

*Eugène Ionesco: a path between two languages, two literatures*

Beyond his undeniable contribution to the « theatre of absurd », Eugène Ionesco lists his name, with the same conviction and steadiness, in the literary and artistic sphere of two countries and two literatures. Born in Romania, country which he associates, all along his existence, to his « father's figure », Ionesco spends his childhood there. After graduating from university with a French language and literature diploma, he makes his first steps on the Romanian literary scene, establishing himself, as a literary critic, with a daring literary judgment, focused on several major Romanian literary figures and on the Romanian literature in general.

Ionesco deals with a double rupture from the very beginning of his childhood : the first would be the remoteness from the heavenly setting of the Normandy countryside, as he describes it himself, the second would be the real drama that he has carried all along a lifetime and which begins with the break-up between his parents. If the first break points out a first contact with the exterior world, the second will generate some consequences much more deep in Ionesco's consciousness. The progressive passage from the childhood to the adult age is to be reached during the Romanian youth. Scattered images, memories, obsessions or anxieties are to be entirely found in his French work at the first, and during all his autobiographical works, afterwards.

Constantly associated to the despotic figure of his father against whom he lead a permanent personal combat, Ionesco is to discover the real face of his father, image which still remains immaculate during his childhood. Deeply marked by the absence of his father, Ionesco soughts desperately to escape from his native country. The oniric aspect of his plays is a constant quest of the domestic setting and especially of his father's figure, retrieved eventually through a long drama journey. Ionesco starts to search his domestic surroundings and begins with a personal quest. Paradoxically, this deep and intimate quest is a real metaphysical and solitary drop which has a unique goal: opening the playwright's universe towards the others, communication with the exterior world. Ionesco is searching himself. And he's doing it throughout heavy and offensive monologues of his characters, throughout the vacuity of their Cues, by deploring at the same time clichés and linguistic automatismes in an everyday speech adopted solidly by all the societies. He's also doing it around a heavy emotional

charge that he puts into his paint-brush through his pictural universe in which he's desperately searching for a refuge when words cannot express nor « what can be expressed », neither « what cannot be expressed ».

We focused on the literary début works of Ionesco with their Romanian language origin, in order to search for the sources of a permanent negative attitude which extends and culminates with the dramatic writings. If the Romanian work is the result of an embodied nihilism expressed in his father's native language, and of an out of hand desire of affirmation on the literary scene, the French work is the direct result of a constant personal research, a devouring challenge, a oniric aspiration towards the domestic setting. The acidity and literary aggressivity give away a rebellious profile full of non-conformism, born from an intellectual génération that dominates his Romanian youth. Let's not forgive the fact that Ionesco arrives back in his father's country against his will. The intense Bucarest years of his youth, accompanying this heavy social, political and literary past, will also be reflected in the French work, blaze of a convergence connection between two literatures, two languages and two societies.

Pesimism and nihilism, as they come out of Ionesco's own rejection of his native country, were revealed throughout an offensive and incandescent writing opening itself upon a key that betrays Ionesco's revenge spirit. Ionesco's taste for negation as it comes out from his very first Romanian essay is to be found in the worship that he shows for contradiction. This combat acquired in his father's country and language was to be seen off along his mother's language and country, the only one capable to reveal and distribute the original note and the freshness that Ionesco has brought. Ionesco is definitely not the creator of the absurd, nor the creator of the theatre.

He gives modern theatre the coolness that he needed, keeping his défensive critic position concerning parisian literary scene, estimated as « impénétrable » at the beginning of the fifties, tarnished by the intensity of the social and political changings. The intensity of domestic conflicts is doubled by the intensity of the social and political Romanian context which constantly deepens the ditch that separated Ionesco from his father's country and that pushed him to be out for leaving Romania by any means.

It is not question anymore about making a distinction between Eugène Ionesco et Eugen Ionescu, as both of them existed and will exist at different and heterogenous ages. The destiny of Ionesco's work and its genesis are closely related to the writer's youth years. Eugen Ionescu belongs to the Romanian culture as much as Eugène Ionesco belongs to the French culture. If theatre is an escaping solution to « theatre », a kind of denunciation formula of human degradation under all its forms, autobiographical journals remain a mean of direct access to a past that Eugène Ionesco persisted to search and that Eugen Ionescu tried desperatly to runaway from. After naturally raising in his mother's tongue, Eugène plunged deeply into the apprenticeship of his father's language. Romanian setting is not limited to its linguistic dimension in which the writer expressed his first anxieties and made his first intimate confessions. It's also the setting around which Ionesco has made his first religious contacts. We tried to go deeper into his « interrupted quest », lauched towards God, and its influence upon French Works. Ionesco obviously tends to a humanist atheism.

We also focused, through many testimonies and biographical notes, on a vast « metatext », on this path cleared between his two existences – the Romanian one and the French one – and also on his literary and pictural genesis, this double way in which the play writer drew up his work.

This « major writer » from the XXth century, as philosopher Mihai Şora called him, issued from the two extremities of the European continent, lists his name among those of the most renowned playwrights of the world. At the end of a life marked by a double identity, Ionesco remains solidar with Romanian people, especially by the time of the December 1989 social and political events and becomes Romanian again, finding his Romanian identity. Spiritually, he becomes Romanian, gets back to his youth and manages to overcome the permanent conflict that has opposed him and his father.