

**Reading Beckett line by line:**  
*Waiting for Godot*

Drámaelemzés sorról sorra:  
*Samuel Beckett: Godot-ra várva*

**BBN-AND-308.01**

*Spring 2015*

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Tuesdays 08:30–10:00, R 315

DES  
<G> 3 credits

**Description & set texts**

“Beckett’s masterpiece” has long been a canonical play in literary studies in English. Moreover, it is among those works of 20<sup>th</sup> century “highbrow” literature that are still read by a relatively wide public also outside highbrow audiences. The aim of the course is to bring the text of one of the author’s major dramatic productions as close to the participants as possible during a single university term. After an orientating introduction, the bulk of the seminar will be taken up by discussing the play-text “line by line,” which here practically means reading and responding to approximately one-sixth of it at a time, dividing each of the play’s two acts into three dramaturgically identifiable parts. Two classes are planned to accommodate overall discussions of the play from specific aspects to which it will be the students’ responsibility to provide introductions in the form of academic presentations based on individual research. A labor-intensive course in its intentions, the seminar offers opportunity for students to take an active part in making sense(s) of the play through phenomenological reflection, discussion with peers, and individual research.

**Schedule**

February 10. **Introduction** to Beckett, *Godot*, and other reading-related issues

*February 17. No class (instructor away)*

February 24. **Act 1** (3/1): title page → *enter Pozzo and Lucky*

*title, “tragicomedy,” view of stage, the two clowns, “play,” misery the Bible, music, metadrama, Irishness, joking, etc.*

March 3. **Act 1** (3/2): *enter Pozzo and Lucky* → Lucky starts “thinking”

*master and slave, society, power, fear, parody, anti-climax, irony, ethics, etc.*

March 10. **Act 1** (3/3): Lucky’s think → *Curtain*

*philosophy, poetry, rhetoric, revelation, parody, Irishness, existence, saying goodbye, the Boy, “They do not move,” etc.*

March 24. **Act 2** (3/1): *Curtain* → *enter Pozzo and Lucky*

*repetition, change, fugue—poetry, memory—time, keeping it going, etc.*

March 31. **Act 2** (3/2): *enter Pozzo and Lucky* → *Exeunt Pozzo and Lucky*

*rhetoric, mockery, irony, comedy, humanity, representation, prolepsis, reference, questions of certainty, blind & dumb*

*April 7. No class (spring holiday)*

April 14. **Act 2** (3/3) *Exeunt Pozzo and Lucky* → *Curtain*

*soliloquy, solipsism, the Boy—again, dénouement, stage imagery, symbolism*

**summary** with hindsight

the possibilities of a **parallel reading** of Acts 1 and 2

- April 21. **Thematic readings 1:** ideas (existentialism, Christianity, etc.),  
The Theatre of the Absurd, theater vs. reading  
—**student presentations**
- April 28. **Thematic readings 2:** biography, oeuvre, history  
—**student presentations**  
*home papers due: May 3!*
- May 5. **Conclusion 1:** questions, remarks, suggestions
- May 12. **Conclusion 2:** discussion of home papers; closing remarks

### Set Texts

- **primary**

- Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*
- at least one other work by Beckett

**Suggested:**

- further plays by Beckett; e.g., *Endgame*, *Act without Words I & II*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Happy Days*
- prose works by Beckett; e.g., *Murphy*, *Watt*, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*
- contemporary works of "The Theatre of the Absurd;" e.g., Eugène Ionesco, *The Bald Soprano [La Cantatrice Chauve]*; *The Chairs [Les Chaises]*; Jean Genet, *The Maids [Les Bonnes]*; Harold Pinter, *The Caretaker*; Edward Albee, *The Zoo Story*
- "legacy," "followers": e.g., Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

- **critical**

- Esslin, Martin. "Samuel Beckett: The Search for the Self." *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Ch. 2.

It is **suggested** that students make themselves familiar with further pieces of critical literature available at SEAS library concerning the play and its author depending on their individual interests in order to aid research for their presentations and home papers.

### Requirements & Assessment

The requirements for the successful completion of the course are the following:

- **class attendance and work:**

- *three absences* are tolerated, while in the case of a fourth absence, a written summary of *all* classes is to be submitted; more than four absences will automatically qualify for an incomplete course;
- giving *short talks* (ca. 5 min.): two or three students should volunteer at the end of each class for the next occasion to contribute a few introductory remarks on the current passages from the play

- giving a full **presentation** (ca. 10-15 min.) on a narrow topic concerning the play

- writing a **home paper** treating the play from a specific aspect

Formatting, length, citations, and deadline:

- 12pt Times New Roman font, *no spacing*, 1-inch margins, letter size
- 2–3 pages of length ≈ 1–2,000 words ≈ 9–11,000 characters (including spaces)
- MLA style (using critical sources is expected)
- The paper is to be submitted electronically (via e-mail) **by May 3**, the latest.

Assessment is based on class participation and the quality of the presentation and of the home paper (mind individual thinking, logical structure, expressivity and correctness in language, and that they should meet the formal requirements of academic papers).