PRAGMATICS IN EUGÈNE IONESCO'S THEATER

LA PRAGMATIQUE DANS LE THÉÂTRE D'EUGÈNE IONESCO

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Abstract: *The use of Grice's cooperative principles, conversational maxims and implicatures are of great utility in deciphering the semantic meanings of Ionesco's "absurdist" plays. Based on these concepts of pragmatic linguistics, we evaluate the meaning of Ionesco's short plays (The Bald Soprano, The Lesson and The Chairs) in relation to the communicative situation. Pragmatics is the field of linguistics that studies the meaning in conversation, as it is communicated by the speaker/writer and decoded to be understood by the listener/reader. Pragmatics is also the study of contextual meaning and how we communicate more than we say. Absurdist plays are particularly appropriate for such analysis, since reference and inference play an essential role in understanding the situation as well as the meaning of the characters in the tirades they utter on stage.*

Keywords: Meaning; Cooperative Principles; Interpretation; Textuality and Theatricality

Résumé : *Le recours aux principes coopératifs, aux maximes conversationnelles et aux implicatures de Grice se révèle d'une grande utilité pour déchiffrer les significations sémantiques des textes théâtraux « absurdes » de Ionesco. En s'appuyant sur ces concepts de la linguistique pragmatique, nous tenterons d'évaluer le sens des pièces courtes de Ionesco (La Cantatrice chauve, La Leçon et Les Chaises) en fonction de la situation de communication. La pragmatique est le domaine de la linguistique qui étudie le sens dans la conversation, tel qu'il est communiqué par le locuteur/écrivain et décodé pour être compris par l'auditeur/lecteur. La pragmatique est aussi l'étude du sens contextuel et de la manière dont on communique plus qu'on ne le dit. Les jeux absurdes sont particulièrement appropriés à une telle analyse, car la référence et l'inférence jouent un rôle essentiel dans la compréhension de la situation ainsi que la signification des personnages dans les tirades qu'ils prononcent sur scène.*

Mots-clés : Sens ; Principes Coopératifs ; Interprétation ; Textualité et Théâtralité.

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1. The author and the Theater of the Absurd

Eugène Ionesco, a Romanian French playwright who wrote mostly in French, is still one of the foremost figures of the French Avant-garde theater. Beyond ridiculing the most banal situations, Ionesco's plays depict the solitude and insignificance of human existence in a tangible way.

Ionesco was born in Slatina, Romania, but spent most of his childhood in France, which undoubtedly influenced his writing. When he was young, Ionesco confessed in his *Fragments of a Journal*, he was struck very suddenly with a feeling of intense luminosity, the feeling of floating off the ground and an overwhelming feeling of well-being. When he "floated" back to the ground and the "light" left him, he saw that the real world in comparison was full of decay, corruption and meaningless repetitive action. This also coincided with the revelation that death takes everyone in the end (Ionesco 1968).

The Bald Soprano (1950) is Ionesco's debut, a play that inaugurates the Theater of the Absurd and demolishes all the conventions of traditional drama. In 1951 his plays *The Lesson* and *The Chairs* were performed in French, and then in English. These dramatic works have aroused diverse reactions from both audiences and critics insured their enduring influence. As a result, Ionesco's plays have had directors and actors of the first rank in the French or British theater, such as Jean Louis Barrault, Orson Welles, and Lawrence Olivier.

Ionesco's earliest theatrical works, which were regarded as his most innovative, were one-act plays or extended sketches: *La Cantatrice Chauve* (written 1948), *Jacques, ou la soumission* (1950), *La Leçon* (1950), *Les Salutations* (1950), *Les Chaises* (1951), *L'Avenir est dans les oeufs* (1951), *Victimes du Devoir* (1952) and, finally, *Le Nouveau Locataire* (1953). These absurdist sketches, to which he gave such descriptions as "anti-play" (*anti-pièce* in French), express modern feelings of alienation and the impossibility and futility of communication with a surreal comic force, parodying the conformism of the bourgeoisie and conventional theatrical forms.

Ionesco is often considered as a writer of the Theatre of the Absurd, a label originally given to him by Martin Esslin in his book of the same name. Esslin placed Ionesco alongside contemporaries Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, and Arthur Adamov, calling this informal group "absurd" on the basis of Albert Camus' concept of the absurd. In his view, Beckett and Ionesco better captured the meaninglessness of existence in their plays than works by Camus or Sartre. Because of this loose association, Ionesco is often mislabeled an existentialist. Ionesco claimed in *Notes and*

Counter Notes that he was not an existentialist, and often criticized existentialist figurehead Jean-Paul Sartre. Although Ionesco knew Beckett and honored his work, the French group of playwrights was far from an organized movement.

2. Stage directions

The present study attempts to reveal the importance of using Grice's cooperative principles, conversational maxims, and implicatures in the process of deciphering semantic meanings embedded in the Ionescian absurdist theater texts. We will therefore use theories related to the field of pragmatics and will assess the meaning of the text according to the communicative situation in the short plays: *The Bald Soprano*, *The Lesson* and *The Chairs*. Thus, the study is concerned with understanding the underlying meaning in the characters' lines, which also involves the stage and its importance in theatre. Some of the key elements in the analysis are meaning, cooperative principles, interpretation, textuality and theatricality.

As Viviane Araújo Alves da Costa Pereira² points out, throughout the 20th century the increased importance of the role of the stage director transformed the way the dramatic text was written: stage directions become a way to indicate the writer's point of view, highlighting at the same time the shift from textuality to theatricality. The stage director, in turn, embodies this emancipation of theater from text, whose importance diminishes when compared to the scene. In this way, the debate over authorship acquires a new dimension: the search for the theatricality in theater.

In an utterance that became famous, Roland Barthes (Barthes 1954, 45-52) states that "theatricality is theater minus text". Isolated from its context and presented like this, this assertion might suggest an idea of theater that is exclusively dependent on stage production; however, Barthes does not reject the text or the stage production; he claims that theatricality - the transformation into theater - should be the essence of all theater.

Ionesco talked a lot about theater in general and about his own plays. He explained how some of them were conceived, as he imagined the show and what reactions he had on the stage. He was a complete man of the theater, ready to experiment with new means of expression, fascinated by the visual and sound dimensions of the show, forever present at rehearsals, in permanent dialogue with directors and actors. This is

² Viviane Araújo Alves da Costa Pereira, "Stage Directions Beyond Theater: Eugène Ionesco's exercise in theatricality", http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S2237-26602016000200331&script=sci_arttext&tlng=en

apparent in the detailed stage directions, which describe the writer as open to the concrete possibilities of staging. The choice of the finale in *The Bald Soprano* was conceived together with the director and the actors, and even the title of the play was the result of a verbal “accident” during rehearsals.

The Pleiade Edition contains, in *The Chairs*, long footnotes of the author which complete the direction, insisting on the need to bring as many chairs as possible on stage, and offering the solution to the introduction of a second Elder woman, who, just when the first one comes out, should come in through another door on the stage, in order to create the comical illusion of ubiquity.

Unhappy with the way *The Picture* was understood, Ionesco later wrote a note to correct the interpretation error: The picture must not be played in a naturalistic key, the characters must be emptied of any social or psychological content. The relationship between playwrights and creators of performances has always been tense, but their “fight” has seldom reached the audience; yet in Ionesco's case, things are a bit different: the relationship of the playwright with the directors or actors who have acted in his plays has a history, and it was written by Ionesco himself, with the clear consciousness that the radical novelty of his theatrical formula must be perceived and completely understood by the public.

After all, all the texts in which Ionesco speaks of his plays can be regarded as an unending explanation towards “the complete stage directions”. He had time to watch many performances of his various plays, and in doing so he continually sharpened his thoughts; even if he did not return to the text to rewrite the stage directions, he always expressed himself without equivocation. No author can defend himself against flawed interpretations, but these reflections of Ionesco's vision exist and it would be a shame to ignore them. Whatever independence from the playwright's intentions the performances have gained with time, such remarks remain important to the director or actor. Nonetheless, the reader himself is, in turn, both a director and an actor in the mind-projection show that occurs during the reading of a play.

3. Theoretical background and linguistic analysis

Pragmatics, which was founded in the 1960's by John Langshaw Austin, a philosopher of ordinary language, is opposed to the traditional acceptance of language to essentially describe reality. Pragmatics is the field of linguistics which studies meaning in conversation, as it is communicated by the speaker/ writer and decoded in order to be understood by the listener/ reader. According to George Yule (Yule 1996), “pragmatics has more to do with what people mean by their utterances than

what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves.” Therefore, pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning, of contextual meaning, and of how more gets communicated than merely what is said. That is why the absurdist plays often require such an analysis, as reference and inference play an essential part in understanding the situation as well as the characters’ meaning in the lines they utter on stage. Reference is an act in which a speaker, or character in our case, uses linguistic forms to enable a listener, or the audience, to identify his goals and beliefs, or the message conveyed by the playwright. Therefore, in order for reference to occur, we must involve inference. “Because there is no direct relationship between entities and words, the listener’s task is to infer correctly which entity the speaker intends to identify by using a particular referring expression.” (Yule 1996, 17-18) Accordingly, inference is the logical assumption we use to accept an utterance because of its connections to the other utterances that are supposed to be true.

As language in communication is not always of literal meaning, it often happens that an utterance is indirectly communicated by allusions, embedded or double meanings, which all play an important social role. This idea was the trigger towards Grice’s cooperative principles and conversational maxims that imply a conversational contribution that is required at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the spoken exchange and which follows the maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner for a perfectly clear and understandable conversational situation.

However, the “theater of the absurd” is not the case of perfect conversational situations, but rather texts of semantic innovations and awkward juxtapositions in order to reveal the absurdity and meaninglessness of the mundane. The violation of Grice’s cooperative principles is present throughout the dramatic text, which makes them difficult to understand, or sometimes impossible to decode without the actors’ performance that contributes additional non-verbal communicative information, and helps the audience cope with the unfamiliar.

By way of illustration, the opening scene of *The Bald Soprano* represents a clear violation of the quantitative principle, as Mrs Smith gives too many irrelevant details to his husband, who is not cooperative at all:

DOAMNA SMITH: Uite că s-a făcut ora nouă. Am mâncat supă, pește, cartofi cu slănină, salată englezească. Copiii au băut apă englezească. În seara asta am mâncat bine. Și asta fiindcă	Mme. SMITH: Tiens, il est neuf heures. Nous avons mangé de la soupe, du poisson, des pommes de terre au lard, de la salade anglaise. Les enfants ont bu de l’eau anglaise. Nous avons bien mangé, ce soir.
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locuim la marginea Londrei iar numele nostru e Smith.

Continuându-și lectura, Domnul Smith plescăie.

DOAMNA SMITH: Cartofii sunt foarte buni cu slănină, uleiul de salată nu era rânced. Uleiul de la băcanul din colț e de calitate mult mai bună decât uleiul de la băcanul de vizavi, ba e mai bun chiar și decât uleiul de la băcanul din capul străzii. Dar nu vreau să spun că uleiul lor ar fi prost.

Continuându-și lectura, Domnul Smith plescăie.

DOAMNA SMITH: Și totuși, uleiul băcanului din colț rămâne cel mai bun...

Continuându-și lectura, Domnul Smith plescăie.

DOAMNA SMITH: De data asta Mary a fiert bine cartofii. Ultima dată nu i-a fiert destul. Mie nu-mi plac decât bine fierți.

Continuându-și lectura, Domnul Smith plescăie.

DOAMNA SMITH: Peștele era proaspăt. M-am lins pe buze. Am luat de două ori. Ba nu, de trei ori. De-asta mă tot duc la closet. Si tu ai luat de trei ori. A treia oară însă tu ai luat mai puțin decât primele două dăți, în timp ce eu am luat mult mai mult. În seara asta am mâncat mai mult decât tine. Cum îți explici? De obicei, tu ești cel care mănâncă mai mult. Nu pofta de mâncare îți lipsește ție.

Continuându-și lectura, Domnul Smith plescăie.

DOAMNA SMITH: Și totuși, supa era poate un pic prea sărată. Avea mai multă sare ca tine. Ha! ha! ha! Și în plus avea prea mult praz și prea puțină ceapă. Îmi pare rău că nu i-am sugerat lui Mary să pună și-un pic de anason. Data viitoare știu ce-am de făcut.

Continuându-și lectura, Domnul Smith plescăie.

(Ionesco 2010, 7-9)

C'est parce que nous habitons dans les environs de Londres et que notre nom est Smith.

M. SMITH, continuant sa lecture, fait claquer sa langue.

Mme. SMITH: Les pommes de terre sont très bonnes avec le lard, l'huile de la salade n'était pas rance. L'huile de l'épicier du coin est de bien meilleure qualité que l'huile de l'épicier d'en face, elle est même meilleure que l'huile de l'épicier du bas de la côte. Mais je ne veux pas dire que leur huile à eux soit mauvaise.

M. SMITH, continuant sa lecture, fait claquer sa langue.

Mme. SMITH: Pourtant, c'est toujours l'huile de l'épicier du coin qui est la meilleure...

M. SMITH, continuant sa lecture, fait claquer sa langue.

Mme. SMITH: Mary a bien cuit les pommes de terre, cette fois-ci. La dernière fois elle ne les avait pas bien fait cuire. Je ne les aime que lorsqu'elles sont bien cuites.

M. SMITH, continuant sa lecture, fait claquer sa langue.

Mme. SMITH: Le poisson était frais. Je m'en suis liché les babines. J'en ai pris deux fois. Non, trois fois. Ça me fait aller aux cabinets. Toi aussi tu en as pris trois fois. Cependant la troisième fois, tu en as pris moins que les deux premières fois, tandis que moi j'en ai pris beaucoup plus. J'ai mieux mangé que toi, ce soir. Comment ça se fait? D'habitude, c'est toi qui manges le plus. Ce n'est pas l'appétit qui te manque.

M. SMITH, fait claquer sa langue.

Mme SMITH: Cependant, la soupe était peut-être un peu trop salée. Elle avait plus de sel que toi. Ah, ah, ah. Elle avait aussi trop de poireaux et pas assez d'oignons. Je regrette de ne pas avoir conseillé à Mary d'y ajouter un peu d'anis

étoile. La prochaine fois, je saurai m'y prendre.

M. SMITH, continuant sa lecture, fait claquer sa langue.³

The maxim of quantity stipulates that one should make one's contribution as informative as is required, but not more informative than required. In the first sentence Mrs. Smith states that they have already eaten, however, there is no need to enumerate everything they have had, as there is no one else present in the room, and both characters are supposed to know what they have eaten. The following lines contain too many explanations and personal opinions on the part of the speaker, while there is no reaction from the listener; therefore, the communicative process is impaired.

The text passes on to a different topic, but this time there is a violation of the relation principle. Both interlocutors miss relevance and logic in their communicative interventions.

DOAMNA SMITH: Iaurtul e ideal pentru stomac, rinichi, apendicită și apoteoză. Mi-a spus-o doctorul Mackenzie-King, care îi îngrijește pe copiii vecinilor noștri, familia Johns. E un medic bun. Poți să ai încredere în el. Nu recomandă decât medicamentele pe care le-a încercat pe pielea lui. Înainte să-l opereze pe Parker, s-a operat el însuși de ficat, cu toate că nu era deloc bolnav.

DOMNUL SMITH: Cum se face atunci că doctorul a scăpat și Parker a murit?

DOAMNA SMITH: Pentru că operația a reușit la doctor și n-a reușit la Parker.

DOMNUL SMITH: Atunci Mackenzie nu-i doctor bun. Operația ar fi trebuit să reușească la amândoi, sau amândoi ar fi trebuit să se curețe.

DOAMNA SMITH: De ce?

DOMNUL SMITH: Un doctor conștiincios trebuie să moară odată cu bolnavul, dacă nu se pot vindeca împreună. Un comandant de navă

Mme. SMITH: Le yaourt est excellent pour l'estomac, les reins, l'appendicite et l'apothéose. C'est ce que m'a dit le docteur Mackenzie-King qui soigne les enfants de nos voisins, les Johns. C'est un bon médecin. On peut avoir confiance en lui. Il ne recommande jamais d'autres médicaments que ceux dont il a fait l'expérience sur lui-même. Avant de faire opérer Parker, c'est lui d'abord qui s'est fait opérer du foie, sans être aucunement malade.

M. SMITH: Mais alors comment se fait-il que le docteur s'en soit tiré et que Parker en soit mort?

Mme SMITH: Parce que l'opération a réussi chez le docteur et n'a pas réussi chez Parker.

M. SMITH: Alors Mackenzie n'est pas un bon docteur. L'opération aurait dû réussir chez tous les deux ou alors tous les deux auraient dû succomber.

Mme. SMITH: Pourquoi?

M. SMITH: Un médecin consciencieux doit mourir avec le

³ <http://www.nikibar.com/publications/ionesco-la-cantatrice-chauve.html>

piere odată cu vaporul, înghițit de valuri. Nu-i supraviețuiește.

DOAMNA SMITH: Nu poți să compari un bolnav cu un vapor.

DOMNUL SMITH: De ce nu? Vaporul are și el bolile lui; oricum, doctorul tău e sănătos ca un vapor; un motiv în plus pentru care trebuia să piară în același timp cu bolnavul, la fel ca doctorul și vaporul lui.

DOAMNA SMITH: Ah! La asta nu m-am gândit... Poate că ai dreptate... și atunci care-i concluzia?

DOMNUL SMITH: Toți doctorii sunt niste șarlatani. Și bolnavii la fel, cu toții. În Anglia, numai marina e cinstită.

DOAMNA SMITH: Dar nu și marinarii.

DOMNUL SMITH: Bineînțeles. (Pauză.)

(Ionesco 2010, 9-11)

malade s'ils ne peuvent pas guérir ensemble. Le commandant d'un bateau périt avec le bateau, dans les vagues. Il ne lui survit pas.

Mme. SMITH: On ne peut comparer un malade à un bateau.

M. SMITH: Pourquoi pas? Le bateau a aussi ses maladies; d'ailleurs ton docteur est aussi sain qu'un vaisseau; voilà pourquoi encore il devait périr en même temps que le malade comme le docteur et son bateau.

Mme. SMITH: Ah! Je n'y avais pas pensé... C'est peut-être juste... et alors, quelle conclusion en tires-tu?

M. SMITH: C'est que tous les docteurs ne sont que des charlatans. Et tous les malades aussi. Seule la marine est honnête en Angleterre.

Mme. SMITH: Mais pas les marins.

M. SMITH: Naturellement. Pause.⁴

First, there is a puzzling association of terms - appendicitis and apotheosis - whose clear use is to create a poetic alliteration, but a nonsense in the process of understanding the sentential meaning. The problem is that the verbal play (which largely defines Ionesco's theatricality) mainly plays the effects of contrasts and associations that remind us of the free association technique used in psychoanalysis. It is therefore necessary to assume the same freedom so as to act accordingly on stage. Therefore, the pragmatic analysis of Gricean principles represents the key to a perfect semantic decoding.

What follows is a series of violations of the principles of relation, manner and quality. When Mr. Smith replies that Doctor Mackenzie is not a good doctor because he has succeeded in one operation but not the other, we encounter a violation of the principle of relation, which requires the interlocutors to be relevant. While, when discussing the association between the doctor and the ship, both characters break the principle of manner which requires the speakers to avoid obscurity and ambiguity, as well as the principle of quality - do not say what you believe to be false, do not say that for which you lack evidence. The final conclusion of the scene reopens the analysis of relevance, as it has nothing to do with the rest of the ideas mentioned in the conversational situation.

⁴ <http://www.nikibar.com/publications/ionesco-la-cantatrice-chauve.html>

The following scenes, including the discussion of a family whose members were all called Bobby Watson, which leads to complete confusion, the visit and the visitors' simulation of a meeting in the train, and the discussion of their address, belongings, children and other mutual elements, as if they have just been introduced to one another, are sheer evidence for the absurdity of the conversational situation. The puzzling effect of respecting the cooperative principle, as well as the maxims, while creating a comic of situation reveals the sensation of void in everyday conversations.

DOMNUL MARTIN: De când am sosit la Londra, locuiesc pe strada Bromfield, stimată doamnă.

DOAMNA MARTIN: Ce ciudat, ce bizar! Și eu, de când am sosit la Londra, tot pe strada Bromfield locuiesc, stimate domn.

DOMNUL MARTIN: Ce ciudat, dar atunci, dar atunci ne-am întâlnit pe strada Bromfield, stimată doamnă.

DOAMNA MARTIN: Ce ciudat; ce bizar! tot ce se poate, la urma urmei! dar nu-mi aduc aminte, stimate domn.

DOMNUL MARTIN: Eu locuiesc la numărul 19, stimată doamnă.

DOAMNA MARTIN: Ce ciudat, și eu tot la numărul 19 locuiesc, stimate domn.

DOMNUL MARTIN: Dar atunci, dar atunci, dar atunci, dar atunci, poate ne-am vazut în casa asta, stimată doamnă?

DOAMNA MARTIN: Tot ce se poate, dar nu-mi aduc aminte, stimate domn.

DOMNUL MARTIN: Apartamentul meu se află la etajul cinci, e numărul opt, stimată doamnă.

DOAMNA MARTIN: Ce ciudat, Dumnezeuule, ce bizar! și ce coincidență! Și eu locuiesc tot la etajul cinci, apartamentul opt, stimate domn!

DOMNUL MARTIN, *cazând pe gânduri*: Ce ciudat, ce ciudat, ce ciudat și ce coincidență! Știți, în dormitor am un pat. Patul e acoperit cu o plapumă verde.

M. MARTIN: Depuis que je suis arrivé à Londres, j'habite rue Bromfield, chère Madame.

Mme MARTIN: Comme c'est curieux, comme c'est bizarre! moi aussi, depuis mon arrivée à Londres j'habite rue Bromfield, cher Monsieur.

M. MARTIN: Comme c'est curieux, mais alors, mais alors, nous nous sommes peut-être rencontrés rue Bromfield, chère Madame.

Mme. MARTIN: Comme c'est curieux; comme c'est bizarre! C'est bien possible, après tout! Mais je ne m'en souviens pas, cher Monsieur.

M. MARTIN: Je demeure au n° 19, chère Madame.

Mme. MARTIN: Comme c'est curieux, moi aussi j'habite au n° 19, cher Monsieur.

M. MARTIN: Mais alors, mais alors, mais alors, mais alors, nous nous sommes peut-être vus dans cette maison, chère Madame?

Mme. MARTIN: C'est bien possible, mais je ne m'en souviens pas, cher Monsieur.

M. MARTIN: Mon appartement est au cinquième étage, c'est le n° 8, chère Madame.

Mme. MARTIN: Comme c'est curieux, mon Dieu, comme c'est bizarre! et quelle coïncidence! Moi aussi j'habite au cinquième étage,

Camera asta cu patul și plapuma verde se află la capătul coridorului, între closet și bibliotecă, stimată doamnă!

(Ionesco 2010, 27-28)

dans l'appartement n° 8, cher Mon-sieur!

M. Martin, *songeur*. Comme c'est curieux, comme c'est curieux, comme c'est curieux et quelle coïncidence! Vous savez, dans ma chambre à coucher j'ai un lit. Mon lit est couvert d'un édredon vert. Cette chambre, avec ce lit et son édredon vert, se trouve au fond du corridor, entre les water et la bibliothèque, chère Madame!⁵

This part of the conversation seems present only a slight question of breaking the maxim of quantity, as the details accumulate. However, the conversational situation does not violate the cooperative principle and yet it is definitely absurd. The following passage deviates a little towards the violation of the relation maxim, because of the repetitive details which do not lead to the obvious conclusion that the characters are husband and wife, as well as because certain elements, such as the colors of the girls' eyes, verge on the absurd:

DOAMNA MARTIN: Ce coincidență, ah, Dumnezeule, ce coincidență! Și dormitorul meu are tot un pat cu plapumă verde și se află la capătul coridorului, între closet, stimate domn, și bibliotecă!

DOMNUL MARTIN: Ce ciudat, bizar, straniu! Atunci, doamnă, locuim în aceeași cameră și dormim în același pat, stimată doamnă. Poate că acolo ne-am întâlnit!

DOAMNA MARTIN: Ce ciudat și ce coincidență! Tot ce se poate, acolo ne-om fi întâlnit, și poate chiar noaptea trecută. Dar nu-mi aduc aminte, stimate domn!

DOMNUL MARTIN: Eu am o fetiță, fetița mea locuiește cu mine, stimată doamnă. Are doi ani, e blondă, are un ochi alb și un ochi roșu, e tare frumușică și o cheamă Alice, stimată doamnă.

DOAMNA MARTIN: Ce coincidență bizară! Și eu am o fetiță, are doi ani, un ochi alb și un ochi roșu, e tare

Mme. MARTIN: Quelle coïncidence, ah mon Dieu, quelle coïncidence! Ma chambre à coucher a, elle aussi, un lit avec un édredon vert et se trouve au fond du corridor, entre les water, cher Monsieur, et la bibliothèque!

M. MARTIN: Comme c'est bizarre, curieux, étrange! Alors, Madame, nous habitons dans la même chambre et nous dormons dans le même lit, chère Madame. C'est peut-être là que nous nous sommes rencontrés!

Mme. MARTIN: Comme c'est curieux et quelle coïncidence!

C'est bien possible que nous nous y soyons rencontrés, et peut-être même la nuit dernière. Mais je ne m'en souviens pas, cher Monsieur!

M. MARTIN: J'ai une petite fille, ma petite fille, elle habite avec moi, chère Madame. Elle a deux ans, elle est blonde, elle a un œil blanc et un

⁵ <http://www.nikibar.com/publications/ionesco-la-cantatrice-chauve.html>

frumușică și o cheamă tot Alice,
stimate domn!

DOMNUL MARTIN, *aceeași voce*
tărăgănată, monotonă: Ce ciudat
și ce coincidență! Și ce bizar! poate
că-i aceeași, stimată doamnă!

DOAMNA MARTIN: Ce ciudat! tot
ce se poate, stimat domn.

Moment prelungit de tăcere...
Pendula bate de douăzeci și nouă
de ori.

(Ionesco 2010, 28-30)

œil rouge, elle est très jolie, elle
s'appelle Alice, chère Madame.

Mme. MARTIN: Quelle bizarre
coïncidence! moi aussi j'ai une
petite fille, elle a deux ans, un œil
blanc et un œil rouge, elle est très
jolie et s'appelle aussi Alice, cher
Monsieur!

M. MARTIN, *même voix traînante,*
monotone. Comme c'est curieux et
quelle coïncidence! et bizarre! c'est
peut-être la même, chère Madame!

Mme. MARTIN: Comme c'est
curieux! C'est bien possible cher
Monsieur.

Un assez long moment de silence...

*La pendule sonne vingt-neuf fois.*⁶

It should be emphasized here that Ionesco's style, of course, largely different from one piece to another, sometimes has geometrical precision, comical effects, and derision - even when he relies on humour, the puns and the humour spring from the underlying meaning, which is hidden in the words. The play continues at the same pace with the visit paid by Mr. and Mrs. Martin, until there is an unexpected firefighter, who has the role of animating the scene and contributes with an increase in speed of the comic situation. Time is also presented as atypical with the clock striking seven times, then three times, five times, two times and then according to the lines.

The final scene expresses the very idea of the absurd and the modern spirit of Ionesco's programmatic art, which succeeds the denial of rational reality and of the sheer logic of existence, while promoting the symbolic mark of aberration and the illogical. The author himself explained: "Cât despre logică, despre cauzalitate, să nu mai vorbim. Trebuie să le ignorăm cu totul. S-a sfârșit cu drama, cu tragedia. Tragicul devine comic, comicul devine tragic." (Ionesco 2011) Therefore, there is no logic in the absurdist theatre, there is no cause and effect, but more importantly, we no longer have to deal with drama - tragedy turns into comedy and the reverse. Relying on contrasts and unpredictability, Ionesco's theater would not function with sharp typologies; on the contrary, it always uses the expanded character, contradiction and polyphony by using poetry and humour.

DOMNUL MARTIN: Ochelarii nu
se lustruiesc cu smoală.

M. MARTIN: On ne fait pas briller
ses lunettes avec du cirage noir.

⁶ <http://www.nikibar.com/publications/ionesco-la-cantatrice-chauve.html>

DOAMNA SMITH: Da, dar cu bani poți să cumperi ce vrei.

DOMNUL MARTIN: Mai bine omor un iepuraș decât să cânt la oraș.

DOMNUL SMITH: Cacadu, cacadu, cacadu, cacadu, cacadu, cacadu, cacadu, cacadu, cacadu.

DOAMNA SMITH: Ce cacada, ce cacada, ce cacada, ce cacada, ce cacada, ce cacada, ce cacada, ce cacada.

DOMNUL MARTIN: Ce cascada de cacade, ce cascada de cacade, ce cascada de cacade, ce cascada de cacade, ce cascada de cacade, ce cascada de cacade.

DOMNUL SMITH: Câinii au purici, câinii au purici.

DOAMNA MARTIN: Cactus, coccis! cocoșat! corcoduș! cocon!

DOAMNA SMITH: Colțosule, ne-ai încolțit.

DOMNUL MARTIN: Mai bine fac un ou decât să fur un bou.

DOAMNA MARTIN, *deschizând larg gura*: Ah! oh! ah! oh! lăsați-mă să scrâșnesc din dinți.

DOMNUL SMITH: Caiman!

DOMNUL MARTIN: Să-i tragem palme lui Ulise.

DOMNUL SMITH: Mă retrag în cocoliba mea printre cocotieri.

DOAMNA MARTIN: Cocotierii cocotierelor nu fac corcodușe, fac coconuci! Cocotierii cocotierelor nu fac corcodușe, fac coconuci! Cocotierii cocotierelor nu fac corcodușe, fac coconuci.

DOAMNA SMITH: Șoarecii șoptesc, șaptele nu șoricesc.

DOAMNA MARTIN: Nu-mi mișca papucii.

DOMNUL MARTIN: Nu-mi pișca papucii.

DOMNUL SMITH: Pușcă musca, nu mușcă pușca.

DOAMNA MARTIN: Musca mișcă.

DOAMNA SMITH: Pișcă musca.

Mme. SMITH: Oui, mais avec l'argent on peut acheter tout ce qu'on veut.

M. MARTIN: J'aime mieux tuer un lapin que de chanter dans le jardin.

M. SMITH: Kakatoès, kakatoès, kakatoès, kakatoès, kakatoès, kakatoès, kakatoès, kakatoès.

Mme. SMITH: Quelle cacade, quelle cacade, quelle cacade, quelle cacade, quelle cacade, quelle cacade, quelle cacade.

M. MARTIN: Quelle cascade de cascades, quelle cascade de cascades, quelle cascade de cascades, quelle cascade de cascades, quelle cascade de cascades.

M. SMITH: Les chiens ont des puces, les chiens ont des puces.

Mme. MARTIN: Cactus, Coccyx! coccus! cocardard! cochon!

Mme. SMITH: Encaqueur, tu nous encaques.

M. MARTIN: J'aime mieux pondre un œuf que voler un bœuf. *Mme martin, ouvrant tout grand la bouche*. Ah! oh! ah! oh! laissez-moi grincer des dents.

M. SMITH: Caïman!

M. MARTIN: Allons gifler Ulysse.

M. SMITH: Je m'en vais habiter ma Cagna dans mes cacaoyers.

Mme. MARTIN: Les cacaoyers des cacaoyères donnent pas des cacahuètes, donnent du cacao! Les cacaoyers des cacaoyères donnent pas des cacahuètes, donnent du cacao! Les cacaoyers des cacaoyères donnent pas des cacahuètes, donnent du cacao.

Mme. SMITH: Les souris ont des sourcils, les sourcils n'ont pas de souris.

Mme. MARTIN: Touche pas ma babouche!

DOMNUL MARTIN: Musca cușca, musca cușca.
 DOMNUL SMITH: Mușcător remușcat!
 DOAMNA MARTIN: Scaramouche!
 DOAMNA SMITH: Sainte Nitouche!
 DOMNUL MARTIN: Ia fă duș!
 DOMNUL SMITH: Uite-acuș.
 DOAMNA MARTIN: Sainte Nitouche trage-un cartuș.
 DOAMNA SMITH: N-o atingeți, s-a făcut țândari.
 DOMNUL MARTIN: Sully!
 DOMNUL SMITH: Prudhomme!
 DOAMNA MARTIN, DOMNUL SMITH: François.
 DOAMNA SMITH, DOMNUL MARTIN: Coppee.
 DOAMNA MARTIN, DOMNUL SMITH: Coppee Sully!
 DOAMNA SMITH, DOMNUL MARTIN: Prudhomme François.
 DOAMNA MARTIN: Gâlgâiților, gâlgâitelor.
 DOMNUL MARTIN: Marina, cur de strachină!
 DOAMNA SMITH: Krishnamurti, Krishnamurti, Krish-namurti.
 DOMNUL SMITH: Papa sapă! Papa n-are supapă. Supapa are-un papă.
 DOAMNA MARTIN: Bazar, Balzac, bazin!
 DOMNUL MARTIN: Bizar, bazon, bizon!
 DOMNUL SMITH: A, e, i, o, u, a, e, i, o, u, a, e, i, o, u, i!
 DOMNUL MARTIN: B, c, d, f, g, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, x, z!
 DOAMNA MARTIN: Ceapă de apă, ceafă cu ceapă!
 DOAMNA SMITH, *facând ca trenul*: Tuff, tuff, tuff, tuff, tuff, tuff, tuff, tuff, tuff, tuff, tuff.
 DOMNUL SMITH: Nu!
 DOAMNA MARTIN: E!
 DOMNUL MARTIN: Pe-a...!
 DOAMNA SMITH: ... colo!
 DOMNUL SMITH: E!
 DOAMNA MARTIN: Pe!
 DOMNUL MARTIN: A!

M. MARTIN: Bouge pas la babouche!
 M. SMITH: Touche la mouche, mouche pas la touche.
 Mme. MARTIN: La mouche bouge.
 Mme. SMITH: Mouche ta bouche.
 M. MARTIN: Mouche le chasse-mouche, mouche le chasse-mouche.
 M. SMITH: Escarmoucheur escarmouche!
 Mme. MARTIN: Scaramouche!
 Mme. SMITH: Sainte-Nitouche!
 M. MARTIN: T'en as une couche!
 M. SMITH: Tu m'embouches.
 Mme. MARTIN: Sainte Nitouche touche ma cartouche.
 Mme. SMITH: N'y touchez pas, elle est brisée.
 M. MARTIN: Sully!
 M. SMITH: Prudhomme!
 Mme. MARTIN, M. SMITH: François.
 Mme SMITH, M. MARTIN: Coppée.
 Mme. MARTIN, M. SMITH: Coppée Sully!
 Mme SMITH, M. MARTIN: Prudhomme François.
 Mme. MARTIN: Espèces de glouglouteurs, espèces de glouglouteuses.
 M. MARTIN: Mariette, cul de marmite!
 Mme. SMITH: Khrishnamourti, Khrishnamourti, Khrishnamourti I
 M. SMITH: Le pape dérape! Le pape n'a pas de soupape. La soupape a un pape.
 Mme. MARTIN: Bazar, Balzac, Bazaine!
 M. MARTIN: Bizarre, beaux-arts, baisers!
 M. SMITH: A, e, i, o, u, a, e, i, o, u, a, e, i, o, u, i!
 Mme. MARTIN: B, c, d, f, g, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, x, z!
 M. MARTIN: De l'ail à l'eau, du lait à l'ail!

polyphonic chaos. However, this state of fury and irritation pairs with satire and rhythmic rhymes to the point of roaring “urlă unii în urechile celorlalți”. These characters do not obey the rules of psychological realism, and they are also experiencing radical registry changes - the language in the beginning of the play is rather dull, while at the end, characters transform themselves via language and register - a turn from excessive politeness to animal sounds, gestures and theatrical performance. After all, Ionesco's theater first sets out to stage a world of fantasies, of changeable characters, of revolt against a human universe emptied of authenticity. Echoes of this world are found even in the later plays, even if their concerns lie elsewhere. In fact, throughout his work, it is about a deep evil, an ontological evil, which escapes any attempt to be pinpointed. If we were to look for words to name this phenomenon, we would say that the evil with Ionesco is the void that haunts our life - an intrinsic vacuum, beyond our spontaneous gestures and reactions, the vacuum together with the subterfuges that we adopt to mask it. When faced with the depth of this evil, the representations that come into play of the predictable psychologies are helpless. That is why Ionesco's path to the world beyond the immediate reality does not pass through flat psychological realism.

The second play, which I have chosen as conducive to pragmatic and sematic analysis, *The Lesson*, is a very short play with three characters, which encompasses several dimensions of possible readings of the text. Here we find abuse of power, competition, corruption, opportunism, aggression, lack of compassion, subliminal messages and their seduction, frustration, and more. As Octavian Saiu says, the characters are individuals, but the consequences are collective, and the danger of an epidemic is imminent. It just requires tenacity and patience.

În *Lecția*, totul plutește în zona infinit mai eterică a agresiunii mentale, ascunse de luciul civilizației. Și a agresiunii sufletești, fiindcă există o componentă emoțională a violenței pe care Ionesco știe să o sugereze suficient de palid, încât să nu devină ostentativă, dar destul de limpede, cât să nu se piardă printre detalii. Cuvântul e mai dens decât gestul. Cuvântul gol, fără miez și sens, cuvântul rostogolit în înșiruii ilogice, absurd, distorsionat și crud. [...] Profesorul vorbește și, prin ceea ce emite ca sunet, transmite nu doar un mesaj, ci o anume energie malefică prin care va ajunge să o anihileze pe Eleva redusă la tăcere. Dincolo de funcția conotativă a obiectelor imaginare care capătă materialitate prin repetarea lor, dincolo de muzicalitatea orgiastică în care eșuează dialogul, dincolo de orice palier semantic al logosului din piesă, rămâne determinant acest tip de energie incandescentă pe care replicile o conțin și care devin vector al violenței. (Saiu 2016, 13)

The language experiences unimaginable metamorphoses in order to capture the lack of content, the clichés and the dehumanization of thought.

ELEVA: Oh, domnule! (*Bate din palme.*)

PROFESORUL, *autoritar*: Liniște! Ce-nseamnă asta?

ELEVA: Iertați-mă, domnule. (*își pune încet mâinile înapoi pe masă.*)

PROFESORUL: Liniște! (*Se ridică, se plimbă prin cameră, cu mâinile la spate; din când în când se oprește în mijlocul încăperii sau lângă Elevă și își întărește spusele cu un gest al mâinii; perorează, fără să exagereze prea mult; Eleva îl urmărește cu privirea și uneori o face cu greu, fiindcă trebuie să întoarcă mult capul; o dată sau de două ori cel mult, se întoarce complet.*) Prin urmare, domnișoară, spaniola este limba-mamă din care au purces toate limbile neo-spaniole, între care spaniola, latina, italiana, franceza, portugheza, româna, sarda sau sardanapala, spaniola și neo-spaniola — ba chiar și, în anumite privințe, limba turcă, mai apropiată totuși de greacă, lucru absolut logic, din moment ce Turcia se învecinează cu Grecia, iar Grecia e mai aproape de Turcia decât stăm noi doi acum: aveți aici încă o ilustrare a unei legi lingvistice extrem de importante, după care geografia și filologia sînt surori gemene... Puteți lua notițe, domnișoară.

ELEVA, *cu voce stinsă*: Bine, domnule.

PROFESORUL: Ceea ce deosebește limbile neo-spaniole între ele și dialectele lor de alte grupuri lingvistice, cum ar fi grupul limbilor austriece și neo-austriece sau habsburgice, ca și de grupările esperantistă, helvetică, monegască, schwi-tzeră, andorriană, bască, șapcă, precum și de grupurile de

L'ÉLÈVE: Oui, Monsieur, oh! (*Elle frappe dans ses mains*)

LE PROFESSEUR (*avec autorité*): Silence! Que veut dire cela?

L'ÉLÈVE: Pardon, Monsieur.

Lentement, elle remet ses mains sur la table.

LE PROFESSEUR: Silence!

(*Il se lève, se promène dans la chambre, les mains derrière le dos; de temps en temps, il s'arrête, au milieu de la pièce ou auprès de l'Élève, et appuie ses paroles d'un geste de la main; il péroré, sans trop charger; l'Élève le suit du regard et a, parfois, certaine difficulté à le suivre car elle doit beaucoup tourner la tête; une ou deux fois, pas plus, elle se retourne complètement.*) Ainsi donc, Mademoiselle, l'espagnol est bien la langue mère d'où sont nées toutes les langues néo-espagnoles, dont l'espagnol, le latin, l'italien, notre français, le portugais, le roumain, le sarde ou sardanapale, l'espagnol et le néo-espagnol - et aussi, pour certains de ses aspects, le turc lui-même plus rapproché cependant du grec, ce qui est tout à fait logique, étant donné que la Turquie est voisine de la Grèce et la Grèce plus près de la Turquie que vous et moi: ceci n'est qu'une illustration de plus d'une loi linguistique très importante selon laquelle géographie et philologie sont sœurs jumelles ... Vous pouvez prendre note, Mademoiselle.

L'ÉLÈVE (*d'une voix éteinte*): Oui, Monsieur.

LE PROFESSEUR: Ce qui distingue les langues néo-espagnoles entre elles et leurs idiomes des autres groupes linguistiques, tels que le groupe des langues autrichiennes

limbi diplomatice și tehnice — ceea ce le deosebește, spun, este asemănarea lor izbitoare, care le face, de altfel, și greu de deosebit una de alta — adică limbile neoespaniole între ele, domnișoară, pe care reușim totuși să le deosebim grație caracteristicilor lor distinctive, dovezi absolut incontestabile ale extraordinarei asemănări care face incontestabilă originea lor comună și care în același timp le diferențiază profund — prin menținerea trăsăturilor distinctive despre care tocmai am vorbit.

ELEVA: Oooh! Daaaa, domnule!

PROFESORUL: Dar să nu ne pierdem în generalități...

ELEVA, *fascinată, cu regret*: Vai, domnule...

PROFESORUL: S-ar zice că vă interesează. Foarte bine, foarte bine.

ELEVA: Oh, da, domnule.

PROFESORUL: Nici o grijă, domnișoară. Revenim asupra lor mai târziu... sau poate nu mai revenim deloc. Cine știe?

ELEVA, *încântată totuși*: Oh, da, domnule.

PROFESORUL: Află, domnișoară, că orice limbă, să știi și să ții minte asta până în ceasul morții...

ELEVA: Oh! Da, domnule, pînă în ceasul morții... Da, domnule...

(Ionesco 2010, 56-58)

et néo-autrichiennes ou habsbourgiques, aussi bien que des groupes espérantiste, helvétique, monégasque, suisse, andorrien, basque, pelote, aussi bien encore que des groupes des langues diplomatique et technique - ce qui les distingue, dis-je, c'est leur ressemblance frappante qui fait qu'on a bien du mal à les distinguer l'une de l'autre - je parle des langues néo-espagnoles entre elles, que l'on arrive à distinguer, cependant, grâce à leurs caractères distinctifs, preuves absolument indiscutables de l'extraordinaire ressemblance, qui rend indiscutable leur communauté d'origine, et qui, en même temps, les différencie profondément - par le maintien des traits distinctifs dont je viens de parler.

L'ÉLÈVE: Oooh! ouuuu, Monsieur!

LE PROFESSEUR: Mais ne nous attardons pas dans les généralités...

L'ÉLÈVE (*regrettant, séduite*): Oh, Monsieur ...

LE PROFESSEUR: Cela a l'air de vous intéresser. Tant mieux, tant mieux.

L'ÉLÈVE: Oh, oui, Monsieur ...

LE PROFESSEUR: Ne vous inquiétez pas, Mademoiselle. Nous y reviendrons plus tard ... à moins que ce ne soit plus du tout. Qui pourrait le dire?

L'ÉLÈVE (*enchantée, malgré tout*): Oh, oui, Monsieur.

LE PROFESSEUR: Toute langue, Mademoiselle, sachez-le, souvenez-vous-en jusqu'à l'heure de votre mort ...

L'ÉLÈVE: Oh! oui, Monsieur, jusqu'à l'heure de ma mort ... Oui, Monsieur.

(Ionesco 1994)

This particular scene in which the verbal flow of the professor resides is an hallucinating enumeration of different invented languages: “le groupe des langues autrichiennes et neo-autrichiennes ou

habsbourghiques, aussi bien que des groupes esperantiste, helvetique, monegasque, suisse, andorrien, basque, pelote, aussi bien encore” (which was translated *bască, șapcă* in Romanian, so as to preserve the comic effect of the conversational situation). The juxtaposition is overwhelming, not to mention interesting, due to the fact that within it, Ionesco comes close to an additional comedic effect in the Basque language and the Pelote language, where the comic effect is based on the automatic association between the game - pelote - and the Basque Country.

The language becomes the protagonist of Ionesco's play, as it acquires a physical presence, namely the most powerful one, an infinitely more dramatic force than the characters themselves. The replies are the ones that attract the attention and concentration of the spectator (the reader), not only by their lack of logic, but also by the comedy resulting from the ridiculous and stereotyped text.

As for the third analyzed play, *The Chairs*, we encounter the same lack of outline, character defining features, or social solution. The old man and the old woman are living their last moments of an anodynebourgeois life, pervaded by blandness, which is only animated by some small memories that end in fretful words and become vaguely boring. A special case is the phrase “maréchal des logis” which turns into the leitmotif of the entire conversation between the two characters. The old man, as the guardian of the estate on the island where he lives isolated with the old woman, says: “... nous avons une situation, je suis maréchal, tout de meme, des logis, puisque je suis concierge” - the phrase *maréchal des logis* being a key element of the play, taken by one or the other character. Here, *maréchal des logis* (literally: the marshal of the dwelling) is a metaphor, since the Elder is a porter. On the other hand, *maréchal des logis* is an old name for a rather modest military rank: a cavalry or artillery officer in charge of chartering. The old man is a platoon-keeper, whose title is contaminated by the supreme military rank: Marshal. *Maréchal des logis* conveys three different meanings, hence the ridiculous and tragic-comic effect, speculated in the play.

BĂTRÂNA: Se-nvârte, se-nvârte, puiule... (*Tăcere.*) Vai! ce savant ești, ce talentat ești, pușor! Puteai s-ajungi președinte șef, rege șef, sau chiar doctor șef, mareșal șef, numai să fi vrut, să fi avut și tu un dram de ambiție în viață...

BĂTRÂNUL: La ce bun? Tot n-am fi trăit mai bine... și la urma urmei noi avem o situație, eu sunt totuși mareșal, mareșalul imobilului, doar sunt portar.

LA VIEILLE: Tourne, tourne, mon petit chou... (*Silence.*) Ah! oui, tu es certainement un grand savant. Tu es très doué, mon chou. Tu aurais pu être président chef, roi chef, ou même docteur chef, maréchal chef, si tu avais voulu, si tu avais eu un peu d'ambition dans la vie...

LE VIEUX: À quoi cela nous aurait-il servi? On n'en aurait pas mieux vécu... et puis, nous avons une situation, je suis maréchal tout de

BĂTRÂNA (*îl mângâie pe Bătrân așa cum mângâi un copil*):
Puișorule, copil mic...

BĂRÂNUL: Mă plictisesc de moarte.

BĂTRÂNA: Erai mai vesel când te uitai la apă... Hai, apucă-te și tu să imiți ca să mai râdem și noi, cum ai făcut aseară.

BĂTRÂNUL: De ce nu imiți tu? E rândul tău.

BĂTRÂNA: Ba-i rândul tău.

BĂTRÂNUL: Al tău.

BĂTRÂNA: Ba al tău.

BĂTRÂNUL: Ba al tău.

BĂTRÂNA: Ba al tău.

BĂTRÂNUL: Bea-ți ceaiul, Semiramida. (*Bineînțeles, nu e ceai.*)

BĂTRÂNA: Hai, fă ca februarie.

BĂTRÂNUL: Nu-mi plac lunile anului.

BĂTRÂNA: Deocamdată n-avem altele. Fă-o pentru mine...

BĂTRÂNUL: Bine. Uite: februarie. (*Se scarpină în cap ca Stan Laurel.*)

BĂTRÂNA, *râzând, aplaudând*:
Curat februarie! Îți mulțumesc, îți mulțumesc, ești tare drăguț, puișor. (*îl îmbrățișează.*) Vai, ce talentat ești! Puteai s-ajungi pe puțin mareșal șef, dacă vroiai...

BĂTRÂNUL: Sunt portar, mareșalul imobilului. (*Tăcere.*)

(Ionesco 2010, 95-97)

même, des logis, puisque je suis concierge.

LA VIEILLE (*elle caresse le Vieux comme on caresse un enfant*): Mon petit chou, mon mignon...

LE VIEUX: Je m'ennuie beaucoup.

LA VIEILLE: Tu étais plus gai, quand tu regardais l'eau... Pour nous distraire, fais semblant comme l'autre soir.

LE VIEUX: Fais semblant toi-même, c'est ton tour.

LA VIEILLE: C'est ton tour.

LE VIEUX: Ton tour.

LA VIEILLE: Ton tour.

LE VIEUX: Ton tour.

LA VIEILLE: Ton tour.

LE VIEUX: Bois ton thé, Sémiramis. *Il n'y a pas de thé, évidemment.*

LA VIEILLE: Alors, imite le mois de février.

LE VIEUX: Je n'aime pas les mois de l'année.

LA VIEILLE: Pour l'instant, il n'y en a pas d'autres. Allons, pour me faire plaisir...

LE VIEUX: Tiens, voilà le mois de février.

Il se gratte la tête, comme Stan Laurel.

LA VIEILLE, *riant, applaudissant*: C'est ça. Merci, merci, tu es mignon comme tout, mon chou. (*Elle l'embrasse.*) Oh! tu es très doué, tu aurais pu être au moins maréchal chef, si tu avais voulu...

LE VIEUX: Je suis concierge, maréchal des logis.

Silence.

(Ionesco 1952)

The guests (the Lady, the Colonel, the Beauty, the Photographer) begin to arrive and they are a real presence for the two Elders, but invisible to the audience. While they are waiting for the conference to start, the hosts maintain the conversation with the guests, whose replies are not heard. They keep arriving in growing numbers, an anonymous crowd, that is unseen and unheard by the public. The surprise of the evening is the arrival of the Emperor, who is also invisible. The two Elders greet him overwhelmed with emotion. The Orator also arrives at the end,

when the old man says goodbye to his wife and gives him the floor. The play has a tragic ending, the Elders throwing themselves out the window and into the water, committing suicide.

The characters - the old man and the old woman - represent the archetypes of the elderly at the end of their lives, deserted and abandoned by everyone else, and who resemble two living dead people who are desperately trying to leave something behind before they die.

4. Conclusion

The subject of these plays is diminished, the focus shifting to the evil rooted in the inner structure of man, regardless of historical era, society or psychological particularities. The common themes of the absurd theater are the lack of meaning of existence, the emptiness of the soul, the limits of human communication, the inability of the individual to find meaning, the inability to harmonize man in a society with all of its rigors. The characters are non-heroes, located between the tragic and the comic, dominated by automatisms, expressing trivialities or absurd statements, devoid of personality and characteristic consistency, representative of the anonymous who have made up humanity for centuries. The main artistic mode is gibberish (confused, stuttered, illogical speech or writing), by which routine judgments are canceled, the conventionalism of the ideas to which the reader (the audience) in the traditional theater is accustomed. The tragedy of existence often produces comical, caricature, grotesque effects: “Eu n-am putut niciodată să înțeleg diferența care se face între comic și tragic. Comicul, fiind intuiția absurdului, îmi pare mai disperant decât tragicul. Comicul nu oferă nicio ieșire... Spun «disperant», dar în realitate, el este dincolo sau dincoace de disperare sau de speranță.” (Ionesco 2011)

In writing his plays, Eugene Ionesco chooses satire, an aesthetic formula specific to comedy, because the state of existential crisis is illustrated by the lack of causality, of precise guilt. The questions “why?”, “What for?”, which the reader (the spectator) tends to ask, do not have their place, since there is no solution to the facts, states or ideas of the characters; one does not follow a predictable response, or an intention to moralize.

According to Vlad Russo and Vlad Zografi (Ionesco 2002, 7), the two interpreters who have translated Ionesco's plays, the destiny of the classics are always to be translated and readapted. If their work remains forever encompassed in the language in which they were written, in other languages the classical texts acquire the fluidity of the successive interpretations of the new translations, which are adapted to the evolution of language, culture, and society. With drama, more than any other

literary genre, the text does not remain a masterpiece in a museum, but rather constantly passes the test of representation on stage, with its own dynamics, styles, interpretations and scenography influenced by models and role models. It often happens that when a classical piece was mounted the director will ask for a new translation, adapt a translation or create an amalgam of existing translations.

The translators (Ionesco 2002, 7) state that the most obvious difficulties in translating Ionesco's texts are by far the semantic issues, and it practically starts at the level of finding equivalences in the target language. With drama, the text cannot be supported by any additional explanations, therefore the author's footnotes to clarify the puns and the multiple meanings of the original text are extremely useful to the interpreter, as well as to the director. However, actors do not know how to play footnotes, and Ionesco, especially in the first editions, gives a lexically disconcerting show, the puns impose a suffocating rhythm on the reader and the actor due to successive layers of meaning which are continuously revealed, and the verbal invention is frenetic.

The same problems are encountered when trying to decode poetry, as poetry is present throughout Ionesco's plays. In the plays written in the early 1950s, poetry counterpoints the drama, and the transition from grotesque or comic to lyrical moments is almost always achieved abruptly. Whole pages of rhymes in *The Chairs* are poetic in the true sense of the word, even if they are also governed by the ridicule and the oblivion hidden between the lines. Ionesco forces us to take things seriously, but also tragically and with an ironical twist of mockery. The effect is often obtained from clear-cut contrasts, not from an indistinct mix.

Eugene Ionesco's courage to build a world on stage, unveiling everything from a different perspective, not for the sake of shock, but in order to set off on an endeavour to reveal something deeper about mankind, the world beyond the scene, and the outside world, encouraged him to bring metaphysics into the theatre. Despite the surreal vibration of the plays, there are countless conjugal mundane scenes built with an exquisite spirit of observation, psychologically supporting the reactions of the characters. Thus, we can sense the mixture of vanity and kindness of the Elders in *The Chairs*, the fear of the king who dies, or Berenger's shallowness. They all represent an infusion of reality but touched by the unusual; it no longer resembles the psychological realism that we have been used to experience before and after Ionesco. Yet, psychological realism remains the key to the interpretation of drama in general, hence the difficulty of rebuilding the play on the stage.

Beyond the inevitable literary contamination, Ionesco's dramatic endeavour, which goes from the ludic and poetic to the invisible, is

profoundly original, and that is why this essay has tried to demonstrate the importance of Ionesco's work as both a representative of absurdist theater and a Romanian writer of foreign expression. He is one of the few geniuses who have captured the 20th century consciousness that life represents a constant fight with a devouring "nothingness", with existential fear, with an endless state of waiting that is impossible to be communicated.

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