THE COMEDY OF THE ABSURD

The course will study the theatre of the absurd on the British postwar stage, focusing on two plays by Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard. We will look at the ways in which these plays address existential issues of meaning in everyday life, as well as the comedy in the absurd that brings out the fine lines between real and unreal, sane and insane. In particular, we will examine how language in these plays draws our attention to identity and memory, menace and desire, parody and intertextuality.

Students will become familiar with basic notions in modern drama and will study the relations of politics and the theatre, as well as existentialist thought. Skills to be acquired include interpretive reading and dramatic performance.

Preparatory questions for discussion in class (to be distributed at the beginning of semester) 10%
1 Personal Project (including presentation in class and written academic paper, 5-6 pages) 40% (paper due March 31, 2022)
1 Final Paper (on a topic to be approved by the lecturer from one of the texts in the required reading list, 7-8 pages, 10 maximum) 40% (due March 31, 2022)

Harold Pinter, The Birthday Party
Tom Stoppard, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead
We will also view screenings of Beckett, Waiting for Godot and Shakespeare, Hamlet, as well as clips from Hitchcock, Psycho.