

Waiting for Godot Samuel Beckett

Waiting for Godot

One of the most significant works of literature of the 20th century, [Samuel Beckett's](#) *Waiting for Godot* (1953) is a play open to all manner of readings. It is a play stripped of the superfluous, in which two men wait. They wait for someone who never arrives.

Plot summary of *Waiting for Godot*

Two tramps - Vladimir and Estragon, or Didi and Gogo in the diminutive - are waiting. They're not quite sure where they're supposed to meet Godot. They can't agree on much. Their dialogue rambles and wanders. There is some business with boots. They contemplate ending it all.

With a 'terrible cry', they are joined by Lucky, a silent, slave-like figure with a rope tied around his neck, and the strutting and imperious Pozzo. After listening in bemusement to Pozzo for some time, Vladimir eventually scolds him for the way he treats Lucky. He then dances and 'thinks' for their entertainment (his thinking taking the form of an ultimately nonsensical monologue). When the two depart, Vladimir and Estragon are alone again. A boy appears as a messenger from Godot: he lets them know that while his master will not come today, he may do so tomorrow.

The second act is full of echoes of the first. Vladimir and Estragon's dialogue is similarly rambling. There is more business with boots. Vladimir sings Estragon to sleep. Pozzo and Lucky return. Pozzo is now blind and Lucky is now mute. A boy, perhaps the same boy as in Act 1, reappears and the two men, once more, consider ending it all. When it is clear that Godot will not be coming they decide to depart for the night, but neither of them moves.

Beckett subtitled the play 'A tragicomedy in two acts', and there is indeed a comic, vaudevillian element to Vladimir and Estragon's double act. There is also tenderness between them; a sense of shared years, and of suffering.

When was *Waiting for Godot* first performed?

Originally written in French as *En attendant Godot*, the play premiered in 1953 in Paris before opening in translation in London in 1955.

Critical Essay

Understanding the Theater of the Absurd

With the appearance of *En Attendant Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*) at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris in 1953, the literary world was shocked by the appearance of a drama so different and yet so intriguing that it virtually created the term "Theater of the Absurd," and the entire group of dramas which developed out of this type of theater is always associated with the name of Samuel Beckett.

His contribution to this particular genre allows us to refer to him as the grand master, or father, of the genre. While other dramatists have also contributed significantly to this genre, Beckett remains its single, most towering figure.

This movement known as the Theater of the Absurd was not a consciously conceived movement, and it has never had any clear-cut philosophical doctrines, no organized attempt to win converts, and no meetings. Each of the main playwrights of the movement seems to have developed independently of each other. The playwrights most often associated with the movement are Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Arthur Adamov. The early plays of Edward Albee and Harold Pinter fit into this classification, but these dramatists have also written plays that move far away from the Theater of the Absurd's basic elements.

The Circular Structure of *Waiting for Godot*

"But what does it all mean?" is the most frequent statement heard after one has seen or finished

reading a play from the Theater of the Absurd movement. Beckett's plays were among the earliest and, therefore, created a great deal of confusion among the early critics.

No definite conclusion or resolution can ever be offered to *Waiting for Godot* because the play is essentially circular and repetitive in nature. Once again, turn to the Dramatic Divisions section in these Notes and observe that the structure of each act is exactly alike. A traditional play, in contrast, has an introduction of the characters and the exposition; then, there is a statement of the problem of the play in relationship to its settings and characters. (In *Waiting for Godot*, we never know where the play takes place, except that it is set on "a country road.") Furthermore, in a traditional play, the characters are developed, and gradually we come to see the dramatist's world view; the play then rises to a climax, and there is a conclusion. This type of development is called a linear development. In the plays of the Theater of the Absurd, the structure is often exactly the opposite. We have, instead, a circular structure, and most aspects of this drama support this circular structure in one way or another.

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