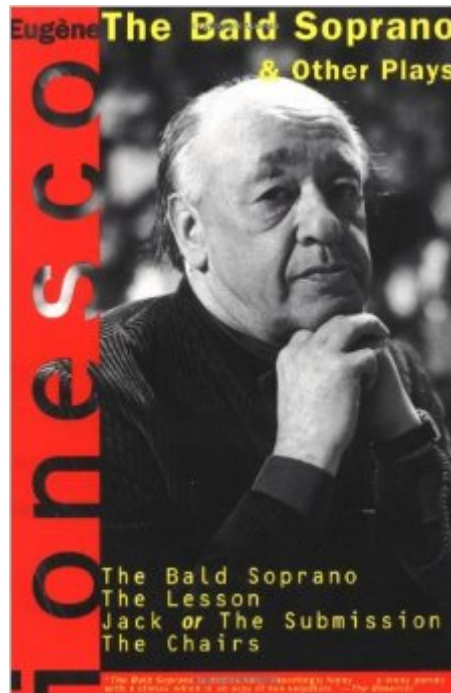


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The Bald Soprano And Other Plays: The Bald Soprano; The Lesson; Jack, Or The Submission; The Chairs



Synopsis

The leading figure of absurdist theater and one of the great innovators of the modern stage, Eugène Ionesco (1909-94) did not write his first play, *The Bald Soprano*, until 1950. He went on to become an internationally renowned master of modern drama, famous for the comic proportions and bizarre effects that allow his work to be simultaneously hilarious, tragic, and profound. As Ionesco has said, "Theater is not literature. . . . It is simply what cannot be expressed by any other means."

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Customer Reviews

I am directing the *Bald Soprano* soon. One of my major battles has been this: How do I translate Ionesco's ideas to my audience. Ionesco did not write his seemingly meaningless text to be a funny piece of senseless fluff. Ionesco saw in his work a profound meaning with deep implications. He shows us six people, whose interactions with each other are completely absurd and meaningless. The characters speak to each other in endless non-sequiters and cliches. They cannot communicate with one another. Their inability to communicate ultimately leads to conflict and the end, not only of the play, but of the lives of these characters (made alive only as long as the play lasts) the audience laughs at this. They look at these characters on the stage and think, "What awful people they are." What they don't realize is that they are laughing at themselves. It is in fact they who scurry about the earth speaking to one another with meaningless words, and in cliches. They are trapped in a world of political correctness, and useless sayings. They don't communicate, but say only what they are expected to say. They fight about things that have no eternal significance, and they fight until it is impossible for either side to win. *The Bald Soprano* shows us

ourselves. The tragedy of the Bald Soprano is that we laugh at it, because we expect that our relationships and indeed our existence is laughable. The tragedy is that we don't even know that we are laughing at ourselves, because we are blind to our own faults. WE don't allow ourselves to see that we are talking without speaking, and fighting without winning. The difficulty to the director is: How do we make the audience see Ionesco's point.

These four one-act plays of bleak absurdity and startling originality place Ionesco alongside Beckett and Pinter as one of twentieth century theater's most enigmatic iconoclasts. "The Bald Soprano" begins as a seemingly placid comedy on proper English manners, but then weird things happen -- irregular clock chimes, contradictions with no logical basis, non-sequiturs -- which build to a crescendo of chaos like a dissonant string quartet. Corrupting every convention of traditional drama, defying every expectation of the audience, it is exactly the "anti-play" its subtitle suggests. In "The Lesson," an aging professor's excessive zeal for a particular subject, made incomprehensibly esoteric by his own obsessive study of it, is the downfall of many a hapless student. "Jack" is the age-old story of a boy who disappoints his family by not wanting to marry the girl they have selected for him, but, like a surrealist painting, the proceedings are rendered grotesque by nonsensical lines and colors. As though to accentuate the banality of the underlying plot, the actors go to dramatic extremes as if they were acting out a "real" drama. But I feel that the most engaging of the four plays is "The Chairs," in which two actors not only must play a nonagenarian couple hosting a roomful of people who have assembled for a lecture, but must pantomime the presence of the (invisible) guests. The bitterly ironic (and very funny) "lecture" given at the end affirms MacBeth's notion that life truly is a tale told by an idiot. I think these plays are more about form than content, as Ionesco is experimenting with visual and verbal imagery and challenging the audience's sense of comfort with the theater, intending to evoke unusual and unpleasant emotions like awkwardness or embarrassment.

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