

Visions and Voices and the USC Libraries have collaborated to create a series of resource guides that allow you to build on your experiences at many Visions and Voices events. Explore the resources listed below and continue your journey of inquiry and discovery!

# WAITING FOR GODOT

## USC LIBRARIES RESOURCE GUIDE



Recognized as the most significant English language play of the 20th century, this self-described “tragicomedy in two acts” by the Nobel Prize winner Samuel Beckett tells the story of two men waiting on a country road: *Waiting for Godot*. And what a wait it is! Together for the first time, Barry McGovern and Alan Mandell—two of the most distinguished interpreters of Beckett’s work—delightfully debate the meaning of life and the absurdities of human behavior in this engagingly funny, relevant and illuminating new production.

**BETH NAMEI** of the USC Libraries has selected the following resources to help you learn more about the Beckett and his play. Visit the online version of this guide at [libguides.usc.edu/godot](http://libguides.usc.edu/godot) for many more resources, including selected journal articles, recommended databases and links to relevant websites.

### About the Author and Play

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The following two excerpts are drawn from electronic reference resources available through the USC Libraries homepage at [www.usc.edu/libraries](http://www.usc.edu/libraries).

Samuel Barclay Beckett (1906–1989) was born in Dublin, Ireland, on April 13, 1906. In 1923 he entered Trinity College in Dublin to study French and Italian. After receiving his degree in 1927, he was awarded a two-year post as *lecteur* (assistant) in English at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. It was in Paris that Beckett met fellow Irish expatriate and modernist author, James Joyce, who would greatly influence his writing style. Beckett published novels, short stories, poetry and plays. It was through his plays that he reached a wider audience and received more acclaim. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1969. Beckett died in Paris in 1989.—*Encyclopedia of World Biography*

*Waiting for Godot* was written in 1949 and first performed in Paris in January 1953. During the initial performances, many spectators were utterly confused and some left before the performance ended. Those who stayed had difficulty understanding what this new type of theater was about. The set was just a mound of dirt and a bare tree, there was no plot, no action and no climax, just two men talking and waiting. This complete upheaval of traditional theater techniques and expectations announced a major change in modern drama. Samuel Beckett was writing at the same time as a number of other dramatists (including, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet and Jacques Audiberti), all independently transforming the shape of theatre, writing plays that would later be classified under the rubric of the theater of the absurd, the new theater or the anti-theater. All of these new playwrights were expressing the absurdity and the hopelessness of the human condition and they were to have a lasting effect on the direction and shape of drama in the latter half of the twentieth century.—*Reference Guide to World Literature*

### Michel Foucault on *Waiting for Godot*

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Foucault saw a performance of *Waiting for Godot* in Paris in the winter of 1953. The following excerpt comes from *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, available at Leavey Library or the Hoose Philosophy Library (call number B2430.F724M554 1993):

Shortly before his death, Foucault remarked, “I belong to that generation who, as students, had before their eyes, and were limited by, a horizon consisting of Marxism, phenomenology, and existentialism. For me the break was first Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, a breathtaking performance.”

That this drama of futility, folly, and aborted metaphysics should have suggested the best way yet to escape from Sartre’s “terrorism” is not accidental. The world of Godot is a world where the very ideas of freedom and responsibility have been dramatically emptied of any lingering moral significance. “Moral values are not accessible,” Beckett would later declare. “It is not even possible to talk about truth, that’s part of the anguish. Paradoxically, through form, by giving form to what is formless, the artist can find a possible way out.”

## Selected Books

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***Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett (1996)***

By James Knowlson

Doheny Memorial Library: PR6003.E282Z764 1996

***Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot (2008)***

Edited by Harold Bloom (Editor)

Doheny Memorial Library: PQ2603.E378E677 2008

Leavey Library: PQ2603.E378E677 2008

***The Coming of Godot: A Short History of a Masterpiece (2006)***

By Jonathan Croall

Doheny Memorial Library: PQ2603.E378E637 2005

***Beckett: A Guide for the Perplexed (2008)***

By Jonathan Boulter

Available online as an e-book

***Samuel Beckett: 100 Years (2006)***

Edited by Christopher Murray

Doheny Memorial Library: PR6003.E282Z79993 2006

***Beckett's Art of Absence: Rethinking the Void (2011)***

By Ciaran Ross

Doheny Memorial Library: PR6003.E282Z798 2011

***Ironic Samuel Beckett: Samuel Beckett's Life and Drama: Waiting for Godot, Endgame, and Happy Days (2006)***

By Pol Popovic Karic

Doheny Memorial Library: PQ2603.E378Z79 2007

***Beckett and Ireland (2010)***

Edited by Seán Kennedy

Doheny Memorial Library: PR6003.E282Z56945 2010

***Samuel Beckett: Anatomy of a Literary Revolution (2007)***

By Pascale Casanova

Doheny Memorial Library: PR6003.E282Z58713 2006

***Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality & Drama (2002)***

By Martin Puchner

Doheny Memorial Library: PN1851.P83 2002

Also available online as an e-book

## Selected Videos

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***Beckett on Film (2001)***

This four-disc set includes all nineteen of Beckett's plays, bringing together some of the world's most talented directors and actors. These videos have been described as "the most comprehensive cinematic interpretation of Beckett's plays."

Leavey Library: LVDVD 137 discs 1-4  
(available at the circulation desk)

***Lecture on Waiting for Godot (2009)***

Watch this "Big Ideas" lecture (48:25 min) by University of Toronto English professor Nick Mount at

[www.channels.com/episodes/show/8083700/](http://www.channels.com/episodes/show/8083700/)

or download the audio podcast at

[castroller.com/Podcasts/BigIdeas/1376128](http://castroller.com/Podcasts/BigIdeas/1376128).

***Samuel Beckett: Silence to Silence (1986)***

The elusive author of *Waiting for Godot* cooperated in the production of this documentary, which traces Beckett's artistic life through his prose, plays and poetry. Billie Whitelaw, Jack McGowran and Patrick Magee—Beckett's great dramatic interpreters—appear in selected extracts from the plays; Beckett specialist David Warrilow narrates a variety of texts.

Leavey Library: LVDVD 1739  
(available at the circulation desk)