

## Introduction

### 1. "Reading"

- 1.1. the act of reading: reader—reading—the read (text); readings (interpretations)
- 1.2. Reader-Response Criticism  
reader's experience of interpreting (including previous reading experiences) as part of the work's meaning
- 1.3. Phenomenology
  - (1) [*philosophy*]
  - (2) first-person exploration of one's own consciousness while focusing on a particular object—cf. 1.1

### 2. "Beckett"

#### 2.1. Samuel Beckett (1906–1989), Irish expatriate author

- born in Dublin to well-to-do Protestant family  
April 13: Good Friday (some doubt reserved)
- studied music at an early age  
John B. (first cousin), composer  
athletic young man—excelled at cricket
- 1923–7: Trinity College, Dublin—studied French, Italian, English  
moved to Paris to teach at the École Normale Supérieure  
got into contact with James Joyce  
—essay contribution to a defense of Joyce's avant-garde techniques of writing in *Finnegans Wake (Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress, 1929)*  
→ assisting him in research toward *Finnegans Wake*  
first writing: *Whoroscope* (collection of poems)
- 1930: back to Trinity C. to lecture—until 1931
- 1931: *Proust*—in London
- 1932: first novel (unpublished until 1992), *A Dream of Fair to Middling Women*  
1933: *More Pricks than Kicks*  
latter half of 1930s: travels in Germany  
1938: first novel, *Murphy*, published in Ireland  
→ translated it into French the following year
- 1938 incident: stabbed on a street in Paris

- 1939: settled permanently in Paris, stayed for the war during the war: 1940 occupation of France → French Resistance (courier) almost caught by the Gestapo awarded the Croix de Guerre and the Médaille de la Résistance
- 1941–5: *Watt* (published 1953)
- ***En Attendant Godot***
  - writing: 1948–9; published 1952 (Les Éditions de Minuits)<sup>1</sup>
  - premier: 1953 (Théâtre de Babylon, Paris)
    - article by Vivian Mercier in the *Irish Times* (February 26, 1956):  
“[Beckett] has achieved a theoretical impossibility—a play in which nothing happens, that yet keeps audiences glued to their seats. What’s more, since the second act is a subtly different reprise of the first, he has written a play in which nothing happens, twice.”
    - author’s note (read out by director Roger Blin) at the very first, abridged, performance on the French Radio:

I don’t know who Godot is. I don’t even know (above all don’t know) if he exists. And I don’t know if they believe in him or not—those two who are waiting for him. The other two who pass by towards the end of each of the two acts, that must be to break up the monotony. All I knew I showed. It’s not much, but it’s enough for me, by a wide margin. I’ll even say that I would have been satisfied with less. As for wanting to find in all that a broader, loftier meaning to carry away from the performance, along with the program and the Eskimo pie, I cannot see the point of it. But it must be possible . . . Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo, Lucky, their time and their space, I was able to know them a little, but far from the need to understand. Maybe they owe you explanations. Let them supply it. Without me. They and I are through with each other.

(Qtd. in James and Elizabeth Knowlson (eds.), *Beckett Remembering – Remembering Beckett*. London: Bloomsbury, 2006, p. 122. Subsequent quotation in “Waiting for Godot,” *Wikipedia*.)

- English text: “translated” by the author
  - publishing: 1954 (New York: Grove)
  - 1993 (London & New York: Faber & Grove)
  - premier: 1955 (Arts Theatre, London)
  - Peter Hall (dir.): “I haven’t really the foggiest idea what some of it means . . . But if we stop and discuss every line we’ll never open.”
  - (Qtd. in Alvin Klein, “Decades Later, the Quest for Meaning Goes On,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 1997. Subsequent quotation in “Waiting for Godot,” *Wikipedia*.)
  - 1964 (Royal Court, London)—first performance of the full play, unabridged
- success as a theater director—productions of his plays in Germany and the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> The publisher is still in operation. See its webpage at <http://www.leseditionsdeminuit.fr/f/index.php> (accessed 9 February 2015).

- Nobel Prize in literature (1969)  
“for his writing, which—in new forms for the novel and drama—in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation”  
(“The Nobel Prize in Literature 1969,” *Nobelprize.org*. Subsequent quotation in “Samuel Beckett,” *Wikipedia*.)
- buried, together with his wife Suzanne, in Paris (Montparnasse Cemetery—along with Baudelaire, Ionesco, and others)

## **2.2. “Beckett” in literary history: poetry, prose, *drama***

### **3. “line by line”**

- 3.1. structural elements—constituent parts
- 3.2. thoroughgoing fashion

### **4. Conclusions: interpretations**

“[The students of literature] must translate [their] experience of literature into intellectual terms, assimilate it to a coherent scheme which must be rational if it is to be knowledge.”

(R. Wellek—A. Warren, *Theory of Literature*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London & New York: Penguin, 1993 (1963), 15.)