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Elegies for Little Beings

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Eugen Ionescu

ELEGIES FOR LITTLE BEINGS

TRANSLATED FROM THE ROMANIAN

BY

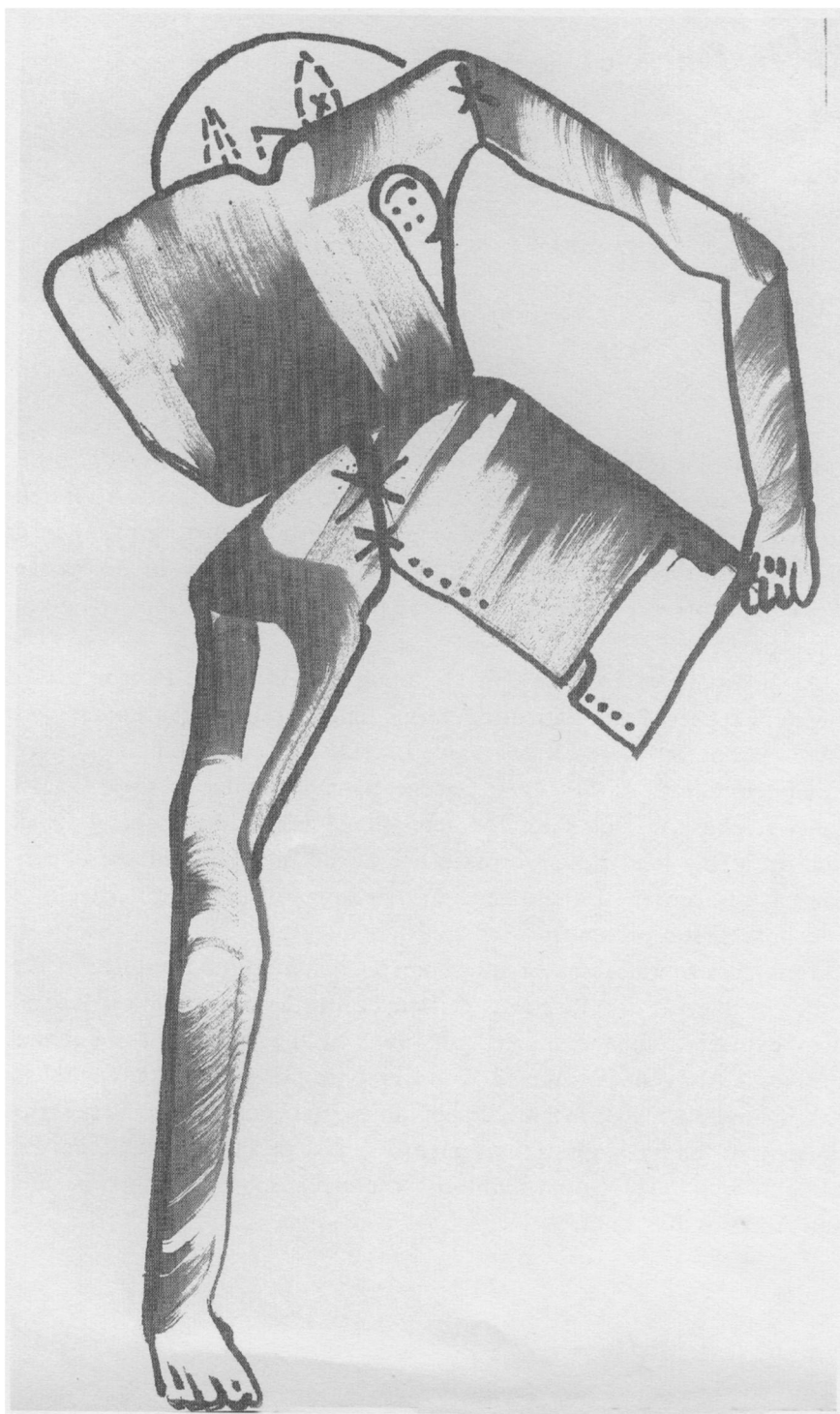
STAVROS DELIGIORGIS

Translator's Note:

Eugen Ionescu (Slatina, 1912-Paris, 1995) received his early education both in France and in Romania (Curtea de Arges; Bucharest). Although known as Ionesco and associated primarily with the history of modern French literature, he has a considerable body of work in his native Romanian, of which the selection of poems which follows is only a small part.

At the time of Ionescu's first coming out in print, Romania was awash in religious and patriotic sentimentalism. (See Eugen Lovinescu's *Istoria literaturii Române contemporane 1900-1937*, Editura Librăriei Socec & Co., București, 1937). Like George Bacovia earlier in the century, Ionescu chose, in the midst of generalized grandiloquence, to speak quietly, in the low, rather scared tones of the rag-and-cardboard "person" at the center of his poems, the sawdust doll of trampled feelings and no esthetic pretensions.

Ionescu was not alone in adopting the chaplinesque personae of the suffering Pierrot and Pierrette. Tristan Tzara, the other famous Romanian expatriate, had explored the tones of the sickly and depressed speaker already before World War I and would assemble and publish his poems in 1934 under the unassuming title *Primele poeme* (The First Poems), in tender homage, one might say, just like Ionescu's *Elegies For Little Beings* (1931), to the tradition of Jules Laforgue, Tristan Corbière, and Aloysius Bertrand.



Stravos Deligiorgis

LOVE SONG

Her face, like a head kerchief;
her nose of cardboard;
her mouth endowed
with cheap chocolate teeth.

Breasts like little matchheads,
body like a scarred pole;
she's ungainly, nearsighted,
about to lose the tip of her nose.

Poor thing, poor thing,
is she in love or is she!

PRAYER

One small sun, Lord,
for my soul.

Lord, I am but a leaf,
only a walnut;
I am a scared bullfrog,
a wounded sparrow.

They have plundered all my nests.
Their slingshots have overtaken me.

Little Lord, lift me up,

and make me happy
like the cattle of innocent horns,
the dogs with angels' eyes,
the water lilies,
the friendly rocks.

THE GIRL WAS SEEING ANGELS

When she was still with us the girl was seeing angels.
But there are no angels!
Who's ever seen angels!

Oh, you, wax doll.
The priest was shaking his head.
The small black dog barked on and on.
The woman in mourning was weeping.
A grave looking gentleman sobbed in his hands
as he looked at the wax doll.

Then it was white, all white.

I don't believe in angels.
You neither?
You neither?

When she was still with us the girl was speaking with angels.

UNCERTAINTY

Long waving trees.
Long waving to whom?

Water does not reflect him back.
To whom does the water hark?

The wind came back exhausted.
Who did the wind chase after?

A man is gazing into the distance.
He sighs, eyes in the distance.

ELEGY

In the garden they
built his little house of clay,

the fresh ornaments smiling
gravely among the flowers.

So no one would disturb him
a meek friar tucked him in.

Now he is quiet and shut in,
leafing through the clear blue dream.

ELEGY

Friend, let's weep:
a tear for the yellow leaf,
a tear for the leafless rose,
a tear for the dead girl,
a tear for the pain of every man.

A tear for every stone,
for every tree,
for every star,
and for the Ideal.

Souls without end, stones too. 'am
afraid to walk lest I step on them.

SOUVENIR

At my wits' ends,
in a haze,

so out of it, I stuck
my right foot in a pot,

neither alert: so I stepped
out with my left.

I have been traipsing, though,
light as air, through the clouds.

If the stars should make me stumble
I would pick them up like apples.

I loved myself, such as
I was; such as I was.