

Department of English & Writing Studies

**Theatre of the Absurd**  
**English 3778G (001)**  
Winter 2018



**Instructor:** Dr. Jo Devereux  
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Arts & Humanities Building 2G28J  
**Office Hours:** Monday 10:30-12:30; or by  
appointment

**Course Location:** AHB 2R21

**Course Date/Time:** Tuesday 2:30 pm-4:30 pm,  
Thursday 3:30 pm-4:30 pm

**Prerequisites:** At least 60% in 1.0 of English 1020E or 1022E or 1024E or 1035E or 1036E or 1042E or 1042E or both of English 1027F/G and 1028F/G, or permission of the Department.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Description

In the twentieth century, art and drama reacted to the cataclysmic events of two world wars and the profound changes in society and culture that followed. This course explores the theory and practice of absurdist theatre, from Dadaism through the work of such authors as Beckett, Ionesco, and Pinter.

Course Materials

**Required Texts:**

1. Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Penguin, paperback. ISBN 978-0-451-15871-0
2. Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*. Faber, paperback. ISBN 9780571243730
3. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*. Faber, paperback. ISBN 9780571244591
4. Jean Genet, *The Maids*. Faber, paperback. ISBN 9780571331550
5. Eugene Ionesco, *Rhinoceros, The Chairs, The Lesson*. Penguin, paperback. ISBN 13: 9780141184296
6. Harold Pinter, *Harold Pinter Plays 3*. Faber, paperback. ISBN 9780571193837





I would like each of you to try different roles over the course of the term: if you are shy,

back a bit and let the quieter members of your group shine.

The Company will need to read ahead, and agree on a scene (or scenes) to perform in advance of their scheduled Thursdays. You need not clear your scene selection with me in advance, but please choose something that will take approximately 10 minutes to perform. Be prepared to meet outside of class for an hour or two, at least a couple of times, before each performance, and establish an informal email discussion list among yourselves in order to hammer out your basic choices and ensure everyone knows their jobs.

Coordinating your schedules will *not*

groups are large because performance cannot happen with just a couple of people: theatre is made in the messy coordination between different personalities with different schedules and different needs. Do your best to accommodate everyone, to get to know

people are your colleagues; they may even be your friends!

After each performance, and a short break, the Company will be asked to get back on stage and participate in a question-and-answer period. Each member of the Company should try to contribute something during the Q&A, especially those whose work has been primarily behind the scenes. This is the time for you to explore in depth, with your colleagues, the terrific thought work that has gone into your presentation!

The final part of the class will involve a post-

their break while the rest of us get into our designated groups. You will be given 10-15 minutes in your group to

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NOTE that the questions you develop must delve below the surface of what the Company is doing. Colleague-critics are reviewers with a difference: your task is to

choices, to offer alternative readings, and to examine how others in the class received

members as well!). One important proviso: colleague criticism is designed to be helpful and respectful, not hurtful and derogatory.

We hope to get a lively discussion going, and will bounce from group to group until either our time or your notes are exhausted. Support a strong, engaged class discussion!

**Assessment:**

Your group's work will be judged on the amount of effort you put into the work NOT on your acting skills and on your willingness to try new things

**Essay 1:** Choose ONE play and write an argumentative essay that focuses on one of the following topics listed below. Be sure to narrow and refine your topic so that it is very specific and clear. Do early research on the topic so that you can develop your essay gradually. Develop your essay

