

Martin Esslin



INTRODUCTION TO THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

Edited by - Dr. Binny Dekka

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OF ABSURD**

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B.C.B.L



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Edited By

Dr. Binny Deka

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PREFACE

The *Theatre of the Absurd* written by Martin Esslin is regarded by some as the most influential book on twentieth century drama as it opened the way for succeeding generations to depict a world which was no longer what it previously was. The 'Introduction' functions as a statement of his purpose of writing the book and also sketches a brief outline of the study which follows.

This book, provided with a summary and notes hopes to help students in their study of the 'Introduction' from *The Theatre of the Absurd*.

Suggestions for improvement are welcome.

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LIFE AND WORKS

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Martin Julius Esslin, writer, academic and radio drama producer was born on the 8th of June 1918 in Budapest, Hungary. His parents were Jewish and he was named Julius Pereszlenyi at birth. He became an Austrian citizen after the Great War when the Austro-Hungarian Empire disintegrated. In 1920, when Esslin was only two years old, his family moved to Vienna where he received his early education in the Bundesgymnasium II. Martin's parents were 'bookish, cultured parents' and he had received a well rounded, excellent education in Vienna from which he benefited. Since no modern languages were offered there, he learnt French from an aunt and taught himself English, Italian and Spanish. He roamed the bookshops in the evenings and at night he accompanied his father to the theatre and the opera. In 1936, he joined the Vienna University and began to study Philosophy and English. He also began to study direction, acting and dramaturgy at The Reinhardt Seminar of Dramatic Art. But in 1938, the Nazis occupied Austria and when his career in theatre was about to take off, he fled Vienna to Brussels. He spent one year in Brussels before moving to England.

In England, Martin Esslin joined the British Broadcasting Corporation's European Service in 1940. He worked as a scriptwriter and producer of radio dramas; he also wrote several features on a variety of social, political and literary topics. Esslin's work was recognised and his rise to the topmost rung of the ladder was steady. He was promoted to the Assistant Head of BBC European Productions in 1955 and as Assistant Head of Drama(Sound) in 1961. He was appointed Head of BBC Radio Drama in 1963, when

Barbara Bray under whom he had worked as an assistant moved to Paris. His pet project during this time was his "national theatre of the air". From 1963 to 1977 the BBC produced numerous radio plays written in English as well as plays written in foreign languages that were translated by his team. Four hundred to five hundred plays were produced in a year by BBC up to the mid sixties. Esslin's knowledge of European drama was the chief reason behind such translations and many of them were taken up by theatre producers who used the versions created or commissioned by him. Several European intellectuals had taken refuge in London following the Nazi invasion whom Esslin knew. He provided them with work and other opportunities which became their chief means of survival. He also tried to fit himself into the British life and soon succeeded in acquiring a perfect understanding of the playwrights and society in which he was to spend the rest of his life.

Meanwhile, in 1947 Esslin married Renate Gerstenberg and eventually a daughter Monica, was born to them. Renate collaborated with him on several projects, while some others supposed to be written by her were allegedly published under his authorship to facilitate sales.

During his tenure as a radio drama producer his reputation grew as a writer, critic and literary journalist. He generated a flood of articles, essays and books; became advisor to Arts Council Panels, Experimental Theatres on their repertory, wrote about prominent individuals and helped writers obtain bursaries and performances. He worked silently and efficiently; an active man who possessed a great passion for his work. In 1959 he wrote the book *The Choice of Evils* about Bertolt Brecht and in 1962 he wrote his most influential book *The Theatre of the Absurd* and several others followed. *The Theatre of the Absurd* shot him to everlasting fame and changed his life. It became the term to categorise a large number of plays written during the 1950s and 1960s by writers whose works exhibited and shared certain characteristics and disregarded rules set down for writing dramas. The term 'absurd' came to be used for a large group of plays written during the Twentieth Century. It included the works

of Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Harold Pinter, John Arden and Ionesco among others. Esslin began to be invited to deliver lectures on his theory of drama within Britain and in the American Universities.

He became a visiting professor of Theatre at Florida State University from 1969 to 1976. But in 1977 a special chair was created for him by Stanford University. He left the BBC and began teaching at The University of Stanford, California as Professor of Drama until 1988 after which he became Professor Emeritus. During these years he carried on his translation and adaption projects with the German Theatre.

The Austrian Government conferred the title of Professor on him; he also received a large number of honours and distinctions from different organisations during his lifetime. In 1972 he was honoured with The Order of British Empire (OBE).

Martin Esslin, The intellectual man never retired but continued his works of writing, translating, reviewing and criticising even after he ended his tenure at the University of Stanford. He returned to Stanford University to deliver lectures which that always forceful, full of knowledge and distinctive. He passed away on the 22nd of February, 2002 at the age of 83. His wife passed away a year after his demise and they are survived by their daughter Monica.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1918 : Birth of Martin Esslin in Budapest, Hungary in a Jewish Hungarian family.
- 1920 : Moves to Vienna.
Joins Bundesgymnasium II.
- 1936 : Joins University of Vienna majoring in Philosophy and English. Studies to be a drama producer at the Reinhardt Seminar of Dramatic Arts.
- 1938 : Flees to Brussels.
- 1939 : Moves to London.
- 1940 : Hired by the BBC European Service.
- 1947 : Marries Renate Gerstenberg.
- 1955 : Appointed Assistant Head of BBC European Productions.
- 1959 : Writes *The Choice of Evils*.
- 1961 : Appointed Assistant Head of BBC Drama (Sound).
- 1962 : Writes *The Theatre of the Absurd*.
- 1965 : Writes *The Anatomy of Drama*.
- 1968 : Writes *The Genius of the German Theatre*.
- 1969-1976: Appointed visiting Professor of Theatre at Florida State University, USA.
- 1970 : Writes Pinter: *The Playwright, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter*.
- 1972 : Honoured with Order of British Empire.
- 1977-1988: Appointed Professor of Drama. University of Stanford, California. Writes books on *Antonin Artaud*.
- 1980 : Writes *The Anatomy of Mediations*.
- 1981 : Writes *The Age of Television*.
- 1988 : Writes *The Field of Drama*.
- 2002 : Death of Martin Esslin.

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

The term 'Theatre of the Absurd' was used by Hungarian born critic Martin Esslin to refer to a type of theatre which shared a common philosophy during the 1950s and 1960s. He had adopted the term from the French philosopher Albert Camus' essay 'The Myth of Sisyphus' (1942) where Camus had expressed the view that the human condition was senseless and absurd. Esslin used the term for the title of his book on the subject which was published in 1961 and reappeared in print in two revised editions. In it he showed that playwrights from different parts of the world had written plays exhibiting the same observation that the world was no longer a fit place for human beings as life had lost all meaning; there was no place for eternal truths, values, unity or order. In short man had lost the capacity to understand the world for which he remained confused, anxious and isolated.

These playwrights whom Esslin mentions as the constituents of the *Theatre of the Absurd* do not belong to any conscious school or movement. On the contrary they are individuals with distinctive concerns. Each writer regards himself as a loner, an outsider and in some way cut off from the world. Yet their works have been found to have a great deal in common. In fact they share the pre-occupations, anxieties, emotions and thinking of large portion of their contemporaries as a result of which their works are similar. Thus, Esslin finds Samuel Beckett an Irish man, Arthur Adamov a Russian, Eugene Ionesco a Rumanian-French, and Jean Genet a French writer's, plays to be the best examples of the Theatre of The Absurd. Each of them were deeply affected by the World Wars and their experimental theatre was a result of the shattered world and values which they had witnessed. Their plays, reflecting their condition, did not follow any established convention.

The Theatre of the Absurd would not accept the conventions of theatre which was unable to reflect the reality of a world which had suddenly lost its 'central explanation and meaning'. It searched for a form in which to express this tragic sense of loss at 'the disappearance of ultimate certainties'. During this period people led mechanical lives, inhabiting a narrow and petty society, complacent in the unawareness of the ultimate reality of his condition. The Theatre of the Absurd endeavoured to break through this barrier of insensitivity and to bring humanity to human beings. Esslin believes that, 'Concerned as it is with the ultimate realities of the human condition, the relatively few fundamental problems of life and death, isolation and communication, the Theatre of the Absurd however grotesque, frivolous, and irreverent it may appear represents a return to the original, religious function of the theatre-the confrontation of man with the spheres of myth and religious reality...(it) is intent on making its audience aware of man's precarious and mysterious position in the universe.'

While attempting to do so, *The Theatre of the Absurd's* subject matter is the poet's individual vision of the world; his innermost and personal intuition of the human condition. The form it adopts to present this vision is different from the realistic theatre of the time in keeping with its subject matter. It is not concerned with problems of conduct and morals. It does not convey information or present problems or destinies of characters or narrate events. It has no theory or ideological debate to explore, to arrive at a solution. It is not concerned with anything which lies outside the inner world of the author; it presents only one individual's basic situation. As such the language it uses is based on concrete images rather than argument and rambling speech.

The action of this theatre is not intended to tell a story but to communicate a pattern of poetic images. In disregarding the conventional elements of theatre it places a great emphasis on the poetic element; it aims at concentration and depth in lyrical and poetic pattern. Since expression of an intuition in depth, is apprehended in a moment, it becomes physically impossible to

present such a complex image within a moment as experienced in reality. Out of necessity it has to be presented over a period of time. *The Theatre of the Absurd* uses this method of presenting poetic images with its ambiguity and its simultaneous evocation of several elements associated to the senses as a means of communicating the reality of life and the world as perceived through the author's inner intimate and personal intuition, even though it might be an imperfect one.

The Theatre of the Absurd is anti-literary; language is devaluated and minimised to a very subordinate role. Recognising the trend of the time of using language purely on the subjective level without objective reality it disregards the convention of using language as the most important means of communication. Language is often mere babblings and is incomprehensible. By doing so the theatre of the Absurd opened up a new dimension of the stage. It was also an honest attempt to restore the proper function of communication for which language should exist rather than for that which it was being used for the purposes of concealment.

It adopted means to shock the audience into their senses by presenting a 'grotesquely heightened and distorted picture of a world that has gone mad'. Esslin emphasizes that this was largely instinctive and unintended. The Theatre of the Absurd confronts its audience with characters whose motives and actions are incomprehensible. Since it is impossible to identify with such characters, they appear comic; the audience laughs at the grotesque characters predicament. The characters are seen from outside without an understanding of their motives, preventing identification with them. According to Esslin, 'such theatre is a comic theatre in spite of the fact that its subject-matter is sombre, violent, and bitter.' Hence instead of tragedy or comedy the Theatre of the Absurd combines laughter with horror. Harold Bloom opines, 'For Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd is a darkly comic form that places great demands upon audiences, asking them to juxtapose incongruencies and to make sense out of often horrific laughter.'

Though the Theatre of the Absurd may appear chaotic and nonsensical it conceals a deeper aim. As Esslin states, '(it) speaks

TEXT

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEATRE
OF ABSURD

ON 19 November 1957, a group of worried actors were preparing to face their audience. The actors were members of the company of the San Francisco Actors' Workshop. The audience consisted of fourteen hundred convicts at the San Quentin penitentiary. No live play had been performed at San Quentin since Sarah Bernhardt appeared there in 1913. Now, forty-four years later, the play that had been chosen, largely because no woman appeared in it, was Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

No wonder the actors and Herbert Blau, the director, were apprehensive. How were they to face one of the toughest audiences in the world with a highly obscure, intellectual play that had produced near riots among a good many highly sophisticated audiences in Western Europe? Herbert Blau decided to prepare the San Quentin audience for what was to come. He stepped on to the stage and addressed the packed, darkened North Dining Hall - a sea of flickering matches that the convicts tossed over their shoulders after lighting their cigarettes. Blau compared the play to a piece of jazz music 'to which one must listen for whatever one may find in it'. In the same way, he hoped, there would be some meaning, some personal significance for each member of the audience in *Waiting for Godot*.

The curtain parted. The play began. And what had bewildered the sophisticated audiences of Paris, London, and New York was immediately grasped by an audience of convicts. As the writer of 'Memos of a first-nighter' put it in the columns of the prison paper, the *San Quentin News*:

The trio of muscle-men, biceps overflowing ... parked all 642, lbs on the aisle and waited for the girls and funny stuff. When this didn't appear they audibly fumed and audibly decided to wait until the house lights dimmed before escaping. They made *one* error. *They* listened and looked two minutes too long - and stayed. Left at the end. All shook ...

Or as the writer of the lead story of the same paper reported, under the headline, 'San Francisco Group Leaves S.Q. Audience Waiting for Godot':

From the moment Robin Wagner's thoughtful and limbo-like set was dressed with light, until *the* last futile and expectant handclasp was hesitantly activated between *the* two searching vagrants, the San Francisco company had its audience of captives in its collective hand. ... Those that had felt a less controversial vehicle should be attempted as a first play here had their fears allayed a short five minutes after the Samuel Beckett piece began to unfold.

A reporter from the San Francisco *Chronicle* who was present noted that the convicts did not find it difficult to understand the play. One prisoner told him, 'Godot is society.' Said another: 'He's the outside.'³ A teacher at the prison was quoted as saying, 'They know what is meant by waiting ... and they knew if Godot finally came, he would only be a disappointment.'⁴ The leading article of the prison paper showed how clearly the writers had understood the meaning of the play:

It was an expression, symbolic in order to avoid all personal error, by an author who expected each member of his audience to draw his own conclusions, make his own errors. It asked nothing in point, it forced no dramatized moral on the viewer, it held out no specific hope. ... We're still waiting for Godot, and shall continue to wait. When the scenery gets too drab and the action too slow, we'll call each other names and swear to part forever - but then, there's no place to go!

It is said that Godot himself, as well as turns of phrase and characters from the play, has since become a permanent part of the private language, the institutional mythology of San Quentin.

Why did a play of the supposedly esoteric avant-garde make so immediate and so deep an impact on an audience of convicts? Because it confronted them with a situation in some ways analogous to their own? Perhaps. Or perhaps because they were unsophisticated enough to come to the theatre without any preconceived notions and ready-made expectations, so that they avoided the mistake that trapped so many established critics who condemned the play for its lack of plot, development, characterization, suspense, or plain common sense. Certainly the prisoners of San Quentin could not be suspected of the sin of intellectual snobbery, for which a sizeable proportion of the audiences of *Waiting for Godot* have often been reproached; of pretending to like a play they did not even begin to understand, just to appear in the know.

The reception of *Waiting for Godot* at San Quentin, and the wide acclaim given to plays by Ionesco, Adamov, Pinter, and others, testify that these plays, which are so often superciliously dismissed as nonsense or mystification, *have* something to say and *can* be understood. Most of the incomprehension with which plays of this type are still being received by critics and theatrical reviewers, most of the bewilderment they have caused and to which they still give rise, come from the fact that they are part of a new and still developing stage convention that has not yet been generally understood and has hardly ever been defined. Inevitably, plays written in this new convention will, when judged by the standards and criteria of another, be regarded as impertinent and outrageous impostures. If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of; if a good play is judged by subtlety of characterization and motivation, these are often without recognizable characters and present the audience with almost mechanical puppets; if a good play has to have a fully explained theme, which is neatly exposed and finally solved, these often have neither a beginning nor an end; if a good play is to hold the mirror up to nature and portray the manners and mannerisms of the age in finely observed sketches, these seem often to be reflections of dreams and nightmares; if a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed

dialogue, these often consist of incoherent babblings.

But the plays we are concerned with here pursue ends quite different from those of the conventional play and therefore use quite different methods. They can be judged only by the standards of the Theatre of the Absurd, *which* it is the purpose of this book to define and clarify.

It must be stressed, however, that the dramatists whose work is here discussed do not form part of any self-proclaimed or self-conscious school or movement. On the contrary, each of the writers in question is an individual who regards himself as a lone outsider, cut off and isolated in his private world. Each has his own personal approach to both subject-matter and form; his own roots, sources, and background. If they also, very clearly and in spite of themselves, have a good deal in common, it is because their work most sensitively mirrors and reflects the preoccupations and anxieties, the emotions and thinking of many of their contemporaries in the Western world. This is not to say that their works are representative of mass attitudes. It is an oversimplification to assume that any age presents a homogeneous pattern. Ours being, more than most others, an age of transition, it displays a bewilderingly stratified picture: medieval beliefs still held and overlaid by eighteenth century rationalism and mid-nineteenth-century Marxism, rocked by sudden volcanic eruptions of prehistoric fanaticisms and primitive tribal cults. Each of these components of the cultural pattern of the age finds its own artistic expression. The Theatre of the Absurd, however, can be seen as the reflection of what seems to be the attitude most genuinely representative of our own time.

The hallmark of this attitude is its sense that the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away, that they have been tested and found wanting, that they have been discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions. The decline of religious faith was masked until the end of the Second World War by the substitute religions of faith in progress, nationalism, and various totalitarian fallacies. All this was shattered by the war. By 1942, Albert Camus was calmly putting the question why, since

life had lost all meaning, man should not seek escape in suicide. In one of the great, seminal heart-searchings of our time, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus tried to diagnose the human situation in a world of shattered beliefs:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a *familiar* world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. *His* is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity.

'Absurd' originally means 'out of harmony', in a musical context. Hence its dictionary definition: 'out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical'. In common usage, 'absurd' may simply mean 'ridiculous', but this is not the sense in which Camus uses the word, and in which it is used when we speak of the Theatre of the Absurd. In an essay on Kafka, Ionesco defined his understanding of the term as follows: 'Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose.... Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless.

This sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition is, broadly speaking, the theme of the plays of Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco, Genet, and the other writers discussed in this book.. But it is not merely the subject-matter that defines what is here called the Theatre of the Absurd. A similar sense of the senselessness of life, of the inevitable de valuation of ideals, purity, and purpose, is also the theme of much of the work of dramatists like Giraudoux, Anouilh, Salacrou, Sartre, and Camus himself. Yet these writers differ from the dramatists of the Absurd in an important respect: they present their sense of the irrationality of the human condition in the form of highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning, while the Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment

of rational devices and discursive thought. While Sartre or Camus express the new content in the old convention, the Theatre of the Absurd goes a step further in trying to achieve a unity between its basic assumptions and the form in which these are expressed. In some senses, the theatre of Sartre and Camus is less adequate as an expression of the philosophy of Sartre and Camus - in artistic, as distinct from philosophic, terms - than the Theatre of the Absurd.

If Camus argued that in our disillusioned age the world has ceased to make sense, he did so in the elegantly rationalistic and discursive style of an eighteenth-century moralist, in wellconstructed and polished plays. If Sartre argues that existence comes before essence and that human personality can be reduced to pure potentiality and the freedom to choose itself anew at any moment, he presents his ideas in plays based on brilliantly drawn characters who remain wholly consistent and thus reflect the old convention that each human being has a core of immutable, unchanging essence - in fact, an immortal soul. And the beautiful phrasing and argumentative brilliance of both Sartre and Camus in their relentless probing still, by implication, proclaim a tacit conviction that logical discourse can offer valid solutions, that the analysis of language will lead to the uncovering of basic concepts - Platonic ideas.

This is an inner contradiction that the dramatists of the Absurd are trying, by instinct and intuition rather than by conscious effort, to overcome and resolve. The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing *about* the absurdity of the human condition; it merely *presents* it in being - that is, in terms of concrete stage images. This is the difference between the approach of the philosopher and that of the poet; the difference, to take an example from another sphere, between the *idea* of God in the works of Thomas Aquinas or Spinoza and the *intuition* of God in those of St John of the Cross or Meister Eckhart - the difference between theory and experience.

It is this striving for an integration between the subjectmatter and the form in which it is expressed that separates the Theatre of the Absurd from the Existentialist theatre.

It must also be distinguished from another important, and

parallel, trend in the contemporary French theatre, which is equally preoccupied with the absurdity and uncertainty of the human condition: the 'poetic avant-garde' theatre of dramatists like Michel de Ghelderode, Jacques Audiberti, Georges Neveux, and, in the younger generation, Georges Schehade, Henri Pichette, and Jean Vauthier, to name only some of its most important exponents. This is an even more difficult dividing line to draw, for the two approaches overlap a good deal. The 'poetic avant-garde' relies on fantasy and dream reality as much as the Theatre of the Absurd does; it also disregards such traditional axioms 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 far less violent and grotesque. Even more important is its different attitude toward language: the 'poetic avantgarde' relies to a far greater extent on consciously 'poetic' speech; it aspires to plays that are in effect poems, images composed of a rich web of verbal associations.

The Theatre of the Absurd, on the other hand, tends toward a radical devaluation of language, toward a poetry that is to emerge from the concrete and objectified images of the stage itself. The element of language still plays an important part in this conception, but what *happens* on the stage transcends, and often contradicts, the words spoken by the characters. In Ionesco's *The Chairs*, for example, the poetic content of a powerfully poetic play does not lie in the banal words that are uttered but in the fact that they are spoken to an ever-growing number of empty chairs.

The Theatre of the Absurd is thus part of the 'anti-literary' movement of our time, which has found its expression in abstract painting, with its rejection of 'literary' elements in pictures; or in the 'new novel' in France, with its reliance on the description of objects and its rejection of empathy and anthropomorphism. It is no coincidence that, like all these movements and so many of the efforts to create new forms of expression in all the arts, the Theatre of the Absurd should be centred in Paris.

This does not mean that the Theatre of the Absurd is

essentially French. It is broadly based on ancient strands of the Western tradition and has its exponents in Britain, Spain, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Eastern Europe and the United States as well as in France. Moreover, its leading practitioners who live in Paris and write in French are not themselves Frenchmen.

As a powerhouse of the modern movement, Paris is an international rather than a merely French centre: it acts as a magnet attracting artists of all nationalities who are in search of freedom to work and to live nonconformist lives unhampered by the need to look over their shoulder to see whether their neighbours are shocked. That is the secret of Paris as the capital of the world's individualists: here, in a world of cafes and small hotels, it is possible to live easily and unmolested.

That is why a cosmopolitan of uncertain origin like Apollinaire; Spaniards like Picasso or Juan Gris; Russians like Kandinsky and Chagall; Rumanians like Tzara and Brancusi; Americans like Gertrude Stein, Hemingway, and E. E. Cummings; an Irishman like Joyce; and many others from the four corners of the world could come together in Paris and shape the modern movement in the arts and literature. The Theatre of the Absurd springs from the same tradition and is nourished from the same roots. An Irishman, Samuel Beckett; a Rumanian, Eugene Ionesco; a Russian of Armenian origin, Arthur Adamov, not only found in Paris the atmosphere that allowed them to experiment in freedom, they also found there the opportunities to get their work produced.

The standards of staging and production in the smaller theatres of Paris are often criticized as slapdash and perfunctory. That may indeed sometimes be the case; yet the fact remains that there is no other place in the world where so many first-rate men of the theatre can be found who are adventurous and intelligent enough to champion the experimental work of new playwrights and to help them acquire a mastery of stage technique - from Lugne-Poe, Copeau, and Dullin to Jean-Louis Barrault, Jean Vilar, Roger Blin, Nicolas Bataille, Jacques Mauclair, Sylvain Dhommé, Jean-Marie Serreau, and a host of others whose names are indissolubly linked with the rise

of much that is best in the contemporary theatre.

Equally important, Paris also has a highly intelligent theatre going public, which is receptive, thoughtful, and as able as it is eager to absorb new ideas. This does not mean that the first productions of some of the more startling manifestations of the Theatre of the Absurd did not provoke hostile demonstrations or, at first, play to empty houses. What matters is that these scandals were the expression of passionate concern and interest, and that even the en-tiest houses contained enthusiasts articulate enough to proclaim loudly and effectively the merits of the original experiments they had witnessed. Yet in spite of these favourable circumstances, inherent in the fertile cultural climate of Paris, the success of the Theatre of the Absurd, achieved within a short span of time, remains one of the most astonishing aspects of this astonishing phenomenon. That plays so strange and puzzling, so clearly devoid of the traditional attractions of the well-made drama, should within less than a decade have reached the stages of the world from Finland to Japan, from Norway to the Argentine, and that they should have stimulated a large body of work in a similar convention, are in themselves powerful and entirely empirical tests of the importance of the Theatre of the Absurd.

The study of this phenomenon as literature, as stage technique, and as a manifestation of the thinking of its age must proceed from the examination of the works themselves. Only then can they be seen as part of an old tradition that may at times have been submerged but that can be traced back to antiquity. Only after the movement of today has been placed within its historical context can an attempt be made to assess its significance and to establish its importance and the part it has to play within the pattern of contemporary thought.

A public conditioned to an accepted convention tends to receive the impact of artistic experiences through a filter of critical standards, of predetermined expectations and terms of reference, which is the natural result of the schooling of its taste and faculty of perception. This framework of values, admirably efficient in itself,

produces only bewildering results when it is faced with a completely new and revolutionary convention - a tug of war ensues between impressions that have undoubtedly been received and critical preconceptions that clearly exclude the possibility that any such impressions could have been felt. Hence the storms of frustration and indignation always caused by works in a new convention.

It is the purpose of this book to provide a framework of reference that will show the works of the Theatre of the Absurd within their own convention so that their relevance and force can emerge as clearly to the reader as *Waiting for Godot* did to the convicts of San Quentin.

SUMMARY

The San Francisco Actors' Workshop was getting ready to perform Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* in the San Quentin penitentiary. It was the 19th of November 1957, and their audience consisted of fourteen hundred convicts. The last play enacted before them had been forty-four years ago when Sarah Bernhardt had appeared there in 1913. Now, the actors were extremely worried about the convicts' response to a play which had been chosen because it did not have a female character in the cast.

Herbert Blau, the director, decided to address the audience in an attempt to prepare them for a play which the world audience had acknowledged as a highly obscure and an intellectual play and which had produced near riots in Western Europe. When he appeared before them in the darkened North Dining Hall he was greeted by a hall of packed convicts, waiting for the curtains to lift. They had lighted their cigarettes and thrown the matchsticks over their shoulders which seemed like a sea of flickering matches to the nervous director. He compared the play to be performed to a piece of jazz music which would appeal in its unique way to each individual as he heard it. He told them that he hoped that *Waiting for Godot* would be meaningful with some personal significance for each one in the audience.

But contrary to their expectation the convicts were able to grasp what had bewildered the intellectually superior audiences of Paris, London and New York. The prison paper, *San Quentin News*, reported in the column, 'Memos of a first-nighter' in the following way:

The muscle-men of the prison waited for the girls and funny stuff to appear; when they did not they fumed and fretted visibly

and decided to leave the hall when the house lights dimmed. But when they waited and listened for those few extra moments they were compelled to sit and watch the performance until it ended.

A second report in the same newspaper read:

'San Francisco Group Leaves S.Q. Audience *Waiting for Godot*'

The San Francisco Company had captivated its audience from the moment Robin Wagner's set was illuminated to the last scene of the play when the two searching vagrants had exchanged handshakes. Critics who had suggested that Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* was an erroneous choice to be performed before convicts were proved wrong.

A reporter of the San Francisco 'Chronicle' reported that the convicts did not find it difficult to understand the play. Each one had interpreted the play in his own way; one told him, 'Godot is society', another told him, 'He's the outside', a teacher said, 'They know what is meant by waiting...and they also knew that if Godot finally came, he would be a disappointment'. The writers of the articles also had showed that they had understood the play:

The play was a symbolic expression by the author which directed the audience to make his own conclusions and to make his own errors. It did not seek to question or force any moral on its audience. It also did not offer any specific hope. All it wanted to show was that everyone is waiting for Godot and will continue to wait. At times when frustration sets in people will call each other names and swear to part forever but it is ironic that there is no place to go.

Such was the impact of this play on the San Quentin penitentiary that Godot himself and other characters as well as particular phrases from it became a permanent part of the private language and institutional mythology of the place.

The reason for their surprising but immediate connection with a play which has been recognised as an esoteric avant-garde one has been put down to the fact that they were unaware of the conventions of drama; they watched it with neither preconceived notions nor with expectations. Hence, unlike established critics, they

were not trapped by its lack of plot, development, characterization, suspense or plain common sense. The convicts did not feel the necessity to pretend that they had understood a play merely to appear intellectually sophisticated as a large chunk of the population has been accused of showing where this play was concerned.

The reception received by Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, Pinter and others prove that such plays which are dismissed as nonsense or mystification have something to say and can be understood. Most of the incomprehension regarding such plays have arisen because they are invariably judged by the standards and criteria of another convention to which the plays do not adhere. Critics and reviewers are bewildered by a new convention which is a still developing stage convention. It is not yet generally understood and has never been defined. As such when these plays are criticised through the understanding of a different convention they are regarded as impertinent and outrageous imposters. A good play of the earlier convention would demand a story, a plot, subtlety of characterization, motives, a fully explained theme with a beginning, a middle and an end; But these plays do not have any of them. Characters are mechanical puppets and no story or plot exists. Instead of holding up a mirror to nature and portraying the manners and mannerisms of the age in fine sketches these plays often seem to be the reflection of dreams and nightmares; instead of witty rejoinders and direct dialogues these plays often consist of incoherent babblings.

These plays aim at achieving something which no conventional play has ever tried before and it therefore necessitated different methods. They can be judged only by the standards of the Theatre of the Absurd, which this book aims to define and clarify.

The dramatists discussed in the book do not form part of any self-proclaimed or self-conscious school or movement. On the contrary each of these writers regard himself as a lone outsider, cut off from the world, and inhabits his private world in total isolation. Each has his individual approach to both subject-matter and form; roots, sources and background. Yet their works are similar because of the sensitive portrayals and reflections of the preoccupations

and anxieties, the emotions and thoughts of several contemporaries in the Western world.

But their works are not representatives of mass attitudes. It would be naive to believe that any age presents a homogenous pattern. Our age is an age of transition. It displays a wide range of influences from the medieval beliefs, the rationalism of the eighteenth century, the Marxism of the mid-nineteenth century to the sudden volcanic eruptions of pre-historic fanaticisms and primitive tribal cults. The components of the cultural pattern of a particular age finds its artistic expression in our age. The Theatre of the Absurd reflects what is considered to be the attitude most genuinely representative of our time.

The chief characteristic of this attitude is its understanding of the non-existence of basic assumptions which former ages had believed to be infallible. Former certitudes and unshakeable beliefs had been tested and found lacking, they were found to be cheap and childish illusions. Religious faith was already on the decline and till the Second World War it was substituted by faith in progress, nationalism and several other totalitarian fallacies. But the war destroyed this faith. By 1942 Albert Camus was suggesting suicide as the best way to escape from the meaninglessness of life. In 'The Myth of Sisyphus', Camus tried to diagnose the human situation in a world of shattered beliefs:

A world which can be explained by reasoning, however faulty was familiar. But when the universe which man inhabits is suddenly deprived of illusions and light he feels like a stranger. He lives in exile; the hope of a promised land is as painful as the deprivation of past memories of his homeland. This divorce of man and his life, the actor and his setting, encapsulates the feeling of absurdity.

'Absurd' originally means 'out of harmony' in the context of music. Its dictionary meaning is 'out of harmony with reason and propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical'. In common usage it might mean 'ridiculous'. But Camus uses the word in the sense in which it is used when speaking of the Theatre of the Absurd. While writing an essay on Kafka, Ionesco defined his understanding

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of the term as anything which had no purpose. When man is cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, all his actions become senseless, absurd and useless. Man is lost without his roots.

Generally the absurdity of the human condition and his sense of metaphysical anguish constitutes the theme of the plays of Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco, Genet and the other writers discussed in this book. Dramatists like Giraudoux, Anouilh, Salacré, Sartre and Camus too wrote on such themes of the senselessness of life. But there was one marked difference between them and the dramatists of the Absurd. The Theatre of the Absurd openly abandoned rational devices and discursive thought while the latter writers expressed their sense of the irrationality of the human condition through highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning. Sartre and Camus utilised the old conventions to express new content while the Theatre of the Absurd sought a new way of expressing their content in which there was unity between form and matter. In some ways Sartre and Camus's artistic method of expression seemed inadequate to carry their philosophy when compared to the Theatre of the Absurd.

Camus' plays were well-constructed, polished plays. Even while they argued that in the present disillusioned age the world had lost all meaning, he adopted the elegantly rationalistic and discursive style of the eighteenth century moralist. Sartre's plays argue that human existence comes before essence and that human personality can be reduced to pure potentiality and the freedom to choose itself anew at any moment. Yet, they reflect his faith in the old convention that man has an immortal soul, which is essentially immutable and unchanging. Both Camus and Sartre's language, brilliant arguments and relentless probing prove their tacit conviction in Platonic ideas. They believed that solutions could be found through logical discourse and that the analysis of language could unearth basic concepts.

Recognising this inner contradiction of form and matter, the dramatists of The Theatre of The Absurd have tried to resolve and overcome it by instinct and intuition rather than conscious effort. Therefore, the Theatre of the Absurd presents the absurdity of the

human condition in concrete stage images and does not argue about it. This is the difference of approach between the approach of the philosopher and that of the poet; between Thomas Aquinas and Spinoza's idea of God and the intuition of God in those of St. John of the Cross or Meister Eckhart: the difference between theory and experience.

It is this effort to integrate subject-matter with the form in which it is expressed that distinguishes the Theatre of the Absurd from the Existentialist theatre.

The works of the French 'poetic avant-garde' theatre of dramatists like Michel de Ghelderode, Jacques Audiberti, Georges Neveux and in the younger generation, Georges Schehadé, Henri Pichette and Jean Vauthier among others exhibit similar preoccupation with the absurdity and uncertainty of the human condition. But it is difficult to draw a dividing line between them and the Theatre of the Absurd because their approaches overlap a great deal. The 'poetic avant-garde' like the Theatre of the Absurd relies on fantasy and dreams, disregards conventional rules of theatre like the basic unity and consistency of each character or the necessity of a plot. Its difference lies in its mood which is far more lyrical and less violent and grotesque than the Theatre of the Absurd. Its attitude towards language also is markedly different as it relies consciously on 'poetic' speech. It endeavours to generate such plays which can create the effect of poems, with images composed of a rich web of verbal associations.

But in The theatre of the Absurd the value of language is disregarded. The spoken word acquires significance because of what happens not on the stage but beyond it; quite often contradicting the words spoken on the stage. It strives toward a poetry that emerges from the concrete and objectified image of the stage. For example, in Ionesco's *The Chairs* the poetic content of a powerfully poetic play does not lie in the words which are spoken but in the fact that they are spoken to an increasing number of empty chairs.

Hence, it may be concluded that The Theatre of the Absurd is part of the anti-literary movement of the present age. Its parallel

expression can be found in the abstract paintings which rejects literary elements in pictures; or in the 'new novel' of France with its reliance on the description of objects and rejection of empathy and ascribing human qualities like reason and the like on animals or plants. Like all these efforts in different forms of art to create new forms of expression the Theatre of the Absurd also was centred in Paris.

The Theatre of the Absurd however is not French. It is broadly based on the ancient strands of the Western tradition. Its practitioners are in Britain, Spain, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Eastern Europe and the United States as well as France. Those who live in France and write in French are themselves not Frenchmen.

Paris is an international rather than a merely French centre. It has evolved as the centre of the modern movement because it allows people to live in an environment of unrestricted freedom. It attracts individuals in search of freedom from across the globe to work and live nonconformist lives without the need to follow conventions of any kind.

That is the reason behind the power of Paris. A cosmopolitan like Appollinaire, Spaniards like Picasso or Juan Gris, Russians like Kandisky and Chagall, Rumanians like Tzara and Brancusi, Americans like Gertrude Stein, Hemingway and E.E. Cummings, an Irishman like Joyce and many others from four corners of the world had converged in Paris and had shaped the modern movement in Arts and Literature. The Theatre of the Absurd's genesis lies in this same tradition and roots. In Paris, an Irishman Samuel Beckett, a Rumanian Eugene Ionesco, A Russian of Armenian origin Arthur Adamov experimented in freedom and also found the opportunities to get their works produced.

Though the staging and the production of the smaller theatres in Paris are criticised for being slapdash and perfunctory, yet this is the only place in the world where so many first-rate men of the theatre can be found who are adventurous and intelligent enough to support and produce experimental works of new playwrights and to assist them in acquiring mastery over stage technique. Many of the names connected to contemporary theatre

are indebted to such men found only in Paris.

The highly intelligent theatre going public of Paris :receptive, thoughtful and eager to absorb new ideas are equally responsible for the unique capacity of Paris to nurture freedom of thought. This does not mean that the Theatre of the Absurd had not provoked hostility or had not opened to empty to houses. But what was important was that it had produced passionate reactions and even the emptiest of theatres had voices which proclaimed loudly and effectively the merits of the original experiments they had witnessed.

It is important to note that the Theatre of the Absurd was able to gain success in Paris in an astonishingly short span of time. However, it is more important to note that in spite of the non-existence of traditional attractions of the well-made drama, the Theatre of the Absurd reached the stages of the world from Finland to Japan and from Norway to Argentina within the short span of a decade. The very fact that it stimulated a large body of work in a similar convention is ample proof to establish the importance of the Theatre of the Absurd.

The endeavour to assess the significance of this movement of our times, to establish its importance and the part it has played within the pattern of contemporary thought can be completed only when it is placed in its rightful historical context. It is important to show that this movement is indeed a part of an old tradition that may have been submerged but which can be traced back to antiquity. All this can be achieved by examining the works themselves; studying it as a phenomenon in literature, its stage techniques and as a manifestation of the thinking of the present age.

A public is conditioned by accepted conventions which is the natural result of the schooling of its taste and faculty of perception. Hence, a new convention or the impact of artistic experiences reaches the public through a filter of critical standards, predetermined expectations and pre-established terms of reference. When it is faced with a completely new and revolutionary convention there begins a tug of war between the impressions that have been received and critical preconceptions which tries to exclude the

impressions that could have been felt. New conventions therefore, invariably produce storms of frustration and indignation.

It is the purpose of this book (The Theatre of the Absurd) to provide a framework of reference to show the relevance and force of the Theatre of the Absurd and of their convention. The reader will be able to understand the Theatre of the Absurd as clearly as the convicts of San Quentin understood the play *Waiting for Godot*.

WORD MEANINGS

San Francisco Actors' Workshop: 1952-1956. Herbert Blau and Jules Irving founded this workshop. They were professors from the San Francisco State College. It became the city's major theatre and came to be known for its presentation of classics but was best known for its interpretation of avant-garde and politically oriented plays. Some of their famous productions were *Mother Courage*, *The Balcony*, *The Birthday Party* and *Waiting for Godot*.

San Quentin penitentiary: Located in California USA, it was established in 1852. It is also known as the San Quentin State Prison. It is the oldest prison of the state and is a California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation state prison for men. The largest prison in USA and the only one which executes male inmates in California.

Sarah Bernhardt: (1844-1923) Sarah was a French stage and early film actress. She earned a reputation as a serious dramatic actress and was named 'The Divine Sarah'. She performed at several places around the world. One of her most famous performances was in the title role of Voltaire's *Zaire*.

Samuel Beckett: (1906-1989) Samuel Barclay Beckett was an Irish Avant-garde playwright, theatre director and poet; one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century. He is considered one of the last modernists, one of the first post-modernists and one of the most important writers by Martin Esslin's Theatre of the Absurd. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1969. He wrote in French and English.

Waiting for Godot: Name of a play written by Samuel Beckett which premiered in 1953. It was written in French, *En attendant*

Godot and two years later was translated to English. He added the sub-titles 'a tragic-comedy in two acts'. This play achieved the apparently impossible task of writing a play in which nothing happens and yet succeeds in keeping the audience in their seats. The two chief characters are Vladimir and Estragon who wait for someone called Godot to arrive and keeps on waiting through the two acts.

Herbert Blau: Born in 1926 Herbert Blau is a director and theoretician of performance. Co-founder of the San Francisco Actor's Workshop and co-director of the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Centre of New York, Blau produced some of the finest avant-garde dramas of Beckett, Genet and Pinter in America including the performance of *Waiting for Godot* in San Quentin penitentiary. At present he is Professor in Humanities in the University of Washington.

Jazz music: A form of music which originated in the African American communities in Southern USA in the early 20th century. It combined African and American music traditions and during the 19th and 20th centuries incorporated American popular music. Institutional mythology: stories of the institution which have acquired the status of folklore within the prison.

Esoteric: Intended or understood by a particular group only

Avant-garde: The term literally means 'advance guard' or 'vanguard' and has been taken from military usage. It is now applied to any group particularly of artists which considers itself innovative and experimental. Movements like Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, Cubism are considered avant-garde.

Analogous: comparable in certain respects

Ionesco: (1909-1994) Eugene Ionesco Rumanian and French playwright and dramatist is one of the famous playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd. His plays were translated to English. Famous among them are *The Chairs*, *The Lesson*, *Jack or The Submission*, *A Stroll in the Air* and so on.

Adamov: (1908-1970) Arthur Adamov was an Armenian born in Russia. When he moved to France he was influenced by the surrealists and Bertolt Brecht. His early works had a dream-like quality and his later work showed political elements. He died of an accidental overdose of drugs. Famous works include *The Parody* and *Le Professor Taranne*.

Pinter: (1930-2008) Harold Pinter was an English playwright, screenwriter, actor and director, he was also a political activist. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2005 and the French Legion of Honour in 2007. Famous for his plays *The Birthday Party*, *The Homecoming*, and *Betrayal*. He acted in radio, stage, television and film productions of his own plays as well as of others.

Superciliously: arrogantly superior, haughty

Mystification: The fact or condition of confusion or mental puzzlement.

Stratified picture: A picture showing the different influences of different ages in stratified layers

Eighteenth century rationalism: An attitude seen in literature during the eighteenth century which adopted a questioning quality, a revolutionary aspect and set aside existing conventions to make way for rationalizing.

Mid-nineteenth century Marxism: Refers to the influence of the political economic theories of Karl Marx and Engels which began to gain acceptance during the mid-nineteenth century. They called for a classless society where all means of production are owned by all. They were against capitalism and believed that it would be overtaken by communism.

Prehistoric fanaticisms and primitive tribal cults: refers to the return of some writers to the prehistoric fanaticisms and tribal cults in their search to make theatre most meaningful. Notably the beliefs of Antonin Artaud.

Totalitarian fallacies: the fallacies committed by political rulers

like Hitler who exercised absolute and centralized control over all aspects of life.

Giradoux, Anouilh, Salacrou, Sartre and Camus: French writers whose works share a sense of the senselessness of life. They were deeply affected by the World Wars.

Genet: (1910-1986) Jean Genet was a French novelist, playwright, poet, essayist and political activist. His works were often controversial. He took to writing only toward the later half of his life. His famous works include plays *The Balcony*, *The Blacks*, *The Maids* and novels *Querelle of Brest*, *The Thief's Journal*, *Our Lady of Flowers*.

Sartre: (1905-1980) Jean Paul Charles Aymard Sartre was a French philosopher, playwright, novelist, screenwriter, literary critic, biographer and a political activist. He was one of the foremost philosophers of Existentialism and was a prominent figure in 20th century French philosophy. He has been a strong influence not only on Western Philosophy but has influenced Eastern thinkers as well. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1964 but he refused to accept it because he felt that it would restrict his freedom.

Camus: (1913-1960) Albert Camus was a French-Algerian author, journalist and philosopher of the twentieth century. He denied that he was a proponent of Existentialism though his name is often linked with it. His views gave rise to what has been termed as Absurdism. He was against Nihilism. In 1957 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature; the first African born author to win it.

The Myth of Sisyphus: Name of philosophical essay by Albert Camus which was written originally in French and was published in 1942. It was later translated to English in 1955 by Justin O'Brien. It contained his philosophy of the absurd which sees man's life as a futile search for meaning, unity and clarity in a world without God, eternal values and truth. Sisyphus is a Greek mythological figure who is assigned the

meaningless task of repeating his action of rolling a boulder to the top of a mountain only to see it rolling down again.

Platonic ideas: Plato, (428/427-348/347BC) Greek philosopher whose philosophy has influenced Western philosophy profoundly. Platonic ideas stand for ideal solutions in this context.

Thomas Aquinas or Spinoza: Aquinas (1225-1244) was an Italian Dominican priest, a Theologist and Philosopher who influenced Western thought. Much of Western modern philosophy is based either in agreement or as a reaction against his views. The Catholic Church regards him as one of their greatest theologian and philosophers.

Spinoza : (1632-1677) was a Dutch Jewish philosopher who has been credited with the laying of the groundwork of the Age of Enlightenment or Reason and modern Biblical criticism. His views influenced Western philosophy.

Aquinas and Spinoza's idea of God was markedly different from John of Cross (1542-1591, a Spanish mystic, priest and Catholic Saint) or Meister Eckhart (1260-1327, German theologian, philosopher and mystic) as the latter two priest's experience of God was mystical rather than theoretical.

Existentialist Theatre: Theatre which believed in Existentialism.

Foremost proponents of this philosophy are Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche in the 19th century and Sartre, Camus in the 20th century. The term was adopted by Sartre from French philosopher Gabriel Marcel who is supposed to have coined it. According to this philosophy emphasis ought to be on the living human individual. Following Nietzsche they believed that God did not exist. Since they also believed that human activity is characterised by freedom and art followed from it, art required to reveal the absurdity of the human condition, of meaninglessness in life. They believed that the world was no longer a fit place for habitation

as it had lost all meaning, reason and order. It followed a philosophy which stressed on the freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of actions. However, Existentialist theatre of Sartre and Camus were criticised as mere 'rhetoric and eloquence' because its thoughts were not 'deeply inscribed in their language'. Their theatre could not express their views.

Appolinaire: Guillaume Appolinaire (1880-1918) French playwright, poet, short story writer, novelist and art critic of the 20th century who coined the term 'surrealism' and wrote one of the earliest surrealist plays, '*The Breasts of Tiresias*'.

Picasso: Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) Spanish painter, sculptor and stage designer of the 20th century who co-founded the Cubist movement and invented constructed sculpture.

Juan Gris: (1887-1927) Spanish Cubist painter and sculptor who lived and worked in France all his life.

Kandinsky: (1866-1944) Wassily Kandinsky was a Russian painter and art theorist whose paintings were the first purely abstract works in the world.

Chagall: (1887-1985) Marc Chagall was a Russian-French artist of the 20th century whose works are considered to be a pioneer of modernism.

Tzara: (1896-1963) Tristan Tzara was a Rumanian-French playwright, poet, essayist, literary and art critic film composer and director. He was one of the founders of Dadaism and was interested in symbolism. His works represented Dada's nihilistic aspect.

Brancusi: (1876-1957) Constantin Brancusi was a Rumanian sculptor who lived his life in France. He is considered the pioneer of modernism. His Abstract style is characterised by geometrical lines. He is known as the Patriarch of Modern Sculpture.

Gertrude Stein: (1874-1946) American writer and poet who adopted France, Paris as her home. She is credited with modernism in literature.

Hemingway: (1899-1961) Earnest Hemingway was an American author and journalist; he won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1953 and the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954.

E.E.Cummings: (1894-1962) Edward Estlin Cummings was an American poet, playwright, author essayist and painter whose poetry is remembered as the voice of the 20th century. He also had lived in Paris.

Joyce: (1882-1941) James Joyce was an Irish novelist and poet considered to be an avant-garde author of the early 20th century. He perfected the Stream of consciousness technique.

Lugne-Poe ...Jean-Marie Serreau: French nationals connected in various ways to French theatre. Paris gave them the necessary exposure and opportunity to develop their individual strengths.

TEXTUAL QUESTIONS

1. Why were the convicts of the San Quentin State Prison able to grasp the meaning of the play *Waiting for Godot* which is considered an obscure and intellectual play?
2. How does Esslin create his ground for '*The Theatre of the Absurd*' in the introduction of the book?
3. Illustrate your understanding of the Theatre of the Absurd from your reading of the introduction of '*The Theatre of the Absurd*'.
4. Why is The theatre of the Absurd called 'anti-literary' and 'anti-play'?
5. What importance does Esslin attach to the city of Paris in the introduction to the '*Theatre of the Absurd*'.

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