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English 2130
Fall 2009

SAMUEL BECKETT: *ENDGAME*

Contexts

- Beckett's Biography
- 1956: British Theater
- 1957: Realities & Fears
 - Hiroshima, 1945
 - Cold War and Bomb Shelters
- Theatre of the Absurd
 - All plays are fluid texts.
- Chess endgame: refers to stage of game when there are few pieces left on the board.
- Existentialism
 - Heidegger's authenticity
 - Sartre: Being and Nothingness.



The Human Situation

- **Facticity:**
 - We are not the source of our existence, but find ourselves thrown into a world we don't control and didn't choose. (2459)
 - Death demonstrates this more than anything. (2480)
- **Anxiety:**
 - Faced with the lack of any external source of value and determination, we face the responsibility of choosing our own nature and values. (2483)
 - In doing so, we must face the awesome responsibility of choosing human nature and values for all people in our free choices.
- **De Beauvoir's Intentionality: Consciousness as Intentional Activity.**
 - Meaning-disclosing, meaning-making & meaning-desiring activities of consciousness are both insistent (spontaneous and unstoppable) and ambiguous (preclude any possibility of self unification or closure).
 - Ethical systems and absolutes offer dangerous consolations for our failure to be the source of the world's meaning or being. (2477-78, 2485)

Three Basic Existential Structures



- **Affectivity: the past filters how things matter to us through our moods. (2474, 2484)**
 - Wittgenstein, Tractatus: "The world of the happy is quite another than the world of the unhappy."
- **Telling: things are made manifest in the present through our use of language to articulate the meaning of our situation. (2471-72)**
- **Understanding: the horizon of the future shapes the way things show up for us because the projects that define our choices extend into the indefinite future, thus running ultimately up against death, the final horizon. (2463, 2470, 2476, 2486-87)**

Existentialism does NOT support any of the following

- The good life is one of wealth, pleasure, or honor.
 - Hamm "owns" the food (2461)
- Social approval and social structure trump the individual.
 - Clov's slave morality (2486)
- Accept what is and that is enough in life.
 - Nagg and Nell (2464, 2465-66, 2478)
- Science can and will make everything better.
 - Post-Apocalyptic World (2463)
 - Pain Killers (2483)
- People are good by nature, ruined by society or external forces. (2482)



And in the end...despair

- In seeing the contrast between the world into which we are thrown and cannot control and the absolute freedom we have to create ourselves, we must despair of any hope of external value or determination and restrict ourselves to what is under our own control. (2473)
- We will never succeed in fully revealing the meaning of the world, never fulfill our desire to impress our meaning on the world. (2487)

Sartre: Being and Nothingness

- "Non-being" reveals "discontinuities" in causality, the holes in it.
 - The example of Pierre.
 - Without discontinuity (like Pierre not showing up) the universe would be rigidly deterministic- every action caused by an earlier event. All reflex, all effect.
- Absences are simply spaces where free action is possible.
 - Both life's "beings" and "nothingnesses" become motives for human action.
- Past simply has facticity: things did happen.
- We each choose the meaning of the facticity.
 - We can choose to let a fact be an insurmountable obstacle, or we can choose to make it art or a motive for scientific study or the subject of a series of experiments...
- We are responsible for our choices & their consequences.
 - Death is the most radical (and absurd) choice of all.