

**Carleton University
Fall 2020
Department of English**

**ENGL 4609A: *Drama Studies: Global Context*
(*Theatre of the Absurd*)**

Prerequisites: 4th year standing, or permission of the Department

Time/Day: Monday 11:35 – 2:25 p.m.

Location: Online

Please confirm location on Carleton Central

Format: *Blended*

Instructor: Prof. Janne Cleveland (she/her)

Email: *Janne.Cleveland@carleton.ca*

Office: DT 1913

Phone: 613-520-2600 ext 2320

Office Hours: TBD and by appointment online

Course Outline:

Theatre critic Martin Esslin coined the term Theatre of the Absurd in 1961, in a close examination of works by Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter, and others. In this course we will explore the form, the context of its development, and a selection of plays that are understood to exemplify it in order to understand its extraordinary influence on 20th century theatre-making. Esslin suggested in part, that Theatre of the Absurd referenced a world that was devoid of meaning, and thus presented a struggle for finding reasons to continue. Students will sign up for a seminar presentation at the beginning of the term from a list of possible topics provided. You will be expected to consider such questions as why did this style of writing and staging emerge then, after the Second World War? In examining the context in which this style emerged, one might expect this to be a time of celebration that such a global trauma had ended. How then, does the philosophy of Existentialism contribute to the development of Theatre of the Absurd? We will consider the social and political landscape in which the style came to represent a new theatrical form that signaled the postwar era following World War II in order to think about its influence later in the 20th century. We will consider whether and how Theatre of the Absurd continues to be influential in dramatic staging in the 21st century. What can we learn from earlier practitioners of the style in terms of posing meaningful questions about the world we live in now, inundated as we are with questions of the meaning of our existence against the backdrop of war, pestilence, and plague? How does humour, with which Theatre of Absurd is associated, work to navigate such anxiously fraught scenarios? We will especially consider how the seeming contradictions contained in the form become part of the strategy for making social and political commentary about the world we inhabit now. We will look at how Theatre of the Absurd takes the position exemplified by Samuel Beckett in his famously quoted “You must go on. I can’t go on. I’ll go on.”

Course Objectives:

1. To develop a familiarity with a variety of cultural contexts within which the writing and staging of Theatre of the Absurd drama takes place.
2. To explore the function of particular performance and staging methods utilized by this form.
3. To discover the context and histories out of which Theatre of the Absurd emerges.
4. To develop and fine-tune a critical analysis of the form and the narratives that represent it.
5. To refine the skills of research.
6. To become comfortable presenting research with confidence.
7. To develop a deeper understanding of how drama reflects and informs the cultural concerns of the social worlds we inhabit.

- **This is a blended course that will be taught in an online format (platform TBD).**

A **blended** online course is one where there is a mixture of synchronous meetings and asynchronous activities. This means students need to be prepared to meet online via web conferencing tools (format TBD) at scheduled days and times. Participation in this blended course will require students to have reliable, high-speed internet access, a computer (ideally with a webcam), and a headset with a microphone.

Course materials will be posted to cuLearn, and it is the responsibility of the student to join the class meeting having done all readings posted ahead of the date for which the discussion will take place.

A list of minimum tech requirements for online learning can be found here:

<https://carleton.ca/its/help-centre/faq-technical-specs-for-new-students/>

NOTE: Many of us are all navigating uncharted territory with the new reality of fully online classes. I will continue to check in with students throughout the term to make sure that your learning needs are being met. In this we will work together, being mindful of the watchwords collaborate and co-operate!

Required Reading:

Ubu Roi Alfred Jarry (1896)
No Exit Jean-Paul Sartre (1944)
Endgame Samuel Beckett (1957)
Rhinoceros Eugene Ionesco (1959)
The Birthday Party Harold Pinter (1958)
Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead (1966)

There will also be a selection of **essays** that will be assigned each week on the cuLearn schedule. It is your responsibility to consult cuLearn and read all assigned materials each week prior to class time.

- **All essays will be available in online PDF formats through Ares**
- **All plays are posted to cuLearn in the week for which they will be discussed (you must read them ahead of the class)**
 - **Readings/plays may be subject to change. Check the final syllabus on cuLearn prior to the beginning of classes**

Evaluation:

CuPortfolio (30%)

Students will be provided with access to cuPortfolio, in which they will create 4 portfolio pages to track their own progress across the term (due dates vary, so check the course calendar). For example, students will produce a bio page (5%), a post-seminar report (10%), a reflection on the annotated bibliography assignment (10%), and a course evaluation (5%). Prompt questions for each portfolio page will be provided.

Seminar Presentation (20%)

Students will prepare a presentation on the materials assigned for one of the weeks during the term. You must sign up for your presentation by **September 21st**. You may use the topic of the seminar to build your final research paper. Presentations will be scheduled at the beginning of class and should take 15 - 20 minutes. There will be time for discussion and questions following each presentation.

Annotated Bibliography (20%)

This assignment is the foundation of your final paper. You will present a proposal for your final research paper that includes a thesis statement (argument), and a list of citations that you will use as evidence to support your argument. You must include **7 - 9** scholarly sources. Each source will be properly cited and annotated in **MLA format*** and will contain a **brief** summary of each article used (no more than 2 sentences), and a careful explanation of how each resource supports your position, along with how you will use it in your paper. We will go over how to do an annotated bibliography in class, but here are also very good resources to help you:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/1/>

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

Final Paper (20%)

This is a **formal writing assignment**. Using feedback from the thesis/outline assignment and the paper workshop, students will present a polished, carefully crafted final paper of **10 - 12** pages (excluding Works Cited page) in **MLA format** with a coherent, arguable thesis supported by

evidence from the text and scholarly sources, a conclusion that responds to and resolves the argument. The most important aspect of your paper is **critical analysis**; in other words, not just what your topic is, but why it is important. As well, elements of writing such as rich vocabulary, proper use of citation style, correct punctuation and grammar, and sentence structure (syntax) will be taken into account. Further, structural elements, such as the logical progression of ideas that form the basis of your argument, will be expected. This assignment is your opportunity to demonstrate what you have learned in the course. Don't be afraid to demonstrate your excitement about your discoveries!

Essay Topics:

Choose one of the topics/texts in connection with the reading schedule to produce a carefully crafted argument. You may choose to develop the argument from your seminar presentation. You are encouraged to discuss your topic, and your approach, in advance with the instructor.

Class Participation (10%)

This is a seminar class, so it is important to take part in discussions. However, students who are naturally quiet or have difficulty operating in a public speaking format will not be penalized. There are many models for learning and contributing to the learning of others. In-class activities like the paper workshop at the end of the term will count toward your participation grade. This class provides you with the opportunity to share your ideas and learn from others in a safe, supported environment. Take advantage of the chance to use your voice!

All assignments will be submitted on cuLearn.

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

NOTE: All assignments must be completed in order to be eligible to pass the course. Failure to hand in all assignments may result in a grade of "F". Assignments submitted after the course has ended will NOT be accepted.

REQUEST FOR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details click [here](#).

Religious obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details click [here](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520- 6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>

PLAGIARISM

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.

Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft. It is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly with the course's instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include failure of the assignment, failure of the entire course, or suspension from a program. For more information please go to: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

Class schedule*

September 14	Intro to the course: Welcome! responsibilities and expectations – what you need to know; what's in the syllabus; how to contact your instructor; office hours and more
September 21	cuPortfolio – tutorial and set up <i>Ubu Roi</i> – we will read/analyze this text together as a class; come to class having read the play <i>The Theatre of the Absurd (Esslin)</i> this essay is available on ARES through the MacOdrum library
September 28	<i>No Exit</i>
October 5	<i>Endgame</i>
October 12	Thanksgiving! No class
October 19	Existentialism in Theatre of the Absurd
October 26	Fall reading week! No class
November 2	<i>The Birthday Party</i>
November 9	Comedy/Tragedy dichotomy – the American election as exemplar?
November 16	<i>Rhinoceros</i>
November 23	<i>Rosencrantz & Guildenstern</i>
November 30	Paper workshop (in class) This is part of your participation grade
December 7	Wrap up! You made it ☺

***Consult cuLearn frequently (at least once/week) for changes/additions to the schedule. It is your responsibility to know what is scheduled and come prepared each week.**