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Inaction as a Tool of Deconstruction:

A Derridean Analysis of Beckett's *Godot* and Melville's *Bartleby*

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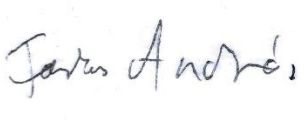

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Abstract

This thesis offers a comparative analysis of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener* through the lens of Derridean poststructuralism. The two works have been subject to extensive analysis, however, comparative and/or Derridean readings are difficult to find. Filling this research gap provides insight into the main characters' attitudes towards missing centres in their worlds, and explores the texts' commentary on the human condition, particularly in a (post)modern world. The aim of this thesis is to investigate how inaction serves as a deconstructive tool against unfounded structures (be it structures of authority, language or being), and how the main characters engage with the deconstruction of structures that are highly important to them—and, by abstraction, to humanity. This is done by a comparative poststructuralist analysis of the short story and the play, by drawing on theories of various fields and thinkers including Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze or Julia Kristeva. My thesis states that, by exposing the missing centres of structures, inaction effectively deconstructs structures of meaning, action and identity, even if the characters go to extreme lengths at maintaining them.

Keywords: Samuel Beckett; Waiting for Godot (1954); Herman Melville; Bartleby, the Scrivener (1853); Jacques Derrida; inaction; poststructuralism

Table of Contents

Introduction

Herman Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener (1853)* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot (1954)* are two of the most theoretically rich and engaging texts of modern literature. Each have been subject to extensive analysis by a wide range of scholars and disciplines, as both works lend themselves well to detailed political, social or philosophical investigations. In recent years, the story of the indifferent Wall Street clerk has been hailed as a poignant example of resistance against oppressive structures, more specifically capitalism. Bartleby has become an unofficial icon of the Occupy Wall Street movement, and Slavoj Zizek, an influential Marxist philosopher has engaged in detail with the political and anti-capitalist implications of Bartleby's behaviour and words[1]. *Waiting for Godot* has also been subject to Marxist analysis, however, perhaps the most common approach of interpreting the text aims to explore what Godot represents and how the characters relate to the different ideological frameworks. Such frameworks include absurdism, humanism, religion or a general meaning of life.

However, in both cases, there is limited research on the structural workings of the two texts, regardless of their ideological implications. Poststructuralist thinkers have also engaged with both texts in various forms, but the application of a Derridean lens, especially with a focus on inaction, is hard to find. My analysis, therefore, will focus on mapping out the structures present among the characters, language and action. Particular attention will be paid to the missing origins of these structures (as described by Jacques Derrida), but regardless of the ideological frameworks these missing origins might represent.

Jacques Derrida's lecture given at Johns Hopkins University on 21 October 1966 is considered by many as the starting point of poststructuralist thought. In his lecture, later published under the title "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"[2],

[1] Slavoj Zizek, *Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008)
[2] Jacques Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." Essay. In *Writing and Difference*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2001).

Derrida pointed out a fact that led to the questioning and re-evaluation of structuralism, language and metaphysics, as well as other well-founded philosophical and scientific concepts. One of his key points was that all structures lack an origin or totality, and therefore language and subsequent structures are merely self-referential. In other words, all structures (e.g. concepts, power structures or identities) gain their meaning by referring to each other, but never to a pure origin or centre[3]. This lecture, therefore, is often credited as the starting point of postmodern thought and the era of poststructuralism. The aim of my thesis is to apply the concepts of poststructuralism to two literary works that have been subject to extensive theoretical analysis due to their rich philosophical, cultural and political subtexts, but lack comparative analyses, especially in the frameworks of Derridean theory.

Herman Melville's short story, *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (subtitled *A story of Wall-Street*) has been written nearly a hundred years before Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* premiered in Paris. Melville, an author often associated with the movements of American Renaissance, Dark Romanticism and Realism, published his most known short story in 1853. This was done in two parts, on the pages of a periodical named Putnam's Magazine. During his lifetime he was mainly known as a travel fiction writer (for works such as *Typee, Omoo or Moby-Dick*), which, nonetheless also contained philosophical themes. Although his works, including *Bartleby*, feature a number of themes associated with the previously mentioned movements, his writings often crossed the boundaries of these traditions, namely in the direction of modernism and postmodernism—as to be demonstrated in this thesis. Melville's story about a Wall Street clerk contains a number of themes that already hint at the defining characteristics of not only modernism, but also postmodernism, and shares a number of connections with Beckett's play. The missing centre of structures is one such theme, a theme which serves as the drive behind

[3] Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play", 353-54.

Melville's narrative[4]. The relationship of Bartleby and his employer, the Narrator, revolves around a missing centre that would give meaning and justification to this relationship. The theories of Jacques Derrida, as well as subsequent post-structuralist thought offer a solid background for explaining the main characters' behaviour.

It should come as no surprise that *Waiting for Godot* (premiered in French in 1953, followed by its English premiere in 1955), one of the greatest landmarks of absurdist drama, features even more poststructuralist themes. The deconstruction of language, action or meaning is strikingly apparent in the play, but perhaps the most interesting structure can be observed in the relationship between Vladimir, Estragon and Godot. The latter makes no appearance in the play, yet a certain structure still exist between the tramps and him. Investigating how these structures work not only helps us understand the complicated relationship of the tramps with the world surrounding them (be it through language, actions or Godot), but also tells us more about the play's commentary on the human condition, especially in the context of a postmodern world.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to place the two works in the frameworks of modernism or postmodernism, but a general overview provides important cultural and historical context for this thesis. Just like all movements before them, the movements of modernism and postmodernism sought to challenge and go beyond the values and norms of previous times. What distinguishes these two movements from others, however, is that they questioned even the existence of an organising force behind their theories and cultural elements. Modernism, in one understanding, is the search for this organising force or centre to build upon, especially in the wake of the 'death of God' or the growing scepticism towards the ethos of the Enlightenment. Post-modernism, on the other hand, realises the futility of such a search, and

[4] Andrea Oppo, "Black Holes: A Philosophical View on and," *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 23, no. 1 (2012): 307-317, https://doi.org/10.1163/18757405-023001020. 309-310.

embraces this lack of centre or origin. Lyotard defines postmodernism as an "incredulity toward metanarratives"[5]—metanarratives that claim to stem from an absolute centre. He also claims, that "[a] work can become modern only if it is first postmodern", partly describing the lack of centres as a common element[6]. This also explains the seemingly anachronistic links between the two works.

The two texts are illustrative of the qualities of modernism and postmodernism to different extents. The Narrator of *Bartleby, the Scrivener* is in a constant search for an origin or totality that would dictate his relationship to the scrivener, and yet his search is doomed from the moment Bartleby utters his catchphrase: "I prefer not to"[7]. This parallels the fruitless search of modernism, which tried to (re)structure the world based on a new, absolute origin that surpasses previous ones, yet it did not find one. On the other hand, the main characters of *Waiting for Godot* take on a more resigned attitude: they show no interest to most of the world around them, yet they engage with it, with a certain unseriousness. They have given up on the search for meaning by deconstructing language and action, only treating them as tools to play with. In a tragic irony, however, they cannot or will not give up on one thing: the wait for Godot. This mirrors the general attitude of postmodernism, and hints at an absurdist theme: the realisation of the lack of meaning in life, while still living with a certain joy and playfulness.

In both works, deconstruction happens through inaction. Bartleby's inaction drives the Narrator to behave irrationally, and it is the inaction of Godot that leaves the tramps waiting in the middle of nowhere. The inaction of the tramps, in turn, deconstructs all meaning around them, but is unable to deconstruct what is represented by Godot. As to be explored throughout this thesis, being inactive means a refusal of choice and a refusal of being part of a structure.

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[5] Jean Francois Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition" in *Literary Theory: An Anthology,* ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 356.
[6] Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition," 355.
[7] Herman Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature,* ed. Robert S. Levine (New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 1475.

Inaction and nonresponse, then, threaten the formation of a structure and point out the meaninglessness thereof.

The tramps' inability or unwillingness to act in a meaningful way mirrors the worldview of absurdism. Absurdism means to understand the meaninglessness of life and still face it with joy, or at least indifference or spitefulness[8]. Absurdism is famously described in Albert Camus' essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus"[9]. In this essay, he suggests that "[o]ne must imagine Sisyphus happy" despite his suffering and realisation of the lack of meaning in life.[10] This is the essence of absurdism, which is also at the heart of Beckett's play. Waiting for Godot is considered one of the finest examples of the Theatre of the Absurd, a collective term for European drama of the post-war era, which explores absurdist and existentialist themes. The movement is defined by dramas which explore the lack of objective or centre of humanity and the absurdity of the human condition.

The key question of my thesis is the following: how does inaction act as deconstruction against structures of authority or meaning in *Waiting for Godot* and *Bartleby, the Scrivener*? By applying a poststructuralist framework, the common themes and parallelisms of the two texts will become evident. Identifying the elements, hierarchies and centres of structures helps to understand the attitudes, motivations and thoughts of the characters and their places in structures. This analysis also provides insight into the complex philosophical and existential commentary present in the two works. Furthermore, the application of the various poststructuralist theories onto the texts supports the validity and importance of said theories. The analysis of Beckett's *Godot* and Melville's *Bartleby* through a post-structuralist framework confirms that inaction is an effective tool of deconstruction against structures, as it reveals the

[8] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus, and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien, 1st Vintage International ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991). 1-78.
[9] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1st Vintage International ed., 1991. 1-78.
[10] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1st Vintage International ed., 1991. 77.

lack of an origin behind any structure that would give meaning, definition or identity to the main characters. This investigation also demonstrates that the creation and continuation of such structures is strongly motivated by a need for self-definition and existence, even if it contradicts the lack of totality or centre for these structures.

The first chapter will explain the key concepts of poststructuralist theories which will be utilised during the analysis, including play, centre or *différance*. The second chapter will explore the nature of structures between Bartleby and the Narrator, Godot and the tramps, as well as others, with a specific focus on the deconstructive effects of inaction. The main theoretical background for this chapter is provided by Derrida and Deleuze. The final chapter discusses structures from three perspectives: the interaction of language and action, the role of rationality in the formulation of structures, and the psychological need for structures. Here, feminist and psychoanalytic theories will also be applied, including logocentrism and *want*.

Chapter 1: Theoretical framework

This thesis explores the structural workings of the two texts from a poststructuralist perspective. The thesis makes use of sources from various authors in the field of poststructuralism, all of whom approach the subjects of structures, agency, language or being from different, but often related perspectives. These perspectives will be joined through the analysis of the two literary texts. The main theoretical framework of the analysis is provided by Jacques Derrida, particularly via his essay "Structure, Sign and Play". His key ideas will be used extensively throughout this thesis, therefore the first chapter provides an overview of important concepts such as "*différance*", "*centre*" or "*play*"[11]. Gilles Deleuze, another poststructuralist thinker, offers slightly different but nonetheless important concepts of language, action or being, among others. His essay on *Bartleby, the Scrivener* also provides valuable insight into the deconstructions that happen in the novella. Furthermore, feminist thought on agency and logocentrism will be utilised to explore the theme of rationality in the analysed texts. Finally, Julia Kristeva's theory on the psychological want for structures will be mapped onto both works, revealing more about the characters' behaviour.

1.1. Derrida's concepts of poststructuralism

The key theoretical framework of my thesis is the work of Jacques Derrida, and the concepts he has developed in his essays such as "Structure, Sign and Play", "Différance", or "Of Grammatology" among others. Perhaps the most influential idea of Derrida was that language lacks an origin, a point of reference, and therefore it is only self-referential and lacks totality[12]–as he writes, "in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse"[13]. This idea marks the beginning of post-structural thought, and has inspired philosophers and

[11] Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play", 351-70.
[12] Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play", 353-54.
[13] Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play", 354.

critics (including Derrida himself) to engage in a deconstructive analysis of all things that are constructed around a presupposed origin which does not exist. These structures include language, structures of power, or even metaphysics.

Derrida claims that since there is no real centre or fixed origin to any of our structures, meaning is constructed through "*différance*"[14]—a neologism coined by Derrida, combining the meanings of "temporalization and spacing" (i.e. difference in space and time) and of "not being identical, of being other"[15]. This means that defining something is, in essence, distinguishing it from something else, which then forms a structure between those two things (a sign is a "signifier referring to a signified"[16]). These structures are, however, also hierarchies, where the supposed centre of the structure is preferred over the periphery[17]. Examples of such hierarchical structures are good versus evil, subject versus object, presence versus absence or man versus woman[18]. In each, the former is preferred over the latter, and each member of the structure is defined by the other. Thus, coming into being happens in relation to something else, which either subordinates or is subordinated. The question of subordination and existence will be explored in detail through the analysis of Beckett's and Melville's works.

At the creation of structure (what Derrida describes as an "event"[19]), a boundary is drawn, which separates one element from another (see *différance*[20]). This delineation is motivated by the centre, the dominant part of the structure, and its supposed totality is what guarantees its dominance[21]. In some cases, however, the boundary is overstepped, or the

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[14] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 354, 370.
[15] Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 8;
Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, "Differance," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology,* ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 278-79.
[16] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 355.
[17] Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play", 357; Jacques Derrida, "Positions," in *Positions,* trans. Alan Bass (Continuum, 2004), 38.
[18] Rivkin and Ryan, *Literary Theory,* 343
[19] Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play", 351, 353.
[20] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 354, 370.
[21] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 365.

boundary changes. Such cases, consequently, show that the distinction which created the structure lacks any essence or origin that would truly and ultimately dictate the distinction[22]. If the tectonics of a structure shift in any way, the structure exposes itself to be mere discourse[23], and not something with inherent and total meaning or value. To illustrate, if the definitions of good or evil shift, these concepts turn out to be arbitrary and meaningless, since their stability, and thus origin and totality are questioned.

Another important concept relating to the boundaries of structure is play. In Derrida's understanding, play is what is allowed by the structure[24]. The freest form of play exists before the formulation of a structure, in which a "center […] arrests and grounds the play"[25]. Therefore, play is a necessary part of deconstruction. If a binary can be bridged, it loses its function and power, and thus, its meaning. Deconstruction is the logical consequence of his thought process: if language has no essence, if all science is merely in discourse with itself, they have to be deconstructed. He envisions two ways of doing this: either by taking "a step outside of philosophy" and disregarding all discourse (i.e. structures without essence, *bricolage*), or, by "treating [discourse and old concepts] as tools" to "destroy the old machinery to which they belong" [26], that is, by playing freely within and beyond their structures, while preserving them for what they are.

1.2. Language, logocentrism and want

Derrida's seminal ideas have had a long-lasting effect on philosophy, psychology and literary criticism, and have found a wide range of applications. Gilles Deleuze, one of the most renowned post-structuralist thinkers, has engaged in detail with *Bartleby, the Scrivener*. In his

[22] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 352, 365.
[23] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 354.
[24] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 365.
[25] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 365.
[26] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 359.

posthumously published essay, "Bartleby; or, the Formula", he investigates Bartleby's catchphrase "I prefer not to"[27] in detail. Although his vocabulary is different from that of Derrida, their ideas overlap in multiple ways. Deleuze explores the deconstructive grammaticality (or agrammaticality) of the phrase, but also its relevance in defining Bartleby, or placing him in a structure. The essay highlights the determining and identifying nature of being incorporated into a structure, be it linguistic, social (e.g. employee versus employer) or a structure of *being* itself. The essay, although implicitly, also elaborates on the idea of play in said structures as well as their deconstruction through Bartleby's actions and words.

Closely related to Deleuze's thoughts are concepts of agency and action. Partly provided by feminist studies, agency in relation with logocentrism (i.e. acting rationally or irrationally) is also a highly applicable field of studies. Scholars such as Davies have investigated the role of being rational and being assimilated in social structures[28]. Although the feminist or gender-focused applications of these theories are somewhat limited in relation with *Bartleby, the Scrivener* or *Waiting for Godot*, logocentrism in general is a core theme of both analysed works. "Logocentrism," as well as "phallogocentrism" (i.e. "the privileging of the masculine in understanding meaning") are concepts Derrida engaged with in detail[29]. The prioritising of logic has been a major force in creating (social) hierarchies, be it of work, gender or other, which also becomes evident in the two analysed works.

A further concept to be explored in the thesis is the want for structures. Post-structuralist psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva, has established the concept of *want,* which describes the human psychological need for structures. She distinguishes the want towards structures from the want

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[27] Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," 1475.
[28] Bronwyn Davies. "The Concept of Agency: A Feminist Poststructuralist Analysis," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, no. 30 (1991): 42–53.
[29] "Phallocentrism or Phallogocentrism." Definition: Phallocentrism, 2002. https://www.cla.purdue.edu/academic/english/theory/genderandsex/terms/phallocentrism.html. ; Rivkin and Ryan, "Differance," 350.

towards objects, noting that the former is preliminary to the latter[30]. In her essay, "Powers of Horror"[31], she emphasises that this want is the driving force behind meaning, language and even desire. She claims, in accordance with Derrida's and Deleuze's theories, that structuring is a means of defining one's self[32]. Understanding something in relation to the self (and thereby assimilating it into a structure) reassures the identity of the subject. The want described by Kristeva also correlates with Derrida's concept of the 'event', which was the start of structurality in his explanation[33].

[30] Julia Kristeva. "Approaching Abjection." in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 5.
[31] Kristeva, *Approaching Abjection,* 5.
[32] Kristeva, *Approaching Abjection,* 1-6.
[33] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 351, 353.

Chapter 2: Derridean structures— Deconstruction through inaction

The second chapter of this thesis will explore the structures and dynamics of the main characters of *Waiting for Godot* and *Bartleby, the Scrivener*. Observed through the frameworks of Derrida, their relationships explain the motivations and desires of Vladimir, Estragon and the Narrator. Beyond the similar themes, the two works share a number of similarities in form as well: both have a similar amount of characters, most of the events take place in one (barren and uninteresting) place, and their narrative structures are also fairly unorthodox. This lack of grand narratives and the limited spaces help to highlight what are central to the works, such as the characters, their relationships and structural dynamics. The characters and their interactions are perhaps the most absurd and subversive elements of both works, and, if observed from the viewpoint of structurality, this absurdity shows a great amount of parallelism with the theories of Jacques Derrida. Camus understands absurdism as a spiteful attitude against the lack of meaning in the world[34], which describes closely Derrida's understanding of the word *play*—meaning the use of structures while understanding their lack of absolute meaning[35].

2.1. The structural relationship of Bartleby and the Narrator

One of the most interesting structures can be observed between Bartleby and his employer, the Narrator. According to the text and our understanding of employer-employee relationships, Bartleby is a subordinate of the Narrator. He works at the law firm in order to complete tasks designated by the Narrator, for which he receives a salary. However, as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that this cannot be the reason for him staying at the firm. Bartleby, not long after his employment, begins not to perform his duties—or, at least, says he prefers not to. This, in a realistic scenario, would result in him being fired from his job. Within the

[34] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1st Vintage International ed., 1991.
[35] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1st Vintage International ed., 1991.

binary structure of employed and unemployed, there is, supposedly, no middle ground, i.e. no play is allowed. However, Bartleby does not get fired for a long time, and even when he does, his behaviour or situation changes little. He does not leave the premises, and the Narrator still cannot imagine turning him away ("Turn the man out by an actual thrusting I could not; to drive him away […] would not do"[36]). Thus, he deconstructs the structure of employment. He does not do what he is expected to, he does not care about the financial compensation for it, and even the termination of his contract has no effect on him. Therefore, there is no clear point when he becomes unemployed. In some sense, he never really was employed (as his obligations did not bind him at all), in another sense he remained employed until the end of the story (as he kept behaving the same as during his employment, and his employer kept the same attitude towards him throughout the story).

Nonetheless, a certain structure is still upheld by the narrator. He is supposedly in the dominant position of this structure, which would dictate and keep the rules of who does what in the firm and who gets to work there. Yet, Bartleby's behaviour steps out of and deconstructs the boundaries of this power structure. Derrida writes that "the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form"[37]. Here, however, virtually all play is allowed, and this free play is what threatens to deconstruct the structure[38]. None of Bartleby's actions (or inactions) fit what the structure is supposed to allow, yet the structure of Bartleby and the Narrator seems to remain—although in different forms. Throughout the text, the Narrator's reasoning for keeping Bartleby employed and in his favours shift constantly. At the first occurrence of Bartleby "preferring not to" do his task, the Narrator glides over it, at the second, he tries to reason with him, to no avail[39]. He "prefers not to"[40] play the part of the other,

[36] Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," 1486.
[37] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 352.
[38] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 352.
[39] Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," 1475-76.
[40] Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," 1475.

complementing part of the structure, thus threating the existence of the structure. Therefore, the Narrator adjusts his approach in order to uphold the structure, even if on different terms. Later in the story, the Narrator keeps the scrivener for his diligence, for "his incessant industry (except when he chose to throw himself into a standing revery[…])"[41], even when he does not perform his requests. After that, he keeps him out of pity, or out of compassion for a perceived illness, or out of a Christian or humanist[42] conviction that "both [he] and Bartleby were sons of Adam"[43]. The mentions of the bust of Cicero in the Narrator's office also seem to hint at a different ethos of the Narrator[44], for example, when he remarks that dismissing Bartleby would be just the same as getting rid of the bust of Cicero. This remark is not only an illustration of Bartleby's stillness; it also suggests that turning away Bartleby would equate to turning against the Ciceronian ideals of the Narrator. All these different and mostly unrelated justifications are made up by the Narrator alone, which parallels one of the key ideas of Derrida. He claims that no structure has an absolute centre or origin[45] which would assign inherent value or meaning to the structure and the *différance* of its elements. This means that Bartleby, through his recurring phrase, deconstructs and makes the structure obsolete, yet the Narrator refuses to accept neither the loss (i.e. the exclusion or othering) of Bartleby, nor the loss of being part of a structure. He stays attached to Bartleby, and he keeps adjusting the centre of their structure for the sake of the structure.

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[41] Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," 1479.
[42] Humanism is understood as the recognition of the autonomy, individuality and equality of human beings. The Narrator wants to adhere to these values, which is also evidenced by the statue of Cicero in his office. According to The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, humanism is also understood as a distancing from (medieval) Christian dogmas, which further exemplifies the shift in the centres of the Narrator's structures;
Chris Baldick, "Humanism," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), https://www-oxfordreference-com.ru.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-561.
[43] Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," 1481.
[44] Ansgar Allen and Emile Bojesen, "Bartleby is Dead," in *Angelaki* 24, no. 5 (2019): 62.
[45] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 365

As Bojesen and Allen[46] point out, the more irrational and subversive character of the two is not Bartleby, but the Narrator. No doubt, Bartleby's behaviour is not usual in any sense, but it is the behaviour of the Narrator that accommodates his strange behaviour to the extreme[47]—he refuses to let go of his scrivener, no matter his passivity. Deleuze writes that "the madness is growing: not Bartleby's madness in 'particular,' but the madness around him, notably that of the attorney"[48]. For seemingly irrational reasons, the Narrator is fixated on sharing a structure with Bartleby, no matter the cost or reason.

2.2. The structurality of Vladimir, Estragon and Godot

In his fixation of structures, the Narrator is not unlike the two tramps of *Waiting for Godot*. In the case of Beckett's drama, it is Godot who is in a seemingly superior position over Didi and Gogo, as he (although not mentioned explicitly in the text) seems to have ordered them to wait for him—at least they behave so. Yet, at one point, Estragon asks if they are tied to Godot, and Vladimir responds with perceptible irony: "'Tied to Godot! What an idea! No question of it. (Pause.) For the moment.'"[49] However, unlike the Narrator, Godot himself is not present in the story in any way. On the surface, Vladimir and Estragon feel some kind of obligation to wait, yet, there is no mention of this obligation. Towards the end, Vladimir mentions that Godot would punish them if they "'dropped him'"[50], but even this seems nonsensical, as punishing them would require Godot to exist, and potentially "arrive". This sheds a new light on the structure and relationship of the tramps and Godot. Derrida states that each structure polices its play[51], and if no such policing exists, the structure is deconstructed. The tramps' waiting presupposes the arrival of Godot, which does not happen. Waiting without

[46] Ansgar Allen and Emile Bojesen, "Bartleby is Dead," in *Angelaki* 24, no. 5 (2019): 61.
[47] Oppo, "Black Holes," 307.
[48] Gilles Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, the Formula." in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 69.
[49] Samuel Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* (New York, Grove Press, 1954), 14.
[50] Beckett, "Waiting for Godot," 59.
[51] Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play", 365.

arrival (or vice versa), then, breaks the structure, just like being employed without working does. The messenger boy repeatedly informs the tramps that Godot will arrive, yet he does not, and nothing implies that he will. This, in some sense mirrors the behaviour of Bartleby: he does not forfeit the structure by making his non-arrival clear and ultimate, yet he does not actually arrive. Thus, the structure remains, but the behaviour of its members plays with its boundaries to a great extent, threatening to deconstruct it.

Towards the end of the drama, the non-arrival of Godot becomes evident to the viewers, but perhaps to the tramps as well—perhaps, it has been clear to them throughout. This could be evidenced by their distrust towards any information they receive, particularly the messages of the boy. The repetitive structure of the play suggests that these events (waiting, the arrival of the boy, or Pozzo and Lucky, etc.) have been recurring for many days or years before the start of the play (if not since eternity), and they will continue to repeat long after the curtains close. This would explain the attitudes of Didi and Gogo, as they turn to the boy with slight annoyance ("'You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me!'" [52]), and with a lot of indifference, especially compared to the significance of Godot's arrival to them. The disinterest they show thus implies that they do not quite believe the news about Godot, but they also do not question them too much. Their actions also display this cognitive dissonance or indecision. At the very end, they decide to commit suicide (for the second time[53]), then they decide to leave (also for the second time), yet they do neither. This parallels the behaviour of Bartleby's Narrator. The latter keeps condemning Bartleby's behaviour more and more, yet he does not abandon him, even when the reasons for not doing so become obsolete.

Oppo claims that Bartleby's non-response not only functions as a "black hole" in terms of his willingness to work (or willingness in general), it also functions as one in terms of the

[52] Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* 59.
[53] Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* 60.

narrative[54]. He understands this black hole as something that eliminates the will, all references, but therefore also the narrative. As described by Rivkin and Ryan[55], narratives often revolve around a missing centre. In the case of Bartleby, however, this centre is never found. or achieved, i.e. the Narrator fails in his goal when Bartleby dies. The 'black hole' of Bartleby devours the structures reaching for this centre. Nonetheless, Bartleby dies in the end, which gives a resolution to the narrative, no matter how tragic or subversive. In *Waiting for Godot*, on the other hand, there is no closure or finality. This, highlights a key difference between the two works: the loss of Bartleby and the values he was supposed to represent derail the narrative, yet the narrative gains some sense of closure, which, however does not happen in *Waiting for Godot*. In fact such a closure would eliminate the narrative as a whole. If Godot was to arrive, the story would amount to a traditional (perhaps boring) narrative, where the missing centre is reached. His confirmed non-arrival (equivalent of Bartleby's death) , however, would eliminate the narrative completely, as not only his, but all other characters' references would be eliminated, i.e. they would cease to exist.

2.3. Search for structure and meaning

A common theme between the Narrator and the Tramps is that they do not want to let go of the structure they are parts of, no matter how irrational or unjustified they are. The potential reasons for doing so are not quite clear, but the application of poststructuralist theory provides some explanations. Derrida posits that structures are built on *différance*, in which one element is defined by the other[56]. In both stories, we know very little about the main characters. In *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, we learn that Bartleby is someone, "of whom nothing is

[54] Oppo, "Black Holes," 307.
[55] Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, "Introduction: The Implied Order: Structuralism," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology,* ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 54.
[56] Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3-4, 9-10; Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play", 354.

ascertainable"[57], as Deleuze puts it; he is "a man without references"[58]. We know a little more about the Narrator, a "prudent" and "unambitious"[59] lawyer, who also seems to champion Christian and humanist values. He is the one who attempts to assimilate Bartleby into any structure at all costs, which, in one reading, is motivated by the need to validate himself, i.e. to establish the structures that prove his most important qualities. He takes pride in his morality, prudence (his "first grand point"[60]) and compassion, however, the demonstration of such virtues requires an object (i.e. another person). Compassion requires someone in an unfortunate situation, but Bartleby—despite all signs—refuses to enact or embody the misfortune that seemingly permeates his life. He "prefers not to" be this object, and thus refuses to confirm the narrator's good qualities. Throughout the story, the stakes of this confirmation of qualities shift and increase: at first it is his authority that is not obeyed (neither the authority of assigning tasks nor the authority of firing an employee), however, the Narrator is relatively unbothered by this. We get to know him as an unambitious, peaceful person. Later on, however, it is his core values that are questioned by Bartleby's lack of response. At one point, he attributes Bartleby and the related difficulties to an 'all-wise Providence'[61], even though he is the one responsible for them. This shows that, to him, these values represent what Derrida describes as an absolute origin[62]—which, however, is an illusion. In one explanation, this is what drives him to help Bartleby even in the most extreme situations. And yet, Bartleby, as it is the essence of his character, refuses to enter or stay in a structure. He prefers even death over demonstrating a *"differance"* towards the narrator (and thus assigning meaning or value to him or a structure).

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[57] Herman Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature,* ed. Robert S. Levine (New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 1469.
[58] Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, the Formula," 72.
[59] Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," 1470.
[60] Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," 1470.
[61] Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," 1488.
[62] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 352

In the case of *Waiting for Godot*, even less is certain about the characters, yet this only makes it more important for the characters to be identified or defined by a structure. We know nothing about the lives of Didi and Gogo, nor about the setting or the reasons why they are there (beyond waiting for Godot). This seems to be contradicted by the act that we learn a few bits of concrete information about them: they reference a previous event when Estragon threw himself into the Rhone, they discuss a "'Macon country'" and a "'Cackon country'"—the latter being addressed as "'[h]ere!'", where the play takes place; and Vladimir says that they have been together for "'[f]ifty years maybe'"[63]. However, none of this information seems trustworthy: the characters' memory is faulty, the Rhone is a real river while countries named Macon or Cackon do not exist[64], Vladimir responds to being addressed as Mr. Albert[65], and so on (note: language use will be further explored in the final chapter). Thus the references they have are more confusing than helpful in connecting them to their world. The only structure that would provide them a point of true reference is their relation to Godot, this relationship, however, remains an imaginary one throughout the play.

In a poignant remark, however, Estragon says: "'We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist'"[66]. This line resounds the struggle of the Narrator and the theory of Derrida: meaning is created through *différance*, i.e. through relation to "something" else[67]. And this struggle for meaning or self-definition is perhaps even more present in the tramps than the Narrator. They are not simply hoping to confirm a characteristic that they designate existential meaning to, they are looking for anything to give them reason or definition. And still, they find this difficult to do, even in their most basic actions, be it talking, thinking,

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[63] Samuel Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* (New York, Grove Press, 1954), 35, 39-40.
[64] Mâcon is a town in France, while Cackon is a vulgar wordplay in French. Thus, Beckett plays with language: some words are meaningful, others are not, and yet others are used 'incorrectly' (e.g. Mâcon country). For further discussion on Beckett's deconstructive language use, see subchapter 3.1.
[65] Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* 32, 58.
[66] Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* 44.
[67] Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 278.

leaving, or waiting. In another explanation, they have simply given up on searching for meaning, except in Godot. This would be evidenced by their disinterested discussions ("Vladimir: 'Shall I tell it to you?' Estragon: 'No.'"), as well as their half-hearted or pointless actions (such as "'do[ing] the tree'"[68]). Despite the comment of Estragon, all of the things that entertain or at least engage them seem to be short-lived. They as easily abandon topics or activities as easily they pick them up, be it eating a carrot or deciding to hang themselves. These provide only an "impression" of meaning, for a short time, which distracts them from their main purpose, waiting for Godot.

And yet, the wait for Godot is also a distraction. In their struggle for existence, i.e. purpose, self-definition or structure, the object they hold onto with the most determination is Godot and his arrival. Were Godot to arrive, they would become something they aspire to be: part of a structure. But Godot does not arrive, even though he messages that he will come tomorrow, "'without fail'"[69]. This is the same indecision or 'indetermination'[70] as that of Bartleby: If he fulfilled what the structure dictates, the tramps would be relieved, if he violated the structure (i.e. if he were certain not to arrive), the tramps would realise that their hopes for a structure were in vain. But, just like Bartleby, he does neither. He remains in a constant non-response, which drives the tramps to maintain the structure and keep waiting. The boy (or boys) play an important role in suspending the tramps' expectations. He appears two times (a third time is also alluded to, namely the day before the first act[71]), yet, each time, the boy claims to be a different one. Each time, he states that Godot will come the next day, but this does not come true. His repeated arrivals seem to imply that Godot's arrival is delayed constantly, and this is unlikely to change in the future. This could explain, that even on the "first" occasion,

[68] Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* 9, 49.
[69] Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* 58.
[70] Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, the Formula," 72.
[71] Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* 33.

Vladimir is distrustful of him ("That's all a pack of lies. […] Tell us the truth!"[72]). Yet they believe the message of Godot, as they have no other choice (the reasons for doing so will be explored in the third chapter).

An important difference between the two stories, nonetheless, lies in the fact that Bartleby and the Narrator are active participants of the story, while Godot is not, in fact even his existence is questionable. This means that, through the unfolding of events, the structure which Bartleby would represent to the Narrator changes constantly, while, in the case of Godot, it remains the same throughout. As mentioned earlier, the Narrator has more specific expectations from assimilating Bartleby into a structure. The last words of the novel, "Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!"[73] show that perhaps 'merely' humanity (and its perceivedly absolute and original values) have been lost with the loss of Bartleby. However, in the—physically and ideologically—desolate setting of *Waiting for Godot*, there is no such value present to begin with. The tramps do not wait for Godot because he represents a value that they deem absolute. It is this vacuum of *engineered* meaning (in a Derridean-Straussian sense, describing meaning that stems from an absolute and total origin[74]), which makes the tramps hold onto Godot. To them, Godot is a chance of absoluteness in whatever form it may be, as all else has turned out to be (or has always been) *bricolage*.

[72] Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* 33.
[73] Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," 1495.
[74] Jacques Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." in *Writing and Difference*, (Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), 360.

Chapter 3: Language, (in)action and being through structures

A common theme between the two works is the inaction or non-actions of the main characters. It is inaction that deconstructs the attempted structures of the Narrator, but it is also inaction which keeps the tramps in a structure with Godot. All of their inactions, however, are in discourse with language, i.e. the words they use. This is perhaps the most prominent in *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (see the formula), nonetheless, the words of Didi and Gogo also contextualise their movements (or lack thereof) to a great extent, and the language use of the complete drama is a commentary on language itself.

3.1. Language

As explored in detail by Deleuze, Bartleby's agrammaticality deconstructs or "ravages" language in different ways[75]. Deleuze notes, in relation to the narrator's lack of response to the formula, that "[a]fter the formula there is nothing left to say"[76]. This is illustrative of the statement that Bartleby's formula is "neither an affirmation nor a negation"[77], i.e. a deconstruction of choice. The formula also removes the referentiality (see *différance*[78]) of language, according to Deleuze[79], which, in Derrida's understanding, is what creates language—and structure—in the first place. Thus, it is Bartleby's language that deconstructs, what he does or does not is much less relevant. The formula has already opened up the possibility for Bartleby's actions or non-actions. As Deleuze notes[80], he keeps copying documents even after he says he "prefers not to" ("he copied […] at the usual rate of four cents a folio[…]; but he was permanently exempt from examining the work done by him) [81], further

[75] Gilles Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, the Formula," 69.
[76] Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, the Formula," 71.
[77] Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, the Formula," 69.
[78] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 370.
[79] Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, the Formula," 70.
[80] Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, the Formula," 69.
[81] Herman Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature,* ed. Robert S. Levine (New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 1475, 1479

showing that it is language that shapes the boundaries of structures he is part of (i.e. "hollows out a … zone of indiscernibility or indetermination" [82]), more so than actions.

In the case of *Waiting for Godot*, on the other hand, language is not used in a directly self-deconstructing way. In fact, it is used in an attempt to formulate structures, not only by the tramps, but by Godot as well. It is through relations that the tramps look for identity or existence, and these relations are established more so through language than through action. Yet these structures are understood by the tramps to have no inherent meaning. They consider it "bricolage"[83], still, they engage in it for the sake of play. Thus, language itself is not completely deconstructed, but the tramps never considered it to be constructed on a solid base (i.e. origin[84]) in the first place. To illustrate, Didi and Gogo discuss various topics from Jesus ("'our Saviour'"[85], to be precise) to suicide, yet not only do the discussions have no action to follow, they also have no consequence in their discussions. "'Well, what of it?'"[86] asks Estragon when Vladimir discusses the death of the Saviour, then quickly abandons the topic. Many of their other discussions are cut off in a similar vein. This is because Didi and Gogo never presumed what most language users do, namely that their discussions can lead somewhere meaningful or that there is an essential meaning behind their words. Despite the fact that it is this essence or origin that they long for, they do not even expect to find it through speech or language, and this is what makes their dialogues absurd and playful[87].

Perhaps the most marked example of playful and deconstructive language use can be observed in Lucky's monologue[88]. His tirade seems to mimic a scientific speech, yet it seems

[82] Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, the Formula," 71.
[83] Jacques Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." in *Writing and Difference*, (Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), 360.
[84] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 352.
[85] Samuel Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* (New York, Grove Press, 1954), 9.
[86] Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* 9.
[87] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 352.
[88] Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* 28-29.

to lack any direct meaning. Among others, it mentions various fictional scientists ("'Puncher and Wattmann'")[89], fictional places, God, various elements of nature, etc. These often fleeting and vague allusions, nonetheless, point at various discourses or elements of language and deconstruct them. By using different words and linguistic formulas—that are usually used in serious contexts—without any meaning or conclusion, the monologue plays with the boundaries of language. Lucky's stream of words can be seen as an illustration of a language without an origin. Beckett's writing plays with various structures within language, be it morphology ("'quaquaquaqua'"), syntax, ("'it is established as hereinafter but not so fast'") or semantics ("'flying floating riding gliding conating'"). Words are being said, but nothing organises them into a meaningful utterance. Although more understandable, the tramps' discussions also display something similar. Their words and sentences make sense *per se* (for the most part), but they have no essence and reach no conclusion—i.e. their discourse lacks totality. Following Derrida's discussion of sign and language[90], it can be said that all language is like that of *Waiting for Godot.* He claims that "there is nothing outside the text"[91], i.e. there is no organising centre of language, as all of it is built on *différance*[92]. Therefore, no matter how gibberish Lucky's words are, in essence, they are just as meaningful as any other language. Thus, Beckett's text deconstructs all language by exposing its lack of origin.

3.2. Action as commitment

The tramps also expect no meaning to be discovered in their actions, but in this regard they are less playful. In some cases, their actions are just as disjointed and playful[93] as their words: for example, they repeatedly put on and remove their hats for no apparent reason[94]. In

[89] Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* 28.
[90] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 353-55.
[91] Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 163.
[92] Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3-4, 9-10.
[93] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 352.
[94] Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* 46.

many other, often more serious cases, however, they do not follow through with their words, be it committing suicide or leaving. A recurring theme in the play is the tramps expressing their intention to leave (or move) and then remaining stationary. This happens various times, but the most remarkable examples of this can be observed at the end of each act ("Vladimir: 'Well, shall we go?' Estragon: 'Yes, let's go.' *They do not move*")[95]. Here, moving or remaining is a matter of commitment to waiting, i.e. structure and meaning. This contradiction of words and actions, beyond the further deconstruction of language, also shows that they do not attribute meaning to their actions or the effects thereof. They understand what Allen and Bojesen[96] point out through their interpretation of Derrida: to commit an action is to commit a leap of faith. For Bartleby to act in accordance with the Narrator would be to confirm both his structure and its origin; and, for the tramps to act in accordance with any structure would be to assign ultimate meaning to it. In "The Gift of Death"[97], Derrida compares Bartleby to Abraham, the main focus of his analysis. Abraham, he explains[98], would "prefer not to" kill his son, however, he is committed to the action. Thus, on the level of language, he is not unlike Bartleby, on the level of actions, however, Abraham is subject to the structure (of God), unlike the scrivener. The tramps, in most cases, do not attribute meaning to language or action.

In one case, however, both language and action are treated as ultimately meaningful. The tramps' wait for Godot depends on, and is motivated by this meaning and its "totality"[99]. It is the words of Godot, relayed by the boy, that make them wait for him, i.e., in this case, what is said is followed by action. Furthermore, they do not give up waiting (even when they say otherwise), because they assign meaning to it—unlike any other action ("Estragon: 'And if he

[95] Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* 35, 60.
[96] Ansgar Allen and Emile Bojesen, "Bartleby is Dead," in *Angelaki* 24, no. 5 (2019): 64.
[97] Jacques Derrida, "Three. Whom to Give to (Knowing Not to Know)," in *The Gift of Death; and Literature in Secret*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 75-76.
[98] Derrida, *The Gift of Death,* 76.
[99] Jacques Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." in *Writing and Difference*, (Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), 352.

comes?' Vladimir: 'We'll be saved'"[100]). Here, they cannot play with the structure: inaction (i.e. waiting) is already a deconstructive act against action (just like Bartleby's preference not to). Furthermore, an in-between position of action and inaction is hard to conceive of, especially without committing to an action first (e.g. suicide or leaving). In addition, deconstructing or giving up on waiting would eliminate the only chance they have for an absolute or total origin, or a reference[101] or existence. Similarly, this is the reason they take the word of Godot (more precisely, the word of the boy) for granted, despite knowing that it is unreliable. (the boy forgets meeting the tramps the day before and Godot's date of arrival also changes[102]).

3.3. Rationality and want: the motivations of structures

An important perspective on structurality, agency and rationality is opened up by poststructuralist feminist literature, which warrants a brief discussion of gender in the two works. Notably, neither the novel nor the drama include female characters. In fact, Beckett has explicitly banned women from playing in *Waiting for Godot*[103]. His exact reasoning is unknown, but feminist theory offers an explanation that could account for the exclusion of women from both works. Davies writes[104], that "women are […] constituted as other to conscious, rational thought", and that "[f]rom a masculine perspective women's inclusion of elements that are not regarded as includable in good, rational thought, is incomprehensible." This means that masculinity is associated with structuring and, its precursor, logos (i.e. speech, rationality). Thus, all that is irrational is relegated to the peripheral, which, in the structure of gender, is the feminine. This is also described by Derrida, under the term phallogocentrism[105].

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[100] Samuel Beckett, *"Waiting for Godot,"* (New York, Grove Press, 1954), 60.
[101] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 361.
[102] Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 56, 58.
[103] "Two Women Must Wait Some Time Longer for Godot," The Irish Times, July 27, 1998, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/two-women-must-wait-some-time-longer-for-godot-1.177183.
[104] Bronwyn Davies. "The Concept of Agency: A Feminist Poststructuralist Analysis," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, no. 30 (1991): 44–45.
[105] Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 278

Therefore, the lack of female characters in the two works can be explained by the fact that both narratives feature characters who are supposed to be parts of structures (more so than women), often in the central positions. It is, then, the characters' failure or refusal to assimilate or be assimilated which provides subversion, drama or absurdity to the two works. Were the characters women, their exclusion from (the centres of) structures would not be as subversive or atypical.

Despite the lack of female characters, there is plenty of irrational behaviour in both works. Mapping (ir)rationality onto the characters reveals more about the working and de-centring of structures. In *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, it is Bartleby who acts irrationally at first. As explained in the previous chapter, not completing his tasks breaks the structure of the workplace, which is built on a notion of rationality. A person policing this structure, then, acts on behalf of rationality. The Narrator is supposed to be this person, but, instead of othering (i.e. getting rid of) Bartleby, he slowly gives up on his own rationality instead. Nonetheless, the structure of rationality is much harder for him to let go of than that of employee-employer. This is evidenced by the fact that he is quick to look for new frameworks by which to relate to Bartleby, all of which are built upon a certain rationale (be it Christianity or humanism). Each one is less rational than the previous, yet he remains fixated on finding a rationalisation or justification for the changing centres of his structures (as described in the previous chapter). The constant shift of centres reveals the lack thereof, and show that the structures enforced by the narrator lack reason, or that rationality itself is a structure lacking an ultimate origin or essence. The latter is also a point made by Derrida, who, based on this observation, de-centred metaphysics as a whole[106].

[106] Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 8.

The tramps of Waiting for Godot also struggle with the dilemmas of rationality and structures, perhaps even more so than the Narrator or Bartleby. They have no reason to define themselves within any structure, except for Godot. They have realised (or knew all along) that all structures lack totality, except for the wait for Godot. Despite appearances, most of their behaviour is not as irrational as it seems: if we consider their actions as play with structures of no essential meaning (i.e. bricolage[107]), there needs to be no particular reason behind their actions, be it eating a carrot or contradicting each other for the sake of doing so[108]. What is, however, not part of free play and therefore acts as part of a structure is waiting. Reason would dictate that, if all else is bricolage, Godot and his arrival should also be seen as such. His arrival is just as dubious as the chance that he might bring some kind of totality or value into the world of Didi and Gogo. And yet, against all odds, they wait. This is their most irrational (non-)action, yet it is the only thing that might give them meaning, definition or existence. Again, they refuse (or are unable) to take the last "step outside of philosophy"[109], which illustrates the absurdity of the human condition.

A similar, but distinguishable force in the creation of structures is *want,* a term used by Julia Kristeva. Want, in psychoanalysis, describes the psychological need for structures. The object of this want is structure itself, which is what motivates any structuring, including being. As Kristeva claims, want is "preliminary to being and object", as well as "meaning, language, or desire"[110]. The want for structures, then, precedes the want for objects. This precedence also becomes evident in the works of Beckett and Melville. As illustrated before, Melville's Narrator is fixated not only on Bartleby, but on structure itself as well. Bartleby, the required object of

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[107] Jacques Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." in *Writing and Difference*, (Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), 360.
[108] Samuel Beckett, "Waiting for Godot," (New York, Grove Press, 1954), 41
[109] Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play." 359.
[110] Julia Kristeva. "Approaching Abjection." in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 5.

his structures, is necessary for establishing said structures, but it is structure itself the Narrator is looking for. Kristeva explains that structure (in her case, of subject and object) is what generates being[111], and being is what the Narrator seeks. Being, to him, comes in the shape of confirming his qualities that he deems essential and defining to his being (e.g. good employer, good Christian, a philanthropist etc.). The want for structures becomes even more evident in *Waiting for Godot.* Here, the object of the tramps' structure, Godot, is not present or perhaps does not even exist, yet the structure is so important to them that they try to establish and uphold it even without its object. As discussed earlier, the importance of this structure lies in the fact that they lack any true origin or totality, therefore it is their being that depends on the structure.

[111] Kristeva, *Approaching Abjection,* 1-5.

Conclusion

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett and *Bartleby, the Scrivener* by Herman Melville are two of the most intriguing and theoretically complex works of modern literature. Both have been dissected by academics of various fields, since they both include extensive political, sociological, and philosophical subtext. However, comparative, and even more so, Derridean interpretations of the texts are scarce. Thus, regardless of the ideological frameworks these missing roots might represent, my research concentrated on charting the structures that are present among the characters, language, and action. Throughout this paper, the deconstructive nature of inaction and indecision has been demonstrated in various contexts.

The application of poststructuralist ideas onto the two texts has revealed how inaction becomes a deconstructive tool in various structures. It has become evident that playing with a structure threatens to deconstruct it, yet many characters—and, by extension, humanity—have no option but to hold onto structures, even when they are being deconstructed. In some sense, both the Narrator's and the tramps' existence depends on upholding decentred or instable structures. As Derrida claimed, existence happens in relation or discourse with something else[112], therefore it is these structures that the characters depend on. While the Narrator seeks to verify his own, essential qualities, the tramps of Beckett's play look for any graspable object that could formulate a meaningful structure with them. Throughout both narratives, however, the realisation of such structures seems less and less likely.

The interaction of language and action in the two texts provides further explanations to the workings of these structures. Bartleby, by uttering his well-known words, opens up a zone of free play for his actions. His language deconstructs the structures of the Narrator, which allows him to act freely, making the Narrator go to unreasonable lengths at trying to restore a

[112] Jacques Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." in *Writing and Difference*, (Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), 355.

structure. Didi and Gogo, as well as the play as a whole, interact somewhat differently with language. The tramps generally treat language as inherently meaningless and use it playfully throughout the play. This evidences a recognition of the lack of origin in language and subsequent structures. Their actions, while still playful and deconstructive in most cases, treat the arrival of Godot as ultimately meaningful. They cannot deconstruct waiting, and thus, cling onto Godot's arrival.

The strong attachment to structures and self-definition is further explained by the theories of logocentrism and *want* (as discussed by Kristeva[113]). Logocentrism dictates that rational, logical structures are preferable to irrationality. In both works, however, even rationality is deconstructed by inaction: the Narrator's changing reasoning loses its grip on Bartleby, while the non-arrival of Godot makes the wait of Didi and Gogo seem less and less reasonable. Yet the characters long for these structures. Kristeva describes a want for structures, an essential part of constructing one's self.[114] She claims that the want for structures precedes the want for any object, which is evidenced by the search for structures in both stories.

This thesis offers a detailed description of structures relating to action, language and identity, which offers a solid ground for further research in various directions. The deconstructive elements of language and action have further implications in ideological and political readings, and the formulations of being or identity through structures can be explored in more detail. Such deconstructions can have various applications of real life, even in non-ideological contexts (such as education[115]), which can be the focus of further research. My research did not explore the theme of repetition in Beckett's play to its full extent, especially in the context of being and presence through *différance*. Derrida's theory of *différance* implies a

[113]Kristeva, Approaching Abjection, 5.
[114] Kristeva, *Approaching Abjection,* 5.
[115] Allen and Bojesen, "Bartleby is Dead," 61-72.

displacement in time (not just space), which some characters lack—i.e. to be present, one needs to be absent at other times, however, the tramps do not leave the scene. Temporality and identity are also an important theme in *Bartleby, the Scrivener*. Only one thing is known about Bartleby's past, namely that he used to work at a dead letter office. Dead letters are letters that do not reach their destinations, i.e. have no end, symbolically mirroring Bartleby, who has no origin. Oppo, by interpreting Agamben, understands the dead letters as descriptors of non-happenings[116], which could be contrasted to Derrida's understanding of the *event* by building onto the findings of this thesis. Furthermore, positioning the two works in a cultural-historical context, as well as in terms of modernism and postmodernism could be a relevant point of further discussion, especially in light of the overlapping modern and postmodern themes of the two texts.

[116] Oppo, "Black Holes," 310.

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