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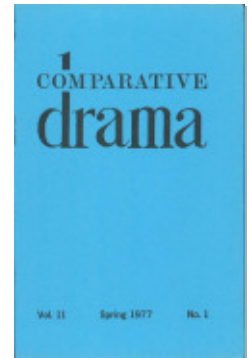
Eugène Ionesco by Ronald Hayman (review)

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though we can very well believe they are accursed. Neither was such as Antiochus, and Pandosto, again like Oedipus, had other reasons as well to strike at himself.

There was still another phase to this matter that was present to my mind in objecting to the ascription of "incestuous passion." What I thought I saw Professor Smith saying of Leontes, rather than of Pandosto, I see many other literary scholars doing, using such a classification too easily. Professor Northrop Frye, for example, in his recent Norton lectures, after calling attention to the relationship of Antiochus to his daughter in Shakespeare's *Pericles*, goes on to say that inasmuch as the action of the play leads towards the restoration of Marina to her father, "the father-daughter incest keeps hanging over the story as a possibility until nearly the end." But Mrs. Marylyn Brady has rightly observed that "the circumstances under which Marina and Pericles meet preclude any such possibility. In the first place, she is no longer associated with the brothel and has established herself in respectability; secondly, Pericles is so sunk in apathy that only the discovery that Marina is his daughter fully rouses him. An incestuous situation may give initial impetus to the plot but has nothing more to do with the play or with the characters of Pericles and Marina except in a negative way by providing a strong contrast to the virtuous lives of the two."

The point is in part that judgments rooted in ancient and lasting horrors have been diluted in the "objectivity" of the categories of psychology when these become the coins of critical fashion. Neither Greene nor Shakespeare regarded these matters this simply.

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Ronald Hayman. *Eugène Ionesco*. New York: Ungar, 1976. Pp. vi + 214. \$8.50.

Ionesco is probably the most influential playwright of the mid-century. (Vying for that role are also Pinter, Beckett, and Dürrenmatt.) Yet only a handful of full-length books have probed Ionesco's dramaturgy. Leading the way has been the imaginative and acute Richard Coe. Among other exhaustive critics, Simone Benmussa and Claude Bonnefoy are worthy of trust.

In some half-dozen essays and in entire volumes (most tellingly in *Notes et Contre-Notes*), Ionesco himself has added fuel to the theoretical controversies his plays have incited. The dramatist's statements (at times occasioned and shaped by opponents such as Kenneth Tynan, but too often loosely conceptualized and self-contradictory) have filled gaps—or sometimes burdened them with non sequiturs.

Ronald Hayman, a director-actor-writer, undertakes to tidy up some of the remaining lacunae. His main effort is to bring a director's reasonableness to "reframe" Ionesco's wild visions for the stage. The enterprise is difficult in the format of this volume, because the book is cursory,

almost skimpy. Hayman's structure stays close to tight tradition. But his play-by-play approach causes pitfalls. The critic traces skeletal outlines of each of Ionesco's plays, pursued chronologically. He adds tidbits of surface psychology and sketches of logical bases for mises-en-scène. Consequently, the sheer outlandishness of *The Bald Soprano* or *The Lesson* and the pyramiding terror of *Killing Game* seem to vanish in thin air. And if they disappear, Ionesco's special genius pales before the mind's eye.

Hayman's critiques, on the other hand, sharpen when he is on firmer directorial ground. He discerns parallels unseen by earlier commentators. In the hecatomb of *Killing Game*, for instance, Hayman detects a Bosch-like *ambiance* which counterposes exuberance and mortal stench. *Exit the King* evokes Nazi murders by injection; paradoxically, King Bérenger had used the same technique in the past to rid himself of undesirable subjects.

The mind-rattling, inane Smith-Martin dialogues which begin *The Bald Soprano* are described by Hayman as a radically modern "rhythm" made up of well-nigh futile sounds and silences. This rhythmical weirdness is one of Ionesco's outstanding innovative devices, often adapted by playwrights after 1955.

Discoveries notwithstanding, Hayman's volume does not always satisfy our critical thirst. It leaves too much confusion unsolved, too many plays half-elucidated. The fanciful savagery which traverses Ionesco's phantasmagoria is barely mentioned. Yet this may be the dramatist's most scathing trick of theatrical magic. To reduce Ionesco to down-to-earth terms is to miss the essential. This is Hayman's temptation. He too generally succumbs.

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