

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

BEYOND THE ABSURD: THE THEATRE OF BECKETT PINTER ALBEE AND MAMET - 20576

Last update 13-08-2023

HU Credits: 2

Degree/Cycle: 1st degree (Bachelor)

Responsible Department: Theatre Studies

Academic year: 0

Semester: 2nd Semester

Teaching Languages: English

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Isaiah Bar Yaacov

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Coordinator Office Hours: Wed. 12:00-13:00 (by appointment)

Teaching Staff:

Mr. Isaiah Bar-Yaacov

Course/Module description:

The Theatre of the Absurd was defined by Martin Esslin in his influential book published in 1961. This was a movement of avant-garde playwrights which developed after the Second World War, and was seen as a kind of artistic reaction to the hegemony of the realistic-psychological style drama which was the dominant trend in European and American theatre at the time. It also saw itself as an alternative to the more political styles of avant-garde theatre (Brecht, etc.). As an independent artistic movement this school was short-lived and seemed to exhaust itself by the end of the sixties, but in the later years of the Twentieth Century we may see the influence of the movement on the works of many playwrights working in Britain, the US and elsewhere. These artists used some of the stylistic techniques developed by the absurdist plays in different contexts. In this course we will attempt to track the influences of the Theatre of the Absurd on four major playwrights working in the English and American theatre. These playwrights are Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Edward Albee and David Mamet. Despite many differences between them we may find many points of closeness between them.

Course/Module aims:

Deepening the knowledge of students in the important plays written in the second half of the Twentieth Century and understanding the connections between the Theatre of the Absurd and the individual work of a range of key dramatists.

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

To identify the common ground and the individual unique characteristics of the writings of some of the most important playwrights working in the English and American theatre in the second half of the 20th Century. To identify how each one has incorporated qualities adopted from the Theatre of the Absurd and adapted them to his own needs. To use a lexicon of terms connected to the post-absurdist drama theory, and especially the connections between causality and dramatic order vs. dramatic disorder and chaos theory.

Attendance requirements(%):

80% - attendance obligatory

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: Lecture and exercise class. Students will be asked to come prepared for class after having read the plays and

the relevant articles, and to participate in the class discussions. There will be short quizzes that will check the student's knowledge of the plays on the reading list. The active participation in class + the quiz grades will account for 30% of the final grade. At the end of the course the students will be asked to write a longer paper which will account for the remaining 70% of the final grade.

Course/Module Content:

- 1) What is the Theatre of the Absurd? Beckett, Esslin and the connections between them.
- 2) Beckett's later drama - searching for the internal minimalism of the bare soul.
- 3) Pinter's early drama - Absurd drama of Comedy of Menace?
- 4) Pinter's later drama - from political struggle to the nightmare of existence
- 5) Albee's early drama - Naturalism and existentialism share the Absurd stage
- 6) Albee's later drama - The birth of the post-absurdist tragedy
- 7) Mamet's drama - Of men and women, competition and survival in a post-absurdist world.

Required Reading:

Bibliography

Part 1 - the plays (required reading);

Albee, Edward, "The Zoo Story" (2 versions)

Albee, Edward, Three Tall Women

Albee, Edward, The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?

Beckett, Samuel, Happy Days

Beckett, Samuel, "Footfalls"

Beckett, Samuel, "Rockabye"

Mamet, David, American Buffalo

Mamet David, Edmond

Mamet, David, Oleanna

Pinter, Harold, The Birthday Party

Pinter, Harold, "One for the Road"

Pinter, Harold, Ashes to Ashes

Part 2 - Articles and books (required reading). Chapters or articles from the following books:

Bennett, Michael Y., *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd*, Cambridge: Cambridge Un., 2015.

Bennett, Michael Y., *Reassessing the Theatre of the Absurd: Camus, Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011.

Esslin, Martin, *The Theatre of the Absurd (Third Edition)*, London: Methuen (Vintage), 2004.

Brater, Enoch, *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theatre*, Oxford & New York: Oxford Un., 1987.

Brater, Enoch and Cohn' Ruby (ed.), *Around the Absurd: Essays on Modern and Postmodern Drama*, Ann Arbor: Un. Of Michigan, 1990.
Demastes, William W., *Theatre of Chaos: Beyond Absurdism, into Orderly Disorder*, New York: Cambridge Un. Press, 1998.

(additional articles relating to the specific plays on the reading list may be added to the list)

Additional Reading Material:

Secondary reading (optional):

בעברית:

אסלין, מרטין, תיאטרון האבסורד , תג. אליקים ירון, תל-אביב: זמורה ביתן, 1985.

עוז, אבי, "דרך ההר -אלימות ואילמות בתיאטרון הפוליטי שלהרולד פינטר, בתוך הרולד פינטר, אמנות, אמת ופוליטיקה: המחזות הפוליטיים ונאום פרס נובל, ער. ותר.: אבי עוז, תל-אביב: רסלינג, 2006.

עוז, אבי, מקור הצל: מחזות הזיכרון של פינטר, בתוך הרולד פינטר, מחזות זיכרון: ארבעה מחזות ומבחר שירים, תל-אביב: רסלינג, 2009.

שונמי, גדעון, אוונגרד ומהפכה בתיאטרון של המאה העשרים, תל-אביב: אור-עם, 1992.

In English;

Baker, William. *Harold Pinter*. Continuum, 2008.

Batty, Mark. *Harold Pinter*. Northcote House Publishers, 2001.

Beckett, Samuel, and S. E. Gontarski. *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*. Anthem Press, 2012.

Bennett, Michael Y. *Edward Albee and Absurdism*. Brill, 2017.

Bennett, Michael Y. *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Bigsby, C. W. *David Mamet*. Methuen, 1985.

Bigsby, C. W. *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Billington, Michael, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*, London: Faber and Faber, 1996.

Bottoms, Stephen J. *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Brater, Enoch, and Ruby Cohn. *Around the Absurd: Essays on Modern and Postmodern Drama*. University of Michigan Press, 1990.

Carroll, Dennis. *David Mamet*. Macmillan, 1987.

Clum, John M., and Cormac. O'Brien. *Sex, Gender, and Sexualities in Edward Albee's Plays*. Brill Rodopi, 2018.

Esslin, Martin, Pinter, the Playwright, London: Methuen, 1982.
Gale, Steven H., Harold Pinter: Critical Approaches, Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson Un. Press, 1986.

Hayman, Ronald, Harold Pinter, London: Heinemann, 1980.

Kane, Leslie. The Art of Crime : The Plays and Films of Harold Pinter and David Mamet. Routledge, 2004.

Kane, Leslie. Weasels and Wisemen : Ethics and Ethnicity in the Work of David Mamet. St. Martin's Press, 1999.

Murphy, Brenda. Understanding David Mamet. University of South Carolina Press, 2011.

Quigley, Austin E., The Pinter Problem, Princeton N.J.: Princeton Un. Press, 1975

Raby, Peter. The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter. Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Roudané, Matthew Charles. Edward Albee : A Critical Introduction. Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Taylor-Batty, Mark. The Theatre of Harold Pinter. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2020.

Grading Scheme:

Essay / Project / Final Assignment / Home Exam / Referat 70 %

Submission assignments during the semester: Exercises / Essays / Audits / Reports / Forum / Simulation / others 30 %

Additional information:

The classes will be taught in English. The students will be allowed to write their final papers in English or Hebrew.