

Theatre of the Absurd

Theatre of the Absurd, dramatic works of certain European and American dramatists of the 1950s and early '60s who agreed with the Existentialist philosopher Albert Camus's assessment, in his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" (1942), that the human situation is essentially absurd, devoid of purpose. The term is also loosely applied to those dramatists and the production of those works. Though no formal Absurdist movement existed as such, dramatists as diverse as Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, Harold Pinter, and a few others shared a pessimistic vision of humanity struggling vainly to find a purpose and to control its fate. Humankind in this view is left feeling hopeless, bewildered, and anxious.

The ideas that inform the plays also dictate their structure. Absurdist playwrights, therefore, did away with most of the logical structures of traditional theatre. There is little dramatic action as conventionally understood; however frantically the characters perform, their busyness serves to underscore the fact that nothing happens to change their existence. In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952), plot is eliminated, and a timeless, circular quality emerges as two lost creatures, usually played as tramps, spend their days waiting—but without any certainty of whom they are waiting. Language in an Absurdist play is often dislocated, full of clichés, puns, repetitions, and non sequiturs. The characters in Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* (1950) sit and talk, repeating the obvious until it sounds like nonsense, thus revealing the inadequacies of verbal communication. The ridiculous, purposeless behaviour and talk give the plays a sometimes dazzling comic surface, but there is an underlying serious message of metaphysical distress. This reflects the influence of comic tradition drawn from such sources as *commedia dell'arte*, vaudeville, and music hall combined with such theatre arts as mime and acrobatics. At the same time, the impact of ideas as expressed by the Surrealist, Existentialist,

and Expressionist schools and the writings of Franz Kafka is evident. or of whether he, or it, will ever come.

In philosophy, "**the Absurd**" refers to the conflict between the human tendency to seek inherent value and meaning in life, and the human inability to find any in a purposeless, meaningless or chaotic and irrational universe.^[1] The universe and the human mind do not each separately cause the Absurd, but rather, the Absurd arises by the contradictory nature of the two existing simultaneously.

As a philosophy, **absurdism** furthermore explores the fundamental nature of the Absurd and how individuals, once becoming conscious of the Absurd, should respond to it. The absurdist philosopher Albert Camus stated that individuals should embrace the absurd condition of human existence. He then promotes life rich in willful experience.