Reading Samuel Beckett, The Shorter Plays

Moderator: Lois More Overbeck, Director Letters of Samuel Beckett Project
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Samuel Beckett’s full-length plays, especially Waiting for Godot, Endgame, and Happy Days, are fairly well-known, but his shorter plays are less frequently produced. Lois Overbeck is one of the editors of The Letters of Samuel Beckett (Cambridge University Press, 2009-2016); the editorial project has been based at Emory University since 1990. Lois is pleased to offer a series of discussions based on the shorter plays. She will introduce these intriguing dramas with close reading and open discussion of the texts, as well as share background about them from the Letters of Samuel Beckett. Discussions take place in The Luce Center so that materials held in the edition’s offices can be readily examined. Performances of the plays will be discussed and links to video materials will be available.

Beckett's work is seminal to the comparative study of languages, literature and theatre in the 20th century. It is also immediate and accessible. Drama teacher Andrew Spacey, who introduces Beckett’s short work to young people and adults with learning disabilities, wrote: “You don't have to be anything other than human to enjoy Beckett.”

As a creative innovator, Beckett extended the limits of every genre in which he worked; the shorter plays are written for stage, radio, television and film. Beckett’s interest in the visual arts and music pervades the work. His close associations with other writers, theatre artists, painters and musicians led to collaborative works. Readers will discover a writer whose life and art offer a paradigm for the cross-currents of the twentieth century, whose classical training in language and culture illumines the issues of our time. As the Nobel Prize Committee expressed it, in Beckett’s writing “the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation.”

Join in these discussions if you already enjoy Beckett’s work or if you want to discover something new. Fair warning, his images will remain with you for a long time.

This seminar will meet at the The Luce Center, 825 Houston Mill Road (free parking available), from 6-7:30pm on the following Tuesday evenings during the 2020 spring semester: February 4, 11, 18, & 25. Participants are expected to attend all four sessions. Everyone from the Atlanta community is welcome and invited to join us for this free seminar. Seating is limited and must be reserved in advance. For further information and to reserve seating on a “first-come basis,” email the Fox Center at foxcenter@emory.edu, or call 404.727.6424.

We are grateful to The National Endowment for the Humanities for its support of this program. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in these seminars do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.