

Working through Trauma in Eugène Ionesco's Diaries

Maria Lupas

Abstract

Eugène Ionesco, one of the main creators of the theater of the absurd, which saw the light in the aftermath of the traumas of the Second World War, also published diaries at different moments of his life. This article traces how Eugène Ionesco used the diary genre to work through his own traumatic experiences. I argue that in the diaries, Ionesco shows how he worked through the memories of his father in order to arrive at a reconciliation. I also suggest that Ionesco used similar techniques to work through his relationships with his native Romania's troubled history, with his friend Mircea Eliade, and with Romania's young generation of the 1930s. Ionesco's "work of memory" would also weigh in on a scholarly controversy that Ionesco, though a member of the French Academy and public intellectual in France, was silent about his own past and that of his friends who had been connected to fascist activism in Romania around World War II.

Introduction

The philosopher Paul Ricoeur uses the term "work of memory" in his 2000 book, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, where he builds on Freud's theory of mourning and melancholy to say that traumatic memories need to be worked through and faced or else they are endlessly repeated in a manner that leads to sickness rather than to health (84). More recently Dominick LaCapra has tried to articulate the connection between the seemingly disparate disciplines of history, and especially literature, and critical theory because our recent past has seen "disastrous events and melancholic aftermaths" proliferate (5). In the case of the writer Eugène Ionesco (1909-1994), several approaches to history and literature seem possible: one approach would examine only his works while another would be to look at his life. Ionesco, however, poses a particular problem because, as critics including Marie-Claude Hubert have noted, Ionesco's life often provided material for the stage (6). My critical suggestion is to use the historical context to ask critical questions and then allow the literary text to speak as a literary text that tells a story with its own internal logic.

While Eugène Ionesco's theater has been amply studied in France and to a lesser degree in the English-speaking world as well, Ionesco's published diaries have been less studied as literature on their own right. They have rather been read as documents concerning his life and his personal connections to persons accused of having supported fascist activism. One example would be the debate around Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine's 2002 monograph *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco, L'oubli du fascisme* [*Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: Forgetting Fascism*].

By situating the diaries in the context of his generation in Romania for which the dairy genre was a privileged genre, and by examining one event that Ionesco has called traumatic and how he wrote it and worked through it in the diary, I attempt to show how he writes a resolution to a story that unfolds in the pages of the diary. The story of Ionesco's relationship with his father may provide hints to other cases where Ionesco worked through trauma and difficulty in his relationships. This may shed some light on Ionesco's engagements as a writer and public intellectual.

1. To write or not to write a diary

Ionesco himself published three volumes of diaries with French publishers: *Journal en miettes* [*Crumbs of a Diary*] (1967), *Présent passé, passé présent* [*Present Past, Past Present*] (1968), and *La quête intermittente* [*The Intermittant Quest*] (1987). In addition, he also used the word "diary" (*journal* in French and *jurnal* in Romanian) in the title of many articles he published in the Romanian or French press throughout his life. Indeed, Ionesco's use of the diary genre goes back much earlier than the first published volumes of the 1960s. It dates to his youth in Romania and took place in a time and climate that were particularly propitious to the diary genre. Ionesco and his generation were in many ways marked by the diary genre.

When Ionesco was coming of age in the late 1920s and early 1930s, two waves of diary publications were hitting the reading public in Europe. The first wave was the re-edition of nineteenth-century diaries that had previously been overly revised and expurgated. The second was a wave of diaries published for the first time that often took their inspiration from the first wave (Lejeune and Bogaert, 208). The first wave included the diaries of Henri-Frédéric Amiel, the Goncourt brothers, Marie Bashkirtseff, and Barbellion, while the second wave included André Gide's diary of his writing the novel, *les Faux-monnayeurs*, the diary of Katherine Mansfield, and the diary of Jules Renard. These diaries published in the French and English-speaking world were also widely known and reviewed in the Romanian press as well.

In a 1936 article published in the Romanian press, the young Ionesco, in describing the Romanian intellectual scene, characterizes and caricatures it by its use of the diary:

[...] era un moment în care cercetarea lucrurilor obiective părea pentru totdeauna desconsiderată; când toți indivizii cereau să trăiască, să crească; era o avalanșă de euri hipertrofiate; de 'viață mai presus de toate'; de trăire a clipei; de acordare de importanță tuturor dezastrelor intime; de disperări, de fluxuri, de subiectivități; era victoria adolescenților, victoria egocentrismelor, victoria tuturor lucrurilor personale care cereau să trăiască, să domine; victoria indisciplinei, a desfrîului, a vitalismelor. Se publicau jurnale intime. Fiecare avea jurnal intim și se bătea cu pumnii în piept ; nu-mi pasă de nimeni decât pe mine.

It was a time when the study of objective things seemed permanently undervalued; a time when all individuals were asking to live, to grow; there was an avalanche of hypertrophied egos; of “life above all things,” of living the moment; of giving importance to all intimate disasters; of despair, of fluctuations, of subjectivities; it was the victory of adolescents, the victory of egocentrisms, the victory of personal matters that were calling to be lived, to dominate; the victory of indiscipline, of unruliness, of vitalities. Diaries were published. Everyone kept a diary and was pounding his chest; I do not care about anyone except myself. (*Razboi I*, 89, my translation)

In the above passage, Ionesco targets members of what has been called the Romanian young generation. All across Eastern Europe, in the aftermath of the Great War, “young generations” asserted their originality vis-à-vis the past. They viewed the experience of the war as “an absolute break in time and history necessitating revolutionary solutions” (Livezeanu 240). The situation was often complicated by the redrawing of political boundaries following the war in Europe and the emergence of nation-states that incorporated new minority populations and necessitated new solutions of symbiosis. Interwar Romania had greatly gained in land and people including several cosmopolitan centers with strong Jewish communities.

In Romania, the “young generation” arguably goes back to 1927, when the future historian of religions Mircea Eliade, then a 20-year-old student, had launched a call to his generation in the columns of the Bucharest newspaper *Cuvântul* [*The Word*].

Although the “young generation” remains an elusive term whose boundaries were fluid, it is interesting that Ionesco, as a young literary critic in his caricature of this generation, notes that one characteristic feature was that everyone was keeping a diary.

The young generation in Romania divided politically during the unstable interwar years. Some intellectuals like Eliade gradually radicalized to the right and associated with ultra-nationalist groups like the Iron Guard (Clark 128), while other intellectuals including Ionesco rejected the Iron Guard (Livezeanu 241).

Although he distanced himself from right-wing politics, Ionesco resembled others in his generation in that he was well abreast of the diary trend. He read diaries and kept a diary. That Ionesco read diaries is evidenced by others of this generation. For example, Mihail Sebastian (1907-1944), a Jewish Romanian writer and literary critic whose diary published posthumously in 1996 revealed the hardships undergone by Jews in Bucharest cultural life during the war years, notes an encounter with Eugène Ionesco in 1941 where the latter is enraged by remarks perceived as anti-Semitic in Gide's diary (September 4, 1941). In his literary criticism of the 1930s and 1940s published in Romanian newspapers, Ionesco rarely reviewed diaries (unlike Sebastian who reviewed numerous published diaries for the Romanian press) with the exception of the diary of the great Romanian literary critic Titu Maiorescu.

Maiorescu (1840-1917) was the founder of cultural circle “Junimea” (Romanian for “youth”) which included such master poets and writers as Mihai Eminescu, Ion Luca Caragiale, and Ioan Creanga, talents which Maiorescu himself promoted. For Ionesco, however, Maiorescu's great work, far more than his other (arguably immense) contributions to Romanian literature, was his diary. He writes in the February 3, 1937 issue of *Facla* that

Titu Maiorescu [...] se dovedește a fi [...] un om care a dorit [...] să facă critică și cultură pentru a evada din el însuși, pentru a-și compensa tristețile, singurătatea, lipsa de credință în Dumnezeu. Acest jurnal e mult mai interesant decât toată critica lui Titu Maiorescu, pentru că, este preferabil să-l vezi în autenticitatea sa, în ceea ce l-a determinat să fie așa cum a încercat să fie. // [...] De altfel, singura șansă a lui Titu Maiorescu de a redeveni actual, de a reînvia era să aibă un jurnal în care să ne vorbească despre el.

Titu Maiorescu [...] proves to be a man who desired to make literary criticism and culture in order to escape from himself, in order to compensate for his sorrows, his loneliness, his lack of belief in God. This diary is much more interesting than all of Titu Maiorescu's critical work because it is preferable to see him in his authenticity, in that which determined him to be that which he tried to be. // [...] And besides, the only chance that Titu Maiorescu has of becoming current again, of resuscitating, was having a diary in which he tells us about himself. (*Război I*, 311-12, my translation)

Ionesco's review of Maiorescu's diary is revealing both of his desire to be unconventional in esteeming Maiorescu's diary over Maiorescu's literary criticism, which had permanently shaped Romanian literature, and of Ionesco's high esteem of the diary genre.

Ionesco even argued for the absolute superiority of the diary genre in his 1934 book, *Nu [No]*. The book's title is Romanian for the negation, "no," and in one section Ionesco attacks novelists for lying, in a posturing reminiscent of Plato's exclusion of poetry from the city in *The Republic*: "*Constituind, organizînd, compunînd, regizînd etc., romancierul artificializează. Şi a artificializa înseamnă a minţi.* [By constructing, organizing, composing, ordering, etc. the novelist is employing artifice. And to employ artifice means to lie]" (188, my translation). Ionesco also argues that literature should instead be more like a diary (194).

Ionesco followed his own advice and published several articles in the Romanian press with the title "Diary" [*Jurnal*] which represent close to 10% of the articles in the two-volume anthology of Ionesco's Romanian newspaper articles, *Razboi cu toată lumea*, edited by Mariana Vartic and Aurel Sasu.

In addition, the fact that Ionesco kept a diary seems to be a known fact among Ionesco's acquaintances. Mircea Eliade in his diary writes in 1945 about an encounter with Ionesco in Paris where the discussion turned to Ionesco's personal diary. Eliade writes that he encouraged Ionesco to continue writing (October 4, 1945).

While Ionesco won world-wide fame for his theater rather than his diaries, his diaries are nonetheless deeply rooted in his literary career and in his perception of literature. During the 1930s the young Ionesco expressed his high opinion of the genre in a context in which diary publishing was reaching new heights. It is also clear that Ionesco both read and kept diaries, a practice he shared with others of his generation

whom he often derided.

2. Working through traumatic memories of his father

There seems to be a scholarly consensus that Ionesco's Romanian years were traumatic even if they later furnished him with powerful material for his career as a writer. Marta Petreu's 2001 book *Ionescu În Țara Tatălui [Ionesco in His Father's Country]* suggests that the Romanian experience was traumatic (61). Anne Quinney has also suggested that Ionesco's origins and experiences in Romania constitute "fundamental concerns at the heart of his writing" (38). The Romanian-American critic Matei Calinescu has pointed to partial sources for the play *Rhinoceros* being in Ionesco's experience of "extreme mystical nationalism" in Romania (1995, 401).

While much attention has been given to Ionesco's painful witnessing of the extreme right, I argue that it is the relationship with his father hereto much neglected in critical treatments of Ionesco that the writer puts foremost on display in his published diaries and that it is this painful relationship, closely intertwined with his experience of the extreme right because his father had supported the Iron Guard, that the writer works through to a reconciliation.

In 1967, Ionesco published *Journal en miettes*, a diary which incorporates Ionesco's experiences with psychoanalysis, but which focuses more on memories of his mother. In it, however, Ionesco weaves in some memories of his father: "*Il avait de grosses chaussures, pauvre bonhomme. On s'est engueulé si souvent à cause de ces chaussures, justement, pauvre papa. [...] J'ai très pitié de mon père, il est vivant bien que mort depuis dix-neuf ans. [He had big shoes, the old man. We often fought precisely because of his shoes, poor papa. [...] I have a lot of pity for my father, he is alive even though dead for nineteen years]*" (203, my translation). An argument over shoes may seem superficial, but Ionesco manages to suggest a deeper cause in the following lines when he writes, "*ils sont morts, je vous dis, et ma mere, et ta maitresse, et ce con de capitaine, cet imbecile de Buruiana, o papa, pauvre con ! [They are dead, I tell you, and my mother, and your mistress, and that schmuck of a captain, that imbecile Buruiana, o papa, poor schmuck]*" (JM, 204, my translation). By naming the father's mistress and a captain and a certain Buruiana, the list suggests a longer story, but without explicating the action or the details.

In the diary, the memories of his father are then interrupted by episodes at a clinic, where "Z.," a psychoanalyst, tries to get Ionesco to work through his past, but then the author again shifts the story to the memories of his father and describes

what he calls a “dream of reconciliation.” The point of departure for the dream is the realization that he had something in common with his father and namely their shoes. This causes father and son to laugh in the dream. It is precisely the big shoes that he had mentioned earlier as the cause of their quarrelling:

A la fin du rêve avec mon père, quand j'ai vu qu'il avait ses bottines noires comme les miennes // ou plutôt que les miennes étaient comme les siennes, j'ai ri et nous avons ri. Je lui avais fait une concession. C'était un rêve de réconciliation. Je le sentais seul, vivant parmi tant de morts, désespéré, perdu, hors du monde. Tout un monde, tous ceux qui l'entouraient, dans le gouffre.

At the end of the dream with my father, when I saw he had black boots like mine or rather that mine were like his, I laughed and we laughed. I conceded to him. It was a dream of reconciliation. I felt him so alone, living among so many dead. He was confused, lost, outside of the world. All this world, all of them in the pit. (210—11, my translation)

Two points about the dream are worth noting. The first is that the beginning of reconciliation occurs when the father's death is emphatically affirmed. The other point is that, strangely, the only cause of the quarrel between father and son that is explicitly mentioned in *Journal en miettes* is the father's big shoes. In the dream of reconciliation Ionesco need only recognize that he too now had big shoes for the conflict to be resolved. It is an easy solution to an all too easy problem, yet in the internal logic of the diary, the story problem seems to be solved. But for a deeper reconciliation to take place, Ionesco needs to acknowledge a more complicated and painful problem with his father.

The stage for a more thorough exploration of the relationship with the father will be in *Présent passé, passé présent*, published one year later. In *Présent passé, passé présent*, the father appears on thirty-four pages of the Mercure de France edition, out of the total of two hundred seventy-three pages. Here, Ionesco seems to confront all the events concerning his father in their painful reality: the attempted suicide of his mother in his father's presence, the conversation with his father where the latter says marrying Ionesco's mother was committing an act of racial impurity, and the father's hypocrisy in changing with the political wind and supporting even the fascist legionary government with its murderous deeds.

Présent passé, passé présent opens with the expressed intent of remembering his

father: “*Je cherche dans mon souvenir les premières images de mon père.* [I search in my memory for the first images of my father]” (9, translation Lane 5). Quickly in the text, the author mentions a singular memory about his father that he says traumatized him (22). The memory is amply prefaced as being an event that left a deep impression on him, something he cannot not tell, and something which determined his attitudes and hatreds (23).

Ionesco describes in slow motion the incident, which is important enough to quote extensively:

I must have been four years old and we were still living in the house on the rue Blomart. [...] I lived in this room with my mother for a long time after he left. [...]// My mother is very unhappy. She is crying. He scolds her, he cries out, as he lies there in bed. My mother comes toward me, then goes away. She finishes dressing or else cleans the room up; she comes over to the bed where he is lying, speaks, goes away, grows more and more nervous. He does not allow himself to show any tender feelings. He has a loud voice, an evil look about him. He keeps talking. What he is saying must be very harsh. My mother begins to sob. Suddenly she makes a move toward the dressing table next to the window. She takes the silver drinking cup that she has been given, in my name, the day of my baptism. She takes the cup and pours a whole bottle of iodine into it, like tears, like blood, staining the silver. Weeping the while in her childish way, she brings the cup to her lips. My father had already gotten up, very quickly, a few seconds before, and I can see him in his long underwear, hurrying over with his long strides and holding back my mother’s hand. He calls her by her name and tries to calm her. My mother continues to weep as he takes the cup out of her hand. The cup, which I still have, is still full of indelible stains. (translation Lane 19-20)

Having written down the memory in its detail, the author can acknowledge the power it has over him even at the time he is writing. Marie-Claude Hubert has already noted how this primordial episode in Ionesco’s life found itself worked into his 1953 play, *Victimes du devoir* [*Victims of Duty*], while André Le Gall in his 2009 biography of Ionesco also highlights the importance of the incident with the silver cup, but limits the importance to childhood (Hubert 42, Le Gall 36). Nevertheless, unlike in the play, in the diary, Ionesco more courageously claims the scene as his own experience.

The story of this childhood trauma is intricately linked to later events in

Ionesco's life. First, the memory suggests a later event in the marriage when the father abandoned Ionesco's mother, with the words, "after his departure." Ionesco thus included a second reproach he had against his father in the same passage. Also in Ionesco's description of the childhood incident, another later memory of his father is woven in between the words prefacing the traumatism and the retelling of the trauma itself. In the preface, Ionesco says that his father, dead, will never be able to read what the author is writing against him (24) and this triggers another memory of the last time the author saw his father which the author then tells. Indeed, the last meeting with his father as described in the diary turned into a quarrel and Ionesco reveals another grievance he has against his own father, namely, being a political opportunist:

The last time I saw him, I had completed my studies, had become a young professor, and was married; we had lunch together at his request, and we had a falling out because he was a rightist intellectual; today he would be a leftist intellectual. He was, in fact, one of the rare lawyers in Bucharest who was allowed to appear before the bar after the Communists came to power. My father was not a conscious opportunist; he believed in the powers that be. He respected the State. He believed in the State, no matter what it represented. [...] As far as he was concerned, the moment a party took over it was right. This is how he came to be an Iron Guard, a Freemason democrat, and a Stalinist. (translation Lane, 18)

The quarrel ended in ugly name-calling and Ionesco concludes that he never saw his father again (26-27). Ionesco weaves together the adult memory of his father's political allegiances to the childhood memory of the father's insensitivity to his mother which led her to try to take poison.

Ionesco continues to explore his relationship with his father in remaining pages of *Présent passé, passé présent* which contain excerpts from a diary written in Bucharest around 1940. The 1940s diary painfully recounts the growing anti-Semitism of the war years. Ionesco describes the oppressive ambient hatred against Jews such as the following remark by one of his colleagues:

The geography teacher at the lycee S.S., the teacher who is so kind and so nice, asks me with his usual kind smile: "Is it true that all the Jews in Bessarabia have

been killed? That means that they have begun to put their plan to exterminate Jews into effect. It's not too soon." And he was happy. I don't know what makes me angrier: their stupidity or their bestiality. (translation Lane 121)

Ionesco also expresses his own powerful anxieties, given his maternal family's Jewish heritage, in this oppressive context:

(Fin janvier 1942) [...] D'abord, notre vie physique est menacée. Menace imminente, nous vivons dans un abri précaire : il y a la guerre, pour tous. En plus, pour nous, ce serait la fin, dans le cas d'une rébellion de la Garde de fer (nous serions éliminés en tant qu'hommes de gauche) ; exterminés, nous le serions // également dans le cas d'une révolution communiste (en tant que bourgeois) ; ou, enfin, nous pouvons être éliminés aussi à la suite des mesures prises par le gouvernement légal contre les gens de notre « catégorie » (160-161).

(The end of January, 1942) [...] First of all, our physical life is threatened. An imminent threat; we live in a precarious shelter: it's war for everyone. Moreover, if there were a rebellion of the Iron Guard it would be the end of us (we would be eliminated as men of the left); we would also be wiped out in the case of a Communist revolution (insofar as [we were] bourgeois [...]); or, finally, we could also be eliminated by measures taken by the legal government against people in our "category" (translation Lane, modified, 111)

Ionesco further describes the beastly transformation of one of his own friends named "A" in the diary, who adheres to the Iron Guard (172-173, translation Lane 120). Significantly, next to these pages, Ionesco inserts another portrait of his father whom he refers to as the lawyer in Bucharest:

I think of the lawyer in Bucharest who was one of the chiefs of police of the government which collaborated with the enemy in 1918 when Romania was occupied by the armies of William II. [...]// The lawyer did not go into hiding. He became a member of General Averesco's party and one of his faithful disciples. [...] Then came the Fascist Iron Guard, which won over the entire country. There was collective delirium, and enthusiastic mass support of the guards; Codreanu, like Mao, like Hitler, like Castro, like Nasser, was the beloved tyrant, the adored killer, the prophet or the Messiah sent by God to do justice, but above all to kill and

flagellate his enemies and his friends. The lawyer, still going in the same direction as History, became a partisan of the Iron Guards and said to his son: "I have committed one great error in my life: I have sullied my blood; I must redeem the sin of the blood." Then came the war [...] (translation Lane, 128-129).

Having become partisan of the anti-Semitic Iron Guard, Ionesco's father looked with regret upon his marriage with the author's mother because of her Jewish heritage. In *Présent passé, passé présent*, Ionesco had thus finally spelled out one painful childhood trauma concerning his insensitive father who drove the mother to try to poison herself, and also a mouthful of grievances against the same politically self-serving father.

Several critical studies have already shown how Ionesco may have suffered from the climate of anti-Semitism in Bucharest around 1940 and how those events later grew into the play *Rhinoceros* (Calinescu 1995, Petreu 2001, Quinney 2007). Nevertheless, I argue that in addition to the adherences of acquaintances and close friends to such anti-Semitic groups as the Iron guard, it is significant that Ionesco's own father adhered to the Iron Guard. The memories of his father in Romania are intertwined with the general situation and constitute a particularly painful point. Above all, in *Présent passé, passé présent* which otherwise abounds in terrifying accounts of the war years, the event that truly gets labeled "traumatic" is the father's dispute with his mother.

Matei Calinescu insightfully suggested that Ionesco's relationship to his father was central to the writer's work and literary identity which grew out of a reaction against this father (2010, 120). I argue that the paternal relationship does indeed hold a central place, but that far from being a static relationship, Ionesco needed to work through the memory of his father.

Significantly, in the 1967 diary *Journal en miettes*, Ionesco imagines a reconciliation with the dreamed father. This happened only once the real father was already gone from this world. The separation was necessary for Ionesco to be able to work through the memory. Even the concession that Ionesco made to his father at least on the banal issue of shoes seemed to necessitate a prior separation from the father for whom he felt compassion in the dream because of the father's suffering among the dead.

In the 1968 diary *Présent passé, passé présent*, after having explored the traumatic childhood memory and described in detail the father's ugly behavior,

Ionesco can finally recognize his father's features on his own face: "*Aujourd'hui, chez le coiffeur, en me regardant dans la glace, j'ai surpris, sur mes lèvres, le sourire bonhomme de mon père* (173). [Today at the barber's when I looked at myself in the mirror I spied my father's good-natured smile on my lips]" (translation Lane, 120). In the internal logic of the diaries, the remark constitutes a reconciliation, fruit of a work of memory that unfolded on the pages of Ionesco's diaries.

3. The reconciliation with the father as a model for reconciliation with the young generation?

A similar pattern of separation and compassion that lead to a reconciliation seems to be at work in another painful relation of Ionesco: that with the Romanian young generation. Ionesco's relationship with the young generation in the 1930s was a complex one, and while being friends with many prominent members of that generation, he somehow did not identify with any kind of group. Perhaps by temperament he needed to contradict dominant opinions. In conscience, as a young man raised in France until his adolescence, he could not easily adhere to nationalist and protectionist politics and tendencies. His nonconformist stance is clearly stated in *Nu [No]* and in many pieces of his interwar journalism brought together under the title of *Războii cu toată lumea [At War with Everyone]*.

Ionesco's last published diary, *La Quete Intermittante* (1986), begins with the question of the whereabouts of the Romanian young generation:

On ne compte que quelques survivants de cet immense naufrage. Rari nantes in gurgite vasto. Guerres, maladies, suicides, assassinats, prisons, vieillesse. Qu'est devenue cette jeunesse ? Ces écrivains et ces poètes, et ces génies, cette jeunesse, la 'jeune génération', comme elle s'intitulait fièrement, fière d'être jeune, ne s'imaginant pas que la vieillesse, la mort existaient, qu'elles les attendaient au bout de la route. Où sont les éternellement jeunes, comme ils se croyaient ?

There are only a few survivors of this immense shipwreck. *Rari nantes in gurgite vasto*. Wars, sicknesses, suicides, assassinations, prisons, old age. What has happened to the youth? These writers and these poets and these geniuses, this youth, the "young generation," as it proudly called itself, proud to be young, not imagining that old age, that death existed, that it was waiting for them at the end of the road. Where are the eternally young as they believed themselves to be? (LQI 10, my translation).

Ionesco, in fact, answers his own question with a verse from Virgil's *Aeneid*. A few are visible here and there swimming on the surface of a vast whirlpool (*adparent rari nantes in gurgite vasto*, *Aeneid* I, 118).

Ionesco seems to pity the young generation brought down by wars, sickness, suicides, assassinations, prisons, and old age. It is precisely because they have been brought down that Ionesco can pity them. These words of reconciliation with the kind of people he had denounced as “rhinoceros” in *Présent passé, passé présent* and elsewhere are possible in part because the members of the young generation have died or are in a weak position.

This seems to be particularly the case with Mircea Eliade who in the 1986 diary, *La Quete intermittente*, appears as a beloved acquaintance. The diary also clearly states that Eliade has died: “*Il y a huit mois que j'ai vu Mircea Eliade, à Chicago. La dernière fois. Et il est mort en avril : déjà, il était son ombre. [I saw Mircea Eliade in Chicago eight months ago. [It was] [t]he last time: already he was the shadow of himself]*” (LQI 59, my translation). Whereas he had made little mention of Eliade in his published diaries of 1967 and 1968, Ionesco abundantly writes about Eliade in 1986, after Eliade's death. His name appears on five of the one hundred sixty-eight pages of the Gallimard edition of the text. Ionesco uses such French verbs as *regretter*, *me manquer*, *remercier* [regret, will miss, thank] to speak about Eliade (LQI 113-114). Ionesco even writes a cry of lamentation for him: “*Ah, hélas, hélas, dis-je, me dis-je. J'ai un tel désir de revoir Eliade, Mircea Eliade, que je ne reverrai plus, hélas, que je ne verrai plus. [Alas, alas, I say, I say to myself. I have such a desire to see Eliade again, Mircea Eliade, whom I will not see again, alas, whom I will not see again]*” (LQI 148, my translation).

There is no need to doubt Ionesco's sincerity in these lines. The literary echo of the biblical David's lamentation on his son Absalom who had turned against him may be present, which would be all the more reason to believe that Ionesco, like David, was sincere in his grief even when he and others had been directly or indirectly wronged by the deceased.

Already in response to Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine's 2002 book, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco, L'oubli du fascisme, trois intellectuels roumains dans la tourmente du siècle*, Ionesco's daughter had argued that Ionesco had forgiven Eliade during his lifetime: “*Ce qu'Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine ne comprend pas, c'est qu'en amitié - comme en amour - on dit des choses violentes, solennelles, 'définitives' ... qui, pour notre plus grande joie, ne // résistent pas au miracle des retrouvailles, à la grâce*

de la réconciliation. [What Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine does not understand is that in friendship as in love, one says things that are violent, solemn, ‘final’...which, to our great joy, do not hold up to the miracle of finding each other again, to the grace of reconciliation.]” (M.-F. Ionesco 115-116, my translation). Yet, in Ionesco’s published diaries, the final reconciliation comes only after Eliade’s death.

There would be further work to be done to probe Ionesco’s complex relationship with Eliade. Some have blamed Ionesco for seeming to be silent about his friends’ political roles in Romania. I argue that a certain separation was necessary before Ionesco could be outspoken. This would be the case for Ionesco’s famous play condemning radicalization of both the right and the left, *Rhinoceros*, which debuted in 1959 after Eliade left France and his proximity to the Ionescos. Similarly, the French translation of Ionesco’s first prose book, *Nu [Non]*, which came to light in the peak of the Romanian young generation and did not hesitate to criticize that generation, also appeared the year of Eliade’s death.

The preface to the 1986 translation shows Ionesco taking a much softer stance on the Romanian young generation and the literary establishment. He says of the 1934 book, *Nu*:

Écrit pour combattre des auteurs et un monde qui n’avaient que les vicissitudes de tous les gens de lettres et de toute littérature, ce livre tourne aujourd’hui à l’avantage et à une sorte de réhabilitation d’une époque qui paraît, à l’heure actuelle, incroyablement libre et que les habitants de la Roumanie d’aujourd’hui contemplant avec la plus grande nostalgie.

Written to combat writers and a world that only had the vicissitudes of all people of letters and of all literature, this book has turned today to their advantage and has become a sort of rehabilitation of an era that seems today to be unbelievably free and that those who live in today’s Romania contemplate with great nostalgia (*Non*, 3, my translation).

In the same way that in 1967 Ionesco was able to write the reconciliation with his own father who had abandoned his mother, and adhered successively to all the oppressive regimes in Romania only once the latter was in the grave and once he could evoke in detail his grievances against his father, perhaps further readings would confirm that Ionesco became reconciled with the young generation which he had once vehemently resisted only once that generation was almost gone. In the case

of Ionesco's relationship with his father, the memory was successively evoked and deepened in a process requiring separation and successive exploration.

Conclusion

Eugène Ionesco died in 1994, barely a few years after the fall of totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe and the opening of Soviet-era archives. It was a time when new technologies were spreading which would usher in new kinds of communication, politics, and power relationships. His theater and his diaries emerged from a history quite different from that of the internet age, but they show the power of a human being to denounce wrongs such as a father's irresponsibility to his family, to work through traumatic memories of broken family relationships, and to forgive and overcome those wrongs. The process required courage, time, and separation. Ionesco's diaries show how he worked through memories of his father which proved to be intertwined with memories of a troubled history in Romania. The process completed in the case of the traumatic memory of the father may also be an example that can be applied to help those who are currently grappling with the complicated legacies of the 20th century.

Works Cited

- Calinescu, Matei. "Eliade and Ionesco in the Post-World War II Years: Questions of Identity in Exile." *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade*, edited by Christian K. Wedemeyer and Wendy Doniger, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 103–31.
- . "Ionesco and Rhinoceros: Personal and Political Backgrounds." *East European Politics & Societies*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1995, pp. 393–432. doi:10.1177/0888325495009003002.
- Clark, Roland. *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania*. Cornell University Press, 2015.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Jurnal*. Edited by Mircea Handoca, Humanitas, 2004.
- Hubert, Marie-Claude. *Eugène Ionesco*. Seuil, 1990.
- Ionesco, Eugène. *Journal en miettes*. Mercure de France, 1967. (=JM)
- . *La quête intermittente*. Gallimard, 1987. (=LQI)
- . *Non*. Translated by Marie-France Ionesco, Gallimard, 1986.
- . *Nu*. [Reproduction], Humanitas, 1991.
- . *Présent passé, passé présent*. Mercure de France, 1968.

- . *Present Past, Past Present: A Personal Memoir*. Translated by Helen R. Lane, Da Capo Press, 1998.
- . *Razboi cu toată lumea: publicistica românească*. 2 vols. Edited by Mariana Vartic and Aurel Sasu, Humanitas, 1992.
- Ionesco, Marie-France. *Portrait de l'écrivain dans le siècle: Eugène Ionesco, 1909-1994*. Gallimard, 2004.
- LaCapra, Dominick. *History, Literature, Critical Theory*. Cornell University Press, 2013.
- Laignel-Lavastine, Alexandra. *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: L'oubli du fascisme: Trois intellectuels roumains dans la tourmente du siècle*. Presses universitaires de France, 2002.
- Le Gall, André. *Eugène Ionesco: Mise en scène d'un existant spécial en son œuvre et en son temps*. Flammarion, 2009.
- Lejeune, Philippe, and Catherine Bogaert. *Le journal intime: histoire et anthologie*. Textuel, 2005.
- Livezeanu, Irina, and Árpád von Klimó, editors. *The Routledge History of East Central Europe since 1700*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.
- Petreu, Marta. *Ionescu în țara tatălui*. 2nd ed, Biblioteca Apostrof, 2001.
- Quinney, Anne Holloway. "Excess and Identity: The Franco-Romanian Ionesco Combats Rhinocerotis." *South Central Review*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2007, pp. 36–52.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*. Éd. du Seuil, 2000.
- Sebastian, Mihail. *Jurnal : 1935-1944*. Edited by Gabriela Omăt and Leon Volovici, Humanitas, 1996.