

📖 Topic Page: [Ionesco, Eugène](#)

Definition: **Ionesco, Eugène** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

French dramatist. A major force behind the Theatre of the Absurd, he had his first success with *The Bald Prima Donna* (1950), a satire on the futility of verbal communication.

Summary Article: **Ionesco, Eugène**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Romanian-born French dramatist. He was a leading exponent of the Theatre of the Absurd. Most of his plays are in one act and concern the futility of language as a means of communication. These include *La Cantatrice chauve/The Bald Prima Donna* (1950) and *La Leçon/The Lesson* (1951). Later full-length plays include *Le Rhinocéros* (1958) and *Le Roi se meurt/Exit the King* (1961).

La Cantatrice chauve The comic wordplay of *La Cantatrice chauve* was inspired by the artificial sentences of a teach-yourself English book, and parodies both everyday conversation and the theatre. It has played in Paris virtually without a break since its first performance in 1950.

Early life Ionesco was born in Slatina, Romania. His father, a lawyer, was Romanian, his mother French. The family moved to Paris, where Ionesco grew up, while his father returned to Romania in 1917. Ionesco was taken back to Romania at the age of 14 to stay with his father, now divorced. He ran away from home when he was 17 and entered the University of Bucharest to study French.

He started writing seriously, producing a small book of poems in 1931 and several newspaper articles. In 1934 he published *Nu*, a collection of essays on the leading Romanian writers of the time. He became a drama critic for the magazine *Facla*, and taught French until 1938, when he returned to Paris to do research at the Sorbonne. He spent the years of World War II mainly in Marseille.

The Theatre of the Absurd Back in Paris after the war, he worked as a proofreader and began to learn English with the aid of a teach-yourself manual; this experience led him to write the 'anti-play' *La Cantatrice chauve*, and the Theatre of the Absurd came into being. Ionesco was the most characteristic practitioner, more so perhaps than Arthur Asimov and Samuel Beckett.

About a dozen plays followed, including *La Leçon*, *Les Chaises/The Chairs* (1952), and *Tueur sans gages/The Killer* (1959). In 1960 Jean-Louis Barrault produced *Le Rhinocéros* at the Théâtre de France. In this play, all except one of the inhabitants of a provincial town turn into a herd of lethal rhinoceroses, symbolizing an authoritarian society. Ionesco's next play, *La Soif et la faim/Hunger and Thirst* (1966), was commissioned by the Comédie Française. However, his later work lacks the brilliance of the earlier.

Honours He was elected to the Académie Française in 1971 and received many other honours and prizes, among them the Grand Prix National du Théâtre.

quotations

Ionesco, Eugène

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