



# The Theatre of the Absurd

*Martin Esslin*

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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.

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