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THE POETRY OF VASILE VOICULESCU. SYMBOL, DISCOURSE, ICONOGRAPHY



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Abstract. Vasile Voiculescu resorts to a vocabulary that has no aesthetic tradition. His poetic word reflects, on one hand, a contingent reality and, on the other, it transfigures it, it restores a degree of ideality to it, a hidden facet that can only be retrieved through a poetic "reading" of the world. Voiculescu perceives with unexpected intensity the drama of language which is unable to represent reality without flaw, integrally, with its many-sided facets, as he lucidly records the subtle relationship between expressed and unexpressed, between nameable and unnamable. The exuberant diversity of allegories, together with the uttermost plasticity of parables in Voiculescu's poetry translate the ideal into the terms of the real. Harsh, unrefined, succulent words appear to address the sense of taste more than aesthetic perception. However, there is a specific grace of detail and stylization, like in the art of reverse glass icon-painting, that renders lyrical images hieratic. Heavy materiality, elementary force and Botticellian hieratism are combined in a new poetic flow. The poetic word is also a revelation of the world's original dimensions, a mirroring, in a small sonorous space, of the boundlessness of the universe. But the word is also the one that incorporates in its fragile pattern human emotions of an overwhelming diversity: love, hate, distortion, rebellion, nostalgia, suaveness.

Key words: poetry, traditionalism, Orthodoxism in poetry, discourse, allegory, lyricism, ideal, hieratic

The poetry of Vasile Voiculescu (1884-1963) conquers its own horizon and reaches its authentic voice starting with the volume *Pârgă* (*Ripeness*) (1921), as previous volumes might be placed under the sign of stylistic quest, expressive exercise and discipleship. It is with the volume *Pârgă* that Vasile Voiculescu gains originality and full expression.

Indeed, *Poezii* (*Poems*) (1916), his debut book, transcribed indiscriminately and freely themes of traditionalist lineage, and was unable to

give the author a very distinct style (echoes of Coşbuc, Cerna or Vlahuță can be distinguished with disturbing clarity). The booklet of patriotic poems *Din Țara Zimbrului* was too caught in expressing something ethically correct.

But with *Pârgă* he develops specific favorite themes, individualizing topoi, he decants an unmistakable style that melts in itself a symbolism apart treated in a slightly didactic manner, a descriptive verve and a specific grace that render lyrical images hieratic. If with Cerna or Vlahuță ideas produced the impression of foreign, unassimilated bodies in relation to the poetic discourse that sheltered them, of a disproportionate and impermissible independence, with Vasile Voiculescu idea is totally absorbed in speech, dissolved in lyricism, through the most varied and multiple artistic techniques, especially with the help of allegories which translate the ideal, rarefied by its very nature, into the terms of the real. Speech is thus "getting substance," ideas acquire amplitude and determinations, the vague precipitates in the distillation devices of lyricism. Just a few examples are sufficient to document the wide and varied range of allegories. Thus, the poet feels he is a diamond that is being rinsed out by the Lord's hand in the waters of eternity (image of a superb plasticity that translates human fragility and beauty, the auroral human presence); he also feels he is a fiddle handled by the hand of God on a violin, a cup molded by the great Craftsman. Some other times, the poet's thought is on watch, like a sailor encountering "large islands of ideals" and pain is for him a rock hiding veins of gold. In the essay *Art and Nationality*, Vasile Voiculescu said: "it's undeniable that art aspires after a global movement. Like any true value, it has a universal course, is spiritual money, more expensive than gold..."¹

Regarding the lexis of this poem, it has poignancy and grip on its object, the poet eludes the rules of formal refinement, of conventional artifice, just in order to give the reader the most acute sense of concreteness and the impression of aliveness. Harsh, unrefined, succulent words appear to address the sense of taste more than aesthetic perception; these are words violating the sensitivity of a reader with predilection for languorous, effeminate poetry. This is a vocabulary that has no aesthetic tradition, words are poetically unconsecrated, anonymous, used by the poet to undermine, restructure and render convention functional again; these are words whose expressive force was not diluted by excessive lyrical exploitation. As G. Calinescu emphasizes, with Vasile Voiculescu "poetry begins with the word. Each word has a lyrical sound. This poetry would lead us to Arghezi's right words that are also chosen according to their karat. But there, poetry only springs out of matching words. Mr. Voiculescu's words have a must of their own, have flesh, density, they are themselves an objectification of states." The word thus retains an elementary force, it has weight and power of suggestion, it is itself a reality that offers itself to perception, translating just that will to materialize, to figure and shape the poetic 'idea' out of the paste of the phenomenal. In a poem of the volume *Destin*, the poet points out, with a remarkable willingness to visualize and render concrete, the nature and purpose of words, of course, all through an

¹ V. Voiculescu, *Gînduri albe/White Thoughts*, Romanian Book Publishing House, Bucharest, 1986, p. 9, translation mine, for this and the next.

allegory: "De-acolo din pajiștea de aur a durerii,/ Unde gândurile pasc în turme neștiute/
Smulse din florile tainei și iarba tăcerii,/ Coboară cuvintele, negre mielușele mute (...)"

A suggestive poem entitled *Poezia* (Poetry) contains the ethical rhetoric of an *ars poetica*; it represents in a symbolic way the act of lyrical creation; the lyrical self feels keenly, almost tragically, the consciousness of poetic convention, of the "farce" that any staging of the words eventually is: "M-am băgat surugiu la cuvinte/ Le momesc cu vâpăi, le hrănesc cu jăratec,/ Le strunesc în ham de gând, când lin, când sălbatec,/ Le-ncing cu harapnicul dorului și mână 'nainte!// Ca să nu zboare la cer ca puricii din basm, pripite,/ Mă plec la fiecare, migălos faur/ Și-ncaț agerile versuri la copite/ Cu potcoavele rimelor de aur/ (...) Loc, loc!/ Rădvanul coboară pe pământ,/ Dar aci se destramă crăiasa de imagini,/ Amuțesc, speriați zurgălăii de rime-n vânt,/ Chingile se rup, caii răzvrățiți, cuvânt de cuvânt./ strâng aripile și fug înapoi pe paragini,/ Rămân, negre, dărele roților pe albele pagini". The poet has, not infrequently, a very strong awareness of his condition as craftsman ("faur") that tames the élan of words, but also an intuition, not less clear, of the insufficiency of these imperfect poetic instruments, simple "black streaks" of the ecstasy of imagination, inconclusive reminiscences of the inner adventures of sensitivity. Voiculescu perceives with unexpected intensity the drama of language which is unable to represent reality without flaw, integrally, with its many-sided facets, as it lucidly records the subtle relationship between expressed and unexpressed, between nameable and unnamable. On the other hand, Voiculescu's poetry proves to be one that relies very much on visuality, on chromatic reflexes, on perspective games, fact again indicating his will for concreteness, for sensual ecstasy, for empathic contact with poetically circumscribed objects, as well as a more pantheistic than theistic view of the world. Images, outlined in thick brush strokes, having autonomy and concreteness, do not exclude, however, as noted, the stylized filigree of details processed with refinement, as in the pastel *Seară întârziată*, a poem that has, in the words of G. Calinescu, the allure of an "initiation into cosmos" "Din umbra ce-și vărsase mireasma ei jilavă/ Un brad bătrân și pustnic privea cum, sus, stingher./ Urcând către lumina ce se-nchidea în slavă/ Cu largi rotiri un vultur se-nșuruba în cer./ Anvinețit deodată văzduhul tot. Din partea/ Uitatei nopți un crainic împrăștia fiori./ Urcat pe-un munte galben și-aidoma cu moartea/ Cosea pe zări amurgul livezi de roșii fiori". In another train of thought, the primary spring of Voiculescu's poetry proves to be one of a dual nature. We deal, on one hand, with an evocative dominant (in poems that depict pictures, places, therefore in pastels) and, on the other hand, we deal with a summoning dominant, adopted mainly in religious-inspired poems. Moreover, religious themes massively feed Voiculescu's lyricism with a unique stamp whose charm is provided by a mixture of stylized grace and dense stroke, of heavy materiality and Botticellian hieratism. These themes (Nativity, Presentation of the Magi, Jesus' death) are allegorically treated and give identity to Voiculescu's orthodoxy which is in line with, as it is well known, the Gandirist movement. An image of a very significant prestige is that of the *angel* that is, as Calinescu writes, decorative convention "not without lyrical effluvia (...), but its meaning is graceful, and calligraphy resembles primitive painting".

Particularly suggestive for the avatars of this image in Voiculescu's poetry may be the poem *L-am lăsat de-am trecut*, showing a clear influence

from Arghezi: “L-am cunoscut de cum l-am zărit, /Trimis înadins de soartă,/ Mi-a trecut pe la poartă/ Și nu s-a oprit./ Era cu părul ca aurora/ Aripile, cu pene de lumină,/ Lânced le târa la picioarele tuturora,/ Prin pulbere și tină”. The impression that emerges from these verses is rather one of desacralization by visualizing the smallest details, the supernatural being, this time, inserted in the natural, terrestrial order of being. Integrated into common order, dealt with in terms of natural-unnatural, making itself visible to the profane and profaning eyes, detailing the miracle, description of what cannot be described, the appearance of Voiculescu’s angel has something of the fate of Garcia Márquez’s angel in the famous story. Is this poem a foreshadowing of the fantastic in Voiculescu’s posthumous prose?

Another dimension that structures Vasile Voiculescu’s poetry is the moral one. The ethical turn, manifest or implicit, imposes itself on the reader’s perception or intuition; as he or she cannot miss a touch of light didacticism that sometimes jeopardizes the aesthetic effect. Ethical eloquence, the iconography often stylized with remarkable finesse, Biblical characters, the idyllic or the evocation of Romanian mythology are just some of the features of Voiculescu’s poetry before 1944, which were, if not ignored altogether, then at least neglected; they give Voiculescu’s work such a peculiar physiognomy. Here one must look, in fact, for latencies, for resources that will be fully revealed with the publication of *Sonete închipuite...?*², of fantastic stories and of *Zahei orbul*(*Zahei The Blind Man*); this is the hidden face of a protean personality of unquestionable value.

Voiculescian lyricism captures our interest today, in two essential aspects: firstly, the force of poetic flow, a lyrical emanation of a nature that is not only robust, but also profound, that turns into lyricism all things and beings that offers themselves to inner eye of the poet; secondly, Voiculescu captures us due to the grace of detail, through the minute, craftsman’s calligraphy of the relief of things, through the gentle suggestion of their intimacy that is irreducible to external events, but translatable, through the latter, into privileged flashing moments. From these constant features, deemed irreconcilable until we perceive their complementarity - authentic and verifiable – Voiculescu’s poetry arises at its most original. There are similarities that can be noted between this poetry and the reverse glass painting, the art of icons on glass. A robust representation is blended with metaphysical thrill. Free emanation of telluric force is there together with stylization in art.

In its broad lines, Voiculescu’s poetry uncovers a quiet evolution without expressive earthquakes likely to alter its course that seems predetermined by implacable authorial intentions set, one might say, once and for all, with quasi-demiurgical precision. It is also not difficult to establish ascendancy in the philosophical poetry practiced, of course, without much aesthetical success, by Vlahuță or Panait Cerna, before Voiculescu. There is, however, a clear difference in Voiculescu’s poetry that gives it a special place

² See the bilingual edition, Romanian-English, Vasile Voiculescu, *Ultimele sonete închipuite ale lui Shakespeare în traducere imaginată/Shakespeare’s Last Fancied Sonnets in Imaginary Translation*. Traducere de/translated by Cristina Tataru, Pitești: Paralela 45, 2000.

within the confines of the so-called "philosophical poetry." If Cerna or Vlahuță insert the concept in a poem *tale quale*, without a proper prior lyrical processing, without any extras designed to give artistic vitality and viability, allowing lyricism to succumb to the conceptual weight it is compelled to support, Voiculescu, on the other hand, "thinks through allegory, through parable and apologue; with them, he increases the old treasure of sacred books and mystical traditions" (Tudor Vianu).

Again, in the poem *Târziu*, Voiculescu brings, somehow, through allegory, Plato's ideas from their heavens into the sensible world, instilling them life, molding them from the dense, rough paste of the concrete. What singles out his poetry, ridding it of the specter of stereotyping, of sterile repetition of predetermined schemes, is precisely the variety, the exuberant diversity of allegories, as well as the extreme plasticity of parables, designed to get ideas closer, to lower their magnitude, their degree of abstraction, to the benefit of the lyrical suggestion able to capture the intimate thrill of things. The poem *Târziu* is representative of how Voiculescu conceives and perceives the poetic act as transfiguration of the world, through allegory, but also as encapsulation, in the body of the poem of defining symbols for his own condition. Here is a quite striking opposition between "deed" and "dream". The deed is regarded as insufficient actualization of the ideal, of the dream or rather as a camouflage of the deeper self behind gestures, behind external facts lacking any gnosiological relief and ontic poignancy. If the dream is seen as an inexhaustible range of virtualities, of latencies sufficient to themselves, the deed is merely an expression of a possibility, it is, perhaps, a failure of the dream that the being keeps encapsulating in itself, a dream of infinity, a continuous aspiration towards other horizons, towards the absolute: "Ți-ascunzi în faptă viciul ca un junghier în teacă,/ Lăuntricele steme le stingi și pleci stingher./ Nu te-ar opri nici ape, nici vântul tot și, iacă,/ Nici alba profeție a Zorilor în cer". Compared with the hopes and dreams of the poet, death comes as a counterweight, as necessary antinomy. To the open horizon corresponds the closure of the being in death. One needs to underline the fact that death has no negative connotations, it is valued as a "longing for death," as aspiration towards extinction, as attraction of the nirvana in the spirit of Eminescu, to a certain extent: "Ca o albină-n câmpul cu firele răscapte,/ Tu cați prisaca Morții: când brumele s-aștern,/ Să intri ca-ntr-un fagure de liniște și noapte,/ Flămând de neagra miere a somnului etern". *Târziu* is a poem of existential contrasts, of the interiorization and exteriorization of a lyric "I" attracted by both the absolute and everyday life, by the world of deed and that of the dream.

One of the most important creations of Vasile Voiculescu, *În grădina Ghetsimani*, is part of the volume *Pârgă* (1921) and it is a poem of religious inspiration. The poem has as its starting point an episode from the Bible, occurring in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus addressed God begging him to give Him the strength to endure the sufferings that He will be submitted to. After this prayer, Jesus will be greeted by Judas who, by kissing Him, betrays Him, resulting in His arrest and humiliation. This is the Christ fable from which Vasile Voiculescu started and to which he gave symbolic and allegorical meanings. Obviously, in the poem narrative elements are few, and

are placed under the sign of essentialization and suggestion. The poet is concerned, in his work, with shaping the figure of the exemplary hero, of Jesus, while highlighting the turmoil of his soul. Christic sacrifices are all initiation steps that will culminate in death on the cross. The poet highlights not only the Garden of Gethsemane episode, but in order to give more dramatism, more tragic force to his verse, he achieves a synthesis of several biblical episodes: the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the crucifixion and the torment endured then, the rendering of the landscape transfigured by the tragic colors of the sacrifice of the exemplary hero. It is obvious that the poem's semantic axis is represented by the revelation of Jesus' dual nature: a human one, subject to precariousness and to the tribulations of the body and a divine one, which allows him access to the universe of sacredness³. The first stanza of the poem, placed in a natural setting that is consistent with the intense feelings of the lyrical hero, suggests precisely this constitutive duality that makes the hero feel intense pain, but on the other hand, it makes him "fight" fate, seek to defeat his own human limits: "Isus lupta cu soarta și nu primea paharul.../ Căzut pe brânci în iarbă, se-mpotriva într-una./ Curgeau sudori de sânge pe chipu-i alb ca varul/ Și-amarnica-i strigare stârnea în slăvi furtuna.// O mână ne-ndurată, ținând grozava cupă./ Se cobora-mbiindu-l și i-o ducea la gură.../ Și-o sete uriașă sta sufletul să-i rupă.../ Dar nu voia s-atingă infama băutură". There are several lyrical syntagmata in the poem, which are metaphor-laden and suggest precisely the dramatic confrontation of the two sides of the hero: the human and the divine. "Curgeau sudori de sânge", for example, highlights the unbearable suffering of the hero, his human nature, his sacrificial destiny and vocation that consecrate his stature, while another syntagma, such as "chipu-i alb ca varul" is a metaphoric and symbolic sign of purity and of the divine nature of Jesus.

In pictorial and statuary images, of particular poignancy of representation, Voiculescu stages the symbolic figure of a character with a messianic vocation, placed under the auspices of the sacred, a lyrical and mythical character that is in an extreme situation, at the crossroads of his sacrificial destiny. Eliade considered the sacred through its phenomenal manifestations: "... the sacred is real par excellence. Nothing pertaining to the profane is part of the Human Being, because the profane has not been ontologically created by myth."⁴. The dramatic conflict between body and spirit, between the avatars of the body and divine will ends with the triumph of the divine nature, which enhances the tragic greatness of the character ("În apa ei verzuie jucau sterlici de miere/ Și sub veninul groaznic simțea că e dulceață.../ Dar fălcile-nceștându-și, cu ultima putere/ Bătându-se cu moartea, uitase de viață!". The last stanza circumscribes, with greater accuracy of detail, the natural setting of the drama transfigured by the poet. It is a background dominated by forebodings and the thrill of fate, a torn nature, a setting that gets tragic colors and vibrates

³ For Mircea Eliade the sacred " manifests itself solely in profane, through symbols and other mundane realities". Mircea Eliade, *Întâlnirea cu sacrul/Experiencing the Sacred*. Volume edited by Cristian Bădiliță, in collaboration with Paul Barbăneagră, Cluj, Echinox, 2001, p. 115.

⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Sacrul și profanul/The Sacred and the Profane*, translated from French by Brândușa Prelipceanu, 3rd edition, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2007.

at the sufferings of Jesus. Perhaps the “bătăile de aripi” passing “prin vraștea grădinii” symbolize the same triumph of divine destiny, of the supra-terrestrial nature of Jesus: “Deasupra, fără tihnă, se frământau măslinii,/ Păreau că vor să fugă din loc, să nu-l mai vadă.../ Treceau băți de aripi prin vraștea grădinii/ Și uliii de seară dau roate după pradă”. Poem of the sublimation of terrestrial condition into divine condition, *În grădina Ghetsimani* is one of the representative poems of Vasile Voiculescu, through its thematic content, through its manner of stylistic configuration of that content and through resonance to the field of the metaphysical. Mircea Braga considere Vasile Voiculescu “maybe the sole authentic religious poetry of the Romanian literature”⁵.

Sonetele is Vasile Voiculescu’s work of lyrical maturity, a work in which the refinement of expression blends with an indisputable depth of meaning. As noted by Mircea Tomuș, “in these sonnets not only our contemporary suffers and loves, but first and foremost Man, the eternal and omnipresent man, ‘the archetypes without age or name,’ evoked by the poet in that disturbing sonnet, that places him in Eminescu’s sublime vicinity.” *Sonetul CLXX* is a praise of the founding word with Orphic meanings, the word that stands apart from the vocals used in everyday communication. In the structure of the word coexist limit and limitlessness, meaning and sublimed referent, moment and eternity, latencies and actualizations (“Sămânța nemuririi, iubite, e cuvântul,/ Eternul se ascunde sub coaja unei clipe,/ Ca-n oul ce păstrează un zbor înalt de-aripe,/ Pân’ ce-i sosește timpul în slăvi să-și ia avântul”). The poetic word is also a revelation of the world’s original dimensions, a mirroring, in a small sonorous space, of the boundlessness of the universe. This paradox is plastically rendered by the poet in the image of upward motion, of the flight to the heights (“în slăvi să-și ia avântul”). But the word is also the one that incorporates in its fragile pattern human emotions of an overwhelming diversity. Love, hate, rebellion, nostalgia, suaveness and grotesque can all be found in the space of the poetic word, are designated by the vocable articulated in various modulations. In Voiculescu’s poetry, beauty, confession and mystical interrogation are the most important elements of the lyrical discourse: “The poems from the volume *Journey to the Place of the Heart* are a direct representation of a unique experience, which does not exclude despair and tiredness, failure and returning to the starting point, but which finds in the love of God and in faith the necessary strength to overcome all difficulties and most of all to overcome the self, with all human weakness and imperfections that we are given.”⁶

Love is a privileged theme of Voiculescu’s sonnets. In this poem, love is poetically represented as an almost divine force that has the quality of pulling beings out of the ephemeral, out of their precarious condition, in order to restore them to their original, archetypal condition, to suggest an ideal world to them. Love causes the liberation of profound being from the prison of flesh, freedom from the narrow patterns of time and space and access to a

⁵ Mircea Braga, *V. Voiculescu în orizontul tradiționalismului/V. Voiculescu in the Sphere of Traditionalism*, Bucharest, Minerva, 1984, p. 110

⁶ Roxana Sorescu, *Introducere în poezia lui Vasile Voiculescu. Poezii/Introduction to the Poetry of Vasile Voiculescu. Poems*, Bucharest, Cartex 2000, 2005, p.6

paradisiac place and a utopian time where the authentic identity of being and communion with the other may be found: "A fost de-ajuns un nume, al tău, sol dezrobirii,/ S-au spart și veac, și lume; ținut prizonier/ A izbucnit în țăndări, viu, vulturul iubirii,/ Cu ghearele-i de aur să ne răpească-n cer". "The magic keys" that human beings hold inside them are precisely those original models of knowledge and affection that God planted and through which human consciousness can rise to the contemplation of immutable, eternal and perfect Platonic Ideas. The final invocation of the poet deals with the aspiration towards perfection, the "pura-ntâietate" (pure origin) through which the being can retrieve its deep, divine roots, those originary reasons that it had forgotten after the "fall." "Cine ne puse-n suflet aceste magici chei?/ Egali în frumusețe și-n genii de o seamă,/ Am descuiat tărâmul eternelor idei;/ Supremelor matrițe redați, care ne cheamă/ Din formele căderii, la pura-ntâietate,/ Să ne topim în alba, zeiasca voluptate". The word has, therefore, magical powers in Vasile Voiculescu's vision; it reflects, on the one hand, a contingent reality and, on the other, it transfigures it, it restores a degree of ideality to it, a hidden facet that can only be retrieved through a poetic "reading" of the world. The word has demiurgic features, it is purifying and founding logos, escape from the barren contours of knowledge and ascension to the archetypal reasons of mythical knowledge. Evocation of meanings more or less latent in the human being, the lyrical word is also invocation of the essences, designation of the world in terms of fictionality. Vasile Voiculescu's poetry stands out in the context of interwar and postwar literature through the allegorical vibration of meanings, through the parabolic expressivity of vision and, last but not least, the deep morality of the writer who no doubt, had an indisputable awareness of writing as a profession of faith and purifying ritual.

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PARABLE AND EXOTICISM IN ALEXANDRU ECOVOIU`S PROSE



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*Abstract: The subject-matter of Ecovoiu's narrative is a-temporal and is extraneous to the Romanian cultural space, hence it does not rely on local specificity, nor does it rely on virtuosities of an untranslatable linguistic expressiveness. The writer places his narrative in the international waters of novel-writing and parable – which represents the advantage of significant openness and of broad human issues from the very outset. The main explanation for all this cannot but lie in the surprising combination between parable, that yields the accessibility of the message therein, and the exotic nature of the narrative, that ensures its appeal to readers worldwide, readers willing to be impressed by a cinematographic perusal of worlds. Not only is *Saludos* a novel about an imaginary journey, but it is one about spiritual adventure at large.*

Key words: Alexandru Ecovoiu; exoticism; parable; novel; imaginary journey; spiritual adventure

A PROSE WRITER`S PROFILE

Alexandru Ecovoiu turns into account nothing of the ways of the post-war Romanian novel: neither the political confrontation with totalitarian society as the main strand of the 60`s generation, nor the persistent autobiographical projection typical of the 80`s generation. The subject-matter of his narrative is a-temporal and is extraneous to the Romanian cultural space, hence it does not rely on local specificity, nor does it rely on virtuosities of an untranslatable linguistic expressiveness. The writer places his narrative in the international waters of novel-writing and parable – which represents the advantage of significant openness and of broad human issues from the very outset.

The novel *Saludos*, published in 1995 with Est Publishing House and which was awarded the Writers` Guild prize, signals an exceptional writer, in a penumbral stance before this award: Alexandru Ecovoiu, born in Bucharest in 1943. A writer extraneous to groups and generations, Ecovoiu was, at least to me, almost an unknown writer, he having published two novels before 1989

notwithstanding: *Fuga din Eden* (*Flight from Eden*) (1984) and *Călătoria* (*The Journey*) (1987), wherefrom *Saludos* (2004 new edition) surfaces in point of theme and narrative. Let me mention also – for a brief creative corpus list – novels as follows: *Stațiunea* (*The Resort*) (the 1997 Romanian Academy Prize; new edition in 2007), *Sigma* (2002 and subsequent editions), *Ordinea* (*The Order*) (2005) and the short-story volume titled *Cei trei copii-Mozart* (*The Three Mozart Siblings*) (first published in German in 1999, then published in Spanish and finally in Romanian in 2001, then a second Romanian edition in 2008). *După Sodoma* (*After Sodoma*) (published in 2012) brings along the appreciation as the best writer of the year in Romania. Alexandru Ecovoiu's novels have been widely translated. For instance, *Saludos*, shortly after its publication in Romanian in 1995, registers its first international feats: translations into German (1999), into French (2000), into Spanish and Serbian – with yet others possible. It is an exceptional book, with a notoriety record that will undoubtedly grow, as its international career has had a tremendous jump-start.

The main explanation for all this cannot but lie in the surprising combination between parable, that yields the accessibility of the message therein, and the exotic nature of the narrative, that ensures its appeal to readers worldwide, readers willing to be impressed by a cinematographic perusal of worlds.

LIFE AS IMAGINARY JOURNEY

Saludos starts, on a rather common note, as a confession made by a mysterious character to a witness met in a bistro on *Rue de la Hachette*, the latter being in Paris with the aim of making a photo album of the city's statues. A photographer, who is none other but the author's avatar, indeed the chosen confessor, even restless at this feeling of being chosen as such. The one who confides in him reveals himself gradually, as is but natural, and gets transformed from an obscure and modest (-looking) stranger into an exceptional character, who gets involved in the most unusual mishaps, a repository of unforeseen secrets. The very tension of the narrative is fuelled precisely by the expectation that the story-telling should reveal the perpetually deferred secret. The stranger proves to be a certain Sey Mondy, who deems himself a citizen of the world, therefore he was not – as one might think – either a Frenchman, or a Brit, or some such, but a reinstantiation – one might say – of the Jew Errant. He is, according to the narrator, The Great Traveller, The Last of the Real Wanderers. We thus have the extremely clear signal of narrative allegory right on the threshold of text. Sey Mondy has knowledge of the world, he is a man of the world in the sense of a totalizing embrace of the world, not in the sense of being a globalist as dominator of the world from within a centre, by a single central power. He has been on the road for forty years at the time of the narrative, he has been around the globe several times, as he is registered with a bizarre competition called *Tardif Globe-Trotter*, a competition whereby a million dollars is awarded to the one who arrives last. He had abandoned reading Philosophy at the Sorbonne in order to be able to register for this competition alongside eighteen other adventurers, out of

which only two had survived at the time of the narrative: Sey Mondy and a dangerous man called Magirus, who surveils his contender stealthily but closely in order to annihilate him. That is why Sey Mondy retells his whole life to his confidante, hand on gun in pocket, in a permanent state of prowl. This is an epic situation of tension maintained throughout the story.

The novel of a confession readily gets transformed into the novel of a journey. The Great Wanderer is a fabulous adventurer, living his life in perpetual peregrination like another Ulysses or yet another Don Quijote – cultural myths that he is keen on distancing himself from – . He earns his keep either by performing as a singer (ever hoarser with the passing of time, either performing cards magic, or – when he has no choice – doing the odd job.) He makes do anywhere he is and survives as a picaro. His anxieties supersede the apparently plain condition of the character, who had set sail, as it were, with the forceful desire of comprehending the world, its invisible forces and hidden meanings. On the surface of it all, extremely appealing and nuclei of picturesque and exotic stories from the four corners of the world, the most remote ones linger. He leaves Paris, where he abandons a Madeleine who gets exasperating by devotion to him, and who will wait for him ever so patiently until the end. In Barcelona he falls in love with Lucia-Dolores, a woman subjugated by flamenco and he eventually loses her like one would a Dulcinea, totally engulfed and engrossed in his never-ending journey. The Spanish lesson he is taught helps Sey Mondy assume his freedom, which spells out to him as "the right to act as you wish" taking certain laws and principles into account notwithstanding. He boards a ship sailing from Porto to New York and a pastor in the New World makes him understand that the Church, whilst being essential to humanity, should be reconsidered and that "being white is by no means a privilege". The paradise of freedom is overshadowed by "a genuine phobia of spies", where "any newcomer could be a spy". Now is the time when he acknowledges and lays out the wager with himself: "I will have to subject myself to my own moral accountability" - the most precious travel kit. Numberless situations on the edge are to occur in Mexico, Venezuela, Columbia, Brasil, our hero thus being southbound. In Amazonia he eats fruit, roots, chunks of snake meat and falls in love with Tude, one of the women in the tribe, wherefrom he hardly succeeds to escape. Next are India and Australia, replete with other mishaps. In Australia he meets Regine, "a superb woman who smelt of eucalyptus and of orange tree bloom", who is the fantastic embodiment of a continent surrounded by the ocean. On the Tibetan plateau, he muses, with an eagle next to him, on Kant`s ethics, loathing it and equally Saint-Simon`s utopia. In Kenya he rides a tamed zebra, riding as though he were flying. Having arrived in India for the third time, close to the border with Nepal, Sey Mondy is entrapped by a swamp that could have proven lethal, if a native had not rescued him on the verge of death. In moments of respite and musing he fantasises about the dream woman embodied by Anys, a "European, caucasian, a moor and a yellow woman" an enthralling abstraction, a fantastic amalgam of races. Sey Mondy is the protagonist of far-fetched stories: one of those is the story of the albino Negro in Cameroon, yet another one is that of his privileged relationship with

Marcella, the Nun, then the one of the white lion's death and the array thereof does by no means stop here. Exoticism/ extreme adventure alternates with episodes of a fairy-tale quality or science fiction. The reader's curiosity is satisfied thoroughly at this level of luxurious and elliptical narrative in its well thought-out fragmentary quality. Nevertheless, a narrative puzzle always aims at things beyond simple story-telling. The wanderer's story is a subjective abstract of the world, a very personal synthesis with philosophical underpinnings. What matters is not simply the exploration of a geographical space, be it vast and surprising, but the exploration of meaning.

A NOVEL OF SPIRITUAL ADVENTURE

Saludos gets transformed from the novel of a journey, vacillating thrivingly between the experience of freedom and the temptation of play into the novel of spiritual adventure, a heralded adventure of knowledge. It is by no means by chance that Sey Mondy abandons reading Philosophy at the Sorbonne in his early twenties, he indeed abandons library, bookish philosophy for the philosophy of life, the philosophy of experience on the edge, whilst forcing or provoking "out there, on a field trip" destiny, love, belief, knowledge, the threshold of death, the power to master the world. The former bookish philosopher keeps his interrogative reflex on the state of the world vivid and incisive, a world in its concrete social fabric: dappled and disastrous. The Great Wanderer wished "to find out something", the ultimate key to the world. The witness, that is the narrator, realizes that "Sey was the bearer of an ancient message". Similar to heroes of Eminescu's prose or to heroes belonging to the German romantics' imaginary inventory, Alexandru Ecovoiu's Sey Mondy is on a quest for – by exploration of the Netherworld – the Idea that is bound to sum up the world, the ultimate truth, the primordial Book. Voyaging is in fact the traditional allegory of knowledge: "I was to travel the world over: to see, to hear, to KNOW!" - Sey Mondy confides in the photographer. If Ulysses had travelled as a wanderer, Sey is in a quest for "a novel comprehension of things" and for a way of experiencing freedom. When he finds love in an Amazonian tribe, where he reigns like a god and where time seemed to have vanished, he realizes, yet again, his true meaning: "I was but a product of the modern world, whose evil I was contesting, but not its advantages; its falsehood, but not its truth. I had not set sail in order to become a savage: my aim was to KNOW". There is a strategy of knowledge, of knowing, revealed by the "complete harmony with the environment", in the complicity with objects, with the rain, with the vegetation, with birds, translated by Sey into the "saludos state", "something between greeting and reverence", a form of freedom, a form of resistance but of catharsis as well, a way of resonating with the world and of identifying oneself with its latent meanings, in order to reveal them. *Saludos* can be said to signify, by cumulative meaning, a game and an exercise in self-suggestion. *Saludos* is a way towards finding "something utterly defining for humanity at large, a symbol acknowledged by all", something above an instinct such as sexuality as dominant temptation and unsatisfactory account of the world. Hence it is not the journey *per se*, albeit adventurous, that constitutes the stakes of the novel,

but the dramatization and vericity value of the unique, novel experience of knowledge.

On the other hand, *Saludos* is the novel of an existential wager and equally of a wager with self. The two wagers have slightly different contents as it were. The bizarre competition called *Tardif Globe-Trotter* has as its underpinning principle extreme delay: the one who arrives last wins the prize. Undoubtedly, a banal allegory of life is comprised therein. Magirus, the last contender in the competition, was the fittest contender of them all, but would become dangerous in the end as he was willing to cheat, being on the prowl at all times, and wishing to annihilate Sey Mondy. Maintaining vigilance as a form of defense stimulates the latter: "I have wasted a lifetime in order to conquer. I engaged in fair-play, whilst he prowled. He prowls as we speak. It's hard to spot him, he wears make-up, he is an ace! He has wigs, moustaches and hoods finer than spider's web, he can impersonate anyone. (...) But it's OK. I can move about more easily having him breathing down my neck. Magirus sustains the competitive state, he is my invisible whip. Magirus can be the Devil or Death itself". The contest lays out longevity and endurance as criteria. This would constitute the existential wager. The wager with self includes two aspects: "the journey on your own" as a form of self-acknowledgement and self-knowledge. Sey Mondy had suspected all this at the outset, but it all becomes clear forty years into the competition: "I had the opportunity to prove to myself who/what I was: little did I know about myself. I was complicated and contradictory; I am all that today as well. The saludos state has only placed me in a convenient relationship with things. Which, after all, could mean everything. Therefore I had to leave". But it would be way too facile for things to be just that. It is not merely longevity that matters, but the longevity of the one who finds out the secret, the longevity of the great connoisseur of the world. The essentialization of the plot appropriates as its central attraction the cultivation of an enigma. The narrative has a very tight logic in deploying the succession of themes, by metaphorical equivalence: life as journey (be it real or imaginary); journey as existential wager and adventure of knowledge; knowledge as initiation, access to mystery and source of power.

All the coordinates of the novel result in revealing a secret. After several nights of confession, the photographer, a substitute of the narrator, but equally of the Writer, realizes in all indignation, that he does not really know who he really was, "the most unusual man he had ever met". He had the misguiding appearance of a Foreign Legion officer, but also that of an explorer on a scientific expedition. He was some of all this, but way more than that. He was the philosopher, the man-on-a-quest for the ultimate truth, an individual endowed with superior intelligence. Sey Mondy has a dodgy megalomania, at times of a destructive demon, at other times of creator of the world, more clearly evidenced by his belonging to a "a commando/squad of the spirit" , made up of twelve writers, all of them Scorpio sign-born, summoned and sequestered in a secret spot, in a Straits and a Lapidarium, in order to write scripts about the fate of The Unitary – that is, Global – State and in order to achieve "logical combinations of situations on the edge". They were all surveilled by a Custodian, who wished to learn, as a representative of some

World Council, where the perturbing elements of a Planetary Order could possibly come from, elements controlled and guided from a single centre of power. Sey Mondy lays out the principles of a sinister utopia of globalization, concocted by a Worldwide Plot. He had been sequestered in that very spot, The Straits, where the application of the utopia of globalization was being planned. He escaped on his own, by miracle, as a result of an escape that seemed impossible. The great secret of the wanderer was the knowledge of this project, rivalling the one of the Freemasons`. That is why Sey Mondy should have been annihilated. A threatening ideological fiction constitutes the secret disclosed to the photographer, who was meant to become the writer who was to communicate this warning. The possible world disaster, synonymous to The Apocalypse, should have been barred or preempted. This is what The Great Wanderer had comprehended in his forty years around the world. The result of his thus acquired knowledge should be relayed by the writer, as the true meaning of his Book. Through this very warning, were he to be believed, he could save the world.

Borgesian by its vision and the inventiveness of epic hypotheses, Kafkian by the economy of means (parable-informed subject-matter, symbolic characters), *Saludos* is an essay-driven novel, interesting both due to the clear-cut line of sensational narrative, and to speculative imagination in the sensitive areas of the Apocalyptical and of the effects of globalization. The inner metamorphosis of the novel can be followed by the reader as an enthralling spectacle, in the sequential passage from the novel of a confession to the novel of a journey or in the intersection between the novel of an adventure of knowledge and the novel of the disclosure of an enigma.

Translated from Romanian by Anemona Alb, PhD.

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EXOTICISM AND THE OPENINGS OF LITERATURE. TYPES OF EXOTICISMS



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Abstract: Exoticism cannot be reduced to its hues, indeed to its nuances. It taps into the endless dimension of passions and of literary imaginary. Exoticism is a natural state of the human being. But it is a state that goes beyond curiosity. Exoticism presupposes the act of knowing, not just knowing externally, but also knowing through creating an interior platform. Exoticism is a vehicle for knowing, maybe the most user-friendly, maybe the most seducing of all. It requires a simple participation, but, at the same time, a totalizing participation of the human being. Exoticism invites man to playing. Exoticism, through its invitation to playing, tends to re-signify or re-define man in contact with the object of exoticism. A condition of exoticism is to be able to surpass the real. We shall further attempt to draw the attention to different occurrences of exoticism in fiction. We have circumscribed these occurrences to ten types: exoticism as resistance (1), internal exoticism (2), imaginary exoticism (3), erotic exoticism (4), cultural exoticism (5), narcotic exoticism (6), political exoticism (7), commercial exoticism (8), identity-informed exoticism (9), entropic exoticism (10).

Key words: exotic, exoticism, Romanian contemporary fiction, occurrences of exoticism, types of exoticisms, exoticism and play

Exoticism has always been metabolized into novelty and discovery, concepts in tune with the need for evasion. It has become, in a way, the *Grail of purposeless voyages*. The tracing of new spaces, the challenges of the adventures in the unknown, the mere exploration of the world have made the passions in fiction and the literary imagination resurface. Thus, the

adventures tapped into a dimension of passions and of the imaginary which has proven endless.

But the tracing of new spaces are the very nuances to which exoticism cannot be reduced. It would mean, then, that exoticism has merely an exploratory function; that it is confined to a zone of endless curiosity and does nothing more, except reach out for the imaginary decors with which we adorn our curiosity.

Exoticism is a natural state of the human being. But it is a state that goes beyond curiosity. Exoticism presupposes the act of knowing, not just knowing externally, but also knowing through creating an interior platform. Exoticism is a vehicle for knowing, maybe the most user-friendly, maybe the most seducing of all. As such, it requires a simple participation, but, at the same time, a totalizing participation of the human being. Exoticism invites man to playing. Travelling, exploration, curiosity for labyrinthine spaces and labyrinthine interiorities are such forms of play. Exoticism, through its invitation to playing, tends to re-signify or re-define man in contact with the object of exoticism. Mystery must find words to be named even in interiority. That is why the many commentators of exoticism settled for certain syntagmata, so that they could grasp also the deep, unseen meanings and differentiate them from the general, tourist-like touches of exoticism.

Tzvetan Todorov (in *Nous et les autres. La réflexion française sur la diversité humaine*) rediscovers exoticism, after Segalen, as a form of diversity. Todorov's book on diversity of mankind contains a chapter referring to famous explorers of exoticism, like Chateaubriand, Loti, Segalen, Artaud (Todorov: 439-453). Victor Segalen was himself rediscovered after 1955.

Victor Segalen (1878-1919), in his notes that make up his *Essai sur l'exotisme*, insists on many questions of actuality, even on the decline of exoticism and exoticism as being in peril (Segalen:22). As Segalen noted, "The exotic Tension of the World is decreasing. Exoticism, as a source of Energy-mental, aesthetic or physical (...) is on the wane." (Segalen: 62).

Exotism¹ becomes obsolete, indeed extinct once new worlds are discovered and civilization becomes ubiquitous. The foreignness of exotism has become all too familiar. "Real scarcity of the alterity" (Baudrillard and Guillaume:48) and the concept of the end of exotism share similar features or even overlap.

If otherness gets too assimilated, exoticism is in danger. Then there is no genuine exchange. This begets homogenization. For Jean Baudrillard (*Ibidem*:116), generally speaking, the sign has a fatality of its own. If all

¹ For this article, the fragile distinction between exoticism and exotism is relevant. Thus, the noun compound of exotic+ism, was attested around 1827, see exoticism. Dictionary.com. *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Douglas Harper, Historian. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/exoticism> (accessed: May 30, 2014). Exoticism defines "tendency to adopt what is exotic", while exotism is "the quality of being exotic", as in "exotism." Retrieved May 31, 2014 from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/exotism>.

dimensions can be turned into signs, they become interchangeable, like within the consumerist society and therefore otherness is lost.

Within the concept of "uniform globalization" (Baudrillard and Guillaume, 94) of the massive changes of cultural actuality, exoticism is no exception here. A certain uniformization emerges. Baudrillard and others were/are skeptical. They do not believe that exoticism can still be produced, under the circumstances that there is little room for the unknown. It is as if you visited the same thing, over and over again. Same geography. And this process originates in industrialization.

More than ever, it is two hundred years ago that literature was seeking exotic places. Without its exotic parameters, we can safely say that the literature of Romanticism probably could not have functioned at its optimum freedom. I would indicate here that even the concept of the ugly was encouraged by the romantics.

The ugly is in itself a kind of exoticism, one that has changed irreversibly the aesthetics of the face of culture. If some functions of exoticism are lost for literature and after otherness was mapped, either there is no place for the unknown, or exoticism is in the danger of entering homogenization, Jean Baudrillard suggests there is an outlet. There is exoticism in exotic hybrid fictions. History itself offers the best source of inspiration for these kinds of fiction.

Baudrillard and Guillaume's book, called *Figures de l'altérité* (*Radical Alterity* in translation) puts forward the phrase "hybrid fictions"(:65). The notion defines the very construct originating in the real and nourished with fiction. Segalen was suggesting something even higher, a pure form of exoticism, rendered possible through the discovery of something eternal, through the ineffable. Thus pure exoticism would not need this exotic rarity, supplemented fictitiously, "combinatory fiction".

According to Segalen, another instance of testing was putting the non-involvement with/in the exotic space on trial. Is it possible or is it impossible to become part of that exotic space, even if symbolically? Segalen's conclusion is that exoticism means to recognise the other one and to subsequently return to yourself. Everything that surpasses the act of recognition gets outside the ambit of exoticism in itself and passes into the prolongations of exoticism, into its nuances. Segalen precedes Marguerite Duras, according to Marc Guillaume. She imagined in all her literature the state of impossibility for lovers, the unfathomable in that sense. The lovers cannot grasp their impossibility, as Segalen had pointed out (Baudrillard and Guillaume:64). As for exoticism, it goes the same way, division and attraction but also the pretence that the impossibility is not there. A tragic condition. An ample lie due to erotic exoticism. Here, Marc Guillaume gives one of the best and truest definitions of exoticism: "Bovaryism is primarily an example of **internal exoticism**: I am caught in my own role and observe myself as an alterity. I create this distance inside myself." (*Ibidem*: 65).

A condition of exoticism is to be able to surpass the real. Here (*Ibidem*:62) the same Segalen noticed the way in which Japan maintains the

senses of archaic, resistant culture within the siege of occidental capitalism (that was before the undermining of the radical alterity of Japan through a crust of Americanized way of life). This is one of the forms of radical exotism. To change into game and feeling the whole import of Western civilization, this is the definition of radical exotism.

It is obvious that the definitions of the French have something to do with a solid modernist component, in all its dimensions, and with a postmodern retrieval of exotism, but with clear antennae in romanticism. Baudrillard says that radical exotism passes the trial of modernity and continues through itself. It is stated that, in this theoretical project, distance is essential. Wherefrom can fictionalization begin, wherefrom can oblivion commence? Or what modifies distance? Segalen used to say something else. That the very **distance**, distance in itself from alterity is the principle of exoticism: "forceful and curious reaction to a shock felt by someone of strong individuality in response to some object whose distance from oneself he alone can perceive and savor" (Segalen:21).

However, it is not distance that matters, the discovery of a geography or of a culture, but a fundamental rule, a kind of law of exoticism: "exoticism can be understood as a kind of fundamental law concerning the intensity of sensations, the exalting of the senses and life" (Baudrillard and Guillaume:76). It seems, however, that all people are under the "jurisdiction" of this law, there is no escape from it: "All men are subjected to the law of exoticism. There is a radical, fundamental foreignness that one must not try to eliminate in general" (*Ibidem*:76).

IS THERE A(N) ETHICS/PHILOSOPHY/AESTHETICS OF EXOTISM ?

This is the starting point for Baudrillard, many a time. It seems that today we simply live a reloaded exoticism, the remake of exoticism on the horizontal line, whereby the deeper senses of exotism are excluded. The voyage and the adventure into the unknown of romanticism have vanished.

In a world where increasingly tourism tends to become a mental orbit (*Ibidem*: 90), we must discover Segalen's radical exoticism. Moving in circles to discover places, without wondering why, is a kind of implosion, we must find the exit into this orbital movement, an exit which should enable us to surpass tourism.

Actually, Segalen had talked about tourism as having started from the very moment man realized the world was a sphere (Segalen:43): "the upset, the disenchanting quality of the spherical world as opposed to the flat world".

An idea which is, at the same time, an act of seduction, it is the law of assimilation. You must take from the visited country something of its strangeness. It is an idea expressed by Segalen, acknowledged by Baudrillard: "the rapture of the subject conceiving its object, recognizing its own difference from itself, sensing Diversity." (Segalen: 20).

THE 21ST CENTURY. WHICH ARE THE REMAINING MEANINGS OF EXOTICISM?

We witness a turn in our own culture, wherefrom strangeness is extricated, by reinventing it. Actually exoticism is not reduced, it is invented. It is re-established, recreated.

Actually, it is Baudrillard who dreams of another type of radical exotism, the only one possible and fascinating for each of us. It is tempting. Reverting to interpretation, recreation, rediscovery of one's own culture brings along a compulsory process, a very interesting one, of de-identification and de-differentiation.

In the epoch of artificial intelligence, an artificial exoticism is constructed. Finally, those skeptical who refuse conceptualization and ideas in debate will claim that literature produces exoticisms any time, and can indeed perpetually produce such artefacts, and that the fabrication of exoticism in the self via imagination is always more powerful than any authentic description.

Or, the same skeptical opponents may argue that what exotism boils down to is an adjectival term, the most often met in literature. The evasion into the exotic or through it was and shall be one of the most in use literary methods to attract those on a quest for *livresque* imagination.

TYPES OF EXOTICISMS

Segalen had referred to "Exoticisms that are intact or potential exoticisms: Woman, Music and, in general, all artistic sentiment" (Segalen:65).

In Romanian literature, George Călinescu referred to a state of economic exoticism in his novel *Bietul loanide* (*Poor loanide*) (1953). The female character, Sultana, (loanide's aspirant lover) herself an embodiment of erotic exotism for loanide, the male protagonist of the novel, maintains mystery in regards to business, in connection to dividends per share. Thus Saferian (Sultana's father) must receive dividends from Baghdad Company of light standard and from a Calcutta tram company, as well. To another character, Demirgean, although yet another Armenian himself, as Saferian, the whole question seemed to have a tinge of "an insane exoticism".

Therefore, the critic and novelist George Călinescu did see exoticism as something superseding the narrow frame of immediateness. Călinescu surpassed that immediateness not only geographically, but also from the point of view of what was conceivable for his characters' social life.

Another example from Romanian literature comes from the poet, philosopher and novelist Lucian Blaga, who, in *Luntrea lui Caron* (*Charon's Boat*) (1990), writes in a letter about getting (ful)filled in his taste for exoticism, by beholding the beauty of the addressee (a mysterious lady). This is an idea of exotism associated with an eccentric beauty, aloof, indeed distant, under-civilised, specifically romantic.

The necessity for other foreign countries is comprised in this taste for the exotic. It is a pleasure that does not diminish beauty, hedonism that by no means detracts. On the contrary, it challenges beauty.

An important idea to be inferred from the example of Lucian Blaga is that of pleasure as coming against beauty. Pleasure does not draw beauty closer, on the contrary, pleasure pushes beauty even further away, indeed keeps it at bay. Even if we know that things are in this way, at the level of speech, in Blaga's example, they are proclaimed differently. It is the linguistic game what gains primacy, overriding the concept. Perhaps the eternal fascination of literature with the exotic may find an explanation in this linguistic game.

An example in opposition to the idea of beauty and the fascination with the linguistic game is more widely-known this time round, from a notorious writer. Malcom Lowry, in *Under the Volcano*, lures the reader inside an aggressive exoticism, with hints pertaining to the grotesque. It concentrates images of a disquieting imagination, a kind of reversal of the imaginary we mentioned before, that of Lucian Blaga. Here the categories pertaining to the ugly enact exoticism, marking it with a factual dimension. The result is, again, superlative, both at the level of language and at the level of the imaginary.

André Gide, in his novel *The Counterfeiters*, resorts to a technical definition of exoticism, which is at the same time a symbolic one. "The name «exoticism» is, I believe, is given to those of Maia's iridescent folds which make the soul feel itself a stranger, which deprive it of points of contact" (Gide:143, N.Y. Vintage Books).

Another relevant example is from a book of philosophy about angels, belonging to Romanian philosopher and art theoretician, Andrei Pleșu. Speaking about the absurdity of a debate about the morals of angels, the Romanian thinker considers that the angelic nature is a meta-ethical one. From the absolute position, namely the angels' point of view, morality is nothing else but an "exotic realm". The moral debate takes place in this "fairy-like exoticism", says Andrei Pleșu in his book *Minima Moralia* (1988), in the chapter dedicated to moral competence.

Before referring to some types of exoticism we have figured out the criteria of their occurrence in fiction, we shall now resort to some very recent examples taken from nowadays Romanian fiction. The novels we mention here have been published since 2010, with one exception. Therefore they should be part of an emergent trend.

Thus, from the most recent authors, published in 2014, we have chosen Dragoș Ghițulete with his novel *Partea stângă a capului* (*The Left Side of the Head*) (2014), Sebastian A. Corn with *Ne vom întoarce în Muribecca* (*We Shall Return to Muribecca*) (2014) and Ligia Ruscu with *O dimineață la vânătoare* (*A Morning Hunt*) (2014). All these novels deal with different dimensions of exoticism. Dragoș Ghițulete retrieves an exoticism which corresponds to indulging in depression. This exoticism enacts an imposed loneliness manifested in the desire to become a citizen of the

world. Corn's novel, *Ne vom întoarce în Muribacca* is a parable with an exotic perspective. From the Amazonian jungle, the author brings forward a space prolonged into histories. These histories may be defined ideologically, ontologically and in point of identity. Corn retrieves all the ideas with a long career in the last century. Ligia Ruscu resorts to political exoticism. The plot is situated in a Romania two hundred years younger. Political exoticism takes the form of backstage scheming. That world is known theoretically, but the novel makes it fresh.

Other novels or collections of short-stories published in 2013 (exception *Sindromul Robinson*) deal with new forms of exoticisms. The examples are *Lunetistul (The Sniper)* (2013) by Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari, *Sindromul Robinson (The Robinson Syndrome)* (2014) by Radu Mareş, *Beniamin* (2013) by Eugen Uricariu and *Scorpionul galben (The Yellow Scorpion)* (2013) by Radu Țuculescu. In Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari's novel, the characters have abandoned the quest for their roots and have undergone ample inner and social changes to redefine themselves as beings in incertitude. Radu Mareş draws a pavilion of solitude where he processes the intensified acts of living, vacillating between geography and solitude. *Beniamin* is the case of mysticism documented as social exoticism. The model was inaugurated by Bogdan Suceavă with his novel *Venea din timpul diez (Coming from an Off-Key Time)* (2005).

Before 2013, there are at least two examples of female contemporary writers who have undertaken exoticism as major writing projects. All their novels are intentionally set in exotic locations and this is the preferred theme. Claudia Golea deals with erotic exoticism: *Planeta Tokio / Planet Tokyo* (1998), *Tokyo by night* (2000), *Vară în Siam (Summer in Siam)* (2004), *French Coca-Cola* (2005) and *Flower-Power Tantra* (2007). These novels have some merits in terms of the theme of exoticism, but are undermined by imposed identity patterns, therefore they belong rather to the category of mass literature. Truly valuable are the novels of another writer, Daniela Zeca Buzura: *Istoria romanțată a unui safari (Safari Romance)* (2009), *Demonii vântului (The Demons of the Wind)* (2010) și *Omar cel orb (Blind Omar)* (2012). She makes use fully of the relationship between exoticism and alterity. It is a productive unit because several types of exoticism meet in a narration that has aesthetical value.

Florina Ilis does not choose exoticism for all her novels, she does so with *Cinci nori colorați pe cerul de răsărit (Five Tinted Clouds in the Eastern Sky)* (2006). She sees how geographic exoticism meets the clashes of civilization with the European space. The dominant note is given by an exoticism delivered by technology. It is provoked by a post-cyberpunk reality. A hybrid exoticism would result from here, namely the *uchronic exoticism*.

As early as 1995, with the release of *Saludos* (novel conceived even earlier), Alexandru Ecovoiu situated his protagonists in a competition for exoticness. His characters could truly see the Reality only by becoming citizens of the world. As compared to the literary year of *Saludos*, the theme

of exoticism and the exotic locations thereof are by far more frequent in the Romanian very recent prose, almost two decades later. The contemporary writer can hardly redefine himself or herself fully without at least one exotic dimension.

In literature, apart from the types of exoticism specified here, there are others that should be mentioned. We shall further attempt to draw attention to different instantiations of exoticism in fiction.

Exoticism as resistance (1). This is the exoticism of people engrossed in the fever of creation. Exoticism conserves a type of unreality for the creator in the process of expressing oneself or for the creator up in the air. It means also the resistance to the platitudes of existence, a kind of emergency dressing for attenuating the symptoms of a rift between the individual and his environment, between the creator and his/her creation. A reservoir of plunges into the cocoons of memory from where a spirit can replenish itself when it gets dry with inspiration. This type, exoticism as resistance, is at the same time an element of opposition against civilization. In a first stage, this formula is a radical one, its function being therapeutic notwithstanding. The civilized man needs exoticism to get out of the routine of civilization. We find in literature exoticism as resistance in those narrations where either the aggression of capitalism or the aggression of a totalitarian state is annulled through the finding of exotic spaces with a vindictive role. The same typical traits of the protagonists of such novels, protagonists who are either misfits, or dreamers, contemplators, depressed etc.

A second type connected to the first is that of *internal exoticism* (2). This is probably the most spread type. It capitalizes both the direct experience, the geographical landscape, once the event is remote it treasures up the experience of recollection. A third type is that of *imaginary exoticism* (3), closely related to the second type. Imaginary exoticism could be regarded as a pleonasm. This type insists on travelling undertaken by the imagination in spaces recomposed after vague information or after figments of the imagination. The senses of this type of exoticism have remained almost unaltered, from literature for children to Jules Verne or to writers of speculative literature.

Erotic exoticism (4) used to be the most spread during Romanticism. Towards the end of the 20th century, this kind of exoticism was to be radicalized. The theories of Michel Houellebecq play here an important role. The writer sees the French-speaking world in exotic countries for other reasons than a cultural pact. His tourist characters discover sexual tourism rather than discovering the histories of the exotic places. This is actually a way to further fuel exoticism. Exoticism is thus exposed by the writer either as an ethical problem of the consumerist society, or as a form of erotic survival for the outcasts or for the eccentrics of the civilized world. Money can offer not just the chance of a geographical exoticization or of an imaginary one. Money actually can buy sexual tourism taken as a very truncated form of exoticism, as unidirectional exoticism.

Cultural exoticism (5), is the highest note of capitalist consumerism. The Maia artefacts referred to by André Gide are part of a cultural knowledge as an advanced form of discovering exoticism. The emphasis is on mystery and primitivism. These are the ingredients sought after by a cultivated protagonist, always entangled in questions without answers otherwise than by integrating them in a culture that is totally alien. This is the case of Daniela Zeca Buzura who has inaugurated, in Romanian literature, an exotic trilogy together with the experiences lived in the Middle Eastern world.

Narcotic exoticism (6) is a radical form of exoticism. Baudrillard rejects the argument that it could be integrated into exoticism, because this type of drug-intermediated voyage has nothing to do with alterity. The subject is bent over his/her own psychodrama. (Baudrillard and Guillaume: 77).

This kind of voyage leaves no room for questions related to otherness. It is a deception from the very beginning.

Political exoticism (7) is related both to cultural policies and tourist advertising, in order to sell into tourist circuits a space that it was intended to be sold. This exoticism is also related to the eighth type of exoticism, that of *commercial exoticism* (8). This category is not only a practice in literature. It is also a practice of the consumerist society as a rule. If we compare political exoticism to commercial exoticism it results that political exoticism has an affiliation to a social category, that of the politicians.

In many political novels, starting with south-American novels and ending with Western utopias and dystopias, there are leaders with dictatorial features or with involvement in conspiracies. They usually come from exotic areas, areas which can be easily capitalized on due to their exoticism. This is the case of exotic regions or of exotic countries which are in conflict with other more advanced countries. Or they may transfer to the public a need for strangeness in a world otherwise too predictable.

It can even be claimed that the political novel with exotic components yields not just the portrait of a leader or of a tyrant, but also the necessity of the society to allot, from time to time, credentials to an exotic individual or to an exotic idea. It is clear that societies resort to this from a need to regenerate themselves, to access novelty and to access challenge. This would be a reversal of the *ennui*.

Identity-informed exoticism (9) may castle position to all the other types of exoticism enounced so far. This is the type of exoticism that gives a broader sense to all the other components. It does not stop at an exterior or interior type of knowledge. It goes beyond identity. It redefines every new experience of exoticism. It gives the individual the over-layers that may change him/her into a being looking for redefining oneself on the grounds of aims for perfection. Equally psychological, philosophical, utopian, this identity is in the search of self, incessantly, precisely because it has the awareness of its fragmentation. This fragmentation results from the possibility to be everywhere and near everything. This way it annuls both the

imaginary and the other types of exiles. For the time being, it all remains rather an ideal on an Enlightenment foundation rather than a postmodernist ideal. The nowadays ideal of this identity-informed exoticism (or *post-identity-informed exoticism*) is in close connection to entropy. That is why, a certain subcategory of it may be even called *entropic exoticism* (10).

It is true that literature confines the concept of exoticism, or takes it to the absurd. The valorisations of exoticism are endless. Exoticism covers all the forms of thought and of the history of ideas that can be comprised in the actuality. A discussion of exoticism has no other way out but to remain an open debate.

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EXOTICISM AND NOSTALGIA IN MIRCEA CĂRȚĂRESCU'S *ORBITOR (BLINDING)*



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Abstract: In Orbitor (Blinding), Cărtărescu constructs and deconstructs the role of memory exploring memory's relationship to immortality – mostly in the third book or father's book, and memory in relation to creation – in the first two books, the mother's book irrespectively the book of the self (the middle one). There is always an unescapable nostalgia from one metamorphosis to another. If Cartarescu, as a postmodernist writer, deconstructs some myths, he never does that to the all-encompassing myth of the book. Nostalgia regenerates this myth. Exoticism embodies the need for another dimension. It is also interwoven in the maternal and paternal genealogies of Mircea, the alter-ego of Cartarescu himself. Exoticism appears in Cartarescu's dreamland as the provocation, as the challenge of the Double. Through exoticism and symmetry, Mircea wants to grasp his dream being, his inner dreamer. The underlying paradigm superior/inferior attributed to exoticism is totally out of question in Blinding, because here all exotic representations are based in oneiric landscapes. A realm where exoticism is preserved in its elements without having anything to do with commodities (see Huggan) is the dreamland of Mircea Cărtărescu's writings. Butterfly symmetry is the preservation of halves, simultaneity is androgyny. Victor, the mirror-twin of Mircea, bound to him in a Narcissus-like story of love and abhorrence, is the embodiment of symmetry at its highest potential. REM is simultaneity, not symmetry. REM is the Entrance to Blinding's manuscript labyrinth centre and the portal to a higher "blinding" reality. For Cartarescu, eternity is simultaneity. Bizarre and familiar, exotized Bucharest and exotized faraway lands have the consistency of dreams. Cartarescu's exoticism is a chrysalis of our chimeric alter-egos.

Key words: exoticism, exotized Bucharest, Romanian contemporary literature, postmodernism, Mircea Cărtărescu, alter-ego, oneiric landscapes, exotic couples, butterfly symbol, antipodes and symmetry, labyrinth, memory, mise en abyme, Monsu Desiderio in fiction.

Motto: *Herman (...) had tattooed Everything, and everything had my face.*
Mircea Cărtărescu, *Blinding. The Left Wing*

CĂRTĂRESCU'S AMAZEMENT AT "EVERYTHING".

Simultaneity and memory can live together only in a manuscript. Cărtărescu's trilogy, *Blinding*, attempts to be, first of all, a huge memory that records the life of writer's deeper self and connects him to a universal memory. The author constructs and deconstructs the role of memory exploring memory's relationship with **immortality** - mostly in the third book, the father's book, and with **creation** - in the first two books, the mother's book and the book of the self (more than the book of the son). What can bring order and simultaneity in memory? Where do all our memories go after death? All the infinite worlds opened up by memory and retraceable through the intensity of our emotions? What does our Creator do with our memories after death if the nature of our bodies changes? – are questions launched in Cărtărescu's third volume of the trilogy.¹

Orbitor (Blinding) seems to be the progress of memory towards its perfect transgression or towards non-memory. The universal memory invoked by Cărtărescu with a theosophical concept, whose expression is a Sanskrit word, Akasia,² is a kind of home of all memories. But this memory reaches its full value when it has the capacity to de-synchronize what we have learnt as past, present or future. That is like the divine tempo.

Memory and immortality. We are holders of "sensory organs for future", as the third book, *Orbitor. Aripa dreaptă*, says (:209). This phrase looks like one of the keys to the centre of this amazing labyrinth that is *Blinding*. With this revelation, a new question, more daring, can be formed: What if we are contemporaneous with our own immortality? Supposing we sought a visionary outlook to frame reality, we would know more about it.

It is through the grace of butterfly wings and butterfly body, present as individual titles of the three novels (*The Left Wing; The Body; The Right Wing*), that both an escape from labyrinth and a unifying vision from above is possible. From this above level, the Godlike one, the giant labyrinth is visible. It is exactly the world of the hero, Mircea (alias Mircișor, Mircică, even Mircica as a child). Mircea Cărtărescu's fictional alter-ego has the same name (and surname!). The giant labyrinth is made of myriads of tiny labyrinths, carved by memory, innumerable on each page. Into this pattern already incorporated in the greatest works of fiction of the world, Cărtărescu introduces his own pace, his own searches and his own scintillating paths of imagination. Thus, the slide of tiny labyrinths into the big one happens "a

¹ "La ce mi-ar folosi viața eternă dacă mi-aș pierde amintirile?" Cărtărescu, *Orbitor. Aripa dreaptă*:479.

² Incidentally, Akasia recalls the Romanian word for home, "acasă".

billion times a second”, just like Escher’s hands drawing each other (Cărtărescu, *Orbitor. Aripa stângă*:75). Eternity is not a non-tempo, but the tempo which is a divine synthesis of everything. First of all, memory should help us break the habit to need the order of past, present, future in our time perception.

„În centrul creierului, înfășurată în sistemul limbic, în fornix și hipocamp, corpi mamilari și amigdală, memoria se bălăcește în apele striate ale talamusului și hipotalamusului, își modelează acolo sculpturile neuronale, înmoaie marmura minții cu lichide fluoescente. Creează rețele ușoare ca pînza de păianjen, sucite în ele însele ca benzile lui Möbius, învălătucite ca petalele într-un trandafir incolor. Curge din real în virtual și iarăși în real, de parcă mâinile lui Escher s-ar desena una pe alta de miliarde de ori pe secundă.” (Cărtărescu. *Orbitor. Aripa stângă*: 74)

In Sean Cotter’s translation: ”In the center of the brain, formed in the limbic system, in the fornix and hippocampus, the mammillary bodies and the amygdalae, memory soaks in the striated waters of the thalamus and hypothalamus, it shapes neuronal sculptures, and it wets the marble of the mind with florescent liquids. It creates nets as flimsy as spiderwebs turned on themselves like Möbius bands, and rippled like the petals of a colorless rose. It runs from the real to the virtual and back to the real, as though Escher’s hands were drawing each other a billion times a second.” (Cărtărescu. *Blinding. The Left Wing* Part 1, chapter 7, paragraph 13).

Orbitor. Aripa stângă (Blinding. The Left Wing) was released in 1996, by Humanitas, Bucharest. *Orbitor. Corpul (Blinding. The Body)* appeared in 2002, irrespectively *Orbitor. Aripa dreaptă (Blinding. The Right Wing)* in 2007, all published by Humanitas. *Orbitor* has acquired easily the top position within Romanian literature. Nicolae Manolescu (:1348) calls the book a Romanian attempt ”in search of lost time” upon which a metanovel is jointed. The metanovel is ”as sophisticated as the Proustian one, with incursions not in socialness or mонденity, but in the archaeology of being(...)”.¹

Grandiose both in project and in accomplishment, *Orbitor* dares to unfold itself as one of world’s greatest books of the 21st century beginnings.

Like in the most thought-provoking books, the theme of *Orbitor* is no more, no less than God and literature. None of the known paths of fiction is taken for the exploration of this theme and none of the known dogmas.

For *Orbitor*’s ambition is to compete with the fundamental books of the 20th century fiction. It contains many droplets from the sacred books of mankind, as Carla Baricz remarks (see Baricz). The century after Nietzsche, the 20th, was a parricidal one, in the sense of pulverising the ”paternal” stability, the centre that had begotten core values. Towards the end of this century which knew the emergence of existentialism, absurd, postmodernity, Cărtărescu writes: ”God has not died, rather *he has yet to be born.*”²

In the peculiar universe of *Orbitor (Blinding)*, the model of sacrifice that connects man to God is that of nostalgia. Nostalgia is both an offering and a relinquishment. But it is also one of memory’s insertions into all universes it creates.

¹ „Nimeni n-a mai scris la noi o proză atât de densă și de profundă, populată de făpturi deopotrivă reale și simbolice, de fluturi ori de păianjeni colosali, atrasă magnetic de promiscua subterană psihanalitică și luminată totodată de splendide curcubeie cerești. *Orbitor* este atât romanul căutării timpului pierdut, cât și un metaroman la fel de sofisticat ca acela proustian, cu incursiuni nu însă în socialitate și mонденitate, ci în arheologia și anatomia ființei, comparabilă cu aceea din *Întâmplările* lui Blecher, într-o sexualitate obscură și flamboaiantă, liberă și interzisă, cum nu găsim în nici unul din romanele emancipate ale generației ’27, nici chiar în acela al lui Arghezi.” (Manolescu: 1348).

² Part III, chapter 25, para.17.

Nostalgia is the sacrifice we must pay for being lifted above our condition as partakers of our divine nature. For Cărtărescu, nostalgia is both a state of soul and of mind. What makes *Orbitor* so astonishing is the author's ability to frame and touch nostalgia in ways it has not been touched before, to transfigure it into words. With its "cinnamon pheromones"¹, nostalgia is an empire delicately woven around the body and around all our perception. At the same time, it is also mind's desire for something unattainable, something beyond knowledge. Biology, medicine, physics, chemistry, theosophy, astronomy, genetics have never guaranteed, through their subjects, the emergence of a grandiose novel. But *Orbitor's* stakes are high, the stakes of everything. "And everything had my face". What fuels this book to expand with the speed of an explosion is the unlimited confidence in the power of words, in the power of a book to comprise everything, even a utopia.

On postmodernist grounds, many myths in *Orbitor* are deconstructed. Cărtărescu is the author of a well-documented critical study on Romanian postmodernism, actually a doctoral thesis. However, there is an all-encompassing myth in his fiction. Regardless how torn it may be, it is there to give unity. This is the myth of the Book. The myth of the Book appears as the most everlasting, as the unchallengeable and ultimate myth, the author relies on it.

Ion Simuț frames Cărtărescu as the writer who proves "the substantiality of Romanian postmodernism". (*Reabilitarea ficțiunii*:319).

The substance of the Book should not have the definite shape of a collection of printed pages glued together, but the indefinite form of a Manuscript. As long as it is a living manuscript, the message in it may be read by somebody from another universe, or it may be reached even by God. The Manuscript is a versatile palimpsest hidden under different forms: either specular surfaces of mirrors or of crystal mausoleums, therefore inorganic textures, or organic forms, such as the rose, the butterfly, Maria's live carpet. At the same time, the paper wad written on all parts, the white sheets or even the cells with their microscopical industries making a chain of body tissues, the paintings of Monsù Desiderio, organic or mental encasements of Mircea's body in something similar to a pupal case are other protean transformations of the manuscript. Cărtărescu's switch of organic to inorganic at the speed of Escher's hands is a game with the pure forms of mind and a bet on literature's capacity to expand perceptions and hold them in something like a hologram. The imprint of the angel inside us, trapped in our body, is an inorganic one, made of precious stones: „Alcătuit din substanță spirituală, cristal gazos circulând prin vene de diamant și artere de jad, prin capilare de perlă și canalicule de porfir, prin interstiții de peruzea și canale limfatice de opal (...)”(*Aripa stângă*:73). In translation: "It's assembled from spiritual material,

¹ „emanând din toate feromonii de scorțișoară ai nostalgiei”- *Orbitor. Corpul*: 100. Since only the first volume, *Blinding. The Left Wing*, has been translated so far, passages (longer than three words) from the second book, *Orbitor. Corpul (Blinding. The Body)* and the third, *Orbitor. Aripa dreaptă (Blinding. The Right Wing)*, are not translated.

Translation mine, D. S., in all quoted passages from Romanian books of criticism.

gaseous crystal circulating in diamond veins and jade arteries, pearl capillaries and marble canals, turquoise interstices and opal lymph nodes” (*The Left Wing*: Part I, chapter 7, para. 11).

The main character of *Orbitor* is the manuscript of *Orbitor*. Only in this way Mircea can be contemporaneous with all his selves and can be in all ”mirco”-cosmoses¹ simultaneously. At the same time, in a manuscript, through analepsis, - after Thomas Pynchon’s model - memory may travel along the inverted tunnels it creates. The Manuscript can be extended to inexistent places. It is part of a fractal bigger reality, it discovers its unity with otherwise impossible margins. It is this very sense of unity what allows Mircea to challenge his double, his ”unreal” twin, and to capture him as if they were on the same side of reality.

„Memoria țese un om, acolo-n adâncul chakrei cu trei petale, în ochiul din frunte. Oricât ar fi de hidos (căci timpul este infernul și o creatură de timp este un diavol din infern, sau poate un etern osîndit), el este geamănul nostru, și o dorință ciudată ne împinge unul spre altul, unul în brațele altuia. (...)Cu fiecare clipă care trece, el se desprinde mai mult de mine, (...)lese din mine ca insecta, încă umedă și moale, din coaja străvezie a fostei ei carcase. Memoria mea este metamorfoza vieții mele, insecta adultă a cărei larvă e viața mea. Și fără o plonjare curajoasă în abisul de lapte care o nconjoară și o ascunde în pupa minții, nu voi ști niciodată dacă am fost, dacă sunt o călugăriță vorace, un păianjen visător pe picioroange nesfârșite sau un fluture de o frumusețe suprafirească.

Îmi amintesc, adică inventez. Transmut năuceala clipelor în aur ereu și unsuros. Și, cumva, străveziu, tot mai străveziu pe măsură ce fântâna din creier mi se adîncește (iar eu, un schelet aplecat peste ghizdurile ei, îmi contemplan largii ochi visători reflectați în apa de aur). Acel hialin unde sențînesc, ca trei flori heraldice pe un scut, visul, memoria și emoțiile, este domeniul meu, lumea mea, Lumea. Acolo-n cilindrul acela scînteietor care-mi coboară în creier.” (Cărtărescu, *Orbitor. Aripa stângă*: 76).

”Memory weaves us, there in the depths of the three-petaled chakra, the forehead’s eye. However hideous (because time is an inferno and a creature of time is a devil from the inferno, or maybe a creature foreverdamned), it is our twin, and a strange desire pushes one toward the other, one into the arms of the other.(...) Every moment that passes, my memory separates from me a little more, it becomes more daring and independent, its shadow and power grow, and it rises over me, spreading its claws and bat wings. (...) It crawls out of me like an insect, still wet and soft, from the transparent shell of its former carcass. My memory is the metamorphosis of my life. If I do not plunge bravely into the milky abyss that surrounds and hides my memory in the pupa of my mind, I will never know if I have been, if I am a voracious praying mantis, a spider dreaming upon an endless pair of stilts, or a butterfly of supernatural beauty.

I remember, that is, I invent. I transmute the ghosts of moments into weighty, oily gold. And, somehow, it is also transparent, ever more transparent the deeper the fountain of my mind becomes (and I, a skeleton leaning over its walls, contemplate the wide, dreaming eyes reflected in the golden water). That hyaline cartilage, there on the shield where the three heraldic flowers meet – dream, memory, and emotion – that is my domain, my world, the World. There in that sparkling cylinder that descends through my mind.” (Cărtărescu. *Blinding. The Left Wing*, part I, chapter 7, para. 14-15).

At the same time, the focus of the Manuscript should not be literature. Herman is very clear in this respect. If Mircea sticks to literature, instead of choosing ”Everything”, then Mircea is not the chosen one, ”they” and Herman have been expecting the wrong guy.

Herman embodies the autoreferentiality of the author.

The author desires with so much pain and dread to find the entrances of his own universe, which he creates, exudes, oozes out, secrets

¹ If, for Mircea’s case, we may substitute ”microcosm” with the Slavic etymology of the name ”Mircea”.

incessantly, together with secreting his own mythology, that the laws of fiction are totally forgotten.

There is another reason (revealed by Herman) for the Book to stay a Manuscript and not turn into a finite thing, apart from the postmodern difference between the Work (the Opus) versus the Text¹. The manuscript can choose its writer, therefore the manuscript contains a maze as long as it is a manuscript, once it is locked the maze becomes an ordinary space like any other².

Nostalgia is the regenerative pain of the world of the manuscript. In the absence of it, the writer's utopia would show its "utopian" inability to hold together the worlds. Victor, who is Mircea's twin, has a strange insufficiency; he cannot feel pain, as if he were a paper person.

In *Orbitor*, the liberation stage of the butterfly is the knowledge of truth. But reaching this stage means that revelations in truth are above the separation proclaimed by past, present and future. What happens to death, then? Death occurs at the passage from a metamorphosis to another. At the same time, *Orbitor* contains by far the most numerous terms with direct reference to creation than any other work of Romanian literature. The facets of creation are numerous and they are all (omni)present: mythical, mystical, metaphysical, teleological, psychoanalytical, scientific (genetic, intracellular and astronomic), esoteric, artistic, architectural, folkloric, fictional, fractal.

Creation happens on every page in relation to a multi-stratified time of fiction. Nested in all of Cărtărescu's other writings, very much like *Rayuela* for Julio Cortázar, *Orbitor* embodies a different time lapse. It passes from the years of previous generations, through the writer's birth and childhood up to the years of Romanian 1989 revolution. From a postmodern perspective, a new cosmogonic flight can be taken (after that of Eminescu's Hyperion), and memory is its medium. What is beyond memory, everything or nothing? *Orbitor's* Time is never linear. It reaches even the level of underexistence, a foetal time, so slow that its passing consists more of vibrations than of instances. Creation is so much the myth and the substance of this fiction because memory captures the very revelations that make all the obstructive patterns of mind crack. The omnipresence of walking statues is a direct reference to previous unhelpful patterns of knowledge or habitual thinking, which can make the self their prisoner. That is why they are given in the charge of a Securitate officer (Stănilă). In the final act, the statues crack and explode. But the statues are ambivalent symbols, they hear the silences and can see inside their brain (with blind eyes). Reaching the universal memory of Akasia also means that uterus (the memory, the pupal case) is not needed any longer, the being has reached a new stage of life: "We are all women, we are

¹ In the age of multimedia text is anyway naturally expanded outside the medium of print. For the expansion of the notion of "text", author-reader interactions, rereading, re-writing, see Cornis-Pope (:18).

² „O carte adevărată selecta mereu un singur cititor, (...) De-aceea Herman nu credea în cărțile tipărite, ci numai în manuscrise, fiecare un unicat, fiecare o Evanghelie. Căci nu tu alegeai cartea, ci cartea te alegea ca să se scrie prin tine.” (*Orbitor. Corpul*: 161).

uteruses, and we will tear ourselves apart (...)so that in another world (...)crystalline beings can emerge(...)” (see infra). There is a difference of memory in connection to feminine creation as compared to masculine, cerebral creation. Masculine creation is the act of feeding, irrigating the manuscript with an irrepressible sadness. But memory has been the case of the self’s larva, its nutrient, its capping, and its mantel.

Labyrinth becomes the matrix, at all levels of the book, in which man confronts the revelation of immortality. But, at the same time, Memory must transcend its own matrix. Dream becomes the only possibility to connect all levels. The vertical sense of motion encompasses even the subterraneous levels, since the city appears also with its maze of “underground networks” as Suceavă remarks. (see Suceavă).

Memory and creation. Memory grows into the substance inhabiting the matrix of labyrinth. In *Blinding*, it is associated with two forms of creation. („Noi suntem creație”/“We are creation”). The first of them is the maternal or the feminine. This is the creation in wholeness, not in rupture. There is no light in the maternal womb, therefore foetus’s main occupation is dreaming. [Anca] „Și am visat mult, mai mult ca oricând, așa cum am auzit odată la radio că embrionii visează în uterul mamelor, că visează (oare la ce?) aproape tot timpul.” In Sean Cotter’s translation: “I heard once on the radio that embryos dream in the womb, that they are dreaming (but of what?) almost all the time.” (Cărtărescu, *Blinding. The Left Wing*, Part I, Chapter 9, paragraph 6). The second type of creation is the masculine or the cerebral one. The leitmotif of the homunculus, the “sad uterus” of the brain², the presence of Herman are the indicators that there is a passage from the world of life to the world of the Book. Escher’s hands drawing each other, sliding from real to virtual “a billion times a second” incessantly cross this passage as they create it.

The speed of passing from virtual into real is an attempt to simultaneity. Auto-fiction has become a trend within Romanian literature, emergent with the 80’s generation, but anticipated by some post-war tendencies. Auto-fiction may rely on memory’s avidity to invent, but if memory eludes its complicated relationship to Time itself, it falls into manageable descriptions. The force of Cărtărescu’s description lies in involving Time in all matrixes created by the TextActually, the book does not contain only the matrix of memory, it is at the same time an “apotheosis of remembering”, as Sharon Mesmer calls it. (see Mesmer).

Matrix, etymologically, comes from the Latin word for “mother”, assimilated to the womb³.

If Maria, Mircea’s mother, is mythically sealed with the sign of the butterfly, there is nothing out-of-ordinary in this investiture. Every woman

¹ Cărtărescu, *Blinding. The Left Wing*, part 3, chapter 25, para. 18.

² “Nu scriu o carte, ci cresc un embrion în uterul trist al țestei și-al camerei și-al lumii mele.” (Mircea Cărtărescu, *Orbitor. Corpul*: 19).

³ “late 14c., “uterus, womb,” from Old French *matrice* “womb, uterus,” from Latin *matrix* (genitive *matricis*) “pregnant animal,” in Late Latin “womb,” also “source, origin,” from *mater* (genitive *matris*) “mother” . *matrix*. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Retrieved November 1, 2014, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/matrix>

bears that sign, since, the author says, "every birth creates a religion"(part 3, chapter 25, para. 46). „Și fiecare naștere creează o religie, este o bunăvestire. Și religia însăși nu are alt sens decât Nașterea.” (Cărtărescu, *Orbitor. Aripa stângă*: 406) "And every birth creates a religion, it is an announcement. And religion itself has no other meaning than Birth."

However, it is through literature that this investiture becomes available and Mircea is both cognizant of and the carrier of his mother's magical symbolism.

Maria's investiture is nothing more than a reminder that the bone which protects the foetus has the form of a butterfly(the illium). And it is connected to the "sacrum" part (bone) of the spine. Cărtărescu does not create his own mythology by putting together ready-made schemes. By reaching any symbol through memory, by re-investing it through his self-expansion into the universe, the writer rediscovers numerous metaphorical correspondences between anatomy and his ways to create fiction through "auto-fiction". Cărtărescu's mythology is at the same time archetypal and postmodern. For instance, if the butterfly bone has a shape coincidental with the writer's symbolism, that is not enough yet. The writer must feel every symbol, the same way in which in the prose entitled *REM*, from the volume *Nostalgia*, Egor writes incessantly "no no no no no no no" covering all the pages with this single word, the pages that make up his precious manuscript. His gesture is painstaking but not absurd, since he feels every "no" differently and takes the effort to transcribe that into letters.

In this way, by feeling every symbol differently, Cărtărescu creates a connection through dream with his whole system. Thus, dream is connected with the maternal womb, because that is the space where we used to dream more, therefore a paradisiac space. That is the time when we were closer to God, in an unknown way. What is retrievable from that state, through memory, is the state of perfect simultaneity. In the subterraneous, sepulchral world of monstrous deeds created by our unexorcised fears, Monsieur Monsù makes a collection of unusual butterflies, actually a monstrous insectary with human iliac bones (butterfly-shaped) painted in different colours. Coca reads her own name on the newest label that is awaiting its insectary exponent, thus knowing she is the next victim. (Cărtărescu. *Orbitor. Corpul*: 424). Coca is the kidnapper of Victor, the one who secluded him in a mother-less and hopeless world, breeding him in a brothel in Amsterdam.

Another correspondence is that between the sphenoid bone of the skull and a butterfly. This bone has orbits, resembling a butterfly executing a rotation. For Herman, it is this butterfly-shaped bone of the skull that protects the dreams of his embryo¹. However monstrous this may look, taken literally, masculine, cerebral creation has the privilege of being nested in Time, of making Time its matrix.

¹ „În țeasta lui Herman se afla, ghemuit, un copil. (...) Ocupa aproape tot interiorul cavității de os, devenită acum transparentă ca de cleștar. (...)Ghemuit în pântecul său de os, copilul visa” (*Orbitor. Aripa dreaptă*:129).

Autoreferentiality and exotism. The most exotic couple of *Orbitor* is illustrated by Herman and Soile. Herman is the watchman at the gateway between reality and dream. Soile has a name which recalls Aurora Borealis.

In *Blinding. The Left Wing*, Herman is the one who uses strange, sharp instruments, needles, similar to torture tools, to make Anca's skull covered with tattoos. This is somehow an unexplainable act, given Herman's bonhomie. Anca, Silvia (in *Blinding*), Nana (in *Nostalgia*) are little girls who refuse to accept femininity in full-blossom. Hard-wired in all possible ways to encapsulate beads of their childhood, the little girls are chosen to express, partially, auctorial self-references. The girls build, mentally and viscerally, a certain resistance to the fact that female destiny implies phases. Their resistance creates the premises of a more reflexive outlook on male/female polarities. Anca is chosen for the very fact that she refuses to copy her mother's fate. Un-separating childish drives from the nubile ones, Anca is a chrysalis herself. Her mission is to encase one of the first metamorphoses of the manuscript of *Orbitor (Blinding)*.

Her connection to Herman is no surprise, under the sign of autoreferentiality. The whole ceremony of tattooing Anca's skull has no other strange significance than the process of a birth. It is a cerebral form of creation. It results in the initiation into a new world which starts to unfold its exotic landscapes, reachable by Anca through Herman's voice. Voice is essential in Cartarescu's fiction, where everything happens at the verge of "liminal and subliminal", as Adam Segal puts it, and Cărtărescu creates a "system" out of it (see Segal).

If Anca's tattooed skull preserves a mirror effect between reality and representation (Mircea sees his face mirrored in it), Soile, who appears in the second book of *Orbitor*, *Corpul*, is made of pure astral light. The signs (the moles) of her skin draw the map of celestial constellations.

Soile's favourite pastime is watching exotic fish in an aquarium, wishing to be one of them. This posits her as the interiority of something not yet graspable. Her strange house on Tunari Street, in Bucharest, at night becomes watertight like a spaceship and travels into cosmos. All the plants surrounding Soile's house have no roots. Her voice is mixture of feminine and masculine.

Through her Rusalka voice mixed with the inflexions of a young man's voice, Herman discerns Soile's story so well as if he had invented it. Born with a tarantula heart, Soile could hardly have had any chance to live. A surgeon who did the complicated operation and a little boy with no chance to live, her donor, helped Soile to survive. Otherwise, she lives under a bell glass. In the first of *Innocent Eréndira* collection of stories, a book on Svetlana's shelf, in Cărtărescu's *REM* (from his book, *Nostalgia*¹), Gabriel García Márquez introduces the story of the woman changed into a spider for having disobeyed her parents. Soile resembles that spider woman of the circus, but in an antipodean way, as a woman of the North who oozes out a mysterious

¹ *Nostalgia* was initially published as a collection of short-stories. The English edition is called "a novel".

natural light of celestial aurorae. Actually, she embodies the hidden interiority which retains the substance of dream.

Before the trilogy *Orbitor*, Soile appears in *REM* (see the volume *Nostalgia*) as Egor's grandmother of a Finish origin, the one who could read the future only by noticing the changes of her husband's tattooed skin. She is the first "reader" of *REM*, since she followed "with her finger the bewitched contour of those three letters, my grandmother Soile, who has already given birth to my mother in 1921" (Cărtărescu, *Nostalgia*). But her reading evolved in insanity, that is why it was so important for Egor that Nana figured out the enigma of *REM* by dreaming all the seven dreams of the pink mother-of-pearl shell.

If Herman is Mircea's own autoreferentiality, Soile is the projection of a female reader, whose imagination the author needs. The end of the second book, *Orbitor. Corpul* (*Blinding. The Body*), clearly addresses to a woman with a book in her hand, a feminine reader: "Tu, care citești acum, întinsă pe canapeaua ta, cartea asta de necitit(...)" (*Corpul*: 432). By turning to her as an interruption of his own story, the writer captures the virtual female reader in a *mise en abyme* reflection.

In the second book of *Orbitor*, Soile appears and wears an enamelled medallion with another Soile in white lace dress in front of her cosmic house, who, in turn contains another Soile in a self-referential loop expanded to at least one thousand clear images. For the first book of *Orbitor*, Esposito mentions the Russian doll system (see Esposito).

Herman recognises Soile because a certain roseate hue of twilight reveals her to him.¹ It is the encounter that imprints a new sense to the whole story, just like the Master intersecting Margarita in Mikhail Bulgakov's novel or just like a dumbfounded Dr. Yuri Zhivago whenever he sees Lara in Boris Pasternak's novel.

In Soile's embrace, Herman touches, for a moment, an astral reality. This reality is Herman's perfect exoticness, Herman being the Manuscript man. The child they beget is not a sad homunculus but a messianic little boy, whose presence proves the fecundity of imagination and punctures the burial chamber of reality. At the same time, it is the birth that literally happens in the third book, to prove the sense claimed in the first book, namely that "religion itself has no other meaning than Birth. Recognising that Soile is the woman of his life, finding his interiority (namely embracing the internal layer of aurora, its astral interface) because his interiority is embodied by Soile, Herman has an irrepressible desire to escape from the Manuscript, to remain hidden, unknown somewhere for the rest of his paper life. He wants to flee "from the brain that has been inventing them", moment by moment"². Exoticism is Herman's inner urge to follow the escape outside the Manuscript.

¹ „Și n-ar fi remarcat-o, în mod sigur, nici atunci, dacă amurgul nu ar fi avut o foarte precisă nuanță trandafirie și dacă Soile, inventată parcă de acea unică densitate a luminii, nu ar fi stat pe banca ei, în rochie de dantelă albă și cu mâinile-n poală, arătînd mai neajutorată decît dacă ar fi strigat după ajutor în largul mării.” (*Orbitor, Corpul*:219)

² "O clipă-și închipse cum aveau să li se schimbe viețile, cum aveau să fugă de ochiul gigantic care-i privea, inventîndu-i, moment cu moment, cum aveau, cu tenacitate, să evadeze din creierul care-i gîndea, din cartea care-i construia și-i deconstruia,(...)". *Corpul*: 246.

If the iliac bone is closer to the rhythms of life, to a foetal rhythm, it is through the protective butterfly bone of the skull that flights to other dimensions are possible, along with the experience of the heavens and hell which are so close to each other in human brain, only millimetres apart.

Only God's imagined brain does not need the protection of butterfly-shaped bone, like the sphenoid and the other cranial bones, because it is His light that is the purest "blinding" light¹, just like His gaze is that of "sad, brown eyes": „ochiul căprui, triunghiular, atoateștiutor, deschis pe imaculatul frontispiciu”.

REM and the labyrinth. Entrance or Exit? In the same way, in Cărtărescu's unique system of symbols, the butterfly is imprinted in our body. It is the very substance with which we think, we breathe, we invent worlds or integrate ourselves in the worlds outside us. Coincidentally, the distribution of white and grey matter of the brain and spinal cord resembles a butterfly (or the letter H). A perfect correspondence to this unseen, internal, stratified butterfly, made of neurons, would be *the mise en abyme*, present at many levels in *Orbitor*.

Just like the way in which the H butterfly configures our relation to universe and our insertion into the world, along with the coordination of all other processes indispensable to life, the *mise en abyme* acts like an internal cord of neurons connecting the writer to himself :

„Că pînă și el s-a cuprins pe sine în *REM*. Că poate pînă și el, în lumea lui (unde eu am pătruns, asta fiind poate singura rațiune a vieții mele), nu este decît un produs al unei minți mult mai vastă din altă lume, ea însăși fictivă. Și el, da, sînt sigură acum, caută cu înfrigurare o intrare către acea lume Superioară, căci visul nostru, al tuturor, este să ne întîlnim Creatorul, să privim în ochi ființa care ne-a dat viață.” (Cărtărescu, *Nostalgia*: 304).

In Julian Semilian' s precise translation: "that we are paper heroes and that we were born in REM's brain, in his mind and heart (...) searching feverishly for an Entrance to that superior world, because our dream, everyone's dream, is to meet the Creator, to look in the eyes the being that gave us life." (Cărtărescu, *Nostalgia*).

An example of a "neuro"-fictional *mise en abyme*, through a stratified butterfly, would be the scene in which Nana locks eyes with her creator, a younger, (late) twentyish/thirtyish Cărtărescu. This scene is present both in *REM*, where the little 12-year-old girl Nana is the main character, and in *Orbitor* (*Blinding*).

The writer looks for a portal to his labyrinth, an "Entrance to that superior world". He finds it only through his character. He is shown the way by his 12-year-old heroine, Nana. He comes across this portal accidentally, as he tries to understand the resistance to revelation built by Nana. This enables him to annul the differences between his male outlook on existence and the female outlook, that of his character. In *REM*, the male/female irreducible differences are absorbed. *REM* is also the location of our double as the projection of our inner dreamer. Mircea-Victor antagonism would not be possible in *REM*, it is possible only in front of a mirror which creates the illusion of *REM*. *REM* comes from

¹ „Abia atunci, înconjurat de slava rotundă a Shahasrareii, marele fluture va zbura deodată în toate părțile, în cele patru dimensiuni vizibile și-n cele șapte strîns înfășurate, pînă ce puterea și culorile lui vor umple țeasta fără tîmple și frunte, craniul fără etmoid, sfenoid și occipital al Dumnezeirii.” (*Orbitor. Corpul*: 40)

Rapid Eye Movement, the only moments within a sleep when we are dreaming, therefore when we are truly ourselves, according to Cartarescu.

Nana "sacrifices her initiation for the kiss" (Ursa: 85). The girl was only one dream short of being the *chosen* one, of finding for Egor (a kind of avatar of Herman) and his ancestors the gateway to the centre of the labyrinth.

But finding the cipher that aligns all the worlds is not what would have made her happy. This is what would have made the writer happy. However, following her wish, the writer discovers the REM himself in a way he could not have otherwise guessed. Let us not forget that we are in a story where the narrator is an insect, following Svetlana (the thirtyish Nana) and her casual lover, Vali. The insect is there, in Svetlana's apartment, to spy on behalf of the writer. REM is not just anywhere, but in the innermost layer of our brain which enables the "I" to be "cuvîntul cel mai enigmatic din lume: eu..." , that is "the most enigmatic word in the world: I...", (see *Orbitor. Corpul*: 288). REM is no man's land in between our most intimate layers of consciousness.

Another *mise en abyme* is the unnamed painting turned to the reader, in opposition to the painting albums on the shelf (Tintoretto, Guardi, da Vinci, Degas, Harunobu, Pontormo, Mantegna). If *Orbitor* is genuinely based on the ekphrasis on Monsu Desiderio, in *REM* the picture is not stated, it must be recognisable. Even Egor and his Elongated mother seem to descend from this painting. It is chosen because it is in a way an image of our soul and therefore a key to REM and to accessing one's childhood.

„Doar unul este puțin întors încoace. Poți vedea pe coperta lui un fel de rulotă de lemn, cu ușile date-n lături, într-un peisaj de clădiri roșietice, cu bolți și creneluri care se pierd în perspective nesfârșite. Cred că e în amurg, dar nu prea târziu. Umbra unei fete care se joacă cu cerul se lungeste pe macadam.“ (*Nostalgia* : 175).

In translation: "... battlements melting into unending perspectives. It appears to be twilight but not very late. The shadow of a little girl rolling a hoop lengthens out on the macadam." (*Nostalgia*-a novel.)

The painting as the main *mise en abyme* for REM's story of incertitude is Giorgio de Chirico's *The Mystery and Melancholy of a Street*.

In *Orbitor*, the writer has to rediscover what Nana has given up, that is why he has to resurrect his character ("Talita! kumi!"). „ - și cum ușa se deschide încet și în camera intră, ca o somnambulă, o fetiță de doisprezece ani (Talita, kumi!), cum se apropie de mine și citește rîndurile care ies din mașina de scris, și înțelege că tînărul scria despre ea (...)” (*Orbitor. Corpul*: 111). *REM* provides, earlier than *Orbitor*, the feeling that there is a synthesis of all tempos, that simultaneity of times is possible, and that simultaneity is the precondition of finding REM.

Nana discovers, at the same time with REM, the ambiguity which is the end of her childhood. It is like a prefiguration of death. It is the first time she experiences a death as a passage from a metamorphosis to another. This end comes implacable also in a biological sense (the menarche), as the beginning of adolescence, in the very night she is supposed to leave the outskirts courtyard that had been her paradisiac world of playing. The ambiguity comes in the form of cheating. Her way of reaching REM has been achieved through cheating, by writing "Ester" on "all the pieces of paper", so that Ester could be her make-believe bride in the seventh game, that of the wedding. Nana has ruined the spontaneity of playing by imposing a rule which was, in fact, a guilt-inducing lie. It is not the same thing with an accidental mistake like stepping in and out of a hopscotch. The price of her REM comes at backing-off from Egor. Unlike her, he

is the one who preserves his childhood, since he has the defect or gift which preserves his thymus active. "L-am liniștit, i-am spus că voi dormi, dar Egor mi se părea în acea clipă îndepărtat, ireal. *REM-ul* meu fusese sărutul pe care i-l dădusem Esterei. În acea clipă avusesem Totul." (Nostalgia: 294). In Julian Semilian's translation: "(...) but Egor seemed at that moment so distant, so unreal. My *REM* had been the kiss I had given to Ester. In that moment, I had the All." (*Nostalgia*).

The butterfly infra-time reminds us of a foetal rhythm. No passing from one stage to another can be forced, from larval stage to pupation and then to the liberated *imago* (adult butterfly). Metamorphosis would fail at an earlier splitting of pupal case. In the same way, simultaneity cannot be compelled, it comes through revelation. (see the motto of the *Left Wing* from the *Bible*, I Corinthians, 13: 9-12)

Escher's hands do achieve simultaneity. This is the rhythm of masculine, cerebral creation, when it is inventing the world through its dream (*REM*) moments, with the speed of the thought. The rhythm of feminine creation is a foetal rhythm, more stable and more similar to the infra-time of butterfly eclosion. Touching *REM* is like touching the Beyond without becoming a different being in time.

In the third book of *Orbitor*, this is fully expressed through a "perpendicular" trajectory, like that of a butterfly perpendicular on our usual horizontal dimensions, mentioned in the first book as follows:

"«Suntem aici ca să ne naștem mama. Ca să îl naștem pe cel ce ne va naște. E drept că nouă ni se interzice leșirea și că nu ne vom naște în alte lumi. (...) Noi ne vom mîntui prin el, inventîndu-l, zămislindu-l pe el, care va crește în aparență în lumea noastră, dar cu adevărat într-o lume uriaș mai înaltă, căci el, nălțîndu-se din planul nostru ca o creastă de val, în a treia, de neimaginat, dimensiune, se va curba spre noi ca să ne vadă, să ne descrie, să ne creeze silabă cu silabă și rînd cu rînd, cum atîrnăm pe statuia de perla a corpului său. Ce vom vedea din el vor fi doar secțiuni, căci el e perpendicular pe lumea noastră, cum se apleacă adînc asupra ei. (...)»". *Orbitor. Aripa stîngă*: 388

"We are here to give birth to our mother. To give birth to the One who will give us birth. It's true, the Exit is barred and we will not give birth to ourselves in other worlds. (...) We will save ourselves through him, inventing him, conceiving him, and he will seem to grow within our world, but in fact, he will grow within an enormous world, one much higher, because he, rising from our plane like the crest of a wave, into the third, unimaginable dimension, will curve toward us to see us, describe us, create us, syllable by syllable and turn by turn, the way we hang from the pearl statue of his body. We will see him only in sections, because he is **perpendicular** to our world, bowed deeply above it." (*Blinding. The Left Wing*, Part III, chapter 25, para.20)

REM is not the moment when you are the holder of the universe (as Egor and the writer could have pre-thought, in a masculine paradigm) but the moment when Time comes to you, flows through you, makes you see beyond your own mortality, even if after that you discover that "Perhaps *REM* is nostalgia".

Cărtărescu's *El Aleph* is called *REM*². Another definition of *REM*, through the words of his character, the 12-year-old Nana, is *All*, or *Everything*. Her *Everything* is the first-time kiss. Ester is the incarnation of love in that moment, when Nana is 12, in love with the emotion of love. The pursuit of love when they are grown up, out of that moment, would have been nonsensical. Carried by the magic of the seven games paralleling the six dreams, Nana recognises the "perpendicular" moment of her life and does everything to have it, even if it means betraying the purposelessness of playing. After that, the Entrance

¹ Emphasis mine.

² In *REM*, published for the first time in Cărtărescu's volume *Visul*, (*Nostalgia* for all the succeeding editions) Cărtărescu makes intertextual references to Cortazar, to Marquez's *Erendira*, to *The Saragosa Manuscript*, to Dylan Thomas and to Borges's *El Aleph*.

of Playing will be forever locked (also barred as the result of betraying her doll, Zizi, actually her younger self, to a cruel trial). She has lost her equality with her Creator. It is through playing that the girls had been recreating the world in seven days, from prehistory (Rolando's skeleton) to a postnuclear era (the thermometer). In their games, the girls could not see the chess players watching their childish playing. "De unde să fi știut atunci că acesta de fapt nu era jocul nostru, așa cum șahul nu e jocul pionilor și-al cailor și al reginelor? Nu, pe atunci nu puteam vedea Șahiștii aplecați cu gravitate peste lumea noastră"(Nostalgia: 234) "How could we foresee that this was not in fact our game, in the same way that chess is not the pawn's game or the knight's or the queen's game? No, at that time we could not discern the Chess Players gravely leaning over our world."(Nostalgia). These chess players on the margins resemble very well *Știutorii, Those Who Know*, from the trilogy of *Orbitor (Blinding)*. Those Who Know are the replacers of reality, among them Cărtărescu includes names like André Breton, the surrealists, Plato, Spinoza. It is not very clear what they have in common, but probably it is because of them, because of their idealism, that the world needs a full replacement with another higher reality. That is why they are "guilty" for the perpetuation of utopias, for mental frames which are infused with idealism to make this reality bearable. The whole world is a conspiracy of the Știutori (Those Who Know) against the Văzători, Those Who See. Again, it is hard for the reader to tell the difference between them. But since there are so many references to the eyes of the unborn child resembling Buddha's eyelids, we can figure out that Those Who See have not lost their connection with maternal creation and the visionary power of dreams. They know God even in infra-reality and in infra-time. They see the future. They do not live in the Nostalgia after a heavenly paradise and do not contaminate the others with it because they have access to a higher sense which is perpendicular on our existence.

Therefore Văzătorii do not waste themselves in hunting for signs of horizontality. The Book should be a perpendicular construction; maybe Dante's book was such an example.

REM is the centre of Cărtărescu's labyrinth. It the middle of all trials, amidst all intricacies, the centre is the kern of another nature. If the attempt to cross the labyrinth has had a negative paradigm, initially, after the reach of the centre a positive paradigm emerges. The centre defies death and is the place where a transsubstation occurs. The hero's fate, in many universal myths, is changed once the centre has been reached.

The writer's way to access REM as a portal is only through his characters. His presence as a *mise en abyme* is a way to hold together all the invented worlds.

Symmetry versus simultaneity. A manuscript, not a book, may retain simultaneity, because its rather organic skins contain different stages in the metamorphoses of Mircea's selves. Another definition of "Everything", apart from that of REM, is that of "Mother". As Simona Sora rightly observes (:248), "MAMA este TOTUL" (MOTHER is EVERYTHING) as far as the first book is concerned, Mother proves out "the genealogy of the divine child"(*Ibidem*).

Narcissus-type of love is, at the same time, an illusion and a rejection of memory. In *Orbitor*, it is expressed through the apparition of Victor, the twin "brother" of Mircea, as a climax moment of the third book. It is only through him, through Victor, that mirror may become Mircea's manuscript, the giant

labyrinth made of tiny labyrinths. We know all about Mircea's memories, yet we know nothing about Victor's memory. Just like Narcissus gazing at himself, Victor is a man without memories.

Memory and love "will be one" in a state of divine transgression, which means the state of perfect simultaneity. Symmetry is the preservation of halves, simultaneity is androgyny. For Cărtărescu, eternity is simultaneity. In Cărtărescu's giant maze which is *Blinding*, simultaneity is the opposite of symmetry. Dream, generated by nostalgia as its compensatory universe, achieves the de-synchronisation with the habit of the reason, namely of putting in order the past, the present and the future.

In the third book, the book of paternal genealogy, Miriam, Mircea's great-great-great-grandmother, becomes the mystical bride of a strange Polish prince, Witold Csartarowsky, poet and admirer of Monsu Desiderio's paintings. Their union, in the shape of a new hieroglyph but also of a Möbius band, attests once again that space is feminine, time is masculine, space is sight, time is desire (*Orbitor. Aripa dreaptă*: 337). As the writer says in the first book, space is a measure of paradise, time is a measure of inferno.

„Spațiul e paradisul, timpul este infernul. Și cât de ciudat este că, la fel ca în emblema bipolarității, în miezul umbrei este lumină și în lumină stă sămînța umbrei. Căci altminteri ce este memoria, fîntîna asta otrăvită din miezul minții, din paradis? Cu ghizdurile ei de marmură strunjită, cu apa ei clătinoasă, verde ca fierea, și cu dragonul cu aripi de liliac care-i stă de strajă? Și ce e dragostea, apa limpede și răcoasă din adîncul iadului sexual, perla cenușie din scoica de foc și de urlete sfîșietoare? Memoria, timpul regatului fără timp. Dragostea, spațiul domeniului fără spațiu. Semînțele opuse și totuși atît de asemănătoare ale existenței noastre, unite peste marea simetrie, și anulînd-o, într-un singur mare sentiment: nostalgia.”

”Space is Paradise and time is Inferno. How strange it is that, like the emblem of bipolarity, in the center of a shadow is light, and that light creates shadows. After all, what else is memory, this poisoned fountain at the center of the mind, this center of paradise? Well-shaft walls of tooled marble shaking water green as bile, and its bat-winged dragon standing guard? And what is love? A limpid, cool water from the depths of sexual hell, an ashen pearl in an oyster of fire and rending screams? Memory, the time of the timeless kingdom. Love, the space of the spaceless domain. The seeds of our existence, opposed yet so alike, unite across the great symmetry, and annul it through a single great feeling: nostalgia.”

The Cărtărescian symmetry would mean a one-winged butterfly (like the memory going only backwards, unable to foresee) after it has lost its butterfly time and can no longer regain its natural frequency, which is that of an infra-time. This one-winged butterfly appears with dots instead of a complete drawing of the wings before Mircea knows the cipher, the drawing of the butterfly being threatened by the drawing of the spider¹. ”I circled around Anca, trying to make connections mentally, to join this spot in the shape of a wing with that line like a polyarticulate spider leg. But I didn't have the key, and without it, everything was chaos and despair” (Part I, chapter 10, para.3). In *Travesti*, Mircea Cărtărescu's novel published in 1994 (by Humanitas), Victor appears from the very beginning under the sign of the spider, a spider inhabiting the innermost thoughts: „Am știut atunci că în creierul meu locuia un mare păianjen, că îi fusesem dat lui, pradă vie și paralizată(...).” (Cărtărescu, *Travesti*:81).

Symmetry is what brings the fear of separation. Symmetry anchors the being in such a powerful illusion that is impossible to find a way out of it.

¹ See also Simona Sora, about "metaphysical butterfly" versus "the postmodern spider": „un fluture metafizic își întinde aripile, iar un păianjen postmodern îl pîndește pe fiecare pagină.” (Sora:250)

A two-winged butterfly would understand its "filaments" for the future. (see Suceavă). Victor, the mirror-twin of Mircea, the one bound to him in a Narcissus-like story of love and abhorrence, is the embodiment of symmetry at its highest potential of drawing the illusion.

"(...)Cu toții avem memoria trecutului, dar câți dintre noi ne putem aminti viitorul? Și totuși stăm între trecut și viitor ca un corp vermiform de fluture între cele două aripi ale sale. Pe una o putem folosi la zbor, căci ne-am trimis filamentele nervoase pînă către marginile ei; cealaltă ne este necunoscută, de parcă ne-ar lipsi ochiul din partea dinspre ea. Dar cum putem zbura cu o singură aripă? profeți, iluminați, eretici ai simetriei prefigurează ce am putea deveni și ce va trebui să devenim. Dar ceea ce ei văd, *per speculum in aenigmate* vom vedea cu toții limpede, cel puțin atît de limpede cum vedem trecutul."

"(...)We all have memories of the past, but none of us can remember the future. And yet, we exist between the past and future like the vermiform body of a butterfly, in between its two wings. We use one wing to fly, because we have sent our nerve filaments out to its edges, and the other is unknown, as if we were missing an eye on that side. But how can we fly with one wing? Prophets, illuminati, and heretics of symmetry foresaw what we could and must become. But what they see *per speculum in aenigmate* we will all see clearly, at least as clearly as we can see the past. Then, even our torturous nostalgia will be whole."

We are prepared before birth with our vision of future, just like it is easy for memory to know the past. This vision occurs within simultaneity. We have had the sense of simultaneity ever since our life before life. Before birth, in the infra-time similar to a butterfly rhythm, our being knows no separation from God. The divine mission entrusted to us by the very act of our birth, if unfulfilled, will need symmetry as a compensatory illusion. The butterfly gives us the supreme metamorphosis of our being, it is through the butterfly than we may have access to an after-death existence. Cărtărescu takes the unusual sides of the butterfly symbol (of Psyche) and interweaves them into his fiction, a territory where he can have his own mythology.

Actually, the butterfly comes as the symbol of time. Time is also the perception of a difference between us and The Other One, according to Emmanuel Lévinas. The Same cannot engulf The Other one, we are never in synchrony with our fellow being and Time is the perception of this difference, of this otherness.¹ Lévinas' ethics of the Other, the face-to-face relation retrieves the infinity of the Other (see *Totalité et infini*) and forbids a reduction to Sameness.

EXOTIC SPACES. In all the three novels of *Orbitor (Blinding)*, memory appears in connection to never-seen places. The reinvention of Bucharest also bears the mark of exoticism and exoticism.² Remoteness and closeness are thus neutralised. Casa Poporului in Bucharest (The People's Palace) is the setting of the climax scene of the third volume, since it is one of the saddest buildings on earth, a chimera of all buildings erected by human haughtiness, a palace of a monstrous gigantism.

Blinding is a wonderful book feeding itself with the nostalgia of visited by actually inexistent places, totally recreated by the imagination of the writer. Even Bucharest is depicted as Mircea's twin, therefore as a chimerical space. The chimeric is a notion adopted by Cărtărescu from his literary model, Mihai Eminescu. (see also Cărtărescu's book *Visul chimeric*, 1991).

¹ See Emmanuel Lévinas. *Moartea și Timpul*. Transl by Anca Măniuțiu, Cluj: Biblioteca Apostrof, 1996, p. 40. (original title: *La Mort et Le Temps*).

² See Staszak (Other/otherness) for this distinction.

In Mircea Cărtărescu's *Orbitor (Blinding)*, exoticism embodies the need for another dimension. It is also interwoven in the maternal and paternal genealogies of Mircea. Herman does not believe in printed books, only in manuscripts, they allow inventions to set in. Through his voice which has the effect of a tunnel, but at the same time of a kaleidoscope, a new world opens to the eyes of Mircea (while listening to Anca's story). Here "blinding" is used in connection to exotic lands as seen in huge anamorphic mirrors. Resembling the dream-like abstruse landscapes or buildings of Monsù Desiderio and of Piranesi, they trigger Mircea's sensation of déjà-vu. Seeing their paintings and etchings, Mircea recognises the very rooms and palaces that have been forming into his mind. He places certain scenes from *Orbitor* into a picture made by Monsù Desiderio.

The most interesting effect is created by human voice. All these fantastic landscapes are being built in a story, in a Tale, because there is always a voice that leads to them. Along with dream, voice is another connector with our memory before birth, since the maternal voice is the first one we must have heard. "Titikan" becomes a magical language, known by all children before they can articulate speech. But in reality Titikan is no more than a truncated nursery rhyme. Only memory can enact it as a magical password to other worlds. The same pattern functions for Cărtărescu's exoticism. Other than by childhood thinking it is difficult to reach the empire of the sacred, because all the learnt things will be a barrier.

Exoticism is dis-placed in such a way that it loses some of its anchors in reality. Cărtărescu's exoticism becomes a dream in another dream, more hidden than the first level. Only a double illusion, a system of Chinese boxes can retrieve it. The paradox is that *Blinding* bears the mark of a powerful exoticism equally accompanied by a de-exotized view. As Staszak says in „Qu'est-ce que l'exotisme?”, "The exotization process implies the objectification and the commoditization of the Other, reduced to a stereotyped role in a picturesque show. To be de-exotized, the exotic Other has to become an alter ego." (Staszak, 2008).

Cărtărescu's de-exotization is unintentional. In Mircea Cărtărescu's *Blinding*, the speed of imagination parallels the speed of the biological processes of the body. The body is Mircea's connection to reality. But, with the speed of Escher's hands passing from real to virtual, everything happens in between worlds, not in reality. A place can be exotized when it is not anchored. Hardships, banality of everyday activities, household necessities, institutions with their problems are minimized through exoticism. This way a space with no anchors in the banality of existence becomes interchangeable with other spaces.

Orbitor's spaces are mental spaces.

The writer's aspiration to Everything and the confidence in the myth of the Book, even if its shape is that of a Manuscript (more suitable to a fractal reality) enact a dreamland with other rules, the rules of imagination.

Cărtărescu's trilogy *Orbitor (Blinding)* populates the constructions of memory with imagination. Cărtărescu's imagination is the most insatiable imagination produced by Romanian literature, ever, after that of the latest European romantic, Mihai Eminescu. Actually, Cărtărescu's versatility of style as a vehicle to match his unparalleled imagination does not come out of nowhere. It has been well explored in his debut as a poet (*Faruri, vitrine, fotografii*, 1980, Cartea Românească publishing house). A peak moment was for him *Levantul*, in

1990, the most difficult to translate of all Cărtărescu's books. It is written with a ludic sprightliness which explores the margins of Romanian poetry by offering a postmodernist epic (in 12 cantos) into the style of all major Romanian poets, using parody and pastiches as the vehicles of this voyage.

Nostalgia, as an unremitting feeling in Mircea Cărtărescu's prose, is our vulnerability at the awareness of being alive. The author has changed the title of his 1989 volume of prose, *Visul (the Dream)*, actually the book which marked the triumph of his originality in Romanian literature, into *Nostalgia*, for all the succeeding editions. Exoticism is sometimes a compensation for nostalgia, but only the exotic landscapes retrieved from dream may offer this compensation.

Exoticism, Narcissus's mirror and the challenge of the double. It is symmetry that allows the exploration of the other self. For Cărtărescu, symmetry is the illusion of the simultaneous.

This contributes to the theme of the double, to the chasing after the encounter with the chimera. Mircea feels himself gazed upon by somebody strange yet familiar from another night, someone who holds in his hands Mircea's world. We encounter here the strangeness/familiarity duality in relationship to Mircea's double, his mirror twin, related to him through fascination and repulsion. "The strange" and "the familiar" make "the dialectics of the exotic", as Huggan shows (see Huggan).

The first movement of the self, the first conscious movement is that of a reversal of position in mother's womb. It is the switch of the body with the head down-up, in the preparation of birth. Cărtărescu sees this preconscious movement as a communication with the double of our being, as a kind of answering to his call.

„Iar apoi, așa cum în a opta lună fătul se-ntoarce cu capul în jos în uter, dublul nostru de chakras și plexuri și raze a făcut și el tumba care ne face atât de paradoxali. Atît de fascinanți. Și poate că el e chiar fetusul care s-a răsucit presimțind nașterea. Căci toți sîntem femei, sîntem utere ce se vor sfișia și vor putrezi, ca să iasă, în altă lume, sub ceruri noi, ei, cristalinii, translucizi asemenea crustaceilor(...). (Cărtărescu, *Orbitor. Aripa stîngă*: 74).”

”But then, the doppelgänger of our chakras and plexuses and rays flipped over, the way that in the eighth month a child turns its head down in the uterus – the reversal that makes us so paradoxical, and so fascinating. Maybe the fetus turns itself over precisely because it senses the onset of birth. We are all women, we are uteruses, and we will tear ourselves apart and we will rot, so that in another world, under a new heaven, crystalline beings can emerge, translucent as crustaceans (...).” (Cărtărescu. *Blinding. The Left Wing*. Part 1, chapter 7, paragraph 12).

For Mircea Cărtărescu symmetry is not only a trope, it is the structuring principle in connection with knowledge. Symmetry means drawing an imaginary line along the visible and invisible, along the real and imaginary, along the specular being or the projection versus who projected it. The symmetry is the long sought after conciliation with the whole (without obtaining the totality). It makes our existence bearable. Symmetry is our consolation prize. Exoticism appears in Cărtărescu's dreamland as the provocation, as the challenge of the Double. The symmetry is the search for unity in the realms of the unreal while the double is provoked as a reencounter with the chimera.

The specular and textual double, Victor, is someone who ventured through the most exotic cities of the earth. He fights in the Foreign Legion and his roots are nowhere. He appears for the first time towards the end of *Blinding. The Left Wing*: ”și imensul perete cu oase iliace al lui Victor, enigmaticul frate întunecat, marele

și necesarul și imposibilul Victor.” In translation: “And now, the immense wall of Victor’s ilium bones, the enigmatic dark brother, the great and necessary and impossible Victor.”

An interesting connection present in Cărtărescu’s trilogy is that between exoticism and oblivion. The exotic spaces cannot be easily forgotten since they had never been real; they are inventions of the author in a dream-like trance.

Exoticism and nostalgia are the themes secretly interwoven in the myth of the book, which is the central utopia. Mircea and Victor are similar to Salman Rushdie’s pair of twins with changed destinies, Saleem and Shiva from *Midnight’s Children*. In *Blinding* they cannot meet on the same side of reality. Two men signed the paintings of Monsù Desiderio, and there is little information about them, about François de Nomé and Didier Barrá. The idea of a bicephalic artist takes in *Blinding*. *The Left Wing* the features of Monsieur Monsù and Fra Armando, like “the hierophants of the abyss”. „Fra Armando v-a arătat calea unificării, eu pe a dezmembrării, și nimeni nu vă spune: Alegeți! Vom inventa ființa ce-o să ne inventeze, dar nu va fi din lumină pură.” (*Orbitor. Aripa stângă*:395) In translation: “‘Fra Armando has shown you the way of unification, I have shown you the way of dismemberment, and no one tells you: Choose!’ ‘ We will invent the being that will invent us, but not from pure light.’ ” *Blinding*. *The Left Wing*: Part III, chapter 25, para. 29-30).

Our twin (like Victor for Mircea) could elucidate the answer to the question why we were born. Victor’s name comes from Victory.

The bizarre & the familiar of Cărtărescu’s exotic dreamland. The imagined *regressus ad uterum* in the first volume, the saga of Maria’s genealogy, the passing of the Badislavs from an isolated Bulgarian hamlet in Rodopi Mountains to settle in Tântava, Muntenia, are all actions under the sign of maternal creation and are predominant in the *Left Wing*, which corresponds to Maria’s book. *The Body*, which is Mircea’s book, abounds in references to the masculine type of creation. This is the creation of the book. It is the passage from Existence to “Textzistența”, as Cărtărescu calls it. *The Right Wing* contains the paternal genealogy, which is that of Costel, Mircea’s father. It is the book of unifying visions, of the alchemic, mystical unions and of a messianic birth.

Dream accompanies masculine creation because it unfolds myriads of new worlds and it retrieves the simultaneity of times.

Postcolonial studies have pointed to the epistemological traps of exoticism as a larger concept. The very ambivalence of exoticism contains its seductive features, on one hand. On the other hand, exoticism has promoted “a sanitized view” (Huggan) of the countries it was attributed to. As Huggan puts it, exoticism is not “an inherent quality to be found in certain people, distinctive objects, specific places” (Huggan:13), therefore it is chargeable with the power of “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu) and it can even lead to a controlled exchange of commodities (Huggan) because of this very “production of otherness”(:13). “Exoticism, in this context, might be described as a kind of semiotic circuit that oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity. Within this circuit, the strange and the familiar, as well as the relationship between them, may be receded to serve different, even contradictory, political needs and ends”(Huggan:13).

In Cărtărescu’s trilogy, exoticism is abundant in occurrences. As imagination triggers, recollections of exotic lands do have an effect on expanding imagination beyond the offer of immediateness. However, there is an important distinction visible in Cărtărescu’s writing. Bucharest is exoticised to the same degree as other remote settings. Mircea Cărtărescu is surely not the first to write

about remote, bizarre places (some visited, some never visited) and to reinvent them.

Since the playground of each novel is the prodigious imagination of the writer, it is the oneirical space that conquers Mircea's anamorphic room, his ex-lodgings (reach-able in imagination at the mere sound of something to do with their street names), and a Bucharest in which we recognise real, true to life events, but spatially it has the consistency of Piranesi's strange drawings.

Postcolonial studies have discovered certain patterns beyond the idealization which accompanies the fascination with the exotic. There is however an important distinction to be made, between fiction and non-fiction.

Stereotypes are easily formed in the constructions of otherness within exoticism.

Exoticism can oscillate between the ideal version of the self (Todorov) and the perpetuation of the stereotype (Said). It encompasses both dimensions. They are so fused in the fascination and familiarity dialectic (see Huggan) that there is no way to separate them, to think them in proper own terms, to come to the state in which they had been before.

Exoticism as a positive creative drive is inherently present in Cărtărescu's trilogy *Orbitor*. In his three novels, exotic occurrences are quite abundant but the underlying paradigm superior/inferior is totally neutralised, because all representations happen in the oneiric landscapes and thus they do not occur in reality, no negotiations of identity happen here. *Orbitor* is like another planet which does not have the same force of gravity.

For example, in a story connected with Mioara, the butterfly appears in effigy as a ring on her hand. It is sculptured in mammoth ivory. The science-fictional character of the whole mammoth story should strike as a fantastic incident. However, it is assimilated to a fascination with the North and polar lands less explored in other writings by Cărtărescu. It is part of a dreamland where imagination is stronger than the appearances of reality: "It was mammoth hair, Mioara explained. A few years ago, she had met an Austrian who had been to Franz Joseph Land, in the frozen north, where he would have starved to death with his fellow researchers on Siberian shamanism, if he hadn't found, in a block of ice, an entire, intact mammoth, the meat of which fed them until spring. From the fur, during the fantastical polar nights in their miserable tents, they wove sweaters, blankets and jewelry."

More meaningful than the relationship between exoticism and assimilation is, for Cărtărescu, the relationship between exoticism and initiation. The writer adopts in his dreamland certain exotic places on the basis of their fascination. Exoticism wants to take things close to the level of assimilation, but once it does that, it disappears as exoticism. In Mircea Cărtărescu's trilogy *Orbitor*, exoticism obeys solely the laws of fiction. Since it always appears in contexts that are not real, but dream-like, it is always out of the inferior/superior paradigm. North Pole is an exotic setting of *Orbitor*. For example, one cannot make speculation about any element from the mammoth story without considering, first of all, the fact that mammoths could not have lived in Mioara's century and could not have been found by researchers on shamanism, not even as intact frozen meat. To say nothing of the researchers' idea to weave sweaters and blankets from the fur of the mammoth! But the ring contains a one-winged butterfly. This instantly refreshes everything in accordance with the complicate symbolism of *Orbitor*. It was a ring with the cipher of future, since its right wing was entire and the left

was in dots: "the right wing of the butterfly was drawn with a firm line, while the other was only outlined in points that had turned black with the passing years." (*Ibidem*).

Charged in this way, stuffed with the ethereal substance of dreams, no exotic place has the power to "manufacture otherness".

The lack of occurrence of exoticism in other works by Cărtărescu is also relevant. For instance, the book *De ce iubim femeile?* (*Why we love women?*) contains mainly stories that are set in real place and are influenced by real life experiences. Some critics even claim that these texts are more of a journalistic nature and they constitute a regress. But Cărtărescu's books should be considered as a whole (see Mihet), therefore progress/regress should be out of question. "Cărtărescu's oeuvre is a sum total, not the mean of some ritualic projects (...). He looks for beauty not just where it is not accessible, but where everyone can see it and no one can grip it." (Mihet, *Insule pentru un imperiu*, translation mine, D.S.).

The myth of the book is more graspable in terms of unity than the myth of the self, because the myth of the book may hide even in the most hidden corners or the most unanticipated. On the other hand, the myth of the book can contain the evil parts of the self. The evil takes here the form of a horrifying sexuality. The presence of a spider like on the other side of the mirror, edging the encounters between the self and the chimerical double, was manifested ever since the novel *Travesti*.

The mirror is the best way to force the double, to conjure it. There is no knowledge of the infernal dimension of the existence without Victor. Actually, without Victor, Mircea's feelers for the infernal dimension of existence would be reduced to mere symbols with no reality. The incarnation of Victor as the hidden, evil side would have been meaningless, something exterior, provided that Victor had been completely disconnected from Mircea. But Victor is so fascinating because he makes a unity with Mircea, not because he is completely detached. However, if we have doubts about Victor, the author tells us clearly: Maria breast-fed Victor with another kind of milk, that of "irreality". The term is used by Cărtărescu by adopting it from Max. Blecher's title of a book published in 1936. Cărtărescu has rediscovered Blecher, and by making him one of his models he has contributed to the rediscovery of this very interesting, meteoric interwar writer.

Sean Cotter's translation of the first novel of *Blinding* (so far), published in 2013, Archipelago books, is a work of art which recreates in English the same waves of language and the same explosions. Not the alternation of styles is difficult, but the preservation of the original energy and sadness. Cărtărescu finds the driest scientific words, employs them in connection to his characters' feelings and makes the most unusual contexts their home.

Sean Cotter has the merit of having given not just any translation, but the "counterbook" of the original. Now the book is open to people from all over the world who may react to other things in the book than Romanian readers. It is as if *Orbitor* truly achieves its visionary nature by turning into *Blinding*¹ and by being actually read by readers from other parts of the world, brought up with different books in mind, within different systems of education and sometimes

¹ Some critics refer to the fact that the translator could have used to original word, *Orbitor*. It is true, but as it is now, *Blinding* has the strong effect of a counterbook.

with no connections whatsoever with childhood and adolescence under communist regimes. The butterfly can rise and fly.

Conclusions. Cărtărescu's trilogy *Orbitor (Blinding)* expands fiction's known ways to concatenate the self to a giant labyrinth (perfectly overlapping the world of the hero, Mircea). Labyrinth becomes the matrix, at all levels of the book, from where the revelation of immortality emerges. It is the space where man confronts his godlike nature. At the microcosmic level of the book, it is memory that has been building the tiny labyrinths although, other than in the book, they might perish after the second of their creation. Actually, the butterfly comes as the symbol of time. The body of the book is simultaneous with its writing, but otherwise it is never fully in synchrony with its metamorphoses. The author constructs and deconstructs the role of memory exploring memory's relationship to immortality - mostly in the third book, the father's book, and to creation - in the first two books, the mother's book and the book of the self

There is always an unescapable longing from one metamorphosis to another. The first movement of the self, the first conscious movement is that of a reversal of position in mother's womb. It is the switch of the body with the head down-up, in the preparation of birth. Cărtărescu sees this preconscious movement as a communication with the double of our being, as a kind of answering to his call. This double is embodied in Victor, Mircea's twin breast-fed with "irreality". REM is the centre of Cărtărescu's labyrinth. The writer's way to access REM as a portal is only through his characters. His presence as a *mise en abyme* is a way to hold together all the invented worlds. Symmetry is the preservation of halves, simultaneity is androgyny. For Cărtărescu, eternity is simultaneity. Victor, the mirror-twin of Mircea, the one bound to him in a Narcissus-like story of love and abhorrence, is the embodiment of symmetry at its highest. Symmetry is what brings the fear of separation. Symmetry anchors the being in such a powerful illusion that is impossible to find a way out of it.

The seductiveness of exoticism also lies in its ambivalence. A new vision on exoticism emerged together with the postcolonial studies. Exoticism has manifested its inability to come to terms with a known frame of life, because of the seductive powers it conveys, leading to a new hierarchy, which is not obvious but implicit. But these aspects are to be considered in real life cases.

Blinding is a wonderful book feeding itself with the nostalgia of visited by actually inexistent places, totally recreated by the imagination of the writer.

The reinvention of Bucharest also bears the mark of exotism. Remoteness and closeness are thus neutralised. The paradox is that *Blinding* bears the mark of a powerful exoticism equally accompanied by a de-exoticised view. If such an enterprise is a utopian one, how does the author take care that utopia does not collapse, how does it replenish it? If Cărtărescu, as a postmodernist writer, deconstructs some myths, he never does that to the all-encompassing myth of the book. Nostalgia is what refreshes this myth.

In Cărtărescu's three novels exoticism is abundant in occurrences. As imagination triggers, recollections of exotic lands do have an effect on expanding imagination beyond the offer of immediateness. However, there is an important distinction visible in Cărtărescu's writing. Bucharest is exoticised to the same degree as other remote settings.

Things might occur differently when exoticism is totally taken out of its real life frame. The negotiations of identity present in everyday life are no longer possible. A realm where exoticism is preserved in its elements without being an imperialism of “commodities” (Huggan) is the dreamland of Mircea Cărtărescu’s writings. In Mircea Cărtărescu’s *Orbitor (Blinding)*, exoticism embodies the need for another dimension. It is also interwoven in the maternal and paternal genealogies of Mircea, the main character of the novel, the alter-ego of Cărtărescu himself. Exoticism appears in Cărtărescu’s dreamland as the provocation, as the challenge of the Double. There is an inherent bond between exoticism, as a non-existent land, bearing similarities with utopia, and nostalgia. Through exoticism and symmetry, Mircea wants that magical trick which allows him to grasp his dream being, his inner dreamer. The underlying paradigm superior/inferior attributed to exoticism is totally neutralised in *Blinding*, because all representations are connected with the oneiric landscapes and thus they do not occur within the negotiations of real life.

After all, it is through literature that we get a chance to reconfigure our dream landscapes, where our most interior worlds lie hidden. They make up the only reality which is truly ours:

”Clădiri mute, fragile, străvezii, cu fațadele încărcate de statui ciobindu-se-n înserare. Ruine melancolice îndurînd căderea definitivă a nopții. Și marea-n fundal, și norii deasupra, într-un impasto neliniștit. Și sub tablou, prinsă-n grosimea ramei, o plăcuță de alamă cu luciul pierdut, pe care era gravat un nume: Desiderio Monsù. De unde știuse el peisajele carstice din adîncul somnului meu? Cum le pictase el acum patru sute de ani, cu acea acuratețe a nebuniei cu care vezi în vis fiecare detaliu, fiecare dunguliță de nefrit și de onix de pe acele coloane, fiecare cută din veșmintul acelor femei? (...)Tot de-atîtea ori ciupitura mă duruse și-atunci știusem că totul e-adevărat, că acele spații vîntoase prin care rătăceam, cu creștetul ras, cu bărbia prelungă, înfășurat într-o singură petală uriașă de lea bălțată, sînt de-acum lumea, singura posibilă, singura mie dată...” (Cărtărescu, *Orbitor. Corpul*: 326).

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L'ALTERATION DE L'EXOTIQUE DANS LA PROSE DE MIRCEA ELIADE

EXOTIZATION IN MIRCEA ELIADE'S PROSE



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*Abstract. In this research we have tried to demonstrate that Mircea Eliade altered the exotic depiction in his books *India* and *The Maharajah's Library*. Eliade was not focused on reporting the real nature of the exotic. His presence in India aimed at gathering the knowledge of its religious beliefs and its yoga practices. Therefore, as a side-effect, he tackled exotization and realized its multiple aspects. Eliade used the exotic landscape as a source for an extraordinary adventure of sensations and feelings. Once in a while he exaggerated, because he wrote these books like reportages. Sometimes, the exotic background is left behind the immediate focus on realistic descriptions of Indian social, religious and economic realities, and other times the exotic turns into fantastic.*

Key words: India, exotic, setting, alteration, exaggeration, realistic description, exotization

En lisant un livre de philosophie indienne, le jeune Eliade apprenait que le Mahardjak de Kassimbazar, une sorte de Mecena, offrait des bourses aux jeunes étudiants indiens et étrangers. Après lui avoir écrit et après avoir obtenu une réponse favorable, le 22 novembre 1928, il s'embarquait à Constanta, pour l'Inde sur le bateau japonais «Hakone Maru», à la troisième classe. Malgré la misère, le voyage à cette classe est instructif et amusant pour le jeune voyageur, qui y rencontrait des gens étranges, des aventuriers et des marchands. Partant pour l'Inde, Eliade se dirigeait en fait vers la réalité de ses rêves d'adolescent et de ses lectures sur ce pays. Tout son être frissonnait d'impatience et de désir de tout voir, de tout connaître. « En voyant la rive d'Egypte, aucune mélodie n'a troublé mon sang, mais une envie ensanglantée d'hurler et d'éteindre dans mes bras.»¹ A mesure qu'il apercevait les premiers indices de sa destination, il éprouvait un bonheur instinctif et innocent, comme s'il pressentait le poids de l'expérience qui l'attendait et qui serait décisive

¹ M. Eliade, *La Bibliothèque du Maharadjah*, p. 179, (n.tr.)

pour sa carrière scientifique et littéraire. Le premier aspect oriental qu'il a rencontré, a été l'animation et l'agglomération sur les quais du port d'Alexandrie. En le décrivant, il réussit à réaliser un tableau d'un dynamisme et d'une expressivité impressionnante:

Ce sont ces centaines d'arabes et de noirs, des porteurs célèbres de tant d'histoires de voyages, la taille haute et larges d'épaules, comme les statuettes égyptiennes, portant des vêtements longs et rayés et des turbans rouges. Pendant que le bateau approche - après deux heures d'inspection policière - les porteurs crient, invitent, assurent, se lient d'amitié avec ceux qui sont au bord, rient, se tutoient, ils offrent des services, les discutent, ils les établissent. C'est un vacarme de bazar et de marché. Toutes ces silhouettes masculines font des gestes saisies par la panique. Et lorsque la nuit couvre le quai, les porteurs avides de poids, envahissent les ponts, renversent, saisissent tout, chargent, pénètrent par des corridors, hurlent, font des signes et disparaissent.¹

Eliade cherchera «dans un univers spirituel exotique», «un foyer», «un univers». Pour lui, «L'Inde...est un point géographique de la connaissance et non un cadre exotique».² Mais vivant dans l'intimité de l'exotique, l'écrivain roumain se rend compte qu'il court le risque d'être changé par celui-ci et il écrit dans son journal: «Je me sens toujours plus étranger, toujours moins moi-même. Est-ce que cette chose existe, l'influence? Peut-un homme changer par le décor? Je voudrais emmener plusieurs amis à Shantiniketan, pour vérifier l'influence fascinante du décor.»³ Au-delà de sa forte fascination, le décor ne se laisse pas facilement reproduit:

J'ai l'impression que l'exotique, le surprenant, le barbare sont des zones que l'écrivain de métier ne peut pas parcourir sans les altérer. Ses réactions sont altérées par cette présence ineffable du public. Il peut écrire sous ses impressions de merveilleux livres, mais ce qui est irréductible et vif dans une zone barbare lui échappera toujours. Sa solitude dans un pays sauvage ou dans les civilisations exotiques sera pareille à une solitude sur le continent. Il parlera avec soi-même comme s'il était seul à la compagnie, en été.⁴

Eliade a l'impression, au contraire, que tout homme, un missionnaire ou un capitaine de navire, un peintre, serait capable d'écrire ses impressions de voyage mieux que l'écrivain. L'écrivain fausse la réalité à cause de sa propre imagination et à cause de sa volonté de créer de l'art en dépit de l'authenticité du vécu, comme Aldous Huxley dans le livre *The Jesting Pilate*. En échange, il se déclare enchanté par la préface du journal du peintre Rockwell Kent où il considère que l'émotion «nude et vigoureuse» et «l'invitation à l'isolement, au voyage et à la souffrance» ont été exprimées parce que le peintre n'utilise pas l'écriture, d'habitude, pour nous faire part de ses sentiments et de ses idées. Il apprécie le journal intime de Paul Gauguin, qui avait réussi à évoquer véridiquement la vie dans les îles du Pacifique. Toutes ces impressions sont écrites dans un article *Journaux de peintres: Alaska et Marquesas*, publié en 1932. Dans cette étude nous nous

¹ M. Eliade. *Biblioteca maharajahului (La Bibliothèque du Maharadjah)*. 179-180. Tous les fragments extraits de *La Bibliothèque du Maharadjah* sont traduits par nous.

² V. Ierunca. *L'Oeuvre littéraire*, dans Le Dossier Mircea Eliade, vol. X, 1978-1979, *Inspiration et Erudition*. Bucaresti : Curtea Veche, p. 42.

³ M. Eliade. *Chantier*. Bucaresti : Humanitas, p. 309.

⁴ M. Eliade. *L'Île d'Euthanasius*. Bucaresti : Humanitas, 1993, pp. 288-289.

proposons de suivre attentivement si Eliade, lui-même a réussi ou non à éviter l'altération de l'exotique dans les écrits publiés environ cette date. Les volumes *L'Inde et La Bibliothèque du Maharadjah* contiennent des articles publiés entre 1928 et 1933. *L'Inde* est parue en 1933 et dans la préface de la deuxième édition, l'écrivain avoue l'avoir composé de fragments, souvent «écrits sur place, d'autres racontés plus tard, d'autres détachées d'un cahier intime.» Il n'a pas conçu son livre comme «un journal de voyage, ni comme un volume d'impressions, ou de souvenirs.» C'est un livre original issue de l'expérience vécue en Inde. Il n'a pas rédigé un journal de voyage, genre littéraire qui lui répugne, car contenant des faits, celui-ci perd l'essence des phénomènes. Il déteste surtout les journaux de voyage qui racontent des expériences vécues dans des pays exotiques et qui sont préoccupés par le décor et par un vil sentimentalisme. Le livre d'Eliade est apprécié par Zigu Ornea qui lui attribue une valeur littéraire supérieure à d'autres livres de fiction.¹ Silvia Dumitrescu² est d'avis qu'Eliade n'était pas intéressé par les aspects exotiques de l'Inde, mais par «les sens cachés», qu'il avait l'occasion de déchiffrer une fois là. On a dès le début du livre les indices de sa perception de l'exotique. Arrivé dans l'île de Ceylan, sous l'acuité des sens, il enregistre tout avec avidité. Tout l'impressionne: la mer, le ciel, le parfum de la jungle et la lumière:

C'est un parfum qui émeut, qui étourdit, sans que l'on sache à quoi le comparer ni où le chercher, un parfum qui sans cesse vous frappe en plein visage, pareil à un vent brûlant et caressant à la fois. C'est un parfum unique, qui vous poursuivra tout le temps à Ceylan; et plus vous pénétrerez profondément dans la jungle, plus vous le trouverez immaculé et hallucinant.³

La forte impression créée par cette île restera longtemps dans sa mémoire et il écrira plus tard dans ses *Mémoires*:

Ceylan m'a conquis même avant de la connaître. Nous n'avions pas encore atteint la rive, que j'étais déjà enivré par les odeurs fortes et aromatiques de la jungle. Ce n'est qu'après avoir vu Kandy et Anuradhapura, que j'ai eu vraiment la révélation de la jungle; la frissonnante peur et l'exaltation devant les cataractes de sève fraîche, de la luxure et de la cruauté végétale.⁴

Il est ainsi évident que le paysage exotique annonce une aventure unique, nourrie par les bonheurs offerts par le ciel et la végétation. «En Inde, Mircea Eliade a eu le sentiment de passer par une expérience existentielle d'exception. Les reportages prouvent indubitablement le passage de l'écrivain dans une autre époque artistique. Le monde extérieur déclenche dans l'âme du jeune homme de 21 ans, de profondes résonances pareilles à l'écho éveillé par les pas d'un visiteur dans une immense cathédrale. Il ne s'agit pas seulement de l'exactitude objective avec laquelle il transmet les images perçues. Chaque fois, Mircea Eliade découvre l'évènement

¹ Zigu Ornea, *L'Inde de Mircea Eliade*. „La Roumanie littéraire”, no. 8, 1999.

² Silvia Dumitrescu, *L'Inde au-delà du cliché de l'exotisme. Mircea Eliade „L'Inde” et „La Bibliothèque du Maharadjah”*, dans www.bookaholic.ro/india-dincolo-de-cliseul-exotismului-mircea-eliade-„india”-și-biblioteca-maharajahului”.-html

³ M. Eliade, *L'Inde*, Editions de L'Herne, 1988, p. 9, traduit du roumain par Alain Paruit .

⁴ M. Eliade, *Mémoires*, 1907-1960. Bucaresti: Humanitas, 1991, p.174.

nouveau, troublant, ardent, qui fait trembler l'esprit et qui incendie la conscience, nous forçant à voir en même temps avec le reporter.»¹

Au-delà du décor exotique

Donc, un premier moyen d'altération de l'exotique est ce passage au-delà du décor et sa transformation dans une source de vivacité totale. L'être finalement respire libre et devient assoiffé de «sensations vertigineuses et fortes», à travers lesquelles il découvre le monde comme une merveille. Celui-ci se compose de fleurs, d'arbustes, de boulevards et de temples bouddhistes, d'une faune caractéristique, de singes et de serpents. Les fleurs sont présentes dans un nombre appréciable des pages du livre, de sorte qu'on a la sensation d'un livre parfumé. L'européen, devant tant de merveilles, reste «timide», stupéfait et «fatigué», incapable de noter dans son carnet les impressions provoquées par les couleurs, les odeurs et les formes. Dans ses *Mémoires*, Eliade retient son incapacité de décrire la beauté de Jaipur et le fait qu'il avait écrit à Ionel Teodoreanu, son ami, en lui enviant les dons de paysagiste. Il avait alors la certitude que celui-ci seul aurait pu décrire «les formes infinies et, les arabesques, et les couleurs». Toutefois, l'écrivain a la capacité de nous transmettre la fraîcheur et la force de ses sensations, de sorte que, même après des années, on dirait que c'est hier qu'il est arrivé en Inde. Le paysage de ce pays est très divers. Du train, qui parcourt le trajet Colombo-Kandy -Anuradhapura, le voyageur a la chance de découvrir la végétation sur les côtes qui ressemble à un cimetière, parce que les arbres écrasent les touffes, les lianes suffoquent les fleurs et l'herbe engloutit tout. Celui qui regarde a l'occasion de méditer à la lutte permanente dans la nature et peut se sentir étourdi et accablé, mais provoqué en même temps, par l'exemple du règne végétal. Devant le paysage exotique, Mircea Eliade s'abandonne totalement: «On est désormais un prisonnier de la jungle, empoisonné par son parfum violent, ensorcelé par ses yeux de fleurs, étreint par ses bras, serpents et lianes.»² Il y a dans *l'Inde* de Mircea Eliade de merveilleuses descriptions de paysages urbains comme celui de la ville de Madras, qui, à cause de son grand nombre d'acacias, de palmiers en fleurs, a l'air d'une forêt. Ici, Eliade visite un monastère situé sur une colline de pierres blanches avec des serpents et, pour la première fois, il se souvient d'Italie, où il avait été à vingt ans. Tout le livre est parsemé avec des descriptions, souvent très exactes des temples et des monastères. A Amritsar, il y a le Temple d'Or, auquel on parvient difficilement à cause de la foule de pèlerins. On peut y parvenir à condition qu'on offre au prêtre de l'argent et des guirlandes de fleurs. Le Temple d'Or est une merveille, situé au milieu d'un lac pierreux et entouré par des rives de marbre :

On dirait un jouet, tellement parfaite et irréaliste est sa position au milieu des eaux qui reflètent ses tours et ses créneaux dorés. Il est fabuleux et stupéfiant, ce temple au centre d'un lac, avec les dizaines de milliers de sikhs qui se rassemblent autour. Des hommes de stature imposante, aux barbes de guerriers, portant des turbans de soie colorée, des ceintures de grand prix, des poignards et des sabres; des femmes, avec leurs riches pyjamas aux couleurs reposantes, leurs nattes noires et parfumées se balançant sur leurs épaules, la plante des pieds peinte en rouge; des enfants, auxquels les proportions de leurs turbans blanc et bleu confèrent des allures de pages orientales à un bal costumé.³

¹ I. Balu, *Mircea Eliade et l'expérience de L'Inde*: Le Dossier Eliade, vol. X, p.217.

² M. Eliade, *L'Inde*, p. 14.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Les illuminations des Européens ne se comparent pas avec ces feux d'artifices de Bengal parce que « le ciel crépite, les trajectoires se croisent, les roues de feu se chevauchent, les cloches de lumière se brisent, des myriades de confettis de braise s'éparpillent»¹ La sensation du voyageur en descendant du temple vers le ghât, où on brûle les morts, est de «rage et de dégoût», qui s'accroît lorsqu'il découvre que les restes du cadavre sont jetés dans le fleuve. A Allahabad, il participe à la plus grande fête religieuse, appelée Kumbh-Mela et qui a lieu tous les douze ans, lorsque des millions de pèlerins se baignent là où se rencontrent les deux fleuves: le Gange et le Jumna. De nouveau l'immensité de la foule de pèlerins accable le voyageur. Sa stupeur est exprimée par des épithètes comme «délirant», «fantastique», «terrifiant» «effroi» et «cauchemar». Son étonnement est naturel, puisqu'il se trouve parmi des gens, des chariots, des camions, des chameaux et des éléphants. Il qualifie le spectacle comme «prodigieux» et «terrifiant». Vers Amritsar, le voyageur est fasciné par la beauté du paysage exotique, qui cette fois-ci semble fantastique:

Partout d'étranges rumeurs, des bruits secs, des glissements sur les troncs, des entortillements de lianes, comme si des serpents ensorcelés s'éveillaient, comme si des paons évanescents tressaillaient. Qui sait combien d'énigmes se cachent à la droite et à la gauche de notre route ? Tenez des lézards goitreux à crête de dragon bondissent des branches, nous tombent sur les épaules, se retournent comme des écureuils et sautent à nouveau, avec un bruit inerte, effrayant, sur la chaussée embaumée. Quelques minutes plus tard, il fait nuit noire. Les arbres ont désormais des silhouettes fantastiques et les lucioles commencent à voler, essaims d'étincelles. Une forêt primordiale, telle est cette forêt d'eucalyptus que traverse le voyageur se rendant de Kapurthala à Amritsar.²

Au coeur du paysage exotique, dans la forêt, le voyageur découvre l'essence de l'Inde : le charme et la joie. Le charme réside dans la vie sauvage et la joie dans la création et dans la mort. Il se trouve devant une image originale de l'Inde: «le passage du luxuriant et du superbe vers l'humble et l'insignifiant».³ La route jusqu'à Jaipur est parsemée avec des églantiers. La ville de Benares avait des routes asphaltées, un long boulevard devant la mer, des terrains sportifs, une plage, mais aussi de petites rues où les femmes broyaient du riz et les enfants mendiaient. La ville de Madras expose devant le voyageur son opulence, mais aussi sa pauvreté. Eliade est logé, dans cette ville, dans la maison de la mission suédoise et les conditions de logement décrits par l'auteur sont vraiment exotiques :

Ici, dans ma chambre, habitent deux moineaux, un lézard à crête dentelée et quelques énormes araignés, qui prennent peur chaque fois que j'allume ma lampe. J'avoue que, la première nuit, j'ai eu du mal à m'endormir et que j'ai entendu le pépiement des moineaux à travers mon sommeil. Le lendemain, j'ai vu le lézard cheminer sur la poutre de ma salle de bains. Je me suis vite habitué aux araignés; elles se tiennent généralement au bord de la fenêtre, et lorsqu'elles s'approchent trop de ma table, je les chasse avec mon crayon.⁴

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*; p. 29.

La nuit fait partie aussi de l'univers exotique. Eliade est amoureux de la nuit d'hiver de l'Inde, qui ne ressemble pas du tout aux nuits européennes, dont elle est séparée par l'Arabie. C'est la nuit de 1001 nuits, où tout se dissout dans les ténèbres et dans le silence : le vent, les lumières, les caoutchoucs noirs, les arbres mango, les lianes, les maisons européennes. On n'aperçoit plus que les feux des terrasses des chaumières et les portes blanches. Dans cette atmosphère, l'écrivain pense à une classification des nuits selon le camarade qu'elles ordonnent : «Dieu, la femme ou l'âme» et il conclue qu'en Inde le camarade est toujours l'âme. A Benares, en échange, la nuit est «sobre» en contraste avec l'agitation de la journée : «Cependant, on n'a pas le sentiment de se trouver dans une cité endormie, mais au sein d'une immense communauté qui murmure secrètement, qui veille ou qui prie. Une fenêtre éclairée, un appel, un bruissement là où l'on n'aurait pas cru qu'il y ait des gens encore éveillés, et l'on sent que la vie loin de s'être assoupie, se recueillie, et l'on apprend que, dans chaque maison, palpète la même vie de famille millénaire, et que la nuit y est aussi une veille.»¹ Ses remarques sur la nuit indiennes sont nombreuses et parsemées partout dans le livre. A Hardwar, les nuits sont sans pareille:

Les nuits n'avaient pas leur pareille. La lune blême argentait les bouleaux, l'herbe bruissait de sons indéfinissables, cette herbe incertaine, repaire de serpents. Les étoiles paraissaient dans le ciel himalayen, bijoux, rivières de diamants, oasis. Car le ciel ici est immatériel, le ciel est proche, les bouleaux sveltes et élégants ne sont que décor.²

L'exotique s'efface devant les éléments réalistes surpris dans un monastère. Dans le monastère de la secte rouge, il remarque une statue de Gotama Buddha, haute de cinq mètres, dans la position connue, sous l'arbre de l'illumination. Celui-ci porte une couronne sur la tête, son visage est rond, ses yeux sont «allongés vers les tempes» et il sourit. Dans le même lieu, il découvre la statue de la déesse Tara, une encyclopédie religieuse, appelé Kanjur, en cent huit volumes et le Tajur, en deux cents volumes, contenant des commentaires métaphysiques et logiques. Il y découvre aussi une traduction tibétaine de Bhagavadgita, une histoire populaire de Buddha, un manuscrit traduit de népalais, des manuscrits en devanagri et des peintures sur les murs. Une occasion pour Eliade de méditer à l'histoire du bouddhisme de l'Inde, «dégénéré et corrigé», «traduit et incompris», avec des implications métaphysiques. Il visite les temples Daksheshvara et Gangadwara, les temples de Shiva et de Sikh, le collège Guruk, où on parle le plus superbe sanskrit, où les professeurs ne sont pas intolérants, malgré «leur attitude réformatrice, offensive et intransigeante.»

Description exacte des réalités sociales de l'Inde

Une autre méthode de se soustraire au charme de l'exotique est la présentation de la réalité sociale de l'Inde. C'est le cas de l'épisode où le choléra fait des ravages dans tout le pays, en tuant des centaines de gens, par semaine, dans Calcutta. Effrayé par la pauvreté et la maladie, le voyageur européen se demande : «Avez vous déjà vu des gens qui, dix mois sur douze, se couchent le ventre creux?»³ Dans le village Lebong, le

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

² *Ibid.*, p.157.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

voyageur participe en qualité d'observateur aux funérailles de la secte rouge lamaïque. Même si les détails de la description sont exotiques, ce que vit l'observateur est d'une grande intensité. Les épithètes comme: «diabolique», «sardonique», «démoniaque», «sauvage» et «primitif» expriment la terreur de celui qui regarde. Une terreur qui se mélange avec la perception du fantastique devant «une forêt de flammes», ou devant «la barbe et les ongles du vampire chinois, qui provoque les tempêtes.»¹ En Inde, une aventure sans pareille est le voyage avec le train. Il décrit un tel voyage à l'occasion des vacances Puja, où les prix sont bas. Alors les Indiens voyagent pour visiter les villages, où ils sont nés, ou les lieux saints. Ils prennent avec eux de nombreux bagages, des casseroles, des pots, des fruits, des verres, de sorte qu'on est très entassé et le train est en général trop chargé. Il arrête pour longtemps dans beaucoup de stations et les voyageurs changent, mais tous possèdent les mêmes bagages. Parfois le train glisse parmi des rochers et offre le spectacle des paysages montagneux. Deux semaines avant la fête religieuse Kumbh-Mela les trains sont agglomérés à étouffer. Sur les quais des gares s'entassent les pèlerins, qui dorment sur les dalles de pierres et mangent de leur sac, s'inquiétant lorsque le train arrive et demandant où il va. Les trains ont en général 30 wagons de troisième classe et dedans voyagent des gens et des saints écrasés, jours et nuits et pourtant à chaque arrêt, d'autres envahissent le train. Un voyage mémorable a été celui de Calcutta à Allahabad, le 22 janvier. Malgré la saison, la chaleur était étouffante et le train était si aggloméré que personne ne pouvait plus bouger. Eliade se rappelle qu'à chaque arrêt, un jeune homme descendait et apportait de l'eau, des bananes et des oranges. «Des gens étaient montés par les fenêtres et s'étaient casés les uns dans les filets à bagages, les autres sur les banquettes. »² Deux femmes et un enfant s'étaient évanouis, mais on n'a pu leur venir en aide, et ils sont arrivés dans cet état à Allahabad. Tous les voyageurs étaient ahuris de chaleur, ils avaient la fièvre, ils gémissaient et ils écoutaient les cris des autres écrasés dans les gares. En l'Inde de 1930, il y avait une révolte civile et 50 milles nationalistes indiens étaient en prison, raison pour laquelle tout étranger avait besoin d'un permis pour entrer dans une ville. Eliade rencontre des lépreux qui descendent en groupes sur la route des pèlerins qui mène de Hardwar à Rishikesh. Ils se font sentir par les bruits qu'ils font: «des sons plaintifs, miaulement féminin et lamentable, litanie édentée, des nasales prolongées liturgiquement - des sons déchirants, mendiants, où l'on distingue difficilement les mots: «Maharadjah, Maharadjah». Eliade apprend qu'ils sont bannis par leurs familles, qu'ils cherchent des lieux où vivent d'autres lépreux. Ils meurent ou ils se suicident dans la jungle. L'État indien ne fait rien pour eux, il les laisse mendier et un ashram leur donne à manger de temps en temps. L'attitude envers ces malades s'explique par l'impuissance des autorités indiennes et aussi par la croyance que chacun doit expier les péchés des vies précédentes.

Tendance à exagérer

Une promenade, à midi, le long du fleuve Gange, lui révèle le climat torride de ce pays et lui provoque une insolation et le fait vivre l'expérience d'une atroce solitude, totale

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52

² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

et définitive. Il décrit magistralement la chaleur, l'insolation qui le saisit, les visions qu'il en a. Tout d'abord, «des courants brûlants» blessent ses yeux, ensuite il a la sensation d'engloutir de l'air chaud, de la poussière et de l'épidémie. « J'avais les muscles morts et pulvérulents, les os desséchés. Mon sang était tantôt glacial, tantôt bouillant.»¹ Il passe aussi par l'expérience de la tempête, qui l'envole. Il volait à côté des êtres inconnus et il se sentait pénétré par des courants électriques. L'expérience vécue pendant cet épisode a été raconté dans l'article intitulé «110 Fahrenheit, cyclon direction S-V», qu'il a envoyé au journal roumain «La Parole» en expliquant qu'il lui aurait été impossible de ne pas exagérer. C'est une autre façon d'altérer l'élément exotique et il est d'autant plus évident qu'il reprend la description dans les *Mémoires*:

Nous étions presque portés par le cyclon et nos casques coloniaux, les thermos avec de l'eau et du whisky, tous les appareils apportés par l'équipe de Calcutta avaient disparu en quelques instants. Nous fuyions tous dans la même direction, mais, quoique nous criions les uns aux autres, on ne s'entendait pas. Nous réussissions difficilement à nous défendre des branches et des ronces envolées par le vent, en tenant le bras devant les yeux. Je ne sais pas par quel miracle je ne me suis pas heurté contre des troncs tombés. Et je ne sais plus comment je suis arrivé chez moi le lendemain, parce que je ne me suis pas remis qu'après quelques journées.²

Mais la tentation de l'exotique apparaît à tout pas. «Le fleuve Gange coule bleu et frais». D'ailleurs le personnage principal de ces fragments est le fleuve Gange, qui fait sa première apparition, lors d'une tempête, par «une lamentation d'écumes et de bois». Benares est «une cité féérique, invraisemblable et nostalgique.»³ Là, l'écrivain est touché par la foule arrivée pour accueillir un homme sain, un Sad-dhu, et aussi par «de fantastiques cohortes de moribonds, de lépreux, de vieillards et de mendiants, venus vivre leur dernière heure sur les marches de marbre du ghat, que les flots lavent inlassablement.»⁴ A côté de ceux-ci, dans le fleuve se baignent aussi des femmes venues de toute l'Inde. L'écrivain surprend leur beauté, de même que leur façon originale de s'habiller. Les belles femmes du Sud se baignent en pyjama de soie et en voiles; celle de Kathiavar sont de gaies femmes et se remarquent par une veste de velours, sans manches et avec broderie d'argent, tandis que les femmes de l'Inde centrale sont petites et portent de lourds bracelets autour des bras; et des bracelets d'argent et des cadenas autours des chevilles. «Sur les berges du fleuve sacré, toute différence s'efface, qu'elle soit de sexe ou de caste, de couleur ou de foi. Ici, tous sont frères et soeurs, enfants de notre Mère -Ganga.»⁵ La mort acquiert ici un autre sens pour ceux qui finissent leur vie dans ce fleuve, car c'est la seule mort, que les dieux approuvent, et pour cette raison les membres de la famille du défunt ne le pleurent pas. La route jusqu'à Jaipur est parsemée d'égantiers fleuris, avec des singes assis sous les lauriers avec des fontaines en ruine. La ville accueille son visiteur avec des paons bleus, qui, à midi, se reposent sous les arbres de mango at qui semblent d'une beauté «noble et sacrée». Il découvre à l'aide du guide des châles, des serviettes, des pots de pierre et les recoins d'une cité construite en pierre rouge, avec des rues larges où se promènent des hommes portant «des châles de chameau sur les épaules» et des

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

² M. Eliade, *Mémoires*, p. 182, (n.tr.)

³ M. Eliade, *l'Inde*, p.41.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

femmes «la cheville lourde de bracelets». Le bazar de la ville est un lieu digne d'être vu, car il offre au voyageur des manuscrits, des sabres aux manches en pierres précieuses, des lampes, des bracelets, des verres dentelés en or, des bagues, des porte-cigarettes et des pierres précieuses. Dans la description de ce bazar, l'altération de l'exotique se réalise par la forte impression exercée sur le voyageur, par les sensations que l'exotique déclenche chez le visiteur. Eliade se sent «enivré par la luxuriance», étourdi, «frémissant par le contact des châles»

Une présence féminine permanente

Un élément exotique qui effleure la sensibilité du voyageur européen est la présence des femmes. Eliade, jeune homme, remarque la beauté des femmes indiennes, leurs différentes figures et leurs façons de s'habiller. Les premières belles femmes, il les remarque dans un autobus à Cairo. Elles portent un voile en deuil sous les yeux, leurs paupières sont fortement fardées et leurs regards sont comme ceux de toutes les femmes d'Orient, sinueux.

Il n'est moins étourdi devant les danseuses élevées et éduquées pour pratiquer cet art et qui fascinent par la beauté et le prix de leurs costumes. Lorsqu'elles dansent, elles imitent un cobra ensommeillé. Leurs mouvements sont très suggestifs et interrompues par «les tressaillements furieux d'une idole animé comme par merveille». Le point culminant est représenté par la danse finale:

Puis vient la danse finale, la danse du nu, incroyablement somptueuse, presque royale: les danseuses n'ont gardé que leurs bijoux et les bracelets d'argent aux chevilles. Sur leurs corps d'un blanc cuivré, l'argent pose une patine de glace. On croirait qu'elles viennent de jaillir de la terre, à laquelle ne les attachent plus qu'à peine leurs jambes lourdement argentées. Elles ressemblent à des idoles à la démarche de rêve, ou à une sarabande d'apsaras, ces nymphes célestes qui charment de leur musique et la danse l'éternité des dieux indiens.¹

La visite au marché de Darjeeling le fait remarquer les femmes vendeuses, au visage ovale, aux yeux vifs dans les orbites étroites, ressemblant aux poupées de porcelaine. Elles portent de lourds bracelets en or, de fins bijoux, des boucles d'oreille, grands comme des assiettes. A Jaipur Eliade est ensorcelé par la démarche «rythmique, harmonieuse et personnelle» des femmes, qui donnent l'impression qu'elles ne marchent pas, mais qu'elles dansent. Lorsqu'elles font un pas, elles poussent la toile qu'elles portent et sous celle-ci on devine des nudités changeantes. Il a la révélation qu'en Inde toute femme est une Devi, c'est-à-dire une déesse appréciée pour son sacrifice et en tant que mère. Toute femme est adorée et leur vie est dirigée par Karma et leur bonheur consiste dans la dévotion envers l'idéal familial et l'éducation des fils. Elles ne connaissent qu'un seul idéal, Seva, servir et croient qu'il n'y a pas de bonheur passager, il y a seule la béatitude éternelle.

L'élément exotique fait irruption à tout pas dans l'oeuvre d'Eliade. Vers Amber il parcourt une route parmi des cactus secs, les chameaux, les éléphants, et les ânes circulent sur les routes et le palais du Maharadjah a des pavillons formés de feuilles et de lianes, au milieu desquels l'eau jaillit de cinq directions. La beauté de la ville

¹ M. Eliade, *L'Inde*, pp. 80-81.

provoque une fatigue à cause de l'étonnement et de la joie. La ville Udaipur lui donne la sensation de vivre dans un conte à cause de la muraille de protection et à cause des ponts de la «lune» et de «l'Eléphant», du lac Pichola des fêtes avec des torches sur le lac, avec des jeux d'artifices, avec des barques et des lamentations. Et la nuit, la lune vient couvrir tout avec son charme.

L'enregistrement objectif de l'exotique est impossible surtout dans la jungle, où l'écrivain participe à la chasse des crocodiles. Après une journée de chasse, ils se baignent dans la même rivière, ne pensant pas du tout au péril, mais à l'hygiène. Il y apprend la coutume des santals qui attrapent un crocodile, ils l'élèvent jusqu'à ce qu'il devienne grand et puis, vivant, ils en coupent un morceau. Le crocodile blessé, saigne, guérit, puis ils en coupent un autre morceau, résistant de la sorte environ dix jours. La montagne Himalaya se révèle dans toute sa splendeur à celui qui le regarde, sans avoir l'âme accablée par les souvenirs, les tentations et le trouble. On y arrive par des chemins assez dangereux, on côtoie des bords de précipice, on avance en lacet, sous des bois et l'atmosphère devient irréelle et le silence atteint une pureté extrême. En Kurseong, Eliade est surpris de voir les femmes porteurs, de petites filles pauvres, qui demandaient du pourboire, une coutume indienne, même si elle n'avaient rien fait. Malgré l'atmosphère tout nouvelle, Eliade devient la victime des pensées et des sensations, qu'il trouve étranges et auxquelles il n'échappe pas qu'avec de gros efforts de concentration pour retrouver «son orbite et les centres d'équilibre». Le jardin botanique de Darjeeling donne à Eliade l'occasion d'exprimer son aversion envers la tentative des modernes de refaire la nature, qui ne peut être créée que par Dieu et avec laquelle les animaux seuls peuvent avoir un contact direct. L'Asie se distingue par son indifférence, qui signifie détachement des choses et de l'action. Par rapport à cette caractéristique de l'Asie, Eliade considère l'esprit olympique «théâtral et présomptueux».

La quête du yoga tantrique

L'exotique est altéré ensuite par des sensations d'isolement et d'accablante solitude qui le déterminent à penser aux dîners gais en compagnie de ses amis roumains. Sentiments passagers, puisque l'enthousiasme réapparaît à la vue de la montagne Kinchinjanga. Il est vraiment en danger dans la jungle, lorsqu'il est attaqué par des sangsues, qu'il apprécie plus dangereuses que d'autres animaux comme le cobra, le lion ou le tigre. «Nous escaladions une espèce de maquis, sous la pluie, des sangsues sur les bras, sur le corps, sur la figure. J'ai d'abord arraché les boutons de ma chemise pour écraser la langue de cuir noire qui me dévorait le sein. Puis j'ai déchiré les épaules de ma chemise, ensuite mes chaussettes. Je glissais, je pleurais, je m'abîmais les doigts, je m'écorchais les genoux, mon pantalon en lambeaux.»¹ Cette histoire aura des conséquences sur lui et il en parle dans ses *Mémoires*: «Des années entières après, je me réveillais trempé de sueurs froides de ce cauchemar: j'avais l'impression, qu'en essayant de monter la pente escarpé et engluée par la pluie, j'avais glissé et je ne pouvais plus me relever. J'avais alors l'impression que j'étais rejoint par cette masse gluante et vive, composée de milliers de sangsues avançant lentement, mais

¹ M. Eliade, *L'Inde*, p. 142.

inexorablement. En réalité, les choses s'étaient passées différemment: «fatigués, harcelés par les morsures rapides des sangsues, nous avons essayé de raccourcir la route et nous sommes descendus vers la vallée, en traversant directement la jungle. Soudain, nous nous sommes arrêtés. Comme un tapis de mousse, des colonnes de sangsues venaient vers nous.»¹

A Rishikesh, il fait la connaissance du maître de yoga Swami Shivananda qui croit dans une seule réalité, l'âme, «une et la même dans l'homme et dans le cosmos». Chez celui-ci il admire «la force indiscutable», «la hauteur spirituelle», évidente dans ses mots, ses conseils et ses attitudes. Il passe l'hiver dans Swarga-Ashram, en respectant sa loi, en renonçant aux vêtements européens et en marchant nu-pieds. Il vit comme les ermites de Swarga-Ashram, le matin, il se baigne, puis il mendie sa nourriture et finit la journée avec des exercices de purification intérieure qu'il appelle «athlétique métaphysique». Ces ermites se distinguent par leur sincérité, par leur tolérance envers toute forme de croyance, considérant qu'il n'y a pas des limites pour la manifestation du divin. La rencontre des lépreux est une leçon de vie, dont le sens se traduit de la sorte: «Tout ce qui nous arrive a un sens caché.»² A Shantiniketan, Eliade découvre un lieu de paix, l'école fondée par Rabindranath Tagore, où se révèle le secret de la bonté et du bonheur. Les cours de l'école se tiennent dehors, sous un arbre et là, parmi les branches et les fleurs, le bonheur semble si facile. Le poète indien lui explique le sentiment du devoir : «le devoir envers soi-même, égoïste en apparence, mais d'un émouvant altruisme en réalité. Car plus on se laisse aller au charme de la méditation, de la contemplation - plus on y plonge - exercice tellement concret chez nous en Inde, tellement inédit et difficile pour vous autres, les Européens - plus l'âme découvre et réchauffe en elle l'amour du monde, puisque toute la Création qui n'est pas autre chose que d'autres de nos membres, d'autres de nos âmes.»³ En Inde, l'écrivain roumain a la révélation du sublime et en même temps « des atrocités et des superstitions», mélange qui le fascine.

Conclusions

Le livre d'Eliade est naturellement écrit sous la forte impression de l'exotique. Les descriptions des paysages ruraux et urbains, de même que la présentation des différentes coutumes alimentaires et religieuses affluent. L'exotique est pourtant altéré par ce que, tout d'abord, il écrit le livre dans le but d'en publier les pages dans divers journaux roumains et alors l'écrivain fait son métier, parfois il exagère, parfois il devient victime de la création littéraire. L'exotique est puis altéré parce que le contact du voyageur avec lui déclenche chaque fois une explosion de sentiments et de sensations qui accable l'être humain. L'exotique pâlit ensuite devant le désir de connaître un vrai pays oriental. En la connaissant, il rougit à cause des péchés des blancs. Il découvre la nature spéciale des indiens qui cherchent la sympathie des blancs et s'ils l'obtiennent, ils leur deviennent dévoués. Eliade apprend la précieuse leçon de l'Inde, la route vers la vie spirituelle, qui n'est autre chose que: «joie, volupté, danse, innocence, liberté, drame et extase.»⁴ Il avait désiré connaître l'Inde jusqu'au

¹ M. Eliade, *Mémoires*, pp. 186-187.

² M. Eliade, *L'Inde*, p.191.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

point où il aurait pu s'identifier avec elle, en devenant un vrai indien. Il y est venu chercher à comprendre le yoga tantrique qui avait fondé une technique de la liberté où «la vie n'était pas sacrifiée, mais transfigurée.»¹ Il réalise que les techniques du yoga sont «le résultat d'une extraordinaire connaissance de la condition humaine.»² Eliade a réussi à arriver au point où il se sentait en Inde comme chez soi et s'il visitait les villes, les temples et les monuments, c'était pour mieux connaître sa patrie adoptive. Dans ses *Mémoires*, Eliade reconnaît que la connaissance de la spiritualité indienne l'a aidé à comprendre l'importance de l'élément autochtone et la synthèse qui a eu lieu dans l'histoire de la culture roumaine.

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¹ M. Eliade, *Mémoires*, p. 204.

² *Ibid.*, p. 207.

FASCINATION WITH THE EXOTIC IN MIHAIL SEBASTIAN'S DRAMA


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Abstract. As a creator of atmosphere dramas, Mihail Sebastian aims to rescue the spectator from everyday conventionalism, prosaic environment and mediocrity. An emblematic aspect of Sebastian's theatre is the author's fascination with evasion, hence the audience's empathy and the box-office success. Sebastian's heroes' dream is manifesting the freedom to escape the mediocre contingency and imagine themselves as different, in Jules de Gaultier's definition of Bovarism. In fact, Bovarism is a kind of inner exoticism. In Sebastian's case, the exotic should not imply only the spatially remote and unknown, but also the unreachable, be it in terms of faraway places or in terms of inaccessible worlds. As a creator of comedies in a more intellectual vein than the majority of Romanian interwar stage-plays, Sebastian managed to fully convert the theme of evasiveness to the spirit of the 20th century.

Key words: sentimental comedy, exoticism, Romanian interwar literature, Mihail Sebastian, evasion, Bovarism, exotic tropes

As the so-called “sentimental comedies” of Mihail Sebastian (1907-1945)¹, not only enjoyed great box-office success, but also gained a favourable position as far as critical reception is concerned. Sebastian's plays outdid a great majority of interwar stage productions by enticing the public through their freshness of expression and intellectual and lyrical mixture.

Subjected to many extensive and frequent analyses, Sebastian's plays generated divergent opinions as well, regarding not their value, but mostly their significance. An emblematic aspect of Sebastian's theatre is the author's fascination with evasion. The audience empathized with this kind of evasion, hence the success in front of the public. There are critics who view the dichotomy between those who dream and those who cannot as a key-element of this drama illustrated by Sebastian (V. Mândra, Paul Georgescu, Mircea Tomuș). Other critics speak about a theatre of “lyrical evasion” (Cornelia Ștefănescu), or about “intellectualized farces” (Ov. S.

¹ Mihail Sebastian is the pen-name of Romanian Jewish writer Iosef Hechter.

Crohmălniceanu). This way Sebastian contributed to a certain renewal of farce, even of its prank element, by creating more intellectualized and subtle farces, with more serious social and moral implications. In this vein, he is attached to and contributes to a certain trend of his epoch, that of sentimental drama and comedy.

As a creator of atmosphere dramas, Mihail Sebastian aims to rescue the spectator from everyday conventionalism, prosaic environment and mediocrity. Sebastian's characters are on firm grounds in the society, they are well adapted socially speaking, since they embrace certain positions or jobs: teachers, bankers, top sportsmen, artists. However, they periodically feel the need of a mental and affective "hygiene", as a way of renewing something deep in themselves and being able to go on. Their refusal of contingency and their periodic evasion is more linked to this need than to the behavioural pattern of total misfits.

Sebastian's texts may be accused of containing neoromantic elements. But the author's need for evasion has also some other roots: the *ennui* typical for the 20-th century, the replacement of Romantic rebellion with passivity and resignation in a *dolce far niente* state, whilst the evasions in time, space and death are replaced by the evasion in illusion. Moreover, Sebastian used to pronounce himself on this idea: *We do not ask the theatre to duplicate, but to create. We do want it to give us the illusion of life, but on the contrary, the certitude of illusion.* (apud Ștefănescu, 1968:98)

Sebastian viewed theatre, first and foremost, as a show, namely illusion, mirage, artifice, game, considering that realism has no place in theatre, since "the realist obsession does bring nothing but bangles, in theatre just as much as in novels." (*Some Remarks on Giraudoux's Theatre*, in Rampa, 1935).

"Man's impenetrable solitude" should not be sieged or deciphered. On the contrary, one should preserve it within a "healthy, solid, uncertain ignorance", as "the only durable thing in this world in which truths are unstable and risky". In the play *Jocul de-a vacanța (Playing Holiday)*, Ștefan Valeriu, one of Sebastian's emblematic characters, does suggest as a universal remedy the reintegration in a kind of vegetative existence, a kind of habituation to a "plant-like laziness", which corresponds to passivity and lack of aggression in dealing with life. According to this idea, man should "not step forward to embrace life, but he should wait for it, for life, to come to him".

Even in his debut text, *Fragmente dintr-un carnet găsit (Excerpts from a Found Notebook)*, Mihail Sebastian reveals his "plant-like attitudes". In this respect, he admits to knowing "no crisis of the soul", but only "seasons". "I was entering the tragic just like a plant must enter winter. I've had my winters of the soul" (translation mine, C. G). Living like a plant is what Sebastian's male characters do and explore. Thus, the "holiday game" becomes the game of oblivion, of the man who lives without memories or aspirations in slumberous places (villa Weber in *Jocul de-a vacanța* is such a location). The locations of Sebastian's plays are other slumberous places: the provincial town in *Steaua fără nume (The Nameless Star)*, the island where a sudden overthrow of government occurs, in *Insula (The Island)*. Such spaces allow Sebastian's

characters to indulge in living exempted from the conscience of time, living without knowing the exact time or date. This actually means having a “plant-like existence” as the plants know but a day of their life, a “long, long, long day”.

Unlike the heroes of Camil Petrescu’s drama, renowned for their radical attitude as seekers of the absolute, Sebastian’s heroes feel the need to take some time off, calling these vacations “the times off of the soul”. Actually, Sebastian’s plays have even been labelled by critics as “pseudo-comedies of the soul’s holiday”. (Mândra, 1962)

Such holidays are, in fact, the perfect time for protagonists to escape from the world of uniformizing everyday conventions. This way, they navigate towards other realms. The farness, the unknown and the long sought after oblivion are there to meet them. In fact, it is this unclear, diffuse ideal that awaits them. There is a certain form of Bovarism that can be met in each of them. Each of them desires to undertake a form of freedom, that is they take the freedom of having such kind of dreams. Sebastian’s heroes’ dream encapsulates the freedom of escaping the mediocre contingency and imagining themselves as different, in Jules de Gautier’s definition of Bovarism (De Gautier, 1993). In fact, Bovarism is a kind of inner exoticism. There is a peculiar purport of the term exoticism if we refer to Sebastian’s characters: it refers not only to remote, unknown places, but places and worlds remote from the character’s world, in terms of inaccessibility, for distance is not important in this case.

The title *Jocul de-a vacanța (Playing Holiday)* is emblematic for Sebastian’s entire theatrical vision. It refers to a deliberate game played on the indwellers of an isolated pension in the mountains by one of them, so as to take a time off from everything, including the news or the possibility to be reached by others. The protagonist who sets up this game does it to retrieve a “dream time” game inside the holiday game. The places are generators of this kind of mirages. They can be associated with the secret room Sambo in Eliade’s work or with the attic of *The Wild Duck* by Henrik Ibsen. Actually, in reference to Ibsenian characters, Sebastian admired more their propensity towards the chimeric than the ideological conflict.

The fascination with the exotic is to be found not only in Sebastian’s characters, but also in the playwright himself. This is valid for Sebastian’s generation, as well (Mircea Eliade and Mihail Sebastian used to be close friends). It is also traceable in Mircea Eliade’s publication of *Maitreyi* in 1933, the book that can be considered the first Romanian exotic novel at length.

For the most unusual of his plays, *Insula (The Island)*, Sebastian chooses a rather odd location. It is an island devoid of any geographical or historical context. It has been advanced that it might have been a South American island. It is here that three people, the characters, are forced to question the worthiness of the values by which they had been guided.

The three protagonists (a banker, a football player and a paintress) share no common social values or beliefs. Forced by the outbreak of a sudden war, on an island about whose government(s) they know nothing

about, they must reevaluate their core beliefs, their conceptions and their priorities in a radical way.

Their escape is imposed by the plot. They will also discover the benefits of this escape by discovering themselves. They will also find that long forgotten zest for living. In order to comply with the new conditions, they shall be forced to mobilize new resources and capacities they could not imagine they were capable of. They will have to renounce the vain glory and be ready to do jobs other times humiliating for them. They would do this in the name of life, in the name of another moment of existence which was granted to them.

‘Memories? I have no memories. Not anymore. We are hungry. And we want to live. The rest is gone. Necklaces and others [...] There is no tomorrow. There is only today. This moment. I don’t know anything else. I can’t see any further [...] I beg, if necessary. Steal, if necessary. I ask, I implore, I search, I scream. I don’t give away this life – because I’m not sure I can get another one [...] I have no scruples, no pride. I’ll throw flames through my nostrils. I’ll do gimmicks in the public square. I’ll walk with the plate. I’ll sing in pubs [...] because I want to live. Because I don’t want the sun to rise tomorrow morning without us’.

The three of them are pushed towards aiming for a purified happiness. They can do that by being separated, for the time being, from the conventions of conformist societies. By interacting with Nadia, Manuel and Bob find the human feeling they had been estranged from, in their previous life styles (before coming to this island where an unexpected war paralyzes every connection they had with their past).

The ennui of their former existence will get transformed here, in this God forgotten place, into a pathos reclaimed by the Romanian interwar generation influenced by the mystical school of thought.

From the confessions and notes as essay fragments put together in *Fragmente dintr-un carnet găsit* (*Excerpts from a Found Notebook*), as well as in the novel *De două mii de ani* (*For Two Thousand Years*), one may ascertain that Mihail Sebastian is a writer with a fondness for problematizing. He claimed the necessity to take a step from an inferior stage of existence to a superior stage of existence, through an existential leap. The aspiration towards the intensity of living, regardless the moral angle, accounts for the readings of Nietzsche and Ibsen: “Something tells me that we are incapable of leaving to the end one of a lifetimes moments, that we have never been entirely loathsome or entirely angels.”

In *Jocul de-a vacanța* (*Playing Holiday*), Bogoiu, a small clerk in a ministry, undertakes the luxury of “navigating” while at work. But his escapades, his mental trips, happen even daily. His daily serious attitude contradicts his inner *navigations through illusions*. Corina, the feminine presence to whom he confesses his daily imaginary trips, always to exotic

¹ Translation mine, this and the following. In the original, see Sebastian: „Amintiri? Eu n-am amintiri. Nu mai am. Nouă ne e foame. Și vrem să trăim. Restul cade. Medalioane și altele [...] Nu există mâine. Există doar ziua asta. Ceașul ăsta. Mai departe nu știu. Mai departe nu văd [...] Eu întind mâna, dacă e nevoie. Fur, dacă e nevoie. Cer, implor, caut, urlu. Viața asta n-o dau din mână – că alta nu știu bine dacă mai găsesc [...] Eu n-am scrupule și orgoliu. Voi scoate flăcări pe nas. Voi face scamatorii în piața publică. Voi umbla cu talgerul. Voi cânta în cârciumi [...] fiindcă vreau să trăiesc. Fiindcă nu vreau ca soarele, mâine dimineață, să răsară fără noi”.

faraway lands, is herself a nostalgic person, despite her pragmatic everyday attitude. She is secretly attracted to the mysterious harbour of Civita Vecchia, embodying for her the trope of exoticism unknown to the others. Bogoiu, the clerk, confesses to Corina:

“No one can image, miss. Fortunately. Otherwise, life would be imposible. At the ministry, for instance... Do you know how many yell at me? Bogoiu, where is that file? Bogoiu here, Bogoiu there. They yell, I remain silent. How could they know that, while they’re looking for the lost file, I’m in the Azores? [...] I get through the Mediterranean, to Atlantic, then to Pacific. I have missed only the Frozen Ocean of the North, so far”.

Steaua fără nume (The Nameless Star) sprouts from the same languor of pushing into dream the ideal worlds, in a contrast setting which is a small and almost unbearable provincial middle class town. However, one can encounter here even the strangeness of hallucinate dreamers like Bogoiu and Miroiu. The former is caught up by the idea of writing a symphony, the latter, Miroiu, is a teacher of astronomy. He navigates all his nights through Ursa Major constellation. It is his way of putting behind the suffocating life of the mercantile, mediocre life of the town.

In such a dull setting, the exotic trope takes the form of an express train. It is the express to Sinaia, a place with casinos and luxurious leisure. The train is enlightened, leaving behind clouds of subtle perfumes; it is inhabited by glamorous women out of a poor teacher’s league and by handsome well-dressed young men. They can go to the casinos to waste their fortunes and lead a fairytale life. In the provincial town of Miroiu not even all the trains have a stop. The highschool girls come to witness the glamorous show even if it lasts only few seconds. Because, as Miroiu notices,

“In a provincial town like ours... the railway station is ...the sea. It is the harbour, the unknown, the remoteness...[...] It is the longing for leaving, for running away [...] To another place, another world”²

On the other hand, this harbour, equalled here with the railway station, is Miroiu’s gate to illusion. He steps into it regularly, every night, escaping from the small-minded frame of his prejudiced townsmen. Actually this “harbour” opens towards a sea full of stars and makes him open to the exoticism of this astral sea:

“There are evenings when the whole sky seems deserted to me, with cold, dead stars in an absurd universe, in which only we, in our huge loneliness, are struggling on a provincial planet, like in a small town where there is no running water, no electric light and the rapid trains don’t stop... But there are other evenings when the whole sky is rustling of life... when, on the farthest star, if you listen carefully, you can hear woods and oceans rustling – fantastic woods and fantastic oceans – evenings when the whole sky is full of signs and callings, as if from one planet to another, from one star to another, creatures that have never met are looking for each other, are feeling each other, are calling each other...”³

¹ In the original: “Nimeni nu-și închipuie, domnișoară. Din fericire. Altfel n-ar mai fi chip de trăit. Bunăoară la minister... Știi dumneata câți țipă la mine? Bogoiu, unde-l dosarul cutare? Bogoiu în sus, Bogoiu în jos. Ei țipă și eu tac. De unde să știe ei că, în timp ce caută dosarul care s-a pierdut, eu sunt în insulele Azore? [...] O iau prin Mediterana, dau în Atlantic, trec în Pacific. Numa-n Oceanul Înghetaț de Nord n-am fost încă”.

² In the original text, see Sebastian:

„Într-un târg de provincie ca al nostru ca al nostru... gara este...marea. Este portul, necunoscutul, depărtarea. [...] Ese dorul de a pleca, de a fugi [...] În altă parte. În altă lume”.

³ „Sunt seri când tot cerul mi se pare pustiu, cu stele reci, moarte, într-un univers absurd, în care numai noi, în marea noastră singurăătate, ne zbatem pe o planetă de provincie, ca într-un târg în care nu curge

Magda Mincu and the teacher Andronic, in *Ultima oră* (*Breaking News*), find the exotic escape in an Asia of the times of Alexander the Great. The play is constructed on the same scheme of the superiority of the imaginary existence over the true-to-life one. Magda shares with the character Bogoiu the same easiness of stepping into this fancied world.

“Alexander the Great. I know him. I’ve met him. Sometimes I can see him [...] There are moments when I can see him very well. I could even speak to him... Look ! We are in June (*she’s changing her voice*) the 2nd, 3rd, 4th of June 323. Hard summer nights in Asia. The tents are still burning from the day’s sun. Forty thousand people are sleeping with their bodies burning, with their swords in their hands, with their shields under their heads. There is only one man watching over, under the white stars, and among the stars, his star which has not fallen yet. He’s thirty three. He has conquered half of the planet and his hands are pure. Long, white young hands. At dawn, he will make a sign and the forty thousand people will move again in order to get by their weapons the land which has left. At dawn! But it is still night. And his star, which has not fallen yet, will fall. Get close to him, His hands are burning... His forehead is warm... His lips are pale.”

Andronic, however, is not so well initiated in the art of “navigation” through other worlds. For him, the transgression into such a world is possible, but at the level of an aspiration. Magda’s and teacher Andronic’s world, in contrast to the world of Grigore Bucsan, the tycoon, is so different, that it gives the sensation of two parallel discourses which never make their meanings coincide.

Mihail Sebastian revisits the old literary theme of evasion in an original way. As a sentient of his generation, he does that by fully converting it to the spirit of the 20th century. His fascination with exoticism is the expression of this link between evasiveness and the spirit of his generation.

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apă, nu arde lumina și unde nu opresc trenurile rapide... dar sunt seri când tot cerul foșnește de viață... când pe ultima stea, dacă ascuți bine, auzi cum freamătă păduri și oceane – fantastice păduri și fantastice oceane – seri în care tot cerul e plin de semne și de chemări, ca și cum de pe o planetă pe alta, de pe o stea pe alta, ființe care nu s-au văzut niciodată, se caută, se presimt, se cheamă...”

¹ In the original: „...Alexandru cel Mare. Îl cunosc. Îl știu. L-am văzut. Uneori îl văd. [...]Sunt clipe când îl văd foarte bine. Aș putea să-i vorbesc... Uite ! Suntem în iunie 2, 3, 4 iunie 323. Nopti grele de vară în Asia. Corturile ard încă de soarele zilei. Patruzeci de mii de oameni dorm încinși, cu spada în mână, cu scutul la căpătâi. Un singur om veghează, sub stelele albe, și printre stele, steaua lui, care încă n-a căzut. Are treizeci și trei de ani. A cucerit jumătate de planetă și are mâinile pure. Mâini albe, lungi, tinere. În zori, va face un semn și cei patruzeci de mii de oameni se vor pune din nou în mișcare, să cuprindă cu armele cât pământ a mai rămas. În zori ! dar e încă noapte. Și steaua lui, care n-a căzut, va cădea. Apropie-te de el. Mâinile lui ard... Fruntea e caldă... Buzele sunt palide.”

DISTANCE AND SPACE IN RADU TUDORAN'S NOVELS



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Abstract. A dominant feature of Radu Tudoran's works is his permanent obsession for travelling, more exactly, for going away. The travel is not a mere entertainment. It is a perpetual initiation whose rules are established in the course of it. Radu Tudoran (1910-1992) was a novelist renowned for his gift of captivating the public. The fascination with faraway spaces is something shared not only by Radu Tudoran's readers but also by Radu Tudoran's fictional characters. They have the ambition of conquering space, many times paralleled with the strength one might have over one's own being and with the capability of conquering the human heart. More than a mere setting for the plot or a neutral geographical vastness, Tudoran's space is always encumbered with symbolic meanings. Radu Tudoran has a special talent in making space unfold before the eyes of the reader in a specific rhythm. His travel novels explore this effect. Space really enriches its senses when it gets to dwell inner experiences, either as solitude or as shared love. The three elements- space, travel, eros - make up a well-defined trio, present in many of Tudoran's proses. For the novelist, love is subjugated by the temptation of remoteness. This renders travel to become almost every time an obstacle of erotic fulfilment. What makes this obsession of leaving even more intriguing is its fusion with the human aspiration for love, more often than not an obstacle in the way of reaching the unknown. Thus, the characters are quite often confronted with a choice that determines their destiny: to leave or to love.

Key words: exotic spaces, sea-journey, love, space, distance, sea-stories, departures

In 1941, when Radu Tudoran was publishing his novel *Un port la răsărit* (*A Harbour at Sunrise*), he also made his readers acquainted with some of his hallmarks, soon to be very popular and known as "radutoranian" features. One of these features is the obsession for remoteness, for known or unknown places, sometimes exotic, sometimes not. Radu Tudoran (1910-

1992) was a novelist renowned for his gift of captivating the readers. The fascination with faraway spaces is something shared not only by Radu Tudoran's readers but also by Radu Tudoran's fictional characters. The novel *Flăcările* (*The Flames*) might constitute an exception from the obsession for remoteness, since this novel is based in Runcu oilmining area.

The abundance of details and the visualness of the narration account for Radu Tudoran's public success. At the same time, the prose-writer is shadowed by a poet of space, equally good. That is why he managed to imprint on the depicted places a nearly sensual lyricism and a magnetism for the unknown, which linger throughout the reading.

"What he contrived to do in this second part was to elevate the geographical matter to a potential of art which is called exoticism. (...) In 1942, Octav Șuluțiu shows that, by reading this novel, the Romanian will realize that even closer places bordering Romanian realities, such as Dniester's Liman, may seem to them more remote than Paris or Vienna and therefore this leads to the invoked exoticism.

In the only monograph written about Radu Tudoran until the present moment, Cristina Gabriela Dinu circumscribes the symbolism of the sea from a tudoranean perspective within the limits of a "means of purification, of elevation from the platitude of real life, towards the unknown and boundlessness".² However, the implications are more profound and transcend the general meaning of infinity and unknown. In Tudoran's novels, the sea is an arche-character. On the one hand, the sea is an ineffable feminine entity who seduces and needs to be conquered by the male heroes (usually troubled by a hopeless disease and urge of going away), on the other hand, the sea is a catalyser of spiritual elevation. The sea, water in general, is an erotic, purifying space and substance, representing a favourable background for the romance.

Un port la răsărit is a first example in this regard. Nadia's behaviour comes to sustain the idea that the sea is a privileged space for love. On dry land, Nadia cannot feel at ease with the engineer, the hero of the novel. The familiar environment is that of the sea. In the second part of the book, Tudoran balances the realistic depiction of the Bessarabian world with a narrative dominated by poetry and mystery, many times at the border of the fantastic. This is what Eugen Simion called "the romantic poetry of the primordial, of the water spontaneity, of nature's splendour and invincibility"³, overlapped by an ineffable

¹ Octav Șuluțiu, *Radu Tudoran: Un port la răsărit*, in „Revista Fundațiilor Regale” no. 10, 1942, pp. 171-172, reproduced in Radu Tudoran, *Un port la răsărit*, Editura Jurnalul Național, București, 2011, p. 484. Translation mine, this and the next. In the original: „Ceea ce a izbutit să facă în această a doua parte a fost să ridice materia geografică românească la un potențial de artă care se numește exotism. (...) Lectura romanului său ne-a arătat cât de străini suntem noi, românii, de unele părți ale cadrului românesc, încât Limanul Nistrului sau litoralul să ne apară mai îndepărtate ochilor noștri decât Parisul sau Viena”.

² Cristina Gabriela Dinu, *Radu Tudoran între biografie și destin*, Editura Premier, Ploiești, 2012, p. 51. Translation mine, this and the following. „mijloc de purificare, de înălțare din banalitatea vieții reale spre necunoscut și nemărginire”.

³ Eugen Simion, *Dicționarul general al literaturii române*, vol. VI, Editura Univers Enciclopedic Gold, București, 2007, p. 801.

of sentiments, thus creating a successful alliance between the erotic and the nautical adventure. However, this alliance survives only from the perspective of an artistic harmony, as exactly this divergence of the two aspects creates the dramatic tension between "to love" and "to leave".

The possible salvations from the vitiated atmosphere of a Bessarabian land settlement, a town, portrayed in this prose, are the very natural tendencies of the individual. Both love and travelling are such tendencies and are well outlined in the novel. Equally seductive and both imagined with equal artistry, the two represent forces confronting each other in an impartial epic course. Nothing suggests the superiority of one over the other. And the engineer's oscillation between them suggests precisely this: each decision of leaving is permanently procrastinated in favour of prolonging the erotic moment; but the conciliation of the two is impossible. Once the protagonist decided to leave, but together with Nadia, the incapacity of choosing and the desire of conjugating love and travelling are disjointed through a fatality which allows only one conclusion: no weakness is tolerated, the distinct natures of the individual cannot be combined and the attempt of affronting a pre-established order is subject to a relentless punishment.

Making one last stop in a harbour where the engineer and Nadia were to get married, the Milad is crushed by a storm which marks the end of Nadia and of the romance; the scene impregnated with the fantastic, when Nadia, dressed in black (hinting at her tragic destiny) and overlapping Ludmilla's image, disappears mysteriously, hinders the hypothesis of a happy-end. The image of the engulfing Bessarabian province is ingeniously suggested through the assumption that Nadia, or her lifeless body, was carried by the waves in other territorial waters.

The sea, be it a being or an exotic destination, imposes its own rules, a sea-borne culture which implies discovery and initiation, an absorbing world in itself, the cause of genuine obsessions among the male characters; this is the case not only in *Un port la răsărit*, but in *Toate pânzele sus!* (Sails up!) or *Maria și marea* (*Maria and the Sea*) as well.

In *Maria și marea*, femininity is captured in a double hypostasis: at a concrete, material level, Maria (and Dia, Tereza, Helga) represent(s) perceptible feminine figures. At a metaphysical level, the fascinating, mysterious femininity is evoked by the sea, the arche-character which dictates the whole action of the novel. For Maria, the infinity of the sea asserts an inexplicable attraction, materialized in a love-hate relationship. The sea acts as a superior conscience through which Maria understands her own shallowness; a contrasting nature through its depth and through the array of its symbols, opposed to the flat personality of the feminine character. Perceived as an enemy, the sea becomes a memento of the protagonist's spiritual limits. It is at the same time a configuration of a superior femininity for which the men from Maria's life give up anything, including Maria. The sea is considered a thief that never gives back what it takes, being the main obstacle in Maria's erotic adventures: "At the beginning I

hated your first passion; I had felt it before you confessed it to me. Maybe in your silence, maybe in the way you would sometimes look at the sea, absorbed by it until reaching a state of sadness. I knew that the sea would once again be my enemy; it has always been, since my father disappeared. Because of it I kept away from you, I defended myself, until I had no strength left and I fell at your feet”¹. The heroine’s incapability of understanding it translates as the incapacity of penetrating the essence of things, of the human spirit, thus proving herself equally unknowing regarding the two men in her life.

The importance of the water-surrounded environment is also emphasised in *Dunărea revărsată* (*Overflowing Danube*). The natural frame potentiates Ana Odeta’s beauty and enriches her charm, so that in no other place can she appear more authentic than in this scenery. The river transforms in an erotic background, which favours confession, be it a monosyllabic one: ”- Why did you come with me? She looked at him again, with greater fear, then turned her eyes and answered, as if giving herself to him: - You know”². The erotic jubilation is possible only in the same environment, against a background which in the author’s intention probably suggests the interfluent fluster of man, nature and... ships, but which eventually proves merely a bland sentimentalism: ”The tugboat blew its whistle, in front; its hoarse, brisk sound seemed an organ chord announcing the time of love which had finally come. The white barge, as she had never seen, was glittering fairly in the moonlight, as if made of festive sequin – and the entire convoy seemed a magnificent wedding procession”³.

In the novel *Anotimpuri* (*Seasons*), the act of leaving and the distance bear the seal of a different environment: the world of aviation. Flying galvanizes the destiny of the book’s heroes, a destiny which in other circumstances might seem quite bland; each character relates to flying from a different position, becoming the exponent of aspirations propelled into a psychology of verticality. Referring to this aspect, Gaston Bachelard analyzed the aerial phenomena which will teach us especially about acclivity, ascent and sublimation⁴. These lessons must be situated among the fundamental principles of a psychology that we he called *ascensional psychology*⁵.

Considering flying an aerial phenomenon as the ones tackled by Bachelard, we can identify a different symbolism related to each character taken separately, beyond the universal meaning.

Flight can be generally perceived as desire for elevation and freedom, of being, at least spatially, above everyone, desire which seizes all of the novel’s heroes (Manuela and the students on the airfield, Vladimir, Ades,

¹ Radu Tudoran, *Maria și marea*, Editura Albatros, București, 1973, pp. 225 - 226. La început uram prima ta pasiune; o simțisem înainte de a mi-o fi mărturisit. Poate în tăcerile tale, poate în felul cum priveai uneori marea, absorbit de ea până la tristețe. Am știut că marea are să fie încă o dată dușmanul meu; a fost totdeauna, de când a dispărut tatăl meu. Din cauza ei m-am ferit de tine, m-am apărut, până n-am mai avut putere și am căzut la picioarele tale”.

² Radu Tudoran, *Dunărea revărsată*, Editura Pentru literatură, București, 1961, p. 378 : „- De ce-ai venit cu mine? Îl privi din nou, cu o spaimă mai lungă, apoi își feri ochii și răspunse, cum s-ar fi dăruit: - Știi.”

³ *Ibidem*, p. 382. „Remorcherul fluieră, în față; sunetul lui răgușit, aspru, părea un acord de orgă vestind ceasul dragostei care, în sfârșit, venise. Șlepul alb, cum altul nu se mai văzuse, lucea feeric în lumina lunii, făcut parcă din paiete festive – și întreg convoiul părea un magnific cortegiu de nuntă”³

⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *Aerul și visele. Eseu despre imaginația mișcării*, Editura Univers, București, 1999, p. 14.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

Amedeu). We could even speak about redemption through flight, as each character will sacrifice in one way or another to this passion. What differs, though, are the individual motivations.

Related to the verticality imposed by flying, Gaston Bachelard notices the correspondence to an axis of moral rules established vertically.¹ Thus, the trajectory of each character in the field of aviation marks a psychological and moral layout. It is almost a parable of flying which explains the individual destinies. We could even say that the author is deliberately punishing his heroes, as the final point on each axis is determined following a descending movement. The path of each character could be represented schematically in a curve system which intersect here and there and end in an inevitable nadir.

Although many times considered a mere background of the novel, the phenomenon of flying cannot be separated from the action in which the characters are involved, because the relation to flying translates the individual relation to life: Manuela is a frivolous girl who treats and regards everything from a simplistic angle, lacking depth; Vladimir is a much too restrained gentleman, maybe even a cowardly person sometimes, whereas Ades is a rebel who lives (and dies) by his own rules. Amedeu, on the other hand, is a figurant who fails because of his incapability of living through himself.

The obsession of going away and of the open-end space is maybe best represented in the novel *Fiul risipitor*, where the adventure of distance has pre-eminence over the sentimental adventure; thus, accepting a well-rounded love by the man eager for adventure would signify betraying the inner urge to leave. In reality, the squandering man fulfils a credo of the author: "The calling towards remoteness, a dominant element in my older or newer books, as I believe will be in my future ones, comes from the personal aspiration of the heroes, of living in a wider world. I don't accept the term of exotic; the geography belongs to us entirely"². The hero from *Fiul risipitor* is permanently called by an indefinite far-away, he is suffocated by the limit of space, seeking through the perpetual escape (an escape from the closed space or even an escape from a possible being – a common, normal, undesirable version of his) a salvation from mediocrity and from „an end beyond the natural"³.

The journey, an inevitable consequence of this obsession of leaving, becomes, beyond a geographic trip, a journey towards the self, an advancement not so much in space, as within the depth of the human being. For that matter, in the novel *Acea fată frumoasă*, the narrating character answers: "How much does conquering space resemble conquering a human heart! Both reveal the power one has over their own being, of exposing one's self to adventure. Because you cannot conquer anything without uncovering your chest"⁴.

¹ Gaston Bachelard, *op. cit.*, p. 15

² Ileana Corbea, Nicolae Florescu, *Biografii posibile*, Editura Eminescu, București, 1975, p. 246.

³ Radu Tudoran, *Fiul risipitor*, Editura Jurnalul Național, București, 2010, p. 354.

⁴ Radu Tudoran, *Acea fată frumoasă*, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1975, p. 110.

Exoticism takes new forms in this novel, an interesting book as regards its construction, being a travel book and a fictional novel at the same time, a successful intertwining between memory and imagination. The reader follows the narrating character in a journey by car through Budapest-Vienna-Innsbruck-Switzerland-Spain, witnessing and partaking of the sincere and unspoiled emotion of the narrator facing the spectacle of the modern world. No matter if the narrator speaks about cities, buildings, technology or, on the contrary, about nature in its purest form, the feelings are transmitted in an uncensored manner, outlining images which project the journey in a dimension at the border of experience and fancy.

Vasile Popovici remarked properly that "all of Tudoran's prose is subject to this going away, it either complies with it entirely, in this case we speak about *Toate pânzele sus!* (1954) or about the numerous travelling memorials, or it balkes it, thus amplifying even more the temptation of remoteness, and this is when the writer gave – intriguingly – his best works: *Un port la răsărit* (1942) and *Orașul cu fete sărace* (1940)".¹ To the last two works mentioned by the critic we should add, although they are not of the same value, the novels *Anotimpuri*, *Fiul risipitor* and *Maria și marea*, as the male characters from the last mentioned novel reproduce precisely the same hypostases represented by Ades and Vladimir, respectively the squandering son and Oswald von Seele. Both Alber and the squandering son or Savin – Ades are active spirits, animated by the idea of leaving more than by the erotic experience, and this masculine type exerts an ineffable fascination for the female character which is every time left behind, whereas the passive spirit of Vladimir, Oswald or Mecarian reduces them to the status of mere replacements. Consequently, for the active male spirit, remoteness embodies a hypnotic female spirit needing to be seduced and conquered and which is preferred to any other female figure.

A rather different circumstance is that of the engineer from *Un port la răsărit*, who, as Vasile Popovici says, shirks from travelling, even though he desires it, and he subordinates not to male categories, but to extremes of the human being. This representation does not appear in distinct characters, as in the other novels, but in the same character, under the tension of an inner calling. Surrendering to both temptations (to leave and to love) causes an apex equally intense as a confrontation of two female hypostases and following which the hero is left without either.

An exception from the opposition love - going away is the novel *Acea fată frumoasă*, where love and travelling don't represent opposing forces, but two elements intertwined in a narration which does not differentiate them.² An apart character is Dominique, the protagonist, who is kept in an ambiguity which gives her a fantastic nature. Real or not, an

¹ Vasile Popovici in Mircea Zăciu, Marian Papahagi, Aurel Sasu (coord.), *Dicționarul scriitorilor români*, Editura Albatros, București, 2002, p. 603.

² Here we could also mention the novel *Toate pânzele sus!*; the love between Anton Lupan and Adnana arises on the background of a journey, but the erotic level is less outlined, the book being primarily an adventure novel.

incarnation of imagination, of death or of love, Dominique accompanies Vicht in a journey which, beyond the spatial geography, covers the geography of the human soul.

Another Anna Karenina, Dominique dies of her free will on the train tracks. As a matter of fact, this is not the only tragic ending imagined by Tudoran. Not once does the author give the impression that he is punishing his characters by choice. Justified or not, death is a punishment, or a solution, for the erotic dilemmas. While some of the characters attune their penitence by staying alive, Nadia, Ades, the squandering son or Dominique represent thanatic resolutions of love lived too intensely.

Eros is another invariant of Tudoran's prose. It bears the spatial hallmark in two contradictory hypostases, one inviting, and the other inhibitory. In the first of them, the space privileges the idyll, becoming a deeply eroticised space. In the second of them, the space is an inhibitory one, it is against love. Travel is comprised into the second hypostasis, that of a love-inhibiting space, as it induces the idea of farawayness.

The three elements– space, travel, eros – make up a well-defined trio, present in many of Tudoran's proses. For the novelist, love is subjugated by the temptation of remoteness. This renders travel to become almost every time an obstacle of erotic fulfilment.

The novel *Un port la răsarit* deals with this very problematics. Even the structure of the book marks clearly the two coordinates of space, inviting and inhibitory. The first part describes the atmosphere in Cetatea Albă. It is a suffocating, desolated city, where the protagonist is swallowed up by a vicious and dehumanizing routinism. This is the world where the inebriation of the body is prolonged into a numbness of the soul. The idea of love is deconstructed and represented as an anomaly, since these kind of feelings exclude the habitude of promiscuity. Here we have an ill-fated space which inhibits the eros by rejecting any aspiration to a superior living, favouring in turn the swampy existence with no perspectives.

When the engineer, who manages to break off with this place, comes back on the city on the firth of Nistru(Dniester), accompanied by Nadia, the vicious environment prevents the spontaneity of gestures. Once the space is changed, being replaced with an inviting kind of space, Nadia and the engineer regain their intimacy.

The second part of the novel is focused on the love story between the protagonist and Nadia. The setting is changed. The main environment shall be the sea, from now on. In opposition to the obstructive space of Cetatea Albă, the sea suggests the opening. It is not only as a geographical representation, but also as the spiritual opening the protagonist needs to get out of his numb soul. The opposition of the two spaces suggests the rescuing dimension of the aquatic environment. Its association with eros suggests the difficulty of choice. The character is confronted with a dilemma: salvation through love or salvation through voyage. A rapid solution to contain both this options looks impossible. The hope of the hero to reconcile the two aspects is sorted out by the fatality which brings Nadia's tragic ending.

The temptation of farawayness and of travel are portrayed as aspirations against love. The incapacity to choose results in the cessation of the privileges offered by seafaring, which actually presupposes an assumed solitude. Thus, the engineer has proven himself unworthy of the ineffable experience of his sea life. He recidivates and takes refuge in the dull, but known space of the town on the Firth of Nistru.

The writer detaches this opposition between eros and voyage in the novel *Acea fată frumoasă*. This is a pseudo diary of travel, actually is fiction. Love and voyage become an inseparable unit through which the significances of the two experiences are amplified. The novel *Acea fată frumoasă* gets the already consecrated formula in the works of Radu Tudoran. Even if it does not represent a total relaxation from the clichés, voyage and love, they are distilled and recapitalised in a more refined solid and ingenious construction.

The valences of voyage are capacitated by erotic living or vice versa. The love for travel is surpassed only by the love for love. The beauty of the beloved, Dominique, annuls distances.

The labyrinthine space recalls not only the voyage but also other tangent notions. One of them is the meandering through the galleries of memory and also the incertitude of self-discovery. Or search for the self.

Radu Tudoran's passion for travel and for charging space with multiple significances are constant features of his literary works as a whole, even since the short story volume *Oraşul cu fete sărace*, up to his monumental work, *Sfârşit de mileniu*. More than a mere setting for the plot or a neutral geographical vastness, space is always encumbered with symbolic meanings. Radu Tudoran has a special talent in making space unfold before the eyes of the reader in a specific rhythm. His travel novels explore this effect. Space really enriches its senses when it gets to dwell inner experiences, either as solitude or as shared love.

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EXOTIC CONSUMPTION AND COMMUNAL IDENTITY. EXPERIENCES OF SCOTTISH POPULAR FICTION



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Abstract. The paper aims to analyze how communal identity can be foregrounded by experiential consumption of settings, as expressed in texts authored by Alexander McCall Smith and M. C. Beaton. Everyday experiences prove to be essential in building up and reinforcing one's identity especially when they are strongly connected to a specific landscape and lifescape.

Key words: consumption, experience immersion, exoticism, identity

COMMUNAL IDENTITY

Asserting group identity through settings and characters is the rock on which writers' appeal and demonstrate its relevance and permanence seen as the very force of cohesion that impinges the advance of contemporary national/local literature.

In all its dimensions, this new type of writing can be regarded as an example of the proliferation of previously marginalized voices within postmodernity, variously linked to multinational, global capitalism and to the fragmentation of the liberal humanist notion of unified subjectivity into multiple/split identities, of a new manner to work with national imagination while celebrating pluralism and difference. National/local/communal imagination is turned into an essential part in a competing carnivalesque system of conflicting possibilities that nevertheless challenges the authors' awareness of their peculiar role in the making of literary history nowadays, when there is so much awareness of the tendency toward "planetary integration" as Žižek names it. This globalizing tendency is sensed at the level of "sovereign nation state" and of a national culture, determining a slow but unavoidable shift in the importance/influence/weight of ethnic particularities in building up a nation's image; they are preserved but "are

submerged in the medium of universal integration, they are posited as particular aspects of the universal many-sidedness” (Žižek, 1992: 162).

Tim Edensor states that nowadays, in this networking world, one’s national/communal, even individual identity can be best expressed and experienced in mundane, quotidian forms rather than in a spectacular, remarkable way (cf. Edensor, 2002: VI), as these are the very sites wherein people make and remake connections between the local and the national, the national and the global, so that the everyday and the extraordinary could generate the image of a culture in its dynamism, in its reaction and interference with universal forces, in its progress and advancement to an acknowledged uniqueness and specificity. This everydayness is best expressed in its connection to space which, according to most theorists, can be understood and experienced cognitively on one hand, and on the other hand, it can be perceived as being melded with sensual, practical, unreflexive knowledge (see Tim Edensor, 2002: 54); space can be read as an intricate text of a signifying system of a nation, community, or an individual as it is a construction that displays a specific culture.

Features of our domestic environments, so commonly regarded as part of familiar mediascapes as they are employed in television dramas and movies, stand for common denominators to consolidate the relationship between people/s who identify themselves as beneficiaries of the spatial complex network and realize that they themselves can alter the space by domesticating it or narrativising it. There are various ways in which people apprehend and understand familiar spaces and their physical or spiritual relation to them, such as in case of the spatial concept of *home* which covers a wide range of significances – a house, a land, a village, a city, a district, a country

National/communal identity is worth considering especially in a pluralistic world and under the pressure of the globalizing forces as it is the very source of asserting one’s traditional, ethnic profile and values. Be it the Caledonian or the English identity focused on in our research, either of them is apparently reproduced in “the banal realm of the everyday as part of the ‘endemic condition’ of nations” (Edensor, 2002: 12) whereby one can identify spaces, practices, routines that stand for signifiers and reminders of one’s national/communal belonging, most oftenly supplemented and augmented by extra meanings, images, activities drawn from popular culture via the contemporary media, the intermediaries trained to conserve and disseminate group peculiarities. Therefore images, ideas, spaces, things, discourses, practices that form the constellations of a cultural matrix render that particular sense of national identity, dynamic, dialogic, creative (see Edensor, 2002: 17).

National/local/individual identity can thus be scaled by the personal, local histories and narratives emerging from everyday familiar landscapes and activities constantly performed against this background that eventually render the features and particularities of a people through their discursive practices and cultural resources (see Edensor 2002: 168).

CONSUMPTION OF SPACES AND PLACES

It is a fact foregrounded by theorists that the spaces around us are “a part of our everyday social reality” and that our spatial behavior “is defined by and defines the spaces around us” becoming an integral part of our social existence” (Madanipour, 2003: 139) through both its private and public spaces that function in a particular way in each place and are seen as essential sites of carrying out the ritual activities that characterize a certain community. Space is usually referred here to as the dimension in which matters are located and contained whereas place is a portion of the space inhabited by people, a specific area or region of the world. The connection and interaction between individuals and spaces/places become meaningful in psychogeographical studies, that are, according to Merlin Coverley, “the point at which psychology and geography collide, a means of exploring the behavioural impact of urban place’ (Coverley, 2006:10), especially when focusing on urban wandering, substantialized in the figures of the mental traveler, the flaneur or the stalker.

This precise status of a flaneur, I guess, is the one that links places to consumption as it is for them that the former enter the competition site of pleasure and leisure. It is what makes the literature of the quotidian in which “authors address the web of social contemporary institutions and spectrum of types of character” to collide and interact within “these social contexts”, while inducing “a pleasure of reading, an exercise of intelligence and a social and moral pleasure” (Kermode, 2004: 9). As reading has been decided to represent an act of consumption in the contemporary world of commodifications, anything can be acknowledged as being purchased and consumed, including traditions that are to be read in terms of their manifestations in people’s everyday life, in their leisure pursuits, in their work practices, their domestic routines and community involvement, in their general attempt to fashion a particular culture which is to become the repository and heritage for the generations to come through the values, myths, symbols they embody and which differentiate a certain people from others.

It is a common place that habits almost everywhere seem to organize people’s lives and stand for accessible interlinks between groups of individuals that can thus establish particular cultural communities where they display routine social performances, consolidating a sense of “shared action and doxa” to constitute what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as being „a habitus” (see Edensor, 2002: 91), that is “the practical basis for action”, the range of forms of competence and skill, and multitrack dispositions (Edensor,2002: 92). Performing specific activities in specific places create a sense of communal identity within a larger national context, foregrounding people’s permanent attempt of individualization as demonstrated in Alexander McCall Smith’s *The Sunday Philosophy Club* (2004) in an instance of operating with the concept of diversity by opposing Scottishness to Englishness:

“This was the Scottish financial community, with all its reputation for uprightness and integrity. These people played golf; they frequented the New Club; they were elders – some of them – of the Church of Scotland (...) These people did not engage in the sort of

practices which had been associated with some of those Italian banks or even with the more freewheeling end of the City of London. And they did not commit murder". (McCall Smith, 2004:134).

In rendering the particular sense of one's belonging to a cultural group, the quotidian landscape, that is Edinburgh, respectively, Scotland, is associated with everyday spaces, like local pubs, restaurants, homes to provide the ontological framework within which „local differences are absorbed into a code of larger significance" (Edensor 2002: 66) in order to simultaneously foreground the national variety and its uniqueness. Thus a restaurant in Edinburgh can easily become the place where the local and the traditional, that is, the Scottish, becomes relevant in the context of global diversity

"Isabel took up a bread roll and broke it on her side plate. She would not use a knife on a roll, of course, although Jamie did. In Germany it once was considered inappropriate to use a knife on a potato, a curious custom which she had never understood ... A nineteenth-century custom... Perhaps the emperor had a face like a potato, and it was considered disrespectful". (McCall Smith, 2004:175).

The Scottish background, epitomized in symbolical elements, acknowledging marks of differentiation and authenticity, both read/consumed as exotic instances/products of a particular community of the globalized/globalizing world:

"There was a whisky nosing at the Scotch Malt Whisky Society. ,Whisky nosers' eschewed what they saw as the pretentiousness of wine vocabulary. While oenophiles resorted to recondite adjectives, whisky nosers spoke the language of everyday life, detecting hints of stale seaweed, or even diesel fuel. Isabel saw the merit in this. The Island malts (...) reminded her of antiseptic and the smell of school swimming pool: and as for taste, ,diesel fuel' seemed to express it perfectly"(McCall Smith, 2004:224).

Despite a well-established tradition and beliefs in this tradition, global processes undoubtedly penetrate our everyday life through the objects we use, the activities and routines we enact, the places and non-places we inhabit, the relations we have or seek to have, leaving us a rather narrow space for embodying and materializing ostensibly specific practices, replacing most authentic, genuine forms with a creolised replica, that is an improvisation of local practices from re/collected past and foreign media, or foreign symbols, even languages in local, respectively national contexts (see Edensor, 2002: 102).

EXOTICISM AND AUTHENTICITY

Space seems to be produced by its inhabitants through their habits and their „constant engagement with the world which relies on familiar matters and constructs an ongoing spatial mapping through the enactment of everyday mobilities" (Edensor 2002: 56) thus strengthening the relationship between people and space, and foregrounding the power of that specific place, even its exoticism. Starting from online definitions of the term, one could posit space in its organic connection to performing one's national or cultural identity by different modes, in the category of elements "strikingly unusual or strange in effect or appearance", respectively, strikingly, excitingly, or mysteriously different or unusual". There is a good illustration of the concept of exoticism in case of M.C.Beaton's *Agatha Raisin* series where the Scottish mind perceives the English milieu as being highly unusual:

"The Cotswolds are surely one of the few man-made beauties in the world: quaint villages of golden stone houses, pretty gardens, winding green lanes and ancient churches. Agatha had been taken to the Cotswolds as a child for one brief magical holiday. (...); to Agatha the Cotswold represented everything she wanted in life: beauty, tranquility and security. So even as a child, she had become determined that one day she would live in one of those pretty cottages in a quiet peaceful village, far from the noise and smells of the city". (Beaton, 1992:7-8)

This geographical matrix epitomized by the fictional village of Carsley has the "condition of being foreign, striking, or unusual in color and design" (online dictionary) as it was

"a very pretty village, even by Cotswold standards. There were two long lines of houses interspersed with shops, some low and thatched, some warm gold brick with slate roofs. There was a pub called the Red Lion and one end and a church at the other. A few straggling streets ran off this one main road where cottages leaned together as if for support in their gold age. The gardens were bright with cherry blossom, forsythia and daffodils. There was an old-fashioned haberdasher's, a post office and general store, and a butcher's, and a shop that seemed to sell nothing other than dried flowers and to be hardly ever open. Outside the village and tucked away from the view by a rise was a council estate and between the council estate and the village proper was the police station, a primary school, and a library".(Beaton, 1992: 12)

It was the answer to the drabness of capital cities, the threat of alienation that people were submitted when living in London, and the nature engulfed among imposing buildings and historical constructions:

"Carsley was beautiful, thought Agatha reluctantly. The village was blessed with many underground springs, and so, in the middle of all the drought around, it glowed like a green emerald."(Beaton, 1992: 220)

The uniqueness of the place and its constituents are both symbolically and semiotically loaded once they can complete the assignment of heightening their status of markers of national/communal/individual identity within an imaginary geography, and of re/producing meaning in a permanent intertextuality:

"Agatha's cottage stood alone at the end of one of the straggling side streets. It looked like a cottage in one of the calendars she used to treasure as a girl. It was low and thatched, new thatch, Norfolk reed, and with casement windows and built of the golden Cotswold stone. There was a small garden at the front and a long narrow one at the back."(Beaton, 1992:12)

The uniqueness of a particular group or individual (the English here) with the inclusion of rituals, habits, everyday, mundane practices that are meant to legitimate it are strongly foregrounded by the minute description of the interior of Agatha's house, much similar to all those who inhabit the village. The inner design is also part of the big picture of an authentic, traditional abode, or at least this is what is expected from both the inhabitants and the residencies to be like, according to a stereotypical representation of Englishness:

"Inside there was a small dark cubby-hole of a hall. To the right was the living-room; to the left, the dining-room, and the kitchen at the back was part of a recent extension and was large and square. Upstairs were two low-ceilinged bedrooms and a bathroom. All the ceilings were beamed. The living-room: Three-piece suite covered in Sanderson linen, lamps, coffee-table with glass top, fake medieval fire-basket in the hearth, horse brasses nailed to the fireplace, pewter tankards and toby jugs hanging from the beams and bits of polished farm machinery decorating the walls, and yet it looked like a stage set."(Beaton, 1992:13)

Any detail can be related to the image that outsiders have of the life going on in such remarkably picturesque parts of the English countryside,

thus completing the knowledge developed by long histories of praising Englishness in its perfection. The English kitchen should look like this to follow the pattern of its general representation:

“Long table, shining under its heat-resistant surface, Victorian dining chairs, Edwardian painting of a small child in a frock in a bright garden, Welsh dresser with blue-and-white plates, another fireplace with a fake-log electric fire, and a drinks trolley. Upstairs, the bedrooms were pure Laura Ashley” (Beaton, 1992: 14)

By constantly reiterating the avenues of traditions and heritage repositories, as defined, imagined and rendered by both reality and the media (ads, movies), Beaton’s book eventually turns them into a site of beauty, high quality, exhibiting unusualness, strangeness, imbedded in their peculiar toponymy, of intriguing name in Cotswold, like “Upper and Lower Slaughter, Aston Magna, Chipping Campden, and so on” (Beaton, 1992: 88), with their highly individualized features on the map of traditional England, such as

“Bourton-on-the-Water is certainly one of the prettiest villages in the Cotswolds, with a glassy stream running through the centre under stone bridges. The trouble is that it is a famous beauty spot and always full of tourists.” (Beaton, 1992: 83),

representing the pinnacle on any tourist’s agenda by its historical sites,

“Warwick Castle is a tourist’s dream. It has everything from battlements and towers to a torture chamber and dungeon. It has rooms peopled by Madame Toussaud’s waxworks depicting a Victorian house party. It has signs in the drive saying: DRIVE SLOWLY, PEACOCKS CROSSING. It has a rose garden and a peacock garden.” (Beaton, 1992: 87),

thus granting a certain exoticism to the place, so much admired and cherished by inhabitants and travelers.

CONCLUSIONS

Even if a place is not characterized by mere foreignness or remoteness, even if it has no scents of tropical islands or the bizarreness of unknown territories and people, it can pertain to the category of exoticism by having other particularities, such as being fascinating, extraordinary, colourful, glamorous, peculiar, as we have attempted to induce by analyzing texts of Scottish writers about both the domestic land (Scotland) and the alien land (England), most often foreground a self-inflicted amount of irony, especially when populating them with unusual locals, e.g. hundreds of women in Cotswolds villages are: “thin, spinsterish, wispy hair, indeterminate features, false teeth...”. (Beaton, 1992: 104)

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EXOTICISM: ATTRACTION, APPREHENSION OR SHEER REJECTION



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Abstract. The aim of our article is to show how exoticism can be considered attractive, and even a source of inspiration, but how it can also be apprehended, or even rudely rejected. Enlightenment and Romanticism saw exotic places and peoples as attractive and seductive. Even Magic Realism started, and became an attraction, precisely due to its exotic characteristics which offered something new, different and fresh to the reading public all over the world. Meanwhile if we understand exoticism as defining something foreign or different, we can also equate it with otherness, migrants, marginalized people.

Key words: exoticism, Magic Realism, attitudes, otherness, Allende, Buck, Carter, Mehran

DEFINITIONS

Deriving from the Greek *exotikos*, meaning *foreign, from the outside*, from *exo-* “outside”, *ex* “out of”, the word *exotic* refers to something of foreign origin or character; not native; strikingly unusual or strange in effect or appearance; having a strange or bizarre allure, beauty or quality; or *something belonging to a faraway, foreign country or civilization and thus demarcated from the norms established in and by the West.*

In his well-known work, *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said attributed an important role to exoticism in the discursive representation of the Orient, but, as exoticism is relevant not only in the representation of the Oriental, but in the representation of alterity in general, the usefulness of his theory goes much beyond the Orient and it may be

applied to postcolonial representations almost everywhere. (see Nagy-Zekmi, 2003:172)

In the introduction to his *Art and Exoticism*, Paul van der Grijp (2009:10) broadens the definition, and writes that within the European literary and artistic tradition, the word refers to “landscapes, customs and exogenous personages that give a *couleur locale* to a story or images situated elsewhere, and answers the yearning for escape and an external viewpoint in the reader, listener or observer. Thus, they are confronted with the question of self-evidence of their own culture, by which the detour via exoticism may result in a critical reflection on one’s own culture.” Further on, the same author explains the Western societies’ interest in exoticism by the fact that exotic societies, fundamentally different from our own, can become a basis and a source of inspiration for the development of cultural self-criticism. (see Van der Grijp, 2009:31)

He discusses exoticism in Greek and Roman Antiquity, adding another dimension to exoticism, a temporal one. Thus, it means not only an evocation of images from another place (which he calls *cultural exoticism*), but also those from another time (or *historical exoticism*). In this idea, every society had a Golden Age, a mythical time of abundance, and this universal theme has had plenty of variations in time. This Golden Age presented the lure of a pleasant escape, a refuge from disturbing things in the present, in a period backwards in time when people lived in harmony with nature, leading a simple and innocent life, when society hadn’t yet been corrupted by “civilisation”.

Montaigne’ historical exoticism seems to have prepared the way for the Enlightenment idea of the noble and “civilized” savage, and, a little later on, for the Romantics’ attraction for exoticism, as we see it in Chateaubriand’s, Byron’s or other writers’ works.

In the early nineteenth century, exotic cultures became a rich source for inventive Western imagery of what were considered to be signs of the raw, the truthful and the profoundly simple. The romantic movement in art, write Rapport and Overing (2003:365), concentrated upon an exoticism of the mind.

Graham Huggan sees exoticism as not an inherent *quality* to be found ‘in’ certain people, distinctive objects, or specific places, but as a particular mode of aesthetic *perception*, which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery. (see Huggan, 2003:13) Yet, twentieth-century exoticisms are the products less of the expansion of the nation than of worldwide *market*; exoticism has, thus, shifted from a mode of aesthetic perception to an increasingly global mode of mass-market consumption.

EXOTICISM AS ATTRACTION

In the beginning, what came to be known as Magic realism (or magical realism as some critics name it) was going to become a means of expressing authentic American mentality and developing an autonomous literature, in spite of its 'old continent' initial influences, making use of oral and literary narrative traditions and a mixture of real and magical. The Boom of the '60s (the term used to define the decade in which Latin American fiction emerged from obscurity in the United States and Europe and became a major critical and commercial phenomenon – see Cobb, 2008:75) was the literary equivalent of decolonization, a decade of sudden, unexpected and international acclaim of several generations of Latin American writers whose works crossed national and linguistic boundaries within Latin America and then kept travelling, via translations, to other continents. It conquered Europe and North America, but it also made Latin American readers read Latin American writers with the avidity they had once reserved for the French, the North Americans, and Kafka (Janes, 1991:6). The works of the writers who have become known worldwide were exported not only due to their quality, but also because of their intelligent appeal to an international mass readership, argues De Castro (2008:101).

Wendy Faris considers that Magic Realism is “a revitalizing force that comes often from the ‘peripheral’ regions of Western culture – Latin America and the Caribbean, India, Eastern Europe, but in literary terms a periphery that has quickly become central and yet still retained the intriguing distance of that periphery. Like the frontier, like primitivism, the lure of peripheralism (more recently called by other names like the subaltern, the liminal, the marginal) dies hard, because the idea is so appealing and so central to the center’s self-definition” (Faris, 1995:165) In our opinion, the novelty brought by Magic Realism and its attractiveness to the readers all over the world is similar to what happened time and time again, when we speak, for instance, about the attraction of exoticism during Napoleonic wars, during Romanticism, a.s.o., periods which opened the way for dreaming of distant lands, people, customs, beliefs, objects, a.s.o.

One of the authors of Magic Realism acknowledges, in her turn, the influence of exoticism on her life and works. Isabel Allende was born in Lima, Peru, but her parents' marriage was not a successful one, so they separated and, sometime later, her mother went on with her life and moved in with Ramón Huidrobo, whom she married after legally separating from her husband. As a diplomat, Huidrobo was assigned to Lebanon, where they spent three years, and where Isabel discovered the power of forbidden reading, of fiction, in other words the stories of

Thousand and One Nights, carefully locked away by her “Tió Ramón” in a wardrobe, together with other precious treasures of his, such as boxes of chocolates or cigarettes.

In her book, *Paula*, dedicated to her daughter, hospitalized and eventually passed away because of an awful disease, porphyria, Allende remembers that period of her life when she read, trembling, inside the wardrobe, at the light of her flashlight, the four volumes bound in red leather (the colour of sin! – our note): “When I heard my parents coming, I had to close the wardrobe in a wink and fly back to bed and pretend to be asleep. It was impossible to leave a bookmark between the pages, and I always forgot my place; worse yet, entire sections fell out as I searched for the dirty parts, with the results that innumerable new versions of the stories were created ”

The magical world discovered through reading inside the wardrobe¹ was a reflection of what was going on outside, beyond the walls of their house. Talking about memory, Daniel Schacter (1996:90) states that people’s recollections of their lives are a complex tapestry that includes memories of specific moments and more general recollections of larger chunks of time. Many of Isabel Allende’s memories are general events, in Schacter’s view, as she is not remembering a specific episode in a particular time and place, but extracting features and themes that are common to many episodes: “I can still smell those markets!” she recalls. “All the aromas of the planet wafted through those twisting streets, a melange of exotic vapours [...] merchants came out to meet their customers and nearly dragged them inside those Ali Baba caves glugged with treasures”².

These years in Lebanon remained embedded in Isabel’s memory and the experiences, colours, smells, people had echoes in her fictional world, becoming a source of inspiration. For Celia Coreas Zapata (2002:29), “that Isabel Allende should discover this classic work of literature in a Muslim land is more than coincidence. It is one more among the strange events that mark her life. A thirteen-year-old adolescent began to intuit her sensuality through the person of Scheherazade while living

¹ As we only had at our disposal the Spanish version and the Romanian translation of the novel, we will use the latter one for the most suggestive quotations. Thus, Allende recalls „Ascunsă în dulap, mă rătăceam în istorii magice cu prinți care se deplasau pe covoare zburătoare, cu genii închise în lămpi, cu bandiți simpatici care se strecurau în haremul sultanului deghizați în babe [...] În paginile astea, dragostea, viața și moartea aveau un fel de-a fi jucăuș, iar descrierile de mâncăruri, peisaje, palate și piețe, de miroșuri, gusturi și texturi erau de o asemenea bogăție, că pentru mine lumea n-a mai fost niciodată la fel.” (Allende, 2007:81)

² „Ah, mirosul bazarului! Toate aromele pământului se amestecau pe străduțele întortocheate, feluri exotice, prăjeli în grăsimi de oaie, prăjituri cu nuci și miere [...] piele vopsită, miroșuri înecăcioase, de tămâie și patchouli, cafea fiartă cu semințe de cardamă, de mirodenii orientale, scorțișoară, chimen, boia, șofran... Negustorii ieșeau în calea clienților și îi duceau aproape pe sus în peștera lui Ali Baba ticsită de comori, le ofereau lighenașe în care să-și clătească mâinile în apă de trandafiri, le serveau o cafea tare și dulce, cea mai bună din lume. Tocmeala era un element esențial al cumpărării, iar mama a priceput asta din prima zi. (Allende, 2007:94)

among Muslims and Christians. That adolescent would also become *Eva Luna*, again through the person of Scheherazade. Or Scheherazade through the person of Eva Luna? Eva Luna, a modern Scheherazade, gifted with legendary magic for telling stories and saving her life with her imagination.”

Eva Luna starts with a motto, a quote from *One Thousand and One Nights*: “And then he told Scheherazade: “Sister, may Allah lead you, tell us a story so the night might pass easier...”¹ *The Stories of Eva Luna* start the same way, with a quote from the Arabian Nights. But Allende is not the only Latin American writer fascinated by this image. Sheherazade is a paradigm for women who successfully resist male domination to save and to give life, writes Silvia Nagy-Zekmi (2003:174), as in (post)colonial cultures they have been termed ‘the twice colonised’, both by the imperial and the male social order.

EXOTICISM AS A CAUSE OF APPREHENSION OR PUZZLED WONDER

However, exoticism is not a delight for everybody, we see in the same text of Paula, as Isabel Allende remembers her mother’s perception of the years passed there. The cultural differences and everyday issues make her life far from enjoyable. She felt she was a prisoner in her own skin. Women were not supposed to go out alone.²

Rousseau and Porter deal with this aspect of apprehension of exoticism when they write that “amongst the various categories of difference in Western culture, the ‘exotic’ has long been prominent. Whatever lies beyond the horizon of our mental maps of the familiar, conjuring fascination and terror alike, acquires the attributes of difference, and thereby, serves to reinforce the comforting perception of our own good order and sweet reasonableness. [...] the exotic is that realm [...] signposted by danger lights. [...] It is marked by frisson [...] (Rousseau, G.S; Porter, Roy, 1990:4) Exoticism encompassed styles of being and behaviour which defied normalcy. Other cultures, other creeds were not merely different, but positively strange.

As Europeans, we are used to view other cultures as strange and exotic, but an interesting reversal of the situation can be found in Pearl

¹ Și atunci i-a spus Șeherezadei: „Surioară, Allah să te călăuzească, spune-ne o poveste ca să ne treacă noaptea mai ușor”. (Allende, 2006)

² „Tentația chilipirurilor nu avea totuși darul de-a o face pe mama să se simtă bine în Liban, avea senzația că era prizonieră în propria-i piele. Femeile nu puteau merge singure pe stradă, în aglomerație putea țâșni oricând o mână bărbătească lipsită de respect pentru a le jigni, iar dacă încercau să protesteze, cădeau pradă unei gloate batjocoritoare. La doar zece minute de casă era o plajă imensă cu nisip alb și mare călduță, care ne invita să ne răcorim de caniculă în după-amiezile de august. Trebuia să ne scăldăm în familie, în grup compact, ca să ne apărăm de ceilalți; era cu neputință să te întinzi pe nisip, ar fi însemnat să invoci practic o nenorocire, ieșeam din apă și fugeam la cabana închiriată special. Clima, diferențele culturale, efortul de a vorbi franceza și a bălmăji ceva arabă, scamatoriile pentru a întinde bugetul de la o lună la alta, lipsa prietenelor și a rudelor o copleșeau pe mama.” (Allende, 2007:96)

Buck's novel *East Wind, West Wind*, published in 1930, which focuses on the world of Chinese women while presenting the Western world as exotic and strange. Kwei-Lan, a Chinese young woman, married to the man she had been promised to even before her birth, gradually comes to terms with his 'strangeness' – he is a doctor, studied in the West, and adopted some of the Western ways and ideas, which disturb her in the beginning – and finds happiness by his side. After convincing her to unbind her feet, and staying by her side along the process, the relation between Kwei-Lan's husband and his wife begin to change, and in the evenings, previously silent, they start talking. One of these conversations deals with perception, the way Westerners perceive the Chinese, which is totally different to what she knows.

“They think our clothes are funny” – he says – “and our faces and our food and all that we do. It does not occur to them that people can look as we do and behave as we do, and be wholly as human as they are.”

I was astounded to hear this. How could they consider their curious look and clothes and behavior as human as ours? (Buck, 1997:88)

When she meets a family of foreigners, there are a lot of noticed things which make her conclude that “nothing about these foreigners is according to nature” (Buck, 1997:107) The people look weird, the window is left ajar in the children's room, they are all dressed in white – the sad hue of mourning and death – and the woman even nurses her own child at the breast. “Nothing about these foreigners is according to nature”, she thinks. (Buck, 1997:107) It is a kind of exoticism *à rebours*, as the differences of the other culture are not attractive, but rather cause uneasiness.

The same idea appears in British writer Angela Carter's experience of Japan, where she lived for three years, initially due to a Somerset Maugham Travel Award, accompanied by five hundred pounds. The way she is perceived by the natives is very similar to what Kwei-Lan thought of the Westerners, not delicate, not fitting the pattern, ignorant of the Oriental politeness strict rules, a.s.o. This makes her exotic in the eyes of her Japanese lover (just like Kwei-Lan's husband and brother are drawn, fascinated by the difference of the Western world): “I had never been so absolutely the mysterious other. I had become a kind of phoenix, a fabulous beast: I was an outlandish jewel. He found me, I think, inexpressibly exotic.” (see Sage, 1996:26)

¹ Pearl Buck, the first American woman to win the Nobel Prize (in 1938), was the daughter of missionaries, grew in China and spent 42 years of her life there.

REJECTION OF EXOTICISM AS OTHERNESS, FELT AS DISTURBING OR EVIL

If Angela Carter looks exotic in Japan and finds a lover who is attracted to her, migrants don't always enjoy the same fortunate experience, as we see in the novel of another migrant writer, Marsha Mehran, who was born in Tehran, but whose parents migrated to Buenos Aires, Argentina, where they opened a Middle Eastern café. Her first novel, *Pomegranate Soup*, mirrors the author's experience of migration, telling the story of three young sisters who leave Iran and set up a small restaurant in County Mayo, on western coast of Ireland.

In its commodified version, the East is liable to being virtually equated with the exotic, writes Ursula Kluvick (2009:77). The popularity of exoticism as a mode of mass consumption effectively disguises its critical discussions on exoticist discourse which recognize that exoticism fulfills two diametrically opposed purposes at once: it simultaneously domesticates and distances that which it constructs as 'the other'. While it designates Eastern objects and subjects as strange and foreign, it simultaneously renders them recognizable in their very otherness.

For Said, Western discourse created a particular Orient in order to justify its economic, intellectual and moral superiority over its territory and its subjects. In Orientalist discourse, colonial and postcolonial, particularly female subjects tend to be represented by an ambivalence of desire and disdain. (see Nagy-Zekmi, 2003:173)

The arrival of the three Aminpour sisters in the small village of Ballinacraugh divides the community into those attracted by the sisters' exotic scents, smells, dishes and features ("Almost at once, Benny (Corcoran) was stung by the cloud of nigella that had blended with the young girl's own rosewater and cinnamon bouquet. The poor man didn't know what hit him. One minute he was wandering around in his own lonely vacuum, the next he was in an Eden of tempting fruits, standing before an Eve whose long, dark hair and fragrance soothed his very heart." (Mehran, 2005:32), and those who are disturbed by their presence, either because they inconvenience their plans or simply because they are outsiders who can surely bring nothing but trouble with them.

For Huggan, while exoticism describes the systematic assimilation of cultural difference, ascribing familiar meanings and associations to unfamiliar things, it also denotes an expanded, if inevitably distorted, comprehension of diversity which effectively *limits assimilation* (2003:14, our emphasis).

Those who are bothered by the girls' presence think of them in rather stereotypical terms. Stereotypes, as we know, allow simplistic and

fantastic claims to be made about a group's members. They are the source of prejudiced responses not towards real others, but towards personal phantasms of others, a root cause of misconception, sexism, racism and classism (see Rapport, 2003:344) The scents coming from the sisters' kitchen resemble warning signals of otherness for Thomas McGuire, the rich pub-owner next door: "Its spicy, sinful intonations reeked of an unknown evil, a godforsaken foreignness that sets off alarm bells in Thomas's large potato head and froze him to his spot". (Mehran, 2005:3)

The town's gossip, Dervla Quigley, feels the same way: she "sniffed the air outside the bedroom window. Yes, a nasty reek of foreignness was definitely in the air. It was a different smell [...] She recognized the same unyielding yeasty scent of rising bread and perky almond intonations, but there was also a vast and unexpected array of under- and overtones she could not name. (Mehran, 2005:30)

When Layla, the youngest of the sisters goes missing, and Bahar is looking for her, asking around, the baker's jealous and unhappy wife treats her very rudely. Assumpta Corcoran's suspicion that her husband is unfaithful to her is enhanced by the looks of the young woman in front of her:

"Assumpta's eyes narrowed. She had passed by the new lunch place several times since it had opened its doors, hoping to catch a sight of the foreigners who were running it. [...] Now she could see that the old gossip's suspicions were well-founded. The brown skinned woman in front of her was the embodiment of John's warning in Revelation: the Harlot of Babylon had just made herself known. God be with them all.

"What can I do for you?" Assumpta's voice was icy." [Bahar asks if she has seen her younger sister and describes her]

"No. Haven't seen anybody like *that* around here," Assumpta replied, making the word *that* sound almost filthy. (Mehran, 2005:153)

Here again, her exotic looks have a negative dimension, one that Assumpta quickly stereotypes and rudely dismisses.

In the the pub, the next place Bahar goes to ask for help, her reception is even worse:

"That's no ordinary woman, Thomas realized with a sudden shudder. She's one of those tarts from the café! [...] Bleedin' Arabs.

Whatever she thought of that kind of small-mindedness, it was nothing compared to the bald **hatred** before her. It was an **exclusion** as foul as she had experienced in those scary early years in London, when the whole city was under alert of terrorist threats, and anyone who looked slightly foreign was watched with suspicion. [...]

Turning on her heels [...] Bahar pushed through the pub door, anxious to escape the dread that was rising in her chest. Just as the door slammed behind her, a sinister voice called out: "Go back to yer stinking camels !" Raspy smokers' laughs enveloped the rest of the smarting insult." (Mehran, 2005:159-161)

As we have seen in the examples discussed above, exoticism as otherness encompasses various attitudes and receptions, which range from fascination, attraction towards it, to uneasiness in its presence or apprehension of it, and even to downright intolerance and rejection.

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WOMANHOOD, PENUMBRAL EXOTIC
INFLUENCE AND SPACE IN GABRIEL GARCIA
MÁRQUEZ'S *LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA*



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Abstract. The paper looks at the myriad facets of exoticism as reflected in a novel by Gabriel Garcia Márquez (Love in the Time of Cholera). A perusal of the text yields instantiations of exoticism as inversion of paradigms Old World/New World, as well as exoticism as hunting for novelty, for difference, for erotic transgression; also disease as exoticism as it begets hiatus, disruption as regards the familiar, the common, all in all as regards the bland rhythms of everyday life.

Key words: exoticism; paradigms; Old World; New World; appropriation of territory

Motto:

You might as well have told a snake charmer in the market.
(Márquez 1988: 250)

A sense of dissolution of borders – or more saliently, boundaries – pervades Gabriel Garcia Márquez's texts. This is but natural within a paradigm of magical realism, Márquez's professed style. Indeed it is cultural capillarity or porousness¹ that informs the obscure transactions going on between characters and between – at times – incongruous practices (the practices of the Indigenous people of South America that still linger *versus* the European/Old World practices of the colonizers). How and to what

¹ *Porousness* is a term used in cultural studies, alongside capillarity, to denote the penumbral influences of cultures upon other cultures that are contiguous to one another – see Carvalho, 2013.

extent, one might ask, is the author eskewing ideological heterotopia under the circumstances? How are incongruities resolved textually?

One of the female characters in the novel engages in escapism as she revisits the places of her honeymoon trip with gusto. Thus she goes to Europe repeatedly, her terror of being at sea for ten days notwithstanding. Remoteness itself is the remedy for all things bland and banal:

"However, she was going to learn very soon that her drastic decision was not so much the fruit of resentment as of nostalgia. After their honeymoon she had returned several times to Europe, despite the ten days at sea, and she had always made the trip with more than enough time to enjoy it". (Márquez 1988: 251)

There is an inversion of paradigms that is apparent here in the sense that the – supposedly – familiar (the Old World) becomes exotic and the other way round. Characters travel to Europe on a quest for novelty and the unexpected, whereas back home, in the New – presumably exotic – World, things have gone – existentially – sour. It is colonialism backwards. It is, paradoxically so, that the New World is redolent of the past, of well-established and sedimented paradigms, and the Old World yields novelty, indeed yields the exotic. It is indeed colonisation of the mind, as mentality gets impregnated again and again by the old ways that had somehow been obscured.

The exotic as prey-hunting is also alluded to in the novel. Florentino Ariza, the – at times – evanescent lover always ready to console inconsolable widows engages in his predatory erotic endeavours as a hunter would. Indeed, to him it is the banal, the tedium of matrimony that he should at all costs elude. Going hunting for vulnerable women who have been recently widowed is his way of instantiating exoticism.

Any new woman conquered indeed represents the unknown, ergo the exotic. Of course, once appropriated, like any territory, the exotic becomes all too familiar:

"He had known for a long time that he was predestined to make a widow happy, and that she would make him happy, and that did not worry him. On the contrary: he was prepared. After having known so many of them during his incursions as a solitary hunter, Florentino Ariza had come to realize that the world was full of happy widows (...). They began living like parasites of gloom in their big empty houses, they became the confidantes of their servants, lovers of their pillows, with nothing to do after so many years of sterile captivity. They wasted their overabundant hours doing what they had not time, for before sewing the buttons on the dead man's clothes, ironing and reironing the shirts with stiff collar and cuffs so that they would always be in perfect condition. They continued to put his soap in the bathroom, his monogrammed pillow-case on the bed; his place was always set at the table, in case he returned from the dead without warning, as he tended to do in life". (Marquez 1988: 202)

Florentino's predatory endeavours are referred to as incursions as a solitary hunter, incursion the operational term thereof. In order to have incursions, one should necessarily locate *terra incognita*, an uncharted territory, the realm of exoticism. Any woman IS.

Disease itself – cholera – is exotic as it places humanity outside its boundaries of comfort and regularity. Indeed it takes one out of the ordinary

in terms of the economy of everyday practices. Fermina, the female protagonist who goes places protects herself – in an useless gesture – from the epidemic but, more relevantly so, from any contagion of the unknown, of the disturbing:

”When they began their drive, Fermina Daza had covered the lower half of her face with her mantilla, not for fear of being recognized in a place where no one could know her but because of the dead bodies she saw everywhere, from the railroad station to the cemetery, bloating in the sun. The Civil and Military Commander of the city told her: ”It’s cholera”. She knew it was, because she had seen the white lumps in the mouths of the sweltering corpses, but she noted that none of them had the coup de grace in the back of the neck as they had at the time of the balloon”.

(Márquez 1988: 252)

Note how the Civil and Military Commander as figure of authority here stands metonymically as part of the entire mechanism of authority, of the rationalization of the random (he states: ”It’s cholera”). Also the Academy is used here as reference as regards rationalistic thought *versus* the irrationality of disease. If one considers Eurocentric paradigms as rationalistic, indeed informed by positivist thought, then the founding of the Academy as institution in newfoundlands, in colonized territory may stand as an outpost of reason and civilization in zones of randomness, or irrationality, of exoticism in that sense (i.e. the epidemic here).

The issue of the infidelity of spouses is exoticized here in the sense that the husband has an affair with the domestic help, more precisely with a black woman. Is he on the lookout for exoticism in the sense that a servant and a black one at that should offer sensations extraneous to marital paradigms? Or is it all about erotic attraction, pure and simple?

In other words, is it just the wife that finds her rival being a black woman repulsive or is it more than that, i.e. an attempt on the part of the husband to exoticize the tedium of – prescribed, non-interracial – marriage? The wife is definitely experiencing the eschatology of the world as she had known it, i.e. her world of bourgeois blandness:

”For her it was the end of everything. She was sure that her honor was the subject of gossip even before her husband had finished his penance, and the feeling of humiliation that this produced in her was much less tolerable than the shame and anger and injustice caused by his infidelity. And worst of all, damn it: with a black woman. He corrected her: ”With a mulatta”. But by then it was too late for accuracy: she had finished”.

(Márquez 1988: 250)

For the cheating husband it is perhaps an escape from inertia, stagnation into the exoticism of erotic adventure. Equally saliently, the wife finds, your own spouse becomes exotic to you in a sense, as you no longer are aware of his urges, his desires thus become ever so remote.

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L'HISTOIRE D'UNE QUÊTE IDENTITAIRE DANS
MADE IN MAURITIUS D'AMAL SEWTOHUL
THE STORY OF A QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN *MADE
IN MAURITIUS* BY AMAL SEWTOHUL



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Sommaire. Le troisième roman d'Amal Sewtohul, "Made in Mauritius", raconte par la voix de son principal protagoniste, Laval, un Sino-Mauricien, des tranches de vie dans un monde exotique, aux échos politiques et sociaux. En fait, l'histoire de Laval n'en est pas une mais une somme d'histoires liées aux communautés qui cohabitent sur l'île, le roman posant une interrogation sur ce qui constitue une nation. Sa lignée illustre très bien le processus de créolisation qui va de paire avec la suppression des frontières et la globalisation.

Abstract. Amal Sewtohul's third novel, "Made in Mauritius", tackles exoticism in relation to emigration and creolisation. Through the voice of its protagonist, Laval, of a Chinese-Mauritian extraction, applying for Australian citizenship, we are offered samples of an exotic world with anchors in the social and the political issues of globalisation. The novel exposes some interrogations, such as what constitutes a nation nowadays and it gives us clues to reflect on words like nationalism, transnationalism and globalisation. Mauritius, as Laval's birthplace, is not a monolithic nation, but a nation «arc-en-ciel», made of the sum of the histories of the inhabitants.

Mots clés: immigration, exotisme, quête identitaire, amitié, amour, nationalisme, globalisation, Sewtohul, arc-en-ciel

Key words: immigration, exoticism, identity quest, friendship, nationalism, globalization, Sewtohul, nation, "arc-en-ciel", citizenship, Mauritius

Amal Sewtohul, diplomate et écrivain, est né à Quatre-Bornes à Maurice en 1971. Il appartient à la nouvelle génération d'auteurs qui sont en train de renouveler depuis deux décennies la littérature mauricienne. *Made in Mauritius*, qui a reçu le Prix des Cinq continents de la francophonie en 2013, est son troisième roman et continue le cycle *Histoire d'Ashok* et d'autres personnages de moindre importance et *Les voyages et aventures de Sanjay*, explorateur mauricien des Anciens Mondes. Ses romans mettent en scène des anti-héros confrontés à leurs origines, dans notre cas un Sino-Mauricien, Laval, le principal protagoniste, qui fait sa quête identitaire en temps de bouleversements post-coloniaux. À part l'immigration et l'identité le roman nous donne des clés pour réfléchir à d'autres problèmes comme le nationalisme, le transnationalisme et la globalisation.

Made in Mauritius évoque la dernière vague d'immigration que l'île Maurice a connue, à savoir l'immigration chinoise, à travers le parcours d'un immigrant chinois, Lee Kim Chan, qui fuit la Chine après l'avènement du communisme. Son fils Laval est né et a grandi à Maurice avant d'aller poursuivre des études en Australie, où il finit par s'installer jusqu'à sa mort. C'est lui qui raconte à sa compagne d'origine germano-polonaise, Frances, l'histoire de ses parents et la sienne. Il s'agit d'un récit à la première personne où deux voix, celle de l'enfant et celle de l'adulte, se mêlent dans un jeu de glissements volontaires. L'auteur raconte par la voix de Laval des tranches de vie dans un monde exotique, aux échos politiques et sociaux. L'amitié, l'amour, la beauté des paysages, le rêve, les désillusions se mêlent à des thèmes plus violents comme par exemple les combats pour l'indépendance des années 1967-1970.

Les principaux personnages du livre sont d'origines diverses (Chinois, Musulmans, Hindous) et se retrouvent à un moment donné de leur existence d'exilés sur cette île où ils aspirent tous à un idéal interculturel qui continue ensuite en Australie où Laval commence le récit 30 ans après sa « traversée de la grande eau » (81). Dans une série de va-et-vient entre époques et territoires, Laval reprend l'histoire du père dans la Chine de Mao, quand la vie paisible des paysans chinois avait été perturbée par le camarade Mao qui avait annoncé qu'il était l'heure pour la Chine d'égaliser la production d'acier de l'URSS. Chaque province avait des quotas de fer à remplir malgré le fait que les paysans ne s'y connaissaient pas en acier. En 1959, vingt millions de Chinois moururent de faim, victimes de ce bond en avant que Mao voulait faire à la Chine. Ce qui fait que son père s'enfuit de la Chine de Mao, caché sous une bâche sur une barque qui l'avait emmené à Hong Kong où il trouve domicile chez un premier oncle, Lee Liu Hua, surnommé le Grand Lee, commerçant à Hong-Kong et qui vivait avec sa famille dans un taudis de la zone industrielle. Le grand oncle lui accorde le gîte et le couvert et écrit à un second oncle, l'oncle Song, qui avait une boutique à Port Louis, la capitale de l'île Maurice, pour lui demander s'il voulait bien aider ce neveu échappé de la Chine communiste. Le Grand Lee lui achète un conteneur, « une grosse bête » (23), qu'il remplit de quincaillerie chinoise invendable pour qu'il puisse démarrer à Port Louis un petit

commerce. Mais son père commet le pêché de séduire la fille du grand oncle, la Petite Ying. Ils furent mariés à la sauvette (car une fille mère n'est drôle pour aucun parent) et envoyés tous les deux à Port Louis en Île Maurice. Un sentiment de chute dans un gouffre sans fin s'empare de sa mère lorsqu'elle se retrouve dans un petit port de pêche qui était Port Louis. Elle avait l'impression d'avoir échoué au bout du monde lorsque l'oncle Song les accueille de mauvaise grâce et les conduit dans le Chinatown de Port-Louis, un quartier minable plein de vieilles boutiques très loin du monde auquel elle avait rêvé. Comme ça sa mère est entrée dans une tragédie sans fin et maudit toute sa vie son père qui l'avait laissée enceinte.

Laval, est né dans le conteneur où il vivra avec ses parents et qui devient tout au long du récit le refuge, la matrice même, le repère et le symbole de cette trajectoire marquée par le doute, l'espoir et les semi-échecs : « Et le conteneur, ce conteneur dont il avait eu si souvent honte - quel genre de famille étaient-ils donc pour vivre dans un conteneur, alors que tout le monde avait une maison bien comme il faut, en béton -, voilà donc que maintenant les yeux de toute la ville étaient braqués sur cette boîte jaune » (12). Symétriquement, à la fin du texte revient une seconde explication : « Cette boîte de métal faisait partie de moi depuis si longtemps, avait été pendant toute ma vie le symbole de ma pauvreté, de mon manque de racines »(260). Ce conteneur représente une sorte d'extension de lui-même (« mon conteneur »,79), il traduit ses sentiments, voyage avec lui, est associé à tous les événements marquants de sa vie, s'adapte à son environnement, se transfigure selon les lieux parcourus et les expériences vécues.

Outre son conteneur que l'on retrouve à la fin du récit en Australie et sur lequel est peint "Made in Mauritius", il est, tout au long de sa vie, flanqué de son ami et contraire l'Indien Feisal et de la cousine de ce dernier, Ayesha, celle qui deviendra sa femme. Avec eux et grâce à eux, il arpente l'île et la société mauricienne formée d'un mélange de nations: des Indiens, des Blanc qui venaient de France et qui possédaient les grands commerces ou du Royaume -Uni et qui possédaient le gouvernement, des Chinois, souvent illégaux, comme ses parents. Les Indiens voulaient prendre l'île pour eux car, malgré le fait qu'ils étaient considérés des paysans bons à couper la canne, il y en avait de ceux qui ont été à l'école et qui sont devenus médecins ou avocats et voulaient prendre toute l'île. Laval, Feisal et Ayesha ont ainsi vécu les jours de l'indépendance et l'époque juste après l'indépendance mais plutôt comme une ballade, car, enfants de 9-10 ans ils n'en comprenaient grand-chose. Et si ces amis le soutiennent à Maurice et l'aide à se retrouver au milieu de cette nation « arc-en-ciel », on va voir qu'ils l'entravent quand il s'agit de naître à soi-même loin de leur "petit paradis tropical"(227), en Australie.

En fait l'histoire de Laval n'en est pas une mais une somme d'histoires liées aux communautés qui cohabitent sur l'île, le roman posant une interrogation sur ce qui constitue une nation. Á Maurice Laval se retrouve au milieu d'une diversité génétique et culturelle et la quête qu'il

entreprind est non seulement celle de son identité mais aussi celle de l'altérité. Né à Maurice de parents chinois et se demandant souvent ce qu'il était, Chinois ou Mauricien, lorsqu'il obtient la nationalité australienne, trente ans après son émigration, il a du mal à s'identifier en tant qu'Australien. Laval Lee est donc un Mauricien d'origine chinoise ou un Sino-Mauricien catholique qui a obtenu la nationalité australienne. Son fils, Sultan Lee, né en Australie de son mariage avec Ayesha la Musulmane, sera lui aussi un collage, un «australien musulman d'origine indienne chinoise mauricienne»⁽³⁰¹⁾ et son petit-fils Nur Mohammad Walker sera «bien mélangé... chinois, indien, blanc et musulman»⁽³⁰¹⁾. Sa lignée illustre très bien le processus de créolisation qui va de paire avec la suppression des frontières et la globalisation. La communauté des sans-papiers venus de partout (Indiens, Irakiens, Libanais, Nigériens, Somaliens, Birmans, Afgahans, Cambodgiens, Chinois, Vietnamiens et Arabes) que Faisal aménage en Australie, tolérée et même soutenue par les Aborigènes, ne fait que renforcer l'idée de l'absurdité des frontières nationales que Sewtohul met en cause. Tout est mouvement et mutation, fluidité géographique et identitaire; l'ancrage territorial disparaît aussi bien que l'identité nationale essentialiste pour donner lieu pleinement à l'identité postnationale. La communauté imaginée n'est donc plus celle de la nation mais bien celle d'un monde élargi qui tient compte des multiples héritages génétiques, culturels et religieux de l'individu. Le personnage de Mariko, une étudiante qui s'est lié d'amitié avec Laval à un moment donné, vient renforcer cette réflexion sur les éléments accessoires inaliénables de l'identité. Alors que la famille de Mariko, d'origine japonaise, est installée en Australie depuis 1883, et que son grand-père a même fait la guerre aux côtés des Australiens contre les Japonais, Mariko est toujours considérée comme une étrangère. Son origine ethnique, révélée par son apparence, l'emporte sur sa nationalité.

Sewtohul trace dans son livre des parcours transnationaux. Ainsi, il choisit de faire évoluer les jeunes Laval, Faisal et Ayesha vers l'Australie, qui en plus d'être une destination privilégiée pour des études supérieures pour les Mauriciens, correspond dans leur imaginaire depuis des décennies à une terre d'émigration, un Occident quelque peu en marge.

Lorsque Laval parle des Mauriciens et des Australiens, il ne se montre tendre ni avec les uns ni avec les autres. Il voit dans les Mauriciens un assemblage hétéroclite, comparable au bric-à-brac entassé par son père dans le conteneur. Mais ces rejets, c'était le peuple mauricien, son peuple : « Car qu'étions-nous d'autre que des produits ratés de la grande usine de l'histoire? Canaille venue des tripots de Bretagne, coolies de Bihar, prisonniers des guerres tribales du Mozambique et de Madagascar, hakkas fuyant les guerres et les impôts de l'empereur de Chine. Nous étions les rebuts de l'humanité, venus à Maurice dans des cales de bateau pour être achetés ou pour pourrir à tout jamais sur des étagères de boutiques misérables ». (126)

C'est une représentation qui privilégie cependant une idée non négligeable, celle de la cohabitation car ces immigrants provenant des quatre

coins du monde ont réussi à inventer un certain vivre-ensemble qui les distingue radicalement des colons qui ont entrepris un véritable massacre sur les Aborigènes d'Australie : « Mais l'Australie avait une histoire à l'envers, dans laquelle les colons s'étaient établis sur les côtes, et avaient ensuite pénétré à l'intérieur des terres, en exterminant les Aborigènes. Et cet intérieur lui semblait sans âme, un immense terrain vague dans lequel des types passaient leur temps à fouiller la terre pour en extraire des minéraux, et à se saouler le soir devant la télévision, dans un bar ». (37)

Cette scène présente un contraste total avec la découverte du paysage de l'intérieur de l'Île Maurice par Feisal et Laval à l'occasion d'une marche à travers les champs de canne lorsqu'ils étaient enfants:

« Nous sommes montés sur une petite bosse qui nous permettait de regarder au-dessus de la végétation, et nous avons regardé le paysage au-delà de l'autre versant de la colline. C'était la première fois que nous voyions à quoi ressemblait l'île, en dehors de Port Louis.(155) [...] C'était à la fois très pauvre, et rempli d'une beauté difficile à décrire, la beauté des lieux oubliés, la route était parfois bordée de grands arbres centenaires, et en voyant de temps à autre des ruines en pierre de moulins à sucre. Comme je l'ai dit plus tôt, c'était un jour où le ciel était couvert de nuages épais, et la lumière qui les traversait tombait en pyramide sur les collines au loin, comme si Dieu se promenait ici et là sur l'île. 'Alors comme ça, ceci est mon pays', me suis-je dit, à un moment. Mais personne ne me ressemble». (159)

Laval erre sur la route de la vie et du monde à la recherche de son identité étant confronté à une pluralité de traditions et coutumes. Il s'en sort mieux que ses parents parce qu'il a su s'intégrer dans l'histoire de son pays. Maurice où il est né n'est point une nation monolithique, mais une nation « arc-en-ciel » et son histoire est la somme des histoires des communautés qui y cohabitent. Par ses amis, Faisal et Ayesha, Laval a très tôt accès à cette pluralité qu'il vit comme une véritable libération. En leur compagnie, il a surmonté, petit à petit, ses limites, ses complexes et ses peurs pour mieux se mesurer à l'autre.

Made in Mauritius de Sewtohul, roman traversé par le thème de la métamorphose, autant individuelle que sociale, se fait remarquer par une écriture d'une modernité remarquable, l'auteur refusant la linéarité traditionnelle du récit tout en préférant une atemporalité cyclique.

RÉFÉRENCES : Amal SEWTOHUL. *Made in Mauritius*. Éditions Gallimard 2012, Collection Continents Noirs dirigée par Jean-Noël Schifano.

MULTIPLE FEMINIST IDENTITY IN *BLACK MILK*

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Abstract. Theorists say that postmodern identity is a construct that can be continuously shaped and reshaped, according to free personal choice, or to new social roles that occur in life. Postmodern identity is therefore mainly a cultural construct, strongly influenced by multiple images, stories, cultural texts. Postmodern culture provides permanently new models or ideas that might be absorbed by a personality and change it, according to its own temperament and its own beliefs and values. Therefore postmodern identity is a multiple one, continuously changing, fact that implies also a permanent self-surveillance and self-knowledge. The present paper attempts to trace these issues in Elif Shafak's autofictional novel Black Milk. On Writing, Motherhood and the Harem Within.

Key words: career, feminism, motherhood, multiple identity, self-knowledge

Elif Shafak was born in Strasbourg, France in 1971, grew up in Spain and studied in the USA. She is an awarded essayist and novelist, writing in English and Turkish, and is considered to be one of the best Turkish writers. She has published thirteen books, nine of which are novels, including *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007), *The Forty Rules of Love* (2010) and *Honour* (2013). Her work has been translated into more than thirty languages. As a successful author and self-proclaimed nomad Shafak wandered the world writing and publishing in Istanbul, US and Europe. She is married with two children and divides her time between London and Istanbul.

In an interview given in October 2007, shortly after giving birth to her daughter, Elif Shafak confessed that: "Becoming a mother was a huge challenge for me. This year, following the birth of my daughter I suffered from a long post-natal depression, that ensnared me amidst the perplexing whirl of Istanbul. For 10 months I orbited around the black sun of depression and couldn't write anything. When it was over, I wrote an

autobiographical novel called *Black Milk* and it will be out soon” (Shafak, 2007). Shafak’s memoir *Black Milk: On Writing, Motherhood and the Harem Within* traces her journey from writer to mother to mother-writer. Being herself an academic, teaching feminist issues, Shafak lends her character the same set of values, seeing in feminism an ideology, a set of beliefs that may influence other ideologies. Feminism is for her an important part of her identity, together with the core construct based on traditional elements. The novel suggests that multiple identities are mutually influencing and interconnected, rather than independent or singular, and that individuals must identify the elements that make up their own identities. In the same interview, Shafak explains that:

Being a new mother generates an unmatched pleasure and happiness. Yet, at the same time, it can trigger a profound identity crisis infused with guilt, loneliness and bewilderment. The postpartum stage can be a particularly debilitating condition for intellectual or artistic women who are used to an independent lifestyle. Today there are two seemingly different, albeit complementary attitudes toward motherhood in Turkey. On one hand, there is the view that sees motherhood as the most sacred thing that can occur to a woman. In this traditional approach motherhood is romanticized and idealized. On the other hand is the view that contemporary women can have it all; they can be perfect career women, perfect mothers, perfect everything. None of these approaches deals honestly with the multiple effects that childbearing has upon women. Despite the fact that countless women are known to suffer from some sort of depression after childbirth, this subject is widely misunderstood and ignored. (Shafak, 2007)

Walt Whitman’s *Song of Myself* is another invoked exemplification of the many selves merging into one: “Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself (I am large, I contain multitudes)” (see Whitman, 1900). As Jessica DeVoe Riley notices in her review, Shafak takes this sentiment to heart. She not only recognizes her multitudes, but she accepts them and loves them equally, without discrimination.

In her introductory note, Shafak defines herself as being a writer, a nomad, a cosmopolit, a sufist, a pacifist, a vegetarian, a woman and, above all, a story teller. Rare are the occasions in which these multitude of selves are in balance. We usually repress certain parts of our personality to the prejudice of others. The autofiction *Black Milk* describes the way in which Shafak’s character is learning to discover and to accept her own inner diversity. It is a pledge for self-knowledge, acceptance and balance in the inner life.

Early in her memoir, Shafak asks the reader a question she had once been asked herself: “Do you think a woman can manage motherhood and a career and at the same time and equally well?” (Shafak, 2012:52)¹ For many years, Shafak’s answer to this question was negative. But now, at 35, refusing to ignore the fears about the impact of marriage and children on her most central self, that of a writer, she seeks the answer through a series of biographical essays on women writers and a magic set of conversations with

¹ „Crezi că o femeie poate să facă față și maternității, și carierei la fel de bine?”

her inner voices, the Thumbelinas, which are tiny little argumentative representatives of her Big Self, living in the inner harem.

The book is divided into two parts, which alternate, and are distinctive in form and content. One of them consists of the essays on the most important feminine voices in literature, while the other one is dedicated to the inner harem. Shafak looks at the experiences of prominent women writers, beginning with Sofia Andreevna Bers, Tolstoi's wife and secretary, mother of 13 (or, according to some historians, 19) children, and ending with Toni Morrison, single mother and Nobel awarded writer. The list goes on with the Brontë Sisters, George Eliot, Jane Austen, George Sand, Virginia Woolf, Zelda Fitzgerald, Simone de Beauvoir, Sylvia Plath, Alice Walker. The author intersperses her own experience with that of her favourite female writers, in order to find help in dealing with the conflict between writing and parenting. She walks through the lives and works of these personalities, and discusses them in an admiring tone from the perspective of their beliefs regarding family and children.

But only she can give the right answer. While seeking this proper answer to the question above, she discovers in herself a choir of discordant voices. In the chapters dedicated to these inner voices, the tone of the book changes to a humorous and a self-ironic one. With the distant objectivity and curiosity of an anthropologist, the main character emerges in studying the different "selves" which compose her "Big Self" as if they were strange figures, apart from herself. The paradox is that these "selves", very individualized characters, very different one from another, co-exist more or less peacefully in the inner harem. Each of them fights for authenticity, for identity and for control over the others and over the Big Self: "There is a mini harem deep down within my soul, a gang of females who constantly fight for nothing and bicker, looking for an opportunity to catch one another off guard", says the author.¹ The Big Self goes down inside her soul, in order to discuss with the Thumbelinas the question of how to manage the conflict between writing and motherhood. They live deep within her soul, in a Gothic, foggy and dark atmosphere, where it is difficult to find a path. At last she finds herself in a city, as well organized and clean as Brussels, where the Little Miss Practical lives.

She is the pragmatic side of the Big Self, leaving nothing to chance, viewing all actions with logic, and her appearance matches her identity: she is small, with short fair hair, comfortably dressed in a large shirt and large trousers, with lots of pockets in which she can find anything, anytime. She uses shampoo and conditioner 2 in 1, to spare time and money, she drinks Diet Coke, and eats goat cheese and smoked turkey sandwiches. Her apartment is simple, clean and elegant, decorated in a minimalist style and her readings are only those about how to be more efficient and functional. Her opinion regarding writing and motherhood is that it is only a matter of

¹ „În adâncul sufletului meu e un harem în miniatură. O ceată de femei care se încaieră întruna din nimic și se ciorovăiesc, căutând un prilej să se prindă una pe cealaltă pe picior greșit.” (Shafak, 2012:50)

time management, and that in a globalised world like ours a good babysitter can be easily found anytime.

Madame Dervish, the spiritual Sufi, is the next Thumbeline in the labyrinth of the soul. She lives a humble life, in a town as spiritual as Mount Athos, and spends her time praying that the Big Self should open her heart for love, truth and beauty. She eats lentil and bread, drinks water and wears a long dress, a turban and slippers. Madame Dervish's advice to the Big Self is that instead of thinking she should start living and experiencing things, and the answer, all answers, would come along the way.

Big Self is not content with this Thumbeline either, and wants another opinion. She gets to a city as crowded as Tokyo, where, behind a door with 3 locks, lives Milady Ambitious Chekhovian, the career-driven artist.

The workaholic Thumbeline's motto is a quote by Chekhov: "If you don't have wishes, hopes or fears, you cannot be an artist." That is why she is a good Chekhovian: she wishes, hopes and fears abundantly, and simultaneously. Therefore, time is everything, and she can't afford wasting it on cooking. Instead, she crunches chips and biscuits during work, and takes lots of vitamins and supplements, and drinks fruit juices. She wears a purple-blue skirt, a jacket and a silk blouse, and her make-up is unostentatious. Her answer is clearly negative: it is not the moment to have children, because there are still so many things to do in order to be a better writer and to leave behind something persistent, a great literary work. Children should be let in the care of those who were born to be mothers, but Big Self is not one of them. She must work harder, in order to become a great writer.

The following visit is to Miss Highbrowed Cinic, who embraces the intellectual. She lives behind an iron door, in an apartment in New York, whose walls are full of pictures of Che Guevara and Marlon Brando, and where cobwebs are visible here and there. She wears a long hippy dress and a jacket with Indian mirrors on it, on her arms jingle a lot of colourful bracelets. She practices Raja Yoga and Reiki, and in spite of all the acupuncture sessions, she couldn't quit smoking yet. Her hippy bags are full of books, note-books and haberdasheries, and she rarely puts on make-up because she would never find the lipstick or the mascara in those bags.

Miss Highbrowed Cinic has been following an alternative diet lately. In front of her there is a plate with organic spinach, organic zucchini and a mixture of vegetables with saffron. Her belief is that by eating meat, i.e. a dead animal, we also 'swallow' the fear of death, this being the reason of our diseases. Her opinion about the dilemma of Big Self is that regardless of what she chooses, writing or motherhood, she would be always discontent, because humans are destined to be melancholic, depressed, unhappy. Her discourse on the dilemma has no end, but the conclusion is that a decision is impossible to take.

When the main character meets her future husband, a new thumbeline shows up. She is Blue Belle Bovary, the Seductress. She looks

like Rita Hayworth in *Gilda*, with long, blond hair, wearing a long, scarlett evening dress, and long, black gloves. She has a sensual, warm voice and represents the femininity, the hedonistic part of Big Self, the sensual-self. She loves jewelry, creams and perfumes, silk dresses and sexy underwear and lives for the pleasures of the senses.

Shortly after meeting her husband-to-be, Big Self surprisingly discovers Mama Rice Pudding, the maternal thumbeline, among her inner voices.

She lives in a house with lace curtains on the windows, surrounded by a flower garden. She is a little bit fatter than the other ones, has a gentle, round, speckled face, deep blue eyes with long eyelashes, and coffee-brown hair. She is about 30-35, and Big Self does not know her, although they had been together since childhood, when the four year-old little girl used to play with dolls. Mama Rice Pudding is the perfect housewife, loving and protective. She cooks fine dishes, makes comfitures, deserts and pastries, knows how to clean the carpets, how to remove spots from skirts and kettles and more such tricks, useful in the household.

Among the other Thumbelines who are of Western cultures, she represents the traditional side of the novel's character. When Shafak's character is waiting for her baby, Mama Rice Pudding becomes the autocratic leader of the inner harem, and hers is the only voice that can be heard from down there. The other career-driven thumbelines are repressed and neglected, and Big Self is forced to focus only on her pregnancy and on the new-born. This gradually leads to a postpartum depression, and she urges a meeting with all her 6 multitudes. The conclusion of the meeting is that the totalitarian regime imposed by Mama Rice Pudding has to come to an end, for the sake of every thumbeline, and that the inner harem should be ruled in a democratic way, in which all the voices within can be heard equally.

The conclusion of the book is that each and every facet of our Big Self has to be free, every inner voice has to be heard, in order to live a balanced and a happy life. On the same line, Elif Shafak stated in an interview that: "I think every human individual is composed of different voices. We always talk about democracy as an external regime, but there should also be democracy within the individual. What kind of regime do we have inside us? Is it an absolute monarchy? Is it a dictatorial regime or is it a pluralistic democracy? The way the individual constructs himself or herself influences the way they interact with others." (see Jalalzai, 2014)

Theorists say that postmodern identity is a construct that can be continuously shaped and reshaped, according to free personal choice, or to new social roles that occur in life. Postmodern identity is therefore mainly a cultural construct, strongly influenced by multiple images, stories, cultural texts. Postmodern culture provides permanently new models or ideas that might be absorbed by a personality and change it, according to its own temperament and its own beliefs and values. Therefore postmodern identity is a multiple one, continuously changing, fact that implies also a permanent

self-surveillance and self-knowledge, a fact shown by Elif Shafak's autofictional novel *Black Milk. On Writing, Motherhood and the Harem Within*.

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- Jessica DeVoe Riley <http://www.literarymama.com/reviews/archives/2012/02/finding-yourself-a-review-of-black-milk.html>

MIRRORS AND DOUBLES IN ATOM EGOYAN'S *EXOTICA*


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Abstract. Exoticism and eroticism often accompany one another in the creation and reading of the Other as a primitive, savage or archaic figure. Atom Egoyan's movie Exotica (1994) offers a frame of intriguing and disturbing type for the development of this link. Our paper analyzes this movie by taking as a starting point some elements that are related to its spatial configuration. The space reveals the issue of the double as a main figure of construction at the base of the movie, and we consequently focus on several levels where duplicity can be retrieved.

Key words: Egoyan, Exotica, exoticism, space, double

Atom Egoyan is a Canadian playwright, producer and film director of Armenian descent, born in Egypt in 1960. Considered to be one of the best contemporary Canadian directors, Egoyan is acknowledged for his distinctive style, thematically focused on issues of morbid nature — family losses, child murders, traumas of various types etc. — with a detail-oriented and symbol building camera. He has won several important film awards and was an Oscar nominee for *The Sweet Hereafter* in 1998, when the award went to another Canadian, James Cameron and his *Titanic*. Egoyan is also a rather extensively studied movie maker, with a consistent bibliography on his cinematographic universe, mostly coming from the Canadian critic space.

The movie our article deals with is *Exotica*, released in 1994, which could be resumed as follows: the main action takes place in a strip club one could locate in Toronto's suburbs, a place that is frequented by auditor Francis Brown with the purpose of seeing Christina, a stripper who dances in a schoolgirl outfit. At the end of the movie we find out that Francis' daughter, Lisa, was murdered when she was eight, that dancer Christina was her babysitter, and that the characters we thought to be unattached to each other outside the space of the club were actually connected. In fact, between all the characters of this movie there is a web of factual or symbolical connections. Relationships mostly operate on the level of symbolical substitution, with characters often taking the place of another absent,

missing, or dead character, or deciding an exchange with their living fellows. The plurality of meanings of some linguistic constructions around the word *place* could represent a reading path for this movie, with characters that evolve in peculiar places, that are out of place, that don't have a place, are dis-placed, estranged, characters that, above all, take someone else's place: Thomas in his father's place, then in Francis', Christina in Francis' daughter's place, Tracey, the latter's niece in Christina's etc. The place, portion of body and space, becomes a metaphorical knot situated at the base of this movie.

The central space the movie is set in is the eponymous strip club: *Exotica*, a name branching towards the words *erotica* and *sex*, operating the fusion of eroticism and exoticism – erotic by the dancers' naked bodies and lascivious movements, and, additionally, by words and sounds. The emcee of the place, Eric, is making lascivious comments on the dancers coming on stage, manipulating the interpretation of the body towards the taboo, nurturing pedophile fantasies when Christina enters the stage, ending up embarrassing the clients:

"What is it that gives a schoolgirl her special innocence? Her sweet fragrance? Fresh flowers... light as a spring rain? Or is it her firm, young flesh inviting your every caress... enticing you to explore... her deepest and most private secrets?"

His exclamations – yes, oh God etc.— are also meant to thicken the lasciviousness of the representation. The movie was actually awarded a special prize by porn industry magazine AVN.

As for the exoticism of the space, this is emphasized from the very first moment, from the first scene of the movie, rolling as a canvas on which the director's name and the casting of the movie about to begin are projected. A canvas of exotic, interior plants, slowly moving from left to right on an Oriental music matched to the spatial exoticism. The row of exotic plants inscribes the repetition on a suffocating orbit because of the dampness and darkness of the closed space, separated from the exterior by a tunnel, through which in the first minutes of the movie we see Christina walking, passing from the street into the club. A tunnel symbolizing the channel of birth, inversely crossed towards the return to the womb, with the club having a protective dimension one might difficultly attach to this kind of place.

The dancers are not in danger in the space of *Exotica*, touching them is forbidden and they are permanently surveyed by two characters occupying two important fractions of the space. The emcee, Eric, from his mixing table, is placed in a superior and central plan, from which he monitors and protects, but also instigates and tempts, leavening desire and censoring it, diabolical and saviour. In his turn, he is surveyed by the heavily pregnant club owner Zoe, who watches from a Rococo style interior surrounding the space inhabited by clients and dancers what is going on in the club, through windows shaped as a woman's torso, perceived as mirrors by the customers. These customers can only see themselves, while Zoe gets to see them through this double faced artifice.

The club's space compresses several points of centrality, whose pretensions of uniqueness or domination are being torn down by the discovery of a point whose perspective seems more advantageous. The scene is the center, marine universe surrounded by open shells, when strippers dance on it, then the center moves to the tables when clients can enjoy, for five dollars— "*five dollars is all it takes to have one of our beautiful foxes come to your table and show the mysteries of the world*" says Eric— the dancers' individualized attention. These tables are the very focal point of the emcee's attention, who, in his turn, is being observed by Zoe from behind the one-way mirrors.

One-way mirrors, that is, a quintessential space of duplicity. Of doubleness and lie. On one hand, you are seeing your projection in a mirror, you are in control of your image, but, on the other hand, you are being watched without knowing it, in an act of extreme exposure, since the way you look at yourself is, almost by definition, intimate. At the same time, fusion occurs between the one watching and the one being watched, fusion between the latter and his image and the hidden other as well. These mirrors are also doubles: Christina had been told by the club's ex-owner, Zoe's mother, that they were meant to protect the dancers, but she then found out that they had actually been projected, initially, in order to satisfy a rich client's special needs of voyeurism. "*Protection and voyeurism are linked in Egoyan's film*" states Coates (1997:27). What was thought to be protection is exposure, under the light of the new information, without nevertheless losing its protecting valence, which remains a possibility to be actualized or not by the watcher, depending on who, on how and why he is watching.

Cristina dances on Leonard Cohen's famous song "Everybody knows", whose text repeats the disclosure of nakedness in front of the other, as Francis and Thomas each find out at a certain moment that people almost unknown to them know about them things they have not mentioned, or even tried to hide.

The entire space of the club is double-faced just like these one-way mirrors¹, doubled in its interior by Zoe's place, like the cloth of its lining. Exotica is double from within, and has a double outside, in the pet-shop owned by Thomas, who illicitly brings Blue Hyacinth Macaw eggs into Canada, a place full of aquariums, undulating fishes like the bodies of the women dancing in the club, with the same suffocating feeling and blue and green aquatic colors.

The mirror has two faces in the sense that everyone sees something else, and in the sense of a double intentionality, protective or perverse, depending on the watcher. It is double also because there is another mirror

¹. We could not help recalling the use that another Canadian, Margaret Atwood, makes of the one-way mirror – a symbol of the border between Canada and the United States – and that funny remark at the beginning of her essay stating that the noses of many Canadians are like Porky Pig's for spending so much time watching what is happening across the border, while the Americans are unaware of being watched.

of the same type in another space of the movie, at the beginning, in the scene at the customs, where Thomas is being interrogated behind the mirror. It is us watching him, not only as spectators of the movie, but also as witnesses or investigators, since we are pronominally included by a character:

"You have to ask yourself... what brought the person to this point. What was seen in his face, his manner, that channelled him here. You have to convince yourself that this person has something hidden that you have to find. You check his bags, but it's his face... his gestures that you're really watching."

Being seen without seeing is the very condition of the film actor, as opposed to the theater one, with the latter getting to have access to the looks of the public on him. The mirror play continues, sending its echo to another interrogatory we find out about in a mention of the father, Francis, considered at one time a suspect of the death of his daughter. Another echo is to be found in the parrot¹ (a privileged figure of the double in its distinctive repetitive qualities) as an object exotically adorning the table of the emcee that has a living double in the house of Francis' cousin, along with Thomas' parrot eggs: life *in posse* (the eggs), life *in esse* (the living parrots), death transcended in the object, a substitute, a fake, yet useful and readily invested with feelings like a child projecting the story of her imagination to a puppet. In this movie, what is lifeless has a living double, a sort of stand-in that takes over its attributes. An "absorption of appearance" (Baudrillard, 1983: 95) occurs: Zoe wears her dead mother's clothes and wig, Thomas takes his father's place, Christina substitutes the dead daughter. Even the living ones have doubles: Thomas takes Francis' place on his request, when the latter gets ejected from the club for touching Christina, on Eric's instigation, while Francis' niece takes Christina's place as a babysitter of the absent, the racialized daughter murdered a long time before. Substitutions occur by artifice, by pact, by blackmail: Francis threatens Tomas to reveal his job as illicit importer of exotic eggs if he refuses to take his place, Thomas buys someone else's seats at the ballet etc. Even we are expected to operate a exchange, as Egoyan states in these words about *Exotica*:

"To me, the highest aim of my film is to enter so completely into the subconscious of the viewer that there are moments and scenes and gestures which can be generated by the spectator's imagination. That becomes part of the film they are playing in their minds, and I hope the film has enough space to allow that type of room, that type of exchange". (Egoyan 1995: 50)

Rolling identities, characters embrace multiple roles, being both who they are and who they are not, or who they don't seem to be. Christina is the dancer in power, but also the innocent girl crossing the fields in search for Francis' daughter, and, previously, the shy, less than spectacular and probably abused teenager that was babysitting the missing girl. The way from her home — a big, classical house, perfectly balanced in contrast with

¹. According to Freud, the bird is a phallic figure. Thomas, who is gay, sticks bird eggs on his body. In this movie, the symbol of the bird is deeply ambiguous: it can definitely stand Freudian interpretations, but is also a key for the desire of nesting and beauty that is prevalent in the characters. Egoyan's world somehow reminds us J.D. Salinger's, with disturbing sexual undertones and the ubiquitous need of purity.

her inner imbalance, with her feelings of self-consciousness and unworthiness, visible when she hears Francis talking with admiration about his daughter – to Exotica, the place where she seems to be at ease, remains unknown to us. Francis is not exactly the voyeur we have imagined at the beginning either, but rather a protector trying to expiate not having been able to protect his daughter:

“Before the savage loss of this child – the trauma fissuring Exotica – he has seemed an unimpeachable father of Christina. After the collapse of his paternity, he and she have met in the ersatz paradise of Exotica to establish new, false, soothing relations with each other”. (Wilson 2009: 78)

Egoyan's mastership consists in taking us somewhere and then displacing us from there: when we hear Francis asking Tracey if she is available, we suspect the worst of him, but then we realize that we have misjudged him, because he pays the girl indeed, but only for baby-sitting services. Eric, the emcee who throws Francis out of Exotica in a jealousy outburst and seems to be an instigating, diabolic kind of character, proves to be the one having found the girl's body. Everything ends up transforming, flowing into something else: the tender hug between Christina and Zoe deviates towards eroticism, with the protected fetus now shadowed by an eroticized mother. The fields, so beautiful, the only space of light in the movie, with people showing up in the orange horizon, randomly walking in a trembling image, is at the same time the place of horror, where the corpse of the little girl lies. Depending on where we are, on where we have arrived, on where we were taken, the image changes, things are what they are and also something else.

When light becomes horror and darkness, what remains is the possibility of relighting by artifice. In a world where the original was lost, what remains is the surrogate, the double, since the desire to recover something of the original, as little as it may be, as false as it may be, is endless. Thomas sticks to his own body the strange material of the exotic eggs that he illicitly imports, then puts them in an incubator. *“The fetishization of exotic birds, which appear everywhere in “Exotica” – the club, Thomas's pet-shop, the apartment that Tracey shares with her father – alludes to an illegitimate borrowing of, and disavowal, of cultures marked as exotic. Thomas's smuggling of Hyacinth Macaw eggs stands as a metaphor for the systematic cultural pillaging of “far-away” places accomplished by Western capitalism, and reproduced in the decor of club Exotica”* says Chanter. (2008: 178)

But one can also see that even in a strange place, under artificial conditions, those beautiful, endangered blue parrots could grow. The dead girl's piano can play by itself, through an engine that taps its keyboard. And Francis' niece accompanies her on flute. Those who could not save the little girl, catch her in the rye, as Salinger would said, end up constructing her memory in a bizarre, deviant, artificial but functional way.

Through the double, through the fake, nothing seems to end. Isn't a photo a fake, an image of someone or something on a material that is strange to him, an artifice? Isn't a movie all that? Hence, the purity of fake. And exoticism as a curtain of smoke through which what has actually belonged to one is brought to him from far away.

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READING LITERATURE IN CONTEXT –
PROFEMINIST AND ANTIFEMINIST RHETORIC IN
MACHIVELLI'S *FAVOLA DI BELFAGOR*
ARCIDIIVOLO

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Abstract. Generally considered one of Machiavelli's lesser works, *Favola di Belfagor arcidiavolo* may well be viewed as one in a fairly long line of writings about women in the European Western tradition. Yet placed against the backdrop of any possible analysis centred around perceptions of womanhood in Italian Renaissance literature, the merit of *Belfagor* does not reside in the female image penned in the portrait of Roderigo's wife, nor in that of the women possessed by the devil. An important element of the text, universally ignored by literary criticism since this is mostly interested in an analysis of Roderigo's adventures on earth, is the rhetoric at the beginning of the novella, present in the description of the dilemma and later of the council of the devils. This rhetoric explains more than just a simple figuration of femininity specific to one single author; through Machiavelli's linguistic choices and his crafted organization of the inciting incident, it casts a light upon a literary phenomenon typical of Renaissance culture in Italy in the second half of the 15th century and throughout the 16th, that of literary defenses of women.

This essay shows the levels on which Machiavelli's novella mirrors, both rhetorically and structurally, writing practices of Italian Renaissance so-called 'defenders of women'; at the same time, it identifies antifeminist and profeminist rhetoric nestled in the language of the text.

Key words: *Renaissance Italy, defences of women, profeminist / antifeminist discourse, evils of marriage, rhetoric.*

The only novella attributed to Machiavelli (1469-1527), *Favola di Belfagor arcidiavolo*¹, also known as *Il demonio che prese moglie*², narrates the earthly adventures of a demon, an archangel fallen from divine grace, then turned archdevil in the Christian Hell. Central to the story are the incarnation of the archdevil into the person of Roderigo de Castiglia, and the tortures he endures following his wedding with *madonna* Onesta, a young and beautiful Florentine woman of the city's impoverished noble class. Beside nobility and beauty, the author reveals, *madonna* Onesta brings such great pride under Roderigo's roof that Lucifer himself never displayed as much; in fact, 'Roderigo, who had tested both of them, considered that of his wife greater'³. The wife's pride increases progressively as she sees her husband's love grow: she gives him orders, she bites him with insulting words when he refuses to do her will, she gradually spends his fortune on dowries for her sisters, new lucrative affairs for her brothers, on clothes for herself tailored according to the latest fashions, and on expensive banquets meant to show her superiority over other women. The servants can barely stand her insolent nature too: the very devils with which Belfagor leaves the underworld so they would act as his servants on earth are long since returned to Hell where they prefer living in flames rather than under the command of the proud woman.

Hunted down by creditors, Roderigo finds temporary refuge inside what Machiavelli terms the *indemoniate* or the *spiritate*: these are women possessed by the devil, and can be either bourgeois, noble, or daughters of kings. Generally unspecified, the madness Roderigo triggers in these young women's behaviour suddenly becomes clear in the case of a young bourgeois wife: intending to convey the undeniable appearance of demonization to the woman, the devil makes her speak in Latin, dispute on philosophical issues, and utter visionary words. Finally, terrorized by the thought he might again and 'with such great annoyance, anxiety and danger' 'put his neck under the marriage yoke'⁴, Roderigo/Belfagor prefers to return to Hell: there he can recount to the infernal princes *quali sieno i carichi e le incommodità del matrimonio*⁵.

The marital unhappiness Roderigo lives next to his beautiful, noble, yet vain wife is an obvious retake on two traditional antifeminist *topoi*

¹ Written 1518-1527 and published posthumously in 1549.

² The editions followed here are Niccolò Machiavelli. *Favola di Belfagor arcidiavolo*, in Niccolò Machiavelli. *Tutte le opere*, I. a cura di M. Martelli, Firenze, Sansoni, 1971, and Niccolò Machiavelli. *The Chief Works and Others*, vol. 2, Allan H. Gilbert ed. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1965.

³ Niccolò Machiavelli. *The Chief Works and Others*, vol. 2, Allan H. Gilbert ed. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1965, p. 871.

⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli. Op. cit., p. 877.

⁵ '[...] testify to his superiors on the burdens and annoyances of marriage', trans. Allan H. Gilbert, in Niccolò Machiavelli. Op. cit., p. 870.

typical of premodern European culture – that of the wife irremediably corrupt by vices, and the symbiotic one of marriage as a damaging state for men. Voices historically remote (Juvenal, *Satire VI*) or more recent (Andreas Capellanus¹, Jean de Meun², Boccaccio³) signal feminine pride as the major attribute responsible for both, from which all the other evils belonging to wicked women stem. Just like with these antifeminist writers, Machiavelli's implicit moral is the warning, limpid for men, that women are full of defects, and marriage even with the highest-standing of them, hell.

A rhetorical position of this kind in the Italian peninsula in the first half of the 16th century is still possible and justifiable in non-dynastic geopolitical contexts⁴. At least during the time of Machiavelli's political career, that is up until 1512 when the Medici overthrow the republic, Florence is one such context. Further, the exile condition in which the writer lives starting with 1513 and his inability to regain any type of political authority under the rule of the Medici family justify in Machiavelli's fiction a deliberate departure from the courtly profeminist overtones that characterize contemporary writers such as Castiglione⁵, active in dynastic geopolitical contexts, e.g. the princely courts from northern Italy.

Within the schematized and unimaginative construction of femininity present in *Favola di Belfagor arcidiavolo*, probably the most eloquent for the parallel evolution of profeminist courtly culture is the analogy between the popular perception of the woman possessed by the devil and erudition. Even more relevant is the fact that speaker of Latin and public disputant of philosophy is a woman of the middle class, an association emphasizing the common contemporary perception of the social discrepancy between the profession of letters and women of sub-noble classes; at the beginning of the 16th century women's intellectual activity is still recognized as exclusive corollary of aristocratic elites.

The merit of *Belfagor* for the present study does not reside, however, in the female image penned in the portrait of Roderigo's wife nor in that of the possessed women. The most important element of the text, universally ignored by literary criticism since this is mostly interested in an analysis of Roderigo's adventures on earth, is the rhetoric at the beginning of the novella, present in the description of the dilemma and later of the council of the devils. This rhetoric explains more than just a simple figuration of femininity specific to one single author; through linguistic choices and organization of the inciting incident, it casts a light upon a literary

¹ See Andreas Capellanus. *De amore*, part III: The Rejection of Love.

² See Jean de Meun. *Roman de la rose*, part II: the gelous husband's monologue.

³ See Giovanni Boccaccio. *Il Corbaccio*.

⁴ For a detailed discussion of antifeminist discourse in non-dynastic geopolitical contexts in Renaissance Italy, see Virginia Cox. *Women's Writing in Italy 1400-1650*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2008.

⁵ Castiglione in reality is ambivalent in regard to woman's nature and merits, and very often in his *Courtier* (Book III) what appears as refreshing profeminist ideology clashes with open antifeminist rhetoric.

phenomenon typical of Renaissance culture in Italy in the second half of the 15th century and throughout the 16th, i.e. literary defenses of women.

The devils' dilemma in *Belfagor* is a condensed, albeit incomplete, mirror of the defence of women genre, here structured around three key moments: the injurious accounts of the souls of those dead *nella disgrazia di Dio*, the scandalized reaction of devils Minos and Radamante as they hear these calumnies, and finally, the devils' intention to unmask a possible conspiracy against women, or else to fully convince themselves of the truth behind those accusations. It is at this point worthwhile paying some attention to these so-called accusations.

The incipit of the novella reveals a dilemmatic situation in which the entire Hell, an honourable institution by definition, is about to fall: the majority of the souls of those dead outside of divine grace are complaining upon arriving in Hell that responsible for their damnation are none other but the wives they held while alive and the institution of marriage (*andando infinite anime di quelli miseri mortali, che nella disgrazia di Dio morivano, all'inferno, tutte o la maggior parte si dolevono, non per altro, che per avere preso moglie essersi a tanta infelicità condotte*¹). The accusation heard by the devils, legitimate governors of Hell by way of judicious administration of punishment, is nothing but the theological antifeminist rhetoric typical of centuries prior to the Renaissance. It becomes interesting to notice how infernal judges Minos and Radamante manifest a complex of concatenated reactions when faced with antifeminist rhetoric: they claim the misogynistic crying of dead husbands to be calumnies (*calunnie*) against the female sex (*Sesso femminile*); they cannot believe the accusations are true and as soon as they notice that *le querele* (complaints) are rising by the day, they decide to make a report to Pluto, king of Hell; Pluto himself appears incredulous and gallant vis-à-vis the denigration of women 'since this seems to us impossible'² (*parendoci questo impossibile*). He recognizes, nonetheless, the potentially harmful situation in which he has been placed. To heed repeated complaints against the institution of marriage and to do nothing about it is *un caso il quale potrebbe seguire con qualche infamia del nostro imperio*, 'an affair that might result in some shame to our empire'³: if the devils give credence to the souls of the dead *ne possiamo essere calunniati come troppo deboli*, 'we shall be slandered as too credulous'⁴; if they do not, they will be labelled as *manco severi e poco amatori della giustizia*, 'not severe enough and hardly lovers of justice'⁵. The problem appears to be that each of these scenarios binds Hell to the opprobrium of the human community: theirs

¹ '[...] as countless numbers of wretched souls who died under God's displeasure went to Hell, all or most of them complained that they were brought to such great misfortune by nothing else than by getting married.' Trans. Allan H. Gilbert, in Niccolò Machiavelli. Op. cit., p. 869.

² Trans. Allan H. Gilbert, in Niccolò Machiavelli. Op. cit., p. 870.

³ Idem.

⁴ Idem.

⁵ Idem.

will be either *peccato da uomini leggieri*, ‘sin [...] of light-minded men’ or *peccato da ingiusti*, sin ‘of unjust ones’¹. This is because either of these two poses falls outside a notion of what represents the perceived politically correct position vis-à-vis women and marriage among Machiavelli’s educated peers. In fact, when Pluto wants to rid himself of each of the possible scandals, he convokes the devils’ council, but does not ask the princely judges of Hell to decide if the accusations against women and marriage are founded on truth or not. Instead, *ho deliberato essere consigliato da voi come*, announces Pluto, *in un caso il quale potrebbe seguire con qualche infamia del nostro imperio, io mi debba governare*, ‘I have determined, in an affair that might result in some shame to our empire, to get your advice on how I ought to conduct myself.’² All Pluto wants to do is to know how to behave in agreement with what contemporary human society, decidedly Machiavelli’s own, that is, the intellectual elite of the first half of the 16th century, perceives as the dictates of bon ton. With the unanimous appreciation of the devils that the case is indeed *importantissimo e di molta considerazione*, ‘very significant and of great consequence’³, a decision is reached that evidence, either pro or against marriage, is what is needed (*quali sieno i carichi e le incommodità del matrimonio*⁴), and that obviously one of them will have to travel to the world of the mortals to gather it. Exactly what the evidence will prove is no longer the responsibility of the devilish council, theirs remains only the duty of investigation.

Extracted from the allegorical level of the novella, the same pose of circumspection that characterizes the devils appears to strike through a number of 16th-century texts that propose to elucidate the question of female excellence, very often producing antifeminist results exactly as in the case of Machiavelli’s novella. *Belfagor arcidiavolo* reflects, therefore, a contemporary anxiety that permeates the process of defining issues linked to the woman matter, for example such as they appear in treatises about woman’s preeminence. What brings such treatises about is the confrontation of the intellectual man of the nascent modern era with its array of erudite women, with the inheritance of antifeminist medieval rhetoric. Some Renaissance writers resort, to paraphrase Benson in her *Invention of the Renaissance Woman*⁵, to methods of investigation and demonstration almost legal in their search for evidence of all kinds, whether coming from historic literature, natural philosophy, or practical experience,

¹ Idem.

² Idem.

³ Idem.

⁴ ‘[...] testify to his superiors on the burdens and annoyances of marriage’, trans. Allan H. Gilbert, in Niccolò Machiavelli. Op. cit., p. 870.

⁵ Pamela Joseph Benson. *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: the challenge of female independence in the literature and thought of Italy and England*, Pennsylvania State University, 1992.

to confirm or refute always the same thing – woman’s defective nature, her inferiority to man, the absence of cardinal virtues in most women, or the evils of marriage. New, however, between 1450 and 1550 is the profeminist treatise which defends and praises women, a positive version of *Belfagor*, in which the same anxieties displayed by the devils’ congregation are felt, but where calumnies against women are combatted, albeit not often in their entirety. Edited most likely only at the beginning of the 16th century, *Belfagor* is, therefore, relevant in the context of Renaissance Italian writings about the merits and demerits of women due to the text’s rhetoric (e.g. the initial incredulity in front of the antifeminist position, the notion of lack of justice toward women, the combined literary notion and practice of investigation and demonstration) as well as due to certain specific lexical choices (*calunnie che [...] al sesso femminile davano, querela*). These stylistic elements are important here not because they may reflect a certain image of womanhood during the Renaissance, but because they synthesize inflections of the very discourse which surrounds the negotiation of such image in the Italian culture of these centuries.

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THE BAROQUE AND THE EXOTIC TROPES OF A PROTEAN CONCEPT



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Abstract. Our paper resorts to three of the obsessive symbols of the literary Baroque: the pearl, the peacock and the mask. All of them establish an explicit link between Baroque and exoticism. They are as well centres of semiotic and stylistic irradiation. Much before the Baroque was crystallised in the concepts of literary criticism, the Baroque French poets associated the Orient with these three exotic tropes of their imaginary. The features shared by the Baroque and by exoticism are: the dialectics of abundance and insufficiency; duplicity; exportability; permeability and utopianism. The pearl, discovered on exotic lands, evokes in its symbolism the very origin of the term "baroque" and the presence of the crisis. On one hand, the pearl act as the very embodiment of a Baroque persistence in suffering, an inner suffering surrounded by outside iridescence. On the other hand the pearl coagulates figures of speech, stylemes of brightness, such as: the oxymoron, the hyperbolas, the metaphors, the symbols, the concettis. The peacock, as a symbol of ostentatiousness and of the exaggerated effort to seduce, patronises the hedonism of expression and the stylistic luxuriance of the Baroque. The peacock is par excellency the exotic bird. It overbids in order to get to luxury and magnificence. Actually, "abundentia stili" is a typical Baroque tendency. Through the mask, the tensions present in the Baroque self may be maintained, their un-resolvability is achieved. The mask is the patron of ambiguity, it nourishes the tensions between essences and appearances. It is consensual with the Baroque vocation for disguise, for dissimulation and illusion. All these three baroque tropes have in common the fact that they are both symbolic presences and they generate superincumbent figures of speech.

Key words: Baroque imaginary, perolas barrocas, Baroque open forms, Baroque tropes, exoticism, pearl, peacock, mask, literature of the Baroque, Baroque stylemes

In mid-20th century literary theorists found themselves in front of a concept that was contradicting their spirit of rigor and reticence. Almost three centuries after the emergence of the Baroque as a style and as an artistic current, things about it were far from being unclouded. However, it was around that time, three centuries after its presence, when the literary Baroque crystallised itself as a concept of literary criticism.

It appears that, more than in the case of other concepts, in the whole history of literature, researchers found insurmountable difficulties in defining the Baroque(our reference is to the literature of the Baroque, not to the Baroque in arts). Therefore, the literary Baroque, more than other movements, seems to have been meant to design its own explanations or to find the explanations in itself. Gérard Genette talks in unequivocal terms about the "revolution" generated by the invention of the Baroque within the 20th century literary criticism¹. According to Genette, the regaining and the invention of the Baroque² have had even a greater importance than the legacy of Romanticism.

"In our present literary landscape³, the discovery (or the invention) of the Baroque is more important than the Romantic inheritance, and our Shakespeare is not Voltaire's Shakespeare or Hugo's: he is a contemporary of Brecht and Claudel, as Cervantes is a contemporary of Kafka. A period is manifested as much by what it reads as by what it writes, and these two aspects of its «literature» act upon one another."⁴

This affirmation about the Baroque goes hand in hand with Genette's plea for an open system, a "structural history of literature", meaning the placing of synchronic tables in a diachronic perspective⁵.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the literary Baroque was not present in the books of criticism and literary history as a concept in itself. After the success it had had in the theories of arts, later, after the Second World War, studies on literary Baroque flourished. As Alexandru Ciorănescu notices, these studies attempted "to clarify or delimitate the contents of this notion so important in the history of culture."⁶

Jacob Burckhardt was the one who imposed the notion of Baroque through his *Der Cicerone*, in 1857⁷. Burckhardt actually referred to the Italian, German, Spanish sumptuous architecture of Counter-Reformation as the "decadence of Upper Renaissance." But it was Heinrich Wölfflin who transferred the word, for the first time, in 1888, to comprise literature and music, in his pioneering study, *Renaissance und Barock*.

¹ Gérard Genette, *Figuri*, București: Editura Univers, 1978, pp. 50 – 58 (translated into Romanian).

² With capitalised letter.

³ The "present" refers to 1964 when this study was published.

⁴ Gérard Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse*, translated by Alan Sheridan, introduction by Marie-Rose Logan, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1982, p. 21.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p.21.

⁶ Alexandru Ciorănescu, *Barocul sau descoperirea dramei*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 1980, p.6.

⁷ See for that René Wellek, *Conceptele criticii*, București, Editura Univers, 1970, p. 73 (translated into Romanian; original title: Concepts of Criticism).

René Wellek is right to underline the importance of German researchers for the study of the Baroque and for comprising the literatures of Europe in the 17th century under a sign of Baroque¹.

Helmut Hatzfeld even tried to prove that Spain is eternally and fundamentally baroque and that this country constituted the irradiation center of a Baroque spirit in the whole Europe². Even the etymology of the term "Baroque" could not reach a consensus. A first sense is claimed by Spanish etymon "baroco" meaning "scholastical trope", "bizarre and complicated syllogism"³. A second etymology is that of a Portuguese word, "barroco", (in Spanish "barrueco"), naming certain *pearls of asymmetric shapes* ("perolas barrocas"), imported by the Portuguese from India. These jewels of irregular shapes were perceived as having strange, bizarre effects. Revisiting all the acknowledged etymologies, Edgar Papu considers that the pearl etymology is the very key to the essence of the Baroque phenomenon.

The arguments for the second etymology, related to irregular pearls, are in the fact that pearl has enacted a certain symbolism within the Baroque. It seems that the pearl potentiated a certain type of representation. It has added glow to the idea of suffering. The pearl resurfaces the baroque intuition that its presence can be exploited symbolically, according to Edgar Papu⁴. The symbolic language of suffering and jewelry is contained in the same etymon. In paintings of the epoch, pearl can be seen more often as an adornment⁵. At the same time, a Portuguese etymology for Baroque is in accordance with Eugenio d'Ors's thesis about the Portuguese origins of the Baroque, in the Manueline style⁶. As a product of the Sea, related to navigation and marine fauna, the pearl adapts itself to this stylistic context. But the important change is the passing of the pearl from this marine environment into fixed forms.

It is to be noted that pearls embellished the facades of some buildings, becoming a blazon, together with the mother-of-pearl shells: « La riche **conque** où la **perle** se range ».⁷ Therefore, the symbol recalling the sea became something that could be fixed in stone. Georges de Scudéry, the French Baroque poet, held the baroque pearl in great extolment among other precious stones and precious metals. They had been brought from exotic lands and they started to pervade the poetical language of the Baroque with their presence⁸.

« Et l'argent lumineux de la nacre changeante / Imite de l'Iris la splendeur inconstante. / Là brille l'émeraude et la pierre d'azur; / Là brillent les saphirs d'un éclat vif et pur; / Là se voit la turquoise

¹ *Ibidem*.

² *Ibidem*, p. 80.

³ Edgar Papu, *Barocul ca tip de existență*, în : *Despre stiluri*, București, Editura Eminescu, 1986, p. 30.

⁴ *Ibidem*, chapter *Sub semnul perlei (Under pearl's sign)*.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Malleville, *Ce mobile coral*, in: Jean Rousset, *Anthologie de la poésie baroque française*, vol.II, Paris, José Corti, 2000, p. 59.

⁸ For a first-time translation into Romanian of the poems of some Baroque French poets, see Constanța Niță, in: *Rev. Poezia*, nr.4 / 2010, Iași, p. 110.

ainsi que l'améthiste / Et le jaspé incarnat et celui d'un vert triste. /Et la **perle baroque** et la topase encore / Qui parmi son cristal fait voir un lustre d'or. /Des **bords de l'Orient** et des **climats barbares**/ On voit le bel émail en des coquilles rares.../Mille et mille jets d'eau font ces rochers humides / D'un cristal bondissant et de perles liquides...»

(Georges de Scudéry, *La Grotte*)¹

We shall further refer to three examples where pearl is described as having a different function. The first example is provided by Gaston Bachelard, treating the pearl within his poetic of elements. The second example is given by Ivan Evseev, seeing the pearl in a mythological context, linking the anthropocentrism of the pearl to its Oriental provenience. With the third example we come back to Edgar Papu, to discern the tragic substratum of the literary Baroque.

The connection between reveries and pearl along with precious stones was emphasized by Gaston Bachelard in the tenth and eleventh chapters of his work *La Terre et les Rêveries de la Volonté*. The precious stones unfold mystical connections between earth and sky, retrieved by our imaginary which perceives them as "earthly stars". All types of the imaginary, according to Bachelard, the fire, the water, the earth, the air, find in their crystalline-stone reveries their essential images.² Therefore, precious stones cannot be limited to their terrestrial appartenance, as far as their projection in the human imaginary is concerned; they are influenced by fire, water, air³. There is even a pearl cosmogony, where the celestial element is essential.⁴ Bachelard quotes Langlois for the example of the sluggish process of Black Sea mother-of-pearls, needing havenly waters and one hundred years to form the pearls.⁵

Ivan Evseev, in his book *Cuvânt – Simbol – Mit*, remarks that precious-stone symbolism is cultivated by the writers of the Baroque age. Actually, its origins may go back to "the Oriental world transplanted at Rome."⁶ There is also the anthropocentrism of a "genetic femininity".⁷ Evseev chooses examples from Persian, Chinese, Indian folk tradition and literatures, along with other examples from the ancient Greece. "Among all precious stones, the pearl displays a lunar symbolism, related to fire, water and woman. Born from the waters and protected by the rays of the moon, hidden in the shell, the pearl represents the genetic femininity⁸".

Edgar Papu considers that the tragic substratum of the Baroque can be inferred from the pearl symbolism. The more dramatic the inside battle is, the more powerful the glow of the pearl is. Actually, due to the lesion in the molusca flesh of the oyster, there is a defensive fight with the vital

¹see Jean Rousset, *op.cit.*, vol. I, p.218. emphasize mine, this and all the following.

² Gaston Bachelard, *Pământul și reveriile voinței*, București, Editura Univers, 1998, p.216.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 225.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 250.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 250.

⁶ Ivan Evseev, *Cuvânt – Simbol – Mit*, Timișoara, Editura Facla, 1983, p.195.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 195.

⁸ :„Dintre pietrele prețioase, **perla** comportă în sine un simbolism lunar, legat de *foc, apă și femeie*. Născută din ape și ocrotită de razele lunii, ascunsă într- o cochilie, ea reprezintă *feminitatea creatoare*.”. *Ibidem*, p. 195.

lessening of the flesh. It is the typical example of the vital crisis that finds overcompensation in defensive iredescence.”¹The bewilderment (*lo stupore, la meraviglia*) becomes the Baroque overbidding feeling, in close connection to glow and crisis.

Victor Ieronim Stoichiță invokes, in art theory, the example of G. I. Bernini, the famous Baroque artist. Studying his biography, Stoichiță says that he would resort to imagination (*ingegno*) in order to determine bewilderment (*lo stupore, la meraviglia*), even if the outcome of this method was delusion (*l'inganno*).²

In the frame of the Baroque, to let yourself carried away by bewilderment in front of delusion was a sign of sensibility and refinement. There was a direct proportionality between the illusionism of the baroque work and the mastery of the artist.³

Due to the opening associated to the Baroque, its approach is almost a trial of the labyrinth. The researcher may discover the relativisation of all criteria, or may discover a void of orientation, as the paradoxical effect of overwhelming information. However, the tension between two contrary principles has become almost a definition of the Baroque. The theoreticians have different ideas about what these two antagonistic terms should be. But, nevertheless, the Baroque is “this permanent battle predestined to loss”.⁴

Just like the Baroque, exoticism is an unclear concept, which may be extended to comprise too many aspects. The most difficult task is to delineate and circumscribe both concepts, they contradict the spirit of rigour of the theoreticians of literature. Baroque is also a problem of transculturation, taking into account that the Baroque in the New World is persistent even in the 20th century as a Neobaroque. The features shared by the Baroque and exoticism are duplicity, permeability, utopianism. The pearl, the peacock and the mask, as recurrent images of French Baroque poets, appear in contexts where the presence of Orient is unmistakable. They draw the enticement that the faraway places are better than the real ones. Much before the Baroque was crystallised in the concepts of literary criticism, the Baroque poets associated the Orient with some tropes of their imaginary, which emerge in explicit and implicit occurrences. An exotic element within Baroque, present as a centre of irradiation, is the pearl. Its contexts are innumerable. In the example cited above, Scudéry uses the very term “la perle baroque”: «Et la perle barroque et la topase encore / Qui parmi son cristal fait

¹ Edgar Papu, *op.cit.*, p. 40. “Este exemplul tipic al crizei vitale care se supra- compensează prin defensiva strălucirii”.

² V. I. Stoichiță, *Posibilul Baroc*, prefață la *Viața lui G. I. Bernini*, București., Editura Meridiane, 1981, p.15. „ a te lăsa cuprins de uimire în fața amăgirii reprezintă pentru teoreticienii Barocului un semn de sensibilitate și rafinament (...) Astfel, conștiința ficțiunii devine sursă de plăcere estetică instaurându-se un raport de directă proporționalitate între *iluzionismul* operei și *măiestria* artistului.”

³ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

⁴ Alexandru Ciorănescu, *Barocul sau descoperirea dramei*, Cluj Napoca, Editura Dacia, 1980, pp. 48-49. „ Lupta nu este decât nostalgia păcii pierdute, iar problema fundamentală a Barocului este năzuința păcii întrezărite în luptă, echilibrul prin intermediul tensiunii, unitatea menținută eroic. ”

voir un lustre d'or./ Des bords de l'Orient et des climats barbares/ On voit le bel émail en des coquilles rares...»

From the following occurrences, we will notice exportability as a feature that is common to exoticism and the Baroque. Along with exportability comes the permeability of the imaginary of the Baroque to the exotic element. This permeability is an aspect present both in the rapid influence of the Baroque in taking over new centres of interest and in the exchange that is supposed to function within exoticism.

The anthology of Jean Rousset has been the most precious instrument for selecting the three exotic tropes present within the Baroque. The French Baroque poets are selected from Rousset's anthology, according to his criteria for their nexus to the age of the Baroque.

Another occurrence of the Oriental pearl appears at Jean- François Sarasin, in the poem *L' On rêve sur les bords de l' onde*: « Et lors que l' Aurore éveillée/Ramenant le jour et le bruit,/Des perles d' Orient a la terre émaillée :/L' on y voit sur les côteaux/ Bondir de toutes parts les innocents troupeaux... »²

A very similar usage is that of the poet Martial de Brives, in the poem *Paraphrase sur le Cantique des trois enfants*. There is a clear exotization of a habitual climate flora, since the complete word for pearl, at that time, must have been "Oriental pearl." Thus, by replacing the dew with the symbol of the "liquid Oriental pearls", although it referred to "our pastures", the same topos achieves the illusion of eccentricity and luxuriousness. There is also an effect of discontinuity between the opulence of the precious pearls and the humility of aromatic herbs, like the thyme and the marjoram: «Grains de cristal, pures rosées,/Dont la marjolaine et le thym/Pendant leur fête du matin/Ont leurs couronnes composées, //Liquidés perles d' Orient,/Pleurs du ciel qui rendez riant/L' émail mourant de nos prairies...»³

In the poem *Bel Iris* by Du Bois Hus, the association of the pearls with teardrops recalls the Baroque tendency to explore the ambivalence of suffering and to indulge in un-exhaustible suffering: «Étoiles des jardins, douces sueurs des cieus,/Cristaux, perles liquides,/Vous n' avez rien d' égal aux larmes de ces Yeux... ». (Du Bois Hus, *Bel Iris*)⁴

The movement of the waves, in the poem of Tristan L'Hermitte is under the sign of eternal retour and the pearl appears the quintessence of a cycle. This time the pearls are not wanted as a symbol because they bring brightness, but because pearl implies light associated with fecundity (see supra, note 23). Pearl can be now a mediator between glittering waters, organic circuits of nature and inorganic textures like the glass (*verre*) or precious metals, like the silver (*d'argent*): «Les vagues, d' un cours diligent,/À longs plis de verre ou d' argent,/Viennent se rompre sur la rive,/Où leur débris fait à tous coups /Rejaillir une source vive /De perles parmi les cailloux... » (Tristan L' Hermitte, *La mer*)⁵

¹ Jean – François Sarasin, in : Jean Rousset, *Anthologie de la poésie baroque française*, vol I, Paris, José Corti, 2000, p. 243.

² see Jean Rousset, *op.cit.*, vol. I, p.218. emphasize mine.

³ Martial de Brives, in : Jean Rousset, *op. cit.*, vol .I, p.132.

⁴ Du Bois Hus, in: Jean Rousst, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 185

⁵ Tristan L' Hermitte in: Jean Rousset, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p.233.

Our research article resorts to three of the obsessive symbols of the baroque: the pearl, the peacock and the mask. All of them establish an explicit link between baroque and exoticism. They are as well centres of semiotic and stylistic irradiation.

The pearl evokes in its symbolism the very origin of the term baroque and the tragic substratum, the presence of the crisis(see supra, Edgar Papu). On one hand, the pearl act as the very embodiment of a Baroque persistence in suffering, an inner suffering surrounded by outside shining. On the other hand, the pearl coagulates figures of speech, stylemes of brightness, such as: the oxymoron, the hyperbolas, the metaphors, the symbols, the concettis.

The peacock, as a symbol of ostentatiousness and of the exaggerated effort to seduce, patronises hedonism of expression and stylistic luxuriance. It overbids in order to get to luxury and magnificence. Actually, "abundentia stili" is a typical Baroque tendency. Within the baroque imaginary, the peacock is another symbolic vector, which exploits the Baroque stage props¹ its dramatic attempt to capture the multiform and versatile image of Baroque man. The peacock is par excellency the exotic bird. It stands for opulence and ephemeral glittering; it also represents gaze and chromatic excess. In Indian tradition, it is the symbol of immortality. In the "Middle East, the peacock is a symbol of man's psychic duality".² This aspect is important for the exotization of the Orient. This time the peacock appears also as a deceiver, through vainglory. It is as if the Orient would show also an ambivalent face. The peacock appears also as the symbol of duplicity, and sometimes appears in conjunction with the mask. Exoticism and the Baroque meet this time under this sign of the peacock, showing that symbols cannot be clearly framed or cannot be clearly attached to singular meanings. They might comprise also the senses that undermine the symbols themselves.

„Under the sign of peacock”³ the Baroque poets of different ages overbid the decorative potentialities of language. Thus, they create the stylemes of the Baroque rhetoric. The poet Jean Desmaretz makes the peacock the inhabitant of a Palace of Vainglory. What strikes here is the association between the sacredness of a temple and the power of glamour and magnificence. The peacock is entitled to take the sovereign's place just because its effulgence is so overwhelming. «Un paon étand sa queue encore plus orgueilleux,/Dont les plumes d' émail et vertes et dorées,/De mille diamants sont richement parées./Cette salle est son temple : elle y tient chaque jour,(Pour souler son orgueil) sa glorieuse cour.»⁴

¹ See Diana Adamek, about the peacock, the lynx eye and the black sun, in the Baroque, in *Ochiul de linx. Barocul și devenirile sale*, Limes, Cluj Napoca, 2004, pp. 24-27.

² J. Chevalier, A. Gheerbrant, *Dicționar de simboluri*, vol. 3, Editura Artemis, București, 1993, p.59 – 60.

³ Constanța Niță, *Under the Sign of Peacock. The Baroque Vein in Radu Stanca' s Work*, in : *Analele Universității din Oradea Fascicula Limba și Literatură Română*, Editura Universității din Oradea, vol 20, 1/ 2013, pp.103 – 111.

⁴ Jean Desmaretz, *Le Palais de l' orgueil*, in : Jean Rousset, *op. cit.*, , vol. II, p. 57.

Another example is that of the poet Tristan L'Hermite : «Aux rayons du soleil, le PAON audacieux,/Cet avril animé, ce firmament volage,/Étale avec orgueil en son riche plumage/Et les fleurs du printemps, et les astres des cieux» (Tristan L' Hermite, *L' Ambition tancée*)

A third similar presence is that of the mask. It perpetuates duality and split. Through the mask, the tensions present in the Baroque self may be maintained, their un-resolvability is achieved. The mask is the patron of ambiguity, it nourishes the tensions between essences and appearances. It is consensual with the baroque vocation for disguise, for dissimulation and illusion.

Occultation and revelation, quest for and refuse of the self, the mask enacts a spiritual travesty. Symbol of metamorphoses, of dedublation and of mimetism,² the mask implies the idea of lost and re-found duality. Within the Baroque, this game is perpetuated ad infinitum. We found an example for this game of masks in a poem by Pierre de Saint- Louis : «Empruntant des couleurs pour reluire et paraître,/Et montrant tous les jours ce qu'elles voudraient être./Sous leurs **masques gluants et distillés appas**,/Nous font voir justement ce qu'elles ne sont pas...»³

The dialectics of abundance and insufficiency, which is typical to the Baroque and exoticism, appears in a poem by Jean de La Fontaine, included by Jean Rousset in his anthology of Baroque French Poets. The pearl is presupposed through the presence of the nacre and of the shell. The pearl and the mask in the same poem create an effect of excess. But what is more important for the poet is the captivity of illusion:

«Au haut de six piliers d'une égale structure, /Six **masques de rocaille, à grotesque figure**,/(Songes de l'art, démons bizarrement forgés),/Au-dessus d'une niche, en face sont rangés./De mille raretés la niche est toute pleine:/Un Triton d'un côté, de l'autre une Sirène,/Ont chacun **une conque** en leurs mains de rocher./Leur souffle pousse un jet qui va loin s'épancher ./Au haut de chaque niche, un bassin répand l'onde :/Le **masque** la vomit de sa gorge profonde...//Quand l'eau cesse, et qu'on voit son cristal écoulé,/La **nacre** et le corail en réparent l'absence :/Morceaux pétrifiés, coquillages, croissance,/Caprices infinis du hasard et des eaux ...»(Jean de La Fontaine, *La Grotte de Versailles*)⁴.

This poem is illustrative for how movement and illusion must be captured in form within the Baroque imaginary, be it in stone or in language. As the art of appearances, the Baroque will impose the effect. Theatricality, the universe as spectacle, the mask, the art of disguise and surprise will be related to the mode of attracting the attention.

All these three baroque tropes presented, the pearl, the peacock, the mask, have in common the fact that they are both symbolic presences and they generate superincumbent figures of speech. The study of Claude Gilbert Dubois is relevant in this respect.⁵ There are correspondences between the pearl, the peacock and the mask and certain Baroque stylemes. Typical for the pearl are: the oxymoron, the hyperbolas, the metaphors, the

¹ Tristan L' Hermite, in : Jean Rousset, *Anthologie de la poésie baroque française*, vol. II, Paris, José Corti, 2000, p. 67.

² Ivan Evseev, *Enciclopedia semnelor și simbolurilor culturale*, Timișoara, Editura Amarcord, 1999, p.273.

³ Pierre de Saint- Louis, *Sous leurs masques gluants*, in : Jean Rousset, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p.56.

⁴ Jean de La Fontaine, in : Jean Rousset, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 220-221.

⁵ Claude Gilbert Dubois, *Le Baroque. Profondeurs de l'apparence*, Paris, Librairie Larousse, 1973, p. 60.

symbols, the concettis. The peacock has a clear resonance with hyperbola. The antithesis, the oxymoron, the paradox and the concetti can be associated with the mask.

These three tropes offer a link between the literary Baroque and exoticism, on the common grounds of the dialectics of abundance and insufficiency; duplicity; exportability; permeability and utopianism, offering an insight view of these concepts (Baroque, exoticism) that continue to fascinate through their mysterious, ungraspable dimensions.

English version by Dana SALA, Ph.D.

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ALEXANDRU GEORGE. UN PUBLICIST ÎNTRE CRITICI

ALEXANDRU GEORGE. A “PUBLICIST “ AMONG CRITICS



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Abstract. Alexandru George writes about Tudor Arghezi or Mateiu I. Caragiale with a lively polemic spirit against previous criticism. Arghezi's creation puzzled literary criticism by its great diversity of expression in poetry, prose and journalism. Alexandru George refers to known interpretations, from E. Lovinescu, Nicolae Iorga, Pompiliu Constantinescu, Eugen Ionescu and G. Călinescu, in the interwar period, to Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu and Dumitru Micu, in the postwar period. Alexandru George keeps finding something wrong or inappropriate in the ways in which Tudor Arghezi's and Mateiu I. Caragiale's works were analyzed, in order to gain a favourable position for his own interpretations, argued in his two monographs.

Key words: Alexandru George, Tudor Arghezi, Mateiu I. Caragiale, polemical spirit, subjectivity, Modernism.

Critica criticii ajunge în *Marele Alpha* (1970) acerbă, evident polemică. Eseistul, erijat ulterior cu modestie orgolioasă între publiciști, intră în „război cu legiunea” criticii lui Tudor Arghezi, fapt anunțat chiar din prima parte a cărții. Miza ar fi, cu un termen de acum, „canonicitatea”, grav afectată, întrucât poetul are, în deceniul 7, o „cotă scăzută”, pe un parcurs de contestare simțită de el ca fiind destul de violentă.

Referințele la criticii care l-au precedat sunt în *Marele Alpha* împrăștiate, e drept că disparat, în câteva capitole (2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10) ale acestui haotic, dar stăpânit, eseu.

Ca poet, citim în capitolul 2. *Am intrat în viața expresiei cu zăticnire*, Tudor Arghezi este ignorat în modalitatea cea mai nedorită, devreme ce rămâne „atât de rău cunoscut”. Al. George intră singur, el însuși, în limbajul

lui Arghezi, fără zăticnire, într-un război critic sigur. Un unic folos extrage de la critică: a lua de bun ceea ce ea a crezut că este rău. Într-o notă, el recunoaște în mod provocator, dar și cu o anume luciditate, că „Travaliul criticii, chiar când nu s-a orientat just, a fost deosebit de divers și de fructuos, și noi înșine am profitat de el.” Dar nu acuză critica într-atât cât scuză opera scriitorului. „Opera lui Arghezi e o neconținută rupere și desfacere a propriei ei alcătuirii, care nu ascultă, nici în taină, de vreun principiu ordonator.” Creație aleatorie, estetică browniană? Nu în estetic, ci în psihologic, prin apropiere deci în estetica psihologică, își bazează Al. George perspectiva de lectură, pretinsă a fi descoperită de el la E. Lovinescu. „Fapt foarte important: Lovinescu are sinceritatea de a mărturisi că nu a putut să-i statornicească «unitatea temperamentală, la care se reduce orice mare poet».” De aici, credința că Arghezi este ireductibil la o formulă. Însă Al. George nu dă semne să știe că eclecticismul poetologic este curent la poetul român oricât de major. Pentru el ceea ce contează la Arghezi este diversitatea temperamentală, recunoscută drept bază creatoare ori izvor al creației. Apoi, performarea temperamentală. Al. George ajunge mai critic, mai exigent, decât E. Lovinescu. Chiar și prematurele *Litanii* fuseseră admirate de marele critic estetic modernist.

Dar restul criticilor? Unii capătă calificativul interesant. N. Davidescu, interesant, așadar, constată că Arghezi are în operă „material sămănătorist”, dar alt ideal estetic. Vladimir Streinu recunoaște – termenii sunt ai lui – o „dramă a inteligenței” la lectura poetului Arghezi. Și tot el, criticul „de orientare «estetistă»”, interesant, află influența lui Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Maeterlinck, și descoperă în poetul român un „geniu verbal”. *Introducere în poezia lui Tudor Arghezi* de Ș. Cioculescu, 1946, rămâne „cel mai sagace studiu scris până acum despre marele poet”. G. Călinescu, un „comentator admirativ”, recunoaște influența lui M. Eminescu, Verlaine, Jammes și, asemenea lui N. Davidescu, intelectualismul arghezian, de altfel preluat cu convingere și de Al. George.

Nu întârzie să apară împotrivorii. Ion Barbu, într-un pamflet, la 1 noiembrie 1927, denunță estetica mecanică, facilă, desuetă, nonintelectualismul deplin în scrisul arghezian, respingerea poetului de idee, ca și cum poezia ar mai avea încă acolo o sorginte. L. Blaga acuză „facilitatea și incoerența” (dar îl va reevalua deferent într-o scrisoare către Melania Livadă!), D. Popovici, ca și D. Caracostea, „naturalismul și caracterul terestru al inspirației”.

Pe doi detractori îi denunță aprig Al. George, unul este Eugen Ionescu, taxat totodată drept „poetul nul”, celălalt este definitiv obscurul N. Georgescu-Cocoș. Atacul din *Nu* al lui E. Ionescu dobândește calificarea nominală de pâlăvrăgeală. În ea, calitățile poetului sunt luate drept defecte. O inversare a lucidității critice, în care Al. George îl vede excelând pe D. Caracostea, este acum disprețuită.

Cu criticii prezentului, Al. George, dincolo de unele excepții ceremonios interesate pe care le semnalează la locul lor, este discreditant. Arghezi a intrat pe mâna, niciodată pentru el bună, a criticii universitare. E

vorba de Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, D. Micu, ba chiar și de T. Vianu, altfel mult admirat, chiar dacă nu, firește, în totul. La mâna universitarilor și a specialiștilor, pe Arghezi, oricum, Al. George nu-l lasă!

Tinerii critici ai vremii, unii, fapt trecut cu vederea, fiind și ei universitari, nu ar vedea nici aceștia clar și deplin în opera poetică expusă (re)cunoașterii. Lor, criticul, autocontestat pentru cariera sa sincopată, nu le mai acordă scuza operei ascunse. Noii critici iviți dezvăluie în Arghezi doar ruralul și conjuncturalul, nu pe marele poet, pe poetul „genial”. Acesta, trebuie s-o spun, este un calificativ ce tinde să revină de aproape zece ori în cele 200 de pagini al volumului.

În capitolul 3 ni se dezvăluie un caz critic curios, acela că Arghezi a fost respins de ai săi, de cei din aceeași familie creatoare. Iorga îl califică drept „scârbos”, iar Crainic ca fiind doar „îngrozitor”. Le sunt aliniați Crevedia, Carianopol, M. R. Paraschivescu. Apropiat lor, dar și poetului, publicul l-a considerat în epocă „poet mare, dar incomod și vulgar”. Iată, aici, și o extensie spre sociologia publicului literar, a receptării celei mai largi. Nu știm cu ce instrumente verificată.

Critica literară strict contemporană, „luminată” de ideologia idealismului materialist dialectic și istoric – explicație pe care Al. George nu o putea da în 1970, dar o putea eventual sugera –, l-a mutilat pe poet, și tot ea i-a barat influența asupra noii generații de poeți. „Poetul profund al halucinațiilor tuturor privegheților nocturne, cel deznădăjduit și invadat de groaza metafizică, sumbrul evocator al morții au fost complet ignorați de generația poetică de după 1960; influența lui Arghezi asupra ei e ca și nulă.” Entuziasmul realismului socialist nu se dezumflase. Poeții înșiși l-au citit pe deasupra pe poetul care avertizase că scrie „pe dedesupt”. M. Sorescu l-a parodiat inadecvat. Criticii șaizeciști au ignorat *Psalmii*, văzând în autorul lor „un Păcală duhliu care umblă prin toate iarmaroacele pestrice ale limbii”, o spune, nu fără talent, criticul de vocație și cu demersul sincopat. Parafrazându-l pe poetul *Testament*-ului, Al. George pune un diagnostic sever receptării: asemenea eroinei lirice, domnița, „Poezia suferă tot timpul în cartea lui Arghezi.”

Pe Arghezi, critica l-a *fantazat* (cazul lui P. Constantinescu) și *mistificat*, mai citim în capitolul 5. Previzibil, în definitiv, „critica raționalistă (P. Constantinescu, V. Streinu, Ș. Cioculescu, n. n.) a pus în lumină nota religioasă a poetului ca un fapt indenegabil”. Al. George nu o urmează, nici nu o refuză cu totul. Abia Crohmălniceanu, descoperitorul unui Arghezi duplicitar, dominant religios, între credință și tăgadă a divinității, este aflat „profund greșit”, „în totală opoziție cu modul nostru de a vedea”.

Alte două respingeri survin în capitolul 10. Prima se referă la poetul în discuție și dispută. D. Caracostea, luat drept clasicist (deși *caracostizarea* criticii interbelice trecea și pentru autorul acestui volum exegetic drept o modernizare excesivă în raport cu impresionismul și biografismul), denunță „instinctul <proletarian> de distrugere”. Transpare lămuritor aici poziția ideologică, aplecată conjunctural, a lui Al. George. De pe o poziție estetică arogat și arogant modernă, el îi respinge acum pe toți clasiștii, cu

motivarea că ei văd maladivul în opera lui T. Arghezi. Cea de-a doua respingere se referă la P. Constantinescu și eroarea lui de a-l reduce pe L. Bloy la catolicism.

Al. George se detașează de „spiritele exagerat sistematice” (cap. 7), cu riscul recurențelor, nu întotdeauna de adâncire a interpretării. În schimb, dintr-o notă de subsol de la începutul capitolului 6, luăm act de faptul că Liviu Călin, însuși redactorul de carte, inexplicabil nespecificat în caseta tehnică, i-a dat lui Al. George „foarte prețioase și docte sugestii (de care) nu ne-am folosit integral”. Ele nu ne sunt semnalate, de aceea suntem constrânși să le adăugăm părții tainice a lecturii.

În definitiv, cum l-au citit criticii de meserie, de pildă, pe poetul Arghezi? Nu tocmai cu măiestrie. Ba dimpotrivă. Iată câteva exemplificări din *Momente în receptarea lui Tudor Arghezi: La sfârșitul lecturii, III*, 1980, așadar scrise ulterior eseului *Marele Alpha* din 1970, cu unele detalii vechi și altele noi.

N. Iorga l-a atacat mereu. P. Constantinescu, în studiul din 1941, exprimă „o admirație îndreptățită dedusă dintr-un act de înțelegere neadecvată”. El și Mihai Ralea descoperă abuziv un poet ortodox integral, Arghezi, arată Al. George, „punând termenii dezbaterii religioase cu totul altfel, mai degrabă prihologici decât religios metafizici”.

P. Constantinescu este dur atacat de un „critic de factură clasicizantă” (notează Al. George, didactic, nu tocmai propriu, deși teoretic se distanțează de „etichetări” terminologice: curente mai cu seamă), D. Caracostea (v. *Contrapunct*, în *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, decembrie 1941). El descoperă acolo „textul fundamental al înțelegerii poeziei, dar și al sufletului poetului”, însă „în mod bizar, calitățile ei (ale poeziei), determinate destul de sigur, sunt luate drept defecte și denunțate ca atare, ba chiar considerate aproape un pericol public”. (Constatarea paradoxalei atitudini poate fi aflată și în *Gânduri la centenarul lui Tudor Arghezi: op. cit.*, de unde suntem din nou asigurați că D. Caracostea posedă o „mare acuitate” prin negație.)

Bine analizat ar fi Arghezi de Edgar Papu în studiul „*Mysterium tremendum*” în *lirica română* din volumul *Soluțiile artei în cultura modernă* (1943), prin *numinos*-ul din *Das Heilige (Sacrul)* de Rudolf Otto: neliniște inexplicabilă, misterioasă, la Blaga și Arghezi.

Din exteriorul domeniului critic explicit, după atacul lui Eugen Ionescu din *Nu*, Mircea Eliade exprimă „cea mai severă apreciere” la adresa poetului Arghezi: „Fiecare vers are lipsuri lăuntrice, de sinteză”, citează Al. George, admitând neomogenitatea poeziei în discuție. Din partea lui M. Eliade, receptarea negativă îi apare neașteptată, ivind numai neajunsuri de formă și trăire poetică.

Felix Aderca, multilateralul literator, se vădește însă foarte generos. Bine înțeles ca poet metafizic, gânditor, este Arghezi de filosoful D. D. Roșca, în *Existența tragică*.

Mateiu I. Caragiale, citim în volumul cu același titlul apărut în 1981, chiar din cap. I, a fost considerat de critici indefinibil, original, izolat, ciudat,

secret, „din alte motive decât cele dorite de el”. Poate că până la un anumit punct putem citi aici o regăsire a interpretului în subiectul abordat. Iată că nu doar în divorț, dar și în uniune se află Al. George cu critica. Impresia persistă și în cazul unor notații de lectură, aflate în cartea, publicată în 1970, despre Arghezi. De altfel, citat în monografia, pe jumătate tradițională, pe jumătate inconformistă, despre autorul *Crailor...*, T. Vianu, scriind expresiv, cu talent, că Mateiu „a topit din nou, în tainicele lui retorte, limba aspră a gloatelor pentru a distila un suc mai dulce, cu puteri vrăjite și răscolitoare”, pare a vorbi chiar (sau și) despre Arghezi.

Al. George își dezvăluie nemulțumirea că este neglijat de cei care scriu și ei despre ce a scris și el. Acum, indispus se arată îndeosebi că articolele sale despre Mateiu au fost ignorate în adevărul lor de Ovidiu Cotruș, care le-a folosit polemic, dar inadecvat, în monografia din 1976. (În capitolul IX, Cotruș mai este, pe deasupra, acuzat că inventează cusururi în *Sub pecetea tainei*.)

Al. George polemizează în capitolul XI cu criticii „de formație tradiționalistă” care văd în scrisul lui Mateiu o operă de Narcis, în loc să-l citească sincron prin proza lui Proust și Joyce. Dar el însuși tratează foarte sumar comparația între structurile literare.

Abia capitolul VIII devine referatul despre primirea critică a *Crailor*, în termenii esențiali: document, stil, confesiune, lirism, mister, universalitate.

Despre *Craii...*, în capitolul VII, Al. George crede că nu se justifică maniheismul personajelor, susținut de T. Vianu, dar plebeianismul lor, observat de E. Papu. Contra lui Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, decide că „Pirgu e un personaj secundar”, însă neverosimil ca ministru european. Finalul fals și strident al *Crailor...* a fost bine prins de inclementul Ș. Cioculescu, numit undeva și un „nemilos critic”.

Craii... este o operă depreciață de Camil Petrescu, citim în capitolul X. (În anul 2000, aș completa, dintre scriitorii noștri cu faimă, i s-a adăugat și N. Breban.)

Și după ce împarte zeci de săgeți contra unor cititori cu vază critică reală, el găsește un alt nume căruia i se apleacă (după Liviu Călin din volumul despre Arghezi): în capitolul XII, p. 195, notează „o observație fundamentală pe care a făcut-o Al. Oprea”, personaj cultural de frunte al asprului timp al istoriei.

Cele trei anexe sunt reactive, critic, în mod compact. Cea dintâi, cu bătaie mai cu seamă metodică, evaluează scrisorile lui Mateiu, senzaționale din punct de vedere psihologic, dezvăluie erorile lui Vasile Lovinescu și înnoiește admirația pentru opera și viața scriitorului, deopotrivă de originale. Cea de-a doua se centrează pe Ș. Cioculescu, critic nedrept, „nemilos”, dar de neocolit. Iar a treia dă replica lui O. Cotruș, critic-ideolog (nu în sens politic, dar filosofic), nepotrivit cu scrisul matein, căruia nu i-ar înțelege structura originală, complexă, amestec de ficțiune, istorie, realitate. Al. George îl vede pe Mateiu înclinat spre un realism istoric. Un text totalitar, din punct de vedere literar, ne descoperă la autorul *Crailor*, până

aici ajunge laxitatea sa critică. Un text, e adevărat, în primul rând artistic. „Într-adevăr, există un primat al artisticului asupra vieții și realității în opera lui Mateiu Caragiale – dar și asupra <ideii>; cei care caută neapărat profunzimi abisale, cine știe ce simbolisme încâlcite, cifruri misterioase pentru amatorii de <herme> se află pe un drum care nu poate duce decât la speculații goale.” Sunt acum numiți O. Cotruș, V. Lovinescu, C. M. Ionescu. Va veni și Matei Călinescu.

În *Viața lui I. L. Caragiale*, o carte „monument” (*Caragialiana: La sfârșitul lecturii, III*), Ș. Cioculescu face eroarea de a-l judeca pe Mateiu după morala burgheză, ceea ce devine un etalon prea sever, la care nu rezistă nici I. L. Caragiale, care nu s-a purtat bărbătește cu Maria Constantinescu, mama lui Mateiu, și el viitor mare scriitor.

Ș. Cioculescu, numit condescendent „maestrul”, scrie cu „strălucire”, în „cea mai bună tradiție a criticii impresioniste” (încadrarea de aici – *Hiperbolele imaginației nestăpânite* – s-ar cere nuanțată în cazul raționalismului său critic, pozitivist, factologic, dacă nu comit eu însumi un mic exces) despre un Mateiu I. Caragiale, prozator liric, prea puțin observator, pentru Al. George el fiind și, sau mai ales, un realist.

La critica de recunoaștere a creației, Al. George își adaugă critica de combatere a nerecunoașterii ei. Criticul devine un fel de pedagog superior, dar cum Al. George probabil n-ar recunoaște acest statut, să-l numim, foarte aproape de „procedimentul” (el folosește termenul) său un corector de erori. Multiple: de uz al, ca și de uzură a, gândirii, interpretării, înțelegerii, de dizlocare și substituire a diferitelor elemente factuale.

Din *Reabilitarea unui nedreptățit: op. cit.*, am deduce că marile erori sunt produse de marii critici, iar corectarea lor vine în consens cu critica întemeiată pe adevăr. Al. George sare în apărarea lui V. A. Urechii, aparent în legătură cu monografia lui Vistian Goia din 1979. Sunt convocați acum critici de marcă drept falsificatori ai celui evaluat lucid de contemporanul nostru ca o personalitate culturală multiplă, pozitivist-haotică, caducă, risipită, circumstanțială, în evoluție după *invenția*, și nu intervenția, strivitoare a lui T. Maiorescu: pretinsa supraevaluare de ansamblu a lui Lenăchiță Văcărescu în comparație cu Goethe, în fapt comparația, obișnuită în critică, era limitată la o poezie. După Maiorescu, vine Iorga, încă mai drastic privit. G. Călinescu, apoi, dezinformat, i-a inventat omului o monstruoasă morală, crezând că a trăit cu patru surori, când, de fapt, după moartea primeia, s-a căsătorit – iată totuși premisa și scuza imoralității acuzate – cu a doua.¹ Multilateralul Urechii (*ia se rostea ca e scurt*) nu are doar detractori, există și buni evaluatori, ori chiar admiratori, diferiți între ei, de la un fel de opus al său ca fantezistul Hasdeu, la raționalistul strict

¹ Ca fapt de ultimă „oră” literară, constat cum tânărul cronicar literar în exercițiu de la revista *România literară*, Cosmin Ciotloș, fără a-i da numele lui G. Călinescu, recreditează istoria biografică a lui V. A. U.: „Sub raport conjugal, deține recordul de a se fi căsătorit de două ori cu două surori, pe care, de altminteri, le-a înșelat cu cea de-a treia.” (*Un aspirant la junimism*, nr. 42, 10 oct. 2014) Greu de priceput ce mai e picant, și ce mai e picat, aici, la examenul ori sub raportul istoriei literare, cu scriitorul și cele (trei sau patru?) surori.

Cioculescu (luat în altă parte drept un critic impresionist ca oricare altul de acest tip).

Erori variate, în acest volum (vezi *Un tratat academic*) găsește Al. George și în Istoria literaturii române, vol. II, publicată sub egida Academiei R. S. R., în 1973. Tratatul este notat totuși superlativ (un superlativ dovedit numaidecât malițios, ironic) drept „un eveniment cultural”. Motivarea apare mai curând simulată: „se propune admirației pentru amploarea și concentrarea de mari nume ale istoriografiei literare românești”. De fapt, Al. George se contrazice acum prin ceea ce-i displace poate mai mult, prin ambiguitate.

În *Principii de estetică* (ed. 1968, p. 90), el reamintește că G. Călinescu scria că „istoriile literare scrise în colaborare sunt niște aberații”. Nu știu ce denunță mai tare, academismul pluri-auctorial sau antiacademismul, de altfel primit de regulă cu distanțare nelipsită de complexe biografice.

Dacă reproșurile au drept cauze erori, acestea sunt multilaterale. Ilustrarea lor apare succintă. Tratatul academico-„socialist” este împopistat cu unele contribuții a căror vechime datează chiar și de trei decenii. Diversitatea de contributory istorico-literari îi sabotează unitatea. Ion Creangă, în sinteza lui Vladimir Streinu, apare aici profund distonant, mai că dispare, deopotrivă istoric și literar. Bibliografiile nu sunt armonizate proporțional.

Un autor ca Al. Săndulescu se arată drept critic și nu istoric literar, în prea aspră sa percepție din prezent spre trecut. Al. Piru, cu care Al. George a rămas într-o constantă idiosincrazie, dacă nu o simplă incompatibilitate, este înțepat din condei: partea sa tare e doar umorul.

Nu trece apoi peste numele greșite; în peste suta de erori, aflate la o corectură strictă cu totul restrânsă, nu lipsesc cele onomastice. „Ne-am limitat observațiile la paginile semnate de profesorii Șerban Cioculescu și Silviu Iosifescu (doi savanți de o rigoare recunoscută și al căror elogiu nu mai trebuie făcut)...”. Dacă așa arată rigoarea savantă notorie, se sugerează cu ironie ambiguă, ce faimă poate avea rigoarea în restul (istoriei) literaturii?

Reacția istoricului politic sau generalist, care avea să fie atât de extinsă după dizolvarea oficial declarată a regimului comunist, nu este cu totul absentă nici acum: „când au făcut junimiștii cartel cu liberalii?”, s-ntreabă referentul tratatului de istorie literară.

În bună măsură, critica, în înțelegerea și săvârșirea sa, îndreaptă erori. Dar uneori erorile de gândire sau de interpretare sunt benefice. Este cazul esteticii grecești, cu uimitoare efecte, discutat în *Dintr-o eroare într-*alta**, din volumul *Simple întâmplări în gând și spații*: „Dintr-o eroare într-*alta* s-a făcut totuși o mare artă.”

Erorilor de tipar le acordă în carte un întreg articol, *Pete în soare și pe hârtie*, cu exemple, inerente în orice tipăritură, față de care Al. George declară că a renunțat la a se arăta malițios, așa cum o făcea altădată. Nici el, firește, nu este, chiar în acest volum, ocolit de erori. „Ce m-a interesat în contractele (contactele, n. n.) mele cu oamenii a fost să-i urmăresc

vorbind...” (148); „discordantele (discordanțele, n. n.) ne apar prea frapante” (206); articolul intitulat *Adeversaritate* în volum, la cuprins apare ca *Adversitate*, în text vorbindu-se de ideea „de adversaritate” (230). În *Mateiu I. Caragiale*, șochează termenul *prespusură* (!): „cei care vor să-l prespusură” (59). E vorba de un dialog care, nefiind exprimat, ca atare se impune ca să-l „presupună”. În *Petreceri cu gândul și inducții sentimentale, capriciile* nu dublează litera *i* (99). Editarea este defectuoasă, există pagini legate greșit, continuarea de la p. 175 apare la p. 178. Eterna cacofonie, apoi, pe cine ocolește? Un exemplu între altele din *Mateiu I. Caragiale*: „Sub o înfățișare angelică, care...” (90). Iată, de exemplu, *În istorie, în politică, în literatură*: expresia capătă și o turnură pleonastică: „spiritul critic este antinomic opus spiritului autoritar” (248). După Al. George, există „naturi subiectiviste ca Arghezi” (*La sfârșitul lecturii, III*, p. 276). Surprinzătoare improprietate. Și atunci cum mai apar naturile subiective?

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CONFESIUNILE LUI MIHAIL SEBASTIAN

MIHAIL SEBASTIAN'S CONFESSIONS



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Abstract: Although attracted even in his literary practice by the confessional discourse – illustrated by the prose *Fragmente dintr-un carnet găsit* (*Fragments from a Found Notebook*), *De două mii de ani* (*For Two Thousand Years*) or by his volume of short stories *Femei* (*Women*), his confessions with a documentary character *Cum am devenit huligan* (*How I Became a Hooligan*) and *Jurnal 1935-1944* (*Diary 1935-1944*) seem written not by an artistic vocation, but by existential needs and the will of preserving moral integrity in tense historical times. The hostilities bore by the Jewish ethnic writer made him develop in his confessions an existential strategy based on equidistance to any kind of extremism or exaggeration. As a response to Nae Ionescu's preface to the novel *"For Two Thousand Years"*, Sebastian decides and announces solitude in public in *"How I Became a Hooligan"*, and secretly puts it into practice in his *Diary...*, developing a genuine technique of loneliness, a mechanism of resistance to the political, ideological, or even sentimental temptations. Sebastian's confessions set off an acute critical spirit and certify a personality of a rare lucidity, moral standing and human dignity.

Key words: Mihail Sebastian, confessions, loneliness, Jewish, war, crisis

Capodopera lui Sebastian, *De două mii de ani* - ce pare un roman „neterminat“ din cauza status quo-ului antinomiilor pe care îl cuprinde, ba chiar îl dezvoltă - va fi lămurit sau, dacă vrem, continuat în splendida replică dată de autorul lui Nae Ionescu în *Cum am devenit huligan*, o capodoperă dacă nu a literaturii, a scrisului românesc fără discuție. Dacă în *De două mii de ani* Sebastian a experimentat singurătatea prin personajul său anonim fără s-o epuizeze, deși alter-ego-urile prietenilor „rinocerizați“ populează textul dar beneficiază încă de loialitatea naratorului și de deghizarea ficțiunii, scriind *Cum am devenit huligan*, autorul plătește prețul complet al singurătății complete și, pierzând deja totul, nici nu se mai adresează prezentului,

ci posterității. (Această destinație specială a textului ar fi putut să fie remarcată de critica vremii și, mai ales, de cea a posterității, dar se pare că asta nici astăzi nu s-a făcut mulțumitor, dovadă lectura „romanțată” a *Jurnalului*). Sebastian explică cât se poate de exact accidentul prefetei lui Nae Ionescu, dar nu-și putea da seama că de fapt nu publicarea ei a fost nefericită, în primul rând, deși momentul istoric era inoportun, ci inițiativa, fie ea cât de nevinovată în 1931. Ideea de a-i cere profesorului un text introductiv la romanul său se explică cu voința lui Sebastian de a-și scoate eroul-narator din dilemele sale interioare, ce-i drept, greu de soluționat, apelând la un spirit exterior și avizat, iar acest adaos să poată fi introdus între copertile volumului („să-mi lămurească, cel puțin în intenția mea, o sumă de întrebări hotărâtoare”. Însă Sebastian a dezvoltat atât de mult termenii antinomiilor - individual/colectiv; concret/abstract; pasiune/spirit critic, eu/noi etc. -, încât nici un gânditor de talia lui Nae Ionescu nu putea să-i vină în ajutor. Naratorul, dorind să-și simplifice lucrurile, le și complică, reproducându-și mereu structura oximoronică a gândirii.

Cum se știe, „soluția” autorului prefetei s-a dovedit cât se poate de arbitrară și deplasată, precum și total lipsită de empatie, suprapunând peste antinomiile individuale ale personajului, adică peste ale unei ființe fictive, o altă antinomie, a unui colectiv istoric real. Sebastian a căzut victimă unei dihotomii interioare analoge dar nu complet identice cu a etniei sale : a cerut prefața tocmai într-un moment „naiv” al personalității sale și, fatal, într-un moment de metamorfoză latentă și invizibilă a profesorului. Nae Ionescu își schimba peste noapte nu doar atitudinea umană față de discipol, ci și pozițiile cvasi științifice asupra evreimii. În textele sale despre iudaism, publicate înainte de apariția romanului, profesorul rezuma contradicția iudaică astfel: „Dar și atunci echilibrul este îndoielnic. Căci niciodată accentul fundamental al vieții iudaice nu a căzut în același fel asupra momentului național și religios. Ci întotdeauna interesul a pendulat între aceste două momente”. În prefață, însă, cum demonstrează Sebastian, nu mai pomenește de natura interioară a suferinței iudaice, idee susținută înainte ferm, ci de cea exterioară ; o explică cu raportul pe care l-au avut evreii cu celelalte popoare – o politizează adică, instituind și justificând antisemitismul.

Nae Ionescu s-a dovedit un lector tendențios și un maestru brutal : a ratat ca spirit critic prin devierea întrebărilor puse de roman, reducându-le la o singură problematică, la cea evreiască, deși dilemele naratorului ne pot trimite la orice individ minoritar din orice fel de lume majoritară. Se cuvenea cel puțin să-i comunice discipolului său - care, culmea, în acest roman săvârșea un fel de „exercițiu de admirație” -, schimbarea poziției sale față de esența suferinței iudaice, afișată în repetate rânduri cu atâta competență. Nu se cuvenea să citească textul ca document, ci ca roman, precum nu se

cuvenea să-l înțeleagă ideologic, ci estetic sau moral. În esență, Nae Ionescu a scos arbitrar naratorul anonim al romanului din contextul său fictiv și l-a plasat în realitatea istorică a prezentului, identificându-l, iarăși arbitrar, cu autorul. A falsificat astfel statutul textului, transferând naratorul pe un teren de luptă străin, exterior, unul politizat, lui însă familiar, un teren pe care se putea manifesta victorios până la cinism. Nae Ionescu se discreditează, de fapt, și în calitate de model uman al alter-ego-ului său din roman (Ghiță Blidaru), căci gestul său, greu de calificat (căci calculat), îi demască mult afișata sa loialitate universală și „vegetală”, tocmai acea pretinsă calitate care stătuse la baza ficționalizării sale. Dușmanul de odinioară al ideilor abstracte abuzează în prefață de axiome ca de niște formule inatacabile ale gândirii. Demonizându-se fără a clipi, profesorul întoarce spatele vechii sale identități intelectuale și morale, celebrate printre studenții săi cu atât efect. Și totuși, după o criză costisitoare a vocației de detașare, Sebastian își revine magistral, capabil fiind și pe mai departe să tragă concluzii lucide și să facă distincții, dovadă *Cum am devenit huligan și Jurnalul*.

Neașteptatele atacuri aduse romanului (și, în mod deosebit, autorului său) au accelerat procesul de însingurare al lui Sebastian, care în romanul pomenit încerca încă să împace sentimentul de solidaritate cu dreptul la individual. Scandalul și, mai ales, atitudinea profesorului au făcut ireversibilă trecerea scriitorului la un și mai acut sentiment existențial de singurătate. Nae Ionescu a exploatat în cel mai inacceptabil mod de insensibilitate tocmai „soluția” de suspans a naratorului, care pendula încă între solidaritate și singurătate. Altfel spus, a brutalizat timpul pe care Sebastian și l-a rezervat pentru a-și elabora extrem de problematicul său echilibru. Dacă singurătatea părea înainte conjuncturală sau o poziție experimentală liberă –, Nae Ionescu i-a arătat natura ei ontologică, opresivă și fatală. Dar Sebastian este ostracizat și din sentimentul oarecum confortabil al singurătății, fiindu-i brutalizată acea „fireasca, simpla, involuntara rămânere a ta, în tine”. În timp ce mulți dintre contemporanii săi se grăbeau să se ascundă în costumele legitimoare și de cea mai recentă modă, lui Sebastian nu-i mai rămânea nici o resursă de singurătate necompromisă de lumea care îl înconjura. „Omul de la Dunăre”, care iubea viața în cele mai simple forme posibile și concrete, trebuia să-și definească singur o identitate abstractă : libertatea spiritului critic. Iată cum omul viu se reduce la o idee, chiar dacă superioară.

Jurnalul propriu-zis al scriitorului reprezintă – în contextul ideologic și politic al anilor treizeci, tot mai tensionat – ieșirea confesiunii din lumea ficțiunii și, de asemenea, din discursul destinat societății. Romanul *De două mii de ani* fiind receptat de contemporani în felul cunoscut, Sebastian nu-și mai permitea luxul jurnalului ca artificio, gratuitatea faptului artistic, cu toate că, din

motive prea circumstanțiale, nu renunță nici în continuare la ficțiune sau, mai bine spus, la „valorificarea” literaturii, cum nu renunță nici la aprecierea documentului ca sursă de literatură. La el nicăieri documentul nu apare doar ca document și nicăieri ficțiunea doar ca ficțiune. În primul caz pâlپاie întotdeauna și o mică undă de semnificație, în al doilea caz pâlپاie și viața imediată, iar în amândouă o blândă atmosferă de resemnare față de tot ce i-a fost dat.

Jurnalul e poate singurul text din perioada interbelică pe care îl putem numi jurnal intim clasic sau jurnal-model, deoarece corespunde și celor mai exigente criterii impuse unei poetici a genului : se ține de fapt fără întreruperi, aproape până la moarte, este datat, cuprinde însemnări de tot soiul, sinceritatea nu se pune la îndoială, literaturizare nu e nicăieri, informațiile cuprind domenii vaste (de la viața intimă, sentimentală până la evenimentele politice, de la considerații despre artă și literatură până la date despre contemporani, de la ideologiile timpului până la știri de război, de la prieteni fideli până la prieteni „converțiți” - și seria poate continua la infinit). Comparat cu al lui Sebastian, cât de monotone par *Notele zilnice* ale lui Camil Petrescu ! -, și faptul nu surprinde, căci pe când Camil Petrescu detesta genul, Sebastian, fără patos totuși, prin aprecierile aduse lui Jules Renard și lui Stendhal, legitimează, indirect, genul.

Într-un eseu dedicat jurnalului intim românesc (*Cealaltă față a prozei*, 1988), Mihai Zamfir împarte jurnalul în două variante : unul este numit „jurnal de existență” și se ține mereu, indiferent de valoarea evenimentelor, celălalt se numește „jurnal de criză” și se ține în momente „cruciale” ale vieții. Concluzia criticului este formulată în întrebare : „de ce literatura noastră numără foarte puține jurnale de existență și relativ numeroase jurnale de criză ?” (p. 106). Iată însă că avem un caz care pornește dintr-o criză (scandalul în jurul romanului *De două mii de ani*), dar apoi urmărește drumul încet și clasic al „jurnalului de existență”, tip Amiel. Sebastian se deosebește de Camil Petrescu tocmai prin faptul că așterne pe foile albe și mărturia unor zile mai senine sau mai plăcute, sau cel puțin mai relaxante, nu doar amintirea celor umbrite de circumstanțe triste și umilitoare, deși, pe măsură ce jurnalul înaintează, autorul lui este tot mai marginalizat în societate, și rămâne tot mai singur. Jurnalul lui Sebastian pare un efort zilnic de supraviețuire esențială, nu conjuncturală; de legitimare interioară împotriva ilegitimării exterioare, de concentrare a inteligenței împotriva reflexelor interioare ale exteriorului. Prin capacitatea de a se detașa de propriul său destin ingrat, scriitorul privea cu o superioritate inofensivă „rinocenzarea” contextului în care trebuia să trăiască și să îndure ostracizarea, încât pasivitatea sa nativă ar fi tentant să fie pusă pe seama conjuncturii. Ironia este că o asemenea judecată, falsă ca o prejudecată, e sugerată chiar de autor: „Dacă drumurile din afară nu

mi-ar fi toate închise, le-aș găsi atât de ușor pe cele interioare?“, se întreabă naratorul încă din *Fragmente...* Răspunsul ar putea fi, desigur, un „da“, căci în tot scrisul lui Sebastian, marcat efectiv de propria sa existență reală, este mai puțin vorba, totuși, de o închidere în sine, ci – începând cu *Fragmentele...* – de o construire sau, poate mai bine spus, de o acceptare a sinelui prin descoperire. Sebastian își formula deja în prima sa carte aproape toate toposurile definitorii ale personalității și alter-ego-urilor sale din volumele ulterioare (jurnal, romane, teatru).

Cum am devenit huligan poate fi înțeles nu doar ca expresie polemică, ci și ca o poetică ulterioară a romanului hulit de critică. Premisele și postulatele din roman se clarifică în document. Singurătatea fiind în roman virtuală, în document devine reală și manifestă.

Jurnalul scriitorului, adică viața sa adevărată mărturisită în text – ce ironie a destinului! – reprezintă eșecul celei mai inofensive concepții de viață, eșecul absenței. Idealul existențial al lui Sebastian – „statutul de plantă” – produce un mecanism antinomic: orice manifestare sau act uman („evadarea copacului din pădure“) trădează automat acest ideal sau, altfel spus, îl compromite. Autorul-narator al *Fragmentelor...*, cu vocația sa de a rămâne doar un „aventurier“ printre „monotone desfășurări de fapte neutre“, nu se poate lepăda de inteligența sa nici practicând detașarea. Cu cât face mai mare efort Sebastian ca să scape de inteligență – „se poate foarte bine lipsi de ea“, amăgindu-se chiar: „O păstrez în raporturile mele cu lumea“ –, cu atât o practică mai eficient. *De două mii de ani* încearcă să rezolve acest paradox printr-un artificiu. Împotriva opiniilor critice de până acum, suntem de părere că în persoana lui Ghiță Blidaru e bine să vedem un alter-ego satelit al scriitorului (nu doar figura lui Nae Ionescu), deoarece discipolul profesorului vroia să rămână pe cât posibil fidel structuralei sale absențe. În timp ce „celălalt“ alter-ego al lui Sebastian – cel autentic, naratorul – se lasă implicat în circumstanțele vremii (totuși, cât de subtilă salvare a libertății în angajament și a abstractului în concret!: „Ce iubesc mai mult în arhitectură este simplificarea progresivă a ideii, *organizarea visului*“ (s. n.), o altă parte a eului său e plasată unui alt personaj. Această sciziune sau autodistribuire este lesne de argumentat. Ideile „zoologice“ ale lui Ghiță Blidaru – „lenea de plantă“, „lipsa de agresivitate în fața existenței“, sau „eu n-am nimic de făcut cu viața, viața are totul de făcut cu mine“, sau „(f)iecare bucurie își are anotimpul ei, fiecare durere pe al ei“ – sunt lansate încă de naratorul *Fragmentelor...* Renunțarea la inteligență din primul volum, precum antiintelectualismul lui Blidaru din *De două mii de ani*, sunt două fețe ale aceleiași medalii. Acest jurnal romanesc autobiografic reprezintă pentru eroul-narator un experiment: încercarea, chiar dacă ratată sau, mai bine spus, nefinalizată, de a socializa și astfel

legitima singurătatea. Confesiunile lui Sebastian sunt poate singurele dintre cele interbelice care nu pornesc de la crize interioare – „Eu n-am avut crize sufletești. Am avut numai anotimpuri“ –, dar, evitându-le, scriitorul ajunge, fatal, la altele, de proveniență exterioară. *Cum am devenit huligan* reprezintă o perioadă de trecere de la ficționalizarea existenței la tratarea ei în direct. Se mai păstrează, prin lămuriri, problematica și mai ales modul de explorare din *De două mii de ani*, recunoscând un fel de eșec al soluționării antinomiilor – „Timpul este desigur o soluție înceată, iar „cîndva“ un termen nesigur“, sau: „E posibilă această linie de mijloc? E posibil acordul atîtor drumuri contrarii? Nu știu“. În același timp, făcând bilanțul a ceea ce se numește cazul *De două mii de ani*, scandalul adică - „(e)l a zguduit echivocurile amicale, a bruscat ezitățile de sentiment, a grăbit sinceritățile și violențele de limbaj“ -, Sebastian trece la mai puțin echivocul mod de a se exprima, la jurnal, păstrând din experiența trecută doar și exclusiv singurătatea: „Nu bănuieți ce excelent exercițiu de singurătate este o asemenea întâmplare“.

Deși document autentic unic, *Jurnalul* nu urmărește să respecte neapărat recuzitele literaturii autenticiste, singurul principiu al consemnării evenimentelor fiind spiritul critic în starea lui cea mai pură. Lumea nu mai este a personajelor, nici a personalităților, ci a mecanismului de observație neinhibat de construcție, „viziune“, ideologie etc. Orice tentativă a lumii de a mima organicitate este respinsă fără ostentație dar și fără echivoc. Construcțiile ideologice și spirituale ale contemporanilor sunt văzute ca niște forme de deghizări spre general, spre „uniforme“, ale micilor egoisme în care ele apar, fără să mai fie nevoie de intervenția auctorială. Teama de atomizare și pierdere în singurătate a contemporanilor se manifestă în graba de integrare în vreo ideologie sau în formele ei instituționalizate, într-o vigoare a spiritului de breaslă și comunitate. Cel care o recunoștea nu era altcineva decât Nae Ionescu: „teoria mea a colectivelor este o fugă de singurătate, o încercare tragică de a ieși din însingurare“.

Acest document autentic sfidează orice criteriu de lectură prestabilit sau căutat, încât orice lectură „tematică“, „literară“ sau de altă natură, care încearcă demontarea textului, falsifică sensul și spiritul său anticonstrucțional, antiliterar, antitendențios etc. Chiar și o prefață, fie ea binevoitoare, pare de o utilitate discutabilă în cazul acestui document care, prin simpla consemnare a faptelor, pune problema morală a contemporanilor în fel acut (o notă asupra ediției ar fi fost poate mai binevenită și suficientă, căci prefețele lansează și ele aprecieri, relativizări, presupuneri etc., împiedicând textul să vorbească singur). Or, *Jurnalul* ascunde o poetică absentă, un principiu ordonator fără principiu, o simplă voință de a înțelege, un fel de „să primesc lucrurile cum sunt“. Nu credem că textul ar purta intenții latente sau că s-ar fi vrut drept material brut pentru texte

fictive: sinceritatea, luciditatea, detașarea conlucrează atât de armonic, încât evidențiază tocmai o intenție contrară dezmembrării, și anume voința de consolidare a propriei personalități. Și numai jocul cu ideea unei eventuale transfigurări i-ar fi afectat coerența, iar felul de a spune (foarte sincer) face parte din materia însăși a textului, căci jurnalul avea, în primul rând, o funcție existențială și o destinație intimă. A vedea în el material brut sau mai multe jurnale, echivalează cu a nu vedea *un singur jurnal* definitiv, indisolubil, căci integritatea documentului vizează integritatea autorului. Tematizarea textului este desigur posibilă, dar în acest caz trebuie să subliniem artificialitatea demersului, ținând cont de spiritul ușor de atestat al textului, și anume de oroarea de rotunjire și chiar de departajare. Sebastian a scris un „bloc de cuvinte“ tocmai pentru că nu înțelegea nici el istoria *în și din* mers; a evitat subînțelesuri, căci căuta înțelesuri. Ideea de „romanizare“ este respinsă tocmai în favoarea realității extrem de „multicolore“, calculată fiind, eventual, valoarea personală a documentului. Sebastian nu-și rescrie textele, le păstrează destinația și genul original – dovadă că și în romane utilizează convenția jurnalului, discursul „natural“ al gândirii, refuzul intervenției ulterioare. În acest document se experimentează tocmai potențialul de semnificație al faptelor reale. Jurnalul sentimental nu se vrea roman sentimental, jurnalul de război nu se vrea roman de război, jurnalul prietenilor convertiți nu se vrea roman al unei generații, pentru simplul motiv că *Jurnalul* reprezintă o opțiune și, prin urmare, o perioadă antiliterară a scriitorului: „ce punem noi într-un roman de 300 sute de pagini este ridicul de neînsemnat față de mulțimea de fapte care e implicată în cel mai obișnuit gest al nostru“.

Cu această capodoperă, Sebastian continuă și încheie procesul de trecere de la realitatea ficțiunii la irealitatea imediată a realului, proces lansat de confesiunea din *De două mii de ani*. În *Jurnal* Sebastian pune într-o și mai acută lumină prețul scump al libertății, valoarea vulnerabilei căi de mijloc, și se supune la o nesfârșită verificare sau recitare a propriului său text, acest adevărat instrument de păstrare a măsurii lucide. Dar jurnalul este și un calmant, o modalitate de a lua contact indirect cu realitatea, printr-o activitate reflectată a scrisului și a recitului. În urma consemnărilor sale, Sebastian citește realitatea prin faptele înregistrate, și nu prin idei, premise, iluzii etc. Și numai gândul unei ispite transfiguratorii ar deservi rostul esențial al documentului și i-ar anula sensul. Ce rațiune ar mai avea chiar și numai ideea de literatură pentru un om care era pe deplin conștient de „(c)um face viața din noi mai mult decât vrem sau putem să fim“. Ne întrebăm, împreună cu autorul, ce ar mai putea adăuga literatura și ce sens mai poate avea ea atunci când viața „face gol în jurul meu“ și când, luând totul, „mă pune din nou în față

începutului“ ? – „Literatura e un narcotic prea slab pentru toate câte se întâmplă“.

Dacă citim *Jurnalul* prin funcția pe care autorul i-a destinat-o, atunci în loc de temele lui se impun mai mult fazele lui distincte, faze delimitate net de izbucnirea războiului. Astfel în „prima parte” avem de-a face cu un jurnal ce vizează adaptarea personalității la o realitate tensionată, dar încă *nedramatică* ; se urmărește deci o lentă și lucidă transformare interioară a eului. În schimb, în „partea a doua” miza este supraviețuirea fizică – luciditatea și gândirea servesc un scop real, elaborarea unei tehnici de trecere prin „provizoratul” imprevizibil al războiului, gata oricând să producă accese și măsuri antisemite, fatale pentru autor. În prima parte Sebastian trăiește cu un pericol moderat, cel puțin neoficial și neinstituționalizat, în a doua parte cu o teroare manifestă și oficială.

Dar că miza era suficient de gravă și în primele capitole ale *Jurnalului*, o dovedește procesul de „pregătire” al autorului pentru a doua etapă, cea acută. La început, Sebastian își consolidează personalitatea imunizând-o printr-o serie de „exerciții” de neutralitate și de suprimări afective. (De nu ne-am afla într-un registru serios, am spune că abilitatea autorului în a-și elabora o tehnică de „rezistență” la toate ispitele de toate felurile, este plină de haz.) Simplificând lucrurile, cum îi plăcea lui Sebastian să facă, am rezuma astfel convingerea autorului : a ceda ispitelor este egal cu a complica viața, a nu ceda, cu simplificarea ei. Din păcate însă, această „simplificare” echivalează cu un program de automutilare afectivă, și își are prețul ei scump. Deoarece acest document suprimă și la nivel stilistic – textul fiind plin de oximoroane, ca simptome ale suprimării – este dificil să reconstituim câte tristeți și câte nedesăvârșiri a consumat Sebastian pentru a-și construi această filozofie a indiferenței, trăind programatic cu „admirații interzise”. Ne putem imagina însă cât de multă renunțare presupunea accesul la imunitate, la un om dornic de fericire la modul cel mai simplu și igienic, într-o lume confuză și lipsită de igienă. „Tensiunea dramatică”, lipsită din textele sale fictive, apare în document, căci - dacă e mai ușor să reziste ispitelor lipsite de simplitate – vai, cum rezistă teoreticianul simplității ispitelor de o simplitate certă ?! Degeaba își întipărește programul în deviză și în oximoron - „fără deznădejde și fără speranțe” -, unele tehnici „copilărești” îi trădează vulnerabilitatea demersului. Pentru accesul la imunitate afectivă și spirituală, Sebastian „uită” evenimentele triste (însă o face, desigur, cu inconsecvență), pe altele le diminuează și le relativizează : „pot exista și nefericiri mai mari decât un regim antisemit”, Privite cu autoironia perfecționată din nevoie, faptele cu totul anormale sau aberante, vor fi considerate „normale”. În consecință, trăind de la o zi la alta cu tot mai puține emoții, parcă „vindecă” de ele, înregistrăm în scrisul

sebastianian o nuanță de maturizare precoce, nuanță pe care autorul de jurnal o simte ca pe un fel de „îmbătrânire” forțată.

Deși atitudini diferite, împlânzirea exceselor (*De două mii de ani*) și refuzul ispitelor (*Jurnal*) se corelează într-o strategie existențială coerentă, atestând organicitatea operei românești cu confesiunile directe ale scriitorului. Este vorba de fapt despre o reducere generală a eului, atât în plan exterior, cât și în cel interior. Dar dacă în primul caz strategia poate să fie benefică, în al doilea caz apar efectele ei negative. De exemplu, în viața intimă sau în procesul creației, reducția se prezintă ca factor psihologic frustrant, acumulând experiențe netrăite, pe de o parte, și afectând mecanismul imaginar, pe de altă parte. Rezistând la ispitele imaginației excesive, Sebastian ține în viață lupta dintre imaginație și cenzura ei. Astfel, actul creator își are specificul său la autorul *Jocului de-a vacanța*, manifestându-se în primul rând într-un fel de lentoare : Sebastian parcă nu își produce „scenele”, ci așteaptă ca ele să fie „văzute”, încât poate să rămână mereu în perimetrul realului. Din acest motiv, până nu epuizează o „experiență” (fictivă), fie ea cât de infimă, nu trece la alte experiențe, „nu le vede”. Un procedeu artistic în defensivă și așteptare, amintind de cel bengescian.

Programul psihologic al autorului pare atât de coerent și consecvent respectat, încât îl putem interpreta ca drept valoare în sine, o operă. Un sistem alimentat de dorul de libertate al celui care era nevoit să trăiască, fără repaus, cu povara amintirii a două mii de ani. Teama de angajament a lui Sebastian nu este doar un simptom „antisocial”, ci o modalitate de a-și ocroti vulnerabila sa libertate. Scrisul însuși apare ca deghizarea participării, un angajament mascat ; o falsă, virtuală și indirectă prezență. Într-o lume care își cultivă excesele (extremele) – unele mai dăunătoare decât altele – angajamentul duce inevitabil la pierderea libertății. Cu această idee neformulată dar indiscutabil sebastianiană, am și trecut în „partea a doua” a documentului.

Aici, *Jurnalul* devine, involuntar, un jurnal de război imposibil, absurd, pe de o parte, și un text plin de tensiune, pe de altă parte. Războiul, fiind o experiență-limită, a mai servit și la alți scriitori ca subiect de roman sau de jurnal; pentru Sebastian însă nu brutalitatea lui generală, ci una specială au făcut din el obiect de studiu primordial („în afară de război, nimic nu mă preocupă”) : faptul că în atmosfera isterică și necalculabilă a evenimentelor politice și militare, era posibilă oricând o acțiune antisemită fatală - adică nu o luptă, ci o exterminare. (Dovadă că, după ce acest pericol trece, dar încă în plin război, în timpul bombardării Bucureștiului de către aviația britanică, Sebastian îl citea liniștit pe Balzac ! – pe când „prieteni” toți erau fugiți undeva la țară !) Prin urmare, Sebastian era nevoit ca în anii războiului - până la retragerea trupelor germane - să fie mereu cu ochii în patru, fără un pic de răgaz. *Jurnalul* este scris sub presiunea

obligației de a fi prezent și atent mereu, culmea, la un fenomen ce se dăsfășura la mii de kilometri distanță, însă reprezentând un pericol extrem de imediat, printr-o logică semnalată mai sus. Războiul exterior, cel concret, avea înfățișarea unei fantome, abstracte, iar cel interior, inexistent însă oricând posibil, părea concret. Această bizară logică și distribuție a pericolului fac din documentul scris cu luciditate un jurnal absurd. Căci, deși din cauza măsurilor antisemite luate de regimul antonescian, nici situația internă nu era tocmai favorabilă, atenția autorului se îndreaptă mai ales spre exterior, spre liniile de front invizibile. Sebastian, omul însetat de real, încearcă, ce ironie a situației, să „vadă” pozițiile de pe fronturi prin interpretarea comunicatelor germane eufemistic formulate. Fără surse autentice, autorul „se apropie” de război prin imaginație, zbatându-se în nesiguranță : „Nu am imaginea frontului și nu știu care sunt liniile lui actuale”. Desigur că, în asemenea condiții, tentativele de interpretare a situațiilor militare s-au dovedit a fi sisifice, iar în urma lor Sebastian trebuia să se mulțumească cu câte o vagă „impresie”. În această fază, jurnalul pare un binoclu îndreptat spre nevăzut, mereu în funcțiune, iar autorul lui, dornic de certitudini, un individ obosit și epuizat de această luptă cu necunoscutul.

Astfel istoria, retrasă din prim plan în culise, subminează valoarea informativă a jurnalului. Dintr-un document direct, acesta se transformă într-unul indirect. Autorul lui, practic scos din viață, produce un text al hibernării, al tentativei imposibile de a „simplifica” și a transcrie în termenii evidenței polifonia senzațională a lumii. Textul suferă brusc de o criză, dacă nu a adevărului, de una a realului fără discuție.

Războiul este o nouă experiență a scriitorului, una care nu se mai lasă interpretată, ilustrând modul în care istoria depășește individul. Iată cum un jurnal devine un document „corintic”, căci războiul este o realitate corintică, afectând vulnerabila coerență a lumii. „Corintizarea” lumii și astfel a jurnalului se manifestă și pe plan uman, căci textul înregistrează, fără ostentație totuși, tot mai multe metamorfoze, ipocrizii și lașități de-ale contemporanilor. Autorul de jurnal, dependent și el de noua realitate - a războiului și a documentului deopotrivă - se transformă încetul cu încetul în personajul propriului său text. Dintr-o criză a contactului direct cu evenimentele din afara Capitalei, jurnalul se întoarce involuntar la „literatură”. Locul ocupat înainte de fapte și date exacte, este cucerit acum, din ce în ce mai mult, de visuri. Fără să vrea, Sebastian „transfigurează” documentul înspre roman oniric. Deplasarea la distanță a liniilor de forță ale frontului și astfel ale istoriei compromite jurnalul tocmai în esența sa de document. Decât războiul, numai lipsa imaginii lui exacte este mai neliniștitoare ; acea permanentă tensiune a neștiinței, suspendarea vieții, obligația așteptării, lipsa repaosului necesar salvării integrității interioare.

Condițiile controlului propriu nemaifiind date și, de fapt, nici actuale, jurnalul se transformă într-un document de tumult incontrollabil din care, din păcate, nici la sfârșitul războiului nu se deschide un orizont senin, așteptat cu atâta demnitate și caracter ; căci uneia dintre cele mai importante inteligențe și structuri morale ale literelor românești, trăind mereu doar cu promisiunea singurătății libere, nu i-a fost dată de tot nici măcar indiferența lumii. Scrisul lui Sebastian, condiționat moral, invocă o lectură morală, o specie a criticii încă neinventată.

Notă: citatele sunt luate din edițiile următoare:

Mihail SEBASTIAN, *Fragmente dintr-un carnet găsit*, Humanitas, București, 2005; *De două mii de ani* (Cu o prefață de Nae Ionescu), *Cum am devenit huligan*, Humanitas, București, 1990; *Jurnal, 1935-1944*, Humanitas, București, 1996.

LA TRADUZIONE DELLA TRAGEDIA «LE
FANATISME» DI VOLTAIRE A OPERA DI HELIADE
RADULESCU: QUANDO LE TRADUZIONI
SEGNANO LA STORIA

VOLTAIRE'S "LE FANATISME" TRANSLATED BY
ION HELIADE RĂDULESCU: WHEN
TRANSLATIONS MARK HISTORY



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Abstract. The process of occidentalization of the Romanian language, which had gotten intense only at the beginning of XIXth century, discovered in theatre a powerful instrument. Within this transformation, an important moment emerged with Ion Heliade Radulescu's translation of Voltaire's tragedy, *Le Fanatisme*. It was printed in 1831 with the title *Fanatismul sau Mahomet Proorocul* and played in 1834 by the scholars of Bucharest theatre school. This translation shows a radical change: until that, few translations had been undertaken and not for playing theatre. But, beginning with 1834, *Societatea filarmonică*, the theatre association created by Heliade in Bucharest, started a huge activity of plays for theatrical repertoires and increased the necessity of more translations. *Fanatismul* is the beginning of a new outlook on literature. The development of a language of tragedy in Romanian and the development of a national literary identity were the necessities of the epoch. Heliade Rădulescu made his translation a vehicle for pedagogy, for illustrating the good and the bad moral behaviour, but also for the confidence that literature could teach people how to prevent the absolute power of tyrants.

Key words: Heliade Rădulescu, Voltaire's tragedies, Romanian theatre, translations

Motto: «Când se va deștepta omul, e sfârâmat șeptul meu»
(Trad. Heliade Rădulescu, *Fanatismul*, Act V, Scena IV)

III **proceso** di occidentalizzazione linguistica e culturale nell'area dei Principati Romeni, iniziato a partire dai primi decenni del XIX secolo, ha visto nella letteratura per il teatro un importante elemento di sperimentazione e attività da parte di molti dei protagonisti della scena culturale dell'epoca. Infatti, la creazione di stagioni teatrali stabili è stata considerata sia da parte degli intellettuali neogreci attivi durante l'ultimo periodo della dominazione fanariota sia, successivamente, dai *pașoptiști* romeni, uno strumento di lotta politica e di emancipazione nazionale.

All'interno di questa storica trasformazione culturale un ruolo di primo rilievo l'ha avuto sicuramente la traduzione in alessandrini romeni della tragedia di Voltaire *Le Fanatisme* a opera di Ion Heliade Rădulescu, stampata nel 1831 presso la tipografia sua proprietà con il titolo *Fanatismul sau Mahomet Proorocul*. Questa traduzione ha la funzione di vero e proprio spartiacque culturale: precedentemente, infatti, possiamo registrare, nell'ambito delle traduzioni teatrali, soltanto alcuni melodrammi metastasiani in romeno tramite versioni neogreche (insieme a pochi altri titoli minori di teatro francese). Negli anni successivi, invece, in particolare a partire dal 1833, prende avvio l'attività di *Societate filarmonică*, una scuola di teatro patrocinata dallo stesso Heliade Rădulescu, che permetterà, attraverso un corposo programma di rappresentazioni in lingua romena, l'ingresso di numerosi autori di teatro occidentale. Va aggiunto che la traduzione heliadiana non è stata soltanto la prima opera teatrale stampata in romeno ma anche il copione su cui gli allievi della scuola di arte drammatica di *Societate filarmonică* si sono cimentati nel loro primo saggio di recitazione il 29 agosto 1834.

In questo studio intendiamo soffermarci inizialmente sul contesto storico e culturale in cui è nata questa traduzione cercando di individuare il canone teatrale in voga nell'area dei Principati romeni negli anni precedenti alla traduzione di Heliade. In secondo luogo, ci soffermeremo su alcune delle caratteristiche della tragedia di Voltaire per cogliere quali ragioni abbiano suscitato l'interesse del traduttore nella scelta di questo testo.

Negli anni immediatamente precedenti alla traduzione romena di *Le fanatisme* l'opera teatrale di Voltaire è stata oggetto di vivo interesse nell'area dei Principati Romeni. L'affluire di compagnie teatrali straniere aveva portato a una larga diffusione nell'Europa orientale di teatro francese, tedesco e italiano. A queste si affiancava la produzione originale in lingua neogreca, spesso legata al mondo dell'istruzione e ad alcune personalità importanti della diaspora ellenica che avevano preso residenza stabile nei Principati. La comunità greca, fortemente legata ai dominatori fanarioti, dette il primo impulso alla diffusione del grande teatro europeo:

Țările române au avut așadar partea lor în această istorie a teatrului francez în afara Franței. Dar [...] el este precedat aici de teatrul grecesc. [...] În timpul domniei lui

Caragea și sub îndrumarea fiicei acestuia, domnița Ralu, luă naștere în 1817 un foarte serios teatru grecesc: este cunoscutul teatru de la Cișmeaua Roșie, al cărui prim conducător este poetul Iancu Văcărescu. Teatrul acesta a jucat și opere originale, dar s-a întemeiat mai mult pe scriitori străini, în primul rând pe Voltaire și pe dramaturgul italian Alfieri.¹

Come vedremo, l'esperienza di Cișmeaua Roșie ha avuto esiti importanti in quanto in tale contesto culturale hanno operato anche importanti intellettuali romeni quali Iancu Văcărescu. In questa prima fase non vengono create scuole di teatro con attori professionisti poiché le rappresentazioni vengono recitate da nobili dilettanti o agli allievi delle scuole. L'attività teatrale fa parte dunque del programma politico del movimento eterista, che vede nel teatro un potente mezzo di propaganda ideologica anti-ottomana e anti-tirannica:

Mișcarea eteristă, cu programul său de eliberare națională, găsește în teatru un larg câmp de răspândire a idealurilor revoluționare. Primele manifestări de teatru cult din țara Românească au loc în cadrul teatrului școlar grecesc, unde elevii, actori-diletanți, înflăcărați patrioți, dornici să servească scopului de emancipare națională, interpretează cu patos, adesea improvizând și actualizând, piese de Voltaire și Alfieri sau piesele revoluționarilor greci.²

Lo spazio romeno diviene un importante luogo di circolazione di idee e di produzione letteraria di teatro europeo o di teatro neogreco originale creato su modelli europei. La presenza, soprattutto a Bucarest, di importanti personalità intellettuali, spesso con un orizzonte culturale di livello internazionale e con forti contatti con l'estero (frequenti i periodi di studio in Francia, in Italia e nell'Impero austro-ungarico), permette un rapido aggiornamento dei gusti letterari e della scena teatrale. Proprio in questi anni, inoltre, il teatro neogreco si era diffuso contemporaneamente in numerosi centri dell'Europa dell'Est, in particolare Bucarest, Odessa, ma anche a Trieste e a Vienna, grazie alla presenza di importanti comunità della "diaspora" che facevano riferimento a tipografie, scuole e teatri.

Le più antiche traduzioni neogreche di cui si abbia notizia basate su opere di Voltaire e di Alfieri nei Principati romeni sono tuttavia riconducibili geograficamente all'area della Moldavia. Le fonti indirette attestano una rappresentazione a Iași di *La morte de César* di Voltaire insieme al *Bruto*

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¹ POPOVICI 1969, pp. 62-3: «l'area romena ha avuto la sua parte nella storia del teatro francese fuori dalla Francia. Ma [...] qui è preceduto dal teatro greco. [...] Nel periodo della signoria di Caragea e sotto la guida della figlia di lui, *domnița Ralu*, nacque nel 1817 un teatro greco di grande valore: si tratta del celebre teatro della Fontana Rossa, il cui primo direttore è stato il poeta Iancu Văcărescu. Questo teatro ha messo in scena anche lavori originali, ma si è basato per lo più su scrittori stranieri, in primo luogo Voltaire e il dramaturgo italiano Alfieri».

² ALTERESCU 1965, p. 146: «Il movimento eterista, con il suo programma di liberazione nazionale, trova nel teatro un terreno fertile di diffusione delle sue idee rivoluzionarie. I primi esempi di teatro colto in Valacchia hanno la loro realizzazione all'interno del teatro scolastico greco, dove gli allievi, attori-dilettanti, entusiasti patriotti, desiderosi di servire la missione di emancipazione nazionale, interpretano con *pathos*, spesso improvvisando e attualizzando, opere di Voltaire e Alfieri o di rivoluzionari greci».

secondo di Alfieri, quest'ultimo datato al 1814, ad opera degli allievi della scuola neogreca della città. Tuttavia è Bucarest il luogo dove si sviluppa l'esperienza più ricca e dagli esiti più duraturi grazie agli interessi teatrali del *domnitor* fanariota Ioan Caragea (1812-1818) e, soprattutto, della figlia Ralu. Inizialmente si ha notizia di alcune rappresentazioni private negli appartamenti della nobildonna con singole scene tratte dalle tragedie di Alfieri e Voltaire, eseguite da giovani appartenenti alla classe nobiliare; l'edificio che ospiterà il cosiddetto teatro di Cișmeaua Roșie verrà invece creato nell'autunno del 1817.³ Domnița Ralu provvede anche alla formazione degli attori e degli organizzatori della messe in scena teatrali inviando a proprie spese a Parigi il giovane Constantin Aristia per un breve periodo (1818-9) per compiere studi teatrali.⁴ È un momento di particolare importanza perché troviamo qui le radici della formazione culturale occidentale di una delle personalità di maggior rilievo della cultura romena *prepașoptistă*.

A partire dal 1818, con l'allontanamento di Caragea e la successione di Alexandru Suțu (1818-1821), il teatro di Cișmeaua Roșie vede l'organizzazione di una stagione maggiormente organica, caratterizzata dalla presenza di repertorio occidentale tradotto in greco e in romeno accanto a opere originali di autori neogreci; inoltre la sala sarà oggetto un controllo statale più articolato da parte della censura. Il primo lavoro di cui si abbia notizia certa circa la sua rappresentazione sembrerebbe essere la tragedia *La mort de César* di Voltaire, tradotta da Seruios e rappresentata il 23 febbraio 1819, versione che godeva di grande successo anche al di fuori dell'area dei Principati.⁵ Al contrario, il primo spettacolo in lingua romena di cui abbiamo notizia è una traduzione dell'*Ecuba* di Euripide a opera di A. Nănescu, rappresentata sempre nel 1819. Gli attori della tragedia euripidea, tutti dilettanti e allievi di Gheorghe Lazăr presso il collegio di Sfânta Sava, annoverano anche il giovane Heliade Rădulescu nel ruolo *en travesti* della protagonista.

Forniamo dunque un elenco delle opere rappresentate, registrato in *Istoria teatrului în România* di Alterescu con alcune aggiunte e precisazioni:⁶

³ Cfr ALTERESCU 1965, p. 146.

⁴ POPESCU-MACHEDON 1967, p. 7. Cfr. anche *ibidem*, p. 16: «din dorința de a ridica calitatea reprezentațiilor teatrale grecești Domnița Ralu a trimis pe Costache Aristia, să studieze arta actoricească cu vestitul actor-cetățean, Joseph François Talma, inovator în teatru, promotorul neoclasicismului, adept al revoluției franceze și prieten al lui Napoleon Bonaparte» («con il desiderio di elevare la qualità delle rappresentazioni teatrali in greco *domnița* Ralu ha inviato Costache Aristia a studiare l'arte drammatica con il famoso attore-cittadino Joseph François Talma, innovatore dell'arte teatrale, promotore del neoclassicismo, seguace della rivoluzione francese e amico di Napoleone Bonaparte»).

⁵ L'informazione è contenuta in *Revue Encyclopedic* (Avril 1819, p. 171) in *Hamburger Correspondent von 1819, Schreiben aus Walchei von 12 august* come riporta PIRU 1967, p. 80. In ALTERESCU 1965, p. 146 viene indicata la tragedia *Brutus* di Voltaire come prima opera teatrale rappresentata in greco nel dicembre 1818. Sulla data della prima rappresentazione non c'è accordo tra i commentatori: probabilmente ne è stata eseguita qualche scena presso gli appartamenti di Domnița Ralu ma Camariano indica la prima data di rappresentazione certa il 17 marzo 1820 (confermata anche da Alterescu). La traduzione di questa tragedia è stata stampata in volume.

⁶ ALTERESCU 1965, p. 146, nota 12.

Traduzioni in romeno

Ecuba di Euripide, traduzione di Nănescu, 1819.

Traduzioni in greco

Phèdre di Racine, traduzione di I. R. Nerulos, gennaio 1819.

La morte di Césare di Voltaire, traduzione di Seruios, febbraio 1819.

Temistocle di Metastasio, traduzione di G. Rusiadi, maggio 1819.

Oreste di Alfieri, 21 novembre 1819.

Filippo II di Alfieri, maggio 1820.

Brutus di Voltaire traduzione di M. Hristaris, marzo 1820.

Agathocle di Voltaire, traduzione di Seruios, 1820.

Merope, traduzione di Seruios

Aristodemo di Monti.

Teatro originale in lingua greca

Aspasia di Nerulos, prima rappresentazione nel 1811, ripresa nel marzo 1819.

La morte di Patroclo di Atanasie Hristopoulos, rappresentata nel 1819.

Polixenia di I. R. Nerulos, gennaio 1820.

La morte di Filottete di Pikkòlos

Demostene di Pikkòlos

Timoleonte, imitazione da Alfieri di I. Zambelios nel 1820.

Si conferma una netta prevalenza delle opere di Alfieri, Voltaire e dei loro imitatori neogreci, quali Nerulos, Zambelios e Pikkòlos. La scelta di soggetti neoclassici, riconducibili al mondo ellenico (la prima tragedia rappresentata in romeno è addirittura un classico euripideo) su modelli non più mediati dall'Arcadia, rientra sicuramente all'interno di una nuova concezione del teatro occidentale alfieriana e voltairiana. È evidente una preferenza per i soggetti con tematiche apertamente anti-tiranniche che danno al genere tragico una forte valenza politica di rivendicazione nazionale: la "diaspora" greca si rivela perciò come una fonte di rinnovamento in senso illuminista che condiziona nel profondo la vita intellettuale dei Principati. Di questo scrive con precisione Ovidiu Papadima:

La fel ca și iluminismul nostru, cel grec își începe mersul mai târziu în secolul al XVIII-lea, mai ales după 1770, și continuă în prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea. Datorită împrejurărilor istorice specifice, savanții și scriitorii greci au avut contacte directe cu iluminismul occidental și cu cel românesc, situația din patria lor nefiind prielnică unei activități în sensul ideilor emancipatoare ale secolului luminilor. Sunt numeroase cazurile în care oamenii de cultură din Grecia își duc viața și își desfășoară activitatea în diverse țări, între care adesea și în Principatele Române.⁷

Fino al 1821 i greci saranno gli intermediari con l'Occidente e, perciò, i promotori della necessità della "sincronizzazione". L'ultima fase dell'Illuminismo neogreco, quella che sfocerà successivamente nella ribellione degli anni Venti, reca nei Principati danubiani una nuova

⁷ PAPANIMA 1975, p. 50: «Allo stesso modo del nostro anche l'illuminismo greco inizia il suo percorso più tardi nel XVIII secolo, soprattutto dopo il 1770 e continua nella prima metà del XIX. A causa degli eventi storici specifici, i pensatori e gli scrittori greci hanno avuto contatti diretti con l'illuminismo occidentale e con quello romeno poiché la situazione nella loro madrepatria non era favorevole alle idee emancipatrici del secolo dei lumi. Sono numerosi i casi di uomini di cultura greci che vivono e sono attivi in numerosi paesi tra cui vi sono spesso i Principati romeni».

concezione della letteratura teatrale che ha come modelli le tragedie di Alfieri, Voltaire, Racine e Corneille sul versante tragico, Molière su quello comico. Fioriscono anche le imitazioni: si prenda, ad esempio, l'attività di un tragediografo come Zambelios, il quale, dopo aver studiato in Italia ed essere venuto a contatto con l'opera di Alfieri, aveva composto nel 1818 una tragedia di chiara ispirazione alfieriana, il *Timoleonte*, rappresentata a Vienna e, successivamente, anche a Bucarest.

Scrive tragedia *Timoleon*, exaltând imaginea personajului său principal, eliberatorul Siracuzei [...]. Prin tragediile lui – considerate de el ca un factor de educație națională – neoclasicismul elen înfruntă ecourile romantismului european, care totuși răzbat și în opera sa, în primul rând prin această ardență a ideii de libertate națională. În acest sens, Zambelios nu e un izolat. La începutul secolului încă, în 1805, anacreonticul Hristopoulos scrisese tragedia *Ahile*. În 1818 se reprezintă la Odesa tragedia *Moartea lui Demostene*, de tânărul Nicolaos Piccolos; iar în 1819, drama istorică *Grecia și străinătatea*, de tot atât de junele Gheorghios Lassanios, căreia acesta îi adaugă tragedia *Harmodius și Aristogiton*, celebrând conspirația celor doi atenieni împotriva tiraniei fiilor lui Pisistrate.⁸

La predilezione neogreca verso l'opera teatrale di Voltaire (che trova riscontro anche nell'ambiente del melodramma italiano coevo) sarà una delle cause del successo di questo autore presso la generazione di Heliade Rădulescu, il quale ebbe la propria prima formazione presso le scuole neogreche.

L'interesse verso le opere teatrali di Voltaire non è causato soltanto dalla loro carica polemica apertamente anti-dispotica, cara ai desideri di emancipazione nazionale, ma anche dallo stile di impronta classicheggiante, che rientrava nei gusti di un'area europea ancora attardata su posizioni decisamente neoclassiche. Questa caratteristica dello stile teatrale di Voltaire lo rende un'*auctoritas* formidabile sia per il nazionalismo neogreco sia per la necessità di occidentalizzazione romanza degli intellettuali romeni:

Pe planul gustului, Voltaire e mai puțin evoluat decât pe plan politic: e clasic, devotat canoanelor impuse de secolul anterior, cerebral și transparent până la extirparea imaginii de orice ambiguitate, de un lirism uscativ și devitalizat, dar tocmai prin nonșalanță, naturalețe, grație, disciplinare a materiei, accesibil unor cititori cruzi, care capătă o mai bună idee despre ei înșiși văzând că s-au înălțat la nivelul filozofiei, când de fapt aceasta e coborâtă la nivelul lor. În schimb, tocmai tragediile, care se bucură la noi de atâta căutare, exprimă fața sensibilă a filozofului, pregătind spiritele pentru acceptarea preromantismului și anticipând, în felul lor, dezlănțuirea puterilor obscure ale ființei și elocvența sentimentului.⁹

⁸ PAPANICOLA 1975, p. 60: «Scrive la tragedia *Timoleonte* dove esalta l'immagine del personaggio principale, il liberatore di Siracusa [...]. Grazie alle sue tragedie – da lui considerate uno strumento di educazione nazionale – il neoclassicismo ellenico resiste agli echi del romanticismo europeo, che, tuttavia, già percorre la sua opera, in primo luogo grazie all'ardore dell'idea della libertà nazionale. In questo senso, Zambelios non è isolato. Ancora all'inizio del secolo, nel 1805, l'anacreontico Christopoulos aveva scritto la tragedia *Achille*. Nel 1818 si rappresenta a Odesa la tragedia *La morte di Demostene* del giovane Nikolaos Pikkolos; e nel 1819 il dramma storico *La Grecia e il mondo esterno* dell'altrettanto giovane Gheorghios Lassanios, alla quale questi aggiunge la tragedia *Armadio e Aristogitone*, celebrando la cospirazione dei due ateniesi contro la tirannia dei figli di Pisistrato».

⁹ CORNEA 1972, p. 105: «Sul piano del gusto Voltaire è meno evoluto rispetto al piano politico: è classico, devoto ai canoni imposti dal secolo precedente, cerebrale e trasparente fino

Il Voltaire teatrale assomma un gusto per la *galanterie*, per l'intreccio romanzesco e per l'analisi psicologica alla presenza di elementi filosofici fortemente semplificati e "dialogizzati" ma non privi di efficacia, soprattutto politica.

Veniamo adesso alle traduzioni romene di opere teatrali di Voltaire. La prima giunta fino a noi è di poco precedente all'inizio delle rappresentazioni di Cișmeaua Roșie: si tratta della versione dell'*Oreste* a opera del moldavo Alexandru Beldiman, redatta intorno al 1810 e conservata in alcuni manoscritti (BAR 3696, etc.) e, successivamente, stampata a Buda nel 1820, proprio nel periodo di massimo successo delle rappresentazioni volteriane a Bucarest. Non ne ho potuto visionare i manoscritti e la traduzione è ancora inedita: rappresenta, tuttavia, un primo esperimento condotto da un intellettuale ancora legato a un contesto storico precedente a quello della generazione *pașoptistă* e probabilmente non destinato alla rappresentazione.

Heliade Rădulescu, con la creazione di *Societatea filarmonică*, si pose per la prima volta il problema pressante della creazione di un repertorio teatrale in lingua romena destinato a essere rappresentato. La breve esperienza neogreca di Cișmeaua Roșie ebbe inevitabilmente il suo peso nella scelta del canone degli autori cui rivolgersi, tra cui spiccano Voltaire, Alfieri e Molière. Heliade, forte dell'esperienza raccolta in campo linguistico e anche nelle traduzioni dal francese negli anni Venti, si era già cimentato in una trasposizione in romeno della tragedia di Voltaire, *Le fanatisme*, probabilmente già pensando a una sua futura rappresentazione.

Nella tragedia di Voltaire possiamo individuare due poli contrapposti: da una parte quello del 'fanatismo' di Maometto e dei suoi seguaci, una forma di subdola *Realpolitik* espansionista, dall'altra quello dei valori tradizionali "umani" impersonati da Zopir. In questo contesto si inserisce, in modo piuttosto artificioso, la vicenda d'amore incestuoso tra i due fratelli Seid e Palmira in un intreccio non troppo originale di agnizioni e di parricidi utile a garantire l'elemento sentimentale e romanzesco. La tragedia di Voltaire è una tragedia "a tema" che intende portare alla riflessione sulle grandi questioni del potere e della tirannide Classicismo, esaltazione della monarchia costituzionale fondata sul diritto naturale (impersonata nella figura di Zopir), riprovazione verso il fanatismo religioso di matrice orientale, elemento pedagogico: tutto questo non poteva non trovare interesse in un intellettuale formatosi nell'ambiente illuminista neogreco e che, anche a livello pratico, auspicava una decisa modernizzazione dei costumi e del pubblico dell'area dei Principati in senso europeo.

all'allontanamento dell'immagine da qualsiasi ambiguità, di un lirismo secco e devitalizzato, ma con leggerezza, naturalezza, grazia, controllo della materia, accessibile a lettori acerbi, che si possono fare così un'idea migliore di se stessi vedendo che si sono elevati al livello della filosofia quando in realtà questa è scesa al loro livello. D'altra parte, proprio le tragedie, che godono da noi di fama, mostrano il lato sensibile del filosofo, preparando gli spiriti per l'accettazione del preromanticismo e anticipando, a modo loro, la liberazione dei poteri oscuri dell'essere e l'eloquenza del sentimento».

Accanto agli aspetti razionalisti di lotta contro l'oscurantismo religioso (e quindi particolarmente attuali nell'area ancora sotto la pesante influenza dell'Impero Ottomano) la tragedia di Voltaire presenta un'altra caratteristica che dovette affascinare Heliade. Il futuro creatore di poemi cosmogonici intessuti di così tanta filosofia e, allora stesso tempo, così attenti alle grandi questioni della libertà dei popoli, dovette trovare nel *tyrannos* Maometto una figura ricca e complessa dal punto di vista umano e psicologico. Nella tragedia di Voltaire Maometto è un sovrano ambizioso e senza scrupoli che intende sovvertire consapevolmente l'ordine delle cose per opporre uno nuovo fondato sull'inganno e sulla paura. Si tratta sicuramente di una figura innovativa che ha permesso a Voltaire di creare una tragedia dall'aspetto inconsueto e che sembra anticipare anche alcuni elementi romantici. Maometto si presenta, infatti, come un conquistatore guidato dalla *hybris* e da una lucida volontà di dominio:

<p>Le glaive et l'Alcoran, dans mes sanglantes mains, imposeraient silence au reste des humains: ma voix ferait sur eux les effets du tonnerre, et je verrais leurs fronts attachés à la terre. [...] Je suis ambitieux; tout l'homme l'est, sans doute; mais jamais roi, pontife, ou chef, ou citoyen, ne conçu un projet aussi grand que le mien.¹⁰</p>	<p>în mâinele-mi sângerate Coran, sabia țiind, cealaltă lume-aș face să tacă înmărmurind; al meu glas într-al lor înimi ca tunetu- ar răsuna și la pământ a lor frunte aș vedea a se placa. [...] Sânt ambițios; ascultă: cine nu e pe pământ? îns-împărat niciodată, sau pontif, sau căpitan, nimini nu-și făcu ca mine un asfel de mare plan.¹¹</p>
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Nel secondo atto della sua tragedia Voltaire inserisce una delle scene più importanti dal punto di vista filosofico: nel dialogo tra Zopir, sovrano di La Mecca, e Maometto, fa esporre al profeta la propria *Realpolitik* attraverso una serie di *exempla* storici. Il potere, secondo Maometto, si basa su un uso consapevole dell'oscurantismo e del terrore delle popolazioni assoggettate e sul fanatismo e la fedeltà dei propri seguaci. Heliade traduce piuttosto fedelmente il testo originale intervenendo in alcuni punti con piccoli cambiamenti:

<p>En Égypte Osiris, Zoroastre en Asie; chez les Crétois Minos, Numa dans l'Italie, a des peuples sans moeurs, et sans</p>	<p>În Asia Zoroastru, Osiris la Eghiptieni și Numa în Italia, Minos între Cretieni</p>
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¹⁰ Tutte le citazioni del testo francese provengono da VOLTAIRE, pp. 275-334.

¹¹ Tutte le citazioni del testo romeno provengono da HELIADE RĂDULESCU 1985, pp. 1-69.

<p>culte, et sans rois, donnerent aisément d'insuffisantes lois. Je viens après mille ans changer ces lois grossières: j'apporte un joug plus noble aux nations entières; j'abolis les faux dieux, et mon culte épuré de ma grandeur naissante est le premier degré. Ne me reproche point de tromper ma patrie; je détruis sa faiblesse et son idolâtrie: sous un roi, sous un dieu je viens la réunir: et, pour la rendre illustre, il la faut asservir. [...]</p> <p>Oui; je connais ton peuple, il a besoin d'erreur; ou véritable ou faux, mon culte est nécessaire. Que t'ont produit tes dieux? quel bien t'ont-ils pu faire quels lauriers vois-tu croître au pied de leurs autels? Ta secte obscure et basse avilit les mortels, énerve le courage et rende l'homme stupide; la mienne élève l'âme et la rende intrépide. Ma loi fait des héros.</p> <p><i>Le fanatisme II, 5</i></p>	<p>(noroade fără-obiceiuri, credință, stăpânători), ei de legi nesăvârșite stătură întocmitori; eu viu după-atâtea veacuri să schimb aste groase legi, aduc un jug mult mai nobil la neamuri, noroade-ntregi. A mea curată credință, zeii mincinoși surpând, îmi statornicează slava pe care o vezi crescând. Nu îmi amănesc eu țara, precum vrei a-mi împluta, ci-i dărapăn slăbiciunea și-idolatria sa. Subt un împărat, credință, eu viu ca să unesc; și ca s-o fac strălucită, trebuie să o robesc. [...]</p> <p>Dar. Eu îți cunosc norodul și sânt toți priimitori de amăgiri, rățacire, fără de care nu pot. Adevărată-ori greșită, credința mea peste tot este prea de trebuință: neamuri o au cunoscut. Dumnezeii tăi ce bine sau ce folos ți-au făcut? Pre lâng-ale lor altare ce laure vezi crescând? Eresul tău fără slavă pe muritori împilând, dezbarbătează-ndrăzneală și face pe om fricos; al meu sufletul înalță și îl face virtuos: eroi face a mea lege.</p> <p><i>Fanatismul II, 5</i></p>
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Dove lo ritiene necessario Heliade riorganizza stilisticamente il più dimesso dettato volteriano conferendogli una maggiore mobilità retorica. Si vedano nell'ultimo estratto testuale, ad esempio, i versi francesi indicati in grassetto e si confrontino con i corrispettivi romeni: il nucleo tematico originale viene esteso concentrando l'interesse sulla strategia di dominio di Maometto dilatando il testo originale in due nuovi versi. Sono piccoli interventi del

traduttore che non stravolgono il testo originale ma conferiscono maggiore o minore peso agli elementi che lo interessano maggiormente.

In altri contesti, inoltre, Heliade non esita ad intervenire, anche in modo drastico, sul testo del drammaturgo francese. L'esempio più evidente riguarda l'ultima scena del quinto atto dove il traduttore aggiunge *ex novo* alcuni versi al monologo finale di Maometto. Questa interpolazione così radicale viene giustificata dalla seguente nota:

Mahomet părăndu-se trăducătorului foarte slăbit, micșorat înaintea lui Omar, și prin muștrarea cugetului desființând interesul urei din inima cititorului, însuflând oarecarea milă, a vrut prin versurile următoare să păstreze până în sfârșit haracterul lui cel sângeratic.¹²

In effetti, il vero ideatore e artefice di molte delle scelleratezze commesse all'interno della tragedia è Omar, un seguace di Maometto, mentre nella conclusione della tragedia Voltaire tratteggia un Maometto impietosito alla vista del cadavere di Palmira, la giovane di cui è segretamente innamorato. Il tardo pentimento del tiranno è sicuramente un *topos* classico che il tragediografo francese decise di inserire probabilmente al fine di compiacere il pubblico con un scena patetica. Heliade Rădulescu rigetta invece questa concessione allo stile sentimentale e, ormai influenzato dal romanticismo, accentua il carattere disumano e tirannico del profeta musulmano. Questo monologo è perciò una creazione originale di Heliade e un saggio di retorica teatrale di carattere sentenzioso. Trascrivo qui sotto il testo presente nell'edizione critica delle opere di Heliade Rădulescu curata da Drimba¹³:

Am pierdut-o!... Las' să piară oricare nenoricit
ce va-ndrăzni să răscoale un cuget de osândit.
Sângele numai înneacă vechile obicinui
și moartea astupă gura răzvâtitelor cărtiri.
Conștiința?... e bătaie pentru acel nimic
ce e născut să nu-și vază nici un cuget împlinit:
Satan în veci este vesel, pentru că-n veci cu folos
a știut să nu se-njunge l-acest obicei fricos.
Legea nu mă osândește, pentru că singur o fac,
și acel ce murmuiește eu cu trăsnetu-l împac. –
Palmiro, dragă ființă! tu puteai îns-a trăi,
numai moartea ta în lume putu a mă umili...
Dar, d-a ajuns l-al meu cuget, nimica nu am pierdut:
ambiția legăminte în veci nu a cunoscut.
Drumul cel mai drept al slavei aicea jos pre pământ
foarte des se îndreptează și prin locul cel mai sfânt;
și prin inima de tată ea își are drumul său-
De te abați, ai pierdut-o; sparge-o și-ți fă locul tău...
în drumul meu este moartea înainte-mergător,
și peste ale ei jărtfe am trecut trumfător.

¹² HELIADE RĂDULESCU 1985, p. 68: «Il traduttore, considerando la figura di Maometto troppo debole, troppo modesta rispetto a quella di Omar perché, con il rimorso, viene allontanato l'odio dall'anima del lettore e si ispira in lui qualche forma di compassione, ha voluto conservare fino alla fine con i versi seguenti il suo carattere sanguinario».

¹³ Il testo di questa aggiunta, curiosamente, non compare nell'edizione critica precedente di *Fanatismul* contenuta in POPOVICI 1939.

Ca să curăț Arabia de basne ce-o amăgea,
 îi trebuia o credință oricum a se-ntemeia;
 și totdeauna credința-mi va fi lunei spre folos,
 până când va ieși alta ca să o doboare jos;
 atunci ea va pieri, poate, însă nu și slava mea:
 vremea în veci va cinsti-o și se va sfii de ea.
 Dacă am amăgit lumea, datorita mi-am făcut:
 slava-mi cea mai mare este pentru că o am putut.
 Nenorociți sânt aceia ce pre sine s-amăgesc.
 Eu, ca dătător de lege, trebuia să o-ntăresc.
 E vrednic d-a sa robie cela ce va rob a fi;
 vrednic e de amăgire cine stă a s-amăgi.
 Prin minuni orice credință temeiu și l-a avut;
 minuni sânt vorbele mele de le-am adus de crezut.
 Printr-insele a mea lege a ajuns a se sfinți,
 și moartea va fi pedeapsa celui ce-o va ispiti.¹⁴

Il collegamento con la prima sezione del monologo, esemplata dal testo di Voltaire, è realizzato dalla ripresa anaforica *Am pierdut-o!...* Con questa vistosa interpolazione Heliade propone qui uno dei primi esperimenti di monologo drammatico in lingua romena, affrancandosi dalla presenza di un testo in lingua straniera e scrivendo in completa autonomia. La conclusione che Heliade inserisce nel suo *Fanatismul* sovverte il sentimentalismo che caratterizzava quella di Voltaire e pone l'accento su aspetti morali quali la coscienza e l'ambizione, che sono i veri e propri fili conduttori dell'intera tragedia: «Conștiința?... e bătaie pentru acel nimic | ce e născut să nu-și vază nici un cuget împlinit», «ambiția legăminte în veci nu a cunoscut», «nenorociți sânt aceia ce pre sine s-amăgesc».

Si tratta di un passaggio retoricamente elaborato che ci offre un'idea concreta di quali dovettero essere le idee di Heliade Rădulescu riguardo alle finalità del genere tragico in quel periodo. *Le Fanatisme*, infatti, è per il nostro traduttore un terreno di sperimentazione e di ricerca linguistica notevole. In primo luogo, egli deve creare una lingua tragica adeguata sia alla componente sentimentale e patetica presente nel testo sia ai dialoghi più

¹⁴ HELIADE RĂDULESCU 1985, p. 69: «L'ho perduta!... Si lasci morire qualsiasi sventurato | che osi rivoltarsi con un pensiero degno di condanna. | Solo il sangue può uccidere le antiche usanze | e la morte serra la bocca a chi protesta ribellandosi. | La coscienza?... è la battaglia per le nullità | nate per non vedere esaudito nessun loro disegno: | Satana è lieto in eterno, perché in eterno e con successo | ha saputo non asservirsi a questa abitudine paurosa. | La legge non mi condanna perché solo io la creo, | e a chi mormora posso dare la pace fulminandolo. –| Palmira, creatura a me cara! tu potevi ancora vivere, | solo la tua morte ha potuto rendermi umile nel mondo... | Ma, se è arrivata al mio pensiero, io nulla ho perduto: | l'ambizione non conosce legami eterni. | La strada più rapida verso la gloria su questa terra | molto spesso si dirige anche attraverso il luogo più santo; | e tramite il cuore di padre essa trova la sua strada – Se te ne allontani, l'hai persa; distruggila e crea il tuo luogo... | sulla mia strada la morte mi precede, | e sulle sue vittime sono passato trionfatore. | Per ripulire l'Arabia dalle falsità che la infestano, | era necessario creare una qualsiasi religione; | e la mia religione sarà sempre utile al mondo | fino a quando non verrà un'altra che la farà cadere; | allora essa perirà, forse, ma non perirà la mia gloria: | il tempo in eterno la onorerà e ne avrà timore. | Se ho infestato il mondo, ho compiuto il mio dovere: | la mia gloria più grande è di averlo potuto fare. | Sfortunati sono coloro che ingannano se stessi. | Io, come legislatore, dovevo renderla più dura. | È degno della propria schiavitù colui che vuole essere schiavo; | degno è di inganno chi vuole ingannarsi. | Ogni religione ha avuto la propria base sulle meraviglie; | meraviglie sono le mie parole, se le ho rese degne di essere credute. | Con queste si è santificata la mia legge | e la morte punirà chi non la rispetterà».

intensamente influenzati dalla filosofia. In questa fase della sua produzione il traduttore non usa un numero eccessivo di neologismi e il pensiero dell'originale è reso con chiarezza in lingua romena adoperando per lo più parole del lessico ereditato: la traduzione di *Fanatisme* sarà un punto di riferimento per gli anni successivi.

Anche dal punto di vista della concezione della letteratura *Fanatismul* mostra una decisa evoluzione rispetto al periodo immediatamente precedente: Heliade Rădulescu concepisce la tragedia come uno strumento di educazione morale e di maturazione della comunità. I primi autori romeni, sia nei loro testi originali sia nelle traduzioni si mostrano attenti alla creazione di una simbiosi tra un sentimentalismo tipicamente settecentesco (e gradito al pubblico) e più moderni elementi pedagogici:

Simbioza dintre interesul pentru seismele sufletești, pentru sentiment, și preocuparea didactică pentru morală, "virtute" nu este singulară, izolată la câteva persoane mai cultivate și cu preocupări educative determinante. Deseori în poezia noastră preromantică, sentimentalismul, care oferă tonalitatea dominantă și colorează cadrul liric al tabloului, apare întovărit de ideea de virtute, cea care va recomprenda necazurile pricinuite de o sensibilitate hipertrofiată. [...] Din toată literatura care se traduce în această perioadă, literatura cum am văzut mai înainte de orientare preromantică, grija traducătorilor este să extragă și să dezvolte aspectele cu conținut exemplar, din care se poate desprinde o învățătură, care au un substrat etic, moral, patriotic.¹⁵

Una componente razionalista e modernizzante percorre, come già presso gli autori neogreci del movimento eterista, le iniziative letterarie patrocinate da Heliade Rădulescu. Si tratta chiaramente di una concezione di matrice illuminista che, tuttavia, invece di servirsi della dimostrazione logica e razionale, preferisce fare uso dello stile sentimentale ed empatico.

Heliade teorizează chiar principiul literaturii ca factor moral care depășește interesul momentului etc., integrându-se astfel unui clasicism eclectic, pe care el l-a profesat cu destulă consecvență: lucrurile sunt cunoscute. Dar s-a observat că aceste idei teoretice, classiciste, urmează să fie puse în practică după o concepție sentimentalistă, individualistă și generală în același timp, favorizând în orice caz o literatură morală, dar inspirată din viața sufletească, etc.¹⁶

¹⁵ ANGHELESCU 1971, pp. 236-7: «la simbiosi tra l'interesse verso i tormenti interiori, verso il sentimento e verso la didattica morale, la "virtù", non è esclusiva, isolata presso alcuni individui più colti e con preoccupazioni educative determinanti. Spesso nella nostra poesia preromantica, il sentimentalismo, che offre la tonalità dominante e colora il quadro lirico, appare accompagnato dall'idea della virtù, elemento che andrà a compensare le amarezze causate da una sensibilità ipertrofica. [...] Da tutta la letteratura che viene tradotta in questo periodo, la letteratura, come abbiamo visto precedentemente, di orientamento preromantico, è cura dei traduttori estrarre e sviluppare gli aspetti di contenuto esemplare, da cui si possa ricavare un insegnamento, che abbiano un sostrato etico, morale, patriottico».

¹⁶ ANGHELESCU 1971, pp. 241-2: «Heliade teorizza il principio della letteratura come fattore morale che oltrepassa l'interesse del momento etc., inserendosi all'interno di un classicismo eclettico che ha professato con una certa coerenza. I fatti sono noti. Ma si è osservato che queste idee teoretiche, classiciste, vengono messe in pratica secondo una concezione sentimentalista, individualista e generale al tempo stesso, favorendo in ogni caso una letteratura morale, ma ispirata dalla vita interiore, etc.»

La scelta dei modelli europei di Heliade Rădulescu è di gran lunga più consapevole rispetto a quella dei suoi predecessori. Il traduttore non pensa soltanto al tema propagandistico della lotta alla tirannia ma anche alla “utilità” morale delle sue traduzioni presso il pubblico, soprattutto quello giovane.

Către 1830 Heliade lasă să se vadă că teatrul îi acaparează atenția și începe să-și cristalizeze o idee mai generală despre rolul său în societate [...]. Într-un articol nesemnat și fără titlu, din iulie 1830 [...], el pledează pentru prima dată necesitatea unui teatru românesc. În chip diplomatic, Heliade arată că, odată instaurate pacea și fericirea în țară “sub înțeleapta și buna cărmuire a preșidentului nostru”, lumea, scăpată de grijile și durerile dinainte, “deodată simți trebuința teatrului...”. [...] Heliade vedea în teatru, “școala cea dintâi a gustului, a moralului și a formării obiceiurilor” [...]. Însă el nu uită să-i atribuie teatrului și rolul de a rafina limba, destinată să ocupe locul ce i se cuvine prin strălucita ei ascendență, făcând apel la mândria națională, căci teatrul este acel loc “în care limba se înfrumusează și se înalță în treapta ce i se cuvine și în care este făcută și hotărâtă ca să o ție odată, puindu-se d-alături ca o tânără logodnică ci surorile ei și luând moștenirea ce legiuit i-a lăsat-o maica sa latină”.¹⁷

I testi che meritano di essere tradotti o imitati dai fondatori della nuova cultura romena sono quelli che apportano virtù morali riconosciute e che sono utili per la comunità. Dunque, nel suo tentativo di creare una tradizione tragica romena, Heliade prosegue sulla strada già percorsa dai suoi predecessori neogreci, accettandone il canone letterario ben definito, che è quello della grande tragedia settecentesca di Alfieri e Voltaire, e la loro posizione ideologica fieramente anti-tirannica. Tuttavia diventa centrale anche l'uso della letteratura come atto finalizzato al raggiungimento dell'autonomia culturale dei romeni: la creazione di un teatro nazionale è un passo in avanti verso l'affrancamento da uno stato di subordinazione culturale attraverso la messa a punto di una lingua nazionale e la formazione di un pubblico.

Fanatismul di Heliade Rădulescu, insieme al *Saul* di Alfieri, tradotto da Aristia nel 1836, segna la fine del periodo di massima espansione del teatro illuminista di matrice italo-francese e l'inizio della fase più matura di occidentalizzazione culturale, momento in cui entreranno nei Principati Romeni i grandi romantici quali Byron e Hugo, di cui Heliade sarà di lì a poco il primo divulgatore. Il nostro traduttore tornerà di nuovo sul teatro di

¹⁷ ANGHELESCU 2001, pp. 66-7: «Verso il 1830 Heliade mostra di dar maggiore attenzione al teatro e inizia a cristallizzarsi in lui un'idea maggiormente organica del ruolo di questo nella società [...]. In un articolo anonimo e senza titolo del luglio 1830 [...] egli teorizza per la prima volta la necessità di un teatro romeno. Con diplomazia politica, Heliade asserisce che, una volta instaurate la pace e la felicità nel Paese “sotto la saggia e buona guida del nostro presidente” (Alexandru Ghica, *n.d.T.*), la popolazione, sfuggita dalle preoccupazioni e dai dolori passati, “ha sentito improvvisamente la necessità del teatro...”. [...] Heliade vedeva nel teatro “la prima scuola del gusto, della morale e della formazione dei costumi” [...]. Ma non dimentica nemmeno di attribuire al teatro il ruolo di strumento per il raffinamento della lingua, destinata ad occupare il luogo che le spetta per la sua origine straordinaria, facendo appello all'orgoglio nazionale, perché il teatro è quel luogo “in cui la lingua si abbellisce e si eleva al rango che le spetta e [...], ponendosi così a lato delle sue sorelle come una giovane fanciulla e ricevendo l'eredità che legittimamente le ha lasciato la madre latina».

Voltaire negli anni seguenti ma con altre finalità: tradurrà il *Brutus* e rivedrà completamente in senso italianizzante la traduzione di *Le Fanatisme*, concentrando la propria attenzione sulla “questione della lingua”. Heliade cercherà nella limpida classicità del tragediografo francese un esempio stilistico da imitare per il suo progetto di trasformazione del romeno in una lingua sublime, esemplata sull’italiano e degna del genere letterario più nobile.

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THE FEAST AND ITS HYPOSTASES IN MIRCEA ELIADE'S PROSE



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Abstract: Feasting is one of the "openings" through which the sacred manifests itself in imanence. The essence of feast is not, in itself, accessible to human knowledge, only its manifestations are. Therefore, the question to ask is not that of *what* feasting is, but *how* it is. To be able to grasp feasting in Mircea Eliade's literary works, we have resorted to four of its forms of appearance: *playing*, *theatre*, *creation* and *sacred eros*. These are acts that have a special potential to open up a horizon of significations accessible to the initiated, should the latter undertake to decipher the signs and integrate the meaning in their own life. The article refers to Mircea Eliade's short-stories in which playing, the spectacle, artistic creation and metaphysical love are particularly noticeable, not as mere occurrences but, rather, as *festive instances* circumscribing a festive chronotope. Eliade's Romanian proses tackled here are: *Podul (The Bridge)*, *Adio!...(Goodbye)*, *Uniforme de general (Two Generals' Uniforms)*, *Șarpele (The Serpent)* and *La țigănci (With the Gypsy Girls)*.

Key words: feast, feasting, ceremonial spectacle, playing, chronotope, festive instances, Mircea Eliade, the sacred as hierophanic, the sacred as kratofanic

The presence of feast-related phenomena in the writings of Mircea Eliade is protean. Feasting is one of the "openings" through which the sacred manifests itself in imanence. According to Mircea Eliade's dialectic of the sacred and the profane, it is where the sacred emerges in the profane that space shall suffer the "opening" and be transmuted into the Centre.

Feasting is an opening, a phenomenon in Heideggerian's acception¹. The feast makes no sense without the revelation of a holy, sacred meaning in it. Through the phenomenon of Feasting, man in general adds

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Etre et Temps*, Authentica, 1985, § 7, p. 13.

significance to his/her living. The sacred sense is a guarantee that life is not senseless. This significance is equivalent to the experience of initiation which can make a breach into the quotidianity.

A simple decoding of the sacred sense is not enough, Eliade presumed. In the volume *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion*¹, he makes references to a type of hermeneutics which he calls "creative hermeneutics". Thus, the interpretation of the sacred sense is possible only by interiorizing it and by assuming it. Therefore, by adopting this position, Eliade poses himself on the same side as the gnostic tradition. At the same time, one can notice how Eliade's "creative hermeneutics" approaches the theory of Heidegger's hermeneutic circle², irrespectively of Henry Corbin's spiritual hermeneutics³.

Feasting, as an exceptional phenomenon, presupposes a complex apprehension; it represents the spatial and temporal fracture in which mundane rationality is pulverised. It is the discontinuity which installs the *festive chronotope*, as we can call the spatio-time of the feasting or of the holiday. But feasting is more than that, it is also the opening of the human existence towards the unlimited horizon of the possible.

In Mircea Eliade's short-stories, written in Romanian, feast takes certain manifestations. We may even speak of the "phenomenalisation" of Feasting, since the phenomenological sense of "opening" is present, but it adds more layers over it. For Mircea Eliade, feasting is a continuum of diverse configurations. Thus, for Eliade's characters, feasting is inherently present in games, provided that these games should create, through playing, a new spatio-temporal order, similar to a festive chronotope. Not any game will be the manifestation of feasting. A second way in which the feast is present for Eliade's characters is that of theatre. Again, not any kind of theatre, only the ceremonial spectacle which brings a festive instance. A third way is that of the creative act. A fourth way is that of Eros.

The present article is grounded in the fundamental relation between feast and signification. This relationship helps the retrieval of feasting as phenomenon. The route we have taken is that from phenomenon to sign. This route aims to identify the locus where reality ceases to be mere perception of objects and opens itself up to something else, to its own sacred dimension.

Mircea Eliade envisages two ways of understanding the feast: one is static, descriptive, and consists in outlining with precision the forms the sacred takes when it manifests; the other is dynamic and symbolic, and involves indirect suggestion of the presence of the sacred in the feast. The theoretical framework we used in view of describing the phenomenon of the feast is interdisciplinary and draws on the history of religions, anthropology, sociology and phenomenology.

¹ In Romanian it was translated as the *Nostalgia of Origins*, Mircea Eliade, *Nostalgia originilor*, translated by Cezar Baltag, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994.

² Cf. Martin Heidegger, „Bâtir, habiter, penser” in *Essais et conférences*, Gallimard, 1958, p. 176.

³ Henry Corbin, *Avicenne et le récit visionnaire*, Verdier, 1999, p. 42.

Eliade evokes the anti-historicism of Henry Corbin, who was his contemporary, to argue that the study of religions should primarily aim to uncover the signifying dimension of the religious event. Interpreting sacred meanings consists in more than merely applying a decoding algorithm; it requires internalizing and living them. Mircea Eliade's "creative hermeneutics" is not only an interpretative method but also a "spiritual technique" which reveals new meanings of existence and keeps the spirit alert and able to recognize them.

The essence of feast is not, in itself, accessible to human knowledge, only its manifestations are. Therefore, the question to ask is not that of *what* feasting is, but *how* it is. *Hierophanic* and *kratophanic* ways of approaching the phenomenon can shed light on certain aspects: in other words, a *modal* method which is faithful to Eliade's scientific and literary work.

From a *hierophanic* point of view, the time of the religious feast shows that human beings have access to "purity"² (Roger Caillois); this time is "pure". From a *kratophanic* perspective, the time of the feast is "strong" and leads to change and transfiguration in the participants. It marks a different kind of *positioning* in which the role of contingency is lessened in a significant way, since what matters is the depth transcendence gives to immanence³.

Paul P. Drogeanu sees in the feast "an alternative cultural model"⁴. In the *paradoxical synchronicity* of the festive chronotope, human beings are in the company of their neighbours but also that of heroes and gods, of the living and the dead, and of their own descendants.

For the historical being situated always in a network, both *proximity relations* between individuals, and *group psychology* are important. At the same time, cultural constraints influence and even impose the adoption of certain types of festive behaviour.

In the myth of death and rebirth, the resolution of tensions is equivalent to a *death*, while receiving the energy which enables the start of a new journey is a *re-birth*. Through its power to abolish routine the feast is, par excellence, able to reduce tensions in people's subconscious. It encourages consumption but it also energizes the individual. Even when they are alone, human beings meet their transcendental *other* or their neighbour through imagination: "Man is essentially festive and imaginative"⁶.

Besides the fundamental relationship between *opening* (in Heidegger's terms) and *signification* through which we seek to understand the feast by exploring its dynamic manifestations, another important

¹ M. Eliade, *Nostalgia originilor*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, p. 102.

² Roger Caillois, *Omul și sacrul*, Nemira, Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997, p. 107.

³ M. Eliade, *Nostalgia originilor*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, p. 93.

⁴ Paul P. Drogeanu, *Practica fericirii. Fragmente despre sărbătorească*, Eminescu Publishing House, Bucharest, 1985, p. 14.

⁵ M., Eliade, *Sacrul și profanul*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1995, p. 70.

⁶ Harvey Cox, *La fête des fous*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1971, p. 23., translation mine.

relationship, between historical and transhistorical time, needs to be considered.

While profane time wears out the human being who, aware of the “terror of history” and the lack of meaning of his or her acts, enters a state of metaphysical anguish, sacred time, which is reversible, always equal to itself and forever present, is different in a *qualitative* way. The feast is, then, a historical event with a transhistorical meaning: “There cannot be such a thing as a ‘pure’ religious act *outside history*, since all human phenomena are inscribed in history. Any religious experience manifests, and is transmitted within, a specific historical context”¹.

To be able to grasp feasting in Mircea Eliade’s literary works, we have resorted to four of its forms of appearance: the feast appears regularly in the form of *playing, theatre, creation* and *sacred eros*. These are acts that have a special potential to open up a horizon of significations accessible to the initiated, should the latter undertake to decipher the signs and integrate the meaning in their own life.

The present research does not attempt to catalogue, in an exhaustive way, all the festive instances in Mircea Eliade’s short stories; neither does it aim to place Eliade’s work in a literary history context. It simply refers to these short-stories in which playing, the spectacle, artistic creation and metaphysical love are particularly noticeable, not as mere occurrences but, rather, as *festive instances* circumscribing a festive chronotope. From Eliade’s prose, these festive instances have a special prominence in the following writings: playing appears in *Șarpele (The Serpent)* and *La țigănci (With the Gypsy Girls)*, *Pe strada Mântuleasa (On Mântuleasa Street)*², the spectacle in *Podul (The Bridge)*, *Adio!...(Goodbye)*, *În curte la Dionis (In Dionysus Court)*, artistic creation in *Uniforme de general (Two Generals’ Uniforms)*, sacred eros in *Șarpele (The Serpent)*, and in all of Eliade’s novels such as: *Maitreyi*, *Nuntă în cer (Marriage in Heaven)*, *Noaptea de Sânziene (The Forbidden Forest)*, but we refer in this article only to Eliade’s short-stories.

Playing and feasting have many shared characteristics but also a number of differences with respect to their actual or potential horizon of significance. Feasting and playing exist through celebration and representation. Celebrating and representing require familiarity with (and the ability to recognize) rules, and the consent for constraints which, paradoxically, ensure the freedom of the human being.

Playing is, in Huizinga’s view, more than mere entertainment: it has a key role in generating culture³. Dialectical in its nature and a crucial ingredient of creative spontaneity, playing is not just a gratuitous act, according to Eliade and Henriot⁴. An entire range of human activities may be carried out in a playing mode, and playing can be an end in itself

¹ M. Eliade., *Nostalgia originilor*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, p. 22., translation mine

² Translated as *The Old Man and the Bureaucrats*

³ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2002.

⁴ Jean Henriot, *Le jeu*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1969.

(Caillois.¹ Theatre, music, dancing, the visual arts encourage the development of a playful dimension of society and often represent attempts to overcome a spiritual void (Rigaud)².

Eliade's work abounds in a variety of forms of playing: dance, disguise, initiation, theatre, playing as a way to achieve or express freedom, or with a soteriological function. In *Șarpele*, playing is kratophanic, since it is initiated and maintained by Andronic, a hybrid hero with human and superhuman attributes. The term kratophanic was introduced into English by Mircea Eliade and it refers to the experience of power in connection to the sacred.³ From the very beginning of *Șarpele (The Serpent)*, playing is ambivalent, at the same time conscious and unconscious. It is perceived as a joke or a farce, a magic trick or an instance of witchcraft. Finally, in the forest, playing becomes erotic. Andronic, the protagonist, becomes the bandmaster of every action. He manipulates all the others without any explicit opposition. He is the outsider of the group, coming out of nowhere. As Ștefan Borbély notes, the impulse comes from outside, through a messenger or an intruder.⁴

A first category is that of **conscious play**. It is easily accepted by all characters due to its resemblance with known games. When Andronic suggests they should play a game in the forest, all the others perceive it as forfeit game. They go for it without suspecting the metamorphoses to come⁵.

As the characters begin to play, each of them experiences a new state of mind. They are caught up in the frenzy of Andronic's suggested playing, though they understand nothing of it and the overall sense of the game seems to elude them.

A second category is that of **unconscious play**. All the characters re-play, during their sleep, at an oneiric level, Andronic's game in the forest. They add, subjectively, erotic elements which persist in the state of wakefulness.

The play in *Șarpele* is kratophanic, since there is a key-character, a manipulator, putting the others at his disposal, using a form of sacred power. He owns all the secrets of power and at the same time he is not equal to the others, he comes from outside, while all the others belong to the same social circle. But his ontological state is even more mysterious. Andronic does clearly not belong to a linear, historical time. He is the son of some boyars, but was brought up by gypsies. He gets the predispositions towards the darker side of conscience, towards the occult and hypnosis from his breeding. As a hybrid hero, he cumulates human and superhuman

¹ Roger Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes. Le masque et le vertige*, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1967.

² Jacques Rigaud, *La culture pour vivre*, Editions Gallimard, 1975.

³ See Fernandez, Veer, Lastovicka, the article http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/v34/500793_100498_v1.pdf

⁴ Ștefan Borbély, *Proza fantastică a lui Mircea Eliade. Complexul gnostic*, Editura Biblioteca Apostrof, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, p. 56.

⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Șarpele*, în *La țișănci și alte povestiri*, Editura pentru literatură, București, 1969, p. 183.

attributes. They have a demonic touch and induce a superhuman power of metamorphoses, of transgressing different levels of existence.

In a way, the apparition of Andronic among the others is like the incarnation of their own instincts. He brings to surface what the others do not dare to pronounce or act upon. He is well received into the circle of friends of the same social scale who intend to spend their weekend at a monastery: the Solomons, Stamate, Liza, Dorina, captain Manuilă, the Zamfirescu, Riri, Vladimir. They give a lift to a hitchhiker, Andronic, the perfect stranger. All the men in the group perceive him as the danger. Captain Manuilă, who courts Dorina, is flabbergasted by seeing all her attention on him. All women become instantly Andronic's allies. The serpent represents the ontological totality. It is the eternal return what conveys the evenimential into the mythic. Dorina is under the spell that all these facts had happened before. By the participation to the mythical act of invoking the snake, all the characters pass into the mythical time.

In *La țigănci* playing is beneficial to the human being, and its nature is hierophanic, not kratophanic (power-related).

Unlike Andronic from *Șarpele*, the initiator of playing, Gavrilescu is caught in the play without the possibility to refuse it.

Gavrilescu accepts to enter the gypsy women's game and, in doing so, recuperates a time he had lost: the moments spent with the first woman he ever loved, Hildegard, with whom he had been truly *happy*.

Gavrilescu is the character caught in a spatio-temporal loop. Entering the place called "at the gypsy girls", he enters a world in which all his formerly stable reference points cease to function well. He knows it is three o'clock but the woman at the entrance, who takes his money, says it is four o'clock. This is just the beginning of the temporal fracture. In the perpetual transformation of the place, of the rooms, the fantastic gets an outlet for its insertion. There is an inter-tempores and an inter-ego type of insertion, a carrousel of his own selves and into that carrousel he takes the glimpse into his own death. The present and the past are caught in a "hora"-like type of circle dance.

In Mircea Eliade's literature theatre is not only an art of representation; it has the status of intermediary world and enables the manifestation of a meaning that transcends and fulfils human being. As spiritual disciplines, one leading to the double revelation of meaning and the other of gold, the eternal substance, theatre and alchemy are closely related.

Theatre helps people go beyond their usual perceptions and situate themselves within a different horizon of meaning: the theatre's *fictum* (Husserl) configures a new reality in which objects and human beings are *completely different* from everyday living¹. A tree on the stage is not merely part of the décor, it has a clearly determined meaning in the world that is

¹ Cf. Edmund Husserl: *Gesammelte Werke*, Band XXIII, Phantasie, Bildbewusstsein Erinnerung. Zur Phänomenologie der anschaulichen Vergegenwärtigungen, Textes aus dem nachlass (1898-1925), Herausgegeben von Eduard Marbach, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague, 1980, p. 510-516.

represented or reconstructed through the acting. And the actor is not an anonymous passer-by but the king or prisoner of the dramatic act.

In Eliade's work, theatre works as a scenario of initiation and has a soteriological function, as in *Nouăsprezece trandafiri* (*Nineteen Roses*). It evokes, reminds, constitutes a form of anamnesis, offering human beings a safe haven against the terror of history as in *Uniforme de general* (*Two Generals' Uniforms*). According to Corbin, "creative imagination" (which is different from making things up or lying) is the only faculty that can orient a person towards another order of reality. The stage is a real world, not an illusion or a mirage. It is important, however, for one to be able to decode accurately the meanings it conveys, and this is only possible through creative imagination. An ontological distinction is in order: the curtain marks the boundary between rational contingency and the irrationality involved in the manifestation of sacred meanings (*Adio!...*).

For actors, there is no such thing as the curtain. From the height of the scene, the curtain loses its delimitative function. Actually, the frontier refers to the delimitation of two worlds ontologically different.¹

In the short-story *Adio!...*, the theatre director explains to the audience the role of the curtain. There is no screen for the actors on the stage, as they are included in the mystery which happens there. The curtain suggests the limits of rationality in what regards the understanding of a mystery. The curtain as a frontier between the rational and the irrational is a frontier visible especially in language, because it illustrates the inappropriation of rationality to the complexity of the surrounding world. The spectacle that it is been watched in this short-story stirs violent reactions within the audience. The spectators ignore the fact that the performance is not a "representation", but the act of creating a radically new world. To understand it requires an initiation in the spiritual sense, not in the intellectual or scientific way. The public is not prepared for this kind of initiation and another barrier into understanding it is the language itself. The audience views the spectacle as an object. For actors, it is not the same, it is not even the image or the representation of something. The performance is the revelation of the sense in a continuous present abstracted from historical determinants.

The language of the spectacle is indirect. In a sense, it is close to dancing because, expressed through movements and rhythm, the dynamics of meaning is closer to the original intention not yet translated in discursive thinking and language.

Through anamnesis, theatre is, also, a technique for recapturing true religious sentiments. On the one hand anamnesis presupposes forgetting, but on the other it triggers memories that have become concealed or that were lost in everyday living (*Nouăsprezece trandafiri*). The

¹ Mircea Eliade, *Adio!...*, în *În curte la Dionis*, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1981, p. 173.

dramatic spectacle has a purifying role and is a threshold of transsubstantiation beyond which the gesture becomes sign, and the word becomes symbol.

Dramatic representation, however, is subject to distortion, when people abandon the authentic and embrace the artificial and the kitsch. While the performance was for the gods, it had meaning and the potential to transfigure. The lack of imagination and a shift in target audiences lead to its downfall. That is why the world has to be recreated through true imagination, and infused with meanings that can save it.

The artist is a kratophanic presence in the world, endowed with the ability to create; not using this potential means committing a "sin of sterility"¹. In Eliade's literature the artist is a *stranger*. Arriving from nowhere, he or she has the freedom to fulfil his role in capturing, understanding and transmitting the sacred meanings: in other words, in revealing. But, without an appropriate decoding by other people and a valid hermeneutics, the artist's act is relegated to the category of mysteries that cannot be understood. Just like feasting and playing, creating is a constrained form of freedom, and has a soteriological function.

The creation act, as another expression of feasting, represents the very "duty" of every human being, at the same time it raises man above human condition. Through intuition and creative imagination, the artist is capable to send forth the revealed sense. Within the creation act, man does not decode the sacred sense, but interiorizes and personalizes it. The imminence of death keeps alive man's creative urges. It is also a response in front of the terror of history.²

It is through the artists that they world devoid of its original sense is re-enchanted.

Finally, we look at eros as festive instance and a recurrent feature in Eliade's work. Its meanings are plural and particularly complex. Love fulfills the human being in two ways, physical and metaphysical; it gives existence a sense of order and direction. As founding principle, eros presupposes the hierogamy of an originary couple whose union gives rise to a festival. Several couples in Eliade's realist and fantastic literature are reiterations of the edenic couple (even if some of them fall from that position) : Allan and Maitreyi (*Maitreyî*), Mavrodin and Ileana (*Nuntă în cer*), Gavrilescu and Hildegard (*La țigăncî*), Andronic and Dorina (*Șarpele*). Eros also has an epistemological function. Knowing the other involves fascination, passion, and truth. Extatic love is festive in nature. Moral constraints manifesting through conformity to rules and traditions limit the human being's creative potential. That is why eros belongs to another horizon of significations. As complete surrender to the extent of crossing the frontier between life and death, love brings revelation to the creative self. But degraded forms of eros

¹ V. Jankélévitch, *Le Je-ne-sais-quoi et le Presque-rien. La Volonté de vouloir*, Seuil, Points, 1980, p. 42.

² Mircea Eliade, *Încercarea labirintului*, 1990, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, p. 85.

such as rape and debauchery are at the opposite end of the spectrum by comparison with festive eros.

Mircea Eliade was concerned with myths and religions of people from all over the world and from different historical epochs not only for the purpose of a methodical and scientific classification, but also as a means to reinforce the tangible manifestations of the sacred and the continuity of elements in man's relationship to the transcendence.

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CVASI-EXOTISMUL SINONIMELOR DE ORIGINE SLAVĂ DIN LIMBA ROMÂNĂ

THE QUASI-EXOTICISM OF ROMANIAN SYNONYMS OF SLAVIC ORIGIN



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Abstract. Starting from the hypothesis that the Romanian language and its synonymic system was strongly influenced by Slavic languages, and accepted many terms of Slavic origin to double the already existing ones, the present paper aims at highlighting both the special role played by this linguistic influence and the opposition between the exotic and non-exotic character of the Slavic words in synonymic series. This implies, before the proper approach, a brief presentation of synonymy—as a microsystem, together with some aspects of its terminology. The systemic character of the synonyms, in any language, was noticed and analysed by many linguists, starting with E. Coseriu, N. Chomsky, J. Filipec, R. A. Budgov etc. In what terminology is concerned, there was a real explosion of new words naming the same linguistic fact or construction, such as: synonymic series/group/pairs/doublets/chain/string. On the other hand, some of the newly formed words, although exotic, were accepted, but others, maybe too exotic, such as: synonymic derivation, ornamental synonyms, intensifying synonyms etc. could not be imposed in linguistics. The paper will show that the Slavic influence upon the Romanian vocabulary, especially upon the synonymy, cannot be neglected, and allows its study to be performed from different perspectives, depending on the instances, series in which the Slavic terms occur.

Key words: synonymic system, series of synonyms, Slavic terms, exoticism, bilingualism

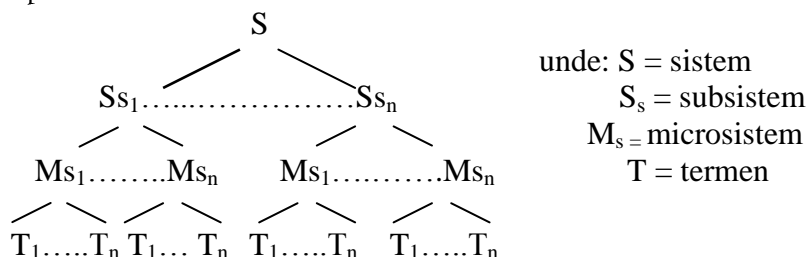
Țără pretenția de a fi exhaustivă (pretenție de altfel foarte îndrăzneță și greu realizabilă, date fiind caracterul deschis al lexicului și vastitatea

problemelor), lucrarea își propune să reliefeze caracterul cvasi-exotic al sinonimelor de origine slavă din limba română, într-o tentativă de sistematizare a generoasei teme, a cărei ecloziune e o evidență. Înainte de a aborda temapropriu-zisă, este necesară o incursiune sumară în câteva aspecte generale ale sinonimiei. Consider oportun excursul în conceptul de sinonim, cu atât mai mult cu cât parcimonioaselor cercetări inițiale dedicate sinonimiei li se opune astăzi o întreagă suită de cercetări în domeniu.

I. Sinonimia-ca microsistem

Având ca punct de plecare importanța sinonimelor în sistemul lexical al limbii, constatăm rolul deosebit al acestora între componenții paradigmelor semantice, mai ales pentru că bogăția și diversitatea realității obiective își găsesc exprimarea în limbă în special datorită sinonimelor. Multitudinea de definiții date sinonimelor a dus la identificarea, din diverse perspective, a diferitelor tipuri de sinonime: fonetice, lexicale, gramaticale, afixale, mixte, etc., toate având la bază premisa unor relații binare, manifestate în fonetică, în vocabular(semantică) și gramatică.

Încercând o îmbinare a cercetării sincronice (sintagmatic) cu cea diacronică (paradigmatică), ținem seama de cunoscuta aserțiune a lui Eugenio Coseriu: „Limba funcționează sincron și se constituie diacronic”. Limba este un mecanism viu, în care sunt prezente sisteme lingvistice complexe, guvernate de reguli, dar și cu numeroase excepții și aparente contradicții, formate din unități succesive tot mai mici care pot fi redată grafic după modelul structuralist sau cel chomskian:



- Sau :
- $S \rightarrow Ss_1 \wedge Ss_2$
 - $Ss_1 \rightarrow Ms_1 \wedge Msn$
 - $Ssn \rightarrow Ms_1 \wedge Msn$
 - $Ms_1 \rightarrow T_1 \wedge Tn$
 - $Msn \rightarrow T_1 \wedge Tn$
 - $Ms_1 \rightarrow T_1 \wedge Tn$
 - $Msn \rightarrow T_1 \wedge Tn$

Prin urmare, prin *sistem* se ajunge la *microsisteme* și de aici la *termeni*. Microsistemele apar în timpul organizării unităților în cadrul

subsistemului, iar termenii reprezintă diviziunea ultimă a sistemului. În această ordine de idei, dacă limba este un sistem, atunci compartimentele ei: fonetică, lexic, morfologie, sintaxă etc. reprezintă subsisteme alcătuite din microsisteme. Categoria sinonimelor, văzută ca microsistem al subsistemului lexical, are la rândul ei în componere alte microsisteme reprezentate de *seriile sinonimice*, ai căror componenți, *termenii*, sunt strâns legați între ei prin sensul lor, reflectând fenomene identice ale lumii reale¹. Caracterul de sistem al seriilor sinonimice presupune concentrarea atenției asupra faptului că relațiile de sinonimie se realizează pe deplin numai pe plan sincron, necesitând mai întâi un studiu descriptiv, deoarece fiecare perioadă din evoluția limbii are un sistem propriu de sinonime bine reliefat, ai cărui componenți se organizează pe plan vertical și funcționează pe plan orizontal. Microsistemul sinonimic are un caracter deschis și dinamic, aflându-se într-un perpetuu proces de dezvoltare, sporindu-și sau diminuându-și volumul în funcție de unii factori cum ar fi: dezvoltarea limbii, etapele specifice prin care trece limba în evoluția ei, diferitele limbaje, posibilitățile de acumulare și asimilare ale fiecărui vorbitor etc. Caracterul de microsistem al sinonimiei se realizează prin asocierile de cuvinte, pe baza sensului comun, care formează așa-zisele serii sinonimice². Josef Filipec remarca faptul că *seria sinonimică* nu e numai o formă de manifestare, ci și un *sistem*³. Descoperirea sistemului în vocabular presupune studierea categoriilor lexicului, puse în corelație, demonstrând că totalitatea categoriilor formează prin interacțiune, sistemul⁴.

În cadrul sistemului, relația sinonimică se construiește prin includerea primului cuvânt, care este dominant, în explicarea celui de-al doilea etc., obținându-se astfel ierarhia unei serii sinonimice unite prin elementul comun al componenților ei.

Spre exemplu,	c1	c2
	<i>a îndrăzni</i> (sl)	<i>a cuteza</i> (sl)
S1-	a prinde curaj(C1+C2)	C2<->C1 – S2
S2-	a se însufleți(C1)	C2<-> C1- S3
S3-	a se încumeta (C1)	C2<->C1-S4
S4-	a avea curajul(C1+C2)	
S5-	a permite(C1+C2)	
S6-	a pofti(C1)	

Utilizând metoda semantică a extensiunii și intensiunii, Carnap⁵ dă o serie de definiții, printre care și pe cea a limbajului sensurilor, afirmând

¹ Apud M., Kiraly, *Sinonimia substantivelor în limbile rusă și română*, București, 1974

² O., Vințeler, *Considerații asupra sinonimiei*, în "Studii" II, Dej, 1980, p.157

³ Cf. J., Filipec, *Česka synonymu z hlediska stylistiku a leksikologie*, Praga, 1961, p.198

⁴ Cf. R., A., Budagov, *Sravnitel'no-semasiologičeskijé issledovanija*, Moscova, 1963, p.8 și p.9

⁵ R. Carnap, *Meaning and Synonymity in Natural Languages*, în „Philosophical Studies”, VI, 1955, Nr. 1-6.

că „designatorii *sinonimi* sunt intersubstituibili în orice context” și că două expresii e_1 și e_2 sunt *echisemnificative* sau *sinonime*, dacă e_1 are același sens cu e_2 , și conchide că, conceptul de sinonimie „cere o definiție sau un criteriu în termeni psihologici și lingvistici”. Un alt punct de vedere, tot filosofico-logic susține că, „nu orice pereche de expresii, care au aceeași intensiune, pot fi numite *sinonime* sau *echipolente*” și că „două expresii sunt sinonime, dacă ele au aceeași intensiune i , intensiunea nu este nici *zero*, nici *universul*, sau dacă intensiunea lor fiind *zero* sau *universul* ele sunt echivalente în înțeles analitic”.

De altfel, metoda substituției este considerată a fi cel mai eficient mijloc de verificare a tipurilor de sinonime. Astfel, în dubletele de felul: *natriu – sodiu, kaliu – potasiu, conjunctiv – subjonctiv* etc., oricare dintre cei doi componenți poate sta în orice context, în orice îmbinare cu caracter mai mult sau mai puțin constant, substituția fiind completă și prin urmare, sinonimele absolute. În schimb, în cazul perechii *vreme – timp* nu există o sinonimie totală, deoarece substituția unui termen cu celălalt este incompletă, în anumite contexte neputându-se realiza. Astfel, putem spune: *nu te-am văzut de ceva timp – nu te-am văzut de ceva vreme* sau *e timp frumos – e vreme frumoasă* etc, dar nu putem spune *de timp ce* în locul lui *de vreme ce* așa cum nu-l putem substitui pe *timp* cu *vreme* în expresii ca : *timi morți* sau în *doi timpi și trei mișcări*.

2. Terminologie sinonimică

Nu puține au fost și părerile lingviștilor privind problema clasificării sinonimelor, spectrul larg al tipurilor de sinonime întinzându-se de la sinonime *totale / perfecte* și *parțiale / aproximative*, sinonime *semantice* și *stilistice*, sinonime după *înțeles, indiciu, culoare, temperatură*, sinonime cu *radicali diferiți* (eterorizice) și cu *același radical* (omoroizice), sinonime afixale, derivative, fonetice etc, până la sinonime *lexicale, gramaticale*, sinonime *permanente, ocazionale*, sinonime *în contact, distanțate* etc.

Nivelele de incidență ale sinonimiei au fost și ele un motiv de expunere a unor păreri diferite, considerându-se că relațiile de sinonimie se pot stabili atât în *limbă* cât și în *vorbire*, deosebindu-se sinonimia *potențială, cea actuală, cea individuală, cea interdialectală sau teritorială, cea stilistică*.

Cât privește terminologia utilizată în cercetarea sinonimelor am constatat existența unor noțiuni mai mult sau mai puțin relevante pentru definirea acestora, cum ar fi: *serie sinonimică, grup sinonimic, perechi sinonimice, dublete sinonimice, cuib sinonimic, lanț sinonimic, șir/rând sinonimic, dominant, cuvânt registru, nucleu permanent, nuanță de sens; coeficient de diferențiere, cuvânt titlu, referent, coincidență, noncoincidență, incluziunea, cumul de sinonime* etc., care s-au impus în lingvistică, spre deosebire de *derivație sinonimică*, sinonime de *intensitate*, de *ornamentare* etc, care nu s-au bucurat de o atenție suficientă pentru a fi menționați în uz.

3. Exotismul împrumuturilor din slava sau cvasi-exotismul sinonimelor de origine slavă în limba română

Ca urmare a conviețuirii cu slavii și a influenței cultural-religioase, prin cărțile de cult, în limba română au pătruns numeroase cuvinte de origine slavă.

Bilingvismul a permis unui număr mare de cuvinte slave să pătrundă în vocabularul de bază al limbii române, cuprinzând o varietate de sfere semantice. Spre exemplu, *substantivele*:

boier<*boljarinŭ*, *stăpân*<*stopanŭ* (stare socială); *maică*<*maika*, *nevastă*<*nevěsta* (familie); *gât*<*ghitŭ*, *obraz*<*obrazŭ* (părți ale corpului), *puscă*<*puška*, *sabie*<*sablja* (armată); *ciocan*<*čokan*, *clește*<*klěšta*, *cumpănă*<*kopona* (obiecte); *poftă*<*pohoti*, *smântână*<*smětana* (hrană); *brazdă*<*brazda*, *ogor*<*ugar*, *plug*<*plugŭ*, *snop*<*snopŭ* (agricultură); *ceas*<*časŭ*, *veac*<*věkŭ*, *vârstă*<*vrŭsta*, *vreme*<*vrěme* (timp); *boală*<*bolŭ*, *rană*<*rana* (medicină); *deal*<*dělŭ*, *nisip*<*nasŭpŭ*, *praf*<*prahŭ*, *trăsni*<*tresnoti* (natură); *cocoș*<*kokoši*, *rață*<*rěco*, *vrabie*<*vrabij* (faună); *colindă*<*kolęda*, *Hristos*<*Hristosŭ*, *sfânt*<*svetŭ*, *slavă*<*slava* (cuvinte creștine și bisericești).

-*adjectivele*: *calic*<*calica*, *drag*<*dragŭ*, *mândru*<*modŭrŭ*, *prost*<*prostŭ*, *rumen*<*ruměnŭ*, *sărac*<*sirakŭ*, *zdravăn*<*sudravinŭ*, *blajin*<*blaženŭ*, *dărz*<*drŭzŭ*.

-*verbele*: *clipi*<*klepati*, *coborî*<*poğorŭ*, *dărui*<*darovati*, *plească*<*pliskani* (acțiuni concrete); *iubi*<*ljubiti*, *îndrăzni*<*drŭznoti*, *pofti*<*pohotěti*, *smuci*<*smučak*, *zgârci*<*šugrŭciti* (acțiuni abstracte); *găti*<*gatoti*, *roboti*<*rabotati*.

-*adverbele*: *aievea*<prepoziția *a* + v.sl.*javě* (pe față, evident); *împotriva*<*protivo*, *îndeosebi*<*osobŭ* (separat), *iute* <*ljute*, *prea*<*pre*, *ba*, *da* etc.

-*interjecțiile*: *iaca* <*jako*, *iată* <*eto*.

Tot bilingvismului i se datorează apariția în limbă a calcurilor lingvistice, diferite de împrumuturi. Calcul nu reprezintă adoptarea unui cuvânt străin, ca împrumutul, ci numai a sensului său. Vorbitorii de limbă slavă și română au transpus din slavă în română procedee caracteristice de expresie, plecând de la coincidența de sens a termenului slav și a celui românesc. Spre exemplu:

v. sl. *světŭ* însemna *lumină*, *lume*, în timp ce dr. *lume* < lat. *Lumen* înseamnă *lumină*. Prin calchiere, *lume* a ajuns să însemne *lumină*, dar și *lume*.

sau bg. *žaleka* (- balama) < *žaba* < *broască*.

dr. *broască* desemna animalul.

Prin calchiere *broască* a preluat și înțelesul de *balama*, *închizătoare*.

Vocabularul românesc s-a lăsat pătruns și de afixe slave, destul de numeroase, dar nu toate la fel de productive. Afixele au fost detașate și au putut fi alăturate ulterior altor cuvinte de diferite origini.⁶ Cele mai frecvent utilizate prefixe slave sunt: **ne-** (negativ): *nemilostiv*<*nemilostivu*, *nevinovat*<*nevinovatu*, **po-** (întăritor al unei însușiri): *pocăi*<*pokajŭli*,

⁶ M., Avram, M., Sala, *Faceți cunoștință cu limba română*, Editura Echinox, Cluj, 2001, p. 68-69

poticni < *potykatî*; **pro-** (anticipativ): *propovădui* < *propovědati*; **răs-** : *răsuci* < *rasukati*, *răzbi* < *razbiti*; **prea-**: preabun, preaslăvi.

Dintre sufixele slave putem aminti: - **ac** (*prostănac*, *scundac*), - **aci** (*trăgaci*, *stângaci*), - **an** (*roșcovan*, *juncan*), - **anie** (*pășanie*, *petrecanie*), - **aș** (*fluieraș*, *codaș*), - **(el)nic** (*postelnic*, *puternic*, *îndoielnic*), - **iște** (*iviște*, *porumbiște*), - **iță** (*cheiță*, *linguriță*), - **iv** (*costeliv*, *milostiv*); - **eală** (*iuțeală*, *răceală*); - **enie** (*ciudățenie*, *sfințenie*); - **iș** (*aluniș*, *păienjeniș*); - **că** (*româncă*); - **ean** (*bănățean*); - **ui** (*pietruî*) ș.a. Sufixe slave productive până azi în românește sunt: - **eală** care formează abstracte verbale (*albăstreală*, *găteală*), - **că** folosit pentru a forma feminine de la masculine (*româncă*, *țărancă*), - **iță** care formează feminine și diminutive feminine (*doctoriță*, *fetiță*) etc.

Cuvintele slave au pătruns în limba română uneori concomitent și în alte limbi, cum ar fi limba maghiară .

	rom.	magh.	slav
Ex:	drag	draga	dragŭ
	prost	paraszt	prostŭ
	a porunci	parancsol	poročiti
	slugă	szolga	sluga

Termenul *zăpadă*, are o istorie interesantă, exotică, deoarece în limbile slave nu există un cuvânt corespunzător celui românesc. Trebuie să se pornească, așa cum precizează G. Mihăilă⁷ de la un verb slav *za-pasti*, *zapatati*, care s-a transmis limbii române sub forma de *a zăpădi* „a acoperi cu zăpadă, a troieni”. De la *a zăpădi* s-a format un substantiv *zăpadă*, după cum de la *a trudi*, *a pofti* s-au format substantivele *trudă*, *poftă*.

Pătrunderea masivă de cuvinte de origine slavă în limba română a atras după sine prezența acestora în cadrul unor serii sinonimice, în care, cel mai adesea, acestea au un caracter străin, exotic. Concurența sinonimelor este consecința suprapunerii unor influențe deosebite asupra limbii noastre, iar suprapunerea straturilor lexicale, jocul sinonimelor, lupta dintre cuvintele de origini felurite sunt viu prezente în limbă.

Cunoașterea temeinică a limbii, a sensurilor multiple, de finețe ale cuvintelor, poate valorifica nuanțat și expresiv tezaurul de sinonime ale limbii. De exemplu, Slavici spunea: „Românul are pentru *labor*(lat) cuvintele *muncă*(sl), *robotă*(sl) și *clacă*(sl); *lucrul* este plăcut, *munca* truditoare, *robotă* silită și *claca* e fără plată”. În această serie sinonimică, cuvintele împrumutate din slava, care își mențin distanța exotică față de limba română *robotă* și *clacă*, în timp ce *muncă* își pierde nuanța exotică și se aliniază latinescului *lucru*.

B.P. Hasdeu afirma, la rândul lui: „Ce limbă are norocul de a dispune de patru cuvinte pentru o însușire care trebuie să fie mândria fiecărui popor: *voinicie*(sl), *vitejie*(sl), *bravură*(fr), *eroism*(fr)”. Aici sinonimele de origine slavă își găsesc ușor locul, adaptându-se complet limbii.

Într-o serie ca: *nevastă*(sl.)-*soție*(lat.)-*muiere*(lat.)-*cucoană*(ngr)-*damă*(fr.) etc. Sinonimul slav poate apărea într-o discuție degajată între două

⁷ Vezi Gh. Mihăilă, *Împrumuturi vechi sud-slave în limba română*, EARSR, București, 1960, p. 239-240

persoane apropiate, fără a manifesta vreo nuanță exotică, ci mai degrabă una populară, comună; *soția ta* indică faptul că interlocutorii fac parte din aceeași categorie socială și sunt de aproximativ aceeași vârstă, dar nu sunt în relații apropiate; *soția dumneavoastră* e o sintagmă folosită de persoane din categorii sociale diferite care nu se cunosc bine; *nevasta dumneavoastră* indică un dezacord stilistic între cele două cuvinte, făcând imposibilă apariția ei într-o discuție.

Termenii vechi: *femeie-muiere-nevastă*, fiind cuvinte populare moștenite din latină sau împrumutate, s-au menținut în vorbire, mai puțin cuvântului *muiere*. Termenul *soție* s-a menținut alături de *nevastă*, ca termen elevat, juridic. Celelalte componente: *cucoană*, *damă*, *madam* au de cele mai multe ori un sens peiorativ, chiar ironic. *Damă* este neutru stilistic doar în sintagme ca *pantof de damă*, *haine de damă*, în timp ce *damă de companie* capătă o conotație depreciativă.

Termenii sinonimici sunt în raport de variație liberă în unele contexte, substituindu-se reciproc, fără modificări esențiale în plan semantic, de exemplu:

s-a făcut $\begin{cases} \text{---} & \text{timp (lat.) frumos} \\ & \text{vreme (sl.) frumoasă} \end{cases}$ în care

- *timp* < lat. *tempus*-e mai abstract, potrivit pentru denumirea fenomenelor exacte, măsurabile;

- *vreme* < v. sl. *vrěme* - e mai nedefinit, mai afectiv, mai popular;

și în raport de distribuție complementară în alte contexte în care termenii nu se substituie reciproc: *timpuri verbale*/ * *vremuri verbale*;

Unii componenți ai seriilor sinonimice sunt sinonimi în orice context, chiar

ei apar diferențe pe care numai un context le poate evidenția, de exemplu: *ceartă*(lat.) - *sfadă*(sl.); *a vindeca*(lat.) - *a lecuî*(sl.).

În aceste serii, un termen e literar, mai general, mai larg răspândit (*ceartă*, *a vindeca*), iar celălalt, în acest caz, cel de origine slavă (*sfadă*, *a lecuî*), e familiar, popular, ușor exotic, uneori chiar cu sens peiorativ (de ex. *a se lecuî* = *a-i pieri cheful*).

Aceeași caracteristică populară o au componenții slavi: *obraznic* și *primejdie*, care intră în serii sinonimice bogate: 1) *obraznic* (sl.) - *impertinent* (lat, fr) - *arogant* (lat, fr) - *neobrăzat* (sl.) - *insolent* (lat, fr) - *ireverențios* (fr, lat) - *neuviincios* (lat.) - *nerușinat* (lat.) - *sfidator* (it.).

$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Impertinent(lat.) - circulă în societatea „bună”, e un neologism;} \\ \text{Obraznic(sl.) - e popular, la fel ca și neobrăzat.} \end{array} \right.$

2) *primejdie*, *pericol*, *amenințare*, *presiune*, *ris*, *nesiguranță*

$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Primejdie(sl.) - cuvânt vechi popular} \\ \text{Pericol(lat.) - neologism} \end{array} \right.$

Perechile sinonimice amintite au stabilit nuanțe semantice care le dau dreptul la coexistență. Datorită vechimii, *primejdie* are un sens mai general și este mai afectiv, departe de exotismul altor cuvinte slave, în timp ce *pericol* este mai circumscris, mai iminent. Spre exemplu, este frecventă

să nu-mi uit *cuvântul*----- să nu-mi uit *vorba* ;
a cere / a lua / a da *cuvântul* ;
a înțelege de *cuvânt* ----- a înțelege de *vorbă*
bună ;
cuvânt de ordine ; om de *cuvânt* ; *cuvânt* de onoare ;
a crede pe *cuvânt* ;
a se ține de *cuvânt* ----- a se ține de *vorbă* ;
vorbă să fie ; a zice
vorbă mare ; a fi în
vorbă ;
străin la *vorbă* ;

a nu găsi *cuvinte* ; în puține / câteva *cuvinte* ;
cu drept de *cuvânt* ; *cuvânt* înainte ; *cuvânt* derivat ;
schimb de *cuvinte* ----- schimb de *vorbe* ;
a schimba câteva *cuvinte* ----- a schimba două
vorbe ;
cu drept *cuvânt* ; auzi *vorbă* ; a avea *vorbă* cu
cineva ; a lăsa *vorbă* ;
dacă așa ți-i *vorba* ; *vorbă* multă
sărăcia omului ;
fără multă *vorbă* ; din *vorbă* în
vorbă ; nici *vorbă* ;
fie *vorba*
între noi ; a lăsa
vorba ;

a călca *cuvântul* cuiva ----- a călca *vorba* cuiva ;
dintr-un *cuvânt* ----- din două *vorbe* ;
vorbe goale ; a purta cu
vorba ; cu *vorbă* că ; *vorbe*
de clacă ; a fi *vorba* despre ;
a-și face *vorbă* cu cineva ;
a ieșit din *vorbă* că ;
a ține de *vorbă* ;
a ieși din *cuvânt* ----- a ieși din *vorbă* ;
a ține de *vorbă* .

Între componenții seriei *cuvânt* – *vorbă*, ca rezultat al folosirii lor într-o bogată gamă de construcții, există coeficienți de diferență. În unele îmbinări se folosește numai componentul *cuvânt*, în altele numai *vorbă*.

Uneori într-o serie sinonimică, în care componenții sunt de origine diferită, se suprapun semantic cuvinte literare cu unele vechi, populare, regionale, familiare : *praf* (sl.) – *pulbere* (lat.) – *colb* (pop.) ; a *inventă* (fr.) – a *izvodi* (sl. pop.) ; *noroi* (sl.) – *glod*, *tină* (sl.) (reg.) ; a *vopsi* (bg) – a *fești* (magh) (reg.) ; Alteori componenții unei serii sinonimice își îngustează sensul, spre exemplu în seria : *cale* (lat.) – *drum* (sl.) – *colnic* (sl.), ultimul termen, cu nuanță exotică, cuprinde doar parțial sensurile primilor doi termeni, sau în seria *fiară* (lat.) – *dihanie* (sl.) – *jivină* (sl.) – *gadină* (sl.) ultimi doi

compenți, de un exotism clar, au doar un caracter regional. Alteori un component al seriei dispare, iar seria se destramă treptat realizându-se, eventual o sinonimie teritorială sau contextuală : *cap* (lat.) – *glavă* (sl.); *vacă* (lat.) – *ialoviță* (sl.); *sănătos* (lat.) – *citov* (sl.), componenții slavi rămânând cu un pregnant parfum exotic.

Ca o concluzie putem afirma, fără teama de a greși că sinonimia constituie o importantă sursă stilistică, alimentează variatatea expresiei și dă posibilitatea actualizării tuturor nuanțelor sematice, iar cuvintele de origine slava aduc cu ele o notă de eleganță exotică sau, dimpotrivă, una comună, populară, în tentativa lor de a intra în serii sinonimice cu cuvinte de aceeași sau de altă origine. Sinonimele sunt căutate anume și folosite în modalități speciale de scriitori al căror stil capătă originalitate tocmai prin bogăția, felurimea și plasticitatea mijloacelor de expresie.

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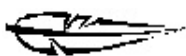


Figura spiritului creator. Eseuri by Eugen Negrici,
Editura Cartea Românească, București, 2014;
(*The Figure of the Creative Spirit. Essays* by Eugen Negrici,
Cartea Românească Publishing House, Bucharest, 2014)

On Creativity

Abstract: Eugen Negrici sets out to detect and analyse the constitutive mechanisms of the creative process, indeed of the creative mind per se. His approach is both diachronic and synchronic, as he equally looks at primordial instantiations of creativity and at contemporary modes of artistic production, namely contemporary literature.

Key words: creative spirit; primordial vs. elaborate paradigms; rigour vs. the esoteric; multiplication vs. uniqueness.

In his book *The Figure of the Creative Spirit* published in 2014, Eugen Negrici, literary critic and literature Professor at the University of Bucharest looks at the intricate constitutive mechanisms of what he labels *the creative spirit*. In so doing, Negrici painstakingly dismembers all the minute interstices of the creative process and looks into the arcane nooks and crannies of the creative mind *per se*.

It is within paradigms that have stood the test of time that Negrici

operates in discerning and analysing the genesis of creativity. He uses primordial elements such as iconographies of the Sun and the Moon in pre-Christian cultures, he then subsequently moves on to Christian elements and the hermeneutics thereof, to eventually reach the plateau of exclusively aesthetic creation, more specifically literature. A thorough delving into, one might say hacking into the esoteric is apparent here. Negrici quite adeptly notices the diachronically valid instantiation of, say, the

Moon as trigger for creativity with early poets:

"It is quite odd to remark how the celestial body of the dark triggers the same kind of vision, over centuries, in the imagination of Romanian writers, even though at times the didactic spirit overrides all and the text merely transcribes thought":

Let us move on now, from the big light to the small one, from the Sun to the Moon, from the lit vase to the chosen vase, from Peter to Paul". (Negrici quoting – palimpsestically – the writings of Antim – (Negrici, 2013: 44)

All this is, therefore, a constant, arguably immobile triggering process that the Moon and the dissolute space of the night offer to writers over the centuries. A caveat, though: all this might just as well develop into cliché, which is a dead-end to all writers. Negrici provides counter-examples of that, whereby authors had a narrow escape from cliché.

Moving on diachronically to full-fledged Christianity, Negrici acknowledges the quintessential impact of the FIRST and FOREMOST CREATION, THE Creation, that of God's creation of the world. Negrici notes: "*In another sermon destined to eulogize The Virgin, I was to come across, quite surprisingly so, a Laus domini, nonetheless splendour-laden, by its grandiose vision of creativity: "However God, Who by one word only has made and built all things visible and unseen, by His absolute omnipotence, to make stars more luminescent than the ones shining in the sky and a Moon more adept than the one that counsels us at*

night and a Sun brighter than this one". (Negrici quoting the writings of Antim).

The enumeration thereof, conceived as a broad display of divine omnipotence, quite lengthy – which might be interpreted as a crisis of stylistic balance – is not in the least arbitrary. It supports, in fact, an old portrayal artifice". (Negrici, 2013: 45). Negrici's exegesis that turns plethora into effectiveness is truly remarkable.

Negrici also looks into what he names *modes of production* regarding the creative process. What he finds salient here is the fragile relationship between *multiplication* (of a pattern) on the one hand and *uniqueness* on the other hand. Creativeness, he argues, lies somewhere in the in-between space thereof.

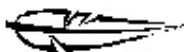
The author is equally concerned with issues of accuracy, of precision, which would be at epistemological odds with genuine, sheer creativeness on the spur of the moment, with what the Romantics called *inspiration, being inspired*. A writer's true calling – and craftsmanship – is that of eskewing this dichotomy. Rigour, Negrici argues, is not necessarily pernicious to the process of writing, it, on the contrary, can add to creativeness *per se*.

Out of these frail, yet forceful dichotomous balances there emerges the creative spirit of the writer in all its understated splendour.

CLEVER STRIFES OF CRITICISM

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Scriitorul și umbra sa.

Geneza formei în literatura lui E. Lovinescu, vol. I-II, by Antonio Patraș.

Institutul European, Iași, 2013;

(The Writer and His Shadow. The Genesis of Form in E. Lovinescu's Literature,
vol. I-II by Antonio Patraș)

Institutul European Publishing House, Iași, 2013)

The Genesis of Form and the Creation of "Shadow" in Lovinescu's Literature

Abstract: Antonio Patraș, an academic at the University of Iași, with a special concern for the literature of Romanian critics, has seized the emblematic value of rescuing the genesis of form in the literary works of the great Romanian interwar critic Eugen Lovinescu (1881-1943).

A Lovinescu mediated by his own fiction writings obliges to a new outlook on his overall work. Antonio Patraș employs the word shadow when he speaks about this other type of creation which has been holding so far a secondary place. The theory of progress through imitation, capitalized by Lovinescu, actually is a response to his inner impelling forces to succumb to nostalgia and compensate them with will.

Key words: criticism, ideology, genesis of ideas, the literature of the critics, Eugen Lovinescu

As a reflection of his interest in tracing back Eugen Lovinescu's

genesis of ideas, Antonio Patraș has discovered a gold-vein with the proven effect of a paradigm.

Antonio Patraș (b. 1973), an academic at the University of Iași, with a special concern for the literature of Romanian critics, has seized the emblematic value of rescuing the genesis of form in the literary works of the great Romanian interwar critic Eugen Lovinescu (1881-1943). So far this aspect has been dismissed as irrelevant, outdated or pointless for the apprehension of Eugen Lovinescu.

The result, attested by Antonio Patraș's book, is surprising. Antonio Patraș is convinced of the fact that the access to the most mysterious, covert side of Lovinescu goes only through Lovinescu's fiction. This is a revelatory gesture. It is unexpected as other critical investigations of Patraș have aimed at the history of critical ideas. The emergent image of Lovinescu was reliable and well-founded. But now, with this book, we assist at a strategic twist in the reception of Eugen Lovinescu's works of literary criticism. A Lovinescu mediated by his own fiction writings obliges to a new outlook on his overall work. This way, even the most reluctant reader of Lovinescu's fiction is indebted to give it a new session of reading. As far as his formation was concerned, Lovinescu achieved it as long as he was building himself as a cultural ideologue of the new artistic movements. This was valid also for his fellow writers, defenders of modernism, and opponents of traditionalism. Since Antonio Patraș is aware of the key role played by Lovinescu's formation, he begins his argument by insisting on every landing of formation in Lovinescu's case.

For example, Patraș narrates with talent certain aspects of Lovinescu's biography. But he does not choose at random. He chooses the very aspects which inlay symbolically a universe with a crucial role for Lovinescu's works: the universe of Lovinescu's fiction, gauged by its very creator after a prolonged period of exercises in other genres. Patraș's idea is an idea worth-following in other cases, too. How are the most decisive and intimate ideas formed, for a great critic who is also a writer of fiction? Mobilized by imagination, aren't they the true engine of critical vision, springing from the nucleus of his fiction?

Unlike the case of the interwar critic George Călinescu, whose novels were not behind his works of criticism, as far as his reception was concerned, for Eugen Lovinescu's reception of his overall work, his novels and other attempts to write fiction used to be placed in a secondary position. Antonio Patraș employs the word *shadow* when he speaks about this other type of creation which has been holding so far a secondary place. The theory of progress through imitation, capitalized by Lovinescu, actually is a response to his inner impelling forces to succumb to nostalgia. It is through will that the interwar critic found compensation to these drives. Lovinescu's novels have been dismissed as "passéiste", idealizing the past in an unjustified way, but, loosely, they allowed also an aesthetical approach, approach from which Lovinescu never dissented.

That is why Patraș reads Lovinescu's other genre than

criticism through an aesthetic framework and not through a cultural ideological one. If someone reads Lovinescu's literature free from the theoretical restriction of criticism there are many new things to be highlighted. As Patraş says, what unifies all the visions on Lovinescu's literature is the concept of melodrama. Actually, of "melodrama-novel". Patraş studies and describes this concept in all its details. It is, of course, a concept associated with obsolescence, but which brings about the possibility to write a complex new poetics, with meta-textual feelers.

As a historiographer of Romanian bourgeois culture, Lovinescu could not do otherwise but systematize (along with other things) the psychological and sexual substrata of the melodramatic reservoir of Romanian literature. There is nothing uncommon in this attitude, because Lovinescu thinks that literature should "adequately translate the complicated life of feelings". Young Lovinescu, as it is known, had tried his inspiration in theatre. Writing theatre proved to be a failure for him. That is why prose writing seemed to have rekindled the hope of a writer who believed in the systematic take-off of the melodramatic element.

The originality of Lovinescu's novels, Patraş thinks, consists of the "insolation" of the procedure. By this device the Russian formalists saw the way in which an artistic consciousness was formed. This procedure is valid especially for Lovinescu's novel of the third decade of the 20th century. Things get more nuanced as Patraş's analyses pass from one novel to

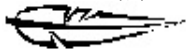
another. The style of Patraş is also important; it is always a colloquial style, with the leisure of living up to the intellectual ideas in it. In this substantial study, Patraş proves that the literature of the critics does contain keys and secrets that are out of sight for a very pragmatic view. The author of this book invites us to see the very way in which literature crystalizes the much too abstract ideas of cultural ideology. At the end of this study, written with a unique passion, and empathy, one may have the feeling of not having read correctly the literature of Lovinescu in the frame of the previous reception.

But from now on, Lovinescu's literature as a whole may pass onto another stage of evaluation from the point of view of criticism, and so may the entire system of criticism developed by Lovinescu, as an essential system for Romanian and European culture.

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Modernismul retro în romanul românesc interbelic by Paul Cernat,
Editura Art, București, 2009;
(Retro Modernism in Romanian Interwar Novel) by Paul Cernat,
Art Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009)

Abstract: Paul Cernat's theories are crystalized around the idea of a Romanian interwar modernism reformed with an eye on its former Belle Époque aestheticism. Although this book on 'retro modernism' has no radical intentions to redefine certain concepts, it manages to reshape our imaginary intimacy with some characters from the most familiar Romanian novels of modernity. All the chosen interwar novels on Cernat's list have some of the main characters trapped between two worlds. However, it is not the critic's list that is important here, but the critic's light. The protagonists mentally indulge in the world of the past, for instance the end of the 19th century and thus they cannot be fully absorbed into their (interwar) present with its changes. In congruence with the topic of the book, the retro element, the light chosen by the critic is the penumbrae in which the subtle movements of a staged choreography are melted.

Key words: retro, Modernism, Romanian interwar literature, la Belle Époque, reception of literary works

Modernismul retro în romanul românesc interbelic (Retro Modernism in Romanian Interwar Novel) by Paul Cernat has a narrow list of chosen novels, therefore the critic's intention to redefine (the long debated) Romanian modernism is out of question. However, it is not the critic's list that is important here, but the critic's light. As readers, we inherently develop a different type of familiarity with the characters belonging to the canonical novels of Romanian interwar literature.

Paul Cernat's list of authors and literary works contains some of the most studied novels in textbooks, syllabi, curricula, within different ages of readings. The pros supporting the theory of retro-modernism are: *Adela*, by Garabet Ibrăileanu, *Enigma Otiliei* by George Călinescu, *La Medeleni* by Ionel Teodoreanu and *Craii de Curtea-Veche* by Mateiu Caragiale, along with Sadoveanu's *Locul unde nu s-a întâmplat nimic*, Cezar Petrescu's *Oraș patriarhal*, and Mircea Eliade's *Domnișoara Christina* and *Nuntă în cer*. The characters of these interwar novels have had a parallel life beyond the pages of the books they belong to, due to the abundant interpretations they have been exposed to. They are the literary characters who have been studied from every angle. However, the fundamental studies about these novels, with essential shifts of perceptions, are not very many. One such book is Nicolae Manolescu's *Arca lui Noe (Noah's Ark)*, quoted by Paul Cernat.

There is a certain joy of discovery within the critical act which may be the guiding light of the critic Paul Cernat. The effect is amazing.

It is through this proper light and proper staging that we have come to understand the characters better. In congruence with the topic of the book, the retro element, the light chosen by the critic is the penumbrae in which the subtle movements of a staged choreography are melted. The critic rebuilds our intimacy with some of the Romanian novels of modernity on different grounds. This is what makes the book excellent. He makes the secrets of the characters more available to us.

Yet, at the same time, we, the readers of Paul Cernat's book, do not have a feeling of owning the secret of Otilia, of Olguța or of Wanda. They continue to be the mysterious women whose secrets are sealed in the pages of the books they belong to. But we have seen them, through the act of interpretation, in the new light which suits them so much better.

Paul Cernat undertakes the complexity of criticism in all it said and unsaid elements. The analyses of the literary works are not essays. They are careful scenographies, where the characters reveal more. Too much day light would have been improper, but too much dark would have made them undistinguishable.

Retro Modernism is a very narrow concept, too tightly attached to many others, like decadence, fin-de-siècle, and passéisme. Paul Cernat's knowledge in the field of theories of criticism is unbeatable. The first chapter of the book brings solid arguments which account for a very good re-evaluation of the literary epoch.

All the interwar chosen novels have some of their main characters

trapped between two worlds. They mentally indulge in the world of the past, for instance the end of the 19th century and thus they cannot be fully absorbed into their (interwar) present with its changes. The former regime was perceived as better, with better institutions, more economical stability etc.

But this idealization of the past is possible in the mentioned novels through an umbilical connection of the characters to all the retro stage props and scenery surrounding them, to their public spaces and to their private spaces.

From all these tiny elements, unseen so far, the critic –very keen on knowing his way into the ideas circulating in the epoch–recreates the specific fin de siècle perfume and nostalgia. In fact, there is a joy for every detail in the act of criticism, sometimes bordering a certain utopian dimension.

We decipher into this book by Paul Cernat the necessity to turn the act of criticism into something more. Simple theories are not enough; one must acknowledge their limitations, however seductive they might be. We sense into the voice of critic the voice of a child fascinated with the universe of *La Medeleni*, for instance. It is the very joy crying out for expression, crying to get a shape of its own. It is not something that the young but mature critic should forget. It is the utopia of criticism that makes us dream, makes us want more, and finally it is this utopia that gives us a different communion with the intentions of the writer and with

the non-intentions, in a word with the fascinating book of fiction standing there before us.

This utopia of criticism that is present in Paul Cernat's book is the utopia of the perfect transparency of the reader. By the vivid animation of ideas, by the complex highlights system and the stages choreography, by the very known system of the theory of criticism, the critic attempts an act where the reader, as being so transparent, can be taken into a shadow corner of the world explained and participate to all the spectacles revealed by the characters themselves from that corner. It is not that the reader will understand more, because no more things will be explained to him or to her. But it is sure that the reader will have a different communion with the scenery of the novel and will be there with a different joy. We may call this an exotic trip into another epoch.

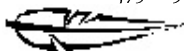
The book reveals so many new things about old novels as it is grounded on a genuine intimacy with modernity.

Modernity means also a time when characters – unlike the migrating postmodern paper characters – were so much absorbed into an intimacy with their contexts that they could not be taken out of it, without losing the air they breathed.

A voyage into the world of a recreated retro-modernism retrieves a temporal dimension of exoticism.

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Bucureștiul lui Mircea Eliade. Elemente de geografie literară,
by **Andreea Răsuceanu,**
București, Editura Humanitas, 2013
(Mircea Eliade's Bucharest. Elements of Literary Geography.
By Andreea Răsuceanu;
București, Humanitas Publishing House, 2013)

Rereading Literary Geographies

Abstract: Andreea Răsuceanu has the ambition to embark on an imaginary voyage through Mircea Eliade's interwar Bucharest, thus revealed as an abstruse labyrinthine system which makes up a system of analogies. The hermeneutic outcome of this system of analogies and crossroads is one of the most interesting, overlapping symbolic geography to biographical routes. This is the city which seems to have left lingering scars on the writer and wounds inside from which he was never quite cured, as attested by Eliade's memoirs and by his diary. Andreea Răsuceanu grasps the very way in which architectonic, industrial, political and psychological aspects or other urbane features ply together to the invention of a complex narrativity.

Key words: interwar Bucharest, Mircea Eliade, literary geography, esoteric literature, urban space

Even if they are less noted than Mircea Eliade's works on the history of religions and religious ideas, Mircea Eliade's books of literature continue to hold an electrifying attraction for readers who have known them or simply discover them.

Bucharest, a city-universe, even nowadays preserving its share of mystery, especially to a Westerner, is the metropolis from whose flesh the bulk of Eliade's imaginary world gets nourished. This is the city which seems to have left lingering scars on the writer and wounds inside from which he was never quite cured. It is a fact attested by Eliade's memoirs and by his *diary*.

Andreea Răsuceanu has the ambition to embark on an imaginary voyage through Mircea Eliade's interwar Bucharest. It is revealed as an effervescent metropolis, which offers, through a weird contemplation, the gateway to complex emotions. For Eliade, all these emotions are absorbed into the cipher-book type of literature, specific to him. There is certain amplitude in his esoteric literature, even the tiniest details are seized by a cipher. Within a classification into types of fiction, Eliade's literature would rank above many others as one of the most bizarre illustrations through its kaleidoscope of sensations and experiments swarming happily in a game of imagination and of the mind.

Bucharest is thus revealed as an abstruse labyrinthine system which makes up a system of analogies. This renders subtle connections at all levels, making an overall subtle

depiction of Bucharest. Andreea Răsuceanu grasps the very way in which architectonic, industrial, political and psychological aspects or other urbane features ply together to the invention of a complex narrativity.

An aspect which confers an alert rhythm to Mircea Eliade's narration is provided by the innovations of modernity. Speed, progress and socio-economical transformations get multiple symbolic facets in his literary writings. Furthermore, they will make transparent the very constituency of Eliade's fiction urban space and of its symbols. Therefore, the whole symbolic geography shall overlap the biographical geography, and the hermeneutic outcome shall be one of the most interesting, as reflected in Andreea Răsuceanu's book.

The configuration of a sensory completeness in all of Eliade's literary writings is an important feature to be followed. Andreea Răsuceanu thinks that Eliade's urban geography is always marked by synaesthesia, and this in turn is iconic for the logical and organizational fundamentals of a landmark-space. The author of the book on Eliade persuades the readers that Eliade's heroes are able to connect to their space both outwardly and inwardly. Outwardly they do it through the geography of a labyrinthine Bucharest, always symbolic, never linear, while inwardly they resort to a strange geography of interiority, a hard-to-decipher landscape, taking the form of failure awareness or of self-annulment.

These configurations are accelerated by the presence of knots and crossroads, by routes and margins, as precise urbane boundary markers with magical resonances in the hearts of Eliade's heroes. The connections, in turn, are always essential in the retrieval of an identity. Andreea Răsuceanu garnishes all these aspects with what she knows in depth. The interdisciplinary studies have proven to be her specialty even since her debut with the book *Cele două Mântulese (The Two "Mântuleasa"s)*, a study about the psychology of image in Eliade's works. In the present volume, *Bucureștiul lui Mircea Eliade (Mircea Eliade's Bucharest)*, we find out about famous places of literary geography which used to

belong to a whole generation, creating a genuine urban mythology.

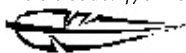
Andreea Răsuceanu's analyses take a subtle hold of the fantastic element. The result is a deeper incursion into the most interior geographies. The passionate readers of Eliade (and of his fellow Romanian writers belonging to the interwar epoch) have a new perspective at disposal through the present volume written by Andreea Răsuceanu. With this book of an alert rhythm and of solid interdisciplinary theories, the readers can embark in the great adventure of deciphering one of the most famous imaginary constructions in the history of Romanian literature.

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***Gastroselves: Expressing Identity in a Hyper-Consumerist Society*, by
Magda Danciu, Delia Maria Radu**

Editura Universității din Oradea, 2014.
University of Oradea Publishing House, 2014

Food and space

Abstract: Studying how people, alias characters, eat and drink in books, allows us a better understanding of the intricacy of one's cultural identity through the decoding of the key leading to the significances carried by meals in terms of pattern of a culture. The comparison between texts, approaches and ideas should facilitate the demonstration of the fact culinary taste is culturally shaped and expresses how complex this primary human activity can be and what the dynamic this social component can appear at a closer inspection.

Key words: culinary and consumer identity, spices and senses, semiotics of food and cooking space, cultural practices, otherness, relationships

The volume of studies entitled *Gastroselves: Expressing Identity in a Hyper-Consumerist Society* written by the two authors, Magda Danciu and Delia-Maria Radu, published in 2014 at the Publishing House of the University of Oradea within the collection Transatlantica, is the result of investigations presented to several conferences of the Cultural Studies work group which belongs to the Center for Research of the Cultural Changes in

a Globalized World of the Faculty of Letters, University of Oradea.

Gastroselves includes both a theoretical body and a close-reading practice on a selection of novels, especially since the late 20th century, mainly from literatures written in English. The three sections or chapters are preceded by an argument, discloses the main inspiration source as coming from the works of Salman Rushdie, yet the selection of investigated works covers a wide geographic area

(North and South America, Europe, Asia).

The title itself, *Gastroselves*, foregrounds the authors' attempt to provide a fresh perspective on the ways identity is shaped in the context of consumer society during the globalization era. The authors also incorporated the marks of philological criticism as we find space as a category of analysis, whereas topos is seen only as an environment, with its functional, relational and socializing potential.

The first section of the book is apparently the most important one, as the two notions defined here can be found in almost all the studies: food and space. The five articles comprised by it scientifically highlight the way in which cultural studies can resume and deepen themes of the theory of literature or of comparative literature, completing its terminology in order to render more accurately the dynamics of the cultural phenomena. Starting from the common theme of man's positioning in society, respectively, of any ethnic group against a majority different from it, from the perspective of the cultural studies we are dealing with a reconfiguration or intentional joining of private (eg. the kitchen) and public spaces (eg. the restaurant) as practices of identity shaping process.

The interaction between the public and the private creates not only conflicts, but also illusions or positive life experiences. The kitchen becomes an Agora of the social cell, which redistributes and negotiates in this place the traditional roles, as the author of the study *Mediatization of the Senses*.

The Restaurant Critic and His/Her Stories convinces us. From another perspective, the food ingested and its preparation methods become embodiments of a set of cultural discourses on health or social status. The core of the book is called *Food and Identity*. Here, Magda Danciu devotes a series of her prose studies to the contemporary Scottish fiction and tries – through notions such as pleasure and leisure food or theoretical spices and flavours – to describe narrative ways of rendering culinary experiences as defining ethnical cultural identity.

Delia Radu's individual studies cover a wide range of literary expressions: from the British Joanne Harris and Jeanette Winterson to the Indian-born Canadian Rohinton Mistry. Her presentations fall within literary criticism and review tackling identity and alterity in various media – film and literature, with a particular focus on the culinary aspect.

The final chapter of the volume is marked by the interdisciplinarity of the theoretical approaches, being dedicated to culinary practices in the epistemological sense. Here the authors include studies dealing with issues of food semiotics and its creolization phenomenon, through globalized trade and consumer society. The olfactory and visual experiences related to nutrition or pleasure eating are presented both in terms of both cultural studies and anthropological perspectives.

The value of this book lies in the fact that it offers an extremely wide range of information on and approaches of the culinary cultural phenomenon, details meant to stir the interest for this line of research

on one hand, and for this type of fiction on the other hand, a fiction that experiments around the concepts of national cuisine or sensory experiences defining the shaping of individual identity. The target audience falls into very

different categories: certain parts of the volume are meant for the researchers with background information in the field of cultural studies, others might interest the less initiated readers in this topic.

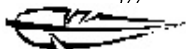
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**Meseértés és értelmezés. A kárpát-medencei népmese hagyomány
hermeneutikai vizsgálata** by Bálint Péter,

Editura Didakt, Budapest, 2013;

(The Understanding and The Interpretation of Fairy Tales.

A Hermeneutic Research on The Tradition of Popular Fairy Tales from the
Carpathian Basin by Bálint Péter, Didakt Publishing House, Budapest, 2013)

Understading Fairy Tales

Abstract: Ever since the debut of the research, Bálint Péter defines the leitmotif-like feature of the age: "We live the age of tale about tale." This observation is completed by the author's confession with regard to the orientation of his study, namely the endeavour for returning to poetics respectively to the hermeneutics of the fairy tale. Also, Bálint Péter is aware of the contribution brought to the tale's "body" by each story teller and fairy tale compeller who contributes to its circulation.

Key words: fairy tales, folklore, narrative discourse in storytelling, anthropology of fairy tales, phenomenological approach of folklore

The Understanding and The Interpretation of Fairy Tales. A Hermeneutic Research on The Tradition of Popular Fairy Tales

from the Carpathian Basin is the title of a recent study signed by its author, Bálint Péter. The Hungarian writer, a fairy tale theoretician, has

the competence required in order to approach such a broad and highly illustrative subject, the fairy tales which prevail within the Carpathian chain, by virtue of breaking down the cultural distances - as suggested by the chosen motto.

Above all, what triggers the interest for reading is the critical method with which the author takes the sense of his object. With a rigorous prudence, he adjusts the properties of hermeneutics and the ideas of the classics and of the new representatives of phenomenological philosophy to the collection of authentic fairy tales, conceiving the specificity of a common consciousness within the Carpathian space. His vocation reveals, both an artistic side highlighted through fantasy and the expert and consequent scientist.

The study itself, densely elaborated, is well proportioned. The theoretical part comprises illustrative theses together with their demonstration. The conclusions drawn by the author are accredited through their unanimity with the affirmations of certain hermeneutic classics. The distribution of the theses on chapters is due to the categorisation of the fairy tales, taking into account the following criteria: the message, the ethos and the function. Hence, the theory is nicely counterbalanced with the exemplification of the related texts, the author specifying, in certain cases, even their code from the Aarne-Thompson catalogue.

Ever since the debut of the research, Bálint Péter defines the leitmotif-like feature of the age: "We live the age of tale about tale." This observation is completed by the

author's confession with regard to the orientation of his study, namely the endeavour for returning to poetics respectively to the hermeneutics of the fairy tale. This is the purpose of *The Understanding and the Interpretation of Fairy Tales...*

The fairy tale, as literary genre, is to be justified by means of the cultural truth. The researched narrative discourses spread some values which are emphasized by Bálint Péter in the light of phenomenology. The role and the essence of fairy tales have both archaic confluences, but also divergences. The sociological function and the moral basis are carefully analysed, and not coincidentally: "at the same time, this is an age of doubt", says Bálint Péter. Within the chapter: *The Story Teller as Compensating and Archiving Being (A mesemondó mint kompenzáló és archiváló lény)* the Hungarian folklorist, Honti János is quoted in order to support the overview of the relation between the real world and the world of tales. He ponders that the world of tales is presented as the correction of ideas of the real world and that it serves as pattern for the cosmic, physical and moral order. Also, Bálint Péter is aware of the contribution brought to the tale's "body" by each story teller and fairy tale compeller who contributes to its circulation. There are two definitions in mutual correspondence brought to the folkloric values of the tale: one from J. Derrida - "the tale] does not represent only the theory of the memory but of the archive as well" respectively the other one from O. Marquard - the folklore is

developed by means of the inflorescence of the modern culture of persistence.

Browsing the first chapters, in the third one, the author makes a sort of brief monograph of the folklorist J. Honti, bringing some of his works in the spotlights. In the subtitle: *Pursuing Honti's Spiritual Legacy*, Bálint Péter establishes the profile of the one whose ideas he invokes in the rest of the study. Starting from the fourth chapter begins the substantial practical part of the study. This chapter deals with issues of spiritualism of which main point is represented by curses. The comments of the folklorist are extended also over the oral role of the uttered texts and over the sophisticated methods of breaking the curse bondage. This device is correlated with metaphysical and religious concepts, such as: the sin or the inbred sinful existence - seemingly, all of them get in the ascertaining inertia of the E. Lévinas' affirmation (inserted at the end of the chapter): "the forgiven existence is not an innocent existence." In the following chapters, the study flow of Bálint Péter brings at least one example of narrative discourse for each category of fairy tale: *The representation in the fairy tale of the relation: I Was – I Am (The Hermeneutics of Fairy Tale about the Boy/the "Cursed" Hedgehog); Tale within Tale: The Hermeneutics of Duplicity (in "the Labyrinth" of Memory and Language); The Aspects of Mother's Death in the Popular Fairy Tale; The Phenomenology of Orphanhood and of Horror; The Silence and Assuming the Responsibility in the Popular Fairy Tale; The*

Hermeneutics of Permanence, Continuity and Solitude; The Charming and Covetous Glimpse; To Be Seen and to Be Understood (the Phenomenology of the Portrait/Image in the Fairy Tale); The Representation of the Ethics of Responsibility in the Popular Fairy Tale; Death in Fairy Tales such as "My Buddy, Death"; When You Call the Stick Gun (The Rhetorical Conflict between the Gypsy and the Priest). I reminded between brackets, the example conveyed by the author, only where I considered that it has an increasing importance. Perhaps, what surprises in these essays are the versatility and the interdisciplinary approach. The author establishes the interrogations referring to the portrait of the stereotypical hero from the tale, his unilateral features, respectively his passivity. It is called in question also the relation between the protagonist and a possible *deus ex-machina* (Latin, "god from the machine"), knowing that the star of destiny belongs with the poetics of fairy tale. The importance with regard to facts of the logos is another paradigmatic aspect emphasized by Bálint Péter. The cause which underlies the sorceries which have as finality the metamorphosis in different zoological-fabled avatars is also checked.

Although the notoriety of the fairy tale might have closed for a while new openings towards research to the folklorist-anthropologists, Bálint Péter does his part in an excellent fashion. His study gives the sensation of rowing down the valley, until the deepness of the last argument in favour of the analysed discourse. He follows out a strong

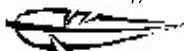
and varied bibliography of names such as: Derrida, Lévinas, Foucault, Bachelard, Propp, Eliade, Honti, Kerényi. Therefore, there are lots of

reasons for which we hope that the outcome of Bálint Péter's struggle in the folkloric field find its way in the bookish circuit of ideas.

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A Poetics of Utopia, by Mircea Crăciun
Limes, Cluj-Napoca, 2011
Limes Publishing House, 2011

Reloading Utopia...

Abstract: The book "A Poetics of Utopia" by Mircea Crăciun constructs itself as a solid and intriguing study, the author revealing himself as a gifted and plenty-documented researcher. Mircea Crăciun would recharge some hyper-used and implicitly long digested stereotyped syntagms with new connotations, he would amend the already vain discourses related to the concept of utopia, offering as a result an endless line of variables; the book is diligently synthesizing all previous valences of the given term, accurately pointing out the ups and downs of utopia's definitions along time and history but the volume is ultimately rewarding the reader with some original and innovative correlations, acceptable perspectives on the matter.

Key words: utopia, utopia and myth, utopia and ideology, utopia and the social imagery, stage, satire

From the very beginning I have to confess my curiosity the moment I have held in my hands Mircea Crăciun's study, in English, on *utopia*: I still clearly remember him as a professor at Faculty of Letters in Cluj and I mostly recollect my surprise when I have paradoxically

discovered him really enjoying teaching the students British Literature, in contrast with his rigorously focused attitude all his disciples were used to while studying Phonetics and Phonology under his guidance – it was as if he were a

different person, suddenly relishing life and academic stuff. Imagine thus my sincere pleasure in reading his book: it displays all the necessary intrinsic ingredients for a successful analysis, for a clarifying argumentation, for a persuasive and challenging debate on the issue.

The book constructs itself as a solid and intriguing study, the author revealing himself as a gifted and plenty-documented researcher, above all proving the reader the ability of establishing from the start ingenious associations, original applications on texts, consequently adding and enriching the meaningful background of both the concept in question and apparently the simple preposition *between*, for instance; all possible affiliations among these two terms of the discursive initial equation are counted and sort of de-mystified: “<Between>, an insignificant preposition, always caught in the endless chain of contiguities (...), or the pleasure engendered by shared secrecy (...) possesses an ineffable power of soldering dichotomies or of disrupting meaning and significance. We perform <between the acts>, we read <between the lines>, (...) between apprehension and comprehension.” In this respect, the author would recharge some hyper-used and implicitly long digested stereotyped syntagms with new connotations, he would amend the already vain discourses related to the concept of *utopia*, offering as a result an endless line of variables; the book is diligently synthesizing all previous valences of the given term, accurately pointing out the ups and downs of *utopia*'s definitions along time and history

but the volume is ultimately rewarding the reader with some original and innovative correlations, acceptable perspectives on the matter: “Doomed never to be attained, forever suspended between possibility and a chimerical aspiration, utopia is a denial of the reason's capacity to offer ontological consistency. (...) There is a quite well established and false belief that anti-utopia or dystopia (two of the many labels attached to the same type of discourse) is entirely the product of modern times and it was engendered by the disappearance of both teleological dreams and trust in the coherence of the world.”; “The huge library of Utopia will direct towards apparently diverging domains as the protean discourse or impulse, fiction or propensity, myth or alternative to an actual social situation.” The book is also a reinvigorating inventory of all virtual links of the concept to its related fields, such as socio-human sciences, progressively clarifying all its subsidiary variables: *Utopia and Myth*, *Utopia and Ideology*, *Utopia and the Social Imagery* – to mention just a few of them. The author is also daring some drastic but generous and ingenious somehow metaphoric definitions and chapter titles, articulated in ironic tonalities: *Utopia is a Satire*, *Utopia is a Stage*, *From Politeia to Res-publica*. Mircea Craciun's study is meant to set things straight, it identifies the lacks and the errors in famous theorist' argumentation, it most definitely proves current and recent readings on this particular issue, it successfully and persuasively

applies the concept to concrete literary texts or theoretical ones: "After dismissing Kant's *reproductive imagination* as well as Bergson's continuum of consciousness which means the rendering absolute of the memory G. Bachelard emphasises the decisive difference between "the image perceived" and "the image created" and claims that imagination acts as an organizing principle that augments the values of reality.": "Through their structuring and content, the literary utopian texts anticipate relations of absolute or pseudo-absolute freedom transcending the existing order. (...) If placed against the background of the Reinassance, the birth of the utopian discourse is a consequence of the new role of the

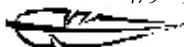
ludic and ludicrous, of the gratuitous and the monstrous in the mythical consciousness and it parallels the reassessment of sacredness in a world impregnated with images and symbols"; "Satire and utopia are dichotomous modes. They "defamiliarise" by producing a breach in the habitual perception of ideas and impinge destructively upon preconceived notions."

In all these respects, Mircea Craciun's *A Poetics of Utopia* obviously represents a definite plus, a convincing and fully efficient study, a well-articulated, plenty-documented and more than inspired and refreshing assessment on the concept of *utopia*, a study worth studying, a research worth researching.

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Aproape de scenă, George Banu. Eseuri și mărturii

Coordonatori: Iulian Boldea, Ștefana Pop-Curșeu

Traducerea eseurilor Alexandru Luca, Vlad Russo, Delia Voicu,
Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2013;

**(Near the stage, George Banu. Essays and confessions) coordinated by Iulian
Boldea and Ștefana Pop-Curșeu,**

Translations by Alexandru Luca, Vlad Russo, Delia Voicu
Curtea Veche Publishing House, Bucharest, 2013

The Kaleidoscope of Theatre Criticism

Abstract: The book “Aproape de scenă, George Banu. Eseuri și mărturii” (Near the stage, George Banu. Essays and Confessions) is the successful teamwork of three Romanian universities: Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, “Petru Maior” University of Târgu Mureș and UNATC (Theatre and Cinema National University) Bucharest, along with “Vatra” literary magazine. The coordinators of the volume, Iulian Boldea (University of Târgu Mureș) and Ștefana Pop-Curșeu (University of Cluj Napoca), have opted for a kaleidoscope-type of nearness in writing about George Banu, present at his Romanian anniversary. The book has an impeccable critical apparatus and, at the same time, succeeds in conveying the same energy and vivacity that a good theatre performance must have. The volume explores the relationship between theatre and knowledge, having George Banu’s texts and conferences as a starting point.

Key words: theatre criticism, meta-theatre, writings on theatre, Georges Banu

Last year, for his 70th anniversary, George Banu, Professor at Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3, at the “Institut d’Études Théâtrales”, received two volumes dedicated to him, one in France, other in Romania. Each book is based on an

academic concept unique of its kind. Apart from the homage to George Banu, these collective volumes have in common the very joy of celebration, replacing any formally expressed speeches. No traps of artificial language just to

show more deference. No circumstantial placing of the honoured man on a pedestal. The book *Aproape de scenă, George Banu. Eseuri și mărturii (Near the stage, George Banu. Essays and Confessions)* is the successful teamwork of three Romanian universities:

Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, “Petru Maior” University of Târgu Mureș and UNATC (Theatre and Cinema National University) Bucharest, along with “Vatra” literary magazine.

The coordinators of the volume, Iulian Boldea (University of Târgu Mureș) and Ștefana Pop-Curșeu (University of Cluj Napoca), have opted for a kaleidoscope-type of nearness in writing about George Banu. Thus, the book brings together a mixture of George Banu’s texts about theatre, the story of a manuscript he had to abandon before his chosen exile in France, a section of evocation and metacriticism, a section called “exercises of identification”, an interview, pictures of Banu with Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba, with other famous close friends and, on the last page, an original drawing by Yannis Kokkos.

The book has an impeccable critical apparatus and, at the same time, succeeds in conveying the same energy and vivacity that a good theatre performance must have. This kaleidoscope approach lets in only sections of the many-faceted theatrical life of George Banu. It is the coordinators’ merit that the sequences are put into motion to create the illusion of the whole, just like the illusion of reality on a stage. The controlled heterogeneity of the book finds its

way into reconstituting an ensemble. The initiative of honouring George Banu through the questions which arose from his work rather than isolating the theatre critic to turn him into a receiver of gratuitous “exercises of admiration” is clear from the very first text, that of the *Argument*.

All the texts bear the mark of dialogue. Some are dialogues with George Banu himself, and they come mostly from people who know him personally, others are dialogues with his writings.

The relationship between theatre and knowledge is thoroughly and inherently thought over by the participants in the volume. The book dwells further enquiries into the contemporary metaphysics of the theatre. Through the attempt to understand George Banu’s work and personality comes also the attempt to understand the mutations of stage theatre over the most recent fifty years. George Banu organised, many years back, the very festivals where Grotowski and Barba and Brook displayed their theories. Banu has had an immense activity within the domain of theatrical projects, by initiating many of them. He is the theorist, the witness and the memory of the major theatre directors and professors such as Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba, Andrei Șerban, Nicky Wolcz, Radu Penciulescu, Ariane Mnouchkine, Anatoly Vasiliev, and was close to Jerzy Grotowski, Giorgio Strehler, Antoine Vitez. He refused theories that tended to have a commodity attached to them, or the theories without any risk. George Banu’s way into seeing another kind of theatre and recreating it through

words is that of the metatheatre as a total act.

The title of the volume, *Approape de scenă (Near the Stage)*, describes his position, that of someone in the proximity of the stage, not exactly on the stage, someone who takes the side of the spectator. But, on the other hand, it is from this very off-stage side that George Banu encompasses two dimensions: the theatrical act and the beyond of it, the *l'entre-deux* of the theatre. His place is both of on the verge of separation and on abysmal union, at the crossroads of *entre deux*.

By inhabiting this uncomfortable isthmus, the critic is the mediator of the two worlds, and also the memory of the spectacle. In this case, it is the memory of the critic that does justice to the extraordinary performance. The memory of the critic preserves it in another way, rendering it through words. To also capture the verticality of the stage means to capture the two dimensions together. There is a point in this book which is like a mirror-reflection about the role of the book. This comes in the chapter entitled "The Corridors of Memory". It is the story of George Banu's doctoral thesis, a manuscript abandoned in the Romania of a Communist regime which had started to demolish everything that meant the creation of the top intellectuals of the country, by imposing a more and more fearful censorship. Under the pressure of the assumed exile, the manuscript was left unpublished. One can understand George Banu's joy to retrieve it 40 years later.

This passage is like a *mise en abyme* of the book. This comes in

between the selection of texts written by George Banu, which constitutes the first section, and the dialogues with his texts initiated by other critics or theatre people. Through this passage, the entrance into the kaleidoscope view is established. The introduction by Iulian Boldea and Ștefana Pop-Curșeu makes the opening, by placing together George Banu's activity and the reception of his activity, as well as the impulse his presence gives to other events: the theatre international festivals organised in Romania, the theatre school and the theatre criticism. After this introduction into the mirror-boxes mechanism, in the third part, the thorough analyses take the aspect of both a closer view and of a remote view. Some of the critics deal with certain circumscribed texts, other refer to a whole range of books on the same direction. George Banu's books received the French prize of the year for the best book on theatre: *Berthold Brecht ou Le Petit contre le grand; Le théâtre, sorties de secours; Le rouge et or*. Other books by him are: *L'acteur qui ne revient pas. Journées de théâtre au Japon, Mémoires du Théâtre, Le Rideau ou la fêlure du monde, Notre Théâtre. La Cerisaie, Les Cités du Théâtre d'Art. De Stanislavski à Strehler, L'Homme de dos, La Scène surveillée, Miniatures théoriques, Les Voyages du comédien, Amour et désamour du théâtre* and of the books dedicated to Peter Brook, *De Timon d'Athènes à Hamlet*, and *Peter Brook: vers un théâtre premier*. We can witness the change regarding the role of the theatre

critic. Some performances might be recorded, but too much of the good thing, like too exact technology, may alter the role of theatre, may interfere with its energies. The words used by a dedicated theatre critic keep all the potentialities of the show intact. It is true that they record an event by recreating it from another texture, but at least a recreation in words is not something alien to the nature of theatre. George Banu emphasises the dream-like quality of a plenary performance.

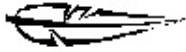
This book, *Aproape de scenă*, is a testimony about why theatre is so important in our lives. It captures in words the very things that make theatre irreducible to other essences. It is the enquiry that matters most, and thus George Banu's contribution is thoroughly energized. The division of the book into three stages follows the switch off of a kind of hidden camera. Quoting Constantin Chiriac, director of Sibiu Theatre Festival, George Banu is an institution. At the same time, says Chiriac (in the preface of the volume *Călătoriile*

sau orizontul teatrului), Banu is both Ulysses and Zorba the Greek in one personality. If George Banu got an anniversary gift from his colleagues of Sorbonne appealing to his Ulysses dimension, the book "Aproape de scenă" corresponds to the other dimension, that of Zorba the Greek. A man who has witnessed first-hand the essential changes of the theatre, who has sought to capture the point of fusion between the dichotomies of theatre, a man who has made memory the best tool and the best symbol of a theatre performance, who has united all the people around him, regardless the amplitude of their careers, so that they could construct together a better and existential cultural act, this is George Banu. He embodies the dimension of joy in playfulness, visible both in his theories, academic writings and in his "adoption" of marionettes from all over the world, for his home and work environment, as we can see in a mirror-photo in the last section of the book *Aproape de scenă*.

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Les Voyages ou l'ailleurs du théâtre. Hommage à Georges Banu,
Essais et témoignages réunis par Catherine Naugrette,
Éditions Alternatives Théâtrales.
Institut de Recherche en Études théâtrales (IRET)
de la Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3

(Călătoriile sau orizontul teatrului. Omagiu lui George Banu,
Volume coordinated by Catherine Naugrette
Preface: Constantin Chiriac, Catherine Naugrette
Translations into Romanian by Ileana Cantuniari,
Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, 2013)

Protean Forms of the Exotic in Theatre

Abstract: The book « Les voyages ou l'ailleurs du théâtre. Hommage à Georges Banu » is a bouquet of reverences made by theatre personalities as an anniversary gift to George Banu. Travels are about defining inner and outer worlds. What strikes the reader is the vulnerability exposed by famous theatre directors and pedagogues of theatrical arts who retell and thus rediscover voyages of their own experiences irrespectively time travels in other theatrical epochs without the fear of exposing too much of their inner being.

Key words: theatre criticism, exoticism, voyages, European versus Asian theatre, history of theatre, theatrical anthropology

The book *Les voyages ou l'ailleurs du théâtre. Hommage à Georges Banu* emerged in 2013 as a bouquet of reverences made by theatre personalities with the

intention of an anniversary gift for George Banu. Since George Banu has been travelling all over the world in search of new theatrical forms, his colleagues, friends and

collaborators supposed that the best the best anniversary present would take the form of a book. Actually, the most precious gift is what the authors of this collective work have to say. Each text is a gem. Each individual text is a presentification, as it bears the sigil of the powerful presence of its author and is, at the same time, a birthday present in the form of thoughts. Travels are about defining inner and outer worlds. The discoveries awaiting the reader at any page are astonishing. This book is like the treasure island of readings about voyage literature.

The reader can enjoy every detail of this imaginary trip, every first-time confession or every new piece of information about theatre in farther places or about theatre in past epochs. The purpose of the book is to reveal unknown dimensions of performing and unexplored dimensions of the sacred within the theatre of the world through outwards and inwards travelling.

Thanks to Catherine Naugrette who coordinated the volume *Les voyages ou l'ailleurs du théâtre. Hommage à Georges Banu*, assisted by Alisonne Sinard, some of the world's most famous theatre artists, Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba, Radu Penciulescu, Andrei Șerban, Ariane Mnouchkine, Nicky Wolcz, along with the world's most famous professors of theatrical studies and theatre critics and theatre artists could send their thoughts as a personal dedication to George Banu. He is the one who concludes the book. George Banu has let himself guided by the belief that "Theatre is Elsewhere" (a paraphrase after Milan Kundera's famous title *La Vie est ailleurs*).

Travelling to witness the theatre of and on other continents, George Banu has seen it as an "autobiographical pedagogy". If the voyage in itself requires an optimist outlook, it is the form of a "critical skepticism" what enables the genuine exchange with another space. When this skepticism is transgressed, the theatre reveals its "double", its capacity to duplicate life. Theatre runs from outside to inside, in the sense of revealing what has already been present as interiority. The great discoverers, such as Brecht face to face with Mei Lang Fang or Artaud face to face with Bali dances, were searching for something already found, something unknown but already treasured internally. George Banu's appetite for travelling originates in the fact that he is the man of two cultures and for the years of his youth in an East-European country, travelling was a myth.

All of those who sign articles in this book are first of all powerful presences. They convey that through the meanders of the theme. We actually see the insights of these people and their subjective hues are the most luminous reference points. We find out about Barba and his 50 second-journey with a parachute.

Where do these voyages take the reader or the spectator? First of all, they open the gates for the people who know who they are, but would go on the unbeaten path of finding more about them through a dangerous journey. They make up the first part of the book, and they are some of the most important theatre directors and theatre artists of the moment: Eugenio Barba,

Andrei Şerban, Radu Penciulescu, Ludvik Flaszen, Ariane Mnouchkine, Jean-François Dusigne, Jean-Jacques Lemêtre, Valérie Dréville, Daniel Jeanneteau, Nikolaus Wolcz, Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, Marie-Hélène Estienne, Peter Brook. A second part is dedicated to the histories of voyages in theatre. Here the articles are signed by Sara Mamone, Siro Ferrone, Ferdinando Taviani, Fausto Malcovati, Jean-Louis Besson, Ines Aliverti, Marie-Christine Autant-Mathieu, Béatrice Picon-Vallin.

The third part is dedicated anthropological experiences of the theatre. Here the signers are Jean-Marie Pradier, Monique Borie, Nicola Savarese, Leszek Kolankiewicz, Marco de Marinis, Franco Ruffini. The fourth and fifth sections are dedicated to the praxis of theatre, irrespectively to the fascination of the spectator while travelling. In the fourth part, the articles are written by Richard Demarcy, Véronique Perruchon, Anne-Françoise Benhamou, Ivan Medenica, Maria-Helena Serodio, Piergiorgio Giacchè. In the fifth part, dealing with the poetics of the spectator, the authors are: Maria João Brilhante, Veneta Doytcheva, Michel Wasserman, Gilles Declercq, the Romanian theatre critic Octavian Saiu and Bernard Debroux. What strikes the reader is the vulnerability exposed by somebody very famous among theatre goers, who retells a taken voyage in the context of uncovering so many self-surrounding layers. The researches in the second section, while speaking about the phenomena of travelling as related to other epochs

of theatre, *commedia dell'arte*, for example, emphasise the most interesting parts unknown to a contemporary theatre-goer. They make it a documented voyage in time, a voyage so many people would love to take. This book is more about the eternal fascination with the exotic than about exoticism. The freshness of memories shows that true beauty is in the eye of beholder. All references to voyages are made by people who have fought misconceptions and earned their way or method in art or in the study of art. What makes the book interesting is the openness of the authors. In talking about voyages, they are drawn especially by the revelations of first-time experiences, and the higher significance of the glimpse into that moment. As far as theatre studies are concerned, exoticism has played a different role. It meant, first of all, a fountain of renewal for European theatre. As George Banu puts it in his conclusive word of this book, Asian and European theatres are complementary. Somebody cannot imagine one without the other or one above the other. Theatre looks like an exception from the possibility that exoticism may insidiously throw in a superior/inferior paradigm. On the contrary, in the realm of stage evolution, European theatre had to make a bow in front of gesture based, collective myth-based Asian theatre. European theatre so much based on words, on the other hand, lives and nourishes itself from memory, while the Asian theatre turns the very collective memory into present. The bond between

theatre and voyage is a complex one, it is a bond that George Banu illustrates best, in his writings, in his meta-theatrical activity, and in his personal credo to capture the alive essence of theatre. After all, as Catherine Naugrette states in her introductory text,

travelling is an art, and the voyage is a voyage into something. The exotic is, for all the travellers in this book, a way to meet one's destiny at a crossroads, in a faraway space or non-space from where only the truest of the inner quests can be followed.

LIFE IN CULTURE

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Biblioteci în aer liber. Oameni, cărți, amintiri by **Marta Petreu**

Editura Polirom, Iași, 2014

(Open-air Libraries by **Marta Petreu**

Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2014)

Living Ideas in Frenzy

Abstract: Marta Petreu's confessions share the qualities of her literature. She writes industriously and in a flow of elegance. Her expressivity leaves the readers with the impression that they may continue, on their own, what her texts started to tell them. She is also that kind of author who inspires confidence in an unfluctuating way. Unlike her poetry and prose well received, Marta Petreu's essays have started from thorough documentation and reached a stage of demystification which seems to have caused much distress allegedly to anyone.

Key words: literary critics, reviewers, literaturecentrism, criticism versus literary research, demystification

Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, „Babeş-Bolyai” University of Cluj, Marta Petreu is what could be called a total writer. She is equally gifted in poetry, prose and history of literature. She gives the impression that she could illustrate any literary genre if she wanted. Her recent volume, *Biblioteci în aer liber (Open-air Libraries)*(2014), is a choice of different literary themes from tangential spheres of literature: criticism, literary history, memoirs, and recollections of encounters with people who marked Romanian literature through their artistic personalities. Marta Petreu’s confessions share the qualities of her literature. She writes industriously and in a flow of elegance. Her expressivity leaves the readers with the impression that they may continue, on their own, what her texts started to tell them. She is also that kind of author who inspires confidence in an unfluctuating way.

At the same time, the author has her amendments to make and her reclaiming. On page 319 she writes about today’s most literary critics (but not quite all of them), who practise a science fiction type of criticism. When these critics (there are clues that she refers to inexperienced critics, mainly, who miss the background because of insufficient proficiency) do their duty as columnists or reviewers for cultural magazines or institutes they can get their word count achieved, even without truly reading the book they are reviewing.

Therefore, Marta Petreu has a category of professional readers

with whom she does not get on well: the hasty literary critics. She says she was even tempted to write on her book that it is not for literary critics. It is true that, as a rule, the same category of critics have responded favourably to Marta Petreu’s books of poetry and prose. They might have not responded the same way to her essays. This is mainly because the interpretations of the writer and philosopher Marta Petreu have not reached a consensus with the methods of literary historians and of some literary critics. Marta Petreu’s essays have started from thorough documentation and reached a stage of demystification which seems to have caused much distress allegedly to anyone.

From these implied polemics, two questions are emergent. If today’s literary critics still have the background for such a profession and secondly if they still care about the professional ethics.

I personally think that there is something fallacious in these questions, since the very reception of Marta Petreu’s poems and of the novel *Acasă, pe Cîmpia Armageddonului* (Home, on Armageddon’s Field) can prove that valuable literature was recognised. Ethical principles were preserved in the approach of Marta Petreu’s works over all. It is clear that the critics sustain her literature, but they do not do that unconditionally. They critics keep Petreu’s poetry and prose and generally reject her essays. On the other hand, Marta Petreu does extensive researches on the most talented literary generation of Romanian literature, the interwar

generation. Even then adversities of doctrines turned into personal conflicts.

Biblioteci în aer liber is also a great book of a return match against supposedly professional readers. By making it a compulsory job, with no emotion, these reviewers do not really contribute to cultural elevation. But actually it is an ongoing literaturecentrism what enables certain unexperienced critics to become professional readers. This situation was settled ever since Maiorescu's times, in the 19th century. The problem is the legitimation that nowadays our culture gives to a verdict even in the domains that are beyond the competences of the reviewer (:304). Marta Petreu shows that literature must be first of all loved and that it rises above those who make it. The city of Cluj is like an arche-character in all these notations, the author believes in the values that shape the life of a profound cultural city, as Cluj surely is.

This book with a Borgesian clue in the title floats in a sensation about the inconsistency of the world. Even the library metaphor bears the same kind of incertitude.

Marta Petreu knows how to verbalise when ethical questions are taken too easily or when civic responsibility needs displays of firm attitudes. Consolation is always found in the family of the same spirits who are evoked. The gallery of portraits in *Biblioteci în aer liber* is the result of vital intellectual encounters with people whose works she admires.

These encounters are amplifiers of her own interiorities. When Marta Petreu admires somebody's work she does it without mechanisms of defence. Her admiration and friendship are prolonged even beyond the tomb. Such examples are Marian Papahagi, Mircea Zăciu, Marco Cugno, Adrian Marino.

Marta Petreu is a writer who lives her ideas in frenzy. No matter how deep the sorrow conveyed in the discourse, it is always sublimated in a style of superb artistry.