

**Drama in English in the World:
*The Theater of the Absurd***

Angol nyelvű dráma szerte a világon:
Az abszurd színház

**BBN-AND-302.01 / BBN-ANG(11)-312.302
BBI-AND-302.01 / BBI-ANG(11)-312.302**

Fall 2014

Sánta Balázs (santa.balazs@gmail.com)
Wednesdays 17:00–19:00, R 423/a

DES
<G> 3 credits

Description & set texts

So much has been said about Martin Esslin's critical "best-seller" that one might even suppose it is no more in need to be actually read. However, in the firm belief that classics are, by definition, capable of offering ever new insights and vistas, and that they do provide the necessary grounding for further learning in any area, the course offers an opportunity to become (more) familiar with Esslin's ideas as well as the works treated in his (most discussed) book. With *The Theatre of the Absurd* as well as the major works treated in it on the reading list, we hope to arrive at a deeper understanding of the concept of the theater, the absurd, and the two put together (not to mention having fun in that arrival, even if not entirely complete). Besides the experience of reading plays by authors of various linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Irish, Romanian, French, English, and American), students will also have the opportunity, toward the end of the term, to present a work of their choice that they find to be relevant to the course.

Schedule

September 10, 17. No classes (instructor away)

September 24. **1. Introduction** to the course (subject matter, aims, requirements, getting-to-know)

Introduction: What is theater? What is drama? What is the absurd?

Working definitions. Martin Esslin and *The Theatre of the Absurd*.

2. Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*

READING: Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*

Esslin, "Introduction. The absurdity of the Absurd"

October 1. **Esslin on the absurd and Beckett**

READING: Esslin, "Samuel Beckett: The search for the self"

Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*

October 8. **Ionesco, *The Bald Soprano***

READING: Ionesco, *The Bald Soprano*

Esslin, "Eugène Ionesco: Theatre and anti-theatre"

October 15. **Genet, *The Balcony***

READING: Genet, *The Balcony*

Esslin, "Jean Genet: A hall of mirrors"

October 22. **Pinter, *The Birthday Party***

READING: Pinter, *The Birthday Party*

Esslin, "Harold Pinter: Certainties and uncertainties"

October 29. No class (fall break)

November 5. Extended universe. **Albee, *The Zoo Story***

READING: Albee, *The Zoo Story*
Esslin, excerpts from “Parallels and proselytes”

November 12. **“Beyond the absurd”?**

READING: Esslin, “Beyond the Absurd”
Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

November 19. **Beyond the theater?** The possibilities of an “absurd literature”

READING (suggestions—pick one or two):
Adams, *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*
Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*
Kafka, “The Metamorphosis”
Lear, *A Book of Nonsense*
Örkény, *One-Minute Stories*

November 26. **“People’s choice”:** each enterprising student introducing an “absurd” play (or a work of a different genre)

Bear in mind: deadline for home papers—Dec 1

December 3. **Conclusion 1:** questions, remarks, suggestions

December 10. **Conclusion 2:** discussion of home papers; closing remarks

Set Texts (each of the enlisted works comes in several editions, any of which should do)

• **primary**

- Albee, Edward. *The Zoo Story*
- Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot [En Attendant Godot]*
- Genet, Jean. *The Balcony [Le Balcon]*
- Ionesco, Eugène. *The Bald Soprano [La Cantatrice Chauve]*
- Pinter, Harold. *The Birthday Party*
- Stoppard, Tom. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

• **critical**

- Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*

Suggested reading

- Adams, Douglas. *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*
- Carroll, Lewis. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*
- Kafka, Franz. *Metamorphosis / The Transformation [Die Verwandlung]*
- Lear, Edward. *A Book of Nonsense*
- Örkény, István. *One-Minute Stories [Egyperces novellák]*

Requirements & Assessment

The requirements for the successful completion of the course are the following:

- class **attendance** (three absences are tolerated, while in the case of a fourth absence, a written summary of *all* classes is to be submitted; more than four absences will automatically qualify for an incomplete course), and
- writing a **home paper** on a topic related to the course. This may be a piece of practical criticism or a theoretical treatise, with *at least three critical references*, out of which one must be to *Esslin’s book*.

Formatting, length, and citations:

- 12pt Times New Roman font, *no spacing*, 1-inch margins, letter size;
- ca. 9–11,000 characters (including spaces) \approx 1–2,000 words \approx 2–3 pages of length;
- MLA style

The paper is to be submitted electronically (via e-mail) **by noon, December 1**, the latest.

Assessment is based on class participation and the quality of the home paper (mind individual thinking, logical structure, expressivity and correctness in language, and that it should meet the formal requirements of academic papers). Should anyone feel enthusiastic enough about the general topic of the course, they are invited to give about a 10-minute **presentation** on a work of their choice on the third-last and/or the last-but-one class. Taking this chance is not expected, but of course it may influence the student's final grade positively.