

Dr. Ken Betsalel / Department of Political Science / Summer 2009  
Class Times: MTWR, 1:00-3:20 pm  
Room: ZH243/ Office: 224 ZH/ PS Office: 208 ZH  
Office Hrs: After Class or by Appointment  
Email: [Betsalel@unca.edu](mailto:Betsalel@unca.edu) Phone: 232:5041

### **Arts 310: The Philosophy & Art of Samuel Beckett**

"Try again, fail again, fail again better." Samuel Beckett the Irish playwright and Nobel Prize winner for Literature is best known for his absurdist masterpiece "Waiting for Godot". What is less well known is Beckett wrote novels, poetry, radio dramas, art criticism and the film script for a short film, simply called, "Film". Viewing Beckett's plays adapted for film, along with other work by and about Beckett; this course examines the biographical and philosophical roots of his work and his impact on modern art, culture and politics. Topics for the course include, Absurdist Theater, staging inaction, quietism, the politics of pessimism, and the art of chance.

#### **Texts:**

1. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954)
2. Samuel Beckett, *Endgame & Act Without Words* (New York: Grove Press, 1957, 1956)
3. Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (Grove Press, 1947, 1951, 1953)
4. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, [1927] 1962). We will be using Heidegger in conjunction with Beckett to stimulate thinking and initiate class discussion; I ask that you read at least ten pages a day throughout the course of the summer session. You may read randomly or in succession and/or both, the choice is yours (I may of course from time to time direct your readings). Bring in a question from the text to discuss.

Additional Readings will be found on syllabus below and assigned in class. Essays, including essays and short selections from Descartes, Schopenhauer, and Kafka. Essays can be found either on arts and ideas Betsalel web site or on class Moodle (to be explained in class)

- : <http://www.unca.edu/artsandideas/Summer/SUM09/SamuelBeckett.html>
- Make sure you have your Student ID number and password for Moodle

#### **Assignments:**

There will be two essays (worth quarter of your grade each); a final arts project (also worth a quarter of your grade); quizzes, in class assignments and class discussion on the readings (which taken together will also make up the final quarter of your grade).

#### **Grading:**

Each essay will be assigned a letter grade based on 100 point scale. Quizzes on the reading will be worth 10 points each. There are no make ups for quizzes. Late papers and assignments will lose a half letter grade for each day they are late (more than three days late will result in an F or

0 points for the assignment). Class participation, along with quizzes and other in class assignments will count for a quarter of your grade. Participation will be evaluated in terms of preparation for class discussion (measure in part by performance on quizzes), meaningful contribution to class discussion (measure in terms of points made and questions asked and responses given), as well as constructive and active listening (measure in terms of support for others points and reinforcement of class discussion). Failure to participate in class discussion will result in reduction in your overall class grade, if it were based solely on your written work.)

**Attendance Policy:**

Attendance is required. More than three absences will result in letter grade reduction. More than five absences will result in an F for the course.

**Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism intended or unintended will result in an F for the assignment and possibly for the course.

**Calendar:**

Monday June 8 through Thursday July 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**Due Dates:**

Essay Number 1 due: Monday Thursday June 18<sup>th</sup>.

Essay Number 2 due: Thursday July 2<sup>nd</sup>

Arts Project Due: Wednesday July 1

***Zen Beckett, Marx Beckett, Political Beckett:***  
**Estrangement, Interest, Interpretation**

**Pre-Test:**

Screening: *Film* written by Samuel Beckett, directed by Alan Schneider.

**Part I: Political Beckett**

**Readings:**

*Waiting For Godot* (Act I)

- Betsalel essay on *Waiting For Godot*
- Betsalel entry on Heidegger

Is alienation the same thing as suffering? Is the root of suffering estrangement?

Modernism In-Between Past and Future

Sources of Beckett's Art:

- Kafka, "He"

## The Split

- Descartes, "First Meditation"

## Pessimism

- Schopenhauer, "On the Suffering of the World"

Can suffering be funny? How about failure? Why not frustration? What makes us laugh?

- Kafka, "A Hunger Artist"

## At the Movies:

- Buster Keaton, *The General*
- Laurel and Hardy, *The Flying Deuces*
- Charlie Chaplin's, *Gold Rush*
- Beckett, *Act Without Words I*

## **Part II: Mirror: Repetition, Responsibility, Repetition, Responsibility, Respond, Petition, Plead**

### Biographical Background:

- Biographical Readings
- Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience"

2 Beckett Texts: *Endgame* & *Act Without Words*

### Beckett on Film:

- *Endgame*
- *Act Without Words*
- *Not I*
- *Ohio Impromptu*
- *Krapp's Last Tape*

## **Part III The Art of Failure, The Failure of Art**

Listening to Beckett, Reading Beckett:

Read selections from:

- *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*

Audio Recordings Selections from:

- *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*

## **Part IV: Still Heart, Silent Heart**

Anticipations, visible Influences, minimal traces & divergent paths  
Gender & difference

Pinter, Mamet, Albee  
Bacon, Giacometti, L Freud  
Glass & et al.

Screening of:

- *Homecoming*
- *Eh Joe*
- *Rough for Theatre I*
- *Catastrophe*
- *Act Without Words II*

Final Question: Is Becket political?

**Notes:**