention to all modernist elements)

There are numerous patterns of thesis and anti thesis throughout the play.

What made *En attendant Godot* (1953) (*Waiting for Godot*) an achievement?

It is a Plotless play announced in the opening with nothing to be done in the 1st line of the play

The central character Godot never appears.

Is it a Play or not a play? The term Play comes from action, yet here it is actionless.

Let's go is the way both acts end BUT no move. Silence and no action

Silence = a breakdown of thought, is as important as dialogue

Philosophical interpretation: Presence of an absence is transmitted to the audience

It was not welcomed at the beginning: In the 1950s, theatre was strictly censored in the UK, to Beckett's amazement since he thought it a bastion of free speech. Lady Dorothy Howitt wrote to the Lord Chamberlain, saying: "One of the many themes running through the play is the desire of two old tramps continually to relieve themselves. Such a dramatisation of lavatory necessities is offensive and against all sense of British decency."

In a much-quoted article, the critic Vivian Mercier wrote that Beckett "has achieved a theoretical impossibility—a play in which nothing happens, that yet keeps audiences glued to their seats. What's more, since the second act is a subtly different reprise of the first, he has written a play in which nothing happens, twice."^[25]

The play was a critical, popular, and controversial success in Paris. It opened in London in 1955 to mainly negative reviews, but the tide turned with positive reactions from Harold Hobson in *The Sunday Times* and, later, Kenneth Tynan.

In the United States, it flopped in Miami and had a qualified success in New York City. After this, the play became extremely popular, with highly successful performances in the US and Germany. It is frequently performed today.

The success of *Waiting for Godot* opened up a career in theatre for its author. Beckett went on to write successful full-length plays.

What does the play deal with?

The play deals mainly with the subject of despair and the will to survive in spite of that despair, in the face of an uncomprehending and incomprehensible world.

Deirdre Bair says that though “Beckett will never discuss the implications of the title”, she suggests two stories that both may have at least partially inspired it. The first is that because feet are a recurring theme in the play, Beckett has said the title was suggested to him by the slang French term for boot: "godillot, godasse". The second story, according to Bair, is that Beckett once encountered a group of spectators at the French Tour de France bicycle race, who told him “Nous attendons Godot” — they were waiting for a competitor whose name was Godot.

III. Language and style

There is no real conversation.

Mercier once questioned Beckett on the language used by the pair: "It seemed to me...he made Didi and Gogo sound as if they had earned PhDs. 'How do you know they hadn't?' was his reply."

High frequency words and simple language, basic and simple, everyday speech and common idioms .

IV. Themes

- Unability to move
- Truth
- Inexistence
- Setting is outside of the real world. Time and timelessness. No specific time but only Waiting.
- inaction .
- Test. dependency, habits, enslavement
- Nothingness : Place is nowhere.No place resembles that place
- Religion incompatible with reason. Uncertainty
- Friendship. Isolation of each character.
- Tension
- Freedom and confinement. Prison of their own making
- Suffering. Hardship physical and mental.
- Mortality. Death is inevitable
- Forgetfulness is very present in the play

-Pozzo's name is not remembered

-Godot is not remembered

-Names are not remembered

-Little boy and second little boy/Forgot whether he came the previous day

-Forgot the bible

Contrasts of time and timelessness:

Vladimir and Estragon are not even sure what day it is. Throughout the play, experienced time is attenuated, fractured, or eerily non-existent. Contrarily, the character Pozzo, prominently wears and takes note of his watch.

Lack of Action: the pair ramble and bicker pointlessly.

The act of waiting is a significant element of the play; during the waiting, the characters pass time idly.

-Waiting hopelessly. The audience waits just like the two tramps wait for something to happen

Vladimir rouses Estragon from sleeping but then stops him before he can share his dreams—another recurring activity between the two men.

They then speculate on the potential rewards of continuing to wait for Godot, but can come to no definite conclusions

Emptiness, uncertainty, and nothingness: Racine writes: "All creativity consists in making something out of nothing."

Estragon : nothing to be done.

Vladimir reminds him that they must stay and wait for an unspecified person called Godot—a segment of dialogue that repeats often

the pair cannot agree on where or when they are expected to meet with this Godot + broken spirits+ they quarrel, embrace, and are mutually dependent

The increasingly jaded, world-weary, discontented, Estragon suggests that they hang themselves, but they abandon the idea when the logistics seem ineffective.

Leaves appear on the tree that seemed to be a dead tree yet this little change does not bring any resolution.

V. Literary techniques and modernism

Aspects of modernism:

- Participation of the reader: Decoding and interpreting the tree. Suicide by hanging at the tree. Not religiously accepted .

-Can it be a classical Play? Balanced in 2 acts. (no complication and resolution)= Two mirrors for 2 acts reflecting endlessly repeated images

-Open ended play

-Fragmented dialogue rather than full text : fragmentation in the lack of continuity and accomplishment = fragmentation in Estragon who wants to hear an old joke, which Vladimir cannot finish without going off to urinate, since every time he starts laughing, a kidney ailment flares up.

-Action makes forget about waiting and time. To be aware of the passage of time through action not silence or idleness . Yet this is a play that contradicts the meaning of 'play' which is 'action'.

interior monologue: Lucky's monologue

-irony

-humour

-sarcasm

-allusions

-Nonsense :waiting interrupted and on again

-attempted suicide and non accomplishment. -Committing suicide to spend the time

-Estragon got beaten but unreal and then real

-loss of memory , lack of biographical details all adding to a general "vaguening

-Stuttering and Repetition of same words

-Lucky does speak but fragmented speech that means nothing

-List of words said one after the other

-Play games to fill up the time

-Speaking to avoid thinking

-Wait why waiting, let's hang ourselves

-Keeps looking in his hat

Epiphany: Vladimir appears to have a small epiphany in a song.

VI. Setting

There is only one scene throughout both acts. Two men are waiting on a country road by a tree. The men are of unspecified origin, though it is clear that they are not English by nationality. The script calls for Estragon to sit on a low mound but in practice—as in Beckett's own 1975 German production—this is usually a stone. In the first act the tree is bare. In the second, a few leaves have appeared despite the script specifying that it is the next day. The minimal description calls to mind "the idea of the lieu vague, a location which should not be particularised".

Other clues about the location can be found in the dialogue. In Act I, Vladimir turns toward the auditorium and describes it as a bog. In Act II, Vladimir again motions to the auditorium and notes that there is "Not a soul in sight." When Estragon rushes toward the back of the stage in Act II, Vladimir scolds him, saying that "There's no way out there." Also in Act II, Vladimir comments that their surroundings look nothing like the Macon country, and Estragon states that he's lived his whole life "Here! In the Cackon country!"

The unity of place is equivalent to the setting of prisons; solitude is caused by the fact that there is nothing there. This is an outdoor scene of two bedraggled companions

lack of fertility and production is indicated by the barren tree which is leafless and then some hope can be indicated in the leaves that appear.

It is an anonymous location in terms of a country road, a tree. The place is unspecified. It could be anywhere; all is indefinite. It could take place at anytime .

VII. Why can we say that there is a Religious dimension in the play?

the first suggestions that Vladimir and Estragon might represent all of humanity: When Pozzo first enters, he notes that Vladimir and Estragon are of the same species as he is, "made in God's image." Later, when Pozzo asks Estragon what his name is, he replies "Adam." This comparison of Estragon to Adam, the first man, suggests that he may represent all of mankind; and this link between Estragon and Adam also relates to the idea of Godot as God.

- "all mankind is us, whether we like it or not." This continues the theme of Vladimir and Estragon's representation of mankind as a whole and shows that Vladimir is himself aware of this comparison. Estragon also illustrates the parallel between the two men and the rest of humanity when he tells Vladimir that "billions" of people can also claim that they have kept their appointment. In this case Vladimir attempts to distinguish them from the rest of mankind, but Estragon insists that they are actually the same.

- Another biblical allusion is presented here through the comparison of Pozzo and Lucky to Cain and Abel. However, when Pozzo responds to the names Cain and Abel, Estragon decides that "he's all humanity." This suggestion indicates once more that the characters in the play represent the human race as a whole.
- Vladimir's need of Estragon's help in order to get up is somewhat of a role reversal. For a brief exchange, Estragon holds the power in the relationship as Vladimir calls to him for help. However, when Estragon does finally stretch out his hand to help Vladimir up, he only falls himself. This seems to indicate that Estragon does not belong in this position of power and responsibility and cannot act to fulfill it.

There is humour and comedic tenderness. They reflect some moral basis of Christianity, that life and strength is found in an adoration of those in the lower depths where God is concealed.

Much of the play is steeped in scriptural allusion. The boy from Act One mentions that he and his brother mind Godot's sheep and goats. Beckett's inclusion of the story of the two thieves from Luke 23:39–43 and the ensuing discussion of repentance.

Some see God and Godot as one and the same. Vladimir's "Christ have mercy upon us!" could be taken as evidence that that is at least what he believes.

This reading is given further weight early in the first act when Estragon asks Vladimir what it is that he has requested from Godot:

VLADIMIR: Oh ... nothing very definite.

ESTRAGON: A kind of prayer.

VLADIMIR: Precisely.

ESTRAGON: A vague supplication.

VLADIMIR: Exactly.

VIII. What are some of the most Ridiculous situations?

When Estragon declares his hunger, Vladimir provides a carrot (among a collection of turnips), at which Estragon idly gnaws, loudly reiterating his boredom.

Act I.

"A terrible cry" heralds the entrance of Lucky, a silent, baggage-burdened slave with a rope tied around his neck, and Pozzo, his arrogant and imperious master, who holds the other end and stops now to rest. Pozzo barks abusive orders at Lucky, which are always quietly followed, while acting civilly though tersely towards the other two. Pozzo enjoys a selfish snack of chicken and wine, before casting the bones to the ground, which Estragon gleefully claims.

Having been in a dumbfounded state of silence ever since the arrival of Pozzo and Lucky, Vladimir finally finds his voice to shout criticisms at Pozzo for his mistreatment of Lucky. Pozzo ignores this and explains his intention to sell Lucky, who begins to cry. Estragon takes pity and tries to wipe away Lucky's tears, but, as he approaches, Lucky violently kicks him in the shin.

Pozzo then rambles nostalgically but vaguely about his relationship with Lucky over the years, before offering Vladimir and Estragon some compensation for their company. Estragon begins to beg for money when Pozzo instead suggests that Lucky can "dance" and "think" for their entertainment.

Lucky's dance, "the Net", is clumsy and shuffling; Lucky's "thinking" is a long-winded and disjointed monologue—it is the first and only time that Lucky speaks. The soliloquy begins as a relatively coherent and academic lecture on theology but quickly dissolves into mindless verbosity, escalating in both volume and speed, that agonises the others until Vladimir finally pulls off Lucky's hat, stopping him in mid-sentence. Pozzo then has Lucky pack up his bags, and they hastily leave.

Vladimir and Estragon, alone again, reflect on whether they met Pozzo and Lucky before.

A boy then arrives, purporting to be a messenger sent from Godot to tell the pair that Godot will not be coming that evening "but surely tomorrow". During Vladimir's interrogation of the boy, he asks if he came the day before, making it apparent that the two men have been waiting for a long period and will likely continue. After the boy departs, the moon appears and the two men verbally agree to leave and find shelter for the night, but they merely stand without moving.

Act II

It is daytime again and Vladimir begins singing a recursive round about the death of a dog, but twice forgets the lyrics as he sings. Again, Estragon claims to have been beaten last night, despite no apparent injury. Vladimir comments that the formerly bare tree now has leaves and tries to confirm his recollections of yesterday against Estragon's extremely vague, unreliable memory. Vladimir then triumphantly produces evidence of the previous day's events by showing Estragon the wound from when Lucky kicked him.

Noticing Estragon's barefootedness, they also discover his previously forsaken boots nearby, which Estragon insists are not his, although they fit him perfectly.

With no carrots left, Vladimir is turned down in offering Estragon a turnip or a radish. He then sings Estragon to sleep with a lullaby before noticing further evidence to confirm his memory: Lucky's hat still lies on the ground. This leads to his waking Estragon and involving him in a frenetic hat-swapping scene. The two then wait again for Godot, while distracting themselves by playfully imitating Pozzo and Lucky, firing insults at each other and then making up, and attempting some fitness routines—all of which fail miserably and end quickly.

Suddenly, Pozzo and Lucky reappear, but the rope is much shorter than during their last visit, and Lucky now guides Pozzo, rather than being controlled by him. As they arrive, Pozzo trips over Lucky and they together fall into a motionless heap. Estragon sees an opportunity to exact revenge on Lucky for kicking him earlier. The issue is debated lengthily until Pozzo shocks the pair by revealing that he is now blind and Lucky is now mute. Pozzo further claims to have lost all sense of time, and assures the others that he cannot remember meeting them before, but also does not expect to recall today's events tomorrow. His commanding arrogance from yesterday appears to have been replaced by humility and insight. His parting words—which Vladimir expands upon later—are ones of utter despair. Lucky and Pozzo depart; meanwhile Estragon has again fallen asleep.

Alone, Vladimir is encountered by (apparently) the same boy from yesterday, though Vladimir wonders whether he might be the other boy's brother. This time, Vladimir begins consciously realising the circular nature of his experiences: he even predicts exactly what the boy will say, involving the same speech about Godot not arriving today but surely tomorrow. Vladimir seems to reach a moment of revelation before furiously chasing the boy away, demanding that he be recognised the next time they meet. Estragon awakes and pulls his boots off again. He and Vladimir consider hanging themselves once more, but when they test the strength of Estragon's belt (hoping to use it as a noose), it breaks and Estragon's trousers fall down. They resolve tomorrow to bring a more suitable piece of rope and, if Godot fails to arrive, to commit suicide at last. Again, they decide to clear out for the night, but, again, neither of them makes any attempt to move.

IX. Characters

There are no physical descriptions of either of the two characters. They are never referred to as tramps in the text, though are often performed in such costumes on stage.

The only thing is that they're wearing bowlers." "

The play only indicates that the clothes worn at least by Estragon are shabby. When told by Vladimir that he should have been a poet, Estragon says he was, gestures to his rags, and asks if it were not obvious.

The bowlers and other broadly comic aspects of their personas such as the fact that Vladimir is possibly the heaviest of the pair have reminded modern audiences of Laurel and Hardy, who occasionally played tramps in their films.

"The hat-passing game in *Waiting For Godot* and Lucky's inability to think without his hat on are two obvious Beckett derivations from *Laurel and Hardy* –

Vladimir - One of the two main characters of the play. Estragon calls him Didi, and the boy addresses him as Mr. Albert. He seems to be the more responsible and mature of the two main characters.

Estragon - The second of the two main characters. Vladimir calls him Gogo. He seems weak and helpless, always looking for Vladimir's protection. He also has a poor memory, as Vladimir has to remind him in the second act of the events that happened the previous night. The weary Estragon cannot remove his boots from his aching feet. He recalls having been beaten the night before. Suddenly, he decides to leave but eventually, dozes off.

The relationship in the pair: Throughout the play the couple refer to each other by the pet names "Didi" and "Gogo", although the boy addresses Vladimir as "Mister Albert". Both characters struggle with delusions and split personality disorders. Their lives are dependent on outside forces over which they have little control.

Vladimir stands through most of the play whereas Estragon sits down numerous times and even dozes off. "Estragon is inert and Vladimir restless." Vladimir looks at the sky and muses on religious or philosophical matters. Estragon "belongs to the stone", preoccupied with mundane things, what he can get to eat and how to ease his physical aches and pains; he is direct, intuitive. He finds it hard to remember but can recall certain things when prompted. For instance, when Vladimir asks: "Do you remember the Gospels?" Estragon tells Vladimir about the coloured maps of the Holy Land and that he planned to honeymoon by the Dead Sea; it is his short-term memory that is poorest and points to the fact that he may, in fact, be suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Al Alvarez writes: "But perhaps Estragon's forgetfulness is the cement binding their relationship together. He continually forgets. The philosophical Vladimir continually reminds him; between them they pass the time." They have been together for fifty years but when asked—by Pozzo—they do not reveal their actual ages.

Vladimir's life is not without its discomforts too but he is the more resilient of the pair. "Vladimir's pain is primarily mental anguish, which would thus account for his voluntary exchange of his hat for Lucky's, thus signifying Vladimir's symbolic desire for another person's thoughts."

They clearly have known better times, a visit to the Eiffel Tower and grape-harvesting by the Rhône; it is about all either has to say about their pasts, save for Estragon's claim to have been a poet, an explanation Estragon provides to Vladimir for his destitution.

Pozzo - He passes by the spot where Vladimir and Estragon are waiting and provides a diversion. Little is learned about Pozzo besides the fact that he is on his way to the fair to sell his slave, Lucky. He presents himself very much as the Ascendancy landlord, bullying and conceited. His pipe is made by Kapp and Peterson, Dublin's best-known tobacconists (their slogan was "The thinking man's pipe") which he refers to as a "briar" but which Estragon calls a "dudeen" emphasising the differences in their social standing. He confesses to a poor memory but it is more a result of an abiding self-absorption. "Pozzo is a character who has to overcompensate. That's why he overdoes things ... and his overcompensation has to do with a deep insecurity in him. These were things Beckett said, psychological terms he used."

Pozzo is a stout man, who wields a whip and holds a rope around Lucky's neck, which he jerks and tugs if Lucky is the least bit slow. He seemingly controls Lucky.

In the second act, he is blind and does not remember meeting Vladimir and Estragon the night before.

Lucky - Pozzo's slave, who carries Pozzo's bags and stool. Lucky is the absolutely subservient slave of Pozzo and he unquestioningly does his every bidding with "dog-like devotion". He struggles with a heavy suitcase without ever thinking of dropping it. Lucky speaks only once in the play and it is a result of Pozzo's order to "think" for Estragon and Vladimir.

When Beckett was asked why Lucky was so named, he replied, "I suppose he is lucky to have no more expectations..."

Lucky's long speech is a torrent of broken ideas and speculations regarding man, sex, God, and time.

Lucky has always been the intellectually superior but now, with age, he has become an object of contempt: his "think" is a caricature of intellectual thought and his "dance" is a sorry sight. Despite his horrid treatment at Pozzo's hand however, Lucky remains completely faithful to him. Even in the second act when Pozzo has inexplicably gone blind, and needs to be led by Lucky rather than driving him as he had done before, Lucky remains faithful and has not tried to run away; they are clearly bound together by more than a piece of rope in the same way that Didi and Gogo are "[t]ied to Godot".

In Act I, he entertains by dancing and thinking. However, in Act II, he is dumb. The only model of Camus' absurdist hero who is the only one to know that life is pointless but who can find a point in life but as he says to Vladimir and the audience, no one can understand what he means. This is in the closing lines of the play.

The relationship in the pair: It has been contended that "Pozzo and Lucky are simply Didi and Gogo writ large", unbalanced as their relationship is. However, Pozzo's dominance is noted to be superficial; "upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that Lucky always possessed more influence in the relationship, for he danced, and more importantly, thought – not as a service, but in order to fill a vacant need of Pozzo: he committed all of these acts for Pozzo. As such, since the first appearance of the duo, the true slave had always been Pozzo."

Pozzo credits Lucky with having given him all the culture, refinement, and ability to reason that he possesses. His rhetoric has been learned by rote. Pozzo's "party piece" on the sky is a clear example: as his memory crumbles, he finds himself unable to continue under his own steam.

Pozzo and Lucky have been together for sixty years and, in that time, their relationship has deteriorated. Beckett's advice to the American director Alan Schneider was: "[Pozzo] is a hypomaniac and the only way to play him is to play him mad." (Hypomania is usually described as a mood state or energy level that is elevated above normal, but not so extreme as to cause impairment)

Boy - He appears at the end of each act to inform Vladimir that Godot will not be coming that night. In the second act, he insists that he was not there the previous night.

The boy in Act I, a local lad, assures Vladimir that this is the first time he has seen him. He says he was not there the previous day. He confirms he works for Mr. Godot as a goatherd. His brother, whom Godot beats, is a shepherd. Godot feeds both of them and allows them to sleep in his hayloft.

The boy in Act II also assures Vladimir that it was not he who called upon them the day before. He insists that this too is his first visit. When Vladimir asks what Godot does the boy tells him, "He does nothing, sir." We also learn he has a white beard—possibly, the boy is not certain. This boy also has a brother who it seems is sick but there is no clear evidence to suggest that his brother is the boy that came in Act I or the one who came the day before that.

Whether the boy from Act I is the same boy from Act II or not, both boys are polite yet timid. In the first Act, the boy, despite arriving while Pozzo and Lucky are still about, does not announce himself until after Pozzo and Lucky leave, saying to Vladimir and Estragon that he waited for the other two to leave out of fear of the two men and of Pozzo's whip; the boy does not arrive early enough in Act II to see either Lucky or Pozzo. In both Acts, the boy seems hesitant to speak very much, saying mostly "Yes Sir" or "No Sir", and winds up exiting by running away.

Godot - The man for whom Vladimir and Estragon wait unendingly. Godot never appears in the play. His name and character are often thought to refer to God. The identity of Godot has been the subject of much debate. "When Colin Duckworth asked Beckett point-blank whether Pozzo was Godot, the author replied: 'No. It is just implied in the text, but it's not true.'"

"Beckett said to Peter Woodthorpe that he regretted calling the absent character 'Godot', because of all the theories involving God to which this had given rise. "I also told [Ralph] Richardson that if by Godot I had meant God I would [have] said God, and not Godot. This seemed to disappoint him greatly." That said, Beckett did once concede, "It would be fatuous of me to pretend that I am not aware of the meanings attached to the word 'Godot', and the opinion of many that it means 'God'. But you must remember – I wrote the play in French, and if I did have that meaning in my mind, it was somewhere in my unconscious and I was not overtly aware of it." (the French word for 'God' is 'Dieu'.) However, "Beckett has often stressed the strong unconscious impulses that partly control his writing; he has even spoken of being 'in a trance' when he writes."

What does Godot mean? God?

- Society
- Science
- The world
- Who or what Godot is?

X. Possible Interpretations

"Because the play is so stripped down, so elemental, it invites all kinds of social and political and religious interpretation" wrote Normand Berlin in a tribute to the play in Autumn 1999, "with Beckett himself placed in different schools of thought, different movements and 'ism's. The attempts to pin him down have not been successful, but the desire to do so is natural when we encounter a writer whose minimalist art reaches for bedrock reality. 'Less' forces us to look for 'more,' and the need to talk about Godot and about Beckett has resulted in a steady outpouring of books and articles.

Throughout *Waiting for Godot*, the audience may encounter religious, philosophical, classical, psychoanalytical and biographical – especially wartime – references. There are ritualistic aspects and elements taken directly from vaudeville and there is a danger in making more of these than what they are: that is, merely structural conveniences, avatars into which the writer places his fictional characters.

The play "exploits several archetypal forms and situations, all of which lend themselves to both comedy and pathos."

Beckett tired quickly of "the endless misunderstanding". As far back as 1955, he remarked, "Why people have to complicate a thing so simple I can't make out." He was not forthcoming with anything more than cryptic clues, however: "

Peter Woodthorpe [who played Estragon] remembered asking him one day in a taxi what the play was really about: 'It's all symbiosis, Peter; it's symbiosis,' answered Beckett."

Beckett directed the play for the Schiller-Theatre in 1975. Although he had overseen many productions, this was the first time that he had taken complete control. Walter Asmus was his conscientious young assistant director. The production was not naturalistic. Beckett explained,

Over the years, Beckett clearly realised that the greater part of *Godot's* success came down to the fact that it was open to a variety of readings and that this was not necessarily a bad thing.

Political

Although the play can in no way be taken as a political allegory, there are elements that are relevant to any local situation in which one man is being exploited or oppressed by another."

"It was seen as an allegory of the Cold War" or of French Resistance to the Germans. Graham Hassell writes, "[T]he intrusion of Pozzo and Lucky [...] seems like nothing more than a metaphor for Ireland's view of mainland Britain, where society has ever been blighted by a greedy ruling élite keeping the working classes passive and ignorant by whatever means."

Vladimir and Estragon are often played with Irish accents, as in the Beckett on Film project. This, some feel, is an inevitable consequence of Beckett's rhythms and phraseology, but it is not stipulated in the text. At any rate, they are not of English stock: at one point early in the play, Estragon mocks the English pronunciation of "calm" and has fun with "the story of the Englishman in the brothel".

Jungian

"The four archetypal personalities or the four aspects of the soul are grouped in two pairs: the ego and the shadow, the persona and the soul's image (animus or anima). The shadow is the container of all our despised emotions repressed by the ego. Lucky, the shadow, serves as the polar opposite of the egocentric Pozzo, prototype of prosperous mediocrity, who incessantly controls and persecutes his subordinate, thus symbolising the oppression of the unconscious shadow by the despotic ego. Lucky's monologue in Act I appears as a manifestation of a stream of repressed unconsciousness, as he is allowed to "think" for his master. Estragon's name has another connotation, besides that of the aromatic herb, tarragon: "estragon" is a cognate of oestrogen, the female hormone (Carter, 130). This prompts us to identify him with the anima, the feminine image of Vladimir's soul. It explains Estragon's propensity for poetry, his sensitivity and dreams, his irrational moods. Vladimir appears as the complementary masculine principle, or perhaps the rational persona of the contemplative type."

Philosophical, Existential

Broadly speaking, existentialists hold that there are certain fundamental questions that every human being must come to terms with if they are to take their subjective existences seriously and with intrinsic value. Questions such as life, death, the meaning of human existence and the place of (or lack of) God in that existence are among them. By and large, the theories of existentialism assert that conscious reality is very complex and without an "objective" or universally known value: the individual must create value by affirming it and living it, not by simply talking about it or philosophising it in the mind. The play may be seen to touch on all of these issues.

While inherent meaning might very well exist in the universe, human beings are incapable of finding it due to some form of mental or philosophical limitation. Thus humanity is doomed to be faced with the Absurd, or the absolute absurdity of the existence in lack of intrinsic purpose.

Ethical

Just after Didi and Gogo have been particularly selfish and callous, the boy comes to say that Godot is not coming. The boy (or pair of boys) may be seen to represent meekness and hope before compassion is consciously excluded by an evolving personality and character, and in which case may be the youthful Pozzo and Lucky. Thus Godot is compassion and fails to arrive every day, as he says he will. No-one is concerned that a boy is beaten. In this interpretation, there is the irony that only by changing their hearts to be compassionate can the characters fixed to the tree move on and cease to have to wait for Godot.

Autobiographical

Waiting for Godot has been described as a "metaphor for the long walk into Roussillon, when Beckett and Suzanne slept in haystacks [...] during the day and walked by night [...] or] of the relationship of Beckett to Joyce."

XI. Conclusion : How to face the Absurd ?

- What is life?

- Fill life with pleasure
- No meaning in life
- Live life and pretend it has a meaning
- Become another kind of artist from who you already are as an artist
- Become a political person
- Acceptance that life is pointless but you are compelled to find meaning anyway

Quotes from the play

“The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh.”

“Estragon: We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?
Vladimir: Yes, yes, we're magicians.”

“Je suis comme ça. Ou j'oublie tout de suite ou je n'oublie jamais.”
I'm like that. Either I forget right away or I never forget.”

“Vladimir: Did I ever leave you?
Estragon: You let me go.”
“Nothing happens. Nobody comes, nobody goes. It's awful.”

“Let's go." "We can't." "Why not?" "We're waiting for Godot.”

“There's man all over for you, blaming on his boots the faults of his feet.”

“Let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day that we are needed. Not indeed that we personally are needed. Others would meet the case equally well, if not better. To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for one the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us! What do you say? It is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons we are no less a credit to our species. The tiger bounds to the help of his congeners without the least reflexion, or else he slinks away into the depths of the thickets. But that is not the question. What are we doing here, *that* is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in the immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come --”

“ESTRAGON: I can't go on like this.
VLADIMIR: That's what you think.”

— [Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot](#)

