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ABSTRACT:

The “Theater of the Absurd” is a designation given to certain plays, written by some European playwrights that became famous in the 1940’s and 1950’s. This term, “Theater of the Absurd,” was coined by the Hungarian-born critic Martin Esslin in his 1962 book published with the same title. Esslin got the idea of absurd from the French philosopher Albert Camus, in his essay “The Myth of Sisyphus.” Even though this kind of theater arose after the Second World War, it has its origins in Ancient Greece, mainly with Aristophanes’ theater. Later, we can find some absurdist elements in the Middle Ages. Also, German Expressionism contributed to the development of these elements. Finally, World War II was the event that brought the Theater of the Absurd to life.

The plays of the Theater of the Absurd are characterized by nonsense dialogues, repetitive or meaningless action, and non-realistic or impossible plots. The most well-known play is Samuel Beckett’s “Waiting for Godot.”

Among the most important playwrights we have Jean Genet, Jean Tardieu, and Boris Vian. They were all born in France. However, there were many other playwrights that were not born in France, but lived and wrote there, often in French. Some of these playwrights include Samuel Becket, from Ireland; Eugene Ionesco, from Romania, Arthur Adamov, from Russia, and Fernando Arrabal, from Spain.

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The “Theater of the Absurd” has had a great influence on the whole world since its appearance, and it has become an inspiration for the modern Theater.

KEY WORDS

Absurd Theater; Eugene Ionesco; Samuel Beckett; Waiting for Godot; Martin Esslin.

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CONTENTS:	PAGE
INTRODUCTION.....	9
CHAPTER 1	
DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS.....	13
1.1 What is the Theater of the Absurd?	13
1.2 Characters	18
1.3 Language	19
1.4 Plot.....	21
CHAPTER 2	
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT.....	22
2.1 Ancient Greece	22
2.2 The Middle Ages	25
2.3 German Expressionism	29
2.4 World War II (1940-1950's)	32
CHAPTER 3	
PRYMARY PLAYWRIGHTS	37
3.1 Eugene Ionesco	37
3.2 Samuel Beckett	39
3.3 Arthur Adamov.....	41
3.4 Jean Genet.....	42
AUTORES:	
Gabriela Morales	
Esteban Heras	



UNIVERSIDAD DE CUENCA

3.5 Harold Pinter.....44

CHAPTER 4

BEST ABSURDIST PLAYS.....47

4.1 “Waiting for Godot”47

4.2 “The Homecoming”57

4.3 “Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead”.....57

4.4 “Rhinoceros”58

4.5 “Endgame”59

4.6 “The Balcony”.....60

4.7 “The Bald Soprano”60

4.8 “Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf”61

4.9 “The Maids”.....62

4.10 “The Ubu Plays”63

CONCLUSION.....65

FOOTNOTES.....68

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....69

APPENDIX.....70

AUTORES:

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FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA, LETRAS Y CIENCIAS DE LA

EDUCACIÓN

“THE THEATER OF THE ABSURD”

**TESIS PREVIA A LA OBTENCIÓN DEL
TÍTULO DE LICENCIADO EN CIENCIAS DE
LA EDUCACIÓN, ESPECIALIDAD LENGUA
INGLESA**

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CUENCA-ECUADOR

2011

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GRATITUDE

To my parents: Gloria Moscoso and José Morales, for being my inspiration, and being an example of sacrifice, responsibility, and unconditional love.

To my sisters: for supporting and comforting me.

To my uncle Jose and my aunt Patricia: for being with me all the time.

Gabriela Morales

I want to dedicate this work to all my family, especially my mother for supporting me and being there for me through all of these years.

Esteban Heras

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is our desire to express our sincere gratitude to all the teachers who shared their knowledge with us during these four years. We especially want to thank:

Dr. Ion Youman

Lcda. Verónica León

Mt. Kate Youman

Dr. Fabián Rodas

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INTRODUCTION

The Theater of the Absurd, arising during the 1940's and early 50's, is one of the most important movements in the history of dramatic literature for its non-conventional form and content. Unlike traditional dramatists who write plays about interpersonal relationships, the playwrights grouped under the label of the absurd wanted to convey their sense of confusion, anxiety, and wonder in the face of an inexplicable universe through the nearly disordered and incomprehensible forms of their plays (Esslin, 1969).

The Theater of the Absurd refers to a particular type of play which presented on stage the philosophy expressed by the French philosopher Albert Camus in his 1942 essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus", in which he defines the human condition as meaningless. Camus argued that mankind had to recognize that a fully satisfying rational explanation of the universe was beyond its reach; in that sense, the world must be seen as absurd.

However, the term "Theater of the Absurd" was first introduced by the Hungarian-born critic and writer Martin Esslin, who made it the title of his 1962 book on the subject. Esslin considered the term "Theater of the Absurd" only as a "device" by which he meant to bring attention to certain fundamental characteristics that could be seen in the works of a range of playwrights. According to Esslin, the five defining playwrights of the movement are Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, and Harold Pinter, even

AUTORES:

Gabriela Morales
Esteban Heras



UNIVERSIDAD DE CUENCA

though these writers were not always comfortable with the label and sometimes preferred to use terms such as "Anti-Theater" or "New Theater." Other playwrights associated with this type of theater include Tom Stoppard, Arthur Kopit, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Fernando Arrabal, Edward Albee, N.F. Simpson, Boris Vian, Peter Weiss, Vaclav Havel, and Jean Tardieu.

Although the Theater of the Absurd is often related to the avant-garde experiments of the 1920s and 1930s, its roots, in fact, date back much further. Absurd elements first appeared shortly after the rise of Greek drama, with the Old Comedy and the plays of Aristophanes in particular. Later, these Absurd elements were developed in the late classical period by Lucian, Petronius, and Apuleius.

Also, the Morality Plays of the Middle Ages may be considered a precursor of the Theater of the Absurd, describing everyman-type characters dealing with allegorical and sometimes existential problems. During the nineteenth century, absurd elements may be noted in certain plays, but the predecessor of what would come to be called the Theater of the Absurd is Alfred Jarry's "monstrous puppet-play" "Ubu Roi" (1896), who is a caricature, a terrifying image of the animal nature of man, and his cruelty.

The Theater of the Absurd was also anticipated in the novels of James Joyce and Franz Kafka, who created archetypes by looking into their

AUTORES:

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UNIVERSIDAD DE CUENCA

subconscious and exploring the universal, collective significance of their own private obsessions.

But World War II was the event that finally brought the Theater of the Absurd to life. The horrors associated with World War II produced a widespread sense of the absolute meaninglessness of human existence. This sense was later expressed in the body of plays that have come to be known as the "Theater of the Absurd." By abandoning traditional devices of the drama, including logical plot development, meaningful dialogue, and intelligible characters, absurdist playwrights sought to convey modern humanity's feelings of confusion, alienation, and despair; the sense that reality is itself unreal. In their plays, human beings are often portrayed as fools, clowns who, although not without dignity, are at the mercy of forces that are inscrutable.

At that time, a "prophet" of the absurd appeared, Antonin Artaud (1896-1948). He refused realism in the theater, calling for a return to myth and magic and to the exposure of the deepest conflicts within the human mind. Although he would not live to see its development, The Theater of the Absurd was the new theater that he expected. It openly rebelled against conventional theater. It was, as Ionesco called it, "anti-theater". It was surreal, illogical, and lacking in conflict and plot. The dialogue often seemed to be complete nonsense. And, not surprisingly, the public's first reaction to this new theater was incomprehension and rejection.

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Among all the absurd plays, the most famous and most controversial is Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot." It is considered one of the most successful for its profound theme, and the form that matches it. On the surface, the play is very anti-traditional, and it seems that no one could understand it; still, it gains appreciation in the field of drama, meaning that the play is not simply a comic play, but a play with deep thought.

The characters of the play are strange caricatures that have difficulty communicating the simplest of concepts to one another as they spend their time awaiting the arrival of Godot. The language they use is often ridiculous. The play seems to end in the same condition it began, with no real change having occurred. In fact, "Waiting for Godot" is sometimes referred to as "the play where nothing happens."

In sum, the main goal of this thesis is to focus on four aspects of The Theater of the Absurd: First, the true and real meaning of the term "Theater of the Absurd"; second, its origins through History; third, the five most important playwrights, who are the predecessors of the movement; and finally, to give an idea of some of the best absurdist plays, which have had a great influence to make this kind of drama one of the most important of our time, and an inspiration for the twentieth- first century Theater.

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CHAPTER 1

DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

1.1 What is the Theater of the Absurd?

The Theater of the Absurd is a name given to particular plays written mostly by European playwrights in the late 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's; and to the style of theater which developed from their work. This designation was invented by Hungarian-born critic Martin Esslin, who made it the title of the book that he wrote about this kind of theater in 1962.

We should mention that, officially, there is no such thing as Theater of the Absurd as a formal organization, movement, or self-proclaimed school. In fact, some of these authors were not always comfortable with the label of the absurd. Sometimes they preferred to use terms such as "Anti-Theater" or "New Theater." Other authors, who have been labeled under this kind of theater, have said that they do not belong to such movement; and that they are just expressing their personal point of view of this world. This tells us that these authors didn't write these plays as part of any particular kind of theater; they had their own and individual roots, foundations, and background. However, they happened to coincide on some themes concerning the condition of man in this world. As we said before, it was Esslin's idea to call it that. Of course his idea got great acceptance.

Martin Esslin got this idea "absurdity" from the thinking of French philosopher Albert Camus in his 1942 essay, The Myth of Sisyphus. Esslin used the term

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“Theater of the Absurd” simply as a means by which he wanted to bring attention to certain fundamental traits noticeable in the works of a series of playwrights who attempted to convey their sense of confusion, anxiety, and wonder in the face of an incomprehensible universe.

The Myth of Sisyphus, as we mentioned above, is an essay by Albert Camus, in which he introduces his philosophy of the absurd: man’s futile search for meaning in a world devoid of God and eternal truths or values. In this essay Camus talks about the *Absurd Man, an Absurd Creation, an Absurd Reasoning*; and the final chapter is *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in which he compares the absurdity of man’s life with the situation of Sisyphus -a figure of Greek mythology: “*The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor.*”¹ Camus sees Sisyphus as the absurd hero who lives life to the fullest, hates death, and is condemned to a meaningless task. He presents Sisyphus’s punishment and pointless work as a metaphor for modern lives spent working at futile jobs in factories and offices. Camus thinks modern people’s life is as vain and meaningless as he thinks Sisyphus’s life was.

If we look up the word “absurd” in the dictionary, we find the following definitions:

- 1) Ridiculously incongruous, or nonsensical.

¹ CAMUS, Albert: **The Myth of Sisyphus**, 1942. p. 80

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- 2) Devoid of value, meaning, or purpose.
- 3) Lacking any meaning that would give purpose to life.

Of these three definitions the last two seem to be more appropriate for the kind of “absurdity” we are discussing here. We shouldn’t forget that the Theater of the Absurd” is not ridiculous, pointless plays. This idea goes far beyond that: It is about the separation between man and his life; the absurdity of the human condition due to a sense of meaningless of life; the reduction of ideals, purity, and purpose. Therefore “absurd”, in the kind of drama we are discussing here, has a much deeper meaning than the regular one.

In addition, it should be stressed that there have been other authors, like Giraudoux or Sartre, who didn’t “belong” to this type of drama and who wrote about the ideas –mentioned earlier – (the absurdity of the human condition, etc) that concern the Theater of the Absurd. Nevertheless, the main difference between these writers and the ones we are talking about here is that these authors describe their thoughts about the pointlessness of man’s life in the form of a coherent and logically constructed way of thinking, while the Theater of the Absurd attempts to communicate its view of the pointlessness of man’s life and the insufficiency of the rational approach through the open rejection of lucid devices and rational thoughts.

Moreover, the Theater of the Absurd has to be differentiated from another important trend of the same epoch, which was also concerned with the absurdity and uncertainty of the human condition: the “poetic avant-garde”

AUTORES:

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Esteban Heras



UNIVERSIDAD DE CUENCA

theater. This theater relies on fantasy and dream reality as much as the Theater of the Absurd does. It also ignores such traditional principles as that of the basic unity and consistency of each character or the need for a plot. Yet, basically, the “poetic avant-garde” represents a different mood. It is more lyrical, and less violent and grotesque. Another important factor is its different approach towards language. The “poetic avant-garde” is based on consciously “poetic” speech. Its plays are in fact poems and images composed of a plentiful mesh of verbal associations, which we don’t find very often in absurd drama.

While traditional theater makes an effort to create a photographic representation of life as we see it, the Theater of the Absurd tries to create a ritual-like, mythological, archetypal, allegorical vision, strongly related to the world of dreams. The central point of these dreams is often man’s fundamental disorientation and confusion of his purpose in this world. Man has no answers to the basic existential questions: Why are we alive? , Why do we have to die? , Why is there injustice and suffering? , Who are we? *“Man has been cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots. He is lost. All his actions have become senseless, absurd, and useless”*, said Eugene Ionesco, one of the most important playwrights of this movement.

The absurd in these plays takes the form of man’s reaction to a world apparently without meaning or man as a puppet being controlled by an invisible force. The main characteristics found in these plays are: broad comedy, mixed with horrific or tragic images; characters going through hopeless situations

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Esteban Heras



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forced to do repetitive or meaningless actions; dialogs full of clichés, word play, and nonsense; plots that are cyclical or absurdly expansive; either a parody or dismissal of realism and the concept of the “well-made play”; the sense that there is no meaning in life. Another characteristic of this kind of theater is the disbelief in God, which is expressed in Samuel Becket’s “Waiting for Godot.” This title has been interpreted as “Waiting for God.” Nevertheless, these plays do have some elements found in conventional drama, but most of them are based on the characteristics mentioned above.

When these plays first appeared on stage, they created confusion and even anger in most critics and audiences, who were accustomed to watching plays that at least had a specific starting point and an end; that had an understandable language, characters, etc. These were not standard plays at all. These plays were a provocation to most people, as they presented human beings that were hard to recognize, and actions that were not motivated. In addition, in some of these plays dialogue seemed to have degenerated into meaningless babble. Some critics thought that this theater was so bad that it didn’t deserve to be called drama.

However, all the elements mentioned above, which the critics thought were the reason why the Theater of the Absurd was bad, have, in fact, made it fascinating. When plays such as “The Bald Soprano” became really famous during the 1950s and 1960s, some critics thought that they were fashionable only because people wanted to talk about how bad these plays actually were.

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Gabriela Morales
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The truth is that not only were these plays being taken seriously, and becoming more and more popular and important, but some young critics thought this kind of theater represented the end of theater as we know it. In other words, they thought standard theater was going to disappear due to the absurd theater; which, of course, didn't happen. What did happen was the Theater of the Absurd became a significant part of world drama.

The "Absurd" or "New Theater" movement was originally happening in Paris only. Some of the absurdists were born in France, such as Jean Genet, Jean Tardieu, and Boris Vian. There were many other absurdists that were not born in France, but lived and wrote there, often in French. Some of these playwrights include: Samuel Becket from Ireland; Eugene Ionesco from Romania; Arthur Adamov from Russia, and Fernando Arrabal from Spain.

As the influence of the Absurdists grew, the style spread to other countries. In England some of those who were considered practitioners of this style include: Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, N.F. Simpson, James Saunders, and David Camptom; in the United States, Edward Albee, Sam Shepard, Jack Gelber, and John Guare.

1.2 Characters

The absence of true character development is one of the primary elements of the Theater of the Absurd; there are no real characters. In their place are one dimensional characters who are representative of a particular aspect of society,

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Esteban Heras



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or non-dimensional characters whose absence of development is in itself symbolic of the indecipherable cosmos that the Theater of the Absurd is trying to show.

For the most part, the characters of these plays are apparently normal people. However, they undergo hopeless and meaningless abnormal situations. They are forced to do insignificant things, and life seems to have no meaning. From a certain point of view, one would think this could represent the other side of the lives of people in the “real world”, in view of the fact that no matter what we do, we are all going to die anyway and lose everything we have. So, everything seems useless in this world; especially things like material possessions. What is apparently normal, like working hard, believing in God, starting a family, etc. if looked at in a different way can become futile. Sometimes it seems as though the whole world were a big stage and we, the people, were just actors in the Theater of the Absurd.

For instance, let’s take a look at the characters of one of the most famous and controversial plays, Samuel Becket’s “Waiting for Godot.” The characters here are strange caricatures that have difficulty communicating the simplest of concepts to one another as they await the arrival of Godot. This play does not tell a story. It explores a static situation: basically nothing happens, nobody comes, and nobody goes. Vladimir and Estragon –characters of this play- have complementary personalities. Vladimir is the more practical of the two, and

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Estragon thinks he is a poet. Estragon often dreams, whereas Vladimir hates listening about dreams.

As we saw above, most of the characters in the Theater of the Absurd are not normal, are not the type of characters that one would find in conventional theater and that is one of the features that makes this new theater unique and a lot different from other kinds of theater. These plays don't have the characterization and motivation found in standard theater; instead, they present unrecognizable characters, who act as puppets.

1.3 Language

Another important aspect of absurd drama is its distrust of language as a means of communication. Language, according to absurdists, is just a vehicle for conventionalized, stereotyped, meaningless exchanges. Words cannot convey the essence of human experience. Words are not enough for people to communicate effectively. In a way, this kind of theater tries to make communication among people more authentic.

Language and actions differ from the usual drama and sometimes cannot be explained in the Theater of the Absurd. In the works of Albee and Ionesco, language, behavior, and structure are abnormal if compared to other plays. Sometimes language can be a key factor that is presented as a weak form of communication. For instance, in "The Future is In Eggs," by Ionesco,

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meaningless chatters between Roberta and Jacques break out during the run of the entire play.

Roberta: Puss... Puss....

Jacques: Puss.... Puss....

Roberta: Puss.... Puss....

Jacques: Puuuss....Puuuuuuuuuss!

These incoherent slurs seem to be irrelevant and could easily be replaced with normal speech patterns. But remember this is the anti-theater, which tries to transmit different things, and therefore uses different methods.

In "The American Dream", by Edward Albee, Mommy and Daddy invite Mrs. Barker over for the evening. When Mrs. Barkers arrives Mommy and Daddy at first seem to be normal and try and make Mrs. Barker comfortable; however, as time passes by, the conversation turns more and more unusual, as we can see in the following excerpt.

Mommy: Are you comfortable? Won't you take off your dress?

Mrs. Barker: Don't mind if I do.

Mommy: There. You must feel a great deal more comfortable.

Mrs. Barker: Well, I certainly look a great deal more comfortable.

In sum, we can say that the language in the theater of the absurd is different from that found in other types of theater. Sometimes the dialogs seem to be nonsense. One would think that the people in these plays are crazy or something, but that is one of the main characteristics of this kind of theater:

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“weird language.” Whereas normal plays consist of pointed dialog, these often contain incoherent babblings.

1.4 Plot

These plays don't have the usual beginning and end that other plays do. That is why sometimes it is hard to understand the main plot of a play –if there is any. In “Waiting for Godot”, for example, nothing seems to happen; there is not a clear plot. The play revolves around two tramps, who are apparently lost and who are filling their days waiting for somebody. The absurdity of life and living is brought out in these plays.

There are many clichés, puns, and repetitions. A classic example is Ionesco's “The Bald Soprano”, where two characters keep repeating the obvious until it sounds like nonsense. The effect is to bring out the insufficiency of verbal communication. The two characters discuss banal matters and end up discovering that they are man and wife.

Basically the plots of the Theater of the Absurd revolve around nonsense dialogs, repetitive or meaningless actions, and non-realistic or impossible stories, which often have neither a beginning nor an end.

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CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Ancient Greece

It is notable how many words in our everyday speech are metaphors which come mostly from the theater: person (persona, personality), scene, role, drama, stage, even theater, among others. Clearly we find theater as a “natural” sort of human activity, “part of the scenery of life”, we might say. However, our contemporary western idea of the theater was born in Greece, in the theater of Athens. One living example of this is that our word “theater” has an ancient Greek etymology. It comes from **theatron**, which meant, originally, a group of spectators (**theatai**) and then by derivation the space within which they watched (or rather participated in) the staged drama.

The theater that was popular in Athens in the fifth century B.C. is considered as the foundation for all drama in the West part of the European continent. The citizens of ancient Greece began to trust less on gods and religious customs and more on themselves when it came to making crucial decisions. Also at this time, Western philosophy began as a way of organizing thought, of discussing ideas in a reasonable way, and of conceiving of the first idea of Democracy. On the other hand, in rejecting the laws and traditions founded on the gods and mythical heroes, the Theater arose as a response to this concern. Athenian authorities found this form of communication so powerful

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that they built open-air theaters for thousands of people; it even became obligatory for citizens to go to performances, which were held as part of religious festivals. The theater was based on the idea of a chorus: a commentator on the action, a sort of ideal spectator who echoed the opinions of the audience. In this same century the genre of tragedy was born, a representation of the difficult nature of the human condition and the nobility of the human spirit under such stress; Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were the three great tragedians of the time. Comedy was also a popular genre, which criticized and made fun of well-known public figures. All of the existing comedies of the fifth century are created by a single author: Aristophanes. From what has survived we can see that Old Comedy appears almost to have come fully formed from the thought and style of Aristophanes. The theater of Aristophanes contains the same freedom of imagination and mixture of fantasy and general comedy that characterizes the anti-literary attitude of the Theater of the Absurd. Absurd elements first made their appearance in the crazy humor and funny scenes of Old Comedy and the plays of Aristophanes. Furthermore, it was Aristophanes above all who shaped the genre of Old Comedy and set the standards by which all those comedians who wanted a chorus had to be judged. Obviously, it should not be forgotten that there were writers of comedy before Aristophanes; also he had contemporaries and rivals. At the beginning, comedy as a genre was officially recognized at the Dionysia since 486, forty years or so before Aristophanes was born, and at the Lenaia since about 440. They both,

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the Dionysia and the Lenaia were festivals held in Athens. When Aristophanes made his debut in 427, comedy was almost sixty years old. Krates, Magnes, and Kratinos were recognized as the first generation of comic playwrights before Aristophanes was born. Aside from all these things, what makes Aristophanes' comedy unique is that his theater was a much more improvised, and also, the geographical setting of the theater was more important to him. The sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus of which the theatrical area formed a part was situated on the south-east slope of the Acropolis ("High City") hill. The Acropolis dominated Aristophanes' Athens far more than it does the high-rise center of modern urban Athens. This was an appropriate site for Dionysiac drama. Not only was the Acropolis the focus of Athenian religious and other civic activity, but it was also suitable geophysically. On one hand, the abrupt rock of the hill itself provided some protection from the cold north winds that blew during January/February and March/April when the Lenaia and Dionysia festivals took place. On the other hand, the lower slope of the hill could be prepared for acoustic and visual purposes to provide rows of seating- in Aristophanes' day just earthen banking and wooden benches for, perhaps, some 14-15,000 spectators. From their benches or the ground they looked down on the drama and beyond it to the plain that stretched to Mount Hymettos and the Aegean Sea. The whole geographical setting, in other words, including the very daylight, was drawn into the dramatic scene rather than been left out. Nothing could be removed from the enclosed space and artificial lighting of our

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modern theater buildings. The drama itself took place in a prepared area at the foot of the hill. The origins of comedy are obscure, but we can say that it is something that grew out of ritual miming, singing, and above all dancing, actions, and words that told or made fun of stories relevant to the Athenians' everyday religious and political experience. Thus, the essential component of the theater was the circular dancing-floor of beaten earth (perhaps modeled on the threshing-floor) known as the orkhestra. Here the Chorus of twenty-four masked men representing humans, animals, or personifications sang in perfect harmony and agreement some lyric passages, and danced mimetically their carefully choreographed steps to the accompaniment of a single instrument something like an oboe. There were three, four, or sometimes more male actors who wore masks. They occupied a separately defined space behind the orchestra, a raised but still low wooden stage to which they had access from the skene. This word, skene, means literally "tent", "booth", or "hut"; however, in Aristophanes' time it was a rectangular, roofed building of light wooden construction. The skene served both as the actors' dressing-room and mask-changing room. It had one or more doors.

One piece that shows Aristophanic Theater and Aristophanes' ability for drama is Thesmophoriazusae. Thesmophoriazusae describes the many types of humor in the theater of Aristophanes, such as the humor in the jokes about women's incontinent passion for alcohol and sex, and it also reflects the Athenian men's anxieties and women's frustrations of the epoch.

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Thesmophoriazusae contains Aristophanic paronomasia, “a play on worlds”; a play between men and women’s worlds. With Aristophanes and his idea of the theater, we have an approach to understand how people conceived the theater at its first beginning, and how this idea has changed through time.

2.2 The Middle Ages

In the Middle Ages, life and thought were dominated by faith—and not, like today, by knowledge—which united society and gave the world its meaning. Then, as a part of Church ceremonial, there appeared religious drama. They were dramatic presentations, as part of the Mass, about the Gospel characters and the lives of saints. The language of all these dramatic pieces was Latin. Even though there was little or no national consciousness in continental Europe about these ceremonial representations, it was, to all intents and purposes, one vast domain living under a feudal system, and there was, too, but one religion. This religious and political unity made it extremely easy for the ideas of the Mystery and Miracle plays to spread through the agency of the bards and troubadours that wandered from court to court of the feudal barons. At the beginning of Mystery and Miracle plays, the priests only took part in acting out the events from the lives of Christ and the saints, and the portrayal took place in the Church proper. Later, as the performances grew more elaborate and space became an important item, the Mysteries and Miracles were pushed out into the courtyards of the churches, and common people began to take part in the acting.

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By the beginning of the twelfth century national boundaries were becoming more or less marked. England by its geographical position was isolated from the currents of thought that flowed through continental Europe, and there, as the people took over the responsibility for the acting of the sacred plays, now called "Mystery Plays", it became the custom to turn individual incidents over to the guilds of the various crafts. Also, there arose a feeling of need to present not only isolated incidents or groups of related incidents at Christmas and Easter, but the whole history of mankind, from Adam and Eve up to the Day of Judgment. The various incidents of this long story were divided among the guilds of a district, that is, workers of each trade or profession, such as drapers, bakers, cooks, or dyers. They were staged on wagons easily drawn from one place to another, and were presented in proper sequence at set stations throughout the district. This complete history enacted by the various guilds came to be referred to as a "cycle", with the name of the district in which the play was presented. Viewed from the light of modern times the four most important cycles were those of Chester, York, Coventry, and Towneley (also called Wakefield). Here we have an example of a few of the Mystery Plays presented by the guilds of Chester around 1450².

The Fall of Lucifer

by the Tanners

The Creation

by the Drapers

² YOUMAN, Ion: **English Literature**, 2008. p. 110.

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The Flood	by the Dyers
The Three Kings	by the Wine Merchants
The Last Supper	by the Bakers
The Passion and Crucifixion of Christ	by the Ironworkers
The Descent into Hell	by the Cooks

That these cycles, even though religious in nature, took into account the popular love of comedy is evidenced by the fact that, in the only surviving incident of the Newcastle cycle, Noah's wife is represented as a vixen. Mechanical devices, trapdoors, and other artifices were employed to represent flying angels, fire-spouting monsters, miraculous transformations, and graphic martyrdoms in a mixture of the sacred and profane, sermons and spectacular effects. About the same time, both in England and on the continent, actors started to represent Virtues and Vices, to give the audience a "moral" lesson. As this grew, the "Morality plays" were born. The most famous play which has survived is Everyman, an import from Holland. "Everyman" means "any man." This play tells, in simple language, of the appearance of Death to Everyman, and his informing Everyman that he must start the long journey to the next world. Everyman calls on certain friends to help him, like Beauty, Strength, Knowledge, Five-wits, and Good Deeds. However, at the end, only Knowledge and Good Deeds travel in his company to the grave. Then Everyman learns that

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the pleasures, friends, and faculties of this world help a man nothing when death comes: only spiritual strength can sustain him at his last hour. This is a moral lesson, but it is given force by being given dramatic form. Another characteristic of both the Mystery and the Morality plays is that they were often long and boring. To relieve the tedium, "interludes" were presented. They were conversations between performances. Interludes were distinguished by their vulgarity more than their humor. Most of these comic plays came originally from France or Italy and were about sex or digestion. From these "interludes" (literally "between the games," which was their actual use in Italy) developed a swift-moving play that was acted independently of any other performance. The best and most famous of these plays of the Middle Ages is the French Farce of Pierre Pathelin.

Mystery plays and Morality plays declined and eventually disappeared with the advent of Protestantism and the religious commotion of the Renaissance.

2.3 German Expressionism

Expressionism, at its first beginning, was a term used by Herwald Walden in his polemic magazine "Der Sturm" in 1912. Expressionism was not referred to as an official movement until it had almost died out. What is now known as "German Expressionism" is probably Germany's most original and important

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artistic form since the Middle Ages. In its youth, German Expressionism was based on the ideas of individual expression and of united brotherhood. The Expressionists were inspired by the possibility of using art to go beyond the limits of human reason, of reaching the truth, or the essence, by non-rational means. Although participants in the Expressionist movement went on to cover a wide range of political point of view, it was initially based on frustration at the subordination and materialism of Wilhelminian Germany, and heavily fixed in Schopenhauer's idea of "the need to embrace the brotherhood of man". Politically, German Expressionism was usually related to communism. While the largely Jewish ethnicity of Expressionist artists, for example Carl Einstein, Georg Kaiser, Gunther, and Schultze-Naumburg, set it in opposition to the anti-Semitism of Nazi Germany. The Expressionist tendency to the extreme, and the desire for a new society, a new goal, and new man was something the Expressionists had in common with the National Socialism that we nowadays consider the right political line.

In the spring of 1914, united Germany seemed stable under Kaiser Wilhelm. It was a time of massive development and change. Industrialization brought a huge population increase, and Germany had the most powerful steel, chemical, and electrical industries in Europe. With a huge navy and its strong imperialist ideals, Germany pursued its colonial ambitions with an aggression that resulted in its isolation by the other world powers. German Expressionism began as a reaction to the Wilhelm's conditions in Germany; a rejection of the bourgeois

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culture established in the country. Young intellectuals felt excluded and classless in a complacent, materialistic Germany. Then Expressionism was a reaction against industrialization, mechanization, and patriarchy in a wider sense.

On the other hand, Expressionism itself can be defined as a self-consciously Post-Impressionist movement. Expressionist work was marked by aesthetic intensity, a tendency to short forms as a way of concentrating and condensing, and a perceptive self consciousness about the limits of language and, the converse, the expressive potential of language. This language could be visual or linguistic. Indeed, the German Expressionists moved towards “primitive art”, as a model of abstraction, or non representational, non-academic, non-conventional art. The expressionist notion of primitivism is attributed to Carl Einstein, whose book “Negerplastik”, published at the start of the First World War, was the first to recognize African sculpture as an aesthetic art form. The primitivism is a rejection, by the Expressionists, of Wilhelm’s Germany and all it represented. It was also a rejection of reason as a means to truth. Also, the Expressionists adopted the notions of violence and disturbance, and retained the idea of “a new man”.

Another important characteristic of Expressionism works, in their visual, poetic, and prosaic forms, was that the German Expressionists put into practice the theories of Werringer, who split art into empathy and abstraction. By

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empathy, he referred to an existential comfort in the world; a sense of harmony and control over nature. Abstraction stood for metaphysical anxiety, and primordial psychic anguish associated with disturbing formations and non representational, abstract art.

But speaking of Expressionist Theater, in its early stages, it was a dramatization of the subconscious, with the consequent loss of character, motivation, and rational plot development of the well-made play. The first Expressionist films were created in the years between the wars. Films like "The Golem" (1920), "Destiny" (1921), and "The Last Laugh" (1924), were highly symbolic and surrealistic performances of filmed stories. The first Expressionist films used sets made of non-realistic, geometrically absurd elements. They were painted on walls and floors to represent lights, shadows, and objects. The plots and stories were about madness, insanity, betrayal, and other intellectual topics. Later, other films like Metropolis (1927) and M (1931), Fritz Lang films, were considered as part of the brief history of German Expressionism.

After the First World War, many Expressionists still believed in the idea of a "new man" and "the renewal of man". Playwrights such as Georg Kaiser tried to develop a suitable language to describe or invent this "new man"; a language which was a remarkable fusion of the intellectual and passionate. However, Expressionism didn't survive to Hitler's Germany. The movement began to lose most of its strength. Not only were the Jewish artists, many of whom were

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expressionists, prosecuted under Hitler, but Nazi ideology, considered modern contributed to the decline of Western civilization. There was still a strong link between Expressionism and the peace campaign of the First World War, and avant-garde was very much a development of the Weimer Republic. The desire for regeneration was something the Nazis shared with expressionists, but for Hitler, the avant-garde artists were something to be swept away; they were something standing in the way of the 'new man'. The Third Reich wanted to destroy and recreate the cultural system of which the expressionists had become part. With Nazism in Germany, the Expressionist movement could see its ending.

2.4 World War II

There is no doubt that a sense of disillusionment, a collapse of all the beliefs is a characteristic feature of our own times. The social and spiritual reasons for such a sense of loss of meaning are various and complex: First, the decline of religious faith that had started with the Enlightenment and led Nietzsche to speak of the "death of God" by the eighteen-eighties; second, the breakdown of the liberal faith in inevitable social progress in the wake of the First World War; third, the disillusionment with the hopes of radical social revolution as predicted by Marx after Stalin had turned the Soviet Union into a totalitarian tyranny; the fall back into barbarism, mass murder, and genocide in the course of Hitler's brief rule over Europe during the Second World War, and finally, as the consequence of that war, the spread of spiritual emptiness in the prosperous

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and affluent societies of Western Europe and the United States. Then there can be no doubt: for many intelligent and sensitive human beings the world of the mid twentieth century lost its meaning and sense. Suddenly, man saw himself to face a universe that was both frightening and illogical - in a word, absurd. All assurances of hope, all explanations of ultimate meaning were reduced to nonsensical illusions, empty chatter, whistling in the dark. If we try to image such a situation in ordinary life, this might be compared to our suddenly ceasing to understand the conversation in a room full of people; what made sense at one moment has, at the next, become an obscure babble of voices in a foreign language. At once, the comforting, familiar scene would turn into one of nightmare and horror. With the loss of the means of communication we are pushed to see that world with the eyes of total outsiders, as a succession of frightening images.

World War II was one of the two important events that finally brought the Theater of the Absurd to life. The global nature of this conflict and the resulting trauma of living under threat of nuclear annihilation put into complete perspective the essential precariousness of human life. The horrors of the First and Second World Wars showed that values were only temporary. The belief in the human capacity to understand the world and control it disappeared. Before this time, there was men's necessity of having an explanation of the world, which was satisfied by religion and the creators of the philosophical systems. The natural desire to get to know and understand the world in its most hidden

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spheres was fulfilled by religious dogmas about the existence of God that guaranteed the meaningful contingency of mankind. However, wars in the world and their consequences, that have left mankind devastated, highlighted the idea that man was inhabiting a universe with which he is out of key. Its meaning was indecipherable, and his place within it was without purpose. One did not need to be an abstract thinker, in order to be able to reflect upon absurdity: the experience of absurdity became part of the average person's daily existence. The end of World War II brought an explosion of theater in response to the new cultural energy and popular demand. In Europe heavy government subsidies were used to restore national theaters and establish new ones. French theater initially set concepts and practices that had been developed in the war years. During this period, a "prophet" of the absurd appeared; Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) rejected realism in the theater, calling for a return to myth and magic and to the exposure of the deepest conflicts within the human mind. He wanted a theater that would produce collective archetypes, and create a modern mythology. It was no longer possible, he insisted, to keep using traditional art forms and standards that had lost their power of persuasion and validity. Although Artaud would not live to see its development, he had established some of the basic tendencies of the Theater of the Absurd by the early nineteen thirties. So, the Theater of the Absurd became a reaction to the disappearance of the religious dimension from contemporary life. The Theater of the Absurd can be seen as an effort to restore the importance of myth and ritual to our age,

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by making man conscious of his new reality and condition. This theater hopes to achieve this goal by shocking man out of an existence that has become common, mechanical, and complacent. It is felt that there is mystical experience in confronting the limits of the human condition. As a result, absurd plays had a highly unusual, innovative form, whose intention was to alarm the viewer, shaking him out of this comfortable, conventional life of everyday concerns. In the meaningless and Godless post-Second-World- War world, it was no possible to keep using the same traditional art forms and standards. So, the Theater of the Absurd rebelled against conventional theater. It was anti-theater, which let go of representation of reality, and represented the existential absence of sense. There are doubts that human beings have the capability to understand the world and control it. The absurdist takes as a starting point the absurd; existence is illogical and useless, with death as an incomprehensible final. The incomprehensibility is the central theme in the Theater of the Absurd, and it makes fun of the sense of life.

On the other hand, Martin Esslin, describes the Theater of the Absurd, or Absurdism, in his 1961 book with the same title, as a set of particular plays which appeared in Paris and became popular during the 1950's and 1960's, and which presented on stage the philosophy articulated by the French philosopher Albert Camus in his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus", in 1942. Albert Camus considered the universe to be chaotic and irrational and thus regarded the search for meaning to be as "absurd" as the futile task of the Corinthian king

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who was condemned to push the same rock up a hill forever, (See chapter 1, 1.1 What's the Theater of the Absurd?). At the same time, Esslin referred the term "Theater of the Absurd" to a range of playwrights who, grouped under the label of the absurd, showed their sense of confusion, anxiety, and wonder in the face of an inexplicable universe. According to Esslin, the five most important playwrights of the movement were: Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, and Harold Pinter. These writers even disagreed with the term "Theater of the Absurd"; they preferred to use terms such as "Anti-Theater" or "New Theater". Other playwrights who were included in this type of theater were Tom Stoppard, Arthur Kopit, Friedrich Durrenmatt, Fernando Arrabal, Edward Albee, and Boris Vian, among others. This kind of theater spread through other countries in Europe and America. Plays related to the Theater of the Absurd share several characteristics, such as nonsense dialogue, repetitive or meaningless action, and non-realistic or impossible plots. The Theater of the Absurd began to decline in the mid- 1960's. Even though this theater shocked the audiences at the beginning, many of its characteristic features were absorbed in current theater, when the Theater of the Absurd declined. The techniques used are now common in modern theater.

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CHAPTER 3

PRYMARY PLAYWRIGHTS

3.1 Eugene Ionesco

Eugene Ionesco was born in Slatina, Rumania, on November 26, 1912. His mother, whose name was Therese Icard, was French and his father was Rumanian. He was a lawyer. Shortly after Ionesco's birth, his mother brought him to Paris, where he spent his childhood, so his first language was French. In Paris, Ionesco studied literature. At the age of thirteen, his family returned to Rumania. In Rumania, Ionesco went to school and took a degree in French at the University of Bucharest. He wrote his first poems, elegies influenced by Maeterlinck and Francis Jammes. He also ventured into the realm of literary criticism, publishing an attack on three important Rumanian writers- the poets Tudor Arghezi and Ion Barbu, and the novelist Camil Pretesco. Ionesco accused them of narrow provincialism and lack of originality. But a few days later he published a second pamphlet, expressing his admiration for the authors and considering them as valid figures of Rumanian national literature. Finally, he presented the two essays side by side, under the title "No!", to prove the possibility of holding opposite views on the same subject.

Having finished his studies, Ionesco became a teacher of French at a Bucharest lyceum. In 1936, Ionesco married Rodica Burileano, a student of Law and Philosophy. Two years later he received a scholarship which enabled him to return to France to do research for a thesis he planned on "The Themes of

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Death and Sin in French Poetry since Baudelaire.” At the same time, Ionesco got involved with and was an active member of the College de “Pataphysique”. This College was dedicated to nihilist irony, practical jokes, and the demolition of culture. It had a commission that was preparing a thesis on the history of latrines.

At the outbreak of war, Ionesco and his wife moved to Marseilles. Later, he returned to Paris, and worked in the production department of a publishing house. His daughter Marie-France was born in 1944. When the war ended, Ionesco was almost thirty- three. There was nothing to indicate that he was soon to become a famous dramatist. In fact, he disliked the theater intensely because of the contradiction presented by the reality of the performers and the fiction of the stage. In spite of his dislike of the theater, Ionesco wrote a play, almost against his will. This is because he decided that he ought to learn English. While Ionesco was learning English, he got the idea for his first absurdist play, “La Cantatrice Chauve” (“The Bald Soprano”), produced in 1950. “The Bald Soprano” is characterized by illogical phrases. These phrases became the dialogue of his play. In fact, The Bald Soprano consists mainly of clichés of a foreign language phrase book, and a series of meaningless conversations between two couples that eventually deteriorate into babbling.

In rapid succession Ionesco wrote a number of dramas. Among Ionesco’s other well-known plays are “The Killer”, “Amédée” (“How to Get Rid of It”), “Victims of Duty”, and “Rhinoceros”. This last one was produced in Germany,

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and it is described as an anti-Nazi play. Ionesco also wrote essays, textbooks for children, and a novel, "Le Solitaire". Finally, in his last years, Ionesco abandoned writing and devoted himself to painting and exhibiting his works. He died in Paris in 1994. Ionesco's work constitutes a truly heroic attempt to break through the barriers of human communication.

3.2 Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett was an absurdist Irish playwright, novelist and poet. He was born possibly on April 16th, 1906 in Dublin. Samuel Beckett belonged to a prosperous Protestant family. His father, William Beckett Jr., was a surveyor. Beckett's mother, Mary Roe, had worked as a nurse before marriage. He was educated at the Portora Royal School and Trinity College, Dublin, where he took a B.A. degree in 1927, having specialized in French and Italian. Beckett worked as a teacher in Belfast and lecturer in English at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. In 1931, Beckett returned to Dublin, and he began to teach French at Trinity College until 1932, when he resigned to devote his time entirely to writing. After his father died, Beckett settled in London, where he underwent psychoanalysis. As a poet, Beckett made his debut in 1930 with "Whoroscope", a ninety-eight-line poem accompanied by seventeen footnotes. In this dramatic monologue, the protagonist, Rene Descartes, waits for his morning omelet of well-aged eggs while he meditates on the obscurity of theological mysteries, the passage of time, and the approach of death. Around

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this time, Samuel met Suzanne Dechevaux-Dumesnil, a piano student, whom he married in 1961. Likewise, Beckett's career as a novelist really began in 1938 with "Murphy", which showed the protagonist's inner struggle between his desires for his prostitute-mistress and for total escape into the darkness of mind. The conflict is resolved when he is disintegrated by a gas explosion.

When World War II began, Beckett was in Ireland, but he moved to Paris and joined the French Resistance, working as a messenger. Sought by the Nazis, he fled with his wife to Southern France. There, they remained in hiding in the village of Roussillon two and half years. Beckett worked as country laborer and wrote "Watt", his second novel, which was published in 1953 and was the last of his novels written originally in English.

After the war, Beckett worked briefly with the Irish Red Cross in St. Lo in Normandy. Between 1946 and 1949, he produced the major prose narrative trilogy, "Molloy", "Malone Meurt", and "L'Innommable", which appeared in the early 1950s. The novels were written in French and subsequently translated into English with substantial changes. "En Attendant Godot" ("Waiting for Godot"), written in 1949 and published in English in 1954, brought Beckett international fame and established him as one of the leading names of the Theater of the Absurd. The tragic-comedy in two acts was opened at the Théâtre de Babylone on January 5, 1953. Another well-known play from the same period is "Endgame". Also, in the 1960s, Beckett wrote for radio, theater, and television.

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Esteban Heras



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Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. The same year, Beckett's wife died. The author had moved just previously to a small nursing home, after falling in his apartment. His last book printed in his lifetime was "Stirring Still" (1989). Beckett died from respiratory problems, in a hospital on December 22, 1989. It was rumored that Beckett gave much of the Nobel Prize money to poor artists.

3.3 Arthur Adamov

Arthur Adamov was one of the most important exponents of the Theater of the Absurd. Adamov was born into a wealthy Armenian family in Kislovodsk in 1908. At the age of four, he moved with his family to Germany. Having completed his education in Paris, he settled there in 1924 and became involved with surrealist groups, editing their journal "Discontinuité" and writing poetry. In 1938, he had a nervous breakdown; the neuroses that had bothered him since childhood and that were the inspiration for many of his plays are revealed in his confessional work "L'Aveu" (1946).

Adamov started writing for the theater in 1947. He tried to express the loneliness and helplessness of man, and the futility of any searching for the meaning of life. In "La Parodie", first performed in the early 1950s, the central characters bombard each other with questions about time against the background of a clock with no hands. "L'Invasion" (1950), "La grande et la petite manoeuvre" (1950), "Tous contre tous" (1953), and "Le Professeur Taranne"

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(1953) show in strange images the cruelty of social conventions and pressures and were influenced by Antonin Artaud's Theater of Cruelty. In the mid-1950s, Adamov turned to a more political style of drama, beginning with his best-known play, "Le Ping-Pong" (1955). The central image of the play, a pinball machine in an amusement arcade, is a symbol of the capitalist system to which men willingly submit in an endless futile game of chance. After "Paolo Paoli" (1957), the plays of Adamov became very radical: "Le Printemps 71" (1961), about the Paris Commune, "La Politique des restes" (1963), and "Off Limits" (1969) are grouped with Marxist propaganda. Adamov committed suicide in 1970.

3.4 Jean Genet

Jean Genet was born in Paris on December 19, 1910. He was the illegitimate son of a Parisian prostitute, and orphaned seven months later. At the age of ten, he was accused of stealing. Although he was innocent, the young boy decided to be a thief. At the age of thirteen, after being supported by the state, he began a life of crime and adventure. From 15 to 18, Genet spent his years in the Mettray Penitentiary, a place of hard labor, where a code of love, honor, gesture and justice was enforced by the inmates, and where his sexual awakening occurred. Then he joined the French Foreign Legion in Syria. He abandoned it, and spent more periods in prison living by petty theft, begging, and homosexual prostitution. By the age of 23, Genet was living in Spain, sleeping with a one-armed pimp, lice-ridden and begging. It was a period which became the basis for "The Thief's Journal", his record of a journey.

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Between 1930 and 1940 he wandered throughout Europe, and he found himself eventually in Hitler's Germany, where he felt strangely out of place. At the age of 32, concentrating on the ambiguity of morality in a society characterized by repression and hypocrisy, he started writing his first manuscript, "Our Lady of the Flowers." It was composed in Fresnes prison, and was published in Lyons in 1943. The novel which involves pimps and prostitutes, depicts the author's erotic world of homosexuality, masturbation, bizarre fantasies, and violent murder. Marked by nonconformity and exoticism, the work uses a fancy language to describe an incredibly nasty environment. However, the work was discovered and destroyed. Genet rewrote it from memory. This handwritten manuscript was stolen from his cell, and it came to the attention of Cocteau and Sartre, two literary distinguished men, who persuaded for a pardon from a life-sentence. More than forty intellectuals and artists wanted the French government to pardon Genet.

Ignoring traditional plot and psychology, Genet's work relies on ritual, transformation, illusion, and interchangeable identities. The homosexuals, prostitutes, thieves, and outcasts are trapped in self-destructive circles. They express the despair and loneliness of a man, caught in a maze of mirrors, trapped by an endless progression of images that are, in reality, his own distorted reflection. Genet's status as an original and important writer was enhanced with Sartre's study of him in the book "Saint Genet."

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After five novels, and then silence for several years, Genet re-emerged as a playwright. He wrote a number of theatrical pieces which further established his success, beginning with the production of "The Maids", and followed by the other classic plays: "The Blacks", "The Balcony", and "The Screens." Genet believed that the theater should be an incendiary event, and was precise about how his works should be produced.

Genet wrote about the gay world, without apology or explanation, revealing beauty in the harsh world in which his characters lived, loved, and died. He felt a sense of solidarity with thieves, and beggars. In later life, Genet supported the causes of the Black Panthers in the United States and Palestinian soldiers in Jordan and Lebanon. His final work, "Prisoner of Love", is a record of his years spent with these two groups. Genet's work, while involved with social issues, refuses any form of political commitment. His confrontation with the world has both deeply stirred and repulsed his readers and audiences. Composed outside literary tradition in terms of plot, characterization, and thematic implications, his personal projections possess a psychological truth fused with dramatic imagery. Genet died in Paris on April 15th 1986.

3.5 Harold Pinter

Harold Pinter was the son of a Jewish tailor. He was born in Hackney, London in 1930. He started writing poetry for little magazines in his teens. As a young man, he studied acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and the

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Central School of Speech and Drama, but soon he left to pursue an acting career under the stage name David Baron. He travelled around Ireland in a Shakespearean company, and spent years working in provincial theater before deciding to turn his attention to playwriting. Pinter started writing plays in 1957. Harold had mentioned an idea for a play to a friend who worked in the drama department at Bristol University. The friend liked the idea so much that he wrote to Pinter asking for the play. The only problem was that if the university was to perform the play, they would need a script within the week. Pinter wrote back and told his friend to forget the whole thing. Then he sat down and wrote the play in four days. The product of his labors was a one-act entitled "*The Room*", which had many of the elements that would characterize Pinter's later works. It consisted of a commonplace situation, which involved threat and mystery, but had no explanation or motivation for the action.

Later this same year, Pinter wrote another one-act play, "The Dumb Waiter", about two hired killers employed by a mysterious organization to murder an unknown victim. In this second play, Pinter added an element of comedy, provided mostly through the brilliant small-talk behind which the two men hide their anxiety. Their discussion over whether it is more proper to say "light the kettle" or "light the gas" is comic and absurd. "The Dumb Waiter" was first performed at the Hampstead Theatre Club in London in 1960.

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Although written after "The Dumb Waiter", Pinter's first full-length play, "The Birthday Party", was produced two years earlier, in 1958, at the Arts Theatre in Cambridge. The play is about Stanley, a man in his thirties who has found refuge in seaside boarding house which has apparently had no other visitors for years. But when Goldberg and McCann arrive, it soon becomes clear that they are after Stanley. Like Samuel Beckett, Pinter refuses to provide rational explanations for the actions of his characters. Sometimes the two men seem to be part of a secret organization, and it looks like they are after somebody who has escaped. It is never clear. Instead, the two men organize a birthday party for a terrified Stanley, who insists that it is not his birthday.

Pinter also wrote other absurdist masterpieces like "The Caretaker", "The Homecoming", "Betrayal", "Old Times", and "Ashes to Ashes." He composed a number of radio plays and several volumes of poetry. His screenplays include "The French Lieutenant's Woman", "The Last Tycoon", and "The Handmaid's Tale." He received numerous awards, including the Berlin Film Festival Silver Bear, BAFTA awards, the Hamburg Shakespeare Prize, the Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or, the Commonwealth Award and the Nobel Prize for Literature. His unique style and gift for creating tension and horror made him one of the most respected playwrights of his day.

Harold Pinter died on December 24, 2008, at the age of 78, after a long battle with cancer. His wife, Lady Antonia Fraser, lived longer than him.

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CHAPTER 4

BEST ABSURDIST PLAYS

4.1 Waiting for Godot



Although it is difficult to read and understand, “Waiting for Godot” is one of the most important works of our time. It revolutionized theater in the twentieth century and had a great influence on generations of succeeding dramatists, such as Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard.

After the appearance of “Waiting for Godot”, theater was opened to a range of possibilities that playwrights and audiences had never imagined before.

At the beginning, the play was written in French by Samuel Beckett in 1948, under the title “En Attendant Godot.” The French version of the play debuted on January 5, 1953, at the Theater of Babylon in Paris. The English version debuted in August 1955 at the Arts Theatre in London. The first U.S. performance of “Godot” was in January, 1956 at the Coconut Grove Theater in Miami. The first New York performance of the play was on April 19, 1956, at the John Golden Theater. Since then it has been produced worldwide. Beckett's

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play came to be considered an essential example of what Martin Esslin later called "Theatre of the Absurd," a term that Beckett denied, but which remains a handy description for one of the most important theater movements of the twentieth century.

In the next section, we present a brief analysis, which includes: type of work, language, setting, characters, themes, and humor. Later, we focus our attention on a summary of the two acts of the play.

Type of Work

"Waiting for Godot" is a two-act stage drama classified as a tragicomedy. In 1965, critic Martin Esslin used the term "Theater of the Absurd" to describe "Godot" and other plays like it. As a result, these plays also became known as absurdist dramas. An absurdist drama, as we saw before, is a play that shows life as meaningless, senseless, and uncertain. The characters may be uncertain of time and place, and they are the same at the end of the play as they were at the beginning.

Language

The language in an absurdist drama often goes nowhere. Characters don't understand each another. They usually answer a statement or a question with an absurd comment. The dialogue sometimes seems to be the give-and-take of the classic Abbot and Costello vaudeville routine in which the two comedians are discussing a baseball game. A player named "Who" is on first

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base. Abbot does not know the name of the player, so he asks Costello, "Who's on first?" Costello says, "That's right, Who is on first." Beckett opens "Waiting for Godot" this way. Estragon, who has a sore foot, is attempting to remove his boot. Though he pulls hard, it won't come off. In frustration, he says, "Nothing to be done." Vladimir replies, "I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle."

Here is a piece of dialogue of Act II where the two men agree that they are happy in spite of their problems. Estragon asks:

"What do we do, now that we are happy?"

"Wait for Godot," Vladimir says. "Things have changed here since yesterday."

"And if he doesn't come?"

"We'll see when the time comes. I was saying that things have changed here since yesterday."

"Everything oozes."

"Look at the tree."

"It's never the same puss from one moment to the next."

The absurdity of the dialogue is the author's way of calling attention to the apparent absurdity of life. For Samuel Beckett, the world moves on its axis, and the people who inhabit it do not always think logically or talk sensibly.

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Setting

About setting, all the action in “Waiting for Godot” takes place next to a tree on a road, beginning in the evening of one day and ending in the evening of the next.

Characters

Vladimir (Nicknamed *Didi*) and **Estragon** (Nicknamed *Gogo*): They are homeless people who wait under a tree for a mysterious person named *Godot*. *Estragon* is an alternative name for tarragon, herb used to season stew, fish, chicken, vegetables, and other foods. Estragon's nickname, *Gogo*, is the French word for a person who is easy to trick. Vladimir is a common Russian name. A prince of Kiev, Vladimir I (956-1015), converted to Christianity from Paganism and introduced Christianity in Russia.

Pozzo: He was a traveler with a slave on a rope leash. The name Pozzo is similar in spelling and pronunciation to the Italian word, “*pazzo*.” As an adjective, it means “*insane*”, “*crazy*”, “*mad*”, or “*irrational*.” As a noun, it means “*wild man*” or “*mad dog*.”

Lucky: He was Pozzo's slave. Lucky is an ironic, common name unless one believes that he has worked out the means of his salvation. Like Christ, he is punished. And, though he bears no wounds from a crown of thorns, he does have an open sore around his neck. Like Christ, who carried a cross to Calvary, he is made to carry a burden (the bag and other belongings that he carries for Pozzo).

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Boy: A messenger who says he represents Godot. He appears briefly in Act I and Act II to tell Vladimir and Estragon that Godot has postponed his scheduled meeting with them. In Act II, he says he is not the same boy who delivered the message the first time. However, in his list of characters at the beginning of the play, Becket mentions only one boy.

Godot: Someone for whom Vladimir and Estragon are waiting. It is supposed that he has important information for them. Godot does not appear on the stage.

Bullies: People who beat Estragon when he is trying to sleep or so Estragon says. The bullies do not appear on the stage; they could be product of Estragon's imagination.

Themes

Hope

Vladimir and Estragon are simple vagabonds. Their only material possessions (besides their tattered clothes) are a plant and a carrot. Nevertheless, they have not given up on life; they do not descend into depression, pessimism, and cynicism. Even though they frequently exchange insults, they enjoy each other's company and help each other. Above all, though, they wait. They wait for Godot. They do not know who he is or where he comes from. However, they wait just the same, apparently because he represents hope.

Search for Meaning

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Vladimir and Estragon are homeless wanderers who want to find an answer to a question that all human beings face: What is the meaning of life?

Godot may have the answer for them. So they wait. After Godot doesn't appear on the first day, they return to the tree the next day to continue waiting. He does not come. Vladimir and Estragon decide to leave the area. However, the stage direction at the end of the play says, "They do not move." Apparently, they plan to continue their search for meaning by continuing to wait for Godot.

Dependency

Vladimir and Estragon depend on each other to survive. They value each other's company. One could imagine Pozzo without Lucky until the second act, when the audience learns he has gone blind. Unable to find his way, Pozzo is totally dependent on Lucky. Lucky, of course, is tied to Pozzo by a rope and by fear of being abandoned.

Monotony

Life is tedious and repetitive for Vladimir and Estragon. In the first act of the play, they meet at a tree to wait for Godot. In the second act, they meet at the same tree to wait for Godot. An Irish critic, Vivian Mercer, once wrote in a review of the play, "Nothing happens, twice."

Humor

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In "Waiting for Godot", Vladimir and Estragon are like Sisyphus and Tantalus. Each one is condemned forever to seek a goal that he cannot reach. But, while trying to reach their goal, Vladimir and Estragon remain cheerful and humorous. They make a joke of their circumstances and themselves. Also, their unfortunate situation reminds of the burlesque film comedians such as Laurel and Hardy, Charlie Chaplin, and Buster Keaton.

A full appreciation of the humor in the play requires a close reading and/or attendance at a performance of it.

Plot Summary

Act I

One evening, two tramps meet next to a tree along a country road. One of them, Estragon, is struggling to remove a boot, to soothe a sore foot. Pulling at it, he says in frustration, "Nothing to be done."

Vladimir, interpreting the statement as an opinion about life in general, says he is beginning to accept that viewpoint, but he has decided to keep struggling anyway. Then Vladimir says he is glad to see Estragon again, even though they had been together the day before. He also says he spent the previous night in a nearby ditch and endured a beating from some bullies who always attack him.

While Estragon pulls at the boot, Vladimir removes his hat and shakes it out, puts it back on, then removes it again and taps at it as if to remove something. He puts his hat back on just as Estragon finally gets the boot off.

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Estragon turns the boot upside down, but nothing falls out. He feels inside it, but there's nothing. Vladimir accuses him of blaming the boot for "the faults of his feet." Vladimir removes his hat again, finds nothing, and says, "This is getting alarming." He also says, "One of the thieves was saved. It's a reasonable percentage."

Vladimir is referring to the two thieves crucified with Christ. When he asks Estragon whether he has ever read the Bible, Estragon says he remembers looking at the color maps in it. The Dead Sea made him thirsty. Vladimir tells him the story of the two thieves (which bores Estragon) and wonders why only one of the four writers of the Gospels mentions that one of the thieves was saved. Vladimir puts his boot back on and walks around to test his foot. After that, he asks:

"You're sure it was here?"

(He means to someone named Godot).

"He didn't say for sure he would come," Vladimir says.

It turns out they don't remember what day he was supposed to come. Nor do they even recall what day it is now.

While waiting for Godot, they have nothing to do to spend their time. Then Estragon suggests that they hang themselves from the tree. Neither wants to go first. At the end, they decide to stay alive because "it's safer," Estragon says. Besides, if Vladimir hangs himself, Estragon will be alone.

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Estragon is hungry, so Vladimir offers him a turnip. However, Estragon finds a carrot in his pocket and eats it instead. Suddenly, Estragon and Vladimir hear a loud cry. They gather together in fear. There is a man with the loop of a long rope around his neck. At the other end of the rope is another man, who uses a whip to drive the first man. The latter is carrying a bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket, and a coat. When they ask the man with the whip whether he is Godot, the man says, "I present myself: Pozzo." The other man is his slave, Lucky. When Pozzo asks who Godot is, Vladimir says he is a "kind of acquaintance," but Estragon says, "Personally I wouldn't even know him if I saw him."

Pozzo becomes interested in Godot, and he says he, too, would like to meet Godot. Lucky, meanwhile, is still holding a bag, and Estragon asks why he does not put it down. Pozzo says Lucky wants to impress him with his hard work so that Pozzo won't sell him at a fair which they are going to be. Lucky is a burden, Pozzo explains. When Lucky begins crying, Estragon tries to comfort him, but Lucky kicks him in the shins, drawing blood. Estragon and Vladimir now begin sympathizing with Pozzo, who says:

"I can't bear it . . . any longer . . . the way he goes on . . . you've no idea . . . it's terrible . . . he must go . . . (he waves his arms) . . . I'm going mad . . ."

"Will night never come?" Vladimir says.

Pozzo then begins into a short lecture about the characteristics of the evening sky in that region of the country, and Vladimir and Estragon praised

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him for it. In return for their praise, Pozzo has Lucky dance for them twice. Lucky next entertains them with a discourse on politics and religion but keeps talking and talking until Vladimir takes his hat off and Lucky goes silent. Pozzo and Lucky leave. Shortly thereafter, a boy who says he takes care of goats for Godot arrives to tell Vladimir and Estragon that Godot won't arrive until the next day.

Act II

The following day, Vladimir arrives first, then Estragon, and they continue waiting. Now the tree has a few leaves. Vladimir discovers that Estragon has forgotten what happened the day before, until Vladimir reminds him. To kill time, Vladimir asks Estragon to sing. Estragon refuses to do it, but he suggests they should ask each other questions. Then their discussion changes to the tree, when Vladimir realizes that it has leaves now. Yesterday it did not.

"It must be spring," Estragon says.

When Vladimir talks again about Pozzo and Lucky, Estragon again forgets who they are. So Vladimir tells him to pull up a trouser leg to see the wound Lucky caused. After Estragon sees the evidence, which is infected, he says he wants to leave. However, Vladimir says they must stay to wait for Godot.

Meanwhile, Pozzo and Lucky approach. Lucky is wearing a different hat, and Pozzo is blind. When Pozzo bumps into Lucky, they fall and become entangled in Lucky's baggage and rope. Pozzo calls for help. Vladimir and

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Estragon don't pay attention, and they keep talking. Pozzo offers 100 francs for help. Estragon and Vladimir keep conversing, and Pozzo raises the reward to 200 francs. When Vladimir tries to pull Pozzo up, he falls. Vladimir tries to get up, but he too becomes entangled. Vladimir calls for Estragon to help, promising that he will agree to his plan to leave. Estragon consents. He tries to help but smells something.

“Who farted?”

“Pozzo,” Vladimir says.

“I'm going.”

Vladimir tries to get up again. He fails. Finally, Estragon, after several attempts, succeeds in helping him up. Pozzo then frees himself, crawls off, and collapses. Estragon and Vladimir decide to help him. After a struggle, they get him to his feet. Because he is blind, Pozzo does not know who helped him. He thinks they could be robbers. Then he asks the time of day. No one is sure. Estragon isn't even sure whether it is evening or dawn. However, Vladimir decides that it is evening and informs Pozzo. Pozzo asks for Lucky, and Estragon goes to reach him. Lucky is still on the ground. Estragon kicks him several times but only hurts his foot.

Vladimir tells Pozzo they are the same men that he met the day before. Pozzo doesn't remember. He calls for Lucky, who gets up and gathers his burdens. Before Pozzo and Lucky leave, Vladimir asks Pozzo to have Lucky sing. But Pozzo says Lucky is mute.

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“He can’t even groan.”

Pozzo and Lucky leave. A boy, who is not the same one as the day before, gives Vladimir a message from Godot namely, that Godot will be coming the next day.

Finally, Estragon, who has been sleeping, gets up and is ready to go away. But Vladimir tells him they can’t go far because they must return to the tree the next day to wait for Godot.

“And if he comes?”

“We’ll be saved,” Vladimir says.

4.2 The Homecoming

This is a play written in 1964 by Harold Pinter. It consists of two acts, and was published in 1965. It is considered one of the best plays of the Theater of the Absurd, and it has been revived many times since its first premiere in London. The original Broadway production won the 1967 *Tony Award for Best Play*.

Plot Summary

Teddy and his wife, Ruth, were living in the United States for more than a few years when he decided to bring her home to meet his family in North London, where he grew up and which she finds more familiar than their dry life in America.

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A lot of problems went on while they were there. Ruth started to tease Teddy's brothers and father, which resulted in Ruth's staying in England with Teddy's relatives, and Teddy's returning home to America with their three sons, without her.

4.3 Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead

This is the title of a play written by Tom Stoppard, which first premiered in 1966. Its original language was English. The play expands upon the exploits of two characters from Shakespeare's famous play, Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The action of this play has some brief appearances of major characters from Hamlet who enact fragments of the original's scenes. Between these episodes the two protagonists express their confusion at the progress of events.

Plot Summary

As we mentioned above, the play develops according to the events which took place in Hamlet: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were ordered to kill Hamlet. They try to do so, but instead they find a letter that says that they have to die. So the couple is on a ship, not knowing what to do.

Finally, the lighting shifts so that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are the only ones visible. Rosencrantz still does not understand why they must die. Still, he resigns himself to his fate, and his character disappears. Guildenstern wonders

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when he passed the point where he could have stopped the series of events that has brought him to this point. He disappears as well. The final scene features the last few lines from Shakespeare's Hamlet. The Ambassador from England announces that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.

4.4 Rhinoceros

Rhinoceros is another famous play that “belongs” to the Theater of the Absurd. It was written by Eugene Ionesco in 1959. Over the course of three acts, the inhabitants of a small town in France turn into rhinoceroses. The only person who does not succumb to this mass metamorphosis is the central character, Bérenger, a flustered figure who is often criticized during the play for his drinking and tardiness.

Plot summary

Loose rhinos cause the first shock and surprise among the characters. People are beginning to turn into rhinoceroses and to follow the rhinoceritis movement. Some people don't believe it's happening, but little by little everyone in town starts to turn into a rhinoceros, and nobody can do anything about it, even though they try.

Finally, everyone becomes a rhinoceros except for Bérenger and Daisy. Bérenger and Daisy agree to resist rhinoceritis and to marry, to restore the human race. Soon afterwards, however, Daisy refuses to "save the world" and follows the rhinos, suddenly finding them beautiful, as she admires their

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enthusiasm and energy. After much hesitation, Bérenger decides not to surrender: "I am the last man; I will stay till the end! I do not give up!" He ends up weeping because now he cannot become a rhinoceros even if he wanted to.

4.5 Endgame

Now it is time to take a look at one of Beckett's masterpieces, Endgame. It was first performed in London in 1957, in French.

Plot summary

The setting is a bare interior with gray lighting. There are two small windows with drawn curtains, a door, and two ashbins covered by an old sheet. Hamm sits in a wheelchair. His servant, Clov, stares at Hamm, motionless. In the two ash cans are Hamm's legless parents. The world outside is dead. Clov hates Hamm and wants to leave him, but he must obey his orders. Will Clov have the strength to leave Hamm? That is the main theme of the play.

Clov has been looking for a chance to leave Hamm ever since he was brought to him as a child. When Clov looks out the window with a telescope and sees what appears to be a small boy, Hamm tells Clov that he can go, and that he doesn't need him anymore. Clov gets ready to leave, but when the curtain falls he is still there. It is unclear whether he will leave or not.

4.6 The Balcony

The Balcony is another important play which we should know about. It was

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first written in French by the French dramatist Jean Genet, in 1956. The play has attracted many of the greatest directors.

Plot summary

Most of the action takes place in a brothel, where Madam Irma casts, directs, and co-ordinates performances in a house of fantasies and illusions. First, some patrons assume the roles of bishops who forgive penitents, a judge punishes a thief, and a general rides his horse. In the meantime, a revolution is in progress outside, in the city, and the occupants of the brothel await the arrival of the Chief of Police. An envoy from the Queen arrives and reveals that the pillars of society the Bishop, the General, etc have all been killed in the uprising. Using the costumes in Irma's "house of illusions" the clients pose in public as the figures of authority, trying to restore order in the city.

4.7 The Bald Soprano

This is the first play written by the Romanian playwright, Eugene Ionesco. It premiered on May 11, 1950 in Paris. Since 1957 it has been in permanent showing at the Theatre de la Huchette. With a record number of interpretations, it has become one of the most performed plays in France.

Plot summary

The Smiths are a traditional couple from London, who have invited another couple, the Martins, over for a visit. They are joined later by the Smiths' maid,

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Mary, and the local fire chief, who is also Mary's lover. The two families engage in meaningless banter, telling stories and relating nonsensical poems.

The Fire Chief takes his leave, saying that there's a fire across town that he must see about. After he leaves, the play goes totally haywire. The characters start spewing totally random non-sequiturs, clichés, and mutilated aphorisms. Eventually, the lights go out and we hear them screaming, "It's not that way, it's over here!" over and over again in the darkness. When the lights come back up, the Martins are in the same positions the Smiths were in at the beginning of the play. The curtain falls as the play begins again, with the Martins saying the same lines that the Smiths did in the first scene.

4.8 Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?

This play was written by Edward Albee in 1962. The play's title, which alludes to the English novelist Virginia Woolf, is a parody of the song "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" from Walt Disney's animated version of *The Three Little Pigs*.

The play involves two couples playing "games," which are savage verbal attacks against one or two of the others at a party. These games are referred to with sarcastically alliterative names: "Humiliate the Host," "Get the Guests," "Hump the Hostess," and "Bringing Up Baby."

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Plot summary, setting, and characters

The play opens with the main characters, George and Martha, coming home from a party. Even though the pair arrives home at two o'clock in the morning, they are expecting guests: the new math professor, Nick, and his wife, Honey.

First, George and Martha humiliate each other in front of their guests, making them really uncomfortable. After that, the game gets even nastier: George and Martha even attack Honey and Nick, attempting to make them reveal their dirty secrets and true selves. Finally, everyone's secrets are revealed and purged. Honey and Nick go home, leaving Martha and George to try to rebuild their shattered marriage.

4.9 The Maids

This is another important play written by Jean Genet, in 1947. A film adaptation of the play was released in 1974.

Plot summary, setting, and characters

In a wealthy bedroom, an elegant lady is being dressed by her maid, whom she calls Claire. The two taunt each other. Later, the maid slaps the lady. Then an alarm clock rings, and the whole scene is gone. The lady is not a lady anymore but one of two maids who have been playing lady and maid in the absence of their real lady. The maid, who has been called Claire, is in fact

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Solange, and Claire acted the part of the lady, and treated her sister as the lady treats Claire.

Every time their lady is out, the two maids play the fantasy game of lady and maid, each playing the lady in turn. They have had the police arrest Monsieur, the lady's lover, by writing anonymous letters to the police. The telephone rings; Monsieur is out. They are terrified. They decide to kill the lady when she returns by pouring poison into her tea. When the lady arrives they remain silent about the news; when she's about to drink the tea, she sees the receiver of the telephone off, and one of the maids tells her the news. The lady is not interested in the tea anymore. She hurries off to meet her lover. The maids are left alone again. They continue with the game of lady and maid. Claire plays the lady and demands that she be served the poisoned cup of tea. She drinks the poison and dies.

4.10 The Ubu Plays

The "Ubu Plays" are three plays written by Alfred Jarry. However, these plays are not from the same epoch as the rest of the plays we have been discussing here, but from the year 1896. These plays are really important to our subject because they are considered the precursors of the Theater of the Absurd. In these plays, Jarry satirizes power, greed, and evil practices. The first is Ubu Roi (King Ubu), which was followed by Ubu Cocu (Ubu Cuckolded), and

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the third one, Ubu Enchainé (Ubu Enchained). Only the first one of these plays was performed during Jarry's 34-year life.

The beginnings of the original Ubu remain a mystery and are a legend within the French theater culture. So the true and complete authorship of Ubu Roi can never be known. However, Jarry revised and expanded the play considerably, endowed it with the marionette concept, and gave its protagonist the handle under which he became famous.

Ubu inhabits a domain of greedy self-gratification- Jarry's metaphor for the modern man. He is an antihero: fat, ugly, vulgar, gluttonous, grandiose, dishonest, stupid, boring, voracious, cruel, cowardly, and evil- who grew out of schoolboy legends about the imaginary life of a hated teacher who had been at one point a slave on a Turkish Galley, at another frozen in ice in Norway, and at yet another the King of Poland. Ubu Roi follows and explores his political, martial, and felonious exploits, offering adaptations of situations and plot-lines from Shakespearean drama, including Macbeth, Hamlet, and Richard III. Like Macbeth, Ubu murders the King who helped him on the urging of his wife, usurps his throne, and is in turn defeated and killed by his son. There is also an adaptation of the ghost of the dead king and Fortimbra's revolt from Hamlet, Buckingham's refusal of reward for assisting usurpation, from Richard III, and The Winter's Tale's Bear.

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While Ubu may be relentless in his political aspirations, and brutal in his personal relations, he apparently has no measurable effect upon those who inhabit the farcical world which he creates around himself. He thus acts out our most childish rages and desires, in which we seek to gratify ourselves at all cost.

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CONCLUSION

LIFE IS ABSURD

Finally we arrive at the last chapter of this thesis, which we will call “Life is Absurd.” That is basically the “motto” of this kind of theater that has had a great influence on modern theater and was a turning point in western theater during the decades in which it was born the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Even though there was never a school or official movement of this theater, it was a major success in those years. It also changed the way we look at theater now, despite what its detractors might think.

Playwrights such as Samuel Becket, Eugene Ionesco, Fernando Arrabal, Arthur Adamov, and Jean Genet had different points of view on many things; some didn’t even want people to say that they belonged to the absurd theater. However, most of their works had several things in common, which was considered a reaction against the traditional concepts of western theater. These authors refused realistic theater and its psychological characterization, coherent structure, (normal) plot and conventional dialogs as an effective way of communication. Through various processes, they started to become unfamiliar with language structure, logic, and traditional consciousness. The so- accepted thought that the world had a meaning (a world which a few years earlier had suffered the terrifying experiences of Hiroshima and the concentration camps) was replaced by a world where words and actions could be contradictory.

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Nevertheless, their intention was not just to turn common sense into nonsense, for its own sake. They tried to show a crude and bitter truth which underlay the idea of the happiness and comfort of the modern man's lifestyle. Each work here creates its own models of inner logic, sometimes sad – as in *Waiting for Godot*, comic as in *The Bald Soprano*, or violent as in *The Balcony*. All of these plays present a grotesque reality.

This new way of creating theater has had an impact especially on three “areas”: the character, which can change sex, personality or status; the plot, which often goes around, goes nowhere, and refuses any conventional solution; and the objects, which can grow to a point where they can throw the character out, or be reduced to a minimum.

Life becomes absurd if we live our life based on illusions. The Theater of the Absurd tries to make human beings aware of this. It attempts to make its audience conscious of man's precarious and mysterious position in the universe and the need of man to be more in contact with himself. This kind of theater doesn't want to convey any information, nor does it want to present the problems of characters that exist outside the author's inner world. It is not concerned with the representation of events, the narration of the fate, or the adventures of characters, but instead with the presentation of one individual's basic situation. It is a theater of situations against a theater of events in

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sequence; thus, it uses a language based on patterns of images. It projects the author's personal point of view.

Life becomes absurd if we just sit in front of the T.V. all day and wait for someone else to do what we are supposed to do. Who are we? Why are we here? These are questions that the Theater of the Absurd is trying to answer by using other elements, not only language.

"In the literary theater, language remains the predominant component. In the anti-literary theater of the circus or the music hall, language is reduced to a very subordinate role. The Theater of the Absurd has regained the freedom of using language as merely one component of its multidimensional poetic imagery. By putting the language of a scene in contrast to the action, by reducing it to meaningless patter, or by abandoning discursive logic for the poetic logic of association or assonance, the Theater of the Absurd has opened up a new dimension of the stage..."³

³ESSLIN, Martin: **The Theater of the Absurd**, 1961. p. 297.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Page 14: CAMUS, Albert: **The Myth of Sisyphus**, 1942. p. 80.
2. Page 27: YOUMAN, Ion: **English Literature**, 2008. p. 110.
3. Page 67: ESSLIN, Martin: **The Theater of the Absurd**, 1961. p. 297.

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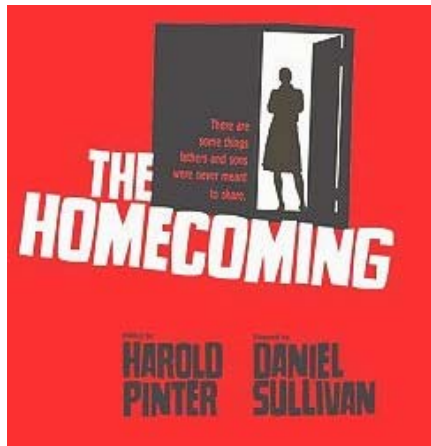
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SELECTIONS

Here are some excerpts from the scripts of the plays we have discussed in this thesis.

THE HOMECOMING

(By Harold Pinter)



This is how Ruth starts to flirt with Lenny, Teddy's (Ruth's husband's) brother, after their arrival at Teddy's parents' house in England.

LENNY

Give me the glass.

RUTH

No!

LENNY

I'll take it.

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RUTH:

If you take the glass...I'll take you.

LENNY

How about me taking the glass without you taking me?

RUTH

Why don't I just take you?

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ROSENCRANTZ AND GULDENSTERN ARE DEAD

(By Tom Stoppard)



This part is from act one. Here Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are flipping a coin and betting on it. They've been doing this for some time. Surprisingly, the result has been always "heads."

GUIL

(Flipping a coin) There is an art to the building up of suspense.

ROS

Heads.

GUIL

(Flipping another) Though it can be done by luck alone.

ROS

Heads.

GUIL

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If that's the word I'm after.

ROS

(Raises his head at Guil) Seventy-six-love.

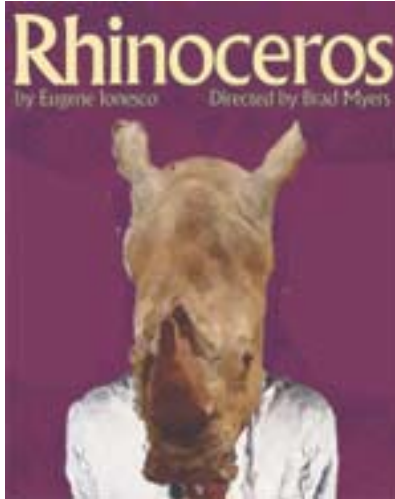
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RHINOCEROS

(By Eugene Ionesco)



This is excerpt is from act one just before Jean turns into a rhinoceros in front of his desperate friend, Bérenger, who ends up being the only one that doesn't become a rhinoceros.

JEAN

Oh! So you managed to get here at last.

BÉRENGER

Morning! Jean.

JEAN

Late as usual, of course. Our appointment was for eleven thirty. And it's practically mid-day.

BÉRENGER

I'm sorry! Have you been waiting long?

JEAN

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No! I've only just arrived myself, as you saw.

BÉRENGER

In that case, I don't feel so bad if you have only just ah...

JEAN

It's different with me. I don't like waiting. I've no time to waste, and as you're never on time, I come late on purpose, at a time when I presume you'll be here.

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ENDGAME

(By Samuel Beckett)



Everything here happens in one act. Clov wants to leave Hamm, but for some reason, he can't.

HAMM

Why do you stay with me?

CLOV

Why do you keep me?

HAMM

There's no one else.

CLOV

There's nowhere else.

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(Pause)

HAMM

You're leaving me all the same.

CLOV

I'm trying.

HAMM

You don't love me.

CLOV

No.

HAMM

You loved me once.

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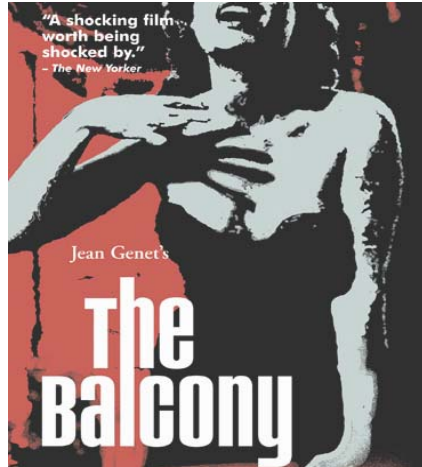
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THE BALCONY

(By Jean Genet)



This part is from act two. The Chief of Police informs Irma of what's going on with the revolution that started in the city.

THE CHIEF OF POLICE

No, no, stay, Carmen. I like having you around. As for the gigolo, let him find me.

IRMA

Put your hand here (on her breast). I'm all tense. I'm still wrought up. I knew you were on your way, which meant you were in danger. I waited for you all a-tremble ... while perfuming myself.

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THE CHIEF OF POLICE

All right, that'll do. Let's cut the comedy. The situation is getting more and more serious. It's not desperate, but it will be before long. The Royal Place is surrounded. The Queen's in hiding. The city it's a miracle I got through the city is being ravaged by fire and sword. Out there the rebellion is tragic and joyous, whereas in this house everything's dying a slow death. So, today's my day. By tonight I'll be in the grave or on a pedestal. So whether I love you or desire you is unimportant. How are things going at the moment?

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THE BALD SOPRANO

(By Eugene Ionesco)



This excerpt is from act one, where Mr. and Mrs. Smith are having a “ridiculous” conversation about something Mr. Smith read in the paper.

MR. SMITH

Tsk. It says here that Bobby Watson died.

MRS. SMITH

My God! The poor man! When did he die?

MR. SMITH

Why do you pretend to be astonished? You know very well that he's been dead these past two years. Surely you remember that we attended his funeral a year and a half ago.

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MRS. SMITH

Oh! Yes, of course, I do remember. I remembered right away, but I don't understand why you yourself were surprised to see it in the paper.

THE MAIDS

(By Jean Genet)



This part is from act one. Here Claire plays the lady, and her sister, Solange, plays Claire.

CLAIRE

Those gloves, those eternal gloves! I told you time and again to leave them in the kitchen. You probably hope to seduce the milkman with them. No, no don't lie. That won't get you anywhere. Hang them over the sink. When will you understand that this room is not to be sullied? Everything! Yes, everything that comes out of the kitchen is spit, so stop it. Make yourself quite at home. Preen

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like a peacock, and above all don't hurry; we have plenty of time. Go! Get my dress ready. Quick! Time presses.

SOLANGE

I beg Madame's pardon. I was preparing her tea.

CLAIRE

Lay out my things. The white spangled dress. The emeralds.

SOLANGE

Very well Madame; all Madame's jewels.

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THE UBU PLAYS

(By Alfred Jarry)

PA UBU

Pschitt!

MA UBU

Ooh! What a nasty word! Pa Ubu, you're a dirty old, old man.

PA UBU

Watch out! I don't bash yer nut in, ma Ubu.

MA UBU

It's not me you should want to do in, old Ubu. Oh no! There someone else for the high jump.

PA UBU

By my green candle. I'm not with you.

MA UBU

How come, old Ubu? You mean you're content with your lot?

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