

# Imagery in waiting for godot and mother courage and her children



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Although *Waiting for Godot* and *Mother Courage and Her Children* are quite different in terms of plot structure and setting, there are similarities present in the use of bleak imagery as symbols of religious, social, and political criticism. The symbolism extends beyond the imagery and encompasses the characters themselves. The props, especially in *Godot*, have an abstract significance more easily apparent in the ways in which they are utilized than their inherent characteristics.

Boots play a symbolic role in both of these plays, although serving different purposes. In *Godot*, the constant struggle of removing and replacing the boots, as well as the incessant question of which boot belongs to which character, is representative of a deeper fundamental identity crisis channeled toward external signifiers of identity. *Mother Courage* offers the red high-heeled boots to Kattrin to comfort her after she receives her facial scar. Kattrin refuses to accept them- they symbolize, to her, the abuse that she has suffered at the hands of men. Male attention has stolen her voice and her facial beauty, and the boots represent the incongruity of love and war.

When the drum rolls signify that Swiss Cheese is set to be executed, the stage briefly becomes dark. This is a symbol of death much akin to darkness that occurred before the crucifixion of Christ. Indeed, *Mother Courage* denies knowledge of Swiss Cheese's identity, reminiscent of Peter's denial of knowing Jesus. Interestingly, the chaplain's song after Swiss Cheese's arrest tells of the moments leading up to the crucifixion. *Waiting for Godot* utilizes darkness as a similar allegory of death, as night falls and the men are relieved of their "duty", no longer bound to wait for Godot.

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One striking moment in *Waiting for Godot* occurs when Pozzo instructs Vladimir to place the bowler on Lucky's head so he can think. This inanimate object, by virtue of the status it affords, allows Lucky to think for himself and he begins to soliloquize. When the hat is knocked off, his monologue abruptly ends. We get the sense that it is not Lucky who is doing the thinking, rather it is the hat and the identity that it embodies. The symbolism of the hats is not restricted to Lucky, and Vladimir and Estragon exchange hats with each other multiple times, highlighting the fluidity and flux of their identities. The rope around Lucky's neck symbolizes the power dynamic between him and Pozzo, and the abuse makes it clear that Lucky is his subordinate. Yet in the second act, the rope is much shorter, and it is Lucky who directs the now-blind Pozzo, blurring the lines between servant and master.

Kattrin, like Lucky, lacks a voice, although hers has been stolen from her through rape rather than slavery. Her drum, another inanimate object, can be said to give her the voice she lacks. It is interesting to note that the drum is among the things that Kattrin brings back after she is attacked while purchasing things for her mother. We see that the drum, to Kattrin, symbolizes defiance against oppression. These inanimate objects, although not infused with any special powers, empower the characters to accomplish what they cannot. Both Kattrin and Lucky surprise us with their significance by the end of the plays. It becomes apparent that Lucky's name, although seemingly ironic, actually suits his position relative to the other characters. Lucky possesses two luxuries that the others lack: certitude and awareness. Lucky does not struggle with the "agony of choice" as Vladimir and Estragon both do; Pozzo gives him the certainty and authority that Godot will never

provide for them. Lucky is also fully conscious of his status as a slave, whereas the other characters maintain an illusion of false freedom. There is an interesting duality here, of the seemingly least fortunate character possessing a fortune of consciousness, that is mirrored by Kattrin's character. She too, is mistreated and seems to lose more in the war than any other character: she loses her voice, her beauty, her dreams, and ultimately her life.

Yet Kattrin displays immense courage, awareness, and self sacrifice- more so than any other character. Mother Courage seemingly touches upon this when she attempts to comfort Kattrin, saying she is " lucky" that she is no longer pretty, and that this would save her. These two characters at first seem inconsequential, but eventually come to symbolize the tremendous potential and fortune of the seemingly unfortunate. Both of these plays are ultimately attempting to portray the devastation and destruction of identity and self that occur through religious, social and political processes.