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Maria McNiece April 6, 2020

Very Unpromising Material: A Physical Reimagining of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

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Abstract

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In this interdisciplinary research project, I examine *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett and physically reimagine the absurdist play through a full-length modern dance piece. Founded in dance, English, and theatre scholarship, this project considers Beckett's influence on the theatre landscape; I investigate the development of the Theatre of the Absurd—a fiction style Beckett pioneered—in Europe after the traumas of World War II. Then, I analyze the historical underpinnings behind the creation of *Waiting for Godot*, as well as the initial reception and historical interpretations of the play. In this project, I pick apart *Godot*'s script to analyze its themes of existentialism and religious allegory—specifically relating to sacred covenants, the Biblical relationship between god and man, and motifs of repentance and salvation. After explaining positionality and choreographic influences, I research Maguy Marin's *May B* (1981), Andrée Howard's *The Sailor's Return* (1947), and Crystal Pite's *The Tempest Replica* (2011). The resulting findings yielded insight into how choreographers have historically worked from Beckett's texts and synergized source texts into their creations. I apply a number of these methodologies into a choreographic process, as well as generated a number of original methodologies. This resulted in the creation of a full-length modern dance piece, which seeks to physically reimagine the original play. This work does not seek to literally retell the play, but rather aims to successfully translate the original text, deeply explore its themes, and include theatricality with innovative movement. This project culminates in two performances of a dance which sparks questions regarding human agency, resiliency, suffering, and above all, hope.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: "VERY UNPROMISING MATERIAL"

A country road. A tree. Evening—Irish playwright Samuel Beckett sets the stage for *Waiting for Godot* with vague fragments that simultaneously create a sense of everywhere and nowhere. *Waiting for Godot* (1952), the first of Beckett's plays, has been revered as "a magnum opus of art" and "one of the most important dramatic works of the 20th century." [1] It reflects the confusing and depressive nature of postwar European life through a monotonous storyline and ill-fated characters named Vladimir and Estragon (nicknamed Didi and Gogo, respectively), who spend the entirety of the show waiting for the title character, who never appears. [2] They find a variety of ways to occupy themselves as they wait, including telling stories, fighting, and considering killing themselves. [3] They encounter three other characters: Pozzo, a grandiose and boorish aristocrat, Lucky, Pozzo's bound, mute slave, and a boy, a messenger who tells Vladimir and Estragon at the end of both acts that Godot will not come today but will come tomorrow. [4] Despite a seemingly direction-less plot revolving around the two protagonists waiting for the title character (who never arrives), this play is famed for revolutionizing theatre and has struck a chord with millions of readers. *Waiting for Godot* has inspired this honors thesis. Through my multi-year relationship with this play, I have discovered once one looks beyond the evidently

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1. Alan Scott, "A Desperate Comedy: Hope and Alienation in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 45, no. 4 (2012): 448–60, https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2012.718149.
2. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015).
3. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015).
4. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015).

confusing and dull text, they find rich allegory, profound existentialist thought, and avant-garde artistic invention.

I picked up a copy of *Waiting For Godot* as a teenager, and the impact of this initial reading has stuck with me ever since. I recall *Godot* being the first piece of art I experienced that significantly influenced my artistic interests and identity. *Godot* is widely interpreted as a play about existentialism, and reading it left me with questions regarding existence, human agency, and fate. Not only was this play thematically compelling, but *Godot* was also the first piece of avant-garde art I had ever come across. The term *avant-garde* refers to artists and works which depart significantly from the traditions of their mediums and push boundaries in terms of techniques, subject matter, and/or form. The play is known for directing the course of theatrical history by intentionally and dramatically breaking theatrical traditions of the time. The play's circular plot, odd characters, grotesque subject matter, and confusing language puzzled audiences in the 1950s but enthralled me decades after its publication. I have selected *Godot* as the focal point of this thesis because the genre-forward values of its playwright parallel my interests as a choreographer, and because I find the text's themes artistically compelling.

I had a similarly striking experience during my studies in dance. A course in the Dance and Movement Studies program at Emory, titled History of Western Concert Dance, exposed me to a dance movement called postmodernism, which was predominantly developed by the Judson Dance Theater collective in the 1960/70s.[5] Postmodern choreographers created dances that radically utilized pedestrian movement vocabularies and unorthodox musical accompaniments. I was immediately gripped by postmodernism and inspired to create work in this style. I was

5. "Trisha Brown," *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th Edition*, (November 2019): 1, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=khh&AN=134506204&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

fascinated by the simplicity of the movement vocabulary and postmodern choreographers' devotion to innovative artistic choices—despite the fact that not all Western concert dance circles were receptive to their boldness.[6] My interest in this dance movement complemented my interest in avant-garde work like Beckett's. Beckett's work pushed boundaries for the stage by reimagining how plays' language, characters, and plots were constructed. It became clear that I am drawn to work of all disciplines which shocks audiences of their time, breaks traditions of their forms, and makes artistic choices for the sake of innovation instead of audience reception.

My fascination with postmodernism became connected with my intrigue with *Waiting for Godot*. My experiences with this dance movement and this play shared a common impact: they both spurred my interest in the avant-garde and inspired me to push past limits artistically. Centering *Waiting for Godot* in my research for this honors project was a natural choice. The selection of *Godot* allows me to engage with a text I find artistically compelling, offers the ability for me to lean into my affinity for avant-garde work, and enables the integration of text-based movement generation in my choreographic process.

Beckett's Biography and Revolution of Theatre

Before delving into *Waiting for Godot* specifically and how it shaped my creative process, I will provide a foundation of who Samuel Beckett was and how he shaped contemporary theatre, as it has additionally influenced my own artistic development. Samuel Beckett was born in April 1906 in Dublin, Ireland.[7] After earning an undergraduate degree in Ireland, he moved to Paris to teach modern languages at a university, where he became friends with famed author James

6. Susan Rosenberg and Trisha Brown, *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2017).
7. Martin Esslin, "Samuel Beckett," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Accessed December 5, 2019. www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-Beckett.

Joyce. [8] He published critical essays and poems, which demonstrated a thematic interest in time and earned him small literary successes.[9] In 1931, Beckett resigned from his academic post and embarked on a six-year pilgrimage around Europe. [10] After returning to Paris, he was stabbed in the street. Although Beckett recovered physically from this incident, the trauma left psychological scars and spurred a lifelong obsession with the roles of fate and randomness in human existence.[11]

Yet, Beckett's biographers agree that Beckett's time as a refugee at the border of Spain served as the true inspiration for *Waiting for Godot*. [12] Beckett and his wife remained in Paris through the outbreak of World War II and the German occupation of France. [13] They joined an underground resistance group named the French Resistance, but when group members began getting arrested by the Gestapo in 1942, the two fled south to the unoccupied zone. [14] They spent three years in hiding near the Spanish border in a town called Roussillon, which was remote and inaccessible to military vehicles, making it a prime location for the two to wait out the war. [15] Beckett passed the time taking walks through the area, playing chess, and working as a farm

8. Martin Esslin, "Samuel Beckett," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Accessed December 5, 2019. www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-Beckett.
9. "Samuel Beckett Timeline," *Theatre Database*, accessed July 15, 2019, https://www.theatredatabase.com/20th_century/samuel_beckett_timeline.html.
10. "Samuel Beckett Timeline," *Theatre Database*, accessed July 15, 2019, https://www.theatredatabase.com/20th_century/samuel_beckett_timeline.html.
11. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).
12. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).
13. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).
14. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).
15. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).

labourer in exchange for food.[16] Beckett suffered from a nervous breakdown during this time. Jon Michaud of *The New Yorker* wrote, "There is no doubt that… his friends' arrests, his escape from Paris, and his separation from the artistic and intellectual life in the capital—compounded by his guilt at being away from his family, especially his mother, during a time of war—all took a toll on him."[17] Beckett's biographers disagree on the severity of his breakdown, but Michaud makes it clear that the traumas of World War II lingered with Beckett long after France was liberated.

The connections between this period of Beckett's life and *Waiting for Godot* are obvious. The play depicts two people waiting for a title character day in and day out, with little information about when he will come or how long they will be waiting. The protagonists wait in a remote location apart from a human population, with little access to food, and live in depravity. This experience parallels the Becketts', who fled the war to a remote place without the luxuries of Parisian life. They were food insecure, lived in poverty, and spent their days passing the time. With only the company of each other and a few other townspeople, they waited for the war to end without knowing how long they would be in hiding. I mention this piece of biography because I find the historical landscape that inspired *Godot* an essential consideration when researching the text. This period of Beckett's life gives vital insight into the bleak landscape he creates in *Godot,* as well as the complicated relationship between the two protagonists. It would be impossible to research the play, much less create a dance work inspired by it, without acknowledging the experiential bleakness that inspired Beckett's writing.

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16. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).
17. Jon Michaud, "The Alternative Facts of Samuel Beckett's 'Watt,'" *The New Yorker*, published June 18, 2017, https://www.newyorker.com/books/second-read/the-alternative-facts-of-samuel-becketts-watt.

After *Waiting for Godot* was published in 1951, Beckett's writing career took off. He spent the rest of his life writing novels, plays, and genre-forward works for radio and television.[18] Despite the fame that ensued, he remained infamously elusive of the public eye, even when he received a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. [19] His legacy remains as not only a decorated writer, but as a pioneer of a new theatrical genre, Theatre of the Absurd, and an architect for new media, like the radio play, film, pantomime, and the television play.[20]

Prior to Beckett's work, Western theatergoers of the early 19th century appreciated melodramas, with their inclusion of music, singing, and displays of spectacular scenes like shipwrecks and battles.[21] In the mid 19th century, however, there was a push to create more "authentic forms" of theater and to wean audiences off the spectacle of melodrama.[22] Subsequently, naturalism and realism were born.[23] Often used interchangeably, naturalism and realism were theatre conventions characterized by historical accuracy, detailed costumes, sets, and props, and ordinary, indoor settings.[24] The presentation of time had strict rules: stage time must equal real time (e.g. an hour of show time equaled one hour of time in the characters' lives), and jumps in time between acts or scenes were uncommon. [25] Naturalistic and realistic

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18. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).
19. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).
20. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).
21. "Melodrama," Encyclopædia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/art/melodrama.
22. Justin Cash, "Realism and Naturalism Theatre Conventions," *The Drama Teacher*, 2014, https://thedramateacher.com/realism-and-naturalism-theatre-conventions/.
23. Justin Cash, "Realism and Naturalism Theatre Conventions," *The Drama Teacher*, 2014, https://thedramateacher.com/realism-and-naturalism-theatre-conventions/.
24. Justin Cash, "Realism and Naturalism Theatre Conventions," *The Drama Teacher*, 2014, https://thedramateacher.com/realism-and-naturalism-theatre-conventions/.
25. Justin Cash, "Realism and Naturalism Theatre Conventions," *The Drama Teacher*, 2014, https://thedramateacher.com/realism-and-naturalism-theatre-conventions/.

plays of this period abided by Aristotle's "three unities of drama"—unity of action, unity of place, and unity of time—which, in accord, requires a play to center a single action which occurs in a single place and within the course of one day.[26] Until Beckett's plays became popularized, theatre strictly abided by the" three unities," as well as the norms of both realism and naturalism.

Beckett's work deliberately and beautifully broke the strict theatrical rules, which plays of the time followed. Instead of creating realistic characters, Beckett's plays featured contradictory people with odd personalities.[27] Instead of devising linear, nuanced plotlines, he wrote circular, fractured storylines that left audiences confused. [28] *Waiting for Godot*'s circular, multi-day, unrealistic plot structure was significantly disruptive on the existing theatre landscape, which is one reason it remains so valuable to theater history today. [29]

Beckett's plays quickly became cornerstones for 20th-century theatre and an absurdist style that would later be coined the "Theater of the Absurd." [30] The term "the Theatre of the Absurd" references the collective of plays and European playwrights who wrote in a style of fiction concerned with existentialism, intrinsic hopelessness, and life's meaninglessness after World War II. [31] Reeling after the trauma of the war, many absurdist playwrights (most notably Samuel Beckett, as well as Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter) began to push back against the naturalistic and realistic traditions for plays of the time, desiring to expand the boundaries of their form to align more closely with their post-war conception of the world. [32]

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26. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Unities," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/art/unities.
27. Martin Julius Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).
28. Martin Julius Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).
29. Martin Julius Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).
30. Martin Julius Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).
31. Andrew Dickson, "Nonsense Talk: Theatre of the Absurd," *The British Library*, 2017, https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/nonsense-talk-theatre-of-the-absurd.
32. Andrew Dickson, "Nonsense Talk: Theatre of the Absurd," *The British Library*, 2017, https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/nonsense-talk-theatre-of-the-absurd.

Andrew Dickson writes that the Theater of the Absurd is "characterized by a fascination with absurdity in all its forms—philosophical, dramaturgical, existential, emotional—and pushing theatre to extremes."[33] Playwrights questioned why realism had exclusivity in theatre and imagined new ways to develop plot and characters that departed from reality.[34] The Theatre of the Absurd denotes the boundary-pushing, non-realistic absurdist style of theatre Beckett pioneered.[35]

Plays within the Theatre of the Absurd contain distinct literary features. In the journal *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Jiang Zhu names these characteristics as anti-character, anti-language, anti-drama, and anti-plot, all of which demonstrate rebellion against the traditions which preceded this theatre movement.[36] "Anti-character" references the development of odd characters with grotesque personalities and curious behaviors.[37] Characters in plays within the Theatre of the Absurd do not resemble the realistic characters developed for 19th-century stages but are often strange, grotesque, and quirky.[38] Similarly, text in the Theater of the Absurd does not follow logical order, as scripts of the time were expected to.[39] Instead, absurdist writers utilize a style of text coined "anti-language," where characters speak in disorder about

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33. Andrew Dickson, "Nonsense Talk: Theatre of the Absurd," *The British Library*, 2017, https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/nonsense-talk-theatre-of-the-absurd.
34. Martin Julius Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).
35. Martin Julius Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).
36. Jiang Zhu, "Analysis on the Artistic Features and Themes of the Theater of the Absurd," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 3, no. 8 (January 2013): 1462-66, https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.8.1462-1466.
37. Jiang Zhu, "Analysis on the Artistic Features and Themes of the Theater of the Absurd," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 3, no. 8 (January 2013): 1462-66, https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.8.1462-1466.
38. Jiang Zhu, "Analysis on the Artistic Features and Themes of the Theater of the Absurd," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 3, no. 8 (January 2013): 1462-66, https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.8.1462-1466.
39. Jiang Zhu, "Analysis on the Artistic Features and Themes of the Theater of the Absurd," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 3, no. 8 (January 2013): 1462-66, https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.8.1462-1466.

irrelevancies, the order of a conversation is unpredictable and hard to follow, and direct questions are typically forgotten about or ignored. [40] I have found that the text of absurdist plays is often incomprehensible upon first reading, and it can be difficult to follow along with the characters' conversations. For instance, in *Waiting for Godot,* text is frequently repeated and circuitous, and characters usually get lost in the stories they tell one another.

In addition to common characteristics of absurdist works, there are other techniques familiar to the genre. Zhu writes about "anti-drama," which references absurdist playwrights' tendencies to pepper comedic character-centric storylines in with a foundation of somber subject matter, creating a blended theater style that walks the line between comedy and tragedy. [41] Jerome P. Crabb, a writer for a website called *Theatre History* states, "Most absurdists also doggedly resist the traditional separation of farce and tragedy, intermixing the two at will, creating an unpredictable world that mirrors our own, in which the poignantly tragic may come upon the heels of the absurdly funny, or vice versa." [42] The unusual fusion Crabb describes forces the audience into discomfort as they struggle to decide whether the appropriate reaction is laughter or horror. [43] "Anti-plot" is the final curious characteristic of absurdist plays, according to Zhu. While plotlines in traditional dramas are clear and easy to grasp, plots in Theater of the Absurd are scattered, fractured, and nonlinear, making it impossible for a reader to follow along

40. Jiang Zhu, "Analysis on the Artistic Features and Themes of the Theater of the Absurd," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 3, no. 8 (January 2013): 1462-66, https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.8.1462-1466.
41. Jiang Zhu, "Analysis on the Artistic Features and Themes of the Theater of the Absurd," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 3, no. 8 (January 2013): 1462-66, https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.8.1462-1466.
42. Jerome Crabb, "The Theatre of the Absurd: An Overview," *Theatre History*, 2006, http://www.theatrehistory.com/misc/theatre_of_the_absurd.html.
43. Jerome Crabb, "The Theatre of the Absurd: An Overview," *Theatre History*, 2006, http://www.theatrehistory.com/misc/theatre_of_the_absurd.html.

or deduce the results of the play. [44] Zhu's research finds there are common themes in absurdist plays that characterize the Theatre of The Absurd. Zhu writes that these themes are "dissimilation of the society… where people are quite cruel to others and cause crisis in the society. [In Theater of the Absurd,] people find that their lives are meaningless and they isolate themselves within the society." [45] The influence of World War II on the development of this theatrical form becomes clear when one considers that these plays often revolve around chaos, cruelty, strong critique of society, and sentiments of life's meaninglessness.

Waiting for Godot, written in 1953, is cited as a play that catalyzed and popularized absurdist writings. [46] Inspired after its publication, many writers around Europe adopted similar styles, expanding the collection of absurdist writings. [47] As the theatre scholar Ruby Cohn wrote: "After '*Godot*,' plots could be minimal; exposition, expendable; characters, contradictory; settings, unlocalized, and dialogue, unpredictable. Blatant farce could jostle tragedy." [48] As Cohn articulates, artists were fascinated by Beckett's novel uses of language, character, drama, and plot, and many who followed were inspired by his work—the most famous of which was Tom Stoppard with his piece *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*. [49] This Hamlet-inspired play was reviewed as conceptually witty and intellectually brilliant; it features two hapless characters who

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44. Jiang Zhu, "Analysis on the Artistic Features and Themes of the Theater of the Absurd," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 3, no. 8 (January 2013): 1462-66, https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.8.1462-1466.
45. Jiang Zhu, "Analysis on the Artistic Features and Themes of the Theater of the Absurd," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 3, no. 8 (January 2013): 1462-66, https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.8.1462-1466.
46. Martin Julius Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).
47. Martin Julius Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).
48. Mel Gussow, "Samuel Beckett Is Dead at 83; His 'Godot' Changed Theater," *The New York Times*, 2010, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0413.html.
49. Cary Mazer, "Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead," University of Pennsylvania Department of English, 2019, http://www.english.upenn.edu/~cmazer/randg.html.

never leave the stage and wait for death. [50] Paralleling the Beckett play *Waiting for Godot*, nothing ever happens thrice in Stoppard's play, and the language of the two protagonists reveal them to be simultaneously philosophical and clueless. [51] Other artists, like Sam Shapard and Edward Albee have incorporated Beckett's bleak landscapes, nonlinear plots, and minimalist language into their absurdist plays.[52] Beckett not only invented, but successfully popularized, a new type of theater and a new style of playwriting—a contribution so significant it cannot be overlooked when discussing the development of modern theatre.[53]

With *Godot*'s lasting impact in mind, one might be surprised to discover that the play did not fare well in its initial production reviews. When it first opened in England at the London Arts Theater Club in August 1955, a critic named Philip Hope-Wallace described the play as "very unpromising material." [54] He was not the only theatre patron who was displeased by the material. During *Godot's* 1953 premiere in Paris, a group of well-dressed patrons forced the curtain to come down after Lucky's monologue. [55] Two years later at the London premiere, an audience member shouted out, "This is why we lost the colonies!" [56] Another, when Vladimir asked

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50. Cary Mazer, "Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead," University of Pennsylvania Department of English, 2019, http://www.english.upenn.edu/~cmazer/randg.html.
51. Cary Mazer, "Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead," University of Pennsylvania Department of English, 2019, http://www.english.upenn.edu/~cmazer/randg.html.
52. Sid Smith, "Samuel Beckett Dies; Plays Inspired Theater of Absurd," *Chicago Tribune,* 1989, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1989-12-27-8903210066-story.html.
53. Anwaar Ahmed, "Samuel Beckett as Dramatist/Playwright," Ask Literature: Drama, 2018, http://www.askliterature.com/drama/samuel-beckett-as-dramatist-playwright/.
54. Phillip Hope-Wallace, "'Very Unpromising Material': A Review for Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot', from 1955," Dangerous Minds, *The Guardian*, 2015, https://dangerousminds.net/comments/very_unpromising_material_a_review_for_becketts_waiting_for_godot_from_1955.
55. Nick Mount, "'Waiting for Godot' without Existentialism," *Raritan* 28 (2008): 24, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=brb&AN=505345707&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
56. Nick Mount, "'Waiting for Godot' without Existentialism," *Raritan* 28 (2008): 24, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=brb&AN=505345707&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Estragon for rope to hang himself with, shouted to give him some. [57] Patrons at the Miami premiere walked out at intermission. Martin Esslin, a drama scholar who coined the term the Theatre of the Absurd, argued that the audience's reaction was due to their sophistication:

> Theatergoers came to *Godot* loaded with educated expectations about what a play should be and do. *Godot* upset those expectations. To the members of an educated audience, the shock of *Godot*… is that it throws [theatrical] conventions in their well-educated faces… [*Godot*] transforms dramatic conventions into… decomposed elements. Traditional drama represents actions; *Godot* is about inaction, about waiting for an action that never comes. Time in Godot... is irrelevant, undifferentiated, one moment no different from another. The play takes place in a single setting, but a setting almost completely severed from any real-world referent, a place nowhere and everywhere…. *Waiting for Godot* follows the unity of action in a play without action, the unity of time in a play without time, and the unity of place in a play without place. [58]

In this passage, Esslin details how theatregoers of the time reacted poorly to encountering dramatic features of the Theatre of the Absurd, which Jiang Zhu named anti-character, anti-language, anti-drama, and anti-plot. This quote also contextualizes *Godot*'s impact on the theatre landscape by detailing how drastically *Godot* upset expectations of traditional audiences at the time. The reasons why established theatre audiences initially hated this play so fervently are precisely the reasons it has become such a magnum opus of theatre: its denunciation, departure

57. Nick Mount, "'Waiting for Godot' without Existentialism," *Raritan* 28 (2008): 24, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=brb&AN=505345707&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
58. Nick Mount, "'Waiting for Godot' without Existentialism," *Raritan* 28 (2008): 24, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=brb&AN=505345707&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

from, and transformation of theatrical norms. These initial responses, although not warm nor welcoming, are important to note to understand the historical context and impact of this work.

Waiting For Godot's first years of production did not look promising. However, despite sophisticated theatregoers hating the play at first, this play has proved to be timeless over the last seven decades. It has been staged consistently all over the world for a wide variety of audiences and has garnered a dedicated cult following. The fact that *Waiting for Godot* seems to be so universally popular despite its age begs the question: What about this play makes it so timeless?

One of *Godot*'s earlier stagings was produced in the San Quentin State Prison, a maximum-security facility in San Francisco, California in 1957. [59] The few productions of *Godot* in North America that preceded this staging were less than successful, garnering disapproval from critics and patrons who favored theatrical tradition over artistic innovation. The inmates of San Quentin were surprisingly the most receptive audience to date. [60] The set and lighting designer, Robin Wagner, was struck by the inmates' affinity for the play and wrote that audience members expressed their resonance with the protagonists' preoccupation with waiting. Martin Esslin opened his 1962 book about absurdist fiction by describing the San Quentin performance of *Waiting for Godot*, marveling that "what had bewildered the sophisticated audiences of Paris, London, and New York was immediately grasped by an audience of convicts." [61]

The San Quentin performances are the most well-known of the *Godot* prison productions, but they were not the first. [62] James Knowlson wrote a famous 1996 biography of Samuel

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59. Nick Mount, "Big Ideas Audio," *Big Ideas Audio* (blog), TVO, December 18, 2009.
60. Russell M. Dembin, "Nothing But Time," *American Theatre* 36 (2): 28–32, 2019, http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=fth&AN=134133031&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
61. Martin Julius Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).
62. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).

Beckett entitled *Damned To Fame*.[63] In this book, Knowlson details an event in 1954 when Beckett received letters from an inmate in a German prison.[64] In these letters, the inmate explained how he translated *Waiting for Godot* into German on his own volition and performed it inside the prison.[65] The letters describe how the inmate's 400-person incarcerated audience overwhelmingly enjoyed the performance.[66] The inmate wrote, "Your Godot was our Godot. We were all Waiting for Godot."[67] In hindsight, contemporary scholars can understand why this unconventional audience easily related to the play's plot, but at the time, it came as a surprise to dramatists and sparked the notion that unexpected audiences had the capacity to see great value in this new, avant-garde theatrical form.

The play continued to be produced successfully around the world. In the early 1990s, Yugoslavian civilians were living under the fire of Serbian nationalist forces during the break-up of Yugoslavia and awaiting the intervention of NATO.[68] In 1993, U.S. artist and activist Susan Sontag staged *Godot* with locals in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, after a particularly bleak summer in which residents waited for international intervention without basic resources like food, water, and electricity.[69] The play echoed the futility of contemporary life in

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63. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).
64. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).
65. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).
66. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).
67. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).
68. Nick Awde, "How Susan Sontag Staged Waiting for Godot during Siege of Sarajevo," *The Stage*, 2018, https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/2018/how-susan-sontag-staged-waiting-for-godot-during-the-brutal-siege-of-sarajevo/?login_to=https://www.thestage.co.uk/accounts/users/sign_up.popup.
69. Susan Sontag, "Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo," *Performing Arts Journal* 16, no. 2 (1994): 87. https://doi.org/10.2307/3245764.

Sarajevo. [70] Similarly, after Hurricane Katrina in 2007, artist Paul Chan drew connections between postdiluvian Louisiana and the Biblical flood in his installation art inspired by *Waiting for Godot*. [71] The installations took place around New Orleans and included stage directions from *Waiting for Godot* as well as five free, site-specific performances of the play. [72]

This play remains a beaconing light in times of bleakness, such as post-WWII, the breakdown of Yugoslavia, and during incarceration. Since 2016, I have observed a trend of American artists exploring *Waiting For Godot* and other Beckett texts in their work. Just down the road from Emory University in Atlanta, a theatre named 7 Stages produced *Waiting For Godot* in 2018.[73] One of the most influential dance artists in the country, Mark Morris, director of Mark Morris Dance Group in New York, restaged Beckett's plays in the summer of 2019.[74] American *Godot*-centered work is on the rise, and I argue that this is, in part, due to the foreboding uncertainty many Americans face under the current political administration. The political landscape in the United States is becoming increasingly bleak, and American artists are turning towards the play for guidance, as Susan Sontag did in 1993 and Paul Chan did in 2007.

This phenomenon can, to an extent, be attributed to the play's profound nature. While writing this play after the trauma he endured during World War II, Beckett was reflecting upon human responses to the inherent uncertainty of life and the inescapable suffering which ensues.

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70. Susan Sontag, "Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo," *Performing Arts Journal* 16, no. 2 (1994): 87. https://doi.org/10.2307/3245764.
71. Paul Chan, "Waiting for Godot in New Orleans," *Cultural Politics* 5 (3): 326-33, 2019, DOI:10.2752/175174309X461101.
72. Paul Chan, "Waiting for Godot in New Orleans," *Cultural Politics* 5 (3): 326-33, 2019, DOI:10.2752/175174309X461101.
73. Alyssa Karounos, "7 Stages Presents Waiting for Godot," 7 Stages Theatre, 2018, https://www.7stages.org/event/7-stages-presents-waiting-for-godot-4/.
74. Alyssa Karounos, "7 Stages Presents Waiting for Godot," 7 Stages Theatre, 2018, https://www.7stages.org/event/7-stages-presents-waiting-for-godot-4/.

Considering the historical context of this play's creation, it is understandable that Beckett would be exploring how religion functions as a lens for people to understand existential stress and life's pains. I feel *Waiting for Godot* presents an alternative to religious interpretations of life, and argues for people to dispel inaction and passivity to claim agency over their own lives. Watching a production of *Waiting for Godot* forces audiences to watch two individuals remain idle despite their unfortunate situation, which elicits a natural frustration as the play unfolds. Audience members question why the protagonists are unable to take action and escape their circumstances, which can stir feelings of existentialism. For me, the play provokes questions like, "To what extent am I in control of my own life?", "Am I remaining idle in hopes that something will change, or am I actively working to make that change myself?", and "In my own life, which is filled with inevitable uncertainty and pain, how do I find meaning?" In other words, "As I wait, and live out my remaining days, what makes those days meaningful?" I argue that *Godot*'s ability to spur these universally relatable considerations positions *Godot* as a timeless piece of art.

Writings on *Waiting for Godot*: Existentialism and Religion

As a theatrical masterpiece, readers, dramaturgs, and literary scholars have written prolifically about *Waiting for Godot.* There have been over 4,000 peer-reviewed journal articles, reviews, magazine articles, and newspaper clippings written about this play. These writings cover a wide range of analyses of the work, but many center analyses on the religious material found in the text and the play's existentialist theme.

Existentialism

Theatre expert Michael Bennett writes that the only word associated with *Godot* more universally than "absurd" is "existential."[75] The term was linked to *Godot* very early on in the life of the play, as New York critic Eric Bentley deemed the play existential in nature in his 1956 review of its first Broadway production.[76] Theatre scholar Martin Esslin affirmed this categorization in his 1962 book *The Theater of the Absurd*.[77] The Grove Press edition of *Waiting for Godot,* the leading edition in print, has proclaimed that the play is a work about existentialism on its back cover for the last thirty years. Existential philosophy is concerned with issues of human autonomy, fate, absurdity, and social criticism—many common themes in plays of the Theatre of the Absurd.[78] I argue there is enough evidence of both Beckett's knowledge of existential philosophy and overlap between these schools of thought and the themes of *Waiting for Godot* to support the claim that this play is an existentialist work. In this section, I will explain the basics of existentialism and outline its relationship to the themes in *Waiting For Godot.*

Existentialism, a term of postmodern philosophical theory, was presented by philosophers Jean Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger. A core pillar of their existential thought is that humans are filled with pain, suffering, and disorientation by the absurdity and meaningless of their world.[79] This seems to parallel *Godot*'s plot, as it is never made clear how Vladimir and Estragon

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75. Michael Bennett, "Waiting for Godot (Review)," *Theatre Journal* 62, no. 1 (2010): 110–11, https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.0.0308.
76. Nick Mount, "'Waiting for Godot' without Existentialism," *Raritan* 28 (2008): 24, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=brb&AN=505345707&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
77. Martin Julius Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).
78. Nick Mount, "'Waiting for Godot' without Existentialism," *Raritan* 28 (2008): 24, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=brb&AN=505345707&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
77. Robert C. Solomon, *Existentialism* (Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College, 2007).

arrived at the country road they remain on for the duration of the play, and their suffering (from both physical and emotional ailments) is a focal point throughout the play.[80] Dr. Nick Mount from the University of Toronto Department of English contextualizes critic Eric Bentley's first denouncement that the play is existential by considering the definition of existentialism in the 1950s. Mount writes that Bentley considered existentialism to be:

> A philosophy which underscores the incomprehensibility, and therefore the meaninglessness, of the universe, the nausea which man feels upon being confronted with the fact of existence, the praiseworthiness of the acts of defiance man may perform—acts which are taken on faith, as self-justifying, while rationally speaking, they have no justification because they have no possibility of success.[81]

When considering this historical understanding of existentialism, it is clear why many drew the connection between the play and this philosophy at the time of its first productions. It is not clear to readers why Vladimir and Estragon continue to wait for Godot. Neither of them seem to know why they are waiting for him, why he is important, or even who he is. Yet, they continue to wait, an act which is taken on the faith that Godot will inevitably come, despite having no evidence to prove the belief that he will arrive. However, Mount also writes that he feels this definition of existentialism is short-sighted when applied to *Godot*, and that it frames Beckett's existentialism as nihilism incorrectly, and I agree. Mount feels that by coining *Godot* "existential" within a popular definition, we overlook a fundamental piece of existential philosophical thought, which

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80. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015).
81. Nick Mount, "'Waiting for Godot' without Existentialism," *Raritan* 28 (2008): 24, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=brb&AN=505345707&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

is that "the silver lining [to the essential human condition] is humanity's radical freedom." [82] The "silver lining" type of existentialist philosophy was primarily developed by Jean-Paul Sartre, who Beckett knew personally while living in prewar Paris. [83] Mount writes:

> It remains reasonable for audiences to associate Waiting for Godot with existentialism, with Bentley's incomprehensible, meaningless, nauseating, hopeless universe. But [there is a] popular misunderstanding that it is a hopeless philosophy. [84]

In this quote, Mount is denouncing interpretations of *Waiting For Godot* as a hopeless play. In an interview with Mount in October 2019, Mount explained that he had done extensive research into the personal relationship between Beckett and Sartre when the two were both living in Paris.[85] Mount believes that Beckett was too close to Sartre to fundamentally misunderstand Sartre's existential philosophy as a hopeless one. [86] Mount argues that Beckett was so well-versed in existential philosophy that it is more plausible the author wrote a "silver lining" into *Waiting For Godot* to resemble Sartre's philosophy. [87] One could argue that this "silver lining" is the unwavering hope Vladimir and Estragon have that Godot will one day come, or even the small leaf that appears on the tree in Act II.[88]

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82. Nick Mount, "'Waiting for Godot' without Existentialism," *Raritan* 28 (2008): 24, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=brb&AN=505345707&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
83. Nick Mount, "'Waiting for Godot' without Existentialism," *Raritan* 28 (2008): 24, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=brb&AN=505345707&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
84. Nick Mount, "'Waiting for Godot' without Existentialism," *Raritan* 28 (2008): 24, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=brb&AN=505345707&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
85. Nick Mount, interview by author via phone, October 9, 2019.
86. Nick Mount, interview by author via phone, October 9, 2019.
87. Nick Mount, interview by author via phone, October 9, 2019.
88. Note: This sentence references the physical change in the tree onstage in *Waiting for Godot.* Beckett indicates in the stage directions that between Act I and II, a small leaf blooms on the tree.

Waiting for Godot, to me, is not a hopeless play simply because it addresses hopelessness. It is a play that explores radical freedom by describing imprisonment. When Estragon opens the play saying "Nothing to be done," I believe Beckett is beginning his claim that in reality, Estragon has much more agency to "do" than he claims. I read this play as a reflection on choice and agency in the face of hopelessness and uncertainty. I find the fates of Vladimir and Estragon to be a demonstration of the consequences of falling victim to hopelessness. To this end, I find *Godot* to be an inspiring play. I find it to plainly state the essentialist nature of uncertainty, suffering, and hopelessness in human life. I believe Beckett presents a clear alternative to complacency by demonstrating the realities of humans who remain unresisting to this fate, and some dramatists agree with me. Martin Esslin is a theatre scholar who wrote a book titled *The Theatre of The Absurd* in 1962—subsequently coining this genre of absurdist fiction. Esslin wrote on the relationship between Beckett's theatrical form and existentialism: "Theatre of the Absurd, then, was an attempt by man, deeply steeped in existential philosophical concepts, to find meaning in a world which no longer made sense because all moral, religious, political and social sense was nonsense."[89] This quote explains that playwrights writing the Theatre of the Absurd were deeply concerned with finding meaning in their lives. Considering the Theatre of the Absurd emerged after World War II, the connection between the absurdist form and existentialism is a logical one. Artists, Beckett included, were overwhelmed by the sudden bleakness of contemporary life and preoccupied with finding a sense of meaning in it to anchor themselves. Reading this passage by Esslin only strengthened my hypothesis that this play is a hopeful one. Considering *Godot's* political and social timeliness, I feel Beckett was, to some extent, attempting to shake the paralysis off of post-WWII Europe and

89. Martin Julius Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

inspire social rebuilding through people taking autonomy of their radical freedom in the face of such bleakness.

Religious Allegory

It did not take long after *Godot* was published for folks to catch on to the play's possible religious allegory, especially since many identified a potential connection between *Godot* and Beckett's Irish Protestant upbringing. There are explicit mentions of the Bible in the text as well as references to Christian stories and figures. [90] Jing Wang from the School of Humanities and Arts at the Shandong University of Finance argues that the religious content in *Waiting for Godot* can be broken into four parts: the relationship between God and man, breaking the agreement, repentance and imprecation, and waiting for salvation.[91] In this section, I will explain Wang's research into how each of these themes show up in *Godot* and supplement Wang's claims with passages in the text that I feel prove Wang's findings and significantly contribute to the play's religious themes.

God and Man

A popular interpretation of *Waiting For Godot* is that the title character is a pseudonym for God. Wang writes that not only is the name Godot similar to God, but there are descriptions in the text that allude to Godot as a God-like presence in the Christian definition.[92] For example, when Vladimir questions the messenger boy about what Godot looks like in Act II, the following conversation ensues:

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90. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015).
91. Jing Wang, "The Religious Meaning in 'Waiting for Godot,'" *English Language Teaching* 4 (1) (2011): 197–200, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1080326&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
92. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015).

VLADIMIR: Has he a beard, Mr. Godot?

BOY: Yes, sir.

VLADIMIR: Fair or… or black?

BOY: I think it's white, sir.

VLADIMIR: Christ have mercy on us! [93]

The acknowledgement of Godot having a white beard is enough for anyone with even remedial Biblical exposure to draw a connection with the Christian God. Wang writes that in the Biblical book of Revelations, John described seeing the revived savior with white hair. [94]

In addition to Wang's finding about Godot appearing God-like by physical description, I have also identified non-physical descriptions of Godot that align with the Christian God. My findings focus on Godot's claimed abilities. The tramps in the play think if they do not wait for Godot, he will punish them, but if they wait faithfully, they will be saved. The following passage is a conversation between Vladimir and Estragon in Act II:

VLADIMIR: We have to come back tomorrow.

ESTRAGON: What for?

VLADIMIR: To wait for Godot.

ESTRAGON: Ah! (Silence.) He didn't come?

VLADIMIR: No.

ESTRAGON: And now it's too late.

VLADIMIR: Yes, now it's night.

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93. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 106.
94. Jing Wang, "The Religious Meaning in 'Waiting for Godot,'" *English Language Teaching* 4 (1) (2011): 197–200, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1080326&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

ESTRAGON: And if we dropped him? (Pause.) If we dropped him?

VLADIMIR: He'd punish us. [95]

I include this passage as evidence that the two men view Godot as a Christian God-like figure because it explicitly states the two men's belief in Godot's ability to punish them. Wang writes that in *Godot*, "Godot can save, or punish, or try or take care of man," which are abilities that directly correlate to the Christian concepts of God's saviorship, oversight and guidance, and ultimate judgement of character. [96] However, despite fear of his punishment, Vladimir and Estragon feel that as long as Godot comes, they will be saved. In Act II, they have the following conversation:

VLADIMIR: We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. *(Pause.)* Unless Godot comes.

ESTRAGON: And if he comes?

VLADIMIR: We'll be saved. [97]

This conversation, similar to the conversation they have about Godot punishing them, I include because it explicitly states that the two men believe Godot has the power to save them. Marcos Norris from Loyola University Chicago claims *Waiting For Godot* bears strong resemblance to many Biblical stories about salvation when he writes, "I know of no other narratives where the characters are racked with uncertainty but nevertheless await the dubious promise of salvation made by a mysterious figure whose credibility is suspect and whose promise is inveterately

95. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 107.
96. Jing Wang, "The Religious Meaning in 'Waiting for Godot,'" *English Language Teaching* 4 (1) (2011): 197–200, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1080326&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
97. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 109.

deferred."[98] I also found evidence that Godot is a God-like figure when the messenger boy describes that Godot beats his brother but not him. This description of Godot's behavior is reminiscent of Christian belief in ultimate judgement—that salvation and protection by God is a privilege only gifted to the good, not to all.

It is important to note that Beckett never verified scholars' theory that Godot is a symbol for God. When questioned on the theory, Beckett famously responded, "If by Godot I had meant God, I would [have] said God."[99] This paradoxical statement puzzles scholars. Since the first three letters obviously create the word God, is Beckett telling us that he *did* mean God? If Beckett would have only written God if he meant God, then what is the meaning of the name Godot? Is it a derivation of the French word for military boots, *godillot*, and instead represent Beckett's wait for news that France was liberated during his hiding in World War II? If Beckett did intend for Godot to be read as a secular symbol, why did he utilize so many Christian God-like characteristics to describe him?

Despite these considerations, there is significant evidence that Godot is a God-like presence when considering the textual evidence regarding Godot's perceived abilities and physical appearance, and supplemental proof when considering the relationship between the characters and Godot. One of the pillars of Christianity is that there has been a long physical separation between God and humanity—one that many Christians believe will end when Jesus returns in the Second Coming. Wang writes that this separation began in the book of Genesis,

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98. Marcos Norris, "'What Has Christ Got to Do with It?': Adaptation Theory, Søren Kierkegaard and Waiting for Godot," *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance* 11, no. 2 (January 2018): 165–81, https://doi.org/10.1386/jafp.11.2.165_1.
99. Marcos Norris, "'What Has Christ Got to Do with It?': Adaptation Theory, Søren Kierkegaard and Waiting for Godot," *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance* 11, no. 2 (January 2018): 165–81, https://doi.org/10.1386/jafp.11.2.165_1.

after Adam and Eve disobeyed the Lord and he banished them from the Garden of Eden. [100] Wang argues that Vladimir and Estragon represent humanity, walking on a "spiritual wasteland" after being separated from God, and spending their days preoccupied with waiting for God's return and suffering in the meantime. [101] I found evidence to support Wang's theory in the text. In Act II, Vladimir says the following:

> VLADIMIR: But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us![102]

I argue Vladimir's exclamation verifies that the protagonists represent a cursed humanity when he says "all mankind is us."[103] Through the excerpts from the original text I have selected to supplement Wang's claims, I claim that there is significant evidence to support interpretations that Godot is a God-like character and the protagonists represent a Christian-view cursed humanity in wait for their savior to return.

Sacred Covenants, Repentance, and Salvation

Another source of religious allegory in *Waiting For Godot* lies in the agreements between the characters. Vladimir and Estragon are engaged in a contract to wait for Godot. While it is unclear whether or not that was an externally imposed or self-imposed contract, and the

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100. Jing Wang, "The Religious Meaning in 'Waiting for Godot,'" *English Language Teaching* 4 (1) (2011): 197–200, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1080326&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
101. Jing Wang, "The Religious Meaning in 'Waiting for Godot,'" *English Language Teaching* 4 (1) (2011): 197–200, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1080326&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
102. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 90.
103. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 90.

characters clearly do not understand the details of the contract (i.e. when Godot is supposed to arrive and where they are supposed to meet), it is evident they are unable to break this covenant. The play ends both acts with the two protagonists agreeing to leave the location, but both not moving, indicating an inescapable inability to leave.[104] In Act I, Estragon proposes leaving the road:

> ESTRAGON: Let's go.
>
> VLADIMIR: We can't.
>
> ESTRAGON: Why not?
>
> VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot. [105]

And then later, after they argue over whether or not they are in the correct location, they emphasize that they cannot rest until Godot comes:

> VLADIMIR: 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.
>
> ESTRAGON: And if he doesn't come?
>
> VLADIMIR: We'll come back tomorrow.
>
> ESTRAGON: And then the day after tomorrow.
>
> VLADIMIR: Possibly.
>
> ESTRAGON: And so on.
>
> VLADIMIR: The point is—

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104. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015).
105. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 8.

ESTRAGON: Until he comes.[106]

These two sections demonstrate that the protagonists cannot escape their condition of waiting. Their inability to break the pattern of waiting for Godot is stated as an irrefutable fact, even when Vladimir reveals that Godot did not say that he would definitely come, which in fact he never does. This parallels many Biblical covenants where agreements are often not held up by both parties. There are a number of examples in Christian scripture where God breaks the agreement. Two notable examples are the Noahic covenant, in which God promised to never destroy the world again as he did with the flood, and the Mosaic covenant, in which God promises to treasure the Israelites.[107] Arguably the most important covenant was the first one, the Edenic covenant, and it was also broken. In the beginning of the Bible, in the book of Genesis, God makes the Edenic covenant with Adam and Eve to partner with him to bring goodness into the world.[108] In this covenant, God promises humanity a blessed life, but the covenant is contingent on humanity's obedience to God (manifest in a command to not eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), and commitment to tending to the Earth and filling it with more people.[109] Humanity infamously broke the covenant by eating the forbidden fruit, and the Bible details how God punished humanity for this disloyalty by cursing them to live in a godless world full of sin and pain.[110]

Wang argues that similar to how Adam and Eve were cursed to live in a world without God's endless blessings, Vladimir and Estragon are doomed to live in a world where their only

106. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 8-9.
107. *The Holy Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).
108. *The Holy Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).
109. *The Holy Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).
110. *The Holy Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

occupation is waiting for a savior to return and free them of their condition. [111] The tramp-like condition of the two protagonists is consistent with the Biblical description of humanity falling to a lower state after breaking the agreement. In the first few minutes of the play, Vladimir describes being atop the Eiffel Tower, a privilege that would only be offered to the elite in the time the play was written, insinuating that at one time, Vladimir and Estragon were privileged and have since fallen in class. [112] It could be argued that Vladimir and Estragon represent Adam and Eve, in the post-covenant Garden of Eden. This argument is supported by the fact that *Godot*'s protagonists are stuck in a condition of poverty and environment of desolation, and just as Adam and Eve lived with the dead Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil as the sole vestige of their former, blessed life in Eden, Vladimir and Estragon are only accompanied by a tree with no leaves.

The theory that Vladimir and Estragon represent a post-covenant Adam and Eve is also supported by the two protagonists' obsession with repentance. In Act I, Vladimir suggests that the two repent and in response, Estragon alludes to an essential quality of their existence to which they are at fault for:

> VLADIMIR: Suppose we repented.
>
> ESTRAGON: Repented what?
>
> VLADIMIR: Oh…We wouldn't have to go into the details.
>
> ESTRAGON: Our being born? [113]

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111. Jing Wang, "The Religious Meaning in 'Waiting for Godot,'" *English Language Teaching* 4 (1) (2011): 197–200, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1080326&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
112. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015).
113. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 5.

This conversation shows that the two men believe there is some inherent quality of their life that they must repent for. This is reminiscent of Christian philosophy of original sin. The belief in original sin refers to Christian thought that humanity exists in an inherent state of sin, which dates back to when Adam and Eve sinned and broke the Edenic covenant. The protagonists' obsession with repentance parallels the Christian belief of repentance as a means to purify the soul of sin and ultimately save it from hell.

I found additional evidence that Vladimir and Estragon represent Christian figures in Act II. Vladimir and Estragon reference Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve, when Pozzo arrives again with Lucky:

ESTRAGON: Are you sure his name is Pozzo?

VLADIMIR: *(alarmed).* Mr. Pozzo! Come back! We won't hurt you! *Silence.*

ESTRAGON: We might try him with other names.

VLADIMIR: I'm afraid he's dying.

ESTRAGON: It'd be amusing.

VLADIMIR: What'd be amusing?

ESTRAGON: To try him with other names, one after the other. It'd pass the time. And we'd be bound to hit on the right one sooner or later.

VLADIMIR: I tell you his name is Pozzo.

ESTRAGON: We'll soon see. (He reflects.) Abel! Abel!

POZZO: Help!

ESTRAGON: Got it in one!

VLADIMIR: I begin to weary of this motif.

ESTRAGON: Perhaps the other is called Cain. Cain! Cain!

POZZO: Help!

ESTRAGON: He's all humanity.[114]

Pozzo responds to the name Abel and solidifies his connection to the Biblical figure. Not only does this conversation tie in a direct connection with Adam and Eve, it includes Estragon's declaration that Pozzo represents all of humanity when he calls for help. This declaration supports a Christian reading of *Waiting For Godot.* Similar to Christian thought on the essential, cursed nature of humanity and its relationship to God, the presentation of the characters in *Godot* are as figures in peril due to their circumstances, who are searching for salvation from external forces.

The above passages serve to argue that repentance and agreements in *Waiting For Godot* resemble Biblical covenants and Christian thought on original sin and humanity's fate. I find there is significant evidence to support the claim that Vladimir and Estragon represent a cursed humanity that longs for the forgiveness of God, and who are bound in an inescapable wait for God to return to them. Once a reader draws the connection between Vladimir and Estragon representing humanity and Godot representing God, they can see the play might represent humanity waiting for salvation or for Jesus to return. As discussed earlier, the two protagonists mention salvation often and explicitly state Godot has the power to save them in Act II. Their first discussion of salvation is when Vladimir tells Estragon the Biblical story of the two thieves in Act I:

VLADIMIR: Ah yes, the two thieves. Do you remember the story?

ESTRAGON: No.

VLADIMIR: Shall I tell it to you?

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114. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 95-96.

ESTRAGON: No.

VLADIMIR: It'll pass the time. *(Pause.)* Two thieves, crucified at the same time as our Saviour. One—

ESTRAGON: Our what?

VLADIMIR: Our Saviour. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other . . . *(he searches for the contrary of saved)* . . . damned.

ESTRAGON: Saved from what?

VLADIMIR: Hell. [115]

This passage introduces salvation as a theme that pervades throughout the play. Here, it becomes clear that there is an entity Vladimir and Estragon both refer to as their Saviour and that this entity has the ability to save individuals from hell. This story comes directly from the Bible. Of the two thieves that were crucified on either side of Jesus, one mocked him for claiming to be the Messiah, and the other chastised his fellow criminal for disrespecting God—and God damned one and saved the other, respectively.[116] Vladimir's address of the damned thief and the saved thief alludes to this story and suggests the protagonists believe salvation is possible for them as well. However, Vladimir goes on to discuss that he is not certain about this salvation, and says, "How is it that of the four Evangelists only one speaks of a thief being saved. The four of them were there—or thereabouts—and only one speaks of a thief being saved."[117] He is referencing that of the four Evangelists present at the crucifixion, only Luke recorded this story. Similar to

115. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 6-7.
116. *The Holy Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).
117. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 6.

the tramps' lack of details about Godot, they have little details about this story, or the details of salvation, heightening the uncertainty around their fate.

As we have discussed, there is significant evidence that the inescapable waiting that Vladimir and Estragon are confined to parallels the experience of those waiting for salvation or, in certain traditions, for a savior to return to Earth. Like those experiences, the characters do not have the exact details of when the event they await will occur but are in a permanent state of waiting for the event regardless.

Criticism of Religious/Existentialist Interpretations

Although all Beckett scholars recognize the prolific religious content in *Waiting for Godot*, they do not all agree that religious or existentialist reading into the play is an accurate approach. In October 2019, I interviewed Nick Mount from the University of Toronto Department of English, who is both a leading scholar in Beckett's work and also one of the most fervent critics of any religious/existentialist interpretations of *Waiting for Godot*. Mount claims that Beckett would have never intended any higher meaning to be derived from the text because that would make the audience smarter than Beckett's characters, a power dynamic Beckett would not have been interested in.[118] Mount says that coining the play as existentialist was simply a marketing tactic on the part of the publishers to make it more palatable and comprehensible to an audience.[119] His final comment summarizes his view clearly: "Those are all misreadings. Claiming a play is existential or about religion makes it palatable and offers readers a chance to feel smart, but Beckett was trying to say 'a play is just a play, do not read too much into it'."[120]

118. Nick Mount, interview by author via phone, October 9, 2019.
119. Nick Mount, interview by author via phone, October 9, 2019.
120. Nick Mount, interview by author via phone, October 9, 2019.

Mount insists that Beckett did not wish for readers to attach higher meanings to his works, despite the numerous connections to existential philosophy and religious scriptures.[121]

Other scholars take a different approach to the religious content in the play. Instead of disregarding it entirely, they argue Beckett was attempting to use this religious content ironically. The connection between the name Godot and the English word God is so clear that English-speaking Beckett could have in no way not predicted that connection to be drawn.[122] However, Mehmet Akif Balkaya from the Department of English Language and Literature at Aksaray University in Turkey claims that Beckett wrote Vladimir and Estragon to hope for Godot to highlight the ultimate meaninglessness of their lives.[123] Balkaya writes the character's hope is written simply "in order to impose meaning on their meaningless life, appeal to Godot as an outside force to distract them from their predicament."[124] In Balkaya's view, Beckett includes these overt religious connections not for audiences to derive higher meaning but to heighten the work's metatheatrical irony that in essence, this world that Beckett has created—and the purgatorial creatures he has written to live inside of it—are utterly meaningless.[125] In this sense, Beckett's claim is simply, as Mount argued—"this play is just a play."[126]

It is important to note these criticisms to present an accurate view of where scholarship lands on these interpretative options, but I do not agree wholeheartedly with all of them. Beckett

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121. Nick Mount, interview by author via phone, October 9, 2019.
122. Nick Mount, interview by author via phone, October 9, 2019.
123. Mehmet Akif Balkaya, "The Meaninglessness of Life in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot and Harold Pinter's the Birthday Party." *The Criterion: An International Journal in English* (August 2013): 1–5, http://www.the-criterion.com/V4/n4/Mehmet.pdf.
124. Mehmet Akif Balkaya, "The Meaninglessness of Life in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot and Harold Pinter's the Birthday Party." *The Criterion: An International Journal in English* (August 2013): 1–5, http://www.the-criterion.com/V4/n4/Mehmet.pdf.
125. Mehmet Akif Balkaya, "The Meaninglessness of Life in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot and Harold Pinter's the Birthday Party." *The Criterion: An International Journal in English* (August 2013): 1–5, http://www.the-criterion.com/V4/n4/Mehmet.pdf.
126. Nick Mount, interview by author via phone, October 9, 2019.

was friends with existentialist philosophers when living in Paris, and therefore would be too familiar with existentialism to overlook the fact that readers would draw existential meaning from the text.[127] Additionally, the connection between God and the name Godot is so obvious that it would be unrealistic to claim it an oversight from a seasoned writer like Beckett. Also, since Beckett was brought up in an Irish Protestant community, I argue the level of nuance to the play's religious allegory does not lend itself to the argument that Beckett flippantly included it. However, I do see viability in the claim that Beckett sought to create a work with a postmodern definition of a play—that a play could really just be a play—and that the inclusion of rich, loaded subject matter like Biblical stories did not warrant automatic interpretation. I disagree with Balkaya's view that religious allegory was used to highlight the meaninglessness of the characters' lives because that intent would have created an audience experience of peering into the characters' lives as outsiders of higher intelligence. I do not believe there is sufficient evidence that Beckett was interested in that effect; separation between audience and actors would negate any relatability observers feel towards the characters. In my reading, *Waiting for Godot* makes sweeping claims about the essence of humanity, which inherently includes the audience in philosophical pondering, and feel the play does not attempt to elevate the audience above the characters. Therefore, the audience's lives are as absurd and meaningless as Vladimir and Estragon's. In order to complete my artistic due diligence throughout this project, I will continue to consider these conflicting interpretations of the work, and will choose the elements I find most compelling within each argument to explore in my choreographic work.

127. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2014).

CHAPTER II

ENTRY POINTS

Now that I have explored ways that scholars have analyzed *Waiting for Godot* and the play's historical impact, I will explain my positionality and influences in entering the creation process of my thesis piece. This section will explain my movement background, choreographic influences, and pieces that have served as inspiration for my movement research in this project. It will also outline my relationship with text-based choreography through dance history examples, dance education research, and personal experiences.

Movement Background

I began formal dance training in high school but was not exposed to modern dance until college. At Emory University, I continued to train in forms I was familiar with (i.e. jazz and ballet) but soon fell in love with modern dance. Emory taught me the depth of modern's history and movement vocabulary and courses, such as Choreography I and II, exposed me to different choreographic approaches. Additionally, I danced in a number of modern dance works for the Emory Dance Company, where I experienced various choreographic and movement styles. From here, I explored my own choreographic voice and created a series of dances with a collaborator that centered our experiences as queer people, as well as a piece entitled *Cubism* for the Emory Dance Company in spring 2019—a piece inspired by my fascination with postmodernism. Over the last two years, I studied at the David Dorfman Dance winter intensive, spent a month researching movement in Berlin at the b12 Festival for Contemporary Dance and Performance Art, and danced with Vim Vigor Dance for a week in New York. These specialized training experiences made me more comfortable with choreography and expanded my technical range in movement vocabularies I had not been exposed to before. Now, I seek to coagulate these varied

artistic experiences into research-based, interdisciplinary work that creates inventive movement with innovative approaches.

Choreographic Influences

As a movement artist, there are several movement and interdisciplinary artists who have shaped my artistic identity, choreography, and style. In this section, I will outline the influence of Trisha Brown David Dorfman, as well as two local Atlanta artists, on my artistry and dancemaking.

I am inspired by the avant-garde and postmodern style developed most prominently by the Judson Dance Theater collective in the 1960/70s. [1] I was immediately captivated when I learned about choreographers like Trisha Brown during my third year of dance studies at Emory. Performance scholar Iréne Hultman writes that Brown "changed the landscape of dance, straddling the visual art and performance field, transforming not only how to perceive dance, but how to make dance—the actual action of movement creation."[2] Here, Hultman describes how Brown transformed the dance world with her interdisciplinary, genre-bending, novel approach to movement and choreography. I was inspired by Brown's intentional and calculated approach to choreographing movement, her inventiveness, and dedication to creating works comprised of "everyday movement" like walking, running, and standing.[3] One current Trisha Brown Dance Company member described Brown's pedestrian movement as "dialogue between natural, clear

1. "Trisha Brown," *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th Edition*, (November 2019): 1, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=khh&AN=134506204&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
2. "Trisha Brown," *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th Edition*, (November 2019): 1, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=khh&AN=134506204&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
3. "Trisha Brown," *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th Edition*, (November 2019): 1, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=khh&AN=134506204&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

ways of moving and extraordinary surprises in the physicality and structure." [4] This clear style of choreography has served as direct inspiration for one of my previous works. After seeing the Trisha Brown Dance Company perform a work entitled *Locus Trio* at Emory in 2018, I was inspired to create a work entitled *Cubism* for the Emory Dance Company. *Cubism* used similar postmodern aesthetics to locomote six dancers around a 4x4 grid. I still strive to emulate Brown's dedication to inventiveness in her choreographic process, her willingness to experiment, and clarity of created movement.

Brown was known for revolutionizing modern dance in the late 20th century and for her avant-garde works, which were set in unorthodox locations like on the sides of buildings and on roof rafts. [5] Brown was well-known for her collaborations with interdisciplinary artists. Dance scholar Susan Rosenberg writes in her book *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art 1962–1987* that Brown immersed herself in discourse with other avant-garde interdisciplinary artists (most notably the experimental musician John Cage) and participated in festivals of many mediums, which shaped her artistry and love for interdisciplinary work. [6] Rosenberg documented a statement from Brown on the interdisciplinary nature of her work: "No one could buy my work in the art world, and the dance world said it wasn't dance—which it probably wasn't, I was caught in the crack doing serious work in a field that wasn't ready for it." [7] Brown's earliest

4. Emily Macel Theys, "DANCING Trisha Brown," *Dance Spirit* 22 (1): 52–53, 2018, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=fth&AN=126931353&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
5. Susan Rosenberg and Trisha Brown, *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2017).
6. Susan Rosenberg and Trisha Brown, *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2017).
7. Susan Rosenberg and Trisha Brown, *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2017).

works were not received with open arms from traditional dance audiences. [8] When she submitted her work *Trillium* in 1962 for a showcase put on by the American Dance Festival, the hub of modern dance in the United States, the jury initially rejected it. [9] Later, the jury reversed their decision but asked Brown to remove the unorthodox musical accompaniment to the work as a condition of its acceptance, which she refused to do. [10] Brown's commitment to her radical artistic choices despite audience pushback inspires me to be bold in my choreographic decisions and remain headstrong in my commitment to them.

David Dorfman is another significant choreographic influence on my work. While dancing with him in January 2019 at his company's winter intensive, I was introduced to the inclusion of text and theatre in choreography, both of which characterize many of Dorfman's works. For example, we spent one day writing instructions on how to do everyday tasks and choreographing verbal delivery of those lines while dancing. We spent another day workshopping vocal performance and delivery of text onstage, similar to the way vocal coaches train actors. Dorfman's approach is that the inclusion of text should be an extension of the choreography, not a replacement of it, and his works incorporate text seamlessly. In his 2006 work *Underground*, Dorfman's dancers emerge from the wings asking questions, which simultaneously appear as text behind them in a video projection. [11] Dorfman uses interdisciplinary elements like this one often, which heightens the sense of theatricality onstage.

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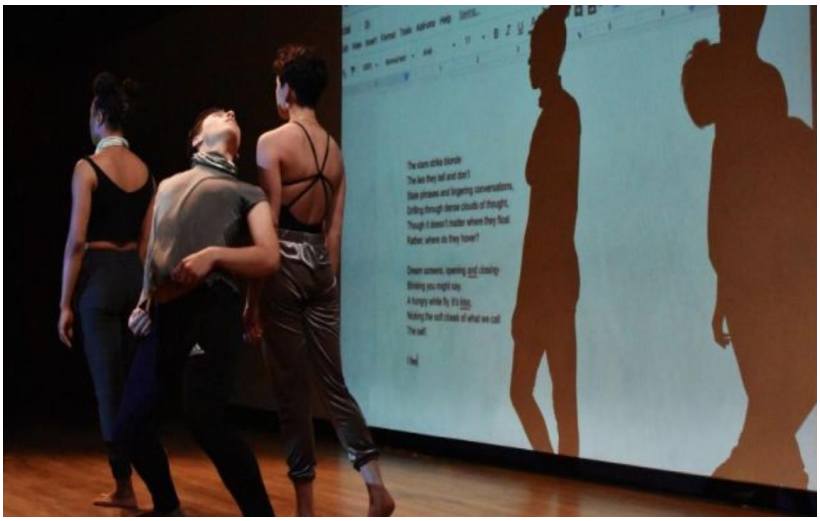
8. Susan Rosenberg and Trisha Brown, *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2017).
9. Susan Rosenberg and Trisha Brown, *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2017).
10. Susan Rosenberg and Trisha Brown, *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2017).
11. Elizabeth Zimmer, "David Dorfman Dance," *Dance Magazine* 81 (3): 101, 2007, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=brb&AN=504293480&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

In his 2005 solo *Lightbulb Theory*, Dorfman reads a text dedicated to his late father.[12] Dorfman's intensive in New York City taught me methods of generating text, exposed me to the power of text onstage, and revealed to me how to incorporate text into choreography seamlessly.

Famous dance icons are not the only artistic influences in my life. Benji Stevenson is a local movement artist who incorporated text in an interdisciplinary way in their 2019 work *Person(a)*. When I interviewed them in February 2020, Stevenson told me this movement-based performance piece was born from the artists' reflections on social media usage and interpersonal relationships. [13] In their work, three dancers performed choreography generated by cast discussions of social media and text-based improvisation scores. [14] In an early version of this piece, their dancers' bodies projected shadows onto an upstage wall as they pass through a video projection, which displayed a screen recording of a computer. As shown on the following page, the screen shows a computer user typing a poem into a Google document. When I first saw this work during a Fieldwork showcase in Atlanta, I was surprised by this relationship between text and movement and inspired to consider ways to incorporate text onstage that go beyond verbal delivery.

12. Phyllis Goldman, "David Dorfman Dance," *Back Stage* 46 (26): 34, 2005, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aqh&AN=17718608&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
13. Benji Stevenson, Interview by author via phone, February 10, 2020.
14. Benji Stevenson, "Person(a) Organized by Ben Stevenson," gofundme.com, July 1, 2019. https://www.gofundme.com/f/the-premiere-of-my-first-work-persona.



Stevenson told me they were inspired by social media and screen time when creating this piece, and thus utilized text in a way that literally incorporated a screen onstage.[15] Stevenson explained that they used a variety of methods to work with text throughout the choreographic process: writing about the subject matter of the work, reading phrases aloud to their dancers to improvise to, creating text-based prompts to generate movement from, and asking performers to recite relevant phrases onstage.[16] Stevenson emphasized that they consider themselves an interdisciplinary artist because they employ writing and dance equally in their creative processes and strive to find innovative techniques to integrate these two mediums in their works.[17]

Another one of my major choreographic inspirations is Okwae Miler, an Atlanta-based movement artist, who creates work that centers on identity politics, specifically the intersection of marginalized identities. I am a dancer for his new work premiering in April 2020, entitled *A Shy, Red Moon*, which focuses on the narratives of Black gay men who are HIV-positive. Miller creates his material primarily through improvising after researching and then setting it into a codified phrase. He writes that his research "involves an intense amount of literature review,

15. Benji Stevenson, Interview by author via phone, February 10, 2020.
16. Benji Stevenson, Interview by author via phone, February 10, 2020.
17. Benji Stevenson, Interview by author via phone, February 10, 2020.

collection of personal narratives, open dialogue, public observation and experimentation."[18] He structures his works by arranging three core phrases, four variations of those phrases that have been manipulated with choreographic techniques, and key moments—sections of stillness and connection between the dancers. Miller's structural approach to building a work has cultivated my organizational approach to a choreography process, and his deep-dives into his research topics have motivated me to seek out a variety of research materials and methods before choreographing to yield a strong, research-centered foundation for the work.

Miller additionally inspired me to center collaboration in my processes. He writes, "The dancers are key in the investigation process, as they are [given] a series of experimental tasks to complete and build the work chunk by chunk."[19] While working with him on *A Shy, Red Moon*, he collaborated with his dancers by facilitating group discussions on the work's focuses: intersectional identity and queerness. These discussions yielded conversations that shaped the choreography and the work's emotional arc. Miller developed my appreciation for highly physical choreography and has broken me out of familiar movement patterns that naturally emerge from my body while I choreograph. His physical style of movement has inspired me to invent and play more during my choreographic processes.

To understand my positionality while creating this work, it is imperative that I explicitly name these artists as my choreographic influences. David Dorfman, Okwae Miller, and Trisha Brown have collectively inspired my preferred movement vocabulary, interdisciplinary choreographic approach, hunger to create impactful, content-based work, and desire to innovate through choreography. Benji Stevenson and David Dorfman exposed me to the possibilities of

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18. Nicholas Goodly, "Okwae A Miller: Creating Intersectional Dialogue Through Dance," *WUSSY MAG,* 2018, https://www.wussymag.com/all/2018/11/5/interview-okwae-a-miller.
19. Nicholas Goodly, "Okwae A Miller: Creating Intersectional Dialogue Through Dance," *WUSSY MAG,* 2018, https://www.wussymag.com/all/2018/11/5/interview-okwae-a-miller.

creating interdisciplinary work and utilizing different mediums while creating a dance. While each of these artists have sparked specific inspirations, they collectively have developed my interdisciplinary style, desire for innovation in the studio, love of research-founded work, and organized approach to beginning a choreographic process.

Dance and Beckett: Maguy Marin's *May B* (1981)

Only a few choreographers have ventured to make work inspired by Samuel Beckett. Mark Morris—American dancer, choreographer, and founder of the Mark Morris Dance Group, a New York based modern dance company—announced in July 2019 he would be embarking on a Beckett-inspired creative endeavor.[20] Morris staged three Beckett plays for the 2019 Happy Days: Enniskillen International Beckett Festival in Ireland. [21] By using Beckett's original stage directions as a guide, Morris breathed new gestures and movement into the original text of Beckett works *Catastrophe*, *Come and Go*, and *Quad.* [22] Despite Morris not taking significant choreographic agency with his renditions of these works, it is important to note his work for the historical context of my project. Decades before Morris's work, French choreographer Maguy Marin pioneered Beckett-inspired movement projects when she created her 1981 work *May B.* Morris took a more straightforward approach to working off of Beckett's dramatic texts than Marin, but their combined work demonstrate that not only are people expressing interest in Beckett-inspired works, artists are finding something deeply inspirational lying within the pages of these decades-old plays.

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20. The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Mark Morris," Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mark-Morris.
21. Roslyn Sulcas, "What Do You Get When You Cross Mark Morris With Samuel Beckett?" *The New York Times*, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/05/arts/dance/mark-morris-samuel-beckett-festival.html.
22. Roslyn Sulcas, "What Do You Get When You Cross Mark Morris With Samuel Beckett?" *The New York Times*, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/05/arts/dance/mark-morris-samuel-beckett-festival.html.

While Morris's work contributed significantly to the small canon of Beckett-inspired dance, Marin's work is a primary and significant inspiration to this project's development, and the research-based development of *May B* guides my own choreographic process. Maguy Marin was the first choreographer to choreograph a dance work inspired by Samuel Beckett's works. Following the completion of her research, Marin created *May B*, undoubtedly her most famous work, which has been performed hundreds of times since its premiere. In 1981, she wrote to Beckett asking for his permission to adapt his works into a movement piece. [23] For a man famed for elusiveness, Beckett showed a surprising interest in her project. [24] Not only did Beckett accept her request, he invited Marin to speak with him about her research. [25] Marin told Thomas Cousineau in an interview that she was surprised by how interested Beckett was in her project. [26] According to her, her biggest takeaway from these discussions with Beckett was that he was disinterested in her maintaining the integrity of his text. [27] He encouraged her to use his text "disrespectfully," as in new ways that intentionally deviated from his original versions. [28] The results of the 1981 conversation between Marin and Beckett led to the creation of *May B*, a three-

23. Judith Mackrell, "Maguy Marin's May B Review – Beckett's Derelicts Go Searching for Cakes and Sex," *The Guardian*, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jul/28/maguy-marin-may-b-review-beckett.
24. Judith Mackrell, "Maguy Marin's May B Review – Beckett's Derelicts Go Searching for Cakes and Sex," *The Guardian*, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jul/28/maguy-marin-may-b-review-beckett.
25. Judith Mackrell, "Maguy Marin's May B Review – Beckett's Derelicts Go Searching for Cakes and Sex," *The Guardian*, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jul/28/maguy-marin-may-b-review-beckett.
26. Thomas Cousineau, "An Interview with Maguy Marin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 133–40. https://doi.org/10.3366/jobs.1994.4.1.14.
27. Thomas Cousineau, "An Interview with Maguy Marin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 133–40. https://doi.org/10.3366/jobs.1994.4.1.14.
28. Thomas Cousineau, "An Interview with Maguy Marin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 133–40. https://doi.org/10.3366/jobs.1994.4.1.14.

part modern dance work that serves as an homage to Beckett's texts, characters, and literary themes. [29]

Marin explained to Cousineau that she wanted the relationship between *May B* and any specific Beckett text to be diffuse, but that *Endgame, All That Fall,* and *Come and Go* were three Beckett pieces she worked with extensively for the piece.[30] The organizing principle that Marin uses to unite the three sections of *May B* is confinement.[31] She writes that an essential idea presented in the work is, "people confined within an enclosed space from which there is no escape and who are forced to confront the problems of being together. Their inability to leave is essential." [32] In *May B,* the dancers are forced to interact with one another while they remain confined to the stage.[33] For example, the first section of *May B* portrays the cast of ten dancers as animalistic, traveling as a herd who fight and are territorial towards one another. [34] Then, the audience witnesses a "process of humanization," as Marin puts it, where the dancers touch one another's faces and realize they resemble each other. [35] They recreate familiar human experiences with one another throughout the rest of the dance, such as celebrating a birthday, dividing themselves into groups, and having sex. [36] Marin's inclusion of the "humanizing"

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29. Thomas Cousineau, "An Interview with Maguy Marin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 133–40. https://doi.org/10.3366/jobs.1994.4.1.14.
30. Thomas Cousineau, "An Interview with Maguy Marin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 133–40. https://doi.org/10.3366/jobs.1994.4.1.14.
31. Thomas Cousineau, "An Interview with Maguy Marin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 133–40. https://doi.org/10.3366/jobs.1994.4.1.14.
32. Thomas Cousineau, "An Interview with Maguy Marin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 133–40. https://doi.org/10.3366/jobs.1994.4.1.14.
33. Thomas Cousineau, "An Interview with Maguy Marin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 133–40. https://doi.org/10.3366/jobs.1994.4.1.14.
34. Thomas Cousineau, "An Interview with Maguy Marin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 133–40. https://doi.org/10.3366/jobs.1994.4.1.14.
35. Thomas Cousineau, "An Interview with Maguy Marin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 133–40. https://doi.org/10.3366/jobs.1994.4.1.14.
36. Thomas Cousineau, "An Interview with Maguy Marin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 133–40. https://doi.org/10.3366/jobs.1994.4.1.14.

moments contextualizes the interactions of the dancers onstage (as well as their inescapable confinement) as intrinsic of the human experience.

The theme of confinement is overtly reminiscent of *Waiting for Godot*, where the protagonists have an inability to leave their waiting spot. I feel as though Marin has identified and successfully physicalized an essential part of *Godot* by confining her dancers to the stage. In doing so, Marin structures *May B* similarly to Beckett's *Godot* in that the action that inevitably results from people's physical captivity is the focus of the entire show. *May B* and *Godot* both force audiences to view familiar, ordinary human experiences like celebrating birthdays, bickering, and waiting as performance. For me, these choices send a powerful message similar to the aims of the postmodern movement—anything can be performance. While postmodern dancers were working to make pedestrian movements like walking, sitting, and standing accepted into concert dance vocabulary, Marin and Beckett were also creating works that showcased ordinary parts of the human experience. Both *May B* and *Waiting for Godot* traded in traditional vocabularies (physical and linguistic, respectively) and conventional techniques for subject matter and structures that were innovative and bold.

Marin stresses the importance of musicality in Beckett-inspired work.[37] She claims, "Above all, an essential element [in Beckett's work] is the intensely musical quality."[38] She writes that the cadence of his writings, decorated by rhythmic fixtures like repetition of certain text, creates an overt musicality to his work. [39] She captures the musical pace of Beckett's

37. Thomas Cousineau, "An Interview with Maguy Marin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 133–40. https://doi.org/10.3366/jobs.1994.4.1.14.
38. Thomas Cousineau, "An Interview with Maguy Marin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 133–40. https://doi.org/10.3366/jobs.1994.4.1.14.
39. Thomas Cousineau, "An Interview with Maguy Marin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 133–40. https://doi.org/10.3366/jobs.1994.4.1.14.

writings through metered phrases of movement where the dancers pace, tic, and grunt. [40] There is only one directly quoted line of Beckett text spoken in Marin's work, the opening line of *Endgame*: "Finished. It will be finished, it may be finished." [41] For the remainder of the play, the cast, who resemble clay figurines more than people, vocalize unintelligibly but express clearly through primal exclamations like laughter, grimaces, and grunts. [42] The various vocalizations of Marin's dancers highlight the musical quality of Beckett's original text.

Marin also captures the hapless nature of many of Beckett's characters perfectly by utilizing grotesquerie in their design. Marin liberally employs the grotesque in her work, often presenting characters in a distorted manner that incites a simultaneously comedic and repulsive effect. Dance scholar Mara Mandradjieff explains Marin's approach to incorporating the grotesque in her writings on another Marin work, *Cinderella* (1985). Mandradjieff writes that in *Cinderella,* Marin includes dolls onstage who behave in such a way that it effectively "creates a space for both humor and disgust, making [*Cinderella*] a prime example of grotesquerie." [43] Mandradjieff characterizes the effects of grotesquerie onstage as "provoking anxiety and uncertainty," "interrogating assumed separations of 'normal and abnormal," and depicting reality

40. Judith Mackrell, "Maguy Marin's May B Review – Beckett's Derelicts Go Searching for Cakes and Sex," *The Guardian*, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jul/28/maguy-marin-may-b-review-beckett.
41. Judith Mackrell, "Maguy Marin's May B Review – Beckett's Derelicts Go Searching for Cakes and Sex," *The Guardian*, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jul/28/maguy-marin-may-b-review-beckett.
42. Anna Kisselgoff, "Trudging in Beckett's Vacuum," *The New York Times*, 1995, https://www.nytimes.com/1995/09/28/arts/dance-review-trudging-in-beckett-s-vacuum.html.

43. Mara Mandradjieff, "Maguy Marin's Posthuman Cinderella: Thingness, Grotesquerie, and Cyborgs," *Dance Chronicle* 40, no. 3 (February 2017): 374–92, https://doi.org/10.1080/01472526.2017.1369299.

as "topsy-turvy" or distorted.[44] Marin incorporates the grotesque in *May B* in similar ways. She presents Beckett's characters as the most basic reduction of their humanity—primal, ignorant, and hungry. The ten dancers in *May B* are barely recognizable as human; their bodies are caked in white chalk, their faces are streaked with clay, and they wear facial prosthetics that exaggerate their features. The combination of their exaggerated, dramatic physical presentation and their primal, nonhuman behaviors present a grotesque view of human characters that provoke anxiety from the audience, blend disgust and humor, and present a distorted reality.

Marin's work inspired me to include text from *Waiting for Godot* into my choreography through dancer recitations and fearless mutilation of the original text. She spurred my interest in portraying the dancers as grotesque by leaning into the disgusting and comedic elements of their personalities and physicalities. Marin's work divorced me from the perception that a choreographer must unconditionally maintain the integrity of the original text when working off of source material for a choreography project. The piece also proved to me that artists can use source texts to create final works that are ultimately emblematic of the choreographer's personal style. Ultimately, *May B* inspired me to think further outside the box with my project, spurred considerations of how I can use Beckett's text as inspiration for a work that is ultimately my own, and discouraged me from creating a work simply attempting to be a physical replica of the original play.

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44. Mara Mandradjieff, "Maguy Marin's Posthuman Cinderella: Thingness, Grotesquerie, and Cyborgs," *Dance Chronicle* 40, no. 3 (February 2017): 374–92, https://doi.org/10.1080/01472526.2017.1369299.

CHAPTER III

SYNERGIZING TEXT AND CHOREOGAPHY:

RESEARCHING AND APPLYING METHODOLOGIES

Utilizing text in both performance and the choreography process has piqued the interest of dance artists all over the world, and a few famous choreographers have increased the visibility of this trend through their works in the last few decades. [1] In *Naharin's Virus* (2001) by Ohad Naharin, a suited figure on top of a platform delivers fragmented speech discussing Peter Handke's absurdist play *Offending the Audience.* [2] Another example is *at midnight, the green bride floated through the village square…* (2012) by Barak Marshall. [3] Performed by the company BODYTRAFFIC, the women dancers improvise text, and two dancers recite a fish recipe. [4] The Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company is also famous for including speeches from dancers. [5] The work *Analogy* (2018) was inspired by oral history, and in the choreographic process one of the dancers memorized 12 paragraphs from the novel *The Emigrants* by W. G. Sebald to recite in performance. [6]

Many choreographers have mulled over how to transform the essential elements of a written text into choreography. Successful choreographers have had a variety of approaches

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1. Laura De Silva, "The Text Trend," *Dance Spirit* 9 (7) (2005): 160–61. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=fth&AN=18095945&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
2. F. Swietek, "The Art of Ohad Naharin," *Video Librarian* 34 (4): 62, 2019, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f3h&AN=137196134&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
3. Nancy Wozny, "When Dancers Speak," *Dance Magazine,* 2019, https://www.dancemagazine.com/when_dancers_speak-2306951655.html.
4. Nancy Wozny, "When Dancers Speak," *Dance Magazine,* 2019, https://www.dancemagazine.com/when_dancers_speak-2306951655.html.
5. Nancy Wozny, "When Dancers Speak," *Dance Magazine,* 2019, https://www.dancemagazine.com/when_dancers_speak-2306951655.html.
6. Nancy Wozny, "When Dancers Speak," *Dance Magazine,* 2019, https://www.dancemagazine.com/when_dancers_speak-2306951655.html.

when using source text. Some artists are concerned with maintaining the integrity of the text and attempt to convey its meaning through movement as literally as possible. Others actively attempt to bastardize and manipulate the text to find new meanings. A few utilize text only as a jumping-off point to inspire their choreographic research. In this chapter, I explore examples of dance artists using text to inform choreography in an effort to highlight the varied approaches choreographers take to text-informed choreography projects. I additionally detail the tools I have learned in personally working with choreographers as a student and dancer. Researching these historical examples and reflecting upon my own encounters yielded insight into the numerous methodologies artists apply to navigate using text. This research inspired my own choreographic process by sparking ideas of how to incorporate the original text from *Waiting For Godot* into my final work.

Stage and Studio: Creating Text-based Choreography

Andrée Howard, *The Sailor's Return* (1947)

While some choreographers directly incorporate text into their staged choreography, others use the source text more fluidly. British ballet choreographer Andrée Howard was disinterested in maintaining the original plot of David Garnett's novel *The Sailor's Return* when she used it as source text to create a ballet in 1947. [7] She reconfigured the original novel's plot into two acts of two scenes each. [8] Then, Howard rearranged key scenes to appear in a new order

7. Susan Jones, "From Text to Dance: Andrée Howard's The Sailor's Return," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 26 (1) (2008): 1–17, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=A596253&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
8. Susan Jones, "From Text to Dance: Andrée Howard's The Sailor's Return," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 26 (1) (2008): 1–17, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=A596253&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

in her work. [9] This was based on Howard's own judgement on which themes were important in the novel, and her new structure reframed the narrative to make a strong cultural critique about female autonomy. [10] Despite Howard's departure from the novel's chronological plot, Howard paid an enormous amount of attention to the original text's detail, as she felt this was essential to capture the tone of the novel. [11] For example, she included a facial expression that the main character displayed in a key scene, which Garnett described vividly in the original novel. [12] She also reproduced a dance Garnett describes in the novel so exactly that every movement mentioned by the writer appeared in Howard's recreation. [13]

Howard's rendition of *The Sailor's Return* serves as an example of a choreographer taking specific details of a source text to work with literally and manipulating larger elements of source material (i.e. theme and plot) to serve their own artistic vision. I was inspired by Howard's commitment to maintaining the integrity of small details of salience (i.e. important

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9. Susan Jones, "From Text to Dance: Andrée Howard's The Sailor's Return," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 26 (1) (2008): 1–17, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=A596253&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
10. Susan Jones, "From Text to Dance: Andrée Howard's The Sailor's Return," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 26 (1) (2008): 1–17, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=A596253&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
11. Susan Jones, "From Text to Dance: Andrée Howard's The Sailor's Return," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 26 (1) (2008): 1–17, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=A596253&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
12. Susan Jones, "From Text to Dance: Andrée Howard's The Sailor's Return," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 26 (1) (2008): 1–17, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=A596253&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
13. Susan Jones, "From Text to Dance: Andrée Howard's The Sailor's Return," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 26 (1) (2008): 1–17, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=A596253&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

facial expressions). I decided to use this methodology in my own process and identify a few details that I wanted to explore literally in my final performance.

Throughout the play, Estragon's struggle to take off his boots appears multiple times. I incorporated this image literally by asking dancers to struggle with their boots throughout the choreography. The first time this scuffling appears is in the first five minutes of the piece, and the audience is reminded of this motif when it occurs twice in a later duet. I also directly incorporated details within the stage directions. At one point in the play, Vladimir and Estragon embrace one another with the following stage directions: "*Estragon raises his head. They look long at each other, then suddenly embrace, clapping each other on the back. End of the embrace. Estragon, no longer supported, almost falls.*"[14] In the dance, I asked two dancers to pace around one another, then clutch each other tightly as they pat one another on the back. One releases the other, and a dancer falls to the ground before the two restart. Not long after this moment appears in the choreography, I incorporate another exact detail when a dancer leaves a duet to mime urinating. This physicalizes Vladimir's frequent departure from Estragon to urinate in *Waiting for Godot.* These Howard-inspired choices helped me maintain the integrity of the play in small, manageable ways without becoming overwhelmed with trying to retell the entire story literally.

Additionally, Andrée Howard's methodology while creating *The Sailor's Return* inspired me to consider how to manipulate theme and plot to serve personal artistic visions. Howard rearranged key scenes to reform the narrative of the original novel to convey her own thematic interests and make a strong sociopolitical critique about female autonomy. [15] Inspired by the

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14. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 64.
15. Susan Jones, "From Text to Dance: Andrée Howard's The Sailor's Return," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 26 (1) (2008): 1–17, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=A596253&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

agency she took over the plot and her ability to invest in themes of interest to her, I decided to choreograph movement phrases that physicalized themes of salience in *Waiting for Godot.*

One overt theme in *Waiting for Godot* is circularity—there is a circular plot structure, time appears to circle back on itself, and actions repeat often. With this in mind, I choreographed a base phrase consisting of movements inspired by circularity. After the cast and I added in multiple details and detours—such as inserting glances at the audience, changing directional patterns, and retrograding movements—we had collaboratively created a more textured phrase that successfully embodied a theme from the text. We also incorporated circularity in the structure of the work. The piece ends and begins the exact same way: four dancers on either side of the space lying face down as the rest of the cast huddles around the tree folding paper airplanes. This feature suggests that the dance is on repeat, and that the cast, like the characters in the play, are eternally bound in an endless loop.

I used Howard's approach to physicalize one more theme of interest to me: hope. For me, hope is an essential element of the original text in *Waiting for Godot.* Despite Vladimir and Estragon's unfortunate circumstances, they never lose hope for long. The audience watches the characters regain hope over and over again and can be shocked by the resilience of their faith that *Godot* will come. For me, this introduced a compelling physical idea. I conceptualize the physicality of hopelessness and hopefulness to be strikingly different as a choreographer; the former incites movement that is bound, deflated, and lacks energy, and the latter inspires me to choreograph with free, unrestrained movements with inflated chests, upward gazes, and open arms. I wanted to explore this idea deeply and created a section of choreography which accompanied the song *(There'll Be) Peace In The Valley (For Me)* by Johnny Cash.

The choreography centered on hopefulness appears at the end of the performance. This section is noticeably different than the rest of the piece. For the first time in the work, the dancers move lusciously, indulgently, and freely. The dancers extend their arms with abandon, fling their body weight around, and open their torsos to the sky. They whirl through the space and appear carefree. Inspired by Marin's exploration of the musicality in Beckett's works, I decided to connect this choreography to the musical features of the song. The dancers move parallel to the cadence and speed of Cash's vocal delivery, creating a satisfying marriage of movement and text. I chose to display this section of choreography near the end, and cast two couples of dancers to perform it alongside one another. This piece ends the work because for me, it represents the essential takeaway from *Waiting for Godot*— that regardless of how dire one's circumstances can become, the human spirit has innate resilience and undying hope.

Just as Howard choreographed her ballet to reframe the novel as a feminist critique, I sought to generate movement sections that reimagine literary themes in *Waiting for Godot.* The movement phrases I generated and the larger framework of the dance embodies *Waiting for Godot*'s literary themes of circularity and hope both physically and structurally. Howard inspired me to generate movement that focused on one theme of importance at a time. This methodology was especially helpful in that it slowed down the choreography process; instead of attempting to tackle the plot and all themes of the play while choreographing, I was able to compartmentalize these themes and physicalize them one at a time. It also assisted the construction choices of the dance by prompting questions like, "Where can I insert this section in the larger framework of the dance so the audience will leave the performance pondering the theme of hope?" I felt this Howard-inspired approach allowed me to deeply consider how to successfully physicalize abstract theme and develop a choreographic voice consistent with my overall vision for the work.

Crystal Pite, *The Tempest Replica* (2011)

Another famous example of a choreographer using a source text is Crystal Pite's *The Tempest Replica* (2011). Described as "not a straight restaging, but a reimagining," this work used William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as source material.[16] While Pite initially felt incapable of adapting this source text, the work she created has been deemed "Pite's most explicit exploration to date of narrative in dance" and dives deeply into the story of *The Tempest*.[17] Pite sought to outline the original plot while exploring key relationships between characters.[18] She identified key words, phrases, and passaged she found most salient, then worked collaboratively with her dancers to create images amongst bodies that depicted the text.[19] For example, she felt the most important word in the play was "shipwreck."[20] When questioned on the role of this word in her work, Pite told *The Globe*, "I got as far as the word 'shipwreck' and I was caught. I was like, 'I want to make a shipwreck in a show, and translate the idea of shipwreck into the body, and make a solo that's a shipwreck'."[21] This quote explains the significance of the word *shipwreck* in *The Tempest Replica*, which appears abstracted in the choreography, as well as

16. Lyndsey Winship, "Putting a Spin on Shakespeare," *Evening Standard*, April 28, 2014, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=n5h&AN=95754923&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
17. Robert Everett-Green, "Taking on The Tempest, from Two Different Angles," *The Globe and Mail,* 2018, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/theatre-and-performance/taking-on-the-tempest-from-two-different-angles/article18492487/.
18. Peter Dickinson, "Textual Matters: Making Narrative and Kinesthetic Sense of Crystal Pite's Dance-Theater," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 1 (2014): 61–83, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0149767714000047.
19. Peter Dickinson, "Textual Matters: Making Narrative and Kinesthetic Sense of Crystal Pite's Dance-Theater," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 1 (2014): 61–83, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0149767714000047.
20. Peter Dickinson, "Textual Matters: Making Narrative and Kinesthetic Sense of Crystal Pite's Dance-Theater," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 1 (2014): 61–83, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0149767714000047.
21. Peter Dickinson, "Textual Matters: Making Narrative and Kinesthetic Sense of Crystal Pite's Dance-Theater," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 1 (2014): 61–83, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0149767714000047.

spoken aloud by one of the dancers. [22] During the creation process for this work, Pite reportedly asked the dancers to work alone, then in pairs, then as an entire group, to physically create a shipwreck. [23] She then used the generated physical images to construct key moments in the work. Pite also incorporates the image of the shipwreck through props onstage; a dancer folds pieces of paper into origami boats, one of which is eaten by another dancer later in the piece. [24] Pite found interdisciplinary ways to highlight additional vocabulary she found essential to the source material. [25] Using the technological capacity of the theater, key words from *The Tempest* are projected onto surfaces on the stage and parts of the dancers' bodies. [26] I found Pite's focus on specific vocabulary within the source text inspiring, as it offers concrete methods to abstract the source material.

Pite's work is a huge inspiration to me. *The Tempest Replica*'s creation sparked a number of ideas of how I can incorporate specific scenes, overarching themes, and dramatic plot structure into my thesis. It also prompted me to think of my thesis as a "physical reimagining" instead of a literal retelling of *Waiting for Godot*, which felt freeing. After researching Pite's methodologies, I found myself less concerned with doing the original play justice. Instead, I

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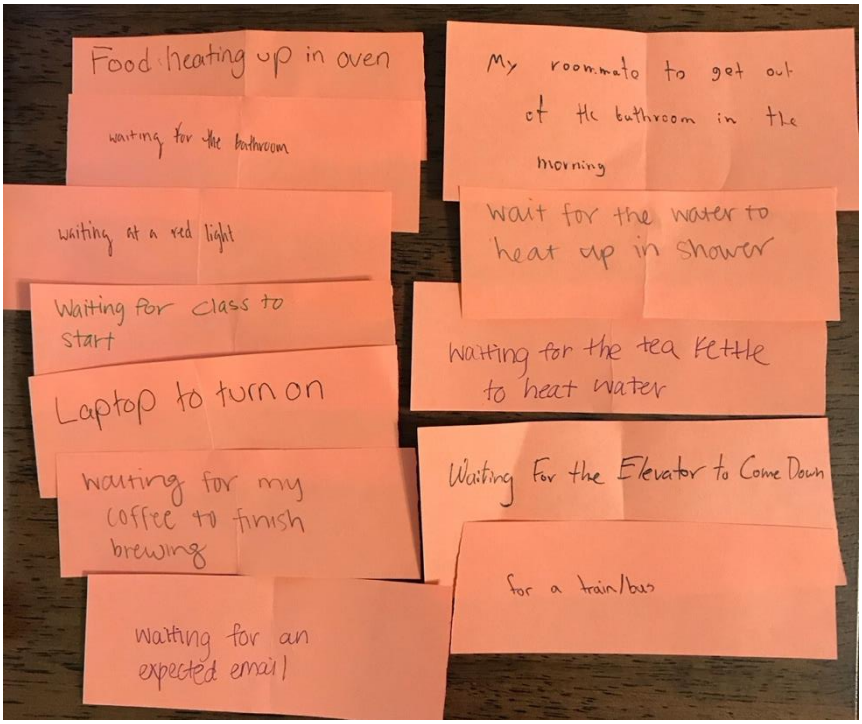
22. Peter Dickinson, "Textual Matters: Making Narrative and Kinesthetic Sense of Crystal Pite's Dance-Theater," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 1 (2014): 61–83, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0149767714000047.
23. Peter Dickinson, "Textual Matters: Making Narrative and Kinesthetic Sense of Crystal Pite's Dance-Theater," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 1 (2014): 61–83, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0149767714000047.
24. Peter Dickinson, "Textual Matters: Making Narrative and Kinesthetic Sense of Crystal Pite's Dance-Theater," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 1 (2014): 61–83, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0149767714000047.
25. Peter Dickinson, "Textual Matters: Making Narrative and Kinesthetic Sense of Crystal Pite's Dance-Theater," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 1 (2014): 61–83, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0149767714000047.
26. Peter Dickinson, "Textual Matters: Making Narrative and Kinesthetic Sense of Crystal Pite's Dance-Theater," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 1 (2014): 61–83, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0149767714000047.

became focused on finding my own ways of reimagining points of special interest through original movement. Identifying moments of salience in *Waiting for Godot* became more accessible. Pite's work made me realize that creating a dance work that somehow encapsulated the enormity of what the play posed—does life have any meaning?—was outside the scope of an undergraduate honors thesis. Instead, I allowed myself to focus on the points, scenes, themes, and moments in the source text that stood out to me—as Pite had—and create a dance that reimagined them. My research into *The Tempest Replica* also offered a variety of exercises I could use in rehearsal to generate choreography with snippets of text from *Waiting for Godot.*

Specifically, I was fascinated by how Pite asked her cast to create a shipwreck individually, then in pairs, and then as an entire group. Similarly to Pite's obsession with the term *shipwreck* during her creation process, I was often occupied by considering *waiting.* I decided to use this exercise to collaborate with my dancers and generate ways to physicalize *waiting*. In rehearsals in December 2019, I asked them to *wait* individually, then in pairs, and then finally as an entire group. The third image we created—where the entire cast waits together—was especially striking to me. I incorporated this image in the middle of the final work. Nine dancers huddle together and move through images of collective *waiting* as two dancers complete a duet.

Inspired by Pite's request of her dancers to embody waiting individually, I asked the dancers to write down examples of things they wait for in their everyday lives (see image below). Amongst other instances, the dancers wrote about waiting for food to be ready, for shower water to warm, for traffic to clear, and for their turn for the bathroom. I collected the cast's writings and asked the dancers to create one movement for each of these situations. The resulting phrase of choreography happened to exist on a low plane and centered seated and lying positions. A few salient moments include the dancers extending their hands out in front of them with their palms facing the sky, pressing their hands between their legs, falling to their sides, and slapping their hands on the ground. This "waiting" phrase appears multiple times in the work—duets execute excerpts of this phrase near the beginning, a trio of dancers perform it in unison in the middle of the work, and the cast performs it in unison a few minutes before the end of the work. I was pleased that we collected dancers' individual physical responses to each of these examples of waiting and were able to collaboratively string them together to create an interesting movement phrase.



The first moment of my work was also generated by utilizing a Pite-inspired methodology. I was fascinated by Pite's use of origami to represent the shipwreck in *The Tempest.* In February 2020, I asked my dancers what origami creations they could fold and received answers like boxes, fortune tellers, and birds. None of these felt like they fit to me, but inspiration struck weeks later when an observer came to watch rehearsal. This observer noted that in the beginning of the piece, he interpreted the dancers looking up at the sky with their eyes closed as dreaming of a faraway place. Another observer noted it seemed as though they were wishing for a plane to come and save them off a deserted island.

Inspired by Pite's use of origami and this feedback, I asked seven of my dancers to wait around the tree at the beginning and end of the piece. These dancers huddle together and whisper to one another as they tear pages out of copies of *Waiting for Godot* and fold them into paper airplanes. I chose to have them tear pages out of the play as an homage to Maguy Marin's 1981 discussion with Samuel Beckett, where he told Marin that she should disregard the integrity of the original play. I felt as though tearing pages out of copies of the play was the ultimate disregard for the original text. The dancers use these pages for their folded planes, which they send through the space once completed. I coached the dancers to fold these planes as if they were creating vessels that would eventually save them from their condition and to send these planes through the air as if they were imagining a real plane coming to rescue them. The planes slide through the air briefly before slamming into the floor and littering the ground. I asked the dancers to appear as though their hope is lost when the planes crash, but to then regain hope as they rip another page and fold another plane. I wanted to physicalize Vladimir and Estragon's endless circle of losing and regaining hope in this image.

In Pite's *The Tempest Replica*, a dancer eats an origami boat. I was inspired by this unorthodox use of origami, which is traditionally preserved in its final form. The paper planes have a similar end in my work. The dancers eventually arise, walk throughout the space, and trample the folded airplanes. The dancers look down, pick up the planes, and after a brief moment of contemplation crumple the planes in their hands. They walk over to the tree and toss the crumpled paper into a piece of aluminum ducting, creating an image reminiscent of people throwing out trash into a can. This image not only seeks to physicalize their loss of hope in their salvation, but also nods to Pite's destruction of origami in *The Tempest Replica.*

National Dance Education Organization

There are many famous examples of choreographers incorporating text into their dance performance or choreography, and all of them offer insight into how artists approach this task. However, I still wondered if any artists had documented a concrete set of principles and exercises centering text and choreography which I could take into rehearsals with me. These types of exercises are essential in giving my choreographic process of translating *Waiting for Godot* a structural foundation. I craved more information on methodologies artists had created and recorded, not just utilized in in rehearsal. While researching how dancers had codified their text-translating choreography process, I found that dance educators were leading the movement of integrating text and dance.

Susan McGreevy-Nichols, the executive director and CEO of the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO), is one of the leading artists working with text-based choreography. [27] She teaches text and choreography workshops around the country and has developed a codified set of exercises that have been integrated into her dance education

27. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.

curriculums. [28] I interviewed McGreevy-Nichols in November of 2019 to gain insight into her work and to more deeply understand her database of codified exercises.

McGreevy-Nichols's interest in incorporating text into her choreography generation stemmed from a passion for promoting dance education and literacy simultaneously. [29] She has subsequently created a large database of prompts and exercises that guide dancers in translating text into movement, and she has documented all of them for use in her curriculum. [30] She stresses that after a choreographer selects a text, they must identify vocabulary in the selected text that is particularly "juicy," or carries rich imagery, to work off of. [31] For me, hearing this was reassuring. McGreevy-Nichols was not suggesting that a choreographer must physicalize every word in a text to effectively translate source material, but that a choreographer can focus on a selected vocabulary bank that they feel is either most essential or most vivid.

We discussed workshops McGreevy-Nichols led in 2019 and which text-inspired movement creation methodologies she introduced to participants in these sessions. [32] She explained that one exercise she focuses on is creating "moving definitions." [33] A choreographer can place key words and phrases on notecards, and then ask dancers to work in pairs to create "moving definitions" of this vocabulary set. [34] While one dancer holds up a card, the other can

28. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.
29. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.
30. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.
31. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.
32. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.
33. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.
34. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.

create movements and gestures that emulate the text's definition and connotations. [35] After "moving definitions" are created in pairs, she asks dancers to share their generated movement with the entire group. [36] McGreevy-Nichols frequently asks observers to guess which text they are watching a "moving definition" of. [37] This practice seeks to ensure the translated definition still comes off as relating to the original text, and therefore, the exercise maintains the integrity of the source material. [38]

McGreevy-Nichols sometimes takes a visual approach when teaching choreographers how to create text-based material. She encourages choreographers to ask their dancers to read through the text and then sketch out what they see in their mind's eye. [39] She carries out these visual exercises often, as she strongly believes in the constructive nature of having images to work off of when stringing together movement phrases into a dance. [40] With some groups, she shows the dancers images related to the text—i.e. a novel's cover or a scene from a produced play—and asks them to record any mental images, feelings, or memories that occur to them as they view these images. [41] The word bank that is created by the dancers jotting down their thoughts can be utilized when creating movement and allows for the dancers' relationships to the

35. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.
36. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.
37. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.
38. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.
39. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.
40. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.
41. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.

text to appear in the choreography. [42] Once a solid base of movements and gestural strings has been created, McGreevy-Nichols suggests applying a combination of the following choreographic techniques to create full phrases with all of the movement: [43]

- Repeat a section of movement over and over.
- Exaggerate various aspects/elements of the movement phrase.
- Slow the sequence down or speed the sequence up.
- Emphasize one aspect of the movement phrase.
- Change the point of interest (i.e. instead of letting your body represent the wind blowing, become an object that the wind is blowing such as a leaf).
- Change levels, focus, and quality (sharp, smooth, light, strong) of movements.
- Do an opposite or contrasting movement to the one that has been created.
- Use multiple dancers to create the aspect to be danced. For example, five dances can form a boat.
- Add other movement to the original movement, such as adding a turn or focus change. [44]

McGreevy-Nichols gave me a concrete set of tools to use when translating the text of *Waiting for Godot.* I was exposed to two generation exercises she created—"moving definitions" and introducing visual components to dancers—both of which I had never encountered before. She inspired me to consider how to use visuals (i.e. inspirational photos and dancer drawings) to help inform my own vision of the work. Our discussion also prompted me to contemplate how to make translating text more accessible to my dancers; the "moving definitions" exercise offered

42. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.
43. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.
44. Susan McGreevy-Nichols, interview by author via phone and email message, November 21, 2019.

an entry point for dancers of varying levels of familiarity with a text to easily engage with the source material.

I utilized the choreographic manipulations Susan McGreevy-Nichols introduced me to throughout the creative process. For example, in a phrase I created based on verbs I found essential in *Waiting for Godot*, I created one gesture that struck me as especially salient— the dancers press their folded hands together in a prayer-like position, tuck them into their shoulder, press their ear to their hands, and close their eyes. They appear to be sleeping, and this movement was generated in response to the verb "sleep." One of McGreevy-Nichols's manipulative exercises was to change the level of a movement, so the cast lists one dancer high above their heads as they appear to "sleep" in this position. I utilized another one of her exercises by repeating this entire motion, and so this image happens twice in the work. Her manipulation technique of repeating a section of movement over and over can be found again in the first ten minutes of my work, when the dancers are on the floor repeating a gestural phrase seven times. In these same moments, I applied McGreevy-Nichols's exercises to "add other movement to the original movement, such as adding a turn or focus change" too, by asking the dancers to change their facing and/or posture at the end of the phrase after the second time repeating the gestures. This added texture to the section, and it was more engaging to watch. The influence of McGreevy-Nichols is seen immediately after this section, where they crawl until they lay face down on the floor. McGreevy-Nichols discussed with me how she emphasizes one movement in a phrase to add variety, so I altered a movement phrase in the middle of the work to highlight the first movement— the dancers popping up their toes up while they lie on the floor. Overall, the exercises that McGreevy-Nichols developed were hugely helpful in cultivating my work's nuance and texture.

The final element of my work inspired by McGreevy-Nichols was incorporated in the rehearsal process. McGreevy-Nichols includes visual elements when choreographing and asks dancers to draw images that come to mind when thinking about the work. I asked my dancers to do the same in January 2020 (see image on next page). This exercise yielded insight into how my dancers conceptualize *Waiting for Godot*, and gave me new images to pull inspiration from when constructing key moments in the work.

Bridging Past Experiences to Current Processes

In addition to my research of historical methodologies, I have personally collected a similar database of text-centric creation exercises and prompts throughout my dance training and choreographic experiences. For instance, in 2018, a collaborator and I used a podcast excerpt as source material and utilized this audio in the soundscape of our created work. After considering how I could incorporate audio into my current choreographic process, I decided to play a

recording of a production of *Waiting for Godot* in rehearsal. The dancers and I improvised while listening to the actors deliver the original lines, and (in silence) selected improvised movements to string together. This created a movement sequence that includes dancers touching their ankles, whirling their forearms in circles, and mashing their fists into the ground. This phrase appears in snippets in the second half of the piece.

Yet, probably the most impactful previous experience I had that shaped my process was at the 2019 b12 Festival for Contemporary Dance and Performance Art, where I worked with Serbian movement artist Fabian Wixe. He once taught us an exercise to generate movement strings, which he explained uses text to guide dancers in creating inventive movements during choreography block. We all wrote verbs on slips of paper, which Wixe pulled from a bowl and read one at a time. The dancers would create a movement or gesture that emulated that verb to whatever level of abstraction they chose. By calling out one verb at a time, the dancers created a movement string that accumulated text-inspired movements gradually. Occasionally, he would yell "change," a command to either change our space in the room or change our body's position or level. By the time the bowl was empty, we had a full-bodied, connected phrase. We would then work in pairs on a manipulation exercise Wixe called "Detail, Detour." In this exercise, one student would dance, and the other would add in one small detail (i.e. inserting a head roll) and one detour (a larger movement pattern, such as transposing a movement onto the floor). After multiple rounds of "Detail, Detour," our phrases appeared "supercharged" with details and fluidity. Wixe's exercise was effective in rooting a choreographic process in text as well as stimulating inventiveness with movement manipulation.

I loved both of these exercises and utilized them in my process of creating *Very Unpromising Material.* While I was in Berlin studying with Wixe, I underwent the laborious

process of cataloguing every word in the play's original text into verbs, nouns, and adjectives. I quickly noticed that in *Waiting for Godot*, some verbs appear over and over again, indicating their importance to the work. I decided I wanted to create a sharply executed gestural phrase inspired by these words that felt central to the play. I classified the following twelve verbs as essential: beat, beg, suffer, lost, sleep, weep, wait, save, hang, repent, put down (in reference to carried objects), and strike.

Once I selected these verbs, I created one simple movement for each word (see image on next page for clear images of each of these movements). This generation method was a familiar process to me, as it was one I utilized in duets I created in 2018 and 2019. To evoke "beat," the dancers punched one fist into their other hand—creating a slapping sound. For "beg" and "suffer," the dancers offer their open hands to the audience with a pathetic expression, then sigh audibly as their shoulders roll forward. The dancers gaze over their right shoulders—appearing "lost." Then, they "sleep" by pressing their folded hands to their left shoulders and closing their eyes. They spend two counts dragging their hands down their cheeks as if their fingers are tracing the pattern of wept tears. To physicalize the verb "wait," they drop their arms from their faces, clench their left fists, and stare at their wrists as if they are staring at a watch. Their chests lift, and their chins point at the sky while their right legs rise off of the floor in a low attitude position; this position depicts being "saved." Their feet find the floor again as they "hang"—their arms clasp above their heads, their elbows straighten, their head hangs loosely at the floor, and their shoulders distend out of their sockets from the reach. Then, they "repent" by looking up at the sky as their palms open to their sides. To reference "putting down" heavy carried objects, the dancers' knees drop to the floor, offering their weight to the supportive floor rather than being

held up on their own two feet. Finally, they strike the ground with their left palms and rock back on to their feet to stand again.

Gesture 1: "Beat"

Gesture 2: "Beg"

Gesture 3: "Suffer"

Gesture 4: "Lost"

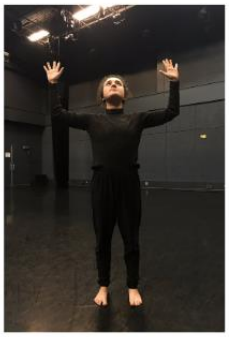
Gesture 5: "Sleep"

Gesture 6: "Tears"

Gesture 7: "Wait"

Gesture 8: "Save"

Gesture 9: "Hang"



Gesture 10: "Repent"

Gesture 11: "Put Down"

Gesture 12: "Strike"

This phrase was taught to all of the dancers and serves as a motif that appears multiple times in the final work. However, I wanted to create related derivatives using the dancers' choreographic abilities. I broke the cast into three groups and offered them different sequences of these verbs (see diagram below). Each group was asked to create their own string of movement by stitching together each designated gesture. The end result was three separate gestural phrases that appeared thematically similar to the gestural phrase I created—unsurprising considering they

Verb	Group A	Group B	Group C
1	Hang	Hope	Beat
2	Beat	Crucify	Hope
3	Repent	Sleep	Repent
4	Beg	Lost	Suffer
5	Wait	Beg	Save
6	Suffer	Save	Crucify
7	Sleep	Wait	Hang
8	Crucify	Hang	Weep
9	Save	Weep	Sleep
10	Hope	Repent	Beg
11	Weep	Suffer	Lost
12	Lost	Beat	Wait

were generated using the same vocabulary. These phrases were incorporated into the choreography of the final work.

Additionally, I applied Wixe's exercise of "Detail, Detour" to many first drafts of choreography I created. Inspired by Howard's theme-based approach to crafting a dance, I choreographed a phrase consisting of movements inspired by the theme of circularity. After I taught the first draft to the cast, I asked them to suggest multiple details and detours we could use to add texture to the choreography. We collaboratively came up with many insertions, including glances at the audience, changing directional patterns, and retrograding movements. Once we had undergone multiple rounds of this process, I felt the phrase looked more nuanced. The process added rhythm, repetition, and dynamic contrast that did not exist in the movement

before. I foresee utilizing this Wixe exercise many more times over the course of my career, as it makes unique movement qualities and patterns much more accessible to a choreographer.

Creating Original Methodologies

Although I incorporated other artists' exercises into my choreographic process, many of these experiences inspired me to find my own inventive ways of translating text and movement. I craved putting my own spin on specific scenes that stood out to me in *Waiting for Godot,* and began exploring how to physicalize these moments with my dancers. One scene that has always struck me is the opening of Act II. In this scene, Vladimir is singing to himself. He sings an absurd, nonsensical song. There is the original text:

VLADIMIR: A dog came in–

Having begun too high he stops, clears his throat, resumes:

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. [45]

This song's absurd lyrics struck a chord with me artistically, and I was interested in the way the stage directions depict Vladimir as not remembering the lyrics to the song. Thus, I committed to incorporating the dog song early on. In December 2019, I assigned this solo to a dancer who I knew had a talent for committing to absurd theatricality onstage, and we worked together on the vocal delivery of the lines for months. As discussed in previous sections, the theme of an isolated individual is common in writings within the Theatre of the Absurd, and I wanted this theme to carry into my own choreography. Additionally, my research into Maguy Marin's use of *Jesus's Blood Never Failed Me Yet* in her work *May B* inspired me. In an interview, Marin explained that the man singing in this song appears to be poor, drunk, and alone in a street, but sings about having hope despite his circumstances. [46] I decided to incorporate the

45. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015).
46. Thomas Cousineau, "An Interview with Maguy Marin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 133–40. https://doi.org/10.3366/jobs.1994.4.1.14.

dog song onstage in a manner which brings out the absurdist theme of isolation and also nods to Marin's musical selection of a single person singing.

About two-thirds into my work, one dancer exits a clump of bodies and begins to sing the dog song as the other dancers begin to sketch out the pattern of Samuel Beckett's play for television, *Quad.* The dancer sings it once to themself, then pauses to think—as Vladimir does in the script. Then, they start again—this time singing more loudly and with their face up towards the ceiling. They clear their throat multiple times and begin the song yet again. They sing with abandon and embody a relaxed, loose physicality. They struggle to remember the lyrics of the song. The dancer repeats the song again—this time screaming the lyrics at a high volume as they turn their attention towards the sky. They move through the space, haphazardly weaving in and out of the dancers sketching out the *Quad* pattern. They exaggerate their physicality as they act out the lyrics of the song. The dancer completes the song and turns towards the tree. They start to sing again with a soft voice and approach the tree. The dancer caresses the tree as they sing to it lovingly—a movement designed to communicate an intrinsic gravitation to the tree. The dancer ends their song on the floor cradling the tree.

Another scene of importance occurs in Act II. Vladimir and Estragon pass the time by viciously fighting with one another. This moment has stood out to me since the first reading, as it strikes me as wildly absurd and a poignant manifestation of a complicated relationship. The argument goes as follow:

VLADIMIR: Ceremonious ape!

ESTRAGON: Punctilious pig!

VLADIMIR: Finish your phrase, I tell you!

ESTRAGON: Finish your own!

Silence. They draw closer, halt.

VLADIMIR: Moron!

ESTRAGON: That's the idea, let's abuse each other.

They turn, move apart, turn again and face each other.

VLADIMIR: Moron!

ESTRAGON: Vermin!

VLADIMIR: Abortion!

ESTRAGON: Morpion!

VLADIMIR: Sewer-rat!

ESTRAGON: Curate!

VLADIMIR: Cretin!

ESTRAGON: *(with finality).* Crritic! [47]

I used this scene as inspiration for a multi-minute fight scene in the middle of the work. First, I asked two dancers in December 2019 to explore how it feels to yell these lines at one another at a high volume. This was an attempt to make the dancers more comfortable with vocalizing at an uncomfortable level of volume onstage. Then, while studying with Vim Vigor Dance in New York in January 2020, artistic director Shannon Gillen worked with me on similar acting exercises. Gillen explained to us that dancers are typically comfortable performing a certain level of anger onstage, but asked us to consider the possibilities of taking oneself to an extreme level of anger usually never seen in public. This prompt was extremely interesting to me, and I brought it back to Emory. I decided to lean into the dancers' discomfort and redesigned the fight scene.

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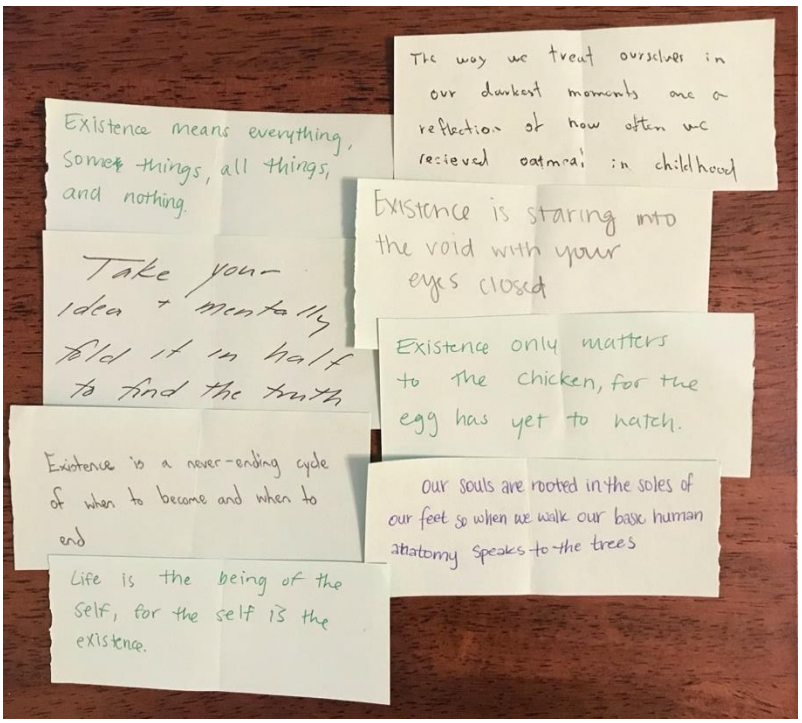
47. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 85.

In the final version of the fight, two dancers are exploring physicalizing the fight scene. One dancer is climbing atop another dancer, trying to tell him about a nightmare he had the night prior. This is a direct allusion to a scene in Act I of *Waiting for Godot* when Vladimir does not want to hear about Estragon's nightmare. The other dancer protests, and they begin to bicker as they shove one another. They begin to fight physically and yell at one another with more vigor. As they yell at one another, they travel through space, colliding with other dancers who are in their trajectory. These other dancers are performing small movements within their kinesphere with an intense task orientation, but when they are interrupted, the fight seems to infect them. Suddenly, the fight catches on like a forest fire throughout the space, and all the dancers are screaming at one another. The group travels through space before a single dancer screams with finality, "Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!" Similar to the original scene, this stops the fight abruptly. Everyone stares at the dancer who just screamed, but nobody says anything. Then, they melt into the floor and all sit with their feet in front of themselves—everyone facing the same direction. Moments pass in silence.

This scene was one of the most difficult scenes to hone in the rehearsal process. Asking dancers to perform an extreme level of anger inevitably incited discomfort, which morphed into nervous laughing throughout this section. We had to work as a cast on this scene often to make the dancers more comfortable with owning this level of anger in their faces, voices, and bodies. I had two individuals from the Emory Theatre Studies department come to rehearsal to help guide the dancers in their theatricality, which benefited the realism of the piece significantly. Once the scene was refined, it received consistently positive feedback from rehearsal observers and became one of my favorite moments in the piece.

The final methodology of my own creation I utilized was a writing exercise with my dancers. Throughout this research project, I have returned to the theme of existentialism many times and how it is jarringly juxtaposed to Beckett's reluctance to speak to its meaning. I decided to ask my dancers to put on Beckett's metaphorical hat for a moment, and write some phrases that (although they seem to have deep existential meaning) they do not feel carry any metaphorical weight. The dancers loved this exercise and leaned into their own creativity to generate some really wonderful material (see image below). I selected one submission, which was written by Jinnie Xie, "Existence is staring into the void with your eyes closed." I loved the cadence of this sentence. I felt as though this phrase succinctly explained Vladimir and Estragon's condition of having the truth at their fingertips but being unable to see their reality clearly. To include it in the work, I choreographed a dancer screaming this sentence to the sky early in the piece.



Conclusion

In researching approaches taken by known choreographers and implementing my own knowledge as a performer, I could construct a large toolkit of exercises to pull from when seeking ways to root my choreography in its source text. I gained an understanding of how to select and work with a key vocabulary bank to create individual movements, how to approach narrowing down a large source text, how to include text generated from dancers, and how to work from a source text through listening to recordings. Yet, although many of the moments in *Very Unpromising Material* were inspired by and generated through methodologies codified by other artists, I was glad to have multiple moments in the work that were generated through my own methodologies too.

CHAPTER IV

ARTISTIC CHOICES

Put simply, western concert dance is a constructed work of art based on specific choices. Dance artists make a number of artistic decisions to support the choreography, including lighting, spatial arrangement of the performance venue, sound, and set design of their works. These choices are sometimes made in collaboration with cast members and production crews. In this chapter, I will explain my final choreographic choices and influences over the production elements of the performances.

Production Elements

Theater Space

The work begins as soon as an audience member enters the space. Similar to the play, the action between characters does not appear to begin when the audience turns its attention to it—instead, it is already in effect. The work is performed in the round (with the audience on all four sides of the dancers). I elected to have the space set up with this configuration because it allows the audience to see the dance from any side of the space. Additionally, since a theme of *Waiting for Godot* and *Very Unpromising Material* is circularity, arranging the space in the round made sense conceptually. I also wanted to physically enclose my dancers to highlight the fact that they were literally confined to the stage at all times. Finally, I felt with a play as avant-garde and unorthodox as *Waiting for Godot*, it would not be defendable to have a traditional proscenium setup.

Sound

When I read or watch *Waiting for Godot*, I am struck by a hyper-awareness of time passing. As I have discussed, plays before *Godot* were largely realistic, and many abided by the

Three Unities. Realism and the Three Unities also affected playwright's relationship to time; one minute of stage time represented one minute of real time. After *Godot*, entire plays could represent a fraction of a second or centuries. Readers of *Waiting for Godot* are easily perplexed by the play's presentation of time. It is unclear how long the protagonists have been waiting for Godot before the play begins or how long they will continue to wait after the play concludes. This awareness of time passing fascinated me, and I was interested in finding ways of sparking a similar effect for audience members who watch the work. An advisor prompted me to consider other stimuli that spark similar effects, and I noticed one instantaneously—music.

When I listen to music that my parents listened to during my childhood, I am overcome by an awareness of time. I immediately reflect on how much time has passed since my childhood and am reminded of what life was like back then. Similar to *Waiting for Godot*, experiencing this music also triggers existential considerations. For me, considering the passage of time sparks feelings of nostalgia and contemplations on my adult life. It became clear that the experiences of reading *Waiting for Godot* and listening to my parents' favorite music both ignite existential thought, feelings of nostalgia, and reflections on time. I began exploring the relationship between choreography and these music selections in the summer of 2019. I created a Spotify playlist of 40 songs that I recalled my parents playing during my childhood and listened to this music on repeat for months. I considered which of these selections sparked the most choreographic inspiration and triggered reflective nostalgia. After a few months, I found myself returning to the same few songs and decided to incorporate them into my work.

The first selection I chose was *Alone Again (Naturally)* by Gilbert O' Sullivan. Not only do I have visceral memories of my father playing this piece in my youth, the lyrics of this song include many of the themes in *Waiting for Godot*—including but not limited to suicide, relational

dependency, religion, abandonment, desertion, and existential bargaining with a higher power (see appendix for full lyrics). I began improvising to this song in efforts to generate material in August of 2019, and in the fall of 2019, I created a duet in an absurdist style to this piece. I continued working on fine-tuning this duet, which explores the grotesque, dependent, and curious relationship between Vladimir and Estragon, and included it in the final presentation of my thesis research in March 2020.

As my thesis developed in the spring of 2020, I selected a few more pieces to include in the final presentation's soundscape. Both of my parents love the song *Horse With No Name* by America. This song is both catchy and haunting, and the lyrics describe an existential epiphany after a journey through a desert. Ironically, the American singer-songwriters had been living in Europe for many years at the time of writing this song, and were relying only on vague memories of American deserts when constructing the lyrics. The experience of calling upon memories of former locations appears in *Waiting for Godot*—i.e. when Vladimir and Estragon recall being in Paris atop the Eiffel Tower. Additionally, listening to this song brings up memories of my childhood which in turn reminds me of locations I formerly occupied. This song is highly recognizable and popular, and I believe this song triggers similar feelings for many people. I selected this song to appear in the first minutes of the work. This choice was designed to evoke nostalgia and reflections of time from the audience early on while watching the work.

I also selected the song *My Sweet Lord* by George Harrison—one of my father's favorite songs. More intensely than any of my other selections, this song instantly triggers flashbacks to earlier years. Additionally, Harrison sings about longing for a relationship with his God and being physically distant from a higher power—ideas overtly present in *Waiting for Godot*. Including this piece of music was a nod to the religious allegory of the play and its plethora of

religious interpretations. Towards the end of the work, Harrison cites a number of Hindu deities. I did not care to include this section of the song, as it carries implications irrelevant to my project and chose to fade the music out before that verse.

The last piece of music that appears in my work is *(There'll Be) Peace In The Valley (For Me)* by Johnny Cash. As a Southern artist, Johnny Cash has always been a familiar voice in my homes. This song speaks to a theme in *Waiting for Godot* of special interest to me—hope. The lyrics of this song (included in appendix) discuss sentiments of hope despite difficult times and unfortunate circumstances. This, in my opinion, is the lasting impression *Waiting for Godot* leaves me with. Readers across the world have marveled for centuries at how Vladimir and Estragon still have hope despite their hapless condition. The soulful and earthy drawl of Johnny Cash connects the hopeful message to a narrative of American resilience, a sentiment familiar to me as someone who grew up in the American South. I chose to pair this piece with free, unrestrained, indulgent movements that include the dancers looking up at the sky, which I feel effectively physicalize the experience of hope. I chose to end the work with this piece of music because I find it emblematic of *Waiting For Godot* overall. This song, *Waiting For Godot,* and my honors thesis choreography all represent an ultimate hope deferred, but not destroyed.

Costumes

I chose to costume my dancers in brown suits with brown, lace-up boots. This was a nod to the historical costuming of this work, which has overwhelmingly placed Vladimir and Estragon in suits. Suits are usually only mass produced in black or brown, but the color black can carry connotations with bleakness and sorrow, and I did not want to convey those associations. Instead, I opted for a warmer, more dated, brown suit. Beckett famously said that the only thing he knew for certain about Vladimir and Estragon is that they were both wearing bowler hats.

Although I planned to initially costume everyone in similar brown bowler hats, they shaded everyone's eyes in the overhead lighting, so I instead placed a few hats on the tree so that they were still incorporated into the overall design.

Tree

The tree is an infamous piece of set design in this play, and in *Very Unpromising Material* dancers interact with it often. In my work, the tree represents an idol to the dancers akin to Vladimir and Estragon's veneration of Godot. Beckett's opening stage directions only offer the tree as a vague clue to where the characters exist, and directors have gone in a variety of directions with the tree's design. Paul Chan created a stripped down, bare, metal tree when he produced *Waiting for Godot* in Louisiana in 2008. The Broadway version of the play centered a realistic, mid-size tree covered in dead vines. For my design, I was inspired by an abandoned object I found in the streets of Brooklyn, New York in the summer of 2019 (see photo below). It

included heaps of old junk and scrap metal piled into a shopping cart. It was unclear if the fixture was a street art installation or had been deserted by a vagrant, but its mysterious history intrigued me in the same way Vladimir and Estragon's did. The fact that the piece was built in the shopping cart evoked a feeling of displacement and homelessness, and the miscellany of the

objects made them appear confusingly out-of-place, which is the way I perceive Vladimir and Estragon in *Godot*. I decided to create a similar design for my tree.

With my father's construction knowledge assisting me, I created a wooden frame within an old shopping cart that supported a seven-foot piece of wood, which stuck out of the shopping cart vertically and served as the tree's trunk. After painting the cart and the wooden frame, we affixed more pieces of wood to the frame to create branches, and then added scrap metal to the skeleton. I dove for this scrap metal at Pirkle Metal Recycling in midtown Atlanta. Photos of the scrap metal dive and the construction of the tree are included in appendix. The final piece was about eight feet fall and four feet wide, and was centered in the middle of the stage throughout the entirety of the work (image of the final product below.)

Choreography

The opening image displays a cluster of dancers seated center stage around the tree. They sit with their backs towards the tree and tear pages from copies of Waiting for Godot*, which they fold into paper airplanes. They stare into space as they throw their origami planes through the air and watch them fall around the space. The planes fall around four dancers, arranged in pairs, lying face down on the floor beside each other. Minutes after the audience settles into their seats, the dancers seem to awaken into consciousness. They rise from the floor, eyes closed, and meander around the space. Ambient sounds of wind whistle through the speakers, creating a sense of everywhere and nowhere. The soundscape consists of silence interspersed with wind and sparse, high-pitched tones. When the dancers hear noise, they curiously turn their faces towards the sky. The dancers open their eyes after a few moments and pace through the space as they recognize one another.*

I created the opening scene to evoke a sense of waiting from the audience as they "wait" for the dance to begin and for the action to take their attention. I also wanted to confuse the audience in terms of where the dance takes place; the ambient noise gives no clues to setting, and the dancers wander around aimlessly. This scene suggests that the dancers are either lost or stranded by directing them to turn their faces towards the sky when they heard noise, which implies that they may be looking for something from above to come save them.

After multiple minutes of this improvisational walking, the dancers find themselves in a circle looking up at the tree as *A* Horse With No Name *begins to play. The dancers raise their arms until their shoulders distend, and then open their palms as their knees sink to the floor. They melt into the floor in unison, and lie face down with their feet towards the tree. One dancer props themself up, which catches on and ripples through the circle. The dancers relax back into*

the floor until a dancer slaps their hand on the floor, causing them all to prop themselves up in unison. They turn to sit cross-legged in the circle, with their flexed hands resting on the ground in front of them. Everyone peers inquisitively into their hands. A series of duets erupt, and dancers begin phrase work developed out of everyday waiting postures. Other dancers wait, continuing to peer into their hands, until the duets come to a close. A dancer declares, "Let's go," inciting a 30-second long process of dancers begrudgingly dragging themselves off the floor. The dancers come to their feet and all stare at the audience with slouched, tired, and irritated expressions.

I crafted this section to demonstrate that the dancers had a shared relationship to the tree. The image of the dancers raising their arms high above their heads and then sinking to their knees as they enclose the sculpture suggests submission to the tree. Dancers lying face down on the floor is a motif that appears multiple times over the work. For me, watching this motion elicits a feeling of being unsettled by the body showing up in a position it should not be in. This is the experience I have reading *Waiting for Godot* and experiencing the characters' displacement, so I wanted to create movement that generated the same experience for my audience members. Then, I show the section where the dancers prop themselves up one at a time in a circle around the tree, which I created to force the cast members into waiting in stillness for their cue to move. After this, I wanted to create more texture onstage—since the dancers had been moving in unison for about five minutes—and duets form. All of these movements were taken from the "waiting" phrase we created based on dancer writings; I decided to insert small pieces of this phrase first, so the audience was introduced to its physical ideas before the cast performs it in unison and entirety later on. Additionally, I was fascinated by the idea of highlighting duets in this work because partnership is a pervasive theme in *Waiting for Godot.*

Once the duets settle, the first piece of text appears in the work through vocal delivery. I selected this piece of text because it is significant to the play—it closes both acts. I guided the dancers to appear reluctant to move because in *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon do not move at the close of both acts despite their declaration of "Let's go."

After a few moments of stillness, the dancers turn their attention to their boots. They begin to slowly walk clockwise in the circle, stumbling over their boots slightly, but the intensity quickly increases. Soon, they are aggressively pulling at their boots, which dissolves the circle in a flurry of stomping and grunting. The dancers struggle to pull off their boots but are unsuccessful. The dancers find themselves staring forward in a clump in a corner of the space. They all turn their upper bodies to look at a dancer in the middle of the clump, who loudly exclaims, "Existence is staring into the void with your eyes closed." The dancer is immediately tackled to the ground by the dancer standing beside them. The other dancers immediately respond by folding at the waist and hunching their backs so their arms dangle in front of them. While the two dancers in the center continue to wrestle each other, another dancer claps four times, which incites the hunched dancers leaving the two wrestling. They walk around the space in a military-inspired walking pattern with their postures confidence and gestures sure. The dancers finish the walking pattern by peering behind themselves at another corner of the space.

The dancers struggle with their boots multiple times in *Very Unpromising Material.* I pulled this image directly from the opening of the play when Estragon struggles to take off his boots. I asked the dancers to dissolve the circle while they stomp and struggle to establish a new spatial idea with everyone clustered in a corner close to audience members. The text I selected for the dancer to exclaim was chosen from a writing exercise I conducted with my dancers. I asked her to scream this line to the sky to establish a verbal relationship with a power above the

space. She is tackled once she finishes this line, which I choreographed to display the aggression the characters of *Waiting for Godot* show one another unexpectedly throughout the play. Then, some dancers depart from the wrestlers in a vaguely militant fashion. I created this phrase after being inspired by reading a theory that the character Godot was a bastardization of the French word for military boots, and Beckett was writing this character as a symbol for waiting for the French military to come to him and his wife during World War II to inform them France had been liberated. Due to this inspiration, this movement is strongly executed, and the dancers walk confidently in unison with prescribed, uniform stride lengths and 90 degree turns of direction.

In a corner, two dancers continue to wrestle. One shouts at the other, "Let's go!" The other responds, "We can't." The first dancer asks, "Why?" The second dancer says, "We're waiting for Godot." This conversation happens multiple times as they continue wrestling. Meanwhile, the rest of the dancers are breaking off into smaller groups. Some raise their hands to the corner they are staring at. Others come to the floor and sit, waiting, in front of the tree with their cheeks in their hands. Another group completes a series of gestures twice. As this happens, the two wrestlers conclude and stand up, high on their toes, and pace the space in a rectangular pattern. They face the audience and take tiny steps as they hold hands tightly. As they pace, all the other dancers crawl to a corner of their space and wait for the two to arrive. One of the two dancers tip-toeing around the space laments, "I can't go on like this." The other responds, "That's what you think." This conversation is repeated three times, and then the dancers look at one another and join the rest of the group on the floor.

While the dancers wrestle, I wanted them to speak so their voices were layered with physical exertion. I selected their dialogue because the lines address a repeated conversation Vladimir and Estragon have in the play—one has to remind the other that they cannot leave, as

they are still waiting for Godot. While this happened in one corner of the space, I built a section of groups performing different movements to create spatial texture onstage. Additionally, it provided some visual relief for audience members as the group spread out throughout the space. Then, the two wrestlers tiptoe around the space—a movement I choreographed to outline the limits of the dancers' literal confinement. The conversation that they have while performing this outlining was pulled directly from the script. It is repeated in the play, so therefore I felt it important to include.

Clumped in another corner of the space, a dancer near the back of the herd begins a gestural phrase as My Sweet Lord *by George Harrison comes in through the speakers. After slapping their hand on the floor to complete the phrase, the rest of the dancers join in. They complete this gestural phrase seven times in unison, changing facings intermittently. After a few cycles, some dancers pause to show the audience a specific moment of the phrase more clearly. After which, the dancers sink into the floor and begin crawling around the space. They lay around the space facedown with their arms outstretched beside them. Then, they slap their hands on the floor and tuck their toes underneath them. Their heads roll, and they come to their knees as they struggle to take off their shoes. They complete phrase work on their own time—turning around themselves, rolling down to the floor, and sliding along the space. They crawl into a circle facing the tree with their arms outstretched towards the ground. They roll their heads, stand up, and draw imaginary circles in the space with their arms. They fall off their centers of balance and stumble into spaces around the stage. They create three diagonal lines, each with three dancers, facing the tree. Two dancers cluster in the fourth corner.*

This clustered moment is a section of special significance in *Very Unpromising Material.* As I explained in an earlier chapter, I created a gestural phrase which physicalized twelve

essential verbs of *Waiting for Godot*. I consider this phrase to be the heart of my work. The phrase happens eight times in total, which allows the audience to see every detail as it is repeated over and over again. The dancers shift their bodies before beginning the phrase again so they change their facing in relation to audience; therefore, the audience can also see the phrase from different angles. Near the end of this section, I had the dancers stop at various points in the phrase. This allows the audience to see the gestures more clearly because the dancer holds the position for an elongated period of time. I received feedback that the matter-of-fact manner the dancers performed this section with suggested a sense of "going through the motions of everyday life." Considering this comment, I asked the dancers stop in different moments of the phrase to allow the audience to symbolically peer into moments of these characters' daily lives. After this section, the dancers perform the material I created to embody the theme of circularity. However, they do not dance in unison so their individual affinities for specific moments of the phrase could be highlighted. In *Waiting for Godot*, it is clear that although the characters are tied through their circumstances, they have distinct personalities. By allowing them to take some autonomy over the material through improvisational choices—i.e. slowing a section down, repeating a movement, or deleting a motion—I highlight the dancers' distinct artistic identities in a similar manner. After a brief assembly around the tree to remind the audience of the group relationship of idolizing the tree, the dancers scatter. I designed their spatial pattern to divide the space into four equal parts. They create diagonal lines towards the tree, which both suggests a relationship with the tree and foreshadows a later section where the dancers pace the same lines.

The duet dancers pace one another, as the other nine dancers complete small, gestural phrases without traveling. The pairs stare at one another, then clutch each other in a tight embrace. They clap each other's backs awkwardly before one falls to the ground. They repeat

this process twice. Then, one dancer crawls atop the other incessantly—hanging off their partner's body like a child. This dancer begins to tell the other about a nightmare they had where a woman looked behind her and turned into salt. The other dancer, who is also being crawled on, becomes increasingly frustrated and begins to protest. These two dancers fight with one another over the fact that one will not listen to the other's nightmare. They begin to travel throughout the space as they fight, involving more dancers. Soon, the fight travels around the space and every dancer is involved with the fight. All eleven dancers scream at one another for about thirty seconds, before two dancers scream at one another, "Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!" When the cast hears this argument, the fight dies immediately. All of the dancers stare at the dancer who just yelled, and then sit down on the floor. After a moment of total silence, one dancer asks another, "Do you think he'll come?" The dancers all ignore the question and lie down on their sides—facing away from the dancer who asked the question.

The two dancers pacing and hugging one another awkwardly was pulled directly from the stage directions of *Waiting for Godot.* This moment then morphs into a scene also from the text, where Estragon is fighting with Vladimir over wanting to share his nightmare. The "nightmare" that one dancer tells the other was selected when I asked this dancer to recite a Biblical story he knew only vaguely. The dancer, Joe Chen, shared that he remembered some pieces of a story about a woman turning into salt. I wanted a story to be told that the dancer did not know well, because in the play, Vladimir and Estragon often tell one another Biblical stories that they do not know the exact details of. As the dancers become increasingly frustrated with one another, they fight. The fight spreads throughout the cast until the entire stage is engulfed in screams. Here, I wanted to highlight the frequent fights the characters have with one another, which often occur

unexpectedly and sometimes without cause. I received feedback that this swarm of fighting seemed to catch on "like a forest fire." While in process, I received feedback observers wondered what stopped the fight. Applying this feedback, I attempted to clarify this question by trying the fight's end in a number of ways—someone screaming, an abrupt stop, a gradual die out. Eventually, I chose for two dancers to scream a conversation over the group's noise, which causes the entire group to fall silent immediately. Therefore, the fight seems to end just as abruptly as it started, nodding to how characters' emotional states can vary dramatically quickly in *Waiting for Godot.* The conversation these two dancers scream was pulled directly from Estragon's dialogue in Act II. I chose this text because it unearths the character's underlying dependence on one another despite their angry outbursts. Once the fight dies, one dancer asks "Do you think he'll come?" This question nods to an essential question the characters in *Waiting for Godot* continually ask throughout the play. I asked the dancers to ignore this question because in works within the Theatre of the Absurd, direct questions are often ignored.

One dancer crawls to standing and drags another dancer out of the group by the foot. They roll the other dancer up to standing, and the two dancers begin an absurdist duet to Alone Again (Naturally). *Throughout this entire duet, the other dancers are waiting as a group. They create architecture with their bodies as they slouch, sit, and rest— waiting for the other dancers to return to them. The dancers in the duet begin by brushing their teeth in a grotesque manner, then roll their hands and heads as they contort their legs. One dancer lies on the ground face down while the other sits on their feet. The seated dancer yawns and struggles with their boots. The two dancers look up at the sky and then struggle to find their footing on the ground. They stand up and leap around the stage gleefully before colliding with one another—provoking them to shove one another with annoyance. They suddenly clutch one another with fervor and stare at*

each other. The dancers turn to the audience and then look up at the sky. They suddenly depart from one another and pace the space hunched over. They gesture with their hands as their backs slouch. One stops to begin urinating on the tree while the other struggles with their boots. The two come together and affectionately look at each other. They cover each other's eyes and struggle as they exaggerate walking in place—effectively miming their inability to leave or move forward in their lives. They crumble to the ground with their arms outstretched in a cross-like position. Their hips rise to the sky, and then they relax into the floor. Their heads shoot up from the floor, and they peer around the space in unison. They turn over themselves and come to a balled-up, crouched position on the floor. Their fingers are curled to create makeshift glasses, which they press to their eyes and connect to the ground. They stare into the ground as their hands shield their eyes from the audience.

The dancers suddenly prop themselves up on one hand and come to standing while grabbing one boot. They swing their grasped hands to the floor. They swing again, this time throwing their bodies into a sloppy turn. They jump forward— their hands tight in a fist in front of them— and then assemble their feet together tightly as they come to their tiptoes. Their arms raise above their heads in a familiar position; their hands are clasped together, their elbows are straightened, and their shoulders hyperextend. They stumble for a few moments, and then they come to their knees. Their arms open, and their palms unfurl as they roll onto the ground. This motion was created to represent repentance towards a higher power. With speed, they shoot one arm towards the sky. Their index fingers continue pointing up at the sky as they roll onto their stomachs, onto their backs, and then back again. They repeat this process until they collide with the rest of the group, which has been patiently waiting for them.

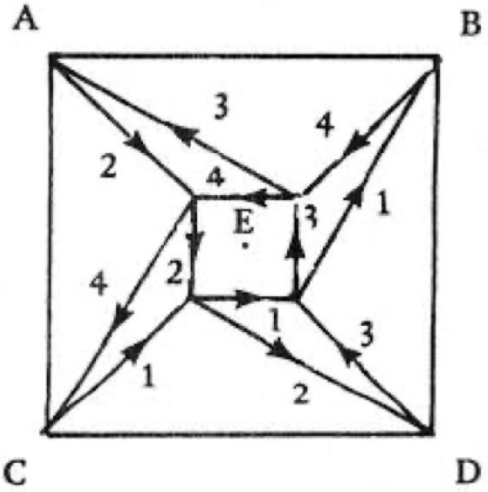
This duet was constructed around many key ideas and themes in *Waiting for Godot*. The opening moment of the two dancers brushing their teeth is performed in a grotesque and absurd way to nod to this nature in *Waiting for Godot.* The dancers perform this everyday motion together in unison while sticking their tongues out, distending their jaws, and scrunching their eyes. Including such an everyday motion onstage feels absurd, but the performance quality of it makes it feel grotesque. I wanted the audience to have a similar reaction to this moment as observers do with *Godot*—feeling unsure whether an appropriate reaction is disgust or laughter. Certain images appear often in the work, such as yawning, an upward gaze, and irritation with one another. These were developed to drive home specific ideas to the audience, such as a relationship to a higher power and a complicated dependency between characters. Other moments are adapted from specific moments in the script, such as napping, struggling with boots, miming hanging themselves, and urinating. These important moments from *Godot* were adapted into choreography to ensure their inclusion in *Very Unpromising Material.* Other moments are purely symbolic. For example, the two dancers fall to the ground at one point in a cross-like position to connote Biblical imagery. Then, they look around themselves curiously because I wanted to include a moment where the dancers are studying the space around them as if they are beginning to question their reality. Later, they press their eyes into the ground. The makeshift glasses represent the characters' abilities to see clearly, but the fact that they are pressing their faces into the floor demonstrate that they are choosing to not see what is around them—an important symbolism in *Waiting for Godot.* While the duet unfolds, the dancers wait in unison on one side of the space. This was developed using Crystal Pite's methodology of asking an entire cast to collectively explore one idea physically.

Once the group is whole again, one dancer begins crawling through the space in a circular pattern. Gradually, the dancers follow. They giggle with one another as they race each other through the space on all fours. Suddenly, they stop and all come to their feet. They curiously peer over one another's shoulders into the audience as if they are trying to scope out their surroundings. One dancer climbs up the wall of bodies and comes to a sleeping position on their side as the rest of the group supports their body in the air. The group carries the lifted dancer to another part of the space—turning 360 degrees—and sets them down carefully on the ground. The dancers repeat this process— they peer over one another, lift another dancer, walk to another part of the space, and set the dancer down. Once the second lifted dancer is set down, the dancers stare at one another inquisitively. Slowly, they begin to gingerly place their hands over one another's eyes. They repeat this movement for multiple minutes.

I choreographed the dancers circumnavigating the space to highlight the theme of circularity and outline their confinement to the stage. The dancers are on all fours and seem to race one another around the space, which resembles a children's game. I included the playful giggling because I wanted to portray these characters as childlike, as Vladimir and Estragon often display immature characteristics. They peer into the audience from the edge of the space because I wanted them to appear inquisitive about what lie beyond their confines. After this moment, they lift one dancer who appears to be sleeping. I incorporated this lift using McGreevy-Nichols methodology; this lift raises a gesture from the essential verbs phrase to a higher plane, and allows the audience to look at an image on a higher level than the rest of the dance. It also repeats twice—a choice which incorporated McGreevy-Nichols manipulation methodology and allows the audience to view it from another angle. The dancers then place their

hands over each other's eyes so I could further develop the motif of characters not being able to see clearly.

A duet of dancers exit the group and walk along the side of the stage. They walk in unison side by side for seven paces. Together, they turn diagonally and walk towards the tree for eight paces. When they arrive at the tree, they circle the tree and then walk towards the opposite corner of the space. They turn together and pace another side of the stage—which takes 14 paces to complete. A pattern is created through this series of left turns. Gradually, more and more couples depart the group and add to this walking pattern. As they file in, they sync their paces and left turns to the already-pacing duets. Once everyone has entered the pattern, the design resembles the structure of the Beckett film for TV, Quad *(see image below.) The dancers*



intersperse their walking with gestures from previous moments of the work, such as pressing their hands together, looking over their shoulders, and dragging their hands down their face. One dancer exits the group but does not enter the same structured walking pattern as the others. Instead, they sing loudly. They sing a song about a dog entering a kitchen to steal bread and eventually getting beaten to death. They begin singing the song in too high an octave, clear their throat, and restart. They seem to forget the words halfway through, and start over multiple times. They sing freely, alone. Eventually, they begin to sing emphatically towards the other dancers—

who walk right by them seeming to not hear or not notice them. They finish their song singing affectionately to the tree and resting their head on the metal frame.

I created this section to allude to Beckett's work in expanding theatrical traditions by creating plays like *Quad*, which were interdisciplinary, inspiring, and genre-bending. Additionally, this pattern feels familiar to the audience at this point because earlier in the work the dancers sketched it out by placing their bodies in diagonal lines facing into the tree. I also wanted the chance to return to the military-inspired motif of unison, specific walking patterns. I chose for the dancers to walk in pairs to emphasize the partnership between characters, and they intersperse gestures from the work as they walk in order to return to previously-displayed physical ideas. I wanted to adapt the singing scene here because it would create texture over the monotony of unison walking. I selected a dancer for this solo due to her willingness to include bold physicality onstage. I received feedback that it was difficult to make out every word this dancer said while singing. Therefore, I brought theatrical voice coach in rehearsal we workshopped this dancer's annunciation while she sang. I also received feedback that although this dancer sang the song multiple times, it was falling flat because of the lack of variety in intonations. I applied this feedback by scheduling a one-on-one workshop with this dancer, where we explored different directives while singing this song. We settled on prompts like screaming at God, drunkenly singing in a street (inspired by Maguy Marin's soundscore in *May B)*, trying to get other dancers to join in on singing, and softly singing the song as a lullaby to the tree. These varying directives offered interesting texture to this section.

The dancers eventually cease their pacing and turn to face their partners. They gradually begin to complete the familiar gesture phrase; they smack their hands together, exhale, turn over their shoulders, and distend their shoulders, amongst other movements. Instead of opening their

palms towards the ground—as they did earlier in the piece—they interlock their arms and cradle their partner's cheek affectionately. Couple by couple, the dancers stop repeating this phrase and turn their bodies to the tree. With palms outstretched towards the tree, all the dancers walk until they create a circle around the sculpture. Their arms fall to their sides as their knees sink to the floor. They roll over onto their bellies, forming a familiar image of all the dancers lying face down with their feet towards the scrap metal tree. A dancer props themselves up with one arm—a movement which ripples through the circle before they all sink back down into the ground. A dancer slaps their hand on the ground, which causes everyone to prop themselves up in unison and come to a cross-legged position with their flexed hand outstretched in front of them. All the dancers move through the phrase work of everyday waiting postures in unison. Once they finish the phrase, they wait in stillness. One dancer says, "Let's go," and the cast erupts into a panicked sprint towards one corner of the room. Some stumble, some fall.

I included a new, more affectionate version of the gesture phrase because I wanted to suggest that these duets were partners. Since the inspiration for *Waiting for Godot* was Samuel Beckett's time with his wife in hiding, many theorize that Vladimir and Estragon are a couple. As a queer artist, I wanted to indulge this queer theory for a moment by having these dancers act lovingly towards one another regardless of the gender of their partner. Once they come back to the tree, the following sequence was constructed to be a derivative of a section which occurs earlier in the work (when *A Horse With No Name* plays). I created this section as a callback to the beginning of the dance to create circularity with my plot structure. When a dancer says "Let's go" this time, it is a slightly different version from the call-and-response that occurs after "Let's go" at the beginning of my work. This was an intentional choice inspired by the fact that in *Waiting for Godot*, some occurrences repeat but are never exactly the same because time is

passing. Instead of the dancers acting reluctant to move, they jump up immediately and race each other to the corner. Not only does this race appear to be another childlike game—which reintroduces the presentation of characters as childlike—but it demonstrates a new agency the dancers have taken over their own fates as they immediately seize the opportunity to move.

The dancers arrive in the corner of the space and collectively pause—clutching one another as they ogle at the audience curiously. They whisper amongst themselves, asking one another whether or not "he" has come and when they think "he" will arrive. One by one, the dancers turn their gaze upward. They depart from the group as they point up towards the sky. This process takes multiple minutes, and the pattern of the dancers departing one-by-one forms a line along the long edge of the space. One dancer begins the familiar gesture phrase and other dancers follow creating a canon. They walk towards the tree as they point towards it, eventually encircling the tree once again. Half of the dancers sink to the floor while four dancers remain standing. The dancers on the ground crawl to the tree, and begin ripping pages out of copies of Waiting for Godot*, which are hanging off the tree. They fold them into paper airplanes and stare blankly as the planes fly around the space. The four dancers who remained standing break into two couples and walk to opposite sides of the space. These two couples perform the choreography that accompanies the song* (There'll Be) Peace In The Valley (For Me) *by Johnny Cash as the rest of the cast waits by the tree. The song concludes, and the two couples end the choreography on their knees with their hands outstretched and their bank hinging. Together, they melt into the floor face down and lie with their arms beside them. The resulting image is exactly the same as the beginning image, which brings the dance full circle. Lights fade.*

The dancers' whispered huddle was an image derived from conversations in the script where Vladimir and Estragon question one another repeatedly over the details of Godot's arrival.

The dancers depart from this image by looking upward and pointing at the sky; I returned to the upward gaze motif to drive home the suggestion that the characters have a relationship to something above them. Then, the dancers perform the gesture phrase one last time in a canon, which allows the audience to revisit this important section of choreography while viewing it in a novel way. Once the dancers walk back to the tree, I designed their movement to return to the opening image—where they huddle around the tree and fold paper airplanes. I reconstructed this image to introduce the idea that the dance was about to return full circle. Then, the four dancers perform the Johnny Cash piece. I included this free-flowing, expansive choreography at the end of the work to end the piece on a hopeful note, and to surprise the audience that despite their circumstances, these characters still have hope. This, to me, is the essential message of *Waiting for Godot.* Then, the final image collects as these two duets of dancers melt into the floor and find their opening position again. The end of the piece returning to the beginning was an essential fixture I felt my work had to include to effectively reimagine *Waiting for Godot*. Just as the characters in the play do, the dancers are in the exact same position as they were when the work began.

CHAPTER V

WAITING: A LIVED THEME

In the spring of 2020, the world watched with bated breath as a novel strain of coronavirus called COVID-19 ravaged the planet. After an initial outbreak in China, the virus spread through air travel into Europe and North America. First declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern in January 2020, the viral outbreak reached such a global scale that it was officially declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization in March. By the middle of March, all 50 states and almost 200 countries reported cases of the deadly virus to the Center for Disease Control. This pandemic halted public life practically overnight. Public schools closed, businesses shut down, and citizens were advised to not leave their homes for nonessential reasons. Ultimately, this project was impacted as well.

In the middle of spring break on March 11th, 2020, Emory University announced classes would be moving online for the remainder of the semester. After extending spring break for a week, the administration would be shutting down university buildings and residence halls, forcing many students out of their homes immediately. The performance location, the Schwartz Center for Performing Arts, closed and many of my dancers traveled home to be with their families. Obviously, this rendered the scheduled performances of my project impossible. The project continued after an adjustment to account for online rehearsal footage and a defense video chat, but this unexpected turn of events allowed me to appreciate this project in a new light.

Reflection and Takeaways

Ironically, there is something morbidly fitting about this project concluding amidst a global disaster. In the face of the ensuing chaos, I expected my cast members to be preoccupied with arranging their travel plans and readjusting their daily lives to accommodate the enormous

changes. Instead, I was shocked to find that my cast emphatically and unanimously wanted to perform. Additionally, I received an overwhelming number of messages from people seeking more information about how they could view the work despite the circumstantial changes. The hope of performing or watching the piece before the university closed seemed to become a moment of solace for both cast members and the Atlanta community. Similar to the *Waiting for Godot* productions by Paul Chan after Hurricane Katrina and Susan Sontag during the Bosnian War, this work seemed to serve as a beacon of hope amidst chaos and uncertainty. This, to me, is the greatest indication that my honors thesis was a successful reimagining of *Waiting for Godot.* The fact that people gravitated towards this work in a time of unprecedented bleakness—just as communities across the globe have with the original play for decades—suggests that this project effectively captured an essential quality of the text. Earlier in this paper, I wrote that although I had researched several contradicting theories, I steadfastly believe that *Waiting for Godot* is a play about hopefulness and the resilience of the human spirit despite uncertainty, chaos, and bleakness. It seems fitting that this work was scheduled to be performed amid a global disaster. Although I am glad we were able to keep community and cast members safe by not gathering to perform, I wish as though we could bring a performance of *Very Unpromising Material* to the public so we could add to the lineage of *Godot*-inspired productions performed in times of extreme sociopolitical turmoil.

Despite not being able to produce performances as scheduled, several people viewed the work in some capacity throughout the rehearsal process and provided me with feedback. I invited many of my artistic mentors to attend rehearsals from January through March. I discussed a few specific pieces of this feedback already but want to hone in on some of the most frequent comments I received. By far, the most ubiquitous piece of feedback was that there was an

immediate and pervasive sense of waiting in the work. Every observer who provided feedback to me stated that this theme was overtly present throughout the piece, and I was excited to hear that this theme came through strongly. My dancers presented me with similar feedback. One of my dancers, Merryn McKeough, wrote "The movement (hunched backs, exhaling, focus on the floor), elicits authentic feelings of hopelessly waiting." Given that an essential piece of *Godot*'s theme and plotline was waiting, it was important to me that both the dancers and audience sense waiting in the work. Other common pieces of feedback were that the audience was engaged throughout the piece due to multiple energetic peaks, that the eerie opening soundscape and upward gazes conveyed an immediate sense of apocalyptic displacement, that the odd physicalities of the dancers spurred curiosity about the characters, that a strong sense of attachment and idolization of the tree was established, and that no side of the space felt untouched or ignored. I was pleased by this feedback because I felt these comments indicated success of many of my goals when physicalizing *Waiting for Godot.* However, the most meaningful piece of feedback was unspoken. The director of the Dance department attended the last rehearsal we held before the announcement about university closure, and upon the conclusion of the work, she cried. This indicated to me the power of the final moment of the work—the four dancers dancing to *(There'll Be) Peace In The Valley (For Me)* by Johnny Cash. She commented later about how powerful that final quartet was, and it proved to me that the ultimate message of *Waiting for Godot* was conveyed—that hope prevails.

On a personal note, this project had a profound impact on me. Before entering this project, I struggled with confidence regarding my work as a solo artist. Ironically, just as Vladimir and Estragon do in *Waiting for Godot*, I learned through this project how to push away doubt and keep moving forward in the face of uncertainty. My research into women dance idols

like Trisha Brown, Maguy Marin, and Crystal Pite inspired me, and I became more willing to believe in my artistic visions. My confidence in my work bloomed. Directing a project of this scale was initially paralyzing, but now I am certain I could do it again—which sets me up for success as I prepare to move to New York City to pursue a professional dance career. I also learned how to lean on an artistic community I trust. By inviting artistic inspirations into the rehearsal process, seeking out experienced colleagues to advise me, and leaning on the feedback of those I trust most, I realized how far someone can fly when they allow their community in to support and back them. Finally, navigating this project taught me that perfectionism stifles creativity and that real artistry comes when one is willing to experiment wildly. I am inexplicably proud of *Very Unpromising Material* and am eternally grateful for all this project has taught me.

Conclusion

As of time of writing, there are many uncertainties in everyone's lives. With modern life currently upended due to COVID-19, many of us are aimless, confused, and lost. As everyone is in quarantine, our days seem to be on a boring, endless repeat of sleeping, passing the time, and bickering with the ones we're in close quarters with. Many were laid off and became food insecure overnight. Just as Samuel Beckett and his wife did over 70 years ago when in hiding during World War II, people around the globe are stuck in social isolation with no end in sight. I never imagined that I would be placed in a circumstance so overtly alike *Waiting for Godot*, but this experience allows me to appreciate the play in a new light as I live through this global disaster. Although we are not sure when, life will one day return to normal, and *Very Unpromising Material* will make its way to the stage eventually, but for the time being—we all remain waiting.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: *Alone Again (Naturally)* by Gilbert O' Sullivan lyrics

In a little while from now
If I'm not feeling any less sour
I promise myself to treat myself
And visit a nearby tower
And climbing to the top will throw myself off
In an effort to make it clear to whoever
What it's like when you're shattered
Left standing in the lurch at a church
Where people saying: "My God, that's tough"
"She stood him up"
"No point in us remaining"
"We may as well go home"
As I did on my own
Alone again, naturally

To think that only yesterday
I was cheerful, bright and gay
Looking forward to who wouldn't do
The role I was about to play?
But as if to knock me down
Reality came around
And without so much as a mere touch
Cut me into little pieces
Leaving me to doubt
Talk about God in His mercy
Who if He really does exist
Why did He desert me?
In my hour of need
I truly am indeed
Alone again, naturally

It seems to me that there are more hearts
Broken in the world that can't be mended
Left unattended
What do we do? What do we do?
Alone again, naturally

Looking back over the years
And whatever else that appears
I remember I cried when my father died
Never wishing to hide the tears
And at sixty-five years old
My mother, God rest her soul
Couldn't understand why the only man
She had ever loved had been taken
Leaving her to start with a heart so badly broken
Despite encouragement from me
No words were ever spoken
And when she passed away
I cried and cried all day
Alone again, naturally
Alone again, naturally

Appendix B: ***(There'll Be) Peace In The Valley (For Me)*** **by Johnny Cash lyrics**

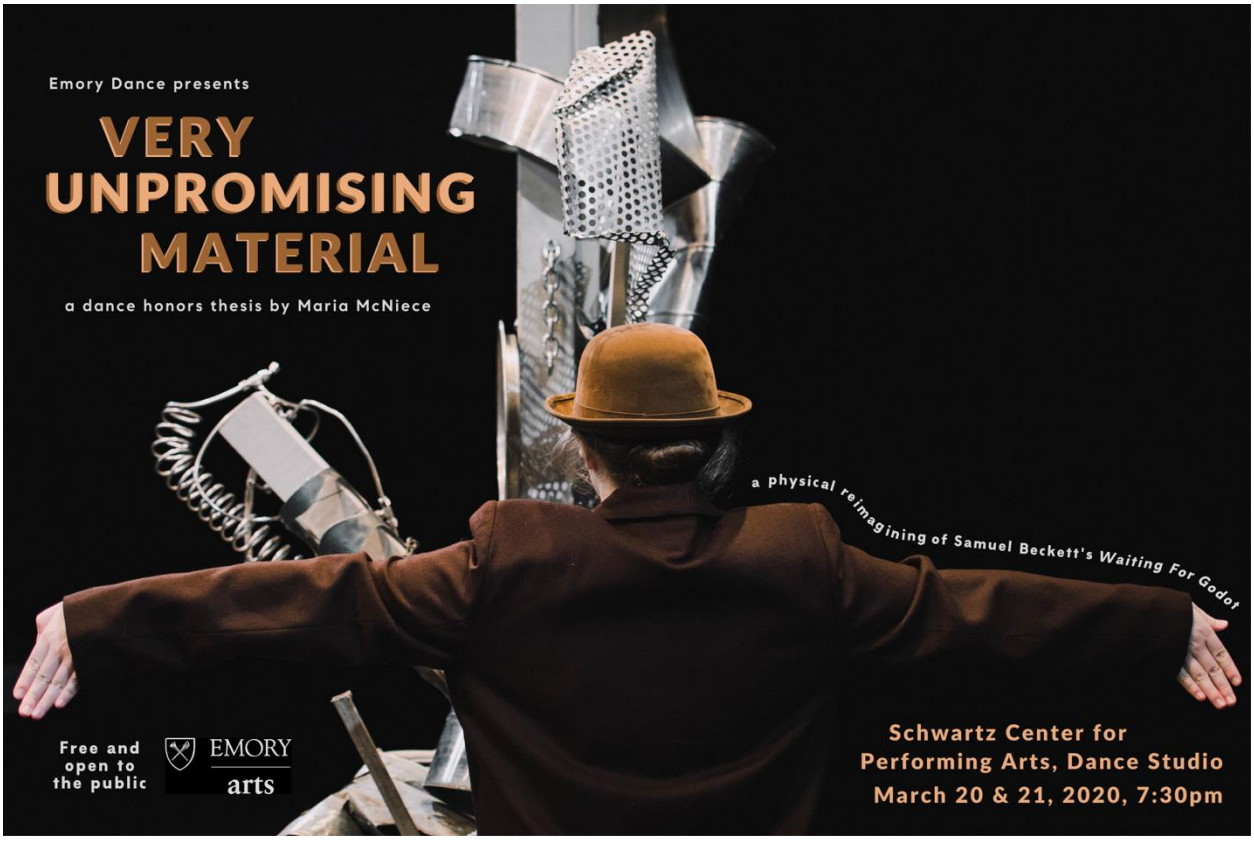
Oh well, I'm tired and so weary
But I must go alone
Till the lord comes and calls, calls me away, oh yes
Well the morning's so bright
And the lamp is alight
And the night, night is as black as the sea, oh yes

There will be peace in the valley for me, some day
There will be peace in the valley for me, oh Lord I pray
There'll be no sadness, no sorrow
No trouble, trouble I see
There will be peace in the valley for me, for me

Well the bear will be gentle
And the wolves will be tame
And the lion shall lay down by the lamb, oh yes
And the beasts from the wild
Shall be led by a child
And I'll be changed, changed from this creature that I am, oh yes

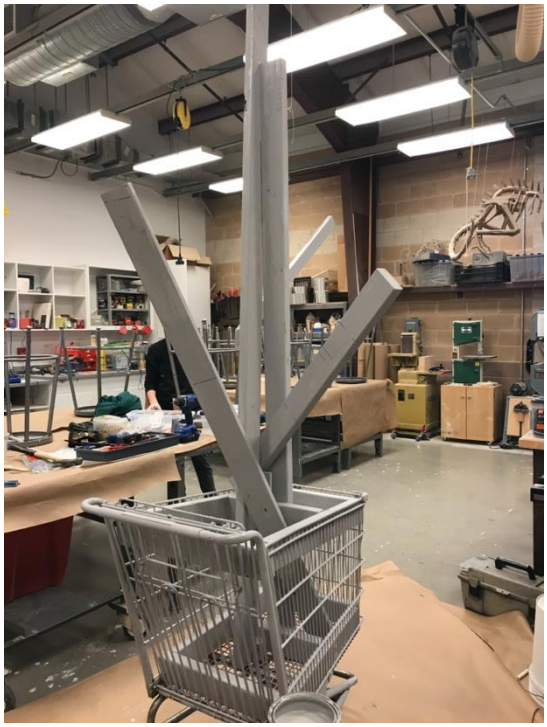
There will be peace in the valley for me, some day
There will be peace in the valley for me, oh Lord I pray
There'll be no sadness, no sorrow
No trouble, trouble I see
There will be peace in the valley for me, for me

Appendix C: Performance Flyer

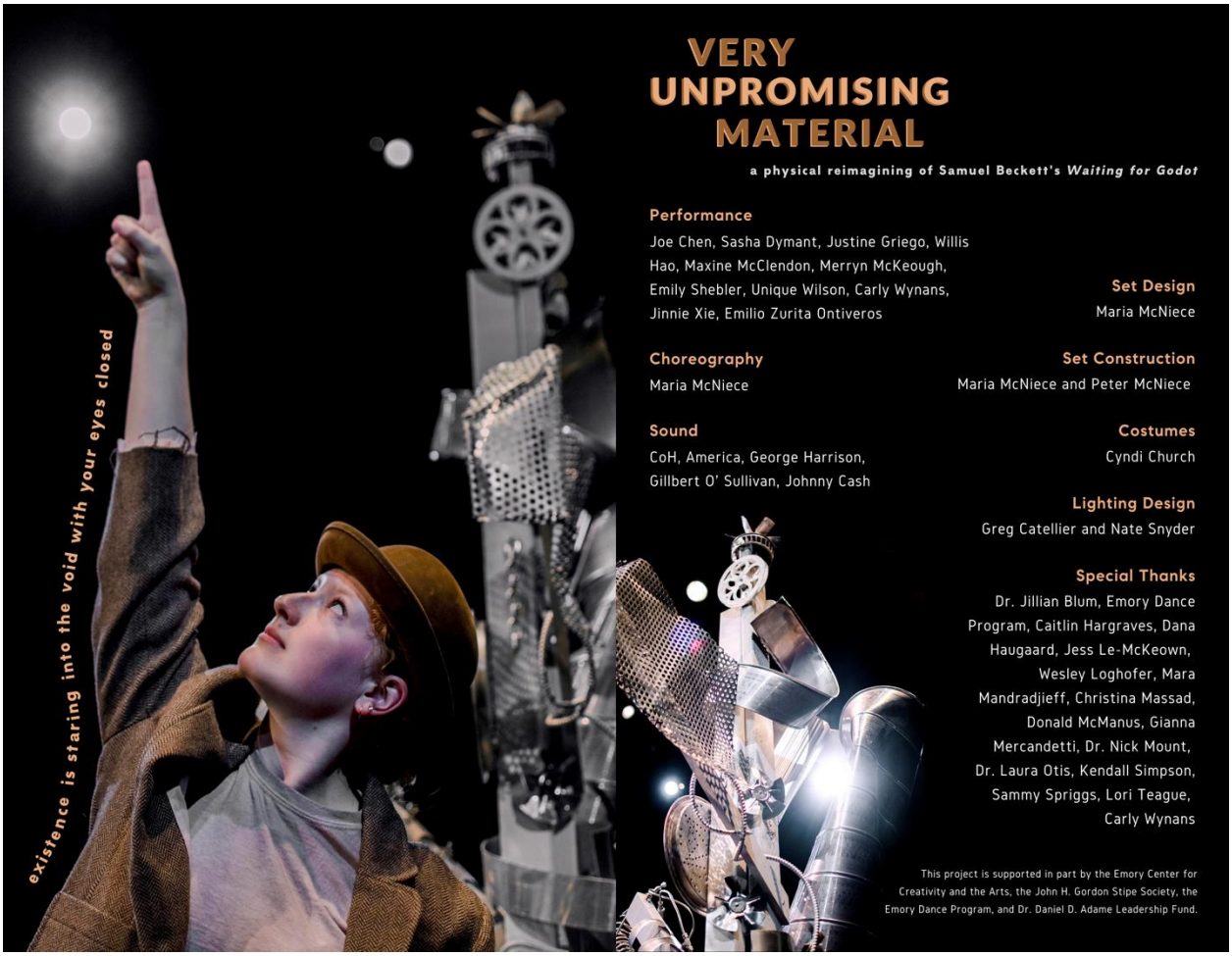


Appendix D: Dancer writings on text incorporation

Appendix E: Photos from tree construction



Appendix F: Playbill Design



Appendix G: Press Release Text

Honors Thesis Concert: *Very Unpromising Material*
March 20th and 21st, 7:30pm
Free
Schwartz Center for Performing Arts Dance Studio

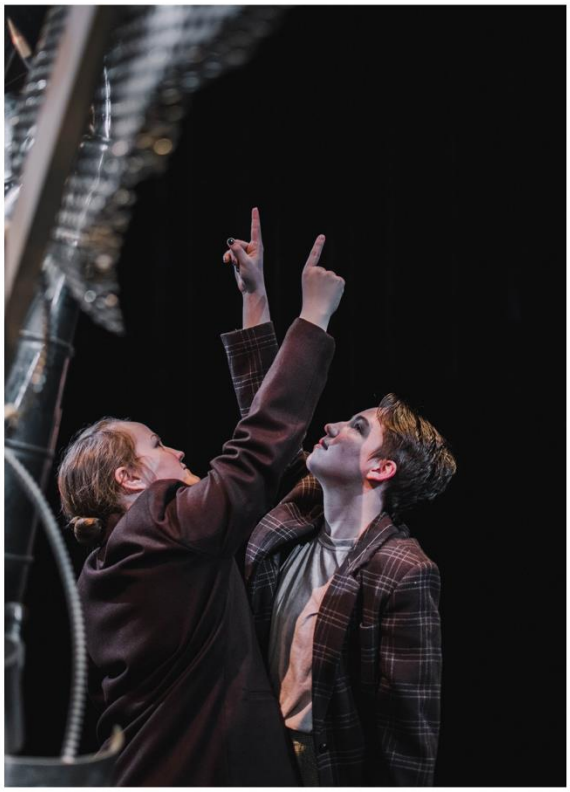
Eleven dancers huddle beneath an eight-foot heap of scrap metal. They stare blankly as they tear pages out from books, fold them into paper airplanes, and hurl them into the air. The planes land on the opening scene of Maria McNiece's honors thesis in Dance and Movement Studies at Emory University, which opens at the Schwartz Center for Performing Arts on March

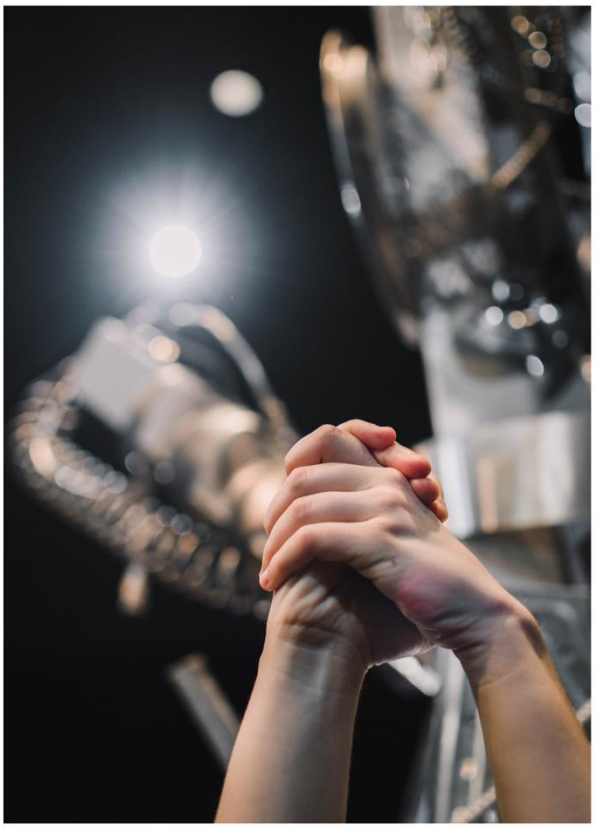
20th. McNiece's interdisciplinary thesis investigates Samuel Beckett's absurdist, avant-garde play *Waiting for Godot* and is founded in dance, English, and theater scholarship. Through an extensive exploration of Beckett's work, McNiece physicalizes themes of existentialism and religious allegory to create a dance that questions human agency.

A cast of suited dancers sing to god, develop quirky mannerisms, and scream at one another during this half-hour show. Never leaving the stage, they lose and regain hope in an endless cycle as they experience their confined, inescapable condition together. Paired with a track of classics from decades past—including works by America, George Harrison, Johnny Cash, and Gilbert O' Sullivan—McNiece's dance sparks nostalgia. The choreography highlights the characters' dependent relationship and physicalizes their collective glorification of a silver tree—built of scrap metal and constructed by the choreographer and her father. The work also features scenes from *Waiting for Godot.*

The show is performed in the round, and there will be a talkback with the choreographer and artists after each performance. This work is supported by the Dr. Daniel Adame Leadership Fund, the Stipe Society of Creative Scholars, and the Center for Creativity and the Arts at Emory University. For more information on the show, contact Maria McNiece at mmcniec@emory.edu.

Appendix H: Thesis Photos (by Christina Massad)





Appendix I: IDEAS Talks Presentation Slides on Honors Project

Maria McNiece

A Physical Reimagining of Waiting For Godot

An Honors Thesis in Modern Dance

Project Overview

English and Literature Studies

Dance and Movement Studies

Theatre Studies

Samuel Beckett and Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil

"One of the most magical and beautiful allegories of our time."

-Clive Barnes, The New York Times

Waiting For Godot

by Samuel Beckett

Plot

Two men wait for the arrival of the title character, who never comes.

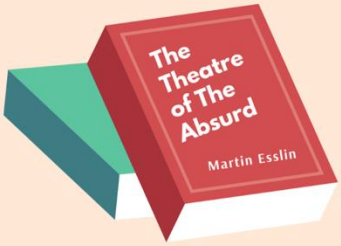
They spend the duration of the play passing the time, but they never leave and never stop waiting.

Paul Chan's *Waiting for Godot*, 200

Realism and the Three Unities

"Theatre of the Absurd, was an attempt by man, deeply steeped in existential philosophical concepts, to find meaning in a world which no longer made sense because all moral, religious, political and social sense was nonsense."

- Martin Esslin



Common Themes

A CRUEL SOCIETY

A MEANINGLESS WORLD

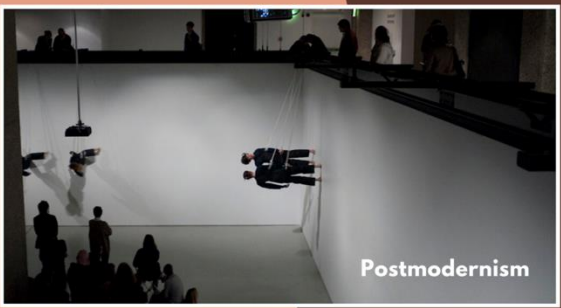
AN ISOLATED INDIVIDUAL

Characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd

- Anti-Language
- Anti-Plot
- Anti-Character
- Anti-Drama

"After Godot, plots could be minimal; exposition, expendable; characters, contradictory; settings, unlocalized, and dialogue, unpredictable. Blatant farce could jostle tragedy."

- Ruby Cohn



Postmodernism

Existence Is Staring Into The Void With Your Eyes Closed

retelling *Waiting For Godot* through modern dance

Mentors

MARA MANDRADJIEFF
Dance and Movement Studies and Women's and Gender Studies, Emory University

LORI TEAGUE
Dance and Movement Studies, Emory University

DR. NICK MOUNT
English, University of Toronto

DR. LAURA OTIS
English, Emory University

DONALD MCMANUS
Theatre Studies, Emory University

SARA CULPEPPER
Theatre Studies, Emory University

DANA HAUGAARD
Visual Arts, Emory University

WESLEY LONGHOFER
Social Enterprise at Goizueta Business School, Emory University

Collaborators

SOUND
Kendall Simpson

SET CONSTRUCTION
Sara Culpepper, Dana Haugaard, Peter McNiece

PROJECT SUPPORTED BY
Center for Creativity and the Arts, Stipe Society of Creative Scholars, Dr. Daniel Adame Fund

LIGHTING DESIGN
Greg Catellier, Nate Snyder

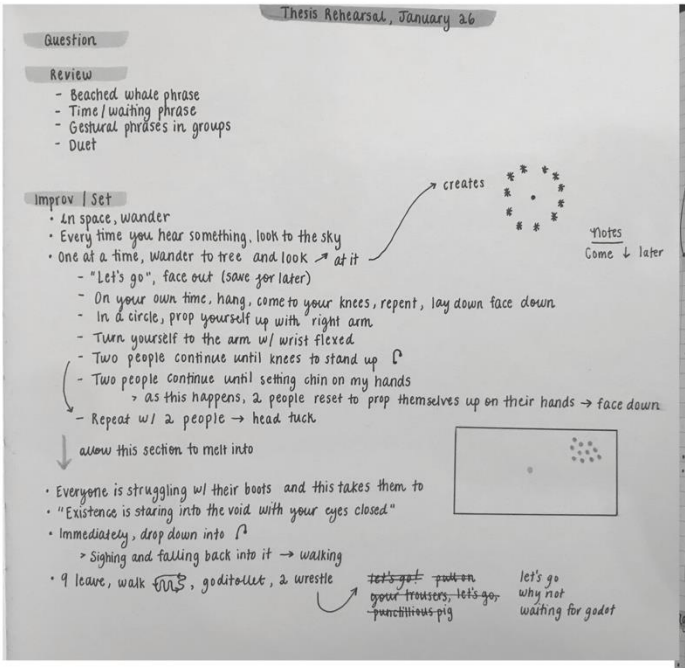
CAST
Joe Chen, Sasha Dymant, Justine Griego, Willis Hao, Maxine McClendon, Merryn McKeough, Emily Shebler, Unique Wilson, Carly Wynans, Jinnie Xie, Emilio Zurita Ontiveros

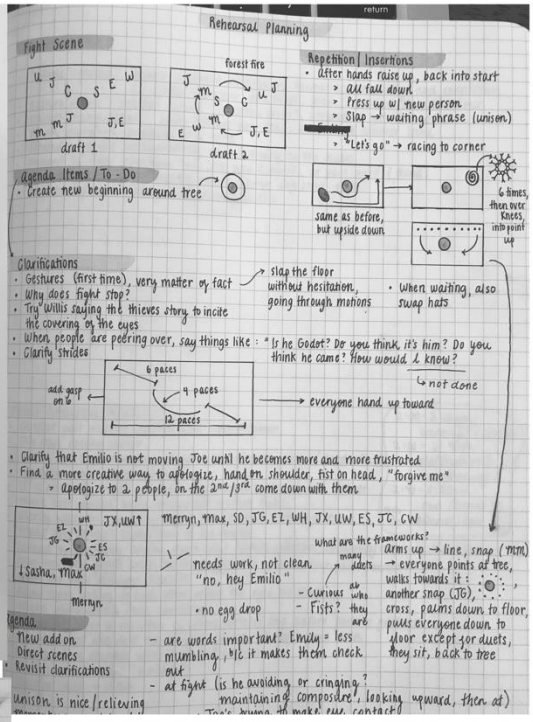
COSTUMES
Cyndi Church

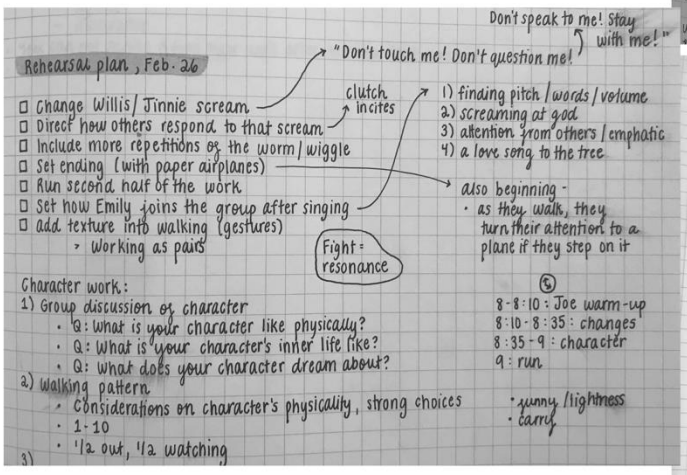
Thank You

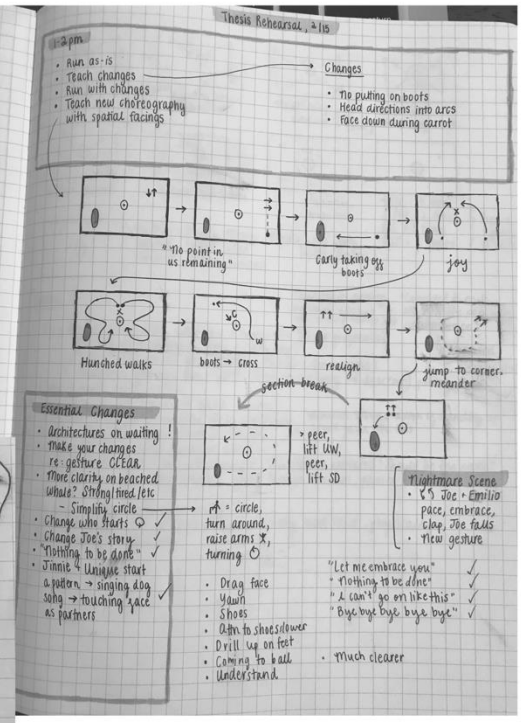
Maria McNiece

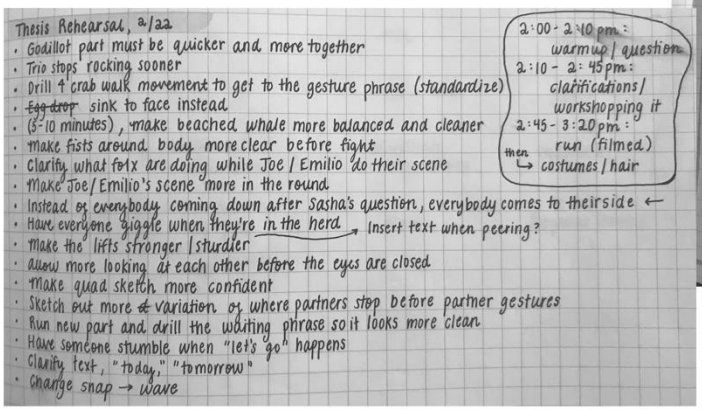
Appendix J: Select Rehearsal Plans











Thesis Rehearsal

Question

Notes
- Merryn really tackle Emily
- Justine and Unique - take more time before hand goes
- Joe wait for ▲ ↓ before hand
- Emily more whiny, more juxtaposed physicality
- When MIE come to corner, Merryn doesn't respond, they look at one another, then turn in
- Willis do it to the music, and begin faster when they are walking
- Transforming it into 7:
  - Willis one
  - Everyone does it twice (after 2 you can change)
  - 3,4 you can change or stay or lie down
  - 5,6,7 stops as usual
- Make beached whale phrase your own, evenly disperse
- Joe gets there first → looks up

• Circle must be faster
• New beginning
• Stand up → ○ faster

New Part
- The roll/pull → run takes you into your spot for screaming
- Screaming is quicker, everyone lies very much in a gerbil pile
- "Do you think he'll come?" No. → either group waiting or face down
- Carly drags Willis out for duet
- Ends back with gerbil pile
- Group circles ~ 19 minutes
  - when, turn back curiously @ audience
  - Unique climbs over, everyone holds her, happens again → Sasha
- Everyone tries to cover one's eyes and others
- Unique / Jinnie run out, jump land → fast phrase material → exhaustion
- Line circles space Walking and holding each other's eyes
- Lies down face down on ground !, roll out → push up
- Everyone dispersed | | | | |, hold., come to admiring tree
  - 2 people splat → around the world → return
  - 2/4 people pull into hang → return
  - 1/2 pulse up on all 4s
  - Everyone turns over, plank-ish on all 4s, shakes until falls (looking at tree)

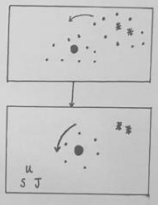
~ 26 min

Notes
- Circle lost momentum
- Arm comes up on "save"
- Have tension re: boots
- Pulse in BW
- Lighting of tree
- Initial text lost
- More volume
- Moment of discovery (embrace)
- More movement
- Circle
- Army more clear
- Diff. moves

Thesis Rehearsal, 1/28

Question - What does/has this work brought up for you?

Review/Build
- Unique and Justine do short "light" phrase → return
  - indulge in this space (~1-2 min)
- Play with "a Horse With No Name"
  - a song about an existential epiphany
- Unique, Sasha, and Justine do the roll down, crawl → corner, begin waiting phrase?
- Jinnie, Max, Emily, Merryn
  - ↳ Crouch down phrase



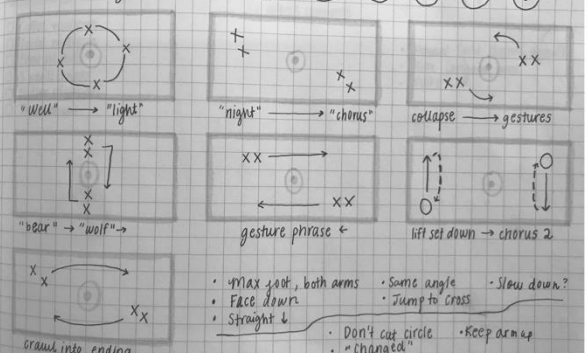
- 1 follows, 1 leads

Reviews
- Duet
- Beached whale
- Crouch
- Gestures

performance
fulfilled
silliness of artistry
despair (in a box)
George vs. intentionality
- references
makes it more understandable

Rehearsal Planning

f i n a l e



Thesis Rehearsal Plan: Wednesday, 1/22

Agenda
- Question: Name 2 instances of waiting (everyday) and 2 existential bullshit phrases
- Warm-up:
  - Prompt 1: Pair up; 1 person prevents the other from standing up
  - Prompt 2: Pair up; try to drag the other person to the other side of the room

  ETA: 8:15pm
- Choreograph new phrase ✱
  - Collaborate, no words, play recording
  - Solicit physical reccomendations from dancers

  ETA: 8:40pm
- Review
  - Individual gestural phrases
  - Essential gestural phrase
  - Duet / beached whale phrase

  } if time!

Breakout: ✱ (15 min, 5 min share)
- Joe / Emilio = shouting / escalating
- Emily = dog solo (wait on this)
- Willis / Sasha ~~and~~ = monkey / annoying
- Justine, Maxine, Merryn, Carly = existential vs. grotesque / funny / disgusting
- Jinnie and Unique = waiting phrase, unison

Improv
- looking to sky for

Thesis Rehearsal #1
December 3, 2019

D hold your choreographers to?

dancers a voice, direction, labor, transparency

Agenda:
- Question
- DDD gestural exercise
- Godot discussion (record)
- Scenes / solo
- Pite creation
- Teach gesture

Dancers: Carly, Emilio, Jinnie, Willis, Emily (late), Maxine, Merryn, Sasha, ~~willis~~, Justine (late), Joe

Scenes:
Emily - dog song
Nightmare - Joe and Emilio (fight) ↳ Jinnie and Justine
Thieves - ~~Sasha~~ Willis and Maxine
Trading hats: ~~Sasha and~~ Carly and Merryn
Lucky's speech - Sasha

- Write body language / emotions
- Physicalize scene
- Highlight visceral, juicy, standout words
- Draw a photo of the scene

Expectation:
- Me: prepare + explain, transparent
- You: on time, remembering (Drive), + scheduling now, absences
- Process: collaboration and cuts, text-based exercises, OKwae's structure

To bring:
- Paper
- Pens / highlighters
- Hats

Questions:
- General reactions / what stood out
- Impressions

Gesture phrase to teach:
- Beat
- Beg
- Suffer
- Lost
- Sleep
- Weep
- Wait
- Save
- Hang
- Repent
- Bag drop
- Strike

Herding sheep - hands as surfer
Liked starting w/ my movement

Appendix K: Emory Dance Program blog post on *Very Unpromising Material*

Very Unpromising Material: Honors Thesis by Maria McNiece
by Raven Crosby, Emory Dance Program Office Assistant

Senior Maria McNiece is a double major in dance and movement studies and business, with a concentration in arts management. McNiece is in the process of completing her interdisciplinary honors thesis, *Very Unpromising Material,* a 40-minute performance piece rooted in modern dance that amalgamates her findings from the Emory departments of English, visual arts, and theater studies. *Very Unpromising Material* centers on the 20th-century absurdist play *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett. McNiece's research focuses on the ways in which movement artists codify methodologies of translating text into choreography. McNiece analyzed historical examples, including Maguy Marin's *May B* (1981) and Crystal Pite's *The Tempest Replica* (2011). She applied her research to construct a physical reimagining of *Waiting for Godot* through modern dance.

Being an honor thesis candidate in dance and movement studies has been a goal McNiece has strived to achieve during the course of her Emory career, and she says that receiving the faculty's invitation to pursue a thesis was one of the biggest honors of her life. "The Emory Dance faculty have continually demonstrated their faith in me as a choreographer, and their unwavering support has carried me through the tough moments with the project. The fact that dancers offered me their energy, time, and bodies for this process is not something I take lightly, and it has been a privilege to have been granted that trust."

Faculty outside of the Emory Dance Program have also helped her throughout this process. "I studied *Waiting for Godot* in a Beckett-centered Emory theater studies course last semester, and have worked with theater faculty like Donald McManus and Caitlin Hargraves extensively on the development of this project. Theater students have guided my cast through performative characterization and vocalization. I worked with visual art and theatre faculty members Dana Haugaard and Sara Culpepper on the design and construction of the infamous tree in *Godot*, which I built as an eight-foot sculpture made out of junk metal. Additionally, Dr. Laura Otis and the Emory English department have been largely influential in my research of this text as a work of literature."

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