

Theatre of the Absurd

- The Theatre of the Absurd is a movement made up of many diverse plays, which when first performed, shocked their audiences as they were startlingly different than anything that had been previously staged.
- In fact, many of them were labelled as “anti-plays.”
- **Martin Esslin** coined the term “*The Theatre of the Absurd*” in his book of the same name published in 1961. These plays emphasized the absurdity of the human condition. The word “absurd” is synonymous with “ridiculous,” Esslin was referring to the original meaning of the word—‘out of harmony with reason or propriety; illogical’
- Essentially, each play renders man’s existence as illogical, and moreover, meaningless. This idea was a reaction to the “collapse of moral, religious, political, and social structures” following the two global wars.
- Absurdist Theatre was heavily influenced by Existential philosophy. Albert Camus’ in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) attempts to present a reasonable answer as to why man should not commit suicide in face of a meaningless, absurd existence through the Greek mythological figure, Sisyphus, who was condemned to push a boulder up a mountain, only to have it roll back down
- The absurd dramatists offered no solution to the problem of existence, suggesting that the question is ultimately unanswerable.

Major Themes

- **A World Without Meaning**
- **The Isolation of the Individual**

Form

The form of a piece of art is often neglected in favor of its subject matter. Form, however, is arguably the most important aspect of absurdist plays. Essentially, these playwrights were reacting against realism because it did not align with their objectives. They did not want to show life as it really was, but rather, the inner-life of man—what was going on inside his head.

Devaluation of Language

One characteristic of this poetic form was the devaluation of language. The absurd dramatists felt that conventional language had failed man—it was an inadequate means of communication. As a result, the movement of the characters on stage often contradicts their words or dialogue. Often they expose how unreliable language is; one can easily say one thing and do the opposite.

Another common way in which they presented the uselessness of language was by having their characters constantly speak in clichés, or overused, tired expressions. One prime example of this is from Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*:

Lack of Plot

Another poetic aspect of absurdist plays is that they lack a plot or a clear beginning and end with a purposeful development in between. There is usually a great deal of repetition in both language and action.

Web source-

<https://sites.udel.edu/britlitwiki/the-theatre-of-the-absurd/>