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# The Theatre Of The Absurd



## Synopsis

In 1953, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* premiered at a tiny avant-garde theatre in Paris; within five years, it had been translated into more than twenty languages and seen by more than a million spectators. Its startling popularity marked the emergence of a new type of theatre whose proponents—Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, Pinter, and others—shattered dramatic conventions and paid scant attention to psychological realism, while highlighting their characters' inability to understand one another. In 1961, Martin Esslin gave a name to the phenomenon in his groundbreaking study of these playwrights who dramatized the absurdity at the core of the human condition. Over four decades after its initial publication, Esslin's landmark book has lost none of its freshness. The questions these dramatists raise about the struggle for meaning in a purposeless world are still as incisive and necessary today as they were when Beckett's tramps first waited beneath a dying tree on a lonely country road for a mysterious benefactor who would never show. Authoritative, engaging, and eminently readable, *The Theatre of the Absurd* is nothing short of a classic: vital reading for anyone with an interest in the theatre.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If you have ever wished for one book to neatly package absurdist theatre, Mr. Esslin's book is the one. This book is readable, comprehensible, entertaining and engaging. In fact, it's rather difficult to put down. His introduction does wonders to dispel any myths as to what absurdist theatre is and isn't. He follows the introduction by individually highlighting those playwrights often associated with

the absurd (Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco, Genet, and Pinter). Of interest is the fact that he does not overwhelm or bore the reader by providing an excess of information. On the contrary, each section is unbelievably tight. His section on Adamov is much appreciated, considering that finding anything on him is near impossible. He then continues with his "Parallels and Proselytes" in which he touches on "lesser-known" playwrights (Albee, Arrabal, and others). He follows this section with three more equally fascinating chapters. In short, Mr. Esslin packs a breadth of relevant information into 480 pages. "The Theatre of the Absurd" should find a welcome home on the bookshelves of actors, directors, dramaturgs, playwrights, or those with an interest in theatre. Buy it, you won't be disappointed.

I came to read this book for a paper I decided to write on Samuel Beckett, for my Theory of History course. A friend who's an actress recommended it for me, and it was an amazing discovery. From an historian's point of view, this book is a rich, challenging and informative approach to one of the most important aspects of the ideology crisis from the beginning of the XXth. Century. As I came to know later, it's a classic on the theatre field as well. Apart from Beckett and some minor authors, there are chapters on Adamov, Ionescu, Genet and Pinter, and a superb essay on the meaning of the concept of "absurd" of human existence. A must read for anyone who wishes to understand not only the art, but the ideas which shaped the latest century.

Esslin outlines important facts about this complicated and confusing theatrical movement. He helps provide a basic understanding for anyone who would like to know about Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, Genet, and Pinter. Absurdism is probably the least understood of all modern theatrical movements of the twentieth century, but Esslin makes it accessible. If you study, teach, design, or perform in the theatre you need to read this book, it is the authoritative text on absurdist theatre.

Anyone interested in the problem of trying to understand and communicate what "reality" means to you on a deeply philosophical level and is curious about how some of the greatest minds in theatrical history have wrestled with this same issue in their own work should READ THIS BOOK. Even if you don't think you care about those things, read this book--you may find that you actually do and you owe it to yourself to find out. It is accessible and revelatory and continues to provide insights that would seem applicable to the future of theater/film/and all other representative artforms. We are still struggling with many of the issues Esslin addresses and our contemporary art has not yet fully integrated his insights into mainstream thought. We can't expect representative art to take

any important leaps forward without first understanding the relevance of the Absurd. This book taught me that. I'm really glad I found it.

This book is well organized and thorough. If you want to learn about the theater of the absurd, this is the way to do it. You will notice that the author is very defensive, constantly defending the right of the theater of the absurd to exist. This is because the book was originally written when it was still controversial, and it always will be to some people, but sixty some years after its advent, the plays are still being performed worldwide and their influence on today's theater continues. Thanks to two updates, Esslin was able to gain a better picture of the place of the theater of the absurd in the bigger picture of the history of drama. Without the end of chapter 8 and the entire chapter 9, the book would be very dated, but as it stands now, it will serve readers for a long, long time.

I was reading an old library copy of the 2nd edition and discovered there was a third, downloaded it to kindle on my iPad, and am disappointed. The text has several errors in it, like the book was scanned and OCR software was used, but not thoroughly error checked by a real person. Many errors are easy enough to figure out, but some are more challenging. Also important formatting was lost such as block indentation of quotes. As I am reading this for a school paper, it is important to know what's a quote and what isn't. Would love to get a corrected version of this otherwise great book.

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