THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

- 1950's and 60s Europe and America
- situation is essentially absurd, devoid of purpose.
- Existentialism
 - what happens when human existence has no meaning and therefore all communication breaks down
- Rooted in the avant-garde experiments in art of the 1920s and 1930s
- Shared trauma from the World Wars plus the threat of nuclear war

ORIGINS

Agreement with Existentialist philosopher Albert Camus's belief that the human



BASICS OF ABSURDISM

- Without purpose
- Illogical
- Out of harmony
- Useless
- Devoid of reason
- Meaningless
- Hopeless

- Chaotic
- Lacking order
- Uncertain



CONVENTIONS

- really happened.
- Lack of cause and effect between scenes or actions
- Irrational or illogical speech, non-sequiturs, irrelevant topics
- Elements of vaudeville and circus movements
- Long pauses/silence

 Non linear, often circular plot development. The structure was a round shape and the finishing point was the same as the starting point. The sense that nothing has

Anti-realistic, little to no plot, unrecognisable set - desert, empty room, sparseness



SAMUEL BECKETT 1906-1989

- Irish Playwright and Novelist
- Travelled Europe, settled in Paris, befriended James Joyce
- Wrote Waiting for Godot and Endgame
- Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969
- Wrote in both French and English
- better."
- "We are all born mad. Some remain so."



• "All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail



WAITING FOR GODOT PUB.1952

- Tragicomedy in Two Acts
- First theatrical success of Absurd Dramas
- they still wait
- Link to script <u>http://www.napavalley.edu/people/LYanover/Documents/</u> English%20121/

• 2 men, Vladimir and Estragon, are waiting for someone named Godot. They discuss their miseries, contemplate suicide, do not know their reason for existing and yet

English%20121%20Samuel%20%20Beckett%20Waiting%20for%20Godot.pdf? fbclid=IwAR3uOI3hlz8ongeh94pzEnyBFAciRzXiTmxTK1QvfXlev9cFSI_arkIaTNQ



Voted as the most significant English-language play of the 20th century



From the 1953 opening of Waiting for Godot

WAITING FOR GODOT

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=99&v=MUXtzkLTABI&feature=emb_logo



HAROLD PINTER OCTOBER 1930 - DECEMBER 2008

- Actor turned playwright
- Never offers an explanation
- Outside forces interrupting a stable environment
- Unlike other absurdist practitioners, his settings are more realistic
- Plays included The Homecoming, No Man's Land, The Birthday Party
- The Dumb Waiter two men waiting for instructions
- "One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness."





PINTER PAUSE

- hesitation.
- unsettling atmosphere.

• There are three different types of silences that can be categorised under Pinter Pauses

• An ellipsis is denoted by three dots and was used by the playwright to indicate slight

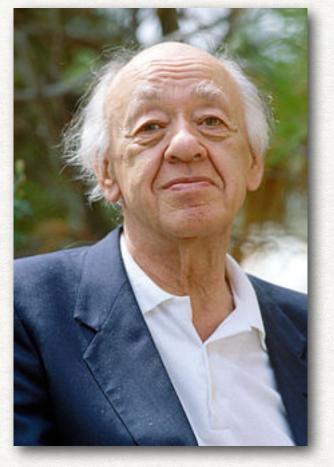
 A pause was a much longer hesitation used by Pinter to more accurately depict the careful construction of an utterance. Generally, during a pause, the character is in the middle of a deep thought process and the use of this device helped Pinter to create tension and an

 A full-on silence, also known as a pregnant pause, is a dead stop during which no word is uttered because the character has encountered a conflict so absurd that they have nothing to say, and they are left in a completely different mental state from where they started.



EUGENE IONESCO 1909-1994

- Romanian-French playwright
- The solitude and insignificance of human existence in a tangible way
- Admirer of Surrealist and Dadaist movements
- The play explores conformity and mob mentality.
- are invisible, so all we see are empty chairs, a representation of their absence.
- Also appeared in TV show Breaking Bad. •
- "Ideologies separate us. Dreams and anguish bring us together."



Berenger - Everyman character - in Rhinoceros everyone turns into rhinos except for Berenger.

• In The Chairs, an old couple welcomes a large number of guests to their home, but these guests



OTHER PLAYWRIGHTS

- Romantic.
- town for killing her ex.
- Jean Genet The Maids and The Balcony struggles between outcasts and oppressors, used parody and role-play within plays.
- illusory child to mask the ugliness of their marriage.

• Tom Stoppard - Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead - two minor characters in a play that has already been written. The Clockwork and the Mystery - Classic vs

• Friedrich Dürrenmatt - The Visit - wealthy woman promises a reward to a whole

• Edward Albee - Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? - George and Martha create an



TINA HOWE

- The American playwright Tina Howe (born in 1937) is able to tread the fine line between Absurdism and Realism in many of her plays.
- Her 1976 play Museum involves 55 characters at a group art show.
- The Art of Dining (1979) uses food and dining (two of Howe's favourite themes) to explore the absurd timeless environment of waiting for a meal. Action, situation, dialogue and detail work together to create the absurd.
- Howe's 1986 play Coastal Disturbances which is set on a beach and required six tonnes of sand for the first production shows how situation and character can drive Absurdist drama rather than language.



- Shows are often described as Pinteresque or Beckettian, why?
- Is there still a place for absurdist theatre today? Why/Why not?

