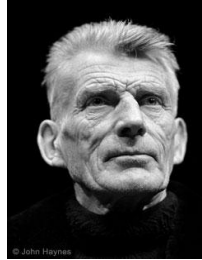


Theatre of the Absurd: an Existentialistic Vision of the Meaningless of Human Existence

Samuel Beckett
(1906 – 1989)
*Dublin



<http://patriciamilton.files.wordpress.com/2009/06/samuel-beckett.jpg>

Concerning post-war British drama, **Samuel Beckett** (1906 – 1989) became one of the most important playwrights of the twentieth century. During the years 1945 – 1960, Beckett produced four crucial plays: *Waiting for Godot* (1948-1949), *Endgame* (1955-1957), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and *Happy Days* (1960). The plays deal with despair and a fierce effort to overcome that despair.

(...) two tramps waiting by a tree in the open country, for **Godot** to come – has become one of the famous images of the modern stage. It is a remarkably simple play; an early critic, Vivian Mercer, famously remarked that it was a play in which “nothing happens twice”, and although this is not an adequate summary of the plot, it does indicate the sparseness of Beckett's writing and stagecraft. (Pattie 2000, 74).

Samuel Beckett was awarded **the Nobel Prize for Literature** in 1969.

Fill in the Gaps.

→ to spare, to survive, writing, Absurd, showed, figure, bleak

Samuel Beckett was a leading _____¹ in the Theatre of the _____², and a major influence on British playwrights such as **Harold Pinter** and **Tom Stoppard**, he _____³ Characters struggling _____⁴ in an empty and meaningless universe. _____⁵ in both English and French, he was concerned _____⁶ language down to its minimum. His world view was uncompromisingly _____⁷, but he drew extensively on the forms and styles of the comedy.

→ Beckett developed the stream of consciousness idea in his own way, using it to search for the underlying truth of man's nature, having his narrators explore the paradoxical experience of *self*, in which the self, while experiencing existence subjectively, it is also able to reflect on its own experience.

Theatre of the Absurd

→ Make up a definition.

Reading: Read an Extract from *Waiting for Godot*

Act I: http://www.samuel-beckett.net/Waiting_for_Godot_Part1.html

Act II: http://www.samuel-beckett.net/Waiting_for_Godot_Part2.html

Sample Study Questions:

1. What do you think is the most effective way that Beckett presents repetition in *Waiting for Godot*?
2. Why does Beckett present two acts instead of three or one?
3. Describe the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon. Why do they stay together despite their frequent suggestions of parting?
4. The two most important sets of characters in the play occur in pairs. Does this emphasis on *pairs* create some significance for the boy who appears alone?
5. Do Vladimir and Estragon stand around killing time because they are waiting for Godot, or is waiting for Godot itself just an act to fill the void?
6. Do you think the play would function differently if the characters were all female instead of male?
7. What is the language like?
8. How do Vladimir and Estragon communicate? Observe carefully how they ask and how they answer.
9. Do you agree that the ultimate question might be: "What is the sense of it all?"
10. How do you feel towards Vladimir and Estragon?
11. Critics say *Waiting for Godot* has no real meaning. What are some examples of possible themes and explorations, however confusing, that Beckett develops?
12. Discuss Beckett's attitude toward hope in the play. Are there any real signs of hope?

Quotes:

→ Explain.

ESTRAGON:

We are all born mad. Some remain so.

*

POZZO:

I don't seem to be able . . . (*long hesitation*) . . . to depart.

ESTRAGON:

Such is life.

*

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.

*

ESTRAGON:

Well, shall we go?

VLADIMIR:

Yes, let's go.

They do not move.

*