

PENGUIN PLAYS

Eugène Ionesco

**Rhinoceros  
The Chairs  
The Lesson**

## THE LESSON

Coming! [*She goes to the door and opens it.*] Good morning, Mademoiselle. Are you the new pupil? You've come for your lesson? The Professor's expecting you. I'll go and tell him you've arrived. He'll be down in a minute! Come in, won't you, Mademoiselle!

CURTAIN



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## *Altona, Men Without Shadows, The Flies*

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

Born in Paris in 1905, Jean-Paul Sartre studied philosophy and took up teaching. After service in the Resistance he became a writer and edits *Les Temps Modernes*. His philosophical books – notably *L'Être et le néant* (1943) – have caused him to be regarded as the founder of existentialism, an attitude which is concerned with the absurdity of so many people's lives and the possibilities of human freedom. His novels, such as *The Age of Reason*, tend to stress the meaningless aspect of modern life.

His plays, on the other hand, deal more with human freedom. *The Flies* (1942) presents Sartre's interpretation of the Greek legend of Orestes, who killed his mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover, in order to avenge Agamemnon, his father, and set Argos free. *Men Without Shadows* (1946) is a brutal study of the effects of torture on captured members of the Maquis. *Altona* (1959 – previously published as *Loser Wins*) comments on the acquisitive aspects of capitalism as seen in a family of rich German industrialists.

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### *Also Available*

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KEAN, NEKRASSOV, THE TROJAN WOMEN

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This volume contains plays by three of the most brilliant and accomplished contemporary European writers.

Anouilh, well known for *Antigone*, is here represented by his ebullient comedy *Ring Round the Moon*. In it he draws vivid and entertaining portraits of human idiosyncrasies with a total disregard for accepted moral values.

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Sartre's *In Camera*, an obsessive intellectual drama, is a study of three of life's victims, who come to realize that 'hell is other people'.

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## *The Theatre of the Absurd*

MARTIN ESSLIN

The theatre is no longer a middle-class drawing room. Ever since sophisticated European audiences exploded in near-riots at the first performances of *Waiting for Godot* avant-garde playwrights have been breaking through the crust of stage conventions to the shifting core of psychological reality present in human hopes, fears and dreams. In plays by such writers as Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter language gutters, communication falters, character and personality disintegrate, the very sequence of time and laws of physics may go by the board. Shorn of all certainties these dramatists are confronting a world in which God is dead, a world which, in the Existentialist sense, is *absurd*.

Martin Esslin's classic study of the dramatists of the Absurd has been fully revised for this Pelican edition. In it he examines the origins, nature and future of a movement whose significance transcends the bounds of the stage and influences the whole intellectual climate of our time.

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PENGUIN PLAYS

RHINOCEROS · THE CHAIRS  
THE LESSON

Eugene Ionesco is a playwright of Rumanian origin, one of the acknowledged leaders of contemporary *avant-garde* drama in France. His other plays are *The Bald Prima-Donna* (1958), *Amédée or How to Get Rid of it* (1954), *Victims of Duty* (1953) and *Jacques or Obedience* (1958). His ideas on the theatre are available in *Notes et contre-notes* and *Journal en miettes*. Ionesco was born in 1912.





*Eugène Ionesco*

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RHINOCEROS

*Translated by Derek Prouse*

THE CHAIRS · THE LESSON

*Translated by Donald Watson*



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# RHINOCEROS

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A Play in Three Acts  
and Four Scenes

## RHINOCEROS

First produced in Paris by Jean-Louis Barrault at the Odéon,  
25 January 1960.

First produced in London by Orson Welles at the Royal  
Court Theatre, 28 April 1960.

### *Characters of the Play*

JEAN

BERENGER

THE WAITRESS

THE GROCER

THE GROCER'S WIFE

THE OLD GENTLEMAN

THE LOGICIAN

THE HOUSEWIFE

THE CAFÉ PROPRIETOR

DAISY

MR PAPILLON

DUDARD

BOTARD

MRS BOEUF

A FIREMAN

THE LITTLE OLD MAN

THE LITTLE OLD MAN'S WIFE

And a lot of Rhinoceros heads

## ACT ONE

*The scene is a square in a small provincial town. Up-stage a house composed of a ground floor and one storey. The ground floor is the window of a grocer's shop. The entrance is up two or three steps through a glass-paned door. The word ÉPICERIE is written in bold letters above the shop window. The two windows on the first floor are the living quarters of the grocer and his wife. The shop is up-stage, but slightly to the left, not far from the wings. In the distance a church steeple is visible above the grocer's house. Between the shop and the left of the stage there is a little street in perspective. To the right, slightly at an angle, is the front of a café. Above the café, one floor with a window; in front, the café terrace; several chairs and tables reach almost to centre stage. A dusty tree stands near the terrace chairs. Blue sky; harsh light; very white walls. The time is almost midday on a Sunday in summertime. Jean and Berenger will sit at one of the terrace tables.*

*[The sound of church bells is heard, which stop a few moments before the curtain rises. When the curtain rises, a woman carrying a basket of provisions under one arm and a cat under the other crosses the stage in silence from right to left. As she does so, the GROCER'S WIFE opens her shop door and watches her pass.]*

GROCER'S WIFE: Oh that woman gets on my nerves! *[To her husband who is in the shop]* Too stuck-up to buy from us nowadays. *[The GROCER'S WIFE leaves; the stage is empty for a few moments.]*

*[JEAN enters right, at the same time as BERENGER enters left. JEAN is very fastidiously dressed: brown suit, red tie, stiff collar, brown hat. He has a reddish face. His shoes are yellow*



## RHINOCEROS

*and well-polished. BERENGER is unshaven and hatless, with unkempt hair and creased clothes; everything about him indicates negligence. He seems weary, half-asleep; from time to time he yawns.]*

JEAN [*advancing from right*]: Oh, so you managed to get here at last, Berenger!

BERENGER [*advancing from left*]: Morning, Jean!

JEAN: Late as usual, of course. [*He looks at his wrist-watch.*] Our appointment was for 11.30. And now it's practically mid-day.

BERENGER: I'm sorry. Have you been waiting long?

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

[*They go and sit at one of the tables on the café terrace.*]

BERENGER: In that case I don't feel so bad, if you've only just ...

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 there.

BERENGER: You're right ... quite right, but ...

JEAN: Now don't try to pretend you're ever on time!

BERENGER: No, of course not ... I wouldn't say that.

[*JEAN and BERENGER have sat down.*]

JEAN: There you are, you see!

BERENGER: What are you drinking?

JEAN: You mean to say you've got a thirst even at this time in the morning?

BERENGER: It's so hot and dry.

JEAN: The more you drink the thirstier you get, popular science tells us that ...

BERENGER: It would be less dry, and we'd be less thirsty, if they'd invent us some scientific clouds in the sky.

JEAN [*studying Berenger closely*]: That wouldn't help you any.

You're not thirsty for water, Berenger ...

BERENGER: I don't understand what you mean.