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UNEVEN WORLDS
BEYOND THE CANONS OF CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS



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INTRODUCTION

In the context of capitalist globalisation and time-space compression (as defined by David Harvey), several socio-spatial theorists have analysed the relationship between the local and the global, as well as how certain regional representations are the product of cultural interferences and hybridisations. From this point of view, our special issue, *Uneven Worlds. Beyond the Canons of Cultural Representations*, investigates the role played by regional and (semi-)peripheral cultures within world-systems and geographies of uneven development, and explores how they resist the false homogenisation implied by globalisation.

Whether or not we are drawn to global fictions that have emerged from postcolonial literary studies and have employed tropes such as “hybridity, diaspora, transculturation, subaltern, hegemony, deterritorialisation, rhizome, mestizo, Eurocentrism and othering” (O’Brien and Szeman 2001, 605), in relation to world literature or to the “one, and unequal” world-literary system (Moretti 2004, WReC), a certain reminiscence of the Iron Curtain, an impossible translation, and a lack of porosity characterise the circulation of peripheral literatures towards the centre. While writers such as Abdulrazak Gurnah, Shehan Karunatilaka and Mohamed Mbougar Sarr are recuperated in the central circuit of the Nobel, Booker and Goncourt prizes, but still living and producing in the centre, we chose to explore the mechanisms of resistance, the impossibility of translation and the subversive strategies of “cultural management” that export various models of the periphery.

Is it through identification, deviation, exoticism or rather through a widespread critique of capitalism that they manage to impose their models? The authors’ contributions to this issue explore the reconciliation but also the crisis models of the Global Novel, proposing new strategies of “cultural translation” in this unequal dialogue. From this point of view, the included articles investigate various forms of cultural hybridity, by involving a strong geographical imagination, aimed at mapping polymorphous models of identity-ideological transgressions.

Using *anarchetypes*, as defined by Corin Braga (2022), and other figures of a possible renegotiation, this issue proposes several theoretical strategies through which periphery becomes “exportable” and genres become evanescent. Within world literature, an important area is the investigation of literary forms hitherto considered peripheral, undermining the hegemony of high-brow literature that marked literary systems in the past.



In “Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*. The Archetypal Initiation Pattern,” Corin Braga applies the core concept that the author has coined – *the anarchetype* – to the ancient Greek and Latin novel. Projected into an organising pattern (the initiation journey) and various mystery cults (Dea Syria, Dionysos, Isis, Medio-Platonism), the tension between archetypal and anarchetypical tendencies is highlighted specifically by placing the popular narrative *Onos* in contrast with the well-known novel *The Golden Ass*.

Cultural hybridisation, present since ancient times, pervades the text written by Laura T. Ilea, “The Secret Memory. How the Goncourt 2021, Mohamed Mbougar Sarr, Rewrites the Story of the ‘Black Rimbaud’,” especially through extended discussions on “plagiarism,” in regard to Western relations to Africa, to its cultures and its storytelling. Different forms of marginality are explored through voices of Senegalese, Haitian, Argentinian writers and poets, through an apocryphal rewriting of the literary history of the twentieth century, as well as through detective journalism. The marginal and the minor appear as an alternative literary history of the twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries, subverting the established power relations between centre and periphery through an “incalculable supplement.”

In her article “Listening and Legibility: Urban Surfaces against ‘Overarching Meanings’ in Lispector’s *The Besieged City*,” Călina Părau focuses on Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector’s novel, opposing the term of “geographies of reason” to the untranslatability of the self. “Geographies of reason” are not countered through introspection or subjectivity, but through a world-making *poiesis*. By opposing *opaqueness* to *legibility*, Lispector maps a territory that defies the logic of the colonial gaze, designing a hybrid global memory, tensed between Euro-American literature and the Global South.

Alex Văsieș, in his article “Global Threads, Unveiling Unevenness: Contemporary Maximalist Projects Interrogating Cultural Hybridisation and Marginality,” highlights the interconnections between migration, periphery, and marginality, in maximalist novels such as Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, or Bernardine Evaristo’s *Girl, Woman, Other*, in order to emphasise the excess of storytelling, the forced meaning and the tendency to narratively mapping the whole world.

In the context of geocritical studies, a relevant contribution is represented by Maria Barbu’s article, “A(n) (Anarche)Typical Journey through New York: Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* as an American Postmodern Odyssey,” which identifies the specificity of the postmodern subject through two types of geographical narratives (internalising utopian tendencies), namely the search for a better life and for bigger opportunities *versus* journeys out of the “sheer pleasure of travelling.”

Constantin Tonu explores the field of cultural translation through his take on “Andrei Makine – From Anonymity to Literary Fame,” by analysing three strategies employed by the author: the pseudo-translation (Makine had to create fictitious translators in order to get his texts published, because French editors did not believe that a non-French writer could master the language to such a degree), the creation of a personal mythology and the exploitation of an image of Russia that would be pleasing to Western eyes. The final outcome is the creation of a hybrid identity, which consists in a strategy of negotiation between two almost irreconcilable models, and especially an art of performing the narrative self.

In the same vein of performativity, Simona Locic’s text, “Avatars of the Storyteller in *Le Petit Chaperon Uf* by Jean-Claude Grumberg,” puts together aesthetics and ethics through the re-staging of Perrault’s canonical tale. The aim of this performative approach is a different narration of the Shoah and the possibility of finding alternatives to the recurrence of evil. The storyteller splits into two: the wolf-storyteller and the heroine-storyteller, which represent the terrifying and the peaceful faces of Great History.

Focusing both on language and performativity, Bettina Ene explores, in the article “Language as a Tool of Influence: Discourse Analysis of Daenerys Targaryen’s Speeches in Dothraki and High Valyrian in *Game of Thrones*,” the popular culture through the strategies of cultural adaptation, examining the multilingual discourse and diplomatic techniques instrumented by Daenerys Targaryen in the “Game of Thrones” television series, by using the Dothraki and High Valyrian languages, designed by linguist David Peterson.

In the context of the pandemic global crisis, the contribution of Gabriela Glăvan, “Pandemic Biopolitics in Romanian Literature,” uses a theoretical frame related to posthumanism, medical humanities, and ethics to explore the conjunction between pandemic effects and fictional narratives in contemporary Romanian literature: Florina Ilis’ *Pandemia veselă și tristă* [The Happy and Sad Pandemic, 2020], Teodor Hossu-Longin’s *Măștile din spatele măștii* [The Masks behind the Mask, 2022], and collective volumes such as *Izolare* [Isolation, 2020] and *Jurnal din vremea pandemiei. Proză de grup* [Journal from the Times of the Pandemic, 2021, edited by Marius Cosmeanu].

Using concepts such as frontier Orientalism, the article of Andreea Mîrț, “Romanian and Hungarian Otherness. A World-System Perspective on the Event Novel,” investigates the dynamics between the Romanian and Hungarian literary systems in the context of the First World War. By analysing the novels *Moartea unei Republici Roșii* [The Death of a Red Republic] by Felix Aderca and *Anna Édes* by Dezső Kosztolányi, the author highlights the tensions regarding the imaginary patterns of otherness and the inequalities within the global system.

Iulian Coțofană, in his text “Ionescu-Ionesco, Voice of an Exile? Proposal for a Theoretical Rereading,” proposes a different reading of Eugène Ionesco’s exile, by focusing on a selection of texts following the 1930s, in an attempt to show that the author’s own reflexive work and the research made on it are deeply interconnected. The main aim of this article is to reopen a central issue in the migration studies, especially regarding the exile or expatriate status of this well-known French playwright of Romanian origin.

Bogdan Contea and Iulia Pietraru reflect on the categories and genres of post-communist literature in the article “The Post-Communist Novel of Transition as Realism of Transition. Thematic Precedents in Romanian and East-Central European Literature,” by instrumenting the most relevant theories on the combined and uneven development systems (WReC). In novels such as Bogdan Coșa’s *How Close the Cold Rains Are* (2020) and Mihai Duțescu’s *Beech Sponges* (2021), the authors speculate on the nature of “the realism of transition” in Romanian post-communism.

The last text of the issue addresses identity-ideological transgressions through Gabriel Girigan’s “Voices of Rudari Women from Filiași (Romania) in the Context of Conversion to Pentecostalism,” by implying notions of cultural transformation and gender in a specific ethnographic context, namely the conversion to Pentecostalism among Rudari women in post-socialist Eastern Europe. Reacting to local cultural practices and the conversion phenomenon among men, women challenge the traditional notions of masculinity through visions, dreams, ecstatic phenomena and mediation, assuming a translating and therapeutical role, which is placed between the past and the future of the Rudari Pentecostal community.

Marius CONKAN

marius.conkan@ubbcluj.ro

Laura T. ILEA

laura.ilea@ubbcluj.ro

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INTRODUCTION

WReC (Warwick Research Collective). “World-Literature in the Context of Combined and Uneven Development”, “The Question of Peripheral Realism”, in *Combined and Uneven Development. Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*. Liverpool University Press, 2015.

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LES MÉTAMORPHOSES D'APULÉE

1. LE SCÉNARIO INITIATIQUE ARCHÉTYPAL

Corin BRAGA¹

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ABSTRACT. *Apuleius' Metamorphoses. 1. The Archetypal Initiation Pattern.*

In this paper I apply a concept I have coined and defined – the anarchetype – to the ancient Greek and Latin novel, more specifically to Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. The text suffers, in my view, from the tension between two contrary formal tendencies, one which is archetypal, another which is anarchetypal. The first structural constraint is the archetypal one. In contrast to the popular narrative *Onos*, that Apuleius takes as his epic source, *The Golden Ass* receives a strong organizing pattern, that of an initiation journey. Transformed by mistake, within a sorcery ritual, into an ass, Lucius suffers a series of adventures and encounters with different mystery and philosophical cults (Dea Syria, Dionysos, Isis, Mediolatonism) which bring him back to the human, and then divine condition. This rite of passage offers an archetypal structure to the novel.

Keywords: *Greek and Latin novel; Apuleius; The Metamorphoses; Mystery Cults; initiation travel; archetype; anarchetype.*

REZUMAT. *Metamorfozele lui Apuleius. 1. Modelul arhetipic al inițierii.* Doresc în acest studiu să aplic un concept pe care l-am creat și l-am definit – cel de anarchetip – romanului grec și latin antic, cu precădere *Metamorfozelor* lui Apuleius.

¹ **Corin BRAGA** est professeur de littérature comparée à la Faculté de Lettres de Cluj. Il a soutenu une thèse de doctorat en lettres à l'Université Babeş-Bolyai, Roumanie, et une thèse en philosophie à l'Université Jean Moulin – Lyon 3, France. Il est membre correspondant de la Academia Nacional de Ciencias de Buenos Aires, Argentina, et de Academia Europea, Londres, UK ; vice-président de l'Association de littérature générale et comparée de Roumanie et vice-président du CRI2i (Centre de Recherches Internationales sur l'Imaginaire). Parmi ses publications : *Le Paradis interdit au Moyen Âge. La quête manquée de l'Eden oriental*, Paris, 2004 ; *La quête manquée de l'Avalon occidentale. Le Paradis interdit au Moyen Âge - 2*, Paris, 2006 ; *Du Paradis perdu à l'antiutopie aux XVI-XVIII^e siècles*, Paris, 2010 ; *Les antiutopies classiques*, Paris, 2012 ; *Pour une morphologie du genre utopique*, Paris, 2018 ; *Archétypologie postmoderne*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2019. Email: corin.braga@ubbcluj.ro.

În opinia mea, textul e marcat de tensiunea dintre două tendințe formale contrare, una arhetipală cealaltă anarhetipală. În această primă parte a studiului voi analiza tendința structurală arhetipală. În contrast cu povestirea populară *Onos* din care se inspiră Apuleius, *Măgarul de aur* primește din partea autorului un pattern structural puternic, cel al călătoriei inițiatice. Transformat din greșeală, în cadrul unui ritual vrăjitoresc, într-un măgar, Lucius trece printr-o serie de aventuri și întâlniri cu diferite culte de mistere și filosofice (Dea Syria, Dionysos, Isis, medio-platonism) care îl aduc înapoi la condiția umană și apoi la cea divină. Acest rit de trecere îi conferă romanului o structură arhetipală.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Romanul antic grec și latin; Apuleius, Metamorfozele, Culte de mistere; călătorie inițiativă; arhetip; anarhetip.*

La *pax romana* a créé, pendant l'Antiquité tardive, un espace œcuménique pour les peuples amalgamés de l'Empire romain, allant de la Mésopotamie aux Îles britanniques, de la Gaule et la Dacie à l'Égypte et l'Afrique du Nord. Autour de la Méditerranée, devenue une mer intérieure (« *mare nostrum* »), la libre circulation économique et commerciale, humaine et culturelle, a permis l'alliance et la fusion d'un grand nombre de civilisations, religions et pratiques religieuses, langues et littératures, plus ou moins adaptées, assorties et unifiées par les institutions communes de la période hellénistique, puis romaine. Le polythéisme antique était arrivé à son apogée et l'Empire était prêt à accueillir dans son système religieux et culturel, à côté de Jupiter Maximus et de la figure de l'Empereur, les divinités et les cultes des peuplades les plus lointaines, des Frigiens, Syriens, Phéniciens, Babyloniens, Parthes, Perses, Égyptiens, Numidiens, Celtes, Germains, Thraces et Daco-Gètes, et tant d'autres. Cette invasion du Panthéon gréco-latin a permis la naissance d'un super-synchrétisme, un véritable « *melting pot* », dans lequel les modèles religieux et culturels se sont multipliés offrant un choix pour tout un chacun : à part les divinités de l'Olympe, les individus pouvaient opter, à souhait, entre les mystères de Cybèle et Attis, de Dea Syria, d'Isis et Osiris, de Mithra, de Sol Invictus, d'Hercules Magusanus, des Chevaliers Thraces, ou encore des sectes plus ésotériques ou intellectuelles des Pythagoriciens et Platoniciens, Stoïciens, Épicuriens, Sophistes, Gnostiques, adeptes d'Hermès Trismégiste, etc.

La littérature du Haut Empire romain n'a pas manqué de refléter ce milieu religieux effervescent (Rohde 1876). Reinhold Merkelbach, partant d'une observation de Karl Kerényi, a même cru pouvoir discerner dans le roman antique le schéma, camouflé derrière le rideau de la littérature, des initiations aux cultes des mystères qui pullulaient dans l'Empire romain (Merkelbach 1962). *Les Métamorphoses* d'Apulée en seraient le chef de série, avec leurs riches descriptions

ethnographiques des rites d'Isis et Osiris (Apuleius 1975), ou encore de la Dea Syria et de ses prêtres ambulants. Dans les autres romans de l'époque sont présentes d'autres divinités de cultes à mystères, qui jouent parfois un rôle important dans les intrigues : Artémis (Isis), Hélios, Isis et Osiris dans *Habrokomes et Antheia* de Xénophon, Astarté (assimilé toujours à Isis) de Phénicie, Dionysos (Osiris), Horapollon, Artémis dans *Leucippé et Clitophon* d'Achille Tatius, orphisme et pythagorisme, mages, brahmanes indiens et gymnosophistes éthiopiens dans la *Vie d'Apollonios de Tyane* de Philostrate, christianisme dans le *Roman* de Clemens, Mithra dans la *Babyloniaca* de Iamblichos, Dionysos dans *Daphnis et Chloé* de Longus, Apollon de Delphes et Hélios dans les *Éthiopique* de Héliodore, etc. Et partout, surtout dans les romans érotiques, trois divinités tutélaires : Éros et Aphrodite d'un côté, Tyché, le sort, de l'autre.

Un récit initiatique suppose autant un trajet spatial vers un centré sacré qu'une évolution dans le temps des personnages, le dépassement d'une étape d'âge, de condition, de pouvoir et de savoir, vers une étape supérieure de maturité et d'épanouissement. Dans les romans antiques, évidemment, il n'est pas question d'une évolution psychologique, d'une maturation caractérielle, comme dans le genre du *Bildungsroman*, il s'agit plutôt d'un passage à un stade supérieur, à un statut d'initié, de sage, de dieu même.

Or, le voyage vers un « point suprême » (selon la formule de Michel Butor) de la mappemonde et l'accumulation par étapes d'un savoir qui favorise la transcendance de la condition initiale sont deux dispositifs narratifs qui permettent aux auteurs de faire rouler le sujet d'un voyage extraordinaire « sur une action unique, entière et complète, ayant un commencement, un milieu et une fin, pour que, semblable à un animal unique et entier, elle cause un plaisir qui lui soit propre » (Aristote 1838/2008, XXIII, I). La présence ou l'absence de ces schémas est un critère important, sinon décisif, pour faire la distinction entre romans antiques archétypiques et romans anarchétypiques.

Dans ce travail je me propose de démontrer que le célèbre roman d'Apulée, *Les Métamorphoses*, souffre la double pression entre ces tendances, l'une de facture canonique, l'autre de facture anarchique.

L'intrigue du roman, indiquée par le titre, est un thème répandu, présent dans le folklore, mais aussi dans la littérature écrite, d'Europe et aussi d'autres continents. Dans le *Index-Motif of Folk-Literature* d'Arne et Thomson, dans le cadre du chapitre D « Magic », le thème « Transformation » occupe les positions D0-D699, puis le sous-thème « Transformation : man to animal » – les positions D100-D190; finalement les motifs précis « Transformation : man to ass » et « Transformation : man to mule » – les positions D132.1 et D.132.2 (*Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, Volume 2, 514). Dans la littérature populaire de la Grèce antique circulait, semble-t-il, le conte humoristique d'un homme transformé en

âne et ses (mes)aventures dans sa nouvelle condition. Il devait se ranger dans la catégorie de « cette prose milésienne » qu'Apulée annonce prendre pour modèle pour son roman, « une série d'histoires variées », sans grandes prétentions, faites pour entretenir de manière plaisante et légère les auditeurs, mais suffisamment incitantes pour être reprises par des auteurs cultes. En effet, le manuscrit d'un conte *Lucius ou l'âne* (Dubuisson 1999) nous est parvenu, que les commentateurs ont du mal à attribuer à un auteur sûr. Le chronographe byzantin Photius lui donne pour auteur un certain Lucius de Patras, mais il est possible qu'il ait pris le nom du protagoniste pour celui de l'écrivain, d'ailleurs inconnu. Des commentateurs comme Ben Edwin Perry et Graham Anderson conjecturent, en se basant sur plusieurs éléments communs du conte avec l'œuvre ample de Lucien de Samosate, que ce dernier en serait l'auteur, peut-être même de deux variantes du récit, une histoire initiale plus longue et un abrégé ultérieur (Perry 1967; Anderson MCMLXXVI). D'autres conjecturent l'existence d'un conte grec anonyme perdu *Métamorphoses*, que Lucius de Patras et Lucien auraient eu pour modèle (Hall 1981, 354-367). En tout cas, indifféremment de l'auteur de *Lucius ou l'âne*, Apulée l'aurait copié, en l'enrichissant toutefois de moult épisodes complémentaires et, plus important, d'un sens général plus ciblé.

Conte populaire ou culte (œuvre de Lucius de Patras ou de Lucien de Samosate), *Lucius ou l'âne* ne semble pas avoir eu un objectif moralisateur ou initiatique ; il visait principalement le plaisir du public, se proposant, de même que le roman d'Apulée, de « flatter ton oreille [ami lecteur] bienveillante d'un murmure caressant » (Apulée 1958, 145). En effet, après la suite d'aventures amusantes ou grotesques vécues par le personnage dans l'hypostase asinienne, Lucius grec revient à sa condition humaine antérieure, sans avoir rien appris, sans souffrir des conséquences ultérieures. Pour citer Thomas N. Habinek, « unlike the Greek Lucius of the *Onos* story, who, after his transformation in the arena, gets on a boat and goes home, apparently unaffected by his experiences, Lucius cannot return to any conventional social grouping because of what he has witnessed » (Habinek 1990, 67). C'est ici qu'intervient Apulée quand il reprend à son compte l'intrigue de l'homme métamorphosé en âne : il fera de la période de transformation animale l'occasion d'une évolution spirituelle du personnage.

Le second titre du roman d'Apulée, *L'Âne d'or*, suggère cette amplification de la « fable » originale à une signification de facture mystique. Le syntagme « âne d'or » est une double métaphore qui se constitue dans un oxymore. Elle met en parallèle deux règnes, animal et minéral, qui supposent chacun une hiérarchie interne. Dans la « chaîne des êtres » animaux, l'âne, connotant de manière traditionnelle la bêtise, le manque de savoir (rappelons-nous le bonnet d'âne dans l'enseignement médiéval), est l'opposé du lion (ou de l'aigle), en tant

que roi(s) des animaux (ou des oiseaux). De même, l'or, en tant que « roi » des métaux et pierre philosophale, est l'opposé du fer (dans le mythe hésiodique des âges) ou du plomb (dans l'alchimie). Pour respecter ces hiérarchies, les combinaisons correctes seraient un âne de fer (ou de plomb) et un lion (ou un aigle) d'or. Donnant à l'âne les attributs de la royauté des métaux, Apulée suggère dès le titre que, à la différence de Lucius de l'*Onos* milésien, qui demeure ce qu'il est, sans aucune transcendance, pour le malheur du protagoniste et l'amusement des lecteurs, Lucius des *Métamorphoses* est destiné à une rédemption, à une condition supérieure à celle qu'il avait avant la métamorphose.

Les commentateurs n'ont pas manqué de remarquer le caractère initiatique qu'Apulée a insufflé au récit, à l'instar de Karl Kerényi et Reinhold Merkelbach, (Merkelbach 1962). Toutefois, l'hypothèse de Merkelbach que le récit contient un message initiatique exotérique, plus facile à faire passer dans des romans laïques que dans les cultes religieux obligés à garder le « mystère », n'a pas été reçue. Il est bien vrai que toutes ces divinités et leurs cultes sont des éléments narratifs obligatoires et parfois incontournables dans la prose antique, mais leur présence ne s'explique pas nécessairement comme une mission religieuse déguisée, sinon par le fait plus banal que, dans l'Antiquité, les figures divines, leurs temples, leurs prêtres et leurs rites, étaient omniprésents. Ils étaient des composantes centrales de la vision du monde et ils faisaient normalement partie du décor social, de manière que leur évocation ne supposait pas forcément des intentions de prosélytisme. Thomas N. Habinek a correctement attiré l'attention sur le fait que, pendant la *pax romana*, la population très mélangée de l'Empire manifestait une grande mobilité, non seulement économique et de statut social, mais aussi religieuse et spirituelle. Le passage des individus d'une communauté de croyants à une autre avec des divinités, prêtres et rituels différents était phénomène courant, et le roman d'Apulée ne fait que refléchir une réalité sociale banale (Habinek 1990, 50).

D'autres commentateurs pensent que, s'il est difficile d'accepter l'idée d'un message ésotérique transmis par les romans antiques au grand public, dans le cas d'Apulée du moins il est possible de discuter l'allégeance personnelle de l'auteur. John J. Winkler et Nancy Shumate, par exemple, explorent les *Métamorphoses* comme la relation d'une expérience religieuse, d'une révélation et d'une conversion soit de l'auteur (*auctor*) soit du personnage (*actor*) (Winkler 1985; Shumate 1996). Toutefois, cette interprétation souffre, selon Habinek, de la projection anachronique d'une psychologie moderne sur celle antique : « Thus it is understandable, if inappropriate, that we seek to interpret Apuleius' narrative of Lucius' wanderings through the provincial countryside, his transformation into a donkey, and his restoration into human form in terms of the self-consciously meditation of the fourth century bishop of Hippo » (Habinek 1990, 51).

En effet, les conventions dominantes de la « seconde sophistique », ainsi que la poétique « légère », parodique, ironique, annoncée par Apulée dès *l'incipit* du roman devaient être suffisantes pour rendre suspecte l'hypothèse d'une identification entre auteur biographique et narrateur-personnage. A. Kirichenko pense même que Apulée lui-même aurait déconseillé narquoisement une possible lecture de type ésotérique, à la manière des fables platoniciennes, qui transmettrait par l'intermédiaire de la fiction une vérité ou une conviction personnelle. Par le nom et le rôle qu'il attribue à des personnages funambulesques comme Socrate, il ironiserait les philosophes et la mode de l'interprétation allégorique : « Thus one of the main functions of the allusion to the *Phaedrus* in the prologue is to suggest, and then immediately to reject in a superbly ironic way, the possibility that Apuleius' fictions may have a far-reaching thematic purpose resembling that of Platonic myths » (Kirichenko 2008, 105).

Tout au plus, on pourrait voir dans le roman une sorte d'apologie indirecte. En effet, on se rappelle que le jeune Apulée, après avoir épousé une veuve plus âgée mais riche, a été accusé par le frère et le fils de celle-ci d'avoir eu recours à des charmes d'amour. Devant le tribunal qui jugeait cette cause de sorcellerie, Apulée s'est brillamment défendu en produisant une *Apologie* dans laquelle il présentait son intérêt pour les plantes et les poissons susceptibles de servir d'ingrédients pour des potions comme une préoccupation scientifique naturaliste (Apulée 2002). En d'autres mots, il substituait à la magie la philosophie médio-platonicienne, de même que Philostrate, à la même époque, démontrait qu'Apollonios n'était pas un mage mais un philosophe néopythagoricien (Philostrate 2023), et que, plus tard, à la Renaissance, les philosophes néoplatoniciens s'ingénieront à faire passer les disciplines occultes pour une philosophie de la nature (ou magie blanche) et non comme magie noire et sorcellerie. Or, les *Métamorphoses* démontrent, de manière oblique, que la magie est maléfique (elle transforme l'homme en âne !) et que le salut de l'individu pieux vient des divinités à mystères.

En tout cas, indifféremment de la situation historique et de l'attitude sociale envers les conversions, ainsi que de l'observance personnelle d'Apulée (réelle, feinte, ou ironique) au culte d'Isis, il reste que, dans l'univers du roman et le comportement du narrateur personnage, les mystères isiaques sont un dispositif narratif pleinement assumé par l'écrivain. Fidèle ou pas en tant qu'individu, en tant qu'auteur Apulée introduit le chapitre final pour donner une finalité à l'intrigue du conte *Lucius ou l'âne*, pour clore le sujet du roman, pour lui imposer un sens global, une *dianoia*. De cette manière, la narration acquiert une symétrie, sinon spatiale (voyage entre deux centres sacrés), du moins temporelle (évolution d'un stade inférieur à une condition supérieure). Le parcours initiatique devient un schéma organisateur qui donne à « l'enchaînement du discours » romanesque une colonne vertébrale, une structure archétypale.

À partir de l'idée de Bakhtine selon laquelle la transformation de Lucius se réfère de fait à sa conversion religieuse, R. B. Branham pense que le sort du personnage suit la séquence « culpabilité – châtement – rachat – bénédiction ». Lucius est coupable de s'adonner à la sorcellerie, il est châtié par la métamorphose animale, il rachète sa faute par les mésaventures subies en tant qu'âne, et finalement reçoit le salut de la déesse Isis (Branham 1989). Lawrence Kim poursuit en ce sens : « By superimposing this sequence onto an otherwise random string of adventures, Apuleius transforms them into a meaningful and temporally irreversible narrative of purification and rebirth while the low, everyday life experienced by Lucius corresponds to the punishment stage » (Kim, in Whitmarsh 2008, 159).

Plus appliqué, Thomas N. Habinek identifie le schéma structurel des *Métamorphoses* dans les rites de passage. Suivant Arnold Van Gennep et Victor Turner, il voit les trois festivals religieux présentés dans le roman comme les étapes d'un « processus rituel » et d'une « expérience liminale » (Habinek 1990, 49-69). Lors du Festival du Rire de Hypata, quand il est jugé pour l'« outricide » (c'est-à-dire l'assassinat des trois outres en peau de chèvre animées magiquement par Pamphile), Lucius reçoit le rôle de *pharmakos*, un étranger exclu de la cité en tant que porteur symbolique du mal. Sa transformation en âne et son rapt par des voleurs rappelle la poursuite rituelle de Dionysos (dont l'âne est une épiphanie courante) et son expulsion du royaume par le roi trace Lycurgue. Écarté de la société, le néophyte fera les expériences les plus diverses, culminant avec ce qui aurait dû être sa mise à mort dans l'arène de Corinthe, dans un rituel de *obiectio ad bestias*. Finalement, pendant le festival de Cenchrées, la déesse Isis lui permet de revenir à la forme humaine, d'être ainsi réintégré dans la communauté, et de plus dans le cercle des initiés aux mystères.

Malgré l'importance concédée par Apulée au culte d'Isis, les *Métamorphoses* sont le miroir d'un tableau plus riche et composite, caractéristique de la vie religieuse de l'Empire. Des descriptions et allusions sont faites à la magie et à la sorcellerie, au christianisme, aux mystères d'Atargatis (Dea Syria), aux mystères de Dionysos, à la mystique orphique et pythagoricienne, peut-être à l'alchimie et à l'hermétisme. Et que dire du super-synchrétisme de la figure d'Isis égyptienne, qui se donne pour hypostases toutes les grandes mères du polythéisme antique : Cybèle des Phrygiens, Minerve Cécropienne des Attiques, Vénus des Cypriotes, Diane Dyctine des Crétois, Proserpine des Siciliens, Cérès des Éleusiniens, Junon des Romains, Bellone des Celtes, Hécate des Cariens, etc. (Apulée 1958, 357)

Mon hypothèse est qu'Apulée ne se contente pas d'évoquer le panorama spirituel très bariolé de son époque, mais qu'il le juge également, distribuant ces croyances sur une sorte d'échelle avec des valeurs différentes. Plus précisément, je vais montrer que le parcours initiatique de Lucius enfile des rencontres avec six pratiques religieuses : magie, christianisme, mystères de Dea Syria, culte

dionysiaque, néo-pythagorisme et médio-platonisme, mystères d'Isis et Osiris. La magie, la sorcellerie et le christianisme occupent le bas de l'échelle axiologique, offrant des exemples de mal-praxis religieux, d'expériences malignes qu'il faut éviter. Les cultes de type orgiastique des prêtres galls et de Dionysos sont à leur tour déplaisants (du moins pour le public romain peu enclin aux rites saugrenus et irrationnels), mais transmettent tout de même au protagoniste des leçons subliminales importantes. Finalement, les mystères pythagoriciens et isiaques sont posés comme les exemples à suivre, qui offrent la véritable sagesse mystique.

Lucius commence son aventure spirituelle en explorant la première de ces pratiques, la sorcellerie. Bien qu'il dise, dès le début, qu'il a quitté le pays de sa famille et vient en Thessalie « pour affaires », on ne le voit point s'occuper de commerce ou autre affaire familiale, tout ce qu'il fait c'est donner cours à sa grande curiosité face aux phénomènes magiques. Photis le vante pour « la noblesse innée de [sa] condition », pour « l'élévation de [son] esprit » et surtout pour avoir « été initié à un grand nombre de religions » (Apulée 1958, 191), mais en fait cette dernière qualité devrait s'appliquer à Apulée lui-même (qui se flatte de cette manière dans son *Apologie*), et moins à son personnage qui, « toujours avide de nouveauté », est fort naïf et crédule dans son comportement. La *temeraria curiositas* de Lucius a pu être considérée, à juste raison, comme l'intrigue, le mécanisme narratif du roman (Winkler 1985, 124 sqq).

C'est cette curiosité ingénue, même sotte, mais aussi impie, *sacrilega curiositas*, qui sera la cause de sa mésaventure. Bien que Byrrhène le prévienne des dangers qu'il court auprès d'une sorcière comme Pamphile, et que la contemplation de la statue de Diane et d'Actéon transformé en cerf, décrite en *ekphrasis* comme prolepse de ce qui va suivre, eut dû lui mettre la puce à l'oreille, Lucius donne libre frein à l'attrait irrésistible des choses interdites : « Mais moi, outre ma curiosité habituelle, dès que j'entendis prononcer le mot, tant souhaité, de magie, je fus bien éloigné de redouter Pamphile ; au contraire, je n'eus plus qu'un désir : me mettre spontanément à son école, cela dût-il me coûter très cher et me précipiter tout droit, d'un bond, dans le gouffre » (Apulée 1958, 165). Dans le roman antique érotique, les personnages sont mus par la force irrésistible de l'Amour ; dans *Les Métamorphoses*, c'est la curiosité du protagoniste qui agit comme une nécessité intérieure impérieuse.

Pamphile est, selon les dires de Byrrhène, « une sorcière de premier ordre et passée maîtresse en toute sorte d'incantations sépulcrales. Elle sait, en soufflant sur des baguettes, des cailloux et de petits objets de cette sorte, plonger toute la lumière de notre univers et de nos astres dans le fond du Tartare et l'antique Chaos » (Apulée 1958, 165). Désirant s'initier à ces pouvoirs terrifiants, Lucius est tout prévenu de la direction dans laquelle ils mènent : vers le « gouffre », vers le monde d'en bas. Pour lui, comme pour tous les apprentis

sorciers, la lumière de l'univers et des astres s'éteindra, il aura à explorer les monstres des ténèbres. Plus spécifiquement, le *descensus ad inferos* du personnage se manifestera non comme une incursion géographique ou cosmologique vers le royaume souterrain des morts, mais comme une descente sur la « chaîne des êtres », une régression de la condition humaine à celle animale.

Mais pourquoi Lucius se métamorphose-t-il en âne, alors qu'il espérait, après avoir espionné Pamphile, prendre la forme au moins d'un hibou (comme elle), sinon celle d'un aigle, roi des oiseaux ? Est-ce que Photis s'est trompée d'onguent, ou lui aurait malicieusement apporté un autre flacon ? Pour ma part, je ne pense pas qu'il s'agisse de pommades différentes, mais d'effets différents de la même crème, selon le bénéficiaire : chacun se transforme dans ce qu'est son identité profonde. Pamphile, en tant que sorcière accomplie, peut bien prendre la forme d'un oiseau de nuit. Lucius, lui, ne fait qu'accommoder son aspect extérieur à ce qu'il est à l'intérieur : un « âne » dans la discipline de la magie, un néophyte dont la curiosité irresponsable lui fait ignorer les précautions et les interdits religieux. À Éleusis les mystes sont prévenus de ne point se retourner lors de la traversé du marécage, symbole du *borboros* infernal. Orphée a brisé cette interdiction et a perdu définitivement son amante. Dans le conte d'Éros et Psyché inclus dans le roman, Apulée offre deux exemples successifs de tels périls guettant les non-initiés : la première fois que Psyché brûle le conseil de ne pas essayer de contempler son amant invisible, la deuxième fois quand elle ouvre la pyxide donnée par Perséphone et en fait sortir une vapeur paralysante. On pourrait dire, dans son cas aussi, que l'onguent a des effets spécifiques pour chaque utilisateur : pour Vénus, c'est un parfum de beauté, pour Psyché – une exhalaison de mort.

La leçon de la métamorphose accidentelle est néanmoins plus ample qu'un avertissement contre la naïveté irresponsable, contre le manque de préparation de ceux qui se hâtent d'explorer les mystères religieux. L'antidote pour l'onguent thériomorphe seront les pétales de rose de la déesse Isis : c'est comprendre que les effets malheureux de la magie peuvent être défaits par l'initiation aux cultes divins. Magie et cultes à mystères sont présentés par Apulée comme deux pratiques religieuses avec des vecteurs opposés : la sorcellerie conduit vers le bas, la nuit, le mal, l'animalité ; le culte d'Isis transporte l'initié vers le ciel, la lumière, le bien et la vérité, la condition divine. Pour Lucius la morale est claire : voilà où mène la magie, voilà ce qui arrive aux trop curieux qui se laissent envoûtés par les promesses et l'art des sorcières !

Bien avant le mythe noir de la sorcellerie au Moyen Âge et à l'Âge classique, déjà dans l'Antiquité les adeptes d'Hécate étaient perçues comme des personnes étranges, dangereuses, à éviter. Les exemples abondent, de Circé d'Homère à Erichtho de Lucan, de Médée des *Argonautiques* à Canidie d'Horace.

Apulée ne s'en prive pas et agrmente la part initiale du roman avec des récits milésiens sur d'autres sorcières, mages et charlatans que Pamphile. Méroé, par exemple, est présentée comme détenant elle aussi des pouvoirs cosmiques, à l'instar des dieux créateurs : elle est « une sorcière, dit-il, une possédée, capable d'abaisser le ciel, de suspendre la terre, de tarir les fontaines, de dissoudre les montagnes, de faire remonter les morts et descendre les dieux, d'éteindre les astres, d'illuminer le Tartare lui-même » (Apulée 1958, 150). Vu ces facultés terribles, pourquoi la sorcière ne serait-elle pas le « spécialiste du sacré » (selon la formule de Mircea Eliade) le plus révééré de la communauté ? D'où vient la renommée ingrate et la peur suscitée par cette *sortarius*, « diseuse de sorts » qui ne se contente pas de pratiquer une forme de divination commune avec d'autres divins comme Tirésias, mais prétend modifier ces sorts même, en faisant chanter même les dieux pour se plier à ses demandes ?

L'explication la plus évidente vient de l'histoire des religions. La mythologie grecque témoigne par tous ses mythes et légendes du grand changement de paradigme religieux qui s'est produit avec la descente dans la Grèce des tribus indo-européennes. Si les aborigènes pratiquaient des cultes dédiés à la grande déesse néolithique, Gaïa, et de son successeur, la grande déesse Rhéa de Crète et des Cyclades, les migrants apportaient le culte d'une grande divinité du Ciel atmosphérique, dieu du tonnerre et des orages, Zeus. L'accommodation réciproque de ces deux systèmes, sur le fond de la « théologie commune » du Proche Orient, pendant le deuxième millénaire av. J.-C, a fini par faire émerger la grande synthèse du polythéisme classique, tel qu'il se reflète chez Homère et Hésiode.

La mémoire historique de ce conflit a été transposée sur le plan du mythe dans la confrontation entre deux générations divines, les Titans et les Olympiens. Les théomachies racontent, dans le plan fantastique, les confrontations par lesquelles Zeus et sa famille ont pris le sceptre du monde : avec le grand serpent Typhon, avec les Titans et avec les Géants de bronze. Dans un autre travail, j'ai cru pouvoir démontrer que ces trois combats évoquent le remplacement des institutions de la religion pré-indoeuropéenne locale : le Roi-serpent autochtone, la caste des prêtres de la grande déesse et la confrérie des guerriers associés. Ces organismes constitueraient les trois premiers peuples de la *Théogonie* de Hésiode, les races d'or, d'argent et de bronze, d'avant l'avènement de Zeus et de ses adorateurs, à savoir les races des héros (les achéens) et de fer (les doriens) (Braga 2019, Chap. III). Et bien que beaucoup des traits et des rites de l'ancienne religion aient survécu, adaptées, dans le polythéisme grec, néanmoins la Grèce classique (de même que plus tard Rome) était réticente face aux cultes orgiastiques anciens de Rhéa, Cybèle, Dionysos Sabazios, et des déesses olympiennes qui en héritaient (Déméter, Héra, Artémis etc.). Hécate et ses suivantes, les sorcières, faisaient partie de ces pratiques acculturées, que la nouvelle mentalité religieuse craignait et abhorrait.

Plus grave encore était le fait que la sorcellerie héritait d'une culture encore plus ancienne, du chamanisme de la préhistoire². Si le chamanisme de chasse des populations du paléolithique est difficile à documenter, en revanche les populations de migrants indo-européens, dont les proto-Grecs³, apportaient les croyances liées au chamanisme des pâtres⁴. Suivant les suggestions de Karl Meuli, Carlo Ginzburg a attribué la sorcellerie européenne toujours à un peuple venant du centre de l'Asie, aux Scythes (Ginzburg 1989 ; Ginzburg 1966). Quoi qu'il en soit, bien que les théories en soient parfois contradictoires et sujettes à contestation, ce qui semble néanmoins acquis, c'est la relation entre le chamanisme ancien, de source en grande partie asiatique, et la sorcellerie en Europe (Hoppál 1984 ; Pócs 1989 ; Hoppál 2022). En tant qu'héritières des shamans, ensorceleurs, sorciers, mages, thaumaturges et autres « spécialistes du sacré » révéés par des populations que les Grecs traitaient comme des primitifs, sauvages, barbares, les sorcières étaient vues comme les détentrices des pouvoirs dangereux et maléfiques des anciennes divinités du monde souterrain et de la nuit.

C'est à cette fascination dangereuse et irrésistible que l'esprit curieux et ouvert de Lucius succombe volontairement. Les mésaventures qu'il va vivre seront une juste punition pour sa curiosité intrépide et finalement hérétique, coupable de *hybris* envers la religion polythéiste établie. Malgré cela, à regarder plus attentivement, pourrait-il s'agir de quelque chose de plus que d'un simple châtement ou expiation ? Car si on opère un « redressement » du sens péjoratif que la métamorphose en âne reçoit dans la mentalité pieuse et on se propose de récupérer le sens initial, non-pervers, que les pratiques chamaniques attribuaient à la transformation, on pourrait voir dans l'accident magique du personnage le début d'une initiation. Bien que cause de plusieurs épisodes pénibles, grotesques, torturants même, ou au moins comiques, l'hypostase animale peut aussi bien constituer une étape intermédiaire nécessaire à une évolution mystique.

En effet, le pouvoir des chamans de prendre des formes animales, laissé en héritage autant aux contes folkloriques qu'à la mythologie de la sorcellerie, est le résultat d'un apprentissage complexe, qui lie les initiés du règne humain à celui animal. Quand il entre dans l'état de transe pour se rendre chez le Roi de la forêt (le souverain des esprits et de la surnature), l'esprit du chaman prend la forme d'un animal dédié, totémique. Ce pouvoir est acquis, ensemble avec d'autres facultés spirituelles, au moment où le candidat-chaman est accepté par les esprits surnaturels en tant que con-locuteur humain. Dans son livre qui retrace les croyances et rites sous-jacents, de facture chamanique, du scénario

² Parmi une immense bibliographie, à titre d'orientation, voir Eliade 1983. Pour le chamanisme paléolithique, voir Anati 1999 ; Clottes, Lewis-Williams 1996.

³ À part Georges Dumézil, pour une vue de synthèse, voir Sergent 1995.

⁴ Pour la distinction entre chamanisme de chasse et chamanisme des pâtres, voir la monumentale synthèse de Hamayon 2016. Pour le chamanisme sibérien voir aussi Delaby 1977.

morphologique du conte fantastique, Vladimir Propp évoque le rituel de la dévoration, englutissement et gestation de l'apprenti sorcier par un animal-monstrueux. Ce qui sur le plan des croyances correspond au dépècement, ingurgitation et puis ré-modélisation du corps magique du futur chaman par les esprits de la forêt, dans le plan du rituel est concrétisé par son intromission dans la peau d'un animal dépecé, qui peut être un renne, un caribou, un cheval, un ours, etc. Pendant plusieurs jours il restera enseveli et isolé du reste de la tribu, se préparant à intégrer une autre communauté, de facture surnaturelle. Dans une variante moins saugrenue, la carcasse de l'animal est remplacée par une yourte spéciale, dont l'entrée, ornée d'un crâne ou de cornes, suggère la bouche béante de la bête (Propp 1983, chap. 3).

Les jours passés à l'intérieur du corps (physique ou symbolique) de l'animal constituent une forme de (re)gestation de l'apprenti et puis sa renaissance à la condition de chaman – partenaire et maître des animaux. On pourrait donc dire que Lucius ne se transforme pas simplement, par erreur, dans un animal, mais qu'il est englouti par un âne, qu'il va passer une période d'initiation dans la peau d'un âne. Apulée le suggère presque ouvertement, en faisant admettre à Lucius qu'il doit « le plus grand gré à l'âne que je fus de m'avoir dissimulé sous cette enveloppe, fait passer par des tribulations variées, rendu, sinon tout à fait sage, du moins plus riche de savoir » (Apulée 1958, 308).

Que l'idée d'ingurgitation du héros par un animal n'était point étrangère à Apulée est confirmé par un autre épisode. Après que Lucius et Charité essayent de fuir la bande de brigands, ceux-ci font le plan de les punir de mort, tous les deux, de la manière suivante : « Décidons, par conséquent, de le [l'âne] tuer demain, de le vider entièrement et dans sa peau de coudre, toute nue, la jeune fille qu'il nous a préférée, en ne laissant dépasser que son visage, de façon à enfermer le reste du corps dans cette prison, puis, nous exposerons l'âne ainsi farci comme pâté sur un rocher tranchant et nous l'abandonnerons à la chaleur du soleil » (Apulée 1958, 260). Enfermé dans le corps d'un animal, Lucius est menacé de recevoir une deuxième personne dans la même carcasse !

Mais pourquoi Lucius se transforme-t-il précisément dans un âne, alors que le choix offert par le règne animal est si riche ? Les chamans ont la liberté de choisir entre plusieurs variantes et opter pour l'hypostase qui convient le mieux à leurs aptitudes et desseins. Les sorcières, à leur tour, peuvent adopter la forme d'un animal de prédilection, qui peut être un hibou, un corbeau, un chat, un loup, etc. Elles peuvent aussi bien transformer d'autres personnes en animaux, ce qu'il se passe avec les camarades d'Ulysse métamorphosés par Circé en cochons. Pamphile peut, elle aussi, punir « ceux qui ne sont pas complaisants et déméritent à ses yeux en se refusant » ; « en un clin d'œil elle les transforme en pierres, en moutons, en toute sorte d'animaux » (Apulée 1958, 165).

Les bestiaires et les physiologues de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Âge ont systématisé les liaisons magiques entre l'homme et l'animal en un catalogue de relations biunivoques entre le caractère moral des individus et les divers animaux pris dans un sens allégorique (« *Congrue igitur Physiologus naturas animalium contulit et contextuit intelligentiae spiritualium scripturaum* ») (*Fiziologul latin* 2006, 26). L'aigle symbolise les convertis par le baptême, le cerf symbolise le bon croyant, le castor – l'abstinent, le chien – le démagogue, le renard – le diable, le Phoenix – le Christ, le pélican – le Père, etc. Dans cette interprétation chrétienne, l'âne sauvage (*onager*), par son habitude de brailler à tout moment sans avoir faim, symboliserait le diable qui rûle de dépit puisque le Christ l'a privé de sa « nourriture » en justifiant l'humanité (*Fiziologul latin* 2006, 40-41). Cette « *interpretatio christiana* » si radicale offre une suggestion pour le trait caractériel que la morale chrétienne culpabilise dans l'âne : ce doit être un péché digne de la damnation.

Dans la religion classique, l'âne est une des épiphanies animales de Dionysos. Il fait partie de son cortège, avec d'autres herbivores comme le taureau et le bouc. Or, dans les mythologies antiques, du Proche Orient et de la Méditerranée, ces bêtes symbolisent la virilité, la force procréatrice masculine. Leur mise à mort rituelle, leur dépècement, dans des rites comme ceux d'Ishtar (voir la légende de Gilgamesh et le Taureau cosmique), de Rhéa minoenne, de Dionysos Sabazios, ou de Mithra, constitue une panspermie destinée à féconder la grande déesse, la Terre mère. C'est cette sexualité orgiastique que le christianisme a satanisé dans le péché de *luxuria*, débauche de la chair. Et comme les satyres et les faunes ithyphalliques du cortège dionysiaque ont offert l'image pour la représentation visuelle des diables chrétiens, on imagine comment l'âne et le (Grand) Bouc (noir), en tant qu'emblèmes du désir sexuel mâle, sont devenus les épiphanies du Diable aux orgies du Sabbat.

Dans l'imaginaire païen d'Apulée, en plus de l'innocence en tant que sottise, l'âne connote donc la sexualité. En effet, si Lucius arrive en Thessalie par curiosité à peine cachée pour la magie, tout ce qui semble l'intéresser mis à part cela, ce ne sont pas les affaires économiques ou la recherche de ses origines familiales (il refuse l'hospitalité de Byrrhène pour celle de Pamphile), mais les plaisirs d'un jeune coureur de jupes et d'un bon viveur. Photis, l'apprentie sorcière de Pamphile que Lucius se propose de courtiser pour avoir accès aux secrets de la maîtresse, incarne parfaitement cette relation entre Éros et Magie, désir sexuel et attrait pour la sorcellerie.

Pendant ses mésaventures dans l'avatar animal, Lucius sera incriminé, à raison ou à tort, de *gula* et de *luxuria* bestiale. La mère du garçon malveillant qui le terrorisait l'accuse que « penché sur sa mangeoire, il se laisse aller à sa glotonnerie et, à force de manger sans cesse, distend son ventre insatiable et sans fond » (Apulée 1958, 277). Le gamin lui-même, « abominable gredin »,

imagine une imputation plus monstrueuse, avec une richesse de détails réclamant une véritable psychanalyse : « Dès qu'il [l'âne Lucius] aperçoit quelqu'un qui passe sur le chemin, si c'est une jolie femme ou une jeune fille en âge de se marier, ou un joli garçon, aussitôt le voilà qui jette son fardeau et, parfois, se débarrasse même de son bât, et se précipite furieusement sur ces créatures humaines, plein d'un désir amoureux ; il les fait tomber, essaie de se livrer sur elles à des dérèglements inouïs, à des voluptés bestiales et, malgré Vénus, les convie à s'unir à lui » (Apulée 1958, 273). Et puisqu'on a évoqué la psychanalyse, voilà que cette fantaisie érotique bestiale, qui est d'ailleurs en accord avec les cultes orgiastiques antiques, devrait commander pour « cet adultère universel » un « sacrifice expiatoire que réclament ses amours monstrueuses » : la castration (Apulée 1958, 274). Toutefois, plus qu'un complexe œdipien, l'idée d'émascation recevra bientôt, comme nous le verrons, une signification symbolique différente.

On peut dès lors déduire que Lucius, à se métamorphoser en âne, n'est pas la victime des charmes maléfiques de Pamphile, ni d'une machination de Photis, et ni d'un accident dans le choix de l'onguent, mais qu'il reçoit justement ce qu'il mérite. On peut aussi bien penser que les *paraphernalia* de Pamphile ne comprennent pas plusieurs sortes de baumes magiques, une pour chaque animal préféré, parmi lesquels Lucius à mal choisi. Il s'agit d'un seul baume, mais qui a des effets différents sur ceux qui l'utilisent : il transforme chaque pratiquant dans ce qu'il est dans son essence. Il met l'extérieur physique en accord avec le profil caractériel de l'individu. Aurait-il été dominé par d'autres penchants comme la glotonnerie ou la violence, Lucius se serait transformé en porc, loup, ou autre bête spécifique. Le baume ne fait que mettre en lumière son véritable caractère, il matérialise l'âne animique en âne de chair. Par la métamorphose, Lucius est mis en consonance, par une métaphore prise au sens littéral (une catachrèse), avec la dominante comportementale de cette étape de sa vie.

C'est depuis ce point de départ, le plus bas sur l'échelle anthropologique, que commencera son initiation et évolution spirituelle. Comme je l'ai annoncé, je pense que les rencontres que le protagoniste fait avec plusieurs cultes religieux sont ordonnées sur une échelle qui va des formes les plus maléfiques et monstrueuses à celles bénéfiques et rédemptrices.

Si la magie offre la première « initiation », malheureusement catastrophique, pour Lucius, il y a toutefois une religion encore pire que la sorcellerie : le christianisme. Les commentateurs n'ont pas manqué d'observer l'attitude hostile d'Apulée envers la nouvelle religion (Simon 1974, 299-305 ; Baldwin 1984 ; Baumgarten 2012, chap. 3.2). Faisant écho aux stéréotypes préjudiciels que la culture antique appliquait au judaïsme et au christianisme naissant, Apulée présente un personnage, la femme d'un boulanger, qui est une caricature humaine monstrueuse. Le sarcasme de l'auteur est dirigé principalement envers la *sacrilega presumptio* de cette femme sur l'existence d'un *deus unicus*, conception bafouant

le polythéisme dominant de l'époque : « Méprisant et foulant aux pieds les puissances divines, elle faisait profession mensongère et sacrilège de servir un dieu qu'elle prétendait être unique, et, sous prétexte de pratiques, d'ailleurs imaginaires, elle trompait tout le monde, en imposait à son pauvre mari et, buvant sec dès le matin, se livrait tout le jour à la débauche. » (Apulée 1958, 308-309) L'exaltation du culte d'Isis pourrait donc être une réaction d'Apulée face à l'émergence croissante du christianisme (Walsh 1968, 143-157).

L'accusation concernant le vin bu dès le matin est probablement une allusion polémique à l'eucharistie et aux agapes chrétiennes. Mais le cumul de traits négatifs ne semble pas avoir de limites : « À cette détestable femelle ne manquait aucun vice, mais, comme en une fosse infectée et fangeuse, toutes les infamies s'étaient donné rendez-vous en son âme ; méchante, stupide, coûteuse, ivrognesse, insolente, entêtée, avide et prompte à mille larcins honteux, prodigue dans ses dépenses coupables, haïssant tenir ses promesses, au plus mal avec la pudeur. » (Apulée 1958, 309) La comparse de « cette abominable femelle » est une « certaine vieille, instrument de ses débauches et messagère de ses amants », dont les machinations rentrent dans les attributs des sorcières érotiques. La fidèle chrétienne est rapprochée ainsi de la sorcière, mais cette association lui est défavorable, car la première accueille seulement les plus dégoûtantes malformations morales, sans les pouvoirs magiques noirs de la seconde.

On dirait qu'Apulée a mis en marche une sorte de cathode éthique, pour rassembler, de manière démonstrative, la somme de traits caractériels négatifs qu'un apprenti doit éviter, et marquer ainsi le seuil le plus bas auquel Lucius pourrait chuter. Il y a un monstre pire que l'humain animalisé, réduit aux instincts primitifs produit par la sorcellerie, c'est l'individu déformé par le mal moral et religieux propagé par le christianisme. Swift se souviendra de cette différence de degré quand il opposera les Yahoos animaux du pays des Chevaux sages, abominables par leur aspect et nature bestiale, aux Yahoos européens, encore plus détestables par leur comportement civilisé seulement en apparence mais cachant des vices et une cruauté impitoyable.

Un troisième système religieux évoqué dans le roman est le culte de la Déesse syrienne. Au premier abord, Apulée en est tout aussi réticent qu'envers le christianisme, reflétant sans doute l'opinion commune négative que les citoyens romains, adeptes d'une religion classique plutôt raisonnée et pratique, avaient eu au début envers les cultes orgiaques venus d'Orient. En effet, les rites de Cybèle et de Attis, de Dea Syria, de Mithra, et d'autres divinités anciennes comme Isis et Osiris, n'ont été acceptés à Rome que tard dans l'histoire, sous la pression ascendante du multiculturalisme de l'Empire.

Obligé à porter la statue, le *xoanon*, de la déesse, Lucius ne peut que plaindre sa posture d'âne chargé de fardeaux de plus en plus lourds. Mais ce qui le révolte le plus est le comportement des prêtres galls, qu'il juge de façon

sarcastique, avec une évidente incompréhension ethnique et religieuse. Contre « ces ignobles personnages » il formule trois types d'accusations, qui appartiennent aux mécanismes dépréciatifs courants contre les cultes exécrés. L'une est celle de charlatanisme. Bien que la tradition des oracles, dont le plus fameux est celui de Delphes, suppose traditionnellement que la pythie souffre d'une fureur « téléstique », possédée par le dieu, Lucius ne se laisse pas convaincre par le rite divinatoire du prêtre galle. Tout ce qu'il y voit ce n'est qu'un spectacle de mauvais goût, un artifice pour faire marcher un public de dupes :

« Pendant ce temps, l'un d'entre eux se livre à des contorsions plus violentes encore et, tirant du fond de sa poitrine des halètements rapides, se donne l'air d'être rempli d'un souffle divin et simule une démence sacrée – comme si la présence des dieux n'avait pas coutume de rendre les hommes meilleurs qu'ils ne sont et en faisait, en réalité, des infirmes et des malades ! » (Apulée 1958, 3296-297)

Bien plus tard, voire au début du vingtième siècle encore, les ethnologues positivistes continueront d'expliquer de manière péjorative (« to explain away » en anglais) la transe chamanique soit comme une forfanterie, soit comme une crise d'hystérie.

La deuxième accusation est celle de sauvagerie. Apulée n'apprécie guère les rites d'autoflagellation imposés par la déesse syrienne, il y voit une forme de barbarie insensée. Lucius regarde horrifié les prêtres galles qui, « se mordant eux-mêmes les chairs, [ils] finissent par se taillader les bras avec les armes à deux tranchants qu'ils portent ». Quant au conducteur de la thiasse qui, utilisant un fouet composé « de bandes de peau de mouton, avec la laine, tressées et terminées par de longues mèches, et le long desquelles sont attachés des osselets de mouton, il s'administre plusieurs coups de ces lanières noueuses et oppose à la douleur une endurance extraordinaire » (Apulée 1958, 297). Ce qui inquiète Lucius, en voyant « la terre se tremper du sang impur », c'est surtout que le « goût de la déesse étrangère » ne se dirige vers lui-même.

La forme suprême d'automutilation des prêtres galles est la castration, ce qui amène Apulée à formuler une troisième accusation, celle de perversion sexuelle. Lucius n'arrête pas de traiter ses maîtres d'« émasculés » et d'« efféminés », quoiqu'il ne tarde pas à découvrir chez eux d'« abominables obscénités » encore plus excessives. Derrière la prétendue chasteté exhibée publiquement se cacheraient des penchants pédérastes, qu'ils satisfont en secret avec des victimes de fortune. Ainsi, avec « un robuste gaillard de paysan », ces « ignobles individus [...] se laissent entraîner par leur répugnant prurit aux pratiques les plus infâmes des amours contre nature : entourant à qui mieux mieux le jeune homme, déshabillé et étendu sur le dos, ils le sollicitaient avec leurs bouches

répugnantes » (Apulée 1958, 298). Et pour amplifier le sarcasme en faisant allusion à la zoophilie, Apulée rend inquiet son personnage qui, à peine arrivé chez ce « chœur d'invertis », craint pour sa propre intégrité corporelle.

Le protagoniste est évidemment dans la position d'un narrateur ingénu, que l'auteur met dans les situations les plus absurdes pour le comique de la narration. Toutefois, que se cache-t-il derrière ces figures grotesques, qu'apparemment Apulée met au même niveau d'abjection et de bestialité que les sorcières ou les chrétiens ? Le culte de Dea Syria avait un fond religieux et ethnologique plus profond et plus ancien que le regard naïf de Lucius n'est point capable de comprendre, mais qui néanmoins influence de manière symbolique ses aventures. On y reconnaît immédiatement les rites orgiaques, la folie divine que les grandes déesses préhistoriques imposaient à leurs suivants. Il y a « le fracas de cymbales, le son des tambourins et les accents émouvants de la musique phrygienne », la danse déchaînée et même le mouvement saccadé de la tête, la *jactatio capitis* (« tête baissée, et tordant le cou d'un mouvement souple et continu, faisant décrire des cercles à leurs boucles pendantes ») par lesquels les Corybantes de la grande déesse Cybèle d'Asie mineure entraient en transe. On y reconnaît l'état de possession que Dionysos impose aux Ménades, car les prêtres galls, « les bras nus jusqu'aux épaules, brandissant d'énormes épées et des haches, se mettent à danser comme des Bacchants, tandis que la flûte les excite à une sarabande de forcenés » (Apulée 1958, 296).

La Déesse syrienne est une ancienne divinité féminine du nord de la Syrie, connue sous le nom araméen d'Atarathéh ou Taratha, transposé dans la forme grecque Atargatis. Elle est la déesse de la fertilité et de la nature, épouse de Hadad, grand dieu du Ciel atmosphérique et de la pluie. Elle hérite beaucoup de traits et fonctions des divinités féminines de la « théologie commune » du Proche Orient et de la Méditerranée orientale (Eliade 1989, chapitre VI ; Xella 2008 ; Godwin 1981). Du panthéon d'Ugarit, composé par deux générations divines, El et Athirath, puis Baal et ses sœurs Anat et Attart ou Ashtart (Astarté), elle semble combiner, déjà dans son nom, les figures des deux dernières déesses. En tant que protectrice des cités, elle est similaire à Baalat, épouse de Baal, les « seigneurs » divins des cités phéniciennes. Elle a été souvent identifiée à la déesse mésopotamienne Istar et à celle cananéenne Astoreth (ou Astarté). De l'ancien fonds néolithique, elle partage des caractéristiques et des rituels avec Cybèle d'Asie mineure et Rhéa de Crète. Finalement, dans la période hellénistique et puis dans le super-synchrétisme du haut Empire romain, sous le nom Derceto et plus général de Dea Syria, elle a été assimilée à Aphrodite (Vénus) et même à Héra ou Junon (par Lucien).

Ce dernier auteur a produit une description de son mythe, de son temple et de son culte à Hiérapolis (Lucien 2004). Une de ses caractéristiques culturelles les plus poignantes est l'autocastration des adeptes. À l'occasion des fêtes périodiques,

les prêtres galles organisent une cérémonie avec des cantiques sacrés joués par les flûtes et les tambours, pendant laquelle ils « entrent en fureur », se tailladent les bras et se frappent le dos. Le jeune néophyte qui désire se consacrer au service de la déesse « jette à bas ses vêtements, s'avance au milieu de l'assemblée en jetant de grands cris, saisit un coutelas réservé, je crois, pour cet usage depuis de longues années, se châtre lui-même, et court par toute la ville tenant en main ce qu'il a coupé. La maison, quelle qu'elle soit, où il jette ce qu'il tenait, lui fournit des habits et des ornements de femme. » (Lucien 2004, 37)

À la différence d'Apulée qui charge la relation d'un sarcasme comique, Lucien est un observateur ethnique plutôt neutre. Intéressé par les ressemblances et les similitudes, il rapproche le rituel des prêtres galles des orgies sanglantes de deux autres déesses anciennes chez lesquelles l'auto-émasculation est un sacrifice de fertilité. L'une est Cybèle, la « mère des dieux » de Pessinonte, en Asie mineure. Son mythe, rapporté par Pausanias, raconte que Zeus donne naissance, en fécondant un rocher, à un hermaphrodite, Agditis. Les dieux décident de castrer ce monstre, engendrant ainsi Cybèle, alors que du sexe perdu naît un amandier. En en mangeant un fruit, Nana, la fille du fleuve Sangarios, tombe enceinte d'Attis. Cybèle s'éprend du jeune homme et, pendant ses noces, plonge l'assemblée dans une folie collective, lors de laquelle Attis s'automutile et meurt. Les efforts de Cybèle de le ressusciter n'ont qu'un succès partiel, toutefois les rites mystérieux qui en découlent promettent la renaissance et même l'immortalité du myste (*Eliade 1989, chap. XXVI, §207*). Lucien donne une variante simplifiée du mythe, dans laquelle Cybèle est assimilée à la grande déesse de Crète, Rhéa : « Ce que pratiquent les Phrygiens, les Lydiens et les Samothraces, leur a été montré par Attis. En effet, après qu'il eut été châtré par Rhéa, il renonça à la vie des hommes, se changea en femme, prit les habits de l'autre sexe et parcourut la terre, célébrant des orgies, racontant son aventure et chantant Rhéa. » (Lucien 2004, 25)

L'autre est Aphrodite (ou Vénus) et son amant Adonis. Lucien restitue la variante orientale plus ancienne du couple, dans laquelle la « Vénus byblienne » est la grande déesse cananéenne Astarté, avec son époux divin Adon (le « Seigneur ») Tammouz : « Les habitants de Byblos prétendent que l'histoire d'Adonis, blessé par un sanglier, s'est passée dans leur pays. En mémoire de cet événement, ils célèbrent, tous les ans, des orgies, dans lesquelles ils se frappent la poitrine, pleurent et mènent un grand deuil par tout le pays » (Lucien 2004, 22). Dans son adaptation grecque et latine, la légende, telle qu'elle est racontée par Ovide, Apollodore, Nonnos et autres auteurs antiques, commence par l'amour incestueux de Myrrha pour son père le roi Cinyras de Chypre. Exilée par les hommes et punie par les dieux, elle est transformée dans un arbre à myrrhe, donnant toutefois naissance à un enfant d'une beauté exceptionnelle. Aphrodite et Perséphone s'éprennent toutes les deux de lui et une décision divine devra trancher : il

passera quatre mois en Hadès et le reste de l'an avec Vénus. Blessée par mégarde par une flèche de Cupidon, Vénus abandonne l'Olympe et descend vivre avec Adonis dans les forêts. Quand le beau chasseur est tué par un sanglier, Vénus transforme son sang en une anémone (Ovide 2006). Plus tard, elle obtiendra de son père Zeus qu'il soit ressuscité, ce qui le confirme dans sa fonction de divinité de la nature qui meurt et renaît.

Quant à Lucien, il avance sa propre explication. Il s'agit d'une interprétation évhémériste, sur le scénario de Joseph et la femme de Putiphar. Stratonice, reine des Assyriens, a un rêve dans lequel Junon lui demande de lui faire bâtir un temple à Hiéropolis. Son mari le roi l'y envoie ensemble avec un jeune et beau conseiller Combabus. Celui-ci, conscient qu'il suscitera la passion de Stratonice, se châtre en secret. Quand le scandale d'adultère éclate et le roi l'amène devant lui pour le punir, il lui montre l'urne dans laquelle il conservait son sexe, le roi lui pardonne et punit les délateurs. Appréciant la chasteté de Combabus, Junon impose dans son temple le rite de la castration : « Une fois cette coutume introduite, elle s'est perpétuée, et tous les ans un assez grand nombre de jeunes gens se réduisent à l'état de femmes, soit pour consoler Combabus, soit pour faire plaisir à Junon. Dès qu'ils sont eunuques, ils ne portent plus d'habits d'hommes, mais des vêtements de femmes, et s'appliquent aux ouvrages de ce sexe. » (Lucien 2004, 30)

En fait, il s'agit de survivances différemment interprétées d'un culte de fertilité. Héritières du symbolisme de la grande déesse néolithique, ces divinités aux traits archaïques, Cybèle, Rhéa, Ishtar, Astarté, Atargatis, Aphrodite-Vénus, Junon syncrétique, font figure de « mères de dieux » et de la nature. Pour engendrer, elles ont besoin d'un principe masculin partenaire, le plus souvent un fils devenu amant et époux, qui garantit la fécondité du couple. La forme suprême de dévotion est représentée par l'offrande du propre sexe par un rituel d'autocastration. Comme le dieu masculin et son substitut humain, le roi, est d'habitude représenté dans les religions proche-orientales et méditerranéennes par un taureau, le sacrifice humain a été souvent remplacé par la mise à mort rituelle d'un animal concentrant le pouvoir générateur. Le dépêchement d'un taureau cosmique, comme ceux tués par Gilgamesh ou par Mithra, ainsi que les taureaux sacrifiés lors des « jeux » cérémoniels de la Crète minoenne, dans les mystères orientaux à Rome et dans les corridas pratiquées jusqu'à nos jours dans le bassin de la Méditerranée, symbolise une panspermie cosmique destinée à assurer la fertilité de la grande divinité de la terre. C'est pourquoi l'émascation des prêtres galls était associée et plus tard remplacée à Rome par des *taurobolia* et *criobolia*, l'abattage et castration de taureaux ou de béliers consacrés⁵.

⁵ Voir l'ouvrage assez ancien, mais riche en informations, de Showerman 1901; Sfameni Gasparro 1985.

Quelle est donc la signification de la rencontre de l'âne Lucius avec Dea Syria ? Porteur sur son dos de la statue de la déesse, il assiste aux rituels orgiaques de ses prêtres, à leur automutilation, au point qu'il s'inquiète que leur furie castratrice ne s'étende à lui-même. Allégoriquement, on pourrait dire que Lucius est châtré pendant son « apprentissage » involontaire, sinon de manière corporelle, du moins spirituellement. Si le baume magique l'avait transformé en âne, c'est parce qu'il avait fait ressortir la nature dominante du jeune héros, sa naïveté autant que sa lascivité. L'âne est justement un de ces animaux qui, à l'instar du taureau, du bélier, du bouc, symbolise la fertilité, le pouvoir fécondant mâle. L'initiation sous-jacente subie de manière inconsciente par Lucius sous le patronage de la déesse syrienne réside dans l'émasculatation de son penchant sexuel, dans le refoulement de sa libido.

Dès lors, à l'encontre de son comportement frivole en tant que jeune homme, l'âne Lucius semble de moins en moins intéressé par le sexe. Si son goût pour les plats humains continue d'étonner ses maîtres, au point de le faire transformer en animal de spectacle, son appétit érotique en revanche baisse, prêt à disparaître. Arrivé à Corinthe, il devient l'objet de l'amour bestial d'une dame de l'aristocratie, qui achète à son maître Thiasus le droit de jouir de son étreinte. Or, au lieu de goûter pleinement sa virilité animale, Lucius est plutôt inhibé et scandalisé lui-même par cette répétition de la scène de Pasiphaé et du taureau marin. Le comble de son « anxiété terrible » est atteint lorsqu'il est programmé pour un accouplement bestial, dans l'arène de Corinthe, avec une femme condamnée au supplice et à la mort. L'horreur de « toucher cette femme criminelle, dont le contact me serait une souillure, et de perdre l'honneur en me donnant publiquement en spectacle » (Apulée 1958, 349), le fait penser au suicide. Sous la peur comique de l'âne de perdre son « honneur » transparait l'angoisse psychanalytique de la castration, poussée à la forme maximale de l'extinction physique, en fait de la mort de l'instinct sexuel.

Mais l'âne est un animal qui fait partie de la suite de Dionysos, avec d'autres herbivores mâles comme le taureau et le bouc et des prédateurs comme le tigre, la panthère, le léopard. Ce qui nous amène à une quatrième rencontre allégorique du protagoniste, bien que moins évidente, avec un autre culte à mystères, celui de Dionysos. Reçu dans l'Empire Romain comme Bacchus, dieu du vin et des orgies, et comme Liber, seigneur des enfers et des morts, le dieu grec est le compagnon, tout comme Adonis en Orient, autant de Vénus que de Perséphone. Un vieux dicton dit que l'accomplissement des désirs apporte la mort. Un Lucius vivant comme un âne et satisfaisant pleinement ses impulsions animales devrait finir par épuiser son énergie libidinale, dialectique qui se reflète dans cette double fonction du Dionysos romain.

Le mauvais sort qui l'avait poussé dans tant de mésaventures semble s'adoucir quand il est acheté par deux esclaves qui sont l'un pâtissier et l'autre cuisinier. Profitant de la distraction de ses patrons, Lucius commence à manger les plats les plus divers, qui vont évidemment avec le comportement d'un homme raffiné et moins avec celui d'une bête. À force de satisfaire ainsi tous ses appétits culinaires, confesse le protagoniste, « mon corps s'était rempli, était devenu gras, obèse, mon cuir, à force de graisse succulente, s'était assoupli, et mon poil, bien nourri, avait pris un brillant magnifique » (Apulée 1958, 339). Quand sa gourmandise anormale est découverte par le maître des esclaves, non seulement Lucius n'est pas puni, mais il est encouragé à montrer d'autres traits humains : boire du vin, lutter, danser, communiquer avec des signes de tête.

Le patron décide de l'utiliser comme attraction de foire et l'emmène à Corinthe. La scène peut être lue symboliquement : un homme entre dans une cité chevauchant un âne. On a pu y voir une allusion railleuse à l'imagerie chrétienne de la Vierge portée par un âne (*virginem asino triumphantem*) et du Messie qui rentre à Jérusalem à dos d'âne, mais le sens global semble en être totalement différent. Bien que le maître de Lucius soit présenté comme un individu normal, riche et cupide, il porte un nom hautement significatif : Thiasus. La *thiase* était le nom de la confrérie de bacchants et bacchantes dédiée à Dionysos, puis attribué à toutes les congrégations d'initiés des cultes à mystères de l'Antiquité tardive. La signification de la scène est éloquente : Lucius, le néophyte-âne, est conduit par un mystagogue, un conducteur de *thiase*. Dans la compagnie des prêtres galls, Lucius était un animal censé porter sur son dos la déesse de Syrie ; ici il est un animal portant sur son dos un initié aux mystères.

Le culte orgiaque de Dionysos Sabazios supposait lui aussi un sacrifice du taureau. Lors des fêtes nocturnes des Triétérides, sur les côtes sauvages du Cythérion, les bacchantes possédées par le dieu se transformaient en prêtresses de la fécondité et de la nature, faisaient surgir des sources d'eau, de lait et de vin, allaitaient à leur sein des nourrissons d'animaux et des serpents. Le rite suprême, par lequel elles s'unissaient au dieu, était le *sparagmos* (le déchiquètement) à mains nues d'un taureau – une épiphanie animale de Dionysos – et l'*omophagie* (la consommation de la chair crue et du sang) (Rohde 1999, chap. « Le culte thrace de Dionysos » ; Jeanmaire 1978 ; Kerényi 1976). On dirait que Lucius est arrivé, par la satisfaction de son *epithymia* (ses désirs instinctuels), au bon moment où l'animal a atteint la forme parfaite pour être sacrifié. Chevauché par Thiasus, Lucius est en effet mené à Corinthe, où il devra paraître dans l'arène publique et tué ensemble avec la femme criminelle.

Suivant les suggestions de C. G. Jung, nous avons interprété, dans un autre ouvrage, le sacrifice dionysiaque (d'un taureau, ou d'un homme comme Penthée dans la tragédie *Les Bacchantes* d'Euripide), comme une suppression

de la libido (Braga 2019, Chap. III). Tuer le taureau, tuer le bouc, tuer l'âne, signifie maîtriser la bête en soi, l'instinct animal. Dans les rites de la Dea Syria, les prêtres galls dédient leur virilité à la grande déesse, assurant ainsi sa fécondité, et se transforment d'hommes en femmes. Dans le rite dionysiaque, c'est la nature animale qui est immolée, faisant place dans le bacchant à la nature divine. La religion orphique est fondée justement sur un des mythes de Dionysos, celui de Zagreus, le dieu enfant crétois, déchiré et mangé par les Titans. Foudroyés par Zeus, de leurs cendres, contenant autant leurs corps que celui de l'enfant, seraient façonnés les êtres humains, ayant une double nature : titanesque, lourde et mauvaise (le corps), et divine, diaphane et immortelle (l'âme) (Rohde 1999, chap. « Les Orphiques » ; Mead 1965 ; Guthrie 1956 ; Boulanger 1925).

Cette anthropologie mystique a été reprise par les Pythagoriciens, par Socrate et par Platon. Un des mythes platoniciens qui l'exprime, et peut bien enrichir la signification de la scène du roman d'Apulée d'un âne monté par un initié, est celle du char de l'âme évoquée dans le dialogue *Phaidros* (Platon 1933). Voulant contredire, devant son plus jeune ami Phèdre, le discours froid, raisonné et cynique de Lysias contre l'amour, Socrate offre un discours « enthousiaste » (« corybanthique »), se laissant posséder par l'inspiration divine, par la « folie érotique », en faveur d'Éros, en tant que dieu (ou daïmon dans *Le Banquet*) qui fait la médiation entre les hommes et les dieux.

L'image du char ailé, reprise à des mythologies plus anciennes, comme celle des Minoens figurant le voyage du mort vers les Champs Élysées, devient chez Platon une représentation des facultés de l'âme. Le cocher est la sagesse (*sophrosyné*), l'intellect raisonnant (*logistikon*), alors que les deux chevaux attelés en sont respectivement les sentiments, la volonté (*thymos*), c'est-à-dire les choses du « cœur » (*thymoeides*), et les instincts, les appétits et plaisirs (*epithymia*), c'est-à-dire les choses du « ventre » (*epithymetikon*). Quand le cocher maîtrise les coursiers, l'attelage ailé de l'âme réussit à briser le toit de la voûte céleste et entrevoir ainsi les véritables réalités, les principes situés au-dessus du ciel (*hyperouranios topos*). Quand il en perd le contrôle, l'âme est précipitée vers le bas, dans le tourbillon et le chaos du monde inférieur, matériel :

« Voilà pour l'existence des dieux ; passons aux autres âmes. Celle-ci fait de son mieux pour suivre les Dieux ; elle élève vers le lieu qui est en dehors du ciel la tête de son cocher ; entraînée dans la révolution circulaire, elle est à grand-peine capable, dans l'embarras que ses chevaux lui causent, de porter les yeux sur les réalités. Cette autre tantôt lève, tantôt enfonce sa tête et, ne maîtrisant pas ses chevaux, elle voit les unes et non les autres. Quant au reste des âmes, comme elles aspirent toutes à monter, elles prennent bien la suite ; mais c'est peine perdue : elles sombrent dans le remous qui les entraîne, se piétinant et se bousculant entre elles, chacune

s'efforçant de se placer en avant d'une autre. C'est donc le tumulte, la lutte, les sueurs, tout cela à son comble, et, comme de juste, l'occasion pour beaucoup d'âmes, du fait de l'impéritie des cochers, d'être estropiées ; pour beaucoup d'entre elles, d'avoir beaucoup de leur plumage froissé ! » (Platon 1933, 39)

L'image du maître Thiasus montant l'âne Lucius est investie donc de la même signification que la déesse portée par l'animal, l'initié conduisant le néophyte, l'intellect dominant les émotions et les instincts. Maîtriser les penchants du corps, la bête en soi, c'est la leçon que Lucius apprend à ses frais, de manière brutale, à travers ses déambulations sous forme animale.

La mystique néopythagoricienne et médio-platonicienne est une cinquième conception religieuse qu'Apulée évoque dans son roman (Whittaker 1988). On pourrait dire qu'elle constitue une sorte d'arrière fond philosophique qui donne l'ossature allégorique de l'initiation de Lucius. Comme le montre Mircea Eliade, pendant l'Antiquité tardive elle était à la mode parmi les gens éduqués et raffinés, car elle offrait un discours conceptuel alternatif aux mythes pléthoriques et aux rituels parfois barbares des religions à mystères populaires pratiquées par les masses. Le culte d'Isis et Osiris, qui constitue la clé de voûte du roman, sera traité, comme nous le verrons, dans l'esprit mystériosophique que lui impose Plutarque dans son *De Iside et Osiride*.

Pour le moment, je me pencherai sur le célèbre conte *Amor et Psyché*, qui occupe les trois chapitres centraux du roman. Apulée semble l'avoir introduit non seulement pour le plaisir de raconter, mais pour en faire un exergue parabolique de la narration : les errements et l'ascension finale de Psyché sont une mise en abyme allégorique du destin de Lucius. Les commentateurs ont beaucoup débattu l'origine de ce conte, oscillant entre deux hypothèses qui ne sont nullement contradictoires : conte populaire, repris au folklore vs. conte philosophique, inventé à la manière de Platon⁶.

Le thème de la perte et la recherche de la personne aimée se retrouve dans le Motif Index sous la rubrique H1385 (*Quest for lost persons*) et plus spécifiquement H1385.4. (*Quest for vanished husband*) et H1385.5. (*Quest for vanished lover*) (*Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, Volume 3, 1460 ; Swahn 1955). Sur la base de sa diffusion, *Amor et Psyché* a été inclus par les ethnographes de formation romantique dans la catégorie des contes de fées folkloriques. Toutefois,

⁶ Pour une synthèse sur l'état actuel des débats, voir Baumgarten 2012, chap. I. Pour un panorama appliqué à la presqu'île balkanique, voir Perencin 2023, 134-150. Il est intéressant que, seulement dans la zone de la Roumanie, circulent rien que 70 variantes du conte, dans lesquelles le mari surnaturel prend différentes formes : cochon, grenouille, ours, chien, corbeau, singe, pigeon, mais peut être aussi invisible, soleil ou vent.

il faut tenir compte du fait que la définition moderne du folklore, en tant que littérature anonyme et collective, ne couvre que très partiellement la réalité ethnographique de l'Antiquité, quand les mythes et les légendes avaient le plus souvent une origine culte (chamans, prêtres et autres « spécialistes du sacré ») et étaient transmis par des professionnels du spectacle (aèdes, prédicateurs, orateurs, acteurs) (Grimal 1963). Il serait donc plus approprié d'en chercher l'origine dans des mythologies anciennes, en tant que restes narratifs désacralisés, des survivances acculturées ayant perdu le sens religieux (Nilsson 1972, chap. I). Et, en effet, plusieurs sources ont été proposées pour le conte: la mythologie commune indoeuropéenne (J. Ö. Swahn), celle iranienne (R. Reitzenstein), égyptienne (K. Kerényi), grecque-alexandrine (H. Erbse, R. Helm, L. Hermann), berbère-africaine (V. Brugnatelli). Du temps d'Apulée, il est possible qu'une telle histoire mythique fût déjà retombée dans la « pop culture » de l'époque, justement dans la catégorie des « récits milésiens » invoqués par Apulée comme sources pour son roman, ou des textes littéraires grecs alexandrins.

Conte folklorique oral, mythe déchu, récit milésien, texte romanesque proche du roman érotique grec, ces hypothèses ont été concurrencées par une autre, celle d'un conte philosophique, à la manière des mythes allégoriques de Platon. Henri Jeanmaire propose d'y voir une variante des allégories sur l'Amour dans *Phèdre* ou *Symposion* (Jeanmaire 1930, 29-48), W. Hooker – une allégorie des scénarios des initiations à mystères de facture pythagoricienne et platonicienne (Hooker 1955, 24-38), R. Merkelbach – des mystères alexandrins d'Isis et Osiris (Merkelbach 1958, 103-116). Les théories ne s'excluent aucunement, le plus probable étant qu'Apulée, de même que pour l'histoire de l'âne, reprend un conte préexistant (peu importe son caractère oral ou passablement stylisé dans un récit littéraire) et lui prête une signification allégorique, en accord avec la mystique médio-platonicienne de l'époque, pour renforcer la parabole initiatique de tout le roman.

Quel est donc l'enseignement et la morale des péripéties de Psyché pour le trajet de Lucius ? Selon l'interprétation médio-platonicienne commune à l'époque, le nom de la jeune fille renvoie directement à l'âme humaine, *psyché*, et donc son évolution se pose d'emblée comme parabole du destin de l'être humain. Sans présenter des parallélismes narratifs ponctuels avec le roman d'Apulée, l'histoire de Psyché donne la signification générale des aventures de Lucius, leur offre une *dianoia* mystique.

Les deux protagonistes partagent un même trait de caractère, qui est le véritable moteur de leurs agissements : la curiosité, *ingenita curiositas*. Or, pour Psyché comme pour Lucius, l'attrait de l'inconnu s'avère être fatal, surtout quand il est naïf et incontrôlé. L'héroïne y succombe au moins deux fois, lorsque, incitée par ses sœurs, se propose de découvrir le visage de son amant invisible,

et lorsqu'elle ouvre la pyxide avec l'onguent qu'elle doit emmener de Proserpine à Vénus. La relation avec le sacré est dangereuse, et c'est pourquoi les mythes offrent autant d'exemples contre la curiosité sacrilège que de prohibitions et d'interdictions concernant les actes impropres. Le désir de contempler un dieu dans sa vraie nature risque de mettre l'humain en contact avec une énergie surnaturelle qui peut le détruire, l'anéantir, comme il arrive à Sémélé foudroyée par l'apparition divine de Zeus. Ignorer une interdiction rituelle, comme celle de se retourner dans les mystères d'Eleusis, annule les effets de l'initiation, comme il arrive à Orphée quand il veut s'assurer qu'Eurydice le suit dans leur montée du Hadès.

Commençons par le baume que Psyché, dans la dernière et la plus difficile épreuve que lui impose Vénus, doit rapporter du monde d'en bas. Aux dires de sa (future) belle-mère, il s'agirait d'une pommade de beauté pour une déesse qui symbolise justement la perfection. Vouloir concurrencer le modèle divin est, pour un humain, qu'il soit le plus beau ou la plus belle, le meilleur chanteur, le guerrier le plus valeureux de l'espèce, est un acte d'orgueil, une *hybris* que le dieu ne tardera pas à punir. Désirant de prélever une « parcelle de beauté divine » pour plaire à son amant, Psyché est châtiée instantanément, la pyxide laissant sourdre une exhalaison paralysante, « un sommeil de mort, un sommeil vraiment stygien » (Apulée 1958, 253). Ce sera à son amant, Éros, de la sauver de la « faute de la même curiosité » et de la libérer du monde d'en bas.

Mais la vapeur mortifère est-elle réellement une punition appliquée par Vénus ? Comme dans le cas de Lucius, je dirais plutôt que le baume reste le même et que ce sont les effets qui en diffèrent en fonction de celui ou celle qui l'utilise : pommade de beauté pour la déesse, onguent de mort pour l'être humain. C'est comme si Vénus avait condamné Psyché à mort pour son impiété, en lui procurant toutefois, de manière assez cynique d'ailleurs, les huiles traditionnelles pour embellir son cadavre. C'est un peu la morale des rites à mystères : les mortels communs sont condamnés à l'oubli et aux ténèbres du Hadès ; seul l'initié saura trouver le bon chemin du salut. Et pour cela, il a besoin d'un initiateur, d'un mystagogue, qui est le prêtre du dieu libérateur.

Dans le conte allégorique d'Apulée, le sauveur de Psyché est Amour, que les orphiques et les pythagoriciens voyaient comme le Phanès Protogonos, Éros cosmique (Guthrie 1956, Chap. IV). Les médio-platoniciens de l'Antiquité tardive avaient médié entre les deux hypostases, combinant la divinité théogonique originelle et l'enfant charmant d'Aphrodite. Dans *Le Banquet*, Diotime le définissait comme « un grand démon », un être « intermédiaire entre le dieu et le mortel », qui a le rôle « de traduire et de transmettre aux dieux ce qui vient des hommes et, aux hommes, ce qui vient des dieux : les prières et sacrifices de ceux-là, les ordonnances de ceux-ci et la rétribution des sacrifices ; et d'autre part, puisqu'il

est à mi-distance des uns et des autres, de combler le vide : il est ainsi le lien qui unit le Tout à lui-même » (Platon 1929, 53). C'est en effet l'emploi que reçoit Amour dans la parabole platonicienne d'Apulée : de libérer Psyché, l'âme humaine, de sa condition mortelle et la rehausser, par un mariage mystique, à la condition divine.

Mais pourquoi la curiosité de Psyché est-elle sacrilège et non pas libératrice, pourquoi son histoire d'amour avec Éros n'est pas heureuse dès le début, pourquoi le désir de s'unir au dieu (*unio mystica*) lui impose un détour par le monde d'en bas et des épreuves apparemment impossibles à surmonter ? La réponse peut être cherchée toujours chez Platon. C'est que dans *Phèdre*, à la différence du *Banquet*, il ne traite plus Éros de *daimon*, mais de dieu, qui représente la Beauté elle-même, en tant qu'idéal divin. C'est cet archétype que le cocher de l'attelage ailé de l'âme se doit de poursuivre, en brisant le toit du ciel vers le *hyperouranios topos* des idées ; si, au contraire, il ne réussit pas à maîtriser le coursier noir, celui des envies et des instincts, l'âme chute dans la bourbe de la matière, dans « ce sépulcre que, sous le nom de corps, nous promenons actuellement avec nous » :

« À la vérité, celui qui n'est pas fraîchement initié ou bien qui s'est laissé corrompre n'est point vif, d'ici, à se porter là-bas, vers la Beauté en soi, quand il contemple ce à quoi, en ce monde-ci, est appliqué son nom. Aussi n'est-ce point avec vénération qu'il tourne dans cette direction ses regards ; mais au contraire, s'abandonnant au plaisir, il agit en bête à quatre pattes, il se met en ce devoir de saillir et d'engrosser, et, se familiarisant avec la démesure, il ne craint pas, il n'a pas honte non plus, de poursuivre un plaisir contre nature. Quant à celui au contraire qui vient d'être initié, celui pour qui l'abondant objet de ses contemplations, ce furent les réalités de jadis, celui-là, quand il voit un visage d'un aspect divin, imitation réussie de la Beauté, ou quelque corps pareillement bien fait, il éprouve d'abord un frisson, et quelque chose l'envahit sourdement de ses effrois de jadis. Puis le voici qui tourne ses regards dans la direction du bel objet ; il le vénère à l'égal d'un dieu ; s'il ne craignait même de passer pour être au comble du délire, il offrirait, comme à une sainte image et à un dieu, des sacrifices au bien-aimé ! » (Platon 1933, 45)

C'est bien ce qui est arrivé à Lucius : fort curieux des choses interdites, mais dépourvu de savoir initiatique, il n'a pas su éviter la corruption, il s'est abandonné aux plaisirs du sexe, il s'est littéralement transformé en une « bête à quatre pattes ». Cependant, les malheurs qu'il a vécus en tant qu'âne, et les rencontres avec les prêtres et les initiés des cultes pratiquant la chasteté, l'ascèse, le sacrifice de l'animal intérieur, l'ont amené à renoncer à ce « plaisir contre nature » et à tourner « ses regards dans la direction du bel objet ».

Pour le personnage d'Apulée, la personnification de la Beauté suprême est la déesse Isis. C'est elle qui, non seulement le relève de la condition déchue et le restitue à celle humaine, mais lui offre la triple initiation qui fera de lui un « héros » et lui permettra de réintégrer « les réalités de jadis ». Les mystères d'Isis et Osiris sont la sixième et dernière religion évoquée par Apulée dans son roman.

Dans la religion égyptienne, Isis faisait partie du panthéon de Héliopolis, qui comprenait Nut et Geb (les dieux du ciel et de la terre), leurs enfants Isis, Osiris, Nephtys et Seth, et les enfants d'Osiris avec Isis – Horus, et avec Nephtys – Anubis. Déesse de la fécondité et de la nature, Isis était capable de redonner vie même aux dieux morts, comme Osiris ou Horus, tués par le frère maléfique Seth. Ressuscité par sa sœur et épouse, Osiris est devenu, dans la théologie désormais commune à toute l'Égypte, le dieu des morts et du monde souterrain, alors que Horus, son fils et vengeur auprès de Seth, est le dieu patron des pharaons (Wiedemann 2003 ; Moret 1983 ; Wilkinson 2005). Importée dans la religion hellénistique et puis romaine, Isis est devenue le support d'un syncrétisme agglutinant, peut-être le plus englobant de toute la civilisation impériale (Cumont 1929 ; Witt 1971). À sa figure ont été assimilées toute une série de divinités féminines, dont Apulée donne une liste fastueuse : Cybèle en Phrygie (déesse de Pessinonte, mère des dieux), Minerve Cécropienne à Athènes, Vénus de Paphos en Chypre, Diane Dyctine en Crète, Proserpine en Sicile, Cérès à Éleusis, Junon pour les Romains, Bellone pour les Celtes, Hécate en Carie, Némésis de Rhamnonte, etc. (Apulée 1958, 357)

Dans le monde impérial, l'explication étiologique qui consacre Isis et Osiris en tant que divinités des morts a été donnée par Plutarque. Dans son traité *De Iside et Osiride*, il fait surplomber la *interpretatio graeca* courante des divinités égyptiennes d'un allégorisme médio-platonicien. Rhéa et Saturne (les équivalents gréco-latins de Nut et Geb égyptiens) ont comme enfants Osiris, Apollo (correspondant à un Horus l'Ancien – qui sera identifié à Horus le Jeune), Typhon (correspondant de Seth), Isis et Nephtys. Osiris conçoit avec Isis, déjà dans le ventre de leur mère, Horus l'Ancien (d'où l'idée que Horus n'est pas tant le frère, mais le fils d'Isis et Osiris), et avec Nephtys Anubis. Pour prendre le pouvoir à son frère, Typhon imagine une ruse par laquelle il enferme Osiris dans une boîte faite à sa mesure (d'ici le modèle du sarcophage) et le jette dans le Nil. La boîte flotte sur la mer jusqu'à Byblos, où elle est suivie par Isis. Incognito, la déesse prend soin du fils des rois de la cité, Malcandre et Astarpe (les dieux phéniciens Melqart et Astarté), essayant de l'immortaliser de la même manière qu'avait procédé Déméter avec le fils des rois d'Éleusis. Puis elle retourne avec le sarcophage en Égypte, où son frère Typhon dépèce le cadavre en quatorze parties et les jette dans différents endroits. Isis réussit à reconstituer son mari

une deuxième fois et Osiris revient du monde des morts. Il apprend à son fils Horus l'art de la guerre, et celui-ci réussit à le venger en triomphant de son oncle et en devenant le souverain du pays. (Plutarque 2001, 18-27)

Pour éviter toute mauvaise compréhension du récit, qui pourrait verser tant dans la superstition que dans l'athéisme, Plutarque se propose, en accord avec l'allégorisme alexandrin à la mode au début du premier millénaire, d'en donner « une interprétation religieuse et philosophique » (Plutarque 2001, 17-18). Plus spécifiquement, il pense pouvoir « montrer la conformité du système philosophique de Platon avec la théologie des Égyptiens » (64). Ainsi, part-il de ce que la tradition avait transmis comme étant le dualisme platonicien (Pétremont 1947), selon lequel le monde serait dirigé par deux principes opposés, le bien et le mal, entre lesquels se trouve une troisième substance, soumise à l'action des deux autres. Osiris, Typhon et Isis sont à l'origine des « daïmons », devenus dieux, qui incarnent ces trois principes. Les deux frères divins correspondraient, dans la métaphore de l'attelage de l'âme, le premier – au cocher, le deuxième – au coursier noir des instincts :

« Dans l'âme du monde, l'intelligence, la raison, qui est le principe, la cause de tout ce qui se fait de bien, est Osiris. *Dans le corps*, c'est-à-dire dans la terre, dans les vents, dans l'eau, dans le ciel et dans les astres, tout ce qui est régulier, stable et salutaire par rapport aux saisons, aux températures et aux retours périodiques des phénomènes naturels, est un écoulement et une image sensible d'Osiris. De même Typhon désigne tout ce qui dans l'âme du monde est sujet à l'influence des passions, tout ce qui est violent, déraisonnable et tumultueux, et dans le corps tout ce qui est vicieux faible et désordonné [...] » (Plutarque 2001, 65).

Isis occupe la position du principe intermédiaire, « la substance femelle, comme l'épouse qui reçoit tous les germes productifs. Platon dit qu'elle est le réceptif universel, la nourrice de tous les êtres » (Plutarque 2001, 70). De même que le coursier blanc, elle tend vers le principe du bien et repousse celui du mal. Plutarque réussit ainsi à sublimer dans des principes abstraits les divinités syncrétiques égyptiennes : Osiris, dieu du monde souterrain, est combiné avec Amon Ra, dieu du soleil et du ciel, symbolisé par le bœuf Apis, dans la figure de Sarapis ; Isis englobe toutes les divinités féminines de la nature et de la fécondité ; et Seth devient le réceptacle de tout le mal, sous la figure du monstre Typhon. De plus, Plutarque pousse le système de correspondances jusqu'à Hésiode, et fait correspondre les divinités égyptiennes aux quatre principes primordiaux de la Théogonie : Isis est Gaia, Osiris est Éros, Seth est le Tartare, et le chaos est l'espace original dans lequel l'univers est né (Plutarque 2001, 74).

Lucius est partagé, symboliquement, entre ces deux vecteurs opposés : le coursier noir qui tire vers Typhon, vers le Tartare, et le cocher du char ailé qui tend vers Osiris – Sarapis, vers Éros. Se laissant entraîner par l'instinct, par la libido, il devient un adepte de Seth et prend la forme de l'animal de prédilection de celui-ci. Plutarque rapporte que les habitants de Busiris et de Lycopolis regardent l'âne comme un animal impur habité par de mauvais génies, alors que les Coptites persécutent les hommes roux (c'est la couleur de Typhon) et jettent rituellement un âne dans un précipice pour conjurer le mal (Plutarque 2001, 39-40). De l'autre côté, quand il arrive à prendre sous contrôle ses tendances bestiales, il sera libéré par Isis, la mère universelle, pour rejoindre Osiris – Sarapis, le dieu syncrétique qui allie la vie et la mort, le Soleil et la Nuit. Et si Sarapis est assimilé à Éros Protogénès des Orphiques, on pourrait dire que Lucius parcourt pendant ses péripéties la distance de l'Amour charnel à l'Amour spirituel, philosophique, du *Banquet*.

Car Lucius ne revient pas à la seule condition humaine normale, comme il se passe dans le récit milésien *Lucius ou l'âne*. Au cours de pas moins de trois initiations dans les mystères d'Isis, il dépasse la condition de néophyte et devient un élu, un adepte et prêtre de Sarapis. Après sa (re)transformation, lors de la fête *Navigium Isidis*, à Chenchrées, le port de Corinthe, Lucius est initié pour une première fois, dans le Iseum local. Mais après un an, arrivé à Rome, des pressages divins lui dictent, malgré sa défiance et la peur de quitter la vie profane, de se faire initier par deux fois encore, pour devenir pastophore et dignitaire quinquennal de la confrérie des initiés. Chaque fois, pour apaiser l'anxiété de Lucius, Isis ou Osiris lui apparaissent en rêve, avec la promesse que la triple initiation lui assurera rien moins que l'immortalité : « que cette attention renouvelée dont t'honorent les dieux te réjouisse ; sois heureux et fier d'être trois fois ce qui n'est accordé à grand-peine qu'une fois à un autre, et autorise-toi de ce chiffre pour t'estimer à jamais sauvé » (Apulée 1958, 376). Il s'agit là d'une évolution importante des cultes à mystères pendant l'Empire romain. Dans les rites égyptiens, le défunt était consacré au rang d'Osiris et admis dans le royaume souterrain des morts ; dans les mystères hellénistiques de Sarapis, c'est le vivant qui est libéré de la nature démoniaque et reçu parmi les « héros » ou demi-dieux de la tradition orphique. Le conte *Amour et Psyché* suggérait déjà cette morale allégorique : par son mariage mystique avec Éros, l'âme humaine est élevée au rang de divinité et admise au banquet de l'Olympe (Baumgarten 2012, chap. 3.1).

L'assimilation d'Osiris à Ra (Apis) dans la figure syncrétique du dieu suprême Sarapis (Osarapis), implique une autre modification importante de la conception religieuse : l'Élysée en tant que résidence des élus change de place, il remonte du monde d'en bas dans le lieu supra-céleste de Platon. Plutarque combat la représentation populaire selon laquelle « Osiris, ce dieu si saint et si

pur, habite réellement dans le sein de la terre et au séjour des morts ». Il lui oppose l'idée « philosophique », partagée seulement par la coterie des pythagoriciens et platoniciens, que le dieu suprême est « aussi éloigné de la terre qu'il soit possible ; toujours pur et sans tache, il n'a aucune espèce de communication avec les substances qui sont sujettes à la corruption et à la mort. » De ce fait, lorsque la mort survient, les âmes des initiés, « dégagées de leurs liens terrestres, [elles] sont passées dans ce séjour pur, saint et invisible qui n'est exposé à aucune révolution » (Plutarque 2001, 100-101), le *hyperouranios topos*.

Apulée ne présente pas de manière explicite cette reconfiguration de l'eschatologie, mais il la suggère de manière indirecte, sous le voile du secret imposé aux mystes : « Aussi, écoute, et crois, car ceci est la vérité. Je suis allé jusqu'aux frontières de la mort, j'ai foulé aux pieds le seuil de Proserpine, j'ai été entraîné à travers tous les éléments, en pleine nuit j'ai vu le soleil étinceler de lumière blanche, j'ai approché, face à face, les dieux d'En-bas et les dieux d'En-haut, je les ai adorés de tout près. Voilà : j'ai tout raconté et, bien que tu l'aies entendu, il est impossible que tu ne sois pas, tout de même, dans l'ignorance. Aussi vais-je rapporter seulement ce que l'on peut exposer sans sacrilège à des profanes. » (Apulée 1958, 371)

L'incompréhension des laïques est due, on peut le supposer, au remplacement, dans les cultes à mystères de l'Empire, de l'eschatologie populaire souterraine par l'eschatologie céleste orphique et médio-platonicienne. Lucius y fait pourtant des allusions qui ne sauraient être ignorées par les initiés. Puisque le scénario courant des initiations était la *catabasis eis antron*, le profane n'aurait pas eu de problèmes à accepter l'idée d'une descente jusqu'aux frontières de la mort, au seuil de Proserpine. Voir le Soleil étinceler en pleine nuit est une image un peu plus difficile à admettre, toutefois Éleusis pourrait en offrir l'explication par le rituel de l'*epopteia*, la révélation, dans une illumination éblouissante, des statues des déesses Déméter et Perséphone. Encore plus difficile à expliquer pour un profane serait la traversée de tous les éléments, car dans la physique aristotélicienne la disposition des quatre éléments, selon leur poids, aligne terre, eau, air et feu ; or, on voit mal comment une catabase attendrait le dernier cercle matériel d'avant la sphère des étoiles. Mais, finalement, dans un scénario de *descensus ad inferos*, il est carrément impossible d'expliquer l'affirmation de Lucius qu'il a approché et adoré face à face autant les dieux d'En-bas que ceux d'En-haut. Depuis quand les dieux de l'Olympe peuvent-ils être visités au Hadès ?

Une suggestion supplémentaire pour le fait que l'initiation de Lucius a été une *anabasis* vient des robes sacerdotales dont on le pare symboliquement à la fin de l'initiation. Il s'agit de douze mantes de consécration, puis d'une tunique « olympique », dont les broderies offraient le « spectacle des animaux représentés en diverses couleurs ; ici des dragons indiens, là, des griffons hyperboréens, qui ressemblent à des oiseaux et que produit une autre hémisphère » (Apulée 1958, 371).

R. E. Witt identifie dans la relation d'Apulée les chambres secrètes des temples isiaques, qui correspondent à des « régions » ou « zones » par lesquelles passe l'initié (Witt 1971, 161-163). Les douze robes devaient renvoyer, dans la religion égyptienne, aux douze heures de la nuit que le visiteur d'Osiris doit parcourir, alors que, dans les mystères hellénistiques, elles symbolisent plutôt les constellations du zodiaque, et donc la voûte céleste. En ce qui concerne la robe « olympique », elle est une représentation graphique de l'univers dans sa totalité, un peu comme le bouclier d'Achille, à la différence que chez Apulée le monde est tridimensionnel, il est une sphère dans le ciel, alors que chez Homère il est plat, de la forme d'un disque.

Traverser les cases du zodiaque implique le détachement du monde matériel, sous-lunaire. Une symbolique similaire apparaît dans les mystères de Mithra. Les nouveaux adeptes étaient initiés dans pas moins de sept degrés (corbeau, époux, soldat, lion, persan, soleil, père), avec un costume différent pour chacun, correspondant aux jours de la semaine et aux sept planètes du système de Ptolémée (Cumont 1973 ; Turcan 1993 ; Turcan 2016). Or, dans la mystique néo-pythagoricienne et médio-platonicienne, les cases du zodiaque et les planètes étaient les facteurs qui, à la descente des âmes dans le monde terrestre, pour s'incarner dans des corps de chair, exerçaient leur influence astrologique chargeant l'esprit pur de diverses prédispositions et tendances : Mars pour la guerre, Vénus pour l'amour, Mercure pour les affaires, etc. Se faire initier dans les domaines de ces constellations et planètes signifiait se libérer de leur influence, rompre une à une les entraves qui retiennent l'âme dans la prison du corps.

Mircea Eliade a noté que, sous l'effet des mystiques néo-orphique, néo-pythagoricienne et médio-platonicienne, les cultes à mystères de l'Antiquité romaine se sont réorganisés comme des religions de la rédemption. L'âme humaine, de nature divine, souffrant à la naissance une incorporation (*ensomatosis*), parvient par l'initiation à se détacher des liens qui la retiennent dans le monde cave et à remonter dans son lieu d'origine, où elle retrouve la pureté et l'immortalité divine. Par son instruction spirituelle, l'initié vainc l'emprise du destin (*Heimarmenê*), de la nécessité (*Anankê*), du sort (Tyché, Fortuna), dictée par la configuration des astres (Eliade 1989, chap. XXVI). Plutarque en donne l'expression parfaite, identifiant Psyché à Isis et Éros à Osiris / Sarapis :

« Les âmes humaines, tant qu'elles sont unies aux corps et soumises aux passions, ne peuvent avoir de participation avec Dieu que par les faibles images que la philosophie en retrace à leur intelligence, et qui ressemblent à des songes obscurs. Mais lorsque, dégagées de leurs liens terrestres, elles sont passées dans ce séjour pur, saint et invisible qui n'est exposé à aucune révolution, alors ce dieu devient leur chef et leur roi : elles sont fixées en lui, et contemplant cette beauté ineffable dont elles ne peuvent se rassasier, et qui excite sans cesse en elles de nouveaux désirs. C'est

cette beauté dont on voit, dans l'ancienne fable, Isis, toujours éprise, la poursuivre, s'attacher intimement à elle, et, par un effet de cette union, communiquer aux êtres qu'elle produit toutes sortes de biens précieux.» (Plutarque 2001, 100-101)

Voilà donc qu'Apulée a doté son roman d'un schéma initiatique, qui lui donne un sens global unitaire. Lucius, le protagoniste, est, comme toute âme humaine, écartelé par les deux coursiers, l'un noir et l'autre blanc, c'est-à-dire partagé entre les penchants bestiaux et les tendances « daïmoniques ». Poussé par une curiosité intrépide, qui est le moteur de ses aventures, il va parcourir toute l'échelle qui va de l'animal au dieu, de la nature charnelle à celle spirituelle. Sur son chemin sont prévues des rencontres avec la plupart des religions antiques, comme si Apulée voulait, d'un côté, faire immerger son personnage dans le plus grand nombre d'expériences mystiques, et de l'autre, offrir à ses lecteurs la possibilité de comparer les rituels de chaque culte et de décider de leur valeur. Les préférences et le jugement de l'auteur ne laissent pas de doute (quoiqu'il ne soit pas du tout sûr qu'on puisse identifier l'auteur textuel avec l'auteur biographique) : la sorcellerie et le christianisme sont dans le domaine négatif, elles plongent l'individu dans l'empire du mal moral et bestial ; les cultes orgiaques, comme ceux de Dea Syria, de Cybèle et Attis, ou de Dionysos, peuvent, malgré la barbarie et l'irrationalité de leurs rites, offrir des moyens de s'affranchir et de dominer les passions de la chair et du sexe ; finalement, les mystères d'Isis et Osiris et la mystique médioplatonicienne mettent l'individu sous le contrôle de l'intellect orienté vers le bien et la beauté, et lui permettent d'échapper au déterminisme matériel et astral et de réintégrer la condition divine originale. C'est un parcours complet, qui fait du conte populaire de l'âne un récit philosophique, une parabole platonicienne du destin de l'âme humaine.

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LES MÉTAMORPHOSES D'APULÉE
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THE SECRET MEMORY. HOW THE GONCOURT 2021, MOHAMED MBOUGAR SARR, REWRITES THE STORY OF THE “BLACK RIMBAUD”

Laura T. ILEA¹

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ABSTRACT. *The Secret Memory. How the Goncourt 2021, Mohamed Mbougar Sarr, Rewrites the Story of the “Black Rimbaud”.* In a mixture of “savage detective story” à la Bolaño, of diary, journalism, interviews and discussions on “plagiarism,” the revolutionary book of Mohamed Mbougar Sarr rewrites the history of Western relations to Africa, to its cultures and its storytelling, but also to different forms of marginality, since its main character, Elimane Madag, is also travelling to South America, being part of its most interesting intellectual circles – through, for instance, Sabato, Gombrowicz, Silvina and Victoria Ocampo. Through voices of Senegalese, Haitian, Argentinian writers and poets, through an apocryphal rewriting of the literary history of the twentieth century, through subverting the theory of plagiarism (since African myths are reinterpreted and melted in the Western culture, similar to African artefacts after the expedition Dakar-Djibouti), as well as through detective journalism (since many characters are interrogating the relation facts-fiction), the marginal and the minor are presented as an alternative, disruptive literary history of the twentieth and of the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: *marginality, minor, African myths, Western culture, plagiarism*

¹ Laura T. ILEA published two novels (*Cartographies of the Other World*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2018, and *The Western Women Have no Honor*, L’Harmattan, Paris, 2015), a short stories volume (*East*, L’Harmattan, Paris, 2008), literary studies among which *The Canadian Literature in Infrared. On Feminine Nihilism* (Tracus Arte, Bucharest, 2015), *Littérature et scénarios d’aveuglement – Orhan Pamuk, Ernesto Sabato, José Saramago* (Honoré Champion, Paris, 2013), and a philosophical study on the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (*Life and Its Shadow. The Existential Foundation of Knowledge*, Idea, Cluj-Napoca, 2007). Her most recent volumes are entitled *Politics of Desire. For a Relational Condition* (Mimesis, Milan, 2021), followed by *Nomadism. About Thought Becoming Flesh* (Litera, Bucharest, 2024). Laura T. Ilea teaches comparative literature at Babeş-Bolyai University and is member of the *Center of Research on Literary and Cultural Studies on Planetarity* (CELCP), Université de Montréal. Email: laura.ilea@ubbcuj.ro.

REZUMAT: Memoria secretă. Despre cum laureatul premiului Goncourt 2021, Mohamed Mbougar Sarr, rescrie povestea unui „Rimbaud negru”. Într-un amestec de „detectivism sălbatic” à la Bolaño, de jurnal, jurnalism, interviuri și discuții despre „plagiat”, romanul revoluționar al lui Mohamed Mbougar Sarr rescrie istoria relațiilor Occidentului cu Africa, cu culturile sale și cu modul ei de a povesti, dar și cu forme diferite de marginalitate, din moment ce personajul principal, Elimane Madag, călătorește în egală măsură în America de Sud, făcând parte din cercurile ei intelectuale cele mai interesante – prin intermediul, de exemplu, al lui Sábato, Gombrowicz, Silvina și Victoria Ocampo. Trecând prin voci de scriitori și poeți senegalezi, haitieni și argentinieni, printr-o rescriere apocrifă a istoriei literare a secolului XX, prin subversiunea teoriei plagiatului (din moment ce mituri africane sunt reinterpretate și preluate în cultura occidentală, la fel cu artefactele africane, după expediția Dakar-Djibouti), precum și prin jurnalism detectivist (întrucât multe dintre personaje interoghează relațiile dintre fapte și ficțiune), marginalul și minorul sunt prezentate ca o istorie literară alternativă, perturbatoare a secolului XX și a începutului de secol XXI.

Cuvinte-cheie: marginalitate, minor, mituri africane, cultură occidentală, plagiat

In the introduction of her keynote conference at the *American Comparative Literature Association* congress (ACLA)², Gayatri Spivak defines translation as “critical intimacy” and places it at the core of an extensive exercise of undermining the I, understood as the subject of capitalist grid, based on a world vision characterized by homogeneity, and rigid borders, whose leading figure is the total war. Total war is the subject and the consequence of “continentality,” of identity politics and grid, understood as fundamental attitudes towards world, others, and territory.

In order to restore the “oceanic” (a world of water rather than a world of land) and to conceptualize the thought of it (languages should no longer be understood as a ground for nation-states), Spivak addresses the idea of scales, namely through rethinking the accident of birth. Working with comparative literature means discovering *ipseity* “in the situation,” precisely through “other” situations that do not necessarily lead to violence. These situations build the prerequisite for the possibility of imagining an extra space. Briefly put, of imagining the world.

² Held at Palais des Congrès in Montreal between March 13-17, 2024. The text presented here (on Sarr’s *The Most Secret Memory of Men*) was originally part of the panel *The Minor in World Literature: Reconfigurations, Recognitions, and Resonances*, organized by Simla Dogangun, Warwick University, and H. Esra Almas, Bilkent Üniversitesi (Bilkent University), at the ACLA.

We tend though to forget that gendering, feminism, and postcolonialism can't be tied exclusively to social foundations, that they are rather related to an incalculable supplement, which cannot be contained in our theoretical approaches. This is the junction through which the role of the minor in literature comes to the fore because it teaches us that violence means desire and therefore gendering, feminism, and postcolonialism, all of them reside in an incalculable supplement.

This incalculable supplement is at the core of Spivak's take on the *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (Apter, Cassin 2014), when she affirms that all methodology betrays the impossibility of action. Furthermore, the untranslatable would mean, in my view, the clash between two worldviews that cannot coincide with each other because of their excess in addressing sensitive issues such as conflict and violence, and especially the fact that, genuinely, desire means violence. In addressing this indiscernibility, Spivak mentions the novel of Mohamed Mbougar Sarr, *The Most Secret Memory of Men*, where the diasporic as well as the vindicative versions of postcolonialism cannot stand together. They collapse in a space of indiscernibility, hence the beauty of the book.

If the time of this collapse is the time of world-making, it also involves the question of the aspirational, of a world-to-come. Aspirational is different from possibility because it is completely undecided. It is sometimes a matter of initiating a change of paradigm, based on what Mohamed Mbougar Sarr calls *The Labyrinth of Inhumanity*, making reference to a decisive book written by his Senegalese predecessor: a long exercise in a "sustained continuity" of a "dehumanized thought." Paradoxically, this exercise leads to an abnormous legacy, based less on *talking the talk* than on *walking the walk*. These are the final words of Spivak's keynote conference, which insists on the fact that at the bottom, literary in a planetary sense means teaching mathematics, geography, history, imagining the external space (the speaker also makes reference to the imperative of *Re-imagining the Silk Road*). Moreover, I would add, if there is a dimension that could be inserted within these interstices of indiscernibility, this is the minor key, which addresses different scales, different logics of causality and thus different experiments of thought.

In the book of Mohamed Mbougar Sarr, *The Most Secret Memory of Men*, the logic of center-peripherality or of minor-major is disrupted (sometimes reversed), by adding to a first periphery (Senegalese writers aspiring to be acknowledged by the Parisian literary milieu) a second one – the South-American intellectual and artistic circles, where a large part of the book action is placed. Literature in its entirety is seen as a series of robbed, apocryphal myths, circulating through the languages of the "murderers" as well as through those of the "murdered," of the guilty ones and of those on whom guilt is perpetrated.

In this “total translation” of the world, in the reversed logic proposed by Sarr (in a way, similar to the logic of *Critique of Black Reason* by Achille Mbembe³), travel always implies the necessity of a counterlife, where the point of arrival is all but a promised land. The peripheral and the anecdotal become the rule; the minor represents the universal wish to transcend cultures, not in the direction of the Major, but rather in the direction of indiscernibility.⁴

The shape of things is shifting towards a “literature of Disaster,” in the direction of minor moments not being anywhere at home, but building a different, aspirational space. To the necessity of impersonating a character, Sarr answers: Don’t exoticize me! We are all guilty of plagiarism. But nevertheless, the autofictional is a staged element of authenticity. What is then everything about?

In a mixture of “savage detective story” à la Bolaño, of journalism, diary, interviews and discussions on “plagiarism,” the revolutionary book of Mohamed Mbougar Sarr rewrites Western relations to Africa, to its cultures and its storytelling, but also to different forms of marginality, since its main character, Elimane Madag, is also travelling to South America, being part of its most interesting intellectual circles – through, for instance, Sábado, Gombrowicz, Silvina and Victoria Ocampo.

In an excessive form of novel, the author is subverting several genres, since the publication of the first and single novel of Elimane (a “Black Rimbaud,” as he is characterized by journalists, writers and editors), *The Labyrinth of Inhumanity* (1938), is from the beginning accepted as a form of plagiarism – firstly of a Western African myth, of a king killing his subjects and nourishing trees with their fat, in order to become more powerful, myth told to Marcel Griaule and Michel Leiris during the famous ethnological expedition Dakar-Djibouti⁵; secondly of many other literary sources, acknowledged by the author. The final outcome is an intrusive form of poetry and thought, influencing careers, lives, destinies, and leading to murders. The editor is forced into trial by the defenders of plagiarism. The central issue of the book is the idea of writing and the way it subverts identity, belonging, and fame. At its core stands also the whole history of Europe, with its colonialism and Holocaust, recounted through characters that are searching for their identity throughout their entire

³ It involves the fact that all subaltern humanity has become *Black*.

⁴ Similar to the shape shift expressed by G. Schwab in *Imaginary Ethnographies. Literature, Culture, and Subjectivity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

⁵ A reinterpretation of this expedition from the point of view of the subject of mobility in a colonial era is offered by S. Harel in « De l’Afrique spectrale à l’objet ventriloque. Parcours de la mobilité dans Dakar – Djibouti, 1931. Le butin du musée de l’Homme », in *Journal of Global Cultural Studies*, 17/2022. It also explores the forms of vehicular mobility through the principle of velocity and through the cartography of the territory covered.

lives. It is not random that three central characters of the book have almost similar names: Elimane, Engelmann and Ellenstein, the African writer published in Paris, the German officer during the Second World War and the Jew, arrested and tortured by him.

Sarr gives voice to the aspirations of an entire generation of writers coming from the francophone Africa, aiming at writing "the Book." Its minor key expresses itself in the forms of a disputable plagiarism, in a mixture of African voodoo and of high literary culture, on the traces of the haunted figure of the above mentioned "Black Rimbaud." And also in the form of a second, unfinished book, since Elimane will never be able to fulfill his task. He ends his life as a wiseman in his ancestors' village.

Through voices of Senegalese, Haitian, Argentinian writers and poets, through an apocryphal rewriting of the literary history of the twentieth century (since Sábato, Gombrowicz, Victoria and Silvina Ocampo become transitory characters in the book), through subverting the theory of plagiarism, since African myths are reinterpreted and melted in the Western culture, similar to African artefacts after the expedition Dakar-Djibouti, as well as through detective journalism (since many characters are interrogating the relation facts-fiction), the marginal and the minor are presented as an alternative, disruptive literary history of the twentieth and of the beginning of the twenty-first century. All characters of the book are in a continual movement between Europe, Africa and South America, being interconnected in a poetic, planetary memory.

The novel of Mbougar Sarr is, simply put, about how a "black Rimbaud" conquers France, asserting his own exclusion. However, if it were only about this, we probably would consider it one of the novels with a strong ideological, ironic, angry, often destroying imprint, about how an entire world was contaminated by the other and can no longer live without it. But also about the way the "soul captures" push certain members of the society of origin to blow their roots, to seek for a foreign soil, to reinvent their ancestors, to rewrite "wild" cartographies, to explore invented languages, to follow a journey in which works, readers and critics will disappear, until one day, when the Work will travel "unavoidably alone in the Vastness. And one day the Work dies, as all things die, as the Sun and the Earth, the Solar System and the Galaxy and the most secret memory of men will be extinguished." (R. Bolaño, *The Savage Detectives*, opening quote of Sarr's novel).

The novel is about writing a book, starting from another, which is entitled *The Labyrinth of Inhumanity*, published in 1938 by an African author who instigated a huge scandal at the time, that eventually led to the bankruptcy of his publisher. It is also about two disappearances – the first one when he realized that his readers were not at all interested in the book, but in all the

adjacent things they could discover in it; the author first leaves to the north of France on the footsteps of his father, who disappeared one day because he was ready to die for the causes of the “white people”; after the second departure of the author, we can mysteriously find him in the South America, following the SS officer who had tortured and killed his publisher, during the German occupation of Paris, in World War II.

The novel focuses thus on a certain form of exclusion and marginality (most often excessive), as the central character, Elimane Madag, but also the narrator of the novel, Diégane Latyr Faye, as well as the fascinating author Marème Siga⁶, they are all in the search of a fundamental book, of a primordial language, which can create echoes wherever one uses or performs it. This language returns to the beginning, at that first book that was thrown into the unknown, which has defied the laws of literary “gravity” and has self-proclaimed the origin of some important founding myths reinvested in contemporaneity. This book defies a long genealogy of writers who will dare to continue a founding irreverent tradition.

In an excessive form of narrative, the novel is an assumed plagiarism of many other sources, accepted by the author, implying that any literature becomes a form of robbery. Just as the appropriations, intrusions, cultural mixtures represent imperfect exchanges, likewise this “genius of collage,” although extremely disturbing at first sight, implies a special virtuosity, a hardly perceptible nuance for those who consider it, without hesitation, a form of imposture:

He recognized the virtuosity of the writing, and he recognized that the story was one of a kind, but he couldn't shake off the idea that the whole thing was theft, a dishonest sham. It was a singular book, never before seen, deeply original, but at the same time it was also a compilation of existing books. ... Elimane responded that literature was nothing but a game of pillages, and that his book proved it. He said that one of his goals had been to be both original and not, since that was one possible definition of literature and even of art, and that his other goal had been to show that anything could be sacrificed in the name of creative perfection (Sarr 2023, 194).

⁶ This is modeled after the Senegalese writer Ken Bugul, raised in a polygamous environment and who, after studying in Dakar, returns to her native village where she becomes the 28th wife of a marabout, after whose death she returns to the metropolis and imposes herself as a writer, internationally acknowledged nowadays. The episode of her polygamous past recurrently comes back in the manner American feminists criticize her, every time she openly talks about women and their role in society.

The final result is thus an intrusive form of poetry and thought, which influences lives, destinies and leads to crime, as all journalists who wrote about the *Labyrinth of Inhumanity* committed suicide. But the irony subsists, as the final purification through the book that kills its adepts is immediately harshly sanctioned: "It's crypto-symbolist bullshit. Risible mystagogy. A tasteless parody of a prophet or Meister Eckhart or a Congolese evangelist charlatan planning to expulse the demons inside possessed women by sodomizing them live on Facebook, Bible in hand. T.C. Elimane would have never written this stuff with any seriousness" (Sarr 2023, 288).

As a result of this "robbery", the publisher of the *Labyrinth of Inhumanity* is facing plagiarism accusations. Writing dynamites identity, belonging, and the idea of fame. But at the same time it restores differently the whole history of Europe, on the traces of colonialism and the Holocaust, whose monstrous heads protuberate, since that what fascinates us can become all of a sudden deathly dangerous.

After deambulating through Europe and South America, the writer returns to Senegal, in his native village, taking the place of his adoptive father (or his biological father-enigma persists), as a keeper of memory, as the intermediary between two worlds – paying the price of losing his previous memory. There are no books in his house, and he becomes destructive when they intrude, reminding him that he will never be able to write a second one. After his death, Diégane, the young author in search for his voice, is tracing him back to his native village and will indeed find fragments of his attempt to "restore the initial cosmogony," but these debris cannot compare to the initial one: "One thing is clear: Madag didn't run out of time, as he says in the letter he sent to his future. He simply never got past the *Labrinth of Inhumanity*. He probably should never have tried. Maybe he only had a single book in him; a single, masterful book. It might be that every writer, in the end, only contains a single essential book, a work that demands to be written, between two voids" (Sarr 2023, 227).

I believe that this aspiration towards the cosmogonic force of writing the first, unrepeatable book, but also the consciousness that will slip into forgetfulness, in a black, reversed cosmogonia, give this novel the tone of a planetary exploration, of a planetary consciousness more precisely. It is capable on the one hand of encompassing experiences of decorporalization and travel of the soul beyond the edges of the material, as in the archaic world in which the narrator of the *Labyrinth of Inhumanity* originates, but also extremely contemporary experiences, such as asking oneself questions about the role of writing, especially in a world where direct intervention, activism, protest, resistance and revolution are urgent. What is to be done, what can a young

writer do by investing full energy in a quest, seemingly useless for all those surrounding him? How can he sustain the search for a nomadic, obsessive fiction in relation to the world, to its emergent causes?

This conflict becomes extremely violent because, unable to do anything in order to change the condition of those people who are immolated for justice, whose lives are endangered by the “necropolitics of fear,” any possible literary enterprise seems a form of escapism, of arrogant non-involvement. The internauts attack: “You know why you’ll never be a big deal here? Because you act like you’re better than us. The whites can celebrate you as much as they like, give you all the prizes they want, talk about you in their fancy papers, but here, you’re nothing. Nada. And when you’re nothing in your home country, you’re nothing everywhere. You’re a traitor, a castaway, a house Negro. You’ll never reach the caliber of... Then he listed the names of seven or eight intellectuals” (Sarr 2023, 305).

How to respond to such an accusation? What can memory do in order to become a planetary narrative, which could echo in dissonant spaces and times? The paths explored by Sarr are the following: first, the Bassar myth of the king who burns his subjects in order to become stronger; it has a follow-up, as after this abominable beginning, a woman of excessive beauty leads the king to the forest, where each tree speaks as the soul of the subjects killed. The king will therefore have to face, one by one, the committed crimes, and will eventually return to life and proper judgment. This myth of burning makes reference to the self-metamorphosis – someone who must burn his past in order to become a completely different person. The Bassar myth thus is the allegory of identity betrayal. Every wanderer becomes incomprehensible to all those he has left behind: “Who was he? A pure writer? An abashed plagiarist? A brilliant impostor? A mystical assassin? An eater of souls? An eternal nomad? A refined libertine? A child looking for his father? A simple, unhappy exile, who lost his bearings and himself? What does it matter, in the end. What I love in him is something else entirely.” (Sarr 2023, 271).

I think that the force, often defamatory, but of an intense poetry, of someone who can appear in the eyes of the others as carrying both the aura of the explorer, but also of a murderer of his own origins, is translatable through the fact that this voice becomes the echo of a wider, almost planetary experience.

There is a passionate odyssey, full of beauty and horror, as any odyssey, a double-edged tide, full of exaltation and dismay. There is a lot of anger – the anger of not being able to live otherwise than with the spine in the flesh; if it is removed, it will definitely kill the one who carries it. This is the spine of contamination with otherness, with a culture that perceives the other as exotic. Elimane is not only a talented writer, but also an exhibited wild object. Although

the descendant (or imprint) of a long genealogy of preservers of memory, "other poets, other wordsmiths, aoidos, magicians and mages, word-bearers, linguistic maieutologists, royal griots, creators of rhymes, speakers of gymnastic poems, other shepherds of silence" (Sarr 2023, 286), Elimane is also the most fulfilled and most tragic product of colonization, which instilled in him the desire to become like the others and equally his alienation.

What can the writer do? What can this broken Ulysses do, who remains, paradoxically, "intact" inside his tongue, by facing the threat: "I know you know that Wittgenstein quote, at the end of *Tractatus*: 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.' But staying silent, not telling, doesn't mean you shouldn't show. We're not here to heal ourselves, or to mend, or console, or reassure or educate; we're meant to stand tall in the sacred wound, to see it and show it in silence. That there is the point of *The Labyrinth of Inhumanity*. Everything else is a failure" (Sarr 2023, 347).

So, asking if the past is the one which haunts us or if, on the contrary we are the ones to haunt it, it seems that a conclusion is required: we haunt the past, leaving no rest to those who precede us. We haunt them with our questions because we do not want the past to remain inscrutable. We want it to continue to be transformed into future, a future that contains the possibility of the new. This is why we reopen the space of memory, the monuments of the past.

The author investigates the past in a minor, assumed key, through voices of Senegalese, Haitian poets, Argentine writers, by an apocryphal rewriting of the literary history of the twentieth century, through a subversive theory of plagiarism, through detective stories, in a "total translation" of the world. This is how the minor is interconnected in a planetary memory. Through its reversed logic (all subaltern humanity has become Black), the minor represents the possibility of transcending cultures, eluding the Major and replacing it through indiscernibility, which means extension of desire. Indiscernibility points also towards an incalculable supplement, engendered by the ambiguous nature of desire: violence and aspiration, renewed projection of an external space. This external space would have no actual meaning if it were not inhabited by a protheic language, as the one explored by Sarr.

As a conclusion, we could affirm that the fundamental book or rather the longing for the fundamental book – is a book of irony, of assumed plagiarism, of robbery, showing at the same time its force of vulnerability, of writing from the edge. Paradoxically, the Book is a minor one.

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LISTENING AND LEGIBILITY: URBAN SURFACES AGAINST 'OVERARCHING MEANINGS' IN LISPECTOR'S *THE BESIEGED CITY*

Călina PĂRĂU¹

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ABSTRACT. *Listening and Legibility: Urban Surfaces Against “Overarching Meanings” in Lispector’s The Besieged City.* This paper looks into the literary dismantlement of projections of *totality* and objectified knowledge in women’s modern writing, focusing on Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector’s novel *The Besieged City*. My central claim is that her writing opposes “geographies of reason,” indirectly arguing for an untranslatability of the self inside modernity’s model of legibility and communication. In this novel, Lispector’s alternative to the discoursing, male-dominant, rational public realm is not the introspective inner space of subjectivity, but an innovative world-making *poiesis* founded on the substitution of the individual self with “the wider life of the world” that remains always a-centric and anti-textual. I investigate the ways in which Lispector opposes *opaqueness* to *legibility*, seeking the uncharted territory outside the logic of historical time or the colonial gaze. Reading Lispector’s novel through the notion of “writing by ear” (bearing multiple meanings, mostly in relation to the re-negotiation of the voice-dominant Western perception about writing) will prove useful in understanding the intricate and tangled relation between Euro-American literature and the Global South in terms of complex forms of heritage hybridization and designs of global memory.

Keywords: *poiesis, totality, Global South, creolization, urban, listening, modernity*

1 Călina PĂRĂU is a teaching assistant in the Department of Languages for Specific Purposes at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University. She holds a PhD in Philology and her main interests include memory studies, critical heritage studies, post-structuralism, the social and cultural imaginary and ideology. Journals that have accepted her papers for publication include: *Philobiblon: Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities*, *Echinox Journal*, *Ekphrasis*, *Revista Transilvania*, *Diakrisis: Yearbook of Theology and Philosophy*, *Transylvanian Review* etc. Her PhD thesis, *Discursul uitat: memorie și rest* (The Oblivious Discourse: Memory and Rest), was published in 2020 at Tracus Arte. Email address: calina.parau@ubbcluj.ro.

REZUMAT. *Ascultare și lizibilitate: Suprafețe urbane împotriva „semnificațiilor globale” în The Besieged City de Lispector.* Acest articol investighează destructurarea proiecțiilor unei „totalități” și a cunoașterii obiective în scriitura modernistă feminină, cu focus pe romanul scriitoarei braziliene Clarice Lispector *The Besieged City* (Orașul asediat). Argumentul central se construiește pe ideea că scriitura sa se opune unor „geografii ale rațiunii,” demonstrând intraductibilitatea sinelui în interiorul modelului de lizibilitate și comunicare al modernității. În acest roman, alternativa scriitoarei la sfera publică raționalizată și discursivizantă nu este spațiul introspectiv al subiectivității, ci un poiesis al construirii de lumi, clădit pe substituirea sinelui individual cu „viața mai cuprinzătoare a lumii” care este anti-textuală și acentrică. Mă interesează modurile prin care Lispector opune opacitatea lizibilului, căutând „ținutul” neexplorat dinafara logicii timpului istoric și a privirii coloniale. Citind romanul lui Lispector prin conceptul de „scriitura cu urechea” (noțiune ce negociază percepția vestică asupra scrisului, dominată de ideea de „voce”) vom înțelege relațiile complexe dintre literatura euro-americană și cea a Sudului Global, cu atenție față de formele de hibridizare a memoriei în designul global.

Cuvinte-cheie: *poiesis, totalitate, creolizare, urban, ascultare, modernitate, marginalitate*

A cidade sitiada, the third novel of Clarice Lispector, a Brazilian woman-writer born in Ukraine in 1920, was first published in 1948. It only came in English translation in 2019 as *The Besieged City*, translated by Johnny Lorenz. Lispector herself found it difficult to get her novel published after World War II, a time when literary audiences seemed to have different expectations regarding the potential responses of fiction (or writing in general) to historical reality. In 1948, the same year this novel about the mirroring relation between a girl lacking imagination (as the narrator describes her) and an industrialized city “mingling some progress with the smell of the stable” (Lispector 2019, 8) made its way to its readers, T. S. Eliot was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. As Anders Österling remarks in his Award ceremony speech, this particular choice meant “a departure from the type of writer that has most frequently gained that distinction.” Moreover, in the aftermath of the atomic bomb, the public acclamation of the writer “describing the aridity and impotence of modern civilization” was nothing short of remarkable. Beside this merely coincidental chronological correspondence (the year 1948), there is something else connecting the two writers that belonged to different cultural frames. Both Eliot and Lispector were interested in exploring the negotiated place of subjective perception inside urban landscapes. I will not look at the two writers comparatively, as that would

be a much more complex and difficult undertaking, but I find it relevant to situate the discussion about Lispector's *The Besieged City* under the umbrella of T. S. Eliot's lines in Preludes:

His soul stretched tight across the skies
That face behind a city block,
Or trampled by insistent feet
At four and five and six o'clock;
And short square fingers stuffing pipes,
And evening newspapers, and eyes
Assured of certain certainties,
The conscience of a blackened street
Impatient to assume the world. (Eliot, 1954, 14)

Clarice Lispector wrote *The Besieged City* in Europe, after marrying, whilst living with her husband in Switzerland. Her novel could have focused on the inner life of the protagonist in the light of emerging urban places and lifestyles in Brazil, illustrating forms of escapism or immersion in relation to confiscated realities of the present. On the contrary, the author chose a horizontal perspective on individual psychology as reflected by the disconnected, uninformative life of the city of São Geraldo. *The Besieged City* could be summarized as the "story" of the way in which urban surfaces come to consciousness inside the perspective of a woman "impatient to assume the world," not by scrutinizing, analyzing or possessing it, but by repeating or multiplying its façade realities as desire crawls besides or in-between these images. The city with its impossibility of mirroring individual life is central to Lispector's novel that seems to teach the reader a new form of attention: one that "would make an effort not to fly over" (Lispector 2019, 97) the elements of a city, but sit inside the town square and gaze at the unsystematic and unreadable spectacle of the world.

The relation between the urban space and literature has been thoroughly analyzed by Malcom Miles who asserted that "the metropolis emerges as the setting and the agent for a distinctly modern consciousness" because "the construct of subject and object become interchangeable." (Miles 2019, 66) This experience of the urban setting as a space of intersections and divisions was also analyzed by Georg Simmel in his essay *Metropolises and Mental Life*. More specifically, Simmel claimed that the metropolis made the citizen simultaneously experience inner, outer and social realities inside an intensified network of sensations and impressions that blur the line between the individual and the supra-individual (Miles 2019, 67) Lispector's novel sheds light on the idea that streets, squares and other transition spaces become "elements in a permanently impermanent reality." (Miles 2019, ix) My claim is that these elements become

formation-scapes of externalized consciousness as the protagonist builds, throughout the novel, the architecture of perception in relation to the visibility of an expanding city. The protagonist's impossible discursive-emancipatory becoming and the blocked "psychocultural development" (Fitz 2001, 24) of the main character are seen through the architecture of a city with an unfinished viaduct inside which the process of self-discovery is hampered by Lucrecia's difficulty in using an inner vocabulary to engage with the world. In a text which demonstrates that Lispector's works (produced between 1944 and 1978) epitomize poststructuralist theories, Earl E. Fritz takes a very close look at how her writing dis-invests "logocentrism" by questioning referentiality and the transparency of language. According to this perspective, Lispectorian style emphasizes "language both as a weblike trap and as the anarchically liberating force" (Fitz 2001, 25) which frees us from conventionality. In the case of *The Besieged City*, I will be interested in viewing language not only as an unstable force, but also as a 'colonial' mediator between the perception of visible urban reality and the inglorious experience of mediocrity as invisibility.

The underlying philosophical dimension of this novel relates to the question regarding an alternative to the possibility of assuming the world and addressing reality from beneath the possessive gaze of objectified knowledge. This issue requires the author to consider language a concealing and an expressive instrument at the same time, whilst providing the reader with no privileged position of introspection or a sense of cumulative narrative order. It comes as no surprise, thus, that the novel was not so well-received at the time and that it was criticized for being "restricted to a pure question of phraseology" (review published in *A MANHÃ*, October 23, 1949) (Lispector 2019, Appendix, 206) and for not having "the power to let us reach a more general conclusion." Temístocles Linhares gave his review the title "The Spell of the Phrase," concluding that *The Besieged City* was "a simulation of a novel," (208) because nothing is defined or complete in this work where "everything is worthwhile." This idea raises the following question: what forms of attention are expected from the reader, if Clarice Lispector writes about a non-hierarchical image of the world, where everything deserves our attention and nothing becomes central in its contours.

The a-centric, anarchetypal structure of the novel was not treated by the reviewer as part of the broader Modernism's defiance, because, in this case, Lispector did not give up 'plot' and narrative in favor of inner life/interior speech, but rather she tried to circumscribe a new 'domain of life' that was, paradoxically, both a projection of the visible life of the city and a construction of the "unimaginative" mind of the protagonist. The title of the review ("The Spell of the Phrase") reflects the construction of the novel, which does not focus on creating a cohesive, coherent image of neither the city nor Lucrecia Neves,

the main character. *The Besieged City* constantly reconstructs and dismantles the assumption that the subject is "the dominating counterpart of the world as a whole." (Habermas 1987, 297) Playing more with relations between objects, animals and landscapes, rather than focusing on the individuation of the character, Lispector seems to want to unravel "the absolute power of dream and desire concealed by the prose of bourgeois life" (Rancière 2009, 41) by focusing on the encounter between heterogeneous elements and perceptions. Lispector's prose highlights the relationship between arts and politics by insisting on the untranslatable and *opaque* dimension of individual life in an age of transparent industrial relations. In addition, given the non-hierarchical analysis of the city through the eyes of Lucrecia Neves, "the heterogeneity of the elements resists the homogeneity of meaning." (Rancière 2009, 42) In *The Besieged City*, language does not mediate between impression and expression (a Western conceptualization that has guided our perspective), but becomes a function of visibility as the proof of existence. "What is seen," with its "hard truth" (Lispector 2019, 198), has a separate logic of its own which insulates the vagueness of individual existence. Language does not serve the protagonist to tell her own "story," because only the proliferated images (not words or names) can bear witness to a mediocre life "lived day to day": "Because from real life, lived day to day, there had remained for her-if she didn't want to lie-just the possibility of saying, in a conversation between neighbor women, in a mixture of long experience and last-minute discovery: yes, yes, the soul is important too, don't you think?" (Lispector 2019, 198)

The Besieged City disrupts the distribution of witnessing positions, as the main character does not bear witness to the world, instead she reconstructs it, not through fantasy, but by displacing the borders of subjectivization and self-recognition. As Rancière puts it, "art does not do politics by reaching the real. It does it by inventing fictions that challenge the existing distribution of the real and the fictional." (Rancière 2009, 49) It could be argued that Clarice Lispector drives our attention towards the fabric of the real by creating this unique character whose psychological life mostly resides in extensions, proliferation, "arrangements of form" (Lispector 2019, 99) and "mute existence." (64) It would also seem that, Lispector does not want to make the invisible visible, but rather she wishes to isolate forms of visibility out of the colonized, 'meaningful' visible. The city, with its "horizon sliced by smokestacks and rooftops," (99) is Lucrecia's "ultimate reality" (100) with no complex conceptualizations or decipherable insights; just the images of an urban real appearing "without touching, without transforming." (101)

In *The Besieged City*, Clarice Lispector weaves in a persistent awareness of modernity's relation to time and space, as it manifested itself under the auspices of projections of "totality". Habermas analyzed the ways in which

modernity carried this “image of history as a uniform process” (Habermas 1987, 6) that justifies the idea of the present being a “transition” inside history’s narrative of redemption or realization. Lispector’s novel mocks this modern time consciousness by emphasizing the materialization of the sense of time in São Geraldo: “and the day in São Geraldo wasn’t the future, it was hard, finished streets.” (Lispector 2019, 35) Another example is the powerful image of the houses “strolling beneath telegraph wires” (37), which marks the frailty of a cartographic present that becomes the reflection of a construction of time as an inter-connected “whole”. Inside this construction, space also becomes wrapped inside lines of connection. For instance, the image of the pipe is recurrent: “from every wall with a pipe something irreducible was being born—a wall with pipe.” (99) The pressure of seizing the visible present inside this over-arching machinery of time is deemed to fail, as the narrator is aware that the memory of the city “would be just the history of what had been seen” (16) and not the history of her watchful gaze that refuses totalization, synthesis and reflection. Lucrécia cannot submit herself to that “bird’s-eye view” of historical time, nor to a scientific “frozen gaze” that conceals reality, because she remains outside a rationalized, commodified real, accepting the redundant, minuscule task of de-centered attention: “she who in order to try to learn about a town square would make an effort not to fly over it.” (97)

Jean-Michel Rabaté adds an interesting nuance to the idea that there is a specific modern time consciousness derived from projections of totality. Talking about masterpieces created after the First World War, Rabaté remarks that “writers and artists felt a heightened responsibility, a duty to be as relevant and as affirmative as possible.” (Rabaté 2023, 16) They also felt an urgent need “to give birth to something that would approach a totality of experience.” Of course, Rabaté concludes that this totality was always incomplete, making artists turn into the gatekeepers of an “unfinishable archive.” (Rabaté 2023, 24) Despite this being a male-dominated artistic response to an unsettling, uprooting historical context, Lispector also resonated with this aesthetics of totality. As she herself confesses in a letter she published as a response to Linhares’ criticism (Delayed Letter, published in *Jornal do Brasil*, February 21, 1970), her character “takes as her own life the wider life of the world.” (Lispector 2019, 210) The ways in which Lispector understands this artistic endeavor of alluding to “a total vision of things” is quite different, though. In *The Besieged City*, the “totality of experience” is not immersive, glorious or poetic, but rather alienating and unbearable: “that mute existence that was always above her, the room, the city, the high degree the things atop the china cabinet had reached, the small dry bird ready to fly [...], the height of the power plant, so much intolerable balance.” (64)

Lispector makes her readers realize that, in writing, this heterogeneous totality is a remaking of the world in a creolized, hybrid, unrecognizable fashion that renders it impersonal, indirect and anonymous. Remaking the world outside a colonized experience of the real provides the experience of dis-identification, untranslatability and the invisible individual life. Moreover, this totality of “mute existence” or “the machinery of things” separates, in Lispector’s writing, the gaze from the world, cross-cutting that relation of meaning and insight that we (the readers as Westerners) would normally expect. There are no contact points between the personal biography of Lucrecia and her impersonal story inside the city of São Geraldo. The protagonist’s way of looking at the world around is transformed, molded or dissolved by the city that imposes its material visible reality over the biographic reality. Individual life is engulfed by “a story much greater than her own” (Lispector 2019, 199) and the “siege” of the city is the protagonist’s failed attempt to belong to the realm of things and thus to the history of the city. The protagonist also experiences the anxiety associated with the projection of history as a material, spatial and unbreakable totality, the city of São Geraldo being compared with a fortress: “the hardness of things was the girl’s most clipped way of seeing. From the impossibility of overcoming that resistance was emerging, in green fruit, the tang of firm things over which was blowing with heroism that civic wind that makes flags flutter! The city was an unconquerable fortress.” (43) There is also a complex episode in which Lucrecia envisions building a city in the prairie, dismantling spatial totality and the linguistic annexation of reality. What she really envisions in this dream of rebuilding São Geraldo is “to recognize, beneath the sedimentation, the true name of things.” (161) Thus, the only way of escaping from that “fortress” is by re-inventing language as a site of construction in which every layer of meaning can be observed in its uprootedness. Lucrecia’s individual life, scattered inside an anarchetypal vision of things or an anti-biographical visuality of experience, cannot become a shared reality, because reality is, in fact, a totalizing image: “he was reality: a silent young man tucked into a raincoat.” (191)

Marilia Librandi interprets the indirectness of Lispector’s writing using the notion of “writing by ear,” which interestingly separates the Western voice-centered (and subject-centered) conception about writing from the idea of *listening* in writing. Listening becomes a keyword for different views that link Lispector’s writing to concepts like vibration, resonance or the ethical relation to marginality. Hearing as resonance is understood as “the foundation of all senses” (Librandi 2018, 14) and the subject becomes a “diapason-subject” (14) which, in Jean-Luc Nancy’s conceptualization, overturns the ideas of teleology or direct reference in favor of the notion of “echo” that best describes the subject’s relation to itself. “Writing by ear” in Brazilian literature also adds new

nuances in respect to the translatability or untranslatability of the self inside the broader “local-regional-world-planetary” system: “The notion of Writing by Ear aims, though, to contribute to «the existence of multiple affiliations», based specifically on listening, i.e., on a pre-language zone of murmurs and rumours, whispers and jokes, tricksters’ puns, witticism, translations and mistranslations populating the contact zone between local-regional-world-planetary, as well as animal-human-earth relationships.” (24) We could add that, by focusing on hearing rather than on seeing or speaking, this notion also reflects the anti-textuality of Lispector’s writing, which dismantles the symbolic structure of the modern public sphere, meaning “the ability to stand for, substitute for, speak in the people’s name.” (Landes 1998, 154) The act of writing, understood in light of “writing by ear”, becomes the counter-part of the public sphere as it distances itself from textuality and the power of reference. “Writing by ear” substitutes the possibility of ‘speaking in the name of’ with the ethical necessity of ‘listening to’ as a continuous, uninterrupted inherent logic of writing. The meaning-making process is no longer built only on the equation of representation, but also on the fragile ‘pillars’ of incomplete internalization, meaning the resonant production of listening/hearing. Clarice Lispector’s protagonist, Lucrecia, places herself “at the écoute of” the “resounding silence” (Librandi 2018, 68) of the city, with its oblivious gears and durations. The listening produced by her writing grants a special place to objects, things and to spaces of duration: “among the ruins she saw the lizard running off and kicking up dust!” (Lispector 2019, 101) As Librandi notices, Lispector’s writing seeks to remove names (instead of giving names or finding ‘the right words’) in order “to escape the system of amputation.” (87) We could argue that the appeal to silence, which also implies moving “beyond the system of interior speech” (91), might be regarded as a decolonial gesture that seeks a way of turning to the world through an unstable, floating listening center that creates another image of the world as a resounding, unfinished project of totality. It is worth noting that, through the term “writing by ear”, Librandi proposes a reconsideration of “the ideology and power attributed to literacy,” (6) by underlining creation/production as reception and vice-versa, in the context of “the robust oral and aural culture of Brazil.” (7) Maria Librandi’s “echopoetics” (9) is understood in relation to “a planetary sense of writing” (19) that sheds light on the “omnivorous and ever-attentive” (19) relation between the Global South and Europe.

We understand the “Global South” as a concept that cannot be narrowed down to a mere geographical distinction between developed countries and the developing world. As Russell West-Pavlov suggests, “the «Global South» does not give us access to «subalterns» who cannot speak, so much as it opens up spaces in which speech can be reinvented.” (West-Pavlov 2018, 8) I believe that

this term can be applied to conduct an interpretation of Lispector's novel from the vantage point of the *caesura* that this concept implies. On the one hand, we have a writer from the Latin-American cultural space with Ukrainian and Jewish roots who temporarily lived in Europe as well. The ways in which her writing indirectly depicts notions of belonging and errantry will help us uncover the hybridization of cultural identification and heritage as *poiesis*. On the other hand, we need to acknowledge the fracture related to the insular dimension of being a woman-writer in a male-dominant sphere of undertakings, not just because it suits a feminist interpretation, but also because it reflects the complex relation between language and the irreconciliation inherent in a feminine "sense of being." (Fitz 2001, 16) It is important to look at these distinctions not only from the dichotomous perspective they open up, but also from the angle of ambiguous relations and residual effects of interconnection and meaning they generate. As Dilip M. Menon suggests, "what ideas like the Global South do is to give pause to conceptions of untrammelled mobility and fluidity" by acknowledging the "multiple inheritances of colonialism, the Cold War, and the unipolar present." (Menon 2018, 34) This means that the notion of the Global South helps us resist the crystallization of connections, routes of exchange and "imagined affinities" (35) into determinate, already mapped spaces of history. The relation between Euro-America and the Global South could be regarded as an unsettled, dynamic and unfinished web of inter-determinations and indeterminacy that we can only bear witness to by paying attention to what Dilip M. Menon calls "maps of affinity" (39) and complex geographies of affect that could "reflect the simultaneity of affiliation with community, nation and the world, and also the fact that identities are conjunctural and oscillate between narrower and wider imaginings." (40) In order to understand how this multilayered sense of affiliation gets to be individually articulated, we might have to consider the role of imagination, understood as "a property of collectives." (Appadurai 1996, 8) Arjun Appadurai sees imagination as an underlying source of social change and as a repertoire of agency in an interconnected globalized world, inside which "communities of sentiment" are being formed. The "work of the imagination" (4) is not solely regarded in its emancipatory light, but also perceived as a "space of contestation in which individuals or groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern" (4) On the one hand, Menon's concept of "imagined affinities" could be understood in a vertical way, encompassing the idea of an intersectionality of heritages and unexplored cultural roots of meanings and symbolic configurations at the margins of historical centralities. On the other hand, Appadurai's conceptualization of "the work of the imagination" might be viewed horizontally, as a dynamic movement of cultural mediation at the level of the global stage on which "migratory audiences" (4) and locally bound identities coexist in a shared

space of projection and contextualization. Both of these conceptualizations draw on Édouard Glissant's "poetics of Relation" that captures the "fluctuating complexity of the world" in its confrontation between the particular and totality, on the grounds of an open relatedness that seizes "the reality of archipelagos" and the diffraction inside processes of *creolization*. (Glissant 1997, 34) As John E. Drabinski underlines in the *Preface* of the book he dedicates to Glissant, "creolization makes *créolité* possible," (Drabinski 2019, xi) understood as a creative world-making process that begins in the abyss of historical trauma, insularity or loss. This creative world-making process rests on a fecundity of loss and mixture, bearing witness to the global dynamics through the rhizomatic and productive vocabularies of marginality. "Thinking in ruins" or "thinking at the shoreline" (x) become expressions of a geography of the globe that seeks to encompass unity and disunity in the complex formulation and re-formulation of insularity and continuity. *Pensée archipelique* opposes the rationality, reification and precision of *pensée continentale*, drawing attention to the floating anxieties that keep theoretical thought ashore, in an attempt to articulate *place* as a site of breaks and compositions.

This tension between reification and *place* as a site of fractures and morphisms is at play in Clarice Lispector's writing, mostly in *The Besieged City*, which constructs "the story of an empty life" (Lispector 2019, 199) reflecting progress in its asynchronicity with the city. The condition of being "blind in the blind city" (191) and living "from a story much greater than her own" (199) contains the intuition of insularity that makes room for the practice of archipelagic thinking. Through a complex "work of the imagination," Lispector's main character in this novel tries to accommodate new visions of the global inside perceptions of newly aligned local urban landscapes: "Cars, with invisible drivers, were sliding in the water and suddenly changing direction, you couldn't say why. São Geraldo had lost any purpose and was now functioning all by itself. (...) In São Geraldo a daily life had been born that no outsider would notice. It was raining and times were bad, it was a full-on crisis." (136) The tension between the global and the local is seen in terms of a gaze or a way of looking that is implanted into a wider perspective that has no access to the opaque, autonomous life of the city that it contains. The act of observing and looking at the city is embedded inside a history of the visible that is underlined by the unregistered "poetics of Relation" inside which urban sediments relate to an indirectly revealed totality: "Individual life? The dangerous thing is that each person was dealing with centuries." (165) or "you couldn't be sure if a city had been made for the people or the people for the city." (49) These "imagined affinities" trying to seize correspondences between the local and the global or between the city and individual perception point towards an impossible sense

of legibility that burdens the subjective perception of Lucrecia. She cannot read into "the wider life of the world" through some underlying sense of solidarity or newly deciphered order. Lucrecia cannot find a space of emancipation in the translatability of the world around her as she does not hold any totalizing interpretations or opinions about inner or outer experiences. The meta-narratives of a "geography of reason" (Drabinski 1019, xiv) are replaced (in this novel) by a sense of *opaqueness*, which, according to Drabinski, characterizes "the unbridgeable difference at the heart of traumatized subjectivity." (29) Although seemingly wanting to tell a story from the perspective of a woman dwelling in "her own stupidity," (Lispector 2019, 103) Lispector is very much aware of the intricate forms of contact that scaffold thinking on the brink of catastrophe. In *The Besieged City*, Lispector indirectly problematizes late modernity's cultural transition by constructing the unreflective gaze of a woman that opposes to the stories of history the mere act of looking at things from an imaginary drawn shoreline of inadequacy.

In conclusion, the Western eagerness to assume the world, made possible by "the ideal of transparent universality," (Drabinski 2019, 13) is upended by the process of "thinking at the shoreline" which informs Lispector's novel about a woman who ostensibly cannot "think" because she just gazes at the world around. Lispector's "writing by ear" ultimately proves that *poesis* withstands discursive *thinking* and that opacity resists alongside discourses of progress, in an indirect "struggle that overcomes colonial repetition." (11) This unreflective geography of the feminine gaze as a construction that mirrors the non-subjectivized experience of the "wider world" is an attempt at short-circuiting the projection of the global inside the memory of a city. To some extent, Lucretia identifies with the city, becoming São Geraldo in the pursuit of registering the visible life of the city. Her perception of the urban life is the memory of the city with its houses "strolling beneath telegraph wires," (Lispector 2019, 37) its "hard, finished streets" (35) and its "plans for building a bridge." (16) In Clarice Lispector's novel, the memory of the city is made up from these traces of visibility and images that can only become visible and legible in the light of global dynamics, just as Lucrecia becomes visible to herself inside the view of the men's gaze: "At this opportune moment in which people were living, each time something was seen-new extensions would emerge, and one more meaning would be created: that was the hardly usable life of Lucrecia Neves. And this was São Geraldo, whose future History, as in the memory of a buried city, would be just the history of what had been seen." (16) Thus, *place* becomes a site of visibility bearing the hallmarks of urban landscapes, whilst the perception of the subject, as a consequence, floats around this 'continental', thinkable visible, becoming residual inside global dynamics. Lispector's main character in this

novel is an expression of archipelagic thinking from the margins of progress or from the reversed vantage point of a city that had left the 'unshaped', invisible inner world of Lucrecia behind. *Place* is the space inside which the female character experiences both a form of sedimentation and of self-break, as the industrialized city of São Geraldo expands into the projection of a world that does not need a witness, but a listener.

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GLOBAL THREADS, UNVEILING UNEVENNESS: CONTEMPORARY MAXIMALIST PROJECTS INTERROGATING CULTURAL HYBRIDISATION AND MARGINALITY

Alex VĂSIEȘ¹

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ABSTRACT. *Global Threads, Unveiling Unevenness: Contemporary Maximalist Projects Interrogating Cultural Hybridisation and Marginality.* Within a frame that emphasizes the tension between the global and the local, this paper aims to investigate the ways in which complex narratives that incorporate the tropes of migration, periphery, and marginality, amongst others, can bring to light aspects of unevenness and cultural and formal hybridisation. Works like Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, or Bernardine Evaristo’s *Girl, Woman, Other* employ distinct maximalist modes of inquiry (Nick Levey) to question topics related to inequality, cultural relevance, or representational biases, in a type of novel about which James Wood claimed that it “suffered from an excess of storytelling and an almost paranoid preoccupation with linking up their many subplots in a web of forced meaning.” What stands at the core of this article is precisely this impulse to *force* a meaning which seems most frequently disrupted by an anarchetypal propensity to renegotiate a “rhetoric of inclusivity” (Franco Moretti) through which the maximalist author tries to exhaustively encompass the whole world (Levey). By selecting a corpus of maximalist novels to illustrate their evolution from the second half of the 20th century until more recent works, such as Evaristo’s, this paper investigates the shift through which these narratives have started to factor margins in, differently and more frequently than in the beginnings of this literary form.

Keywords: *Maximalist Novels; Hybridisation; Migration; Periphery; Marginality; Anarchetype; Postmodernism.*

¹ Alex VĂSIEȘ (Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, alexvasies@gmail.com) is a PhD student in Comparative Literature, working on a thesis about maximalist narratives in the second half of the 20th century. He has published several academic articles on the topic, as well as three collections of poetry. He has translated more than a dozen works of fiction (Chuck Palahniuk, Tom Hanks, Graeme Macrae Burnet, among others), literary theory (Fredric Jameson and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson) and poetry (Alice Notley). Email: alexandru.vasies@ubbcluj.ro.

REZUMAT. Fire globale, dezvăluind inegalitatea: Proiecte maximaliste contemporane care interoghează hibriditatea culturală și marginalitatea.

Într-un cadru care evidențiază tensiunea dintre global și local, acest text își propune să investigheze modurile în care anumite narațiuni complexe care încorporează figurile migrației, periferiei și marginalității, printre altele, pot pune în lumină aspecte legate de inegalitate și de hibridizarea culturală și formală. Cărți precum *Dinți albi* de Zadie Smith, *Ministerul fericirii supreme* de Arundhati Roy sau *Fată, femeie, alta* de Bernardine Evaristo folosesc moduri de investigare maximaliste specifice (Nick Levey) pentru a aduce în discuție subiecte legate de inegalitate, relevanță culturală sau biasuri de reprezentare, într-un tip de roman despre care James Wood susținea că „suferă de un exces al povestirii și de o preocupare aproape paranoică de a lega numeroasele intrigi secundare într-o rețea de sens forțat”. Miza principală a acestui articol vizează tocmai acest impuls de a *forța* un sens care pare cel mai frecvent perturbat de o tendință anarhetică de a renegocia o „retorică a incluziunii” (Franco Moretti) prin care autorul maximalist încearcă să cuprindă într-un mod exhaustiv întreaga lume (Levey). Selectând un corpus de romane maximaliste cu scopul de a ilustra evoluția lor din a doua jumătate a secolului XX până la opere mai recente, precum cea a lui Evaristo, această lucrare investighează schimbarea prin care aceste narațiuni au început să țină cont de margini într-un mod diferit și mai frecvent decât la începuturile acestei forme literare.

Cuvinte-cheie: Romane maximaliste; Hibridizare; Migrație; Marginalitate; Anarhetip; Postmodernism.

Introduction

Considering the contemporary interest and focus on migration, periphery, and marginality, increasingly noticeable in the field of literature, certain types of texts that were hitherto discussed precisely by virtue of their aesthetic complexity or innovation can no longer be analysed solely from the perspective of their aesthetic dimension. Theorised as experimental approaches, which nevertheless had to lay claim to a sufficiently established and authorised literary tradition, maximalist narratives published starting from the second half of the 20th century were legitimised as a form capable of responding to postmodern historical conditions. With a focus on their artistic mastery, these works have seldom been put in the context of their “structure of positionality” (Bhabha 1994, 53), of their place within a world-system in which they are subjected to questions of inequality, cultural relevance, or representational biases.

The tradition and theoretical frameworks of these narratives are mainly occupied by white male authors whose ambitious projects are more often than not analysed either through the lenses of their role in defining a nation through aesthetic or linguistic means (as can be observed in the case of the encyclopedic novel proposed by Edward Mendelson in 1976), or authors trying to fulfil different versions of artistic nationalistic ideals, as in the case of the perpetual pursuit of “the Great American Novel” (Buell, 2014). The common denominator of interpretative models such as Mendelson’s and more recent ones that concentrate on the dimension and the complexity of a literary work is not related only to the intricacies of a postmodern novel. What the systems novels (LeClair 1989), the mega-novels (Karl 1983), or the maximalist novels (Ercolino 2014)—to name just three more recent configurations that approach this type of expansive postmodern narrative—and Mendelson’s encyclopedic novel also have in common is a notable lack of fiction authored by women. As an example, Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000) stands as the solitary work by a female author among the seven primary texts listed by Stefano Ercolino in his efforts to define the maximalist novel.

This gender and racial disparity within the realm of expansive postmodern narratives raises important questions about representation and inclusivity. The critical examination of these literary traditions must extend beyond the exploration of aesthetic and linguistic innovations to address issues of gender and race, thereby enriching the critical discourse and providing a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse voices contributing to the contemporary literary landscape. Recognizing the absence of female perspectives in the discussion of maximalist narratives becomes crucial for fostering a more inclusive and equitable appreciation of the complexities inherent in these works. Building upon Warwick Research Collective’s seminal *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Literature of World-Literature* (2015), the present text aims to investigate the specific maximalist modes of inquiry (Levey 2017) employed by three female authors of colour in order to bring to light aspects of unevenness and cultural and formal hybridisation.

Before I proceed with the detailed presentation and analysis of the three novels at hand, it is imperative to embark on a brief exploration of maximalist fiction crafted by male authors. This exploration will specifically focus on those works that hold pivotal positions within a canon of maximalism that has taken shape during the last decades, shedding light on the ways in which this particular subset of literary expression was analysed in order to formulate distinct solutions for a form of fiction that constitutes itself according to an “aesthetics of difficulty.” This preliminary investigation aims to provide a contextual foundation, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the novels under consideration and their place within the broader landscape of maximalist fiction.

Relative predecessors

First, it can be stated without any hesitation that Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) serves as the foundational text for all subsequent theoretical developments concerning maximalist novels. In the previously mentioned text, attempting to delineate the characteristics of an "encyclopedic narrative", Mendelson underscores the "special and definable place" that these narratives "occupy in their national cultures" (1267). Positioned at the culmination of a lineage that commences with Dante's *Commedia*—encompassing Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Goethe's *Faust*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, Joyce's *Ulysses*—Pynchon's work demonstrates an "international scope" that deliberately disregards national boundaries. In Mendelson's view, Pynchon is the encyclopedist of the emerging international culture, surpassing the ingrained limitations specific to national cultural contexts (1271-2). Mendelson's list of titles notably lacks contributions from female authors, and the theorist addresses gender-related issues only at a single point in the discussion.

Discussing the encyclopedic impulse and the structuring of encyclopedic information, Mendelson employs the dichotomy between analytic and synthetic modes. Within this framework, he draws a distinct connection between certain qualities and gender archetypes. The analytic approach, characterized by a systematic dissection and examination of components, is linked to archetypally masculine traits. On the other hand, he associates the synthetic dimension, marked by a holistic and integrative approach, with archetypally feminine characteristics. This dichotomous perspective provides a lens through which he examines how gendered perceptions influence the conceptualization and organization of encyclopedic knowledge. In the same paragraph, the critic highlights a "law of encyclopedic form" asserting that "encyclopedic narratives find it exceptionally difficult to integrate their women characters at any level more quotidian or human than the levels of archetype and myth" (1272). This observation indicates not only the lack of female authors or the challenge of incorporating female characters, but also the pervasive generalisation imposed upon women in these "imperial works." These works, according to Mendelson, "assert the claims of a grander imperium than love or the family"—nevertheless normative—revealing a fundamental articulation of this literary object as "strain[ing] outward from the brief moments of personal love toward the wider expanses of national and mythical history" (1272-3).

As Nick Levey shows, the prominence of American authors in relation to the maximalist production of fiction "is perhaps also explainable by the fact that America is the symbolic homeland for the excesses of material and informational consumption that typify standard accounts of the postwar world"

(21). In the realm of American maximalist literature, Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* stands as an unparalleled benchmark, rivalled, perhaps, only by the delayed reevaluation of William Gaddis's *The Recognitions* (1955), often regarded as a precursor not only for Pynchon but also for Davis Foster Wallace and other writers who published after the 1990s. In the 1980s and 1990s, against the backdrop of a "systemic distrust" regarding the "centripetal forces that give national imaginaries continuity and contour as ideological fictions" (Buell 2014, 15), the very idea of an American literature was challenged, thus questioning the established norms of the traditional narrative structures that had long defined American literary identity. In response to this intellectual and creative upheaval, novel forms began to surface, expanding the boundaries of literary expression. Within this transformative landscape, two noteworthy examples stand out, each contributing to the diversification and redefinition of American literature during this period. As with Mendelson, Pynchon also serves as the "gold standard" for Buell, and is similarly regarded as such by Ercolino, LeClair, or Levey (referring specifically to the theorists mentioned earlier). However, what the last three have in common is a shift in emphasis to the more recent maximalist novels written by Don DeLillo and David Foster Wallace.

Spanning half a century of American history, the non-linear narrative of *Underworld* (1997) revolves around Nick Shay, the director of a waste management firm and a late 20th-century citizen deeply fixated on a baseball game from half a century earlier. Amidst the intricate tapestry of interconnected epic threads, Nick Shay grapples with the complexities of an unhappy marriage, embarks on the reconstruction of his genealogy, and questions the nature of his identity, juxtaposing it with his national identity, reminiscent of a modern Leopold Bloom (Morley 2006). In a departure from his predecessors who often framed the quest for identity within grand narratives aimed at restoring national grandeur, DeLillo introduces an *underhistory* (O'Donnell 2000, 156). *Underworld* shifts its focus to the nuances of everyday life and seemingly mundane narratives, diverging from the grand narrative that traditionally shapes America in its geopolitical struggles, particularly against the backdrop of the Cold War.

The representation of official history in the novel becomes only indirectly symptomatic of the actions and events unfolding. A character within the novel explicitly articulates this theme: "You can never underestimate the willingness of the state to act out its own massive fantasies" (1997, 421). The characters in DeLillo's narrative find themselves bewildered by the intricate geopolitical scenarios and critical events, such as the Soviet thermonuclear experiments, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Vietnam War (Nagano 2010, 241-256). It is precisely this deviation from a functional or authorized historical framework, the disruption of conventional narratives and the necessity of a reassessment of the impact of ideology and history on the shaping of a nation's

collective or partial consciousness that legitimizes DeLillo's "counterhistory" (DeLillo quoted in Ercolino 2014, 82), making it critical in the evolution of further maximalist projects.

David Foster Wallace distinguishes himself from his predecessors² by projecting the action from *Infinite Jest* (1996) into a dystopian future where the United States of America, Canada, and Mexico coalesce into a North American super-nation named O.N.A.N (Organization of North American Nations). The narrative primarily revolves around a junior tennis academy, reflecting Wallace's autobiographical connection as a former junior tennis player, and a rehabilitation centre for substance abusers. *Infinite Jest* weaves together four main narratives, creating a challenging fictional landscape in which the identification of a dominant thread becomes a difficult quest, indicative of the novel's rhizomatic structure.

The first narrative introduces a group of radicals from Quebec ("The Wheelchair Assassins") planning a coup d'état. The second narrative focuses on Boston residents undergoing recovery at the Ennet Clinic due to drug and alcohol abuse. The third narrative immerses readers in the competitive and idiosyncratic environment of a tennis academy run by James and Avril Incandenza, while the fourth narrative centres on the Incandenza family, particularly the youngest son, Hal, who can be considered, albeit vaguely, as the novel's main character. These threads intertwine through a film titled "Infinite Jest," the creation of James Incandenza. The film possesses an enchanting allure that leads viewers to lose interest in all other aspects of life, eventually culminating in fatal consequences. This convergence of storylines, unified by the enigmatic film, construct a multifaceted novelistic exploration of characters, themes, and of the profound impact of artistic creation on the human psyche. The novel's monstrousness lies in its expansive size and its exploration of a dystopian universe characterized by anomalies. While *Infinite Jest* satirizes consumerist society and the film industry, Wallace's problematization introduces the concept of an "apocalypse by absorption" (Fest 2012, 291). The novel contends that infinite accumulation is essentially impossible, providing a unique lens through which the American author challenges prevailing notions of commodification

² I use the term "predecessors", even though *Underworld* (1997) was published after *Infinite Jest* (1996), as is well known that the relationship between the two authors involved a type of master-disciple dimension. The two corresponded regularly, and DFW referred to DeLillo as a master, the former's manuscript archive proving the meticulousness with which he read and annotated his books. See G. Foster, "A Deep Insider's Elegiac Tribute: The Work of Don DeLillo in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*", *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature*, 2016, and D. T. Max, "Final Destination" in *The New Yorker*, June 11 & 18, 2007. Moreover, at the time of the publication of *Infinite Jest*, David Foster Wallace's second book, DeLillo had already published eleven novels, none of them comparable in ambition and achievement to *Underworld*.

and abnormal expansion specific to late capitalism, through which an artefact can end up devouring its viewers.

Drawing from the examples briefly addressed above, I would like to assert that I consider maximalist narratives to represent the literary form which best illustrates the cultural and literary landscape of late capitalism. Before moving on to the three novels that represent the main objects of inquiry for this text, I would like to emphasize, once again, that some of the most important aspects of maximalism involve a formal flexibility, a deviation from structural norms which may sometimes be framed as anarchetypal, corresponding to the “decentred and multiple subject of the contemporary world” (Braga 2006, 254). In what follows, I try to correlate the maximalist form of the novel to a “peculiar plasticity and hybridity of the novel form [that] enables it to incorporate not only multiple literary levels, genres and modes, but also other non-literary and archaic cultural forms . . . in order to register a bifurcated or ruptured sensorium of the space-time of the (semi-)periphery” (WReC 2015, 16).

The centre and the process of double peripheralization

Rather than setting up a dichotomy where Zadie Smith, Arundhati Roy, and Bernardine Evaristo are positioned as direct counterparts to DeLillo, Wallace, and Pynchon, my intention is to establish a sense of contiguity within the realm of maximalist productions. The works of these authors should not be viewed as inherently antithetical or in conflict. Nevertheless, a specific symmetry is present in my selection, and I will briefly elucidate this choice with the aim of providing a justification that extends beyond personal preference.

First of all, my selection is unequivocally grounded in gender considerations. As previously noted, the body of maximalist novels traditionally scrutinised in theoretical discussions predominantly consists of works written by men. Consequently, considering this gender disparity, it is imperative to address this imbalance comprehensively. Acknowledging this disproportion extends beyond a mere brief mention; it necessitates active participation in more extensive dialogues aimed at redressing and rectifying this inequality.

Secondly, the authors I have chosen in order to investigate the ways in which complex narratives can bring to light aspects of unevenness and hybridisation do this by virtue of their own racial positionality. From the standpoint (Harding 1986) of their racial identity, all three authors can provide nuanced portrayals of social, cultural, and artistic contexts that encompass themes of migration, periphery, and marginality. In this regard, their works serve as important sources of insights into the complex intersections of race, offering narratives that explore the intricacies of identity, displacement, and the dynamic interplay between core and periphery within the contemporary world-system.

Furthermore, I deliberately selected three authors who can be perceived as equivalents to the three discussed maximalist male authors, particularly concerning the centrality of the literary culture in which they are immersed. It is unnecessary to emphasize the significance of both the American literary scene and market, or the pivotal role played by British literary institutions. The prominence of these cultural contexts is self-evident, and the chosen authors operate within these influential spheres, contributing to and engaging with two literary landscapes that hold immense sway over contemporary discourse and readership.

Nevertheless, viewed through the lens of the combined and uneven development theory, the three female authors of colour whom I have selected might embody a process akin to what is referred to as “peripheralization.” This outcome arises from their gender and racial identity within a literary field and sub-domain—specifically the maximalist canon—largely dominated by male figures. Considering that

some of the most significant literature from the core countries emanates from the semi-peripheries or peripheries of those countries: marginalised class, ethnic or regional positions . . . the ‘unevenness’ characteristic of (semi-)peripheral literature will also be discernible in literature from the core formations that is nonetheless ‘peripheralised’ by its relatively disprivileged (or provincial) location within the highly mobile and scalar ‘centre’. For of course the unfolding of combined and uneven development produces unevenness throughout the world capitalist system, and not merely across the divide represented by the international division of labour. (WReC 2015, 55-57)

Taking this into consideration, it is imperative to recognize that Zadie Smith, Arundhati Roy, and Bernardine Evaristo all write in English, the most widely spoken language globally. Additionally, they enjoy the privileges afforded by one of the most robust and performant literary systems worldwide. This linguistic and literary context amplifies their reach, enabling their narratives to transcend geographical boundaries and resonate with a diverse and expansive readership, making them relevant and intriguing participants within “a literature that variously registers this combined unevenness in both its form and its content to reveal itself as, properly speaking, world-literature” (49), even more so as they undergo a process of double peripheralization described above.³

³ It might be interesting to explore the possibility of maximalist novels undergoing a parallel process of peripheralization due to their intricate and demanding form, given the constant shrinkage of attention span (Bradbury 2016). On the other hand, given the fact that Amy Rhodes, the head of marketing for the company that first published *Infinite Jest*, “stated that the publicity campaign of the novel was orchestrated precisely around its imposing dimension, promoted as a clear sign of its importance” (Frank Bruni quoted in Ercolino, 22), it would be equally entertaining to question the dynamics of a literary market that affords such a strategy.

How do these three works of fiction engage with the margins? In what manner do their modes of representation distance themselves from maximalist works written by men, as illustrated earlier? How do they interrogate forms of cultural hybridisation and how does their structure (or the destitution of traditional structure) register the combined unevenness at the margins and peripheries of the world-system, even while activating at the core of a performant literary system?

Frames of reference

Even though these works unfold with intricacy and depth that resist facile summarization, I will try to offer a description for each of them, emphasizing the most important aspects in each case. The aim is to illustrate the shift through which these narratives have started to factor margins in and to speculate on the instances of (semi-)periphery more frequently than in the beginnings of the maximalist form.

In 2000, as a recent undergraduate at Cambridge University, Zadie Smith published her debut novel, *White Teeth*, an intricately crafted work of fiction that explores the complexities of three distinct cultures and follows the interconnected stories of three families across three generations. The Iqbals, Samad and Alsana, are Bangladeshi immigrants, parents of twin sons Millat and Magid. The Joneses, an English-West Indian family with one daughter, are linked to them through the friendship that the male figures from each family (the aforementioned Samad and Archie Jones) established while fighting together in the Second World War. The Chalfens constitute the third family in the narrative—white Londoners, intellectuals, a subtle counterpart for the previous two families. Notably, their eldest son is enrolled in the same state school attended by the children of the Iqbals and the Joneses.

In what was described as a “multicultural mosaic where Englishness is dislocated and even close to complete erasure” (Cuder-Domínguez 2004, 183), Smith depicts a “hybrid Commonwealth” (Gilroy 2001, 60), where the intersecting lives and contradictions of the characters mirror a myriad of themes, including history, racism, imperialism, generational dynamics, legacies of Empire, genetic manipulation, and the dynamics of contemporary urban spaces (McCallum qtd in Ashcroft et al 2012, 485-6). *White Teeth* sold more than 2 million copies worldwide and garnered enthusiastic reviews, earning several prestigious literary awards, notably the *Guardian* First Book Award and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction.

Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Fiction* (2017a) represents a different type of work in an author’s literary trajectory. Considering the various

ways in which cultural forms, particularly the novel, can be employed or shaped in terms of expectations and reception, it is worth mentioning the significance these titles hold within each author's career. This exploration not only sheds light on the authors' creative evolution, but also enhances our understanding of the positions these works occupy within their broader literary journeys. If, as we have seen, *White Teeth* is a debut novel that succeeds in establishing an author still highly relevant after more than 20 years, *TMOUH* represents the next step after this sort of recognition. During a 20-year hiatus in literary fiction, Arundhati Roy published more than 15 works of non-fiction on politics and culture, becoming one of the most relevant voices addressing problems related to India (the Kashmir separatist movement, the Indian government's nuclear policies).

Roy's first novel, *The God of Small Things*, won the Booker Prize in 1997 and was ranked as one of the most influential Asian novels. Set against the backdrop of social and political upheaval in post-colonial India, the novel delves into themes of caste discrimination, societal expectations, and the profound impact of historical events on individual lives. Roy's non-linear prose and oscillations between the past and the present contribute to the novel's depth and complexity. Following the same non-linear structure, but also amplifying the formal oscillation that interlaces various characters and storylines across different regions of India, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* navigates through decades of political and social upheaval, with the central focus on Anjum, a transgender woman, and the eclectic group of individuals she encounters in a graveyard that becomes her unconventional home. After getting familiar with Anjum and the fight she is waging against heteronormativity, her plot is abandoned, and the second part of the novel (interestingly enough, the two parts equate with three voices that tell the story, thus setting up the first, and most obvious, formal asymmetry of this work) explores the story of Tiloottama, an architect loved by three men, a possible alter-ego of Roy herself. "The multi-focal narrative", in which Roy mixes and includes gender identities and secret agents, outcasts and postcolonial sensitive topics, is "loosely tied together by a foundling" (Iyer 2018, 166).

Finally, *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) is Bernardine Evaristo's eighth novel and arguably her most distinguished work to date. Following a cast of twelve female characters across more than a century, the "vigorous, polyphonic, free-flowing" (Murphy 2019) work of fiction represents Evaristo's absolute literary outbreak, as the co-winner of the 2019 Booker Prize, alongside Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments*. The novel does not follow the basic typographical rules of its genre, that is Evaristo chooses to explore the intersectional experiences of her characters without capital letters, without full stops, in lines of different lengths that set a reading pace contrasting the one that would be required in the case

of a work of literature involving various racial, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as reflecting the complexity of contemporary British society.

The primary characters (those after which the chapters of the book were named) are mostly black British women, navigating the British patriarchal society and somehow connected (not only symbolically but also physically) by *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, the latest production of Amma (a lesbian socialist playwright). The trajectory of each character is as diverse as it gets, including racist positions (such as Penelope's), harmful love relationships, or migration experiences that weave through intergenerational stories, contributing to a narrative deliberately avoiding any "overarching story" (Frazer-Carroll, 2019).

The refinement of realism

As previously asserted and as the concise introductions to the three titles which stand at the heart of this text show, it is noteworthy that these works have not only swiftly gained prominence but have also consolidated their positions at the very core of the world literary system. In my perspective, these novels represent more than individual successes; they epitomize a distinctive and pertinent paradigm for maximalist writing in the post-2000s era. The ascent of these works to literary eminence not only attests to their individual artistic merits, but also signifies a broader cultural and literary shift. By delving into the nuanced complexities of their narratives and thematic explorations, these novels not only captivate readers but also leave an indelible mark on the evolving literary landscape, contributing to the ongoing discourse surrounding maximalist literature in the 21st century.

Yet, reinforcing the structure of their intersectional identities, I have previously alluded to the potential (semi-)peripheralization that these authors might be subjected to. This aspect calls for a deeper exploration into the dynamics of how their unique positionalities, marked by intersecting factors such as race and gender, could influence their reception within literary circles. However, my main interest here is to address the ways in which

the narratives of (semi-)peripheral authors who hew quite closely to the line of the dominant realist traditions display irrealist or catachrestic features when registering the temporal and spatial dislocations and the abrupt juxtapositions of different modes of life engendered by imperial conquest, or the violent reorganisation of social relations engendered by cyclical crisis. (WRec 2015, 72)

This notion of "irrealist aesthetics" can be framed not as an indication of a devaluation or "depreciation" of realism, but rather as a nuanced evolution or refinement of it. This reinterpretation occurs within the specific context of

combined and uneven development, where the conventional boundaries and structures of realism are reexamined and adapted to address the complexities inherent in this dynamic and multifaceted world of hybridity and excess of narratives (WRec 2015, 70).

Perhaps the more resonant label that was applied to Smith and other novelists that began publishing their works at the cusp of the new millennium was that of “hysterical realists” (Wood 2000). The narratives, *White Teeth* included, are characterized by their extensive and meticulously detailed descriptions, intricate plot structures, and are populated by a considerable number of characters (all of which might seem specific to classic realism). However, as “the stories and substories sprout on every page . . . in the pursuit of vitality at all costs” (Wood 2004, 178 qtd in Ercolino 2014, 158), these works become both exhaustive and lengthy, and the realist conventions are weakened. Another element that might contribute to this “realism plus” (Pope 2015, 169) in *White Teeth* is the complex timeline that pervades the seventies and the eighties, while also including events from 1857 and 1945. The sense of irreality could thus be prompted by this “endless web of meaning” (Wood 2000, 3) that is randomized through a peculiar postmodern method in “fortuitous encounters, lucky escapes, accidents, coincidences, unforeseen circumstances, fatalism, tensions between those who believe themselves pre-saved and other the unsaved.” (Pope 170).

“‘Irrealism’ should not be opposed to realism, but rather seen as the critical, rather than conformist, impulse at its heart,” (Menozzi 2018, 7) is a definition that could very adequately be applied to *White Teeth*. The quoted fragment, though, can be found in a text that questions the realism in Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Motivated by an incessant desire to elucidate India to non-Indian audiences, authors writing in English such as Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Jhumpa Lahiri may inadvertently engage in a process of anglicization and homogenization, says Meenakshi Mukherjee, when talking about “an anxiety of Indianness” (2000). Perhaps tributary to her political activity in the twenty years between the two novels, Arundhati Roy “straddles the boundaries between fiction and polemical prose . . . the novel’s sprawling form is not failure of craft but a deliberate aesthetic choice which reflects the author’s engagement with the challenges of telling a story of the nation from multiple minoritarian perspectives” (Iyer 166). “How does one narrate a fragmenting nation?” asks Iyer in the same text, a pertinent question that might seem directed against a synthetic realism of the type defined by György Lukács in his *Studies in European Realism* (1950).

Nevertheless, Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* best illustrates what Filippo Menozzi describes as a process of “reframing realism”, going against the idea that “reality is linear, coherent, and easily captured by documentary representation” (Menozzi 3). The “epic scale of what is really going

on” (Roy 2009, xi-xii) is not a matter of documentation or collecting facts with “factual precision,” but has instead more in common with the “fighting realisms’ whose investment is not merely in mapping present realities but in the revelation of possible futures and emergent social orders” (WRec 77). It is interesting to speculate on the fact that this reframed realism—Menozzi goes further in defining an “aesthetic of the inconsolable” (7)—might perhaps be amplified by a chronological shuffling that Roy employs even from the very beginning of the book. I am here referring not only to the numerous interruptions and digressions in Tilottama’s story narrated by Biplab Das in the second part of the novel, but also to a mechanism of reversal which enables the reader to see the effect before the cause, in what I would audaciously interpret as that Lukácsian “concealed totality of life” (2003, 60) in a postcolonial context.

Regarding Evaristo’s *Girl, Woman, Other*, the situation looks less complicated. The novel corresponds to what might seem to be a “clean” realist fiction. Nonetheless, there are certain aspects of this work that deserve to be explored further. The British author self-described her style as fusion fiction, a technique that implies “a hybrid ‘disruptive’ style that pushes prose towards free verse, allowing direct and indirect speech to bleed into each other and sentences to run on without full stops” (Bucknell 2019). To a certain degree, this hybridity is precisely the feature that subverts the classic realism. For, in this polyvocal novel, the underlying cohesion that usually describes a realist work (however complex and labyrinthine) is corrupted by an anarchetypal impulse, grounded in experimentalism, openness and decentring.

The latter is discernible in Evaristo’s fusion fiction through her intentional avoidance of metanarratives and through the deliberate omission of assigning a central role to any singular character. Even though the book begins and ends with Amma’s play, there is no evident imbalance in the space of representation that each of the twelve protagonists receive. Additionally, the question of realism might be addressed from another point of view to which I will refer just tentatively, due to limitations of space and objective. At some point, it might be challenging to investigate the ways in which what is commonly read as realism is transformed by the usage of free verse, or the flexibility of such a form to accommodate what Bucknell calls “multiple fabricated realities” of Evaristo’s characters.

Margins and Ethical Commitment

Earlier, I said that I consider the maximalist form to best describe the contemporary world, its multitudes and depths, as well as its propensity for hybridisation and amalgamation of information and detail. Capitalizing on maximalism as “a mode of inquiry linked to excess and giganticness employed

to give attention to the overlooked and trivial” (Levey 2017, 161), this part of my text aims to deal especially with the overlooked hypostasis that the selected authors try to make sense out of, addressing questions related to marginal experience, fragmented identities, in-between states and the role that polyphony still plays in articulating these aspects in their fiction.

Establishing the centre or the core of a maximalist novel is, as we have seen, a difficult operation. However, as Zadie Smith herself affirms, at the centre of *White Teeth* sits Irie (the daughter of Archie and Clara Jones), who falls in love with Millat, the son of Samad and Alsana Iqbal: “The reason Irie gets to the centre of the book is not really about her, but about a certain idea of indeterminacy which is in a lot of writing of my generation of my peers, about the centre always being slightly displaced and there are a whole myriad of reasons for that” (O’Grady 2002). The displacement and the indeterminacy that describe this generation of young writers correlate with a general sense of identity fragmentation, best illustrated in Smith’s novel by the characters’ attempt at “shaping their sense of identity and ramifying across the generations” (Dawson 2007, 152), which generally results in amplifying an existential split. Samad’s struggle to impose an ethnic and religious identity on his sons, or Marcus Chalfen’s project of eliminating the chaos and the randomness end up reiterating the same “instabilities . . . in cosmopolitan identities . . . [as well as an] unexpected political outcome of diasporic hybridity [that] undermines facile models of both genetic and cultural determinism” (165).

Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* follows the same logic of uncovering crises in identity, in-between states and, most importantly, the spaces of precarity (Mendes and Lau 2019, 5) inhabited by her compelling characters that seem to shift permanently between structures of existence (see, for example, Biplab Das multiple identities, or Major Amrik Singh’s misleading testimonies, framing the vacillating game of military and political power that unfolds in Delhi and Kashmir). Roy’s novel takes the sprawling form of a fragmented, digressive narrative that is able to question marginality, to challenge the representation biases of caste and of the hijras through its multiplicity of “polyphonic stories of precarious figures struggling to survive on the margins of Indian society” (Gorman-DaRif 2018, 2).

I previously mentioned that Roy’s multi-focal narrative is tied together by a foundling. As Irie in *White Teeth*, Miss Jabeen the Second acts as a metonymic plot device that underscores the impossibility to reclaim a stable, fixed identity. Taken under the care of a diverse cast of characters representing various marginalized typologies, she embodies a replacement for Miss Jebeen the First and becomes the subject of their persistent articulation of care. Moreover, what lies at the heart of Roy’s novel is a sort of tension between the possibility to

embody everyone and everything and the ambition to avoid any levelling that would domesticate the hybrid postcolonial condition. At the end of this “book of porous borders” (Roy 2017b), a cisgendered Syrian Christian woman and a transgender Muslim are brought together by the same imperative that finally offers a transformative solution for the narration of a fragmented nation:

How
to
tell
a
shattered
story?
By
slowly
becoming
everybody.

No.
By slowly becoming everything. (Roy 2017a, 442)

This passage creates an excellent transition to *Girl, Woman, Other* in terms of how the hitherto marginalized communities can be factored in by means of a communitarian machinery that underscores the socio-cultural context of each intervention. Evaristo manages to formulate individual voices without threatening their difference. The shattered story mentioned in Roy’s case is here the story of racial exclusion, that can be overcome only through a reassessment of the past through the present and the future. It is what Shirley King does, as a teacher, when she realizes that her mission is to encourage her pupils to “avoid repeating the mistakes of the past and to deepen our understanding of who we are as the human race.” The strategy applied by Shirley is that of making history “*fun and relevant*” as “we don’t exist in a vacuum, children . . . we are all part of a continuum, repeat after me, the future is in the past and the past is in the present” (Evaristo 2019, 221).

This mantra-like guidance that emphasizes the need for awareness regarding the errors of the past (the element that ties future and present together) is realized through a fun and relevant approach to history. As a tactical operation, it seems to reverse the “proportion of boredom in the ratio of boredom to interest” that Sianne Ngai attributed to authors of “sprawling and encyclopedic works” (2015, 140). Evaristo’s characters are interesting, their voices (from 19-year-old Yazz to 93-year-old Hattie) are extremely idiosyncratic and actual, subtending the themes of race, gender, sex, politics, or marginality with a

noticeable ethical commitment. It is precisely on the matter of this ethical impulse that I would like to end my analysis on these three exuberant novels. They all share this tendency of questioning the status-quo, of tackling subjects that deviate from the centre, of questioning representational biases through the means of a “*defamiliarization of the real*” (Ercolino, 163).

Conclusion

It is, of course, complicated to discuss maximalist novels extensively and to try to encompass their information and meaning in all their complexity. What I wanted to achieve here was addressing the ways in which complex narratives that incorporate the tropes of migration, periphery, and marginality, amongst others, can bring to light aspects of unevenness and cultural and formal hybridisation. My aim was to investigate the shift through which recent maximalist narratives have started to factor margins in differently and more frequently than the pioneers of this literary form. To accomplish this, I provided an overview of notable pre-2000 maximalist novels by Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, and David Foster Wallace and, subsequently, I delved into the nuances of three post-2000 novels by Zadie Smith, Arundhati Roy, and Bernardine Evaristo.

In the case of the three male authors, the frame of reference was that of an American literature that seems to perpetually entertain the idea and the model of a Great American Novel. As a result, we are witnessing the creation of a space adequate for a debate involving the national and post-national dimensions of narratives, doubled by the tropes of information (and its uncontrollable proliferation), of alternate methods of articulating history, and of (almost) apocalyptic consumerist dynamics. The transition to what I consider to be a new mode of building maximalism in fiction was illustrated through works of ambitious and sprawling configuration written by three women of colour. In their cases, the most interesting aspects were those of a potential refinement of realism and the ethical processes through which marginal figures and identities can be investigated without affecting their specificity along the way. It goes without saying that numerous other inferences could be made starting from these works and the associations between their thematic, stylistic, or ideological particularities, and I am hopeful that the present paper will unfold in a more extensive study in the future.

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AVATARS CONTEMPORAINS DU CONTEUR DANS *LE PETIT CHAPERON UF* DE JEAN-CLAUDE GRUMBERG¹

Simona LOCIC²

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ABSTRACT. *Avatars of the Storyteller in Le Petit Chaperon Uf by Jean-Claude Grumberg.* Since the 17th century, when the story became part of the written literature thanks to Charles Perrault, the fairy-tale *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* represents an inexhaustible source of inspiration for all art creators. Over time, the renewal stakes of this canonical history changed and, during the 21st century, the heroine of the marvelous universe enters the theatre stage and inscribes the recreative approach of the tale in a contemporary art that puts together aesthetics and ethics. One of the authors who successfully managed to reconcile ancient and contemporary culture by transforming the canonical scheme of this tale is Jean-Claude Grumberg. Being a contemporary writer who finds the creative substance of his work in his childhood memories and in the painful experience of the deportation of the Jews, Grumberg wrote in 2005 the play *Le Petit Chaperon Uf* in order to tell the Shoah differently and to propose alternatives to a possible recurrence of evil. In his process of cultural and generic adaptation of the tale, the storyteller has an essential role. Our study aims to answer to two questions: "why the storyteller is metamorphosing?" and "who is his avatar?" in the play *Le Petit Chaperon Uf*. Playing an essential

¹ Cet article est une version remaniée d'un chapitre de la thèse de doctorat qui n'est pas publiée, soutenue par Simona Locic à l'Université Alexandru Ioan Cuza, « Métamorphoses du conte de fées dans la littérature contemporaine de langue française ».

² **Simona LOCIC** est l'auteure d'une thèse en cotutelle qui porte sur les *Métamorphoses du conte de fées dans la littérature contemporaine de langue française*, soutenue en septembre 2022. Elle est intervenue dans des colloques et des séminaires intensifs pour les doctorants en France, en Roumanie et en Espagne et, actuellement, elle est chercheuse dans le cadre du projet *Liquid Stories: Adaptation and Rewriting in Contemporary Theatre*, à l'Université Alexandru-Ioan Cuza de Iași. Ses centres d'intérêt sont : la réécriture et l'adaptation théâtrale des contes de fées à l'époque contemporaine, l'hybridation générique et l'intergénéricité, le dialogue entre littérature et les autres arts. Parmi ses articles publiés on peut citer : « Franchir le seuil féerique. *Barbe-Bleue* – du conte populaire au roman » (2021) ou « Réinvention de l'héroïne féerique dans le roman *Barbe bleue* d'Amélie Nothomb » (2019). Email : simona.locic@institutfrançais.ro.

role in the process of transmitting the tale over time, nowadays, he becomes part of the performance and his voice merges with the voice of other participants in the action. The wolf-storyteller and the heroine-storyteller try, each in turn, to tell the tale in order to impose their own version of the great [His]Story of humanity: the terrifying and monstrous, for the Nazi-wolf, and that of peace, for the little girl forced to wear the yellow hood.³

Keywords: *fairy-tale, theatrical adaptation, hybridization, rewriting, contemporary literature.*

REZUMAT. Avataruri ale povestitorului în Le Petit Chaperon Uf de Jean-Claude Grumberg. Încă din secolul al XVII-lea, când intră pe scena literaturii scrise datorită lui Charles Perrault, povestea *Scufița roșie* devine o sursă inepuizabilă de inspirație pentru toți creatorii de artă. De-a lungul timpului, mizele și factorii care au determinat rescrierea și adaptarea acestei povești canonice, care respectă o schemă unanim cunoscută, s-au schimbat. În secolul XXI, eroina universului fabulos intră pe scena teatrală și înscrie demersul recreativ într-un cadru mai larg, al artei contemporane care aduce împreună estetica și etica. Unul dintre scriitorii care au reușit cu succes adaptarea culturii vechi la cultura contemporană, metamorfozând schema canonică a poveștii, este Jean-Claude Grumberg, un autor pentru care copilăria sa și experiența dureroasă a deportării evreilor reprezintă principalele surse de inspirație. În 2005, Grumberg scrie piesa *Le Petit Chaperon Uf* cu scopul de a condamna într-un mod diferit Holocaustul și de a propune alternative la o posibilă recidivă a răului. În acest proces recreator de adaptare culturală a poveștii și de hibridizare a genului literar, povestitorul joacă un rol esențial. Studiul nostru își propune să răspundă la două întrebări esențiale: „care sunt factorii care determină metamorfoza povestitorului?” și „cine este avatarul său?” în piesa contemporană *Le Petit Chaperon Uf*. Jucând un rol esențial în procesul de transmitere a basmului de-a lungul timpului, el devine actor pe scena teatrală iar vocea sa se suprapune și se confundă cu cea a altor participanți la acțiune. Lupul-povestitor și eroina-povestitoare încearcă, fiecare la rândul său, să spună altfel povestea pentru a impune propria versiune a mării Istoriei: terifiantă și crudă, pentru lupul-nazist, una a păcii și a egalității, pentru fetița forțată să poarte scufița galbenă.

Cuvinte-cheie: *basma, adaptare teatrală, hibridizare, rescriere, literatură contemporană*

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Du chaperon rouge au capuchon jaune

Selon Dominique Viart et Bruno Vercier, à l'époque contemporaine, ce qui vient définir la création littéraire, ce sont ses motivations et la manière dont elle répond à la crise d'une nouvelle période historique et de la conscience de l'être humain. Pour les deux théoriciens, la littérature représente à présent « le fer de lance de l'activité critique » (Viart 2012, 32) et elle met l'acte artistique face aux enjeux sociétaux et aux multiples crises auxquelles se confronte le monde actuel parmi lesquelles le racisme, la discrimination, les guerres de religion ou la soumission des plus faibles. Face à ces constats, l'acte créateur ne reste pas silencieux et il cherche, par tous les moyens, à contester les failles de la grande Histoire⁴ dont l'être humain est responsable.

À l'époque contemporaine, la mise en œuvre de cette démarche critique et créative fait souvent appel à une littérature déjà consacrée, sur laquelle les auteurs se penchent afin d'y puiser leur source d'inspiration, mais, également, afin de la contester.⁵ Le retour à un héritage littéraire qui appartient à la culture universelle se fait par le biais de la réécriture, de l'adaptation théâtrale et d'un dialogue entre des histoires venant du temps jadis et les autres arts.⁶

Dans ce processus de création en palimpseste, le conte de fées occupe une place à part. Genre canonique, il offre grâce à sa forme de récit court et schématique, ancré dans l'inconscient collectif, d'innombrables possibilités de réagencement de ses éléments. Afin de donner une voix aux motivations qui guident leur travail artistique, des écrivains et des metteurs en scène contemporains transgressent les frontières génériques et les canons culturels transmis à la postérité par les contes merveilleux et réinventent le genre, en l'alignant aux finalités vers lesquelles ils tendent :

Chaque période de l'histoire suscite un état du monde ou de la conscience, une qualité d'expérience ou une forme d'existence que les productions de la culture n'ont encore jamais traduits. L'artiste, l'écrivain, découvrent à cette occasion combien les discours déjà constitués falsifient le monde. Il doit alors en imaginer d'autres. La littérature [...] écrit là où le savoir

⁴ Nous proposons l'emploi du mot Histoire avec majuscule pour renvoyer aux grands événements historiques tels que la Shoah.

⁵ Nous pouvons rappeler ici le travail d'adaptation théâtrale et de réécriture de Typhaine D qui publie en 2016 le recueil *Contes à rebours* dans le but de contester la vision patriarcale du monde, transmise par les contes de fées à la postérité. Autrice et comédienne, Typhaine D critique l'univers édulcoré de ces histoires connues de tous, typique notamment des créations artistiques de Walt Disney.

⁶ Voir en ce sens le livre album *La femme de l'ogre* dessiné par Etienne Appert. À travers son art riche en émotions, qui remplace les mots par les images, le graphiste nous raconte en s'appuyant sur un récit imagé par Bernadette Appert, l'histoire bouleversante de la femme de l'ogre, personnage faisant partie de l'économie narrative du conte *Le Petit Poucet*.

défaillie, là où les formes manquent, là où il n'y a pas de mots – ou pas encore. C'est pourquoi il y faut d'autres mots, combinés selon des syntaxes improbables. Inédites, dans tous les sens du terme. (Viart 2005, 11)

Dans l'ensemble de cette matière fournie par les contes merveilleux transmis au fil des siècles, l'histoire de l'héroïne connue le plus souvent sous l'appellation *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* a fait l'objet d'un nombre impressionnant de réécritures et d'adaptations théâtrales.⁷ Entrée dans la culture écrite grâce au recueil de Charles Perrault *Histoires ou contes du temps passé. Avec des moralités*, paru en 1697, le conte est transmis à la postérité sous une double forme littéraire car, en 1812, en Allemagne, les Frères Grimm publient une autre version, dans *Contes pour les enfants et la maison*. Pendant une longue période, en Europe occidentale, ces deux versions littéraires coexistent et se greffent sur les variantes du récit appartenant à la culture orale.

Racontant l'histoire d'une petite fille qui rencontre le loup dans son chemin vers la maison de sa grand-mère, les deux contes présentent, comme tout récit merveilleux, la confrontation des deux forces – le bien et le mal – dans le but d'illustrer une bonne morale ou le triomphe du bien. Il s'agit de la punition de l'héroïne à cause de sa désobéissance dans le cas de la version perraultienne, et de la punition du loup qui dévore la petite fille et la grand-mère, dans le conte des Frères Grimm.

Les versions littéraires et folkloriques de ce récit portent sur l'initiation d'une petite fille à la vie adulte et sur les dangers auxquels elle se voit confrontée au moment où elle sort du nid familial. Dans les versions de la littérature orale et dans celle des Frères Grimm, contrairement au parcours que l'héroïne a dans le conte de Charles Perrault, généralement, elle réussit à échapper au loup ; elle est aidée par quelqu'un d'autre, comme, par exemple, le chasseur, ou elle réussit à s'échapper grâce à sa propre astuce.

Moins connue, un exemple concret en ce sens est la version folklorique *Conte de la mère grand* recensée par Paul Delarue dans son catalogue *Le Conte populaire français*. La variante folklorique, plus que celles de la culture écrite, attire l'attention sur l'importance que tient dans le conte merveilleux l'ingéniosité de la protagoniste à échapper aux dangers en ridiculisant, en même temps, l'antagoniste. L'héroïne prouve ainsi l'accomplissement de son aventure initiatique par ses propres moyens. À titre d'exemple, dans *Conte de la mère grand*, elle a l'idée très ingénieuse de demander au bzuu, avatar folklorique du loup, de sortir de la maison seulement pour quelques instants, avec un fil de laine attaché au pied :

⁷ Quelques exemples en ce sens sont : le récit *La Petite à la burqa rouge*, de Tahar Ben Jelloun ; la pièce de théâtre *Le Petit Chaperon rouge*, de Joël Pommerat ; la réécriture accompagnée d'images *Mon livre-frise - Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*, de Lola Moral et Sergio García Sánchez.

Quand la petite fille fut dehors, elle fixa le bout du fil à un prunier de la cour. [...] Quand il [le bzou] se rendit compte que personne ne lui répondait, il se jeta à bas du lit et vit que la petite était sauvée. Il la poursuivit mais il arriva à sa maison [de la fille] juste au moment où elle entra. (Delarue 2002, 374 Tome I)

L'un des auteurs contemporains qui a trouvé dans l'histoire de la petite fille portant le chaperon rouge une importante source d'inspiration est le dramaturge Jean-Claude Grumberg. En 2005, il publie *Le Petit Chaperon Uf*, pièce de théâtre qui réécrit le conte du *Petit Chaperon rouge* afin de parler aux plus jeunes de l'un des plus grands crimes contre l'humanité : l'Holocauste.

Selon Claude Roy, Jean-Claude Grumberg est « l'auteur tragique le plus drôle de sa génération » (Roy 1995, 7). Figurant déjà sur la liste officielle du Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, Grumberg écrit des pièces de théâtre, de la littérature pour la jeunesse, mais aussi des récits ou des romans, étant à la fois scénariste et homme de télévision. Distingué avec le prix Molière à plusieurs reprises et avec le Grand Prix du Théâtre de l'Académie française en 1991, l'auteur fait entendre dans son œuvre les échos de son enfance brisée par l'expérience douloureuse de la déportation des Juifs dans les années '40. En effet, en 1942, quand il n'avait que trois ans, Jean-Claude Grumberg assiste à la rafle de son père, né à Galați en Roumanie, et à celle de ses grands-parents. Déporté tout d'abord au camp de Drancy et après, en 1943, à Auschwitz, Zacharie Grumberg, le père, ne reviendra jamais. Pendant cette période sombre de l'histoire de l'Europe, le jeune Grumberg et son frère trouvent protection en France, dans La Maison des enfants de Moissac. Les échos de cette expérience traumatique vécue indirectement se font entendre dans toute son œuvre, une création qui « s'est construite, pour une partie importante et significative, autour de la condition juive ». (Caune 2019, 153) Une fois adulte, il prend conscience de la monstruosité des événements historiques qu'il a vécus et il veut en rendre compte et en parler aux enfants sans briser leur innocence :

Qu'est-ce qu'on peut donner aux enfants que nous avons faits et qui sont en train de grandir ? Le goût de vivre malgré tout. C'est-à-dire malgré tout ce qu'on leur raconte, malgré tout ce qu'ils voient, tout ce dont ils sont témoins ? Et je pense que comme je vis en enfant déporté [...] j'étais moins enfant déporté quand j'avais cinq ans, qu'aujourd'hui. Et je me sens beaucoup plus survivant aujourd'hui qu'il y a trente ans, quarante ans.⁸

⁸ J.-C Grumberg, "*Le Petit Chaperon Uf*", *L'origine de l'écriture* [Vidéo]. La transcription nous appartient. La vidéo peut être consultée en ligne en suivant ce lien : <https://www.theatre-contemporain.net/textes/Le-Petit-Chaperon-Uf-Jean-Claude-Grumberg/playlist/id/A-propos-de-Le-Petit-Chaperon-Uf>

Très attaché à la littérature destinée au jeune public, Jean-Claude Grumberg vit avec le sentiment d'une responsabilité qui concerne la transmission de la vérité sur l'extermination vécue par le peuple juif pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale. À l'âge adulte, l'auteur contemporain comprend et prend conscience des réalités monstrueuses qui ont brisé son enfance et qui ont marqué tragiquement l'histoire du XX^e siècle. Afin que l'Histoire de l'Occupation, la déportation des Juifs et la réalité de l'après-guerre ne se répète plus, il cherche et il trouve dans la littérature un outil qui l'aide à transmettre un message responsable et responsabilisant à la fois. Écrire devient pour lui un acte artistique et social au cours duquel le conte joue un rôle essentiel. Il est un outil dont on ne peut pas se passer et contribue fondamentalement à la manière dont l'écrivain entend accomplir sa démarche : dire la vérité de l'Histoire afin de responsabiliser le lecteur-spectateur vis-à-vis du besoin d'empêcher une possible récurrence du mal.

Par le biais de la réécriture et de l'adaptation théâtrale, Jean-Claude Grumberg met en œuvre ce que Alexandre Gefen définit dans une interview donnée à Flora Moricet comme « la fonction sacerdotale de l'écrivain contemporain » ; il devient une porte-parole, « un écrivain public » qui « se retrouve à assumer des fonctions collectives » (Moricet 2018). En partant d'un événement personnel, le dramaturge se sert du schéma du conte merveilleux et se saisit d'un sujet historique qui implique de grandes questions d'éthique, en devenant ainsi le messenger de ceux qui ont subi ou qui pourraient subir à l'avenir la monstruosité humaine. Dire le conte autrement, proposer une autre version des faits, le réécrire et l'adapter se transforment en un travail de « réparation » (Moricet 2018) de l'Histoire, qui permettrait de penser les choses d'une manière moins violente, de pointer ce qui est destructeur dans le monde et de chercher des solutions.

Tel un conteur qui prépare son auditeur avant de l'introduire dans l'univers merveilleux, Jean-Claude Grumberg précède son adaptation théâtrale d'un préambule qui explique sa démarche. Intitulé « Le Petit Chaperon Uf. Un conte du bon vieux temps ? », cet avant-propos répond à la question de son titre et confirme le caractère actuel et l'atemporalité de l'histoire *Le Petit Chaperon rouge*. Réécrire le conte permet de faire parler l'Histoire présente et, à titre d'exemple, l'Histoire passée, afin de dénoncer l'horreur dans le monde et d'empêcher sa résurgence.

Connaître l'histoire, les histoires, la vraie Histoire, à quoi cela sert-il ?
Sinon à alerter les chaperons d'aujourd'hui, à avertir les enfants que la liberté de traverser le bois pour porter à sa mère-grand un pot de beurre et une galette n'est jamais définitivement acquise... Cette liberté

appartient à chacun et à tous. Hier ce furent les enfants Ufs et Oufs, ainsi que leurs parents et grands-parents, qui durent fuir, se cacher, changer de noms et de papiers afin d'échapper aux griffes du loup. [...] Demain, si l'on n'y prend garde, les loups s'attaqueront peut-être aux enfants Ifs ou Gnifs ou Gnoufs, les loups eux seront toujours les loups et vous savez comme ils savent dissimuler leur bave et leurs grandes dents sous de belles et trompeuses paroles avant de se mettre à hurler et à mordre. (Grumberg 2015, 23)

Dans ce texte liminaire, l'auteur explique son projet dramatique : raconter la vraie histoire du Petit Chaperon, une histoire qui doit transmettre la vraie Histoire, afin d'alerter les chaperons d'un aujourd'hui atemporel. En étant un avant-propos où s'instaure le nouvel horizon d'attente du lecteur-spectateur, le préambule, sans le dire clairement, offre des détails précis sur la portée historique, politique, sociale et personnelle de cette recreation du conte. Derrière l'histoire il n'y a que la vraie Histoire, l'expérience douloureuse vécue par Jean-Claude Grumberg en tant qu'enfant juif : « Un temps pas si vieux et pas si bon où des loups de noir ou de vert vêtus pourchassaient des petits enfants – dont l'auteur faisait partie –, les obligeant à porter du jaune afin d'être facilement reconnaissables. » (23)

Pour le dramaturge, il ne s'agit pas d'être engagé contre ou pour telle ou telle chose. Le devoir de l'écrivain est celui d'être responsable de dire les vérités, en étant parfaitement conscient du message qu'on transmet et du profil de son destinataire :

Quand on s'adresse à un public, on a une responsabilité. Il faut s'exprimer, pas seulement faire plaisir aux gens : rendre compte du monde dans lequel on vit et troubler le spectateur, le perdre entre le rire et les larmes. (Grumberg 2013, 157)

À la lumière de cette responsabilité qui traverse sa création comme un fil rouge, la présence du conte dans son œuvre, en tant que source d'inspiration, ne surprend pas. L'auteur trouve dans l'univers merveilleux du *Petit Chaperon rouge* et dans la structure schématique connue de tous, une matière et un support qui peuvent être employés et transformés afin de rendre compte des réalités les plus inquiétantes et monstrueuses de l'Histoire de l'humanité. Par la violence inhérente à l'univers fabuleux, mais, en même temps, par cette même violence fragilisée grâce au triomphe du bien et à son objectif rassurant, le conte devient pour Jean-Claude Grumberg un terrain qui permet d'exprimer les failles et d'envisager des solutions possibles.

Le conte merveilleux – un genre voué au renouvellement

Récit court et schématique, selon le catalogue *Le Conte populaire français* de Paul Delarue, les versions du conte *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* font partie du groupe du conte-type n°333, dont le schéma narratif se remarque par quatre éléments : 1. L'héroïne, 2. Rencontre avec le loup, 3. Chez la grand-mère, 4. Fuite de la fille, mort du loup (Delarue 2002, 370, Tome I). Au fil du temps, la structure déterminée par ces quatre éléments s'est habillée d'une matière fictionnelle qui faisait écho à l'époque ou à la communauté où apparaissait telle ou telle version du conte.

La postérité doit cette pluralité des variantes aux conteurs. Selon le folkloriste danois Holbek Bengt, certaines des distinctions qui étaient importantes dans les vies des conteurs étaient également importantes dans leurs récits. Il s'agit notamment de la distinction entre les riches et les pauvres et entre les hommes et les femmes.⁹ (Bengt 1987, 182) La reprise du même schéma dans le contemporain et une adaptation à une nouvelle culture et à une nouvelle expérience de vie résonnent avec le processus millénaire de la transmission du conte au fil du temps.

Au long des siècles, les multiples réalisations de la même histoire ont confirmé la thèse proposée par Nicole Belmont dans son ouvrage *Poétique du conte. Essai sur le conte de tradition orale*. Selon la chercheuse, le conte n'est qu'« un espace narratif, à l'intérieur duquel les conteurs jouissaient d'une certaine liberté de vagabondage » (Belmont 1999, 16) ; cette liberté permet une réalisation instantanée et spontanée de tel ou tel schéma narratif connu par celui qui raconte ou qui, à l'époque contemporaine, réécrit et adapte pour la scène du spectacle. Cet espace narratif est régi par les relations et les rapports constants qui existent entre les personnages participant à l'action.

De la théorie proposée par Vladimir Propp dans sa *Morphologie du conte*, en passant par les études de Marie-Louise Ténèze et jusqu'aux recherches plus récentes de Raymonde Robert, le conte de fées est défini comme un genre où les rapports de force entre « le héros » et « l'agresseur » (Propp 1973, 96) régissent l'organisation narrative et deviennent la clé de voûte de toute nouvelle version ou réécriture de telle ou telle histoire : « la relation entre le héros [...] et la situation difficile à laquelle il se trouvera confronté dans le cours de l'action » (Ténèze 1970, 24) représente le critère constitutif du genre.

En représentant la lutte atemporelle entre le bien et le mal sous toutes les formes, la dynamique du conflit entre l'héroïne du conte merveilleux *Le Petit*

⁹ La traduction nous appartient. "This enables us to propound the hypothesis that some of the distinctions that were of importance in the narrators lives were also of importance in their tales. We are referring to the distinction between rich and poor and that between men and women." (Bengt 1987, 182)

Chaperon rouge et son agresseur, le loup, par le méfait que ce dernier produit, permet au dramaturge contemporain de parler des sujets choquants et très douloureux : les crimes contre l'humanité. Mais le triomphe du bien, garanti dans le conte, offre à Jean Claude Grumberg une source d'inspiration qui rassure et qui résonne avec la visée de son travail artistique. En se définissant « par la place fondamentale qu'y tient [...] la fonction Méfait, mais aussi, non moins essentiellement, par le phénomène particulier du désamorçage de ce méfait, par l'assurance de sa réparation » (Robert 2002, 35) l'histoire *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* devient pour Grumberg le « chemin » qu'il a besoin de prendre afin d'arriver du conte, à l'Histoire (Piacetini 2019) et accomplir ainsi sa mission responsable à visée réparatrice.

Dans les variantes du conte-type n° 333, le méfait se produit par la violence et est illustré par des détails et des scènes parfois très choquantes. Dans la version folklorique *Conte de la mère-grand*, arrivée à la maison de sa mère-grand, déjà dévorée par le loup, l'héroïne est invitée par ce dernier à manger une partie de la viande qui reste du corps de l'ancienne femme et à boire son sang, mis dans une bouteille de vin :

- Bonjour, ma grand, je vous apporte une époigne toute chaude et une bouteille de lait.
- Mets-les dans l'arche mon enfant. Prends de la viande qui est dedans et une bouteille de vin qui est sur la bassie. (Delarue 2002, 373 Tome I)

Cette violence intrinsèque à l'histoire, qui est une violence de l'expérience vécue par la petite fille dans la maison de sa grand-mère, perpétue l'une des fonctions primordiales du récit merveilleux : combattre la violence de l'existence – dans le cas de Jean-Claude Grumberg, de la grande Histoire de la Shoah – par la violence du conte renouvelé.

Selon Renaud Hétier, comprendre la valeur symbolique du conte merveilleux signifie comprendre aussi la valeur positive de ce mécanisme de la cruauté pure qu'il délivre. Le récepteur est nourri « d'une sagesse de la violence qui permet de penser, de transformer cette dernière » (Hétier, 1999 5) pour remettre en cause un fonctionnement destructeur du monde. Une prise de conscience de la violence et une éducation qui vise à la combattre ne peuvent se faire que par le biais d'une éducation « engagée dans une culture partagée qui offre des voies d'intégration symbolique » (5), qui parle de la violence et de ce qui la provoque. Dans les versions folkloriques ou entrées déjà dans la tradition, cette violence qui accomplit et répare le méfait est une violence du geste, du langage, des situations que le conteur présente à son récepteur. En l'approfondissant, Jean-Claude Grumberg trouve dans l'acte violent de l'agresseur

un élément qui, en se métamorphosant, lui permet de combattre les failles du monde et de « réparer » l'Histoire en proposant une nouvelle version des faits.

Généralement, à l'exception de quelques versions folkloriques et à celle de Charles Perrault, où l'héroïne est dévorée par le loup, l'histoire de la petite fille confrontée à l'agresseur sanguinaire a une fin heureuse. Envisager la victoire du bien et, en même temps, être conscient que le mal peut certainement exister sont des éléments typiques du conte en question, très importants pour le dramaturge contemporain. Les deux fins antithétiques proposées par Charles Perrault et les Frères Grimm se transforment en un élément hypotextuel (Genette 1982) indispensable pour la nouvelle manière de dire le conte et leur mise en scène se fait en transformant le conteur en un participant complexe et versatile du jeu scénique.

En effet, entre les deux principales sources d'inspiration – *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* de Charles Perrault et *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* des Frères Grimm – et *Le Petit Chaperon Uf* contemporain, les « relations transtextuelles » (7) – selon la terminologie de Gerard Genette – peuvent être identifiées à tous les niveaux établis par le théoricien : architextuel (au niveau des traits générique que le dramaturge emprunte au conte) ; hypertextuel, car *Le Petit Chaperon Uf* est « un texte dérivé », « un texte qui se greffe [sur sa source d'inspiration] » (12) ; intertextuel (grâce aux citations explicites qui renvoient directement au conte et marquent une relation de coprésence entre les deux textes) ; paratextuel (par le titre qui reprend sous une forme hybride le célèbre titre du conte original) et métatextuel. Cette dernière relation transtextuelle, représentée dans la pièce par la confrontation des versions de Charles Perrault et des Frères Grimm sur la scène du spectacle, éclaire le sujet des avatars contemporains du conteur, car, chacun à son tour, l'agresseur et l'héroïne, souhaite raconter sa propre vision des faits.

Le conte face au jeu intergénérique

Pour entrer dans le contemporain et pour donner « au conte les couleurs du temps » (Fix 2018, 9), l'histoire se réinvente en s'adaptant, le verbe « s'adapter » étant définitoire pour le processus de métamorphose en question. Dérivé de son étymon latin *adaptare*, adapter un texte signifie modifier une œuvre de l'esprit afin qu'elle convienne à un autre emploi, à une autre technique, à un autre public, à un art précis, en l'occurrence au théâtre. Jean-Claude Grumberg ne met pas en scène le conte, mais sa vision des faits, sous une forme renouvelée. Lors du processus de réécriture et d'adaptation, cette forme renouvelée n'est pas dépourvue des traits génériques d'origine. Ils sont intégrés dans une autre formule artistique grâce au travail d'appropriation qui traduit la démarche responsable, à visée réparatrice de Grumberg :

Le mot *appropriation* comporte toute une série d'éléments au cœur de cette démarche : intégrer un cadre, y rester tout en pointant les contours, digérer son contenu pour mieux le réexposer, transfigurer les codes de lectures de l'œuvre tout en lui témoignant son respect, bref, personnaliser tout en endossant les qualités et les attributs d'une œuvre légitime. (Hennaut 2016 : 149)

Lors de ce travail d'appropriation, pour le dramaturge contemporain, le conte, genre canonique par définition, opère comme un « espace de jeu » (Dion 2001, 361) où les éléments définitoires du narratif transgressent les frontières génériques vers le dramatique, en s'invitant sur la scène des spectacles. En s'infiltrant dans le discours théâtral, le schéma narratif du récit et la voix du conteur illustrent une « situation de mitoyenneté » typique de l'esthétique littéraire et théâtrale contemporaine. Employée par l'universitaire Franc Schuerewegen, lors d'un séminaire intensif pour les doctorants sur le transfrontalier aujourd'hui dans la fiction, la notion de « mur mitoyen »¹⁰ – un mur qui sépare deux maisons qui font partie du même bâtiment – nous semble éclairante pour le processus de réécriture et d'adaptation théâtrale en question.

Une première interaction avec l'objet-livre ou avec la mise en scène proprement dite encourage, au moins de prime abord, le classement de cette pièce dans une catégorie générique explicite : le théâtre. Pourtant, une analyse plus approfondie permet de constater un dialogue métatextuel fondamental pour la transmission de la signification entre le narratif – propre au conte par tradition – et le dramatique, mais aussi entre l'histoire séculaire et la scène. Ce lien entre les deux genres est assuré précisément par le rôle que le conteur a joué, autant par le passé, lors du rituel de contage qui a assuré la transmission du récit au fil du temps, que dans le contemporain, quand il s'invite grâce à ses avatars sur la scène du spectacle. Il devient tangible, présent et témoigne du jeu intergénérique, hypertextuel et métatextuel typiques de ce métissage littéraire et artistique contemporain.

Les voix du conteur contemporain

Pour Jean-Claude Grumberg, dire le conte autrement et prendre la liberté de le métamorphoser grâce au travail d'appropriation résonnent avec le processus séculaire de la transmission de la même histoire au fil du temps. En effet, pour la plupart, les chercheurs se sont accordés sur le fait que, depuis toujours, le

¹⁰ Nous renvoyons ici au séminaire intensif pour les doctorants « Lire et écrire le transfrontalier aujourd'hui, dans la fiction romanesque et ailleurs », organisé à Cadix, en Espagne entre le 2 et le 13 juillet 2019, par le réseau international *LEA* ! (Lire en Europe Aujourd'hui).

voyage multiséculaire de ce récit court et ses infinies métamorphoses tissent un lien très fort avec le milieu social et l'époque qui lui sert d'écrin. C'est précisément par le même mécanisme que l'histoire de l'Holocauste se greffe sur le conte *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* grâce au travail d'appropriation de Jean-Claude Grumberg. En s'adaptant à la scène, la nouvelle œuvre hybride parle sur une autre réalité et prend la parole pour une autre communauté, en résonant de cette manière avec un mécanisme de fonctionnement qui est, depuis toujours, le même :

Le conte merveilleux, dès que nous l'envisageons dans ses réalisations culturelles concrètes, a besoin, en dépit du caractère de monde à part que nous reconnaissons en lui, d'être inscrit dans l'ensemble fonctionnel du système d'expression de la communauté en question. Plus profondément, d'être situé dans la vie de cette communauté elle-même. (Ténèze 1970, 65)

L'auteur métamorphose le récit séculaire en empruntant au conte merveilleux son identité de style et le schématisme inhérent. Jean-Claude Grumberg souhaite parler d'un événement qui a touché l'Histoire, notre Histoire à tous, et métamorphoser le conte devient pour lui une réécriture de l'antisémitisme. En suivant les règles de l'univers merveilleux dont l'aventure finit bien, son œuvre rassure grâce à la fin ouverte de la pièce, qui ne privilégie ni la morale de Charles Perrault, où la petite fille est dévorée, ni celle allemande, des Frères Grimm, où elle est sauvée par un chasseur. Grâce à cette double version du dénouement, le dramaturge trouve dans le conte du Petit Chaperon rouge une histoire qui lui laisse le choix de dire ou de ne pas dire toute la vérité sur la monstruosité et le caractère inhumain du monde. Pour lui, l'ensemble hypertextuel choisi lui offre le moyen de montrer du doigt le mal, et, en même temps, de suggérer la solution salutaire.

Quant aux avatars contemporains intradiégétiques du conteur, ceux dont nous entendons les voix et qui doivent nous transmettre la version actualisée du conte, dans *Le Petit Chaperon Uf*, la démarche créatrice prend une direction tout à fait originale. Chez Jean-Claude Grumberg, il ne s'agit pas d'incarner de manière traditionnelle le conteur dans la pièce grâce à l'intervention d'un personnage, mais de renvoyer à son rôle, à l'acte de conter et au principe qui le régit : créer à chaque fois une version originale, la vraie.

Dès son incipit, l'œuvre offre un aperçu très éclairant de la démarche créatrice de l'auteur contemporain. Bien que dans la liste de personnages nous n'ayons aucune mention de sa présence, le rôle du conteur est joué, paradoxalement, par l'agresseur même. Pour Grumberg, un théâtre qui se

suffirait de la simple représentation de l'Histoire ou de l'histoire – le conte – ne permettrait pas la création d'un lien suffisamment fort pour faciliter la transmission du message. Le conte doit être raconté et, pour que le pacte soit conclu, le public doit entrer dans l'univers merveilleux à travers la formule classique « il était une fois », qui rappelle l'*illo tempore* typique du monde féérique. Le cadre spatio-temporel annoncé, renvoyant au conte original – « à l'orée d'un bois, non loin d'un village » (Grumberg 2015, 25) – se métamorphose rapidement et le caractère anhistorique du conte universel est aboli, notamment par le biais des détails transmis par les indications scéniques et le nom des personnages. Wolf, « un loup déguisé en garde municipale » (25), par son nom qui signifie loup en allemand, commence à tisser le lien entre les atrocités commises par les nazis entre les deux guerres mondiales, et l'adaptation théâtrale de Grumberg. En étant le premier acteur qui entre en scène, le caporal Wolf – avatar contemporain du loup d'autrefois et, à ce moment du conte renouvelé, avatar du conteur – s'adresse au public :

Bonjour, bonsoir petits enfants, ici votre vieil oncle Wolf qui raconte histoire bon vieux temps, histoire Petit Chaperereron reron... Chaperereuu aaaaah ! Histoire Petit Capuchon. Vous connaître ? Ça fait rien, Wolf raconte quand même. Silence fixe repos ! Wolf commence. Il y avait une fois non pas marchande fois dans ville de Foix il y avait une fois petite fille village, tiens elle arrive... (Grumberg 2015, 25)

Fusionner la voix du conteur et la voix de l'agresseur n'est pas un choix aléatoire. Wolf commence à présenter l'histoire de l'Histoire de la Shoah. Symbolisant à l'échelle historique et politique le nazisme, dans un premier temps, l'agresseur essaie de mettre en scène l'histoire de la petite fille Uf, telle que les événements ont été vécus par les Juifs lors de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Cet *incipit* est particulièrement important. Dès le début, il annonce le détournement du conte et les enjeux esthétiques, scéniques et symboliques du renouvellement et de l'hybridation générique. La question rhétorique « Vous connaître ? » n'a pas lieu d'être. L'agresseur va raconter l'histoire à sa manière et de la manière dont il a fait la grande Histoire ; la nouvelle version du conte n'est plus celle du Petit Chaperon rouge, mais celle du Petit Capuchon Uf, avatar fictionnel d'une petite fille juive.

L'originalité de l'adaptation proposée par Grumberg réside dans les éléments concrets qui se greffent sur le texte contemporain. En créant le portrait du nouvel agresseur-conteur, ils rendent compte des oppressions subies par les Juifs à l'époque de l'entre-deux-guerres. Ainsi, la lettre U que Wolf identifie sur « l'ausweis » (26) – le document d'identité de la petite fille – est

une allusion concrète au tampon « J » qui devait figurer, en France, sur les cartes d'identité et d'alimentation des Juifs, à partir de décembre 1942. Cette reconnaissance désormais faite, avec un plaisir terrifiant, le caporal nazi, celui qui établit le schéma de la nouvelle histoire antisémite du Petit Chaperon, rappelle à la petite fille toutes les choses interdites aux Ufs. Le beurre, la galette faite au sucre et la couleur rouge ne peuvent plus être mangés ou portés par les Ufs à l'époque de la nouvelle réalité nazie.

Pour le processus d'hybridation générique et de recyclage du conte, le choix de ces trois éléments n'est pas anodin. Dans les versions hypotextuelles, la couleur rouge du chaperon, tout comme le beurre et la galette que la petite fille porte à sa grand-mère sont trois éléments concrets qui assurent et créent son identité dans les versions traditionnelles du conte. Ne plus les avoir se traduit par une perte de son identité même.

Cette transformation de l'héroïne du conte merveilleux se fait par la violence et par l'humiliation typiques du comportement du loup nazi, avatar du conteur, qui trace les nouveaux axes du schéma narratif. Dans un premier temps, l'héroïne contemporaine est dépourvue de son chaperon rouge. Elle reçoit ensuite un autre, jaune, « capuchon » de la stigmatisation et de l'humiliation : « Il [Wolf] arrache le capuchon rouge du Petit Chaperon et lui jette un horrible capuchon jaune » (33), sale, car « Jaune couleur Uf ! » (33) et « Non-Ufs portent rouge. » (33) Dissimulé sous le respect des lois absurdes du régime nazi, le vol du beurre et le vol de la galette, que la petite fille veut porter à sa grand-mère, deviennent d'autres étapes essentielles dans le processus de métamorphose du conte. La nouvelle version de l'histoire, résultat des lois dictées par le régime du loup nazi, met en scène la réalité deshumanisante à laquelle sont soumis les Ufs, avatars fictionnels des Juifs.

Ce qui fait pourtant l'originalité de l'adaptation de Jean-Claude Grumberg est la confrontation, sous la forme d'une scène finale métatextuelle, des versions les plus connues du conte-type n° 333. Le dramaturge met le lecteur-spectateur face à deux variantes traditionnelles du conte *Le Petit Chaperon rouge*, celle des Frères Grimm et celle de Charles Perrault, qui essaient, chacune à son tour, de s'imposer et de proposer des dénouements différents au régime nazi. Wolf, le caporal nazi, nous assure de la légitimité de la version perraultienne, à la fin de laquelle la petite fille est dévorée par le loup, tandis que Petit Chaperon Uf se souvient de la « vraie histoire du Petit Chaperon Rouge, la jolie histoire, celle qui fait pas peur et que tout le monde comprend. » (Grumberg 2015, 23)

Autour de la confrontation de ces deux variantes se construit la Scène 3 de la pièce. Le moment pourrait être analysé comme une véritable mise en scène du processus même de l'adaptation et de la réécriture des contes merveilleux en général. Arrivés à la fin, Wolf et Petit Chaperon revendiquent, chacun à son tour,

la version source qui lui est favorable, en proposant un enchâssement des variantes possibles à la grande Histoire de la Shoah. Les personnages prennent conscience de leur statut actantiel et regardent, de l'extérieur de leurs rôles, les deux fins possibles, que personne n'a prévues au début du jeu de la réécriture et de l'adaptation :

PETIT CHAPERON

Je m'en fous, je veux que tu me rendes mon capuchon rouge.

WOLF

Ah impossible, interdit.

PETIT CHAPERON

Non non, je joue plus, je veux plus être le Petit Capuchon Uf ou Jaune, je veux être dans la vraie histoire.

WOLF

Tu es dans la vraie histoire.

PETIT CHAPERON

Non non, dans la vraie histoire du Petit Chaperon Rouge, la jolie histoire, celle qui fait pas peur et que tout le monde comprend. C'est dans celle-là que je veux être.

WOLF

Bon ben comment on fait alors ?

PETIT CHAPERON

On arrête tout et je raconte aux petits enfants la véritable histoire du Petit Chaperon Rouge sans Ufs ni Oufs. (Grumberg 2015, 64)

En prenant le rôle de la conteuse, Petit Chaperon commence à raconter l'histoire en rappelant ainsi au loup la réalité merveilleuse du conte et en revendiquant la fin heureuse, généralisée par les Frères Grimm. Cette fin métatextuelle de la pièce devient un vrai duel des deux variantes les plus connues du conte. Le macro-conflit entre le bien et le mal, concrétisé dans les versions traditionnelles entre le loup et la petite fille, se métamorphose et prend une tonalité métatextuelle :

PETIT CHAPERON

[...] Le loup prend un raccourci, arrive chez la mère-grand, se fait passer pour le Petit Chaperon et croque la mère-grand. Puis il se met au lit puis attend le Petit Chaperon.

WOLF

Et quand le Chaperon arrive le loup la croque.

PETIT CHAPERON

Oui oui oui oui oui, mais après c'est pas fini, des gentils messieurs...

WOLF

Quels gentils messieurs ?

PETIT CHAPERON

Des chasseurs de loups tuent le loup, lui ouvrent le ventre et font sortir mère grand et le Petit Chaperon qui leur dit : « Si vous saviez ce qu'on est mal à son aise dans un ventre de loup ! »

WOLF

Pas du tout, le conte s'arrête quand le loup croque le Chaperon Rouge, point à la ligne. Bref silence. (Grumberg 2015, 64)

Cette confrontation des versions restreint à petite échelle la contradiction séculaire entre le récit de Charles Perrault et celui des Frères Grimm. Pourtant, le conte, tel que l'héroïne-conteuse de Grumberg l'entend, ne peut finir que bien et les possibles fins heureuses s'enchaînent. En tant que nouvel avatar du conteur, elle prend son rôle au sérieux et ne se limite plus à la reprise d'innombrables dénouements déjà connus. La protagoniste propose sa propre version et, par conséquent, « la vraie », car il est dans la nature de chaque conteur ou de chaque conteuse de prétendre à la vérité :

PETIT CHAPERON

Oui mais dans la vraie histoire une fois dans le ventre du loup le Petit Capuchon Chaperon monte sur les épaules de sa mère-grand et quand le loup dort sort tout doucement par sa bouche, et puis après tire sa mère-grand, et puis après elles appellent la police et le loup est pris et enfermé dans sa cage. (Grumberg 2015, 64)

Conclusion

Adaptation théâtrale d'un conte universellement connu, *Le Petit Chaperon Uf* parle au lecteur-spectateur contemporain des moments les plus sombres de l'Histoire. Jean-Claude Grumberg trouve dans la structure narrative de ce genre canonique un schéma qu'il habilite de sa propre sensibilité, de sa vision du monde et de ce que la Shoah a représenté pour lui, le petit garçon d'autrefois à l'enfance brisée. En remplaçant le loup par Wolf, le caporal nazi qui rencontre une petite fille juive, qu'il intimide et terrifie par ses gestes et ses mots, le dramaturge contemporain essaie de rendre compte des failles de l'Histoire de l'humanité. L'agresseur et l'héroïne, qui perpétuent, chacun à son tour, dans le dramatique, la voix du conteur d'autrefois, deviennent les deux forces autour desquelles se réécrit non seulement l'histoire universellement connue, mais aussi l'Histoire de l'antisémitisme.

La réécriture et l'adaptation du conte du Petit Chaperon rouge se réalisent chez Grumberg sous l'influence d'une responsabilité que l'écrivain pense avoir vis-à-vis de son public le plus jeune. Les enfants doivent connaître la grande

Histoire, mais ils ont également le droit d'imaginer et de savoir qu'il existe des alternatives heureuses aux dénouements malheureux. Les rapports de force entre l'héroïne de l'univers merveilleux et son agresseur, le loup d'autrefois, deviennent la pierre angulaire du processus et du schéma recréateurs qui proposent une autre vision des faits, une « réparation » à la réalité terrifiante du nazisme. En se substituant au conteur, par leur présence et leur discours, l'héroïne-conteuse et le loup conteur témoignent du jeu intergénéral entre le dramatique et le narratif. La confrontation métatextuelle, dans la scène finale, de deux versions antithétiques du conte – *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* de Charles Perrault et *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* des Frères Grimm – et la proposition d'une nouvelle fin font du Petit Chaperon Uf et de Wolf des vrais avatars de la figure millénaire du conteur, qui mettent en scène une nouvelle vision du conte, celle du dramaturge contemporain.

En témoignant d'une violence intrinsèque, dont le but est de montrer la bonne et la mauvaise morale, le conte devient pour Jean-Claude Grumberg une source d'inspiration qui se prête parfaitement à sa démarche responsable, à visée réparatrice. L'histoire du Petit Chaperon rouge, par sa double fin enracinée dans la culture littéraire et folklorique depuis des siècles, permet au dramaturge contemporain de confronter le bien et le mal, la mort et le droit de vivre en paix. Le loup-nazi et l'héroïne obligée à porter le chaperon jaune deviennent les avatars contemporains des conteurs d'autrefois qui cherchent à transmettre à la postérité deux variantes antithétiques, mais possibles, de la même Histoire/histoire. Cette confrontation des versions du conte transforme la pièce en une mise en scène de la quête de la vérité ultime et de l'humanité. La démarche va de la reprise des fins déjà consacrées du conte *Le Petit Chaperon rouge*, jusqu'à l'invention d'une nouvelle version qui hyperbolise et fait – tendrement – la caricature de la scène salutaire. Se multipliant à l'infini, les fins transforment la pièce de théâtre de Jean-Claude Grumberg en un texte hybride à plusieurs niveaux, qui rend compte de la nature caméléonesque du conte.

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A(N) (ANARCHE)TYPICAL JOURNEY THROUGH NEW YORK: DON DELILLO'S *COSMOPOLIS* AS AN AMERICAN POSTMODERN ODYSSEY

Maria BARBU¹

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ABSTRACT. *A(n) (Anarche)Typical Journey through New York: Don Delillo's Cosmopolis as an American Postmodern Odyssey.* Journeys made across the North American territories were often made in search of something: a better life, a further frontier space or the lifestyle and the bigger opportunities from the other coast. Other times, mostly towards the second half of the 20th century, these journeys were made out of the sheer pleasure of travelling, having no pre-established routes and allowing themselves to drift endlessly and leave rhizomatic traces on America's map. In the case of Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, these two types of geographical narratives overlap in Eric Packer's chaotic limousine ride across New York, through which he tries to reach his hairdresser but is forever delayed by various things happening on the streets. Through an in-depth geocritical analysis of why the quintessence of the 21st century's American space proves to be unnavigable in straightforward and ordered ways anymore, this paper will use Corin Braga's "anarchetype" to define this type of movement and also to link it to the multiple and decentred identity of the postmodern subject. In addition, the protagonist's journey through Manhattan will be seen as a postmodern odyssey where the destination eludes the traveller to the point in which the journey's meaning does not even depend on it anymore.

¹ **Maria BARBU** is a PhD student at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca and a research assistant at "Anarchetypes. Reevaluation of marginal literary forms and genres", a grant coordinated by prof. Corin Braga and funded by UEFISCDI and the Romanian Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization. Her PhD thesis focuses on the analysis of anarchetypal patterns in post-1950 North American travel literature. She has a Master's and a Bachelor's degree in Universal and Comparative Literature, as well as a second Bachelor's degree in Art History, so her research interests combine the two fields and add themes or theories from philosophy, history of religions, study of the imaginary or sociology. She has published scholarly articles and literary reviews in the *Echinox Journal*, *Brukenethalia*, *Transilvania* and *Steaua* magazine. Email: maria.barbu@ubbcluj.ro.

Keywords: *Don DeLillo, Cosmopolis, anarchetype, geocriticism, postmodern odyssey, rhizomatic journey, American literature*

REZUMAT. O călătorie (anarhe)tipică prin New York. Odiseea americană postmodernă a lui Don DeLillo în Cosmopolis. Călătoriile prin teritoriile nord-americane au fost deseori făcute în căutare de ceva: o viață mai bună, un spațiu de frontieră mai întins sau stilul de viață și oportunitățile mai mari de pe cealaltă coastă. Alteori, mai ales în a doua jumătate a secolului al XX-lea, aceste călătorii au fost făcute din simpla plăcere de a călători: neavând rute prestabilite, ele lasă urme rizomatice pe harta Americii și se mișcă în derivă de-a lungul acesteia. În cazul romanului *Cosmopolis* de Don DeLillo, aceste două tipuri de narațiuni geografice se suprapun în plimbările haotice ale lui Eric Packer cu limuzina prin New York, prin care acesta încearcă să ajungă la frizerul său, dar este mereu blocat de diverse lucruri care se întâmplă pe străzi. Printr-o analiză geocritică aprofundată a motivelor pentru care chintesența spațiului american al secolului XXI dovedește imposibilitatea navigării sale în mod direct și ordonat, această lucrare va folosi conceptul de „anarhetip” al lui Corin Braga pentru a defini acest tip de mișcare și, de asemenea, pentru a-l lega de identitatea multiplă și descentrată a subiectului postmodern. În plus, călătoria protagonistului prin Manhattan va fi văzută ca o odisee postmodernă în care destinația își pierde treptat din importanță până la punctul în care sensul călătoriei nu mai depinde deloc de ea.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Don DeLillo, Cosmopolis, anarhetip, geocriticism, odisee postmodernă, călătorie rizomatică, literatură americană*

Through its very history and construction, the North American continent has become synonymous with movement, whether referring to journeys made for leisure or to the more political and economic implications of migration. Having been discovered by chance as a result of traveling, and then colonized westward all the way to the Pacific coast through the same activity, this territory has had the idea of motion at the deepest core of its development. It has used it to adapt to the various changes that have shaped the nation from its earliest beginnings to its ever-elusive present. However, given the postmodern nature of the book analyzed in this paper, my text will focus mostly on how traveling across America took place starting from the second half of the 20th century. After underlining some of the most important implications of postmodernism on the understanding of space, my approach will dive into Don DeLillo's work to discuss how it reflects technology's intrusion in, and acceleration of, the daily lives of New Yorkers and their distorted perspective on the world around them, even when it comes to the simple activity of crossing a city to get a haircut. To this end, the

story's anarchetypal characteristics – such as the dual nature of the protagonist's limousine, which is in motion but fails to cover any distance, and the narrative episode's order, which is no longer relevant for the journey's meaning – will also be seen as a result of postmodernity's effect on the functioning of both the urban world and the texts written about it.

Understanding space in postmodernity

In postmodern times, the notion of space has acquired some new meanings relative to the discourses in which it was previously integrated. Starting from 1955, for example, when the French philosopher Guy Debord defined the concept of psychogeography as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals” (Debord 1955, 23), there has been a growing interest in how space is not only available for analysis and rational categorization but can also be subjectively felt and experienced. Following the same line of thought, Henri Lefebvre's *La production de l'espace* (1974) underlines two other dimensions that need to be considered to fully understand space in its social instance, in addition to the actual, physical, and geographical space that we perceive around us and that has been shaped throughout history by various people in power: the conceived space and the lived space.

This triad, associated with “spatial practices,” “representations of space,” and “representational spaces,” was then picked up by Edward Soja, who slightly modified the names of the elements and gave them a slightly new interpretation. In his view, “the perceived space” becomes the “Firstspace,” the physical space which is “materialized, socially produced, empirical [...], directly sensible and open, within limits, to accurate measurement and description” (Soja 1996, 66). “The conceived space” becomes the “Secondspace,” the imagined space that presents a mental representation of the world around us, the space associated with diverse meanings and feelings, which is also “the primary space of utopian thought and vision, of the semiotician or decoder and of the purely creative imagination of some artists and poets” (67). Lastly, the “lived space” becomes the “Thirdspace,” which is seen as both different from the former two and encompassing them:

a space that is common to all of us yet never able to be completely seen and understood, an ‘unimaginable universe’ [...]. Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious. (56-57)

Soja took these ideas even further in *Postmetropolis* (2000), where he used this term to describe the enormous American cities whose organization reflects the multiple, decentered, fragmented, and labyrinthine mental configuration of the postmodern subject. The “urban imaginary,” or “our mental mappings of urban reality and the interpretive grids through which we think about, experience, evaluate, and decide to act in the places, spaces, and communities in which we live” (Soja 2000, 324), thus becomes a crucial element in the understanding of our physical surroundings, making us realize, at the same time, how much of a social construct and product the notion of space also is.

This dispersed postmodern worldview is thus reflected in the way people build their cities, but it can also be observed in how they write their stories. Corin Braga explored this aspect in depth and brought forth the concept of the “anarchetype”, defined as being

made up of three Greek etymons: the prefix a, an (‘a-,’ ‘anti-,’ or ‘contra-’); árkhaios (‘old,’ ‘original,’ or ‘primitive’) or arkhê (‘beginning’ or ‘principle’); and týpos (‘type’ or ‘model’). Grouped in pairs, these roots can be found in ‘anarchy’ (comprised of an and of the verb árkhain – ‘to lead’ or ‘guide’) and ‘archetype’ (‘first type,’ ‘original model’). Depending on how we combine all three of them, the anarchetype would denote, then, either an ‘anarchic model’ of text, which rejects and destroys structure, or an ‘anti-archetype,’ to wit, an ‘exploded’ or fragmented archetype. (Braga 2022, 122)

Consequently, texts composed according to this principle lack a central meaning and develop “in surprising and contradictory directions that cannot be subsumed under a single scenario,” in contrast with their more ordered counterparts that respect Aristotle’s rules about the unity of place, time, and action (123). This difference is highly visible in travel narratives too, as anarchetypal journeys take the form of endless wanderings across territories where the concept of boundary is either permeable or nonexistent, an aspect almost impossible in archetypal voyages where the starting and ending points are clearly established and connected by a linear route from the beginning.

It is not necessary for anarchetypal travel narratives to take the form of epic journeys which expand over a large period of time or which cover thousands of kilometres of land or sea. They can take place within the confines of the same city too, as it is the case of DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*, so for this reason it is important to acknowledge how the very essence of the city has been transformed during the past few decades. There has been significant research done on the changes undergone by American cities (fictional or not) during the modern and postmodern eras, and the majority of the studies point to their transformation into complex and open worlds that tend to organize themselves according to principles of

irregularity and multiplication, instead of remaining enclosed into a strictly regulated system of boundaries and organizing patterns. Due to this aspect, as Stefan L. Brandt very well underlines in an article focused on the liminality of cities portrayed in postmodern American literature and movies, these urban conglomerates begin to function as “marketplace[s] of ever-shifting borders and identities through which the American cultural self is defined, challenged, and reinscribed” (Brandt 2009, 554), precisely because their liminal character makes them obliterate any kind of distinction between the real, its copies and its imaginary counterparts, or the past and its future reiterations (something that will be easily visible in the novel analysed later on as well). And because the truth is not singular anymore, but scattered instead into countless possibilities that are reflected by the “contradictory structure of the postmetropolis”, the “mega-city becomes a place in which the meta-narratives of Western society are systematically deconstructed” (559).

In turn, the ambiguity of a place “loaded with the promises of personal advancement and self-realization but also associated with the perils of decline and degeneration” (558) transforms the American postmodern city into a structure resembling more and more the one of a labyrinth, where creating a clear image of your surroundings or of your identity becomes an impossible task. There are choices to be made at every step, but the possible options are still restricted and controlled by the very organization of the space they have to be made inside. In this way, the “enigmatic assemblage of indecipherable signs” (561) that this labyrinth can be equated with leads to a suffocating sense of confusion and alienation due to the intensity with which these signs keep entering every individual's life. From another angle, it can all be seen as a deeper and uglier version of what Émile Durkheim started to notice, in the form of his “anomie” theory, from as early as the end of the 19th century: the lack of an absolute truth and of norms based on it leads to the disappearance of order and stability in society and thus to individuals who feel their existence slowly slipping away from under their control.

DeLillo's radiography of American society and his critical acclaim

When it comes to Don DeLillo's oeuvre, the connection between his texts, the characteristics of the postmodern city experience, and the cultural and political forces that keep the world moving is well-documented and analyzed by his critics. Covering over fifty years of drastic changes within North American society, DeLillo's works always create connections between these changes and a series of figures or events that left their mark on Western history: the rule and thinking of Adolf Hitler, John F. Kennedy's assassination, or the Cold War and its implications,

which served as a background for everything that happened in the second part of the twentieth century. There is a strong cause-effect relationship between these events and the American fragmented identity, as well as between the way DeLillo portrays America's road to postmodernity and the contemporary trends and events shaping this transformation. These aspects are considered by his readers and commentators, who, like Joseph M. Conte, for example, see a foretelling character in DeLillo's works as well as "the gift of the novelist for expressing the latent crises in the culture before others have fully recognized them" (Conte 2008, 180).

Indeed, in his analyses of contemporary American society, the writer seems to dedicate much ink to the future, particularly to how it has ceased to be the future and instead became a part of the present of a culture turned self-referential. For Peter Boxall, this culture "reaches past its own spatial and temporal margins, colonizes its own outsides, brings even un-lived time under the jurisdiction of the global market" (Boxall 2006, 4). Moreover, starting with *Americana* (1971) and gradually advancing to the novels he wrote in the 21st century, DeLillo chronicles the development of (military) technology after the Second World War in parallel with the creation of a world where there is no longer anything impossible to think or achieve, where the concept of the possible is no longer available for exploration. In this way, Boxall points out, "the oeuvre follows a trajectory of virtualization. It produces a map of the way that information and computer technology prepares history for repackaging, for reabsorption into the weightless time of the moving image, the time of the streaming video feed" (223).

The problem with this continuous technological progress, however, is that it eventually estranges people from themselves. As Bruce Bawer notes, one of DeLillo's preferred themes has to do precisely with America's lack of individuality and humanness, with the "sensory overload" condition that makes the protagonists of his works search for "refuges from a technologically overdeveloped society" in the only ways this has become possible nowadays: through the use of extreme violence and a return to primitivism (Bawer 2003, 21-23). I have already mentioned the power that the postmodern city's impulses have on its inhabitants, and DeLillo makes it even more obvious: to live and be exposed to such a city means, as another critic notes, "to absorb and incorporate [its] sensory patterns" (Brandt 2009, 555). This experience can end up being so overwhelming that a separation between the private life of an individual and the public background of the place where their existence unfolds is no longer visible.

One of the novels in which the writer explores this dynamic in a particular way is *Cosmopolis* (2003), a book whose name seems not to appear so often among the critical bibliography focusing on this writer's works. There are,

nevertheless, important studies analyzing *Cosmopolis*' take on the global (cyber-) capital markets and the narrative's distorted perception of time due to it being accelerated by technology, as well as its prophetic character in relation to 9/11 and the recession of the late 2000s or a perspective that underlines the book's belonging to a flat type of aesthetics (Moraru 2023). However, my study will present only briefly some of their main ideas, connecting the postmodern changes that have occurred within the construction of space, characters, narrative episodes, and man's relationship with the world he inhabits with DeLillo's view on the subject. After that, the paper will mostly take into consideration Ian Davidson's analysis in "Automobility, materiality and Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*" to look at Eric Packer's journey through Manhattan from a geocritical perspective that will showcase the characteristics of an anarchetypal postmodern odyssey.

***Cosmopolis* at the intersection between capital and technology**

Cosmopolis' plot has two main axes that traverse the entire length of the book: the billionaire protagonist's spontaneous desire to cross Manhattan for a haircut – "He didn't know what he wanted. Then he knew. He wanted to get a haircut" (DeLillo 2011, 7) – and his equally motivated attempt to bet against the devaluation of the Japanese yen to increase his profits. Both these journeys, set against the backdrop of the postmodern chronotope of American consumerism and capital markets, deviate from a linear trajectory due to Eric Packer's numerous planned and unforeseen encounters across the city. The road from his forty-eight-room apartment (presumably located in the residential complex of the Twin Towers) to the hairdresser his father used to go to is disrupted by chaos in the streets caused by a visit from the president, anti-capitalist protests, a water main break, a funeral procession, and even a death threat on his head. His various discussions with his wife, his mistresses, and his staff members (including his chief of security, chief of technology, chief of finance, chief of theory, and personal doctor) all influence his mood and strategy regarding his actions on the capital market.

Despite being considerably shorter than the usual DeLillo novels, *Cosmopolis* brings forth all the elements needed, in Conte's words, to portray "the collapse of an American future determined by the pure synergy of finance and technology" (Conte 2008, 190), especially as the plot takes place in New York, which became the most important hub of global capital towards the last decades of the 20th century. Eric Packer's road to success, starting from designing his website of "forecasting stocks" (DeLillo 2011, 75) and ending up as a top billionaire investor, mirrors the changes of a world that moved financial transactions completely into the digital sphere, accelerating their pace, and the ways in which the increasing

pervasion of technology in every aspect of people's lives changed their world perspective. As many critics have suggested, postmodern times, especially as DeLillo depicts them in his books, are as distressing and "out-of-joint" as Hamlet's: technology is easier to access than our own bodies, and "the passage of money seems more effortless, more weightless, than the passage of thought" (Boxall 2006, 6). Media of all kinds "must be reckoned with as social forces" (Duvall 2008, 2) because they are gradually losing their mediatory function and start being regarded as the real itself. Multinational corporations have come to seem more vital and influential than governments when it comes to influencing and organizing society (DeLillo 2001, 33).

The last quote is taken from the essay DeLillo wrote soon after the tragedy of 9/11, a text where he also underlined some essential signs of the times that were to be explored even more later in *Cosmopolis*: "the speed of the Internet summoned us all to live permanently in the future, in the utopian glow of cyber-capital, because there is no memory there and this is where markets are uncontrolled and investment potential has no limit" (DeLillo 2001, 33). This is particularly visible in Packer's profession, who is no longer trading stocks associated with specific commercial or industrial sectors; instead, he is working with the flow of money itself, trying to find and predict the "hidden rhythms in the fluctuation of a given currency" (DeLillo 2011, 76). Almost as if the character reflects his author's ability to recognize the changes within American culture before they actually take place, Packer also succeeds in juggling cyber-capital to his advantage, understanding that nowadays nothing happens gradually anymore. Instead, things change, in Conte's view, with "the instantaneity of a paradigm shift in which suddenly none of the rules and explanations of the earlier regime applies" (Conte 2008, 181). However, technology ultimately proves to be above any outcome predicted by humans, underlining yet again postmodern man's inability to organize his life in an ordered and linear way: "[technology] helps us make our fate. We don't need God or miracles of the flight of the bumble bee. But it is also crouched and undecidable. It can go either way" (DeLillo 2011, 95).

There is one last point that needs to be made about this connection between speed, technology, capital, and the flow of time before moving on to the more geographical aspects of the story: the world has long passed the times when its progression was linear and when a clear distinction between past, present, and future could be easily made. For Boxall, this results in the fact that technological means are seen as both obsolete because their objectual, hardware form is no longer a match for their fluid, software essence, but the latter also accelerates our sense of time and reality and thus brings our imagined future into our experienced present (Boxall 2006, 222-224). No longer the untouchable metaphysical concept ruled by the gods, "[t]ime is a corporate asset now. It belongs to the free market

system. The present is hard to find. It is being sucked out of the world to make way for the future of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential" (DeLillo 2011, 79). Consequently, everyone experiencing this ever-fleeting present contaminated with both traces of the past and glimpses of the future is living their life in a continuous hybrid, in-between state, without being able to rely on any of the certainties on which their existence has been based until now.

The immobile mobility of Eric Packer's limousine

All these aspects considered, how does a typical journey through a city reflecting these paradigmatic changes look like in DeLillo's words at the beginning of the new millennium? My argument is that a typical trip of this kind is best described as anarchetypal, since its structure conforms to the characteristics presented by Corin Braga in his theory.

Despite his opposite intentions, *Cosmopolis'* protagonist ends up following an unplanned route across Manhattan, demonstrating how the idea of traveling aimlessly (or, in this case, trying and failing to reach a place that could be regarded as a destination) is not always consciously assumed by the traveler. Sometimes it is a self-imposed consequence of the spatiotemporal circumstances within which the voyage takes place. "[F]rom dawn to nightfall and from the bastions of wealth and global power to the squalid indigence of an abandoned warehouse" (Conte 2008, 181), Eric Packer's limousine is supposed to take him across town in a maximum of half an hour if we look on a map at the distance between his residence on First Avenue and the more industrial side where he wants to go, situated after Eleventh Avenue. Yet, the ride takes him a whole day, and both its purpose and ending remain suspended. This happens, as I will soon expand based on the arguments of the already mentioned Ian Davidson, because DeLillo writes in a time when the illusions of prestige and freedom brought in the 1950s-1960s by the spread of automobile ownership among the American middle class overlap with and then are destroyed by the increasingly digitalized technologies that operate in a dual mode: they make it impossible for cars to offer such a liberating experience anymore while also adding to their construction functions that transform the car into much more than just a means of transportation (Davidson 2012, 470).

Davidson also points out how, after almost a century in which people's reliance on and possession of cars kept increasing exponentially, the experience of the road changed drastically, leading to the more efficient plane travel replacing the long road trips, which became both boring and impractical due to the frequent traffic jams (472). In relation to other famous literary travels, the one from *Cosmopolis* thus seems to belong to a category of its own: an anarchetypal journey

that reflects the chaotic, unpredictable, and fragmented nature of contemporary urban existence.

It's a journey that certainly does not have the teleology of that of the Joads, whatever the consequences of arrival in California, or even the futility of those in Kerouac's *On the Road* [...]. Nor is it a journey of discovery of land and identity as in Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley*, or an escape route into an unknown future for the villain as in Patrick Hamilton's *Gorse* trilogy. The car in *Cosmopolis* is a vehicle that was never meant to go anywhere, and can't anyway because of the density of the traffic. (473)

DeLillo creates a powerful contrast between the physical immobility of the journey and the speed of abstract financial transactions, currency changes, and the continuous flow of market information. "Never mind the speed that makes it hard to follow what passes before the eye. The speed is the point. Never mind the urgent and endless replenishment, the way data dissolves at one end of the series just as it takes shape at the other. This is the point, the thrust, the future. We are not witnessing the flow of information so much as pure spectacle, or information made sacred, ritually unreadable" (DeLillo 2011, 80). Despite the fast pace at which everything happens in the digital world, including the characters' way of talking about it, movement in the real world advances only in time, as geographically it seems to return "to the pace of the 1865 locomotive act, where a vehicle was limited to 4 mph (and 2 mph in towns) and preceded by a man with a red flag" (Davidson 2012, 477).

The more traditional function of the car—taking its owner where they need to go or taking the open road to help them escape their daily routine—is thus replaced by one that keeps something else in motion: data and money (478), i.e., precisely the things that keep the capitalist world from crashing down. The car acquires a hybrid, in-between state that renders it both mobile and immobile at the same time, an aspect that also becomes valid for the urban environment that serves as a background for all the narrative episodes. Postmodern depictions of cities in books or movies often highlight their artificially constructed character, and New York, in particular, appears as a place without a fixed past or a linear history, one whose "present invents itself, from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future" (De Certeau 1993, 127 quoted in Brandt 2009, 566). Brandt's analysis on the liminality of such cities correlates their structure, made of overlapped surfaces without any depth, with the individual's similar lack of a core identity, ultimately reaching an image where the apparent order of such fictional spaces is essentially just labyrinthine, regulated chaos that takes its component parts from the real and the imaginary world equally (576).

In this view, American cities lose their individuality and begin to resemble one another, especially in post-apocalyptic narratives where all are equally destroyed by different cataclysms. Alan J. Gravano, another researcher of New York's characteristics in DeLillo's novels, also emphasizes how postmodernity fragmented the urban world and made artificial things like commodities and consumerism dominate the spiritual or moral values, which have almost completely disappeared (Gravano 2011, 181). This annihilation of elements that could have given life some sort of essence or sense leads to people feeling as empty as the ultra-modern and technologized cities they live in (183, 188), which remain paradoxically empty despite being permanently full of tourists. Experiencing the city in postmodernity thus feels overwhelming from a sensory point of view—both due to the masses flooding any metropolis and the ongoing flux of information interrupting our personal life from the technological devices around us. At the same time, it also gives the impression of a sterile environment lacking specificity or a deeper meaning than what can be seen on the surface.

It becomes clear now how, within this chronotope where spatial boundaries (between one city and another), temporal boundaries (between past, present, and future), and ontological boundaries (between the real and its imaginary – or not – copies) are not so strict anymore, an ordered, finite, purpose-driven, and clearly structured journey is no longer possible. “A ride crosstown does not happen unless we make a day of it, with cookies and milk” (DeLillo 2011, 19), Packer hears from his bodyguard. The length of a day will indeed be needed for him to reach his hairdresser, even though that scene will not represent the end of his journey, as I have already mentioned. And yet, anarchetypal as it may be, this slow-motion and rhizomatic car ride across Manhattan is only a logical consequence and reflection of this new postmodern (dis)order of things, an argument that I will further explore.

In the sharp radiography of contemporary America that he constructs in *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo introduces an episode that proves beyond doubt that the existence of human beings has been altered to its very core by technology's interference with the limits between the present and the future: the episode of the protagonist's death. Eric Packer experiences this particular event in advance, as he sees himself dead on his smartwatch before Benno Levin, an angry former employee whose confessions make up the inter-chapters of the book and who wants to kill him to hold him responsible for the economic and political implications of his financial activities, gets to shoot his gun. This sensation, called by Peter Boxall a “reverse déjà vu, a kind of future anterior” (Boxall 2006, 231), creates an expectation for the readers and a presumptive ending for Packer's story. However, the very last sentence of the novel seems to contradict this assumption: “this is not the end. He is dead inside the crystal of his watch but still alive in original space,

waiting for the shot to sound” (DeLillo 2011, 209). Henry Veggian, another of DeLillo’s analysts, notes how anachronistic scenes where effects are experienced before their causes appear several times throughout the novel, including when Levin describes Packer’s corpse lying on the floor before they even meet. These episodes create chronological disruptions that, as the critic argues, reflect the “out of sequence” narrative organization used to “dramatize the novel’s characters” (Veggian 2015, 93).

When it comes to DeLillo’s way of choosing to close the novel, the fact that the protagonist remains suspended between life and death is significant. As Veggian explains, “the novel uses anachronism and discontinuity to dramatize the asynchronous time of global capital markets: Eric expires but he does not. Rather, he continues to exist as a numerical quantity on a spreadsheet, in the form of debt, as an image broadcast for media consumption, as a shock wave washing over collapsing global markets” (89). The anarchetypal character of Packer’s journey (both the physical one through Manhattan and the ontological one through time) is exemplified to the fullest here. Boxall’s analysis supports this claim by identifying all the elements that situate the plot, especially its ending, in between any fixed categories that could give it a more ordered structure.

On the one hand, the organizing principle that has set some decade boundaries in DeLillo’s previous novels is no longer functioning in *Cosmopolis* (Boxall 2006, 215). We see Packer encountering an anti-capitalist protest during his limousine ride, a manifestation that is actually “against the future. They want to hold off the future. They want to normalize it, keep it from overwhelming the present” (DeLillo 2011, 91). However, within this “unboundaried” chronotope from the beginning of the new millennium, when nothing is yet clearly framed (Boxall 2006, 216) and both places and days seem to look alike everywhere (11), this separation between the present and the future is no longer possible. The resulting confusion is defining for the postmodern individual who is condemned to experience all the possible realities intersecting at that moment at once (226). This can be best observed in two distinct scenes: in the first one, Packer is questioned by his wife about what he was doing in the hotel she saw him getting out of, and he lists a large variety of options which could all be true precisely because the truth is not unique anymore and all the possibilities hold the same value within the potentiality field. In the second one, we find him stuck in the middle of the street, towards the end of the novel:

There was nothing to do. He hadn’t realized this could happen to him. The moment was empty of urgency and purpose. He hadn’t planned on this. Where was the life he’d always led? There was nowhere he wanted to go, nothing to think about, no one waiting. How could he take a step in any direction if all directions were the same? (DeLillo 2011, 180)

This happens right before he hears a gunshot and his name being called by Levin, who seems to be urging his former boss to take some action in this overwhelming list of choices among which he is lost and some responsibility regarding the implications of his rush for money and global power.

On the other hand, beyond Boxall's focus on how the book's finale places Packer's journey (of life) in the gap between what happens in real time and what cyberspace has already shown will happen in the future (232), a gap he calls "the stretched time of an ending that continued to go on" (226) or a "finishedness which is also in process" (230), we must mention another aspect that gives the story its anarchetypal character. Packer's financial transactions influence the entire banking system and eventually cause its downfall because he cannot properly understand the yen. Benno Levin's speech in the novel's last pages also explains why this downfall occurred. Instead of trying "to predict the movements of the yen by drawing on patterns from nature" and "looking for balance, beautiful balance, equal parts, equal sides," Packer should "have been tracking the yen in its tics and quirks. The little quirks. The misshape. [...] That's where the answer was, in your body, in your prostate" (DeLillo 2011, 200), which was also asymmetrical, as Packer is told during his regular medical check-up in his car.

What DeLillo emphasizes here is, again, the idea that the laws of nature, which built everything according to ordered and clearly structured patterns, are not capable of functioning anymore in a world where technology is so advanced that it brings into the present fragments of an unknowable future that have not happened yet. What people need to consider now when trying to "organize" their lives is the asymmetrical, the hybrid, the slightly-off, the chaos, and the disorder themselves.

Lastly, this analysis of *Cosmopolis* will address one final aspect: the possibility of Packer's journey being equated with a postmodern odyssey. Classical odysseys like Homer's and Virgil's or medieval ones like Dante's and the Irish legends from Celtic mythology usually involved a long and sometimes wandering series of travels that had a clear purpose and ultimately led to the initiation of the hero who completed them. Such archetypal voyages were later continued by the Renaissance's exploration journeys attempting to reach the Far East and the 17th-18th century trend of extraordinary voyages, but texts like Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* reversed the perspective, satirizing this genre and destabilizing the ordered patterns on which such travel narratives were written. Ultimately, setting aside the migratory journeys across or toward North America for economic or political reasons, the majority of modern and postmodern voyages on this continent turned into voyages of discovery of land,

authentic life, or identity, thus having an idea as a purpose rather than a physical destination.

However, regardless of the century or culture they were a product of, what all of these texts had in common was the duration of the journey, which expanded considerably in both time and space, covering months, if not years, from the protagonist's life and thousands of kilometers across various continents or seas. By contrast, in *Cosmopolis* everything happens in just one day in the same city, and the impression we are left with throughout the journey and at its end is neither one of advancement nor one of completion: "there is no sense of a journey being completed, but rather of a vehicle in endless circulation" (Davidson 2012, 473). Nevertheless, the numerous obstacles, detours, and secondary episodes that together constitute the actual plot of the novel still qualify it as an odyssey, albeit one constructed according to the principles of the postmodern worldview. At the turn of the millennium, a single city is portrayed as being labyrinthine enough for a simple ride across it to turn into an entire odyssey, and since this odyssey's destination eludes the traveler to the point where the journey's meaning does not even depend on it anymore, the order of the narrative scenes becomes irrelevant as well. Even if Packer's limousine had first been blocked by the street protests instead of the water-main break, or if he had been consulted by his doctor only after meeting his chief of theory, his hair would still have been only half cut by the end of the day, and his life would still hang in expectation of the gunshot sound by the end of the novel.

Conclusions

"The trouble with a tale where anything can happen is that somehow nothing happens" (Updike 2003), reads a review written shortly after *Cosmopolis* was published. It can easily be observed how DeLillo depicts here a journey seemingly devoid of movement compared to any tradition of literary journeys, yet a bit more relatable when seen in the context of America's traffic jams and chaotic big-city boulevards. Postmodern times transform a typical journey through New York into an anarchetypal one, a simple ride across the city to get a haircut into an odyssey that not only involves navigating through a labyrinth of obstacles but also ends with suspended closure as Eric Packer gets only part of his hair cut and will probably lose his life but has not yet lost it by the time DeLillo writes the last word of his book. Being the center of global cybercapital, New York is affected and transformed along with its inhabitants and their worldview equally. Thus, a different approach to understanding the intersections of space and time is needed to make sense of anything.

To put it simply, things look different now in a country haunted by the specter of capitalism, whose essence is reduced to “the investment banker, the land developer, the venture capitalist, [...] the software entrepreneur, the global overlord of satellite and cable, the discount broker, the beaked media chef, [...] the exiled head of state of some smashed landscape of famine and war” (DeLillo 2011, 10). These figures are driven around the city by taxi drivers to various places where they change the course of world events. If DeLillo’s work is often seen as “an authentic, moral reaction against what are often characterized as the ‘excesses’ of the postmodern” (Boxall 2006, 14), the fact that these excesses can take the form of individuals being overwhelmed by constant impulses from the past and future simultaneously and thus permanently stuck in the middle should not come as a surprise.

Finally, through its analysis of the economic, financial, technological, and political climate illustrated in the book, as well as the paradoxically disordered way in which a journey through a geometrically structured American metropolis looks from a geographical point of view at the beginning of the 21st century, this paper has demonstrated that the “order at some deep level” and the “pattern that wants to be seen” (DeLillo 2011, 86) are actually not discoverable anymore, neither by billionaires like Eric Packer nor by the simple people protesting in the street. Covering physical distances now becomes less important and visible than covering digital ones. Bringing a constant flux of information into everyone’s life and manipulating the financial strings of the world to drag even the future into the present are signs that the postmodern world is heading more and more towards an anarchetypal understanding of how things should work.

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ANDREÏ MAKINE – FROM ANONYMITY TO LITERARY FAME

Constantin TONU¹

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ABSTRACT. *Andreï Makine – From Anonymity to Literary Fame.* The aim of this article is to analyse the strategies that enabled Andreï Makine to go from being a penniless Russian immigrant living in a Parisian cemetery to becoming a celebrity in the French literary world. The first aspect to be considered is the use of pseudo-translation. Unlike another Russian writer in exile, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who always believed that his works would be read by his compatriots and have an impact on the Russian cultural space, Makine, who settled in France in 1987, decided to write in French, mainly for a French readership. However, his first two novels were rejected by the Parisian publishers who did not believe that a Russian could write so well in French, so Makine had to create fictitious translators in order to get his texts published. Another significant factor is the way in which he exploited his biographical aspects to create a personal mythology. The third, and perhaps most important, factor that has contributed to Makine's consecration in the French cultural space is the way he describes his country of origin (he has been accused of creating an image of Russia that would be pleasing to Western eyes) and his host country, praising both the French language and, as the title of one of his books puts it, "this France that we forget to love".

Keywords: *pseudo-translation, hybrid identity, personal mythology, slavophilia, francité*

¹ **Constantin TONU** is a Ph.D. student at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. His Ph.D. research focuses on the re-emergence of Pan-Slavism in the post-communist period. He has published a book, *The Desert in Literature*, and a series of articles and book reviews in *Echinox Journal*, *Transilvania*, *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Philologica*, *Ekphrasis Journal*, *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*. Email: constantin.tonu@ubbcluj.ro.

REZUMAT. Andrei Makine – de la anonimitate la faimă literară. Acest articol își propune să analizeze factorii și strategiile care au facilitat transformarea lui Andrei Makine, un imigrant rus fără bani și fără acte care trăia într-un cimitir parizian, într-o celebritate a spațiului literar francez. Primul aspect care va fi abordat este utilizarea pseudotraducerii. Spre deosebire de un alt scriitor rus exilat, Alexander Soljenițin, care a crezut întotdeauna că lucrările sale vor fi citite de compatrioții săi și vor avea un impact asupra spațiului cultural rusesc, Makine, stabilit în Franța din 1987, a decis să scrie în franceză în principal pentru un public francez. Cu toate acestea, primele două romane ale sale au fost respinse de editorii parizieni care nu credeau că un rus poate scrie atât de bine în franceză. În consecință, Makine a fost nevoit să creeze traducători fictivi pentru a-și publica romanele. Al doilea aspect semnificativ este modul în care scriitorul și-a instrumentat elementele biografice pentru a crea o mitologie personală. În cele din urmă, al treilea și poate cel mai important factor care a contribuit la consacrarea lui Makine în spațiul cultural francez este modul în care el descrie țara sa de origine (a fost acuzat că a reprezentat Rusia clișeic, pentru a fi placul occidentalilor) și țara gazdă, elogiind atât limba franceză, cât și, cum spune titlul uneia dintre cărțile sale, „această Franță pe care uităm să o iubim”.

Cuvinte-cheie: *pseudotraducere, identitate hibridă, mitologie personală, slavofilie, francitate*

With 24 books published over a period of 34 years (four of them under the pen name of Gabriel Osmonde), Andrei Makine is one of the most prolific and best-known contemporary French writers. His novels, translated into dozens of languages, have been the subject of several doctoral theses (Nazarova 2003; Clément 2008; Chilea-Matei 2010; Harmath 2011; Bărbuceanu 2014), monographic studies (Parry, Scheidhauer and Welch 2004, 2005; Laurent 2006; Sylwestrzak-Wszelaki 2010; Clément 2011; Toma and Samarineanu, 2017; Duffy 2018 etc.) and numerous scientific articles and book chapters. With each new novel, Makine is invited to give interviews, speak at conferences and appear on radio and television, and his public presence has become increasingly sought after. Furthermore, in March 2016 he became a member of the French Academy, a distinguished achievement that can be seen as the culmination of his integration into the French literary world. The reputation he enjoys today, however, contrasts sharply with his precarious situation in the first years after his arrival in France in 1987 as an obscure Russian immigrant.

His journey from anonymity to national and international literary fame, and the strategies and contexts that facilitated it, is the focus of this research. The three main aspects that will be discussed are: the use of pseudo-translation as a

response to the refusal of Parisian editors to believe that an unknown Russian immigrant could write well in French; the instrumentalisation of biographical data to create a personal mythology; and the portrayal of the country of origin and the country of adoption in a way that appeals to the French. Methodologically, biographical research and the contextual approach will be used for the first two aspects, while the third aspect will be explored through textual analysis.

Born in 1957 in Krasnoïarsk, Siberia, Andreï Makine lived in the USSR until the age of thirty, when, taking advantage of the more relaxed environment brought about by Gorbachev's reforms, he seized the opportunity to go to France as part of a teacher exchange programme and applied for political asylum, which he was granted. The experiences of his early years in Paris seem to have been imbued with an aura typical of the characters of Romantic literature. As he had neither money nor proper papers, he lived for a while in a nook in the Père Lachaise cemetery, and then in a 12-square-metre room in the Montmartre district. However, the poverty and precariousness of his external conditions mattered much less to Makine than his inner freedom. As he confessed in an interview, he did not feel poor and helpless because he already had a perfect knowledge of French, which he had learnt as a child from his French-born grandmother, Charlotte Lemonnier, and he was in a place that offered him the necessary freedom of expression, France (Makine 2016, 0:45-1:00).

It was under these circumstances, half starving and mostly "sitting on park benches" (Tolstaya 1997), that Makine wrote (in French) his first two novels: *A Hero's Daughter* (1990) and *Confessions of a Fallen Standard-Bearer* (1992). The story of their publication became so famous that it is anecdotally mentioned in most studies devoted to the man known as "the most Russian of French writers"² (Makine 2023). The difficulties the author encountered in trying to publish these two books were due to the climate of suspicion among French publishers at the time, who did not believe that a Russian could write well in French and therefore rejected the manuscripts without even reading them. In response, Makine, who was prepared to do anything in his power to get them published, resorted to the literary trick of pseudo-translation, i.e. he invented fictitious people who supposedly translated the novels from Russian into French: Françoise Bour for the first novel and Albert Lemonnier for the second – „he even had to translate the second novel into Russian for a publisher who demanded to see the «original»!" (Safran 2003, 246). In the case of *A Hero's Daughter*, he also wrote an entire paratext from the perspective of the supposed translator to make it more convincing. It included an "acknowledgement in which Makine and the fictitious Françoise Bour express thanks to «Georges Martinowsky»,

² "Le plus russe des écrivains français" (my translation).

«agrégé de russe», for having read though the manuscript and translation and commented on them” (McCall 2006, 286), and more than thirty footnotes, mainly explaining Russian cultural or historical references such as “kommunalka”, “lejanka”, “matriochka”, “N.K.V.D.”, “Raikom” and “Obkom” (Lievoin 2013, 447-449; McCall 2006, 286-287). This ingenious subterfuge of pseudo-translation proved successful and his novels were finally published.

The story also appears in the last chapter of his autobiographical novel *Dreams of My Russian Summers (Le Testament français)*, narrated by the protagonist Aliosha, a Russian writer who has emigrated to France (and Makine’s alter ego), who confesses:

All this was the fruit of a pure and simple literary hoax on my part. For the novels had been written directly in French and rejected by publishers. I was “some funny little Russian who thought he could write in French”. In a gesture of despair I had then invented a translator and submitted the manuscript, presenting it as translated from the Russian. It had been accepted, published, and hailed for the quality of the translation. (Makine 1998, 220)

Therefore, in order to be accepted by the Paris literary authorities into The World Republic of Letters, Makine had to give up thinking of himself as a French writer and instead adopt the identity, the label of a Russian author – a foreigner, an outsider who wanted to be published in a prestigious centre of literary consecration (Casanova 2004). All the more so as he could thus “be pegged and marketed in the fashionable category of «writer from Eastern Europe»” (Wanner 2002, 123), for the exoticism of Russian themes was in high demand among the French population at the time – an interest that Makine, who was quick to recognise the advantages of marketing himself as a Russian writer (Taras 2000, 51), knew how to capitalise on. As Ian McCall notes:

at the end of the 1980s, when Makine was looking for a publisher, the former Soviet Union was the subject of great media attention in France. From 1987 onwards, news magazines like *L’Express* ran many articles devoted to various aspects of Russian politics, history and culture. This included features on Gorbachev’s reforms and Russia’s relationships with other countries, articles on the goulags and dissidents, and reviews of literary and (socio)historical texts. (McCall 2006, 290)

Despite Makine’s strategies, his early novels did not find a significant echo in the French literary world. It wasn’t until his fourth novel, *Dreams of My Russian Summers* (1995), the first book in history to win the two most prestigious literary awards in France, the Prix Goncourt and the Prix Médicis (and also the

Prix Goncourt des Lycéens), that Makine emerged from anonymity to become an overnight celebrity (Safran 2003, 246; Tonu 2023, 125). This astonishing success, which also earned him French citizenship (which he had been denied in the past), immediately put him in the media spotlight, with journalists trying to find out everything they could about the hitherto unknown Andrei Makine. But the way he responded to the excessive curiosity of his interviewers, refusing to give details of his personal life and letting the novels do the talking for him, only added to the mystery surrounding him and thus increased his popularity (Clément 2011, 12).

As Ionela Bărbuceanu points out, Makine's assertion that "I am what my books are, that's all"³ (Makine 2016, 2:10-2:13), that the author's biography and intentions only serve to imprison the text (Barthes 1997, 147) and limit the free and seminal play of meanings (Derrida 2001, 352), has not pleased all but a few critics (such as Erzsebet Harmath and Murielle-Lucie Clément). Others (such as Nina Nazarova) set out on the tortuous path of reconstructing Makine's life, "gathering all the available data, both from interviews and from the novels recognised by the author as having the strongest autobiographical overtones"⁴: *Dreams of My Russian Summers and Once Upon the River Love* (Bărbuceanu 2016, 86). The result of this attempt to fill in the gaps is a biographical narrative based on a series of assumptions and possible interpretations of controversial characters or episodes. It is believed that Makine lost his parents at an early age, was sent to live in an orphanage, and then grew up under the influence of an older French-speaking woman, Charlotte Lemonnier, who instilled in him a love of French language and culture (and who he refers to as his grandmother in some interviews and as a close family friend in others). But we can't be sure that this was the case; it's not even certain that Andrei Makine is his real name. "In fact, apart from the author's date and place of birth, which in themselves have been subject to polemics, little is known about the life of a man who, while happy to talk to journalists, remains highly discreet about his past or deliberately misleads his interviewers by providing them with mutually contradictory information" (Duffy 2018, 6).

The practice of reading Makine's novels in an autobiographical key⁵, combined with the lack of clear information about the writer's background, has

³ „Je suis ce que sont mes livres, c'est tout” (my translation).

⁴ „adunând toate datele disponibile, atât din interviuri, cât și din scrierile recunoscute de autor ca fiind cu cea mai accentuată tentă autobiografică” (my translation).

⁵ For example, in an article published in 1996, Sascha Talmor, in her autobiographical reading of *Dreams of My Russian Summers*, went so far as to claim that Andrei Makine grew up in the remote village of Saranza, where much of the action of the novel takes place (Talmor 1996, 2095) – although there is no such village in Russia, it is a fictional place, most likely “a conflation of the real cities of Saratov and Penza” as David Gillespie notes (Gillespie 2012, 798).

even led to the hypothesis that Makine had links with the KGB – speculation that has gained momentum with the publication of the novel *Requiem for a Lost Empire* (2000), whose protagonist is a secret KGB agent. Nina Nazarova, for example, says that this hypothesis is likely to be true because, even in the Gorbachev era, Russians “could not travel abroad without the consent of the secret services or a clear mission from them”⁶ (Bărbuceanu 2016, 41-42). Moreover, the explanations given for his defection to the West in 1987 (aversion to capitalist Russia and to the official Soviet narrative of the war in Afghanistan) are rather unconvincing, especially since he had already had a stable and successful academic career in the USSR: professor at the Pedagogical Institute in Novgorod (Nazarova 2005, 16; Duffy 2018, 6-7).

Critics have noted that Makine’s authorial image was not constructed solely on the basis of external sources. On the contrary, he actively influenced it through his numerous appearances in the press and the (pseudo)biographical details he skilfully inserted into his novels, thus contributing to the creation of a personal mythology (Lievois 2013; Bărbuceanu 2016, 17-18; Olteanu 2009, 143). The mythological aura is maintained even by his eccentric lifestyle. Condemning the consumerism and capitalism that dehumanise us, Makine decided to live like a hermit in the hustle and bustle of the Parisian metropolis. Single, unmarried and committed to the ideal of chastity, on the grounds that living with a woman would not allow him to devote himself entirely to artistic creation, Makine leads a rigorous and austere life, refusing to be tempted by material possessions to the point of making his own household objects out of wood.

The sudden and astonishing literary success of 1995 did not change him. Makine retained his value system of preferring inwardness and spirituality to outwardness – which is why, existentially and literarily, he is more closely associated with the Russian Orthodox tradition, with his country of origin, than with his adopted country (Bărbuceanu 2016, 45-47). The very appearance of this writer, who speaks perfect French but with a strong Russian accent, has fascinated the French public. Dominique Fernandez’s description of Makine in the *Dictionnaire amoureux de la Russie* (2004), taken up by many Internet platforms, is eloquent in this respect: “To look at his tall stature, rigid stance, face carved with a serrated edge, prophet’s beard and clear eyes, you’d think he was one of those pilgrims who walked the vastness of the steppe with a stick in his hand (...). But beneath this serene monk-like physique lies a rebellious, tormented and violent spirit.”⁷ (Barguillet Hauteloire 2016)

⁶ „nu puteai călători în afară fără acordul serviciilor secrete, sau fără o misiune clară din partea acestora” (my translation).

⁷ A voir la haute stature, le port rigide, le visage taillé à la serpe, la barbe de prophète, les yeux clairs, on dirait un de ces pèlerins qui parcouraient, un bâton à la main (...), l’immensité de la steppe. Mais sous ce physique serein de moine, se cache un esprit rebelle, tourmenté, violent. (my translation)

In addition to the clever instrumentalisation of biographical aspects and the use of the ingenious ruse of pseudo-translation, Makine's decision to write in the language of his adopted country can also be seen as a marketing strategy. The novel that made him famous, *Dreams of My Russian Summers*, was accepted directly in French by the prestigious publisher Simone Gallimard, the author being praised for the virtuosity with which he articulated his thoughts in the language of Voltaire. In one of his public discussions, Makine mentioned that he chose to write in French because it gave him much more freedom of expression than the impoverished and ideologised Russian language of the Soviet era, but also because his target audience was the French (Makine 2019, 1:02:35-1:03:02). As David Gillespie points out, by writing in French, mainly for a French readership (and thereafter, through translations, for an international one), the Franco-Russian writer

significantly departs from the Russian literary tradition of direct engagement with his native country, especially pronounced during the twentieth century with the banishment of entire generations of writers abroad, and perhaps best embodied by the case of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Although his works were banned in the Soviet Union, Solzhenitsyn always believed that they would be read by his compatriots, and never doubted that his word as a writer of truth would eventually have a profound effect on Russia itself. (Gillespie 2010, 6)

In Makine's case, the reception of his work in his native country proved to be poor and rather negative. From the point of view of his compatriots, the exiled writer is guilty of a triple betrayal: firstly, for leaving the country; secondly, for replacing the Russian language with French; and thirdly, for the way in which he portrayed (contemporary) Russia in his texts. Only one of his books has been translated into Russian, *Dreams of My Russian Summers* – “published, some would say ironically, in the journal *Inostrannaia literatura*” (*Foreign Literature*) in 1996 (Gillespie 2012, 799) –, and despite his international fame, it did not receive good reviews from Russian literary critics. For example, both Maya Zlobina, the first to write about the novel, and Tatyana Tolstaya, an imposing figure on the Russian literary scene, accused Makine of fabricating an exotic image of Russia full of clichés, stereotypes and kitsch in order to please the West.

Zlobina bases her criticism on Makine's loss of contact with Russian reality as a result of his emigration. Because he spent the first thirty years of his life in the USSR, the story doesn't quite reach the realm of the aberrant, the “total myth”, but the falsehood is nonetheless obvious and, what's more, served up “without a hint of irony”. According to her, the whole novel is

a straightforward combination of customary stereotypes [...] which only foreigners can accept as the real McCoy. But then again, they are the ones

the author is writing for, and this can be felt from the very beginning by the urgency with which the author picks out things that can impress the European eye: boundless expanses, fields of flourishing crops ‘from the Black Sea to the Pacific Ocean’, the steppe, the steppe, the steppe and snows without end and in which, of course, lurks something enigmatic and alluring. (Zlobina 1996, translated by Gillespie 2010, 3-4)

Tatyana Tolstaya, while noting some positive aspects – the novel is well conceived, multidimensional, postmodern, saturated with cultural allusions –, continues Zlobina’s ideas, insisting that Makine’s writing is too slow, too calculated, too serious, too aesthetic, without surprises, without humour, densely packed with banalities, clichés and worn-out metaphors. It’s a blatant homage to Proust, but without the Proustian richness and intensity. After analysing several passages in terms of how they sound in Russian⁸, Tolstaya concludes that “this is not how a Russian writes for Russians (for himself), this is how a Russian writes for the French (for «them»), as if he «understands» what is required of him, what «they» need, how to attract «their» attention”⁹ (Tolstaya 1998). The impression one gets from reading Makine’s novel, she claims, is that we are dealing with a cultural hybrid, a linguistic chimera, a literary basilisk, a Russian pretending to be French, writing in French, with a French reader/publisher in mind, describing Russia as an imaginary Frenchman would do.

Moreover, according to Tolstaya, if this novel, which caused a sensation in France, had been published in Russia, it wouldn’t have won the slightest prize, and no one would have bothered to translate it into other languages (Tolstaya 1998). This diatribe is all the more interesting and perplexing because, as David Gillespie notes, Tatyana Tolstaya is guilty of the same intellectual dishonesty for which she attacks Makine. That’s because, in addition to the harsh and scathing review I quoted above, published “in the Russian-language magazine *Znamia*, for a Russian readership” (Gillespie 2012, 800), she wrote another review of the same novel, this time for an English-language readership, in *The New York Review of Books*, in which she praised Makine for his poetic evocation of France, but also for his passionate and powerful portrayal of Russia, “a country where cruelty and reverie form a paradoxical unity” – adding that this portrayal that could only have been made by someone who was born in Russia and spent thirty years of his life there (Tolstaya 1997).

⁸ She read the novel in Russian, translated from the French by Y. Yakhnina and N. Shakhovskaya in 1996: Андрей Макин. 1996. *Французское завещание*. Роман. Пер. с французского Ю. Яхниной и Н. Шаховской. “Иностранная литература”, № 12.

⁹ “Так не пишет русский для русских (для себя), так пишет русский для французов (для «них»), как бы «понимая», что от него требуется, что «им» надо, чем привлечь «их» внимание” (my translation).

But it is not only Russian critics who have said that Makine's depiction of his native and adopted country was a major factor in his extraordinary success in 1995. Adrian Wanner, for example, argues that the immense popularity of the novel *Dreams of My Russian Summers* is at least partly due to the fact that Makine seems "to confirm the French sense of cultural superiority over more «barbarian» societies such as Soviet Russia" (Wanner 2002, 111). The novel tells the coming-of-age story of the narrator, Alyosha, a young boy who lives in the 1960s and 1970s in an industrial city on the banks of the Volga and spends his summers with his French grandmother, Charlotte Lemonnier, in Saranza, a quiet town on the edge of the steppe. Learning French from his grandmother and listening to her fascinating stories about the France of her youth, the boy feels "a French implant" growing in his heart. As a result, he lives his life torn between two identities and two worldviews, that of a Russian and that of a Frenchman, the conflict between them being the driving force of the whole narrative.

One of the most emblematic passages explaining this duality is when the protagonist analyses the word Tsar: "when I pronounced the Russian word «ЦАРЬ» a cruel tyrant rose up before me; while the word «tsar» in French was redolent of lights, of sounds, of wind, of glittering chandeliers, of the radiance of women's bare shoulders, of mingled perfumes, of the inimitable air of our Atlantis" (Makine 1998, 39). Alyosha admits that there is tyranny, evil, torture, suffering, self-mutilation, censorship and oppression in the USSR. But he confesses that he still feels irrevocably bound to it. That he loves it despite its absurdities, atrocities and monstrosities. Or rather, because of them, for he sees in them "a higher meaning that no logical reasoning can penetrate" (Makine 1998, 144). There is a certain Slavophile influence in this fragment – a tradition that insisted on the idea of a clear difference between, on the one hand, rational, logical-mathematical Western Cartesian thought and, on the other hand, Slavic or Russian thought, which does not operate analytically, separating things into their constituent elements in order to understand them, but which glimpses the essence of things through a mystical-religious, irrational approach (Tonu 2023, 127).

The image of Russia becomes a bit more nuanced thanks to the contrast between the big, nameless, Stalinist-style industrial city on the Volga, where Alyosha has to spend most of his time, and the small, sleepy, dusty provincial town of Saranza, a peaceful place, "lost in the middle of an endless plain" (Makine 1998, 126), where his imagination could run free. Makine's suggestion, which he would develop further in other novels (such as *The Life of an Unknown Man* and *The Woman Who Waited*), is that beyond the sordid, depressing and oppressive social reality of the USSR, "where censorship, violence and atrocities were almost ubiquitous, there is a deep and authentic Russia, not in Moscow and St. Petersburg, but in the endless steppes, in the remote and forgotten villages, where traditional Russian spiritual values have remained intact" (Tonu 2023, 136) and where the Russian soul is truly at home.

During his holidays in Saranza, Alyosha is swept away on the seductive waves of his grandmother's stories to an idealised France that he calls "our Atlantis". Embellished and romanticized in Charlotte's words, this country becomes a fabulous and mythical realm onto which the boy projects all his fantasies and desires, a compensatory universe in which he can always escape from everyday Soviet life. Conceived as a radical otherness of the USSR, the imagined French space is endowed with all the positive characteristics that are supposed to counteract the shortcomings of the Soviet reality. French elegance and refinement contrasts with Russian barbarity and coarseness; freedom with censorship; lightness with excess; rationality with absurdity; French sensuality, charm and love with animalism and crude sexuality (Charlotte's rape) etc. (Mélat 2002, 42)

In the young narrator's imagination, this distant and mysterious France is associated with femininity, with the ideal lover, and the French language allows him to be initiated into the mysteries of love and eventually to mature (Sala 2009, 53-54). But it is a France of the past that has been re-created in words and transfigured by his and Charlotte's imagination. As he himself admits towards the end of the novel, "the France that had appeared one day in the middle of the steppes of Saranza owed its birth to books" (Makine 1998, 228). In other words, "for most of the novel, before the narrator's actual visit to Paris, Makine's (and Alyosha's) France is a mere linguistic and literary construct" (Wanner 2002, 113). Years later, however, when the protagonist finally arrives in the long-dreamed-of Atlantis, he discovers that the real France, capitalist and bureaucratic, has little in common with the object of his desires.

Nevertheless, Makine's criticism of this disappointing present is always accompanied by an emphasis on what France once was and what it could become again. A glorious past and a belief in the vitality of the values that make up Frenchness (*francité*), which he defines as a constant and passionate search for new forms. Makine's exhortation, expressed artistically in the novel *Dreams of My Russian Summers*, and further developed in another book, *Cette France qu'on oublie d'aimer* (2006), is that we should learn to love France again.

These declarations of love for his host country and the portrayal of Russia as either inferior and barbaric or as an exotic land described in stereotypical and clichéd terms could not fail to flatter the French public. In addition, Makine's recourse to the ingenious trick of pseudo-translation, the deliberate instrumentalisation of biographical aspects in order to create a personal mythology, and the way in which he emphasised his hybrid Franco-Russian identity, contributed at least in part to his overwhelming literary success in France and then on the international stage.

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LANGUAGE AS A TOOL OF INFLUENCE: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF DAENERYS TARGARYEN'S SPEECHES IN DOTHRAKI AND HIGH VALYRIAN IN *GAME OF THRONES*¹

Bettina ENE²

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ABSTRACT. *Language as a Tool of Influence: Discourse Analysis of Daenerys Targaryen's Speeches in Dothraki and High Valyrian in Game of Thrones.*

This article delves into the examination of the multilingual discourse and diplomatic strategies employed by Daenerys Targaryen, a central character in the "Game of Thrones" television series. The investigation centers on her utilization of the Dothraki and High Valyrian languages, both meticulously crafted by linguist David Peterson expressly for the show. Employing critical discourse analysis, this study seeks to unravel the linguistic influence wielded by Daenerys in her pursuit of power and influence within the fictional realm of Westeros. Through an analysis of her multilingual abilities, the article explores how Daenerys navigates and negotiates linguistic and cultural barriers to build alliances, forge connections, and assert her authority. Through an examination of the linguistic dimensions inherent in her diplomatic endeavors, the article illuminates the role of language as a potent tool for persuasion, negotiation,

¹ This article represents a shortened version of part of a chapter of Bettina Ene's unpublished PhD thesis for Babeş-Bolyai University, "From Fiction to Function. The Use and Influence of Dothraki and High Valyrian Constructed Languages in the *Game of Thrones* Fandom".

² **Bettina ENE**, PhD student with the Doctoral School of Linguistic and Literary Studies, Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Letters, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Associate at the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication, and Lingua Centre, within the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Babeş-Bolyai University. She has been teaching Business English to the 1st and 2nd year students within the same department, and General and Business English within the Lingua Centre, where she is also an English language examiner. Scientific fields of interest: Sociolinguistics, Internet Linguistics, Cyber Identity Construction, Discourse Analysis, Constructed Languages, Pop Culture, and Fan Studies. She recently finished her doctoral dissertation on the use and influence of constructed languages in the "Game of Thrones" digital fandom. E-mail: bettina.ene@econ.ubbcluj.ro

and cultural mediation within complex sociolinguistic contexts. The findings of this study significantly enhance our comprehension of multilingual diplomacy and its portrayal in popular culture, emphasizing the pivotal role of language in shaping political discourse and interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: *Game of Thrones, constructed languages, language and identity, cultural adaptation, intercultural communication.*

ABSTRACT. *Dialoguri transculturale. Evoluția personajului Daenerys Targaryen ca ambasador cultural în Game of Thrones.* Acest articol explorează discursul multilingv și strategiile diplomatice folosite de Daenerys Targaryen, un personaj central din serialul "Game of Thrones". Ne concentrăm asupra modului în care Daenerys se folosește de limbile Dothraki și High Valyrian, create cu meticulozitate de lingvistul David Peterson special pentru acest serial TV. Prin analiza discursului, studiul nostru își propune să dezvăluie cum Daenerys manevrează influența lingvistică în căutarea puterii și a influenței în lumea fictivă a Westerosului. Explorăm cum, prin abilitățile sale multilingve, Daenerys depășește și negociază barierele lingvistice și culturale pentru a construi alianțe, a crea conexiuni și a-și afirma autoritatea. Prin examinarea dimensiunilor lingvistice implicate în eforturile sale diplomatice, articolul aduce în prim-plan rolul limbii ca instrument puternic de persuasiune, negociere și mediere culturală în contexte sociolingvistice complexe. Concluziile acestei cercetări contribuie semnificativ la înțelegerea diplomației multilingve și la modul în care este prezentată în cultura populară, subliniind importanța centrală a limbii în modelarea discursului politic și relațiilor interpersonale.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Game of Thrones, limbi construite, limbă și identitate, adaptare culturală, comunicare interculturală.*

Introduction

The HBO television series "Game of Thrones" has gained considerable popularity and is based on the renowned book series "A Song of Ice and Fire" by George R.R. Martin. It is set in a fictional medieval era on the continents of Westeros and Essos, delving into the power dynamics and alliances among noble families in Westeros, while also highlighting the exiled Targaryen family's mission to reclaim the throne. The main focus of this study is to analyze Daenerys Targaryen as a discourse community and explore the challenges she encounters in attaining and maintaining power. One noteworthy aspect of Daenerys is her need to converse in two distinct languages, Dothraki and High Valyrian. To support the analysis, the original and translated script from the

television show will frequently be utilized as evidence. This unique circumstance provides an opportunity to compare the two interpreters and gain a deeper understanding of her intentions and goals through her words. A comprehensive examination of the power struggle in "Game of Thrones" would require a detailed exploration, but this paper will primarily concentrate on the linguistic and discourse elements of Daenerys, specifically scrutinizing the war and power struggle in Essos. Therefore, we will employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as our chosen theoretical framework, which centers on the study of the relationships between language and power as well as the ultimate goal of the improvement of the human condition (Wodak and Meyer, 2001). According to van Dijk (2001), CDA looks at the way language structures impose or reinforce views, which in turn may lead to the unequal distribution of power and influence between different groups. In traditional views of language study, it is viewed from an autonomous perspective; language is considered to be a tool fitted to the communicative needs of its speaker (Baugh and Cable, 2001; Stubbs, 1983). The authors operate under the assumption that the main problems and central phenomena of these fields can be examined separately from their social context. This perspective aligns with formal approaches to semantics and discourse pragmatics. However, it faces criticism from Critical Discourse Analysis. According to van Dijk (2009), CDA strives to provide a comprehensive and empirically validated account of the relationships between discursive strategies, texts, their cognitive and social effects, and our own ethical and political positions. One of the distinguishing features of CDA is its emphasis on using linguistics to effect social change and promote social justice. Many CDA researchers align with this viewpoint, especially when studying topics like racism, xenophobia, and nationalism (Krzyzanowski, 2008). This goal is driven by the belief in the power of language and its influence on society and human behavior. What sets CDA apart from other approaches to language study is its primary focus and adherence to a specific theoretical framework. While traditional linguistics concentrates on language form, structure, and semantics, CDA examines language in its functional capacity. It looks at language's ability to achieve certain goals or objectives, always connecting the analysis of linguistic elements to the research question and the broader context of the text or discourse being investigated (Ruth Wodak in Wodak and Meyer, 2009, 2001; Stubbs, 1983). Nevertheless, prior to immersing ourselves in our main subject of inquiry, we aim to provide a brief discussion on the meaning of the term "discourse" or "discourses." According to Johnstone (2018:9), 'to discourse analysts, "discourse" usually means actual instances of communicative action in the medium of language, although some define the term more broadly as "meaningful symbolic behavior" in any mode (Blommaert, 2005: 2). When it comes to communication, however, Johnstone (2018:9-10) states that

it can, of course, involve other media besides language. Media such as photography, clothing, music, architecture, and dance can be meaningful, too, and discourse analysts often need to think about the connections between language and other such modes of semiosis, or meaning-making.

When analyzing the discourses of Daenerys Targaryen in Dothraki and High Valyrian within “Game of Thrones”, our examination extends beyond mere word choices in her dialogues or speeches. As Johnstone (2018:9-10) suggests, we also consider ‘other media besides language’. For instance, in Daenerys’s case, we scrutinize her careful selection of attire, which varies depending on the geographical and cultural milieu she finds herself in, as well as the individuals she interacts with and the speeches she delivers. Additionally, her choice of hairstyle, characterized by different braiding styles, is adjusted to match the cultural context she is immersed in at any given moment. Therefore, according to Johnstone:

calling what we do “*discourse analysis*” rather than “*language analysis*” underscores the fact that we are not centrally focused on language as an abstract system. We tend, instead, to be interested in what happens when people draw on the knowledge they have about language, knowledge based on their memories of things they have said, heard, seen, or written before, to do things in the world: exchange information, express feelings, make things happen, create beauty, entertain themselves and others, and so on. (Johnstone, 2018:10)

Johnstone states that discourses

are conventional ways of talking that both create and are created by conventional ways of thinking. These linked ways of talking and thinking constitute ideologies (sets of interrelated ideas) and serve to circulate power in society. In other words, “discourses” in this sense involve patterns of belief and habitual action as well as patterns of language. Discourses are ideas as well as ways of talking that influence and are influenced by the ideas. Discourses, in their linguistic aspect, are conventionalized sets of choices for discourse, or talk. (2018:10-11)

In our case study, we will illustrate Daenerys Targaryen’s discourses in Dothraki and High Valyrian, which exemplify her beliefs and recurring actions (for example, her ability to amass the largest army in Essos, eliminate her adversaries, reclaim the Iron Throne, and assert sole rulership over the Seven Kingdoms). Additionally, we will examine linguistic patterns observed in her speech in Dothraki (such as her use of “iron chair” instead of “iron throne”, “iron

suits" instead of "armour", "poison water" instead of "sea", "wooden horses" instead of "ships" and so forth).

The "Game of Thrones" series comes with a rich linguistic landscape that has gone largely unexplored. Many languages are spoken throughout the series and create an intricate web that mirrors the sociopolitical climate of the world created by George R.R. Martin. What is known of these languages thus far is fairly limited, and the focus of this paper will be a discourse analysis of Daenerys Targaryen's speeches in Dothraki and High Valyrian. The purpose of this analysis is to interpret the dynamic between the speaker and the addressees in these scenes and to ultimately comment on the use of language as a tool for establishing power relationships.

Therefore, the primary focus of this paper revolves around Daenerys Targaryen, a central character in the highly acclaimed television series "Game of Thrones", in which she is introduced as the last surviving member of House Targaryen. Born in exile, Daenerys initially resides in Essos with her abusive brother Viserys. Her early life is marked by hardship and subservience. Daenerys's narrative takes a significant turn when she is married off to Khal Drogo, the leader of the nomadic Dothraki horse lords. Despite initial challenges in adapting to the Dothraki culture, Daenerys gradually gains respect and authority among the members of the tribe. Her marriage to Khal Drogo plays a pivotal role in her character development. One of the notable aspects of Daenerys's storyline is her acquisition of three dragon eggs, thought to be petrified. However, they hatch into dragons, which she names Drogon, Rhaegal, and Viserion. The dragons become symbols of her power and a formidable force in the series. Daenerys's overarching goal is to reclaim the Iron Throne and restore the Targaryen dynasty's rule over the Seven Kingdoms. Throughout the series, she faces challenges ranging from political intrigue and betrayal to ethical dilemmas in her quest for power. Daenerys becomes known for her commitment to justice, freeing the oppressed, and her desire to break the cycle of tyranny in Westeros. As the series progresses, Daenerys evolves from a vulnerable and uncertain young woman into a strong and determined leader. The character of Daenerys Targaryen is one of the most intricate and iconic in "Game of Thrones," and her storyline contributes significantly to the overall narrative of the series.

Another fascinating aspect of Daenerys's character is her linguistic prowess. She initially emerges as the heir to the Targaryen legacy with a command of High Valyrian, the ancient language of her ancestors. As the series progresses, she also learns and speaks Dothraki, the language of the nomadic horse lords, whose leader, Khal Drogo, as mentioned earlier, she is forced to marry by her brother, Viserys.

The use of these fictional languages in the TV show adds depth to Daenerys's character, showcasing her adaptability and determination to navigate the diverse cultures in the world of "Game of Thrones." The mastery of languages becomes a symbolic representation of her growth as a cultural ambassador and a leader with a vision of a more just and unified realm. Daenerys's linguistic journey reflects the broader theme of cultural diversity and diplomacy in the series. The ability to communicate in different languages becomes a tool for forging alliances, understanding local customs, and ultimately exercising power in a world characterized by intricate political intrigues and complex relationships.

Research Objectives

The present study aims to analyze Daenerys Targaryen's adept use of High Valyrian and Dothraki throughout various seasons of "Game of Thrones", discerning patterns in her linguistic evolution. By tracing the progression of her linguistic expertise, our objective is to reveal associations between language usage and pivotal moments in Daenerys's character development.

Moreover, delving into Daenerys Targaryen's interactions with a myriad of cultures presented in the "Game of Thrones" narrative constitutes a central aspect of our study. This exploration aims to examine the various instances where Daenerys encounters and navigates through diverse cultural settings. When examining the discourse surrounding Daenerys's character, it is evident that her persona serves as an "identity kit", as she often transitions between languages, accompanied by changes in attire and demeanor. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in Season 1 Episode 10. During this episode, Daenerys assumes a distinct appearance unlike her usual attire. She adorns herself in Dothraki garments and is no longer accompanied by her two female slaves. The alteration of her costume directly corresponds to her change in language. When speaking her native tongue, High Valyrian, she assumes a slave/master dynamic with her khalasar, whereas when conversing in Dothraki, she fully embodies her role as a Khaleesi and proclaims her intent to vanquish the lords of the Seven Kingdoms.

Within this objective, our primary focus is to evaluate the intricate interplay between linguistic and cultural diversity, discerning how these elements intricately shape the portrayal of Daenerys as a cultural ambassador within the series. 'While there is a wealth of research on language and identity which focuses on the identity of "real", "alive" people, little research has been undertaken on the identities of characters in fictional genres (e.g. drama, television drama)' (Cabrejas-Peñuelas 2021). However, 'attempts have been made to categorize characters in character typologies: "flat" ("simple"), "round" (elaborated) (Forster 1987) in early classifications, while later categorizations

(see Culpeper 2001, 48-52) focus on traits in binary opposites, such as male/female, good/bad, and hero/villain (2021). By scrutinizing Daenerys's linguistic adaptability and cultural diplomacy, we seek to unravel the nuanced ways in which she fosters understanding, forges alliances, and navigates the complex sociocultural landscapes encountered throughout her journey.

Language and Power in "Game of Thrones"

In "Game of Thrones", language assumes a crucial role within its highly diverse setting. Here, the presence of not only the two specially crafted languages for the TV series, High Valyrian and Dothraki, but also their respective dialects hold significant importance, a facet we will elaborate on later in this paper. According to Fairclough (1989:5), discourse analysis involves examining not only the messages and meaning conveyed through language, but also the structure and identity that language displays. This understanding is crucial for comprehending the discursive power of a specific culture or language. Fairclough further emphasizes that discourse analysis investigates the context, aims, behavior, and relationships in events where language plays a significant role (1989:5).

In agreement with Fairclough, Martin and Nakayama (2018) argue that language is a form of social practice and institutional power. Therefore, to thoroughly analyze Daenerys's political role within the television series, it is crucial to understand her messages and linguistic forms in Dothraki and High Valyrian. These languages serve as the foundation for comprehending her cultural identity and its impact on her acquisition of power. Furthermore, it is important to note that communication acts as the primary locus of a sociocultural system, as suggested by Fairclough (1989). Culture and language are parallel identities, where culture serves as the foundational metaphor for communication, and communication serves as the foundational metaphor for culture. In Daenerys's case, her cultural identity is constructed through the languages of Dothraki and High Valyrian. By closely analyzing her speeches, one can gain insights into the construction of her cultural identity and the power of these languages on their respective cultures.

The examination of Daenerys's speech aligns with the principles of discourse analysis, as it involves deconstructing her language to uncover hidden messages and structures. By understanding how her language influences her political power, we can explore the parallel relationship between language and culture, as intertwined identities. Fairclough further emphasizes that discourse analysis investigates the context, aims, behavior, and relationships in events where language plays a significant role (1989:5).

In line with Fairclough's perspective, Martin and Nakayama (2018:83) argue that language constitutes a form of social practice and institutional power.

With this in mind, it becomes evident that analyzing Daenerys's political role within the television series necessitates a thorough understanding of her messages and linguistic forms in Dothraki and High Valyrian. These languages serve as the foundation for comprehending her cultural identity and its influence on her acquisition of power (Martin & Nakayama, 2018:83).

All of these aspects of language link together, making these factors types of social and cultural capital. On a more practical level, language and specifically oracy is power. Power implies the intentional use of influence. Language can often be a tool of influence. This is not necessarily a negative thing, rather it is an aspect of social interactivity. As it stands, language can be a tool of soft power, that is the use of attraction and persuasion, rather than coercion or force. And at the ultimate level, language can be a means of establishing the boundaries of what one can and cannot do.

The relationship between language and culture is both intricate and complex. Language is used to maintain and convey culture and cultural ties. Different ideas and values are embedded in languages. Language also acts as a vehicle for cultural expression. It is the primary tool used for transmitting and expressing culture.

Consider various scholars who have written about the relationship between language and culture. One distinguished individual is Edward Sapir, who firmly believed in the close connection between language and culture, asserting that language has a powerful influence on our perception of the world. He argued that language is not only shaped by culture but also serves as a vehicle for transmitting culture across generations (Sapir, 1921). According to the author, our comprehension of the world is greatly influenced by the words and concepts available in our language, and distinct languages reflect diverse ways of thinking and interpreting reality. He stressed the significance of studying language in order to gain insight into the unique worldview of a particular culture (Sapir, 1949). Sapir, as a linguist, presented the argument that language plays an essential role in molding our perception and comprehension of the world. He placed great emphasis on the interconnectedness of language and culture, asserting that language mirrors the shared ideas and values of a community.

Whorf (1940) builds upon the ideas put forth by Sapir and introduces the concept of linguistic relativity. He argues that the way a language is structured and the words it contains have a profound impact on how speakers of that language perceive and understand the world. According to Whorf's theory, each culture may have its unique way of conceptualizing reality, shaped by the characteristics of its language.

In the realm of identity and pride, sociolinguist Cameron (1996) delved deeper into the subject and conducted a more thorough examination of the role of language in indicating social identity. She proceeded to investigate how our

language choices often serve as an indication of our membership in particular social groups, as well as how it can potentially uphold existing social hierarchies. Through her research, Cameron was able to shed light on the significant and symbolic influence that language exerts in the establishment and representation of both personal and collective identities. These scholars and various others have contributed to our comprehension of the elaborate relationship between language and culture. Their work emphasizes that language is not merely a tool for communication, but a fundamental aspect of human experience, epitomizing and molding our cultural heritage and individual identities.

Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in “Game of Thrones”

In the fictional world of “Game of Thrones”, linguistic diversity adds a rich layer to the narrative, reflecting the multicultural nature of the series. Culture plays a significant role in shaping behavior and thinking in all contexts (Hofstede, 2001). The linguistic choices made reflect the social and cultural aspects of the world they are used in. High Valyrian and Dothraki are integral to this linguistic tapestry. High Valyrian is an ancient language associated with the Valyrian Freehold, a powerful civilization that once dominated much of Essos. It was the language of the nobility and scholars, and remnants of High Valyrian culture linger in various regions. Daenerys Targaryen, being a descendant of the Valyrian dynasty, is a native speaker of High Valyrian. As the last living Targaryen, her command of this prestigious language symbolizes her royal heritage and distinguishes her from other characters in the series.

On the other hand, Dothraki is the language of the nomadic horse lords, the Dothraki people, who roam the vast grasslands of Essos. Led by powerful leaders such as Khal Drogo, the Dothraki culture is fiercely independent and values strength and honor. As mentioned in the previous part of the paper, Daenerys learns Dothraki as a means of assimilating into this culture after being wed to Khal Drogo, the leader of the Dothraki people. Her ability to communicate in Dothraki highlights her adaptability and willingness to engage with a variety of social contexts.

The multicultural aspect of “Game of Thrones” is amplified by the presence of these languages and their respective dialects. The characters who speak High Valyrian or Dothraki come from different regions and backgrounds, contributing to the intricate web of relationships and power dynamics in the series. Language becomes a tool for diplomacy, alliance-building, and navigating the complexities of a world marked by diverse cultures and traditions.

Language as Symbol of Power and Identity: Daenerys Targaryen's Linguistic Strategies in "Game of Thrones"

In the vast and politically charged landscapes of Westeros and Essos in "Game of Thrones", the utilization of language extends beyond mere communication — it becomes a powerful symbol of both authority and cultural identity. This section delves into the strategic linguistic choices made by Daenerys Targaryen, focusing on her adept use of High Valyrian and Dothraki in various social and cultural contexts. Due to the intricate relationship between power and language, CDA has evolved to provide a toolbox of methods with which to examine how language can be indicative of power relations within society. These methods are related to the description of language form, the relationships between text and action, the systems of concepts, and the context of the situation. Since its early application in the study of propaganda, the detected depth of social significance in language use puts it in a unique position to address power and language (van Dijk, 2001). Daenerys possesses an understanding of the influence of language and effectively employs it to assert her authority. In the tenth episode of Season 5, it becomes evident that she utilizes language as a means to establish her dominance over both her subjects and adversaries. By articulating the name *Meereen* in a distinct manner, she distinguishes herself from the aristocratic classes in Meereen, thus indicating a disparity in social standing. Similarly, when addressing Hizdahr zo Loraq, she deliberately enunciates his name differently from his own pronunciation, using Valyrian to emphasize the distinction between her elevated position and his. This serves as a reminder, not only to herself but also to others, that she towers above him, employing language to wield her power. Furthermore, her selection and utilization of an interpreter further accentuate her authority and superiority.

To conclude, Daenerys's linguistic tactics are intricately linked to her complex beliefs concerning home, authority, and identity. In Season 1, she portrays herself as a vulnerable girl who has endured mistreatment from her abusive brother. It is only after rescuing the Unsullied and establishing a profound bond with her dragons that she begins to reclaim her Targaryen roots and assert herself as the rightful Dragon Queen. Daenerys Targaryen's character is a multifaceted persona with intricate ideologies. She has often been criticized for displaying a "white savior" complex, employing violent methods and expecting gratitude from those she has "liberated". Despite claiming the Iron Throne as her birthright, she also professes to fight for the oppressed. This apparent contradiction may stem from her internal power struggle, as she tries to reconcile her projected values with her personal desires. Ultimately, her success hinges on her ability to uphold her unconventional identity while simultaneously wielding the political power and strategic prowess needed to conquer the realm of Westeros.

High Valyrian

Daenerys Targaryen's proficiency in High Valyrian, the ancient and prestigious language of the Valyrian Freehold, is emblematic of her Targaryen lineage and royal heritage. As the Mother of Dragons and a claimant to the Iron Throne, Daenerys strategically employs High Valyrian in formal and diplomatic settings. Its usage reflects her desire to assert authority, presenting herself as a legitimate and regal figure.

To begin, High Valyrian takes center stage in formal ceremonies, proclamations, and interactions with Westerosi nobility. Its archaic beauty and intricate grammar serve as a linguistic spectacle, harking back to the grandeur of the Targaryen legacy. By choosing High Valyrian for ceremonial utterances, Daenerys not only conveys her noble status, but also initiates a symbolic restoration of the cultural and linguistic prominence associated with the dragonlords. A pivotal moment emphasizing the significance of employing High Valyrian in formal ceremonies is exemplified in Daenerys's victory speech. The speech in King's Landing takes place in the final episode of "Game of Thrones", Season 8, Episode 6, titled "The Iron Throne." After the destruction of King's Landing, Daenerys, flanked by her forces, addresses the gathered survivors and soldiers:

Daenerys (addressing her army, the Unsullied): 'Dovaogedys! Dovaogedys! Jeme hen muñoti ñoghoti nadintaks se hae buzdaryti ubredaks. Sir daeremirossa iksat! Daro Vililio gierion hen qrinio hilmiot daeredat!' (Eng: 'Unsullied! All of you were torn from your mothers' arms and raised as slaves. Now you are liberators! You have freed the people of King's Landing from the grip of a tyrant!')

The Unsullied: * Slam their spear butts onto the ground, three times in perfect sych, affirming their pride in their achievement and their queen *

Daenerys (addressing her army, the Unsullied): 'Yn vilibazma tetos daor. Ilvra egralbri qubemiluty daor yn vapar tolvio vyho gieryndi daeredoty! Hen Vinterveli va Dornot, hen Laniso Viliniot va Qarthot, hen Jaedria va Zeo Embrot, abrar, valar, riñar toli grevo go bottis. Grevi ynoma pryjelat?') (Eng: 'But the war is not over. We will not lay down our spears until we have liberated all the people of the world! From Winterfell to Dorne, from Lannisport to Qarth, from the Summer Isles to the Jade Sea, women, men, and children have suffered too long beneath the wheel. Will you break the wheel with me?').³

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7mzJ3fKAw0&t=125s>, accessed on 30.01.2024

In the aftermath of King's Landing, Daenerys's victory speech stands as a poignant moment, where the utilization of High Valyrian serves to underscore her commitment to a new era. As she addresses her people in the ancient tongue, the language of her ancestors, it symbolizes both a reclaiming of her Targaryen heritage and a declaration of transformative change. The deliberate choice to speak in Valyrian not only adds a touch of regality, but also communicates a profound sense of authority.

Another illustration of Daenerys employing High Valyrian occurs in diplomatic discourse. High Valyrian becomes a linchpin in Daenerys's diplomatic endeavors. In negotiations and alliances with Westerosi houses, its usage is deliberate and strategic. The language, with its historical weight and cultural significance, serves as a powerful tool in asserting her claim to the Iron Throne. Daenerys, as a linguistically astute diplomat, employs High Valyrian to engage in negotiations with a level of sophistication that mirrors the courtly discourse of Westerosi politics. Its use is not merely a linguistic choice but a conscious effort to restore the political and cultural authority associated with House Targaryen.

One of the most notable scenes in the series, in which Daenerys Targaryen acquires the Unsullied⁴ and communicates with them in Valyrian, takes place in Astapor, during Season 3, Episode 4, titled "And Now His Watch Is Ended." In this pivotal moment, Daenerys arrives in Astapor seeking an army to support her quest for reclaiming the Iron Throne. The city is known for its highly disciplined slave army, the Unsullied. Daenerys negotiates with the slave-master Kraznys mo Nakloz to purchase the Unsullied in exchange for one of her dragons, Drogon. To demonstrate the control she would gain over the dragons, Daenerys allows Kraznys mo Nakloz, the Astapori slaver, to hold the dragon's chain:

Daenerys: 'Is it done then? They (the Unsullied) belong to me.'

Missandei (Daenerys's translator and advisor): 'Pindas lu sa sir tida?' (Eng: 'She asks if it is now done.')

Kraznys: responds affirmatively in Astapori Valyrian: 'Sa tida. Pelos ji qlony. J'aspo eza zya azantyr.' (Eng: 'It is done. She holds the whip. The b*tch has her army').

Missandei: 'It is done. You hold the whip.'⁵

However, as Kraznys attempts to assert control over Drogon, it becomes evident that the dragon is not as submissive as the slaver believes. The dragon resists, jerking away and refusing to stay docile in Kraznys's grasp.

⁴ The Unsullied are a highly disciplined and skilled slave army in the world of "Game of Thrones."

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ph8CPHgzI5Y>, accessed on 30.01.2024

The tension in the scene builds as it becomes clear that the dragons cannot be easily subdued. As the transaction unfolds, Kraznys underestimates Daenerys due to her speaking in the Common Tongue, assuming she doesn't understand Valyrian. However, Daenerys reveals her command of Valyrian when she speaks to Drogon in the language, catching everyone by surprise.

Frustrated and unable to control Drogon, Kraznys calls for Missandei, to convey a message to Daenerys. He instructs Missandei to tell Daenerys that the dragon is not listening to him, highlighting the limitations of his authority over the powerful creatures. This moment is crucial as it foreshadows Daenerys's eventual mastery over her dragons and emphasizes the dragons' intelligence and independence. It sets the stage for the subsequent turn of events where Daenerys reveals her understanding of Valyrian and her strategic plan to retain both the Unsullied and her dragons:

Daenerys (addressing the Unsullied): 'Dovaogedys! Naejot memebatas! Kelitis!'

Kraznys (speaking in Astapori Valyrian): 'Ivetra j'aspo zya dyni do majis.' (Eng: 'Tell the b*tch the beast won't come').

Daenerys (addressing Kraznys in Valyrian): 'Zaldrizes buzdari iksos daor.' (Eng: 'A dragon is not a slave').

Kraznys (speaking in Astapori Valyrian): 'Ydra ji Valyre?' (Eng: 'You speak Valyrian?')

Daenerys (addressing Kraznys in Valyrian): 'Nyke Daenerys Jelmazmo hen Targario Lentrot, hen Valyrio Uepo anogar iksan. Valyrio muño engos ñuhys issa.' (Eng: 'I am Daenerys Stormborn of the House Targaryen of the blood of Old Valyria; Valyrian is my mother tongue').

She then turns to the Unsullied, issuing commands that nullify the slave-master's control over them. In this powerful moment, Daenerys not only acquires the Unsullied without sacrificing her dragon, but also emancipates the slave army by exploiting her linguistic advantage:

Daenerys: (addressing the Unsullied in Valyrian): 'Dovaogedys! Aeksia ossenatas, menti ossenatas, qiloni pilos lue vale tolvie ossenatas, yn riñe dore odrikatas. Urnet luo buzdaro tolvio belma pryjatas!' (Eng: 'Unsullied! Slay the masters, slay the soldiers, slay every man who holds a whip, but harm no child! Strike the chains off every slave you see!').

Kraznys (speaking in Astapori Valyrian): 'Nyk skan jiva aeske! Zer sena! Zer sena!' (Eng: 'I am your master! Kill her! Kill her!').

Daenerys: (addressing her dragon, Drogon, in Valyrian): *Dracarys!* ("Dracarys" is a High Valyrian word that serves as a command for Daenerys Targaryen's dragons to breathe fire. The literal translation of "dracarys" from High Valyrian is "dragonfire" or "fire of the dragon").

The scene showcases Daenerys's strategic brilliance, linguistic prowess, and determination to break free from the shackles of oppression. It marks a turning point in her character arc as she begins her journey to liberate slaves and build her own formidable army. The use of Valyrian adds depth to the exchange, emphasizing the cultural and linguistic dynamics at play.

In summary, High Valyrian represents symbolic restoration. Beyond the immediate political context, Daenerys's use of High Valyrian symbolizes a broader endeavor — the restoration of the Targaryen dynasty's glory. As the last surviving member of her house, Daenerys leverages language as a tool for cultural reclamation.

Dothraki – The Interplay between Language and Cultural Assimilation

Conversely, Dothraki, the guttural and raw language of the nomadic Dothraki people, serves as a linguistic tool for Daenerys when engaging with the horse lords of Essos. Unlike the elegant and refined High Valyrian, Dothraki is stark and direct, reflecting the harsh realities of the nomadic lifestyle. Daenerys's command of Dothraki becomes instrumental in navigating the intricacies of cultural diplomacy.

However, Daenerys's mastery of Dothraki is not merely linguistic. It signifies her willingness to fully immerse herself in the Dothraki way of life. Speaking Dothraki is not just about communication; it is a symbolic act of cultural assimilation, crucial for building alliances and solidifying her role as Khaleesi.⁶ Language is regarded as the primary facilitator of acculturation. The process of acculturation refers to the alterations that individuals undergo when they interact with a different culture, leading to a continuous sequence of adaptation and assimilation (Berry, 1980). Language serves as a means of communication and a symbol of identity. Proficiency in a language corresponds to a high degree of acculturation to the target culture. Research conducted by Fishman (1972) indicates that individuals who do not adapt to the linguistic changes in their language community experience social dislocation.

Subsequently, we wish to illustrate an excerpt from Season 1, Episode 8, titled "The Pointy End." In this scene, Mago, a warrior within Khal Drogo's khalasar, confronts Khal Drogo about his decision to spare the lives of defeated enemies, particularly women and children. Mago expresses discontent with this deviation from Dothraki traditions, advocating for the more traditional practice

⁶ In the context of "Game of Thrones", the title "Khaleesi" refers to the wife of a Dothraki leader, known as a Khal.

of enslaving defeated foes. Khal Drogo, however, listens to Mago's grievances but surprises everyone by defending Daenerys's plea to spare the women and children. This moment showcases Khal Drogo's growing respect and admiration for Daenerys, as he recognizes her influence on his decisions and begins to question certain aspects of Dothraki traditions. This scene is pivotal in demonstrating Daenerys's evolving role within the Dothraki culture and Khal Drogo's changing perspective as he starts to embrace a different approach under her influence:

Drogo: 'Zhey jalán áthhirari ánni, Mágo ásta mesháfka fich qorasókh máe: óhara háeshi rákhi fin qóraso me ásaja máe. Ásti anhaán hash jíni jíla.' (Eng: 'Moon of my life, Mago says that you took his spoils, a daughter of the Lamb Men who was his to mount. Tell me if this is so').

Mago: 'Yer ifák. Yer ássoo áнна voséchi!' (Eng: 'You are a foreigner. You do not command me!').

Daenerys: 'Ánha kháleesi. Ánha assók yéra sekósshi.' (Eng: 'I am khaleesi. I do command you!').

Khal Drogo responds to this (the speech beginning 'See how fierce she grows?')

Mago: 'Khal fin ássoe mezháh jáhakmeni vos khal.' (Eng: 'A Khal who takes orders from foreign whores is no Khal.'⁸ (Lit. 'A khal whom foreign whores order is no khal.')

The scene where Daenerys braids Khal Drogo's hair is a poignant moment that highlights Daenerys's efforts to learn the Dothraki language and immerse herself in their culture. In this cultural exchange, Daenerys engages with Khal Drogo in Dothraki, demonstrating her commitment to adapting to his way of life. Despite the initial challenges, Daenerys's attempts to communicate in Dothraki reflect her desire to bridge the linguistic and cultural gap between herself and the Dothraki horde. The following is an excerpt from a dialogue between Daenerys Targaryen (Khaleesi) and her husband, Khal Drogo, from Season 1, Episode 7⁹:

Khal Drogo: 'Vezh fin Sája Rhaesheserés vos zígereo adoroón shíqethi.'
(Eng: 'The Stallion who mounts the world has no need of iron chairs').

⁷ Notes: Mago here uses the informal second person with Dany, which is a grave mistake—especially before Khal Drogo.

⁸ Notes: The word *mezháh* has a double meaning. When used within the Dothraki culture, it refers to a woman one has sex with but whom one doesn't marry. It's not an insult, if used appropriately, but it is when used inappropriately (e.g. in reference to someone else's wife). https://dedalvs.com/work/game-of-thrones/game_of_thrones_master_dialogue_s1s2.pdf, accessed on 30.01.2024

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAsDy8V9I3s>, accessed on 30.01.2024

Daenerys: 'K'ási ássikhqoyisiri, Vezh ádothrae nakhaán rháesheseri.' (Eng: 'According to the prophecy, the Stallion will ride to the ends of the earth').

Khal Drogo: 'Sorfosór nákha she Hávazzhifi Kázga. Vo hrazéf laz yóma evethíz.' (Eng: 'The land ends at the Black Salt Sea. No horse can cross the poison water').

Daenerys: Dalén rhaggát evéth ma ále vékhi she Váes Serís: Hrazéf Ído fíni óvethi yómme havázh...' (Eng: 'There are a thousand ships and more in the Free Cities: Wooden horses that fly across the sea...').

Daenerys: 'Sorfosór nákho vosécchi she havázh. Sáni sórfi vékha yómme havázh. Sórho áthyolari ánni.' (Eng: 'The earth does not end at the sea. There are many dirts beyond the sea. The *dirt* of my birth').

Khal Drogo: 'Vos "sórho": *Rháeshi*.' (Eng: 'Not "dirts": *Lands*').

Daenerys: 'Rháeshi, sek...' (Eng: 'Lands, yes...').

Khal Drogo: 'Kísha vástoki vos alíkh hrázefi ído m'ádori shíqethi.' (Eng: 'We will speak no more of wooden horses and iron chairs').

Daenerys: 'Me vos "adó", me...me...' (Eng: 'It's not a chair, it's a... *throne*').

Khal Drogo: *Throne?*

Daenerys: 'Adór finaán khal névasoe. Che kháleesi.' (Eng: 'A chair for a king to sit on. Or a queen').

Khal Drogo: 'Khal vos zígereo adoroón ánevasoe maán. Me zígeree sajosoón dísse.' (Eng: 'A khal does not need a chair to sit upon. He needs only a mount').¹⁰

The significance of this scene lies in Daenerys's symbolic gesture of adopting Dothraki customs, transcending mere language learning. Through the shared language, she seeks not only to communicate but also to connect on a deeper cultural level, emphasizing her commitment to her marriage and the integration of Dothraki traditions into her identity. This moment foreshadows Daenerys's evolving role as a cultural ambassador.

Moreover, Dothraki, known for its blunt and forceful nature, becomes a linguistic expression of strength and authority. Daenerys employs Dothraki when addressing the Dothraki horde (khalasar), conveying commands with a directness that resonates with their warrior culture. The language serves as a bridge between Daenerys and the Dothraki, establishing her as a formidable leader who understands, respects, and embraces their way of life.

For women rulers such as Daenerys, public ruling also means 'internalizing masculinized characteristics', including 'confidence, ferocity, aggressiveness and a capacity and a willingness to use force.' These 'characterize her development

¹⁰ https://dedalvs.com/work/game-of-thrones/game_of_thrones_master_dialogue_s1s2.pdf, accessed on 30.01.2024

as a ruler and a wielder of authority' (Clapton & Shepherd 2015:3). Moving forward, we aim to provide further illustration for the aforementioned ideas:

Daenerys: 'Anha qafak asqoy yeroa, majin yeri m'athiri m'adrivoe ven qoy qoyi, m'adothrae anni m'avijezeri anna athzhowakaroon.' (Eng: 'I ask your oath, that you will live and die as blood of my blood, riding at my side to keep me safe from harm').

Dothraki: 'Qoy qoyi! Qoy qoyi!' (Eng: 'Blood of my blood! Blood of my blood!')

Daenerys: 'Anha aqafak san ale yeroa ei Khaloon ray qaf khalasaroon mae!' (Eng: 'I will ask more of you than any Khal has ever asked of his khalasar!')

Daenerys: 'Hash yeri adothrae hrazef ido yomme Havazzhifi Kazga?' (Eng: 'Will you ride the wooden horses across the black salt sea?')

Daenerys: 'Hash yeri vaddrivi dozge anni ma khogaron shiqethi mori majin vohhari okrenegwin mori?' (Eng: 'Will you kill my enemies in their iron suits and tear down their stone houses?')

Daenerys: 'Hash yeri vazhi anhaan Rhaeshis Andahli, jin azho me-Khal Drogo ast asqoy mehas hatif Maisi Krazaaji kash shieraki vitihir asavvasoon?' (Eng: 'Will you give me the Seven Kingdoms, the gift Khal Drogo promised me before the Mother of Mountains as the stars looked down in witness?')

Daenerys: 'Hash yeri m'anhoon, ma jinne m'ayyeyaan?!' (Eng: 'Are you with me, now and always?!').¹¹

Furthermore, Daenerys's deliberate use of Dothraki is not just a matter of linguistic choice; it is a strategic tool for cultural adaptation. Daenerys, by speaking the language of the nomads, breaks down barriers and fosters a sense of unity. It becomes an essential aspect of her journey towards becoming the Mother of Dragons and the Khaleesi who unites disparate tribes under a common cause, and precisely the identity she gains as Mother of Dragons 'provides her the power she needs to emerge as a leader' (Schroeder 2016, 21). The usage of language functions as a small-scale representation of a broader culture, and through acquiring mastery of the language, Daenerys attains a more profound comprehension of the identity and customs of the Dothraki people.

Moreover, as stated by Schroeder (2016, 91), 'the Dothraki respect the tangible physical force of the dragons' real power and the Westerosi respect their connection to the Targaryen line'. These two important aspects make Daenerys 'able to assume her public authority' (Cabrejas-Peñuelas, 2021).

¹¹ <https://dedalvs.tumblr.com/post/145160388754/dothraki-dialogue-episode-606-of-game-of-thrones>, Accessed on 30.01.2024

According to Schroeder (2016, 92), 'so long as she remains connected to the dragons, and the symbolic maternity they represent, she is able to assume the role of authoritative figure and influence others.'

In conclusion, the exploration of Daenerys and the Dothraki unveils a dynamic interplay of cultural exchange, leadership dynamics, and the evolution of characters within "Game of Thrones." Daenerys's transformative journey from a vulnerable girl to a respected Khaleesi not only showcases her adaptability and resilience, but also highlights her ability to influence and lead a nomadic warrior culture with unique traditions.

The Impact of Acculturation on Daenerys Targaryen's Journey

Daenerys's motives for taking action are highly pragmatic and strategic. By engaging with the Dothraki, Daenerys is displaying her loyalty and commitment to them. She is aware that in order to conquer Westeros, she requires the support of the Westerosi, so it is crucial for her to maintain her alliance with them. By demonstrating a long-term dedication to the Dothraki, Daenerys hopes to create a scenario where she can return to Westeros leading a Dothraki horde. This strategic approach is also evident in her decision to invest time in learning the Dothraki language. When she emerges from the palace wearing Dothraki attire, she is outwardly displaying her progress in the acculturation process. Acculturation is a phenomenon where interaction between two cultures leads to changes in the cultural traditions of either the individual or the group (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits 149). Daenerys desires a swift integration process, as prolonged contact between cultures increases the likelihood of conflicts regarding racial dominance, ultimately leading to the elimination or impoverishment of the minority group (Gordon, 1964). Given the turbulent and unstable history of Khaleesi rule in the past, Daenerys recognizes the dangers posed by her current situation. To protect herself and her people from a violent and embarrassing downfall, Daenerys equips herself with the means to both adapt to and control the Dothraki culture (ibid).

Conclusions

This study has examined the connection between constructed languages, cultures, and power dynamics in Martin-esque secondary worlds. Through a critical discourse analysis, two societies in George R.R. Martin's "A Song of Ice and Fire" book series and the accompanying HBO television series "Game of Thrones", namely the Dothraki and the Valyrians, were compared in terms of their language, culture, and behavioral norms. Based on this analysis, it was

concluded that language plays a crucial role in shaping social environments and power relations between different groups of people, challenging the notion that linguistic manipulation is exclusive to the real world, used by powerful groups to solidify their dominance. This assumption poses difficulties when applied to fantasy and science fiction secondary worlds, thus a framework was applied to objectively evaluate the level of linguistic relativity in any given constructed language and culture. By doing so, we can gain a better understanding of how and why certain manipulations of linguistic systems in secondary worlds are portrayed, and what this reveals about the author's perspective on existing social power dynamics, avoiding hypothetical comparisons with the real world. The Valyrians, known for their control over dragons, held significant power. If culture and language are the defining characteristics of a people, then language was the tool through which the Valyrians advanced their influence.

In essence, Daenerys's journey epitomizes the transformative potential inherent in cultural exchange. As she traverses the diverse landscapes of Westeros and Essos, her mastery of Dothraki and High Valyrian becomes more than a linguistic skill—it transforms into a powerful instrument of cultural diplomacy. Daenerys's ability to communicate seamlessly with different communities not only showcases her adaptability, but also positions her as a bridge between worlds, embodying the essence of a cultural ambassador. The significance of language in Daenerys's narrative arc goes beyond mere communication; it becomes a catalyst for shaping alliances, dismantling cultural barriers, and redefining power dynamics. In leading the Dothraki horde, Daenerys not only commands respect, but also introduces a new order that amalgamates diverse cultural elements.

Ultimately, the exploration of Daenerys Targaryen's role as a cultural ambassador within the "Game of Thrones" TV series not only unravels a rich tapestry of linguistic proficiency, cultural adaptation, and leadership, but also sheds light on the intricate dynamics of diplomacy and influence.

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PANDEMIC BIOPOLITICS IN ROMANIAN LITERATURE

Gabriela GLĂVAN¹

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ABSTRACT. *Pandemic Biopolitics in Romanian Literature.* The biopolitics of the COVID pandemic years has had a powerful impact on all areas of activity, including literature and the arts. Contagion and isolation quickly became the governing terms of social interaction, and writers promptly echoed their impact in works that tried to capture the spirit of the time as it was unfolding. Romanian writers were particularly prompt in responding to the challenges of this unprecedented crisis in modern decades, therefore the first pandemic writings were published in the later months of 2020. Florina Ilis' *Pandemia veselă și tristă (The Happy and Sad Pandemic)*, Polirom, 2020), Teodor Hossu-Longin's *Măștile din spatele măștii (The Masks behind the Mask)*, Hyperliteratura, 2022) and collective volumes such as *Izolare (Isolation)*, Nemira 2020) and *Jurnal din vremea pandemiei. Proză de grup (Journal from the Times of the Pandemic)*, Brumar, 2021), edited by Marius Cosmeanu, are just the most visible examples that could be explored in this context. Drawing from theories concerning posthumanism, medical humanities, ethics and contagion, this paper aims to explore the manner in which the pandemic segment of Romanian literature could be integrated into a global literary framework that highlights a diversity of genres and a plurality of voices galvanizing the relationship between the massive effects of the pandemic and narrative art. My paper aims at mapping an emerging literary dialect that gives shape, voice and coherence to a collective experience that has left an indelible imprint on the present and will significantly shape the cultural climate of the near future.

¹ **Gabriela GLĂVAN** is an Associate Professor at The West University in Timișoara, The Faculty of Letters, History and Theology, where she teaches Comparative Literature. She is the author of a book on Romanian modernism (2014), of a critical essay on Franz Kafka's short stories (2017) and on Max Blecher {read: /'bləkər/} (2020). She has published numerous academic studies on modernism, the avant-garde and post-communism and is a contributor to several cultural magazines. Email: gabriela.glavan@e-uvt.ro.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, isolation, collective trauma, posthumanism, contagion, medical humanities, peripheral literatures.

REZUMAT. Biopolitica pandemică în literatura română. Biopolitica anilor pandemiei COVID a avut un impact puternic asupra tuturor domeniilor de activitate, inclusiv asupra literaturii și artelor. Contaminarea și izolarea au devenit rapid termenii esențiali ai interacțiunii sociale, iar scriitorii au reflectat imediat impactul acestora în lucrări care au încercat să surprindă spiritul vremii pe măsură ce acesta prindea contur. Scriitorii români au fost în mod special prompti în a răspunde provocărilor acestei crize fără precedent în deceniile moderne, astfel încât primele scrieri pandemice au fost publicate în ultimele luni ale anului 2020. *Pandemia veselă și tristă* a Florinei Ilis (Polirom, 2020), *Măștile din spatele măștii* de Teodor Hossu-Longin (Hyperliteratura, 2022) și volume colective precum *Izolare* (Nemira, 2020) și *Jurnal din vremea pandemiei. Proză de grup* (Brumar, 2021), editate de Marius Cosmeanu, sunt doar cele mai vizibile exemple care ar putea fi explorate în acest context. Bazându-se pe teorii despre postumanism, științe umaniste medicale, etică și contagiune, această lucrare își propune să exploreze modul în care segmentul pandemic al literaturii românești ar putea fi integrat într-un cadru literar global ce evidențiază o diversitate de genuri și o pluralitate de voci dinamizând relația dintre efectele cele mai de ecou ale pandemiei și arta narativă. Lucrarea își propune să cartografieze un dialect literar emergent care dă formă, voce și coerență unei experiențe colective ce a lăsat o amprentă de neșters asupra prezentului și va modela semnificativ climatul cultural al viitorului apropiat.

Cuvinte-cheie: Pandemia COVID-19, izolare, traumă colectivă, postumanism, contagiune, științe umaniste medicale, literaturi periferice

Introduction. The genre and concepts of pandemic writing

The global health crisis triggered in 2020 by the COVID pandemic left its mark on a rapidly growing literary production inspired by the unusual new realities of everyday life: lockdowns, social distancing, isolation, and a massive strain on all human relations. This has established the particular literary niche of pandemic literature, an eclectic space where professional and occasional writers expressed and published their perspectives on the experience of the pandemic. Romanian literature was prompt to reverberate the dramatic notes of the period: since the first months of the pandemic, various literary works have been published, covering a wide range of approaches and styles. I shall outline the characteristics of these Romanian literary accounts of the period, starting from an analysis of the manner in which they integrate into what

Priscilla Wald called “the outbreak narrative.” Although her 2008 approach to the issue may not have anticipated the specific details of the 2020 COVID pandemic, the framework she proposes, based on previous major outbreaks such as the 2003 SARS or HIV, functions as a general, paradigmatic one, with notions and concepts of universal applicability. While Wald uses the concept of “outbreak narratives” in a broad sense, “to designate those epidemiological stories” (Wald 2008, 3), I shall adapt the notion to the specific circumstances of the 2020 pandemic, proposing instead an analysis of the COVID stories these various writers and contributors to collective volumes published in the aftermath of the first pandemic waves.

Among other significant observations concerning the articulation and spreading of outbreak narratives, Wald notes their ability to have a significant impact on the social dynamics of the moment, as “they promote or mitigate the stigmatizing of individuals, groups, populations, locales (regional and global), behaviors, and lifestyles, and they change economies” (Wald 2008, 3). Epidemics, outbreaks, and, in an extended sense, pandemics have their own story, and they articulate a narrative that helps health specialists identify patterns that, in turn, contribute to reliable methods of diagnosis and, furthermore, to establishing treatment protocols. There is, quite evidently, a privileged imaginary space where epidemics and narratives coexist, thus directly invoking the essential meaning of “contagion” (con-tangere, in Latin, means “to touch together”). They also imply the “reunion” of individuals, communities, and societies under the same auspices imposed by the equalizing effect of epidemics. This feature often appears in literary texts, as a reminder of the irrational force of disease, one that universally uncovers the precarity of the human condition. In a commentary on Geddes Smith’s story of the Black Death from his highly successful book, *Plague On Us* (1941), Wald argues that it emerges as “formulaic” and “formative,” proving a paradigmatic structure that can harbor other stories from various other historical intervals. The “narrative logic” (Wald 2008, 23) of the epidemic, one that has been sought by scientists and storytellers alike since the essential intuition concerning the relation between epidemiology and narrativity arose in scientific discourse, established an important bridge between narrative art and the often unwelcoming (for the humanities) scientific world (Wald 23). The COVID pandemic proved there is a certain level of contamination between the medical vocabulary and everyday language, with notions specific to the epidemiological context spilling into the perimeter of basic conversation. The early days of the pandemic were marked by a constant mention of viral load, quarantine, isolettes (covered stretchers for carrying the first COVID patients, considered highly contagious and dangerous to others), as the media flooded public discourse with scientific notions meant to convey the severity of the moment.

Who speaks of the pandemic, and how? To what degree does literary fiction recreate the complex atmosphere of the first months of the pandemic – the fear of illness and death, the high mortality rate, the unknown dimension of the actual threat, the disbelief at the severe public health measures imposed by governments worldwide, the grief of witnessing an overwhelming amount of private suffering and loss? How does literature fare among the competing discourses narrating simultaneously the same plot, that of the pandemic? The literary texts I intend to discuss focus on narrow, individual perspectives and outlooks that project subjectivity rather than collective emotion. Yet they can be revelatory for the wider questions they pose, as the year 2020 appears more distant in time, and some notions are easier to process and assimilate through the lens of the interval that stands between the present and that specific moment.

There is a vast literature exploring the ravages and social impact of epidemics from past ages, from Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* to Camus' *The Plague* and Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*. The 2020 pandemic generated a massive response from writers across the globe, as technology proved an important tool of instant communication. Before the first books about the pandemic were published, there were various other types of interventions on the issue, from blog posts to social media posts and interviews. As the pandemic unraveled, writers such as Sarah Moss (*The Fell*), Anne Tyler (*French Braid*), Roddy Doyle (*Life Without Children*), Isabel Allende (*Violeta*), and Carley Moore (*Panpocalypse*) filled the literary stage with fictional reflections of the new state of emergency that impacted and transformed contemporary global culture. In Romania, the first books incorporating pandemic themes started to appear in the first months of the crisis: the collective volume *Izolare (Isolation, Nemira)* was published in electronic format on April 13, 2020, barely a month after the first lockdown. In 2020, Petre Crăciun edited *coronaJURNAL. Gânduri din izolare (coronaJOURNAL. Thoughts from Isolation, Zorio publishing)*, and later, in October, Florina Ilis published a volume of short stories – *Pandemia veselă și tristă (The Happy and Sad Pandemic, Polirom)*; later, in 2021, Marius Cosmeanu edited a collective volume titled *Jurnal din vremea pandemiei. Proză de grup (Journal from the Time of the Pandemic, Brumar)*; in 2022, Teodor Hossu-Longin published *Măștile din spatele măștii (The Masks Behind the Mask, Hyperliteratura)*. I shall explore Ilis' volume as a single-author fiction about the pandemic and the collective volume *Jurnal din vremea pandemiei. Proză de grup* in order to identify the characteristics of a genre that could be integrated into the larger paradigm of pandemic literature. I shall also investigate the articulation of a biopolitics of the pandemic in these literary texts, in the proximity of a conceptual anchor defined by social distancing, isolation, sanitary regulations, and control.

Literature and the biopolitics of a global health crisis

One element that reverberates through all these narratives is the imprint of authority on social and private lives. The public health measures taken by governments to control the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and, implicitly, infection rates, were met with varying degrees of acceptance and hostility. In his approach to the matter of public health and control, Michel Foucault articulates the definition of biopolitics, correlating it with forms and structures of power and oppression. The term has been invoked in connection not only with epidemics as agents of social disruption but also with the COVID pandemic. Although Foucault's concept of biopolitics is still under debate as an articulated theory that can be invoked in major public health crises that involve state-controlled power structures, it coherently resonates with some major issues raised during the recent pandemic. Foucault defines biopolitics in the last chapter of the first volume of his *History of Sexuality – The Will to Knowledge: History of Sexuality* (1976). It is a major form of political power that administratively controls life and the biological existence of a population, and its main purpose is to “ensure, sustain and multiply life, to put this life in order” (Foucault 1976, 138). Directly connected to biopolitics is the notion of biopower, signifying the manners in which biopolitics is put into action. However, there is an intrinsic historical dimension to Foucault's notions of biopower and biopolitics, as his arguments are circumscribed to various political structures from the 17th to 19th centuries. While he connects the mechanics of biopower to the juridical privileges of sovereign power, he also notes that its system took shape in the 17th century, focusing on the essential processes governing the life of the body: “propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was inflicted through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population*” (Foucault 1976, 139). The technologies perfected to acquire better control of the body and its functions grew into a complex system that gained prevalence in the 19th century, and the biopolitical became an essential component of the historical form of individual subjectivity.

Surveillance and control are other Foucauldian notions that have been invoked in connection with the 2020 pandemic, especially since they reflect Foucault's description of the discipline measures taken in cities affected by the plague (Foucault 1977, 195-200). The strict rules of lockdowns garnered much criticism in Romania, especially since there were large intervals in which citizens had to carry documentation to justify basic outings, such as driving to work or medical visits. Florina Ilis fictionalizes such an instance, when the lives of the protagonists in her short story *Q urăsc! (I Hate Her!)* change after a brief

encounter sparked by a strict pandemic provision: all citizens had to carry a written statement in public spaces, justifying their presence outside their homes. Beyond the ironic caricature of characters and circumstance, this local element of the 2020 lockdown – imposed by the provisions of the Military Ordinances of March 2020 – alludes to the weakness of a state that generally failed to control the health crisis, as the medical system, in permanent difficulty even before the pandemic, was severely strained. Local politicians were overwhelmed by the challenges of the moment: at one point in late March/early April 2020, the Romanian government deployed armed forces on the streets in major cities, with the absurd requirement that the national anthem be played on the audio stations of police cars. Lockdowns and the subsequent isolation they involved are the background of many confessional interventions in the collective volume *Journal from the Year of the Pandemic*. The contributors to this volume are journalists, bloggers, travel writers, and professionals from various fields that, in one way or another, involve writing narratives, teaching, and communication. They are located in various places across the globe, which creates the effect of a universal community experiencing present history simultaneously, with variations induced by the specific pandemic climate of the region or country they inhabit. The volume renders imaginary maps of the pandemic, from Bucharest to New York, Helsinki or Haifa to the Canary Islands. Each place has its own version of the pandemic, its own rhythm of survival, as daily life contracted and dilated according to different local responses to the crisis. Projected as a collective enterprise possibly meant to illustrate a common assumption about the effects of the pandemic – that it equalizes differences and levels out social asperities and inequities, the volume renders a different type of response, as uniformity remains mainly biological (different access to medical resources could be an argument against this assumption, too). As Lennard J. Davis noted in his analysis of the pandemic structures of biopower, “inequality in a time of pandemic is nothing new” (Davis 2003, 17).

In a critical intervention on the issue of the biopolitics of the COVID-19 pandemic (from April 2, 2020), Daniele Lorenzini comments on the iteration of Foucault’s concept in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, while also drawing on Judith Butler’s observations regarding the inequalities deepened by the health crisis and on Bruno Latour’s hypothesis that “the health crisis prepares, induces and incites us to prepare for climate change” (Latour 2021). Lorenzini also criticizes the facile assumption (reinforced by the fictional plots of the literary texts I shall discuss) that since the biological condition has been brought to the fore as the common denominator of the fight against the coronavirus, this involves a larger spectrum on which all members of a society are equally vulnerable. Lockdowns, remote work, online learning, and Zoom meetings quickly became part of a seemingly universal language of the pandemic,

as if, indeed, all workers, families, and jobs had the chance to undergo a smooth transition that mostly affected their dynamics and routines, not their income, opportunities, or even access to education. Lorenzini argues that, in line with Foucault's link between biopower and racism, understood as a form of exposure to the risk of death, we should also consider the "differential exposure" of individuals to health risks when the same forms of biopolitical control are involved. Indeed, unlike the characters in the short stories and the collective journal entries discussed here, many social groups were affected by the pandemic in more dramatic ways than the general code imposed by social distancing. Biopolitics, Lorenzini states, "is always a politics of differential vulnerability," as it permanently reinforces hierarchies that perpetuate vulnerability as an intrinsic element of the political order. The pandemic was a catalyst for the inequalities inherent to all major crises, exposing the different ways in which it affected various categories of workers and professionals who, despite an increased personal risk, contributed to the functioning and normalization of everyday life.

Another essential concept for a coherent critical perspective on the biopolitics of the COVID pandemic is posthumanism. Its conceptual proximity to the framework of contagion and epidemics is obvious: the posthuman experience involves not only a reconsideration of the universalist notion of the human (or Man, as a central figure of humanism) but also of the ways in which human life is interconnected with coexisting non-human elements, natural or artificial, including viruses or technological creations.

The coronavirus pandemic emerged from an act of contagion between animals and humans in a context that has been considered dangerous long before the pandemic started. Abusive commercial practices, the irresponsible exploitation of the environment, and the careless mismanagement of our contact with non-human species are just a few elements that could be called to designate the posthumanist context in which the pandemic erupted. The Anthropocene, understood as a distinct era in the history of life on Earth, in which the effects of the human presence left an indelible mark on nature, has also been regarded as an interval "born of anthropocentric illusions of our ontological separation from nature" (Newman, Topuzovski, 2021).

The sudden effacement of human agency from urban landscapes during lockdowns offered a startling view of our civilization's material edifices deprived of the animation that integrated them into a vital circuit. The effects of the pandemic have been interpreted politically by invoking the harsh restrictions imposed during lockdowns but also by observing the rise of populist and extremist discourse. Conspiracy theories, rumors, and irrational fears became almost as viral as the virus itself. The pandemic called for a rethinking of the limits of human agency and the human condition (Newman, Topuzovski 2021, 14).

Although pandemics have been known to have a profound impact on the course of history, the effects of such a crisis are largely dictated by the context in which it occurs and can often be unpredictable. An optimistic outlook on the pandemic interval could discern positive aspects (digitization and remote work, among others) that materialized due to rapid societal changes in many countries (Ağın and Horzum 2023, 2).

The newly released collective novel *Fourteen Days* (Atwood, Preston, 2024) could easily become a classic of the genre. Written by thirty-six American and Canadian writers, it is based on a Decameron-like principle, with a fourteen-day gathering of tenants on the rooftop of a New York building, taking turns telling apparently unconnected stories. What reunites these divergent voices is their undertone that ties them to the continuum of the present day, the life, conflicts, backgrounds, histories, and identities that give meaning to each narrative.

Its unifying element is the intended novelistic genre to which the volume is ascribed, demanding a reading centered on the inner coherence of the plot. That unifying frame is the unraveling of the pandemic crisis and the particular ways in which characters process the anxieties and traumas triggered by it. Similar Romanian endeavors are less coherent from this perspective, and this could be due to a significantly reduced editing interval and a more eclectic group of writers reunited.

Both *Izolare* (*Isolation*, Nemira Publishing, 2020) and *Jurnal din vremea pandemiei* (*Journal from the Time of the Pandemic*, Brumar, 2021) illustrate the cohesive principle that the literary reflection of this global crisis is best captured in non-curated diversity. *Izolare* sought direct impressions from writers expressing themselves freely, in the midst of a fast-paced string of events, as the pandemic spread and unfolded unpredictably. "We are not in a Camus book, nor in a Chaucer or a Boccaccio one. We are in Romania, in our homes," one narrative voice declared. The collective pronoun reunited twenty authors who contributed with short prose and poetry that illuminate their personal experience of the first months of isolation and quarantine.

As the world closed and social experiences were restricted drastically, everyday life was suddenly reshaped by new governing laws, some of them flagrantly contradicting those that defined it in the first place. Communication and encounter were replaced by social distancing; politeness and small talk were hidden behind face masks, conviviality and goodwill were effaced by suspicion and avoidance. Screens and virtual worlds replaced, in a matter of weeks, entire structures and cultural constructs that nourished our social environments.

A significant question involving the *Journal from the Time of the Pandemic* concerns the professional domains that have relevance and visibility in these literary accounts of the pandemic period. Can we derive patterns and recurrent

themes in these stories, articulating a distinct framework of pandemic literature? Before exploring possible answers to these issues, it is also interesting to note that collective projects apparently aim to capture one of the specific dichotomies that define the pandemic crisis, that of the individual and the collective, echoing the tension between the subjective perception of trauma and what could be approximated as its objective dimension.

The *Journal* has, indeed, a diaristic component. Multiple narrative voices detail the experience of the pandemic in various places across the globe, focusing on perception and emotions. Florin Șerban plans a manifesto in his intervention: "So, my words are aimed as a small manifesto of resistance and resilience against the epidemic of uncertainty that seems to engulf us, along with the epidemic itself" (Găneț in Cosmeanu 2021, 37). The mask, as a metonymy of the pandemic, is also the common denominator of cultural difference: "Asians wearing masks are seen by Westerners like some weirdos who had run away from the office on a secret mission to spread the virus across the world. Things start to change and some European governments have recently imposed the public wearing of masks" (Șerban in Cosmeanu 2021, 197).

An interesting, contrasting intervention belongs to a political figure, Raluca Prună, an experienced member of various European institutions who, at the moment the pandemic started, was a member of the European Commission. Her contribution confirms the initial denial phase of the crisis, in which, at least for a few weeks after the pandemic erupted in China, everyday life (including business and political life) continued in a regular manner. The optimistic tone of her first intervention remains valid until today: "I'm trying to find the advantages of this dystopian pandemic – we'll advance more rapidly in our digital agenda, in our use of artificial intelligence, there will be less pollution, although not sustainably, isolation will bring us close to metaphysics, we'll ask ourselves the difficult questions we've always been afraid of" (Prună in Cosmeanu 2021, 186).

A significant aspect of the ways in which pandemic biopolitical control is imposed in the various countries mapped in these diverse accounts is the cultural reception of restrictions, integrated into local contexts of adapting to the pandemic. A distinctive feature of the global biopolitics of the pandemic emerges: governments imposed strict rules that disrupted and changed preexisting routines of social and private life, with little resistance from those affected. The narrators of these personal accounts are not a representative segment that could illustrate this aspect beyond doubt, though. On the contrary, the pandemic narratives included in this *Journal* reflect compliance with the rules and a sense of retreat from the imaginary battlefield with a seemingly ubiquitous threat. Life in big cities appeared dramatically altered by social distancing and lockdowns, while the slow life of less populated areas proved friendlier.

Cosmeanu's *Journal* also proposes a geography of the pandemic, one that integrates the human element in a context of vulnerability and individual crisis. Its articulation becomes visible once the diaristic cyclicity of the *Journal* emerges – the repeated interventions, at different points in time, of the contributors, create the effect of a rising tide, a process that visibly becomes more threatening and severe as the pandemic progresses.

A marginal benefit of rapidly coagulated editorial adventures is the fact that authors have less time to transform authentic experiences into aesthetically rearranged artistic products. The pandemic ensued abruptly, and its deadly impact reverberated globally with great intensity. Literature, as a traditionally privileged means of rendering inner intensities, was also a favored therapeutic tool involved in expressing the universal angst and disbelief at the rapid onset of large-scale illness and loss.

Moreover, collective volumes allude to other popular discourses that are part of an extended definition of today's literature – blog posts, live stories on social media, personal narratives on vlogs, to name just the most visible forms. The overt message of the collective projects mirroring the pandemic experience is that storytelling is a therapeutic form of confronting a limit of today's social architecture, meant to alleviate the brutal, irrational, unexpected forces that generated the apparently unmanageable chaos of a new virus infecting countries and continents.

As the Authors Guild Foundation, who, together with Margaret Atwood and Douglas Preston, edited the volume *Fourteen Days*, mention in a note prefacing the *Fourteen Days* novellus, as they call it by its Latin name, "we human beings have faced our gravest challenges by telling stories. When we are confronted with war, violence, terror – or a pandemic – we tell stories to sort things out and push back against a frightening and incomprehensible world" (2024, 1). The carefully curated collection of stories, authored by Atwood, Emma Donoghue, Erica Jong, Ishmael Reed, and Weike Wang, among similarly resonant other names from today's literary canon, is, from an editorial perspective, an unusual event, expected to have a less common type of impact.

Romanian Literature has often been negatively affected by its delays in relation to Western and World literature. The modernist and postmodernist literary projects of the 1930s and 1980s, respectively, were also visible efforts to align the national canon to Western and international cultural power lines. Relevance could indeed be aided by timeliness, and it appears that this could have been a reason behind the prompt publication of the individual and collective volumes exploring the effects of the pandemic.

Although it appeared later than other books published in an electronic format, Florina Ilis' short story volume *Pandemia veselă și tristă* (The Happy and Sad Pandemic) raised the most critical interest as the first single-author literary narrative about the pandemic (Cobuz, 2020; Colțan 2020). Ilis is a successful contemporary writer, with a solid critical reputation and a consistent record of literary prizes and acknowledgments. However, from the bland title (an allusion to a minor volume of verse, *Balade vesele și triste* (Happy and Sad Ballads) by George Topârceanu) to the unusual brevity of the stories (Ilis is a marathon, 500-pages type of writer), the volume is an atypical production in the genre of pandemic literature.

From the beginning, the tone is mixed: the dire circumstances of the newly-decreed state of emergency are paralleled by sheer satire. Two men trapped in unhappy marriages realize the pandemic and the new regulations concerning travel around the city, including to and from work, interfere with their daily plans of using work as an excuse to be away from home. *O urăsc!* (I Hate Her!) is just as unrealistic and satirizing as the next title, *O iubesc!* in which a young IT specialist working for a small company fantasizes about falling in love with the only single colleague at his office. Both stories are ironic anecdotes about social distancing and its destructuring effects: it dissolves family units already estranged by routine, boredom and incompatible personality traits, while also nourishing unrealistic projections, fixations, and obsessions, deepening the social chasm for those who had already failed to fit in. Ilis approximates comic undertones in her narrative, destabilizing the serious regime of the pandemic crisis but remaining faithful to the "happy and sad" framework of her literary investigation.

The new COVID biopolitics is visible here through a single, massive lens: that of the private sphere and of personal relationships. More than a collective trauma, the pandemic unfolds as a string of small personal disasters. There is no protest, no resistance, no revolt against the sudden inauguration of the rule of biopolitical power taking control over personal routines and social interaction.

Ilis defies the medical norm of the pandemic, in which the pathological spectrum is dominated by the virus and the illness that triggered it. There are, she seems to suggest, deeper pathologies lurking beneath the thin veneer of normal life, and any major crisis of global impact would have brought them to the surface. Human relationships appear just as fragile and vulnerable as the bodies avoiding infection. Ilis appears to delimit an anatomy of the pandemic in which the focus is on the larger effects of pathologies and forms of contagion. From this perspective, the otherwise ideologically thin narratives illustrate the ease and acceptance that accompany the rise to authority and power of a biopolitical spectrum merely contested through conspiracy theories.

Starting with the third story, COVID seems to become central, as the fear of contagion grows exponentially as expats and foreigners continue to travel freely across borders and continents. Appropriately titled *Corona*, the story revolves around the homecoming of a young woman who had been away in Japan. Traveling from the Far East, she unknowingly became infected and, quite predictably, unwillingly became what has been termed a “superspreader,” a patient who infected others at a fast rate. An involved narrative voice tries to describe the actual experience of illness: the high, delirious fevers, the sense of losing contact with one’s ailing body, confusion bordering on hallucination, and a distorted sense of time. The actual narration of symptoms is a strategy to render the authentic experience of the pandemic – feeling, as Virginia Woolf deplored in her famous essay, *On Being Ill*, “what wastes and deserts of the soul a slight attack of influenza brings to light” (Woolf 2002, 32). The narrow space of the narrative dramatically reduces the effects of this descent into illness and the overall effect of the experience is thus minimized. However, this story touches upon one of the most sensitive political issues of the pandemic in Romania – the ambivalent popular attitude towards the return of the diaspora, of which a great part were workers who could no longer keep their jobs due to COVID-related restrictions. The protagonist of the story brings the pandemic home, and the coronavirus kills her grandmother. As it happened all across the globe, here, too, the virus mercilessly claimed the lives of elders and the chronically ill. Pandemic public health regulations favor open borders and free circulation (WHO), despite the negative effects such measures could entail.

As it was empirically observed, the young, healthier adults were less prone to develop severe forms of the disease, but their less compromised immunity could not prevent them from transmitting the disease to older, more vulnerable family members. This could be regarded as a dramatic point of crisis in the biopolitics of the pandemic, one that affected families and the social fabric on an already sensitive issue – that of healthcare for elders and their general well-being, both in emerging economies and in Western countries.

Judecata de Apoi (Judgment Day) could be read as an ironic commentary on the Christian Orthodox ritual of canonizing public saints. Doctors and nurses, sanctified by the collective imagination in the first months of the pandemic (later demonized by online conspiracy trends), become the subjects of a church painter’s convoluted, comical meditation. His intention was to paint them as saints on the walls of a countryside church:

The painter started to think deeper. (...) He had sometimes thought that he should adapt somehow to the times. But how? He could paint the founders from present times wearing clothes that reflected today’s

rigors, much like the masters from older days had. That would be right! But what else? No! he had to stick to the canons, because religious art had its own strict rules. But perhaps things must be renewed somehow. The people of today don't know anything about the plague, but they do know of the coronavirus. Should he paint doctors taking care of the sick, dressed in white cosmonaut clothes, as they could be seen on TV? With gloves and visors! What an artistic revolution that would be! After a hundred years art critics will explain, in books, his innovation... (Ilis 2020, 98)².

O noapte de gardă (A Night on Call) expands the medical dimension of Ilis' volume in a direction meant to expose a wider spectrum of the fragility of life in pandemic times – the death of a COVID-infected newborn. A story with a well-developed plot, this life-and-death tale from the hospital is both dramatic and disturbing. The stories of two mothers and their babies intersect just as illness and death penetrate the porous membrane protecting them from the violent ravages of the pandemic. Despite the far-fetched plot twists, the story emerges as a powerful scenario framing the life-affirming power of medical personnel, despite some thorny ethical questions that cannot be ignored. Ultimately, Ilis suggests that there is a powerful irrational component in the crisis delimited by the pandemic, but its ultimate goal is to bring order into chaos.

The last short story of the volume, *Minunata lume virtuală (The Brave Virtual World)* is a brief, jocular narrative about the complex, rapidly proliferating discourses of the social media. A separate universe of its own, the virtual world presents itself as a simulacrum of reality that closely mimics the disintegration and confusion ingrained in the essence of a global health crisis. Again, a mother and her baby are in hospital, having been tested positive for COVID. Their families communicate via social media, in a seemingly endless verbal tide that seems to diminish the gravity of the personal crisis they were facing. Denial and the illusion of communication were the early side effects of a protean, secondary crisis that lingers, in various forms of post-traumatic stress disorder even after the main crisis ended.

Conclusions

The volumes about the pandemic published as the crisis unfolded, in a discourse that paralleled the actual experience, had the mirroring effect of art created in the immediate proximity of the reality that inspired it, to which it

² All translations from Florina Ilis, *Pandemia veselă și tristă*, Polirom, 2020, and Marius Cosmeanu (ed.), *Jurnal din vremea pandemiei*, Brumar, 2021, are mine.

responded and which it tried to process, filter, and assimilate. Their therapeutic role was more evidently urgent, and the voices they reunited could be read as a chorus capturing and rearranging the intensities of the pandemic interval. The sense of community, of participation in a massively turbulent phenomenon that needed to be made comprehensible through art, are the elements that define the literature written and published under the imperative of the moment. Synchronous with the events it transfigured, this literary regime is defined by an impossibility to approximate the meaning of the complete experience, as it was still unpredictable and ongoing. It reflects a distinctive biopolitical regime, defined by compliance with the regulations of the global health crisis and retreat into individual realms characterized by uncertainty and isolation. Conspiracy theories and occasional bypasses of rules did not amount to a consolidated form of opposition to the rather sudden policy implementation of COVID pandemic rules.

However, the pandemic has drastically diminished its presence in today's public vocabulary, as if it tried to counteract its absolute dominance in years past. There is little, if any, mention of the collective trauma of the pandemic in today's culture in Romania, and the literary narratives highlighting it (including the ones discussed here) do not seem to gather more critical attention than the thin amount they received when published in 2020 and 2021. One explanation could be that the suffocating omnipresence of pandemic-related issues at all levels in public life created a temporary effect of rejection, while the trauma of the pandemic itself is, inevitably, still being processed. In her exploration of the literature about the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic, Elizabeth Outka (2020) notices a surprising scarcity of books tackling the massive catastrophe that swept the entire Western world. A possible answer lies in Western culture's perspective on major disasters, often regarded as irrational events that escape comprehensibility and reason. One strategy to overcome them is the effort to forget them as soon as their power diminishes. The literature of the pandemic will continue to grow and be just as diverse as the voices narrating it: some of it will bear the imprint of the moment, while other levels, reflecting a finite experience, will critically filter its meaning through a more distant lens.

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ROMANIAN AND HUNGARIAN OTHERNESS. A WORLD-SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE ON THE EVENT NOVEL

Andreea MÎRȚ¹

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ABSTRACT. *Romanian and Hungarian Otherness. A World-System Perspective on the Event Novel.* The article aims to investigate how the combined and unequal world-system is reflected in two peripheral novels in the modern literary system that focus on the Romanian-Hungarian 1919 military conflict, as part of the First World War. *The Death of a Red Republic* [Moartea unei Republici Roșii] by Felix Aderca and *Anna Édes* by Dezső Kosztolányi are comparatively discussed in order to see how regional and (semi-)peripheral literatures articulate the dynamics of world-systems and geographies of uneven development. The event novel, both recipient and generator of tensions and socio-economic, political, and cultural change, is representative of the articulation of imaginary patterns regarding otherness. In this sense, the article investigates how “frontier Orientalism” is activated in the narrative of the war and how this imaginary reflects the inequalities within the world system.

Keywords: *world-system theories, frontier Orientalism, imaginary, subgenre, Romanian literature, Hungarian literature*

REZUMAT. *Alteritatea română și maghiară. O perspectivă sistem-lume asupra romanului evenimentului.* Articolul își propune să investigheze modul în care sistemul-lume combinat și inegal este reflectat în două romane periferice în sistemul literar modern, romane care au în centru conflictul româno-maghiar din 1919, parte a primului Război Mondial. *Moartea unei Republici Roșii* de Felix Aderca și *Anna Édes* de Dezső Kosztolányi sunt discutate comparativ pentru a vedea cum literaturile (semi)periferice articulează dinamica sistemelor-lume și a geografiilor dezvoltării inegale. Romanul evenimentului,

¹ **Andreea MÎRȚ** is a PhD student at the Doctoral School of Linguistic and Literary Studies of Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. Her dissertation focuses on the representation of the “East” in the Romanian novel. Her interests include modern and comparative literature, translation studies, and contemporary Romanian literature. Email: andreea.mirt@ubbcluj.ro.

ca narațiune care încapsulează și generează tensiuni și schimbări socio-economice, politice și culturale este reprezentativ pentru articularea tiparelor imaginare privind alteritatea. În acest sens, articolul investighează modul în care “orientalismul de frontieră” este activat în narațiunea despre război și modul în care acest imaginar reflectă inegalitățile din cadrul sistemului-lume.

Cuvinte-cheie: *teoria sistemului-lume, orientalism de frontieră, imaginar, subgen, literatură română, literatură maghiară*

One of the most representative (sub)genres of the novel in the first half of the 20th century is the war novel. From Erich Maria Remarque to Ernest Hemingway, war writing has attempted to capture the complexity of the great event that was the First World War. The impact of the event also had the effect of transforming the way the war is recorded and depicted *in* and *through* fiction. The psychological effects of the war made the narratives focus on recording trauma: “modern military technology has rapidly transformed battles in a way that transcends traditional modes of perception, revealing the incompatibility of modern and archaic experiences of combat. It has generated and intensified feelings on the part of combatants that wars have acquired a dynamic of their own, to an extent that may sometimes cause soldiers to lose their hold on reality” (Löschnigg 2020, 143). The different ways of perceiving the traumatic event in fiction also have in common the awareness of the technologization of war. It can be seen that “modern weapons technology has fundamentally altered the locus of agency” (Norris 2000, 16), making possible a “sense of the war as a machine and of all soldiers as its victims” (Hynes 1990, 439), and thus “mechanized war affects the spatial and temporal orientation of narratives” (Löschnigg 2020, 144).

This article discusses two novels, *The Death of a Red Republic* [Moartea unei republici roșii] by Felix Aderca and *Anna Édes* by Dezső Kosztolányi that refer to the same historical moment regarding the interaction between the Romanian and Hungarian nations. On the one hand, the novels belong to two peripheral literary systems (the Romanian and the Hungarian respectively), both influenced by the literary productions produced in the Western literary core. Felix Aderca's novel also has a peripheral place in the Romanian literary system. Often, when the experience of war in the modern Romanian novel is discussed, canonical novels such as *Forest of the Hanged* [Pădurea Spânzuraților] by Liviu Rebreanu (1922) or *Last Night of Love, First Night of War* [Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război] by Camil Petrescu (1930) are invoked. These have been appreciated in Romanian literary history for the way the narration psychologizes the experience of war and for the aesthetic qualities of writing.

On the other hand, the novels discussed in this article do not focus precisely on the First World War, but more precisely on the event of the Romanian-Hungarian military conflict of 1919, when the Romanian troops occupied Hungary to fight against Bolshevism, whose representatives had taken power.

Starting from Fredric Jameson's theory that the literary genre represents "social contracts between a writer and a specific public" (Jameson 1981, 106) and from Franco Moretti's famous theory about the compromise between a foreign form and a local content in peripheral cultures ["foreign form, local characters and then, local narrative voice" (Moretti 2000, 65)], I will discuss how both novels represent the otherness (Romanian and Hungarian) and how this imaginary of the other is further seen as the expression of the combined and unequal world-systems. In this context, the foreign form is represented by the event/war novel with a focus on the psychological experience of the soldier. However, the local characters and narrative voices in these peripheral novels do not emphasize the psychological, but the social and political effects of the event. The Warwick Research Collective, following Jameson's theory, considers "'world literature' as the literature of the world-system – of the modern capitalist world-system, that is." (WRek 2015, 8). Therefore, the proposed novels are discussed in this frame of world literature theory in order to point out how the social and economic inequalities are reflected also inside the event of the war because, as the authors of the Warwick Research Collective emphasize, "the literary 'registration' of the world-system does not (necessarily) involve criticality or dissent. Our assumption is rather that the effectivity of the world-system will necessarily be discernible in any modern literary work, since the world-system exists unforgoably as the matrix within which all modern literature takes shape and comes into being" (20). Therefore, the article aims to investigate how the combined and unequal world-system is reflected in two peripheral novels in the modern literary system with the military conflict event at their centre. It will be explored how the event novel (as a *foreign form*), imported in the peripheries and involving *local characters*, produces a *local narrative voice*, which aims to materialize certain social and/or national stakes rather than to reproduce the authenticity/psychological effects of the military conflict experience, as it happens in the novel of the war produced in the West literary system. Moreover, beyond these social and national stakes, these novels manage to record the combined and unequal world system.

The Hungarian otherness in a Romanian event novel

In the studies dedicated to the (sub)genres of the Romanian novel published in *Revista Transilvania*, based on the data provided by *Dicționarul Cronologic al Romanului Românesc de la origini până în 1989* [*Chronological*

Dictionary of the Romanian Novel from its Origins to 1989], it can be observed that the war novel records 12 entries for the period 1900-1932, respectively 18 novels in the period 1933-1947 – as a percentage representing 2.46 or 2.45% (see Terian et al. 2020). The authors of the article propose instead the *event novel* or *novel of an event* concept to “designate a subgenre that focuses on the impact on the novel's plot of the characters' participation in a major historical event (generally a war, revolution, or uprising)”² (Terian 2020, 58). Anne Fuchs proposes in the same manner the concept of “impact events”, which “can be defined as historical occurrences that are perceived to spectacularly shatter the material and symbolic worlds that we inhabit. Impact also denotes the duration of the after-effects in the material culture and collective consciousness” (Fuchs 2012, 10). These events create “impact narratives”, a concept aiming to “not only designate processes of verbal narrativisation that are so essential in the production of cultural identity. The term ‘impact narrative’ is shorthand for an infectious form of cultural memory that is relayed across diverse genres and media” (12). I consider *event novel* or *impact novel* terms more significant for the novels discussed – there are, on the one hand, different opinions regarding the idea of naming “war” the conflict from 1919, and on the other hand, the novels do not focus exclusively on the military conflict: it is in the foreground of Felix Aderca's novel and in the background of Dezső Kosztolányi's novel, but in both novels the event plays a decisive role in narrative construction, having an impact on the interaction between the characters and their perception of otherness.

It is noted in the article published in *Revista Transilvania* that the most productive period of the genre in Romania is in the interwar period, as an effect of the First World War (60% of the production of this subgenre belongs to the event of the First World War). The First World War produced a paradigm shift in the evolution of this subgenre: first of all, the abandonment of the heroic, glorious rhetoric, and the emphasis on realism, on the individual, traumatic experience. They are novels of trauma and memory, which also problematize the effects of the war's industrialization (see Löschnigg 2020). The modification of the novel form, i.e. the emphasis on personal experience and its psychological effects through narrative means, can be seen in the Romanian literary system in canonical novels such as the two previously mentioned, *Last Night of Love*, *First Night of War* by Camil Petrescu and *Forest of the Hanged* by Liviu Rebreanu. The novels that serve as case studies in this article do not emphasize the psychological effect of the event, but focus on its social and political stakes.

The Death of a Red Republic [Moartea unei republici roșii] by Felix Aderca was published in 1924. The novel, written in the form of a diary, focuses

² Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. The original Romanian reads: “pentru a denumi un subgen care focalizează impactul pe care îl are asupra intrigii romanului participarea personajelor la un eveniment istoric major (în general, un război, o revoluție sau o răscoală).”

on Captain Aurel, whose experience with the war brings him face-to-face with the (especially female) Hungarian otherness. The social stakes of the author are visible, especially in the way the heroic spirit is ironized and the soldiers are caricatured. To discuss how the encounter with Hungarian otherness is evoked in Felix Aderca's novel, I will use Andre Gingrich's concept of "frontier Orientalism". He starts from the Orientalism theory proposed by Edward Said (1979) and shows that the relations between neighbouring peoples are not always represented with the same imaginary structures or metaphors that would define the Far East for Western Europe. In this regard, frontier Orientalism is defined as "a relatively coherent set of metaphors and myths that reside in folk and public culture. It places the home country and its population along an adjacent territorial and military borderline which is imbued with a timeless mission." (Gingrich 1996, 119). Thus, a difference between frontier Orientalism and Said's classical Orientalism resides in the metaphors proposed by geographically close communities: they are generated in popular culture, and not necessarily produced by the intellectual or academic community. Another difference would be the image of the other: if the exponents of the Orient defined by Said are seen as primitive barbarians, in the case of frontier Orientalism they are seen as more than that, specifically as rivals. National differences are always accentuated, primarily in terms of religion (Gingrich mainly discusses the perception of Christian Europeans towards the Muslim peoples they border).

Because the experience of war involves the direct encounter with the people on the border, in the following paragraphs I will discuss how the subgenre of the event novel articulates the social imaginary of neighbouring otherness. The analysis aims to interrogate how the direct encounter on the battlefield reinforces certain stereotypes and recurrences of the imaginary or if, on the contrary, it deconstructs them.

In the case of Aderca's novel, there is first a dichotomy between Romanians and Hungarians, the latter seen as absolute enemies. In the context of the depicted military and political event, the Romanians would be the saviours, and the Hungarians would be the "demonic" Bolsheviks: "Maybe you feel sorry for this killed soldier? He was a Bolshevik: look on his cape, his red star" (Aderca 1924, 68).³ Thus, a politicization of Hungarian otherness is noted: it is seen neither as humanity nor as a nation but as a political construct. In fact, in this politicized image, the dichotomy West – East, Occident – Orient is active: the Romanian soldiers, as liberators, become the exponents of the West, the promoters of its civilization, who will free the Hungarian nation from Bolshevism. Bolshevism is seen, of course, as a product of Russia, whose image in Romanian literature has often been exoticized.

³ "Poate că-ți pare rău de soldatul ista ucis? Era bolșevic: uite colea, pe capei, steaua lui roșie."

Throughout different historical contexts, the West-East dichotomy becomes more complex when applied to the relationship between Hungarians and Romanians. In general, Hungarians perceived Romanians as inferiors and their nation as uncivilized, while Hungarians themselves were similarly perceived in the Western imaginary. However, in the Romanian imaginary, the Hungarians do not appear as a civilizing agent, they are not included in the category of Western nations. As Melinda Mitu and Sorin Mitu show, in the case of the relationship between Romanians and Hungarians, it was the Occidental thought that mediated the images and perceptions of one nation regarding the other (See Mitu 2014, 27-39).

In this cultural context, Aderca's novel highlights the excessive politicization of the social imaginary at the beginning of the novel to prove its artificiality. In the beginning, the Romanian soldiers got to interact with the Hungarian soldiers and confirmed that they had enemies in front of them. The stereotype of the Bolsheviks as wild, barbaric, and uncivilized is deconstructed when the Romanians discover that the military industry is also present on the opposing battlefield. Only with the experience of war do Romanian soldiers also discover what lies beyond the mechanism of war, i.e. the real victims: "His discovery was indeed funny [...] a whole people of Bolsheviks: women with babies at their breasts, men from agricultural labour, with drooping heads, ragged clothes and bare feet – some of them held large scythes in their hands, like banners with a steel banner, shining over their head" (90).⁴

Expressionist descriptions in the writings of Felix Aderca contribute to the depoliticization of the idea of war and the humanization of Hungarian otherness. The Hungarian people thus become an otherness that mirrors the Romanian one. Captain Aurel realizes in the end that both Romanians and Hungarians are nothing more than victims of the mechanism of war and, implicitly, of the world-system that generated this mechanism.

The mirroring of otherness does not, however, equalize the status of the two nations. Another pattern in imagining Hungarian otherness is its feminization and exoticization. On the one hand, there is a feminization of space: "Pusta lay lazily like a golden woman, rolled under the sun" (80).⁵ Hungarian nature and land acquire these feminine valences, which make Romanian soldiers think about it as being their property (on an imaginary, aspirational level, and then on a concrete level, by conquering this space).

The feminization and exoticization of Hungarian space do not (only) make visible ideological stakes of the direct military conflict — Romanian

⁴ "Caraghioasă era într'adevăr descoperirea lui [...] un popor întreg de bolșevici: femeii cu prunci la săni, oameni de muncă agrară, cu capetele zbârlite, hainele zdrențuite și picioarele goale — unii din ei țineau coase mari în mână, ca niște stindarde cu flamura de oțel, lucind de-asupra capului."

⁵ "Pusta se întindea leneșă înainte ca o femeie caldă, aurie, rostogolită sub soare."

masculinity finding its counterpoint in Hungarian femininity, which becomes property, an object of male desire. The feminization of the imaginary referring to Hungarians also works as an idealization of it, in the same way that the Romanian space is also idealized: “Time had stopped around them and all the Romanian fairy tale — colour, miracle, aroma — had been brought by these souls, in the passionate uniformity of the wilderness” (93).⁶ Even if the nationalist stakes are visible in this type of imaginary, the function is to create familiarity: the Romanian soldier should see in the Hungarian land not just a battlefield, but the same essence and depth that their own homeland has. Therefore, it is shown that the discursive nationalism that generates the schematic dichotomies I discussed earlier changes when the Romanian soldiers encounter the “Hungarian space” directly, without the mediating space of the battlefield, where the nationalist roles must be performed more visibly. It is no longer a discourse that they have taken over, but one that they generate “naturally” – the fascination of the space is almost mystical, the landscape sensitizes them and, in fact, it is a familiarization with the discovered world, which comes into their possession.

The feminization of space in Aderca's novel continues with the discovery of the urbanity by the Romanian soldiers. If the *puszta*, as a rural space, registers the coordinates of a deep, atemporal space, which has the role of preserving (national) values, Budapest, as an urban environment, becomes a space of artifice and degradation. At this point, Felix Aderca suggests implicitly a critique of modernity (that is, of the modern world-system), by caricaturing the Hungarian metropolis. Budapest is placed in line with other Western capitals: “I understood that Budapest is the City of Sensuality. Rome is an archaeological cemetery, Vienna a graceful trinket, Berlin a department store, London a monster with thousands of heads. Paris is a word of the 17th century, Budapest — Budapest is a sumptuous lady of consumption!” (157).⁷ Budapest become an object of consumption and aspiration for the Romanian soldier.

Thus, the meeting between the Romanian soldiers and Budapest leads to the awareness of their inequalities, which are more of an *economic* than *political* nature. The feminization and exoticization of the big city have both the role of suggesting the desire of the Romanian soldiers to appropriate this space as an object of consumption (an aspiration that they would have for any Western

⁶ “Timpul se oprise în jurul lor și tot basmul românesc — culoare, miracol, aromă — fusese adus de aceste suflete, în uniformitatea pasională a pustei.”

⁷ “am înțeles că Budapesta este Orașul Sensualității. Roma e un cimitir arheologic, Viena un bibelou grațios, Berlinul un magazin universal, Londra un monstru cu mii de capete. Parisul un cuvânt de spirit al secolului al XVII-lea, Budapesta — Budapesta e o damă somptuoasă de consumație!”

city, being aware of themselves as part of the peripheral world), as well as to deconstruct the initial stereotype of a Bolshevik city: “the Red Republic has passed — the luxurious women have remained. They laugh ignorantly, they have all the violence and thirst of the East, draped in the delicacies of the West: they have merged here two visions of life” (160)⁸. The artificiality of the city, with its modern vibe, consumerism, and frivolity, is both a critique of modernity and of the mechanism of war itself, which becomes in turn artificial. The political stakes of the Romanian soldiers are left behind in favour of the fascination for the great city which invites to be *consumed*. Therefore, Felix Aderca manages to show the Hungarian otherness as a mirror of the Romanian one: both victims of the unequal system, accentuated also by the reality of the war.

I consider that this novel can be discussed from the perspective of world-system theories because it deconstructs a nationalist or militant perspective on war. The period in which the novel appears is not devoid of thesis literature, because of the nationalist ideological movements that encourage such writings (see Bogdan Crețu 2019, 102-110), towards which Aderca takes a critical position in his own novel. In this regard, the novel can be seen as representative of the “reflexive mode of literary remembering”, using the classification proposed by Astrid Erll. She makes a distinction between the experiential, the monumental, the antagonistic, and the reflexive mode of remembering in literary works that aim to register the war event (Erll 2009, 40). Novels with a nationalist stake can be considered as part of the “antagonistic mode” because they “help to maintain one version of the past and reject another” putting at work the “negative stereotyping” (41). As the author observes, there is no fixed delimitation between the four ways of literary remembering, they can work simultaneously in the same work, and their implementation makes literature “a major medium of critical reflection upon such processes of representation” (42). The representation does not aim, as can be seen in Aderca's novel, to depict only the war event, but also how one nation interacts with another, deconstructing or creating new stereotypes that remain in the collective cultural memory. The imaginary reflected in cultural stereotypes about otherness reveals, in fact, ideological constructs behind the ideas of civilization, modernity, and development that a nation has. Felix Aderca's novel instrumentalizes the event of 1919 to show, even implicitly, the social and ideological neuroses of inter-peripheral interaction as an effect of capitalist modernization.

⁸ “Republica roșie a trecut — femeile de lux au rămas. Ele rîd neștiutoare, ele care au toată violența și setea Orientului, drapate de gătelile de gust ales ale Occidentului: s-au contopit aici două viziuni ale vieții.”

The Romanian otherness in a Hungarian novel

As a counterpoint to Aderca's novel, I discuss the image of the Romanians in a Hungarian novel, *Anna Édes* by Dezső Kosztolányi, published in 1926. It can be considered more of a social novel than a war novel *per se* – using psychological elements, the narration depicts the decadence of the Hungarian bourgeois class. The plot follows the way a maid, Anna Édes, ends up killing her masters, as exponents of the upper class. The choice of the novel as a counterpoint is justified by the event that takes place in the background: the invasion of the city of Budapest by the Romanian army, more precisely, the event of 1919. In this sense, as *The Death of a Red Republic*, *Anna Édes* can be considered an event or impact novel as well. There is obviously a correlation between external events, the war, the invasion of the Romanian army, and the crisis of the bourgeois class, which represents the main focus of the novel.

In the first part of the novel, the narrator depicts the general astonishment on both sides (Romanian and Hungarian), caused by the conquest of the city:

This was something that neither Hungarians nor the Romanians themselves would ever have been able to imagine, not in their wildest dreams. They glance at each other astonished at this miraculous turn of events. It was literally incredible. Hungarians at their windows watched Romanian vehicles cruising the streets below but they didn't believe it. Not even the Romanians could believe it straightaway.... A dream. All heaven lay before them, nothing barred their way. At first they didn't know what they should ask for and in their childish greed they grabbed at showy knick-knacks rather than things of real value. (Kosztolányi 1993, 27)

One can observe in the description of the amazement a kind of infantilization of the Romanian soldiers, who take over the city for themselves. This infantilization shows that the political and ideological content delivered before being part of a war is an artificial construct in front of the reality of the encounter with the Romanian otherness. At the same time, the inferiority complex of Romanians compared to Hungarians is also suggested. The stereotypes activated by frontier Orientalism (Hungarians/Romanians as absolute enemies) will be deconstructed with the celebration of victory.

The encounter between two nations event, like any war event, contributes to the fluidity of a stable image of otherness. If the Hungarians generally imagined the Romanians (from the Kingdom of Romania, not from Transylvania) according to the economic gap, the direct encounter with them in a military conflict produces a transfer of the imaginary: from backward, uncivilized, the Romanians become enemies. How the imaginary of otherness changes its emphasis in conflict situations is obviously determined by nationalist stakes (see Bárdi, Pál 2022, 14-22). In this regard, Dezső Kosztolányi's novel,

critical to the national stakes associated with the bourgeois class, offers an image of Romanians, especially from the perspective of the social class they belong to.

The novel further presents the festive atmosphere: the Romanian soldiers discovering the great city, as in Aderca's novel. The fascination and the process of accommodation to this mundane life, which comes as a crowning of national success, is performed:

The Romanians move into their immediate vicinity. Those at whom she had stared in astonishment in the first few weeks of the occupation now strolled before her house as if they had been born around the corner. [...]. On Sundays, reeking of scent, the slim dark corseted officers promenaded up and down the Var with their entourage of chorus girls, or took excursions in the hills, or picnicked on the grass with their latest sweethearts and took photographs to commemorate the occasion. They were serenaded by gypsy bands at the Philadelphia, who played them old Hungarian tunes such as they might once have heard and passionately sung as students back in the Transylvanian hills. (39)

It seems that the conquest of Budapest as a political and national gesture remains in the background, giving way to the city as an object of Western, metropolitan consumption. As in Aderca's novel, the city becomes the symbol of modernity and triviality. Celebrating the victory also represents compensation for the situation to which the soldiers are subjected, especially through the prism of their social class (the obligation to participate in this war, the precariousness of life on the front, etc.). The position of the Romanian soldiers on the "winning" side of the conflict leads to the attenuation of the situation of being part of a lower class, and hence victims of the war's political mechanism: the way in which they take possession of the city reflects their social and economic aspirations. Just like in the case of the Romanian author, the city is conquered by Romanian soldiers through the Hungarian girls:

Lajos, Katica's boyfriend, had a long record as a burglar and had been arrested, so the girl found herself a Romanian, a shepherd boy from the 'old kingdom' barely out of his teens. The tinhelmeted warriors had never seen such a beautiful woman. His arm wound around her waist, taking her hand in his, he walked her round and round the Vérmező, admiring her rouged lips and her tinted blonde hair. He communicated to her by signs that he would marry her if only she would return to Romania with him. (39)

Dezső Kosztolányi's novel problematizes the idea of enmity between the two nations, showing that this is a construct. The cohabitation between Hungarian maids and Romanian soldiers suggests that otherness functions as a marker of

class identity. The ideological stake of the novel is visible, especially in the imagining of the intersection between Romanians and Hungarians: the experience of war can lead to class consciousness and putting aside the national one. The novel suggests how the unequal and combined world-system is perceived by the lower classes: the principal victims of the war mechanism, the soldiers and the maids, stand in a way in solidarity, even if they belong to different nations, as the revolt against the upper classes and, implicitly, the modernization that they produce for their own benefit. The occupation of Budapest, the novel also suggests, has not only a national significance but also a social and economic one for the Romanian soldiers and the Hungarian maids. *Anna Édes* shows that the national consciousness imposed on the lower classes can be questioned through the interaction between two groups which identify themselves as part of the same social class, even if they belong to enemy nations. In the end, the questioning of the national ideas leads to the transformation of the imaginary regarding otherness.

Conclusion

The novels discussed highlight the social and ideological stakes of the conflict from 1919 between Romanians and Hungarians, rather than the psychological effects of it. The “imagined communities” (Anderson 2006) of the characters living the experience of the war reproduce the specific stereotypes of frontier Orientalism. However, as seen in Aderca’s and Kosztolányi’s narratives, these stereotypes are brought into the discussion in order to be deconstructed. The images of otherness are created according to the outcome of the war (the idyllic image of peasants, Romanian soldiers, and maids in Budapest is motivated, in the case of the Romanian novel, by the effect of military success, and in the Hungarian one, as an effect of the decline of the bourgeois class, promoter of nationalism and representative of social inequalities).

Although the novels have realistic stakes, one can see the functionality of the national/social constructs or the ideological visions of the authors in the configuration of the imaginary. The imaginary of otherness and the depiction of the city work, however, in the case of both authors, by unmasking the artificiality of the war and by highlighting the real victims of it. The soldiers, like the other representatives of the lower classes, through the interaction with the so-called enemy nation, end up changing their perceptions of otherness and realizing, as the novels suggest, that they are victims not only of one precise event but of the entire political and social mechanism of modernization, which produces and instrumentalizes wars to deepen the inequalities between the core and the periphery.

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IONESCU-IONESCO, VOIX D'UN EXILÉ ? PROPOSITION D'UNE RELECTURE THÉORIQUE

Iulian-Emil COȚOFANĂ¹

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ABSTRACT. *Ionescu-Ionesco, Voice of an Exile? Proposal for a Theoretical Rereading.* In this paper, we propose a different reading of Eugène Ionesco's exile by drawing from a selection of texts from the 1930s and afterwards. As our purpose is to challenge the prevailing discourse surrounding the topic, we have opted to focus on critical and theoretical elements rather than biographical details. We keep in mind that the author's contributions and the research on his work are two intertwined discourses. In post-1989 Romania, Ionesco is widely regarded as one of the leading literary figures of the Romanian exile. It is our opinion that his exiled status has not been sufficiently investigated, and our aim is to demonstrate that prudence and close reading could uncover some striking nuances that could lead scholars to the solution of a central question: Should Ionescu-Ionesco be regarded as an exile or rather as an expatriate?

Keywords: *Eugen Ionescu – Eugène Ionesco, exile, expatriate, ideology, reception*

REZUMAT. *Ionescu-Ionesco, vocea unui exilat? Propunere pentru o relectură teoretică.* În articolul de față propunem o lectură diferită a exilului lui Eugène Ionesco bazându-ne pe o selecție de texte din anii 1930 și de mai târziu. Întrucât scopul nostru este să chestionăm discursul predominant legat de subiect, am ales să ne concentrăm mai curând asupra elementelor critice și

¹ **Iulian-Emil COȚOFANĂ** is a PhD student within the Doctoral School of Philology Studies from "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University in Iași. His ongoing doctoral dissertation, written in Romanian, is entitled *Eugène Ionesco. For an archeology of ideological mechanisms of reception*. His academic interests focus on Romanian literature, Romanian criticism and history of literature, the theory of literature and critical theory. His most recent contributions are "Efecte discursive ale atitudinii anticomuniste ionesciene" in Ioana Bot, Mădălina Agoston (eds.), *Literaturi transnaționale în transmisiune directă: Transilvania, translații, transgresiuni*, and "Marin Preda între ideologii de receptare" in Ofelia Ichim (coord.), *Interferențe culturale, lingvistice și geopolitice în spațiul românesc*, both published in 2023. Email: iulian.cotofana@uaic.student.ro, iulian2006ro@yahoo.com

teoretice decât asupra detaliilor biografice. Ținem cont de faptul că contribuțiile autorului și cercetarea relativă la opera sa sunt două discursuri întrețesute. În România de după 1989, Ionesco este îndeobște considerat drept o figură literară marcantă a exilului românesc. Opinia noastră este aceea că statutul său de exilat nu a fost suficient investigat, iar obiectivul nostru este să demonstrăm că prudența și lectura atentă pot dezvălui nuanțe remarcabile: ar trebui Ionescu-Ionesco să fie tratat drept un exilat sau mai degrabă drept un expatriat?

Cuvinte-cheie: *Eugen Ionescu – Eugène Ionesco, exil, expatriat, ideologie, receptare*

Préliminaires

Eugène Ionesco est un écrivain consacré grâce à son théâtre. Cependant, pour comprendre l'ensemble de son activité, il faut également considérer les différentes étapes de son écriture et de sa réception. À notre connaissance, il y a un manque d'intérêt pour l'étude de ses écrits politiques tardifs sur lesquels, paradoxalement peut-être, il dure plutôt un consensus. En revanche, nous remarquons une tendance accrue à lire les textes de jeunesse de Ionescu², car on pouvait en anticiper le dramaturge. Nicolae Florescu, Gelu Ionescu, Ion Vartic, Ecaterina Cleynen-Serghiev, Alexandra Hamdan, Marta Petreu, Laura Pavel, Matei Călinescu, Sergiu Miculescu et Eugen Simion se sont penchés sur ses productions roumaines. Toutefois, certains aspects biographiques du dramaturge donnent naissance à des débats. Par exemple, Mihai Iovănel attire l'attention sur l'absence de l'indication de l'origine roumaine de Ionesco sur la page Internet de la collection Pléiade (Iovănel 2017, 231). Une autre question concerne sa citoyenneté française. Pour Emmanuel Jacquart, Ionesco « se fait naturaliser français » en 1950 (Ionesco 2013, LXXIX). En revache, grâce aux « services rendus à la culture française »³, Matei Călinescu considère l'année 1957 comme l'année de sa naturalisation (n.t. ; Călinescu 2017, 23).

² Tout au long de l'article, nous faisons une distinction concernant l'orthographe du nom de l'écrivain. Notre raison principale de respecter l'histoire littéraire et les changements qui ont eu lieu à partir d'un moment donné. Par conséquent, nous n'attribuons pas à Ionesco ce qui a été publié en tant que Ionescu. Le phénomène inverse est également valable : ce n'est pas Ionescu l'auteur de *La Cantatrice chauve*, mais Ionesco. Quant à la forme Ionescu-Ionesco, celle-ci se rapporte aux cas où il est question d'un aspect commun. La correspondance intime est vue comme appartenant à Ionescu-Ionesco. Pourtant, nous devons faire attention aux nuances du style et des idées même dans la situation de *Nu/ Non* publié autant en Roumanie qu'en France. En résumé, l'écriture et les préoccupations de Ionescu n'équivalent pas à celles de Ionesco ; on ne peut pas les interchanger inconsidérément.

³ « "pentru servicii aduse culturii franceze" » (Călinescu 2017, 23).

Jadis, en Roumanie, *Nu [Non]* (1934) de Ionescu a eu une réception mitigée : Petru Comarnescu et Mircea Vulcănescu l'apprécient⁴ ; en retour, dans sa correspondance, après avoir lu *Nu*, Emil Cioran prit ses distances par rapport à Ionescu (Cioculescu 2005, 201). À cette époque-là, la consécration de Ionescu lui a valu l'étiquette d'« enfant terrible » de la littérature roumaine (en français dans le texte ; Pană 2021, 574) ou bien d'« enfant aux ambitions démesurées »⁵ (n.t. ; Cioculescu 1934, 655). Ionescu lui-même semble regretter qu'il ne soit que « le-jeune-homme-qui-s'est-attaqué-à-Arghezi » (Ionesco 1986, 87).

Étant donné la circulation restreinte des écrits de Ionescu-Ionesco⁶ pendant le régime communiste⁷, sa réception après 1989 fait écho différemment à la réception positive et limitée des années 1930. Pendant les années 1930, on observe que Ionescu « se permet et on lui permet les plus impertinentes plaisanteries »⁸ (n.t. ; Miculescu 2005, 142). Dans les années 1960, par contre, Ionesco bénéficiait de l'opinion favorable de certaines publications de l'exil roumain⁹, quoique dans une lettre rédigée le 27 octobre 1961, adressée à Lucian Boz, il s'y soit montré prudent : « “Sans indications biographiques [...] – auteur de langue française et, si tu veux, raconte les débuts théâtraux en France, c'est tout. [...] tu ne me connais qu'en tant qu'auteur de langue française (donc auteur français) à partir de 1950” »¹⁰, (n.t. ; Florescu 1998, 38). Suivant ces précisions, Sergiu Miculescu apprécie le « ton impératif »¹¹ de la missive (n.t. ; Miculescu 2005, 146). Il faut aussi mentionner que Ionesco cache son passé d'écrivain roumain, y compris son procès de 1946 ; après la publication en 1946 d'un texte de 1945, dans une revue littéraire roumaine, Ionescu est condamné pour avoir insulté l'armée roumaine¹². Dans la même épître destinée à Lucian Boz, il veut recouvrir son présumé statut d'exilé : « [...] Rien [...] sur le procès fameux, rien sur l'exil [...] »¹³ (n.t. ; Florescu 1998, 38). Implicitement, avant de devenir

⁴ Ecaterina Cleynen-Serghiev a traduit en français et a établi un dossier de réception de la parution de *Nu* (Cleynen-Serghiev 2019, 131–186).

⁵ « un copil cu ambiții nemăsurate » (Cioculescu 1934, 655).

⁶ Durant le communisme, les anthologies de théâtre ont porté sur la couverture le nom de Ionescu. Arrivés en Roumanie, ses volumes français portaient la variante francisée de son nom.

⁷ Si le dernier texte publié date depuis 1973, la critique sur Ionescu-Ionesco n'a pas disparu.

⁸ « Își permite și i se permit cele mai sfruntate giumbușlucuri » (Miculescu 2005, 142).

⁹ « Cité et commenté avec une ferveur obstinée dans les publications de l'exil roumain existantes en France et ailleurs [...] » (n.t. ; Florescu 1998, 38) / « Citat și comentat cu o încăpățânată fervoare în publicațiile exilului românesc din Franța și nu numai [...] ».

¹⁰ « Fără date biografice [...] – autor de limbă franceză și, dacă vrei, povestește începuturile teatrale în Franța, doar atât. [...] nu mă cunoști decât ca autor de limbă franceză (decă autor francez) începând cu 1950 » (Florescu 1998, 38).

¹¹ « tonul imperativ » (Miculescu 2005, 146).

¹² Marta Petreu a reconstitué minutieusement ce procès (Petreu 2012, 129–171).

¹³ « Nimic [...] despre faimosul proces, nimic despre exil [...] » (Florescu 1998, 38).

académicien en 1970 (***) 1970), il dissimule publiquement l'activité déroulée à Vichy : « [...] Maurice Schumann [...] : "Où étiez-vous pendant la guerre ?" Eugène Ionesco [...] : "À cette époque-là je n'étais pas français, je servais mon pays d'alors" [...] » (Ionesco 2004, 89). Somme toute, Ionescu avait déroulé une activité de promotion de la culture et de la littérature roumaines en cherchant des collaborations. Dans les trois lettres adressées à Tudor Vianu, concernant sa période à Vichy (le 5 novembre 1942, le 23 décembre 1943 et le 20 février 1944), Eugen Ionescu, étant au début attaché de presse puis secrétaire culturel principal, exprime ses soucis et ses contraintes professionnelles. Jusqu'à un moment donné, il partageait cette partie de sa vie, par écrit ou oralement, uniquement à quelques confidents.

Relativement à la compréhension de ses pages en roumain, y compris la correspondance, nous soulignons qu'on a mis à l'œuvre sa biographie ou son propre discours biographique au service de la réception. Concrètement, en Roumanie au moins, la réception des épîtres de Ionescu destinées à Vianu révèle une lecture principalement biographique. C'est-à-dire que l'on a instrumentalisé leurs contenus afin d'extraire des faits concrets à propos d'autres congénères tels que Eliade, Cioran et Noïca. Cependant, qu'est-ce qu'un texte non fictif nous montre ? Peut-on y retrouver les mécanismes du discours de l'écrivain ? Le discours centré sur le thème de l'exil problématisera, rangera et exposera en grandes lignes l'auteur. On arrive ainsi à négliger les particularités de ses propres discours. C'est ainsi, peut-être, qu'on a méconnu le penchant pour le raisonnement politique et idéologique de Ionescu-Ionesco, même si, pour Ionesco, la production théâtrale a été centrale. Puis, l'image de l'auteur révélée de cette façon ne focalise pas sur sa double constitution : d'une part, c'est l'écrivain qui la dessine et, d'autre part, ce sont les spécialistes qui la disséminent et la renforcent. Il s'ensuit qu'une telle méthodologie laisse de côté les sous-entendus renvoyant au pouvoir dans le discours premier et dans le discours second. En principe, au lieu d'identifier et d'analyser les liens entre les textes politiques, théoriques et critique-littéraires, on privilégie souvent l'œuvre fictionnelle de Ionesco et les écrits où il s'explique. Nous nous écartons de la pratique habituelle qui interprète Ionescu-Ionesco par ses propres écrits et par son « moi critique hypertrophié »¹⁴ (n.t. ; Pavel 2022, 39). Nous regardons également du point de vue de Finkenthal et Kluback, qui suggèrent qu'une « longue conversation avec et sur Eugène Ionesco »¹⁵ fait ressortir une autre réception (n.t. ; Kluback, Finkenthal 1998, 10) : il s'agit non pas d'instrumentaliser les propos de Ionescu-Ionesco afin de lui offrir une meilleure interprétation, mais de réfléchir au monde à partir de ses propos.

¹⁴ « [un] eu critic hipertrofiat » (Pavel 2022, 39).

¹⁵ « [...] o lungă conversație cu și despre Eugène Ionesco » (Kluback, Finkenthal 1998, 10).

À nos yeux, indépendamment d'une coutume discursive bien constituée, Ionescu-Ionesco¹⁶ n'est pas tout à fait un exilé. Il serait tout au plus un expatrié¹⁷. Nous essayons de soutenir ci-dessous une telle hypothèse. Néanmoins, le premier défi est de répondre à la question suivante : comment aborder l'exil sans tomber dans l'analyse biographique ? Autrement dit, lorsqu'on a tendance à lire biographiquement les essais, les articles politiques pamphlétaires¹⁸, la correspondance, les journaux ou les mémoires d'un créateur, comment procéder à une lecture théorique qui les traitera différemment ? En fin de compte, notre tentative théorique essaie de mettre en relief les nuances possibles des discours de Ionescu-Ionesco et de ses critiques. Les deux ne s'articulent pas sans une base idéologique.

Dans l'ensemble, notre démarche s'adresse à ceux qui pensent que le savoir sur les écrits de Ionescu-Ionesco est saturé. À vrai dire, le rebondissement dépend d'une perspective orientée à l'encontre de l'auteur et du discours critique dominant. Si, d'un côté, on a tenu pour acquis son statut d'exilé et, de l'autre côté, on a dédaigné sa préoccupation politique, alors il est temps de revisiter ces aspects moins discutés ou trop homogénéisés et figés. Pour son compte, Ionescu-Ionesco avait fait publier cette sorte de textes en ayant ses raisons et son récepteur potentiel d'abord roumain, puis français, roumain ou international. D'une certaine manière, ses morceaux plus longs ou trop concis sur le sujet politique et idéologique restent une clé principale si l'on s'intéresse à ces questions. L'objectif d'une telle recherche est d'élargir la compréhension et l'interprétation de cet auteur. Quant à l'analyse du thème de l'exil chez lui, elle devient significative en raison d'un axe de réflexion de la critique et de l'histoire littéraires roumaines. Ce sont elles qui ont promu l'idée de son bannissement, alors que Ionescu-Ionesco démontre plutôt l'inverse : pour autant que la France soit par élection sa « vraie patrie », la Roumanie s'impose forcément comme pays de son exil. Du côté français, si Ionesco est traité absolument en tant qu'auteur français d'origine roumaine, le couple exil-expatriation est

¹⁶ Du point de vue des critiques roumains, il s'agit plutôt de « Ionescu » en tant qu'exilé, alors que la critique française est encline à ignorer l'exil. Toutefois, le problème est que l'on fait appel à son nom roumain lorsqu'il est question de l'étape française de son œuvre. Étant donné qu'il aurait pu devenir un exilé à partir de 1945, nous utilisons la forme Ionescu-Ionesco.

¹⁷ Les preuves auxquelles nous faisons appel montrent qu'il serait un expatrié. D'ailleurs, si l'on voulait abandonner cette investigation presque tout à fait biographique, on concéderait à juste titre l'avis de Petru Comarnescu : « Ionesco et Cioran se considèrent [...] en tant qu'écrivains universels et non pas des écrivains roumains réfugiés ou en exil » (n.t. ; Vartic 2011, 87) / « Ionesco și Cioran se consideră [...] scriitori universali și nu scriitori români în refugiu sau exil ». Nous échappons à l'étude biographique grâce à l'attention prêtée au discours second.

¹⁸ « [...] Car, s'il y avait eu, au lieu du cafouillage idéologique [...], au lieu de cet aveuglement, une conscience mondiale nette [...], le mal aurait pu être évité [...] » (Ionesco 1977, 38-39).

neutralisé. Préciser strictement l'origine n'indiquera pas les motifs à cause desquels quelqu'un avait quitté sa nation. L'expérience culturelle et littéraire roumaine était invisible aux yeux des Français¹⁹, puisqu'il la masquait. Toutefois, en vertu d'elle, il a réélaboré peu à peu son premier exercice dramatique rédigé en roumain qui deviendra *La Cantatrice chauve*.

Esquisse commentée sur la notion d'exil

Prononcée le 25 mai 1994 à Paris, cette phrase de Monica Lovinescu est révélatrice : « [...] Ionescu n'a jamais été proprement dit en exil. Il a été surtout l'ami de quelques-uns d'entre nous... [...] »²⁰ (n.t. ; Corbea, Florescu 2002, 110). D'emblée, on apprend que, même après avoir acquis la célébrité, Monica Lovinescu appelle Ionesco par son nom roumain. On retrouve cette situation également dans ses entretiens avec lui (Lovinescu 1992, 119–149). Puis, elle ne le considère pas comme exilé. Enfin, les points de suspension laissent la remarque ouverte, en nous invitant à méditer. C'est ainsi que Monica Lovinescu permet la remise en question de l'appartenance de Ionescu à l'exil roumain, auquel il est souvent assigné. En raison de sa consécration théâtrale, la réception française ignore ou prête peu d'attention à la problématique de son exil. Pourtant, cette observation nécessite une approche prudente. Une biographie parue assez tardivement en France montre une certaine perception sur l'exil roumain (Le Gall 2009). En revanche, un manuel de 1989, qui l'élude complètement, évoque les *Rhinocéros* comme manifestant « l'idéologie et son corollaire, le totalitarisme » (Lecherbonnier et al. 1989, 639, 645). On n'y suggère pas l'option tardive et patente contre le communisme. Cet exemple d'ordre didactique est pertinent à propos de la visibilité plus réduite à l'époque des propos anticommunistes de Ionesco par rapport à son œuvre artistique. Sa charge idéologique est plus évidente à partir de ses recueils de textes comme *Notes et contre-notes* et *Antidotes*. Nous suggérons ainsi que la présentation scolaire de son théâtre est exemptée de ses prises de positions politiques. Enfin, quoique Jean-Paul Sartre ignore la trajectoire biographique de Ionesco, il donne l'exemple d'un discours tendancieux, car il souligne inexactement son statut d'étranger : « [...] Tous ces écrivains [Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov] sont des exclus. D'origine étrangère, ils sont extérieurs à notre langue, à notre société [...] » (Sartre 1973, 75). Pour conclure, nous devons tenir compte des différentes étapes de la réception de Ionescu-Ionesco.

¹⁹ Un parallèle avec l'épître de Cioran du 5 juillet 1946 est possible : « [...] "À quoi me servent les cinq livres publiés en Roumanie ? Personne ne peut les lire" [...] » (n.t. ; Vartic 2011, 84) / « "La ce îmi servește aici c-am publicat cinci cărți în România? Nimeni nu le poate citi" ».

²⁰ « Ionescu nu a fost propriu-zis în exil niciodată. El a fost mai ales prieten cu câțiva dintre noi... » (Corbea, Florescu 2002, 110).

À contrario, le discours roumain insiste sur la prédominance de la caractéristique de l'exil chez Ionescu. Cette insistance est justifiée par le rapport établi entre Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran et Ionescu-Ionesco. Vu leur consécration et leur prestige à l'étranger, ils sont mis ensemble. La période de l'entre-deux-guerres tombe dans l'oubli, puisqu'on accentue leur amitié ultérieure. Lorsqu'on se réfère à cette triade, on n'appuie pas sur les liaisons établies avant et après la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Ainsi, on est enclin à oblitérer le changement survenu dans leur relation²¹. De plus, à leur égard on constate l'édification d'une mythologie²² sans en préciser le rôle constitutif de la réception. Marie-Claude Hubert, par exemple, semble utiliser ce discours marqué par leur succès. Par surcroît, elle tient pour acquis leur statut d'exilés : « [...] Ionesco se lie avec ceux qui, comme lui, connaîtront la gloire littéraire en exil [...] » (Hubert 1990, 31). Il semble que ce soit une affaire d'aura. Si l'on ne doutait pas de son effet, l'aura aurait la tendance à façonner encore ce type de discours guidé par leur consécration. La réception peut-elle mettre entre parenthèses leur prestige ? Établissons-nous ainsi les prémisses d'une autre optique ? Autrement dit, peut-on accorder de l'importance aux propriétés des écrits de Ionescu-Ionesco et de sa réception afin de relever des faits moins pris en considération ?

Le retentissement en Occident des œuvres de ces trois auteurs susmentionnés sera l'une des prémisses à partir de laquelle on les récupérera après 1989. En ce sens, Cornel Ungureanu nous offre un aperçu sur le contexte. À cette époque-là, la littérature roumaine était confrontée à la production littéraire des auteurs dits exilés. Eu égard au manque de discernement des enthousiastes des années 1990, Cornel Ungureanu rappelle un principe de bon sens : « la mode de l'éloge [...] [et les] campagnes de diffamation » sont inadéquates pour mieux cerner l'héritage des littérateurs exilés. De plus, ce patrimoine ne représente pas nécessairement une meilleure littérature par rapport à celle écrite en Roumanie : « [...] Être un auteur "interdit pendant le communisme" ce n'est pas immanquablement être un grand écrivain »²³ (n.t. ; Ungureanu 1995, 9). En écrivant en roumain, les hommes et les femmes de lettres, comme Mircea Eliade par exemple, ont pu être mieux intégrés dans

²¹ « Quoiqu'ils se soient battus sans relâche à travers des polémiques dures pendant les années 1930, l'exil les a mis l'un à côté de l'autre [...] » (n.t. ; Ungureanu 1995, 113) / « Chiar dacă în anii treizeci s-au războit în polemici necruțătoare, exilul i-a pus alături [...] ».

²² « [...] Ils ont été ensemble et ils ont édifié ensemble une mythologie personnelle [...] » (n.t. ; Ungureanu 1995, 113-114) / « [...] Au fost împreună și împreună au construit o mitologie personală [...] ».

²³ « [...] A fi un autor "interzis în anii comunismului" nu înseamnă, neapărat, a fi un mare scriitor » (Ungureanu 1995, 9).

la littérature roumaine par les critiques et par les historiens littéraires²⁴. Ce n'est pas le cas de Ionesco et de Cioran dont la plus grande partie des écrits a été composée en français. Par contre, dès les années 1990, les textes roumains de Ionescu, qui appartenaient à cette histoire littéraire, ont dû être redécouverts à cause des restrictions du régime communiste. La réimpression des textes précédents et la publication de nouveaux documents et de nouvelles recherches ont facilité le dessein d'une nouvelle réception. L'étude de Marta Petreu, *Ionescu în țara tatălui*, est la plus remarquable à ce propos.

Dédié à l'exil littéraire roumain, l'ouvrage de Florin Manolescu est un exemple où l'on problématise peu l'appartenance de Ionescu-Ionesco à l'exil. De plus, les pages consacrées à lui considèrent manifestement toute son activité sous le nom orthographié à la roumaine (Manolescu 2010, 415–425). Si un tel livre encadre Ionescu-Ionesco dans le phénomène de cet exil, d'autres sont plus prudents et détaillent ce que présupposent l'exil et les termes connexes. Par-delà les nombreux faits dépeints, y compris l'activité anticommuniste de Ionesco, on y mentionne la question liée à sa citoyenneté, qui diffère en fonction des chercheurs. Celle-ci est reprise à partir de l'année 1950 (416). C'est cette date qui est plutôt connue. Dans la deuxième édition, Florin Manolescu déconsidère peut-être la thèse avancée en 2006 par Matei Călinescu à propos de l'année 1957. Même si ce problème est secondaire, nous suggérons ainsi le lien entre une production littéraire notable et l'obtention de la citoyenneté française. Étant naturalisé français dans le pays auquel il aspirait depuis la fin des années 1930, Ionesco est-il encore un exilé roumain ?

Points de vue lexicaux

Tout d'abord, nous attirons l'attention sur le lexique employé pour sa part. En 1942, est-ce que Ionescu est confronté à l'exil imposé par le pouvoir politique de l'époque ? Ou bien s'est-il exilé ? Vu ses pages de journal du 19 mars 1945 et sa lettre à Tudor Vianu, datée du 19 septembre 1945, ainsi que la fin de son volume *Présent passé...*, le verbe (s')exiler ne lui correspond pas non plus. Dans *Présent passé...*, il s'estime être « un évadé qui s'enfuit dans l'uniforme du gardien » (Ionesco 1968, 274). On cite assez souvent cette phrase. À travers les agendas littéraires de E. Lovinescu, Marta Petreu a trouvé le désir vif de Ionescu de quitter la Roumanie : « [...] 1931 : "Eugen Ionescu" (qui veut s'expatrier) [...] »²⁵ (n.t. ; Petreu 2012, 201). En outre, Albrecht Betz mise similairement sur

²⁴ D'après Monica Lovinescu et Virgil Ierunca, le roman *Forêt interdite* peut être compris autrement : « [...] beaucoup [...] ne partagent pas nôtre réception du roman » (n.t. ; Corbea, Florescu 2002, 111) / « [...] mulți [...] nu o receptează așa cum o receptăm noi ».

²⁵ « "Eugen Ionescu (care vrea să se expatrieze)" » (Petreu 2012, 201).

l'engagement politique des exilés : « Plus qu'un autre phénomène du XX^e siècle, l'exil a mis en évidence les liens étroits qui unissent la littérature et la politique » (Betz 1991, 15). En nous interrogeant sur le statut d'exilé de Ionescu-Ionesco, nous pouvons l'examiner lui aussi *mutatis mutandis* sous cet aspect. Quand bien même il peut entretenir un rapport ambigu et autocritique avec la politique²⁶, Ionesco l'assume en rapport avec les mécanismes littéraires et les conséquences politiques. Dans un texte confessionnel, où la préoccupation mystique est dominante, nous trouvons une telle remarque : « [...] je ne leur plais pas ! [...] Parce que je n'étais pas communiste, au temps où il était malséant de ne pas l'être. Ils ne m'ont pas pardonné d'avoir été anticommuniste avant eux [...] » (Ionesco 1987, 46). De temps en temps, de tels propos y surgissent. D'après Marie-France Ionesco, c'est la perspective d'un exil métaphysique qui le définit mieux²⁷. En revanche, la question métaphysique nous éloigne de notre manière de voir, qui privilégie le côté social et politique.

Étant donné le soutien avoué dont il a bénéficié²⁸, Ionescu a quitté la Roumanie, comme fonctionnaire auprès de la Légation royale de Roumanie à Vichy. Par conséquent, le schéma où Ionesco figure dans la catégorie d'un exilé en raison du régime communiste est imprécis (Zara 2013, 278). Une telle idée perd de vue que les années 1940 sont incontournables quant aux nuances. À la suite de la lettre du 9 février 1948 adressée à Tudor Vianu, peut-on dire que Ionescu devient dès lors un exilé roumain ? Son discours comme exilé en Roumanie est encore plus problématique, car subjectif : « [...] là-bas, je me suis senti en exil » (Ionesco 1996, 23). Dans son journal des années 1940-1942, Ionescu nota : « [...] Si je reste ici, je meurs aussi du mal de mon vrai pays. Affreux exil [...] » (Ionesco 1968, 164).

Ensuite, après 1945, est-ce qu'on peut utiliser le verbe (s')expatrier ? À partir de quel moment serait Ionescu-Ionesco un expatrié ? En tout cas, il n'est pas un expatrié dès le début. Il y a une synonymie entre les verbes exiler et expatrier que Littré éclaircit. Chez Littré, expatrier ne suppose « que l'idée de sortir de sa patrie », alors qu'exiler prévoit supplémentairement « une condamnation ou une autorité supérieure » qui contraint quelqu'un à abandonner son pays (Littré). Il y a aussi une similitude persistante entre les verbes pronominaux, à savoir s'exiler et s'expatrier, où l'on observe une volonté implicite. On peut enfin considérer Ionescu-Ionesco comme un expatrié, puisqu'il s'est établi de bon gré en France. Or, dans ce cas, ce serait justement un peu inexact. S'il avait dû se rendre en 1942 à la Légation royale de Roumanie à Vichy, serait-il devenu dès lors un expatrié ? Selon

²⁶ « [...] Par souci d'antipolitique, j'ai fait [...] moi-même de la politique, parce qu'être contre la politique, c'est encore faire de la politique » (Ionesco 1979, 9).

²⁷ « [...] l'exil essentiel et douloureux, [...], est l'exil métaphysique [...] » (Ionesco 2004, 51).

²⁸ « [...] Mes amis des différents ministères m'ont arrangé un bon passeport [...] » (Ionesco 1968, 274).

Marie-France Ionesco, Eugène Ionesco faisait remarquer plus tard qu'il « servai[t] [s]on pays d'alors », à savoir la Roumanie (Ionesco 2004, 89). Peut-il devenir un expatrié aux alentours de l'année 1948 ? Il est plus probable, même s'il n'y a pas un consensus à ce sujet. Par exemple, pour la période 1945-1957, Matei Călinescu considère Ionescu comme appartenant à la catégorie de « l'exil politique roumain de Paris »²⁹ (n.t. ; Călinescu 2017, 41). En conséquence, son statut d'exilé ou d'expatrié est visible plutôt du côté historiographique roumain. En revanche, pour le public français, il a pu être présenté comme un « Français d'origine roumaine » (***) 2013) ou comme « auteur dramatique français d'origine roumaine » (***)). Ce fait ne présuppose plus qu'il soit un expatrié roumain. Finalement, aucun point de vue n'échappe aux mécanismes discursifs.

Deux ouvrages sur l'exil

Nicoleta Sălcudeanu théorise trois catégories qui peuvent être mises en relation avec Ionescu-Ionesco : « l'Expatriote, l'Expatrié et l'Ex-patriote ». Telles qu'elles ont été conçues, Ionescu-Ionesco appartiendrait aux deux premières. La caractéristique principale « des Expatriotes » consiste en leur préoccupation constante pour la Roumanie. Tour à tour, Ionescu-Ionesco a gardé implicitement et explicitement la Roumanie dans son esprit. Par rapport à Monica Lovinescu, Paul Goma et d'autres, c'est leur implication permanente qui les dissocie en partie de Ionescu-Ionesco. C'est pourquoi la catégorie « des Expatriés » lui convient également. Si celle-ci se caractérise, entre autres, par la « reconfiguration et la réécriture identitaire », « l'acculturation », « l'ironie, l'auto-ironie [...] l'inventivité déchaînée », deux inconvénients apparaissent. L'acculturation ne concerne pas proprement dit Ionescu-Ionesco, puisque dès son enfance il était en contact avec la culture française. Un autre inconvénient se rapporte aux « valeurs roumaines [restées] intactes »³⁰ (n.t. ; Sălcudeanu 2003, 81-82). Ionesco est plutôt solidaire que nostalgique lorsqu'il se réfère à la dissension roumaine face au stalinisme : « [...] Et pourtant, c'est parfois en Roumanie que j'aimerais vivre maintenant, [...] où il y a une opposition au stalinisme [...] » (Ionesco 1977, 100). On trouve la même attitude après la chute du régime de Ceaușescu : « [...] Je suis français depuis longtemps, mais les événements me font redevenir roumain [...] » (Ionesco 2013, CIV). Ses propos assez positifs concernant la Roumanie après 1989 appartiennent à une autre étape de son engagement anticommuniste.

²⁹ « [exilul] politic românesc de la Paris » (Călinescu 2017, 41).

³⁰ « [...] *Expatrioții, Expatriații și Ex-patrioții* [...] reconfigur[are] și rescrier[e] identitare [...] ironia, autoironia, [...] inventivitatea dezinhăbită [...] aculturația [...] [v]alorile românești rămân intacte [...] » (c'est l'auteur qui souligne ; Sălcudeanu 2003, 81-82).

La qualité d'« Expatrié » lui correspond mieux que les insuffisances notionnelles des « ExPatriotes ». À coup sûr, nous n'introduisons pas Ionescu-Ionesco dans la catégorie des « Ex-patriotes » dont les particularités supposent « la transculturation », « l'amoralité identitaire suprême » et une « adaptabilité »³¹ maximale (n.t. ; Sălcudeanu 2003, 83). Il ne peut pas être désigné ainsi. Donc, c'est l'« Expatrié » qui le qualifie imparfaitement. Toutefois, ses rapports avec la Roumanie, qui relèvent de son côté « ExPatriote », ne doivent pas être ignorés complètement. Ces deux dénominations discutées jusqu'ici montrent comment il est difficile de trancher l'héritage discursif de ce créateur.

Pour ce qui est de la problématique de l'exil, Eva Behring le délimite par rapport à l'émigration et à la diaspora. De plus, elle constate l'usage mécanique du terme « exil » à propos des auteurs roumains répertoriés. Comme nous avons montré ci-dessus, il s'agit du moins d'une attitude machinale relative à Ionescu-Ionesco. Si l'on suivait strictement l'idée d'« un bannissement » et les antinomies « l'étranger – l'intimité » et « désintégration – intégration »³² (n.t. ; Behring 2001, 13), on encadrerait Ionescu-Ionesco dans la catégorie des exilés. Si l'on considérait aussi l'idée d'« un exil dans l'exil »³³ pour Ionesco, elle serait fallacieuse. Bien qu'on ait pu le critiquer pour son « anticommunisme viscéral »³⁴ à cause de son conflit avec le marxisme et le communisme, il ne pouvait plus être marginalisé entièrement après avoir conquis un capital symbolique par son théâtre et par son admission à l'Académie française.

Le mécontentement de Ionescu à l'égard de la Roumanie a été canonisé par son livre *Nu [Non]*. Eva Behring souligne « le système culturel officiel » et « le refus de l'accepter » comme sources de son indignation. L'autrice rajoute que l'on rappelle souvent la « répulsion » de l'auteur envers « le début de fascisation de sa génération » et elle fait ressortir « le lien profond pour la culture française » à laquelle avait contribué la mère de Ionescu. D'après l'historienne littéraire, ce dernier fait est plus juste à l'égard du désir de Ionescu de rentrer dans « "sa vraie patrie" »³⁵ (n.t. ; Behring 2001, 15). L'influence du père, souvent mentionnée dans les recherches biographiques, n'est pas évoquée.

³¹ « [...] transculturați[a] [...] amoralitate identitară supremă [...] [un coeficient maxim de] adaptabilitate » (Sălcudeanu 2003, 83).

³² « [izgonire], [...] străinătate / intimitate, dezintegrare / integrare » (Behring 2001, 13).

³³ « L'exil dans l'exil » porte sur les exilés marginalisés par « "l'hostilité" du milieu gauchiste dominant » (n.t. ; Dimisianu 1997, 10) / « Exilul din exil [...] ostilitatea "mediului stângist dominant" ».

³⁴ D'après Gabriel Dimisianu, ce sont « les [Français] convertis [à l'anticommunisme] » qui sont écoutés et non pas Ionesco, qui est classé en tant que « "anticommuniste viscéral", donc décrédibilisé » (n.t. ; Dimisianu 1997, 10) / « [...] [numai] converțiții [francezi] sunt ascultați [...] "anticomunist visceral", deci lipsit de credibilitate [...] ».

³⁵ « [...] sistemul cultural oficial, refuzul acceptării acestuia, [...] repulsia față de fascizarea incipientă în cadrul generației sale [...] legătura profundă cu cultura franceză [...] "adevărata patrie" [...] » (Behring 2001, 15).

La chercheuse met en relief les relations complexes de l'exil roumain avec « Eugen Ionescu ». D'un côté, la partie plus conservatrice, comme « le Groupe de Madrid », devient plus accueillante envers lui grâce aux *Rhinocéros*. Pour eux, la portée potentiellement anticommuniste de la pièce valait mieux que leur autocritique fasciste. De l'autre côté, ces groupes ont dû intégrer ces représentants-là qui jouissaient d'une « réputation internationalement croissante » pour que l'on évite un « autochtonisme provincial ». Parmi eux on peut compter « Ionescu »³⁶, bien que ce soit lui qui a été incorporé et qui contournait à ce moment-là toute adhésion, toute implication directe dans les enjeux des exilés engagés (n.t. ; 90–92). Dans son journal, Virgil Ierunca notait le parcours non impliqué politiquement de Ionesco dès les années 1950 jusqu'au début des années 1960 (Ierunca 2000, *passim*).

Un dernier point se rapporte à l'édition des textes de Ionescu-Ionesco avant et après 1989. Un aspect en commun est que sa publication a du rapport avec le succès en Occident. Comme nous avons mentionné, avant 1989 l'édition et la réédition de Ionescu-Ionesco ont été limitées. Les volumes les plus remarquables ont été deux anthologies de théâtre de 1968 et 1970 préfacées par B. Elvin, respectivement par Gelu Ionescu. En 1971, Eugen Simion a fait republier seulement quelques pages de critique littéraire dans une chrestomathie dédiée aux critiques littéraires roumains. Le théâtre de Ionesco paraissait alors sous son nom roumain. Les politiques idéologiques et culturelles plus ouvertes des années 1960 ont toléré bien la discussion de ses textes, car on ne pouvait plus ignorer « les accomplissements » de l'exil roumain. On évitait une image « provinciale et limitée »³⁷ de la République socialiste (n.t. ; Behring 2001, 202).

Après 1989, on a pu faire circuler librement l'œuvre de Ionescu-Ionesco. L'implication des anciennes et nouvelles maisons d'édition ont créé (in)directement son statut d'exilé si l'on choisissait de le présenter de cette manière (211). Une institution telle que La Fondation culturelle roumaine [Fundatia Culturală Română] s'occupait autant de l'importation que de l'exportation de la littérature roumaine (Iovănel 2021, 658–659). À cette époque-là, le temps n'était plus propice pour les discernements, mais plutôt pour la récupération des auteurs roumains. Quant à Ionescu-Ionesco, les éditions principales comme Humanitas et Univers ont eu pour but, durant les années 1990, de le faire connaître et ont commencé à publier ses textes systématiquement. Il y a eu aussi l'apport des maisons d'édition Echinox, Albatros et Jurnalul literar. Indépendamment de l'institution qui faisait sortir ses volumes, c'est ainsi qu'on a propagé la

³⁶ « [...] un autohtonism provincial [...] Grupul de la Madrid [...] [a trebuit să se deschidă] față de scriitorii cu o crescândă reputație internațională [...] » (90–92).

³⁷ « [...] [Exilul avea de prezentat] câteva realizări [...] [nu trebuia să apară drept] provincială și limitată » (Behring 2001, 202).

réception antérieure de l'auteur. Celle-ci était constituée du discours prédominant sur « l'absurde », par la grille de lecture qui cherche à anticiper l'œuvre de Ionesco dans les écrits de Ionescu et, quelquefois, par l'évocation de ses contributions anticommunistes. En 1991, on avait préféré proliférer l'image d'un Ionescu-Ionesco comme « créateur de notoriété internationale du théâtre de l'absurde » qui a une « œuvre d'essais [...] nettement anti-extrémiste et antitotalitaire dès les premières pages »³⁸ (n.t. ; Ionescu 1991, 1). À partir de ces caractéristiques, le problème concerne la persistance de la grille de l'absurde dans la réception et l'intérêt plus réduit pour une analyse des publications portant sur la critique du communisme. Ces dernières ont été plutôt mentionnées que mises en question. Ces faits intéressent les chercheurs, étant donné que Ionesco pensait qu'il contournait toute idéologie. Il est frappant que l'anticommunisme ne soit pas vu comme une autre idéologie.

Pays(âges) de l'histoire

Daté du 19 mars 1945, intitulé « Fragments d'un journal intime » et paru en mars 1946 dans la revue « Viața românească [La vie roumaine] »³⁹, le texte de Ionescu est dressé contre sa « patrie ». Ionescu scrute caustiquement, avec parti pris, le pays dont il s'est échappé en juin 1942. La même chose se passe en partie avec sa lettre du 19 septembre 1945 pour Tudor Vianu. Par rapport à la missive, le morceau publié dans la revue est extime⁴⁰ plutôt qu'intime. Plus ou moins déconcerté, Ionescu pense « si ces lignes seront un jour publiées »⁴¹ (n.t. ; Ionescu 1992, 272). Pourquoi exiger « l'abolition de l'idée nationaliste » ou se demander sur l'injustice des « capitaines odieux, les majeurs et les colonels roumains »⁴² si l'on n'a pas en vue le public (n.t. ; 269, 271) ? En effet, Ionescu dissimule son jeu ancien de publier des pages prétendument intimes mais destinées aux lecteurs.

Ces deux documents montrent que Ionescu est obligé de faire face aux changements auxquels il est soumis. En retour, son attitude soi-disant détachée transparaît dans ce passage écrit en français : « Quant à moi, j'ai abandonné la partie et j'ai fichu le camp » (***) 1994, 275). Pourtant, il y a « une réelle

³⁸ « [...] creatorul, de notorietate internațională, al teatrului absurdului. Opera eseistică este net antiextremistă și antitotalitară încă de la primele pagini » (Ionescu 1991, 1).

³⁹ Nous respectons l'orthographe du nom de la revue qui précède l'année 1946. La graphie du nom de la revue glisse à « românească » à peine en 1965.

⁴⁰ Matei Călinescu évoque ce terme forgé par Michel Tournier (Călinescu 2016, 5).

⁴¹ « [...] dacă aceste rânduri vor fi vreodată tipărite [...] » (Ionescu 1992, 272).

⁴² « [...] să se desființeze [...] ideea naționalistă [...] odioșii căpitani, maiori și colonei români [...] » (Ionescu 1992, 269, 271).

dépendance affective »⁴³ face à ses congénères intellectuels que Laura Pavel souligne (n.t. ; Pavel 2022, 27) : « [...] J'étais affligé par ma haine envers eux ; je suis encore lié à eux. Avec qui puis-je continuer le dialogue ? [...] »⁴⁴ (n.t. ; *** 1994, 275). Nous retenons une sorte de rupture avec Eliade, Cioran, Noïca, Vulcănescu et Haig Acterian. Selon Ionescu, ces représentants de la jeunesse de Bucarest « et tant d'autres » étaient « les victimes du défunt odieux Nae Ionescu »⁴⁵ (n.t. ; *** 1994, 274). Dans une lettre de 1946 adressée à Petru Comarnescu, il évoque de nouveau sa relation compliquée : « [...] nous sommes des hyènes les uns pour les autres, [...] tant que l'histoire existera [...] »⁴⁶ (n.t. ; Cioculescu 1993, 10). Plus tard, au moins ses rapports avec Eliade et Cioran s'amélioreront.

À ce moment-là, Ionescu n'avait pas l'envie de rire, bien qu'il y ait eu des signes contraires (Rodríguez 2009, 52, 60). Mariano Martín Rodríguez circonscrit la période approximative de la genèse de « l'idée » de la pièce *Englezește fără profesor* [*L'Anglais sans professeur*], première forme de *La Cantatrice chauve*. Il s'agit désormais de la période comprise entre 1941 et 1943 au lieu de 1948. En somme, il est sûr qu'une première version a été écrite afin d'être publiée en 1946 (54). Toutefois, dès l'année 1945, son discours confidentiel faisait ressortir son souci intellectuel, professionnel et quotidien : il tâtonnait dans la lettre citée de Petru Comarnescu⁴⁷ et dans celle de 1947 à Tudor Vianu la possibilité d'une collaboration littéraire en faisant usage du pseudonyme Ion Miran (***) 1994, 304). Ces deux exemples laissent apercevoir encore l'image d'un Ionescu écrivain roumain. D'ailleurs, à la différence de Cioran, Ionescu-Ionesco n'a pas prétendu abandonner la langue roumaine. Avec *La Cantatrice chauve*, c'est son œuvre littéraire et non littéraire qui sera principalement rédigée en français. Ses prises de paroles politiques, sa correspondance, ses discussions intimes, les entretiens ont pu continuer en roumain. En décembre 1989, après la chute du régime de Nicolae Ceaușescu, Ionescu-Ionesco transmet aux Roumains un message de solidarité (Ionescu 1989, 1). Mais en 1945 il était temps de régler les comptes avec ses congénères et avec le nationalisme roumain et de s'interroger sur l'avenir.

⁴³ « o reală dependență afectivă » (Pavel 2022, 27).

⁴⁴ « [...] Eram blestemat să-i urăsc și să fiu legat de ei: cu cine să continui dialogul? [...] » (***) 1994, 275).

⁴⁵ « [...] și atâția alții [...] sunt victimele odiosului defunct Nae Ionescu » (***) 1994, 275).

⁴⁶ « [...] suntem hiene unii pentru alții, [...], cât va mai fi istorie [...] » (Cioculescu 1993, 10).

⁴⁷ Ionescu se montre très prudent : « [...] (ne pas dévoiler [le pseudonyme] à personne) [...] » (n.t. ; Cioculescu 1993, 10) / « [...] (A nu se dezvălui nimănui) [...] ».

Points méthodologiques en guise de conclusions

Nous avons tenté un autre discours que celui de la critique et de l'historien littéraires. La conception de Walter Benjamin sur l'historien matérialiste, qui prête son attention « à l'écho des voix qui se sont tues », a servi d'appui (Benjamin 2013, 55). Il faut reconnaître que les années 1940 sont essentielles afin de réfléchir sur la question présupposée de l'exil chez Ionescu. Nous nous sommes concentrés sur la transformation du discours d'un moyen de transmission à un objet pertinent de réflexion par soi-même. C'est parce que le discours partage ce qui est central, canonique, ou marginal, exploratoire. Ce qui est canonique a tendance à se transformer en une compréhension commune. C'est de cette façon qu'on aurait instauré la perception de « l'absurde » chez Ionescu. Même s'il y a eu une certaine réévaluation de son théâtre, celui-ci est resté en principe dans la catégorie du « théâtre de l'absurde ». Parmi les exégètes⁴⁸, Laura Pavel⁴⁹ et Simona Modreanu⁵⁰ ont signalé le phénomène en 2002.

Si l'on s'occupe du discours de la critique sur Ionescu-Ionesco, il en résulte, d'une part, une préoccupation pour l'investigation biographique. D'autre part, on constate la recherche des catégories esthétiques, bien que l'intention littéraire n'ait pas nécessairement l'enjeu. Par exemple, Eugen Simion essaie de sauvegarder esthétiquement le texte du 19 mars 1945. Il fait appel au genre du pamphlet : « [...] il serait abusif de demander [au pamphlet] d'être vrai, puisque sa force vient uniquement de son expressivité [...] » (Simion 2013, 365). Néanmoins, ce morceau de Ionescu est l'expression véhémement contre les conséquences du nationalisme.

La lecture biographique ne va pas de pair avec la tentative théorique, car la prise de conscience de la mécanique discursive incite le récepteur à formuler un autre avis. Le discours en soi n'est pas neutre, ni naturel. Chaque discours risque d'assujettir le sujet recherché. Jacques Derrida a réfléchi à une question similaire relativement à la biographie. Celle-ci risque de figer l'image sur un auteur. Derrida aborde l'autorité émanée d'un livre et d'une maison d'édition. De plus, il souligne l'importance de chaque lecture personnelle face à l'agencement d'un biographe. Enfin, Derrida suggère en même temps que le texte qui est lu sans être dépouillé de ses strates est silencieux face à l'avenir

⁴⁸ Nous rappelons aussi cette optique : « Le "théâtre de l'absurde" est une étiquette malencontreuse [...] » (Jean-Blain 2005, 7).

⁴⁹ « [...] des textes dramatiques habituellement étiquetés par la critique et par le public comme "absurdes" [...] » (n.t. ; Pavel 2022, 8) / « [...] texte dramatică etichetată în mod greșit de critică și de public drept "absurd" [...] ».

⁵⁰ « [...] "l'absurde" – quelque alléchante et rassurante que puisse être cette étiquette [...] » (Modreanu 2002, 8).

(Derrida 2007). C'est pourquoi l'essai *Les Paradoxes du succès* de Tudor Vianu peut aussi nous intéresser : ce sont le discours second, le prestige et l'autorité qui contrôlent le lecteur (Vianu 1936, 134–151). À ceux-ci nous ajoutons les habitudes de l'enseignement et les clichés de la réception. Ignorer les lieux communs rend difficile la problématisation du discours répétitif. Le risque est de ne pas aller plus loin et de répandre ce que l'on connaît déjà⁵¹. La perspective de Foucault sur la « pratique quotidienne et réglée »⁵² contribue à notre horizon théorique. Pourtant, à notre avis, le discours sur la littérature persiste d'être cette pratique réglée par les procédés du commentaire.

Le discours et l'idéologie mettent en œuvre un découpage de la réalité. Ils sont indissociables dans la mesure où la grille idéologique fait usage du discours afin de mettre en acte le quadrillage. Dans *Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur ?*, Foucault pense que ce qu'un créateur a écrit ne permet pas au lecteur de trouver des significations innombrables. On « exclut, on sélectionne » les contenus et on trie « la prolifération du sens » à travers la « figure idéologique » de l'auteur⁵³. Il suggère plutôt la capacité de tout écrivain de préconfigurer sa réception. Autrement dit, l'auteur prévient préalablement la surinterprétation. Toutefois, ce que Foucault semble omettre, c'est la bonne ou la mauvaise interprétation qui enrichit ou appauvrit un texte, car la lecture illustre un espace de tensions.

À l'époque, Ionesco croyait qu'« [i]l faut voir les choses de très haut » (Ionesco 1968, 62). Or, grâce à la perspective ouverte par la critique idéologique, il est impossible qu'on ait accès à un tel lieu privilégié. Le mot idéologie a reçu des significations multiples pendant le XX^e siècle. Contrairement à l'esprit souvent perpétué par Ionesco, nous supposons que l'idéologie est un phénomène et un concept que nous ne pouvons plus ignorer. Nos façons de lire et d'analyser se développent à partir d'une base idéologique que l'on peut soumettre à l'examen.

Est-ce que la thématique de l'exil détermine par avance la réflexion strictement sur la biographie de Ionescu-Ionesco ? La tentation du critique et de l'historien littéraires est souvent de ranger, de classer, d'éclaircir son

⁵¹« [...] les discours qui, indéfiniment, par-delà leur formulation, *sont dits*, restent dits, et sont encore à dire. [...] ce sont [...] ces textes curieux [...] qu'on appelle "littéraires" [...] » (Foucault 1971, 24).

⁵² « [...] j'ai entrepris l'analyse d'un savoir dont le corps visible n'est pas le discours théorique ou scientifique, ni la littérature non plus, mais une pratique quotidienne et réglée » (Eribon 2017, 338).

⁵³ « [...] L'auteur n'est pas une source indéfinie de significations [...]. Il est un certain principe fonctionnel par lequel, dans notre culture, on délimite, on exclut, on sélectionne [...]. L'auteur est donc la figure idéologique par laquelle on conjure la prolifération du sens » (Foucault 2017, 839).

objet : « [...] Il me fuit, il refuse de se laisser analyser, il veut éviter les commentaires, il n'a pas envie de se voir épinglé dans un compartiment de l'histoire littéraire [...] » (Simion 2013, 20). En revanche, la pensée théorique incite à la fois à l'autoévaluation de la méthodologie et au questionnement de celle d'autres agencements. Même si l'on risque de s'écarter des intentions d'un auteur, on peut puiser de lui des moyens de rendre plus complexe la compréhension et de produire des effets sur le monde.

Autrement dit, c'est la tâche du chercheur de fouiller et d'explicitier comment Ionescu-Ionesco a envisagé et a passé sous silence son exil ou, pour mieux dire, son expatriation. Si l'on choisit d'observer ce filon relatif à sa vie, on ne peut plus l'ignorer. La pertinence de l'analyse consiste à révéler comment le discours premier et le discours second les ont abordées. Par conséquent, il importe que l'on mette en lumière ou que l'on se désintéresse de cette problématique qui ne présente pas la même gravité pour tout récepteur. L'horizon culturel, méthodologique, théorique et idéologique joue son rôle déterminant. Le partage net des termes exilé et expatrié ne conclut rien d'autre chose que, d'une part, Ionescu-Ionesco a entretenu des rapports ambivalents avec la Roumanie, son passé et son avenir d'écrivain et, d'autre part, que ce problème relève de la disposition du scientifique. Ces aspects de son œuvre roumaine et française concernent par excellence l'analyse de leur partie non théâtrale, bien que ses pièces autobiographiques tardives en fassent usage.

C'est quasi similaire à propos de l'implication de Ionesco contre le marxisme et le communisme : il revient au récepteur de l'exposer. Quand même, l'auteur a recueilli deux volumes à ce sujet (*Antidotes* et *Un homme en question*) et il s'y est référé quelquefois dans tous ses journaux intimes (*Journal en miettes*, *Présent passé, passé présent*, *La quête intermittente*). En outre, la plupart des essais de *Notes et contre-notes* montrent son opposition face au marxisme, aux brechtiens et à l'idéologisation. C'est-à-dire que, pour lui, le politique et l'idéologique ont été une préoccupation évidente et constante sans qu'il n'ait écrit énormément. Dès son engagement public, le combat contre le communisme et contre toute « rhinocérite » idéologique a été mené jusqu'au bout. Néanmoins, faisons attention qu'il ne réfute que l'idéologisation totale, qui annule l'individualité et l'esprit critique. Selon lui, l'art peut se rapporter à une idéologie, mais il ne doit pas l'illustrer ou servir à des buts non artistiques. Après tout, dans ce genre d'écrits, Ionesco a dû adopter une logique et un discours anticommunistes et antimarxistes fondés sur une idéologie contraire. C'est dans un tel point que nous ressortons son orientation idéologique. En empruntant à ses propres moyens d'expression, nous concluons : avant d'être contre toute idéologie, il a dû en avoir une (Ionesco 1979, 9). À l'instar de la perspective d'Albrecht Betz, nous comprenons Ionescu-Ionesco en tant que

représentant de l'artiste confronté inéluctablement, et paraît-il à contrecœur, à la tourmente sociale, politique et idéologique du XX^e siècle. Nous saisissons son souci par rapport à ce type de tensions percutantes même dans sa lettre de septembre 1991 destinée à Marta Petreu (Ionesco 1991, 32–33). Finalement, retenons que, dans l'avant-propos de *Non*, Ionesco rappelle obliquement les conséquences du régime communiste roumain (Ionesco 1986, 7). Ces exemplifications servent à prendre note du cheminement de la pensée politique de Ionesco, quel que soit leur nombre.

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THE POST-COMMUNIST NOVEL OF TRANSITION AS REALISM OF TRANSITION. THEMATIC PRECEDENTS IN ROMANIAN AND EAST-CENTRAL EUROPEAN LITERATURE

Bogdan CONTEA¹, Iulia PIETRARU²

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ABSTRACT. *The Post-Communist Novel of Transition as Realism of Transition. Thematic Precedents in Romanian and East-Central European Literature.*

The present study aims to analyze how certain narrative formulas circulate within the world literary system – one but unequal (Moretti 2004, WReC 2015) – starting from the case of the novel of post-communist transition, specific to many Eastern European literatures. The Romanian literature abounds in such novels, which take various forms according to the different literary paradigms from which they have emerged. Thus, we consider that post-communist Romanian literature, or at least its social-political regime of relevance, is a symptomatic case of what the authors of *Combined and uneven development: Towards a new theory of world-literature* (WReC) call “(semi-)peripheral irrealism”. According

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- ¹ **Bogdan CONTEA** is a first-year student at the master’s degree program “Romanian language and literature in the era of globalization” at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu and member of the Literary geography research group at the Faculty of Letters and Arts (LBUS). He published in 2023 the article “The Novel of Communism Before and After Mihai Iovănel’s History” in *Transilvania Journal* and “Nichita Stănescu - the Reactions at His Poetic Debut” in *Vatra*. Email: bogdan.contea@ulbsibiu.ro
 - ² **Iulia PIETRARU** is a first-year student at the master’s degree program “Romanian language and literature in the era of globalization” at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu and member of the Literary geography research group at the Faculty of Letters and Arts (LBUS) and part of the international research project TradEspace (“Traduire l’espace: Les littératures de l’Europe Centrale et Orientale”) being carried out as part of a consortium between LBUS and University of Zagreb (<https://grants.ulbsibiu.ro/tradespace/>). She published an article in 2024 on “The romantic utopia – mythologizing spaces” in the collective volume *Cultural Crossroads: Remodelling the Individual. Reshaping the World* (edited by Marius Nica, Ploieşti, Editura Universităţii Petrol-Gaze), which is part of her undergraduate thesis (“Utopian Spaces in Romanian Prose. A geographical node network”). She is interested in new methods of literature research (WorldLit, geocriticism, ecocriticism, geopoetics, affective geography), cultural studies and in new literary formulas in the Romanian contemporary space and beyond. E-mail: andreeaiulia.pietraru@ulbsibiu.ro.

to this study, the literature produced in peripheries and semi-peripheries is often formally dominated by a series of practices identified as specific to modernism, which arise, determined by the condition of the semi-periphery, in the unique and uneven system of world-literature, in which fiction becomes the narration that mediates lived experience in the “palimpsestic, combinatory and contradictory ‘order’ of peripheral experience.” (WReC). Nevertheless, a new direction of contemporary prose is being traced recently in order to rethink/reproblematize the past and the way it can be reflected in literature. A series of recent novels such as Bogdan Coșa’s *How Close the Cold Rains Are* (2020) and Mihai Dușescu’s *Beech Sponges* (2021), as well as others, give rise to a new aesthetic formula of the post-communist novel of transition through the ways in which they operate with realism. We therefore propose to investigate the recent history of the phenomenon of fictional representation of the Romanian transition in relation to similar phenomena in East-Central Europe, while also analyzing the specifics of “the realism of transition” (as we will call this new literary category, in the footsteps of Mihnea Bâlici).

Keywords: *the novel of transition, (semi-)peripheral literature, peripheral realism, post-communism, the realism of transition*

REZUMAT. Romanul tranziției post-comuniste românești ca realism al tranziției. Precedente tematice în literatura română și est-central europeană.

Lucrarea de față își propune să analizeze modul în care anumite forme narrative circulă în interiorul sistemului mondial literar – *unul dar inegal* (Moretti 2004, WReC 2015) – plecând de la cazul romanului tranziției postcomuniste, specific pentru multe dintre literaturile Europei de Est. Literatura română abundă de astfel de romane, acestea luând diverse forme, conform diferitelor paradigme literare din care au luat naștere. Noi argumentăm însă că literatura română postcomunistă, sau cel puțin regimul ei social-politic de relevanță, reprezintă un caz simptomatic pentru ceea ce autorii studiului *Combined and uneven development: Towards a new theory of world-literature* (WReC) numesc “irealism (semi-)periferic”. Conform studiului, literatura produsă în periferii și semiperiferii e adesea dominată formal de o serie de practici identificate drept specifice modernismului, ce iau naștere, determinate fiind de condiția semiperiferiei în sistemul unic și inegal al world literature, în care ficțiunea devine relatarea ce mediază experiența trăită în “«ordinea» palimpsestică, combinatorie și contradictorie a experienței periferice” (WReC). Cu toate acestea, în ultimii ani se trasează o nouă direcție a prozei române contemporane în vederea regândirii/ reproblematizării trecutului și a modului în care acesta poate fi reflectat literar. O serie de romane recente precum *Cât de aproape sunt ploile reci* (2020) de Bogdan Coșa sau *Bureți de fag* (2021) de Mihai Dușescu, dar și altele, dau naștere unei noi formule estetice a romanului tranziției postcomuniste prin modurile în care operează cu realismul. Ne propunem așadar să investigăm istoria recentă a fenomenului reprezentării ficționale a tranziției românești în relație cu

fenomene similare din literaturile est-central europene, analizând totodată specificul “realismului tranziției” (așa cum vom numi această nouă categorie literară, pe urmele lui Mihnea Bâlici).

Cuvinte-cheie: roman al tranziției, literatură (semi-)periferică, realism periferic, postcomunism, realismul tranziției

Introduction

The dynamics of the post-revolutionary Romanian literature represents an interesting case among East-Central European literatures. Despite sharing the same totalitarian past, the Ceaușescu regime presumably incited repugnance at the highest level once it was taken down. The literatures of ex-communist countries attempted to depict the changes that came with the transition to capitalism. Consequently, a new functional category of literary texts emerged, texts that were called, in the Romanian research field, by Andreea Mironescu “novels of transition” (Mironescu “From social memory to literary representation: the novel of transition in post-communist Romania”). The novelist’s predilection for writing about the social realities afferent to this period set in motion a trend that manifested itself without interruption from 1989 to present. Notably, some of these novels succeeded to circulate across their borders due to being translated into multiple languages in the former communist literatures and also in the ones that had never known communism.

What makes this subject worth discussing is the fact that, as we will attempt to argue, the germs of fiction about transition have perpetuated in the Romanian literature in a continuous flux all these years, taking different forms and leading to what has emerged in the last 3-4 years and what we label, following Mihnea Bâlici, the realism of transition (Bâlici 2023). In his essay Bâlici uses this term in a more or less rhetorical way, trying to explain the growing number of recent novels that discuss the realities of transition, opting for narratological and formal approaches closer to realism. His argument is especially justified by the fact that in the Romanian literature, the majority of the novels about transition incorporate a series of literary techniques that surpass realist conventions. We intend to conceptualize the term proposed by Bâlici through an analysis that deals with Romanian literature in relation with the fiction of changes that emerges in the context of East-Central European post-communism, in the combined and uneven system of world literature. We will also try to demonstrate the specific characteristics of the realism of transition based on case studies of two recent novels that we consider to be defining for

delineating the limits of this realism. For a better understanding not only of the specific nature of this realism, but also of the means through which this mutation is produced, a periodization of the most representative paradigmatic events that have defined and redefined the problematic of transition is needed. We divided them into three categories, as defined in the Romanian research field, based on their characteristics.

The miserabilist realism

The first movement in prose is that of the novel inclined to examine the social climate, that manifested itself in the post-communist Romanian literature under the name of miserabilist realism (Iovănel 2021 403-408)³. The most representative authors of this period include Radu Aldulescu, Emil Mladin, Cornel George Popa, Petre Barbu, among others. After the metarealist postmodernism (Iovănel 2021, 375)⁴, miserabilist realism brought social observation back to the forefront, with most of these novels discussing transition as it was happening. As Mihai Iovănel states:

The miserabilist realism ‘chooses’ a method of representation as noise, as a quantum of fragments or as a nightmare-like or carnival-like delirium. The lack of grounded meaning is compensated by the introduction of harsh allegories which usually explain the anomalies of the communist system: this is why anticommunism is the main ideological engine of the novels written in the ‘90s. The authors usually resort to schemes typical to sensational literature (not in the spirit of a postmodern reclaim, but in a rather naive way) (403)⁵

³ The representative authors of this paradigm were not familiar with this term, which has been recently formulated by Mihai Iovănel in his *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*.

⁴ “The miserabilism of the ‘80s is a forced consequence of late communism (as opposed to Eugen Negrici’s belief that they abandoned the omniscient-balzacian realism out of comfort). This generation maintain a suspicious distance not that much with reality (which they argue that they expose it more authentically than the former generations), but with the methods of the old omniscient realism”/ “Metarealismul opzecist este o consecință forțată a comunismului târziu (contrar tezei susținute de Eugen Negrici că ei ar fi abandonat realismul omniscient-balzacian din comoditate). Optzeciștii întrețin un raport de suspiciune nu atât cu realitatea (pe care pretind că o expun în viziuni mai autentice decât scriitorii din generațiile anterioare), cât cu metoda vechiului realist omniscient și totalizator.” (Iovănel 2021, 375, our translation).

⁵ „Realismul mizerabilist «alege» o formulă de reprezentare a realității ca zgomot, ca o sumă de fragmente sau ca delir coșmaresc ori carnavalesc. Lipsa sensului la nivelul solului este compensată prin introducerea unor alegorii groase, care de regulă explică anomaliile sistemului comunist: de aceea, anticomunismul este principalul motor ideologic al romanelor scrise în ani 90. Autorii recurg frecvent la scheme din literatura senzațională (dar nu în spiritul reciclării postmoderne, ci într-un mod mai curând naiv” (Iovănel 2021, 403, our translation).

If countries like Germany or Poland have generated a particular literature that took into consideration a reconciliation with the past⁶ and the capitalization of the perspectives that the neoliberalism will enlarge (Trepte, 259), in the first decade of Romanian post-communism the leading principle of literature was anticommunism. Thus, transition appears in these novels as a difficult period caused by the legacy of communism (406)⁷. These narratives have a strong ideological underlayer that have remained unaddressed because of the “anti-communist ethos” which dominated the critical discourse of the period.⁸

The Millennial Realism

The second representative movement concerning the literary representation of the sociology of transition is dominated by what Adriana Stan has labelled as millennial realism. It refers to the literature written by young poets and novelists in the early 2000s, whose aesthetic surpassed the anticommunist practices of the miserabilist realism. Regarding the prose based on this realism, it is generally written in the first person, having a testimonial character and pleading for biography and authenticity. The term of “realism” from the phrase “millennial realism” reflects the authors’ propensity to map the reality of transition as it was happening. The Fracturist Manifesto, written by Marius Ianuş and Dumitru Crudu, represented the aesthetic movement that gave birth to the millennial realism as violent, voracious and critical towards its society. Thus, millennial realism can be discussed as the first artistic and literary manifestation capable of realistically portraying the social realities of transition. Concerning the limits of this realism, Stan brings into discussion the capacity of social observation that first-person narration can produce in relation with third-person narration:

⁶ “Expectations of the readers as well as of literary critics run high, demanding impatiently a universal, comprehensive “Wenderoman”, a seminal novel on the peaceful revolution in post-communist East-Central Europe as well as in Germany.” In *Trepte* (2019-2020, 257-266). “In search of an adequate novel on the democratic changes of 1989/1990. A paradigmatic approach”. *Wolność i Solidarność*, no. 11–12, 2019-2020, p. 257-266.

⁷ See how Iovănel describes the realities of the most visible Romanian miserabilist realist author, Radu Aldulescu: “The novels create a modernist-naturalist puzzle where the modernist pulverization of omniscience and the adjustment of the narrative to the interior perspective of the characters meets a neozolism that explains the present misery through a simplistic, ideologic and socio-economic determinism (a trivial perspective of anticommunism where present dysfunctions are caused by a communist past).” / “Romanele compun un puzzle modernist-naturalist, în care forma modernistă a pulverizării omniscienței și a ajustării narațiunii la perspectiva interioară a personajelor întâlnește un neozolism care explică mizeria din prezent printr-un determinism socioeconomic simplist ideologic (o viziune trivială a anticomunismului, disfuncțiile prezentului sunt cauzate de trecutul comunist)” (Iovănel 2021, 406, our translation).

⁸ See Dumitru (2019, 1-7).

[T]he self-assertive stance of this new literary authenticity and the overlap of realism with radical individualism weakened the force of social observation that was, and still is, traditionally associated with realist esthetics. [...] The more articulate realism envisioned instead by the theorist should «efface the individual personality» in favor of a «blank third-person narrative» meant to «register a pure present of time and space» Following the steps of Lukács, then Raymond Williams' accounts of nineteenth-century realism, today's criticism still doubts that subjectivist art could provide a valid vantage point from which to comment upon the social reality. (76)

As related to the predilection of these authors, like Adrian Schiop, Ionuț Chiva, Alexandru Vakulovski, to write their works in a biographical manner using first-person narration, Stan argues that, according to the fact that only a decade had passed since communism ended, the period was too short for the authors to take a reflexive distance (74) from the presented events, strongly related to the ascension of capitalism. Thus, by “incorporating typically capitalist ideologemes of subjectivity” (74), millennial realist writers managed to produce a realism capable of “reflecting a larger social order”.

Stan adds that millennial realism has lost its relevance with time, particularly because the authors lost their revolutionary enthusiasm and their characteristic violence (80). What followed this realism was a prose of layered fictional architectures (80), which will be discussed further. After the historicization of millennial realism, especially after 2010, “the type of first-person critical realism patented by millennials was only carried on incidentally and within individual projects, albeit in narratives that were able to shed a crude, zero-stylized light on the havoc wreaked on subjectivities by current economic orders (prose writers Adrian Schiop and Lavinia Branîște are the standout cases here)” (82).

The novel of transition as a novel of memory

Unlike the two paradigms discussed above, the novel of memory involves a much looser category of texts. We have chosen to denominate this functional category following in the footsteps of Andreea and Doris Mironescu, who dedicated a study to the novel of memory as a world genre⁹, where they provided a categorization of it. Three novelistic subcategories are thus proposed: the semi-autobiographical narratives of traumatic memories, published in the immediate aftermath of the revolution (1990s) and agglutinated by vehemently anti-communist discourses; the novels of (n)ostalgic memory, published after

⁹ See A. Mironescu, Doris Mironescu (2020, 97-115).

2000; and the novel of agonistic memory (which overlaps temporally with the second subcategory), characterized by mysterious plots, historical implications, dialogism, exposition of a post-ideological position, etc. In support of our labelling, the novel of transition is a subgenre of the novel of memory defined by the two scholars in the study aforementioned, resulting from the merging of the last two subcategories: the novel of nostalgic memory and the novel of agonistic memory. Extending the scope of the discussion to the East-Central European literary heritage, we find that there are two different narrative approaches to the democratic turning point of 1989/1990: “one is the concentration on «personal autobiographical experience» in combination with «documentaries»; the other is concentrating first of all on «literary imagination» – that is, on literary fiction *par excellence*.” (Trepte 2019-2020, 259)

Memory narratives began to circulate in the Romanian literary field in the 2000s, *Simion liftnicul* [*Simion the Lift-Boy*] being one of the first novels of this kind. The novel of transition, as a subgenre of the novel of memory, questioned the collective memory of the time and shaped its processes, while also having a satirical intentionality. Its mechanism within Romanian literature has been thoroughly analyzed by Andreea Mironescu:

“In recent decades, memory has tended to become a refuge-concept: as an ideal of societies in a post-historical era, on the one hand, and as an object of study with interdisciplinary openings to the humanities, on the other. [...] It combines the nostalgia for the past and a violent rupture with it, the attention to the discontinuity of reality and history, pluriperspectivism, the consciousness of the mediated, distorted character of perceptions of the world.”¹⁰ (Mironescu A. 2016, 34)

The first writers to fictionalize the immediate reality of the transition, the miserabilist realists of the 1990s, instrumentalized the poor living conditions by blaming communism for this reality. Subversive reactions to the past were also inserted into the discursive web of memoir novels about the transition, in a way specific to that period, but they went beyond the aesthetic formula of miserabilist realism, which was characterized by a carnivalesque, nightmarish dimension, allegorical underlayer, and anticommunist pathos rendered through sensationalist narrative constructions. They also break away from the millennial

¹⁰ „Memoria tinde să devină, în ultimele decenii, un concept-refugiu: ca ideal al societăților într-o epocă post-istorică, pe de o parte, și ca obiect de studiu cu deschideri interdisciplinare către științele umaniste, pe de altă parte. ... În el se întâlnesc nostalgia față de trecut și ruptura violentă cu acesta, atenția către discontinuitatea realului și a istoriei, pluriperspectivismul, conștiința caracterului mediat, distorsionat, al percepțiilor despre lume.” (Mironescu A. 2016, 34, our translation).

realists by dispensing with autobiography and the unmediated perception of reality through the prism of narrative subjectivity. Thus, if the hallmark of the 2000s novels was visceralism and miserabilism, those within the sphere of the novel of memory stylized reality differently by immersing everyday life in burlesque fantasies with well-defined ironic and parodic nuances.

One of the best-known novels of this kind from its early period is *Simion liftnicul* [*Simion the Lift-Boy*, 2001] by Petru Cimpoescu, an exponent of the 80s generation, but who established himself with the novels published around 2000, the one mentioned above being one of them. A series of other novels of memory about transition would continue to appear, including *Coming from an Off-Key Time* (2004) by Bogdan Suceavă, (2005) by Florin Lăzărescu, *Sînt o babă comunistă!* [*I'm an Old Communist Hag!*, 2007] by Dan Lungu, or *Cruciada copiilor* [*Children's Crusade*, 2007] by Florina Ilis, to name but a few. Writers in this category have critically interrogated and deconstructed social memory and multi-layered local identity at the fictional level through irony and metatextual parody (Mironescu A. 2015, "From social memory to literary representation", 35), debunking discursive clichés encrypted in a transnational code. For example, in *Simion liftnicul* [*Simion the Lift-Boy*] the attempt of a "mystical escape from the hell of transition"¹¹ is rendered (Iovănel 2021, 384), resulting in a metarealist representation of the phenomenon of transition, with the narrative being constructed by appealing to a series of narrative techniques such as metafiction or artificial typology. In a 2001 book review, Luminița Marcu points out in detail the way in which the author relates to the reality of the transition: "the preferred object of the novelist Petru Cimpoescu always remains reality, although this novel with thickened strokes and metaphysical parody does not offer us realism in the traditional sense of the word."¹² (Marcu, 2001).

In Bogdan Suceavă's novel, *Venea din timpul diez* [*Coming from an Off-Key Time*], and in Dan Lungu's novel, *Raiul găinilor* [*Chicken Heaven*], one can observe the predilection for satire and meta-textual parody (Mironescu A. 2015, "From social memory to literary representation", 35) in terms of the way the characters relate to the past (through recourse to nostalgia), and in Filip Florian's *Degete mici* [*Little Fingers*], there is the same satirical intention, the plot being constructed in the logic of magic realism while historical objectivity becomes irrelevant (35). In Florina Ilis's "masterpiece of the genre", *Cruciada copiilor* [*Children's Crusade*], Mironescu observes the meta-fictional narrative, thus interpreting the novel as a "metaphor of transition" (36). Another effect such strategies have is to narrow the perspective on historical reality. For instance, Dan Lungu, in *Sînt o babă*

¹¹ „evadare mistică din infernul tranziției” (Iovănel 2021, 384, our translation).

¹² „obiectul predilect al romancierului Petru Cimpoescu rămâne mereu realitatea, deși nu realism în sensul tradițional al cuvântului ne oferă acest roman cu tușe îngroșate și parodie metafizică.” (Marcu, 2001, our translation).

comunistă! [*I'm an Old Communist Hag!*] chooses to present the post-communist reality through the eyes of a single character: Emilia Apostoae. In this way, a part of reality is masked and the perspective limited.

When analyzing the Romanian memory novel, Andreea and Doris Mironescu notice that most of these texts take narrative forms that, in the WReC's terminology, can be labelled as "irrealist". Among them there are allegorical novels (as a subgenre of the traumatic literature, as theorized by them, but also having having the anticommunism as the main characteristic) (Mironescu A, Mironescu D. 2020, 108), the nostalgic ones (frequently self-fictions, others having an "unreliable narrator, usually a child positioned as the reflector of the story," or operating even with the fantasy as in *Orbitor* [*Blinding*] by Mircea Cărtărescu) (110) and the agonistic ones (where the most interesting case is the one of the novel sub-categorized as satirical that combines, as Florin Filip in *Degete mici* [*Little Fingers*], the detective plot with the reduction of the characters to standard typologies and with a satirical perspective of the past) (111).

Viewed together, these novels rely on "satirical, even grotesque" (36) representations of the reality of transition, attempting to "deconstruct the clichés of everyday life in post-communist discourse" (36). It is also worth noting that these novels (and others) have also been analyzed by the same author in terms of their hypertextual dimension, which she interprets as a legacy of postmodern literature.¹³ (A. Mironescu 2015, "The novel of transition as hypertext", 170). We note that, at the level of textual construction, all the aesthetic formulas systematized here abound in narrative artifices designed to alter the veracity of the social context/reality. Among these we would mention inconsistent narrators, meta-textual parodies, satire, humor, thesism (especially in *I'm an Old Communist Hag!*) (see Terian 2019), predilection towards metafictional form, hypertextuality, etc. In summary, we are dealing with what Adriana Stan calls "layered fictional architectures in prose".

The transnational dynamics of the novel of transition

By considering two guiding conditions, the novel of transition becomes a spongy global literary subgenre: on the one hand, it is generated by the same

¹³ „De altfel, ficțiunea postmodernă a redefinit nu numai rolul intertextualității în literatură, ci și formele ei de manifestare. Prin multitudinea reprezentărilor sale mediatic, un eveniment devine un „text” nu doar în înțelesul extensiv al termenului, ci și în acela propriu, de relateare a ceva uzând de tehnicile proprii narațiunii.” / “Moreover, postmodern fiction has redefined not only the role of intertextuality in literature, but also its forms of manifestation. Through the multitude of its media representations, an event becomes a ‘text’ not only in the broad sense of the term, but also in its own sense, of relating something using the techniques of narrative.” (A. Mironescu 2015, "The novel of transition as hypertext", 170, our translation).

collective, social, political conditions/experiences, on the other hand, it attracts common international readers (Mironescu A. and Mironescu D. 2020, 98). The mutability of the novel of transition is an inherent aspect of global literary systems, proving its transnational potential.

In terms of the novel of transition, one cannot say that its narrative form is transmissible; rather, the phenomenon of narrative pleomorphism appears in the early phase of the development of this formula, opening the way to a comparative approach to the phenomenon. Specifically, in the case of the novel of transition, one can mention the concept of polygenesis/pleomorphism (Mironescu A. and Mironescu D. 2020, 97), because its literary formula manifests itself simultaneously in the ex-communist countries as a result of a socio-political mechanism common to the countries of the Soviet bloc. It cannot, therefore, derive from literary areas with a divergent historical and political framework, but it can only spread within these spaces. This phenomenon is particularly interesting for the theory of the circulation routes of narrative schemes, which posits that most narrative circulation is from the center to the periphery, while circulation from the periphery to the center is rare and from the periphery to the periphery is almost non-existent (see Moretti 2003).

Investigating the transmission of memory in Eastern Europe, Andreea Mironescu argues that the narrativization of transition is closely linked to the issue of transmission and encoding of collective memory, especially through “the transmission of affects and emotions through the ‘narrative of pathos’ [...] and the phenomenon of ‘resonance’ at the level of cultural memory of the emotional cargo of exemplary images, motifs and figures” (A. Mironescu 2016, 26), concepts taken from the researchers Geoffrey Hartman and Aleida Assmann (Hartman, in Hartman & A. Assmann 2014).¹⁴

Thus, for circumstantial reasons, there is no direct literary influence (center-periphery), nor exportability (in terms of borrowing and reproducing a specific form) of the novel of transition (from the periphery to the center, at least so far), since it appears simultaneously in countries with related collective memories: “That is because the novel of memory springs from a concern with political identity, not with form, so it is not essentially influenced by mimetic aspirations to replicate international commercial success, but instead it is fueled by national and local stakes and conditions.” (A. Mironescu and D. Mironescu 2020, 97). However, the novel of transition, also seen as a generic formation, does not remain a strictly local phenomenon but becomes an individual narrative pattern that circulates transnationally, especially in the sphere of East-Central European literatures (and also in post-dictatorial non-European literatures) or in societies

¹⁴ In order to understand how the memory of communism works in literature, see the concept of (*n*)*ostalgia* discussed by Maria Todorova (Todorova 2010).

with a similar political, economic, and social status. Analyzed on a global scale and considering, in addition to the relations between literary texts, the social practices surrounding them, we observe that a number of similar characteristics and methods specific to any period of transition, stemming from the fall of political/colonial regimes, are activated, so that some *cultural patterns*¹⁵ (Assmann 2011) are reiterated at the narrative level in several post-Soviet areas.

As Andreea and Doris Mironescu suggest in the study quoted above, “it also goes to show that, sometimes, a subgenre is a matter of perception and that ‘local’ sub-subgenres such as the novel of Romanian communism, American neo-slave narratives, and the novel of genocide may very well function as parts of the same world literary genre” (A. Mironescu and D. Mironescu 2020, 98-99). We can only understand a national literature in relation to a broader context—the context of transition, in this case. Even if the literary phenomenon of transition is common to every post-communist state (and not only), it is nevertheless individualized according to the specificity of each environment and even to the specificity of each period.

How is the fiction of post-communist change constructed in East-Central Europe? For instance, according to Rajendrei A. Chitnis, just as the first part of the Romanian novel of the post-communist transition (1990s), “Czech literature in the 1990s, to a greater extent than either Russian or Slovak, was dominated by explicitly or implicitly autobiographical works seeking to give an eyewitness account of the experience of the 1970s and 1980s, and at the same time to assert the writer’s own anti-Communist credentials” (Chitnis, 11-12). One can observe an exhaustion of realism as a literary formula in the post-communist East-Central European context and an assumption of a self-reflexive voice, in contrast to the collectivizing one specific to totalitarian ideology (59). In addition, the carnivalesque function of narratives, specific to postmodern aesthetics, serves as a technical support for the autobiographical discourses of the aforementioned period. The authorial auto-stylization is also found in “Podobojí” by Czech writer Daniela Hodrová, by means of “the characterization of Diviš Paskal in Podobojí as clownish, irrepressibly curious and constantly in danger of over-reaching himself” (107). In Slovakia, for example, in Peter Pišťanek’s novel “Rivers of Babylon,” the description “of an amoral cartoon world in which every character is motivated only by personal gain relieved Slovak literature of its seriousness, hyperbolically breaking taboos on sexual motifs, restoring parody, black humor, and the grotesque” (51).

Another interesting case is that of the Russian writer Victor Pelevin, characterized by R. Chitnis as an author of emptiness, where this emptiness represents the general state produced by socio-political changes in the post-

¹⁵ See the concept of *cultural patterns* theorized by Aleida Assmann (Assmann 2011).

Soviet period. His novels, especially “*Omon Ra*,” are interpreted through a carnivalesque lens as a literary technique, as theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin (142). This novel presents the journey of Omon, who wants to fly to space and thus fulfill his duty towards his country. However, it is only a parody of socialist realism prose dedicated to “Heroes of the Soviet Cosmos” (155). Omon does not fly to the moon but travels through the subway tunnels of Moscow. In the end, when he attempts suicide, his gun does not function, an image representing “a metaphor for the collapsing Soviet military-industrial complex” (155).

All these particularities that we have briefly outlined have been produced by the fiction of changes that emerged as a result of the collapse of communist regimes in East-Central Europe. They were analyzed from the perspective of world literature in the context of a combined and uneven world literature by the WReC researchers. The authors of this study observed that the novel produced in peripheral and (semi)peripheral spaces (that were, or still are, under the pressure of the changes produced by the capitalist ascension) are written in a manner that they call “irrealist.” The researchers observed that these novels:

“[S]hare not only common themes, plots and subjects, but also a range of formal features that we propose to call ‘irrealist’. Of course, anti-linear plot lines, meta-narratorial devices, un-rounded characters, unreliable narrators, contradictory points of view, and so on, have all been identified as the techniques and devices characteristic of the distinctive (and restricted) Euro-American literary formation typically addressed under the name of ‘modernism’. But we understand these techniques and devices more broadly as the determinate formal registers of (semi-) peripherality in the world-literary system, discernible wherever literary works are composed that mediate the lived experience of capitalism’s bewildering creative destruction (or destructive creation)”. (WreC 2015, 51)

Therefore, irrealism as a formal register first appears in the (semi)periphery and periphery of the world-system because of the emergence of capitalism in these spaces with either a colonial or a totalitarian past. Their observation regarding the narratological element of fiction refers to how the writers of this literature used a wide range of literary techniques specific to modernism. The consequence of these formal choices was, certainly, the estrangement of the narrations from any conventional form of realism, or the “ideal type” in their own terminology.

A series of examples are incredibly relevant when it comes to the link between the modernist form of the narratives and the under-development characteristic for semi-peripheral territories. In Pio Baroja’s novel *The Quest* the scholars from Warwick remark a narrative whose “twitchy plot, non-linear structure and persistent anxiety over mimetic stability”, narrated by an “anxious,

unreliable narrator” is in direct relation with “Spain’s evident ‘backwardness’”, in the context of a “capitalist modernization in the semi-peripheries” (130). A more interesting case is the one of a more recent novel, *The Busconductor Hines* by the Scottish writer James Kelman. This book is published five years after his debut with “Thatcherite neoliberal revolution” (139), and it discusses the life of an “archetypical victim of the transformation sweeping across his region: he loses his job in a time of rampant privatization of the ‘public’ transport service”. As such, the novel intends to criticize the establishment by discussing the consequences of neoliberalism, mainly for the unprivileged social groups, such as losing one’s job, the widening of the social class gap, and the need for people to change dwellings and habits, and compete for “jobs, housing and other forms of social security” (142). The narrative form, which the Warwick researchers consider the direct effect of that period’s instability, was generated, however, by techniques specific to modernism:

Kelman’s prose shuttles between sober modes of documentary naturalism and intense bursts of subjectivist modernist narration, often rendered in the working-class dialect of his main characters. This modernist consciousness is conveyed through a narratological procession of esoteric thoughts and visions combined with linguistic denotations of sensory overload and psychic disturbance. Temporal shifts are also apparent throughout, down to the granular level of the tense phrasing in many sentences... Hence the ubiquity of fragmented plot lines, meandering narratives, random and restless focalisation, the concern with memory and memorialisation that disrupts the progression of story, and the use of contingency and surprise events, of spatial deformation and of anecdote and compression. (142)

We have chosen these two examples to demonstrate how this method functions within any area with a (semi)peripheral status. When discussing the literary documentation of the socio-economic transformations resulting from the transition to neoliberalism in East-Central Europe, WReC dedicates a whole chapter to the prose of the Russian writer Victor Pelevin, as well as a subchapter to the novel *Rivers of Babylon* by Peter Pišťanek. In the case of the contemporary Russian novelist, especially in his novel *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf* (2008), where “the aesthetic registration of the transitions to neoliberal forms of capitalism in the post-Soviet semi-periphery of Europe” (97) proposes a satirical allegory of post-Soviet Russia built through the relation between two “irrealist” mechanisms: the neo-gothic aesthetic of the narration and an unreliable narrator. The novel has a first-person narration from the perspective of the female character A Hu-Li, “a 2,000-year-old fox spirit.” Despite the supernatural characters, the addressed problems are usually mundane, from the emergence of the Russian oligarchs to the Russian politics of oil export. This kind of unreliable

narration plays a key role: “Pelevin’s own novel uses A Hu Lui’s unreliable narration and reflections on reading to speculate on the role of dialectical hermeneutics in the revelation of ideology and mystification [...] As she seeks to understand the antinomies of her social order, the reader is forced into a mode of dialectical interpretation, deepened by the additional difficulty of A Hu Lui’s own unreliability as a narrator, since she is prone to regurgitate and reformulate ideas she has heard before” (112).

Rivers of Babylon, which we discussed through the lenses of R. Chitnis, who analyzes it regarding the parodic and grotesque dimension, is analyzed by WReC with emphasis on the way in which the narration is constructed. The novel tells the story of Rácz, a country man who, after the chaos produced by the transition, ends up gaining power inside a system controlled by the Mafia and by the imperative of capital accumulation, proposing a world “unthinkable just two or three months ago”. Thus, this novel is a documentation of the transition, not only through the presented events, but also through the fragmentation and implausible narration, all suggesting the lack of coherence in the reality of transition itself:

“The structure and plot of Pist’aneč’s novel challenge its readers to reflect on the credibility of events as they unfold. The central plot line itself the incredible rise of the novel’s anti-hero Racz from peasant to political oligarch - is designed to give readers several pauses for thought. Racz’s initial ‘leap’ - straight from the pages of Trotsky’s formulation of the law of uneven and combined development - from rural field to urban boiler room is presented, in a circumspect movement between present and future imperfect tense, as simultaneously plausible and unbelievable. Temporal challenges punctuate the narrative, indexing anxious attempts on the part of the new plutocrats to break decisively with and supersede the past of the chapters move forward in staccato fashion, with unbalanced leaps and bounds, mirroring the outlandish yet startling ‘progress’ possible for some, such as Racz and his various hangers-on, in this new world of temporal unsteadiness and altered social relations” (116)

Therefore, fragmentarism in relation to an unreliable narrator leads the WReC scholars to consider the novel, from a formal perspective, a “modernist picaresque satire” (116). It can be observed how the irrealist way of building a novel specific to the periphery becomes a pattern frequently encountered in East-Central European literatures in the combined and uneven literary world-system. Whether we talk about the “elements of dystopian, magical realist, fantastic, gothic and speculative fictions” which “allegorize social upheaval and transformation in the ‘new Russia’” (108), or about the predilection for autobiography, which frequently becomes a satirical or grotesque representation of the reality of transition, which R. Chitnis observes in the fiction of changes, especially in Czech, Slovak, and Russian literature, it can be formulated that

these ways of surpassing realism through reports register the changes in the periphery.

The Romanian post-communist literature makes no exception, as we have shown above through the chronological division of Romanian novels of transition. In this regard, the novel of transition represents a symptomatic case for the condition of semi-peripheral literature, subject to socio-political transformations. Starting from Mihnea Bâlici's observation regarding the "new Romanian realism of transition," we will demonstrate in the upcoming pages that, with the emergence of this new realism, the intentions behind the literary representation change, especially because their narratives are of a more traditional realism, emphasizing the verisimilitude of the action and discussing the period of transition through critical reflection. We argue that the main reason for this mutation towards realism in discussing transition in literature is the temporal distance from that period. As WReC researchers argue, (semi)peripheral realism develops as such precisely because it emerges in the middle of the transition. The question that arises is: When does the transition end so that it can be discussed as part of the past? It has been said over the years that a temporal reference point could be the year 2007, the year of Romania's entry into the EU, but the integration was not instant, and thus, 2007 does not define a real change that reshaped society's life. This impossibility of tracing the end of the transition in time was best approached by Florin Poenaru, who understands this period as an ideological construct, not a temporal one, the finality of which "is drifting away as you get closer to it" (Poenaru, 11). Therefore, even if we cannot precisely tell when and if the transition has ended, it can be stated that the distance from its epicenter (the first two decades of the transition) represents the starting point of this change of perspective. This relatively recent trend in Romanian literature manifests itself through a number of novels published in the last few years, and for the present paper, we will focus on two of them that we consider the most representative for the analysis of the formula of the realism of transition.

Case studies

Bogdan Coșa's novel, *Cât de aproape sunt ploile reci* (*How close the cold rains are*), published in 2020, reveals a glacial naturalism (narratively, not humanly), a realism without inkhorn falsifications (Goldiș 2023), with vivid, unprocessed recordings of the Romanian countryside of the last decades. The first 40 pages of the book leave the reader with the feeling of a deliberate dissipation of the narrative framework, of the world, caused by ambiguous references to different situations or characters, without many clues or insights. As Alex Goldiș notes in a review dedicated to this novel:

“[T]here is no clumsiness in the construction of the text here, but, on the contrary, a programmatic refusal to counterfeit the raw reality through forced causal or explanatory interventions: it comes to the reader as it is, without interpretative lenses. The asceticism of the narrative voice, which refrains from commenting on or in any way anticipating the harsh logic of the world in view, represents a way of letting it deliver itself to the reader in all its complexity.”¹⁶ (Goldiș 2023).

The author does not seek to accomplish the narrative experiment through metatextual tricks, flamboyant narratives, or sceneries but produces an aesthetic mutation towards a realism devoid of the narrative means used so far in literary representations of the transition. Up to 2020, the reality of the transition was burdened, at a discursive level, with metatextual games, intertextuality, remnants from postmodernism, schematism, artificial typological characters, and carnivalesque vision. Coșa solidifies a realism purged of artifice and based on a critical reflection on the post-communist period.

The narrative spans a period of about 25 years and is set in the countryside, in Dumbrava Frumoasă, an isolated and isolating village, “surrounded by high mountains from all directions” (Coșa 2020, 31). The narrative rises from two synergistic fulcrums: the decline of rural families (the Toaders’ and Camelia’s family, related through Nuțu’s marriage to her daughter Casiana) and the economic precariousness of transition (a factor that triggers migration, job loss, inter-family and emotional imbalance, divorce, alcoholism, violence, and abuse). The rural environment is configured as a form of escapism for those living in small industrial towns (Nae, Petru), which spread their noise to small mountain villages. Even though Nae moves to an urban environment, he still lives in harsh conditions, on the outskirts of town, in a neighborhood for those without families.

The plot does not focus on a single character; all the voices cooperate to complete and densify reality. The characters sum up social voices whose intensity is scattered and almost blurred in the reality of the time: rural people, emigrants, or proletarians working as foresters, saleswomen at the village shop (later purchased by Profi), or nurses. The narrative operates with causal nuances, presenting different facts as deriving from each other: violence, social deprivation, and other issues arise due to social pre-events and changes in social morphology. The author dispenses with any intention of caricaturing the

¹⁶ „nu e vorba de stângăcie în construcția textului aici, ci, dimpotrivă, de un refuz programatic de a contraface realitatea brută prin intervenții forțat cauzale sau explicative: ea survine către cititor așa cum e, fără lentile interpretative. Ascetismul vocii narative, care se abține să comenteze sau să anticipeze în vreun fel logica aspră a lumii aflate în vizor, reprezintă o modalitate de a o lăsa să se livreze cititorului în toată complexitatea ei.” (Goldiș 2023, our translation).

characters, never condemning them, and never seeming superior to them. He configures a fictional world that retains the reality's landmarks while maintaining a lenient view towards social castes affected by historical phenomena such as transition or migration. Aurelia is perhaps the voice that controls and governs (or wants to govern) everything within the diegesis. Like Moromete¹⁷, she wants to keep alive the rural micro-world, whose main satisfaction comes from working the land, but "now the gardens were only worked so that they wouldn't remain unworked, so that they wouldn't disgrace the family; Aurelia no longer raised so many animals, the children would not be interested in that."¹⁸ (44).

The novel brings up the issue of migration with the arrival of Dumitrița (the youngest of the family) and Bebe from Italy, announced during a discussion between Dana and Petru. Their temporary return reveals traces of insecurity and quasi-inferiority in Dumbrava. The BMW, the sweets, the lust for life, and the apparent economic stability of the two emigrants mask their real life; *la bella vita* is interrupted in Italy, where the characters do menial work, and family dysfunction persists.

The narrator never exposes the shortcomings of the period but only suggests them, letting the reader infer from dialogues and previous situations. Often, we learn about the situation or life of some characters from other characters and their dialogues, not directly from the narrator (e.g., the discussion towards the end of the book between Petru and Nae about the instability of the family relationship and Peter's accident). The intensity of veracity is thus supported by the suggestion or remembrance of events or relationships in the corpus of dialogues and conversations, without being directly stated by the authorial voice. The narrator gives way to his characters: for example, we learn about the communist period from a letter sent to Aurelia years ago by Sanda's parents. Moreover, the language of the characters remains vivid, unprocessed.¹⁹ (33)

¹⁷ The two volumes of the novel *Moromeții* impose the most extensive literary record of the time. The former (1955) is considered emblematic in terms of its representation of the evolution of social relations in the countryside, and the latter (1967), the novel of the obsessive decade, representative in terms of the context in which it appeared, socialist realism). The novel reveals the struggle of the central male character, Ilie Moromete, for financial independence and for the preservation of the family center in the countryside, around the household, in a period of great social transformation - the disappearance of rural life/ of the Romanian village caused by the communist regime.

¹⁸ „acum grădinile erau lucrate doar ca să nu rămână nelucrate, să nu se facă de râs; Aurelia nu mai ținea atâtea animale, pe copii nu-i interesa.” (Coșa 2020, 44, our translation).

¹⁹ „- D-apăi la Margareta. S-o dus pe la amiază și n-o mai vinit. Nu mai căta geozdanul, ți l-am pus eu în antreu.” (Coșa 2020, 33).

“- She is at Margareta. She went at noon and has not come back. Stop carrying the schoolbag, I put it in the vestibule.” (Coșa 2020, 33, our translation).

Pauperism breeds failure, failure breeds alcoholism, alcoholism breeds violence, and violence breeds a lack of empathy and love, culminating in the disintegration and loss of rural life. A world where the only source of culturalization is TV shows like *Mom Swap* (*Schimb de mame*). Meteorological, emotional, economic, and social instability grind the fate of the rural community and individuality alike: “the present was empty, life was swirling in the void, everything remained in the past.”²⁰ (170). This narrative about failure and alienation, family dysfunctionality, and the accelerated disintegration of the rural center—family and community—relies on a realistic representation of reality. Thus, the realism of transition no longer needs the narrative techniques specific to previous paradigms but expresses itself through the veracity of the narrative.

Beech Sponges (2021), the novel by Mihai Duțescu, sparked one of the most interesting polemics²¹ in recent Romanian literary discussions regarding the fictional representation of communism in post-communism. The novel tells the story of a family from Teleorman over several decades (the narrative spans from 1960 to 2000), staking the social dynamics of the characters across three generations. The first part (chronologically) presents the life of a regular family under communism. Here we see not only the reprehensible aspects of the system: propaganda, censorship, food deficiency, Security’s intrusion in family life, traveling only within the Socialist Bloc, and institutional abuse (e.g., when they return from a trip to Moscow and their jewelry is seized), but also the benefits of social mobility made possible by communism. Schematically presented, it refers to how the two young teenagers from the rural world managed to study and move to the capital. There, they were offered a bedsitter, and after their firstborn, an apartment.

The Revolution marks the shift to the period of transition and is mentioned briefly because the protagonists did not take part in it. Additionally, throughout the narrative, nothing sensational or heroic happens; Duțescu engages in building the life of common characters, where the little things in life represent the whole reality.

The novel maps the instability of the period and its effects on the psychology of the characters, all representative of the bourgeoisie of Romanian post-communist society.

“the Revolution came and even like that, without debts, their money lessen from a moth to another. You could find anything you wanted, and they were young and craving any sort of foolishness, better

²⁰ „prezentul era gol, viața rodea în gol, totul rămăsese în trecut.” (Coșa 2020, 170, our translation).

²¹ The controversy was sparked by Marius Chivu in his review “Comunismul de carton” [Cardboard Communism]. *Dilema Veche*, no. 932, February 17-23, 2022, and it was later pursued by Mihai Iovănel in a Facebook post. For more information see (Contea 2023).

cigarettes, nesses when convenient, jeans, creams, soaps: everything they had to obtain until then under-the-counter and with a lot of money.” (Duțescu 2021, 123)²²

Duțescu documents with precision the economic dynamics of the beginning of the transition and especially the huge consumerist accessibility in opposition to the economic inflation and the devaluation of currency. The opening of the borders represented an opportunity for small businesses, and the Romanians chose Turkey and Yugoslavia for commercial trades. Radu (Ducu), the protagonist in *Beech Sponges*, participates in such trips by selling ball bearings and other personal goods:

Everywhere you looked, the parking lot was filled with Romanian cars and buses from across the country, crowded in the middle of a market spread without logic which Ducu believed was called ‘car boot sale’[...] With the night [...] the Romanian buses were almost empty: the majority of the women were taking their purses and also going towards the town, coming back only at daybreak [...] Ducu [...] understood what it was to understand- also witnessing in silence, together with the rest, to that sad and solemn nocturnal exodus of the women of all ages from the Romanian buses that were going to Turkey at the beginning of the ‘90s.” (125-29)²³

Therefore, the novel records the compromises that some people had to make under the pressure of economic dynamics. Ducu also takes advantage of the new freedom: he engages in commerce in Turkey and Yugoslavia, takes repeated holidays from his job, opens a store with some family friends, travels across the country (this time staying in hotels rather than camping as during the communist period), and buys land on the outskirts of Bucharest, which he works with his wife Angela. The novel excels in building the psychology of its characters. Living in the capital and failing to live a decent life exclusively from their salaries, the married couple starts trading across borders and running a

²² „Venise Revoluția și chiar și-așa, fără datorii, banii li se împuținau de la lună la lună. Începuseră să se găsească tot ce voiai, iar ei erau tineri și poșteau la fel și fel de prostii, țigări mai bune, nesses la discreție, blugi, creme, săpunuri: tot ce se chinuseră să facă rost pe sub mână și cu bani mulți până atunci.” (Duțescu 2021, 123, our translation).

²³ „Cât vedeai cu ochii, parcare era înțesată de mașini și autocare românești venite din toată țara, îngrămădite în mijlocul unui târg întins fără noimă, despre care Ducu credea că se cheamă „talcioac” Odată cu lăsarea nopții [...] autocarele românești se goleau aproape cu totul: majoritatea femeilor își luau poșeta și ele spre oraș, întorcându-se abia când se crăpa de ziuă [...] Ducu [...] a înțeles până la urmă ce era de înțeles- asistând și el în tăcere, alături de ceilalți, la acel exod nocturn, sobru și trist al femeilor de toate vârstele din autocarele românești care făceau Turcia la începutul anilor 90.” (Duțescu. 2021, 125-29, our translation).

small business, leading to estrangement from one another. Angela suffers from a reproductive system condition, but Ducu seems unaware of it. In a review, Marius Chivu states that “Ducu is a careless husband and father, lazy, unloving, and absent, and the only event that affects him is his father’s death, because he doesn’t take his wife’s illness seriously, just as he does with his” (Chivu 2021). Although Chivu’s description is fair, it is not sufficient since the character begins to act this way once he starts leaving the country for long periods for commerce, once he opens the store, and generally once obtaining money becomes the main effort for their family. Therefore, the novel excels in faithfully representing the realities of transition and maintaining an authorial balance. The narrator relates without judging the characters’ actions, and their psychology is attentively constructed in relation to the socio-economic changes without becoming didactic. Through this novel, the anticommunist tendency to judge the present through the past, social satire, allegory, artificial typologies, and sensationalism give way to a more realist representation capable of capturing the reality of the transition as it was for the majority.

Conclusions

The novel of transition has a well-defined history in post-communist Romania, shaped by the historical paradigms from which it emerged. The first to fictionalize the transition were those known today as the Miserabilist Realists (Iovănel). They mapped the first decade of the Romanian transition using a series of literary techniques from the postmodernist toolkit. Among them, Radu Aldulescu is probably the prose writer who came closest to realism, but the anticommunist theses of his prose took precedence over the truthful representation of reality. They were followed by the 2000 generation, represented by a number of younger authors who wrote critically in relation to society. Their prose immediately recorded reality by opting for first-person narrative. This was also a short-lived artistic movement, but still an important avant-garde movement in the rediscovery of realism.

A third category we have discussed is the novel of transition as a novel of memory, borrowing Andreea Mironescu’s term, which treated the subject separately. This category includes novels published after the 2000s, which narrativized the transition period by appealing to the cultural memory of society, opting for various narrative formulas, from allegory to magical realism, and even to various narrative games of a satirical nature. Analyzing these forms of the Romanian novel of transition in relation to a number of other East-Central European literatures, we have noticed how they all developed in similar ways. Using the methodology and terminology of the WReC study, which argues that

(semi)-peripheral literatures are written in “irrealist” ways in terms of the literary techniques by which they are constructed, we have demonstrated how Romanian literature is no exception in terms of the “irrealist” representation of transition (except for the millennial realism of the 2000s).

However, following Mihnea Bâlici’s observation about the recent “realism of transition,” we have tried to demonstrate the recent emergence of a new form of literary representation of the period of transition. Considering as case studies Bogdan Coșa’s *How Close the Cold Rains Are* and Mihai Duțescu’s *Beech Sponges*, we have observed how they propose a realist narrative, purged of “irrealist” techniques specific to previous aesthetics, but also of satirical or anticommunist intentions. Taking into account the argument postulated by the WReC research group, according to which peripheral irrealism arises precisely because it appears as a chronicle recording the transformative dynamics of the semi-peripheries under the pressure of the rise of capitalism, we also argue that one of the causes that led to the emergence of the realism of transition is the reflexive distance that the authors can now take from the first two post-communist decades, in which the effects of the rise of capitalism were much more pronounced.

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VOICES OF RUDARI WOMEN FROM FILIAȘI (ROMANIA) IN THE CONTEXT OF CONVERSION TO PENTECOSTALISM

Gabriel GIRIGAN¹

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ABSTRACT. *Voices of Rudari women from Filiași (Romania) in the Context of Conversion to Pentecostalism.* The present article examines conversion to Pentecostalism among Rudari women in post-socialist Eastern Europe. The case study focuses on a Rudari ethnic community located in a small town in southern Romania and shows that Rudari women assume a dual role: one involves preserving the interplay between Pentecostalism and local culture, while the other entails initiating conversion among men. Women facilitate conversion through visions, dreams, or manifestations of illness, which position them as gatekeepers who translate Pentecostalism into the local cultural context. Furthermore, women serve as guides for men undergoing conversion, playing a vital role in bridging the gap between Rudari traditions and the Pentecostal culture. They demonstrate proficiency in interpreting Pentecostal ecstatic phenomena within their predominantly male community, with their voices serving as mediators throughout the conversion process (Brusco, 2010). Similarly, women act as “therapists,” facilitating men’s conversion and addressing issues related to the transformation of traditional notions of masculinity.

Keywords: *Pentecostalism, Romania, Boyash studies, cultural transformation, conversion narratives, gender, ethnography*

¹ **Gabriel GIRIGAN** is a Research Assistant at the Institute of Research and Interdisciplinary Studies, Department of Humanities and Arts, Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu, Romania. He has completed his PhD in History from Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Gabriel's research interests are focused on the history and anthropology of Eastern Europe, post-socialism, gender studies, and Romani studies. Currently, he is focusing on the theoretical and policy issues faced by the Roma minority in Romanian society, with a close look at the relationship between Roma communities and environmental justice. Email address: gabriel.girigan@ulbsibiu.ro

REZUMAT. *Voci ale femeilor rudărese din Filiași (România) în contextul convertirii la pentecostalism.* Articolul de față prezintă convertirea la pentecostalism în rândul femeilor dintr-o comunitate de rudari în contextul postsocialismului est-european. Studiul de caz prezintă o comunitate etnică de rudari dintr-un oraș mic din sudul României. Argumentez că femeile rudărese au un dublu rol în comunitate, primul de conservare a dualismului dintre pentecostalism și cultura locală și al doilea de inițiere a convertirii în rândul bărbaților. Femeile alimentează convertirea religioasă prin viziuni, vise sau semne de boală. Toate aceste condiții prelabile au facilitat devenirea lor ca interprete ale traducerii pentecostalismului în cultura locală. Mai mult decât atât, femeile devin astfel călăuze ale convertirii bărbaților. Ele joacă, de asemenea, un rol important în medierea celor două lumi, tradițiile Rudari și noua cultură pentecostală. Ele sunt capabile să descifreze semnele extatice pentecostale într-un context comunitar dominat de bărbați, vocile femeilor devenind astfel un mediator în procesul de convertire (Brusco, 2010). În mod similar, femeile acționează ca „terapeute” în contextul procesului de convertire și transformare a machismului bărbaților.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Pentecostalism, România, studii asupra băieșilor/rudarilor, transformare culturală, narațiuni ale convertirii, studii de gen, etnografie*

Introduction

Interest in how Pentecostalism has impacted women and gender dynamics has been documented since the 1970s and 1980s (Brusco 2010, 75). While massive conversions were observed in South America, Asia, and Africa, it is essential not to overlook Europe, particularly Eastern Europe after the fall of communist regimes. In post-communist Eastern Europe, the Roma community has been one of the most active in terms of conversions. In Romania, numerous specialists have delved into this phenomenon (Fosztó 2006, 2009, 2012; Kiss, Fosztó 2012; Roth, Gog 2012; Gog 2007, 2009). Yet, there has been comparatively less focus on Rudari communities within Roma studies. Although Rudari self-identify separately from Roma, academic studies often include them as part of Roma studies. Recently, a volume entitled *Boyash Studies: Researching “Our People”* (Sorescu-Marinković, Kahl, and Sikimić 2021) has been published, exploring Rudari in Romania, Greece, Croatia, and Hungary, addressing history, identity, language, and religious affiliation.

At the European level, studies on Pentecostalism among the Roma have covered various themes such as gender dynamics and personal transformation (Gay y Blasco 1999; Roman 2017; Slavkova 2021), Pentecostalism’s relationship

with identity (Roman 2017, 2021), changes in the Roma community's status (Ries 2007), and ethnicity within Pentecostalism (Cantón-Delgado 2017). In Central and Eastern Europe, recent studies by Melody Wachsmuth (2023) in Serbia and Croatia have explored religious identity, gender dynamics, and health issues. Eva-Liisa Roht-Yilmaz (2020) analyzed Roma communities converting to Pentecostalism on the Latvia-Estonia border and focused on the role of Roma missionaries from Finland called Kaale and the narrative of demarginalization, while examining the relationships between converted and non-converted Roma, and between non-Roma and Roma converts. Less explored are Pentecostalism's effects on marginalized communities, particularly concerning women and their role in mediating and negotiating these transformations.

In Filiași, a small town in southern Oltenia, Romania, the Rudari community resides on the town's outskirts, known as "Rudărie," which is mainly affiliated with the Neo-Protestant Pentecostal denomination. The town consists of three ethnic communities: Romanians, Rudari, and Roma, segregated geographically with Romanians mainly in the town center and the other two communities on the outskirts. Romanians, the majority ethnic group, adhere to Orthodox Christianity, and the Rudari in the Rudărie neighborhood who have not converted to Pentecostalism remain Orthodox. The predominant wave of conversions to Pentecostalism among the Rudari community occurred after 1989, coinciding with the collapse of socialism. While instances of conversion existed during the communist era, they were relatively rare due to persecution and a diminished religious milieu. Often linked with the Roma population due to skin color, the Rudari have historically been present throughout the Balkans. In Oltenia and Muntenia, they are known as "Rudari," whereas in Moldova and Transylvania, they are called "albieri" and "băieși" respectively. Their traditional occupation shifted from gold washing in early modern times to wood processing since the nineteenth century.

The conversion to Pentecostalism among Rudari has brought significant changes for both converts and non-converts, impacting identity, local traditions, dress, spirituality, gender dynamics, and corporeality. Both men and women convert, but their experiences differ. Some families have one spouse converted and the other not, while others have both converted. Women from Rudărie have detailed their conversion experiences and its effects, and although they do not hold formal positions in the Pentecostal church hierarchy—unlike men who may serve as pastors or elders—their voices have gained prominence in conversions among the Rudari. More specifically, they often serve as key intermediaries, establishing continuities and discontinuities between local and Pentecostal culture, on the one hand, and initiating and converting their spouses to Pentecostalism, on the other hand.

In the Pentecostal community of Rudărie, women outnumber men and have developed a deep understanding of both their own bodies and those around them, nurtured by local traditions and social dynamics. Rudari women wield significant influence in body-illness relationships. Pentecostalism highlights the connection between the body and the Holy Spirit, conversion signs, sin, and morality. Combined with local customs like the Gurban ritual, Pentecostalism has enabled women to become authorities on corporeal matters. They can decipher signs of illness and conversion, shaping these insights into pedagogical roles both within and outside the Rudari community. Their pre-existing knowledge of the body aligns with Pentecostal perspectives, sustained by informal healing practices prevalent during communist and post-socialist times, when they sought alternative medical services from priests in monasteries, local healers, and practitioners of the occult. Encouraged by shared cultural elements such as dreams, crises, prayers, and taboos, this expertise in illness and corporeality has merged with the Pentecostal framework, ensuring Rudari women's longevity as experts in illness and corporeality.

Despite their informal influence, formal roles within the Pentecostal church elude women in Rudărie; they are excluded from decision-making structures and are often patronized or even reprimanded by church leadership. Formally speaking, they appear to be marginalized by the church. However, their informal roles, especially evident in conversion narratives, significantly shape community dynamics within family contexts, and in relation to non-converts and local traditions. This prompts an exploration of the role Rudari women play in the broader context of mass conversion to Pentecostalism post-socialism. In this regard, two pertinent questions arise: (1) how do Rudari women navigate the interface between local and Pentecostal cultures during conversion, and (2) what impact does corporeality have on gender dynamics within the Pentecostal community?

According to formal church structures, women are perceived as spiritually deficient, necessitating intervention to rectify their perceived spiritual waywardness. However, ethnographic evidence contradicts this notion, indicating instances where men require spiritual guidance. This is exemplified in the case of Melisa's husband, whom she assists in the conversion process to Pentecostalism. Initial discussions highlight the local context and traditional healing practices such as the Gurban ritual. In this context, an illustrative case study comes from Lila, who undertakes a transnational endeavor to conduct the ritual for the well-being of her family members. The focus then shifts to Nora, whose journey involves conversion to Pentecostalism and an interplay between local and Pentecostal cultural frameworks. Following this, the analysis delves into the dimension of corporeality within the Rudari community, elucidating how women

interpret and navigate this aspect. Finally, attention is directed towards Melisa, who spearheaded conversion within her own family unit, serving as an example of how women can become informal initiators of this process. Her story is particularly noteworthy as it encapsulates instances of illness alongside the conversion narrative, wherein she actively facilitated translation, mediation, and interpretation of divine signs, culminating in her husband's conversion.

A common thread observed in the narratives of Nora and Melisa is the delineation of conversion signs, the intricacies of the conversion process, and the outcomes stemming from the interpretation of divine manifestations. Throughout these narratives, illness emerges as a pivotal factor, prompting distinct methodologies for interpretation and healing: one rooted in the traditional Gurban ritual and the other embedded within the Pentecostal paradigm. Furthermore, these accounts converge on moments of existential crisis within the believer's journey, underscoring the centrality of corporeal experiences. Ultimately, these narratives and the crises encountered therein serve to foreground the resilience, adaptability, and agency exhibited by women within informal settings.

Methodology

The field research took place in the Rudărie neighborhood of Filiași, focusing primarily on individuals affiliated with the Pentecostal faith. Multiple discussions with specific individuals over time were conducted, notable in Melisa's case, where a trusting relationship was established, allowing her to generously share several events related to her conversion journey.

A combination of individual and focus group interviews was conducted. Additionally, discussions were held with individuals residing outside the neighborhood to gain insights from other perspectives, particularly from Romanians. However, interviews were not conducted within the Roma community.

Rudari women demonstrated a readiness to participate in discussions regarding their experiences of converting to Pentecostalism and elucidating the link between local and Pentecostal cultures. Women from various age groups and social backgrounds were approached, with both men and women often taking part in focus groups. The ethnographic work commenced in 2013–2014, with the most extensive phase of the process occurring between 2015 and 2016. Interviews, structured and semi-structured, were conducted with participants. In instances where recording devices were not feasible due to subjects' discomfort, key points were noted and later transcribed into a field journal, with detailed indexing throughout the research process.

Conversations were also carried out with religious leaders from the Pentecostal community. By attending religious services, I observed the dynamics of organization, church structure, and the roles of men and women within the congregation. Notably, it was the women who delved deeper into and articulated themes concerning morality or corporeality in the Pentecostal Rudari community, aspects of significant interest for the study at hand.

In summary, rather than being subjected to aggressive proselytizing efforts, I encountered narratives that shed light on the intricacies of gender dynamics within families and the roles of women in the conversion process, the pre-conversion state, emotional experiences, and the challenges faced throughout. All names mentioned in this study are fictitious to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

Pentecostalism and local culture

A significant aspect of the changes occurring during the post-socialist era and the adoption of neo-Protestant beliefs is the interaction between Rudari culture and customs, and Pentecostal values, morality, gender dynamics, and machismo. The Rudari people serve as the architects of this dialogue, showing a readiness to reinterpret and negotiate cultural elements to redefine their communal identity when necessary. From this standpoint, specific research directions (Robbins 2010, 161-162) explore how Pentecostalism sets itself apart from other denominations. Their focus is on examining how other religious traditions engage with cultural elements, the manner in which this interaction leads to tensions, and how these clashes tend to ease over time. Conversely, Pentecostalism thrives on and is sustained by cultural tensions.

To comprehend how Pentecostalism becomes ingrained in the Rudari community, I must delve into the content and structure of conversion narratives. These narratives serve as intermediaries, illustrating both the personal changes accompanying conversion to Pentecostalism and the communal shifts. The personal, cultural, and eschatological dimensions, reflecting the broader adoption of Pentecostalism, draw from the work of researcher Joel Robbins (2010, 161). However, in presenting these aspects within the Rudari community, I also aim to shed light on other specific elements of the Rudari culture that Robbins did not explicitly address in his general model.

Within the Rudari community, at a personal level, there is a struggle between the “old self,” i.e., the unconverted, and the “new self” or the converted. There are trials sent by God to test faith, battles with the Devil, and efforts to resist the temptations of the “world.” On a cultural level, there is an interplay between the ancient thaumaturgic traditions specific to Rudari customs such

as the Gurban ritual and the novel healing techniques represented by Pentecostal practices. This cultural exchange occurs within the context of illness, a central theme for the Rudari, linking the personal, cultural, and eschatological dimensions. On an eschatological level, the transformations brought about by Pentecostalism indirectly depict the continuous efforts of the converted Rudari to prepare themselves before divinity, striving to be “saved” and redeemed. Robbins suggests that ruptures in the personal, cultural, and eschatological dimensions appear not only at the ideological level of Pentecostalism but also in terms of everyday practices of the converts. According to him, this is due to the significance attached to ritual practices in the daily lives of converts (2010, 161). These ritual practices, termed “rituals of rupture,” encompass various processes such as the rites of deliverance, prayer, waiting, purification, conversion rituals such as baptism and speaking in tongues, as well as the rituals of spiritual warfare (Robbins 2010, 161).

In discussing the challenges posed by these ruptures in the lives of converts, a crucial concept is dualism. This notion, examined by renowned scholars of Pentecostalism, Joel Robbins and André Droogers, underscores the dual nature in the “duplex culture” of Pentecostalism, which encompasses Pentecostal beliefs and principles on the one hand, and the beliefs and principles of the converts, which they employ to construct their identity, on the other. Droogers emphasizes this dualism in analyzing the external repertoire of Pentecostal communities, highlighting how the denomination “oppos[es] the community of the saved to the sinful world” (Droogers 2014, 210).

Women between two worlds: Traditional culture and Pentecostal culture

The Gurban ritual stands out as the most deeply ingrained tradition among the Rudari community. Typically observed during Saint George’s Day or the Ascension, this ritual serves as a healing ceremony for a family member and draws the participation of both family members and neighbors. The ritual is governed by explicit rules dictating how it is carried out and the preparations required before its commencement, including spiritual purification, bodily cleanliness, and tidying of the domestic space. Central to the ritual is the sacrificial offering of a lamb dedicated to the divine, with the method of preparation—whether roasting or boiling—determined by the content of a dream. Renowned folklorist Ileana Benga provides insights into the Gurban ritual as practiced in a rural community in Oltenia, emphasizing the role of dreams in determining diagnosis and the duration of the ritual, which can extend from three years to a lifetime. Notably, the ritual involves ecstatic elements and is

conducted by specialized individuals. The Gurban ritual encompasses two cultural components, drawing from both folklore, particularly the depiction of divine figures known as “Saints,” and the Islamic culture, notably “Kurban Bayram” (2021, 75-77).

Bogdan Neagotă, an authority on Rudari studies, offers a folkloric depiction of the Gurban ritual in the Oltenia region, contextualizing it within the magico-religious domain (2021, 99-129). Conversely, Magdalena Slavkova delves into the experience of Pentecostalism from the viewpoint of a Rudari woman undergoing conversion. Her case study highlights the transformative impact of Pentecostal conversion on the lives of Rudari women in Bulgaria, often leading to familial tensions (2021b, 169-173). The case of the Rudari woman in Bulgaria is relevant for the study at hand, since Nora, one of the participants in my study, has reported tensions in relation to her grandmother, while Lila, unlike other members of the Rudari community in Filiași, still observes the Gurban ritual. Nora’s and Lila’s narratives serve as catalysts for exploring the intersection between the Gurban ritual and Pentecostal healing practices, shedding light on illness management strategies in Rudărie.

The enduring significance of the Gurban ritual is palpable in its solemn observance today, symbolizing a link between the present Rudari generation and their ancestors. Personally participating in Lila’s Gurban afforded me insights into the ritual’s protocols and its social and therapeutic dimensions. Lila, a Rudărie resident working abroad, embodies the phenomenon of labor migration, which emerged as a recurring theme through my field research, with a significant portion of the community mentioning that Rudari individuals often seek employment opportunities in France. Lila’s work takes her to Italy year-round, with periodic returns to her hometown in Rudărie during the summer months. Within the framework of migration, my objective in examining Lila’s case was to discern whether the behavior of migrants undergoes any discernible changes upon their departure for employment abroad. Lila, however, has not embraced Pentecostalism, nor did she express any inclination toward conversion during our discussions. I opted to present Lila’s case as it underscores the enduring presence of local customs, notably the Gurban ritual, amidst the backdrop of two post-socialist phenomena: international labor migration and the widespread adoption of neo-Protestant denominations following the events of 1989.

In terms of methodology, my involvement in the Gurban ceremony occurred during the second phase of my fieldwork (2016) in the Rudari neighborhood of Filiași, and I believe it played a crucial role in fostering trust within the community. It should be noted that participating in the Gurban ritual is quite challenging for someone from outside the Rudari community

due to its strict adherence to rules. However, through my participation, I gained deeper insights into how this tradition fits into Rudari culture and was able to objectively analyze various cultural aspects of the community. By the time of my second research phase in the Rudari community, I had become familiar with the Rudari and their identity struggles. They had begun to accept my presence in the neighborhood, and discussions about Rudari traditions flowed smoothly. On this occasion, a young man suggested visiting a family performing the Gurban ritual that day. Lila, who had traveled from Italy to organize the ritual for her son and husband, led the ceremony. Initially, there was some suspicion towards outsiders joining the ritual, which was reflected by the host's reserved attitude. However, having previously discussed Rudari history and traditions with the man who greeted us at the site, he and the young man facilitated my participation. Despite this, some reserve and suspicion persisted, stemming from the strictness of the ritual and the intrusion of an outsider into the intimacy of Rudari culture. The primary rule of the Gurban, emphasizing sexual abstinence before participation, was firmly emphasized by both the male host and Lila. Violating this rule could compromise the ritual's healing efficacy.

Lila's commitment to the Gurban tradition was evident in her organization of the ceremony, held twice that year on May 6 and June 9. Her adherence to these dates underscores the ritual's significance and effectiveness, as perceived by its practitioners. Lila mentioned that while some individuals organize the ritual for three consecutive years, she performs it annually for her son, a practice she has maintained for thirty years. During the Gurban ritual, prayers are offered to the "Saints," imploring their intervention for the healing of the afflicted. The prayer follows a specific structure: "O Saints, Merciful Ones, remember [the name of the afflicted person], grant them strength and vitality throughout their entire being, in their bones, their feet, their head, as they present offerings to you year after year—a plump lamb, an oven of bread, a vessel of wine. Amen." These supplications are repeated three times, with an additional plea on the third repetition, "May that which the elders prayed for come to fruition. Amen." An integral aspect of the Gurban rite involves the preparation of five loaves of bread in sand: two are inserted into the lamb's abdomen, while three are placed on the ceremonial table. In Rudari tradition, the lamb is the sacrificial animal.

The story of Lila's involvement in the Gurban ritual and her commitment intertwines with Nora's story, who turned to Pentecostalism when her son survived drowning. Residing in the Rudărie neighborhood, 38-year-old Nora engaged in a discussion with me about her devout adherence to Pentecostalism and her religious experiences. While Lila's case demonstrates the continued observance of the Gurban tradition for three decades, Nora's story highlights

the clash between local customs and Pentecostal beliefs. This conflict became apparent several years ago when Nora and her grandmother discussed the historical healing practices of the Rudari community. This dialogue exposed differences in healing approaches between Pentecostal converts among the Rudari and non-converts, with Nora recounting her efforts to persuade her grandmother of the perceived ineffectiveness of the Gurban ritual.

For Nora, like many of the Rudari, the Gurban ritual serves as a link between the present and the world of their ancestors, who followed an ancient religion known as “the Law of Moses.” A snippet from my conversation with Nora is especially illustrative in this respect:

“‘They adhered to the Law of Moses.’

‘What did that entail?’

‘It involved performing the Gurban, slaughtering a lamb.’

‘I understand.’

‘If someone fell ill.’

‘Tell me more about the Gurban.’

‘Yes, they uphold this tradition, which is sinful. They don’t grasp the significance of Jesus coming as a lamb and sacrificing himself for us. My grandmother wasn’t aware of that; I tried explaining what’s written in the Bible, but she was old and struggled with it. She observed this Gurban.’

‘Why wasn’t she aware of it?’

‘She was unaware and couldn’t understand; she identified as [Christian] Orthodox, and she performed the Gurban when she was unwell, if her foot ached. She believed it would heal her: someone takes a lamb, slaughter it, remove its organs, skewer it, and eat it. She believed in the Gurban, and said “You Saints,” but she had her own phrasing, distinct from our Bible.’

(Nora, 38, Pentecostal, Filiași)

This notion of a connection between the Gurban and Judaism resonates widely among the Rudari. Nora’s narrative also underscores the divide between Pentecostals and Christian Orthodox Rudari, with the latter still observing the Gurban. This dichotomy gives rise to a paradox, echoed not only in this case but also in the accounts of other Rudari: the Gurban ritual is believed to have roots in or shares similarities with Jewish sacrifices to the divine. Such associations elevate the significance of this observance in the eyes of the Rudari. However, among Pentecostal Rudari, this reverence for the celebration is eclipsed by Jesus Christ, regarded as the true divine entity capable of healing. Furthermore, this context, viewed through a Pentecostal lens, elucidates the distinction between the “old world” and the “new world.” The “old world” is steeped in Gurban tradition, whereas the “new world” symbolizes the discovery of the true God.

Nora's words highlight this transition from Gurban tradition to Pentecostal faith:

“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was on him,’ see ‘by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us,’ that’s why they did it during the time of Moses, they believed that if you took a sheep, sacrificed it, and offered it up in smoke to God, declaring it done, you would be healed, that’s tradition, you see, when Jesus Christ came for us, he abandoned these traditions, and said ‘I gave myself as a sheep, as a lamb.’” (Nora, 38, Pentecostal, Filiași)

When revisiting the conversation from a Pentecostal standpoint, Nora is careful to distance herself from the Gurban, accentuating its ineffectiveness compared to the powers of Christ. According to her, her son, aged around 10, was saved from drowning through divine intervention. Nora's viewpoint on the Gurban and Pentecostalism emerges most vividly from the following excerpt:

“And who provided healing during the Gurban?”
‘She remained unwell, and she died.’
‘No, but who, who was responsible for the healing?’
‘Well, there was someone.’
‘During the Gurban.’
‘There was someone, her husband, he had to maintain cleanliness, refrain from intimacy, abstain from any activity, she had to be pure to slaughter the lamb, in order to heal her from ailments like foot pain or skin lesions or various afflictions, and the enemy [Satan], tempting them into sin, said it’s enough to say ‘You Saints’, but they shouldn’t have said ‘You Saints’, they should’ve said ‘Holy Father.’”
“And who were these Saints?”
“They were nobody, I don’t know what those terms mean, because I don’t believe in such concepts, and my grandmother passed away. All my grandparents passed away, on both my father’s and mother’s side.’
‘No, I’m asking because I’m curious who they prayed to during the Gurban.’
‘Yes.’
‘To whom did they appeal?’
‘They invoked, ‘You Saints,’ that’s all I know, ‘You Saints, too pure, too enlightened, Saints,’ as for whom they were, I don’t know, who were the Saints, I don’t know.’
‘And where did these Saints derive their power from?’
‘From where, I don’t know, I know about Jesus Christ who possesses power, I know about Jesus Christ who healed my child, he rescued him from the slimy pit.’” (Nora, 38, Pentecostal, Filiași)

Nora's stance on the inefficacy of the Gurban, compared to the potency of Jesus Christ and the Bible, clashes with Lila's narrative. Both Lila and Nora turn to different belief systems for healing, each finding success in their chosen paths. Lila's faith in the Gurban stems from thirty years of practice, particularly for the sake of her son. Conversely, Nora adheres faithfully to Pentecostalism, attributing her son's rescue from drowning to Jesus Christ. Contrasting Lila's and Nora's stories sheds light on the significance of the Gurban and its relationship with Pentecostalism.

Their narratives also highlight conflicting beliefs within the Rudărie neighborhood. Nora argues for the Gurban's inefficiency compared to prayer and Pentecostal practices, while Lila, who routinely returns from Italy to Romania, to her neighborhood of Rudărie, specifically to conduct the healing Gurban ritual for her ailing husband and son. Her recurrent visits to the country for this purpose, along with her meticulous observance of the regulations surrounding this healing tradition, showcase Lila's belief in this practice. This dichotomy suggests that healing approaches within the community vary between the Gurban and Pentecostalism. Despite this, there is an interplay between these healing modalities. For instance, there are similarities in the divine signs sent to individuals for decision-making or indicating healing. In the Gurban practice, dreams serve as a signal that one must undertake the ritual. Conversely, in Pentecostal tradition, healing or directives for healing often come through dreams, which serve to reveal the will of the Lord. While dreams in the context of the Gurban inform individuals about potential healing, in Pentecostalism, they are interpreted differently, sometimes involving consultation with church elders or church specialists in dream interpretation.

The evolution of the Gurban presents a paradox. Post-1989, its practice has declined, and nowadays it is often done merely out of "love for tradition" rather than necessity. Practicing "out of affection" implies that the ritual occurs without the prerequisite of someone being ill. According to the Rudari, factors contributing to the decline in the Gurban practice include the migration of Rudari individuals abroad and conversion to Pentecostalism. However, Lila's case presents an exception, suggesting that migration and exposure to new cultures abroad do not always result in a disconnection from old local traditions. Typically, globalization tends to uproot individuals from their cultural heritage, but in Lila's case, this was not the case. Furthermore, her commitment to the Gurban ritual for her husband and son underscores her belief in its efficacy. Lila's dedication also plays a role in preserving local traditions by setting an example for the community to follow.

In conclusion, Lila and Nora's experiences illustrate how the Rudari approach illness from both Pentecostal and Gurban perspectives. While Pentecostalism rejects the Gurban, local Christian Orthodox beliefs tolerate it.

Both narratives offer insights into illness management typologies. Despite lacking a conversion narrative, Lila's commitment to the Gurban mirrors Nora's faith in Pentecostal practices.

Body, Pentecostalism, and family

In the context of Pentecostal conversions, Rudari women frequently delve into discussions concerning the body. Often, the focus lies on an ailing body, either bewitched or subjected to trials during the conversion journey. Candy Gunther Brown, whose research focuses on corporeal dimensions, coined the term "the body's role in a spirit-centered cosmology" (2011, 12). In Rudari cosmology, a steadfast belief in spirits, both benevolent and malevolent, has endured, encompassing superstitions, witchcraft rituals, spells, incantations, and notably, the Gurban ritual. In the Rudari worldview, bodily suffering prompts appeals to supernatural forces for relief. Moreover, the body serves as a conduit, linking the Rudari's traditional cosmology to the Pentecostal cosmology they have embraced.

From a Pentecostal standpoint, the body assumes significance as an intermediary for divine signs. Frequently, these signs manifest as illnesses, symbolic of a spiritual journey that individuals must traverse. Illness is a sign, and the process of healing symbolizes the struggle against sin and the cooperative effort with God to overcome it. Many Pentecostal Rudari recount illnesses as tests of faith sent by God, contrasting with the belief that illnesses stem from the devil. The body also has an important function for the Rudari because it receives divine signs both pre- and post-conversion. More specifically, it becomes a battleground before conversion and during conversion, yet in most cases, it is pre-conversion that the Rudari individual has a liminal experience, usually illness, which triggers the religious transformation.

The body is likened to a sanctuary requiring care akin to nurturing the soul. Rehabilitation from the effects of alcohol and smoking is necessary, underscoring Pentecostal doctrine prioritizing the soul's salvation. If the soul repents before God, salvation and entry into heaven are guaranteed. The body requires modest sustenance and attire, adhering to behavioral and dress code practices in line with Pentecostalism. Additionally, the body serves as the vessel for verbal and non-verbal interactions with the world, simultaneously housing demons and receiving the Holy Spirit—a paradoxical reflection of Pentecostal dualism, which manifests throughout the convert's life.

Dreams often feature prominently in Pentecostal Rudari narratives, particularly regarding the body. Directly associated with illness is the occurrence of healing through dreams, a phenomenon I came across among Pentecostal

Rudari. In a specific instance, Dominica, a 68-year-old Pentecostal woman, recounts how God appeared to her in the hospital during the night in a dream and cured the ailment in her throat. She vividly describes Jesus approaching her “with a scalpel and tweezers” to facilitate her healing. This narrative exemplifies the attribute frequently mentioned by the Rudari in their accounts of healing, portraying God as the ultimate physician.

Raluca Bianca Roman’s study within the Roma (Kaale) community in Finland sheds light on this corporeal aspect of conversion, elucidating phenomena such as individual transformation, the body’s significance post-conversion, and the manner in which the convert navigates relationships within the community and in relation to non-converts (2017, 256-273). In the Kaale community, Pentecostalism plays a role in standardizing and regulating both body and spirit (Roman 2017, 263). Similarly, among Pentecostal Rudari, their denomination fosters a standardization of both body and spirit, with women playing a significant role in transitioning elements from the old spiritual framework to the new Pentecostal one. Specifically, they take the lead in facilitating communication between these two frameworks, adapting as they progress and establishing connections between traditional bodily experiences and those of Pentecostalism. They become experts in the informal Pentecostal practices.

It is interesting to see how the Pentecostal Rudari approach their bodies and their experiences through a Pentecostal lens. This analysis is built upon the notion that “examining believers’ bodily experiences allows us to gain insight into the dynamics of becoming and remaining a religious convert. Exploring how converts learn to read and experience their bodies, which involves feelings of doubt and success, provides tools to understand the appeal and limits of religious movements in our time” (Klaver & van de Kamp 2011, 424). The practice of understanding the body was already present through rituals such as the Gurban or superstitions the likes of interpreting witchcraft practices. While I will not delve into the phenomenon of witchcraft in this analysis due to its complexity, elements of it surface in Rudari narratives as origins of illness or attempts at healing. This acknowledgment helps paint a broader and more comprehensive picture of the cosmological intersections within the Rudari universe. The body emerges as a recurring theme for Rudari when discussing illness and its significance. Illness and the body intersect, but the process of understanding one’s corporeality and deciphering its meanings through signs received from traditions (e.g., from the “Saints”) or from the Christian Orthodox faith tradition has made the transition to Pentecostal interpretation of the body intriguing. Why? Because illness, the body, and their meanings held significance in traditional Rudari culture even before conversion, thereby establishing a knowledge base for the relationship between the individual and their body.

Healing holds prominence in Pentecostalism, as does the individual endowed with the gift of healing. Nonetheless, Rudari women should not be deemed meritorious only if they perform miracles or heal according to the formal dictates of the church. Women in Rudărie ought to be acknowledged for their roles as interpreters, guides, therapists, and facilitators of the transition between local culture and the Gurban. They should not be marginalized or rendered formally invisible, as their contributions are vital to the social fabric of the community. They bolster the emotional well-being of families during their own conversions and those of other members, navigate interactions with the “world” of the unconverted, elucidate the phenomenon of conversion, and serve as moral beacons within both their families and the community. The emotional aspect is pivotal in the conversion process, with women displaying heightened sensitivity to it compared to men and demonstrating an aptitude for distinguishing between “clean” and “unclean spirits” (Slavkova 2021a, 263-264). Rudari women embody this aspect, not only detecting these forces but also adeptly interpreting them. They have operationalized such concepts, displaying a willingness to engage in detailed discussions on the subject owing to their experiences with informal medicine even prior to conversion. Furthermore, during the process of receiving the Holy Spirit, women often exhibit greater fervor than men and in certain cases even regard God as their “husband” (Slavkova 2021a, 263-264), which represents a pinnacle point in the outcome of conversion.

In Slavkova’s study on Roma women in Bulgaria, she highlights how the church imposed certain restrictions on women, such as refraining from singing certain folk songs, giving up dancing, avoiding certain foods cooked during Christian Orthodox and Islamic holidays, or abstaining from “kurban soup” (2021a, 265). Among Rudari women from Filiași, there is a fond recollection of their pre-conversion “worldly life,” which included activities such as going to the movies, as exemplified by Melisa. Another scenario involves a woman who finds that influences from the non-converted world can hinder conversion. She expressed a desire to participate in the festivities and have fun like the “worldly people” at her son’s wedding. Here, we see a situation where a potential convert is torn between family obligations and societal expectations.

The desire to break free from the “worldly life” and the routines that contradict Pentecostal principles often emerges in conversion stories. This is evident in Melisa’s case, who had a passion for cinematography. Melisa, a middle-aged woman from Rudărie, experienced crises and illnesses, much like Nora and Lila. She sought medical help for her illness, but her focus was supporting her husband’s conversion. Before his conversion, her husband indulged in drinking and smoking, common behaviors among non-converted men. The turning point for Melisa was when their children fell ill. She interpreted this

as a sign from God urging her husband to convert. Despite her encouragement, he initially refused. However, when he fell ill himself shortly after, a pivotal moment appeared. Melisa interpreted it as a clear sign for him to convert and break the cycle of illness in their family. Despite his initial reluctance, her husband eventually converted, influenced by the illness and Melisa's guidance. Alongside supporting his conversion, Melisa helped him transition from his old social circles, where he exhibited traditional masculine behaviors, to the new social norms dictated by Pentecostalism.

Elizabeth Brusco, a specialist in analyzing gender relations in Pentecostalism, conducted research on this topic in South America. A quote from one of her contributions analyzes the dynamics of machismo and the role of women in the family, which also sheds light on the nuances of gender relations in Rudărie:

“[M]en often state in their testimonies that they were led to convert as the result of having been healed of an illness. Machista culture, with its premium on individual independence and physical prowess, makes no provisions for illness, and in fact physical disability is anathema to it. When a man gets sick he must withdraw from his usual activities and return home so that his wife (or other female relative) can nurse him. He becomes dependent on his wife and family in a way that would be unthinkable if he were well. He is also physically suffering, and his fear of what is going to happen to him and his dependence on his wife and family combine to render him uncharacteristically receptive to their counsel. If his wife has already converted she is armed with the logic of the church to argue that his illness is the result of his *vicios* (vices) and that only by giving them up will he be well again. The spectacular aspects of evangelical worship (e.g., speaking in tongues and other displays of ecstatic worship) provide further fuel to convince him of the power of the new religion.” (2010, 89-90)

Melisa interpreted her children's illness as a consequence of her husband's reluctance to attend the Pentecostal church. The situation took a turn when her husband fell ill himself. Following this event, he gave up his vices and started attending the Pentecostal church. Melisa played a pivotal role in incorporating the church's teachings into how she explained her husband's illness to him and its origin. Consequently, she became a decisive factor in his conversion to Pentecostalism. The couple underwent baptism and conversion on the same day. In this instance, Melisa served as the female intermediary figure in the Rudari man's conversion journey. This enabled the Rudari woman to take on the role of guiding conversion both within the church and the family.

Within the family dynamics, Melisa became a symbol of her husband's departure from his machismo.

Conclusions

Both Lila and Melisa take a keen interest in the well-being of their families, prioritizing the protection of their children and husbands. This shared commitment is evident throughout their life stories. Both women actively address illness and corporeality through informal means, while also standing up against the threats posed by illness. Lila's case stands out due to the rarity of the Gurban ritual celebration within the community. Nonetheless, her perseverance and dedication to the ritual, performed for the benefit of her family, underscore the practice's significance despite its decline. Regarding the corporal dimension, discussions involving both men and women occurred, with women often providing clearer articulations, shedding light on the new interpretations of the body following conversion to Pentecostalism. The individual's relationship with their body within the Pentecostal framework exhibits both continuities and discontinuities within the locally framed spiritual phenomenology. This syncretism presents an intriguing opportunity for women to assert themselves in decoding and mediating these phenomena based on their experiences.

The family serves as the primary arena for gender transformations, encompassing interactions between mothers and children, husbands and wives. Field data show that women wield informal influence over family affairs, with cases such as those of Lila and Nora testifying to their active involvement in maintaining family health. Similarly, Melisa consistently prioritizes her family's well-being. In the context of conversions, Rudari women often engage with corporeality and healing in the dialogue between Gurban and Pentecostalism. Women predominantly narrate their conversion experiences as journeys of bodily and thaumaturgic self-awareness, which also manifest in the way in which they relate to the world. Although men also experience self-awareness during conversion, women tend to recall it in more intricate detail, emphasizing elements such as dreams interpreted through a Pentecostal lens and conversion signs. They bridge the gap between local traditions and Pentecostalism, while their understanding of the body and illness facilitates the conversion process for men. The case studies represented by Lila, Nora, and Melisa serve as a consistent narrative highlighting the pivotal role of women within the community. While men often hold patriarchal roles within the family unit, the domain of illness and corporeality is predominantly shaped by women.

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INTERVIEW

ENTRETIEN AVEC ALEXANDRE GEFEN (CNRS – Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – ENS)

Despina JDERU¹



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¹ **Despina JDERU** est l'auteure d'une thèse qui porte sur l'imaginaire du deuil dans la littérature française de l'extrême-contemporain, ayant poursuivi ses recherches à l'Université de Bucarest en Roumanie et à l'Université de Fribourg en Suisse. Elle s'intéresse principalement à la théorie littéraire appliquée à littérature française contemporaine et à la littérature mondiale. Elle a publié de nombreux articles sur l'expression du deuil dans le récit français contemporain et a donné plusieurs conférences aux universités Sorbonne, Harvard, Princeton, etc. Ses publications récentes comptent un entretien avec David Damrosch (Université de Harvard) dans la revue *Colloquium Helveticum. Cahiers suisses de littérature générale et comparée* (52/2023) et un chapitre d'ouvrage intitulé « Ne pas dire Deuil. C'est trop psychanalytique. Le récit de deuil au carrefour des émotions » dans le volume collectif *Explorations cognitivistes de la théorie et la fiction littéraires* (Hermann : 2023). L'entretien a comme point de départ deux conférences données récemment par Alexandre Gefen : une première conférence à l'Université de Bucarest, « Écriture et société : l'exemple de la littérature française contemporaine », et une deuxième à l'Université de Szeged, « Les limites de l'empathie ». Il a été publié en roumain, à la une, dans la revue culturelle *Observator Cultural*, nr. 1194, février 2024, pp. 11-13. [<https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/literatura-contemporana-nu-se-multumeste-doar-sa-descrie-realul-intr-o-maniera-pasiva/>] Email : despina.jderu@litere.unibuc.ro.



Alexandre GEFEN est Directeur de recherche CNRS au sein de l'unité Théorie et histoire des arts et des littératures de la modernité (THALIM, CNRS/Université Sorbonne Nouvelle — Paris 3- ENS), théoricien et historien des idées et de la littérature. Il est l'auteur de nombreux articles et essais portant notamment sur la culture, la littérature contemporaine et la théorie littéraire. À travers ses études, il a renouvelé le champ des études littéraires : écritures numériques, amateurs, littérature populaire, extension générique (non-fiction, écritures transpersonnelles, nouveaux réalismes littéraires), extension thématique par l'inclusion de problématiques contemporaines comme la question du trauma et de la réparation. Dans les essais publiés, il s'attache à observer les transformations de l'idée de littérature et à renouveler l'épistémologie des études littéraires en portant notamment intérêt aux sciences cognitives. Fondateur de Fabula.org, Alexandre Gefen s'intéresse également aux Humanités numériques, à travers des recherches qui portent sur le web scientifique, la philologie numérique et ses enjeux épistémologiques, les cultures numériques et les intelligences artificielles.

Parmi ses dernières publications : avec Sandra Laugier, *Le Pouvoir des liens faibles*, (CNRS éditions : 2002), *Territoires de la non-fiction* (Brill : 2020), avec Olivier Bessard-Banquy et Sylvie Ducas, *Best-sellers. L'industrie du succès* (Armand Colin : 2021), *L'idée de littérature. De l'art pour l'art aux écritures d'intervention* (Corti : 2021), *La littérature est une affaire politique* (L'Observatoire : 2022), avec G. Crozet, *La littérature, une infographie*, (CNRS éditions : 2022), *Créativités Artificielles* (Les Presses du réel : 2023), *Vivre avec ChatGPT* (L'Observatoire : 2023), *Un monde commun. Le savoir des sciences humaines et sociales* (CNRS éditions : 2023).

Despina JDERU : Cher Alexandre Gefen, vous êtes spécialiste en théorie littéraire appliquée à la littérature française contemporaine, mais aussi critique littéraire. La relation entre littérature et société, compte tenu notamment de l'influence qu'exercent les dynamiques sociétales sur l'évolution de la littérature française, n'est pas inédite. Elle a constamment articulé la dynamique de la littérature française au fil des siècles, et de cette relation ont découlé des préoccupations, des tensions et des attitudes théoriques enrichissantes. En quels termes repensez-vous, dans les études consacrées à la littérature française, l'attention que les écrivains français contemporains portent aux problèmes sociaux ? Ces préoccupations sont nuancées et mises en perspective par une présence publique très importante des écrivains dans les forums, débats et émissions littéraires. Pourquoi pensez-vous que la relation des écrivains avec la société a subi une transformation si significative et importante qu'elle semble être devenue leur principale préoccupation ?

Alexandre GEFEN : L'engagement politique des écrivains dans les années 50 jusqu'aux années 60 était très marqué par une position idéologique pour des partis qui a été suivie par une réaction de retour à la forme pure du nouveau

roman et à des écritures personnelles et autobiographiques, mais on constate à partir de la fin du XX^e siècle une attention croissante des écrivains à l'égard des problématiques sociales comme l'état des territoires, la désindustrialisation, la question du travail, les nouveaux rapports de force économique. Le recours au roman aussi bien que le recours aux documents ou enquêtes de terrain sont bien des pratiques que les écrivains français contemporains ont déployés pour cartographier ou ausculter, analyser la société aussi bien que le font les géographes et les sociologues ? C'est au point que l'on a avancé que Nicolas Mathieu et Michel Houellebecq avaient anticipé la crise des gilets jaunes en s'intéressant à des zones périurbaines et qu'ils avaient un regard particulièrement aigu sur certaines questions mal représentées médiatiquement.

Despina JDERU : Outre sa rapidité de réaction, son vif intérêt, mais aussi sa capacité à s'impliquer et à porter à l'attention des lecteurs des enjeux contemporains, passés sous silence ou restés, pour diverses raisons, dans l'ombre, la littérature contemporaine semble dévoiler une autre promesse que l'on ne peut ni ignorer ni taire : celle de réparer. En 2017, vous avez publié aux Éditions José Corti, un essai intitulé *Réparer le monde. La littérature française face au XXI^e siècle*. Comment cerner cette promesse que semble nous faire la littérature sans chercher à tout prix à saisir sa dimension esthétique, mais aussi sans tomber dans une sorte de confiance absolue envers cette littérature « d'intervention » ?

Alexandre GEFEN : J'ai le sentiment que la littérature contemporaine ne se contente pas de décrire passivement le réel, de l'enregistrer, d'arriver après le réel comme on aurait pu le croire en disant que le social résonnait dans la représentation littéraire. Je crois que la littérature française contemporaine va aller plus loin que cela, elle va essayer de tisser des ponts, de reconstituer des communautés, de réfléchir à des projets politiques, d'accompagner les individus en leur rendant une dignité, de leur redonner une place dans le discours social et de ce point de vue-là, elle fait donc plus que décrire en fait, elle agit. Et cette forme d'action de la littérature j'ai proposé de la qualifier de « réparation » dans un contexte historique où la France a été très, très marquée par des problèmes économiques depuis une cinquantaine d'années, une inquiétude culturelle, le sentiment d'avoir perdu sa place dans la chaîne des nations, sa place internationale. Donc beaucoup, beaucoup d'inquiétudes nées avec les années 80, accentuées par un libéralisme de plus en plus prégnant qui va demander aux individus une adaptation à des conditions de travail, à des conditions de vie nouvelles. J'ai l'impression que la littérature en a fait le diagnostic, mais qu'elle va proposer à travers la socialité littéraire, à travers le discours littéraire un accompagnement et une intervention dans l'espace public.

Despina JDERU : Qu'apporte la littérature en plus d'autres discours qui auraient le potentiel de dénoncer et de souligner des déséquilibres, des tensions ou des problèmes ? Je pense qu'on peut dire que le roman est dépassé comme genre littéraire dans le champ de la littérature française contemporaine.

Alexandre GEFEN : Le roman est essentiel pour traduire les problématiques qui traversent les sociétés modernes depuis Balzac, et même plus loin, depuis Marivaux. Comme le dit Georg Lukács, le roman va se faire « la tragédie d'un monde sans Dieu » pour en penser les questionnements. Des auteurs comme Aurélien Bellanger ou Michel Houellebecq participent de cette tradition romanesque centrée sur le problème de l'individu dans des récits qui ont souvent une dimension initiatique. Mais le roman n'est pas la seule forme déployée pour rendre compte du monde social. L'enquête de terrain qui va procéder à la manière de l'ethnologie, l'enquête sociale qui va faire un diagnostic comme la sociologie, celle que pratique Anne Ernaux par exemple, les formes variées de documentation par la non-fiction sont tout à fait importantes dans le champ contemporain. Elle évite effectivement le danger d'héroïser ou d'imposer une grille de lecture au monde social, elle se contente de la décrire et ces philosophies de la description sont parfaitement intéressantes dans le champ contemporain où l'on considère que déjà décrire c'est beaucoup. Et c'est l'activité fondamentale de l'écrivain.

Despina JDERU : Je voudrais m'arrêter à ce dernier mot que vous venez de prononcer : écrivain. Si l'on réfléchit au statut de l'écrivain contemporain qui a été assujéti à des transformations nombreuses et très significatives, on s'arrêtera inévitablement aux quelques romans qui ont suscité maintes critiques et débats dans l'espace littéraire français, qui ne sont pas écrits par des écrivains, mais par ceux qui deviennent écrivains par le fait qu'ils les ont écrits. Je pense à ceux qui deviennent écrivains en écrivant un roman dans lequel ils dénoncent et décrivent les abus qu'ils ont subis, les traumatismes dont ils ont été victimes et les souffrances qui les ont accompagnés. Deux exemples que nous avons évoqués récemment : Vanessa Springora avec *Le Consentement* ou Camille Kouchner avec *La Familia grande*.

Alexandre GEFEN : On peut naître à la littérature par une question personnelle et c'est peut-être une autre filière que le roman social que ce roman du trauma qui est une autre forme importante de la littérature contemporaine et effectivement ce roman du trauma s'invente en se faisant. Il n'a pas de forme prédéfinie contrairement au romanesque qui demande une sorte de métier, un savoir-faire du narrateur de récit. Le roman du trauma, le roman de l'expérience dite à la première personne très souvent d'ailleurs ce n'est pas un roman, mais c'est un

récit, et lui a tout à fait le droit d'hésiter, de chercher sa forme. C'est le cas d'un roman qui a beaucoup fait parler de lui à la rentrée littéraire, *Triste tigre* de Neige Sinno, sur l'inceste, qui est un récit qui cherche et qui réfléchit à la bonne manière de faire face à une expérience traumatisante. Et qui est un roman largement métalittéraire, qui réfléchit à la manière dont la littérature doit se positionner par rapport à une expérience personnelle.

Despina JDERU : Dans ce cas, l'auteur est une écrivaine ayant une expérience et une activité littéraires très riches.

Alexandre GEFEN : La question est de savoir qu'est-ce que c'est qu'un écrivain est complexe. Il n'y a pas une unique manière d'être un écrivain : on peut l'être par vocation ou par profession.

Despina JDERU : Ou par moment. Il peut arriver qu'un écrivain n'écrive qu'un seul livre puis s'arrête.

Alexandre GEFEN : Les modèles, les visions de l'écrivain se sont diversifiées, on a encore la vision romantique de l'écrivain inspiré, qui ne peut faire rien d'autre que la littérature, mais il y a d'autre part des romanciers qui, eux, se situent du côté de l'efficacité, d'un positionnement dans le champ de la littérature de métier, qui font des *best-sellers* et qui gagnent de l'argent. D'un côté, vous avez l'écrivain identifié à son œuvre, Éric Reinhardt par exemple, qui ne peut faire qu'écrire et d'un autre côté on aura Éric-Emmanuel Schmit qui lui est un faiseur. On a une cartographie très variée des types d'écrivains dans le champ de la littérature contemporaine : il faut en souligner la diversité, la superposition de versions très différentes de ce que c'est que la littérature : entre celui qui veut imposer une radicalité politique par la radicalité de la forme et celui qui veut simplement raconter l'histoire en étant le plus accessible, entre celui qui considère que la littérature est un travail quasiment scientifique pour explorer le monde et documenter par exemple la crise écologique et l'écrivain qui choisit des formes plus lyriques ou plus épiques. On a vraiment des possibilités très variées et je crois que c'est d'abord de cette diversité que l'on doit rendre compte.

Despina JDERU : Cette idée m'amène à la question suivante qui rassemble l'orientation que vous avez exploitée dans le colloque, mais aussi les idées avancées dans l'étude que vous avez consacrée à la dimension politique de la littérature, *La littérature est une affaire politique*. L'une des réflexions théoriques les plus débattues dans l'espace littéraire français concerne l'attachement politique et engageant de la littérature contemporaine. Comment pensez-vous que nous prévoyons concilier littérature et politique, si une telle compréhension existe ?

Alexandre GEFEN : La politique de la littérature en France est une politique qui se pense très différemment de l'engagement militant, du livre à thèse. Elle est celle d'un écrivain qui est vecteur d'une démocratie par l'échange de la parole, celle d'une transmission des valeurs républicaines par la lecture, plutôt qu'un écrivain qui serait partisan. On est dans une version politique qui ne ressemble pas à l'époque de l'affrontement de grands blocs, mais qui est plutôt une manière de faire comprendre l'altérité, le bon fonctionnement de la société, la complémentarité des voix, d'orchestrer finalement les dissonances et cela c'est le type de politique que la littérature fait. Si elle défend des causes, ce sont des causes qui sont moins idéologiques, par exemple la cause écologique ou la cause féministes. C'est de la politique comprise au sens très large du terme.

Despina JDERU : Vous avez également une activité très riche dans l'espace anglo-saxon, à travers les conférences que vous animez dans les universités et les projets dans lesquels vous êtes impliqué. Vous êtes également un spécialiste de la littérature mondiale, dont les deux variantes circulent dans l'espace français : la littérature mondiale et la littérature-monde. Dans une récente interview que j'ai menée avec David Damrosch, l'universitaire et historien américain a fait une remarque sur la littérature mondiale à laquelle j'ai longuement réfléchi, à savoir que le plus grand mérite de la littérature mondiale est de ne pas penser la littérature comme un objet esthétique fermé et détaché de la réalité, qui existe en soi et pour soi, mais qui s'articule par un engagement politique et social. Ce constat fait écho à ce qui se passe aujourd'hui dans l'espace littéraire français, ce qui m'incite à vous poser la question suivante. À l'occasion des séjours de recherche que vous avez effectués dans des universités anglo-saxonnes, avez-vous remarqué, peut-être, des points de communication entre ce qui se passe en France, dans le domaine de la littérature française, et d'autres littératures, d'autres espaces culturels ?

Alexandre GEFEN : J'ai le sentiment que ces passions sociales, cette volonté de produire des formes différentes de justice dont une justice épistémique, culturelle ou mémorielle sont très présentes dans le roman anglo-saxon qui a fait suite au postmodernisme. De ce point de vue-là, les jeunes auteurs contemporains me semblent tout à fait proches des écrivains français avec peut-être plus de liberté à réinventer les outils romanesques alors que la France a cultivé une sorte de purisme qui continue s'exercer et des scrupules à l'égard du roman et de la fiction que les Anglo-saxons n'ont pas.

Despina JDERU : Nous pouvons encore penser la littérature en dehors de cet engagement, ou même s'il s'agit d'un engagement esthétique dominant, disons que nous avons affaire à un roman qui n'est performatif à aucun niveau, mais poursuit avec insistance et explicitement un désir esthétique, il y a toujours un engagement dans ce cas aussi ?

Alexandre GEFEN : Mon rôle est d'observer la manière dont les gens définissent la littérature. Même si un texte se veut très autonome, on peut en faire un usage pédagogique pour permettre de comprendre le monde. Jacques Rancière a essayé de montrer que des ouvrages qui se situent vraiment du côté de la proposition esthétique pure faisaient aussi de la politique et que donc le pouvoir exercé sur les sensibilités : le pouvoir de donner un statut artistique à n'importe quel objet est une capacité démocratique fondamentale.

Despina JDERU : Dans l'étude que vous avez consacrée à cette question, *L'idée de littérature. De l'art pour l'art aux écritures d'intervention*, vous proposez une histoire de la littérature et nous disions juste avant qu'il y ait certaines attitudes et transformations des concepts littéraires et de l'écrivain qui reviennent inévitablement dans notre contemporanéité. Dans cette histoire de l'évolution et de la transformation de la littérature, quel aspect vous a le plus surpris en tant que théoricien et observateur de la littérature, et pensez-vous qu'il y a des moments cycliques spécifiques qui font partie de la dynamique de la littérature et qui ne devraient pas nous surprendre ?

Alexandre GEFEN : Le grand critique roumain Adrian Marino a fait une biographie de l'idée de littérature, il a traité la littérature comme la vie de quelqu'un, de manière organique. Malheureusement, ce n'est pas traduit en français, et de cet essai je n'ai qu'une petite partie traduite en anglais. Ce que j'ai voulu faire c'est aussi « la vie et la mort » du concept de littérature : sa naissance au XIX^e dans le cadre d'une spécialisation de l'écrivain par rapport à l'historien et à l'intellectuel et puis à la fin du XX^e siècle après le grand geste de la modernité, l'extension du champ de la littérature à des pratiques sociales relationnelles artistiques variées et le fait que de très nombreux amateurs se soient mis à écrire contribue à donner une vision beaucoup plus large du mot de littérature, au point qu'on a pu parler d'une mort de la littérature à partir des années 90. S'il n'y a pas de mort de la littérature, il y a sans doute une transformation de la notion de littérature, en tout cas dans une partie du champ.

Despina JDERU : Je pense à l'image de l'auteur, dont on parle beaucoup aujourd'hui par rapport aux textes de Roland Barthes, qui écrivait sur la mort de l'auteur à un moment de l'histoire où l'auteur était, comme aujourd'hui, très présent.

Pensez-vous qu'on puisse faire une sorte de prédiction et anticiper que cet excès de présence de l'auteur soit remplacé à l'avenir par son désir de s'abandonner au texte et de s'isoler ?

Alexandre GEFEN : La mort de l'auteur est un vieux fantasme barthesien, mais c'est en fait beaucoup plus ancien. On peut le faire remonter à la disparition élocutoire du poète rêvée par Mallarmé où le langage parlerait tout seul ou on peut aller plus loin et le faire remonter à des théories de l'inspiration dans lesquelles l'auteur serait simplement le lieu par lequel une divinité psychopompe transmettait un message. Il y a toujours une tension entre un auteur incarné et dont le travail naîtrait de l'autobiographique et du personnel et qui serait totalement identifié à son œuvre et un auteur qui est vu comme le simple passage comme un simple véhicule malgré lui de grandes problématiques qui le traversent. C'est une vieille question, le débat se trouve déjà dans Platon qui évoque à la fois le travail artisanal de l'écrivain et la manière dont l'écrivain est dépossédé par la parole divine qu'il ne fait que transmettre.

Despina JDERU : Vous avez évoqué et développé dans la conférence que vous avez donnée à Bucarest en novembre 2023 le concept de « littérature relationnelle ». Pourriez-vous expliquer ce concept à nos lecteurs ?

Alexandre GEFEN : C'est un concept qui vient de la manière dont on a pu parler d'art relationnel à partir des années 2000, c'est-à-dire un art dans lequel le plasticien ou l'artiste essaye de travailler et de co-construire avec le public. Cette co-construction de l'art et assez ancienne dans l'histoire des arts plastiques et des performances, on fait des performances avec le public et on essaye d'établir un certain type de relations. Par exemple Marina Abramović qui s'assoit et qui regarde dans les yeux les gens qui viennent la voir, c'est une performance relationnelle. J'ai essayé de voir si le concept n'était pas aussi intéressant pour penser la manière dont la littérature contemporaine se joue en permanence en relation avec le lecteur à travers des rencontres, des dialogues, des échanges. Cela m'a permis aussi de réfléchir à la manière dont toute la littérature numérique est une littérature qui s'adresse directement à ses lecteurs, dans laquelle on interagit avec les lecteurs. Et plus largement je me suis intéressée à la manière dont la littérature essayait maintenant d'avoir comme valeur la production d'une relation à soi et d'une relation à l'autre. Ces sont des discours très fréquents que l'on retrouve sous la plume des écrivains comme des critiques, la littérature est ce qui permet de se retrouver, de se comprendre et c'est aussi ce qui permet de se lier aux autres parce qu'à travers l'empathie, à travers la

peinture de l'altérité, l'écrivain nous permet d'être plus proche de celui qui est loin. Et cela c'est très important dans des sociétés très individualistes, très fluides, dans lesquelles les liens sociaux et de communication sont ténus.

Despina JDERU : La dynamique de la littérature contemporaine semble très efficace, notamment en raison de la mission dont elle est dotée. Mais il me semble que cela favorise aussi une forme de victimisation, peut-être même exacerbée de l'écrivain français contemporain qui s'expose constamment dans l'espace littéraire et en dehors de celui-ci.

Alexandre GEFEN : Je crois que l'on peut parler d'une victimisation générale de la société. Les gens tentent à se définir par leurs vulnérabilités et effectivement dans la littérature la question de la victime a au fond remplacé celle du héros. On s'intéresse moins à l'héroïsme en soi qu'à la manière dont les victimes vont devenir agissantes. C'est un grand thème : donner de la puissance aux victimes et les faire sortir de leur condition passive : la littérature est supposée de nous aider à comprendre comment on a été victime de quelque chose, découvrir notre trauma et comment nous pouvons nous en sortir. C'est en tout cas une des conditions fortes de la littérature française contemporaine quoi qu'on pense de cette obsession pour la violence subie.

Despina JDERU : Vous avez récemment écrit et publié une étude qui a reçu un accueil très enthousiaste et beaucoup d'intérêt intitulé *Vivre avec ChatGPT : Séduire, penser, créer, se cultiver, s'enrichir* qui est unique comme sujet de recherche et comme approche. Comment avez-vous découvert ChatGPT et pourquoi un spécialiste de la théorie littéraire et de la littérature s'intéresse-t-il à l'IA et à cet outil en particulier ?

Alexandre GEFEN : Ma génération s'intéresse à des problèmes éthiques et politiques de la littérature, comme vous l'avez dit, mais elle a connu le développement du numérique et la transition du numérique. Moi je suis né avec l'informatique, à vingt-cinq ans j'ai développé *Fabula* et la question des humanités numériques – c'est-à-dire des manières d'analyser la littérature d'un point de vue quantitatif, de l'éditer et de l'analyser à distance, comme le dit son grand spécialiste, Franco Moretti – a été fondamentale dans mon approche et j'ai mené les deux parcours en parallèle. Et c'est précisément dans le laboratoire de Franco Moretti à Stanford que j'ai découvert les premiers outils d'analyse du langage qui, quelques années après, donneront lieu aux modèles de langage, ce que l'on appelle *large language models* dont ChatGPT. J'ai donc suivi depuis le début l'invention des outils d'apprentissage profond qui permet d'analyser et de produire du langage et lorsque ChatGPT est arrivé pour le grand public cela faisait des années que j'utilisais déjà des modèles de langage et je connais leurs pouvoirs. J'ai donc accompagné, à la demande de mon éditeur, l'ouverture du ChatGPT au grand

public par un petit essai qui est une réflexion philosophique sur cet outil. J'essaie d'expliquer comme cela fonctionne, qu'est-ce que l'on peut faire, quels en sont les limites. C'est un essai qui a pas mal de succès en France et qui vient d'être traduit en italien. Cela m'a beaucoup amusé d'avoir ce questionnement parallèle. D'ailleurs, dans le travail sur ChatGPT je parle beaucoup des usages de ChatGPT pour écrire des livres et des romans et je parle aussi de la question de la disparition de l'auteur de manière amusante comme d'une seconde mort de l'auteur, après la première mort de l'auteur de Roland Barthes.

Despina JDERU : Pouvons-nous, en tant que lecteurs, faire appel à ChatGPT, ou cet outil peut-il, dans une certaine mesure, nous aider à comprendre la littérature ? Peut-il devenir un outil fiable pour les lecteurs ?

Alexandre GEFEN : Pour les auteurs, beaucoup rêvent de faire un best-seller avec ChatGPT, mais cela ne marche pas. On peut faire écrire quelques idées, quelques passages à ChatGPT de manière tout à fait intéressante. On peut l'entraîner à imiter le style de l'auteur, à choisir un registre, le tragique ou pathétique plutôt qu'un autre. On peut faire des choses assez amusantes qui restent limitées parce que ChatGPT ne peut produire aucun contenu offensant, violent ou un roman sans violence cela n'existe pas. Ce sont vraiment des limites à ce qu'on peut faire avec ChatGPT. Ensuite, comme lecteur, ChatGPT traduit très bien, explique très bien les choses que l'on ne peut pas comprendre. Il peut dans certains cas devenir un lecteur-auteur, quelqu'un qui va reprendre un passage et transformer un texte, il peut vous apprendre à écrire à la manière d'un texte que vous êtes en train de lire, pourquoi pas. Les outils pour la lecture peuvent être assez intéressants, peuvent vous aider à trouver des textes similaires aussi. C'est toute une gamme de lectures augmentées qui pourraient naître avec ce modèle de langage.

Despina JDERU : Dans l'essai que vous avez écrit, vous demandez à un moment donné à ChatGPT d'écrire un éloge funèbre à l'occasion de votre future disparition. ChatGPT écrit un discours très beau et nuancé, un éloge de votre existence professionnelle et personnelle. J'ai été particulièrement frappée par ce paragraphe et je me demande si un tel outil utilisé par les masses ne nuit pas directement et négativement à notre créativité et notre imagination.

Alexandre GEFEN : Il y a deux problèmes. D'abord, un problème qui tient au fait que ChatGPT était aligné, pour employer un mot du langage informatique, ce qui veut dire que l'on a mis en place des valeurs pour qu'il n'y ait pas de contenu relevant de la discrimination et du racisme, donc ChatGPT a une sorte de positivité constante. Cette positivité au fond est associée aussi à toute une représentation du monde qui est une représentation du monde américain avec

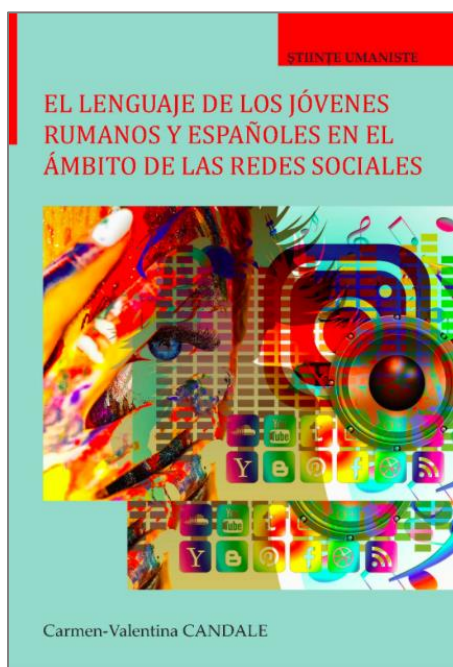
des valeurs parfois un peu stéréotypées. Effectivement il y a un danger de stéréotyper nos imaginaires, de les aligner nous-mêmes sur des imaginaires américains ou des imaginaires d'une positivité un peu banale, de *feel good*, et ChatGPT est très consensuel, on peut dire qu'il est même *woke* dans certains aspects. Ensuite il y a un deuxième problème, c'est le problème de notre rapport à l'outil. L'outil peut nous fléchir et peut limiter notre imagination, et par ailleurs le fait de nous appuyer en permanence sur un outil peut nous dispenser d'avoir un entraînement naturel. C'est là le plus grand problème dont on devrait parler plus souvent à propos de ces outils, ce n'est pas qu'ils puissent prendre le contrôle du monde et détruire l'espèce humaine, mais ils sont tellement efficaces pour traduire, expliquer, argumenter, résumer, écrire des lettres de motivation et des argumentaires qu'en fait on s'appuie sur eux et quand on s'appuie sur un outil, nous perdons nos facultés mentales. Or, les facultés de raisonnement, d'analyse, d'argumentation critiques, elles sont fondamentales à la vie humaine, à l'existence sociale, à l'existence démocratique. Et le danger c'est cette paresse. On a déjà perdu la mémoire avec Google, va-t-on perdre la capacité à s'exprimer par nous-mêmes avec ChatGPT ? C'est une question assez intéressante à poser.

Despina JDERU : Les recherches et critiques littéraires très riches que vous menez témoignent naturellement du fait que vous êtes un lecteur assidu de la littérature française, quelle que soit l'époque littéraire. Pourriez-vous recommander quelques titres de la littérature française contemporaine à nos lecteurs ?

Alexandre GEFEN : Mes deux lectures de cette rentrée littéraire sont un roman d'amour post *Metoo* qui s'appelle *Western* de Maria Pourchet, extrêmement drôle, très théâtral, en même temps romantique et qui essaye de réinventer le romantisme dans un moment où le rapport homme-femme est devenu très compliqué en France. Comme le dit Maria Pourchet : « Les femmes ont peur d'hommes. Et les hommes ont peur de faire peur aux femmes ». On est dans une situation amoureuse assez nouvelle dans cette hypersensibilisation au rapport des forces de l'amour qui n'existait pas auparavant et Maria Pourchet essaie d'en faire un roman et d'en faire un vrai roman d'amour. Et autre lecture sur un grand thème de la littérature française contemporaine autre que la question féministe, qui est la question écologique, écrit par Gaspard Koenig, un roman qui s'appelle *Humus*. C'est un texte tout à fait remarquable qui met en scène deux ingénieurs agronomes qui veulent changer le monde en changeant la manière dont on traite les déchets, deux manières d'exprimer un idéal écologique et une interrogation sur la manière dont notre société peut faire place à un changement potentiel et sur la résistance aux changements et à l'impératif écologique.

Réalisé le 26 novembre 2023 à Szeged, en Hongrie.

**Carmen-Valentina Candale, *El lenguaje de los jóvenes rumanos y españoles en el ámbito de las redes sociales*,
București: Editura Universității din București -
Bucharest University Press, 2023, 399 p.**



Tal como se menciona en el título, el libro que tenemos entre las manos versa acerca del lenguaje de los jóvenes españoles y rumanos en las redes sociales y constituye un estudio monográfico que destaca, a nuestro juicio, por al menos dos aspectos. Primero, se trata de un amplio análisis contrastivo de dos lenguas romances, centrado en la comunicación actual entre los jóvenes. Dicha aproximación lingüística implica un abanico de aspectos (léxico-semánticos, morfosintácticos, pragmáticos, ortografía y puntuación, etc.), pero, además, esta ha de atender a factores sociolingüísticos y extralingüísticos, puesto que se investiga una categoría social bien delimitada y su relación con las redes sociales. Estamos ante un tema sumamente actual y complejo, a saber, el discurso en el ámbito virtual, cuyas tendencias y características el presente estudio trata de desenmarañar y esclarecer. La autora logra

identificar y delimitar las tendencias de las lenguas en ebullición, bajo la influencia de factores extralingüísticos, como Internet y el desarrollo tecnológico, la comunicación mediada por ordenadores, las mutaciones que afectan a la comunicación interhumana y a las relaciones sociales.

Según la autora, su investigación tiene tres objetivos principales (p. 11): (*i*) “presentar los rasgos lingüísticos más sobresalientes de la expresión en el ámbito

online"; (ii) "delinear las diferencias que se pueden notar en nuestro corpus entre el lenguaje de los jóvenes españoles y el de los jóvenes rumanos"; (iii) "mostrar también la variación de las particularidades de este tipo de lenguaje en función de la plataforma utilizada para comunicar". Por tanto, se insiste más bien en las incongruencias, y no en los símiles, que hay entre el lenguaje de los dos grupos de informantes, teniendo en cuenta la especificidad cultural de cada uno.

Estructuralmente, aparte de la *Introducción* general, el libro en cuestión se compone de dos partes principales, o sea, *Aspectos teóricos*, que abarca tres capítulos, y *El análisis del lenguaje en el ámbito de las redes sociales*, la parte aplicada, integrada por ocho capítulos. A estas se suman las *Conclusiones*, la bibliografía y dos extensos anexos. Así, la investigadora proporciona al principio los fundamentos teóricos, el marco en el que encaja su indagación. El primer capítulo, el estado de la cuestión, presenta los estudios llevados a cabo anteriormente acerca del lenguaje electrónico, pero describe también la metodología que se adopta. Como se trata de un tema polifacético, el encuadre metodológico se inscribe en la sociolingüística, que conlleva un caudal de variables lingüísticas y extralingüísticas. A continuación, se tratan aspectos relacionados con la comunicación mediada por ordenador, en el segundo capítulo, y con el lenguaje de los jóvenes y las redes sociales, en el tercero. Se delinean los rasgos más representativos de la comunicación electrónica, entre los cuales se mencionan la 'multiautoría', la 'multimodalidad', el 'hipertexto', el contraste 'sincronicidad/asincronicidad', la 'contextualización multiestratificada' y el 'perfil personal'. La comunicación en el ámbito virtual implica mutaciones profundas en lo que concierne a los conceptos de 'comunidad', 'relación interhumana' e 'identidad social', que reflejan una nueva expresión identitaria propia de los internautas.

En la segunda parte se tratan distintos aspectos lingüísticos relativos al lenguaje de los jóvenes en Internet, a saber, la influencia del inglés y el léxico empleado, la sintaxis, las marcas de oralidad y las funciones de los recursos gráficos, la ortografía y la puntuación, los hipervínculos, aspectos pragmáticos. Cabe decir que, si bien el lenguaje electrónico, en intrínseca relación con el registro coloquial, presenta las marcas propias de la oralidad, se construye como un discurso idiosincrásico. Consideramos que uno de los logros meritorios de la labor emprendida por Carmen Candale es precisamente la identificación de las particularidades lingüísticas de este discurso, como forma específica del discurso oral y coloquial.

Cada uno de los capítulos que integran la presente monografía acaba con unas conclusiones parciales, que ponen de relieve los resultados a los que ha llevado la investigación del corpus. En el amplio capítulo final dedicado a las conclusiones (p. 187-197), además de retomarse de manera sumativa dichas conclusiones parciales, se exhiben consideraciones de corte más general, que se dependen del análisis contrastivo. En lo que sigue, nos referiremos a estas conclusiones, que estimamos muy valiosas.

Entre los jóvenes rumanos se nota una tendencia más alta a utilizar anglicismos (préstamos, calcos) y a escribir mensajes exclusivamente en inglés. Según la autora, esto se explica por la mayor competencia en inglés que tienen los jóvenes rumanos frente a los españoles y por la "propensión de la cultura rumana hacia la integración de las influencias extranjeras" (p. 87). Los anglicismos, cuyo uso denota originalidad,

creatividad, actitud lúdica, pero también esnobismo, en ocasiones, aumentan o atenúan la fuerza ilocutiva del mensaje comunicado. Tal originalidad y subjetividad se notan igualmente en el uso del léxico y en las innovaciones léxicas. Los vocablos empleados, entre ellos muchos coloquialismos e incluso palabras ofensivas o vulgares, así como las creaciones léxicas (de uso recurrente o *hapax legomena*) reflejan no solo las tendencias generales del lenguaje coloquial, sino también una determinada globalización lingüística propiciada por la comunicación en el ámbito electrónico.

La sintaxis, amén de reflejar los rasgos del estilo oral y coloquial, va influida por los recursos puestos a disposición por el medio electrónico: elementos gráficos (emoticonos y *emojis*), hipervínculos, *hashtags*, *tags* y enlaces (*links*). Resulta una sintaxis acumulativa y simplificada, basada en la coordinación copulativa y en la yuxtaposición de estructuras breves y simples, carentes de puntuación. A esto se agregan las dislocaciones y la organización arbitraria del enunciado, así como el uso de las exclamaciones prototípicas y de las interrogaciones, que cubren un caudal de funciones pragmáticas.

Las estrategias sintácticas y los recursos léxicos están interrelacionados con las marcas de la oralidad y los elementos gráficos que los internautas tienen a su disposición. Mencionamos aquí solo algunos de los fenómenos identificados por la autora (p. 289-290): el uso de las interjecciones, incluso obscenas (sobre todo, por los españoles), los verbos en imperativo, los vocativos (apodos o apelativos informales), las formas populares (especialmente, en el corpus rumano), fenómenos sintácticos como la repetición, la elipsis, la acumulación de los enunciados y la fragmentación del discurso. Los emoticonos y los *emojis* tienen como “función principal la de reemplazar el paralenguaje” e “ilustrar las emociones o las actitudes de los participantes” (p. 290).

El análisis pragmático del corpus ha revelado las estrategias con las que se suelen transgredir las máximas de Grice. La investigadora observa que dichas máximas se infringen mediante mensajes no contextualizados o demasiado breves, la metáfora, la hipérbole, la ironía y la litote, un rosario de sustituciones grafémicas, elisiones, etc. Todos estos aspectos “hacen que muchos de los mensajes sean breves, oscuros, ambiguos y desordenados” (p. 292).

La comparación de los dos grupos de jóvenes pone de manifiesto que los españoles recurren menos al uso del inglés y oralizan más, a través de los marcadores discursivos, las interjecciones, la puntuación u otros recursos fonó-ortográficos. La autora aprecia que “el lenguaje de los jóvenes españoles se distingue en el ámbito virtual por mayor oralidad, exaltación, emotividad y viveza que el de los rumanos” (p. 293). Por otra parte, los jóvenes rumanos destacan por los abundantes anglicismos y por el uso del inglés en tanto que lengua de comunicación. Esta tendencia podría reflejar una determinada aspiración al “internacionalismo, actitud cosmopolita y originalidad” (p. 294).

Los anexos, que no pueden faltar en el caso de este tipo de indagación, incluyen dos corpus de muestras lingüísticas, procedentes de jóvenes internautas españoles y rumanos. El corpus posibilita al lector entender en su conjunto y profundamente el fenómeno analizado entre las páginas de este libro. Asimismo, la abundante bibliografía a la que la autora ha recurrido a lo largo de su investigación descuelga por diversidad y actualidad. Dada la complejidad del tema, se impone la consulta de un caudal de obras relacionadas con la lingüística, la comunicación y varios aspectos de la lengua.

BOOKS

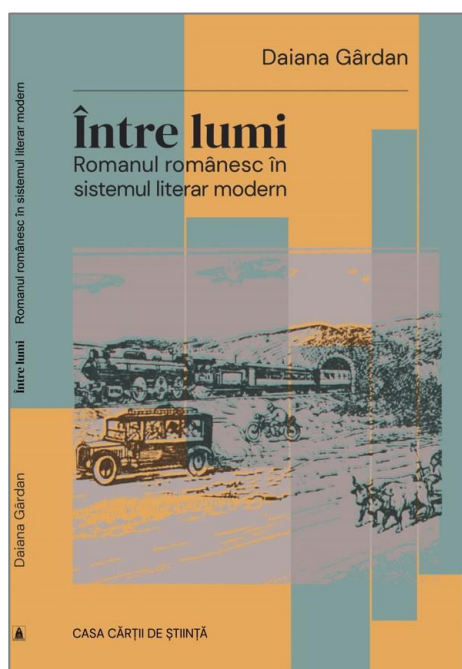
En suma, el libro de Carmen Candale es una monografía que destaca no solo por su amplitud, sino también por la información científica, el rigor metodológico y la fluidez de la exposición. Esta contribución viene a esclarecer la multitud de tendencias relacionadas con un fenómeno complejísimo, que afecta a la comunicación y los mecanismos de expresión de la lengua de Internet. Ya es consabido que el lenguaje de los jóvenes contiene los gérmenes de las mutaciones lingüísticas que están a punto de producirse, por ello su investigación es como si echáramos un vistazo al futuro. El sutil análisis, así como el carácter organizado de la argumentación denotan un profundo conocimiento del tema por parte de la autora y su habilidad de manejar una gran cantidad de datos lingüísticos de índole muy distinta. Consideramos que este libro es una valiosísima aportación a los estudios comparativos y de romanística y estamos convencidos de que su lectura será una experiencia enriquecedora para cualquier persona, lingüista o no.

Răzvan BRAN

*Profesor contratado doctor, Universidad de Bucarest
razvan.bran@lils.unibuc.ro*

BOOKS

Daiana Gârdan, *Între lumi. Romanul românesc în sistemul literar modern*, Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2023, 259 p.



Daiana Gârdan's 2023 volume *Între lumi. Romanul românesc în sistemul literar modern* is a methodologically heteroclitic reappraisal of the Romanian novel between 1845 and 1939, with the focus on the first four decades of the twentieth century, prompted by the sustained relevance of the novels published in this period in the Romanian literary canon. The volume has a macroscopical approach, informed by the instruments subsumed under Moretti's distant reading paradigm and the most recent frameworks within World Literature scholarship. In this sense, the author reveals the gap between what has canonically been described in literary scholarship as the two poles of power in the literary field at the beginning of the twentieth century, the "modernists" and the "traditionalists", and their various forms of rhetoric with regards to the novel on the one side, and literary production brought to light by Gârdan's

distant readings on the other. As the author demonstrates, the gap between the clear-cut and often unequivocal appraisals of the Romanian novel that literary historiography and contemporary literary scholarship are tributary to and the reality of literary production is seldom made visible through traditional heuristic instruments. Her analysis is focused on the reevaluation of the two most prominent genres of the period, the rural novel and the urban novel, to which she adds a third category, the *interstitial* novel. Her reassessment of each of these categories brings to the fore the tensions and complexities of this division and questions the many presumptions that literary historiography operates with, focusing on the interrelated dynamics between genre



production and the production of social space. As such, the author reevaluates how the transfigurations brought about by the establishment of modernity at the beginning of the twentieth century are metabolized in the Romanian novel. Predicated upon the conceptualizations of Fredric Jameson and the Warwick Research Collective, while reexamining the development of the Romanian novel from a transnational and global perspective, the volume connects contemporary literary studies to the more extensive and capacious frameworks of world-systems, integrating the Romanian novel into the circuits of World Literature.

The first chapter explores the methodological tools and heuristic instruments that the author operationalizes in the chapters dedicated to the three subgenres of the novel. In particular, Gârdan traces back the underlying assumptions that contemporary paradigms like digital formalism and World Literature hinge upon and shows how they are connected to the aims of Mikhail Bakhtin, among others. She explores the affordances and limitations of the methodologies upon which her analysis is predicated, accounting for the challenges of operationalizing research hinging on Digital Humanities tools in the context of the Romanian novel, with regards to existing archives and available infrastructure. An important point explored in the first chapter, which will accompany her analysis in the following chapters, is that methodologies based on Digital Humanities, including her own, do not aim to replace close reading and traditional hermeneutical approaches in their entirety, but rather to become symbiotic with these approaches and account for their blind spots. The second chapter is dedicated to the study of the genres and subgenres that are relevant to her argument, opening up a discussion about the functionality of different taxonomic systems in the case of the Romanian novel. Her metacritical investigation and her thematic analysis of various Romanian literary genres brings to the fore the complexity and the ambiguity behind these labels and operationalizes a taxonomy that is suitable to the analyses which follows this chapter.

The last three chapters are dedicated to each of the subgenres that the author explores, namely, the urban novel, the rural novel, and the interstitial novel. The chapter dedicated to the urban novel explores the most salient examples of the genre in order to highlight the tensions surrounding this notion. The synthesis between digital instruments and a sociological approach predicated on the issue of spatiality brings to the fore the two directions that Gârdan identifies within the urban novel - what she calls the *modern modern novel* and the *antimodern modern novel*. While the former is symptomatic for a prevalent attitude amongst Romanian writers at the beginning of the twentieth century, which aimed to calibrate the Romanian novel to what they perceived to be the most outstanding and consequential influences of the time, the other is more skeptical toward the notion of modernity, representing modernity as dispossession and depletion. The comparative dimension of this chapter highlights, from a transnational framework, the correlations between the Romanian modern novel and the North American novel in the first half of the twentieth century.

The chapter dedicated to the rural novel begins by demystifying various notions about the rural novel in Romanian literature, for example by highlighting the minor number of rural novels that were published in the first part of the twentieth century relative to the total number of published novels. This data, coupled with other findings

and assertions, highlight the ways in which many issues about the rural novel which were previously considered resolute are in fact more complex and deserving of reconsideration. By comparing one of the seminal rural novels in Romanian literature, Rebreanu's *Ion* with Euclides da Cunha's *Rebellion in the Backlands* and utilizing a transnational framework, the author advances important considerations about naturalism in Romanian literature and how it is metabolized on the one hand, and how the image of the Romanian peasant is constructed in the novel of the first half of the twentieth century on the other hand, to name just a few of her considerations in this chapter.

The last chapter, dedicated to the interstitial novel, explores the effects of the insertion of capitalism and its subsequent new social configurations in the peripheries of Romania. This type of novel, predicated on (semi)peripheral and transitory forms of spatiality, metabolizes *the unequal and combined effects* (to use WREC's Trotskyist formula) of the injection of global capitalism into archaic forms of life. By connecting her observations on the Romanian literary production with literatures from other (semi)peripheral spaces, in this case South America, the author demonstrates the global relevance of her arguments.

By engaging with digital instruments and contemporary scholarship within World Literature, the author undoes many commonplace and cliché-ridden assumptions about the Romanian modern(ist) novel. As her findings on the metabolization of the social transformations in (semi)peripheral spaces at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century demonstrate, many of her assertions are not only relevant to literary studies on a local level, but also to World Literature studies focused on the peripheries on a global level. The importance of this volume to contemporary literary studies is related not only to the author's theoretical acquisitions, but also to her advancement of pioneering hermeneutical instruments in contemporary Romanian literary scholarship.

Alexandra BRICI

MA Student, Babeş-Bolyai University

Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Email: alexandra.brici@stud.ubbcluj.ro

BOOKS

Andreea Bugiac, *Révolutions romanesques. Le destin du roman français au Siècle des Lumières*, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2022, 257 p.



Placé dans la continuation de plus amples recherches sur les événements charniers du XVIII^e siècle, l'ouvrage d'Andreea Bugiac, *Révolutions romanesques. Le destin du roman français au Siècle des Lumières*, propose une interrogation attentive sur l'enchaînement des causalités qui ont entraîné le développement du roman à l'époque des Lumières. Se remarquant déjà grâce à son livre portant sur le XVII^e siècle français (*La littérature française sous la loupe : baroque et classicisme*, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2021), l'auteure réussit, par un examen détaillé des pratiques sociales et culturelles de l'époque, à surprendre d'une manière complexe, mais jamais lourde, comment le roman moderne a contribué à l'évolution non seulement des idées littéraires mais aussi des idées et des valeurs sociales et même politiques de l'époque. La structure duale qu'elle choisit pour son ouvrage permet d'insister à la fois sur le

contexte politique et intellectuel du temps, mais aussi sur une micro-analyse de quatre exemples pertinents.

Intitulé « Révolution des idées », le premier volet de l'ouvrage commence par la description d'une double révolution, culturelle et littéraire, qui sert à introduire le lecteur dans l'atmosphère toujours changeante du XVIII^e siècle et à établir les concepts-clés des mentalités émergentes. Quelques notions privilégiées à l'époque, comme le progrès, la modernité et la régénération, se rejoignent toutes dans l'idée de « civilisation »,



qui perd ses acceptions traditionnelles chrétiennes en faveur d'une morale naturelle, plutôt laïque. L'auteure montre comment cette nouvelle manière de comprendre la réalité, à la fois comme une « utopie à atteindre » et comme un « concept à débattre » (p. 19) sert de tremplin pour ce qui rendrait les sociétés « heureuses et accomplies » (*ibid.*), l'humanité et la tolérance devenant des idéaux moraux et sociaux fondamentaux pour les nouveaux « honnêtes hommes ». L'analyse suivante, concernant le surnom du siècle, opposant la « lumière » divine, associée à l'Église, et les « lumières » désignant, au pluriel, l'intellect humain, insiste sur l'importance du culte de la raison pendant la période visée. Le développement de l'esprit critique est favorisé, selon l'auteure, par la libéralisation du savoir rendu accessible à un « public éclairé » (p. 51), qui devrait s'en servir pour apprendre « l'usage de son propre entendement » (*ibid.*).

Après un bref examen des déplacements qui s'opèrent au niveau des pratiques intellectuelles de l'époque, le Siècle des Lumières est examiné d'un point de vue politique et historique, avec un accent placé surtout sur les contrastes énormes causés par une hiérarchie sociale injuste. Ainsi, Andreea Bugiac souligne comment la révolte contre l'un des problèmes les plus frappants de l'époque, celui d'ordre fiscal et économique (« la misère » des impôts très lourds supportés par le Tiers état en antithèse avec « l'opulence de la Cour », p. 58), se trouve à la base de l'essor d'une bourgeoisie « éclairée » et engagée, dont les philosophes deviennent « une voix » pour un peuple « gagnant à peine son pain quotidien » (p. 61). À la base du déclin de la monarchie absolue en France, on retrouve ainsi une « remise en cause radicale des principes sur lesquels l'absolutisme se fondait » (p. 82). Les changements qui se font sentir au niveau des attitudes, des discours et des valeurs pendant la transition de l'Ancien Régime à la République après la Révolution de 1789, l'adoption de la Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen et la chute d'une monarchie constitutionnelle éphémère sont à mettre en rapport, selon l'auteure, avec des évolutions littéraires qui annoncent aussi une « modernité romanesque ». Grâce à la constitution d'une « bourgeoisie citadine et lettrée » (p. 105), les lecteurs de la classe moyenne, maintenant de plus en plus nombreux, commencent à privilégier les « histoires de vie », qui présentent les aventures authentiques de l'homme ordinaire pendant sa quête « de l'inexpérience à la maturité et à la sagesse » (p. 107). Assimilant de plus en plus cette nouvelle forme instructive, l'enjeu majeur du genre romanesque devient, graduellement, celui d'inviter le public à une compréhension critique des événements racontés et de le pousser à former ses propres opinions en utilisant sa raison.

Constituant le fondement de l'ouvrage d'Andreea Bugiac, cette évolution du roman est amplement poursuivie dans la deuxième partie du volume, intitulée « Révolutions romanesques : quatre études de cas ». L'auteure s'y arrête sur quatre romans du XVIII^e siècle français, chaque roman choisi étant représentatif pour une formule romanesque novatrice qu'on pourrait associer avec cette époque. L'un des dilemmes de l'époque (« Comment inventer sans donner l'air de le faire ? », s'interroge l'auteure dans le sillage de Georges May ; p. 127) prend la forme d'une véritable crise de la fiction, à laquelle répond, entre autres, la solution narrative du roman épistolaire polyphonique, son trait le plus marquant étant, pour Yannick Séité cité par l'auteure, sa « dimension largement ironique » (p. 131). Les *Lettres persanes* de Montesquieu, le premier exemple soumis à

l'analyse, fait sentir « la veine réaliste et dialogique du roman des Lumières » (p. 136). La pluralité des voix narratives offrirait, ainsi, une autonomie relative au discours (donc une opportunité pour le lecteur de décider lui-même le point de vue à adopter sur la civilisation française (re)découverte à travers le regard des Orientaux Usbek et Rica), pour suggérer une critique sociale oblique associée avec le topos du voyageur étranger. L'autre grande formule romanesque consacrée à l'époque est le roman-mémoires, dont le narrateur est souvent un « homme de qualité » qui raconte la leçon morale de ses aventures pour instruire le lecteur. Dans *l'Histoire du chevalier Des Grieux* et de *Manon Lescaut*, l'abbé Prévost s'éloigne de la tradition classique de ce mélange entre roman et biographie historique et utilise une « intense subjectivité » (p. 172) pour composer une « histoire de cœur » où le sentiment se fait « action » (p. 182), comme le dirait Jean Sgard, tout en explorant de la sorte les effets tragiques de la passion sur les caractères et les psychologies des amoureux.

De cette analyse de l'amour et de ses effets sur les psychologies amoureuses, Andreea Bugiac vire ensuite vers les roues du libertinage révélées dans les *Liaisons dangereuses* de Laclos. En s'appuyant sur une typologie historique des séducteurs puisée chez Robert Mauzi (« le jeune débutant », « le petit maître » et « le roué », pp. 193-194), l'auteure construit une « carte » affective et psychologique métaphorique des protagonistes, qui utilisent la conquête amoureuse, cette condition qu'ils ont assumée (« conquérir est notre destin », affirme Valmont dans une déclaration célèbre ; *ibid.*) comme une modalité de destruction progressive de leurs victimes. Le « pacte » de l'ironie et de l'ambiguïté favorisées par les deux libertins (la Marquise de Merteuil et Valmont) est doublé d'une « complicité entre le personnage et le lecteur » (p. 203), ce dernier se retrouvant souvent « au même niveau » (p. 204) que les séducteurs condamnés, vu qu'il se permet l'accès à une correspondance privée qui ne lui est pas adressée. Le quatrième roman abordé, le fameux *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* de Denis Diderot, dynamite toute convention et toute attente du public : Andreea Bugiac souligne le caractère d'« épopée comique du genre romanesque » qui résulte de l'amalgame de traits différents qui s'associent à l'intérieur d'un roman à la fois « philosophique », « d'apprentissage », « dialogique ou théâtral », de « revendication sociale » et même d'*apparence* « picaresque » comme le remarque avec justesse Mihaela Chapelan (pp. 213-214). Le célèbre incipit est compris par l'auteure comme une « amorce de contrat », Diderot se servant de ses deux protagonistes (et du Narrateur et du Lecteur, « métamorphosé[s] en personnage », p. 222) pour problématiser l'idée de liberté.

L'ouvrage a plusieurs points forts. Andreea Bugiac propose, autant que possible dans le cadre d'un ouvrage sans ambition exhaustive, une grande richesse d'informations, utiles pour tout chercheur. Son « examen d'anatomie romanesque » (p. 7) sert à surprendre au niveau de l'analyse des œuvres la pertinence de certains concepts théoriques et à inviter le lecteur à les problématiser à son tour. Sur la question de l'actualité du sujet abordé, la réponse de l'auteure s'inscrit, elle aussi, dans la mentalité des Lumières : il faut connaître le passé pour pouvoir bien avancer vers l'avenir.

Pour conclure, l'analyse approfondie d'Andreea Bugiac sur les évolutions des idées littéraires et la modernisation du roman à l'époque des Lumières offre une perspective éclairante sur les mutations culturelles et littéraires qui ont eu lieu en France pendant le XVIII^e siècle. En explorant diverses formules romanesques, l'auteure observe l'impact de ces changements sur la société de l'époque et la manière dont les textes reflètent ce « goût du siècle » imprégné de militantisme, d'ironie ou de polyphonie.

Une lecture indispensable pour les chercheurs et les étudiants souhaitant creuser davantage le monde littéraire des Lumières françaises, *Révolutions romanesques*. *Le destin du roman français au Siècle des Lumières* se montre comme un mélange équilibré de théorie et d'exemplification, d'interprétations offertes et de pistes ouvertes à l'entendement du public.

Elisabeta Maria MÂRZA

Étudiante à la Faculté des Lettres,

Université Babeş-Bolyai de

Cluj-Napoca, Roumanie

Email: elisabeta.marza@stud.ubbcluj.

BOOKS

Mihaela Ursa, *Indisciplina ficțiunii: Viața de după carte a literaturii*, Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2022, 312 p.



In an increasingly apocalyptic climate in which the death of literature is loudly proclaimed, Mihaela Ursa refuses a nostalgic and melancholic reflection on the decline of the culture of the book. Instead, she chooses to investigate the ways in which the current media landscape has shaped the reception of fiction and how these mutations can be used in order to “revive” the classics and literature in general for a new generation of digital natives. Therefore, although this book is focused on canonical texts, the author does not intend to discuss their canonicity or their aesthetic value, but the way in which they are reappropriated through their transmedial circulation.

The introductory chapter starts with the important assertion that literature is no longer the privileged road towards accessing narratives. However, instead of either mourning or praising the end of the literature-centric era, the author proposes a more useful activity: reflecting on how this change may impact our relationship with

fiction. Since cultural and artistic revolutions do not manifest themselves as a destruction of previous practices in their field, the new technologies and media that are developing very rapidly do not signify the end of the book as a material support or the end of literacy as an ability, but instead their mutation and integration in a new network of narrative media. After all, as Mihaela Ursa argues, transmediality has been a trait of artistic productions since the very beginning, the rise of literature being the phenomenon actually responsible for narrowing the narrative space to its strictly written manifestation.



As opposed to being limited to monomedial study fields, the remedial approach promoted by the author means using the preferences and habits of digital natives, in their role as consumers of transmedial cultural franchises, for creating a network of hybrid cultural artifacts in order to spark the interest in a new, multimedia form and reception of fictional narratives.

In the second chapter, "Crisis and Literariness" (*"Criză și literaritate"*), the author investigates the fetishisation of literature, which created an artificial opposition between the aesthetic and the ethical. This gap between ethics and aesthetics has been the foundation of the autonomy of the aesthetic, a principle very popular in the 20th century which still engenders debates today, especially in the cultures from the former communist block where literature has been heralded as one of the main pillars of resistance against totalitarian oppression. However, exactly this phenomenon helps Mihaela Ursa deconstruct this myth, since the aesthetic autonomy has worked as an ideological and political project during communism, when writers fictionalised their identity as the quintessential dissidents and the keyholders of the truth. In addition, the critic also highlights how the superficial understanding of concepts coined by the Russian formalists has fuelled the fetishisation of the literary text. For instance, defamiliarisation and literariness have long been seen as the possessions of literature alone, even though the formalists described them as characteristics typical of all forms of artistic expression that are aware of their own techniques of representation, while also making them visible. In order to counteract this limited view of fiction, the transmedial approach requires researchers to surpass the boundaries of their own discipline by gaining a very good grasp of its instruments, while also being able to adapt and rethink them critically.

The following chapter, "Imagined Colonisations" (*"Colonizări imaginate"*), discusses the ways in which monomedial prejudices of readers and viewers can be overcome and the benefits a transmedial approach would bring to the reception and analysis of hybrid artifacts, which function as cult objects. These are texts that have generated such an influential memetic network that they have become almost autonomous from their content and meaning, existing in a fetishised form through their referentiality. Mihaela Ursa notes that the new technological developments have opened new avenues for accessing a particular "storyworld" (a term Marie-Laure Ryan uses to refer to the world generated by a particular story, serving as a setting in which other subsequent stories may also take place) other than the primordial canonical text. This, in turn, has revealed that storyworlds are shaped by the specific semiotic techniques of their medium, which makes remediation a process that can no longer be ignored. However, it does not mean that the old media will be replaced by the new. On the contrary, the old semiotic systems have to be adapted in order to profit from the possibilities opened by the new ones. Thus, remediation can contribute to dispelling the illusion of a medium's semiotic transparency, leading to the development of a more critical consumer. The author concludes the chapter by underlining the two major advantages of bringing the classics into the realm of popular culture. First of all, as mentioned before, the original texts will be perceived self-reflexively, since transmediation requires a good understanding of the mutations a storyworld suffers when being adapted to a new semiotic system.

Secondly, popular culture will enable the renewed circulation of these texts and their revitalisation, even if their canonical structure will not be able to remain wholly intact.

The next three chapters contain case studies of three canonical texts whose transmediation has influenced their historical and contemporary reception and durability. In “Before Consuming, Add Zombies” (“Înainte de consum, adăugați zombi”), Mihaela Ursa shows how the transmedial treatment of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* gives a new, “zombified” (p. 187) life to the source text in Seth Grahame-Smith’s *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and in its cinematic adaptation by Burr Steers. Even if such a parody seems to do a disservice to the original, it actually generates more interest towards it, while also reviving a genre (even if in a comic manner) which had lost all of its vitality due to the formulaic and uninspired state it had arrived at. As such, both Austen’s text and the zombie genre are changed through this transmedial and intertextual semiotic transfer, since such a mash-up negates any attempt of immersion in the story, instead uncovering the generic conventions and the stylistic techniques that antithetically coexist in the final product.

The chapter “Don Quixote and the Chivalric Fandom” (“*Don Quijote și fandom-ul cavaleresc*”) builds on the argument that the hidalgo’s story was always part of a “transfictional system” (a term Mihaela Ursa also borrows from Marie-Laure Ryan) consisting of Cervantes’ novel in two volumes and the apocryphal continuation of the first volume, attributed to Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda. As such, *Don Quixote* becomes a macro-text through its numerous intertextual references and because of its varied history of reception. For instance, the author mentions how the (often inaccurate) illustrations based on the novel, called *auques*, were part of the popular culture surrounding it, thus turning the now canonical text into a transmedial artifact even before the advent of the new media. Perhaps even more unexpectedly, the author integrates both Cervantes and Avellaneda into the equivalent of what today would be called a “fandom”, since the former is an enjoyer of chivalric romances, while also heavily criticising their degraded and formulaic nature during his time, while the latter attempts to make corrections in Cervantes’ text and to fill the gaps left by the original author. In turn, Cervantes reacts (and makes Don Quixote himself react) to Avellaneda’s continuation, thus generating a pluralistic authorship of the novel that comes in conflict with its static nature in the literary canon.

Last but not least, in the chapter “The Taming of Shakespeare” (“*Îmblânzirea lui Shakespeare*”), Mihaela Ursa discusses an interesting type of transmedial adaptation, the film poster. She emphasises the fact that promotional posters are less relevant for their accuracy in relation to the actual films, but more telling with regard to the values they express, often a result of the audience’s expectations. In the case of the adaptations of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, the posters also vary from culture to culture. They may either promote the reestablishment of traditional masculine and feminine social realities (as is the case in Argentina) or show the violence these rigid domestic hierarchies often encourage (for instance in France). Furthermore, the author highlights how different interpretations of the open ending of the play are reflected in the variety of cinematic adaptations, most of them choosing only a certain overall meaning mirrored in the ending preferred by the director.

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In the conclusion of the volume, the critic attempts to dismantle the idea that current transmedial artifacts always encourage an immediate, superficial perception, turning digital natives into people incapable of a slow-paced reception required for literary narratives. By choosing *Patchwork Girl* as an example of a digital reworking of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Mihaela Ursa demonstrates how the collaborative creativity needed for reconstructing the female character's textual body stimulates a slower, more methodical way of interacting with the hypertext generating the narrative, bringing the user closer to an experience similar to that of carefully reading a literary text. Consequently, the book ends with one of its essential ideas and perhaps its main takeaway point, now supported by the comprehensive theoretical excursus as well as by the concrete examples presented by the author: the literary and the postliterary will coexist in the future and they will influence each other's practices, since both of them are part of a semiotic web capable of opening different paths towards experiencing fictional narratives and immersing users in the storyworlds they create.

Luca MĂTĂSARU

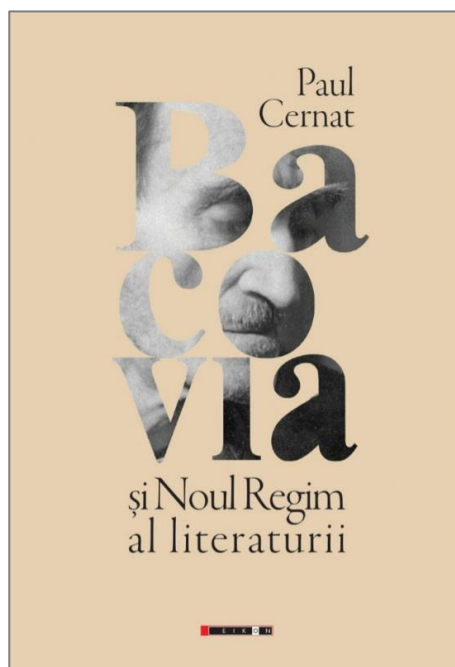
MA Student, Faculty of Letters

Babeş-Bolyai University

Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Email: luca.matasaru@stud.ubbcluj.ro

**Paul Cernat, *Bacovia și Noul Regim al literaturii*,
București: Eikon, 2022, 446 p.**



Paul Cernat's recent volume, *Bacovia și Noul Regim al literaturii* (*Bacovia and the New Regime of Literature*), is an in-depth analysis of Bacovia's case by delving into the history of reception, underscoring that "it is not so much the validity of the evaluations that is of interest here, as the «mutation of aesthetic values» that favored or, on the contrary, disfavored the reception of one segment or another of Bacovian literature" (p.6), hence the division into *the old regime*, respectively *the new regime* of criticism. The book's main aim is obvious right from the title: the rehabilitation of those volumes that were overlooked by what the critic calls *The Old Regime of Criticism* which includes the commentators who privileged the debut volume (*Plumb*), identifying in the following ones signs of creative decline and, implicitly, an involution. However, the later poetic generations (from the war generation to the Generation 2000 and post-2000)

relate to the last volumes, as Cernat convincingly demonstrates when he compiles an inventory of influences, based on the testimonies of writers regarding the influence of Bacovia and inventorying, at the same time, poems with references in the verses or in the title to the poetry of the last Bacovia. Aligning alongside the commentators who argue that the volumes published after *Plumb* does not mark a regression, but, on the contrary, the intuition of a new paradigm (*the new regime of literature*), Cernat pleads for the existence of two directions/ "two Bacovianisms" that would characterize the path from *Plumb* to *Stanțe*: "the symbolist-decadent one" and the one "of «shorthand» notation – a term taken from Mircea Scarlat - demetaphorized, direct", the latter

revealing not the involution, but the awareness of the limits of the models assimilated until then.

To reconstruct the writer's profile and the trajectory of his work, the critic turns to the available resources, consulting the critical editions of the work and even comparing variants of the texts, from the one in the manuscripts to the published versions, when they serve to explain Bacovia's options. Regarding the reception, in addition to the exhaustive exploration of the references, there are also exposed cases in which the critics revise themselves pleading in favor or against the writer in question (the examples of Manolescu, Vladimir Streinu). The sources of documentation include related documents that can shed light on some aspects from both work and biography, such as Mușoiu's security file, also relevant for Bacovia's political beliefs, interviews, memoir volumes of relatives or personalities with whom Bacovia intersected: the contributions of Agatha Grigorescu-Bacovia, *Amintirile despre Bacovia (Memories of Bacovia)* of grandson Maximilian Vasiliu; I.M. Rascu, *Memorii și medalioane literare (Memories and Literary Medallions)*; Mihail Sadoveanu, *Pagini de jurnal și documente inedite (Diary Pages and Original Documents)*; Tudor Opris, *Pietre la templul adevărului (Stones at the Temple of Truth)*. The documents consulted reveal the portrait of a multifaceted writer which invalidates some of the clichés attached to both the author and his work.

In accordance with the idea of the two Bacovianisms, a significant part of the volume explores Bacovia's adherence to symbolism, with nuances regarding the specific difference that the Romanian poet brings in relation to the foreign representatives of the current. In the chapters dedicated to the analysis of the imaginary, there are delineated themes and motifs specific to symbolism ("morbid Bachovianism", with the "figures of fall and dissolution", "meteorology of poetry", urbanism and technological innovations – in *The Poetry of Electricity and Asphalt*) to demonstrate that, in fact, the writer relates to the models, but eventually stands in their proximity to expose conventions, in order to finally release from the tutelage of the influences. Cernat's idea is that, in Bacovia's case, there is not so much an overcoming of symbolism as a "structural incompatibility", which simultaneously allows "the situation inside and outside the current" (p.103), considering, on the one hand, the foreign influences and, on the other hand, the reference to Eminescian romances. Taking into account the elements that characterize Bacovia's poetry from the first volumes, the critic launches a plea in favor of a "de-idealized symbolism" (p. 103) or even pseudo-symbolism that manifests itself through the lack of encryption. Consequently, "the function of Bacovian poetry is no longer, can no longer be, a visionary, prophetic or militant one, but much more modest - nevertheless essential: a technique of survival at the limit" (p. 106). Existence at the limit implies the integration of the biographical component that allows the investigation from the inside of the deficiencies of the outside world, taking into account the fact that "«disease as a metaphor» of the dying century becomes, in *Plumb*, an anagolon of his own suffering" (p.235). At the same time, Cernat depicts, from the level of themes and motifs identified, the changes produced in Bacovian writing and the way in which the writer manages to produce mutations both within his own formula and in the literary landscape. For example, in *The Meteorology of Poetry* the reference to autumn is intended to signal the difference between the poems in *Plumb* and the later ones, "where the old musicality

gets an abrasive-modern note and an acute grip on the real" (p. 132). Similarly, the appearance of ravens in the last books is seen as a path to de-symbolization: "the poetic significance of ravens does not remain the same over time; symbolically marked in the age of *Plumb*, it will progressively de-symbolize itself, until the confidential irony of *Stanțe burgheze*" (p. 394).

Next to the sections that explore the Bacovian imaginary are those oriented towards the writer's profile, with notable effects on the reception of the work. Thus, clichés appearing in criticism are taken up polemically, in order to be deconstructed, such as, for example, the signaling of madness and Bacovian aphasia, as indicators of involution, being, in fact, "an effect of the confusion between the person and *persona*" (p.242). In the chapter *A Poet of Madness*, Cernat explains the appearance of the signs of madness starting from the biographical background which, combined with the decadent conventions, generates a personal imprint as "the poet drills, under the cover of fashionable lyrical discourses, a language of his own use of neurosis, psychosis, imbalance and alienation" (p.238). In contrast to the alienated label appears the idea of the one who stages the speech of an alienated person and controls it rationally: "Bacovia does not write, cannot write from within his own crises, but post festum, «when it's quiet». He therefore simulates the confusion, recalling and transcribing it; he enters, that is to say, into the experience already surpassed as in an assumed role as if it were life itself" (p.246). The self-censorship of some verses that could jeopardize his recovery during the totalitarian regime is also seen as a sign of lucidity, the selection of verses demonstrating "awareness of the ideological charge of any word" (p.322). The extension of the idea of a rational Bacovia appears in the chapter *Cogito and Reflexivity* where Cernat nuances opinions explored to a little extent, such as those of Ion Caraion, or Constantin Călin, that offer relevant insights. The exercise of inventorying the references to thought in Bacovian poetry reveals a continuity, since these references appear from the debut volume crossing the last volumes as well, although the change is registered by diminishing the morbid notes in favor of recording the elements that make up the everyday setting. What emerges from the analysis of the semantic fields associated with thought is that "the cogito is not only a reflexive exercise, but the precondition of existence: the entire Bacovian poetry involves, after all, the overlap between thought and lived. An existential-reflexive poetry, not a genuine, cenesthetic or artificial-theatrical one" (p. 362).

Another assumption is that of a Bacovia dismantled of the theoretical insight. The idea is questioned through the examination of the book fund highlighted by the numerous quotations from the work which reveal, in the poetry's case, the reference to internal referents (Traian Demetrescu) or external ones (Poe, Verlaine, Rimbaud etc.) as a way of bringing the conventions to light, activating the metatextual dimension through the writer's pose that can be found both in his poetic and prose texts. Considered as extensions of poetry, Bacovian prose excels when the confessional notation is used and fails with the tendency towards objectification. Through language or narrative techniques, with the attention given to the direct recording of the daily data, intriguing associations are made, Bacovian proses becoming compatible with those of Hortensia Papadat Bengescu, Doina Ioanid, Gheorghe Crăciun, Gabriel Marineasa and others.

Metaliterary fragments also reveal "a writer's aesthetic consciousness that expresses itself better in and through his own literature than in interviews or articles" (p. 343). However, the exploration of interviews alongside some fragments of the texts in verse and prose reveal, beyond the clumsiness of expressing ideas about literary creed, which confirms the "ineptitude for conceptual discourse", a voice that goes against theorizations with a persiflant attitude proving that "not the «Aphasic» degeneration took over Bacovia's late lyrics, but irony" (p. 369). Irony thus appears as a fundamental dimension of the writing, counterbalancing the existential sadness and becoming, at the same time, a "symptom of the desacralization of poetry" (p.399) and a mark of "defensive lucidity" (p. 404) so that, later on, it also appears as a form of a masked protest against the triumphalist attitude inscribed in the political context, the smile functioning only as an ephemeral form of hope. The repudiation of the defiant attitude that allows a critical look through distancing is, in fact, responsible for the poet's failures: "every time the poet indulges in the manner, conventions of romanticism and decadent symbolism – abandoning the 'realistic' notations that give sharpness to his lyrics and at the ironic distance – it fails poetically" (p.264).

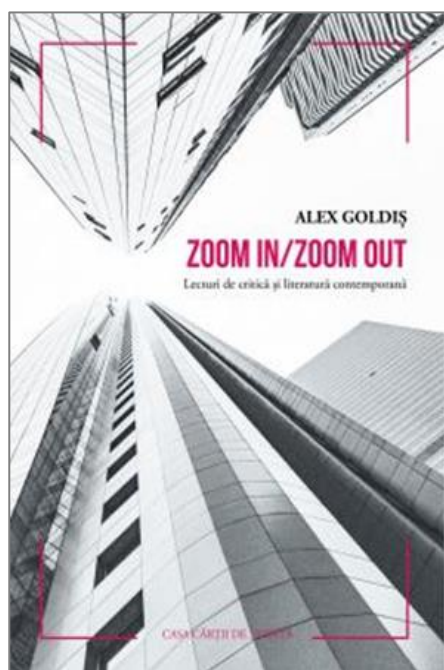
Through the elements exposed so far, Paul Cernat's volume obviously represents an important contribution from the series of research dedicated to Bacovia, adding nuances to the last stage of Bacovian writing and demonstrating, through an exceptional documentation, the compatibility with new poetic tendencies, while deconstructing preconceptions that have obscured some defining elements of writing. A volume that manages to highlight the achievements without overlooking the failures, reconstructing the profile of a rather polyphonic "mutant" who managed to defy the framings by reinventing himself.

Ioana ONESCU

*PhD Student, Faculty of Letters
Babeş-Bolyai University
Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: ioana.onescu@ubbcluj.ro*

BOOKS

Alex Goldiș, *ZOOM IN/ ZOOM OUT*, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2023, 369p.



Alex Goldiș's 2023 book, *ZOOM IN/ ZOOM OUT: Lecturi de critică și literatură contemporană* (*Readings of contemporary criticism and literature*), is a comprehensive and enduring exploration of some of the most influential texts regarding literature and criticism that marked the Romanian literary scene. The book has a tripartite structure, the first part dedicated to Romanian literary fiction and the others to Romanian criticism and international theory respectively. To be more specific, the book represents a collection of reviews and chronicles that span over more than a decade of academic writing. Consequently, the volume is not meant to portray a Romanian canon or a recent literary history, but a more nomadic network of the dynamics concerning contemporary literature and criticism.

The first section, dedicated to literary fiction, represents the most extensive fraction of the book. Gathering up thirty-three chapters, this section delves into a diverse exploration of poetry, prose and memoirs. The reviews are arranged chronologically, the very first one dating from 2007 – dedicated to Petru Cimpoeșu – and the last one is from the previous year, 2023 – dedicated to Sașa Zare. As the author notes in the opening argument that links the corpus of the volume with its title, the main idea governing these chronicles was to offer a close analysis of the authors which form this section – hence, a *zooming in* – while also offering, when possible, a more distanced and panoramic view over the main dynamics regarding the state of literature in the first part of twenty-first century Romania – hence, a *zooming out* motion. The chapters do not connect in any form, perhaps only theoretically



and methodologically, for they stand alone as reviews and detailed analyses of a wide range of literary volumes.

I shall point out only a part of these chapters, arguing the fascinating ability of Alex Goldiș to move from one text to another, maintaining the same energy and professionalism throughout the years. In his articles, the reader will notice three main focal points that the author uses: analysis of a certain volume, positioning the respective text in the larger area of the writer's previous works and, finally, placing the author in the much broader context of Romanian literature in general. For example, we can take a look at Goldiș's review over Radu Vancu's volume of poetry: *Sebastian în vis (Sebastian in a dream)*. Goldiș starts from drawing the larger picture of the young generation of poets that have come to grow up and to adapt their new poetic language. Pointing out the transition to the novel of some representatives (Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari, Dan Coman or Stoian G. Bogdan), Goldiș succeeds to highlight Vancu's relevance in the Romanian poetic field.

Even more, the author does not hesitate to include in this volume some reviews dedicated to debuts that marked the last twenty years. The chapters about Andrei Dósa, Medeea Iancu, Ștefan Baghiu, val chimic, Bogdan Lipcanu and Sașa Zare are relevant for the reader in order to understand their impact at that time and to highlight the changes that took place through their literary texts. Consequently, these reviews stand as proof of Goldiș's ambition to create a space of dialogue between literature and criticism, while also supporting the new generations of writers.

At the same time, it is highly relevant to enunciate that the author does not hesitate to write about older generations. He analyses the works of Gabriela Adameșteanu, Angela Marinescu, Dora Pavel, the memoirs of Mircea Cărtărescu, Adrian Marino, Alexandru Mușina, Paul Cornea and Ion Ianoși and the dialogue between Gabriel Liiceanu and Mircea Ivănescu. The author maintains a keen eye while regarding their works, remembering that the old generations are not necessarily *a priori* golden and perfect generations, but also noticing their relevance in the evolution of literary history.

From this point, a reader can already notice the diversity of texts that Goldiș chooses to integrate in his volume. Travelling from poetry to prose, the author includes memoirs, autobiographies, dialogues, childhood fiction (Răzvan Rădulescu) and anthologies: one coordinated by Marius Chivu, dedicated to short-fiction of the 2000s and the other, coordinated by Alina Purcaru, called *Povești cu scriitoare și copii (Stories with female writers and children)* dedicated to short-fiction that focuses on the mother-child relationship.

When considering the unity of these reviews, as I pointed out before, it's quite difficult to follow a main theoretical narrative that the author adopts. The texts seem to be linked only by a rather abstract part of zooming out, through which the reader is allowed to match different dots from different chronicles in order to create his or her own history of Romanian contemporary literature.

However, the chapters concerning poetry tend to emphasize some common features of the contemporary dynamics. If we take a look, for example, at the review dedicated to Andrei Dósa or the one dedicated to Ștefan Baghiu, we will notice that the author exposes the mundane character of the Romanian lyricism. The poets of the 2000s seem to refuse to include *high motifs* in their poetry and instead choose to talk about colloquial subjects.

Regarding prose fiction, Goldiș calls attention to the main themes that travel in the contemporary literary circuit. He highlights through a review dedicated to Petru Cimpoeșu that there are two main vectors that guide Romanian literature: one with an autofictional tendency and one with a higher level of fantasizing, with a larger ambition to be imaginative and inventive.

Closer to our times, the chapters dedicated to Dan Lungu with his novel, *Pâlpâiri* (*Flickers*, 2018) or to Bogdan Coșa with *Cât de aproape sunt ploile reci* (*How close are the cold rains*, 2020) are meant to expose the instrumentalization of the rural and urban spaces in Romanian prose fiction. Also, the author discusses the problem of transnationality, exposing the consequences of capitalism on the older Romanian generations: migration and reevaluation of the rural context and its economic reactions.

In the last review, dedicated to Sașa Zare and her debut, *Dezrădăcinare* (*Uprooting*, 2023), the author points out a certain return of vitality and a contestation of the patriarchy. The volume, considered both a novel and a manifesto, can be taken as a conclusion to this large chapter dedicated to Romanian literary fiction, not without noticing the relevance of this novel in the local debates regarding LGBTQ+ discourse and the toxic intergenerational relationship between mothers and daughters (pp. 167-171).

The second part of the volume concentrates twenty-two chronicles dedicated to the Romanian criticism after the 2000s. Goldiș delves into some of the most prolific critics with the ambition to show their relevance in the literary field. Depending on the figure taken under interrogation, the author knows how to tackle all the relevant topics that must be questioned.

One of the most complex chronicles is the one dedicated to Nicolae Manolescu. Goldiș, aware of the importance and the complexity of such a critic, gives us an exhaustive chronicle to *Istoria critică a literaturii române. Cinci secole de literatură* (*The Critical History of Romanian Literature. Five Centuries of Literature*). Systematically, Goldiș follows the mechanisms that form the Romanian literary canon. He dedicates sub-chapters in which he makes the critique of post-war criticism; the main target is its aestheticism and impressionistic strategies to evaluate fiction, as well as the belief in the autonomy of the aesthetic. After that, he takes a closer look at the author, Nicolae Manolescu, focusing on his evolution as a young critic up to the way in which he guided the younger generation through the communist regime in order to maintain a certain distance from the influence of the political apparatus. Furthermore, Goldiș does not forget to place every detail in perspective, zooming out and exposing Manolescu's relationship with his teacher, G. Călinescu. Pointing out that G. Călinescu offered a history of Romanian literature in the inter-war period, Goldiș makes parallels between the two daring volumes, exposing the innovations and updates that Manolescu had to offer. For example, the author mentions that *Istoria critică* is more exclusive regarding the number of authors introduced. Even more, he reproaches Manolescu that there is no attention for literary groups, collectives and cenacles. With a keen hermeneutical eye, Goldiș knows where the most important part of such a literary history written by a post-war critic lies: the postmodern literature. On this note, the 2000s critic exposes how Manolescu fails to consecrate his own national literary life.

Against canons and hierarchies, Goldiș puts in his volume a series of reviews regarding broader literary life. Chronicles dedicated to Nicoleta Sălcudeanu, Mihaela Ursa, Andrei Gorzo, Florina Pîrjol, Grația Benga, Adriana Stan and Cosmin Ciotloș are meant to offer a scenic view over some groups (Cenaclul de luni – The Monday Cenacle), theoretical approaches (structuralism) and literary topics (2000s poetry, autofiction or the erotic motif in literature).

On the other hand, some of the reviews are dedicated to authors that concentrated their work on only one figure. This is the case for Mihai Iovănel (a study on Mihail Sebastian), Teodora Dumitru (a study on Eugen Lovinescu), Andrei Terian (a study on G. Călinescu), Sanda Cordoș (a monography on Ion Vinea), Laura Pavel (a monography on Dumitru Țepeneag). The author engages in meta-critical analysis in order to give the public a professional introduction to these academic volumes. Goldiș gathers up reviews that, from a reader's perspective, become a manual for contemporary criticism that is linked to the broader field of Romanian literary history.

It might seem that Goldiș refuses to give the public a clear exploration through the contemporary literature domain, but, in fact, he succeeds to portray the evolution of a critic chronologically, while displaying the thematic vectors that impregnated the last twenty years of humanistic autochthonous life. His aim is not to delineate rough patches between authors and academics, but to bring the public closer to the humanities.

The last part of the book, the shortest, is oriented towards international theory. Encompassing ten chronicles, Goldiș does an impressive job by introducing the public reader – from academia or outside it – to the contemporary emergent theories.

The main theory that dominates the chronicles is *distant theory* and World Literature Studies. Goldiș comments on authors such as Franco Moretti, Matthew L. Jockers, Martin Puncher and David Damrosch, highlighting not just their theories, but their possible connection with the Romanian field.

The author remarks, in his review of Franco Moretti's and Matthew L. Jokers' theories, two main obstacles that could slow down *distant theory* from entering academia. Because of the post-war tendency of practicing an impressionistic criticism, *distant reading* could be seen with a skeptical eye. Even more, Goldiș observes a pragmatic reason: the deficiency in electronic archives, without which a quantitative analysis cannot be done completely.

One of the most important articles that stands out in this chapter is not a review, but a short study regarding the prejudices formed against quantitative studies.

Goldiș turns his attention to five misjudgments made by the Romanian humanistic field. The first one tackles the idea that quantitative data ruins the critic's hermeneutical input. The author of the volume points out that these kinds of studies do not function only on digital effort, but they need a clear hypothesis and a conclusion that can be formulated only through a critic's interpretative skills.

A second issue tackled by Goldiș is the belief according to which quantitative data ruins the old aesthetic and theoretic categories. Therefore, he explains how, through Moretti, quantitative studies keep count of the old aesthetic structures after a postmodern era in which, through deconstruction, the old forms were demolished (p. 338). Linked to the idea that these studies do not care about old forms, Goldiș highlights the third misjudgment, according to which quantitative studies do not pay attention to the text.

The author explains how distant reading and computational analysis work together with the close reading processes, in which the computer or the critic must interpret the themes, the recurrence of words, phrases etc., using a microscopic view to recognize specific or more general features of literary texts.

The fourth observation is linked with the idea that individuality and specificity are lost. Goldiș exposes the shifts that take place once literary movements, themes, motifs are well connected and intertwined through computational analysis. The author invokes a study over the recurrence of certain words in Kafka's fiction, arguing how one novel is rather individualized from another, by the use, for example, of neutral words (p. 340).

Lastly, the fifth misjudgment that Goldiș comments on is the lack of interaction between quantitative studies and socio-political contexts. The author evokes a study from 2007, through which Matthew L. Jockers observes the dynamics of Irish-American fiction over the course of 250 years.

Throughout *ZOOM IN/ZOOM OUT*, Alex Goldiș, professor of Romanian contemporary literature, showcases his skill in analyzing and contextualizing contemporary literature. As I mentioned before, there is no unity between chronicles, but they manage to highlight the evolution of a critic. Structured as a collage, the volume brings together authors and theories, forming a pluralistic space for the contemporary literary landscape. On this note, the volume becomes an intriguing archive of articles that, otherwise, would be lost in online folders where the public rarely looks.

Horațiu TOHĂȚAN

Master's Student, Faculty of Letters

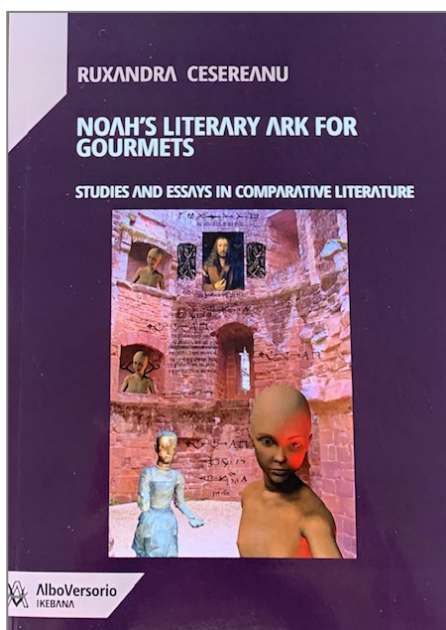
Babeș-Bolyai University

Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Email: horatiu.tohatan@gmail.

BOOKS

Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Noah's Literary Ark for Gourmets. Studies and Essays in Comparative Literature*, Milano, Edizioni AlboVersorio, 2023, 194 p.



The collection of essays by the writer and researcher Ruxandra Cesereanu presents a suite of critical studies in the form of hermeneutic articulations, as reflected in the title of the volume, for an audience nursing thoroughly entrained dialogic polyvalences. The author of these studies aims to launch new critical nuances and brave hypotheses through which to immerse the reader in an exercise of comparative reading. The pillars of strength on which these demonstrations of literary criticism are supported shed light on the theoretical arsenal of the author. The reader goes through this volume witnessing the incubation of a layered hermeneutic where mythocriticism, psychoanalysis, history and ethics meet to delimit themselves in fine nuances or to complement each other.

We must appreciate the dexterity with which Ruxandra Cesereanu precisely masters the tools of comparative reading in the dialogue she initiates, often even in the middle of dissonance, or, at first glance, of non-interstitial registers.

The volume is made up of five sections, each of which revolves around a broader conceptual theme: the imaginary and the symbiosis produced between fictional worlds and their witnesses; the replacement of the center with the periphery alongside the rhizomatic poetics it gives birth to; the posthuman condition and the leaps from utopia to anti-utopia alongside a new habitation of the human psyche; the restorative function of dissident literature and the legitimization of literature as a recapture of history; and last but not least, a cinematic foray into the philosophy of the image bordering on a poetics of nostalgia.

Ruxandra Cesereanu develops a fecundity-sterility dialectic starting from two distinct states of paradise in T. S. Eliot and C. S. Lewis in which the author relies on an ideational glissando on the possibility of salvation. Analyzing on a mythical and symbolic level the



idea of a lost or revitalized paradise (*The Waste Land* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*), the author slices the image of the desolate land on the border between ritual and absurdity, meaning and alienation. The demystification and loss of the sacred dimension of antiquity, the author argues, holds a fundamental key to understanding Eliot's work. Ruxandra Cesereanu, on the one hand, emphasizes the responsibility and intentionality of modern man, and on the other hand, proposes, in the case of Lewis, an alchemical and syncretic reading lens, superimposed on the theological vision, in the form of a "vegetal Christianity". The crucial nuance that the author points out is that literature provokes a spiritual exercise of recalibration of the ethical, moral and spiritual coordinates. Her essay highlights the idea that the search for the fictional paradise is a form of rewriting, problematizing and getting acquainted with it.

The author shows an obvious interest in the "fantasy complex", a concept she treats from the perspective of the reparative effect of compensating for a possible universe that one wants to reach, in the sense of transgressing the unconscious. Ruxandra Cesereanu launches the hypothesis according to which fantasy literature can lead to identity metamorphoses on a teleological level in her analysis of the volumes *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The exercise of imagining a compensatory paradise can be capitalized on after the elimination of some systemic structures, and here lies the stake of defamiliarization that Ruxandra Cesereanu unveils using the concepts of specialized literature. The author creates a mosaic composed of exegetes' definitions, pointing out that the fantasy spectrum incorporates an extension of the human psyche, a favorable context for overcoming negative, traumatic structures. The researcher demonstrates the way in which individual or collective maturation can be achieved through alternative realities. The terminus of the study lies in the argument that solidifies the way Tolkien conveys the solution of salvation through stories, as he problematizes questions of literary theory such as their origins and the resistance to narrative. For the author, the mechanisms of proximity and distance present in Tolkien's work, the reimagining of the relationship between the characters and the self, constitute the essence of the idea of enchantment. In this way, Cesereanu achieves a meta-reflection on the edge of fantasy consciousness.

Another analysis is devoted to the Japanese paradisiacal space in Sei Shonagon's *The Pillow Book* and how the ecstatic geography experienced by an aestheticizing eye can reframe the being in an ineffable state. The author goes beyond the Aristotelian grid of interpretation of divine contemplation, suggesting the need for sensory knowledge. In other words, the author analyzes the aesthetics of this paradise by turning to the Japanese heritage indicating a synesthetic reading key, which is corporeal up to ecstasy. Sei Shonagon's paradise is one lived and undertaken on a material, but dazzling level. Ruxandra Cesereanu inventories the synesthetic frescoes and the aesthetic principles that emerge from the exercise of looking. The taxonomy of the beautiful evokes and ensures a hierarchy of the imperial institution, focusing on the act of creation. The power and autonomy of desire seem to be synonymous with the art of gardening. At the same time, evil is not the one to blame for the desolation of a garden, but instead the absence of good is the one responsible for it. This connotation given to paradise emphasizes, on the one hand, the primacy of the will, but also submission to hierarchical structures, because beauty is also marked by a gradation of perfection. Ruxandra Cesereanu nuances the obsession for the garden of paradise by recalling the influence of space in man's relationship with the cosmos, drawing important differences in relation to the biblical

paradise. While the Japanese paradise is marked by change and modesty, the biblical paradise is marked by eternity and nudity. The author's critical approach reminds us that we are dealing with an archeology of the ecstatic female gaze in front of purity.

In the essay "The Atlas of Globalizing Fiction", Ruxandra Cesereanu examines the hexagonal structure of the Omani Cloud Atlas. The author offers a spatial track for understanding this fictional universe by developing the concept of identity matrix. The destinies of the characters are codependent on the spatiality that contains them, an opportunity for the author to give Mitchell's spatial techniques a new name. She considers the designation of "poetics of the space" to be more just than "literary mapping". Spatial transgressiveness is the tour de force that Cesereanu sees implemented in *Cloud Atlas*. Moreover, it marks the phenomenon of the globalization of fiction.

The Yerofeyev-Zinoviev-Bolaño triad brings to the fore the condition of marginality as spatiality and as a social body. The triple case study brings up the x-ray of some "space usurpers" alongside the gradations of symbolic deaths they suffer. Peripheries become centers in the case of a simulated inferno of Gogolian expression (Yerofeyev), drunkenness carries attributes of dissent, and justice is equivalent to an infernal court (Zinoviev), as utopia slides into anti-utopia in the underground of the ultimate sense of poetry (Bolaño). Ruxandra Cesereanu envisions the possibility of the existence of a single collective character. Likened to Caliban's sons, Bolaño's characters exist independently of a canon that births them.

Bolaño's postmodern baroque is interpreted as a ballad of misery in the multiple valences of the novel *The Savage Detectives*: hazard, alienation, madness. Another text that proves, in the author's opinion, the ontic turn from the edge to the center is *2666*. The author's remark about overcoming the genre is important. Precisely because of this rhizomatic project, the grotesque is revealed as a noir of plural identity quests.

Franz Werfel is an anchor figure for the Armenian resistance whose literature represents a way of enduring in the face of oppression and genocide. Ruxandra Cesereanu focuses her study on the rediscovery of the Armenian cause, arguing why the resistance on Mount Musa Dagh can be seen as a biblical rewriting of Armenian expression. In addition to the resistance mechanisms identified, the author insists on a syncretic reading, offering a mythical, psychic, and biblical reading model of the Musa Dagh Mountain.

The obsession with memory in the novel *Dora Bruder* by Patrick Modiano questions a poetics of remains and traces, where the shadow aims to reveal identity. Ruxandra Cesereanu focuses in the "Cenotaph and Memory" study on the thaumaturgical process of searching. The author even sees in the plot of the novel a psychopomp gesture to restore the ethical and ontic connection with the truth. Grafting onto already existing criticism, Cesereanu discusses the narrative function of the image. The importance of spectrality is one of capitalizing on gaps and forgetting. The author pleads for a terminological alternative regarding the hybrid genre proposed by Modiano, namely that of "documentary fiction". The gaps become testimonies, and the homage to the specter that has become a woman makes possible the subject's agency over personal history. The post-memoir exposes the great history.

The intergenerational polyphony of Ludmila Uličkaia finds its place in a study applied to two novels: *Imago* and *Iakov's Ladder*. The author's intention is to demonstrate Uličkaia's stylistic and architectural kinship with Solzhenitsyn. The author claims that the fictional approach can lead to the revisiting of history and indicates how Uličkaia investigates the myth of truth as ages repeating themselves in other forms. The Russian

Gulag is multi-faceted, and Cesereanu aims to decipher its variations. The traumatic course from one generation to another is carefully monitored in both works, where the Gulag represents the weight of this legacy.

Posthuman binoculars follow the reality-unreality binomial and the mutations brought about by the violation or manipulation of possibilities. Hybridity is the new eschatological ambition present in *Lanark* and *Unthank* in which the anthropocentric profile is fractured, and bioethics is what needs to be legitimized. The author wonders what type of species is proposed within the vertebrate-liquefied pitch. Cesereanu problematizes a rather a-human equation. The author also studies "the ontological alterity" and "the alterity of the opposite" through a posthuman lens, in the works of Will Self and of Marie Darrieussecq respectively, with metamorphosis as the common denominator. The author notes that a subject reframed towards fragmentation is needed, and this implies a constant revisiting of the imaginary. The question that Cesereanu raises is related to the possibility of overcoming a canonical pattern. How much are we willing to dialogize with a radical otherness? Is communion still possible in the face of differences? The author maps for us a psycho-somatic Eden adapted to the paradise of transsexuality. Ruxandra Cesereanu sees in postmodernity new rites of initiation in conquering decentrality. If *Cock and Bull* present an Adamic couple outside of codependency, where the being is self-sufficient through radically assumed androgyny, *A Novel of Lust and Transformation* speaks of a decay assumed with a self-ironic narrative skepticism. Extreme somatization leads to the exclusive living of the primary needs represented by the non-human. Living fully in otherness, as Ruxandra Cesereanu suggests, involves a revolution of cognitive and ontic schemas. The definitive metamorphosis of the characters could be understood on an epistemic level. It is not the protagonists who have to return to the original state, but the society that has to contain them, alongside itself, in its change.

The pulverized nomadism of Andrei Codrescu is analyzed in the last part of the section. The author analyzes the profile of the anarchetypal poet in the context of the relocation of the spirit of the avant-garde. The crisis of the posthuman subject leads Codrescu to embrace the dispersion of a quantum logic that recomposes from fragments. The exile, the avant-garde, the hipster, the anti-systemic mentor are included in Andrei Codrescu. Ruxandra Cesereanu analyzes a series of essays and novels by the writer in the middle of which anarchy is a primordial condition for liberation from cyberutopia. The author concludes the ludic-anarchic profile by reminding that Codrescu's work militates against dissolving into a simulacrum.

The cinematographic addendum apotheotically concludes the volume of predominantly literary studies, offering an exceptionally cryptic exercise in revisiting the inflections of nostalgia in Andrei Tarkovski (*Nostalgia*) and Lars von Trier (*Melancholia*). The analysis of the films represents a trans- and intermedial study in relation to the history of images and the cultural and philosophical prerogative present in the directorial choices of the two. Ruxandra Cesereanu offers a lucid and multifaceted meditation on the origin of this imaginary of nostalgia in which the history of ideas seems to communicate actively and reactively with the history of art.

Elisabeth BACIU

MA Student, Faculty of Letters

Babeş Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Email: elisabeth.baciu@stud.ubbcluj.

BOOKS

**Anne Reverseau, Jessica Desclaux, Marcela Scibiorska,
Corentin Lahouste, *Murs d'images d'écrivains, Dispositifs et gestes
iconographiques (XIX^e-XXI^e siècle)*, Louvain,
Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2023, 279 p.**



Paru en février 2023, l'ouvrage collectif rédigé par le groupe de chercheurs de Louvain se propose d'introduire les lecteurs dans les coulisses de la création littéraire. *Murs d'images d'écrivains, Dispositifs et gestes iconographiques (XIX^e-XXI^e siècle)* radiographie l'intimité artistique des écrivains, en mettant au premier plan l'aspect visuel. Paru dans le cadre du programme de recherche ERC Handling de l'UCLouvain, le volume ouvre l'horizon d'attente du lecteur en s'attaquant à la fonction de l'image/de la photographie dans la construction identitaire de l'écrivain et le rôle qu'elle remplit dans le lieu destiné à la création. Recueil critique hybride, qui mélange le texte critique aux reproductions des espaces intérieurs où travaillent des écrivains, le livre a comme but l'analyse de l'influence que le milieu visuel qui entoure l'artiste a sur sa construction identitaire, et surtout sur la configuration de la création littéraire.

En abordant un sujet de grand intérêt actuel – l'hybridité des arts et la relation entre l'écriture et l'espace visuel –, le livre problématise cette relation intermédiaire sur laquelle se base le processus de création littéraire, notamment du point de vue de l'écrivain contemporain. Au cours des sept parties et chapitre par chapitre, les chercheurs interprètent soigneusement les gestes identitaires de chaque écrivain pris comme étude de cas, afin de donner au lecteur une image de plusieurs écosystèmes visuels très biens agencés.

La première partie, « Des images pour décorer ses murs. Questions d'esthétique », problématise le goût des écrivains concernant l'aspect visuel de leur domicile et de leur espace de travail. En s'appuyant sur de grandes légendes de la littérature comme Proust



et en arrivant à des écrivains contemporains en pleine ascension, comme Yannick Haenel, les chercheurs analysent les préférences visuelles de ceux-ci concernant les objets qui les accompagnent dans le processus créatif. Dans cette partie, le lecteur rencontre la figure de « l'écrivain esthète », désireux de s'entourer, comme dans un musée personnel en miniature, par des répliques de peintures célèbres (Joséphin Péladan) ou par des cartes postales reproduisant des tableaux qui apparaissent dans les romans (Yannick Haenel).

En plus d'inventorier des écrivains qui s'intéressent au côté esthétique, ce chapitre met en parallèle le goût d'esthète (soutenu par Marcel Proust, qui fait l'éloge de l'image comme enjeu de la narration et élément déclencheur de la mémoire) et le désir de rompre avec la tendance « inesthétique » des surréalistes (Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon, Georges Hugnet) de renoncer au canon, en mettant sur leurs murs des cartes postales avec des rues, des affiches publicitaires et des couvertures de livres. Le lecteur peut suivre les tendances esthétiques des écrivains consacrés et de leurs héritiers qui construisent de vrais « écosystèmes visuels » où « chaque élément, et même l'absence d'élément [devient] signifiant » (p. 55).

La seconde partie, « Murs d'images, lieux de mémoire personnels », projette le regard sur le monde affectif de l'écrivain, dans sa manière de vivre le travail du deuil et d'esquisser son image publique. Les premières sections sont dédiées à l'espace commémoratif créé par Edmond de Goncourt pour garder intacte la mémoire de son ami décédé, l'artiste Paul Gavarni. Le mur de l'écrivain devient ainsi une chapelle sacrée qui préserve l'image et expose les œuvres de l'illustrateur disparu. Dans ce cas, les photos collées au mur remplissent la fonction d'élément catalyseur pour le travail du deuil.

En ce qui suit, les auteurs s'arrêtent sur le cas de Simone de Beauvoir, qui aimait s'entourer de photographies illustrant ses proches, et des instantanés pris pendant ses voyages. Le mur devient ainsi un lieu de la mémoire personnelle, un trésor de souvenirs qui va être transmis aux générations futures. Les chercheurs problématisent, à partir du dispositif mémoriel de Simone de Beauvoir et de « l'autel admiratif » que la romancière Violette Leduc lui consacre, la condition de la femme en tant que « gardienne de la mémoire privée » (p. 69). Les auteurs du recueil apportent aussi une critique historique et sociale sur la place cruciale de la femme dans la préservation et dans la transmission générationnelle des souvenirs familiaux et de l'héritage iconographique. Un cas à part est représenté par l'appartement de Romain Gary dont les murs sont recouverts par ses (auto)portraits publics, parus dans des revues, et par des découpages d'articles sur sa femme. Ici, la réflexion de l'intériorité de l'écrivain est exposée tout d'abord dans les médias et ensuite récupérée par l'auteur dans un mouvement personnel – public – personnel.

Le troisième chapitre, « Figures tutélaires aux murs et panthéons littéraires », explore « la parenté culturelle » établie à travers les portraits et les images agencés dans le cabinet de travail. Amis ou modèles, les figures derrière la vitre, qui semblent emprunter l'allure d'un totem, « regardent » les écrivains et les inspirent dans leur travail. Cependant, dans les cas explorés par les chercheurs, la dimension sacrée des représentations du chapitre précédent est remplacée par une note de familiarité. Les écrivains s'entourent par des photographies pour créer une communauté, au sens propre, et en même temps figuré : « ces portraits de figures tutélaires sont l'équivalent des photographies de famille, une façon de se construire (pour soi) et de montrer (pour

les autres) sa famille imaginaire » (p. 110) Si la famille culturelle envisagée par Martin du Gard est soigneusement rangée sur le mur, pour aider l'écrivain dans son processus de documentation et de création des personnages, pour Louis Scutenaire, « la reconstruction généalogique de sa famille spirituelle » est représentée par un pêle-mêle de découpages, en accord avec son écriture surréaliste.

Les chercheurs traitent dans ce chapitre une situation à part, celle des librairies qui ont un coin dédié aux portraits des écrivains. La période de l'entre-deux-guerres a connu l'essor de ce genre d'espaces dédiés à la lecture et aussi à la reconstruction de la communauté littéraire formée d'auteurs, de libraires et de lecteurs. Les librairies d'Adrienne Monnier et Sylvia Bleach ont entrepris ce genre de travail, d'effacer les limites entre le public et le privé et de donner l'occasion aux lecteurs de jeter un regard au-delà de l'image publique de l'écrivain, dans son intimité.

La quatrième partie s'intitule « La bibliothèque comme mur pluridimensionnel » et voit cet espace à la fois comme public et privé. Cette fois-ci la parenté culturelle de l'écrivain s'exprime par les livres exposés, ce qui crée l'idée d'une ouverture de l'écrivain vers le social, vers le public. D'autre part, la bibliothèque est abordée par les chercheurs en tant que lieu privilégié de la création littéraire. Les étagères insérées dans ce mur d'images gardent, parmi les livres, des souvenirs visuels (des photographies, des cartes postales, des découpages, des illustrations) qui deviennent un vrai réservoir d'idées et d'inspiration pour l'écrivain. Les critiques abordent le cas de l'atelier créatif de Michel Butor, où le lecteur se confronte avec une saturation visuelle. Parmi les livres et les manuscrits, il y a aussi des dessins faits par l'enfant de Michel Butor, des lettres échangées et des œuvres issues de la collaboration avec d'autres artistes. Son espace de travail et d'écriture d'où se dégage le sentiment d'isolement, devient, regardé de plus près, un espace de la collaboration et de l'interaction artistique. Cet intérieur ne s'impose pas seulement comme lieu de dialogue entre les confrères, mais aussi comme lieu de rencontre entre l'art plastique et la littérature. À une analyse plus profonde, l'apparent désordre du bureau et de la bibliothèque cache un ordre intérieur issu de la vision de Butor.

À l'opposé, l'image de la bibliothèque d'Henri Pollès s'impose par la rigueur et l'ordre qui la caractérisent. Compartimentée en sections historiques et géographiques, elle devient un véritable phare littéraire guidant l'auteur dans son processus d'écriture. La même fonction de point d'ancrage remplit le bureau de Yannick Haenel. Même s'il est connu en tant qu'écrivain nomade, qui trouve son inspiration dans des lieux divers tels que le train ou le café, c'est son espace familial qui lui confère un véritable abri pour le déroulement de l'acte créatif.

Le cinquième chapitre, « Un moteur pour la création », s'attaque à la facette du mur d'images en tant qu'outil qui facilite et qui entraîne le processus de l'écriture. Chaque auteur analysé a sa propre manière de s'entourer d'éléments visuels qui remplissent le rôle d'adjuvants ou d'intermédiaires entre les pensées et la feuille de papier encore blanche. Issues du « besoin de spatialiser sa pensée » (p. 188), les variantes d'agencement des images dans l'espace personnel de l'écrivain se présentent sous formes très diverses, d'un point de vue à la fois physique et numérique. Le lecteur rencontre la situation de Jean-Christophe Bailly qui a conçu un dispositif réunissant des photographies différentes, choisies de manière arbitraire, sans connexions entre elles ; mais aussi

l'esthétique de Christophe Poot qui poste souvent des photographies avec son lieu de travail sur ses réseaux sociaux, comme une sorte de mise en abyme de son inspiration visuelle.

Les chercheurs abordent le cas spécial de l'écriture ekphrastique, en retenant l'exemple d'Henri de Régnier dont le bureau de travail est une « réserve d'images matricielles » (p. 162) utilisées pour faire avancer ses narrations. D'autre part, Yannick Haenel est présenté dans la posture d'un écrivain alchimiste qui transforme le matériel visuel en matériel écrit, ayant toujours près de lui les œuvres picturales qu'il désire transposer dans l'univers de la parole. En d'autres mots, *via* l'ekphrasis, Haenel convertit en texte les émotions et les sentiments que son mur d'images génère en permanence en lui.

« Montrer le mur d'images : développement d'un cliché médiatique » traite le concept de « posture de l'auteur », c'est-à-dire la façon des écrivains de créer leur image publique à l'aide de l'espace consacré au travail. Les lecteurs montrent un grand intérêt pour les incursions dans l'univers personnel de l'écrivain, désirant toujours jeter des regards indiscrets dans les coulisses du processus créatif. C'est pourquoi les écrivains s'exposent souvent dans leur espace intime devant leurs murs d'images. Par exemple, Marguerite Duras se laisse immortalisée par la caméra dans un état admiratif devant des portraits, tandis que William S. Burroughs devient le sujet même d'une photographie (la couverture de cet ouvrage critique) qui le montre en tant que créateur de son mur d'images, mais aussi comme manipulateur de l'élément visuel. Le cas de Georges Perec est analysé pour établir une liaison entre l'apparition médiatique de la personne de l'écrivain, à l'aide de son mur d'images, et l'imaginaire romanesque de l'auteur. Pour Perec, l'agencement des images ne tient pas seulement à la construction d'une posture, mais il nourrit aussi son imagination, car le mur devient « un plan symbolique sous-jacent du roman dont le bric-à-brac textuel fait intrinsèquement écho au bric-à-brac visuel propre au mur d'images » (p. 220).

Le dernier chapitre, « Exposer les murs d'écrivains », problématise l'accès du public à ce lieu sacré de la création. Les chercheurs mettent en avant le caractère muséal de l'espace personnel de l'écrivain, en donnant des valeurs à chaque objet, livre et image qui décorent la pièce. Deux variantes sont prises en considération, l'une d'entre elles étant l'ouverture de l'espace vers les visiteurs, telle qu'elle est rendue possible par la maison de l'écrivain. Par exemple, dans le cas de Michel Butor, la conservation du bureau est proposée pour accueillir des artistes en stage, afin de permettre l'usage des livres collectionnés par l'écrivain au fil des années. Dans le cas d'André Breton, son mur d'images a été relogé au centre Georges Pompidou. Il est à observer donc cette tendance de reconstruction du geste identitaire en dehors de l'espace familial et d'avancer une entière scénographie publique qui doit correspondre à celle intime.

Ce livre critique est donc une source d'informations essentielles pour les passionnés de littérature, car il leur offre un vrai « tour guidé » de ces espaces paratopiques. À la fin de ce voyage visuel, il est clair que cet espace privilégié du dialogue a un rôle crucial dans le laboratoire créatif de l'écrivain, le mur d'images devenant une sorte d'*axis mundi*, non seulement de l'écrivain, mais aussi de son univers littéraire.

Maria-Lorena RACOLȚA

*Doctorante à la Faculté des Lettres,
Université Babeș-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca, Roumanie
Email : maria.racolta@ubbcluj.ro*