
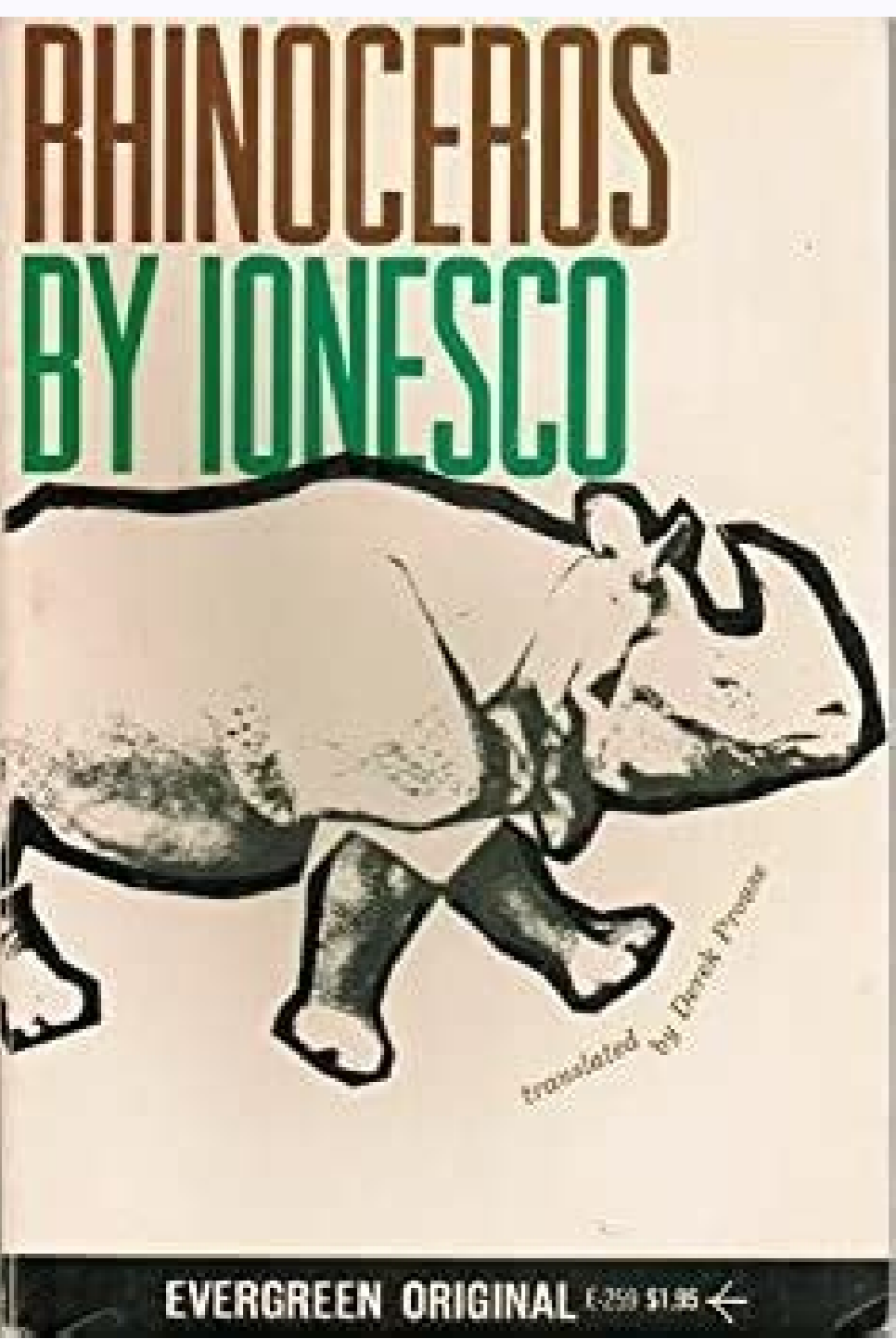


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Eugène Ionesco (1909-1994)  
 photograph by 1950s

Dans l'édition illustrée, le texte intégral, enrichi d'une lecture d'image-écho pictural de l'auteur, est suivi de sa mise en perspective comparée au dix-neuvième :

1909-1914 - La jeunesse d'Ionesco, entre questions sociales et politiques

1914-1918 - Le langage littéraire - l'écriture du signe au regard de la représentation picturale

1918-1924 - Le début de l'œuvre - de la nouvelle à la pièce

1924-1939 - Les personnages récurrents de la dramaturgie

1939-1944 - L'œuvre romanesque et satirique

1944 - Les années postérieures (après la Seconde)



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suffered, worked, or dreamed, **Bérenger** ultimately speaks in his anguish to the futility of all human endeavor given the eventuality of death, a finality as capricious as the actions of **The Killer** in the first of the **Bérenger** plays. **Lest** the spectator, however, leap to the conclusion that the **Orator**'s audience has hallucinated by the old couple, **Ionesco** calls in his script for crowd noises that, in production, tend to sound like a cross between applause and howls of derision. **Smith**, seemingly oblivious to his lack of interest, continues to discuss the fine English food that they have eaten (including such anomalous dishes as quince-and-bean pie) and tell him the ages of their children. When death threatens (as it often does in the later plays), **Ionesco**'s habit-conditioned characters will often proceed as lambs to the slaughter in a manner even more credible than the "philosophical suicide" described by **Camus** in **Le Mythe de Sisyphe** (1942; **The Myth of Sisyphus**, 1955) as a characteristic human response to the absurd. Motivated primarily by his desire to avenge **Mlle Dany**'s apparently senseless murder, **Bérenger** sets off on a dogged search for the **Killer**, often appearing to be the only sane man (or indeed the only human being) in a world turned upside down. 1954 (**Victims of Duty**, 1958); **Le Maître**, pr. **The Chairs** Initially baffling even to those spectators familiar with **The Lesson** and **The Bald Soprano**, **The Chairs** broke new ground in the development of **Ionesco**'s theater by introducing a poetic element of which his earlier plays had given little indication. Nevertheless, his deep-seated mistrust of political extremism on both sides left him peculiarly vulnerable to charges of political indifference. Like **The Lesson**, **The Chairs** vigorously rejects simplistic efforts at interpretation, although on the surface it might be said to be "about" love, marriage, aging, and, above all, the futility of all human endeavor. Sure at last that he has not lived in vain, his message about to be delivered, the **Old Man** leaps to his death from a tower window, followed closely by his wife. Beneath it all, however, the viewer can perceive a strong nostalgia for lost innocence, or at least for things as they ought to be. In an evident parody of the political slogan "Every man a king," **Ionesco** presents a king who is indeed **Everyman** and whose life will be nullified as well as ended with his death. 1951, pb. Toward the end of the 1950's **Ionesco**'s plays seemed to strive increasingly for political relevance, with decidedly uneven results. Unfortunately, the streets are empty; eventually, the **Architect** explains to **Bérenger** that the inhabitants are hesitant to leave their homes for fear of an unknown killer, who lures people to their deaths by promising a glimpse of "the colonel's photograph." Based on a short story in fact entitled "La Photo du colonel" ("The Colonel's Photograph"), **The Killer** quickly departs from simple satire in its deliberately uncertain distinction between the act of murder and the basic fact of death. Before long, the **Smiths'** maid interrupts to announce the arrival of their invited guests, **Mr.** and **Mrs.** Indeed, the device of the protruding pachyderms is every bit as powerful and eloquent as that of a gratuitous murderer in the previous play. 1955 (Jack: Or, **The Submission**, 1958); **Théâtre**, pb. Among them, the characters provide for a strong infusion of humor, if never "comic relief." The aging **Queen Marguerite**, clearly descended from **Mrs.** 1963 (**Foursome**, 1963); **Délire à deux**, pr. Ponderousness of tone is avoided largely through **Ionesco**'s choice of murdering characters; the king's protracted final moments are witnessed by both of his queens (one young and pretty, the other middle-aged and tart of tongue), a guard, and a Doctor who serves also as **Astrologer** and **Chief Executioner**. In one, for example, an old woman converses animatedly with her long-lost mother; the actress playing the mother is in her young and vibrant twenties, the age at which the old woman last saw her. **Anouilh**'s play, in part a parody of the **Oedipus** theme, presents an amnesiac war veteran who, reunited with his true family after twenty years and countless false leads, seeks refuge in amnesia against a sordid past that he has no desire to reclaim. Critic **Martin Esslin** hailed **Ionesco**'s theater as a far more effective illustration of **Albert Camus**'s concept of the absurd than **Camus** himself had ever written for the stage. (The bell in fact sounds three times, at rather long intervals, before the **Chief** sees fit to show himself.) Once inside, the **Chief** avails himself of celebrity treatment to regale his hosts with a long, involved, and totally nonsensical story prefaced with the title, "The Head-Cold." The maid, attempting a story of her own, is pushed brutally offstage by the other characters and possibly beaten to death; in any event, she is not seen again. Dramatically, **Ionesco**'s most effective use of language occurs in its deformation, with "normal" speech replaced either by incongruous banalities or by equally nonsensical monosyllables. 1962, pb. Political elements such as bureaucracy, war, and oppression are present in abundance, although portrayed (as usual in **Ionesco**'s work) without emphasis, as yet another anomalous fact of life, such as death. Lane. **Nancy**, **Smith** and from **Madeline** of **Amédée**, continues the satire of marriage that runs as an undercurrent through many **Ionesco** plays; the younger **Queen Marie**, meanwhile, seems to represent maternal warmth as well as the promise of young love. His guide, the **Architect** (who also functions as police chief and coroner), explains that nothing has been left to chance, and that even the weather is controlled. Once admitted to the **Smiths'** parlor, the **Martins** join their hosts in what may well be the most effective parody of social interaction ever portrayed on the stage; all four participants hem and haw, clear their throats, and let one another's conversational gambits drop with a resounding thud. In Jack: Or, **The Submission** and **The Future Is in Eggs**, for example, courtship and marriage are reduced to the least attractive stereotypes, characterized by animal noises, obscene rutting gestures, and a quantitative standard for human reproduction. The **Professor** seems to exist only when, and because, he speaks. It is not long before transformations from man to beast become an hourly occurrence, with the animals taking over local businesses and ultimately the broadcast media. in German 1959, pb. Although uneven in quality, perhaps least effective when the author seemed to have a specific message in mind, his theater is nevertheless sufficiently rich and varied to provide rewarding work for future generations of actors and directors. **The Chairs** remains, like its predecessor, hauntingly enigmatic, reflecting back on the spectator his own attempts to determine the play's meaning. 1970 (**The Hard-Boiled Egg**, 1973); **Jeux de massacre**, pr., pb. **Man with Bags** Based in large measure on nightmare visions already recorded in **Ionesco**'s memoirs, **Man with Bags** ironically inverts, intentionally or not, the title and premise of **Jean Anouilh**'s immensely popular 1937 play, **Le Voyageur sans bagage** (**Traveller Without Luggage**, 1959). In each of his plays, **Ionesco** seems to be exhorting his audience to "rehumanize" the world before matters get worse than they already are. Political satire thus serves, for **Ionesco**, as the means to an end, rather than as an end in itself. **The Old Woman** (**Tamar Cohn**) and **The Old Man** (**David Sinaiko**) in **Cutting Ball Theater's** **The Chairs**. New York: Iwayne, 1996. One of **Ionesco**'s more entertaining and edifying styles, although commonly associated with his shorter plays, involves the characters in aimless speech as the stage gradually fills with objects. **The Lesson**, for example, would appear at first glance to be more evolved and "later" than it really is. It remained for **Ionesco**, however, to explore even in his earliest efforts the horrific consequences that result when identity is lost or denied. Elsewhere in **Ionesco**'s theater, nearly all forms of human behavior are duly stripped of acculturated meaning, shown to be as absurd and out of phase as they often seemed to **Camus** himself. The action of the play compresses some twenty years, indicated by **Queen Marguerite**'s assertion that the king will be dead within an hour and a half, at the end of the play. Principal drama **La Cantatrice chauve**, pr. In a variation on the proliferation theme, for example, the characters of **Amédée** share the stage with a growing corpse that is about to crowd them out of house and home; what usually shows of this monstrosity is a man's shoe, approximately three meters in length, with sock and trouser leg attached. 1963 (**The Picture**, 1968); **L'Impromptu de l'Alma: Ou, Le Caméleon du berger**, pr. In any case, the **Killer** has no real lines to speak, serving mainly as foil to **Bérenger**'s impassioned, eloquent (and perhaps overlong) speech in defense of life, liberty, and the human race. Unfortunately, his acknowledgment served to authorize a fixed interpretation of a play which, in true **Ionesco** fashion, is in its essence open-ended and fraught with ambiguities. In **Amédée**, the telephone-operator wife "goes to work" at a switchboard in her own apartment while her husband, a writer, labors over the same phrases that have occupied him fruitlessly for years. Divorced from the context of the play, the mastery scene depicting **Mother Peep**'s rally might well be seen as one of the most powerful parodies of demagoguery and totalitarianism ever portrayed on the stage. Reprint. **The Lesson** retains such resonance as to resist simplistic attempts at explanation. It therefore seemed quite fitting that **Ionesco**, nearly forty years after **Traveller Without Luggage**, should balance **Anouilh**'s speculative fantasy with a highly convincing rebuttal. The audience, however, never sees the guests, who are represented onstage by a rapidly growing number of empty chairs—hence the play's title. Among the greater of ironies is that **Ionesco**, a man truly displaced by two world wars, gave evidence even in his earliest plays of a profound social conscience. Whether the individual likes it, identity (especially as retrieved through memory) is the only available proof of his existence. As close to lyricism as **Ionesco** had thus far come in his career, **Bérenger**'s speech in **The Killer** remains a powerful statement in defense of humanity; predictably, however, it falls on deaf ears, and **Bérenger**, out of options, offers himself freely to the **Killer**'s brandished knife. Recapitulating the frequent use of nonsense dialogue in **The Bald Soprano**, **Ionesco** in **The Lesson** at first disorients the spectator with the **Pupil** who, armed merely with a schoolgirl's book bag, confidently announces her intention to pursue the "total doctorate", even so, she is shaky on elementary geography and utterly unable to subtract, although she can multiply six-digit numbers in her head. **Esslin**, **Martin**. At first, **Ionesco** admitted, he had no real idea of how to end the play, having once considered (and rejected) the arrival of armed "police" to clear the house of spectators. Deceptively simple both in concept and in execution, **Exit the King** harks back to **The Killer** and **The Chairs** in its portrayal of a royal **Bérenger** awaiting death. Gesturing and grimacing in a worthy parody of **Marcel Proust**'s aristocratic hosts, the old couple continue to seat their invisible audience; the **Orator**, however, is quite visible, and as soon as the **Emperor** arrives (unseen), the action is ready to begin. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968. 1954 (**The Bald Soprano**, 1956); **La Leçon**, pr. In time, the distinguished guests begin to arrive, greeted and seated by the delighted and understandably anxious old couple. The testament, it seems, is in the form of a speech that the **Old Man** has prepared from the raw material of his long life, but which he feels unqualified to deliver in his own voice. 1958 (**Improvisation: Or, The Shepherd's Chameleon**, 1960); **Tueur sans gages**, pr., pb. As the **Housekeeper** has warned him, "philology leads to the worst"; for **Ionesco**, "philology" here connotes not a "love of language" but a penchant pursued past the point of addiction. Categories: Drama Criticism, Literary Criticism, Literary Theory, Literature, Theatre StudiesTags: Alfred Jarry, Analysis of Eugene Ionesco's Play Exit the King, Analysis of Eugene Ionesco's Play Man with Bags, Analysis of Eugene Ionesco's Play Rhinoceros, Analysis of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Chairs, Analysis of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Killer, Analysis of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Lesson, Analysis of Eugene Ionesco's Plays, Antonin Artaud, Camus's Caligula, Criticism of Eugene Ionesco's Play Exit the King, Criticism of Eugene Ionesco's Play Man with Bags, Criticism of Eugene Ionesco's Play Rhinoceros, Criticism of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Bald Soprano, Criticism of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Chairs, Criticism of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Killer, Criticism of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Lesson, Criticism of Eugene Ionesco's Plays, Essays of Eugene Ionesco's Play Exit the King, Essays of Eugene Ionesco's Play Man with Bags, Essays of Eugene Ionesco's Play Rhinoceros, Essays of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Bald Soprano, Essays of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Chairs, Essays of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Killer, Essays of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Lesson, Essays of Eugene Ionesco's Plays, Eugène Ionesco, Eugene Ionesco's Plays, French Avant-garde theatre, Literary Criticism, Literary Theory, Notes of Eugene Ionesco's Play Exit the King, Notes of Eugene Ionesco's Play Man with Bags, Notes of Eugene Ionesco's Play Rhinoceros, Notes of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Bald Soprano, Notes of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Chairs, Notes of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Killer, Notes of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Lesson, Notes of Eugene Ionesco's Plays, Plot of Eugene Ionesco's Play Exit the King, Plot of Eugene Ionesco's Play Man with Bags, Plot of Eugene Ionesco's Play Rhinoceros, Plot of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Bald Soprano, Plot of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Chairs, Plot of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Killer, Plot of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Lesson, Research Paper of Eugene Ionesco's Plays, Study Guide of Eugene Ionesco's Play Exit the King, Study Guide of Eugene Ionesco's Play Man with Bags, Study Guide of Eugene Ionesco's Play Rhinoceros, Study Guide of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Bald Soprano, Study Guide of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Chairs, Study Guide of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Killer, Study Guide of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Lesson, Study Guide of Eugene Ionesco's Plays, Summary of Eugene Ionesco's Play Exit the King, Summary of Eugene Ionesco's Play Man with Bags, Summary of Eugene Ionesco's Play Rhinoceros, Summary of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Bald Soprano, Summary of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Chairs, Summary of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Killer, Summary of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Lesson, Summary of Eugene Ionesco's Plays, Theatre Studies, Themes of Eugene Ionesco's Play Exit the King, Themes of Eugene Ionesco's Play Man with Bags, Themes of Eugene Ionesco's Play Rhinoceros, Themes of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Bald Soprano, Themes of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Chairs, Themes of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Killer, Themes of Eugene Ionesco's Play The Lesson, Themes of Eugene Ionesco's Plays, Thesis of Eugene Ionesco's Plays There is also the matter of the **Tynan** debate, or **London** controversy as it has often been called among students of **Ionesco**'s work. Set against the stuffy banality of a bourgeois household (**Ionesco** himself suggested the use of a set prepared for **Henrik Ibsen**'s **Hedda Gabler**, 1890, English translation, 1891), **The Bald Soprano** begins with the dour, machine-voiced **Mrs.** **Turning** at last to an available blackboard, the **Orator** fares hardly better, managing at best a meaningless gabble of words, letters, and fragments.

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