

## “Writing Time: Anton Chekhov and Samuel Beckett”

LIT 6246, Spring 2014, Department of English, University of North Florida

Wednesdays 6:00 - 8:45 PM; Location: 8-English Hall 2117

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### Course Description

“What is the theater, but the body’s long initiation in the mystery of its vanishings?”

— Herbert Blau, *Take Up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point*

“Time passes. Everything passes. We pass. We were only here for a little while. Too little to know...”

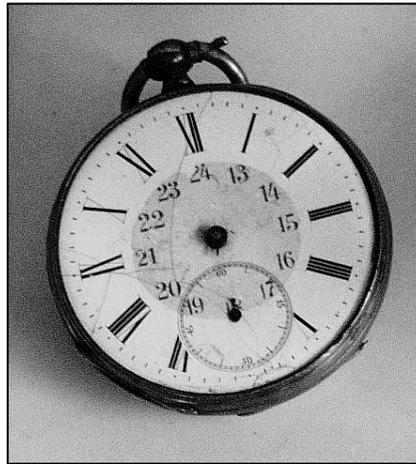
If only we knew. If only we knew...”

— Olga, in Chekhov’s *Three Sisters* (111)

“Use your head, can’t you! Use your head. You’re on earth. There’s no cure for that.”

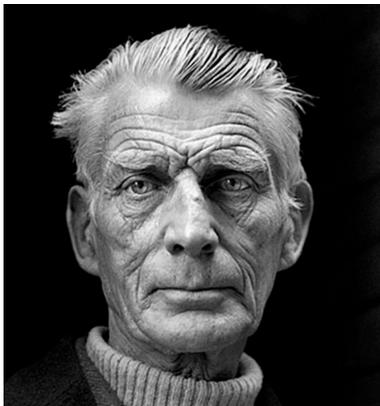
— Hamm, Beckett’s *Endgame* (53)

Our modern dilemma, or our dilemma of being modern — “absolutely modern,” as Arthur Rimbaud would have it — resides in large part in our modern experience of time has, for conflicted, as it has dawned upon us live in bodies, where there’s both too And, maddeningly, these two types of experienced together.... *at the same* awareness of time (as if a beast with two as “the hidden enemy that gnaws our which, while too much time causes slowly, the day never ending), too little *near!*). Both panicked and bored, on radically contrary but simultaneous whether we like it or not, an individual’s as we are apparently obliged to shoulder awareness and the bodily burdens of time, to deal with them on our own.



our vexed relationship to time. For some time, been confused and slowly that we live in a world, we little time and too much time. time...*too much...too little...* are *damn time!* This new, twinned heads, what Baudelaire described heart”) instills within us a sense in tedium (the clock moving too time causes terror (*the end is* edge and gripped by *ennui...* these impulses toward time are now, responsibility, *our* responsibility, alone both the intellectual

Such a rich and troubling awareness of time is at the solid core of so much of what the two great modernists, the



Russian Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) and the Irish/French Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), wrote about throughout their lives. Too much time... too little time...this impossible conflict arises again and again in each of their writings, joining the two writers in its web of reference. In their plays and short stories, time is told, time is examined, as the silent force compelling (and condemning) all actions and inactions.

In this graduate seminar, we will examine a broad range of Chekhov and Beckett’s writings, enjoying and seeking to understand their



enormous significance to so much that came after them, the time that followed *their* time, and how these authors' engagements with time became *our* engagement with time's passing presence, its pressing absence.

**Required Text (Available at the UNF bookstore)** In order for us to all be "on the same page" in our discussions, please buy the *exact* editions of the books listed below, with the same ISBN listed below.

**Chekhov:**

1. *The Seagull*, by Anton Chekhov (Adapted by Tom Stoppard) Publisher: Faber & Faber; ISBN-10: 057119270X
2. *Uncle Vanya*, by Anton Chekhov (Adapted by David Mamet) Publisher: Grove Press; ISBN-10: 0802131514
3. *The Three Sisters*, Anton Chekhov (Adapted by David Mamet). Grove Press; ISBN-10: 0802132766
4. *The Essential Tales of Chekhov* (Ed. Richard Ford). Publisher: Harper Perennial; ISBN-10: 0060956569

**Beckett:**

1. *Collected Shorter Plays*, Samuel Beckett. Publisher: Grove Press; ISBN: 0802150551
2. *The Complete Short Prose of Samuel Beckett, 1929-1989*, Publisher: Grove Press; ISBN-10: 0802134904
3. *Endgame*, Samuel Beckett. Publisher: Grove Press; ISBN: 0802150241
4. *Happy Days* by Samuel Beckett. Publisher: Grove Press; ISBN-10: 0802130763
5. *Waiting for Godot*, by Samuel Beckett; Publisher: Grove Press; ISBN-10: 0802130348

**A Partial List of Supplemental Materials:**

1. Samuel Beckett's "Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit" (handout or PDF)
2. Leo Bersani's "Beckett: Inhibited Reading," from Bersani's *Arts of Impoverishment* (handout or PDF)
3. Richard Ford story (handout or PDF)
4. Maurice Maeterlinck's "The Tragical in Daily Life" (handout or PDF)
5. Theodor Adorno's "Trying to Understand *Endgame*" (handout or PDF)
6. From Arthur Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea* (handout or PDF)
7. Vladimir Nabokov's "The Tragedy of Tragedy" and "Chekhov's Prose" (handout or PDF)
8. Herbert Blau's "Remembering Beckett" (handout or PDF)
9. James Wood's "Why?: The Fictions of Life and Death" (handout or PDF)

**A Partial List of Media Materials:**

1. Film adaptation of Chekhov's *Ward No. 6* (DVD in UNF library)
2. Film adaptation of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* (DVD in UNF library)
3. *Beckett on Film* (Five-DVD set in UNF library)
4. Jerome McGann on the value of recitation (mp3 file)

**Beckett Websites:**

1. The Samuel Beckett On-Line Resources and Links Pages: <http://samuel-beckett.net/>
2. Apmonia: A Site for Samuel Beckett: <http://www.themodernword.com/beckett/>
3. Beckett on UBU: <http://www.ubu.com/sound/beckett.html>

**Chekhov Website:** <http://people.brandeis.edu/~teuber/chekhovbio.html>

**Course Requirements:**

1. Regular attendance (*no* absences are expected, barring dire emergency). With each absence, your final grade incrementally suffers, i.e., half a grade for each absence.
2. Attentive, active, aggressive reading and preparation of all assignments
3. Read all of the assigned readings OUTLOUD, *voicing* the materials, passing them through your body (your breath, your tongue, your mouth...), *not* just through your brain.
4. Vigorous in-class participation. This is *crucial!* Discussion, rather than lecturing, will be central all semester.
5. Keeping an on-going workbook (explained below)
6. "Close Reading," "Recitations," "Review" and "Response" (explained below)
7. One memorization and class recitation (100 word minimum)\*
8. A midterm essay, 7-9 pages (with earlier versions evaluated/worked on *in class* prior to final versions)
9. One longer final essay, 12-15 pages (with earlier versions evaluated/worked on *in class* prior to final versions), with clear evidence of secondary sources integrated into your final essay.