

Wieland Schwanebeck, M.A.

1220 **"I can't go on. I'll go on." –** **Tue (2)** **HSZ 105**
70320 **Theatre of the Absurd**
2220
2420
73120
73130

Ü 2 KP (regular and active participation, 15-minute presentation or written assignment)
PS 6 KP (regular and active participation, 15-minute presentation or written assignment, term paper)

When Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* was performed for the first time in 1953, there was an outcry amongst spectators who did not know what to make of a play that seemed to abandon most of the cherished traditions of theatre. Even Peter Hall, the celebrated director of the play's English premiere, was at a loss to explain what it was actually about.

Several decades after their heyday, the most prominent texts of the movement that later became known as the "Theatre of the Absurd" (Martin Esslin) retain many of their qualities: both funny and profoundly sad, shocking and moving, always on the edge of despair.

In this course, we will discuss some of the philosophical foundations of Absurd Theatre (which has its roots in Existentialism) and contextualise it amongst literary traditions. Is Absurd Theatre really the complete antithesis to the classical Aristotelian idea of drama? Which conventions does it challenge? How is it related to genres like comedy and farce? Does the notion of character apply to Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon at all?

In addition to addressing key texts by Beckett, Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard, the seminar will also provide a general introduction to the study of drama, including categories such as character analysis, speech conventions, genre, and classical as opposed to modern drama.

We will refer to the respective chapter from Vera and Ansgar Nünning's *Introduction to the Study of English and American Literature* (2008), but the course is also aimed at students who have yet to attend the introductory course.

Please buy the following edition and read its introduction before the start of the term:
Samuel Beckett: *Waiting for Godot*. London: Faber & Faber, 2009. [ISBN 0571244599]

Further information will be available on OPAL at the beginning of the term.