LEILA VIEIRA DE JESUS

A STUDY OF FOOLS:
LEAR'S FOOL IN SHAKESPEARE'S *KING LEAR* AND VLADIMIR AND ESTRAGON IN BECKETT'S *WAITING FOR GODOT*

PORTO ALEGRE

2012

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL
INSTITUTO DE LETRAS
PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS
ÁREA: ESTUDOS DE LITERATURA
ESPECIALIDADE: LITERATURAS DE LÍNGUA INGLESA
LINHA DE PESQUISA: LITERATURA, IMAGINÁRIO E HISTÓRIA

A STUDY OF FOOLS:

LEAR'S FOOL IN SHAKESPEARE'S *KING LEAR* AND VLADIMIR AND ESTRAGON IN BECKETT'S *WAITING FOR GODOT*

Mestranda: Leila Vieira de Jesus

Orientadora: Rosalia Angelita Neumann Garcia

Dissertação de Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa, apresentada como requisito parcial para a obtenção do grau de Mestre em Letras pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

PORTO ALEGRE

2012

CIP - Catalogação na Publicação

Vieira de Jesus, Leila
A study of fools: Lear's Fool in Shakespeare's King Lear and Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's Waiting for Godot / Leila Vieira de Jesus. -- 2012.
125 f.

Orientadora: Rosalia Angelita Neumann Garcia.

Dissertação (Mestrado) -- Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Instituto de Letras, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, Porto Alegre, BR-RS, 2012.

1. Fools. 2. Shakespeare. 3. King Lear. 4. Beckett. 5. Waiting for Godot. I. Neumann Garcia, Rosalia Angelita, orient. II. Título.

Elaborada pelo Sistema de Geração Automática de Ficha Catalográfica da UFRGS com os dados fornecidos pelo(a) autor(a).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Rosalia Angelita Neumann Garcia, for her guidance, patience and suggestions, and, most importantly, for introducing me to Samuel Beckett and *Waiting for Godot* in a Literature class during my under-graduation years;

I would like to thank the committee for accepting my invitation and taking the time to read my work;

I would also like to thank my family and friends for the support and for putting up with my constant canceling of plans, especially in the last few months of writing this thesis;

And Cesar Gemelli for the support, encouragement, and dedication.

King Lear: Dost thou call me fool, boy?
Fool: All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with.
(William Shakespeare, *King Lear*)

We are all born mad. Some remain so.
(Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*)

Resumo

O foco dessa dissertação é analisar o papel, as características, e a presença dos bobos ao longo da história, focando em sua constante aparição no teatro. Os personagens principais da minha análise serão o Bobo, na peça *Rei Lear* de William Shakespeare, e Vladimir e Estragon, na peça *Esperando Godot* de Samuel Beckett. Na análise desses personagens, discuto semelhanças entre os autores, que já foram notadas por críticos como Martin Esslin, Jan Kott, e Northrop Frye, e mostro como os personagens de Beckett são similares aos bobos de Shakespeare. Bobos, no teatro, frequentemente agem como mediadores entre o palco e a plateia, guiando os espectadores e falando verdades. O Bobo de Lear diz verdades criticando seu mestre e o lembrando das decisões erradas que ele tomou; os personagens em *Esperando Godot* dizem verdades sobre a falta de sentido de nossas vidas e, mais importante, nos mostram essa falta de sentido no decorrer da peça. Em relação à linguagem, o uso dela pelos bobos é diferente do uso dos outros personagens porque eles a manipulam para criar desentendimentos e jogos de palavras. No teatro de Shakespeare, a principal razão para esse uso peculiar da linguagem é que os bobos querem mostrar sua sagacidade; no teatro de Beckett, eles usam uma linguagem sem sentido para mostrar que ela está quebrada e que tentativas de comunicação são inúteis. Através das ações e diálogos dos bobos de Beckett em *Esperando Godot*, podemos ver que a vida é absurda e que vivemos em um mundo cheio de incertezas. Apesar de personagens bobos geralmente serem vistos como superficiais e insignificantes, especialmente nas peças de Shakespeare, eles são extremamente importantes no teatro e têm uma maneira única de interagir com os outros personagens e com o público.

Palavras-chave: Bobos; William Shakespeare; *Rei Lear*; Samuel Beckett; *Esperando Godot.*

Abstract

The focus of this thesis is to analyze the role, characteristics, and presence of fools throughout history, focusing on their recurrence in the theater. The characters I will focus on are Lear's Fool in William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, and Vladimir and Estragon in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, discussing similarities between the two authors, which have been mentioned by critics such as Martin Esslin, Jan Kott and Northrop Frye, and showing how Beckett's characters are similar to Shakespearean fools. Fools in the theater often act as mediators between the stage and the audience, guiding spectators and telling truths. Lear's Fool tells truths by criticizing his master and reminding him of the wrong decisions he has made; the characters in *Waiting for Godot* tell truths about the meaninglessness of life and, most importantly, show us this meaninglessness throughout the play. The use of language by fools is different from that of other characters because they manipulate it to create misunderstandings and word games. In Shakespeare's theater, the main reason for this peculiar use of language is that fools want to show their wit; in Beckett's theater, the characters use nonsensical language to show that language has broken down and that attempts at communication are pointless. Through the actions and dialogues of Beckett's fools in *Waiting for Godot*, we can see that life is absurd and that we live in a world full of uncertainties. In spite of the fact that fool characters are often seen as shallow and insignificant, especially in Shakespeare's theater, they are of extreme importance in the theater and have a unique manner of interacting with other characters and with the audience.

Keywords: Fools; William Shakespeare; *King Lear*; Samuel Beckett; *Waiting for Godot.*

Table of Contents

Introduction

Martin Esslin says, in *The Theater of the Absurd*, that his is not a book to discuss Shakespeare's fools as forerunners of the Theater of the Absurd, and he adds that we are too familiar with Shakespeare to notice how there is, in his plays, “the same type of inverted logical reasoning, false syllogism, free association, and the poetry of real or feigned madness” (ESSLIN, 2004, p. 332) present in the plays of the Theater of the Absurd. I was very intrigued by Esslin's statement when I first came across it, and decided to make Shakespearean fools and the Theater of the Absurd the focus of my thesis. The characteristics that Esslin cites are similar to those of the Theater of the Absurd mostly relate to the characteristics of the fool characters in Shakespeare, which made me think that it is not because we are too familiar with Shakespeare that these similarities have been overlooked, but because not enough attention has been given to Shakespeare's fools.

Frederick Warde wrote in the first page of his book written in 1915 that studies on Shakespearean fools were not common. He says that “among the legion of books dealing with the characters of Shakespeare, I have found the majority to be devoted to his tragic and serious creations, a few to his humorous types, but none to his fools” (WARDE, 1915, p. i). It is sad to realize that, almost one hundred years later, this reality continues. We do have some books focusing on Shakespeare's fools today, but the number is nearly insignificant if you compare it with the number of books on Shakespeare's serious characters. With my study of fools and a chapter focused on Shakespeare's fools and the Fool in *King Lear*, I aim to shed some more light on these neglected characters.

To analyze the similarities between Shakespearean fools and the Theater of the Absurd, I decided to work with Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Beckett's play was an easy choice because it was the first play of the Theater of the Absurd I had contact with, and I am still amazed at how much a seemingly shallow and

nonsensical play has to say. Choosing a play by Shakespeare, however, was more difficult. I first wanted to work with *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* because I think Launce and Speed's personalities are very similar to Vladimir and Estragon's, but I realized that my thesis would focus too much on the comical aspect of fools and not enough on the serious aspects and on their telling of truths, which, I believe, are the characteristics most critics overlook, focusing mostly on their humorous side. Since I thought Lear's Fool was a combination of the comedy and seriousness I was looking for, I chose *King Lear* to be the Shakespearean play I would work with. Deciding to work with this play turned out to be a fortunate choice because, as I read more criticism on it, I discovered that Lear himself can also be seen as a fool once he goes mad. It is important to highlight that the link between *Waiting for Godot* and Shakespearean fools has been noticed since the first performances of the play. Edith Kern, in her article "Drama Stripped for Inaction: Beckett's *Godot*," mentions a critic who said that there is in the play "an almost Shakespearean clownery from which suddenly a kind of creaking poetry jumps in your face" (KERN, 1954, p. 41). *Waiting for Godot* was first staged in 1953, and it is impressive to see that the connection the play had with Shakespeare was mentioned only one year after it premiered.

The study of fools is very important because of their recurrent presence in literature, culture, and history. Vicki K. Janik, editor of *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art, and History*, says that "Conventional fools appear and have appeared everywhere" (JANIK, 1998, p. xiii), and she adds that we have to look for reasons for their presence, "reasons why humanity apparently requires these bizarre figures […] We must conclude that these complex, seemingly paradoxical characters fulfill essential roles in society" (Ibid., p. xiii). The different kinds of fools and their characteristics will be discussed in the first chapter of my thesis.

In this first chapter, I will discuss Desiderius Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*, in which the character Folly says that we should not follow most people's idea that folly is considered unfortunate. Folly calls to our attention that fools are around us and within us, and that we cannot escape it. I will also attempt to define the term "fool" and discuss how it is different from other terms frequently used to refer to these types of characters, especially the terms "clown" and "jester." In this chapter, I will analyze and discuss the presence of fools throughout history and in the different forms of art, and my analysis will be based on Enid Welsford's *The Fool, His Social and Literary History (*1966), Bente A. Videbaek's *The Stage Clown in Shakespeare's Theater (*1999), and Janik's book mentioned above. I will also discuss

Michel Foucault's ideas on reason and madness presented in *L'Ordre du Discours* (1971) to show how there is wisdom in the often nonsensical speech of the fools. At the end of this chapter, I will briefly analyze characteristics of the main characters of my study (Lear's Fool and Vladimir and Estragon) to show in which ways they can be considered fools.

The second chapter will be focused on Shakespearean fools, especially on the Fool in *King Lear*. The main critics I will use in this analysis are Videbaek and Janik, which have been mentioned before, and Frederick Ward's *The Fools of Shakespeare: An Interpretation of Their Wit, Wisdom And Personalities* (1915). In this chapter, I will briefly discuss the neglect of this type of character and the different meanings their appearance on stage may have, depending if the play in question is a comedy or a tragedy. I will also analyze the two most famous actors who played Shakespeare's fools on the stage at the time of Shakespeare, Robert Armin and Will Kemp, and see how they influenced the character of the fool. I will then discuss the use of language and physical comedy by Shakespearean fools and, after a more general analysis of the fools in Shakespeare, I will move on to the main character of this chapter, Lear's Fool. I will talk about the Fool's teachings and the ways in which he criticizes Lear, the other characters in the play, and the world around him. The fact that Lear goes mad and becomes his own fool will also be discussed, as well as the connection the play has with the Theater of the Absurd.

Even though fools are not the main characters in Shakespeare's plays, they are of much importance. They tell truths, serve as a guide, and entertain the audience. As Videbaek says, the moment of the appearance of the fool is always carefully timed “to produce the greatest effect, usually to emphasize a turning point in the action or in a major character's fate or development or to set major events and themes of the plot in relief” (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 34). In the tragedies, fools often have the role of pausing the tragic intensity of the play; when they appear, the audience takes a step back and is able to take a breath in order to endure the following sequence of tragic scenes. In the comedies, the fool usually appears to remind the audience that the play is a comedy and that, no matter how evil the characters on the stage seem to be, the play will still have a happy ending.

In Shakespeare's theater, there are some fool characters that are more developed than others. Lear's Fool, for example, is well-developed and has a significant amount of time with the audience; the grave-digger in *Hamlet* and the gatekeeper in *Macbeth*, however, are not so well-developed and are only present in few moments in the plays. Even though he is not a

well-developed character, the grave-digger does his part as a fool and makes Hamlet reflect upon life and death and the prince learns from what he has to say. The roles of the fools are the same whether they are well-developed characters or not, what changes is that, when he is more developed, “he is more noticeable, and his effect grows when the audience is allowed to become better acquainted with him” (Ibid., p. 73). I believe Lear's Fool's effect on the audience is significant not only because we are more acquainted with him, but also because he serves as a bridge that makes us understand Lear better; as Goldsmith says, in *Wise Fools in Shakespeare*, the Fool does not weaken the tragic aspect of the play, but “he does soften its austerity and humanize it for us” (GOLDSMITH, 1955, p. 99). Because of the presence of the Fool, we feel closer to Lear and are able to understand and connect with him.

The focus of the third chapter will be Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, emphasizing the characteristics and actions of Vladimir and Estragon. This chapter will be longer than the chapter on Lear's Fool because, while the Fool in *King Lear* is only present in some scenes in the play, Vladimir and Estragon are present on stage practically throughout the whole play and, because their presence in Beckett's play is constant, there are more aspects to discuss about them and more examples to illustrate what is being analyzed. The main works that will be used in this analysis are Martin Esslin's *The Theater of the Absurd* (2004) and *An Anatomy of Drama* (1976), Melvin J. Friedman's *Samuel Beckett Now* (1970), Andrew Kennedy's *Samuel Beckett* (1989), and Lois Gordon's *Reading Godot* (2002). I will start this chapter discussing the Theater of the Absurd and its main characteristics, including Absurdist playwrights' attempts to show the meaninglessness of life, and then I will briefly comment Beckett's theater in general before focusing on *Waiting for Godot.* I will discuss how Beckett tries convey the absurdity of life and how he uses language to show that communication is useless. I will also analyze the lack of hope and certainty in the play, as well as the constant use of repetition, which, I believe, has the role of showing the stagnation in the lives of the characters. Their use of language and their constant conversation will also be discussed in this chapter. Another aspect of the play that will be discussed is what the characters do to pass the time while they are waiting for Godot, and I will also analyze what Godot might represent in the play and whether we should believe he will arrive or not.

Beckett's play starts with Estragon saying “Nothing to be done” and ends with the same character saying “Yes, let's go,” followed by the stage directions that say “*They do not move*,” which shows that there is no progress in the play. The life of the characters is resumed

to repeatedly reliving similar days in the hope of being saved by Godot. Beckett is very concerned with language and, according to Martin Esslin, he uses nonsensical conversations to express the breakdown and the disintegration of language, especially because in a play where there is no certainty, there can be no definite meanings as well. Esslin believes that the Theater of the Absurd shows the absurdity of the human condition in which man has been deprived of certainties. The critic links the lack of certainty in today's world with the decline of the religious belief, but I do not agree with him. I believe our uncertainty nowadays is linked to all the horrible things that happen in the world and that we cannot control. Everything in life is too ephemeral, and that is what causes the felling of uncertainty. This lack of certainty is one of the things that makes the truths Vladimir and Estragon say different from the truths we find in Shakespearean fools. In Beckett's play there is no absolute truth because there is no right or wrong course to be followed, the time of established truths and ethical norms is in the past; the characters live in a world where certainty is barely present. The truth that is conveyed in this play is the truth of the harsh reality we live in. The way the characters act and the meaninglessness of their lives reflect on the true meaninglessness of life in general.

With this thesis, I hope to show the importance of fool characters and how there is so much more to them besides their evident foolery. Their wisdom and the truths they say should be considered when one studies plays where a fool is present, especially in Shakespeare's theater, where they are often ignored by scholars, critics, and even theater directors. I also hope to make people see the serious side to Vladimir and Estragon, who, through the absurdity of their existences, show the absurdity of life in general. Lear's Fool in *King Lear* and Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, for being fools, have some characteristics in common, and I hope to explore these characteristics to show how closely connected Shakespeare's theater and Beckett's theater can be.

1. The Fool in Literature, History, and Culture

1.1 Folly through Folly's words

In 1509, Desiderius Erasmus wrote the essay *The Praise of Folly*, an oration, spoken by Folly herself, in which the author, through Folly's words, exalts folly and makes us aware that folly and fools are around us at all times. As the title of the essay says, the oration is a *praise* of Folly. Folly is often associated with lack of control and wisdom, but, in her oration, Folly brings it to a new light, believing that it is she who brings happiness to a man's life:

> I restore […] man to the best and happiest part of his life. And if men would but refrain from all commerce with wisdom and give up themselves to be governed by me, they should never know what it were to be old, but solace themselves with a perpetual youth. (ERASMUS, 1668, p. 21)

Folly also says that she is present in all of us because of the way Nature created men. According to her, wisdom means being controlled by one's reason, and folly means being controlled by one's passions; and while reason was confined "to a narrow corner of the brain" (Ibid., p. 26), all the rest of our bodies was left to be controlled by our passions. Thus, Folly is more present in our bodies than wisdom, and we should not try to resist it. Folly also disagrees with philosophers who say that it is a most terrible thing to be foolish; for her, being foolish and making mistakes is part of being a man—"I hear the philosophers opposing it and saying 'tis a miserable thing for a man to be foolish, to err, mistake, and know nothing truly. Nay rather, this is to be a man" (Ibid., p. 51).

It should also be noted that Folly does not come alone; she says she is often followed by her companions: Self-love, Flattery, Oblivion, Laziness, Pleasure, Madness[1],

[1] It is a thin line that divides the definition of folly and madness, and in some languages they even share the same translation – in Portuguese, for example, we could translate both terms as "loucura." Folly herself, in Erasmus's essay says that, if folly and madness are not the same thing, folly is the next degree of madness, questioning "For what else is madness than for a man to be out of his wits?" (ERASMUS, 1668, p. 61). Based on research in a few on-line dictionaries (The Free Dictionary—www.thefreedictionary.com, The Oxford Dictionaries—http://oxforddictionaries.com/, and The Longman Contemporary English Dictionary—www.ldoceonline.com), today "madness" is more related to illness, insanity, and rage; The Free Dictionary

Intemperance, and Dead Sleep (ERASMUS, 1668, p. 14), and she is present, along with her companions, in many aspects of our social daily interactions, especially in marriage and friendships:

> What divorces, or what not worse than that, would daily happen were not the converse between a man and his wife supported and cherished by flattery, apishness, gentleness, ignorance, dissembling, certain retainers of mine also! […] I am so necessary to the making of all society and manner of life both delightful and lasting, that neither would the people long endure their governors, nor the servant his master, nor the master his footman, nor the scholar his tutor, not one friend another, nor the wife her husband, nor the usurer the borrower, nor a soldier his commander, nor one companion another, unless all of them had interchangeable failings, one while flattering, other while prudently conniving and generally sweetening one another with some small relish of folly. (Ibid., p. 32-33)

I agree with Folly and believe that it would be extremely difficult to lead a life guided only by wisdom and rational thinking; we would not be able to deal with people, especially in relationships where one is more powerful than the other, if it were not for the little bit of folly we all have in us to use when it is necessary. We sometimes have to look on the absurd side of life and accept that not all things necessarily make sense in order to keep us sane. Folly, in Erasmus' book, also says that men who are taken to be fools, idiots, lack-wits, and dolts are the happiest of men because they are not afraid of death, they are not tormented by evils, nor do they have hopes of a good future. Their lack of understanding of the world around them can, thus, also be seen as a blessing, for they do not have to deal with fear and disappointment. They are able to play, sing, and laugh at themselves without being judged; they do not have to deal with the harshness of life.

Erasmus also brings to the discussion the fools that work in courts, advising kings and princes about state matters. Folly says she is not surprised that princes prefer fools to serious men because wise men only talk about grave matters, while fools “fit them with that they most delight in, as jests, laughter, abuses of other men, wanton pastimes, and the like” (Ibid., p. 58). According to Folly, fools “are the only plain, honest men and such as speak truth” (Ibid., p. 58); fools are in a privileged position because they are, paradoxically, both insiders and outsiders in society. Their exclusion allows them to have a broader view on what is happening, and their integration grants them the permission to say truths about such happenings. Fools are usually, and at first, seen as mere entertainers, but, when we take a closer look, we can see their roles as truth-tellers and educators.

---

even defines it as “great folly.” “Folly,” on the other hand, is related to lack of wisdom and understanding, stupidity, and rashness. For a better and more visual distinction of the two terms, see Annex 1.

1.2 Defining Terms

Before going deeper into my analysis of fools in this study, I must first deal with matters of terminology. In the criticism I read on these types of characters, there seems to be an interchangeable use of terms such as “fool,” “clown,” “jester,” “knave,” and “buffoon,” and authors usually give a brief comment on the differences between each type to later choose whichever term they like best. Bente A. Videbaek, author of *The Stage Clown in Shakespeare's Theater*, for example, sees all these types of characters as stage clowns, and believes that fools, jesters, servants, etc, are subcategories of the stage clown. A similar situation happens with Vicki K. Janik, editor and author of two chapters of *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art, and History*, who sees “clown,” “harlequin,” “jester,” “joker,” “trickster,” “vice,” and others as simply synonyms for “fool.” She acknowledges there are some differences, but such differentiations are too fuzzy, so she chooses the term “fool” to encompass all these types.

> The term “fool” has a broad range of synonyms: clown and harlequin, jester and joker, buffoon, trickster, vice, even devil and demon. But these words do not offer consistent qualitative or quantitative differences that might separate fool types from one another. Etymologies of these terms are similarly overlapping and general. The implicit meanings most common in the late twentieth century identifies jesters as verbally witty, buffoons as stupid, clowns as common circus figures providing visual foolery, and fools as dupes or fops. Finally motivation for their actions distinguishes self-serving tricksters as mischievous, vices as malicious, and devils/demons as evil. Yet because the differentiations associated with these terms are hazy and even subjective, we will not use them to delineate types and will use the term “fool” to represent the entire group. (JANIK, 1998, p. 2)

I do not agree with her definition of fools as “dupes or fops;” I do not see them as being easily deceived by others nor as someone worried about manners and clothing. However, based on Janik's definitions, I do believe the fool is a mixture of the jester and the clown—at the same time they are verbally witty, they also occasionally use visual foolery to entertain. I share her view when she refers to the Marx Brothers and The Three Stooges as clowns, for their main means of entertainment is through physical comedy, but I have difficulty accepting Beckett's characters in *Waiting for Godot* being treated as “clowns”—the very title of Donald Perret's chapter in the book is “Beckett's Postmodern Clowns: Vladimir (Didi), Estragon (Gogo), Pozzo, and Lucky.” For Janik, the clown is closely related to circus figures relying on visual foolery, and I believe labeling Beckett's characters “clowns” limits their characteristics. Of course, in *Waiting for Godot* the characters do depend on visual foolery, but that is not their main characteristic; they also make use of other means to

entertain their audience and reader. Their verbal wit and their ability to say truths and open the audience's eyes to the reality of life is just as important as the laughters brought by the hat-swapping sequence, for example. Thus, I do not agree with Perret's choice of denominating Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo, and Lucky clowns, and I think that “fool” would be a much better term.

Woody Allen is also described as a clown in Douglas Brode's chapter on the director/playwright/actor/writer, which goes against Janik's definitions in the introduction of her book. Allen's greatness is not in his physical humor, but in his use of words and his view of life,

> always scoffing at the apparent happiness of everyone around him as a cover for his secret longing to be as conformist as they. He alternately contemplates suicide and fears death; he struggles for success and scoffs at those who achieve it, including, eventually, himself. (JANIK, 1998, p. 27)

His ideas are not portrayed through visual foolery and this is not his main focus (which would, as Janik pointed out in her introduction, be the implicit meaning of the term “clown” in the late twentieth century). Allen's view of the world can be seen through the conversations and dialogues between the characters in his plays and movies. Even though Janik's book is interesting and relevant because it gives examples of the most different types of fools, I wish she and the authors of the chapters in the book had reached a consensus as to what each term meant, since in many of the chapters we see authors using terms differently from what Janik had proposed in her introduction.

In 1935, Enid Welsford's *The Fool, His Social and Literary History* was first published. It is, still today, a very important book in the study of fools, for he presents us with the most different types of fools, making history come alive in his descriptions. It should be noticed, however, that even after his long and detailed descriptions, Welsford also decided to use the term “fool” to refer to all types and it is the term he chose for the title of his book. Below, I will analyze the differences brought by Welsford between the “fool,” the “buffoon,” the “clown,” and the “jester,” which are the most common terms used to refer to these types of characters, and discuss their place in history and culture.

The first of Welsford's terms I will work with is “buffoon.” The author describes buffoons as men who take life easily, who offer entertainment to their fellows, and do not worry about the serious aspects of life. Welsford says that “their company is welcome, good stories about them accumulate, and if they have little conscience and no shame they often

manage to make a handsome profit out of their supposed irresponsibility" (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 3); they are "a quick-witted sociable race, who expressed themselves easily not only with the pen, but with the tongue" (Ibid., p. 14). Quick-wittedness, however, was not their only talent. They also imitated and mocked people, and were contortionists and acrobats. Princes and masters of buffoons cherished them deeply, which, according to Welsford, made them extremely conceited. The masters' appreciation for buffoons was so great that, while buffoons triumphed and made money, "learned poets, eloquent orators, subtle philosophers languished in obscurity" (Ibid., p. 15). To exemplify how much masters cared for their buffoons, the author mentions Camillo Querno, a somewhat famous buffoon, who was deeply cared for by Pope Leo X. Welsford also points out that a buffoon—such as poets, orators, and philosophers—can also be seen as an educator, "for he draws out the latent folly in his audience" (Ibid., p. 28).

If we take the place of the buffoon in history, it is interesting to learn that, although buffoons were very popular in fourteenth-century Italy, being allowed to wander freely from court to court, they were not as popular in England. In the sixteenth century, attempts were made to introduce buffoons to the English court (as they were very popular in Paris at that time), but these attempts were not successful. According to Welsford,

> in the reign of Henry VIII severe treatment was meted out to the lively young minions who tried to introduce the buffoonery of Paris into the staider atmosphere of London. Elizabeth was fond of a good entertainment, but she would rather quarter herself on her nobles than hold open house for sharp-witted ne'er-do-wells. We have to wait for the coming of the Stuarts to find a state of affairs similar to that which prevailed on the continent. (Ibid., p. 25-26)

It should be highlighted, however, that if buffoons and their contortions were not very popular in the reign of Henry VIII, the same cannot be said about fools. Robert Hillis Goldsmith, author of *Wise Fools in Shakespeare*, even jokes that the King had more fools than wives. Will Sommers, for example, was a very popular court jester in the court of Henry VIII and, according to Goldsmith, the King even sought Sommer's advice in matters of state (GOLDSMITH, 1955, p. 36).

Welsford says the buffoon can be seen as a fool because both earn their living "by an openly acknowledged failure to attain to the normal standard of human dignity" (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 3). Both the fool and the buffoon are outsiders; even though they might be cherished by their masters and rulers, they are still in the margins of society—the difference is that the fool is in the margins because he is either a real or pretended madman,

and the buffoon because he is “an absurd ne'er-do-well” (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 3), an irresponsible and idle character who does not take life too seriously. Welsford also mentions another type of buffoon—the mythical buffoon. Unlike the typical buffoon (that actually existed and was a part of society), the mythical buffoon was an invention of people's imagination, such as fairies, elvish creatures, and hobgoblins, for example. These mythical buffoons are foolish and naïve, “quite incapable of foresight or prudence, or of understanding anything more than the most literal meaning of the words that are spoken to them” (Ibid., p. 50) and, according to Welsford, one of their strongest characteristics is their heartlessness and lack of care for other people. When Welsford talks about mythical buffoons, he mainly uses as examples Till Eulenspiegel and Robin Goodfellow, or Puck. Eulenspiegel is a trickster in German folklore whose name was credited to many tales popular in the Middle Ages in Germany. He used to play jokes on other people and expose their greed, folly, hypocrisy, and foolishness. Robin Goodfellow, also known as Puck, is a very popular character in literature and culture, and is mostly remembered for being a character in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Robin Goodfellow is usually a domestic fairy who is mischievous and plays pranks and practical jokes. Welsford does not mention, however, that although there are mythical characters who are mischievous and tricksters, they can also be good-hearted, kind, and helpful, and should not be taken to be strictly evil.

When we move into the analysis of “jester,” it is interesting to notice that Welsford only refers to them as “court-jester,” therefore, linking the presence of jesters only to the court, where they live among royalty, entertaining their masters. Janik says that in the study of fools, jesters are often seen as one of the subcategories. According to her, when fools are divided due to their clothing, they can fall into two categories: the tramp, if the lumpishness of their clothes is characteristic; or the jester, when they are dressed in motley, wearing a coxcomb or a cap with bells on their heads[2]. When talking about court-jesters, Welsford links them with the clowns of the traditional festivals and says that both the court-jester and those clowns are fools and that “their folly is regarded not merely as a defect but as the quality which endears them to the community” (Ibid., p. 199). The difference between court-jesters and clowns, for Welsford, is that the former is a servant kept by their masters to be “the butt

[2] According to Goldsmith, the origin of the bells in jesters' caps comes from medieval times. He says that “medieval knights and demoiselles went about the banquet hall and the tourney-yard with bells on their bracelets and bells on their toes. In mimicking this court folly, the fool merely wore more bells and kept up the fad longer” (GOLDSMITH, 1955, p. 3-4). Both Goldsmith and Welsford, however, highlight that this official motley was not always worn by the court-jester, they also used to dress like ordinary courtiers.

or wit of the household" (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 199), and the latter is an ordinary countryman who dressed as a clown to have fun and because of tradition. At festivals, this man who dressed as a clown "blackened his face, dressed up and talked nonsense, for no other reason except that his fathers had done it before him, and that in some undefined way it would bring good luck" (Ibid., p. 199). While court-jesters made of it their jobs, clowns were simply men having fun.

Bente A. Videbaek sees court-jesters as a subcategory of clowns, and she says that their fooling is a conscious act, that their "lack of understanding is artificially put on" (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 40), and that is what differentiates court-jesters from the other types of clowns. In her book, Videbaek focuses on clowns in the theater; she does not spend too much time in the discussion of fools, clowns, and jesters in history and culture. She then says that jesters and wise fools, who are artificial fools, are the group that is most studied by critics of literature "probably because their involvement in the main plot seems the most significant, and their written parts are large and complicated and thus readily accessible for literary analysis" (Ibid., p. 40). The author defends that court-jesters, in Shakespeare's theater at least, have certain obligations and privileges because of their status as court-jesters attached to a specific household. Some of their obligations are to have some wit and "great agility in the use of language" (Ibid., p. 77). She also points out that one of the main roles of the jester in the theater is in their position as educators and mirrors of the audience—they stand outside the plot, and because of this distancing, they are able to comment on it.

According to Welsford, the clown is, as I mentioned above, the honest countryman who disguises himself during festivities, painting his face and talking nonsense, believing that that would bring him good luck. When he analyzes the stage-clown, the author believes that his personality belongs only to the theater, for "they have no substantial being at all outside the walls of the theater, but depend completely upon the comic imagination of their creators[3]" (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 277). He believes the stage-clown has the ability of "caricaturing humanity in a delightful manner" (Ibid., p. 277), but, when the play is over, the stage-clown is left on stage. Videbaek mentions that, in Elizabethan[4] times, "the word clown was often used

[3] It is interesting to notice, however, that Welsford highlights that the creator of the stage-clown does not necessarily have to be the playwright; the actor who plays the stage-clown is often his character's creator. The actor creates the character of the stage-clown, but, when the play ends, he does not proceed in foolery. In his chapter on Shakespeare's Feste in Janik's book, Neil Novelli supports this saying that, in Elizabethan times, "actors doing the clown roles in plays seem not to have submerged themselves in fictional characters but to have kept their own identities" (JANIK, 1998, p. 186).

[4] Even though Shakespeare continues to write after Elizabeth's death, under the reign of James I, I will

as a term for a country bumpkin, a clod, or a person lacking in mental capacity, all these often found in one and the same person" (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 196), and she also says that the clown is always involved in role-playing and that they are not necessarily involved with the theater: "We find him in a variety of roles, spanning from the folk tradition of England in the Middle Ages over famous modern-day circus performers to film and television stars such as Charles Chaplin" (Ibid., p. 2). However, she criticizes clowns on television and film because she believes these media take away one of the main roles of the clown—that of mediator—since they hardly receive any feedback from the audience.

> Whatever their cultural or historical circumstances, clowns are in direct contact with the audience, address the spectators, and often comment on the proceedings they take part in even as they occur. Their goal is laughter, though they not always aim for the guffaw, and very often the laughter may leave the spectators wiser. (Ibid., p. 3)

Besides discussing the role of the clown, Videbaek also mentions their dress. She says they are easily identified because of it, and they might be either grotesquely dressed, exaggerating one or more features of their clothing, or wearing rags and sometimes motley. Videbaek focuses on the clown in the theater, and says that the stage-clown is empowered with a freedom of speech and social mobility which allows him to be involved in the play, and still maintain some distance to comment other characters' comings and goings—"He is not fully integrated, yet not apart either" (Ibid., p. 3). She also believes both minor clowns and major clown roles have the ability to influence the audience's perception of the play. Their mere presence makes audiences look at the play differently. Videbaek's clowns, thus, are very similar to other authors' fools. Their characteristics are almost the same (their dress, their role as mediators, their aimed laughter, their teaching of the audience), and it seems the author simply chose the term "clown" as a preference, since she does not try to differentiate "clowns" and "fools" to support her use of the former term. This matter will be further discussed below.

For Welsford, the fool is the man

> who falls below the average human standard, but whose defects have been transformed into a source of delight, a mainspring of comedy, which has always been one of the great recreations of mankind and particularly of civilized mankind (WESFORD, 1966, p. xi)

and, in the theater, he is the character who stands between the stage and the audience. Wisdom

---

continue to use the term "Elizabethan times" and "Elizabethan Drama" because Shakespeare's drama is so connected with the reign of Elizabeth.

has always been connected to the fool—there is even the term “wise fool” to characterize the one who uses his wisdom to play the fool, and then be licensed to speak freely—, and Welsford believes the fool is “the truth-teller whose real insight was thinly disguised as a form of insanity” (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 239). This insanity, it should be noticed, could be both real and feigned. Janik, in the introduction of her book, talks about the division between natural and artificial fools; a distinction that, according to Welsford, was very much used in Elizabethan times, and that goes back at least to the twelfth century. Natural fools are those who are unable to function normally “because of physical, mental, or emotional conditions” (JANIK, 1998, p. 1), while artificial fools are the ones who imitate the limitations of natural fools, and use this feigned condition to be allowed to have free speech and mock others in society. They are allowed to cross or ignore boundaries other people have to obey. Janik also addresses the role of the fool in society, which they are a part of, though continuing to be isolated observers. Fools question society and, at the same time, make people laugh at its absurdity and at themselves:

> By convention, fools stand simultaneously both within and without the normal patterns of art, ritual, and life. They participate in events, yet they remain isolated observers, evaluating the world as if they care for nothing. With their pranks and parodies, fools question prevailing order, and their objectivity makes them at once comic individuals who are too removed to suffer and ironists who see existence as absurdity. Fools mock social structures, individual righteousness, passionate personal relationships, and the mutating and fragile underpinning of human thought —language itself. Fools, then, operate as antirulers, offering society skeptical, unencumbered viewpoints that scorn pride and challenge such concepts as logic, cause, reward, and solution. (Ibid., p. xiv)

Unlike serious men, fools are not worried about their place in the world and their position in their lives, and their lack of concern could not be better portrayed than by their jokes and their manipulation of language.

It is evident that there is not only one type of fool, and Janik proposes, on page 3, the following division to differentiate the several types according to how much they are able to understand about themselves and others around them. The *wise fool* would be the one who perceives and acknowledges his own weaknesses and desires and the weaknesses and desires of others; the *dupe or victim* would be the one who perceives and acknowledges his own weaknesses and desires, but not those of others; the *trickster or evildoer* does not perceive and acknowledge his own weaknesses and desires, only those of others; and the *innocent or holy fool*, who perceives and acknowledges neither his own weaknesses and desires nor those of others. Her division is valid especially if we want to analyze how fools behave in their worlds

(be it the real world or the world of theater or film, for example) based on the knowledge they have. Other approaches and divisions would also be valid, such as analyzing not what fools perceive and acknowledge, but *how* their perception and acknowledgement is portrayed and absorbed by the audience. Janik also says that fools are divided, in most studies, into two or three categories, that can be based on a variety of criteria. She says that fools can be either seen as tramps or jesters, based on what they wear; natural or artificial performers "according to their physical peculiarities or natural talent for entertaining" (JANIK, 1998, p. 2); and as evildoer, victim or accuser, based on the motivation of their behavior. The author also admits that the term "fool" includes a broad range of figures, and cites dwarves in court, circus clowns, and ritualized mock priests to exemplify the many different characters the term "fool" comprises.

Because they are at the same time part of society and distant from it, fools are granted the possibility of commenting on people and their actions from a wider point of view. In the theater, they present the audience with deep insights on humanity because of their distancing and because of the wisdom that they possess. They can also master language and hypnotize their interlocutors with their witty word-plays and intentional misunderstandings. Fools should also be praised for their ability to entertain and make people laugh. Sometimes this laughter might in fact teach the audience something about themselves, but sometimes it is mere comedy, made for us to simply enjoy. I believe, then, that "fool" should be used as a more general term, and that other terms, such as clown, jester, and buffoon be used as subcategories. Janik argues that clowns are fools who depend on visual foolery to achieve laughter, and I agree with this description. I believe clowns are strongly connected to physical humor and that is why I disagree with Videbaek's decision of calling these types of characters who appear on Shakespeare by the term *clown*, a decision which is shown even in the title of her book—*The Stage Clown in Shakespeare's Theater*. Of course some of them are clowns and rely on physical humor, such as Launce in the scene in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* in which he uses his dog, his shoes, and his staff to represent the members of his family, but it is much more common to see Shakespeare's characters using language and shaping dialogues in their own favor. Feste, in *Twelfth Night*, even calls himself not a fool, but a "corrupter of words" (Act III, Scene 1, 40). Because of its connection to folly and wisdom, I believe that "fool" is the most proper term to talk about all these types of characters—or at least the ones that will be analyzed in this work.

1.3 Fools throughout History and in Literature

To analyze fools, it is important to know a little about their history and their role in different cultures and eras. In *The Fool, His Social and Literary History*, Welsford is able to transport his reader to different times and different places to show us the importance of fools at that given time or place. Moreover, he also discusses the role of fools in literature, especially in the theater, which is relevant to my study and which, in the following paragraphs, I will present. Vicki K. Janik's *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art, and History* and Bente A. Videbaek's *The Stage Clown in Shakespeare's Theater* will also guide me in the analysis of the role and history of the fool.

According to Welsford, there is not enough information to support the belief that dwarf-fools were used as entertainers in Classical Greek literature; there is only evidence—described by the author as “vague and unsatisfactory” (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 58)—that a character such as this was present as early as the sixth century B.C. He also says that, in the Roman Empire, wealthy men used to keep “half-witted and deformed slaves” (Ibid., p. 58) in their households as a form of entertainment, and many of them were mentally deficient and physically stunted. Because of this physical quality they possessed, it was very common for these dwarf-fools to be seen as mascots for the ladies, equivalent to today's lap-dogs and teddy-bears. Goldsmith, in *Wise Fools in Shakespeare*, also supports this idea, saying that

> people sometimes kept monstrous imbeciles as pets much as ladies of a later day kept monkeys. These mental defectives were bought at public auction in the monster-market, and the more foolish they were, the better was the price that they brought. (GOLDSMITH, 1955, p. 5)

Welsford also points out that their main appeal was not intellectual, but sensational, and he mentions that Clement of Alexandria, a Christian theologian who is said to be one of the early Church Fathers, tells that ladies had the habit of taking their deformed fools to the table to play with.

Another interesting fact mentioned by Weslford is that, up until the eighteenth century, professors of German Universities “could augment their incomes by playing the fool at court” (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 7), which shows the close connection between folly and wisdom. The wisdom of fools can also be connected with the wisdom of madmen, who are often taken to

possess some kind of knowledge hidden, at times, even from themselves. Welsford says:

> There is a widespread notion which is not yet quite extinct that the lunatic is an awe-inspiring figure whose reason has ceased to function normally because he has become the mouthpiece of a spirit, or power external to himself, and so has access to hidden knowledge-especially to knowledge of the future. (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 76)

Michel Foucault also deals with the role of the madman as the one who carries hidden truths, especially in the theater. Foucault, in *L'Ordre du Discours* (a lecture given by him in 1970 at the Collège de France) believes that, since the Middle Ages, the madman's word had two possible and very different paths. It was either seen as discourse that could not circulate among the discourse of others, recognized as neither true nor important; the madman was forbidden to sign contracts and testify at court, for example. On the other hand, his discourse could also receive strange powers, such as the one of telling hidden truths (*une vérité cachée*), pronouncing the future, and seeing the wisdom that others could not see. Foucault believes the madman's reason was "*une raison plus raisonnable que celle des gens raisonnables*" (FOUCAULT, 1971, p. 12). The French author believes that, today, the madman's word is no longer seen as null or unacceptable; for him, the madman's word takes us further, it makes us search for the meaning in it. Regarding the theater, Foucault believes that that was where the madman was seen as unarmed and reconciled (*désarmé et réconcilié*), because he had the possession of a hidden truth (*vérité au masque*). Madmen and fools have been, for a long time, connected with wisdom and reason, to a greater or smaller degree. They have taught us that there can be some piece of knowledge even in their often confusing and blurry discourse, and, because of that, we should not simply dismiss them as being seemingly insane.

There is an entire chapter dedicated to the medieval court-fool in Welsford's work, in which he says that there is no doubt the court-fool was a regular institution in England in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. Edward I, for example, had 'Martinetto de Vasconia fatuo' play before him in 1299-1300; Edward II possessed a fool named Robert, who even had another servant to take care of him. Court-fools, at this time, were very cherished by their masters, who used to "make provision for their fools in old age" (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 116). Royal courts used to keep account books to control their expenditures, and it is possible to learn a little about the life-style of jesters at this time from these books. According to Welsford,

> we can tell for instance that they were on the whole kindly treated, that their physical and spiritual needs were attended to, that their relatives came to visit them,

that they were honourably buried." (Ibid., p. 119)

They were not seen simply as another servant, there was a special relationship between them and their masters. Regarding their attire, as I have already mentioned, the uniform we associate with fools today (dressed in motley, caps with bells and ears, coxcombs, and the occasional sword in the hand), and which is what most fools in theater wear, was not, according to accounts, worn by the professional court-fool. Instead, they were worn by amateur actors who impersonated court-fools. Because of the lack of material on this matter, and because account books were used to control the court's expenditures, we cannot be sure whether Welsford is correct or not when he says that court-fools used to dress like ordinary courtiers. If we wanted to speculate, we could say that the fool's clothes could have easily been handed down from their masters and patched together by themselves, which would not appear in the account books, for example. Welsford also mentions that the fool's dress was, at times, imposed as a form of punishment, representing, thus, a symbol of madness and servitude. This punishment and the fact that it became a symbol of madness is what made amateur actors adopt this way of dressing. Welsford says that

> It seems likely that the fool's dress survived from Roman times, became recognized as the official wear for fools in the Middle Ages, and was adopted by amateur actors of fool-societies, just because it was a costume traditionally associated with lunacy. (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 124)

These amateur actors were probably artificial fools, and wearing the fool outfit was one of the ways they had to get closer and become more similar to natural fools. In the theater, fools are usually dressed in motley so they stand out the moment they go on stage. This way, the audience knows immediately what type of character they are and what to expect from them.

During the Renaissance, fools gained notoriety. They began to stand out and could even be somewhat famous: "when really successful in the practice of their art, [fools] could acquire something of the notoriety of a modern music-hall artist of film-star" (Ibid., p. 128). Welsford says this change of attitude and the beginning of fools' fame started first in Italy, but it later spread to other countries, including England. According to the author, the period when court-fools were most common in Shakespeare's country was when the War of Roses ended, because then it was possible "to develop the lighter side of court life" (Ibid., p. 159), and he highlights that court-fools were very popular during the reign of the Tudors. Towards the seventeenth century, however, court-fools began to disappear. Frederick Warde, author of *The*

Fools of Shakespeare: An Interpretation of their Wit, Wisdom, and Personalities, believes the easy access to other forms of entertainment and the fact that more people had more knowledge caused the decay in the importance and esteem of court-fools:

> Printing began to develop, knowledge to be more general, and literature to be appreciated; entertainment was found in the printed publications of wit and humor, rather than from the lips of the jester, and the quality of the latter began to deteriorate from the witty retainer of the court, to the coarse buffoon whose jests appealed to the low and the ignorant, rather than to the cultivated and intelligent. (WARDE, 1915, p. 75-76)

In spite of the decline of the fool at court, however, he was still very common in literature and in the theater, and had already marked his territory in people's imaginations.

In literature, Welsford believes that the court-fool is the character who is licensed to speak "unwelcome truths" (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 235). The author also points out that, contrary to what we might expect, if it were not for Shakespeare, court-fools would not have been so present in Elizabethan drama, a point also mentioned by Videbaek. According to her,

> Shakespeare is the only playwright of his time who explores the possibilities of the clown's part, and uses it to the fullest. We may often find clowns or clownlike characters in Elizabethan plays, but Shakespeare alone has deliberately used the clown's part as a major contribution to the understanding of the play. (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 1)

Welsford associates the popularity of fools on stage between 1598 and 1605 to the success of Robert Armin, who was becoming a very successful comic actor. One of the roles of the fool in the theater is that of a detached commentator. While the serious hero is worried about grave matters, the fool does not care about them and does not believe they are worth worrying about; he takes attention away from problems: "the serious hero focuses events, forces issues, and causes catastrophes; but the Fool by his mere presence dissolves events, evades issues, and throws doubt on the finality of the fact" (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 324). The fool is detached from social life, and he speaks outside the dramatic plot of the story. He might be present in serious scenes of a play, but he is never a part of them. Fools in Shakespeare's theater will be analyzed in greater detail in the the following chapter.

Videbaek discusses the impact of the mere presence of the fool on stage. She believes his appearance changes the perception the audience has of a given scene or maybe of the whole play. She argues that the fool appears when the audience needs him, be it to relieve the tension of the play, or to serve as a guide to the happenings on stage. According to her, the appearance of Shakespeare's clowns serves to give the events on stage "a certain coloring,

which will linger with the audience even after the clown has disappeared" (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 3). The author also gives an account of how the Elizabethan fool came to be what it is and where he got its characteristics from:

> The Elizabethan stage clown is a conglomerate of a large number of different ancestors, all of whom have contributed to the formation of the clown's characteristics. Some of these diverse elements belong in quite a distant past, others are still part of the theatrical culture, while some are contemporaries of the clown's. The comic servant in Greek and Roman plays, the Vice of the medieaval morality plays, and the *Commedia dell'Arte* tradition contributed to the clown's skillful repartee and the tradition for his acrobatic tumbling. The idea of “the village idiot” and “the country clod” gave him his straightforwardness and naivete, which often serves him well when he delivers home truths to unwilling ears. Finally, the historical court fool or jester added to the clown's part his free license to speech, his professionalism, and many articles of dress. And even the figure of “the malcontent” may find his place among the stage clown's effects. (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 2)

Because their characteristics come from different types of characters, it can only be expected that fools be different from one another and have their own striking features. While one fool may be more prone to acrobatic stunts, another can be more focused on telling truths, for example. She also calls attention to the fact that fools in the theater, especially in Shakespearean theater, do not have realistic personality traits; they are more a function than a character, and, because of that, they are able to appear and disappear without any introduction or excuse, and they are not missed when they are not seen. One of the instances that best shows the fool as a function more than a character is in Marlowe's *Pilgrimage to Parnassus*, written around 1589, in which, according to Videbaek,

> a clown emerges from nowhere, pulled onto the stage with a rope. He is totally disconnected from the play's plot, and he is given only a short time to captivate the audience before he is thrown off the stage not to be seen again. (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 195)

The fact that he is pulled by a rope highlights his condition of a function rather than a character. Unlike other characters, this clown is not even able to control his own movements. Although I do not have any more information about Marlowe's play, it reminded me of Beckett's *Act Without Words I*, in which a man is flung onto stage by a rope and has several objects lowered to him by the same rope. This short play by Beckett shows human stagnation at its worse, and a deeper comparison to Marlowe's play would be incredibly interesting.

1.4 Fools in Popular Culture

In her book, Janik calls our attention to the fact that fools are present in cultures throughout the world. According to her, "they intrude into conventional order, making us laugh at them, at others, at ourselves, and even at the order itself, artfully distracting us for the moment from the questions raised by their presence in the system" (JANIK, 1998, p. 1). They are present in many different genres of art, such as the theater, the opera, and the circus, for example, and their role is to "explode, invert, blur, or establish a new order, balance and harmony" (JANIK, 1998, p. 2). The author presents many instances of very different fools, with the most distinct characteristics and from various places and times, presenting discussions on characters and people that perhaps are not always associated with being fools. There are, for example, chapters on Woody Allen, Lucille Ball, Charlie Chaplin, the American Circus Clown, The Drag Queen, Forrest Gump, The Three Stooges, and many others, including, of course, Lear's Fool and Beckett's characters in *Waiting for Godot*. All these discussions opened my eyes to the recurring presence of fools in literature, culture, and religion throughout history. Therefore, to briefly exemplify their recurrent presence, below I will present some information on the Feast of Fools and on two very popular characters that I had never taken to be fools before.

In France and England, from the 1180s to the 1600s, there was an enormous religious celebration called the Feast of Fools, whose main character was the Bishop of Fools. According to Simonette Cochis, the author of the chapter on the Bishop of Fools in Janik's book, the celebration occurred mainly in churches and cathedrals on or around New Year's Day, although it was also common for people to celebrate the festivity outside the church. The Bishop of Fools mocked the liturgy of the Mass and sang sacred songs replacing some words with obscenities or gibberish, for example. Many people participated in this celebration, and it was common for them to wear clothes inside out, for men to wear women's clothes, and for nudity to replace robes. Cochis says that "the script for the feast was molded on the liturgy of the Mass, its costumes were a takeoff of priestly garb, its lyrics mimicked sacred song, and its actions followed the rites of the holy offices" (Ibid., p. 97). The Feast of Fools was a celebration that turned the church hierarchy upside down, where the Bishop of Fools would be elected by the lower clerics and would then officiate in farcical holy offices and lead "jests, cavalcades, and boisterous merrymaking that became the hallmark of the feast" (Ibid., p. 98). The higher clergy often tried to ban this popular celebration, but it was so difficult to control that it continued to reappear for more than four centuries. Because of the reversal of roles, the

Bishop of Fools is seen as an indicator of the social and political preoccupations of the common man of that time. The Bishop of Fools was able to "vent repressed anger and resentment, to blow off steam, and thus to actually perpetuate the social order by acting out their frustrations within the all-embracing liturgy of the church" (Ibid., p. 102), mostly because of their allowance of free speech. The social and religious order was reversed, and, throughout the festivities of the Feast of Fools, the Bishop of Fools was allowed to speak his mind and criticize and mock the liturgy of the Mass and the church's ruling class and their abuses of power.

Another chapter in Janik's book that I was surprised to find was the one on Lucille Ball. Her most famous characters are Lucy Ricardo, from the television show *I Love Lucy*, and Lucy Carmichael, from *The Lucky Show*. As I had seen only a few episodes, I had never imagined she could be considered a clown. Bruce Henderson, the author of this chapter on Ball, says that her characters are comic, ironic figures who comment on the action and that she uses her humor to "draw our attention to the incongruities of the world" (JANIK, 1998, p. 64), especially in the roles Ball played in the 1930s and 1940s. This characteristic of being a commentator is often present in fool characters, and it brings Ball closer to the audience—even if the audience is at home, watching the show through their TV sets. In the 1950s and 1960s, Bell's main role shifts from commentator more to that of entertainer, and this is seen as her "clownish" period, in which her main goal was to incite laughter. In this period, Ball was able to break ground and show early female clowns the possibility of physical comedy, which was not popular among female entertainers at that time.

In the same book by Janik, James O'Brien includes a chapter on Forrest Gump, the awkward book and movie character who is somewhat excluded from society and bullied by its members. O'Brien discusses both the 1986 book by Winston Groom and the 1994 Robert Zemeckis film starring Tom Hanks as Forrest Gump to show that the character can be seen as a fool. The author believes both the literary and the cinematic Gump fit perfectly in the definition of the natural fool, because "he is both unsuspecting and unselfishly loving, he fails to comprehend or acknowledge the political nature of society, never questioning either his own acts or those of others" (Ibid., p. 227), and, thus, according to O'Brien, he exposes the stupidity and inhumanity of America's institutions. In spite of his unusual physical characteristics (in the book he is a very large man, six feet two inches tall, 242 pounds, while in the movie he is an average built man, but with odd head movements and speaking with a

southern accent), Gump is a lovable character who somehow manages to teach his reader/spectator. According to O'Brien, Groom's 1986 novel is a "gentle satire on the follies of American life and aspirations" (Ibid., p. 230), while in Zemeckis's movie there is a bit of a change: the American public is led to focus more on family, friends, and work, and leave behind discussions on race, war, and culture. Thus, O'Brien believes Hanks's Gump is the "ingenuous, innocent fool" who serves as "messenger for this messianic request" (JANIK, 1998, p. 230).

In her work, Janik also includes chapters on the clowns of the American Southwest, from the Pre-Columbian time up until the present, as well as Rigoletto, South African Political Clowning, The Yankee in the nineteenth-century American theater, and even Paul the Apostle. This great variety and recurrence of fools throughout history, literature, and culture is worth noticing, and it shows how much there still is to be explored in the study of fools.

1.5 Lear's Fool and Vladimir and Estragon as Fools

There is no doubt that Lear's Fool, in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, is a fool according to the aspects mentioned so far. Fools were often present in Shakespearean plays, and, in *King Lear*, the role of the fool is of extreme importance. Videbaek says that Lear's Fool is the only clown playing a major role in a Shakespearean tragedy; usually in Shakespeare's tragedies, the fool plays a minor role, and is used to "illuminate a turning point in the action" (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 123). Lear's Fool is not a part of the tragic plot of the play, but is, most of the time, by Lear's side to teach him and show him his wrongdoings. He is often engaged in word-plays and riddles to try to entertain Lear and take his mind off his master's misdeeds. Lear's Fool is, according to Welsford, "an 'all-licensed' critic who sees and speaks the real truth about the people around him" (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 256); and being a critic of Lear's actions, he also teaches the audience about the play itself and about matters of our own lives. Lear's Fool also uses a bit of physical comedy, using his coxcomb as a prop to call his master a fool when he offers it to the now crownless Lear.

Over 300 years after Shakespeare wrote *King* Lear, Irish playwright Samuel Beckett wrote *Waiting for Godot.* Like Lear's Fool, the main characters of Beckett's play can also be

identified as fools. Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo, and Lucky open the audience's eyes to hidden truths (or truths that are not hidden, but that the audience choses to ignore) and use language and visual foolery for comedy, two of the main characteristics of fools. Out of the four characters, I will focus mainly on Vladimir and Estragon. I believe these two characters are the true Beckettian heroes because of the way they portray the absurdity of our lives. My reading of Beckett's play made me realize that we cannot always understand what is happening with our lives, we do not always know what we are waiting for, and, at the same time, we try to find things that "give us the impression we exist," as Estragon says, playing games and engaging in conversations to have the feeling time is passing faster.

When discussing Shakespearean fools and Lear's Fool, specifically, Weslford says that the English playwright "provokes questions and reveals ambiguities" (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 259), and this could also be said of Beckett through the characters in *Waiting for Godot*. Vladimir and Estragon make the audience face facts and question themselves about matters in their own lives, unveiling the helplessness of life. Welsford also adds that the genius of the fool is manifested

> by his power of deluding us into the belief that he can draw the sting of pain; by his power of surrounding us with an atmosphere of make-believe, in which nothing is serious, nothing is solid, nothing has abiding consequences. (Ibid., p. 321)

Beckett's play does have this atmosphere of make-believe, with actions happening on a country road with a tree in the background and a boy appearing at the end of each act saying that Godot will not be able to be there that night, but will surely meet them the following day. However, underneath the play's apparent unpretentiousness, lack of solidity, and unconsequentiality, there is a sad and harsh truth behind the lives, actions, and dialogues of Vladimir and Estragon. One of the interpretations of the play is that, through the hopelessness and meaninglessness of Didi and Gogo's lives, we realize that our own lives might also be hopeless and meaningless. Perhaps we are all, like the characters in the play, pointlessly waiting and hoping for something—or someone—to change our lives, a change that will never come.

Welsford says that the role of the fool is also to show the contradictions inside of every one of us, and when they show us these contradictions, we are able to realize we are just like fools:

> In the first place we are creatures of the earth, propagating our species like other animals, in need of food, clothing and shelter and of the money that produces them.

> Yet if we need money, are we so wholly creatures of the earth? If we need to cover our nakedness by material clothes or spiritual ideals, are we so like the other animals? This incongruity is exploited by the Fool. The Fool is an unabashed glutton and a coward and knave, he is—as we say—a natural; we laugh at him and enjoy a pleasant sense of superiority; he looks at us oddly and we suspect that he is our alter ego; he winks at us and we are delighted at the discovery that we also are gluttons and cowards and knaves. (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 322)

When I first read the play, I had difficulty accepting I was like Vladimir and Estragon, I felt somewhat superior to them. After reading it a few more times, however, I became more and more aware of our similarities. I felt that perhaps their nonsensical dialogues, their games and imitations, their physical humor, and their friendship mimic our lives. They stage, right in front of us, how absurd existence is.

Another characteristic of fools that we find in Vladimir and Estragon is that they are social outcasts, and because of that they know the truth. Because they are excluded from society they are allowed a broader vision that enables them to see things through a different perspective. Janik, in her preface, talks about this distance fools keep and about other characteristics that fit Beckett's fools in *Waiting for Godot*. She says:

> By convention, fools stand simultaneously both within and without the normal patterns of art, ritual, and life. They participate in events, yet they remain isolated observers, evaluating the world as if they care for nothing. With their pranks and parodies, fools question prevailing order, and their objectivity makes them at once comic individuals who are too removed to suffer and ironists who see existence as absurdity. Fools mock social structures, individual righteousness, passionate personal relationships, and the mutating and fragile underpinning of human thought —language itself. Fools, then, operate as antirulers, offering society skeptical, unencumbered viewpoints that scorn pride and challenge such concepts as logic, cause, reward, and solution. (JANIK, 1998, p. xiv)

One of the ways through which fools teach and mock others is through language, and in *Waiting for Godot* we see that language is broken down. It is not used merely to interact and exchange ideas, but to show that communication is often complex and useless. Besides Vladimir and Estragon's nonsensical conversations which lead nowhere, we have Lucky's confusing and fragmented speech. The characters in this play also use a great deal of physical comedy and repetition in the play, which, at first, brings the audience to laughter, especially when Estragon's pants fall and in the hat-swapping scene, for example. When we realize, however, that this has been going on for a long time, and will probably go on for even longer, we see how absurd and static life can be.

Vladimir and Estragon, like Lear's Fool, fit the description of fools and share characteristics with these types of characters which have been present for a long time in our

culture, history, and literature, and will probably remain present for some time still. The study of fools is not at the top of literary criticism, but because of their importance and recurrence in literature, it should not be overlooked. I believe Shakespeare's fools inspired Beckett's fools in some way, so I will analyze their characteristics and see to what extent Vladimir and Estragon can be seen as modern-day Lear's Fools.

2. Shakespearean Fools and the Fool in *King Lear*

2.1 The Neglect of Shakespearean Fools

Fools are present in many of Shakespeare's plays. Their personalities and importance in the play may vary, but their recurrence shows how significant and relevant they are in Shakespeare's theater. According to Bente A. Videbaek, author of *The Stage-clown in Shakespeare's Theater*, the fool was an institution on the Shakespearean stage.

> The combination of the clown's role and the well-known actor filling it was a delight in itself, and his disrespect and total lack of inhibition was a large element of his appeal. The combination of the well-known actor in the equally well-known pattern of the clown's role is especially suited to exercise control over the audience's perception and response to the play. (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 191)

In the introduction of her book, however, Videbaek brings it to our attention that, in modern times, the part of the fool is usually forgotten and not given their due attention; not only by readers/audiences and students of Shakespeare, but also by critics and directors. Goldsmith, author of *Wise Fools in Shakespeare*, even says that audiences are “almost always bored and confused” (GOLDSMITH, 1955, p. ix) by the fool characters in Shakespeare, and Videbaek adds that,

> Though the clown may appear in one scene or a few scenes only and have very little dialogue written down for him to speak, even small parts prove to be placed at significant turning points in the action. Unfortunately, in modern times, the part of the clown has often seemed irrelevant to both critics and directors. Critics may say that the part has been written in by somebody other than Shakespeare because the style seems inconsistent with the rest of the play, or the clown's presence is seen as a mere filler. […] Directors, working within the limitations given by the budget for the performance, may get rid of a problem easily enough by cutting the tiny part altogether. The stage clown, delicately poised as he is between the actual involvement in the proceedings and calculated distance, can become a prime target for elimination, especially in plays where the part has not had a chance to establish a niche for itself in modern performance practice. (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 1-2)

Fools and smaller parts have been overlooked by Shakespeare's audience since, at

least, the beginning of the twentieth century, for we can see Frederick Warde discussing this matter in *Fools of Shakespeare*, published in 1915. He complains mostly of young readers, who,

> eager for the development of the plot or for the main points of the story, frequently neglect or omit the minor parts, deeming them non-essential to the interest of the play. This is to be deplored; for Shakespeare has placed many of his best thoughts and most pointed epigrams in the mouths of comparatively unimportant characters; so that to pass over or neglect these passages is to lose many beauties of thought, much philosophic reflection, and fund of characteristic humor. (WARDE, 1915, p. 132-3)

It is a shame that Shakespeare's fools are (and have been) neglected, because they truly are important in Shakespeare's plays, not only entertaining the audience, but also teaching and guiding them.

2.2 The Role of Fools in Shakespeare's Theater

According to Videbaek, “Shakespeare always times his clown's appearance perfectly to fit the audience's need, sometimes for relief from tension, but most often to serve as a guide through the maze of the play” (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 2). This condition of being a guide comes mostly from their position in the play. Usually, the fool is not directly connected to the main plot of the play—he does not have a hand shaping what happens on stage—, which gives him a certain distance to see things from a broader point of view, allowing the audience to take a step back and see things more clearly and have deeper insights on the happenings in the play. As Welsford says in *The Fool: His Social and Literary History*,

> as a dramatic character he [the fool] usually stands apart from the main action of the play, having a tendency not to focus but to dissolve events, and also to act as an intermediary between the stage and the auditorium. (WELSFORD, 1966, p. xii)

The mere presence or appearance of the fool in a scene can change the way we look at it. As Videbaek points out,

> Every clown part, no matter how minor it may be, is important for the audience's understanding of the play, or the point of view on which we base our final interpretation. Even a clown in a minor role can be a teacher and a guide for the audience, open hitherto unexplored approaches, and lend depth or dimension to the character with whom the clown interacts. This effect can be accomplished with great economy, because the clown usually appears at a turning point in the action, and so his very presence comes to signal a change and opportunity for greater insight. (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 7)

It is very common in Shakespeare's comedies for the fool to appear at dark moments in the play so that he can remind the audience that the play is, in fact, a comedy, and that it will have a happy ending. With this reminder, the audience does not misinterpret what they see on stage as dark or evil, and expect a joyous outcome, which happens in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, for example—one of Speed and Launce's function in this play is not to let the spectators be misled by Proteus' evil actions and betrayal. In the tragedies, the fool is usually absent from crucial points of the play and when the play approaches its ending and climax, because he would divert the audience's attention. When the fool appears in tragedies, it is usually to put what has happened on stage into perspective, as Videbaek points out,

> The tragedies provide the minor clown figure with an opportunity to influence the audience through manipulation of mood and tone […]. His presence and comments often allow us to see characters and events from yet another angle, lending greater scope to our experience and more depth to our interpretation. (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 35)

And she later adds that,

> In a tragedy, unexpected as he may be, his very presence alters the audience's perspective on the scene. We are suddenly allowed to step back from the intensity of our involvement, and maybe we are even allowed a small explosion into laughter. The clown becomes our safety valve. He allows us a short breathing space to collect ourselves and prepare our minds for the next peak of intensity, which can be all the more painful as a result (Ibid., p. 192).

Even though the role of fools in the tragedies is a minor one, he is nonetheless very important in these plays. Without his presence, we would not only miss the guidance of the fool, but we would also be dragged too deep into the tension of the tragedy.

2.3 Fool Actors in Shakespeare: Will Kemp and Robert Armin

When analyzing the fool characters in Shakespeare, one cannot fail to mention, at least briefly, the actors that played the fool characters in Shakespeare's company—the most famous of which are Will Kemp and Robert Armin. As Videbaek points out,

> Shakespeare's plays were written into a rich tradition of clowning with deep and varied roots. His wonderful clowns probably owe their lasting success and effect to the fact that Shakespeare had the possibility of writing for a company he knew intimately, and the great good luck to have as clown actors as gifted in their various ways as Kemp and Armin to write for. (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 199)

Armin took Kemp's place as the principal fool actor in Shakespeare's company, and he is said to have had great collaborations with the British playwright. Neil Novelli, author of the chapter on Feste in Janik's *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art, and History*, says these

collaborations resulted in the kind of fool that used more his wit than teasing and silly jokes.

> When Robert Armin, however, succeeded Kemp as principal comedian with the Lord Chamberlain's Men, he and Shakespeare seem to have collaborated to create a new kind of fool, for example, Feste, in which the actor stayed in character, used wit rather than rough raillery, provoked thought as he commented on life around him, and supported the play's thematic development rather than disrupting it. Armin did not submerge his own identity to the extent that many modern actors do, but nevertheless he apparently kept his comedy within the limits of the fictional character and did not intrude into the action as Kemp did. (JANIK, 1998, p. 186)

In a way, Armin seems to have been more professional and understanding of the role of the fool on stage. James P. Bednarz, author of the chapter on William Kemp in Janik's book, agrees that Armin was more competent on his job and that he helped in the development of Shakespearean fools.

> Kemp's place in Elizabethan theater history will always be inextricably bound up with that of Robert Armin, who replaced him as the principal clown for the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1600. In the transition from Kemp to Armin, critics have for the most part perceived a gain than a loss. Through Armin, a comedian known for his singing rather than his dancing, and for his greater intellectual sophistication, Shakespeare is usually said to have found a fitter vehicle for the dense verbal wit he was interested in conveying through artificial fools like Touchstone and Feste. Kemp's replacement by Armin thus marks a transition in Shakespeare's comedy from plays with boorish “clowns” like Dogberry to those with perceptive “fools” like Touchstone. (Ibid., p. 278)

Dana E. Aspinall, on the chapter on Robert Armin in this same book, believes Armin allowed “more sophisticated representations” (Ibid., p. 41) of fools, and she says that Touchstone was the first character Shakespeare wrote specifically for Armin. In the introduction of her book, Janik also says that Armin was probably the first actor to ever play Lear's Fool, who indeed is a very wise and perceptive fool.

2.4 The Characteristics of Shakespearean Fools

Shakespeare, through Olivia's words in *Twelfth Night*, listed the characteristics of the fool and what is expected from this type of character. She says:

> This fellow's wise enough to play the fool,
> And do that well craves a kind of wit:
> He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
> The quality of persons, and the time,
> And, like the haggard, check at every feather
> That comes before his eye. This is a practice
> As full of labor as a wise man's art;
> For folly that he wisely shows is fit,

> But wise men, folly-fallen, quite taint their wit. (Act III, Scene I, 64-72)

Besides paying attention if it is the right time and the right audience to practice his jests, the fool has to, through his feigned folly, show his wisdom. As Frederick Warde says, the fool needs to be “quick to take advantage of every occasion for the exercise of his wit, with judgment of the time, and discretion as to what to say as well as what to leave unsaid” (WARDE, 1915, p. 1). Fools show their wisdom and quick wit through language, twisting the meaning of words and engaging in language games, puns, and riddles. According to Margreta de Grazia, author of the chapter “Shakespeare and the Craft of Language” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, edited by Alexander Leggatt, puns were very popular in Shakespeare and at his age, and she says that such puns are seen as annoying by today's audience. She believes that, “In retrospect, we can understand why this prominent Shakespearian feature proved such an irritant to succeeding ages” (LEGGATT, 2004, p. 58), but I cannot agree with her. I still think it is very possible to enjoy the puns and wordplays in Shakespeare's plays.

The manipulation of language by fools in his theater is so great that Feste, the fool in *Twelfth Night*, calls himself not Olivia's fool, but her “corrupter of words” (Act III, Scene I, 40). It is very common for the fools in Shakespeare, especially in the comedies, to play with words and thus entertaining the audience and his fellow characters, as we can see in the two examples below.

> Viola: Save thee, friend, and thy music. Dost thou live by thy tabor?
> Feste: No, sir, I live by the church.
> Viola: Art thou a churchman?
> Feste: No such matter, sir: I do live by the church; for I do live at my house, and my house doth stand by the church. (Act III, Scene I, 1-11)

In this dialogue, Viola is disguised as Cesario and she listens to Feste playing music with his tabor; when she asks him if that is what he does for a living, he twists the meaning of her question, showing her his wit and entertaining the audience. In the next dialogue, taken from *The Merchant of Venice*, we can see Launcelot Gobbo playing language tricks on Lorenzo:

> Lorenzo: Go in, sirrah: bid them prepare for dinner.
> Launcelot: That is done, sir; they have all stomachs.
> Lorenzo: Goodly Lord, what a wit-snapper are you! Then bid them prepare dinner.
> Launcelot: That is done too, sir; only, 'cover' is the word.
> Lorenzo: Will you cover then, sir?
> Launcelot: Not so, sir, neither; I know my duty.
> Lorenzo: Yet more quarreling with occasion? Wilt thou show the whole wealth of thy wit in an instant? I pray thee, understand a plain man in his plain meaning: go to

> thy fellows, bid them cover the table, serve in the meat, and we will come in to dinner.
> Launcelot: For the table, sir, it shall be served in; for the meat, sir, it shall be covered; for your coming in to dinner, sir, why, let it be as humorous and conceits shall govern. (Act III, Scene V, 45-60)

Here we are able to see that Lorenzo acknowledges Launcelot is wittier and manages the use of language much better than himself. Launcelot consciously traps Lorenzo in these word games, which only he can stop and win.

Another way in which fools entertain the audience is through physical comedy. According to George Steiner in *The Death of Tragedy*, the Elizabethan audience deeply enjoyed these moments in the theater: “It [the public] delighted in clowns, in comic interludes, and in the acrobatics and brutality of physical action” (STEINER, 1963, p. 21). Although this means of entertainment is not as common as language games in Shakespeare's theater, they do happen at times, as we can see in the characters of Launcelot Gobbo and Launce. Launcelot Gobbo's father meets Launcelot on the street and does not recognize his son because of his blindness. The elderly man asks Launcelot for directions on how to get to the Jew's house, for there is where Launcelot used to work. The youngster decides to “try confusions with him” (Act II, Scene II, 36) and says “Turn up on your right hand at the next turning, but at the next turning of all, on your left; marry, at the very next turning, turn of no hand, but turn down directly to the Jew's house” (Act II, Scene II, 39-42). According to Frederick Warde, these lines are accompanied by Launcelot turning his father around in different directions, adding comedy to the scene. Warde says, “Launcelot takes the old fellow by the shoulders, and turns him first to the right, then to the left, and finally completely round” (WARDE, 1915, p. 107). Another Shakespearean scene that called my attention to its physical comedy is from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. In this scene, Launce is showing the audience how he said goodbye to his family. His confusion and his use of props are bound to bring laughter to the audience.

> This shoe is my father:—no, this left shoe is my father;—no, no, this left shoe is my mother;—nay, that cannot be so, neither:—yes, it is so, it is so; it hath the worser sole. This shoe, with the hole in it, is my mother, and this is my father. A vengeance on 't! There 't is: now, sir, this staff is my sister; for, look you, she is as white as a lily, and as small as a wand: this hat is Nan, our maid: I am the dog:—no, the dog is himself, and I am the dog,—O! The dog is me, and I am myself: ay, so, so. (Act II, Scene III, 14-24)

In this scene, Launce has his dog, his staff, his hat, and both of his shoes to play with and make them represent the members of his family. Despite the fool's hurting for parting

with his family, we do find it funny when he changes which shoe represents which of the members of his family because of its poorer condition, and later in the scene when he kisses the shoe that is supposed to represent his mother and says he can smell her bad breath, which is triggered by the bad smell coming from his shoes. According to Videbaek, “much comedy is crammed into this little section. Launce forgets his sorrow in his eagerness to get the shoes exactly right, and brightens visibility when things come out to his satisfaction” (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 59). Launce is, in my opinion, one of the dearest fools in Shakespeare. I feel a mixture of pity and delight in his scenes and in his interactions with his dog Crab. For some reason, he seems more humane than other fools. Harold Bloom, in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, criticizes the absurdity of the plot of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* but he highlights his admiration for the great character that Launce is, and says he has been wasted in this play, “which is not at all good enough for him” (BLOOM, 1999, p. 38). I share Bloom's passion for Launce, but I cannot agree with him that it is a weak play, for I find the plot quite entertaining.

In the theater, in general, it is common for the fool or the mad character in the play to speak hidden truths—the *verité au masque*, as Foucault says—, and according to Welsford Shakespeare often turned to the fool to say truths other characters did not know.

> Shakespeare makes the fullest possible use of the accepted convention that it is the Fool who speaks the truth, which he knows not by ratiocination but by inspired intuition. The mere appearance of the familiar figure in cap and bells would at once indicate to the audience where the 'punctum indifferens', the impartial critic, the mouthpiece of real sanity, was to be found. (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 269)

The audience, upon seeing the presence of the fool, trusted him to open their eyes and reveal facts they may not have noticed or may not know about the play. However, I do not agree with Welsford's statement that fools know the truth through their *intuition* and not through *ratiocination*. Carolyn S. French, author of the article entitled “Shakespeare's 'Folly': King Lear” shares Welsford's view and believes that Lear's Fool is one of these fools whose teachings are based on intuition. She says the Fool is “never deliberately unkind, but is a true innocent […] whose wisdom is obviously not his own making” (FRENCH, 1959, p. 527). I do not agree with the author and believe that artificial fools—those who feign their folly to be allowed to speak their mind—do come to conclusions through observation of facts and ratiocination, and not merely by intuition, which is the case of Lear's Fool in *King Lear,* who understands where his master did wrong and uses this to remind him of his mistakes later on.

2.5 The Fool in *King Lear*

The Fool in *King Lear* is incredibly wise and he often shows his wisdom when criticizing his master, other characters in the play, and the society they live in. Though he knows he might be whipped if what he says does not please his audience, this potential threat does not stop the Fool from speaking his mind. Lear's Fool can be considered superior to other characters because he acknowledges and accepts his folly. As Terry Eagleton says in *William Shakespeare*, "to know your own nothingness is to become something, as the Fool is wiser than fools because he knows his own folly and so can see through theirs" (EAGLETON, 1995, p. 80). The Fool says both Lear and Kent are fools, but they do not accept it, for it takes a wise man to accept his own folly.

In the first scene in which the Fool appears, he offers Kent his coxcomb, implying that the latter is also a fool, and then he explains that the reason why he thinks Kent is a fool is because only a fool would continue on following a king who has lost everything. As Northrop Frye says in *Fools of Time*, "we are now in a world where it is folly to be genuinely loyal" (FRYE, 1967, 105). However, Kent continues to follow Lear because of his loyalty, not because he expects anything in return. That, in the Fool's eyes, is a characteristic of fools.

> Fool: *[to Kent]* Sirrah, you were best take my coxcomb.
> Kent: Why, Fool?
> Fool: Why? For taking one's part that's out of favor. Nay, an thou canst not smile as the wind sits, thou'lt catch cold shortly. There, take my coxcomb. Why, this fellow has banished two on 's daughters and did the third a blessing against his will. If thou follow him, thou must needs wear my coxcomb. (Act I, Scene 4, 94-101)[5]

In this same scene, the Fool also calls Lear a fool. He tricks his master when explaining to him the difference between a bitter fool and a sweet one:

> That lord that counceled thee
> To give away thy land,
> Come place him here by me;
> Do thou for him stand.
> The sweet and bitter fool
> Will presently appear:
> The one in motley here,
> The other found out there. (Act I, Scene 4, 137-44)

In the passage above, the Fool identifies himself as the sweet fool, and Lear as the bitter fool who advised himself to give away his kingdom, and when Lear realizes he has been

[5] The quotes from *King Lear* are from the Bantam edition, edited by David Bevington and David Scott Kastan, and it is an edition which is based on the folio text but including about 300 lines found only in the first quarto, as the editors specify in the introduction of their book.

called a fool, the Fool explains “All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with” (Act I, Scene 4, 146-7). It should also be highlighted that this was not the only time the Fool called his master a fool. In the next scene, when the Fool is trying to entertain Lear with riddles, an unexpected comeback from the King impresses and surprises the Fool, who admits that his master would make a good fool.

> Fool: The reason why the seven stars are no more than seven is a pretty reason.
> Lear: Because they are not eight.
> Fool: Yes, indeed. Thou wouldst make a good fool. (Act I, Scene 5, 34-48)

The Fool also adds that, if the King were his fool, he would have him beaten because “thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise” (Act I, Scene 5, 43-4); the Fool means that Lear lacked wisdom and did not know how to deal with the fact that he was growing old and would have to find a solution to who would rule his kingdom. His pride took over his bad judgment, which caused the kingdom's doom.

2.5.1 Lear's Fool's Teachings and Criticisms

Throughout the play we see the Fool constantly teaching Lear and trying to open his master's eyes to the reality Lear still cannot see, and the the way through which the Fool does most of his teachings is through criticizing Lear and reminding him where he did wrong, as we can see in the following examples. After the Fool offers Kent his coxcomb, he says he will teach Lear a speech, in which he does not focus only on Lear's mistake of giving his kingdom to his daughters, but about general matters in life:

> Have more than thou showest,
> Speak less than thou knowest,
> Lend less than thou owest,
> Ride more than thou goest,
> Learn more than thou trowest,
> Set less than thou throwest;
> Leave thy drink and thy whore,
> And keep in-a-door,
> And thou shalt have more
> Than two tens to a score. (Act I, Scene 4, 115-124)

The Fool is giving Lear (and the audience) advice on how to behave and act; people should not ostentate their wealth, and they should not tell people everything that they know and lend all of their belongings. They should also listen to what people have to say, and weigh in their minds if that is relevant or believable, and spend more time at home. If we act thus,

we would lead simpler and less complicated lives; in other words, the Fool is telling us not to try to impress others and worry about our own lives.

In Act II, Scene 4, the Fool again teaches Lear and the audience, and he shows how much he understands our society and how he can grasp the meaning of people's actions. He criticizes the greed of some people, who only treat others well based on what they can get in return, and he also criticizes how unfair fate sometimes is, as we can see in the following excerpt:

> Fathers that wear rags
> Do make their children blind,
> But fathers that bear bags
> Shall see their children kind.
> Fortune, that arrant whore,
> Ne'er turns the key to th' poor. (Act II, Scene 4, 47-52)

The Fool states that, if a father is poor, like Lear is now, his children do not care about their needs; however, if a father is wealthy, carrying bags of gold, his children treat him kindly. When the King was powerful and wished to divide his land, his daughters Regan and Goneril were ready to profess their love to get what they wanted and Lear believed them because, at the beginning of the play, “Lear would rather have flattery than the truth” (STUART, 1967, p. 172). As soon as Goneril and Regan got their land and power—leaving Lear landless and powerless—, they did not help their abandoned father and did not try to satisfy his wishes. In this passage, we also see the Fool observing that Fortune is unfair because it does not open doors too the poor, who face more difficulty and obstacles trying to achieve things in their lives. Welsford points out that the Fool's criticism is filled with grief, and that he is indeed sorry for his master's current state. Welsford says, “his tactless jokes and snatches of song spring so evidently from genuine grief” (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 256), highlighting that there is sorrow underneath his sarcastic comments. The Fool does believe Lear acted wrongly, but he wishes he had not, for he deeply cares about his master.

Throughout the play, Lear's Fool more than once tells his master he is now nothing. When he complains that people have him whipped for lying, for telling the truth, and for holding his peace, he also says he had rather be a fool than be Lear: “I had rather be any kind o' thing than a fool. And yet I would not be thee, nuncle. Thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides and left nothing in the middle” (Act I, Scene 4, 181-4). A few lines later he repeats that Lear is nothing, saying:

> Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need to care for her [Goneril's] frowning; now thou art an 0 without a figure. I am better than thou art now; I am a fool, thou art nothing. (Act I, Scene 4, 187-90)

In these lines, the Fool also adds how pathetic it is that now Lear has to worry about his daughters' moods, because now he depends on their mercy. He tells his master “He that keeps nor crust not crumb, / Weary of all, shall want some” (Act I, Scene 4, 194-5), meaning that the one who gives away all of his possessions will later be in need of at least a part of his belongings. Before, the King was powerful and did not have to worry about how others would react to his decisions; now that he is powerless, he relies on his daughters Goneril and Regan, two people who do not really love him, but who massaged his ego for a few moments in order to get the land and power they were eager to have.

By giving up his kingdom, Lear has lost his identity. He does not recognize himself anymore, and the Fool tells him he is now Lear's shadow, as we can see in the following passage:

> Lear: Does any here know me? This is not Lear.
> Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?
> Either his notion weakens, or his discernings
> Are lethargied—Ha! Waking? 'Tis not so.
> Who is it that can tell me who I am?
> Fool: Lear's shadow. (Act I, Scene 4, 222-7)

Here, the Fool is telling Lear he is nothing but the shadow of the man he used to be. Lear has lost everything, and all that is left unchanged is his shadow. The fact that the Fool tells Lear this sad truth makes Goldsmith see the Fool as “Lear's alter ego, his externalized conscience” (GOLDSMITH, 1955, p. 66). Colin McGinn, author of *Shakespeare's Philosophy*, stresses the strong link the shadow has with nothingness when he analyzes this metaphor.

> A shadow is the closest thing to nothingness a person can be, without losing being altogether. A shadow is an absence of light, a mere blank trace, having no bulk or substance […]. To be a shadow of one's former self is to be a nothing where once one was something. (MCGINN, 2007, p. 114)

Lear has lost his kingdom, his power and his authority; he now depends on his two daughters who do not care for him. Everything that he was and represented is now gone, his existence is limited to being the shadow of the powerful king he once was. It must have been very upsetting and distressing for Lear being told by his Fool the sad truth of his current situation—and this scene and dialogue make the audience realize, perhaps for the first time in the play, that our lives, like Lear's, can be reduced to nothing.

In Act I, Scene 5, Lear gives Kent a letter for the latter to take to his daughter Regan, hoping that she will take him in. The Fool then uses his wit and forms a riddle to say that Lear does not have a brain if he expects kind treatment from his daughter.

> Fool: If a man's brains were in 's heels, were't not in danger of kibes?
> Lear: Ay, boy.
> Fool: Then, I prithee, be merry. Thy wit shall not go slipshod. (Act I, Scene 5, 8-12)

First, the Fool asks Lear to confirm that if a person's brains were in the heels, they might suffer from kibe, also known as chilblain, which is an inflammation of the hands and/or feet caused by exposure to cold. Upon the king's confirmation, the Fool implies that if Lear's brains were in his heels, he would not need to protect himself from chilblain because he has no brains. Lear, however, does not take the Fool's criticism seriously, and sees it as a simple jest, for his next line is “Ha, ha, ha!” (Act I, Scene 5, 13). At this point in the play, Lear has not yet realized how foolish he is in believing his daughters and dividing his kingdom. He does not see the Fool's comment as a wise remark, but as a meaningless joke.

The example above is only one of the moments in which Lear's Fool uses puns and riddles to try to stop Lear from thinking about his wrongdoings. These word games are frequently used by Shakespeare's fools and, undoubtedly, they are also present in the use of language by the Fool in *King Lear*. Josephine Waters Bennett, in an article for the *Shakespeare Quarterly* entitled “The Storm Within: The Madness of Lear,” says that the Fool's “bitter jests counter and balance Lear's bitter thoughts. Where Lear blames his daughters, the Fool blames Lear” (BENNETT, 1962, p. 145). Throughout the play, we can see Lear cursing at the daughters he had praised for saying they loved them: he calls Goneril a “degenerate bastard” (Act I, Scene 4, 250) and says to the two “you unnatural hags, I will have such revenges on you both” (Act II, Scene 4, 280-1). Lear wants revenge because he believes his situation is completely his daughters' fault, he refuses to accept that he is also to blame for his sad and abandoned condition. The King believes the reason why he is powerless after dividing his kingdom is because of the evilness of his daughters; he cannot admit that he was at fault and that it was partly his own pride that led him to that situation.

The Fool's criticism towards Lear does not cease even when the King is going almost completely mad. Even in this state, the Fool still criticizes his master and uses riddles to do so, as we can see below:

> Fool: Prithee, nuncle, tell me whether a madman be a gentleman or a yeoman?
> Lear: A king, a king!

> Fool: No, he's a yeoman that has a gentleman to his son; for he's a mad yeoman that sees his son a gentleman before him. (Act III, Scene 6, 9-14)

A *yeoman* is an owner of property who is below the rank of gentleman, being thus his inferior. The fool believes that a man can go mad upon seeing his children at a higher rank and more powerful than himself, which is what we see happening to Lear. Not only has he lost his kingdom, but he lost it to his own daughters, who lied to him about their love to their father only to get the part of the kingdom they wanted.

Even though the Fool's criticism and teachings focus on Lear, I should highlight that the King is not the only recipient of the Fool's teachings in the play. The Fool also advises Kent to stop following Lear, because he is no longer a king and no longer had power. He tells Kent, “We'll set thee to school to an ant to teach thee there's no laboring i'th' winter” (Act II, Scene 4, 66-7), meaning that, as the ants do not work during the winter—for they would die —, a wise man should not follow a fallen king. Kent, however, continues being loyal to Lear, and he can be seen as a fool for that reason.

Analyzing the play, I could only find three instances of the Fool interacting with the audience. In the first interaction, he acts as our guide and emphasizing how unnatural it is for a father to be reprimanded by his daughters; in the second, he uses a pun to make a bawdy joke merely with the goal of entertaining the audience. Acting as our guide, we see the Fool asking “May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse?” (Act I, Scene 4, 220-1), meaning that there is obviously something wrong and backwards when a daughter lectures her father. The second time the Fool addresses the audience is when he is alone on stage in the very last lines of Act I, which go “She that's a maid now, and laughs at my departure, / Shall not be a maid long, unless things be cut shorter” (Act I, Scene 5, 49-51). Here, *things* means *penises*, and the Fool says that, if things be cut shorter (literally or figuratively), the maid will continue to be a virgin. Bawdy jokes for the mere entertaining of the audience were very common in Elizabethan theater. They were one of the ways to make the audience step back and have a moment of comic relief before the tension of the play continues. The third time the Fool addresses his audience is in Act III, Scene 2, which will be analyzed in end of this chapter.

Many Shakespearean fools also use physical humor, especially in the comedies, to entertain the audience; it is not, however, a strong characteristic of Lear's Fool. One of the situations in which he does use physical humor is when he asks his master for an egg to turn it

into two crowns. In this scene, we can imagine the Fool using the egg and gestures to incite some laughter in the audience.

> Fool: Nuncle, give me an egg and I'll give thee two crowns.
> Lear: What two crowns shall they be?
> Fool: Why, after I have cut the egg i'th' middle and eat the meat, the crowns of the egg. (Act I, Scene 4, 152-6)[6]

The Fool also takes advantage of the moment to criticize Lear saying, “Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gav'st thy golden one away” (Act I, Scene 4, 159-60); as Videbaek says, “Lear's 'bald crown' which used to bear the golden one, is the home of nothing” (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 126). In this scene the Fool, besides reminding Lear of his mistake, points out how unwise he was in his decision of dividing his kingdom. Janik believes the breaking of the egg is also a representation of the destruction of the kingdom—“in breaking the shell, the center is lost; in breaking the crown, the kingdom is lost” (JANIK, 1998, p. 18)—, so the Fool's use of the egg would not only serve to say Kent is also a fool, but to show Lear the collapse of his kingdom.

Despite his jokes and games we can see that the Fool is aware of how people behave and does not cease to comment on it. Videbaek highlights that the Fool's jesting, even when it is harsh and direct, “shows deep compassion and understanding of the human condition” (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 114); she also believes that

> Lear's Fool is a creature whose whole being is founded on understanding of the human condition and pity for those who cannot cope with the harsh realities of Lear's world. […] Lear's Fool, though biting, is always loyal, caring, and compassionate. (Ibid., p. 123).

This understanding of the human condition is due to the fact that he is excluded from society and, from a certain distance, the Fool is able to see things more clearly because he has a broader view of what his happening. Not being a part of society, he is able to observe it from afar and analyze how people comport themselves.

Regarding the manner in which the Fool criticizes Lear, Alan Hager, author of the chapter on Lear's Fool in Janik's book, says that the Fool's criticism towards Lear is often indirect, which I do not agree with. Hagar says the Fool's criticism is

> generally directed at the king's oddly egotistical naïveté in giving up his kingdom to his daughters. But he also rails at cosmic and social disorder from a utopian position. His method is always indirect and witty and sometimes bawdy. (JANIK, 1998, p. 290)

[6]As stage directions are lacking, however, we should keep in mind that the amount of movement and foolery by the Fool in this scene depends much on the director and on the actor playing the part of the Fool.

The Fool might use somewhat complex sentences, games and riddles when he is trying to criticize and teach Lear, but I do not see it as indirect. He clearly tells Lear where he is wrong and where society is wrong, but Lear chooses to ignore it. Hager sees the Fool's words as humorous, but always with “personal and social criticism in edgy form” (Ibid., p. 193). I, however, prefer not to see it as humor with a bit of criticism, but as criticism with a bit of humor. Although fools in Shakespeare's theater (especially in his comedies) are more concerned with the comic aspect of being a fool, I believe Lear's Fool's main concern is to tell truths and try to help his master learn about his mistakes, and the way in which he can tell those truths without fear of being reprimanded is adding a little bit of humor to it. As David Bevington and David Scott Kastan, editors of the Bantam edition of *King Lear*, mention in the introduction of the book, “The Fool offers Lear advice in palatable form as mere foolery or entertainment and thus obtains a hearing when Kent and Cordelia have been angrily dismissed” (SHAKESPEARE, 1988, p. xiv), and Jonas Barish and Marshall Waingrow add that

> The Fool, by virtue of the license accorded him, becomes tutor to Lear, delivering his lessons not bluntly, as Kent does, not railingly, but wrapped up in enigmatic riddles, jingles and proverbs, which nevertheless are plain enough to arose the threat of the whip on several occasions. (BARISH; WAINGROW, 1958, p. 351)

Both Cordelia and Kent openly criticize or go against the King's point of view in some way, which resultes in their banishment. The Fool, for being a fool and for knowing the King's personality and his moods, is aware that if he speaks the truth outright the outcome will be his banishment. Thus, he uses foolery and jokes so that the truths can be “digested” by the King.

Despite all the criticism done by the Fool, we should keep in mind how loyal he is to the King, leaving only when he is no longer needed. We see the Fool praising his own loyalty when he says:

> That sir which serves and seeks for gain,
> And follows but for form,
> Will pack when it begins to rain
> And leave thee in the storm.
> But I will tarry; the fool will stay,
> And let the wise man fly.
> The knave turns fool that runs away;
> The fool no knave, pardie. (Act II, Scene 4, 76-83)

The fool knows that many disloyal companions stopped following the King when he lost his kingdom and criticizes that the reason why those followers started following Lear in the first place was not loyalty or care, but for gain, because they expected something in return.

The Fool, on the other hand, will stay by his master, for he believes that the one who deserts his own master is the greatest fool. The verb *tarry*—which is found in the lines “But I will tarry; the fool will stay, / And let the wise man fly”— can mean either “stay” or “wait for,” and I believe that this shows that the Fool knew that Lear was going mad and becoming a fool, and that the wise man he used to be (or was taken to be) would soon disappear. Once Lear is no longer wise, the Fool becomes an unnecessary presence on stage. While Lear's madness is surfacing, the Fool is still present, and, as George Steiner put it, “through the long funeral of Lear's reason sounds the hornpipe of the Fool” (STEINER, 1963, p. 19-20), who tries to entertain his master with jokes and riddles, such as the dialogue in Act I, Scene 5, that will be analyzed below.

When Lear is still in the beginning of the process of his going mad, he starts to realize where he went wrong, and that is when the fool tries to entertain and humor him. His attempts, however, fail, because Lear's mind keeps going back to his mistakes. Frederick Ward describes such attempts by the Fool as pathetic, because he does not manage to entertain his master:

> How pathetic are the steadfast efforts of the Fool to change the current of the old king's thoughts, and dull the constantly recurring memories of his wrongs. As one witty suggestion fails to hold his attention, the Fool flits to another; a jest, a riddle, a pun, anything that will stifle the sob, hold back the tear, or deaden the memory. Not folly or folly's sake, but to allay the pain of a broken heart. (WARDE, 1915, p. 198)

As we can see from the passage below, while the Fool tries his best to entertain his hurt master, Lear keeps going back to his place of suffering.

> Fool: Thou canst tell why one's nose stands I' th' middle on 's face?
> Lear: No.
> Fool: Why, to keep one's eyes of either side 's nose, that what a man cannot smell out he may spy into.
> Lear: I did her wrong.
> Fool: Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?
> Lear: No.
> Fool: Nor I neither. But I can tell why a snail has a house.
> Lear: Why?
> Fool: Why, to put 's head in, not to give it away to his daughters and leave his horns without a case.
> Lear: I will forget my nature. So kind a father!—Be my horses ready?
> Fool: Thy asses are gone about 'em. The reason why the seven stars are no more than seven is a pretty reason.
> Lear: Because they are not eight.
> Fool: Yes, indeed. Thou wouldst make a good fool. (Act I, Scene 5, 19-38)

This is the dialogue in which, in my opinion, the wittiness of the Fool is most evident in the whole play. He is able to both create riddles to entertain the king and criticize him for

giving away his land. Besides entertaining Lear, the Fool's remarks also entertain the audience and the readers of the play, who most probably amuse themselves with the Fool's jokes. In this excerpt, we can also see that, in spite of the Fool's attempts to take Lear's mind away from his problems, the King keeps going back to thinking of his wrongdoings, as we can see when he says “I did her wrong,” and “I will forget my nature. So kind a father!” Lear here is starting to realize that he has part of the responsibility for being in the state that he is. Perhaps triggered by this revelation of self-guilt, a few lines later we see Lear uttering his fear of going mad —“Oh, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven! / Keep me in temper; I would not be mad!” (Act I, Scene 5, 45-6). Lear's prediction (and fear) of his own madness is found again in Act II, when he says “Oh, Fool, I shall go mad!” (Act II, Scene 4, 288); a fact that will indeed come true, as Lear himself realizes when he says, in Act III, “My wits begin to turn” (Act III, Scene 2, 67).

2.5.2 Lear as His Own Fool

Lear's madness results in the disappearance of the Fool from the stage. I believe that, when the Fool disappears, he might not be missed—or his absence might not even be noticed[7] —because Lear has become his own fool. Some scholars, such as Videbaek, link the Fool's disappearance with Cordelia coming back and believe she is the one who takes his place; the author says: “Cordelia will shortly reappear at Lear's side and take the Fool's place as truth-teller and healer of her father” (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 134). However, I believe that it is Lear who is now the fool, a view shared by authors such as Kott and Carolyn French, who says:

> Scholars have explained the Fool's disappearance at the end of Act III on the grounds that Cordelia takes his place as Lear's spiritual guide. However, this is not quite accurate. It is Lear himself who becomes his own Fool during the Dover scene —telling himself the moral truths he could not bear to hear when he was sane. (FRENCH, 1959, p. 527)

Lear, when he was sane, was not able to see truths about the world and who he really was by himself. Being mad, he now understands where he has gone wrong and what he should have done to maintain not only his kingdom in one piece, but also his relationship with

[7] The fact that the Fool's disappearance from the play might not be noticed by some readers was brought to my attention when reading a monograph by Patricia Corrêa of Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul entitled “Loucura como caminho para a verdade: O efeito da Loucura no personagem principal de King Lear” written in 2006 where she states, on page 20, that the Fool is the only character who accompanies Lear throughout the whole play. It is interesting that the Fool's absence might go unnoticed because he is a character who brings us closer to Lear and helps us understand the King. On the other hand, the very fact that one might not notice the Fool's disappearance supports the idea that Lear has now become his own fool.

Cordelia. Even though Videbaek believes it is Lear's beloved daughter who takes the Fool's place as teller of truths, she admits that the King is also able to learn truths about the world by himself now. The critic says that Lear "takes over from the Fool and begins to make fundamental discoveries about himself and his relationship to his world" (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 127), and one of the instances in which we can see Lear discovering truths about the world is in Act III, Scene 4, where Lear says, while talking to Edgar (disguised as Poor Tom):

> Thou wert better in a grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no skill, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! Here's three on 's are sophisticated; thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here. *[Tearing off his clothes.]* (Act III, Scene 4, 100-8)

Lear realizes we are all equal. He notices that, he is no better nor worse than Edgar, the only difference is that Lear wears the sophisticated attire of a supposedly civilized society, while Edgar is unadorned; he is the natural essence, the natural man. Even if we do not agree with Lear's point of view that stripped out of our clothes we are all the same, we can see that, in a state of semi-insanity, he is able to see the world in a different way from what he did before. According to Jan Kott, author of *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* "King Lear has gone through the school of clown's philosophy. When he meets Gloucester for the last time, he will speak the Fool's language" (KOTT, 1974, p. 168), as we can see in their conversation about Gloucester's blindness.

> Lear: Read.
> Gloucester: What, with the case of eyes?
> Lear: Oho, are you there with me? No eyes in your head, nor no money in your purse? Your eyes are in a heavy case, your purse in a light, yet you see how this world goes.
> Gloucester: I see it feelingly.
> Lear: What, art mad? A man may see how this world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears. (Act IV, Scene 6, 143-51)

Lear realizes that one does not need to have eyes to be able to see the world, just like one does not need to be sane to do it as well. As a madman, Lear is able to discover, according to Welsford, the inner truth about the world.

> Now that Lear has lost his sanity, he enlarged his vision. As his wits begin to leave him, he begins to see the truth about himself; when they are wholly gone he begins to have spasmodic flashes of insight in which, during momentary lulls in the storm of vengeful personal resentment, he sees the inner truth about the world. [...] The King having lost everything, including his wits, has now himself become the Fool. (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 266)

Early in the play, the Fool tells his master that he would make a good fool, and that is what happens in the play. Lear is now the one whose role it is to tell hidden truths. The disappearance of the Fool is not marked by anything special. After the mock trial scene, Lear says “We'll go to super i'th' morning,” to which the Fool replies “And I'll go to bed at noon” (Act III, Scene 6). On the one hand, I wish the Fool's last line had been more climatic or more meaningful, since he is such an important part of the play and will not be seen again; on the other hand, however, his last sentence was “quiet” enough to make the transition of Lear becoming his own fool be as smooth as possible. We still have songs, riddles, and insights of truth in the play, but now through the character of Lear. The body of the Fool becomes absent from the play, but his mind and his wisdom are still present in his master.

In Act IV, Scene 6, we have an example of a moment of self-discovery by Lear. He realizes he was not the special, all-powerful king he used to take himself to be.

> They flattered me like a dog and told me I had white hairs in my beard ere the back ones were there. To say ay and no to everything I said ay and no to was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to make me chatter, when the thunder would not peace at my bidding, there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not men o' their words. They told me I was everything. 'Tis a lie. I am not argue-proof. (Act IV, Scene 6, 96-105)[8]

Lear now knows that all that has been said to him while he was a king was a lie, for his followers (and daughters) simply wanted to please him because of his rank. They told Lear they agreed with something just to satisfy their majesty, and told him that he had reached the wisdom of old age when, in fact, he was still immature. He now understands the frailty of the human condition and of himself. Before going mad, Lear thought of himself as superior to others, but now he knows that he is just as fragile as anyone.

In the next scene, we see Lear's madness still opening his eyes to the world, but we can also see some signs of dementia, since he cannot, for example, recognize his loving daughter.

> Pray, do not mock me.
> I am a very foolish fond old man,
> Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;

[8] I should call the reader's attention to the state in which Lear enters this scene. The stage direction, in my edition and in many others, says “*Enter Lear [mad, fantastically dressed with wild flowers]*.” According to Sholom J. Khan, author of the article “Enter Lear Mad” for the *Shakespeare Quarterly*, the Quarto stage directions simply said “mad,” the description “fantastically dressed with wild flowers” was added by Edward Capell in the eighteenth century based on the description by Cordelia in the first line of Act IV, Scene 4, which go: “Alack, 'tis he! Why, he was met even now / As mad as the vexed sea, singing aloud, / Crowned with rank fumiter and furrow weeds, / With hardocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckooflowers, / Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow / In our sustaining corn” (Act IV, Scene 4, 1-6), which makes reference to different kinds of weeds, herbs, and flowers.

> And, to deal plainly,
> I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
> Methinks I should know you, and know this man,
> Yet I am doubtful; for I am mainly ignorant
> What place this is, and all the skill I have
> Remembers not these garments, nor I know not
> Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me,
> For, as I am a man, I think this lady
> To be my child Cordelia. (Act IV, Scene 7, 60-71)

It is difficult being able to recognize one's own foolishness and ignorance, and Lear can only do this after he goes mad. It is also interesting that the king is aware of his pathetic situation, and asks not to be laughed at or mocked. To discover his true self, he had to pay with his sanity, and even though now he might be laughed at or mocked, he has much more wisdom that he used to have when he was king.

Videbaek says that, after the storm scene, Lear “must make do with what fortune has left him, nothing” (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 131). I understand that Lear becomes a poor, powerless man, but I believe the discoveries he makes about himself are worth something. He went from being an arrogant king, to a madman whose folly opened his eyes to wisdom. Fortune might have taken away his material belongings, but it has freed his mind to gain a form of self-knowledge that would probably not be achieved had he remained that all-powerful king. I also disagree with Goldsmith, who believes the Fool was somewhat responsible for Lear's madness, because he made his master realize the depth of his folly. According to the author, the Fool's jests and riddles when he is trying to make Lear occupy his mind with something else other than his mistakes are “neither wise not psychologically sound when applied as remedy for Lear's malady. Nay, even more; they are downright harmful” (GOLDSMITH, 1955, p. 64), and adds that the Fool is either “malicious or stupidly naive” (Ibid., p. 64). Perhaps because of my close connection/affection to the Fool (and fools in general) due to my research, I feel annoyed seeing Goldsmith refer to the fool as a “stupidly naive” fellow. Firstly, I don't believe the Fool is, in any way, malicious; we can see that through his loyalty and sorrow towards Lear's current situation. I also think he is not naïve at all, because I believe in his power of observation and understanding of the world around him. I think Lear would go mad in spite of the presence of the Fool, but without his so-called “harmful” jests, we would not be able to understand and connect with the king on the level that we do[9]. Goldsmith later says that “The Fool's manner grows gentler as the

[9] I should highlight that Goldsmith does not question the presence of the Fool in the play. In fact, he says that “There is no question but that Lear and his play would be poorer without the Fool” (GOLDSMITH, 1955, p. 98). I brought the elimination of this character to the discussion because I believe that the Fool does not have

King's madness increases. But it is not his business, nor has he the skill, to nurse the old man back to mental health" (Ibid., p 67), and I do agree that the Fool becomes more and more concerned with his master as the latter falls deeper into madness, telling the King not to go outside during the storm, for example, but of course he does not have the skill to bring Lear back to mental health. It is not even certain that the Fool *wants* Lear to be sane again, for being mad is how the King is able to truly know himself. It depends on what we would rather be—a "wise" man who knows nothing and lives a lie, or a mad man who has gained wisdom and learns things about the world and himself. As David Bevington and David Scott Kastan say in their introduction to *King Lear*, "misery teaches Lear things he never could know as king" (SHAKESPEARE, 1988, p. xv).

2.5.3 Lear's Fool and the Theater of the Absurd

Lear's Fool's characteristics of manipulation of language, telling hidden truths, and using physical comedy and bawdy jokes to entertain the audience all remind me of the Theater of the Absurd. However, there are some specific parts in the play, which will be analyzed below, that seem to have many similarities to this type of theater. One of them is in one of the Fool's last appearance, when he says he will "speak a prophecy." Besides the fact that he is alone on stage and directs this speech to the audience, making this his third direct interaction with his spectators/readers, his criticism of members of society such as priests and noble men and his belief that their behavior cannot be changed made me think of the message the plays of the Theater of the Absurd try to convey. The Fool's prophecy states that:

> When priests are more in word than matter;
> When brewers mar their malt with water;
> When nobles are their tailors' suitors,
> No heretics burned but wenches' suitors,
> Then shall the realm of Albion
> Come to great confusion.
>
> When every case in law is right,
> No squire in debt, nor no poor knight;
> When slanders do not live in tongues,
> Nor cutpurses come not to throngs;
> When usurers tell their gold i'th' field,
> And bawds and whores do churches build,
> Then comes the time, who lives to see't,
> That going shall be used with feet. (Act III, Scene 2, 81-94)

---

a role creating or increasing Lear's madness.

This excerpt appeals to me because of its hopelessness that things will change. Even if all those utopian dreams were met, walking will still be done on foot, which is the Fool's way to say that our lives stay pretty much the same.

Videbaek mentions in her book that we might feel uncomfortable with the Fool in *King Lear* for his role as mediator, which called my attention because I did not think Lear's Fool could cause such discomfort. The author believes that

> Though we may feel uncomfortable about the Fool, we need him to keep our perspective on King Lear. The Fool as a mediator between stage and audience is not always welcome to us, and though he is loved, the Fool's comments are not always welcome to Lear either; but as the real world fades from Lear's view and his sight is directed inwards in madness we come to see the Fool in a different light. (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 124)

Unlike the author, I find it difficult for someone to feel uncomfortable with this character, because his concern and care for Lear always come through in his criticism. However, I do agree with Videbaek when she says the Fool's criticism may be, at times, more relevant than his clowning. She believes Lear's Fool

> may be seen as more critic than clown, and the amusement he provides is always tinged with sorrow […] He is a true guide and interpreter, whom we readily trust, and we feel for him all the more because his actions often go against his comments. He sees Lear's shortcomings and is critical of him, but his love prompts his every action (ibid., p. 134-5)

The Fool's role as mediator is very important in the play because, with his guidance, we are able to better understand Lear and the play itself—Videbaek herself says that if it were not for the Fool, we would not be able to feel Lear's pain and sorrow because we would not be able to understand him. We need the Fool to “keep our perspective on King Lear” (Ibid., p. 124). If the discomfort Videbaek talks about is caused by the truths he says, I believe such feeling is our own fault, for denying and refusing to face the ugly truths spoken by the Fool. Videbaek does not say this in her book, but another possibility is that this discomfort comes from the lack of laughter brought by the Fool. In the background of what fools say and do, there is usually the goal of comedy, but we do not see this happening in *King Lear*. Lear's Fool's sayings do not, most of the times, trigger our laughter, and this might be seen as a problem for someone who expects more comedy from the this type of character. According to the author, because of the constant threat of being beaten and of the worsening circumstances of Lear, “our laughter becomes constricted and may even disappear” (Ibid., p. 123). This constant threat can also be related to Pozzo and Lucky's relationship in *Waiting for Godot*. We

do not laugh at the often humorous movements of Lucky because I believe we share Lucky's fear of being beaten by his master.

Videbaek also believes that one of the reason laughter is not much present in *King Lear* is because we are so close to Lear that, by laughing at him, we would be laughing at ourselves:

> Lear's Fool is a court jester, and his essential function is no different from that of the court jesters in the comedies; he too brings forth the aspect of human folly and holds it up to ridicule. In the comedies, however, the target is broad and includes general ideas, but in the tragedy of *King Lear* the King's folly is the main target, and our involvement with the King becomes so close that laughter at him will be perceived as directed at ourselves also. (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 124)

The Fool might make people feel uncomfortable with his presence because they see themselves being criticized by him when he is criticizing his master. The Fool's role as a mediator between the audience and Lear makes us feel close to the King, so we can relate when we see him in his miserable condition, having lost everything. This close connection we have with Lear is due to how human and similar to us the Fool makes Lear appear to be. Therefore, we realize it is difficult to laugh at Lear (and at ourselves). Seeing the absurd and ridiculous aspects of Lear's existence on stage and realizing that our existence may also be absurd and ridiculous is another similarity between the Theater of the Absurd and *King Lear*.

Besides all the characteristics of the Theater of the Absurd found in the character of Fool, the character of Lear also reminds us of the Theater of the Absurd. Through him, we learn that we can all lose everything and be reduced to nothing. As Colin McGinn says in *Shakespeare's Philosophy*,

> if Lear can be reduced to homeless nothingness, wailing (like a child) in the storm, so can anyone. The play makes us feel the storm raging against our paper-thin walls. We are fragile beings, and out accommodations are fragile too. We are always one step away from nothingness. (MCGINN, 2007, p. 123)

Lear's situation reminds us that our lives are not as stable as we might take them to be. The control we believe to have over our lives is an illusion, because everything can be taken away from us based on a simple mistake.

We find in Shakespeare many other characteristics common to the Theater of the Absurd. As Victor Hugo said, in this translation by Steiner which he quoted in *The Death of Tragedy*, “Shakespeare is the drama; and the drama which mingles in one breath the grotesque and the sublime, the terrible and the clownish, tragedy and comedy” (STEINER, 1963, p. 152). Shakespeare is able to show us terrible things about our existence, but that does not

mean he leaves the comedy aside. In Beckett's theater and specifically in *Waiting for Godot*, we are also confronted with the drama and comedy of life. The main characters of the play are hopelessly waiting for Godot and they voice their despair due to the stagnation of life and, at the same time, they play with each other and wittily use language to make jokes and jests which represent the comedy in the play.

3. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and the Theater of the Absurd

3.1 The Theater of the Absurd

One cannot study Beckett without briefly commenting the Theater of the Absurd. The best known authors of this type of theater are the French playwright Eugène Ionesco[10], and the Irish author Samuel Beckett. The plays by these authors (and others of the Theater of the Absurd) share the characteristic of representing the frailty of human existence. According to Enoch Brater and Ruby Cohn, the main characteristics of the Theater of the Absurd are the "de-emphasis on plot and a fragmentation of dialogue" (BRATER; COHN, 1992, p. 5). Since the plot is not the focus of the plays, they are usually quite simple. Examples of simple plots can be found in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, where two men are waiting for their savior to arrive, and a teacher who kills his students in Ionesco's *The Lesson*. The unconventional plot

[10] Even though Ionesco's theater is not the main focus of my thesis, I have to mention his play *The Chairs*, which I think is one of the most absurd in the Theater of the Absurd. In this play, an old man and an old woman are having a party in which an orator is coming to have a very important speech. These are the three characters we see, because all the other guests are invisible. As the guests arrive, the old couple brings out chairs to accommodate them. In this play, the two main characters have one-sided conversation with the invisible guests, showing how shallow and empty our interactions can be. It is also interesting to see the old couple being so suffocated by the noise and tumult of those invisible guests that they can barely talk to each other anymore. When the orator, the only of the guests we can see and hear appears, he merely grumbles and write semi-unintelligible words on a blackboard. Ionesco created such high expectations to what this orator would say—his speech is preceded by the double suicide of the old couple, where, just before he killed himself the old man told the orator: "One last time … I place my trust in you … I count on you. You will tell all … bequeath my message." (IONESCO, 1958, p. 158-9)—that we are left hopeless and disappointed at the end of the play. The reason why I think this play is one of the greatest plays of the Theater of the Absurd is not its lack of concern with plot and the fragmented dialogue, but it is because of how it makes us feel when we are expecting and hoping for something to happen or to give us answers. We should not hope for the true meaning of life because life is meaningless, and that is what I think Ionesco brilliantly shows in this play.

of these plays is only the background for the characters' representation of modern man; what is seen on stage are our fears and meaningless interactions. Martin Esslin, perhaps the best known critic of the Theater of the Absurd, when addressing the “problem” of lack of plot in the plays in this type of theater, says:

> the action in a play of the Theater of the Absurd is not intended to tell a story but to communicate a pattern of poetic images. […] Things happen in *Waiting for Godot*, but these happenings do not constitute a plot or story; they are an image of Beckett's intuition that *nothing really ever happens* in man's existence. (ESSLIN, 2004, p. 403)

One of the goals of the lack of plot in the Theater of the Absurd is to show the meaninglessness of the actions in our lives. This lack of plot also allows our attention to turn to the play as a whole and to pay more attention to dialogue, which is very peculiar in the plays of the Theater of the Absurd.

Esslin believes that the plays of this type of theater go against the traditional idea of what a play is supposed to be like, in general. He says:

> If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of; if a good play is judged by subtlety of characterization and motivation, these are often without recognizable characters and present the audience with almost mechanical puppets; if a good play has to have a fully explained theme, which is neatly exposed and finally solved, these often have neither a beginning nor an end; if a good play is to hold the mirror up to nature and portray the manners and mannerisms of the age in finely observed sketches, these seem often to be reflections of dreams and nightmares; if a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue, these often consist of incoherent babblings. (Ibid., p. 21-2)

The critic adds that “The Theater of the Absurd has renounced arguing *about* the absurdity of the human condition; it merely *presents* it in being” (Ibid., p. 25), which I think is also a very important characteristic of this type of theater. The authors do not defend absurdity and discuss it in their works. Instead, they show the absurd world of the characters on stage, which we later associate the absurd world we live in. Often, one of the ways they do this is through nonsensical and meaningless dialogue. In these plays, conversation is used to show us that language is not as clear as we take it to be, and that we often talk just to keep conversation going, not worrying much about the meaning of words.

From my experience, when some people watch or read a play from the Theater of the Absurd, they are often unable to get past the absurdity of it, and take the play to be sheer nonsense, a play which cannot be understood. These people usually focus on the comedy and on the lack of plot and reasoning in the plays, and dismiss the play as being unimportant and insane; they fail to grasp the fact that the objective of the plays is to show the nonsense and

meaninglessness of life in general. In spite of the comedy that is usually present in the plays, they manage to show how insignificant life is and how little control we have over it. The playwrights aim to portray the hopelessness of life before us, and it takes courage and strength to accept this as the reality of our existence.

3.2 Samuel Beckett and His Theater

Samuel Beckett is perhaps the most studied playwright of the Theater of the Absurd. In spite of also having written novels and poems, *Waiting for Godot* was Beckett's first success. His plays show characters in absurd situations; characters who are often physically restrained as well. Sometimes this can appear in the form of garbage cans and wheelchairs in *Endgame*; or they are interred up to the waist (and later to the neck) in a mound in *Happy Days*; or they are unable to leave their place of waiting in *Waiting for Godot*, to give a few examples. Besides showing the emptiness of life, in Beckett's plays there is a beautiful symmetry, as well as countless repetitions which relate to the habits and repetitions we maintain in our lives. According to Rosette Lamont in the chapter “Beckett's Metaphysics of Choiceless Awareness” in Friedman's *Samuel Beckett Now*, Beckett's novels and plays share a similar circular structure in which the end is very similar to the beginning, for we can see it “evolving from point zero in limbo, and returning to that point, or its vicinity” (FRIEDMAN, 1970, p. 201), highlighting the repetition and sameness of the lives of the characters on stage.

Katharine Worth, author of the chapter entitled “Maeterlink in the Light of the Absurd” in Enoch's and Cohn's *Around the Absurd*, describes Beckett's theater as “comically absurd and yet dark and disturbing” (ENOCH; COHN, 1992, p. 29) and George Steiner in *The Death of Tragedy* believes that Beckett has a distinct note of “comic sadness” (STEINER, 1963, p. 350). Beckett tries to to show how lost man is, and he also adds some comedy to this exposure of the meaninglessness of life. Comedy, in *Waiting for Godot*, is present from the beginning until the very end of the play. When the play begins, we see a frustrated Estragon repeatedly trying to take off his boots, and when the play is about to end, we see an absent-minded Estragon with his pants down because he had forgotten to pull them up. In both instances, together with the comedy there is a sad feeling to it all. In the first scene, the sadness arises because Estragon cannot manage to do what he wants, that which will give him pleasure, and, therefore, he soon gives up; in the second, because once again Vladimir and Estragon have

waited for Godot and this wait has been in vain since he did not come. When Andrew Kennedy, author of *Samuel Beckett*, is analyzing the final moments of the play[11], he states that Estragon's forgetfulness in pulling his pants up is a “broad vaudeville act placed riskily near the end” (KENNEDY, 1989, p. 31), but I do not think it was a risk putting it so near the end of the play. It just goes to show how closely connected comedy and tragedy are in this play, and how, even if life is meaningless, one can still find humor in it. However, in Beckett's second most famous play, *Endgame*, comedy and tragedy do not stand side by side; it is a much darker and sadder play than *Waiting for Godot*—Beckett himself said it was more inhuman than his previous play—and comedy is not so present throughout this play. In *Endgame*, we see the “comically absurd” slowly disappearing because the image of the characters' degradation is too strong. Humanity is on the verge of extinction, and it is clear that the characters on stage are living their last moments. With all this sadness and isolation, comedy is nearly absent from the play, especially in the second act[12].

Also important in Beckett's theater is his use of language and silences. Through the dialogues in the plays, the Irish playwright not only calls our attention to what is being discussed (since we are all somewhat obsessed with meaning), but also to the dialogue itself. Andrew Kennedy says that “within a non-sequential play structure, an inward-moving dialogue has made us attentive to the moment-by-moment ripple effect of words (and silences) in the theater” (Ibid., p 19). I find it very interesting that Kennedy described Beckett's dialogue as “inward-moving” because that describes exactly what it is. The dialogue in Beckett's plays does not serve the purpose of developing the plot or of moving the play forward. The dialogue moves towards itself, its goal is to create more dialogue. Just as

---

[11] The final lines of the play are:
Estragon: Well? Shall we go?
Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.
Estragon: What?
Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.
Estragon: You want me to pull of my trousers?
Vladimir: Pull ON your trousers.
Estragon: *(realizing his trousers are down).* True.
He pulls up his trousers.
Vladimir: Well? Shall we go?
Estragon: Yes, let's go.
They do not move. (BECKETT, 1994, p. 109)

[12] In 2010 I had the chance to watch a staging of *Endgame* directed by Venezuelan director Héctor Manrique in Porto Alegre in the 17th edition of “Porto Alegre em Cena.” I had read the play before and knew how terribly sad was the realization of how decadent we are or will be despite of the running around of Clov and the occasional foolery in the play. It was interesting, however, to watch how the audience responded, becoming slowly aware of the sadness of the play. The constant laughter in the beginning of the play disappeared little by little, as the audience there present started to realize there is nothing funny about our degrading state.

important as the dialogues are the silences in Beckett's theater. Ronan McDonald says that "the most expressive moments in his plays often occur in the pauses and silences, indicating, at turns, repression, fear, anticipation or horrified inarticulacy" (MCDONALD, 1982, p. 36). For McDonald, silences are important in Beckett's theater because of the author's desire to find out what there is between the words—in McDonald's words, "his desire to find expressiveness in the spaces in between words" (Ibid., p. 36)—and he posits that Beckett himself said, in a letter written in 1937 to Axel Kaun, that he saw language as a veil that needed to be torn apart in order for him to discover the meaning (or lack of meaning) behind it. In *Waiting for Godot*, silence is unbearable because that means the characters have to think, and Vladimir and Estragon fear thinking and try not to do it since thinking would make them realize the insignificance of their existence, a fact which they do not want to face; I believe they are unconsciously aware they lead insignificant lives, but they refuse thinking about it because they then would have to consciously accept the sad reality of their lives. Another reason why the two characters do not want to think is to avoid hearing all the dead voices of those who had thought before. According to the pair, these voices "talk about their lives. / To have lived is not enough for them […] To be dead is not enough for them" (BECKETT, 1994, p. 69), showing again that life is meaningless and that we never feel as if we have had enough. Since the silences in this play are dreaded, the characters turn to empty conversation and to entertaining themselves. The fact that the characters are constantly talking is one of the characteristics of *Waiting for Godot* that will be discussed in the analysis of the play below.

3.3 *Waiting for Godot*

Waiting for Godot is one of the most representative plays of the Theater of the Absurd and it is an excellent portrait of modern men and the lives we lead—G. S. Fraser, in a review about the play in 1956 says that "the tramps with their rags and their misery, represent the fallen state of man" (GRAVER; FEDERMAN, 2005, p. 109). Martin Esslin in *An anatomy of Drama* says that in *Waiting for Godot* we are met with an "unfulfilled expectancy when one is waiting for something which has been promised but fails to materialise" (ESSLIN, 1976, p. 117), and he adds, in *The Theater of the Absurd*, that

> The subject of the play is not Godot, but waiting, the act of waiting as an essential and characteristic aspect of the human condition. Throughout our lives we always wait for something, and Godot simply represents the objective of our waiting—an event, a thing, a person, death. Moreover, it is in the act of waiting that we

> experience the flow of *time* in its purest, most evident form. (ESSLIN, 2004, P. 50)

Beckett's play shows that in life we are constantly waiting for something; and, while we wait, time is passing by and life is getting closer to the end. Edith Kern, in her article "Drama Stripped for Inaction" highlights how much we identify ourselves with Vladimir and Estragon and that we notice that we too are "bewildered and abandoned in a universe which makes no sense" (KERN, 1954, p. 42). *Waiting for Godot* tries to show a world in which hopes do not turn into reality, and human interaction and dialogue rarely make sense. Nonetheless, people are still eager to talk and engage with others. Vladimir is aware that, when Pozzo and Lucky leave and they run out of distractions, they will be once again in an empty world: "In an instant all will vanish, and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness" (BECKETT, 1994, p. 92). For Edgar Robinson, author of *The Comedy of Language*, Beckett's protagonists have this conflict within themselves; they "seek rest and are compelled to move, seek silence and are compelled to speak and write their reports, are overwhelmed by a sense of the irrational yet compelled to rationalize" (ROBINSON, 1980, p. 138). The characters know that moving, talking and rationalizing is useless, but they do it (or attempt to do it), nonetheless. The characters are aware that, whatever they do, it will not take them away from the nothingness of their existence.

George Steiner clearly stated in *The Death of Tragedy*, first published in 1961, that any judgment on Beckett's theater would be precarious because they were too "close in date" (STEINER, 1963, p. 349). However, the critic ventures himself and says that a writer can remove from the stage "all forms of mobility and natural communication between characters and yet produce a play" (Ibid., p. 350), though he believes the result would be "crippled and monotonous" (Ibid., p. 350), as if the characters were puppets behaving as if they were alive. I believe Beckett does treat his characters as puppets, and we can see this not only in *Not I*, a play in which the only thing the audience can see on a dark stage is a stagnant mouth which talks incessantly, but from his notes at the time he directed *Waiting for Godot* in Germany[13]. When Beckett was the director of the play, he carefully calculated how and where the characters on stage were supposed to move, showing how the visual aspect of the play was as important as the dialogues. It is also interesting that Steiner described a play with unconventional communication and mobility as "crippled and monotonous." From the traditional point of view, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* does lack well-developed plot and

[13] For copies of the notes found in pages 132, 133, 134 of Lois Gordon's *Reading Godot* (2002), see Annex 2.

characters, for example, but these absences do not make the play crippled and tedious. Even though Vladimir and Estragon are merely waiting for Godot, a lot happens on stage to allow one to see it as far from monotonous; they talk and play; there is dancing and singing, which entertain the characters themselves as well as the audience. To refute Steiner's argument that the play is crippled, I would say that we get from the play exactly what we need to grasp the current situation of the characters on stage and, consequently, of our own situation. Also, I believe that, the lack of the traditional play structure—with beginning, middle, and end—is what enables the play to contain the idea of infinite continuity.

3.3.1 (Lack of) Hope

The play shows a world where everything is destroyed and where any attempt to overcome the difficulties in life is useless. When Peter Szondi analyzes the play in *Theory of Modern Drama*, he says that “everything lies in ruins—dialogue, form as a whole, human existence” (SZONDI, 1987, p. 54). I agree with his view that the play shows the complete destruction of the world and of human interaction. However, even though many critics agree that the play shows the decadence of man in today's world, others interpret the fact that Vladimir and Estragon *keep* on waiting for Godot as a representation of human hope. One of these critics is Rosette Lamont, who says “Vladimir and Estragon may not stray far from their place of waiting, yet they come to realize that patient expectation of *something* or *someone* has meaning in itself, that it represents in fact the enduring hope of mankind” (FRIEDMAN, 1970, p. 201-2). Martin Esslin also believes that Vladimir and Estragon live in hope; he says they “wait for Godot, whose coming will bring the flow of time to a stop. […] They are hoping to be saved from the evanescence and instability of the illusion of time, and to find peace and permanence outside it” (ESSLIN, 2004, p. 52-3); for Esslin, the pair keeps on waiting because one day Godot might come and save them from their current situation. We can see this in the play when Vladimir thinks someone is coming, in Act II, and he triumphantly says “It's Godot! At last! Gogo! It's Godot! We're saved!” (BECKETT, 1994, p. 83). Esslin later adds that Vladimir and Estragon's hope is the only thing that keeps them from realizing the absurdity of the world and of their lives. He says, “the hope, the habit of hoping, that Godot might come after all is the last illusion that keeps Vladimir and Estragon from facing the human condition and themselves in the harsh light of fully conscious awareness”

(ESSLIN, 2004, p. 59). Other critics, such as Eugene Webb, are against the interpretation of the fact that they keep on waiting as a representation of hope. Webb says that Vladimir and Estragon

> go on in their own way, but the critic must resist the temptation to interpret this as an affirmation on the part of the play of hope or human fortitude. All of these characters go on, but in the old ruts, and only by retreating into patterns of thought that have already been thoroughly discredited. In the universe of this play, "on" leads nowhere. (WEBB, 1972, p. 41)

The degradation of man and of the world in the play shows that there should be no hope. The many repetitions in the play make us realize that life will always be the same. Eric Bentley believes the theme of the play is not the waiting itself, but what the characters do while they wait. In this matter I agree with him, though I cannot agree with the author when he says that "Estragon and Vladimir do not only wait. *In* waiting they show, ultimately, human dignity: *they* have kept their appointment, even if Godot has not" (GRAVER; FEDERMAN, 2005, p. 119) since I interpret their insistence in waiting not as hope or dignity, but as lack of courage to actually do something. The play does show that life is meaningless and absurd and that the only thing we can do is entertain ourselves to pass the time. That is what Vladimir and Estragon do, because they are content in waiting for Godot; they accept their current situation and do not do nothing to try to change it. They do not know what there is to life *besides* waiting for Godot because they have come to terms with their present state. Perhaps they would eventually discover there is nothing more to life than merely waiting, but the point is they do not even try, and I think that is because they are afraid of what they might find out. In this sense, I believe we are very similar to Vladimir and Estragon. It is usually hard for people to make serious changes in their lives; we are, at times, too complacent about our situation and we lack the courage to find out what there is besides the things we know and are accustomed to, just like Didi and Gogo seem to lack the courage to do something with their lives other than waiting.

The critics who see hope in the play also turn to the fact that the barren tree in Act I has four or five leaves in Act II, but I agree with Michael Worton, in the chapter "*Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*: Theater as Text" in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett* edited by John Pilling, who believes that the leaves on the tree should not be interpreted as a sign of hope: "The appearance in Act II of four or five leaves has often been interpreted as a sign of optimism, but this interpretation must be unsatisfactory for it neglects (or forgets) that the text constantly denies time as a hopeful movement forward" (PILLING, 1994, p. 76). I also see in

the play a constant denial and inability of progression, and believing there is hope in the play because of the appearance of leaves on the tree would be somewhat desperate to find meaning and hope in the play because the reality of a meaningless, hopeless world is too difficult to accept.

3.3.2 Uncertainty

Uncertainty plays a big part in *Waiting for Godot*. The main characters in the play are unsure about many things and they question Godot's arrival, his identity, Pozzo and Lucky's identity, the boy's identity, whether they are waiting at the right place, and whether they are happy or not, just to name a few examples. Martin Esslin believes uncertainty is one of the very essences of the play: “In *Waiting for Godot*, the feeling of uncertainty it produces, the ebb and flow of this uncertainty—from the hope of discovering the identity of Godot to its repeated disappointment—are themselves the essence of the play” (ESSLIN, 2004, p. 45). I believe that the only certainty that Vladimir and Estragon have is that they are waiting for Godot, and they take pride in that. In the midst of so much uncertainty, they know they are waiting for Godot. When addressing this certainty, Vladimir says “What are we doing here, *that* is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come” (BECKETT, 1994, p. 91). Their certainty of knowing that they are waiting for Godot might be seen as hopeful because it shows that the characters still expect to be saved, but I believe that the main reason why they keep on waiting is not because they think Godot will come, but to be able to continue having the certainty that they are waiting, to give themselves the illusion that there is a purpose to their lives. As the character himself admits that the only certainty is that they are waiting for Godot, we will see in the passages below some examples of the recurring presence of uncertainty in the play and how little this uncertainty matters to them. Not knowing things and having to ask questions is what fills the play and gives us (and the characters) a sense that there is something happening on stage.

In this first excerpt, we can see Vladimir and Estragon are not sure of many things: Godot's arrival, if they are waiting in the place they are supposed to waiting, what season of the year it is, and what kind of tree is behind them:

> Estragon: You're sure it was here?
> Vladimir: What?
> Estragon: That we were to wait.
> Vladimir: He said by the tree. *(They look at the tree.)* Do you see any others.
> Estragon: What is it?
> Vladimir: I don't know. A willow.
> Estragon: Where are the leaves?
> Vladimir: It must be dead.
> Estragon: No more weeping.
> Vladimir: Or perhaps it's not the season.
> Estragon: Looks to me more like a bush.
> Vladimir: A shrub.
> Estragon: A bush.
> Vladimir: A—. What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place?
> Estragon: He should be here.
> Vladimir: He didn't say for sure he'd come. (BECKETT, 1994, p. 8)

Godot is the person they are waiting for, the person who will supposedly save them from their unfortunate situation, and still the pair does not seem to care that they are not certain if Godot is coming. It is amazing that their main occupation in life is to wait for Godot to arrive and yet they do not seem to mind that they might be waiting in the wrong place and that they are not certain of what day it is (and of what day Godot said he would meet them). They also are unable to remember if they were there to wait for Godot the day before, and they also mention that they are not sure about what it is that Godot is going to do for them. They know that they will be saved when he comes, but they are uncertain as to how or why.

> Estragon: What exactly did we ask him for?
> Vladimir: Were you not there?
> Estragon: I can't have been listening.
> Vladimir: Oh … Nothing very definite.
> Estragon: A kind of a prayer.
> Vladimir: Precisely.
> Estragon: A vague supplication.
> Vladimir: Exactly. (Ibid., p. 14)

Estragon admits that he was not listening when they asked Godot for whatever it was, and still Vladimir agrees with him when Estragon says it was “kind of a prayer … a vague supplication.” It is obvious that Estragon is only guessing and that Vladimir does not know what it is they asked Godot for either, so he agrees with his friend.

Uncertainty of identities is very common in the play; even though we get the impression they have been doing this for a long time and, thus, encountering Pozzo, Lucky, and the boy daily, Vladimir and Estragon are still uncertain of the identity of Pozzo, Godot, and the boy. In the first Act, when Pozzo and Lucky arrive on stage, Vladimir and Estragon mistake Pozzo for Godot:

> Estragon: *(undertone).* Is that him?

> Vladimir: Who?
> Estragon: *(trying to remember the name).* Er …
> Vladimir: Godot?
> Estragon: Yes.
> Pozzo: I present myself: Pozzo.
> Vladimir: *(to Estragon).* Not at all! (BECKETT, 1994, p. 18-9)

Estragon's uncertainty as to the identity of Pozzo is expected, since throughout the play he forgets Godot's name various times and he also forgets that they cannot go because they are waiting for Godot. Vladimir, however, who supposedly met Godot, has to wait for Pozzo to introduce himself to make sure he is not Godot. Though at times Vladmir seems more sure than Estragon, he is just as uncertain of things as his friend, as the dialogue above shows. When Pozzo asks Vladimir and Estragon what sort of relationship they have with Godot, they are also uncertain and do not know precisely who he is and how close their relationship is.

> Pozzo: Who is he?
> Vladimir: Oh he's a … he's a kind of acquaintance.
> Estragon: Nothing of the sort, we hardly know him.
> Vladimir: True … we don't know him very well … but all the same …
> Estragon: Personally I wouldn't even know him if I saw him. (BECKETT, 1994, p. 20)

Besides not being sure of Godot's identity, right after Pozzo and Lucky depart, Vladimir and Estragon's discussion centers around the identity of their visitors as well. They cannot decide if they had met Pozzo and Lucky before or if the people who were just there were different people:

> Vladimir: How they've changed!
> Estragon: Who?
> Vladimir: Those two.
> Estragon: That's the idea, let's make a little conversation.
> Vladimir: Haven't they?
> Estragon: What?
> Vladimir: Changed.
> Estragon: Very likely. They all change. Only we can't.
> Vladimir: Likely! It's certain. Didn't you see them?
> Estragon: I suppose I did. But I don't know them.
> Vladimir: Yes you do know them.
> Estragon: No I don't know them.
> Vladimir: We know them, I tell you. You forget everything. *(Pause. To himself.)* Unless they're not the same …
> Estragon: Why didn't they recognize us then?
> Vladimir: That means nothing. I too pretended not to recognize them. And then nobody ever recognizes us.
> Estragon: Forget it. What we need—ow! *(Vladimir does not react.)* Ow!
> Vladimir: *(to himself).* Unless they're not the same.
> Estragon: Didi! It's the other foot!
> *He goes hobbling towards the mound.*
> Vladimir: Perhaps they're not the same … (Ibid., p. 52)

The uncertainty of the pair is so marked that Estragon is not even certain he *saw* Pozzo and Lucky, for he says he *supposes* he saw them. It is also interesting to see Vladimir convincing himself of the possibility that Pozzo and Lucky are not the same people that he had met before. At first, he confesses it to himself, and only later he is ready to tell Estragon the possibility of Pozzo and Lucky not being the same. Vladimir frequently changes his mind and becomes unsure of things the more he thinks about them. He manages to convince himself that something he was sure of might not be so certain after all. The reappearance of Pozzo and Lucky in Act II again makes Estragon question Pozzo's identity and even after Vladimir affirms it is Pozzo, Estragon keeps thinking for some time that it is Godot:

> Vladimir: Poor Pozzo!
> Estragon: I knew it was him.
> Vladimir: Who?
> Estragon: Godot.
> Vladimir: But it's not Godot.
> Estragon: It's not Godot?
> Vladimir: It's not Godot.
> Estragon: Then who is it?
> Vladimir: It's Pozzo. (BECKETT, 1994, p. 88)

Vladimir feels sorry for Pozzo because he fell on the floor and expresses it through words using Pozzo's name, and still Estragon takes him to be Godot. Similar to what happens in Act I, when Pozzo and Lucky leave in Act II, Vladimir and Estragon again question if Pozzo might have been Godot or not:

> Estragon: Are you sure it wasn't him?
> Vladimir: Who?
> Estragon: Godot.
> Vladimir: But who?
> Estragon: Pozzo.
> Vladimir: Not at all! *(Less sure.)* Not at all! *(Still less sure.)* Not at all! (Ibid., p. 104)

Vladimir's increasing uncertainty also echoes his attempts to convince himself that perhaps the Pozzo and Lucky on stage in Act I are not the Pozzo and Lucky he had previously met. In this excerpt, however, his uncertainty is whether Pozzo is Godot. At the end of Act I, Vladimir and Estragon are unsure of the identity of the boy who comes to bring a message from Godot. Vladimir cannot be sure if he had met the boy before and if it was him who brought Godot's message the previous day.

Perhaps the saddest uncertainty in the play is when Vladimir says that he does not know whether he is unhappy or not. He admits to this uncertainty when he asks the Boy, in Act I, about his connection to Godot:

> Vladimir: Does he give you enough to eat? *(The Boy hesitates.)* Does he feed you well?
> Boy: Fairly well, Sir.
> Vladimir: You're not unhappy? *(The Boy hesitates.)* Do you hear me?
> Boy: Yes Sir.
> Vladimir: Well?
> Boy: I don't know, Sir.
> Vladimir: You don't know if you're unhappy or not?
> Boy: No Sir.
> Vladimir: You're as bad as myself. *(Silence.)* (BECKETT, 1994, p. 56)

I believe not knowing if one is unhappy or not is worse than being unhappy and knowing it. If we know we are unhappy, we can try to change our situation and how we feel, but if we do not know it, there is nothing we can do. I understand that stating one's certain happiness or unhappiness would not be possible in a play where uncertainty prevails, but I cannot help feeling bad and sorry for Vladimir and the boy in this dialogue. Their uncertainty as to whether they are happy or not is one of the aspects of the play that might make us relate to the characters. We might be content with our lives and we might have accepted life the way it is, but that does not necessarily mean that we are happy, and it does not mean that we *know* whether we are happy or unhappy. I can understand when the characters are unsure as to who someone is or what day it is because these are external factors that might lead to confusion, but being uncertain as to what we feel is a sad reality of modern man, who is lost, isolated, and often unable to recognize his feelings. We also see Vladimir's uncertainty as to how he feels when he meets Estragon again in Act II: "*(Joyous.)* There you are again... *(Indifferent.)* There we are again … *(Gloomy.*) There I am again" (Ibid. p. 64). His emotions quickly changes from being happy to be with his friend again, to sadly realizing the stagnation of his situation. Vladimir tries however, to show they are indeed happy, asking Estragon to say that he is happy, even if it is not true, which implies that words can be completely meaningless.

> Vladimir: Say you are, even if it's not true.
> Estragon: What am I to say?
> Vladimir: Say, I am happy.
> Estragon: I am happy.
> Vladimir: So am I.
> Estragon: So am I.
> Vladimir: We are happy.
> Estragon: We are happy. *(Silence.)* What do we do now, now that we are happy?
> Vladimir: Wait for Godot. (Ibid., p. 66)

What is interesting is that it does not matter how Vladimir and Estragon feel, or how they say they feel because the fact that they are waiting for Godot does not change. Whether they are happy or unhappy, and whether they know it or not, their situation remains the same. The two main characters are unsure of almost everything that happens in the play (and about

how they feel as well), but they do not mind this uncertainty because, being frequently unsure of things, they are compelled to discuss and debate on the subjects they are not certain of. Uncertainty gives them yet another excuse to keep conversation going in a play where the presence of dialogue is of extreme importance.

3.3.3 Repetition

As well as uncertainty, repetition is also a recurring feature in *Waiting for Godot*; the very structure of the play is based on repetition—Vladimir and Estragon meet, they entertain each other, Pozzo and Lucky arrive and leave, Vladimir and Estragon entertain each other once more, the Boy comes saying Godot will not come that day but will surely come the following day, repeat. Beckett uses repetition for comedy and to show the audience how things do not change much. Even though Pozzo is blind, Lucky is dumb, and there are four or five leaves in the tree in Act II, these circumstances do not change the fact that Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for Godot, that they have been waiting for a long time and will, most probably, continue to wait indefinitely. This aspect of repetition, which has the goal of showing that small changes do not make us change our daily habits, is present in the play to call the audience's attention to the fact that life, in general, is also made up of endless repetition. Perhaps the repetition in our own lives is not as obvious as it is in the play, but it had to be recurrent on stage to show us how ridiculous and absurd it is to lead the same meaningless life every day. Erich Segal, in *The Death of Comedy*, points out that the repetition in the structure in the play shows that there will probably be no end and that Vladimir and Estragon will forever live in this endless repetition. Segal says that “Didi and Gogo will wait forever for their appointment to be kept. The drama will have no happy ending. Indeed, it will have no ending at all. There will be no revel, renewal, or rejuvenation” (SEGAL, 2001, p. 452); the two characters will repeat their routine and even the small changes along the way will not keep them from waiting for Godot. John Fletcher says that, even though the end of Act II is sadder than the first, it lacks “tragic finality” (FLETCHER, 2000, p. 75), and I believe he is right, but not because the ending is not tragic enough, but because of the lack of finality itself. The end of the play does not suggest finality at all because of the play's structure, which brings forth the idea of continuous repetition.

Perhaps the best known repetition in the play is the ending of the two acts. In Act I

Estragon asks “Shall we go?,” to which Vladimir replies “Yes, let's go,” followed by the stage directions that say “*They do not move*” (BECKETT, 1994, p. 59). In the second act, it is Vladimir who asks if they should go and Estragon who replies before the same stage direction saying “*They do not move*” (Ibid., p. 109). This repetition is extremely meaningful not only because it closes the play with the idea of infinite repetition, as I mentioned in the paragraph above, but also because it points out how stagnant life is. Lois Gordon, author of *Reading Godot*, says that the fact that they do not move after deciding to do so “reflects their deepest awareness of their failed efforts to discern anything right or purposeful in life” (GORDON, 2002, p. 57); Vladimir and Estragon know that their lives are resumed to waiting for Godot, and the fact that their actions deny their words shows that their words are meaningless and that they cannot find anything meaningful to do with their lives. They do not move because they know they have nowhere to go and nothing else to do. Besides the dialogue above, there are many other examples of repeated sentences throughout the play, and the repetition of these dialogues carries a certain amount of sadness and hopelessness in them. The first time the dialogue “Let's go / We can't / Why not? / We're waiting for Godot” (BECKETT, 1994, p. 8) is repeated, we might find it amusing, being fooled by the apparent naivety and forgetfulness of the characters (especially Estragon), but as the dialogue drags itself throughout the play, and we see that the characters are *not* going to give up waiting, we feel more and more frustrated and inert. I believe this frustration can be closely related to the many times we ourselves said we would do something, but ended up doing nothing.

Many words and sentences are repeated in *Waiting for Godot*, and I believe these repetitions are present in the play to show that communication is absurd and empty, and to keep conversation alive, as we can see in the following examples. A very common type of repetition in the play is anaphora, where clauses begin with the same word, which also provides a repetition of the rhythm of conversation. One of the instances where we find repetition is when Vladimir and Estragon are discussing what Godot said to them when they asked him for help:

> Estragon: And what did he reply?
> Vladimir: That he'd see.
> Estragon: That he couldn't promise anything.
> Vladimir: That he'd have to think it over.
> Estragon: In the quiet of his home.
> Vladimir: Consult his family.
> Estragon: His friends.
> Vladimir: His agents.
> Estragon: His correspondents.

> Vladimir: His books.
> Estragon: His bank account.
> Vladimir: Before taking a decision.
> Estragon: It's the normal thing.
> Vladimir: Is it not?
> Estragon: I think it is.
> Vladimir: I think so too. (BECKETT, 1994, p. 14)

Besides the evident repetition, we can also see in this passage that the characters talk for the sake of talking. Estragon does not seem to know what it was that Godot promised them, for he asks Vladimir what Godot replied, yet we see Estragon himself giving suggestions on what Godot said and what he would do. Whatever it was that Godot said and promised them does not seem to be of much importance here, what matters is that the question gives them an excuse to talk and play with words. We also find repetition through anaphora when Vladimir and Estragon are looking at the bruises on Lucky's neck because of the rope around it:

> Vladimir: A running sore!
> Estragon: It's the rope.
> Vladimir: It's the rubbing.
> Estragon: It's inevitable.
> Vladimir: It's the knot.
> Estragon: It's the chafing. (Ibid., p. 23)

I find Beckett's use of anaphora in many instances in the play very clever because it is a slight linguistic shift that shows the stagnation of the characters' lives; the characters' situation does not change much, and the same happens with their dialogues. Every time Vladimir and Estragon start a sentence the same way as the previous sentence was started, they are denying change and continuity, showing that their dialogue indeed is inward-moving.

There is also repetition in the play when Vladimir and Estragon mimic what Pozzo says. When talking about getting rid of Lucky, Pozzo says, “I can't bear it … any longer … the way he goes on … you've no idea … it's terrible … he must go … *(he waves his arms)* … I'm going mad … *(he collapses, his head in his hands)* … I can't bear it … any longer …” (Ibid., p. 33-4), after which there is a silence and they all look at Pozzo and Vladimir and Estragon repeat what Pozzo has just said:

> Vladimir: He can't bear it.
> Estragon: Any longer.
> Vladimir: He's going mad.
> Estragon: It's terrible. (Ibid., 1994, p. 34)

Even though the words are pretty much the same, there is a difference between them. When Pozzo says the words he is clearly in pain and desperate about his situation; perhaps

parting with Lucky is harder on him than he first wanted to admit. Vladimir and Estragon, however, are simply making a distanced, emotionless commentary on Pozzo's situation. While it is a problem for Pozzo to admit that he is going mad, Vladimir and Estragon are not affected by it; even though Estragon says it is terrible that Pozzo is going mad, his words do not have much value and he does not seem to be truly affected by Pozzo's madness.

When Pozzo is about to leave, there is a lot of repetition as they are saying their good-byes. It is important to notice how long it takes Pozzo to finally go and how difficult it is for him to depart because they have been entertained and able to maintain conversation in the presence Pozzo.

> Estragon: Then adieu.
> Pozzo: Adieu.
> Vladimir: Adieu.
> Pozzo: Adieu.
> *Silence. No one moves.*
> Vladimir: Adieu.
> Pozzo: Adieu.
> Estragon: Adieu.
> *Silence.*
> Pozzo: And thank you.
> Vladimir: Thank *you*.
> Pozzo: Not at all.
> Estragon: Yes yes
> Pozzo: No no.
> Vladimir: Yes yes.
> Estragon: No no.
> *Silence.*
> Pozzo: I don't seem to be able … (*long hesitation)* … to depart. (BECKETT, 1994, p. 50)

In this passage, we again see how actions deny the words. After they say good-bye the first time, no one moves; when they say good-bye again, there is a silence. Words are used to fill the time and stop the silences, and, in this excerpt they are also comic, with the many repetitions of *adieu* and *yes yes* and *no no*.

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye states that “repetition overdone or not going anywhere belongs to comedy” (FRYE, 1973, p. 168) because the main goal of repetition is mere laughter. As I believe the main goal of the repetition of sentences in *Waiting for Godot* is to show the stagnation of the characters' situation and not of laughter, I do not think Frye's comment fits to this type of repetition. However, it does apply for the repetition of movements by the characters, which are clearly used to enticing laughter. One of the best examples in the play in which there is a repetition of movements is in the hat-swapping scene, where Vladimir and Estragon put on and take off hats in an amazingly coordinated manner:

> *He [Vladimir] picks up the hat [Lucky's], contemplates it, straightens it.)* Must have been a very fine hat. *(He puts it on in place of his own which he hands to Estragon.)* Here.
> Estragon: What?
> Vladimir: Hold that.
> *Estragon takes Vladimir's hat. Vladimir adjusts Lucky's hat on his head. Estragon puts on Vladimir's hat in place of his own which he hands to Vladimir. Vladimir takes Estragon's hat. Estragon adjusts Vladimir's hat on his head. Vladimir puts on Estragon's hat in place of Lucky's hat which he hands to Estragon. Estragon takes Lucky's hat. Vladimir adjusts Estragon's hat on his head. Estragon puts on Lucky's hat in place of Vladimir's which he hands to Vladimir. Vladimir takes his hat. Vladimir puts on his hat in place of Estragon's which he hands to Estragon. Estragon takes his hat. Vladimir adjusts his hat on his head. Estragon puts on his hat in place of Lucky's which he hands to Vladimir. Vladimir takes Lucky's hat. Estragon adjusts his hat on his head. Vladimir puts on Lucky's hat in place of his own which he hands to Estragon. Estragon takes Vladimir's hat. Vladimir adjusts Lucky's hat on his head. Estragon hands Vladimir's hat back to Vladimir who takes it and hands it back to Estragon who takes it and hands it back to Vladimir who takes it and throws it down.* (BECKETT, 1994, p. 80-1)

The orchestrated movements of this scene amaze me and the repetition is incredibly humorous. The comedy in this scene owes a lot to previous forms of entertainment, such as the circus, silent films, and actors like Charlie Chaplin. According to Donald Perret in the chapter entitled “Beckett's Postmodern Clowns” in Janik's *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art, and History*, “the play is a potpourri of music-hall and vaudeville routines, numbers from the French café-concert and circus acts, all seasoned with gags from Chaplin and Keaton” (JANIK, 1998, p. 80) and later adds that we have, in the play, “elements from all these forms converging” (Ibid., p. 82). John Fletcher, in Bloom's *Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot,'* adds that the hat-swapping routine is a “direct tribute to the masters of silent-film comedy, Chaplin and Keaton, and their talkie successors Laurel and Hardy” (BLOOM, 1987, p. 18). I do not wish to deeply analyze the origin of the comedy in *Waiting for Godot*, but I believe it is important to at least mention what probably inspired Beckett and from where he got some of the ideas for the comedy in his theater.

Besides the hat-swapping sequence, there are many other instances in the play where the comedy is similar to that found in Chaplin or in *The Three Stooges* is present, and the quote below is one of these instances:

> Vladimir: Listen!
> *They listen, grotesquely rigid.*
> Estragon: I hear nothing.
> Vladimir: Hsst! *(They listen. Estragon loses his balance, almost falls. He clutches the arm of Vladimir who totters. They listen, huddled together.)* Nor I.
> *Sighs of relief. They relax and separate.* (BECKETT, 1994, p. 15)

We can also find a similar type of comedy when Vladimir asks Estragon to go hide behind the

thin tree which, evidently, is not big enough to make Estragon go unseen. The stage directions say: "*Estragon goes and crouches behind the tree, realizes he is not hidden, comes out from behind the tree*" (BECKETT, 1994, p. 83-4), and when he comes out from behind the tree, he expresses frustration that the tree will be of no use to them (since they were also unable to commit suicide by hanging form it). Another example in which we can see comedy through the characters' movements and their repetition of movements is in Lucky's constant letting go and picking up of objects at Pozzo's demands, as the following excerpt shows:

> *([Pozzo] To Lucky.)* Coat! *(Lucky puts down the bag, advances, gives the coat, goes back to his place, takes up the bag.)* Hold that! *(Pozzo holds out the whip. Lucky advances and, both his hands being occupied, takes the whip in his mouth, then goes back to his place. Pozzo begins to put on his coat, stops.)* Coat! *(Lucky puts down bag, basket and stool.)* Touch of autumn in the air this evening. *(Pozzo finishes buttoning his coat, stoops, inspects himself, straightens up.)* Whip! *(Lucky advances, stoops, Pozzo snatches the whip from his mouth, Lucky goes back to his place.)* Yes, gentlemen, I cannot go for long without the society of my likes *(he puts on his glasses and looks at the two likes)* even when the likeness is an imperfect one. *(He takes off his glasses.)* Stool! *(Lucky puts down back and basket, advances, opens stool, puts it down, goes back to his place, takes up a bag and basket.)* Closer! *(Lucky puts down the bag and basket, advances, moves stool, goes back to his place, takes up bag and basket.* (Ibid., p. 21-2)

Even though Lucky's repeated actions and his comings and goings do not relate too much with *King Lear*, for Lear's Fool and Lear himself, once he goes mad, do not make use of his type movements, the passage above reminds me of another Shakespearean character, Launce, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. In the scene which was discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, Launce uses props to represent the members of his family. In this scene, we can see in Launce a certain sadness and confusion, which does not seem to be present in Lucky. Based on the stage directions above, we can only see Lucky's complete subordination and submission to Pozzo.

When Vladimir and Estragon hear someone coming, there is also a great deal of repetition of movement by the pair, that is somewhat terrified by the eminent arrival of Pozzo and Lucky.

> *A terrible cry, close at hand. Estragon drops the carrot. They remain motionless, then together make a sudden rush towards the wings. Estragon stops halfway, runs back, picks up the carrot, stuffs it in his pocket, runs to rejoin Vladimir who is waiting for him, stops again, runs back, picks up his boot, runs to rejoin Vladimir. Huddled together, shoulders hunched, cringing away from the menace, they wait.* (Ibid., P. 17-8)

Estragon's rushed comings and goings are humorous and remove some of the tension in the play. Even though the characters are afraid of whoever it is that is coming, their foolery

on stage prevents this fear from being completely transported to the audience. Another example in the play where there might be physical humor is in Lucky's dance and Estragon's subsequent attempt to imitate it:

> *Lucky dances. He stops.*
> Estragon: Is that all?
> Pozzo: Encore!
> *Lucky executes the same movements, stops.*
> Estragon: Pooh! I'd do as well myself. *(He imitates Lucky, almost falls.)* With a little practice. (BECKETT, 1994, p. 41)

I was surprised to find there were no stage directions as to how Lucky should dance and how long this dance should last since Beckett was known to be concerned about the movements and place of his characters on stage. The only information we have as to how this dance could be in the text of the play is when Pozzo says Lucky calls it The Net because "he thinks he is entangled in a net" (Ibid., p. 42). The duration of the dance, or how people move when they think they are entangled in a net, however, are not explained in the stage directions.

The beginning of Act II, similarly to the beginning of Act I, also shows a repetition of movements, but this time it is Vladimir who is on stage. In the first act, Estragon repeated his movements trying to take off his boots; in the second, we see Vladimir repeatedly walking from and to the extremities of the stage:

> *Enter Vladimir agitatedly. He halts and looks long at the tree, then suddenly begins to move feverishly about the stage. He halts before the boots, picks one up, examines it, sniffs it, manifests disgust, puts it back carefully. Comes and goes. Halts extreme right and gazes into distance off, shading his eyes with his hand. Comes and goes. Halts extreme left, as before. Comes and goes. Halts suddenly and begins to sing loudly.* (Ibid., p. 62)

He then sings his dog song, which will be analyzed below, and, when he stops, he continues moving around the stage: "*He remains a moment silent and motionless, then begins to move feverishly about the stage. He halts before the tree, comes and goes, before the boots, comes and goes, halts extreme right, gazes into distance, extreme left, gazes into distance*" (Ibid., p. 63). Although his movements are very similar before and after the song, the punctuation of the stage directions after it make his movements seem more rushed. I feel that, while before the song he moves more calmly and takes his time, especially when he is gazing into the distance, after the song he is more agitated, perhaps out of preoccupation because Estragon has not arrived yet. The dog song Vladimir sings in the beginning of Act II is, on the surface, a silly song about a dog that stole a crust of bread from the kitchen, was beaten to death, and all the other dogs came to its funeral. What the song is about, however, is what

matters the least; it is its endlessness that really matters. The song and stage directions go:

> A dog came in the kitchen
> And stole a crust of bread.
> Then cook up with a ladle
> And beat him till he was dead.
>
> Then all the dogs came running
> And dug the dog a tomb—
> *[He stops, broods, resumes:]*
> Then all the dogs came running
> And dug the dog a tomb
> And wrote upon the tombstone
> For the eyes of dogs to come:
>
> A dog came in the kitchen
> And stole a crust of bread.
> Then cook up with a ladle
> And beat him till he was dead.
>
> Then all the dogs came running
> And dug the dog a tomb—
> *[He stops, broods, resumes:]*
> Then all the dogs came running
> And dug the dog a tomb—
> *[He stops, broods. Softly.]*
> And dug the dog a tomb... (BECKETT, 2004, p. 62-3)

As Eugene Webb says, “the song starts over again where it began and repeats itself endlessly. Time in the song is not a linear sequence, but an endlessly reiterated moment” (WEBB, 1972, p. 37). The song can go on forever, in an infinite repetition, much like the play itself, which, in Andrew Kennedy's words, suggests a “a ritual without end” (KENNEDY, 1989, p. 28).

Even though repetitions, both of words and movements, are constantly present in the play, I should highlight that sometimes the repetition is not exact, and there is often some sort of change in the repeated circumstances. One example of this repetition with a difference is when Pozzo, in Act I, after eating his meal says “Ah! That's better” (BECKETT, 1994, p. 24), showing his evident satisfaction. Estragon, after eating the rest of Pozzo's discarded chicken bones, says those same words “Ah! That's better” (Ibid., p. 26). The sentence was repeated but it is clear that Estragon is not satisfied. The repetition of the same words by the two characters shows the contrast between them. As John Fletcher says, “The repetition of the words in different mouths is therefore an ironical device for pointing contrast” (BLOOM, 1987, p. 19). While Pozzo has enough means to keep himself satisfied, Estragon has to beg for food and money. Another instance where repetition is not exact is in the last two sentences in each act. Act I ends with Estragon asking “Well, shall we go?” and Vladimir replying “Yes, let's go”

(BECKETT, 1994, p. 59); in Act II the question is made by Vladimir, who says “Well? Shall we go?” (Ibid., p. 109). The question mark gives the impression that they are even more unsure in the second act, and it also causes a bigger pause in the sentence. Fletcher says that

> the punctuation varied only slightly to slow down delivery the second time. […] The first time round, these two sentences can be delivered a more or less normal speed, but on the second occasion they should be drawn out, with three- to six-second pauses between their constituent phrases. When this is done, the intense emotion generated in the auditorium as the last curtain falls is redolent of great sadness. (BLOOM, 1987, p. 20)

The sentence in the second act is more painful and paused, which is suitable because the second act is indeed cruder and makes us more uncomfortable.

There is also a difference in the appearance of the boy in Acts I and II. John Fletcher says that “the words of the Boy, delivered 'in a rush' in act 1, have to be dragged out of him by Vladimir the second time round” (Ibid., p. 21). When the Boy appears in Act I, he seems scared, but engages in conversation with Vladimir and answers his questions. It is only after eighteen lines from the boy that he delivers the message “*(in a rush).* Mr. Godot told me to tell you he won't come this evening but surely to-morrow” (BECKETT, 1994, p. 55), and even though the words in the message were spoken *in a rush*, I do not believe their encounter was rushed at all. Vladimir gets a lot of information from the boy, who still has nineteen lines after he delivers Godot's message. Vladimir learns, for example, that the boy is a native from those lands, that he works for Godot, that he minds the goat and that the has a brother who minds the sheep, and that Godot does not beat him but beats his brother. In Act II, the boy only has 17 lines in total and he does not even say the words of Godot's message. Vladimir asks him the questions and he replies with short answers, usually “Yes Sir” or “No Sir,” as we can see below:

> Vladimir: Do you not recognize me?
> Boy: No Sir.
> Vladimir: It wasn't you came yesterday.
> Boy: No Sir.
> Vladimir: This is your first time.
> Boy: Yes Sir.
> *Silence.*
> Vladimir: You have a message from Mr. Godot.
> Boy: Yes Sir.
> Vladimir: He won't come this evening.
> Boy No Sir.
> Vladimir: But he'll come tomorrow.
> Boy: Yes Sir.
> Vladimir: Without fail.
> Boy: Yes Sir. (Ibid., p. 105)

I do not agree with Fletcher when he says that the boy's words need to be “dragged out of him” in Act II because Vladimir does not even give him the chance of delivering Godot's message; he impatiently bombards the boy with inquiries and does not give him the opportunity to say for himself what he was there for. I believe the entire second act of the play is, in fact, dragged out—the characters move more slowly and seem to be more aware of their situation—, with the exception of the encounter with the boy. Perhaps because Vladimir is more aware the stagnation of his life, he is less impatient with the boy and quickly asks what he wants to know and soon dismisses the messenger.

Perhaps the most significant change in the play is Pozzo's blindness and Lucky's dumbness in the second act. Vladimir and Estragon, however, are not affected by this change. The only moment when they seem surprised or pity the visitors is when Pozzo and Lucky are about to leave and Vladimir wants Lucky to sing, or think, or recite, and is met with the news of Lucky's dumbness. Vladimir cannot believe it and, when asks Pozzo since when Lucky has been dumb, he receives an angry reply from Pozzo:

> Pozzo: *(suddenly furious).* Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (BECKETT, 1994, p. 103)

I believe Pozzo going blind and Lucky going dumb represent the fact that, even though changes that we cannot control happen around us, they are not significant enough to have an impact on our situation. Pozzo and Lucky's condition does not change the fact that Didi and Gogo are waiting for Godot, their lives remain the same even with the changes around them. In his book entitled *Samuel Beckett: 'Waiting for Godot,' 'Endgame,' 'Krapp's Last Tape'*, John Fletcher says that “Act Two is a development, and not a simple repeat, of Act One” (FLETCHER, 2000, p. 73). Even though I agree that Act II is not a simple repetition of Act I, I find it hard to agree with Fletcher when he says it is a *development*. When there is development, there is the idea of advancement and growth, the idea that something was worse before and, after it developed, it improved. I do not see this improvement in *Waiting for Godot.* Things do not get better nor do they advance in the second act. In spite of the changes I mentioned here, the fact that they are the same people doing the same thing as before—waiting for Godot—remains.

3.3.4 Constant Conversation

As I have said before, dialogue plays a very important part in *Waiting for Godot.* In a play where the plot is almost inexistent, their constant conversation is what keeps the play going. At a certain point in the play, when Estragon suggests that they stop talking for some time, Vladimir is somewhat hurt by his friend's request and cannot endure the silence and not having anyone to interact with:

> Estragon: Let's stop talking for a minute, do you mind?
> Vladimir: *(feebly).* All right. *(Estragon sits down on the mound. Vladimir paces agitatedly to and fro, halting from time to time to gaze into distance off. Estragon falls asleep. Vladimir halts finally before Estragon.)* Gogo! … Gogo! … GOGO! (BECKETT, 1994, p. 10)

Without dialogue, the play becomes less interesting, and Vladimir seems to notice that, so he wants to keep conversation alive. Eric Bentley, in *The Life of the Drama*, says the play is the opposite of *azione parlata*, where there is a minimum of words because something more important is happening on stage. He believes that in *Waiting for Godot* there seems to be "a maximum of words because nothing at all is going on—except waiting" (BENTLEY, 2000, p. 100), and Lois Gordon highlights the fact that most of the play is composed by "illogical fragments and dialogue exchanges" (GORDON, 2002, p. 98) As Donald Perret states in the chapter "Beckett's Postmodern Clowns" in Janik's *Fools And Jesters in Literature, Art, and History*, the dialogues in the play are formed by echoes, variations, reformulations, misunderstandings, and disagreements; and he highlights that these elements carry the dialogue forward, but "not toward its conclusion, for there is none, but towards its inevitable repetition" (JANIK, 1988, p. 81), in agreement with Andrew Kennedy's statement that the dialogue in the play is "inward-moving" (KENNEDY, 1989, p 19). The dialogue does not move forward towards any resolutions or developments in the plot or in the characters; it moves around itself, in constant repetition. The speech of the characters is made up of different characteristics and styles, from lower forms of speech to the higher. As Andrew Kennedy points out, "their speech is a mixture of the formal ('Nothing to be done') and the colloquial; the minimally simple and the rhetorical […] ('Get up till I embrace you') and literary or biblical allusion ('Hope deferred maketh the something sick, who said that?')" (Ibid., p. 24). And this mixture of styles and the ability the characters have to change from different registers is one of the ways which brings comedy to the play.

When Peter Szondi analyzes the dialogue in *Waiting for Godot*, he says that "nothing but empty conversation remains to confirm the existence of those beings who wait for Godot"

(SZONDI, 1987, p. 54), highlighting the fact that even if Vladimir and Estragon's dialogues are at times nonsensical and meaningless, that is what assures them of their existence. Szondi also adds that “constantly pressing toward the abyss of silence, retrieved from it over and over again but only with great effort, this hollow conversation still manages to reveal the 'anguish of man without God' in this empty metaphysical space” (Ibid., p. 54); even though silence is a pressing fear of Beckett's bums and that their dialogues sometimes make no sense, the characters in *Waiting for Godot* are able to show the emptiness of life. The fact that Szondi believes the absence of Godot represents the anguish of “man without God” will be dealt with below, in the discussion of the representation of Godot.

Constantly present in the dialogues in the play are wordplays and misunderstandings, and through them, the characters are able to both entertain themselves and the audience. Lois Gordon says that they play with words and then it is as if “their words can become like their hats, to be juggled to fill the void, another means of diffusing anxiety” (GORDON, 2002, p. 57). I find this association between the words and the hats quite interesting; it is as if the words were also something physical that could be quickly swapped between the characters, as they do with the hats. Misunderstandings, however, are not used only for entertainment, for they also show the loneliness of man. When the characters are unable to make themselves understood and when communication is difficult, it shows the isolation of the characters and their inability in maintaining meaningful conversations.

Janik says, in the introduction of her book, that “the wordplay of clowns simultaneously generates humor and isolation in *Waiting for Godot*” (JANIK, 1998, p. 14). The isolation created in their use of language is also pointed out by Eugene Webb, who says:

> Even though the company of one another is one of the few distractions they have from the boredom and anxiety that constantly press upon them, their moments of real companionship are evanescent. Most of the time they are locked away from each other in separate streams of thought. (WEBB, 1972, p. 29)

Though the characters are constantly talking, it does not necessarily mean they are communicating. John Fletcher, in his chapter in Bloom's book, also highlights the lack of true communication between the characters, who are frequently caught up in their own thoughts. Fletcher says that the dialogue in the play is very similar to our daily conversations, with the “inconsequential spontaneity of everyday speech, in which the different participants tend to pursue a line of thought independently of each other” (BLOOM, 1987, p. 16). Edith Kern is another critic who believes that the characters in *Waiting for Godot*, especially Vladimir and Estragon, talk in separate monologues, but highlights the fact that even though they talk to

themselves, they need the physical presence of the other. She says their conversation is

> a monologue which cannot be spoken without the presence of the other, although he may not even listen. Each needs the other as a comrade, a sounding board, an echo of his complaints, his dreams, his thoughts, his fears. (KERN, 1954, p. 45)

One of the instances where we can see examples of these separate streams of thought in the play is right in the beginning of the first act when Estragon says “Nothing to be done” (BECKETT, 1994, p. 2) and Vladimir says “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 tried everything. And I resumed my struggle” (Ibid., p. 2). While Estragon is saying there is nothing to be done about his boots because he does not seem to be able to take them off, Vladimir talks about his perseverance throughout his life. Another example of these separate streams of thought is when Estragon and Vladimir are discussing that Estragon thinks the carrot gets worse the more you eat it and that Vladimir thinks it gets better because he gets used to it. At the end of the dialogue present in this excerpt, we can see that each one of them is saying what they think and not exactly engaging in conversation.

> Estragon: Funny, the more you eat the worse it gets.
> Vladimir: With me it's just the opposite.
> Estragon: In other words?
> Vladimir: I get used to the muck as I go along.
> Estragon: *(after prolonged reflection).* Is that the opposite?
> Vladimir: Question of temperament.
> Estragon: Of character.
> Vladimir: Nothing you can do about it.
> Estragon: No use struggling.
> Vladimir: One is what one is.
> Estragon: No use wriggling.
> Vladimir: The essential doesn't change.
> Estragon: Nothing to be done. (BECKETT, 1994, p. 17)

When I first read the play, I thought that, in the end of this dialogue, what one character said was complementing what the other character had said. However, if we separate the lines, we can see that they are actually following their own thoughts. Vladimir is saying that liking something the more or the less you eat it is a question of temperament, there is nothing you can do about it, since one is what one is, and the essential things do not change. Estragon, on the other hand, is saying that it is a question of character, that there is no use struggling, no use wriggling, and that there is nothing to be done about it. Each one of them is saying what they think, and the presence of the other is merely physical support.

Besides the aspect of language which shows loneliness, we cannot fail to mention that the conversations in the play also carry a lot of humor. This comedy through language is seen

in the characters' misunderstandings and their playing with words and sounds. In the example below, we can see the the characters playing with the sound of “Pozzo.”

> Pozzo: I am Pozzo! *(Silence.)* Pozzo! *(Silence.)* Does that name mean nothing to you? *(Silence.)* I say does that name mean nothing to you?
> *Vladimir and Estragon look at each other questioningly.*
> Estragon: *(pretending to search).* Bozzo … Bozzo …
> Vladimir: *(ditto).* Pozzo … Pozzo …
> Pozzo: PPPOZZZO!
> Estragon: Ah! Pozzo … let me see … Pozzo …
> Vladimir: Is it Pozzo or Bozzo?
> Estragon: Pozzo … no … I'm afraid I … no … I don't seem to … (BECKETT, 1994, p. 19)

Vladimir and Estragon's confusion and misunderstanding of sounds in this scene seems to be feigned, but that does not make the dialogue any less humorous. Another example of the misunderstandings in the play is when Vladimir and Estragon are talking about Estragon's boots in Act II, when Vladimir asks Estragon where his boots are.

> Vladimir: Where are your boots?
> Estragon: I must have thrown them away.
> Vladimir: When?
> Estragon: I don't know.
> Vladimir: Why?
> Estragon: (*exasperated*). I don't know why I don't know! (ibid., p. 74-5)

It is evident that Vladimir is asking why Estragon threw away the boots, and the fact that Estragon understands that Vladimir is asking why he does not know the reason why he threw them away is also humorous and might trigger laughter in the audience. We see again a similar type of misunderstanding when Pozzo asks Vladimir and Estragon if they are friends, meaning friends or enemies of *him*, but Estragon thinks Pozzo is asking and Vladimir and Estragon are friends.

> Pozzo: Are you friends?
> Estragon: *(laughing noisily)*. He wants to know if we are friends!
> Vladimir: No, he means friends of him. (ibid., p. 97)

The misunderstanding itself is comical, but what calls my attention to the dialogue above is the reaction Estragon gets when he thinks someone is questioning their friendship. His noisy laughter shows how unconceivable it is for him to imagine a world where he and Vladimir are not friends. In spite of his threats to leave his friend, he knows that they are inseparable.

The misunderstandings in the examples above show how difficult communication is in the play, where there is usually one character who is not sure of what the other character is trying to say. One example of this difficult communication is when Vladimir is trying to tell

Estragon the story about the thief who was saved and his friend does not seem to follow:

> Vladimir: One out of four. Of the other three two don't mention any thieves at all and the third says that both of them abused him.
> Estragon: Who?
> Vladimir: What?
> Estragon: What's all this about? Abused who?
> Vladimir: The Savior.
> Estragon: Why?
> Vladimir: Because he wouldn't save them.
> Estragon: From hell?
> Vladimir: Imbecile! From death.
> Estragon: I thought you said hell.
> Vladimir: From death, from death. (BECKETT, 1994, p. 7)

Estragon's confusion and his many questions show that he was not paying too much attention to what Vladimir was saying. The fact that Estragon was not paying attention, however, does not seem to be much of a problem; in spite of Vladimir calling his friend "imbecile," at least Estragon is engaging in conversation, which is what Vladimir was eager for. Another instance where we can see that communication is difficult is when Estragon asks Vladimir a question and they are both distracted by Estragon's hunger:

> Estragon: *(chewing).* I asked you a question.
> Vladimir: Ah.
> Estragon: Did you reply?
> Vladimir: How's the carrot?
> Estragon: It's a carrot.
> Vladimir: So much the better, so much the better. *(Pause.)* What was it you wanted to know?
> Estragon: I've forgotten. (ibid., p. 16)

What impresses me the most in the quote above is that Estragon is not concerned with what the answer to his question is, but merely *if* Vladimir has replied. Again, what matters is to keep the conversation going, a conversation in which its subject is less important than the conversation itself.

As we have seen so far, through language the characters on stage are able to show their isolation and their difficulty in communicating with each other, as well as the absurd and comic side of language through their misunderstandings and word games. We should keep in mind that, in the midst of this isolation and confusion of language, the characters manage to make some comments on the present meaningless existence of man. Donald Perret calls these comments "metaphysical statements" (JANIK, 1998, p. 81), through which the characters tell truths about the human condition. One of Pozzo's metaphysical statements is spoken when he says that even the smallest and seemingly meaningless interactions with people have an effect on our lives: "From the meanest creature one departs wiser, richer, more conscious of one's

blessings” (BECKETT, 1994, p. 28). No matter how isolated we might be, Pozzo believes we are constantly affected by our interactions with other people. Another instance of Pozzo's wisdom on human existence is when he is explaining why he wants to get rid of Lucky. He says, “I might just as well have been in his shoes and he in mine. If chance had not willed otherwise. To each his due” (Ibid., p. 31), showing that Pozzo is aware that we do not have control over most aspects in life. He knows that it is chance that made him the master and Lucky the slave just as much as he knows that this situation could easily have been different. Another instance where we can see Pozzo's teachings is when he says: “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. *(He laughs.)*” (BECKETT, 1994, p. 32). An important element that I had not initially realized when reading the play and that Ruby Cohn called my attention to in her chapter entitled “The Laughter of Sad Sam Beckett” in Friedman's book is that, since laughter is associated with happiness, and Pozzo says that when one person starts to laugh somewhere else another person stops, when Pozzo laughs at the end of the sentence, he is depriving someone from laughter and happiness. Cohn says, “within his tightly closed system, then, he has just deprived someone of laughter by laughing himself” (FRIEDMAN, 1970, p. 188). If we are selfless and believe that when we laugh we are depriving other people of laughing, this laughter might be tainted by the sadness of knowing that someone else is not laughing at that moment because we are. Our happiness then might be ruined or cut short if we know that our happiness is depriving someone else from being happy.

Vladimir also has his share of “metaphysical statements,” and one instance is when Estragon is complaining that his boots hurt his feet and Vladimir says, “There's man all over you, blaming on his boots the faults of his feet” (BECKETT, 1994, p. 4). It is very common for people not to admit they are wrong or flawed and find something else or someone else to blame for their mistakes, and this is what Vladimir is criticizing in his friend. Estragon should at least consider that the problem is with his feet, not with his boots, which he does not do. In the second act, Vladimir also tells some truths such as “in an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness” (Ibid., p. 92), which has been mentioned before. Vladimir knows that the distractions in our meaningless lives are limited and short and that, even if we do entertain ourselves, it will not hide the nothingness of existence. Near the end of the play, he also brings forth some questions about his existence and his place in the universe:

> Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? To-morrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of to-day? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be? *(Estragon, having struggled with his boots in vain, is dozing off again. Vladimir looks at him.)* He'll know nothing. He'll tell me about the blows he received and I'll give him a carrot. *(Pause.)* Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. *(He listens.)* But habit is a great deadener. *(He looks again at Estragon.)* At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, He is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. *(Pause.)* I can't go on! *(Pause.)* What have I said? (BECKETT, 1994, p. 104-5)

It seems that in this passage, Vladimir is completely aware of his condition. He has so little control over his life that he cannot even be sure if he is awake or asleep. He is conscious of the repetition that rules his life and that it was this habit of waiting for Godot and of living the same day over and over again that was his doom. Vladimir is also aware of how unimportant and insignificant his existence is, and Lois Gordon says that, in this scene, Vladimir is "overwhelmed by hopelessness, unsure of the purposefulness of their activities, unsure of reality itself" (GORDON, 2002, p. 82) This is the only moment in the play when Vladimir admits that he cannot go on and that their existence is too senseless for him to accept it. Estragon says numerous times throughout the play that he is going, but we know that it is an empty threat and that he would not be able to part from Vladimir and give up waiting for Godot. When Vladimir says he cannot go on, however, I feel that he really means it. When, after saying it, he asks himself what he has said, I believe he is shocked both with what he said—admitting that he cannot endure living life like this anymore—and because his words, this time, had meaning. Throughout the play, Vladimir and the other characters carelessly used words just to keep conversation alive, not worrying much about what those words mean, which I do not feel is the case in Vladimir's speech quoted above. I believe it was the first time he meant the words he said, and that is why saying them has such a devastating effect on him.

Perhaps the most ground-breaking use of language in *Waiting for Godot* is Lucky's speech, and even if this character is not one of the foci of my study, I cannot overlook his interesting monologue[14]. Vivian Mercier describes it as a "shocking mixture of seeming sense

[14] The monologue goes as following: "Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattman of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment plunged in fire whose fire flames if that continues and who can doubt it will fire the firmament that is to say blast hell to heaven so blue still and calm so calm with a calm which even though intermittent is better than nothing but not so fast and considering what is more that as a result of the

and evident nonsense" (MERCIER, 1994, p. 145), and G. S. Fraser wrote a review of *Waiting for Godot* in the "Times Literary Supplement" in 1956, saying that "Mr. Beckett has never been more brilliantly unreadable; not only Didi, Gogo, and Pozzo, but the audience want to scream" (GRAVER; FEDERMAN, 2005, p. 113). At the same time Lucky's speech is nonsensical and confusing, with unfinished sentences and his *quaquaquas*, we try (even though it is an attempt in vain) to make some sense out of it. Scholars and critics say that Lucky's "think" tries to convey the idea that there is a personal God who loves us, but who does not love all of us, and that the reason for that is unknown. Edith Kern, in the chapter "Beckett's Modernity and Medieval Affinities," tries to remove the nonsensical part of Lucky's speech and says that what Lucky is saying is:

> given the existence … of a personal God … with white beard … outside time … who from the heights of divine … aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown … and suffers with those who … are plunged in torment … it is established beyond all doubt … that man … fades away. (BLOOM, 1987, p. 116)

Even though I understand people's need of finding a complete sentence and a meaning underneath the nonsense in the speech, I posit that it goes against the idea Beckett is trying to convey. Vivian Mercier points out that "as an audience loses the thread of the progressively

---

labors left unfinished crowned by the Acacacacademy of Anthropopopometry of Essy-in-Possy of Testew and Cunard it is established beyond all doubt all other doubt than that which clings to the labors of men that as a result of the labors unfinished of Testew and Cunard it is established as hereinafter but not so fast for reasons unknown that as a result of the public works of Puncher and Wattman it is established beyond all doubt that in view of the labors of Fartov and Belcher left unfinished for reasons unknown of Testew and Cunard left unfinished it is established what many deny that man in Possy of Testew and Cunard that man in Essy that man in short that man in brief in spite of the strides of alimentation and defecation wastes and pines wastes and pines and concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown in spite of the strides of physical culture the practice of sports such as tennis football running cycling swimming flying floating riding gliding conating camogie skating tennis of all kinds dying flying sports of all sorts autumn summer winter winter tennis of all kinds hockey of all sorts penicilline and succedanea in a word I resume flying gliding golf over nine and eighteen holes tennis of all sorts in a word for reasons unknown in Feckham Peckham Fulham Clapham namely concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown but time will tell fades away I resume Fullham Clapham in a word the dead loss per head since the death of Bishop Berkeley being to the tune of one inch four ounce per head approximately by and large more or less to the nearest decimal good measure round figures stark naked in the stockinged feet in Connemara in a word for reasons unknown no matter what matter the facts are there and considering what is more much more grave that in the light of the labors lost of Steinweg and Peterman it appears what is more much more grave that in the light the light the light of the labors lost of Steinweg and Peterman that in the plains in the mountains by the seas by the rivers running water running fire the air is the same and then the earth namely the air and then the earth in the great cold the great dark the air and the earth abode of stones in the great cold alas alas in the year of their Lord six hundred and something the air the earth the sea the earth abode of stones in the great deeps the great cold on sea on land and in the air I resume for reasons unknown in spite of the tennis the facts are there but time will tell I resume alas alas on on in short in fine on on abode of stones who can doubt it I resume but not so fast I resume the skull fading fading fading and concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown in spite of the tennis on on the beard the flames the tears the stones so blue so calm alas alas on on the skull the skull the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the labors abandoned left unfinished graver still abode of stones in a word I resume alas alas abandoned unfinished the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the skull alas the stones Cunard (*mêlée, final vociferations*) tennis . . . the stones . . . so calm . . . Cunard . . . unfinished . . ." (BECKETT, 1994, p. 45-7)

more disrupted sentence, it ceases to try to understand and is swept away by the verbal torrent" (MERCIER, 1994, p. 145), and that, in my opinion, was Beckett's goal in writing this speech. I believe he wanted us to stop looking for meaning in the words and to stop trying to grasp any reason in them, thinking that words are the most important aspect of communication. Martin Esslin says the speech is "a parody of philosophical jargon and scientific double-talk" (ESSLIN, 2004, p. 69), but I do not agree. I believe the Irish playwright might in fact use parody during Lucky's speech, but, in my opinion, the purpose of the speech was not to be a parody. Beckett once told a reporter that he did not know who Godot was, and if he did, he would have said so in the play. I think the same applies here. If Beckett had wanted to make Lucky's speech understandable and convey a meaningful point of view through his words, he would have done so. However, he chose to make the speech meaningful not because of what it has to say, but because of what it represents—that words are taken too seriously and that sometimes it is useless trying to grab hold of any meaning in the confusion of people's speeches.

3.3.5 While Waiting

One of Vladimir and Estragon's biggest concerns is what they can do to pass the time —perhaps they even worry more about what they can do while they are waiting than if Godot will arrive at all. Lois Gordon believes that in waiting, they show the emptiness and nothingness of life:

> Both figures demonstrate concretely—in taking the hat off and putting it back on and in pulling the boot off, with additional gestures of turning each in different directions—that there is nothing to be done, nothing to be found, nothing to be revealed. The ritual of demonstrating or enacting nothing is the consummate activity of waiting/living. (GORDON, 2002, p. 156)

By waiting and in finding what to do while they are waiting, Vladimir and Estragon admit to the meaninglessness of their lives. All they want to do is find some kind of activity that will make the time pass faster, and they are well aware of that. After Pozzo and Lucky leave, for example, we have the following dialogue in which we can see their awareness of the passing of time:

> Vladimir: That passed the time.
> Estragon: It would have passed in any case.
> Vladimir: Yes, but not so rapidly. (BECKETT, 1994, p. 51)

And later Vladimir says, “how time flies when one has fun” (BECKETT, 1994, p. 86). One of their favorite things to do to pass time and entertaining themselves is talking—no matter how useless and meaningless the conversation might be. Martin Esslin says that “in a purposeless world that has lost its ultimate objectives, dialogue, like all action, becomes a mere game to pass the time” (ESSLIN, 2004, p. 87); they do not talk to learn new things or to interact with other people, but to entertain each other. As Germaine Brée points out in the chapter entitled “Beckett's 'Grands Articulés'” in Friedman's *Samuel Beckett Now*, Vladimir and Estragon talk about their current situation of waiting very calmly, as if having to repeatedly wait for Godot does not bother them: “Beckett's characters discuss their miserable and repugnant situation very calmly; they find it not only tolerable but, on the whole, fairly good” (FRIEDMAN, 1970, p. 80). Vladimir and Estragon have accepted their life the way it is and they have grown so used to it that they fail to see how absurd their existence and their waiting is.

In the beginning of the play, the pair decides to tell each other stories to pass the time. The first one is the story of the two thieves, one of which was saved and the other was not. The meaning of the story, however, is not what matters the most, what they want to do is to be entertained so that they feel that time is passing faster.

> Vladimir: Do you remember the story?
> Estragon: No.
> Vladimir: Shall I tell it to you?
> Estragon: No.
> Vladimir: It'll pass the time. (BECKETT, 1994, p. 6)

When Vladimir finds Estragon unresponsive and uninterested in the story, he says “Come on, Gogo, return the ball, can't you, once in a way?” (Ibid., p. 6). Another story that they consider telling is the one of the Englishman in a brothel:

> Estragon: You know the story of the Englishman in the brothel?
> Vladimir: Yes.
> Estragon: Tell it to me.
> Vladimir: Ah stop it!
> Estragon: An Englishman having drunk a little more than usual proceeds to a brothel. The bawd asks him if he wants a fair one, a dark one or a red-haired one. Go on. (Ibid., p. 11)

I find this quote incredibly humorous because usually, when we ask someone if they know a story, it is because *we* want to tell it. Instead Estragon, upon finding out Vladimir knows the story himself, asks his friend to tell it to him. When Vladimir refuses, Estragon starts telling the story and encourages Vladimir to continue. What Estragon wants is not to

hear the story, but to keep conversation going so that they do not notice the stagnation of time.

Another thing they consider doing while they are waiting is hanging themselves. I do not see the characters considering suicide because that would be the answer and the solution that would release them from their miserable condition, the thing that would make them free from having to wait. Instead, I believe they consider it only to have something to talk about. When Estragon suggests that they hang themselves, that becomes the focus of their empty conversation, and it helps time pass faster.

> Vladimir: What do we do now?
> Estragon: Wait.
> Vladimir: Yes, but while waiting.
> Estragon: What about hanging ourselves?
> Vladimir: Hmm. It'd give us an erection.
> Estragon: *(highly excited).* An erection! (BECKETT, 1994, p. 12)

After pondering over who is heavier and should be hanged first because the bough might break, they give up the idea of hanging themselves and decide not to do anything because it is safer. The idea of committing suicide served its purpose, because it made the two friends engage in conversation. In Act II, still before Pozzo and Lucky's reappearance, Estragon says they are unable to keep quiet and that the reason why they talk so much is so they do not have to think or hear the dead voices of those who had though before.

> Estragon: In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.
> Vladimir: You're right, we're inexhaustible.
> Estragon: It's so we won't think.
> Vladimir: We have that excuse.
> Estragon: It's so we won't hear.
> Vladimir: We have our reasons.
> Estragon: All the dead voices.
> Vladimir; They make a noise like wings.
> Estragon: Like leaves.
> Vladimir: Like sand.
> Estragon: Like leaves.
> *Silence.*
> Vladimir: They all speak at once.
> Estragon: Each one to itself.
> *Silence.*
> Vladimir: Rather they whisper.
> Estragon: They rustle.
> Vladimir: They murmur.
> Estragon: They rustle.
> *Silence.*
> Vladimir: What do they say?
> Estragon: They talk about their lives.
> Vladimir: To have lived is not enough for them.
> Estragon: They have to talk about it.
> Vladimir: To be dead is not enough for them.
> Estragon: It is not sufficient.

> *Silence.*
> Vladimir: They make a noise like feathers.
> Estragon: Like leaves.
> Vladimir: Like ashes.
> Estragon: Like leaves. (Ibid., p. 68-9)

The dead voices of those who had thought before, like Vladimir and Estragon, are unable to remain dead and quiet. Beckett's characters still hear them, and that reminds them of how much pain thinking brings them. Vladimir and Estragon are aware of their stagnant situation, but because they cannot control it, they would rather not think about it and simply go on with their lives occupying their heads with nonsensical conversation. Again in Act II they show their awareness of having the ability to make themselves busy by not noticing the passing of the time and the stagnation of their condition of waiting. Estragon tells Vladimir "We don't manage too badly, eh Didi, between the two of us? […] We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exit?" (BECKETT, 1994, p. 77). What amazes me about this line is that the pair does not want to be assured of their existence, they just want to have *the impression* they exist. They want to feel as if they were doing something meaningful with their lives even if they actually know that life is meaningless. Whatever they do to pass the time makes them feel as if they matter, as if they are important, however brief that sentiment might be. Throughout the play we notice that silence is unbearable to them, perhaps even worse than having to wait for Godot, and so they have to be able to entertain themselves in order not to fall into silence again. In order not to think, they contradict each other, ask each other questions, and consider giving their mercies, singing, hanging from the tree, exercising, and trying to guess Pozzo's name (even though they know it is Pozzo), to point out a few of the things they do to pass the time. Vladimir says that "thinking is not the worst. […] What is terrible is to *have* thought" (ibid., p. 71), but later adds that it is not the worst, but that "we could have done without it" (Ibid., p. 72). Vladimir and Estragon have thought before, and a part of them wishes they had not. Perhaps what they thought about was the disgrace and decay of modern man and this is too much for them to handle. When they faced the truth about their lives, they perhaps felt too impotent and unable to change things, and then decided to stop thinking to prevent themselves from feeling that way again. Now, they live in a world where they are nothing but mere puppets, doing what they can to entertain themselves while waiting for an uncertain salvation.

3.3.6 The Representation of Godot

During my analysis of one of the dialogues in the play I used a quote from Peter Szondi which said that the play, where two bums are waiting for their savior, reveals the “anguish of man without God” (SZONDI, 1987, p. 54). Unlike Szondi, I do not believe Godot represents God, but I cannot rule out his interpretation of the play because I believe Godot represents whatever we need/want him to represent; he is whatever people think is going to save them and take them away from their mediocre existence. If Szondi believes, as other critics do, that it is God who can save them from this situation, it is more than natural that he would see Godot as God. Another interpretation of what Godot represents is that he is the recognition Beckett hoped to receive for his works. Harold Bloom says,

> I take it that 'Godot' is an emblem for 'recognition', and I thereby accept Deirdre Blair's tentative suggestion that the play was written while Beckett waited for recognition, for his novels to be received and appreciated, within the cannon. (BLOOM, 1987, p. 7)

Even though all interpretations are valid, I cannot help saying that taking Godot to be a symbol of Beckett's long-waited recognition is, in a way, diminishing Beckett's work and making it appear too simple. Perhaps what Beckett was waiting for and hoping for was recognition, but it may be too bold a leap to say that Godot represents this recognition. When Martin Esslin analyzes the representation of Godot, he calls his readers' attention to the political impact that the play may have. He mentions that Algerian people might see Godot as the promised land they never got from the government and that those from Poland might have seen it as national liberty:

> Landless Algerian peasants saw Godot who never comes as the often promised but never delivered land reform; and audiences in Poland with its history of subjection to other nations, responded with unanimous opinion that Godot was the national freedom and independence so often denied them. (ESSLIN, 1976, p. 117)

Ruby Cohn says that the play clearly tells us who Godot is: “[It is] the promise that is always awaited and not fulfilled, the expectation that brings two men to the board night after night. The play tells us this dramatically and not discursively” (BLOOM, 1987, p. 45). I also see Godot as that long-awaited promise and situation that seems to never come true, he is whatever it is we expect to happen or whoever it is we hope will come to save us from the meaninglessness of life.

3.3.7 “The Play Where Nothing Happens, Twice”

Waiting for Godot has been said to be the play where nothing happens, twice. It was first used to describe the play by critic Vivian Mercer on February 18 1956 in a piece on the play for the *Irish Times* entitled “The Uneventful Event” and it has been widely used for people who study the play. Over the years, however, critics and scholars started to realize just how eventful the play is. Pozzo and Lucky come and go, the boy comes and goes, Vladimir sings, Vladimir and Estragon consider suicide, they talk, and play games. Martin Esslin brings it to our attention that we might not notice at first how many things are happening in the play because the characters are constantly saying there is nothing to be done, and that nothing happens there:

> the very fact that the characters keep reassuring themselves that nothing ever happens and that there is nothing for them to do creates its own kind of suspense: the audience cannot quite believe that this is so and wants to know what *is* going to happen next. And on the way to their final recognition that, ultimately, there has really not been anything happening, enough interesting episodes have occurred. (ESSLIN, 1976, p. 44)

One of the instances in which the characters reassure themselves is when they start to prepare to leave, still before Lucky's speech, when they say:

> Estragon: In the meantime nothing happens.
> Pozzo: You find it tedious?
> Estragon: Somewhat.
> Pozzo: *(to Vladimir).* And you, Sir?
> Vladimir: I've been better entertained. (BECKETT, 1994, p. 40)

And later when Estragon says “Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!” (Ibid., p. 43), which is certainly not true because many things are happening on stage. Ruby Cohn also calls the reader's attention to how much happens on stage. She says, “refrains, repetitions, and pauses camouflage how *much* is happening on stage. Only in retrospect, after viewing it all, do we realize how much is at stake in these hapless happenings” (BLOOM, 1987, p. 47). Ronan McDonald also disagrees with Mercier's statement that *Waiting for Godot* is the play where nothing happens, twice. He admits to the inertia and nonsensical dialogue which are greatly present throughout the play, but says:

> against Mercier, it is clearly not the case that nothing happens here. Even apart from the arrival of Pozzo and Lucky, which brings a welcome injection of energy into both acts, a range of movement and activity takes place: playing with boots, exchanging hats, trousers falling down, characters running on and off. Moreover, the conversation and physical exchanges between the two leads constitutes a sort of dramatic activity. (MCDONALD, 2007, p. 33)

These nonsensical dialogues, the comings and goings on Pozzo, Lucky, and the Boy, repetitions and pauses entertain both Vladimir and Estragon and the audience; while the two

characters are waiting for Godot, the events on stage help them and the audience forget (however briefly) that their existence is resumed to waiting for something they are not sure will arrive.

The arrival (or not) of Godot is a fact that has been much discussed by critics and scholars of *Waiting for Godot*, and many of them firmly state that Godot will never come. Hersh Zeifman, author of the chapter "A Trick of the Light: Tom Stoppard's *Hapgood* and Postabsurdist Theater" in Enoch and Cohn's *Around the Absurd*, says that the very structure of the play invalidates the hope that Godot will come. Zeifman says that "in a circular text reflecting the unattainability of desire, Godot will never come" (ENOCH; COHN, 1992, p. 179). Perhaps the only desire fulfilled in the play is Estragon's desire for food when he eats a piece of carrot, the rest of Pozzo's chicken and a turnip. Vladimir, having a urination problem, cannot even fulfill his desire of urinating when he is with Estragon. For Zeifman, the hope that Godot will come and save Vladimir and Estragon is useless, because nothing good can be achieved in this play. Donald Perret, author of "Beckett's Postmodern Clowns" in Janik's book, also believes that Godot will never come. When describing the play, he says:

> A timeless, clownesque country somewhere out of this world. Four characters in symmetry with two-syllable names. Acts and actions that repeat, more or less. Performers performing for the sake of performance, spectators watching spectators, and all of it in order to pass the time while waiting for a last routine and an ultimate clown. But *neither will ever come, and everyone is forever condemned to another repetition*" (my emphasis). (JANIK, 1998, p. 79)

Perret believes the characters are trapped in a daily routine that will never change because Godot will not appear. Thus they will be stuck in this never-ending repetition. Luís Carlos Maciel also believes that Godot will never come. In *Samuel Beckett e a Solidão Humana*, he says that hope is what keeps Vladimir and Estragon able to continue with their existence, but he adds that this hope is an illusion because Godot will never come:

> A imagem dos dois vagabundos de *Esperando Godot* mostra a esperança como única força capaz de mantê-los nesta existência contingente, no mundo vazio que a peça constata. Mas essa esperança é pura ilusão, absolutamente inútil porque Godot jamais virá. (MACIEL, 1959, p. 73)

Eric Gans also believes Godot will not come and he emphasizes the fact that, if Godot did come, they would cease to wait, and then the major action of the play would be over. Gans says: "Beckett's heroes, more humble and more realistic, are content to wait. And by making waiting their central activity, they insure in effect that Godot will never come" (GANS, 1982, p. 6). Eric Bentley, however, believes we cannot assume that Godot will not arrive because it would remove the suspense and anticipation present in the drama. When we first read or see

the play, the first time we see Pozzo and Lucky coming, we do take them to be Godot, or at least expect it, and Bentley believes this expectation must not be ruled out.

> A lot of comment on Beckett goes wrong in taking for granted a pessimism more absolute than 'Godot' embodies, in other words in taking for granted that Godot will not come. This philosophical mistake produces a mistake in dramatic criticism, for to remove the element of uncertainty and suspense is to remove an essential tension —in fact the essential drama. (GRAVER; FEDERMAN, 2005, p. 119-20)

Vladimir and Estragon are well aware of their condition of waiting, and know that they will continue to wait, as we can see below:

> Estragon: And if he doesn't come?
> Vladimir: We'll come back to-morrow.
> Estragon: And then the day after to-morrow.
> Vladimir: Possibly.
> Estragon: And so on.
> Vladimir: The point is—
> Estragon: Until he comes. (BECKETT, 1994, p. 9)

What is interesting in the quote above is that Estragon does not say that they will keep on waiting for Godot *forever*, but *until he comes*, showing that he still hopes for Godot's arrival.

Another reason why Bentley believes we cannot say that Godot will never come because that would mean we have given up hope. He then compares the play to the prisoners in Auschwitz, who kept hoping to escape and be saved from their terrible circumstances:

> The Auschwitz prisoners hoped, however improbably, to get out: it is not certain that Godot *won't* come. And what Beckett's work ultimately embodies is this hope. […] For, whether they should or not, people do continue to hope for Godot's arrival. (GRAVER; FEDERMAN, 2005, p. 120).

We all know that Godot does not arrive during the play, and I agree with Bentley that it is wrong for us to assume he will *never* come. I understand his preoccupation in making it clear that the assumption of Godot's absence would be wrong. However, I do believe that Godot *most probably* will never come and that Vladimir and Estragon will remain stuck in their situation, especially because Godot's arrival would deny and go against what Beckett tries to show in the play, which is the meaninglessness and hopelessness of life.

The main characters in *Waiting for Godot* lead an absurd life, repeatedly waiting for someone they are not even sure will arrive. While they wait, they have meaningless conversations and do whatever they can to pass the time and to give themselves the impression that they exist. Vladimir and Estragon's shallow existence is surrounded by uncertainty and nonsense. Meaning is lost and hope is useless in a play which does not move

forward and goes on in endless repetition. Martin Esslin says that "*Waiting for Godot* is an image of the emptiness of human existence" (ESSLIN, 1967, p. 118). What we see on stage is a reflection of our own lives. Even though it is difficult for us to accept it, Beckett is trying to open our eyes to the true meaninglessness of life. Accepting that we have almost no control over our lives and that our actions do not have any purpose is not an easy task, but that is what the characters on stage are trying to teach us and make us see. The play shows us that conversations and interactions are useless, they are merely ways we find to entertain ourselves while time passes by. Edith Kern says that *Waiting for Godot* is a play where "shoes, hats and names never fit" (KERN, 1954, p. 46) and that is a very accurate description for a play in which there is so much uncertainty and lack of purpose, and which shows that identities and possessions do not matter in a world where our existence is insignificant and meaningless.

Final Considerations

Even though *King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot* were written over 300 years apart, the two plays have some characteristics in common, especially when our focus of *King Lear* is on Lear's Fool. Vladimir and Estragon, as well as Lear's Fool, have the role of both teaching the audience and entertaining them and, even though sometimes they might do their teaching and entertaining in different ways, they share this very important role of serving as a teacher and guide to the audience. Vivian Mercier says that Vladimir and Estragon represent, at the same time, the tramp “who is at once clown and philosopher” (MERCIER, 1994, p. 72), and I think that is the most evident characteristic Beckett's pair has in common with Shakespeare's fools. In Shakespeare's plays we usually see the fool entertaining as well as teaching the audience. The truths they tell are not only regarding the world on stage, but also the world of the audience. We can apply Lear's Fool's teachings to our own lives, and learn from him that we should not ostentate our riches, and say everything that goes through our minds, for example. Vladimir and Estragon have this same function of both entertaining and teaching, the main difference is that, while Lear's Fool *tells* truths to teach the audience, it is more common for Beckett's pair to *show* the audience their main teaching—the meaninglessness of life. As Esslin said, the authors of the Theater of the Absurd *represent* the absurdity of the human condition; the play in its entirety makes us notice that life is absurd. The stagnant situation of Vladimir and Estragon and the little difference the changes in the play make serve to make the audience realize the hopelessness of life. Beckett wants to show us that we are all like Vladimir and Estragon—the characters themselves say they represent all mankind—, we just need to be brave enough to admit and accept that we lead absurd lives in an absurd world as the characters on stage do.

According to Esslin, Ionesco defined the word *absurd* as “'that which is devoid of purpose. … Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all

his actions become senseless, absurd, useless'" (ESSLIN, 2004, p. 23) and in the plays of the Theater of the Absurd, such as *Waiting for Godot*, we can clearly see that actions are meaningless. One might not accept the meaninglessness of their actions and disagree with the authors, believing that their existence is significant and that they can change the world, but my interpretation of these plays is that the authors want us to see that there is nothing we can do to change the world or ourselves. We live in an absurd world filled with the preoccupations and anxieties of people who are in the verge of extinction—like the characters in Beckett's *Endgame*. If we take Ionesco's definition of the word, we can also say that *King Lear* is an absurd play because it shows that our actions are useless. Some critics, such as Norman Berlin, believe that the condition of Shakespeare's play is not absurd and says that "his vision in *King Lear* is dark, filled with anguish and madness and suffering, but it is not absurd" (BERLIN, 1967, p. 651). At first, I agreed with Berlin's view that *King Lear* does not portray the absurdity of the human condition, but when I came across Ionesco's definition of *absurd* and Mercier's definition which said that absurdity, in the philosophical sense, "implies irrationality, confusion, the absence of meaning and purpose" (MERCIER, 1994, p. 86), I started to see that there are elements of the absurd in *King Lear*. Shakespeare wrote the play shortly after James I had been crowned King of England. Being also King of Scotland, James's crowning brought to discussion the unity of the kingdom, and this unity was often looked at with wary eyes. The English playwright shows, in *King Lear*, the political uncertainties of that time and reflects on the possible tragic consequences the destruction of a powerful kingdom may have. In his theater, Shakespeare deals with the unhappiness and uncertainty of modern man, aspects of our existence that have been constantly discussed and represented in literature throughout the centuries. Lear, when he was still in charge of his kingdom, probably did everything he could to make sure he would have a stable old age, in which he would be admired by his people and have an opinion that mattered and a voice that would be heard. Of course he makes the bad choice of deciding to divide his kingdom between his daughters, but the fact that he loses everything due to that bad decision shows the uselessness of our actions. We can prepare as much as we want for the future, but this preparation is futile because we cannot control the future. As Martin Esslin says, there is in Shakespeare's theater "a very strong sense of the futility and absurdity of the human condition" (ESSLIN, 2004, p. 333), which applies to *King Lear*. According to Northrop Frye, in *Fools of Time*, the situation in *King Lear* is indeed absurd, and it is the Fool and his jokes

that make us accept this absurdity. Frye says that the jokes of the Fool “consist largely of puns, conundrums, and parodies of syllogisms, and so establish a comic counterpart to the tragic action in which absurdity is made convincing” (FRYE, 1967, p. 105); according to the author, the Fool's jokes are present in the play to balance with the tragic, and then it is possible for the audience to come to terms with the absurdity in the play. David Bevington and David Scott Kastan believe that the universe in *King Lear* shows that “human life is meaningless and brutal” (SHAKESPEARE, 1988, p. vii), which we can see in the pointless provisions of the King. Martin Esslin says that the Theater of the Absurd is concerned with the ultimate realities of the human condition and problems such as life, death, isolation, and communication and that it is “intent on making its audience aware of man's precarious and mysterious position in the universe” (ESSLIN, 2004, p. 402). This preoccupation with making the audience aware of man's condition is also a characteristic present in *King Lear*. We see Lear's world falling apart and understand how insignificant life is and how little control we have over what happens to us.

Lear's accomplishments and the things he achieved throughout his reign do not have any value from the moment he decided to divide his kingdom onwards. Even though his madness allowed him to be wiser than he had ever been before and to have a greater knowledge of the world, that was not part of his plan. Lear wanted to divide his kingdom between his daughters and continue with the status of an admired king but without the responsibility of ruling (a responsibility he no longer wanted to have because of his old age). However, his plan falls apart when he realizes the wretchedness of his daughters, which might make people see his actions, the things he did to achieve a high standard in life, as meaningless and purposeless. This meaninglessness of our actions is closely related to the plays of the Theater of the Absurd. Absurdist playwrights show us characters who are doomed from the start. When the play begins, we know not to hope for salvation because, since their existence is meaningless and absurd, hoping for salvation would be useless. In *King Lear*, we also see that Lear is doomed from the start of the play, when he divides his kingdom between two of his daughters and leaves out the one daughter who truly cares about him because of pride. Perhaps we do not know that he is going to be mad at that point, but we can be sure that his bad decision will have consequences. In *Waiting for Godot* we are faced head on with the absurdity of Vladimir and Estragon's life, an absurdity that we might recognize (or refuse to recognize) from the senselessness of our own lives. Vivian Mercier even says that Beckett

“amused himself” (MERCIER, 1994, p. 86) by making the characters in his plays comment on the meaninglessness of their lives and of the play itself and we can see this in *Waiting for Godot* when Vladimir says “This is becoming really insignificant” (BECKETT, 1994, p. 76).

The characters in *Waiting for Godot* are well aware of their insignificance since the very beginning of the play; Lear only realizes and accepts his meaningless condition after he has gone mad. Josephine Bennett, in her article “The Madness of Lear,” says that the speech in which Lear admits that he is not everything, and that he is not argue-proof in Act IV, Scene 6 is the mark of the beginning of Lear's recognition of his place in the world and his human frailty, and she adds that this speech “marks the beginning of his return to sanity” (BENNETT, 1962, p. 142). I do not see Lear returning to sanity at all. He does learn truths about himself and the world he lives in, but that does not mean he ceases to be mad. In my opinion, the only reason why he was able to learn those truths in the first place was because he was not sane. I think Bennett wanted to believe in Lear's sanity not to accept that we need to be mad and outcasts to truly understand the world around us, which is similar to people's refusal of seeing themselves in the characters of *Waiting for Godot* because they do not want to admit to the meaninglessness of life.

Perhaps one of the best-known comparisons between Beckett and Shakespeare was made by Jan Kott in his chapter “*King Lear* or *Endgame*” in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*. One of the foci of his analysis is the pinching shoe in both *King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot*. Kott says that

> In Act IV, where Lear meets the blind Gloucester and after a great frantic monologue gives the order that one of his shoes be taken off, as it pinches him. It is the same pinching shoe that one of the clowns in *Waiting for Godot* will take off at the beginning of the scene. (KOTT, 1974, p. 157)

Normand Berlin does not agree with Kott and believes the only thing Shakespeare and Beckett have in common is that “both writers deal with the human condition, man's nature, man's mortality, the mystery of his existence” (BERLIN, 1967, p. 647), and that this is a characteristic that they share with all great dramatists. Berlin explicitly refutes the relation of Estragon and Lear's pinching shoes, saying:

> The shoes of Lear and Estragon pinch, Kott is happy to point out. I have been unable to find pinching shoes in *King Lear*, but even if there were, the shoes, after all, would belong to different feet. And here, perhaps, is the clearest example of the danger of superimposing Beckett on Shakespeare. For Lear is a king, and Estragon is a tramp. The king may become a fool and madman, but he was a king when he first appeared on stage and he is a king when the play ends. His life is intrinsically

> connected with the life of the state and the world; he becomes a “ruined piece of nature”; his fall is the fall of the world, “the promised end.” In short, he has a definite place in a spiritual landscape; he is a specific part of a world picture. And his journey through the play is a journey toward recognitions. Estragon is a tramp who never had, and never will have, shoes that fit. His life has no connection with a state of the world. In fact, there is no specific state or world he can be part of. He does not go on a journey; he, with his friend, waits and whiles away the time. (BERLIN, 1967, p. 649)

One of the biggest problems I see in Berlin's view is his assumption that Estragon *never had* shoes that fit. I agree that he might never have them in the future, since now he is stuck to a moment in his life where he has to wait for Godot; but I have trouble with Berlin's certainty that Estragon was of no importance in the past. We do not know much about Vladimir and Estragon's past, but Vladimir says, in the beginning of Act I, that they were respectable: “Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were respectable in those days” (BECKETT, 1994, p. 3), thus I think Berlin is mistaken in stating that Estragon never had shoes that fit and that he never was someone of importance. Berlin also says that while Lear goes into a journey of recognition of himself and of the world, Estragon simply waits for time to pass and does not make any discoveries. I believe, however, that the discoveries *we* make through Estragon's actions and behavior prove that his life does have a connection “with a state of the world.” I agree with Berlin that Lear's fall is the fall of the world, but the same is true for Estragon. He also represents the absurdity of our lives and our uncertainties about the world.

Beckett's characters and Shakespearean fools also share the characteristic of bringing comedy to the play, and one of the reasons for the presence of this comedy is to allow the audience to enjoy themselves before facing the more tragic and devastating moments in the plays. Edson Costa Duarte says, in a magazine article entitled “O nonsense em Samuel Beckett,” that in *Waiting for Godor*, Beckett uses comic remarks, irony and nonsense that allow the audience to take a breath and prepare themselves for the next blow. He says, “[Beckett] cria compartimentos cômicos, jocosos, de humor negro, de fina ironia e de *nonsense*, onde o leitor se oxigena, toma fôlego, para esperar o próximo golpe” (DUARTE, 2004, p. 44). Duarte believes we need to take a step back from the tragedy in the play before being faced with another moment in the play which might present an even harsher reality. Bente A. Videbeak says the fools in Shakespearean theater have this same function of allowing the audience to relax for a moment before another intense scene. She says:

> In a tragedy, unexpected as he may be, his very presence alters the audience's perspective on the scene. We are suddenly allowed to step back from the intensity of

> our involvement, and maybe we are even allowed a small explosion of laughter. The clown becomes our safety valve. He allows us a short breathing space to collect ourselves and prepare our minds for the next peak of intensity, which can be all the more a painful as a result. (VIDEBAEK, 1999, p. 192)

Lear's Fool does that in *King Lear*. Despite his teachings and criticisms, his scenes do have some humor to entertain the audience and provide us with the chance of getting away from the action in the play. One should keep in mind, however, that the blow Vladimir and Estragon soften is different from that which is softened by Lear's Fool. The Fool makes us step back from the intensity of the action in the play and the increasing tragedy in the plot; Vladimir and Estragon make us enjoy the comedy for a bit before we are faced with the harsh reality of life through Vladimir and Estragon's actions on stage.

Donald Perret believes that the characters in *Waiting for Godot* use their condition in this fallen world to show the truth. He says “in their ridiculousness speak or show the truth” (JANIK, 1998, p. 81), and this is also a characteristic of Lear's Fool in *King Lear* and Shakespearean fools in general. In Shakespeare's play, the Fool was constantly engaged in criticizing his master for dividing his kingdom and for blaming his daughters for his misfortunes. He used his position of being a fool to be able to tell those truths to his master and not to be punished if such truths did not please Lear. Fools are allowed (and are expected) to speak truths and not to worry much about their consequences; as Charles M. Kovich says, “the fool is allowed to cross or ignore boundaries that others must keep” (JANIK, 1998, p. 204). They do not have to worry about obeying the limits of how far they can push and criticize their masters and society in general. In *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, for example, Speed tells his master Valentine that Silvia, Valentine's beloved, is not as pretty as Valentine sees her because his eyes are ruled by his love. Speed says that if Valentine saw Silvia through his eyes, he would see her deformities and Valentine's folly for loving her. Valentine accepts what Speed tells him because Speed is a fool and his criticism is allowed. As Folly says in Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly*, powerful men prefer fools to serious men to tell them truths and advise them because they use of jests and laughter, while serious men only worry about grave matters. I believe the whole play of *Waiting for Godot* can be seen as a criticism to the the way modern man leads his life, but the kind of criticism we have in *King Lear*, through words, is not very constant in Beckett's play. When criticism through words is present in *Waiting for Godot*, as it is when Vladimir criticizes Estragon for blaming the boots for the “faults” of his feet, the characters have a similar function to Lear's Fool. Estragon complains that his feet hurt because of his boots and Vladimir says “There's man all over you, blaming

on his boots the faults of his feet" (BECKETT, 1994, p. 3). Here, Vladimir is criticizing Estragon (and men in general) for not being able to take blame for their mistakes or imperfections, and always finding something else or someone else to blame for their wrongdoings. Vladimir, in this dialogue, and Lear's Fool have a similar function, then, of making others (Estragon and Lear) understand each of them needs to accept and admit their own faults. Betty Stuart, when analyzing *King Lear*, says that "Lear can see only the injustice done to him, but his Fool tells cryptically the other side of the story" (STUART, 1967, p. 174), which is what Vladimir does in the passage above—he reminds Estragon that his story and his problems can be seen from a different angle.

Another one of the roles that Shakespearean and Beckett's fools share is that of commentator. Enid Welsford, when analyzing Lear's Fool, says that his words "furnish important clues to the interpretation of a difficult play" (WELSFORD, 1966, p. 256). I am not sure I agree that *King Lear* is a difficult play, but I agree that the Fools comments are important because they make us feel more engaged in the play. I, at least, felt angry at Goneril and Regan for abandoning their father and treating him the way they did, and when the Fool says "May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse?" (Act I, Scene 4, 220-1), meaning that the order of things is wrong if daughters are lecturing and feeling more important than their father, I was relieved that the Fool was expressing my own indignation towards the situation. Vladimir and Estragon's role as commentators is a little different from Lear's Fool's. They do not make comments on a specific situation, but on their waiting situation as a whole. The characters say things like "Nothing to be done!," "This is becoming really insignificant," and "Nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful," reflecting on their stagnant and meaningless existence. Even though they are mistaken when they say that nobody comes and nobody goes —because we have Pozzo, Lucky and the Boy coming and going in each act—, that is how the characters feel. Perhaps they feel this way because only the presence of these three characters is not enough for them. They want more, they want Godot to come. And even if we do not agree with their comments, they are fulfilling their roles of commentators.

Even though Norman Berlin says Beckett and Shakespeare use language differently, I believe that the use of language of Lear's Fool and Vladimir and Estragon is very similar. Berlin says that "Shakespeare trusts language, allowing it to communicate meaning. Beckett uses language, but to show that there is no meaning to be communicated" (BERLIN, 1967, p. 651). I agree with him if we take into consideration Shakespeare's serious characters, but I

believe that, when you analyze Shakespeare's fools, their use of language is similar to Vladimir and Estragon's. Shakespearean fools, like the characters in *Waiting for Godot*, worry about the comedy of language and how they can play with it, using puns and causing misunderstandings. I believe that Shakespearean fools play with words to allow entertainment and comedy to the audience, to try to make them laugh, and to show their quick-wittedness, which sometimes even makes the other characters in the play comment on their ability with the language, as Lorenzo says to Launcelot in *The Merchant of Venice*, "Goodly Lord, what a wit-snapper are you! " (Act III, Scene V, 48). The characters in Beckett's play also use word games with a comical intent, a characteristic they share with Shakespearean fools, but I believe their main goal in playing with language is to show its emptiness. The nonsensical dialogues and the countless repetition of sentences in the play are there to show that communication is difficult and should not be taken so seriously. Through a use of language which is disrupted, Beckett is trying to show the breaking down of language and that we should look for the meaning beyond the words spoken. I should also point out that in both plays the characters use language and dialogue (however nonsensical those dialogues might be) to prevent them from thinking. Vladimir and Estragon even admit that the reason why they are constantly talking is to stop them from thinking. Richard Gilman says that the pair talks to save their own lives: "they ad-lib for their very lives, talking endlessly for fear of the annihilation silence would bring" (BLOOM, 1987, p. 73); talking entertains them and gives them the impression they exist. We also see Lear's Fool using the technique of talking to prevent the King from thinking about his mistakes in *King Lear*. As Warde points out that, in Act I, Scene 5, "the Fool changes the current of his thoughts by another question. … Again the memory of his grief returns, and again the Fool provides a diversion" (WARDE, 1915, p. 198). Lear's Fool, in this scene, tries his best to entertain his master, using riddles and word games, all to engage into conversation and make Lear stop thinking about his mistakes. I believe Lear's Fool is not successful in his attempt to make his master stop thinking (we see, in the play, Lear's mind going back to his mistakes after the Fool's questions) because Lear is still too sane to embrace the nonsense and emptiness of the language fools use. Vladimir and Estragon are successful in talking to stop them from thinking because they are both fools who understand language, as well as their existences, are meaningless, something that, at that point of the play, Lear did not know.

When we analyze the personalities of Lear's Fool and Vladimir and Estragon, one

characteristic that stands out is their loyalty. In *King Lear*, the Fool is loyal to his master; in *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon's loyalty is based on their friendship. In both plays there is talking about parting. Lear's Fool says only a fool would continue to follow the powerless and insanity-bound Lear and advises others to part ways with the king. As Barish and Waingrow say, “he repeatedly counsels prudent, self-interested service, and ignores his own counsel in order to obey a more obscure impulse of loyalty grounded in feeling. There is never the slightest doubt but that his loyalty will override his commonsense” (BARISH; WAINGROW, 1958, p. 351). He does not take his own advice and only leaves Lear when he is no longer needed. Vladimir and Estragon also talk about parting ways, but they soon discard the idea. According to Rosette Lamont, they are loyal to each other because their friendship and companionship is the only certainty they have in the world. However, I do not believe the pair stays together because they want to have that certainty, but because they genuinely care about each other. The reason why they talk about parting, I believe, is simply to pass the time and to keep conversation alive. One of the instances where they talk about separating is in Act I, before Pozzo and Lucky appear, and it is Estragon who suggests that they go their separate ways. Even though he is the one who comes up with the idea, he admits that it would be a terrible situation if they parted; he says “That would be too bad, really too bad. *(Pause.)* Wouldn't it, Didi, be really too bad? (BECKETT, 1994, p. 11). Estragon also brings back the subject in Act II when he says “It'd be better if we parted,” to which Vladimir replies “You always say that and you always come crawling back. (Ibid., p. 68). As in any human interaction and friendship, Vladimir and Estragon sometimes get tired of each other and their frustration rises, leading Vladimir to say things such as “You're a hard man to get on with, Gogo” (Ibid., p. 68). However, even with all their talking of parting, their caring for each other prevails. Eugene Webb says the two are inseparably linked, as “the symbiotic love-hate relationship of a couple” (WEBB, 1989, p. 24), and it is clear in the play that Vladimir and Estragon worry about each other and that they do what they can to protect one another. I believe the sweetest moment between the two is when Lucky kicks Estragon and the latter says he will never be able to walk again, to which Vladimir replies that he will carry his friend if it becomes necessary.

While Vladimir and Estragon's loyalty is based on friendship and mutual caring, I believe the Fool's loyalty is based on devotion towards his master. I do not mean that there is not mutual caring between Lear and his Fool, for I think there is, but I believe that is not the

reason why the Fool remains loyal to Lear. The Fool knows that his master needs him and, because of his selfless affection and dedication to Lear, he does not leave the king's side until he knows that his presence is no longer necessary. Josephine Bennett describes the Fool's devotion as “doglike,” and says we need the Fool to be loyal to remind us that Lear is capable of love, “keeping Lear human in that part of the play where Cordelia cannot appear, keeping the audience reminded of her and of Lear's capacity for love” (BENNETT, 1962, p. 144). Whatever is the reason why the Fool remains loyal to his master, we should praise his devotion for he continued to support Lear when his master needed him the most and when most of his subordinates had abandoned him.

At times, the characters in *Waiting for Godot* turn to a lower type of comedy where laughter is the main goal. Lois Gordon says that “a good deal of *Godot*'s humor arises from the two men's failure to enact simple tasks, like removing shoes and buttoning pants” (GORDON, 2002, p. 65), and besides those mentioned by Gordon, we also see in the play references to farting, spitting, kicking, garlic breath, stinking feet, and urination. This type of comedy is also present in Shakespeare's theater, where bawdy jokes are very common. We can find an example of the Fool's use of bawdy comedy in *King Lear*, when the Fool says “She that's a maid now, and laughs at my departure, / Shall not be a maid long, unless things be cut shorter” (Act I, Scene 5, 49-51). As I mentioned before, *things* here is a reference to penis, showing that in *King Lear*, as in Beckett's play, the playwright resorts to this kind of humor in which laughter is easily achieved. I believe the reason why Shakespeare and Beckett use this kind of comedy is to be able to reach out to those members of the audience who might not be following and understanding what is happening on stage, and to make sure they are also able to feel entertained during the play.

In spite of all the similarities discussed in this thesis, I need to point out that there are things very divergent in the plays. To exemplify, two things that the plays do not have in common is the characters' uncertainty and the use of repetition. While the characters in *Waiting for Godot* are unsure of almost everything, Lear's Fool does not hesitate on his teachings and seems to be certain of the things he says. When we turn to the presence of repetition in the plays we see that Lear's Fool does not use repetition in his speech and in his movements, and, as we saw from the analyses of Beckett's play, repetition is recurrent and endless in *Waiting for Godot*. The characters in Beckett's play use repetition in their actions and dialogues both with the aim of humor and of showing the stagnation of life, and the play

itself suggests the endless repetition of the lives of the characters. I believe, however, that even with these differences the characters are very similar, especially when their role in the play is analyzed.

Shakespeare's clowns could be seen, as Martin Esslin says, as forerunners of the Theater of the Absurd, and, in spite of the differences presented in the paragraph above, the more I compare Shakespearean fools with the characters in Absurdist plays, the more I see this connection. Some critics also believe some of Shakespeare's serious characters, such as Hamlet and Lear, have some characteristics in common with the Theater of the Absurd. Perhaps because I have not deeply analyzed *Hamlet*, I cannot make this connection, but having read so much criticism on *King Lear*, I can easily see in Lear characteristics of the absurd. Lois Gordon believes Lear has a lot in common with Beckett's Pozzo, and I find the comparison was very interesting. Gordon says that Beckett's character is “a modern-day Lear, on the road to nakedness and unaccommodation, to madness and truth” (GORDON, 2002, p. 78) and I believe their personalities are also similar. When I first read the following description by Rosette Lamont, I immediately thought of Lear. Lamont says:

> Pozzo belongs to that race of men afflicted by the inability to learn by suffering. This egotistical, narcissistic traveler, in love with the sound of his voice and the ready flow of his rhetoric, is convinced that he owns not only the land around the road, but the road as well and all the people on it. His stool which Lucky sets up for him whenever he wishes to rest is a portable throne. (FRIEDMAN, 1970, p. 215)

Both Pozzo and Lear (at least in the beginning of Shakespeare's play) have a very high opinion of themselves and believe they are better than the people around them. One of their differences, however, is that Lear can learn by suffering. Upon going mad, Lear was able to see things clearly and to discover his true position in the universe; Pozzo, on the other hand, continues to see himself as a superior being, even after going blind in Act II. I believe there are a lot more aspects about these two characters that can be analyzed and show that, in Gordon's words, Pozzo is the modern-day Lear, and that there are many other connections to be made between Shakespeare's characters and the Theater of the Absurd.

Martin Esslin believes that the dignity of man depends on his ability to face the senselessness and meaninglessness of their existence, “to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions—and to laugh at it” (ESSLIN, 2004, p. 429), which reminds me of when Nell says, in Beckett's *Endgame*, that “Nothing is funnier than unhappiness” (BECKETT, 2009, p. 26). I believe the laughter Beckett and Esslin talk about has to do with acceptance.

The laughter that might come out of our acceptance of the meaninglessness of our situation is actually painful and destructive, because it makes us see a reality we were trying to avoid looking at. It takes courage and strength to accept that actions are useless, as *King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot* show us, and if laughter is the consequence of that acceptance, it was certainly the result of a painful and destructive discovery.

The fools in both of the plays discussed in this thesis are able to open our eyes and make us see the world differently and reflect upon how we lead our lives. Due to their allowance of free speech, they are able to say truths that would probably not be acceptable (by other characters on stage and by the audience) had they come from the mouths of other characters. When Lear's Fool tells truths and criticizes his master Lear accepts it; when Beckett's fools show us the meaninglessness and absurdity of life, we understand what they are trying to show us and, even if we do not agree with the insignificance of life, we accept their point of view and reflect upon it. The ability these fools have of making us see what we might have overlooked in the play or in reality in an often humorous manner is, I believe, what makes us take into consideration what they have to say and what makes us feel close and relate to them. In the theater, fools are deeply welcomed by the audience when they appear on stage because of their role as guides in the play. In Shakespeare's plays, for example, they are seen as a bridge between the stage and the audience, helping spectators to better understand the happenings on stage. Similarly, Vladimir and Estragon can also be seen as guides, who lead the audience to the awareness and acceptance of the absurdity of life. As they repeatedly live the same day over and over again, they take the audience with them to show how insignificant life can be. They are, in a way, asking the audience to reflect on their own lives and ask themselves what they can do to either accept the meaninglessness of life or fight against it.

When we look at the similarities between Shakespeare's fools and the fools in Beckett's plays (especially the characters analyzed in this thesis), it becomes clear why Esslin says that Shakespearean fools can be seen as forerunners of the Theater of the Absurd and why Beckett's play was compared to the clownery in Shakespeare. Besides the evident similarities that have to do with physical humor and bawdy jokes that have the obvious intent of creating laughter and filling the stage with clown-like foolery, Beckett's characters and Shakespeare's fools share the important role of teaching and telling truths to the audience, a role that has been somewhat neglected in the study of Shakespeare's characters. When fools

are mentioned by critics of Shakespeare, they often focus on the comic aspects of fools and do not deal with the fact that their wisdom is welcomed by both the audience and the other characters. I believe that, when stating that Shakespeare's fools are (one of) the predecessors of the Theater of the Absurd, the serious aspect of these characters comes to surface and is seen as a characteristic just as important as their foolery. Since the plays of the Theater of the Absurd often have a mixture of foolery and seriousness, comparing these plays to Shakespeare's theater makes it easier to see this same mixture in his plays. The plays of the Theater of the Absurd and Shakespearean fools manage to both entertain us and make us laugh as well as make us see the world differently and reflect upon our lives, and this similarity, which can be seen in Lear's Fool and Vladimir and Estragon, shows how closely connected *King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot* are.

References

ARISTOTLE. **On Poetics**. Translation: Seth Bernadete and Michael Davis. South Bend: St. Augustines Press, 2002.

BARISH, J. A.; WAINGROW, M. “Service” in King Lear. **Shakespeare Quarterly**, v. 9, n. 3, p. 347-355, 1 jul 1958. [Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/2867337. Accessed on 2012-01-31 19:43:42]

BECKETT, S. **Endgame & Act Without Words I**. New York: Grove Press, 2009.

BECKETT, S. **The Complete Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett**. Croydon: Faber and Faber, 2006.

BECKETT, S. **Waiting for Godot**. New York: Grove Press, 1994.

BENTLEY, E. **The Life of the Drama**. New York: Applause Books, 2000.

BERLIN, N. Beckett and Shakespeare. **The French Review**, v. 40, n. 5, p. 647-651, 1 abr 1967. [Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/384670. Accessed on 2012-01-31 19:52:39]

BENJAMIN, W. **The Origin of German Tragic Drama**. Translation: John Osborne. New York: Verso, 2009.

BENNETT, J. W. The Storm Within: the Madness of Lear. **Shakespeare Quarterly**, v. 13, n. 2, p. 137-155, 1 abr 1962. [Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/2866783. Accessed on 2011-11-17 19:27:09]

BLOOM, H. **Samuel Beckett’s 'Waiting for Godot'**. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987.

BLOOM, H. **Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human**. New York: Riverhead Trade, 1999.

BRATER, E.; COHN, R. **Around the Absurd: Essays on Modern and Postmodern Drama**. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1993.

BRUCE, S. **Shakespeare: King Lear**. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

CORREA, P. **Loucura como Caminho para a Verdade: O Efeito da Loucura no Personagem Principal de King Lear.** Porto Alegre: UFRGS, Instituto de Letras, 2006.

DUARTE, E. C. O nonsense em Samuel Beckett. **Revista de Divulgação Cultural**, Blumenal, n. 82, ano 26, p. 40-49. Janeiro/Abril 2004.

DUKES, G. **Samuel Beckett: Overlook Illustrated Lives**. New York: Overlook Press, 2001.

EAGLETON, T. **William Shakespeare**. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995.

ERASMUS, D.; JOHN WILSON, T. W. **The Praise of Folly**. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1968.

ESSLIN, M. **An Anatomy of Drama**. London: Temple Smith, 1976.

ESSLIN, M. **The Theatre of the Absurd**. New York: Vintage, 2004.

FLEISSNER, R. F. The "Nothing" Element in King Lear. **Shakespeare Quarterly**, v. 13, n. 1, p. 67-70, 1 jan 1962. [Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/2866898. Accessed on 2011-12-01 17:17:16]

FLETCHER, J. **Samuel Beckett: Waiting for Godot, Endgame, Krapp's Last Tape**. London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 2000.

FOUCAULT, M. **L'ordre Du Discours: Leçon Inaugurale Au Collège De France Prononcée Le 2 Décembre 1970**. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.

FRENCH, C. S. Shakespeare's "Folly": King Lear. **Shakespeare Quarterly**, v. 10, n. 4, p. 523-529, 1 out 1959. [Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/2867101. Accessed on 2012-01-11 18:54:16]

FRIEDMAN, M. J. **Samuel Beckett Now**. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1970.

FRYE, N. **Anatomy of Criticism, Four Essays**. Princeton: Princeton University, 1973.

FRYE, N. **Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy**. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967.

FRYE, N. **Northrop Frye on Shakespeare**. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

GANS, E. Beckett and the Problem of Modern Culture. **SubStance**, v. 11, n. 2, p. 3-15, 1 jan 1982. [Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/3684020. Accessed on 2012-01-31 18:29:46]

GRAVER, L.; FEDERMAN, R. **Samuel Beckett the Critical Heritage**. London: Routledge, 2005.

GRAZIA, M. DE; WELLS, S. **The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

GOLDBERG, S. L. **An Essay on King Lear**. London: Cambridge University Press, 1974.

GOLDSMITH, R. H. **Wise Fools in Shakespeare**. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1955.

GORDON, L. **Reading Godot**. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

GORDON, L. **The World of Samuel Beckett, 1906-1946.** New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

IONESCO, E. **Four Plays By Eugene Ionesco**. Translation: Donald M. Allen. New York: Grove Press, 1958.

KAHN, S. J. Enter Lear Mad. **Shakespeare Quarterly**, v. 8, n. 3, p. 311-329, 1 jul 1957. [Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/2866991. Accessed on 2011-11-14 18:02:12]

KERN, E. Drama Stripped for Inaction: Beckett's Godot. **Yale French Studies**, n. 14, p. 41-47, 1 jan 1954. [Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928960. Accessed on 2012-02-01 19:46:33]

KENNEDY, A. K. **Samuel Beckett**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

KIRSCH, A. The Emotional Landscape of King Lear. **Shakespeare Quarterly**, v. 39, n. 2, p. 154-170, 1 jul 1988. [Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/2870627. Accessed on 2012-01-11 18:50:16]

KOTT, J. **Shakespeare Our Contemporary**. Translation: Boleslaw Taborski. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974.

JANIK, V. K. **Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art, and History: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook**. Westport: Greenwood, 1998.

LEGGATT, A. **The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

LUDWIG, C. R. **Tensões Políticas e Psicológicas em MacBeth e no Drama de Shakespeare.** Porto Alegre: UFRGS, Instituto de Letras, 2008.

MACIEL, L. C. **Samuel Beckett e a Solidão Humana.** Porto Alegre: Instituto Estadual do Livro, 1959.

MERCIER, V. **Beckett/Beckett: The Classic Study of a Modern Genius**. New York: Souvenir Pr Ltd, 1994.

MCDONALD, R. **The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett**. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

MCGINN, C. **Shakespeare's Philosophy: Discovering the Meaning Behind the Plays**.

New York: Harper Perennial, 2007.

NEELY, C. T. “Documents in Madness”: Reading Madness and Gender in Shakespeare’s Tragedies and Early Modern Culture. **Shakespeare Quarterly**, v. 42, n. 3, p. 315-338, 1 out 1991. [Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/2870846. Accessed on 2011-11-29 19:22:14]

O’DONOVAN, P. Beckett’s Monologues: The Context and Conditions of Representation. **The Modern Language Review**, v. 81, n. 2, p. 318-326, 1 abr 1986. [Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/3729698. Accessed on 2012-02-01 20:01:34]

PILLING, J. **The Cambridge Companion to Beckett**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

RACKIN, P. Delusion as Resolution in King Lear. **Shakespeare Quarterly**, v. 21, n. 1, p. 29-34, 1 jan 1970. [Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/2868398. Accessed on 2011-12-06 17:34:33]

ROBINSON, F. M. **The Comedy of Language: Studies in Modern Comic Literature**. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1908.

SEGAL, E. **The Death of Comedy**. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

SHAKESPEARE, W. **King Lear**. Edited by David Bevington and David Scott Kastan. New York: Bantam Classics, 1988.

SHAKESPEARE, W. **The Complete Illustrated Works of William Shakespeare**. London: Sterling, 2000.

SMITH, G.; SAUER, G. Who Is Afraid of Godot? **The English Journal**, v. 57, n. 1, p. 17-20, 1 jan 1968. [Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/812513. Accessed on 2012-02-01 20:09:07]

STEINER, M. G. **The Death of Tragedy**. New York: Hill and Wang, 1963.

STUART, B. K. Truth and Tragedy in King Lear. **Shakespeare Quarterly**, v. 18, n. 2, p. 167-180, 1 abr 1967. [Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/2867703. Accessed on 2012-01-18 15:24:24]

SZONDI, Peter. **The Theory of the Modern Drama**. Translation: Michael Hays. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

VIDEBAEK, B. A. **The Stage Clown in Shakespeare’s Theatre:** London: Greenwood Press, 1999.

WARDE, F. **Fools of Shakespeare**. London: McBride, Nast & Co., 1915.

WEBB, E. **The Plays of Samuel Beckett**. Seattle: Univ of Washington Pr, 1972.

WELSFORD, E. **The Fool: His Social and Literary History**. Gloucester: P. Smith, 1966.

WILLIAMS, G. **Shakespeare's Sexual Language: A Glossary**. King's Lynn: Continuum, 2006.

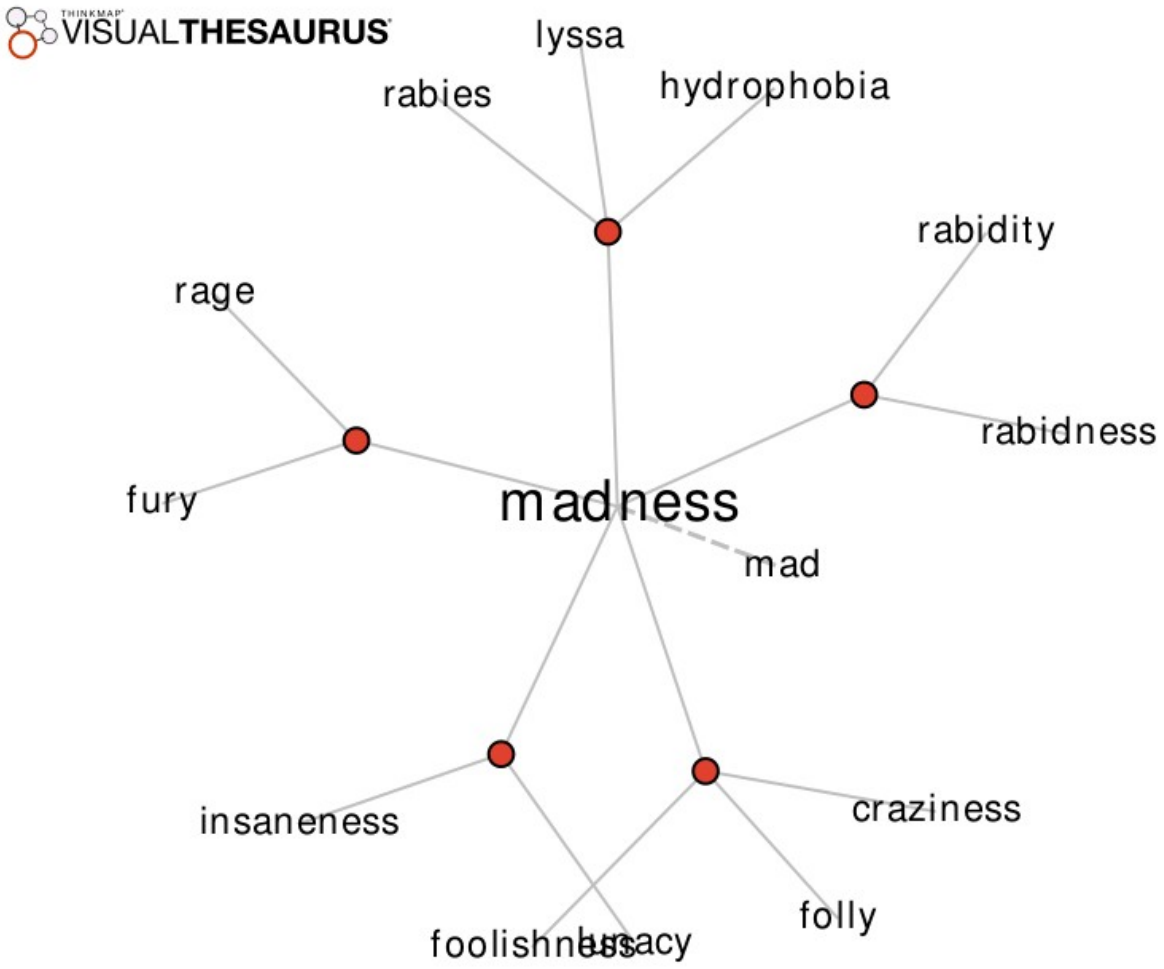
YEATS, B. J. **The Two Travellers**. 1942. il. color. [Available at http://www.tate.org.uk/collection/N/N05/N05660_8.jpg. Accessed on 2012-02-10 18:49:12]

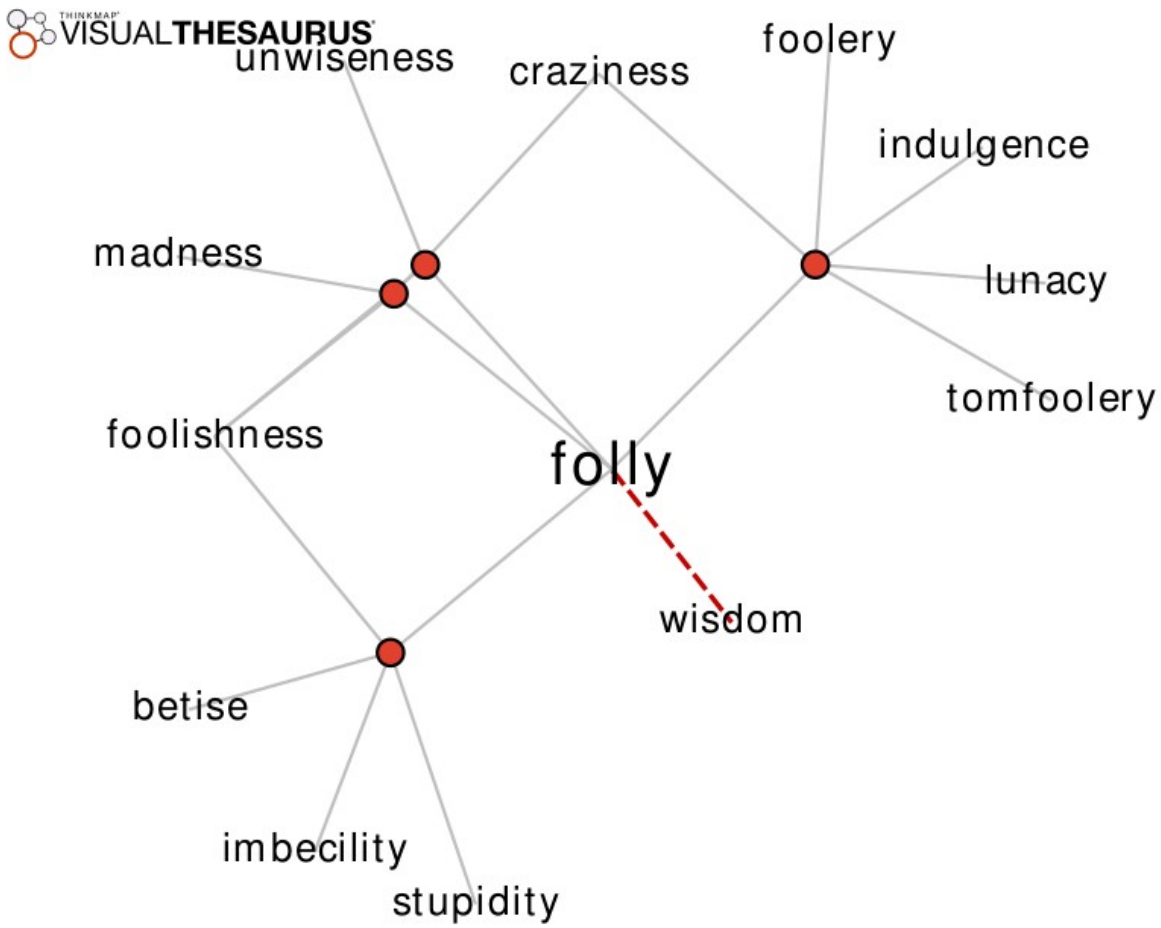
YEATS, B, J. **Tinkers' Encampment: The Blood of Abel**. 1940. il. color. [Available at http://www.galeriedada.com/view_image.php?path=img_big/Ye3.jpg. Accessed on 2012-02-10 19:02:07]

Annex 1

The following images were made on the Visual Thesaurus website (http://www.visualthesaurus.com/) by ThinkMap, Inc[15]. From the images, we can see that, even though madness is naturally connected to folly and foolishness, it is also connected to lunacy, craziness, and insaneness, terms that are related to the illness of being mad. I should also call attention to the fact that the term is linked with rage and fury, relating madness to the inability of self-control. Folly is linked with imbecility, stupidity, betise, and, most important, unwiseness; the lack of wit, which is one of the strongest characteristics of fools. Only in the visual thesaurus of folly can we see that it is also linked to its antonym, wisdom, showing the close relation between wisdom and folly. The link between wisdom and folly is indeed very strong and significant, since fools are frequently taken to be wise and to say things others cannot understand or accept.

[15] Image and text from the Visual Thesaurus (http://www.visualthesaurus.com), Copyright ©1998-2011 Thinkmap, Inc. All rights reserved.


VISUALTHESAURUS
lyssa
rabies
hydrophobia
rabidity
rage
rabidness
fury
madness
mad
insaneness
craziness
folly
foolishness
lunacy


VISUALTHESAURUS
unwiseness
craziness
foolery
indulgence
madness
lunacy
tomfoolery
foolishness
folly
wisdom
betise
imbecility
stupidity

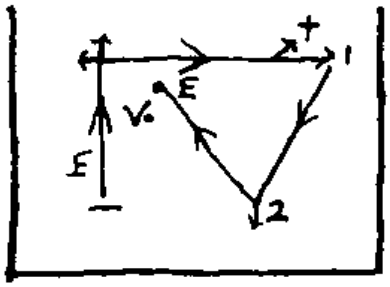
Annex 2

In the following pages you will find Beckett's notes from when he directed *Waiting for Godot* in Germany in 1975. They can be found in Lois Gordon's *Reading Godot*, pages 132, 133, and 134. Note how meticulously the Irish playwright chose the right place and movements for the characters.

INSPECTION PLACE

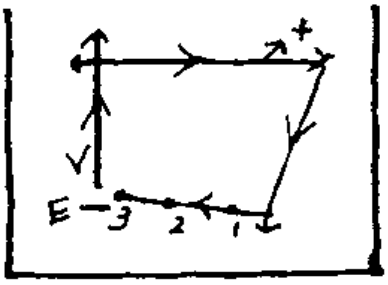
73

1
A2



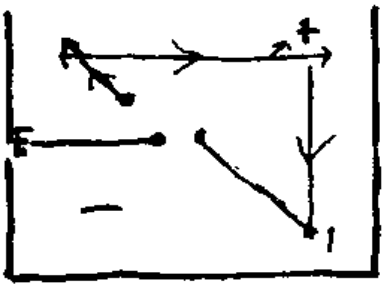
1. Lauschiges Plätzchen
"Charming spot"
2. Weitere aussichten . .
Komm wir gehen
"Inspiring prospects"
"Let's go!"

2
A2



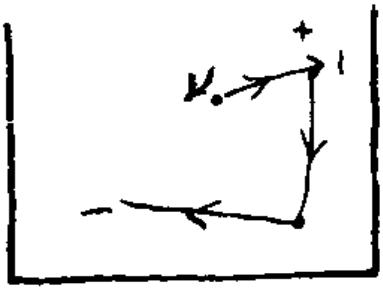
1. Gogo
2 "
3 "

3
B1

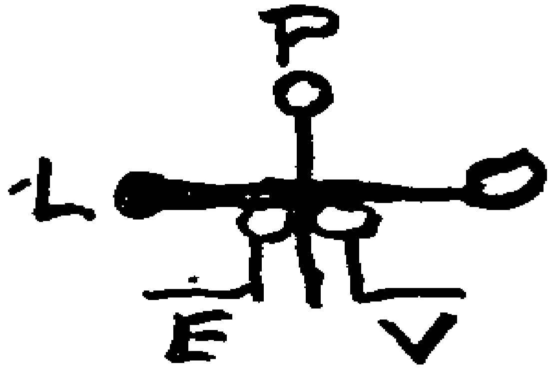


1. Boots.
Ein Hundkam . .
"A dog came in . . ."

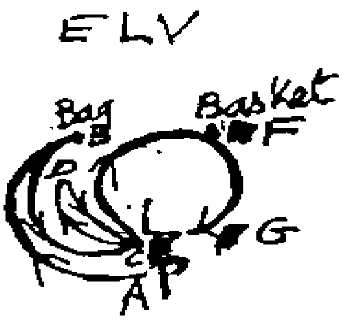
4
B5



1. Looks after receding P/L
Not properly inspection



32



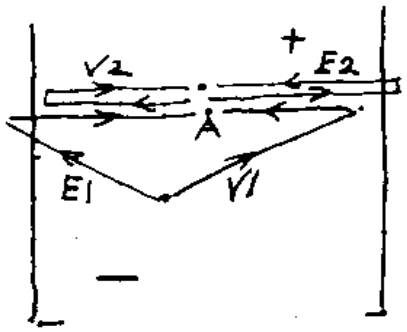
or

~~vielleicht [illegible]~~

← L

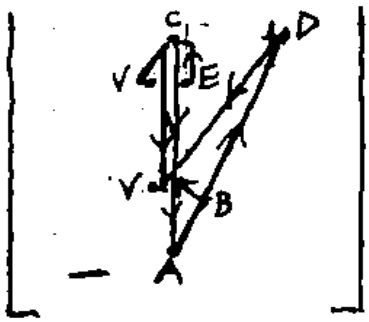
EPV

40



ihm entgegen gehen
A V takes E's arm for ← E breaks away for →
"to meet him"

3 Possibilities
~~+ E [illegible] when on again, V not off~~
2 Both " " " " "
~~3 " off long enough for enemy stage to carry~~



C Idiot V takes hold of E and draws him part of way to A. A-B backward B to stabber of V
B Du willst nicht after hinterm Baum V with E to tree
D Rühr dich nicht
D-V Den Baum kann man behind the tree

C Imbecile
B You won't
D Don't move
D-V Decidedly this tree

Annex 3

Throughout his life, Beckett was very familiar with other forms of art other than literature, especially paintings. Vivian Mercier, however, calls it to the reader's attention that his knowledge on art did not come from studying or books; he says: “So far as I can judge, most of Beckett's knowledge of painting and sculpture has been acquired by tramping unweariedly through museums and haunting exhibitions, rather than from the written word” (MERCIER, 1994, p. 88). Besides visiting galleries and going to art exhibits, Beckett also had the chance of meeting and becoming acquainted with many artists. Even though Beckett's parents did not care much for art, his father's sister Cissie went to art school in Dublin and Paris and later married William “Boss” Sinclair, an art dealer in Germany and Ireland. Beckett was then able to meet artists on his trips to Germany and also in Paris, the city in which he chose to live. According to Mercier, the only artist on Beckett's list of modern masters that he knew well was Irish painter Jack Butler Yeats (brother of William Butler Yeats), and Mercier says “Beckett and Yeats soon became close friends, despite the thirty-five-year difference in their ages” (MERCIER, 1994, p. 95). Lois Gordon highlights the fact that Beckett was deeply influenced by many painters, especially Jack B. Yeats and Cézanne. I, who do not have any background in paintings and simply like to admire them, do not see many similarities between Cézanne's paintings and Beckett's plays; I think Cézanne is not as dark and abstract as Beckett's plays, but Gordon defends that

> One enters *Waiting for Godot* as much as one enterns a Cézanne landscape. Both lack closure, have roads that descend and ascend to undefined destinations; there is no beginning or end. So, too, Beckett's silences and multiple tableaux—characters frozen in a gesture or making statements like, “Let's go,” followed by *“They do not move.”*— function like the white, unpainted areas of Cézanne's canvas, which stand in striking contrast to his intersecting blocks of color. For Beckett and Cézanne alike, these formalized absences, the black canvas, the tableaux, the silences, are like a tabula rasa. The spectator is invited to freely associate, to locate the space (the words) that connects floating planes (the busy activity on stage) and to move in personal time and space from volume to volume (in Beckett, from conscious to

unconscious thought). (GORDON, 2002, p. 116)

However, what most called my attention (and what made me decide to include this Annex) in Gordon's analysis of the influence of paintings in Beckett's theater was when he compared Jack B. Yeat's paintings to *Waiting for Godot*. He says that "*Waiting for Godot*, for example, bears an uncanny resemblance to Jack Yeats's *Two Travellers* and *Tinkers' Encampment: The Blood of Abel*" (GORDON, 2002, p. 113) and his choice of words (*uncanny resemblance*) triggered my curiosity and I was amazed at what I found. *The Two Travellers*, presented below, is incredibly similar to the idea of *Waiting for Godot.*

The Two Travellers, by Jack B. Yeats (1942).[16]

The two men on an open road and the unclearness of the world around them immediately turned my mind to Beckett's play and what it must look like on stage. Perhaps for being too impressed with the similarity between *Waiting for Godot* and the *Two Travellers*, I could not find much resemblance between *Tinkers' Encampment: The Blood of Able* and Beckett's play. I should highlight, however, that the term *tinker* can used, especially in Scotland and Ireland, as a term to refer to travelers and itinerant group, which could have had some influence in Pozzo and Lucky's comings and goings.

[16] Available at http://www.tate.org.uk/collection/N/N05/N05660_8.jpg. Accessed on 2012-02-10 18:49:12.

Tinkers' Encampment: The Blood of Abel, by Jack B. Yeats (1940).[17]

The characters in Beckett's theater usually come in pairs, and Gordon says that

> The image of two lonely men on the verge of companionship or enmity, like Cain and Abel, was repeated in many of Yeats's paintings. Beckett was drawn to Yeats's hoboes and clowns, to his recurrent images of a destitute and bereft humanity, as well as to his efforts to evoke the deepest recesses of thought. (GORDON, 2002, p. 113)

The fact that two lonely men were a recurring presence in Yeats' paintings certainly had an effect on Beckett; in most of his plays the characters are divided into pairs—Vladimir and Estragon, and Pozzo and Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*, Hamm and Clov, and Nell and Nagg in *Endgame*, Winnie and Willie in *Happy Days*, Old Krapp (on stage) and Young Krapp (on tape) in *Krapp's Last Tape*, to mention a few—and the loneliness and isolation of these pairs is always portrayed in his theater.

[17] Available at http://www.galeriedada.com/view_image.php?path=img_big/Ye3.jpg. Accessed on 2012-02-10 19:02:07.