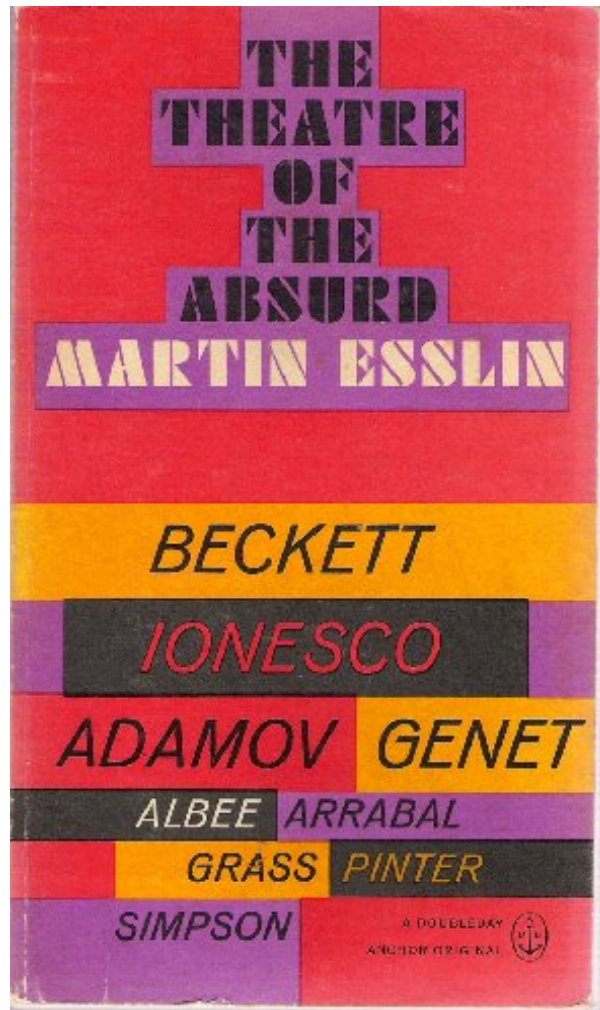
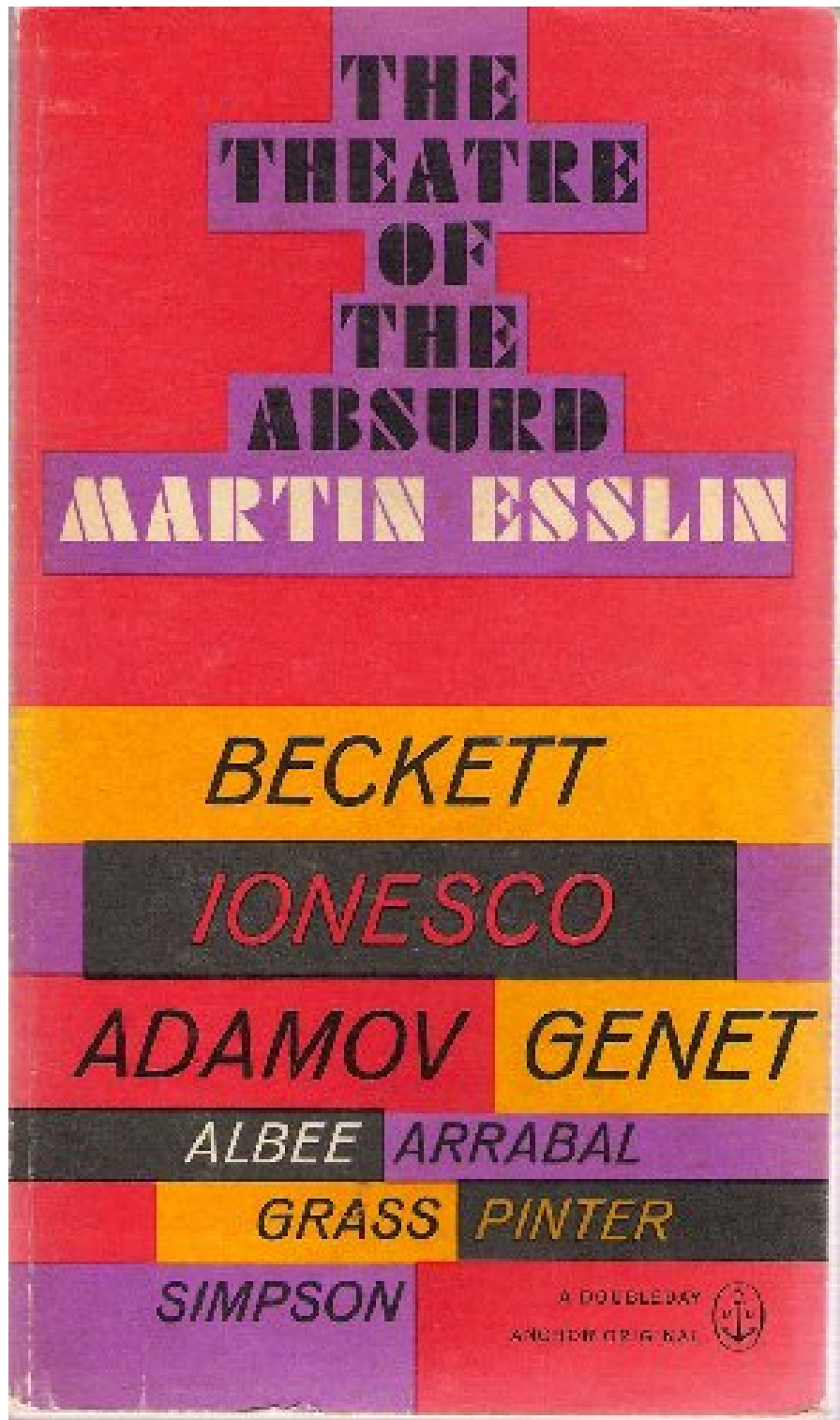


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Review

“Exciting and stimulating...a very useful reference work and a standard text book.” —Literary Review

From the Inside Flap

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

About the Author

Martin Esslin was born in Budapest and educated in Austria. He read Philosophy and English at Vienna University and graduated as a producer from the Reinhardt Seminar, the well-known dramatic academy. He left Austria in 1938 and in 1940 began working for the BBC as a producer, scriptwriter, and broadcaster. In 1963 he became Head of Radio Drama at the BBC, a position he held until his retirement in 1977. At his death in 2002 at the age of 83 he was Emeritus Professor of Drama at Stanford University.

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Hamm: We're not beginning ... to ... to ... mean something?

Clov: Mean something? You and I mean something?

(from 'Endgame' by Samuel Beckett)

Martin Esslin coined the phrase 'Theatre of the Absurd' in this ground-breaking book, and the term has become part of the language just as this book has become an indispensable part of any literature and drama library: the definitive study of the playwrights who have dramatised the fundamental absurdity of the human condition. In this readable and illuminating work - still a classic of theatre studies - Esslin shows how Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, Pinter and others have confronted a world in which there is no communication and where man flounders in a void, cut off from his roots and shorn of all certainties."A seminal work" (Independent)

"An exciting and stimulating book, a very useful reference work and a standard textbook" (Literary Review)

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None Finer

By Absurdist Ad Nauseam

If you have ever wished for one book to neatly package absurdist theatre, Mr. Esslin's book is the one. This book is readable, comprehensible, entertaining and engaging. In fact, it's rather difficult to put down. His introduction does wonders to dispel any myths as to what absurdist theatre is and isn't. He follows the introduction by individually highlighting those playwrights often associated with the absurd (Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco, Genet, and Pinter). Of interest is the fact that he does not overwhelm or bore the reader by providing an excess of information. On the contrary, each section is unbelievably tight. His section on Adamov is much appreciated, considering that finding anything on him is near impossible. He then continues with his "Parallels and Proselytes" in which he touches on "lesser-known" playwrights (Albee, Arrabal, and others). He follows this section with three more equally fascinating chapters. In short, Mr. Esslin packs a breadth of relevant information into 480 pages. "The Theatre of the Absurd" should find a welcome home on the bookshelves of actors, directors, dramaturgs, playwrights, or those with an interest in theatre. Buy it, you won't be disappointed.

20 of 21 people found the following review helpful.

A classic on the history of theatre and thought

By J. B. Marques

I came to read this book for a paper I decided to write on Samuel Beckett, for my Theory of History course. A friend who's an actress recommended it for me, and it was an amazing discovery. From an historian's point of view, this book is a rich, challenging and informative approach to one of the most important aspects of the ideology crisis from the beginning of the XXth. Century. As I came to know later, it's a classic on the theatre field as well.

Apart from Beckett and some minor authors, there are chapters on Adamov, Ionescu, Genet and Pinter, and a superb essay on the meaning of the concept of "absurd" of human existence. A must read for anyone who wishes to understand not only the art, but the ideas which shaped the latest century.

19 of 22 people found the following review helpful.

a must read for the theatre teacher.

By Daniel Stowell

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

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