

The New Criterion

Notebook

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Ionesco & the limits of philosophy

by [Anthony Daniels](#)

On *Le roi se meurt* by Eugène Ionesco and the philosophy of Owen Flanagan.

Recently I read a short polemical book by a political philosopher in which he claimed that the works of Shakespeare, while entertaining and emotionally engaging, lacked intellectual content by comparison with the works of the great philosophers. If it were wisdom and knowledge that one was after, it was to the latter that one would turn. Literature was for entertainment, intelligent or not as the case might be. What applied to Shakespeare must, a fortiori, apply to all other literature, for by general consent the works of Shakespeare contain the richest description of the human condition ever written. Nor do we seriously expect that body of work ever to be surpassed. This being the case, philosophy was for thinkers, literature for those in need of light relief from the hard work of genuine thought.

This view, with which I am not sympathetic, supposes that everything truly important can be said, or is best said, in straightforwardly p ...

Anthony Daniels's most recent book is *In Praise of Prejudice* (Encounter Books). He was born in 1949. After qualifying as a doctor, he worked in what was then Rhodesia, followed by South Africa, before returning for three years training as a psychiatrist in London's East End. Three and a half years in the Gilbert Islands were interspersed with some South American wandering, and then between 1984 and 1986 he worked in Tanzania. His first book, *Coups and Cocaine*, was followed by *Fool or Physician*, subtitled 'the memoirs of a sceptical doctor.' *Zanzibar to Timbuktu*, his trek across Africa by public transport was published to great acclaim in 1988, and was a runner-up in the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award.

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