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Editor's Note

The present volume of the Cultural Intertexts series includes articles by specialists from partner universities, doctoral schools and academic research centres, as well as a selection of papers presented at the third edition of the Scientific Conference organised by the Doctoral Schools of "Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati (4-5 June 2015), section 6: "Cultural Spaces: Retrospective and Prospective Views". Inaugurating a new entry, a review on a doctoral thesis is added to round up the collection.

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We are especially grateful to the scientific advisors for their valuable contribution to the volume, for their suggestions and commentaries on the coherence, consistency, relevance and originality of the papers they kindly accepted to review.

Michaela Praisler

Embracing the Absurd of a Meaningless Life: Edward Albee's *A Delicate Balance*

Andra Elena AGAFIȚEI*

Abstract

The passing of time, the development of technologies and services and the emancipation of women are just some of the elements that have brought their contribution to the shaping of the new American family. In the modern American family, everything has suffered immense transformations, starting with the role reversal between the husband and wife and ending with the altered relationships with the other members of the family.

*The American home has become just a simple house, a space in which love, affection, mutual respect, comfort, and security are no longer its attributes. The home is not a shelter anymore, but a hiding place; a place in which the spouses, who have grown so accustomed to each other that they have nothing else to talk about, choose to live their meaningless lives, waiting for the final moment of existence – death. One such couple, who fears and denies reality and tries to escape into the comfortable world of illusion, is the one Edward Albee presents in *A Delicate Balance*.*

The present paper aims at awakening the readers' consciousness regarding their condition as human beings "trapped" in an absurd world, the purpose being that of bringing forth the social function of the Theatre of the Absurd.

Key words: American cultural studies, American family, Modern American drama, social function, Theatre of the Absurd.

A Delicate Balance opens with the two main characters, Agnes and Tobias, who spend their time indoors, in their library-living room. They are approaching sixty and they live with Claire, Agnes's sister, with whom Tobias once had an affair. They drink and discuss about Claire's drinking problems and about the possibility of Agnes going mad someday.

They seem to live a calm, monotonous, and balanced life. However, the balance of their home is soon ruined by three arrivals, by people whom they perceive as disturbing elements. First, there is Claire, then comes Julia, their daughter, who returns "from the latest of her marital failures" (Bigsby 1968: 224). The last who come to their house are Edna and Harry, the so-called best friends. All these characters come "in search of comfort, hoping to find some refuge from

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the sudden crisis in their own lives" (Biggsby 1968: 224). However, these arrivals do nothing more than to temporarily disturb the balance Agnes always says has to be maintained, no matter the price. In order to keep this balance, to which Agnes and Tobias have grown accustomed over the years, they ignore Claire who, once categorized as an alcoholic, can easily be left aside. As for Julia, they prefer not to discuss too much about her fourth failed marriage.

Instead, what they cannot do is ignore Edna and Harry, who have become frightened and have come to spend the night at their house. The fabricated, unnatural equilibrium of the house is ruined by their simple arrival. Not being used to having guests in the house, Agnes starts acting strangely when it seems to her that some things have been placed somewhere else in the room. However, she is relieved when Edna tells her that the things are still in the room, but placed in a different position.

The presence of Edna and Harry in their house does much more damage than Agnes and Tobias could have imagined. Their arrival makes them realize how estranged have they become in time. Living separate lives, each of them having a room of one's own, Agnes considers her husband a stranger in her bedroom:

Le temps perdu. I've never understood that; *perdu* means lost, not merely... past, but it was nice to have you there, though I remember, when it was a constancy, how easily I would fall asleep, pace my breathing to your breathing, and if we were touching! ah, what a splendid cocoon that was. But last night - what a shame, what a sadness - you were a stranger, and I stayed awake (Albee 2008: 92).

Second of all, Harry and Edna bring with themselves that fright, that terror, the "nothingness itself" (Vos 1973: 83). Driven by the "emptiness of their own relationship" (Sykes 1973: 453), the two hurry to their best friends' house, where they are perceived as intruders. Even though Tobias admits that their "forty-year friendship may have grown to love" (Kingsley 1973: 78), he still does not want them in because, he too, in his turn, has withdrawn from the real life, especially after his son's death. However, the situation forces the sixty-year-old couple to receive their "twins". Not being used to having other people in the house, Agnes and Tobias feel uncomfortable and confused, even if they try to be calm.

Pushed by his wife, who considers that men must deal with the moral problems, Tobias must decide whether or not to let them stay, "knowing that the 'disease' they carry is contagious and that infection in the household will likely upset the balance" (Weales 2005: 32). As the man of the house, he must at least try to push away "the plagues", as Agnes calls Harry and Edna's arrival, especially since Agnes seems to realize that the two friends resemble too much with her and her husband.

In *A Delicate Balance*, all characters are cheaters; all of them try one way or another to escape the reality of their lives. Claire finds comfort in alcohol – which has always been a “solution” for many people – Julia runs back home, just like a scared child, trying to find comfort in her parents’ arms, and Edna and Harry leave the threatening atmosphere that has installed in their home only to face it again, this time, in the house of Agnes and Tobias, in the shape of an invisible mirror that stands between the two couples. They all try to escape “the anesthesia of contemporary life” (Biggsby 1968: 224), escape which Agnes sees possible in her speculation of the possibility of going mad. This “protective schizophrenia” (Biggsby 1968: 226) is her last resort.

Nonetheless, even though scared by the reality she sees in others, Agnes does not abandon her ship, but continues to be the “brave sailor” who knows that when the night is over, and the nightmare is gone, things go back to how they were before the unfortunate “event”. “And when the daylight comes again... comes order to it” (Albee 2008: 122), the exact order that she has so desperately tried to maintain, the so much desired balance.

The recollection of their past, the inability to fall asleep next to the man she has chosen as husband prove that their spiritual connection does not exist anymore. The blessing of the intimate companionship no longer characterizes this couple. The idea of growing old together fades away for Agnes and Tobias. Failing to give and receive love, they remain bitter and choose to lie to themselves, believing their life is perfect as it is.

As we can see, the “home” of the modern American family of the twentieth century is but an empty shell; a space devoid of meaning and feelings, a faded image of what once has been a comforting and nurturing shelter for all the members of the family.

Through *A Delicate Balance*, Edward Albee does much more than to present dysfunctional families, in which love is the love of undisturbed routine and where comfort is the one offered by the alcoholic drinks; through his play, the American playwright draws our attention to the fact that human relationships desperately need to be reestablished. “In this sense, the Theatre of the Absurd is the true theatre of our time” (Esslin 1960: 6).

Acting like a mirror placed between the audience and the stage, the play, through its apparent “nonsensical” exposure of the situation, succeeds in making the public think outside the box, think about what *is* going on, not about what *happens*; it succeeds in making them question everything they see and hear on the stage, hoping that this will raise their awareness towards their own condition, that of modern human beings, “trapped” in an “absurd society”. Once the public arrive to this conclusion, once they identify the absurd in their own existence, only then they can choose to react against it or not, as the end of *A Delicate Balance* points out. Whatever this choice might be, we can be sure that it is a *conscious* one.

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New Realities of the Contemporary Novel

Ofelia AL-GAREEB*

Abstract

The aim of the present paper is to introduce some of the latest developments in the contemporary novel. In order to attain our goal, we shall proceed to firstly survey the cultural background, namely the (post)postmodernist period, then some tendencies concerning the literary genres, with an emphasis on three of the recent modes/genre – “hysterical realism”, “recherché postmodernism”, and the maximalist novel. In contemporary (literary) reality, the past is revisited, reconsidered, repeated, incorporated and modified, given a new meaning, and not necessarily imitated or copied, or negated; a reworking of the past to call for a new way of being in the future. The end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first are characterized by an effusion of many new versions of realism, sometimes hybridized; the multi-faceted realism is a reality.

Keywords: post-postmodernism, “hysterical realism”, “recherché postmodernism”, the maximalist novel, the multi-faceted realism.

According to theorists, critics, historians and artists, the actual state of affairs in art (literature included), be it postmodernism, or post-postmodernism, digimodernism or pseudomodernism (Kirby 2009: 1) [1], automodernism (Samuels 2008: 219) [2], post-millennialism [3], altermodernism (Bourriaud 2009: 12) [4], metamodernism (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010) “oscillates between the modern and the postmodern, between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity” (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010), swings between past and present, between hysteria and paranoia. As Kirby (2009) puts it, living in our actual world became problematic, troublesome, tensioned, equally for both writers and readers:

[...] this fatalistic anxiety extends far beyond geopolitics, into every aspect of contemporary life; from a general fear of social breakdown and identity loss, to a deep unease about diet and health; from anguish about the destructiveness of climate change, to the effects of a new personal ineptitude and helplessness. [...] This pseudo-modern world, so frightening and seemingly uncontrollable, inevitably feeds a desire to return to the infantile playing with toys which also characterizes the pseudo-modern cultural world. Here, the typical emotional state, radically superseding the hyper-consciousness of irony, is the *trance* – the state of being swallowed up by your activity. In place of the neurosis of

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modernism and the narcissism of postmodernism, pseudo-modernism *takes the world away*, by creating a new weightless nowhere of silent autism. You click, you punch the keys, you are 'involved', engulfed, deciding. You are the text, there is no-one else, no 'author'; there is nowhere else, no other time or place. You are free: you are the text: the text is superseded (Kirby 2009).

To counter-act the "fatalistic anxiety" that extends over the tormented inhabitants of this "taken away" world in order to find a sense, a meaning and a place in the contemporary universe, we are free to deliberately step over the threshold of the fictional universe, bearing deeply in our hearts the hope of discovering either the peace of mind, or a potential solution to the devouring existentialist disquietude, as some of the novelistic worlds depicted in the (post)postmodernist books imitate or recreate the actual world. And there, between the lines, the apathetic, sceptic, *blasé* reader can decipher a solution of evading, even for brief periods of time, "far from the madding crowd", far from reality.

As Danuta Fjellestad and Maria Engberg (2012) insist in their study, "Toward a Concept of Post-Postmodernism or Lady Gaga's Reconfigurations of Madonna", a (re)turn from postmodern irony to post-postmodern realism seems to have taken place, probably as a stage in the cyclical emergence of the literary mode. Illustrative of the process is Keith Opdahl's opinion, cited by the two authors mentioned above, "the realistic novel has remained our single major literary mode for over 125 years, habitually springing back to outlast those movements that ostensibly buried it" (Opdahl 1987: 1-16 cited in Fjellestad and Engberg 2012).

Such being the case, the invitation to revisit the past (as professed by many theorists of the cultural phenomenon of post-postmodernity) – a nostalgic return towards older styles and genres in a new context (under the guise of the desire to return to the infantile playing with the toys) – is not surprising; therefore, the realist novel represents the choice for such an actuality.

In fact, realism has never ceased to exist, it is still alive within the broader fabric of contemporary fiction – it has only invested in other forms – practically, an amalgam of realisms, a remixed hybrid genre. We speak of types of realism with touches of postmodern self-consciousness; thus, we have magical, paranoid, "neurotic"[5], "hysterical realism", encapsulating therefore feelings, emotions, and affects, with an emphasis on "representing the world as we all more or less share" (McLaughlin 2004).

Although the novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shared the same view of the nature of reality, those of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries consider that what constitutes reality is debatable, as David Lodge suggests, "to the later writers in the [realist] tradition what this world means is much more problematical", because "language does not so much mirror reality as use conventions to construct simulacra of what some readers can accept as reality (Lodge 1977: 47 cited in Holmes 2005: 18)."

A more simplified view on realism, “the persuasive mimesis of probable human activity”, seen as the central language of the novel, is that of James Wood: “Realism is not a law, but a lenient tutor, for it schools its own truants. It is realism that *allows* surrealism, magic realism, fantasy, dream, and so on” (Wood 2005). In one of his volumes of critical essays, *How Fiction Works* (2009), James Wood states that:

Realism is a “genre”; it is taken to be mere dead convention, and to be related to a certain kind of traditional plot, with predictable beginnings and endings; it deals in “round” characters, but softly and piously (“conventional humanisms”); it assumes that the world can be described, with a naively stable link between word and referent (“philosophically dubious”); and all this will tend toward a conservative or even oppressive politics (“politically . . . dubious”). [...] Barthes argued that there is no “realistic” way to narrate the world. The nineteenth-century author's naive delusion that a word has a necessary and transparent link to its referent has been nullified. [...] Realism does not refer to reality; realism is not realistic. Realism, said Barthes, is a system of conventional codes, a grammar so ubiquitous that we do not notice the way it structures bourgeois storytelling. Graham Greene effortlessly produces the kind of artful-but-natural “realism” that its opponents have in mind. [...] The style could be called commercial realism (Wood 2009: 171-173).

The critic's conclusions are based upon the analyses he made to a whole series of different authors, their style and techniques used, in order to prove that fiction is both artifice and verisimilitude. He argues once more that at the bottom of his enquiries lies *the real* (his emphasis), yet insisting upon the differences between realism and reality, realism and realistic.

Further on, Wood goes on with his point of view *vis-à-vis* realism, which he calls “liveness” and, at the same time, offers a word of advice for “the true writer”:

Realism, seen broadly as truthfulness to the way things are, cannot be mere verisimilitude, cannot be mere lifelikeness, or lifesameness, but what I must call *liveness*: life on the page, life brought to different life by the highest artistry. And it cannot be a genre; instead, it makes other forms of fiction seem like genres. For realism of this kind – liveness – is the origin. It teaches everyone else; it schools its own truants: it is what allows magical realism, hysterical realism, fantasy, science fiction, even thrillers, to exist. [...] The true writer, that free servant of life, is one who must always be acting as if life were a category beyond anything the novel had yet grasped; as if life itself were always on the verge of becoming conventional (Wood 2009: 186-187).

Wood, “the unabashed champion of realism” as Robbins maintains (2012), defends the literary mode in all his collections of critical essays, indirectly recommending to all the authors he reviewed and did not meet the demand of his guiding principle in writing – liveness – to comply with it and as such become true writers. Or, in order to describe life as it is, maybe writers should resort to “moderate realism”, a phrase coined by Coetzee, describing a way of writing in which the kind of detail we are directed to does not yet have the kind of extravagant

commitment to noticing and re-noticing, to novelty and strangeness, characteristic of modern novelists—an eighteenth-century regime, in which the cult of “detail” has not yet really been established (Wood, 2009: 74).

In 2001, reviewing Zadie Smith’s debut novel, *White Teeth*, the British writer and critic Wood coined the phrase “hysterical realism” in order to describe what he considered to be a literary mode/genre characterized by a strong contrast between the absurd, prolix prose and the action of the novel, or between the characters’ description and the attentive, detailed examination of the specific social phenomena. In his article, “Human, All Too Inhuman”, which was published by *The New Republic*, Wood introduced that phrase which denotes his conception on the “big, ambitious novel” (Wood 2001) “that pursues vitality at all costs” (Idem), and which “knows a thousand things, but does not know a single human being” (Wood 2001). In his own words: “In that essay I say something like they are not exactly stories that can never happen, because they do involve human beings, but they are in some way inhuman stories (cited in Birnbaum 2004).” He presents the genre as an attempt to “transform fiction into social theory” (Wood 2001) and of telling “how the world functions instead of telling us what does one feels about something” (Wood 2001). The critic considers Don DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon to be the pioneers of the genre, followed by David Foster Wallace and Salman Rushdie. Later on, Wood continues this idea in his collection of essays, *The Irresponsible Self: On Laughter and the Novel*, published in 2004, maintaining that: “The hysterical realism of such contemporary writers as Pynchon and Rushdie is the modern version of Sterne’s perpetual excitements and digressions.” (Wood 2005: 7).

Without defining the hysterical realism, James Wood insists on some of the particularities of this literary sub-mode/genre as resulted from the analysis of the texts of the above mentioned writers: an excess of main and secondary stories intertwining, doubling, even tripling on themselves (permanent story-telling, equivalent to a grammar structuring). The critic states that the principles of realism have not been abolished; on the contrary, they have been used and abused and as such, he does not object to matters of verisimilitude, but to those of morality. Accordingly, this style does not lack reality, *per contra*, it seems to escape reality, while it borrows from reality itself. The narrating mode seems incompatible with tragedy or moral suffering, the existence of vitality is taken for a drama of vitality. Narratives are excessively centripetal – the characters are always searching for connections, relations, patterns, and comparisons – and in that entire uninterrupted search there is something essentially paranoid as concerns the belief that everything is mutually determining and interacting. The characters are not really alive or fully human, yet they impose connections that, finally, are rather conceptual. What is missing is the humane, thus underlying the crisis of characters and the way they can be represented in literature, although the critic admits that since modernism, “many of the greatest writers have been offering critique and parody of the idea of character.” (Wood 2005: 105).

Having as a starting point the idea that beginning with John Dos Passos and Sinclair Lewis all the American writers (and not only them, it might be added) have been dreaming about the “Big Social Novel”, which strives to seize the times in order to form a document of the American history, Wood considers, though, that the dream about the big American novel has been resuscitated by Don DeLillo’s *Underworld* (1997), a novel with an epic social power. Subsequently to that, the critic maintains, all the young American writers emulated DeLillo, imitating his tentacular ambition, his effort in precisely defining an entire misconstrued culture, of being a great analyst of systems, crowds, and politics, of creating at the highest possible level, all being tributary to the “parent”, Charles Dickens in terms of long stories depicting all of society on its different levels, vivid external descriptions, “caricatural” characters (with the notable difference that Dickensian characters “feel and make us feel”). Far from being “big”, Wood insists that the contemporary novel is:

[...] a perpetual-motion machine that appears to have been embarrassed into velocity. It seems to want to abolish stillness, as if ashamed of silence – as it were, a criminal running endless charity marathons. Stories and sub-stories sprout on every page, as these novels continually flourish their glamorous congestion. Inseparable from this culture of permanent storytelling is the pursuit of vitality at all costs (Wood 2001).

Responding to the British critic in the article “This is how it feels to me”, published in *The Guardian* in 2001, Zadie Smith, in her turn, describes hysterical realism as being “a painfully accurate term for the sort of overblown, manic prose to be found in novels like my own *White Teeth* and a few others he was sweet enough to mention” (Smith 2001). Smith accepted the term explaining the fact that, still, “any collective term for a supposed literary movement is always too large a net, catching significant dolphins among so much cannable tuna” (Smith 2001). Concerning the queries brought into discussion by the writer and critic Dale Peck to his contemporary fellow-authors, they are, to a great extent, similar to those of John Wood, only the denomination of the sub-mode being different – *recherché* postmodernism.

Peck insists that the maximalist novel (genre under which he frames the works of the analysed authors) is too long and too digressive, and that it is a novel about ideas and not about people, “solipsistic and impotent or unconscious and rarefied, written by recidivist realists who pretend the twentieth century didn’t happen” (cited in Kellaway 2003), with the difference that he considers it to be elitist, while Wood opines that it is not enough attenuated. The critic affirms that by means of his acid criticism “he’s saving the novel from its enemies, practitioners of ‘*recherché* postmodernism’, ‘recidivist realism’ – the elitist, esoteric, ‘exclusionary’ literature. [...] Their massive literary advances and domination of display and review space have crowded out competitors. The lavish praise critics bestow on contemporary fiction renders them complicit in its mediocrity.” (qtd. in Atlas 2004).

Peck is more concerned with the praise the authors receive on the part of the readers, and with the fact that they are so easily published and acclaimed, and sees only the zaniness, the slapstick, and “the same one-dimensional commentary on contemporary society”, taking into consideration the deeper, darker aspects of the works of the writers he tears to pieces; referring to Pynchon, for instance, he also says he dislikes the hallucinatory grandeur of his vision, being unimpressed by “a thirty year writing career [that] hasn’t produced a single memorable or even recognizably *human* character” (cited in Ketzan n.d.).

In *Hatchet Jobs: Writings on Contemporary Fiction* (2004), a collection of tendentious criticism, Dale Peck offers an assessment of the actual state of affairs of the American and British fiction. ‘There are’ he maintained ‘two strains of literature currently in vogue . . . *recherché* postmodernism and recidivist realism’. As Richard Bradford (2007: 70) states currently postmodernism equals realism in its capability to foil authenticity. Bluntly and undesignedly, Peck underlines the fact that postmodern writing is the victim of a self-created paradox: by means of anti-realism and by eschewing standardized mimesis and an obsessive concern with the nature of writing and representation it has become what its practitioners tried to avoid, a classifiable field and subgenre of literary writing.

According to James Atlas, Peck equally despises both canonical authors and his contemporaries. The modernist tradition, he argues:

began with the diarrheic flow of words that is *Ulysses*, continued on through the incomprehensible ramblings of late Faulkner and the sterile inventions of Nabokov, and then burst into full, foul life in the ridiculous dithering of Barth and Hawkes and Gaddis, and the reductive cardboard constructions of Barthelme, and the word-by-word wasting of a talent as formidable as Pynchon’s; and finally broke apart like a cracked sidewalk beneath the weight of the stupid – just plain stupid – tomes of DeLillo (Atlas 2003).

Reviewing Rick Moody’s *The Black Veil*, the critic also blames the readers for the state of affairs in literature:

[...] they, too, bear some responsibility for the condition of fiction – who have long since forgotten what the modernist and postmodernist assaults on linearity were actually about, and as such have lost the ability to tell the difference between ambiguity and inscrutability, ambition and bombast; of writers who are taken at face value when they are being ironic and who are deemed ironic when they are telling it straight – assuming, of course, that they themselves know the difference. Assuming, I should add, that they actually have a subject (Peck 2002).

Similarly, faithful to his distaste for too long and too digressive novels, he tears to pieces David Foster Wallace for his novel, *Infinite Jest*: “[...], most importantly, work up an elaborate – and elaborately digressive – plot which deliberately ends as unsatisfactorily as possible” (Peck 1996).

In *The Encyclopedia of the Twentieth Century Fiction*, Robert Rebein submits a definition of the concept of maximalism as opposed to minimalism: “maximalist fiction or maximalism denotes fictional works, particularly novels that are

unusually long and complex, digressive in style, and make use of a wide array of literary devices and techniques. Among the novelists associated with this style are David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Franzen, Richard Powers, Rick Moody, William T. Vollmann, and, from a slightly older generation, Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, and Paul West. In their separate ways, both minimalism and maximalism have been explained as responses to the declining relevance of literary fiction in a cultural landscape dominated by newer media such as television, video games, and the Internet. The heyday of minimalist fiction was the decade of the 1980s" (Rebein 2011).

Stefano Ercolino's article, "The Maximalist Novel" (2012), focuses on the novelistic genre, attempting at defining the new aesthetically hybrid genre of the contemporary novel which emerged in the United States of America in the 1970s and spread to Europe at the beginning of the 2000s. The author analyses the powerful symbolic identity of the maximalist novel and explores its traits, such as: length, encyclopaedic mode, dissonant chorality, diegetic exuberance, completeness, narrative omniscience, paranoid imagination, intersemioticity, ethical commitment, in a number of seven contemporary novels.

In 2014 Ercolino published his book, *The Maximalist Novel: From Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow to Roberto Bolaño's 2666* in which he elaborates on the maximalist paradigms. As support for his enterprise, the author reviews some other theoretical approaches to narratives: Tom LeClair's "systems novel", Franco Moretti's "world text", and Frederick R. Karl's "Mega-Novel", all having a "common focus on investigation: long, superabundant, hypertrophic narratives, both in form and content" (Ercolino 2014: 1)

A lengthy novel is both a possibility and indispensability for experimental fiction as long as the procedure or the new genre emerges from the quantum of details of the text, because it offers the space for a diversity of procedures/rhetorical devices - encyclopaedism, chorality, digressions, a multitude of narrative threads.

According to Ercolino, modernism witnessed the origins of the "encyclopedic narratives" (Mendelson 1976) in Gustave Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the "encyclopedic novel" being considered by the latter a genre of the Western novel (Burn 2007). Anyway, the goal of encyclopedic narratives is a "synthetic representation of the *totality* of the real" (Ercolino 2014: 2), thus responding to the novelists' desire of conceptually mastering the more and more complex and elusive reality, of representing it and the fields of knowledge necessary for its synthesis. Yet, in order to specify the criteria on the basis of which a novel is considered encyclopedic, a specific modality has to be taken into consideration and that is the encyclopedic mode, defined as an instrument, "a particular aesthetic and cognitive attitude, consisting of a more or less heightened and totalizing narrative tension in the synthetic representation of heterogenous realities and domains of knowledge, ascribable, in essence, to the powerful hybridization of maximalist narratives with the ancient epic." (Ercolino 2014: 39)

Another maximalist trait, chorality refers to the plurality of voices, none of them being the dominant one. In the novels circumscribed to the genre, narration is fragmented, i.e., fragments of different lengths, separated one from the other by typographical spacing (signaling a change of scene, variation in point of view, transition in time/space, introduction/recommencement of a narrative thread, introducing a new character) co-exist with the traditional partition into parts and chapters. This is a multilinear diegetic organization – in the maximalist novel it is the collectivity of characters and the plurality of stories that counts; the autonomy of the parts is the procedure permitting a synthesis of the world (Ercolino 2014: 57-59).

The maximalist novel is polyphonic, insists Ercolino, as it is heterogeneous, represents a large diversity of knowledge, languages, registers, styles, genres, characters, voices; yet polyphony never degenerates into chaos as long as there are ordering criteria to the story (2014).

The diegetic material of the maximalist novel is extremely abundant: a hypertrophic narration, innumerable characters and stories, themes and digressions – a discursive excess like an overflowing river, as LeClair, quoted by Ercolino, maintains: “Because the material of systems novel often seems to grow, rather than to be built, the noise, gaps, and the gratuitousness in the texts imply an open and natural system rather than a closed and artificial ordering.” (LeClair 1989 cited in Ercolino 2014). The main procedure by which the diegetic exuberance manifests itself is the digression, which, according to Portelli (1992) “contains all the world within one text.”

The completeness of a text is given by the relation at the level of the arrangement of the plot and the mechanisms of its production into specific structures, “imitative forms”, as LeClair names them. These structures are: geometrical, temporal and conceptual. Also, the omnivorous relationship with time is to be mentioned. As concerns the conceptual structures, they are: leitmotif, myth and intertextual forms.

Another characteristic of maximalist novel, narratorial omniscience, may vary from a more overt, “traditional” form of omniscience to a more complex one, which Ercolino defines as “omniscience through recomposition or derived omniscience” (2014: 97). According to the Pouillon/Todorov classification, to which Genette added the notion of “focalization”, there are three different narrative instances in which the reader perceives the narrated facts through the narrator’s agency: the narrator knows more than the character and zero focalization – classical omniscience; the narrator knows as much as the character and internal focalization – story with a point of view; the narrator knows less than the character and external focalization – in behaviourist stories. In most of the cases, the three focalizations co-exist and it may change within the same fragment. Besides, in maximalist novels it is necessary to construct a narratorial gaze apt at perceiving from above. (Ercolino 2014: 97-99). This omniscience is a form of the complex and diverse occurrence – the return of the author.

One of the characteristics of the postmodern narrative is paranoia. This is because the world, fiction included, is so very deeply obsessed with conspiracies, intrigues and schemes, so consequently it became a trait of the maximalist novel, paranoia being the motor of the maximalist literary imagination, playing the role of poiesis of fiction and constructing the plot, as Ercolino demonstrates in his book (Ercolino 2014: 105-106).

Contemporary literary imagery rests upon a semiotic exchange – hybridization for the maximalist novel with cinema, television, video, painting, comics, pop icons – hybrid imagery.

Another trait is ethical commitment – as Stefano Ercolino maintains:

[...] should be situated within a seam of continuity with the best *engagé* literary tradition of the twentieth century and not under the banner of a rupture with the postmodern literary system [...] the maximalist novel can be seen as a postmodern *recuperation* of postmodernist elements, or better still as a genre of contemporary novel generated by an *intereference* between modernist and postmodernist aesthetic codes [...] an *aesthetically hybrid genre* of the contemporary novel.

As concerns the thematic field of the maximalist novel, recurrent themes of great historical, political and social importance are pervasive, and thus the maximalist novel is perfectly inscribable in the tendency of (re)turning to the realism of the nineteenth century.

Maximalism – the tendency towards excess – creates a world in itself and of itself, as long as meaning is not inherent in the world and must be (re)created, but lies deep inside, and not on the surface. Maximalism uses great details to set up scenes; it allows the writers to experiment with as many different themes, symbols, and literary motifs as they wish, and elaborate more on characters, to alternate – due to its flexibility and richness of the language – rhythms, plans, even realities. Moreover, its lengthy narration is more appropriate to the professed tendency of revisiting the past the more so as the nineteenth-century epitomic novels of Balzac, Dickens, Flaubert, Dostoyevsky, et cetera, were, similarly, hundred-pages long.

To conclude, we shall say that indeed, mimesis was the dominant theory of literary realism. The end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first are characterized by an effusion of many new versions of realism, sometimes hybridized. Literary post-postmodern realism(s) are circumscribed to an epoch that does not totally disallow modern techniques and devices.

Nowadays, the multi-faceted realism is, let us put it this way, a reality; the twentieth and twenty-first centuries novels share all sorts of realism, albeit social, magical, hysterical, critical, commercial, gender realism, postrealism or hyperrealism, and so on and so forth, or, as it is the case with most fictional works, a hybrid type of realism.

Notes

[1] Terms proposed by Alan Kirby: “[digimodernism] owes its emergence and pre-eminence to the computerization of text, which yields a new form of textuality characterized in its purest instances by onwardness, haphazardness, evanescence, and anonymous, social and multiple-authorship”.

- [2] Term proposed by the cultural theorist, Robert Samuels: “technological automation and human autonomy”.
- [3] Term coined in 2000 by the American anthropologist Eric Lawrence Gans to describe the epoch after postmodernism in ethical and socio-political terms.
- [4] Term proposed by Nicholas Bourriaud: a “synthesis between modernism and post-colonialism”.
- [5] The term “neurotic realism” was coined by Charles Saatchi referring to a new trend in British visual art that was shown in a two-part exhibition 1998-1999.

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Perspectives on Imagery A Text-Image Complementary Relationship

Steluța BĂTRÎNU*

Abstract

The work of art exposes the soul of the artist, but it also brings order in the existential chaos. The one that has to complete it has to go through an artistic transformation, travelling to other spaces and times. This happens in Leonardo da Vinci's famous work of art, "The Last Supper" which, having a great complexity of symbols and significations, has always been a source of inspiration for other artists and arts (literature, film, photography), interested not necessarily in the biblical theme, but especially in that particular mise-en-place. The proposed study shows the way in which both renewing art and perceiving it becomes possible and presents the most accurate means of drawing the viewer inside the magical circle of creation. The theme especially aims at the complementary text-image relationship, extended to various verbal or nonverbal arts.

Keywords: The Last Supper, imagery, image, arts, creation

Artistic and theoretical syntheses are always temporary, but they maintain their value through repeated, more complex revisions. Lessing classifies arts according to the means of the realization criterion, as fluent or stable, successive and simultaneous. A classification of the distinct arts belongs to Kant, who ranks them by the word (poetry and rhetoric) or by the gesture (architecture, sculpture, painting). In reality, arts permanently merge, leading to a unification that fills the existential emptiness, while the beholder feels more intensely, more thoroughly, introducing him into the world of "beauty".

Sociologists and aestheticians support the ubiquity of image in everyday life, because an image appears to be easier to perceive than a word, the writing of Guttenberg being replaced by television, cinematography and video. The introduction of the image in communication is not a novelty; a look *en-arrière* sends us to the pictographic type of writing, to the Egyptian hieroglyphics, represented through beings or things. To make a distinction between word communication and image communication, one needs good knowledge of the field, otherwise, this hard work would not lead to a concrete result.

The Dutch sculptor Schasfoort supports teaching visual communication in school "as a second mother tongue" (INSEA Congress, Lisbon, 1994). By placing the image in front of the word, the artist underlines the existence of a history of

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facts and culture. Closely following painting and sculpture, the silent film has been labeled as a universal art, because, in English "I see" actually means "I understand". All artists want to bring into existence through serene images delicacy, transcendence and beauty. But a work of art is not just a classification of the world through which the artist's soul is exposed; it is the product of an arrangement; the anchorage from life to art marks the walk to another existential order. Inside a unit, all the elements of art are linked together and determine one another. A work of art leads to unexpected effects on the beholder and makes the art lover have forever renewed expectations. Due to an accurate retrospective, the art admirer can follow the evolution of Leonardo da Vinci's work of art, *The Last Supper*, whose meanings still compete in aesthetic perception.

Leonardo da Vinci's famous work of art, a mural painting, in tempera and oil, is painted on one of the walls of the dining room of Santa Maria delle Grazie church in Milan. Measuring 460x880 cm, the painting of the Florentine artist, complex through its multiple symbols and significations, is the most duplicated painting in brushwork, photography, movie scenes, not necessarily recalling the Supper itself, but more precisely the mise-en-place designed by Leonardo (1st Addendum).

The harmony of colors and the arrangement of proportions" make the image sing", an aggregate of emotions transmitted by the exquisite work of da Vinci. Plastic art is accomplished through contemplation, a sequence of scenes and the registry overlapping that lead to open perspectives. Due to a synthetic, global perspective, the image thematically enters the scriptural scene of Christ's Last Supper, the way it is described in the Gospel of John (13:21). Da Vinci does not avoid the strictness of logical thinking, and, based on an analytical view, one can notice in the geometrical center (at the cross-bracing) an essential element of the composition - Jesus Christ. Though not consciously perceived, this center acts upon the beholder, giving him balance, the same as it gives balance to the image itself. In da Vinci's Last Supper, the geometric centre is in unison with the main interest centre and is placed on Jesus' forehead, the key-character, placed off three windows, an allusion to the Holy Trinity, the background being represented by the sky.

The existing decorative elements, not to be unvalued, do not replace the expressive faces of the apostles, amazed by Jesus' confession: "I truly speak to you, that one of you will betray Me" (Mathew 26, 23; John 13, 21). In this iconic spectacle, the image of the apostate Judas is easy to notice, a solitary posture, like Messiah himself, a fact that adds to the drama of the work of art; in contrast with the disquietude of the others, Jesus' presence brings calm and balance, and his opened palms mean inside tranquility, an open invitation to easiness and resignation. The compulsory interpretation imposed by da Vinci leads the beholder to the magistral image of Jesus, separated from the others due to his serenity and acceptance of what had already been established. As regards the

geometry of the painting, the painter allocates the elements of the painting, directing visual observation on the forms and the main character, obtaining closure or remoteness, from the big picture to the panoramic picture: the apostles divided in four groups, each group made of three members, equally placed to the left and right of Jesus, Jesus Himself in the center. The entire group is disposed on one single plan, in the background – the ideal world – the opening that allows us to see the sky, down – the earthly elements – the table companions. On a more profound examination of the painting, the art lover is attracted by different geometrical surfaces, from the bottom of the room to the forefront, while the white color of the table cloth and the blue of the sky retouch the murmur of the shapes. The monotony of the composition is avoided by the distinct salience of the profiles and of their dramatic expression: amazement, terror, anxiety, guilt, turmoil, Messiah's face is enlightened by the blue of the horizon which insidiously acts on the subconscious of the spectator, offering the impression of tranquility and divine protection.

Examining the details of the painting, full of symbolic meanings, one cannot miss out Jesus' chromatic, different from that of the apostles, in red (it produces tension as it awakes the congenial system) and blue (it calms down, invading the congenial system), a balanced chromatic unified by the three windows in the back, a symbol of opening in/towards divinity. Jesus is painted without a halo and beard, very different from the traditional iconographic image, while the apprentices, noticeably fidgety and exaggerated in gestures, are painted in a naturalist manner. Also, researchers are trying to understand the painter's choice in food that does not correspond to the Bible (bread, fish, salt, wine, citrus fruit), or the salt cellar spread in front of Judas, or his empty plate, or the reason there is leaven bread there. Without encouraging the various interpretations which are more or less relevant, the conclusion seems to be the same: the painting is full of conflicting, ambivalent meanings and symbols; the work of art is still voided of religious meaning.

An arch over time is needed in order to remember that *The Last Supper* in the field of iconography has appeared in Christian art very early, since the time of the Roman catacombs. The first representations were based on symbols: bread, fish, vine, table, holy cup. After the 4th century, the scene gained powerful religious and artistic meanings. The scene is painted in the Holy Altar, as the Sacrament of the Apostles; the six placed at the right of Jesus receive the bread, His body, the other six, at the left, His blood – the symbol of the holy cup. The holy sacrament represents a dialogue with God, The Holy Thursday *Gloria in excelsis* calls upon the parishioners, by saying: "From the food of the Master and from His immortal feast, come, believers, to a high place, bearing in mind thrifty thoughts, to alleviate ourselves." (Mathew 28, 20)

In the Orthodox iconography, the same scene takes place around a semicircular table; all the characters face the beholder, a fact that facilitates the

communion with the believers (2nd Addendum). In this scene, too, the eye cannot avoid Jesus, depicted a little bigger than the others, a fact that is not surprising at all. Jesus is the only character wearing a halo, a divine sign, the others being deprived of it, and Judas being easily noticeable because of his treacherous gesture. The same as in other representations, the faces of the prentices give away their amazement towards the words of Messiah. Judas, placed on the left, dips the bread in a plate placed far from his reach, coming apart from the homogeneous group, a movement accompanied by Jesus' line: "The one that has eaten from the same bowl as me will be the one to betray me." The details complete the work's message: Jesus' clothes painted in blue make us think of the fight between the sky and the earth, blue and white fighting together against red and green, the same way the confrontation between Saint George and the griffin is represented in the Christian iconography. The same fleck, but a darker one, somehow incumbent, is used when painting the canopy and it expresses the detachment from the values of this world and the lift of the uncaged soul towards God.

Undoubtedly, da Vinci, through his work of art, continues to cause numerous challenges, full of symbols and significations, the same way Da Vinci's Code, written by Dan Brown, does. However, a special attention should be given to the movie *Viridiana* (1961) directed by the Spanish director Bunuel, that remakes the scene of the Last Supper, replacing Jesus and his apostles with a grotesque group, in the middle of which a blind beggar is triumphantly placed (3rd Addendum). The movie deals with the theme of debasement of the heroine in the title, criticizing church, too, transposed in good will. The scene of the orgiastic feast, on the background of the rhetorician Mesia de Händel, intercepts the tension between chaos and order, decay and grandeur. The cinematographic art of the 1960's - 1970's startles with some of the directors' lack of inhibition, whose radical techniques and language have been retained in the world of movie. The mystery and the irresistible, the attributes of the European avant-garde, constantly accompany three iconic figures: Michelangelo Antonioni - with the sensation of time alienation and control, Ingmar Bergman - through his philosophical profoundness and Luis Bunuel - through his surrealistic image of the bourgeoisie. Along his constant obsession of blurring the boundaries of freedom, Bunuel consolidates his unique style towards a somewhat discrepant display of the real world, breaking the already famous classical paradigms.

In *Viridiana*, it seems that the Spanish director brings the world of movie in the street, among usual people, allowing them to freely act in order to be clearly depicted at their worst. Not by chance, the group of tramps, a bunch of feeble-minded people, is to be got off on the right foot, by Viridiana, a pious young woman and a future nun. The gentleness of this woman will hustle against the violence and brutality of this grotesque group that, even worse, will dishonor her. Bidding defiance to the sick humor of the movie, the scene of the famous feast can be unbound starting with the simple positioning of the blind man, the omphalos -

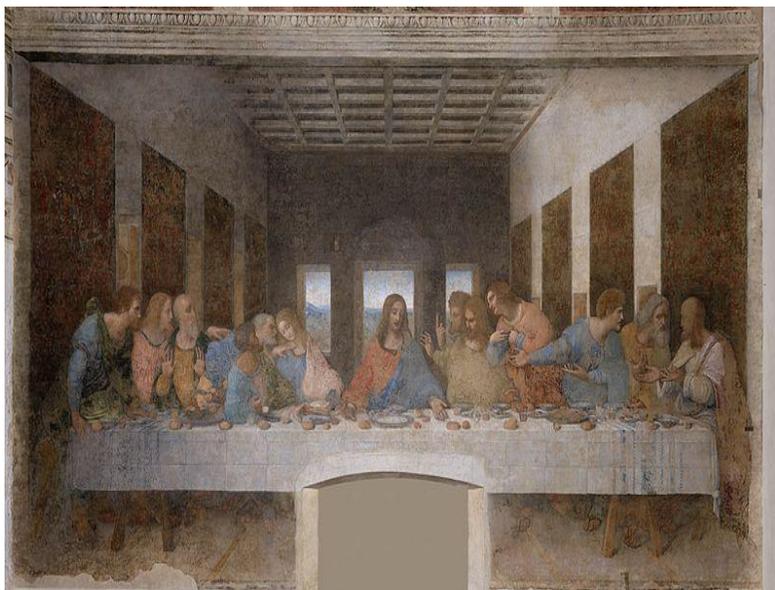
a false master of the earthly equilibrium, that sets into sightless conflict the various forces of nature and reason, a conflict that has the role to settle things down, by giving them a new life, a new purpose. Therefore, Viridana, the representative of order and equilibrium, will lose when confronted with this dirty gang, because evil, in all its dimensions, cannot be eradicated by one particular enlightened mind. She herself will be the victim of perdition; few saints cannot bury such a vast darkness. It is not parody and cynicism that bring the importance of the climax of the movie presenting the famous scene of the Last Supper, but the hidden message of the director addressed to the clergymen, generally speaking, regarding human condition: order and harmony can be overturn at any time, the boundary between value and nihilism is feeble, religion can measure and verify anytime, each person's Credo.

Da Vinci's fresco can be found in modern painting, too, (*The First Supper* - Susan Dorothea White) or in the field of publicity, the case of Marithé și François Girbaud being well known, artists who have chosen an original version in order to promote their business. The advertisement designed to represent it, considered to be a parody of the Supper, has been prohibited after the decision of the Court, "*Croyances et libertés*" and the Conference of the Bishops of France. The image corresponds to that by da Vinci through the positioning of the twelve female characters and one male character, photographed from the back, replacing the apostles with women. The table, voided of table posts, around which the twelve young women sit, Jesus Himself being represented by a female character, undoubtedly sends to the role women have in the world and in the religious field. It renders the image of the woman in the modern times (the presence of a radio in the painting), the impact it has on the world of fashion (the characters wear woman clothes, the male character is displayed from the back) and the woman's creative force to support the Universe's equilibrium. A woman is situated in the middle of the painting, and underneath there is a dove, the symbol of peace and divinity, which rests on a hand that does not belong to any of the characters already depicted. Briefly put, it could be a direct reference to da Vinci's message, a signature of the painter or the hand of divinity (4th Addendum).

The gates of art remain wide open. The constant recursion to the past, by simply admiring the painting, shows that value always gains new meanings and by redefining itself, it lives in the most sensitive of hearts. Even through fragments, art keeps an order that characterizes the human being inside its religious, artistic or social life.

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ANNEX 1

ANNEX 2



ANNEX 3



ANNEX 4



Dimitrie Bolintineanu's *Manoil* From Literary Convention to Moralizing Lesson

Viviana-Sabina BRĂTUC*♦

Abstract

This paper analyses the construction of Manoil, the eponymous hero of Dimitrie Bolintineanu's novel, in relation to: a number of European fictional models present in the 19th century in the 'very young' Romanian literature; to the non-competitive rapport between the realist and romanticist conventions of the time in point of character authenticity/verisimilitude, and also to the narrative strategies which include the diary, the epistolary novel and timid attempts at introspection. Set within the framework of the narrative structures of the sentimental epistolary novel, Bolintineanu's character is constructed so as to illustrate the moralizing theme which holds that the representation of femininity may acquire both positive and negative connotations (and functions), intervening in the male character's inner and outer journey as a destructive or, on the contrary, re-constructive force.

Keywords: Romanian epistolary novel, early Romanian literature, sentimental novel, diary, influence of French literature

Bolintineanu is one of the pioneers of the Romanian novel. The novel *Manoil* was published in 1855 in *România literară*, although it had been finished a few years before and had been since the end of 1851 in the possession of Vasile Alecsandri, who intended to publish it in the journal scheduled to be launched at that time. Thus, after a few attempts made by other authors, such as Ion Ghica (*Istoria lui Alecu/ The History of Alecu*, written before 1848 and preserved only as a manuscript, which is just a sketch of a novel), or Mihail Kogălniceanu (*Tainele inimii/The Mysteries of the Heart*, confined to only an introduction, published in 1850 in *Gazeta de Moldova*), *Manoil* is the first fully accomplished novel of Romanian literature.

As a subjective, sentimental, epistolary novel – according to Nicolae Manolescu's description (2001) – *Manoil* belongs to a literary tradition dominated by Jean Jacques Rousseau's *New Heloise* (1837), Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, as well as by Chateaubriand's and Mme de Stael's novels. What draws the readers' attention is its lyrical-epistolary form, which had come to be adored by novelists in pre-Romanticism and during the first period of Romanticism, as it was suitable for introducing a new type of hero – a sentimental, melancholic and often pessimistic one, inclined towards long lyrical divagations. Later, still in

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Romanticism, Alfred de Musset (*Confession d'un enfant du siècle*) or George Sand moved from the epistolary form to a first-person narrative, which suggests confession.

Made up of two parts, the novel *Manoil* retraces, in the former half, the “sentimental education” (announcing Bolintineanu as a Flaubert avant-la-lettre) of the Romantic hero (*the poetic man*) with pure soul and sensitive, distrustful nature, inclined towards melancholy and pessimism, disgusted by life, a close relative of Werther or René, of an ardent patriotism and great passion. Here, there are some *genuine* reasons for the protagonist’s sadness: he is an orphan with a modest fortune who finds himself among rich boyars who often despise him, and who is disillusioned with his first love, a common trait among the Romantic heroes.

Un deșert amar – se confesează Manoil – este în inima mea...! aș voi să mor...! Nimic nu mă mai ține pe pământ ...!

[A bitter desert – Manoil confesses – is in my heart...! I wish I died...! Nothing keeps me on the face of the Earth...!] (Bolintineanu 1993: 32)

At grips with his society, he finds refuge in nature. Embracing Rousseau’s conviction that civilisation and culture are to blame for the corruption and unhappiness of man, Manoil condemns the books and glorifies the naturalness of the simple man:

O, cărțile...! Iată începutul durerilor mele... cum aș fi voit să fiu muncitor de aceia ce-și trec viața în simplitate și nu se comunică cu cugetările altora...!

[Oh, the books...! Here’s the beginning of my sorrows... how I wish I were a worker, one of those who live their lives in simplicity and do not express themselves using other people’s thoughts] (33).

The conventional and naïve erotic subplot is also present. Deception intervenes again when he falls in love with Mărioara, a landlord’s daughter who cheats on him. Thus, from a pure, honest and sensitive soul, he turns, in just two years spent abroad for studies, into a cynical reveller who shows contempt for any form of pure and innocent love. “*Acolo unde mi-e bine și acolo unde-mi place, acolo este patria mea, și este de prisos ca s-o iubesc, căci ea poate exista și fără iubirea mea*” [Where I’m good and where I like to be, there’s my homeland, and it’s useless to love it, as it can exist without my love] (51), says Manoil, ironizing the idea of patriotism.

At the last minute, Manoil is saved from moral degradation by Zoe, the girl he had betrothed before his leaving the country and who had remained faithfully in love with him during his departure (Păcurariu 1969: 82).

The latter half of the novel is an outline of Manoil’s ‘adventures’ in Paris, the capital of compromise and vices, which are ready at all times to make him lose his way. The pattern is borrowed from mystery novels, such as *The Mysteries of Paris* by Eugene Sue or *The Mysteries of London* by Paul Féval. It will be later used in the Romanian literary space in *The Mysteries of Bucharest* by M. Bujoreanu or *The Mysteries of the Journey* by C. D. Aricescu.

According to Nicolae Manolescu (1990), in *Istoria critică a literaturii române* [*The Critical History of Romanian Literature*], Bolintineanu's novels deserve a special place in Romanian literature as they display a melange of the popular and the sentimental, as well as an obvious break with the structures of the old novella. Therefore, their historical role is underlined first and foremost, as they represent the 'seed' for our future psychological novel, much in the way in which the popular novels are the forerunners of the social novel.

A specific trait of the novel after 1848 is this formula of the mystery novel which renders society in a mythical and prejudiced manner. The conflict does not engage verisimilar characters but heroes that embody some ethical and religious principles. The formula of the French and English mystery novel, with all its clichés enters the space of Romanian literature either in relatively domesticated forms or in forms completely divorced from the literary specificity and even from the readership's expectations. Moreover, the exercising of some writing/ reading patterns overcomes the inherent disadvantage of the beginning, and, with Nicolae Filimon's *Ciocoi vechi și noi sau ce naște din pisică șoareci mânăncă* [*The Old and the New Parvenus or Like Father, Like Son*] and with Dimitrie Bolintineanu's two significant novels, *Manoil* and *Elena*, the patterns of the new genre are born, with autochthonous substance and hybrid strategies.

The combination between the epistolary novel and the diary, as means to create the illusion of authenticity, gives Bolintineanu the freedom of dimensioning and adjoining the narrative sequences in the sudden passages from a moment to the next in the plot, in the natural insertion of descriptions, and even in the timid attempts at auto-analysis.

There are, naturally, many autobiographical elements in *Manoil*, although they are heavily idealised. *Manoil* is a renowned poet, and Bolintineanu's poems are reproduced verbatim in the narrative. At first sight, the novelist is just the recipient of the letters sent by his friend *Manoil*, who addresses him with the introductory formula "Dear B". However, the reader soon realises that the protagonist, *Manoil*, is a representation of the author, inasmuch as Alexandru Elescu, the protagonist of the next and more accomplished novel, *Elena* (1862), is also an autobiographical character.

The unusual spatial-temporal configuration of the novel is inspired from the eighteenth-century French novels, which also constitute an inspiration for other aspects. Thus, *Manoil*, consists, in fact, of letters with specific dates which ultimately pile up in a kind of diary. Moreover, both *Manoil* and *Elena* set their characters in motion alongside a single line: love, its confession and accomplishment.

In addition, the sentimental novel "isolates its protagonists" with a reductive procedure - at its heart there is a hero who sees no meaning in struggling for his life, which is why he takes refuge on an estate, in search for women's company and the charms of nature (Manolescu 2001: 83).

In *Manoil*, the characters are not clearly defined, lacking psychological depth, and they are grouped into two opposing categories, in an irreducible contrast. Thus, the novel features positive characters, endowed with superlative

qualities (Manoil, Ana, Zoe, Smărăndița, etc.), and negative characters, also superlative in their vices (Alexandru C., the monster, and Mărioara, the prostitute). The author dismisses any shade of grey and, as Teodor Vârgolici (1972: 84) maintains, only 'paints' in black and white.

However, the elements of the sentimental novel lend the typologies – especially the feminine ones – touches that are reminiscent of 'minor' Romanticism:

Smărăndița – de 25 de ani, fără exagerare, o frumusețe rară, dar seamănă cu o floare ce în dimineata vieții sale se înclină melancolică! ... un suflet plin de blândețe, o inteligență superioară; multe cunoștințe, mai ales pentru o damă din timpul și din țara noastră!;

Zoe – nepoata Smărăndiței – o copilă de cincisprezece anișori; chipul mătușei-și, dar strălucitor de frăgezime. Ai asemăna-o cu un bobocel de roză pe care fluturii încă nu-l bagă în seamă; plină de spirit și de inimă ...;

Tudora – bălaie și rumenă ca o roză sălbatică, plină de frăgezime și de sănătate;

Mărioara este o amicică a Smărăndiței: o fată de boier mare, de 18 – 20 de ani; nu este prea frumoasă, dar drăgălașă ca luna lui mai! ... vorbele ei răsună ca o muzică sublimă; ideile cele mai comune în gura ei se îndumnezeiesc!.

[Smărăndița – a 25 year-old young lady who, without any exaggeration, is a rare beauty, but who resembles a flower that bends melancholically in the dawn of its life... a soul full of mellowness, a superior wit, possessing great knowledge for a lady of our times in our country!;

Zoe – Smărăndița's niece – a 15 year-old child, whose face closely resembles her aunt's, but glowing with freshness. You'd compare her to a rosebud still ignored by butterflies; full of heart and spirit...;

Tudora – fair and rosy like a wild rose, fresh and healthy;

Mărioara is one of Smărăndița's friends: the daughter of a grand boyar, around 18 or 20 years old; she's not that beautiful, but she's as cute as the month of May!... her words sound like sublime music, the most banal ideas become godly in her mouth!] (Bolintineanu 1993: 8)

Obviously, in keeping with the romantic model of the age, Mărioara is an ordinary person, meant to deviate towards the negative pole of the macro-level of meaning of the novel. She rises to the expectations of the readership and becomes a famous prostitute with criminal thoughts (Antofi 2008: 72).

In what the late half of the nineteenth-century reader is concerned, (s)he wants "deceit and not the truth", as Nicolae Manolescu (2001: 92) maintains in *Arca lui Noe [Noah's Ark]*. Thus, everything that happens to the protagonist is in close relation to what was expected to happen during that age. Manoil is illustrative for the type of the parvenu made up by women. This aspect is underlined by the character's metamorphosis, which is inexplicable in the terms of realist verisimilitude. Metamorphosis may be regarded as "a sign of imitation and upstartness" if one accepts, as Manolescu does (2001: 92), the fact that Manoil openly detests Alexandru C. but secretly admires him. Manoil turns from an orphan and an intruder in N. Colescu's house into a family man. From this

perspective, *Manoil* is a novel about founding a family, and the hero walks a path of initiation up to his complete maturing.

In the beginning of the novel, Manoil is desolated by the lack of “knowing the soul of the others” of a maleficent, coquettish woman, Mărioara, who, with her angelic looks, almost ruins his life. The differences between them are clear, as Manoil has no name or wealth, he is merely a poet, satirised by her – a beautiful, blonde woman who mocks his love and soon abandons him. However, at the end of the novel, the truly angelic Zoe, “*bobocelul de roză pe care fluturii însă nu-l bagă în seamă*” [the rosebud still ignored by butterflies] (8), proves to be the one who really loves him and who offers to him a rich family, a name, an idyllic life in the country, surrounded by books and drunk with love, with no concern about “the prejudices” of those who would say that the man is kept by his wife (84). Manoil’s rise and fall are both caused by women. The sentimental thesis proposed by *Manoil* is that the woman can turn the man into either an angel or a demon.

Another modern technique often present in the structure of the 1848 novels, namely the *mise en abyme*, is made use of to announce the moral and sentimental recovery of the protagonist, programmatically designed by the actual theme of the novel (Antofi 2008: 72). It is the part in which Smărăndița appears in Manoil’s dreams:

Altădată tu erai floarea tinerimei noastre! Patria ta pusesă în tine atâta speranță!... inima ta era tânără și plină de candoare ca o fecioară; câți te cunoșteau nu puteau să se oprească de a te iubi ... iar astăzi, cel mai degradat om nu s-ar crede stimat ca să-ți strângă mana; cel ce crezuse în talentul tău astăzi roșește că a putut avea o asemenea cugetare; inima ta s-a îmbătrânit, s-a degradat și nu mai poate să bată de acum înainte decât la fapte nefolositoare! ... pentru ce ai venit în casa aceasta? Vrei să amăgești pe Zoe; pare că roșești de a fi singur în felul tău, și vrei să târăști în tina în care te afli tu ființa astă tânără și inocentă! ...

[You were the pride of our youth back in the days! Your homeland had such hopes for you!... Your heart was as young and candid as a maiden’s; whoever met you could not refrain from loving you... and today the most degraded man would not feel esteemed to shake hands with you; whoever once believed in your talent now blushes at this thought; your heart aged and degraded and is only able to beat for useless things!... Why have you come to this house? You want to trick Zoe; you seem to be ashamed of your unique ways and want to drag into the mud with you this young and innocent human being!] (Bolintineanu 1993: 56)

As for verisimilitude in the plot construction, it is completely out of the question. In *Manoil*, the situations turn inside out in a single sentence, and the author only needs a few lines, at the end of the novel, to make the good ones happy and to punish the evil (Simuț 2001: 26).

At the level of the novel discourse, the elements of Biedermeier Romanticism - the domestic idyll, the eulogy to country life and moralism - are slightly counterbalanced by the intention of monographing the Romanian society of the age, along all its coordinates, and by certain Balzacian techniques used in the construction of the characters. The latter are, nevertheless, rather rudimentary

and represent a procedure rather than a structuring function for the narrative and for the diegetic universe (Antofi 2008: 75).

If one carefully examines the clumsiness in the novel construction, the reading of Bolintineanu's novel reveals not only an active femininity, ready at all times to defy norms in order to follow the heart, but also one aware of her inferior position in the society. Thus, a woman cannot have as much freedom as a man. This discourse underlines a departure from the traditional imaginary which condemns woman as a weak being dominated by passion and feelings. The view on femininity is no longer rigid, as in Kogălniceanu's case – the feminine self is emphasised, and the interest in its subjective life increases.

The novel ends just like a fairy tale, and the negative characters get what they deserve: Alexandru C. dies in unclear circumstances and Tudora's father is accused of his death, whereas Mărioara admits her guilt and brings forth arguments, stirring the reader's sympathy, as everything is pinned on her late and hopeless love for Manoil:

Manoil m-a iubit; eu nu-l iubeam; dar el mă desprețui cu cruzime!... apoi plecă în streinătate... mă măritai cu un bărbat bătrân, crezând că-l fac să călătorească, numai să văd pe Manoil... din căsătoria asta, purceseră toate relele mele...

[Manoil loved me; I didn't love him, but he cruelly despised me... then he went abroad and I married an old man in hope I'll make him travel, just so I can see Manoil... all my misfortunes come from this marriage... (Bolintineanu 1993: 88).

To conclude, with a theme and the character construction as a product of its sentimental nature inspired from French literature, Bolintineanu's novel provides a representation of the age and follows the difficult process of Manoil's becoming as he firstly declines and is then miraculously redeemed by the power of love.

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Landmarks for the Contemporary Analysis of the Video Games

A new possible general scheme of analysis

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Abstract

Video games¹, as a contemporary cultural phenomenon, have drawn the attention of academic scholars, who decrypt them from a cultural perspective (what happens outside the game?) or as cultural object in itself (what happens inside the game?). Nowadays, video games are analysed from multiple research perspectives, such as the economic, political, social or technological, and are decoded with the help of aesthetics, popular culture, gender studies, production and reception studies (Aarseth, 2003; Wolf & Perron, Introduction, 2003; Wardrip-Fruin & Harrigan, 2006). Today's situation fundamentally differs from the one a decade ago, when the academic arena was dominated by the ideational debate known as ludology versus narratology. Yet, there are gaps in the specific literature, depicting a research field in its infancy ("game studies"). The objective of this analysis is to understand the dynamics of games studies in terms of methods and theories used (a critical literature review), and to propose a general scheme for analysing video games as cultural artefacts that may spot out some structures and content descriptors to be used for increasing the games' engagement. The applicability of the scheme of analysis is validated on two video games: DayZ and Heavy Rain.

Keywords: video games, ludology vs. narratology, game studies, game theory, engagement

Introduction

Historically, games have been used as study tools for other academic fields (philosophy, economy, military strategy), academic literature being rather lacunar in studies focused on the game itself. Several classic books, such as *Homo Ludens* (Huizinga 2012), *Man, Play and Game* (Caillois 1958) and *The Study of Games* (Avedon & Sutton-Smith 1971) represent the foundation for understanding games from diverse perspectives: sociological, anthropological, philosophical, ethnographical, cultural and aesthetic.

Although the recent tendency shows an interest towards hybrid theories, two trends that have dominated the academic discourse for over a decade, ludo- and narrato-centric, still mark the way video games are studied. The idea that video games are capable to possess a complex content, a structure and rhetoric, raises a conceptual confusion at the level of the object of study. The lack of a

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universally accepted definition and the research focus on one single element, excluding other items or even the potential relationship between them, lead to a short-sighted perspective, which may trigger conceptual ambiguities. The most common error occurs because of analysing games *in vitro*, without understanding or describing the connection with the players, the *game* being inseparable from the *gameplay*. In this respect, Rao (2011) notes that the methodologies used in the present day analyses do not take into account the structure design, but focus on the players' reaction to contextual experience.

Celia Pearce highlights the need for a specific theory of the video games. She starts from the premise that adopting an already existing theory from literature, film or television studies, while bringing some advantages, is in fact not enough because it cannot analyse the video games as distinct entities, but only apply its own theoretical and methodological frameworks (2006: 143). Pearce's arguments indicate the fact that the video games must be studied in a way that embraces the social and material experiences, especially in the gameplay context proposed by Zimmerman: the game is the expression of the system, an intrinsic part of it (2006: 159).

In these circumstances, the aim of present paper is to understand the dynamics of the analyses of video games in terms of methods and theories used in the present-day academic discourse, and to propose a general scheme for analysing video games as cultural artefacts, a scheme that may spot out some structures and content descriptors to be used for increasing the games' engagement. To build the analysis framework, this paper investigates the evolution of various approaches to video games and synthesizes the main theories and models of the contemporary video games analysis. The general scheme for analysing video games is inspired by theoretical frameworks proposed by Aarseth (1997) and Consalvo and Dutton (2006) and by the model of engagement and its attributes designed by O'Brien and Toms (2008), being built around eight topics of interest: interface study, narration, game goals, interaction maps, degree of (perceived) freedom, character and object structure, feedback. The validity of the proposed grid is supported by the opinion of a number of industry specialists, as stated during in-depth interviews (two former game designers, a realization manager and a narrative designer), and by the review of two successful video games: *DayZ* and *Heavy Rain*.

The video games theories. From the prisoner's dilemma to the dilemma of the magic circle

The first Theory of Games, proposed by Von Neuman and Morgastern (1944), is known as "the prisoner's dilemma". Although the focus is not on the games *per se*, it uses the game principle to better understand politics and diplomacy and for solving marketing problems or predicting the competitive behaviour (Herbig

1991). Yet, as Smith remarks, this theory can also be applied when studying video games, at a design level and for community management (Smith 2006). The creators of games use concepts such *zero-sum* or *non-zero sum game* to encourage certain types of behaviour and actions during the game. Salen and Zimmerman analyse video games as systems. They argue that the decision tree is equivalent to the formal space of possibilities in video games, being useful for mapping certain aspects of the game or as conceptual tool that constructs the formal structure of a video game (2004: 247).

The Theory of the Features (elements) of video games, embraced by ludologists, assumes that games are systems composed of elements that interact with each other, creating, as Salen & Zimmerman observe, a dynamic system, a whole (2004: 50- 54). In essence, this theory considers that the player produces an action to the system by accessing various elements of the interface, and that the system produces a reaction in return. The rules stretch between action and reaction, giving room to the players, while keeping the system intact as the “magic circle” of any games observed by Huizinga almost a century ago (Huizinga [1938]2010: 51). The paradox *rules - game* occurs due to the fact that rules are rigid, fixed, closed and unequivocal, while the game is associated with fun, improvisation and creativity. Rules are essentially restrictive, therefore they limit the actions of players and provide a structure out of which the gameplay and the game itself appear. Sicart emphasizes the importance of structure, arguing that it offers the very “container for the actions of players” (2009: 95).

A theory of the video games that marked the academic world is Bogost’s Procedural Rhetoric (2007). He considers that video games work as a system, and he introduces the phrase “*procedural rhetoric*” in the academic discourse. The *procedural* stands for how to “process, explain or understand the processes” and the *rhetoric* captures “the convincing and the effective expression”. Bogost concludes: “the procedural rhetoric is a technique for making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created” (2007: 2-3). Borrowing the “procedural” concept from Murray (1997: 71), Bogost claims that video games bring novelty in the relationship with other media due to their procedural characteristic, being able to be persuasive. He applies this theory on video games with potential influence on people (political games, advertgames and educational games), and suggests that rules are more important than the meaning (2007: ix). Although the procedural rhetoric helps academia to better understand some terms related with video games’ ontology, this approach has its limitations: it excludes the players’ contribution and creativity and it induces dangerous directions and unpropitious speculations (for example, if the influence would be so great, shooters would generate large-scale social problems). Sicart highlights in his article *Against Procedurality* the limit of the procedural rhetoric, showing that the meaning of video games is not produced directly by the

rules, but by the game being played (Sicart 2011). The professionals support this approach creating games for players: “games are adapted to a specific audience. Players’ feedback is asked during the focus groups ran when working on a game” (Istrate 2014).

Other areas of interest, such as the semiotic models, gender, ideology or political messages also succeed to focus the scientific research on the messages and meanings of video games (Maietti 2004, Ferri 2007, Ferri, 2009). Out of these, the semiotic analysis difficultly arises, due to the fact that video games are different from one session to the next one, because it depends on the player’s choices.

Sustained efforts of ludologists to minimize the importance of storytelling in video games or to split the narrative from video games cannot exclude the theory of video games narrative. With no intention to re-visit the presence, function, manifestation or characteristics of the narration in video games, the present paper needs to clarify the distinction between *being narrative* and *containing narrative*. This aspect is important because, as Ryan observes, there is not a “comprehensive and widely accepted theory of the importance of the medium as material support for the form and content of message” (2004: 22). The defensive reaction of ludologists (Eskelinen 2001, Frasca 2003, Aarseth 2004) failed to properly assess how the narrative model could have been adapted or how could it have been used as basis for a new model specific to video games. Much more objective, Ryan analyses the situation starting from the fact that narrative is not an end for video games but a means, helping the player to reach an objective. She argues, “[p]layers are usually too deeply absorbed in their task to reflect on the plot that they write through her actions” (2004: 349). Yet, with the narrative support, “people describe their sessions with computer games” (349), when discussing about the game, face to face or on forums, with other players, observers or with different discussions collaborators. Ryan admits that the narrative element is subordinated to the playing action, depending on the strategic game design (350). Cezar Vârtosu, realization manager, Ubisoft România, confirms this point of view:

The basic mechanics is “dressed” in one form or another by the scriptwriter who creates the story. We have a design principle: *form follows function*, which means that the story of a game must be based on its functionality. Of course, it rarely happens vice versa: to start with a story and to create functional elements that support that story (Vârtosu 2014).

Therefore, the destiny of the game universe is created by the actions undertaken by the player, and not by how the narrative was built by the narrative manager. However, the narrative success of video games lies in “their ability to exploit the most fundamental of the forces that move a plot forward: the solving of problems” (Ryan 2004: 349). Thus, the active searches and the choices players make in accordance with the rules imposed by the game designer and with the frame

objects available in the game universe intervene in the narrative instrumentality. Denis James Ryan, narrative designer, Gameloft Romania, confirms that narrative experience brings

a gratification to the players when it is in complete harmony with the whole game: with the rules, with the set-up, with the tone of voice, with the music and the audio-visual effects, with the characters etc. (Ryan 2015).

In 2012, Aarseth proposes *A narrative theory of games* (Aarseth 2012), distancing from the “old model” of opposing the story to the game: the clearer the story, the less game and *vice versa* (actually this has not been confirmed by practice, but on the contrary, has been inquired by successful games such as *Mass Effect* (BioWare, 2007), *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream, 2010), *LA Noire* (Rockstar Games, 2011)). Aarseth explores the narrative elements proposed by Seymour Chatman (1978) in video games, and builds a spectrum (linear story, non-linear story, linear game, quest game and pure game) on which he marks the narrative kernels that can or cannot influence the gameplay. The result is an interesting model with four variables that depict the game on an ontological level (the universe, the objects, the agents and the events), between the ludic and the narrative poles. Aarseth validates his model by analysing five video games against Tolstoy’s novel *War and Peace*. He concludes that the most important is the agent who initiates the action.

I consider that a clarification is necessary: the complexity and the richness of a character are not enough to guarantee the players’ interest. As Laurel observes, using the Aristotelian definition of “virtue”, a good character “does (action) what it *intends* to do (thought)” (Laurel 1991: 73). Even though the players develop relationships with the characters, with the avatars in which they project themselves, they are instruments only, used by the players to make their choices and perform their actions in the game. Modified like this, Aarseth’s model is useful for understanding the limit between the communication authority (the game designer as game author) and the interaction with the players. This model allows a more thorough analysis, one which can investigate the particular ways in which the content of the game mobilizes the players.

The reviewed theories capture the video games from different points of view, some widely accepted, others attacked, some revised or improved because of the empirical findings, others reviewed from different angles or with other instruments. The major value brought by all these video games theories is that they allow a better and more detailed understanding of the overall video games field, and that they lead to the development of a discourse with its own terminology.

Contemporary models of analysis of video games

Scholars use basic video games elements, group their main characteristics and develop structural-functional analyses models with slight deviations. Focusing on the most typical characteristics of the video games, Aarseth suggests that the analysis must be oriented towards the triad structure, gameplay and the game universe (2003: 2). The game structure is based on rules and simulation; the gameplay studies the reasons and the strategies of the players, while the game universe shows the importance of the fictional context, the design typology, the used textures, etc.

The MDA model proposed by Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek takes into account the mechanics, the dynamics, and the aesthetics of the video games (Hunicke, et al. 2004: 2). In terms of aesthetics, the authors try to stay away from concepts such as *fun* or *gameplay*, proposing a taxonomy with eight components that can, all or just some of them, be identified in a specific game. Revolutionary when launched, the model proves to be difficult to apply on video game analyses mainly because of its terminology. For example, the industry overlaps the mechanics with the rules (Istrate 2014), while the *aesthetics*, as proposed by the authors, is very subjective, leading to equivocal interpretation (the authors themselves use approximations such as “exploration and discovery are *probably* (not marked in original text)...” (Hunicke et al. 2004: 4).

The TETRAD model for video game analyses is built by Schell around four factors: (1) technology, the least visible element, based on which the game is built (from codes to the interface); (2) aesthetics, depicted as sensorial experience of the player; (3) mechanics (rules and game devices); and (4) narrative, the story about what is happening during the game, from the beginning to the end of this (Schell 2008: 41).

The *Actions-Gameplay-Experience* (AGE) model emphasizes the player in its relationship with the game, bearing in mind the fact that the player’s actions must be done by respecting some rules that lead to the gameplay (Dillon 2010). The AGE Model is only apparently easy, because it suggests that players can be engaged through emotions and common human instincts. Dillon completed later this model with the *6/11 Framework*, proposing six particular emotions and eleven instincts (Dillon 2011: 1-3). The AGE model is successfully used in empirical analyses (Bakker et al. 2011).

All reviewed models show the need for an easier scheme to be applied on video games analyses, for a simplified set of descriptors for the structures and the content that could be used both for better understanding the video games and for better developing them, with increased engagement.

Areas of interest for the development of a general scheme of analysis

Aarseth considers that the simple combination of the existing theories reduces new media to terms such as “interactive”, “puzzle type” or “worlds”, even though video games are “a unique aesthetic field of possibilities” (1997: 17).

Everything gravitating around the player and his or her choices brings into discussion the inter- and multi-disciplinary nature of video games. One of the theories that require taking a step into the psychology field, with its motivational, emotional and cognitive studies, is the Theory of the Gameplaying. Applying it in the video game analyses brings forth a major risk, on the one hand because of the impossibility of understanding and accumulating fast enough the theory and concepts of psychology, and, on the other hand, because of losing the focus exactly from the object of the analysis. To be sure that a scholar does not step out from the video games studies field, Järvinen proposes in his PhD thesis fewer elements to focus on: purposes, emotions and the reciprocity me-others (2007: 99). This may seem too simplistic because it disregards both players’ motivation/engagement, and the rules, structure and the meaning of the video games. In this context, Moulthrop’s observation needs to be recalled: the player manipulates complex systems in video games because of the configuration (2006: 63) and because of the feedback loops.

The four axes model for qualitative analyses of the video games proposed by Consalvo and Dutton (2006) helps understanding the gameplay experience. The model examines the choices that players have in relationship with the interaction with other characters, players or non-playing characters (NPC) and studies the behaviours triggered by the game universe in different situations, and the intertextuality of the game. The proposed axes focus on: object inventory, interface study, interaction map, gameplay log, all revolving around the interaction between players and the interface.

Due to the current technological evolution, interactivity is no longer specific for the video game, being used in many other industries (i.e., advertising). Yet, the differentiating factor for the video games, not yet embraced by other industries, is the feedback-based interactivity: the player is rewarded (points, time, resources, level up, etc.) or penalized (closing the game before ending it). Therefore, the feedback is a feature that must be included in the game experience analyses.

Inspired by the theoretical frameworks proposed by Aarseth (1997) and Consalvo and Dutton (2006), and by the model of engagement and its attributes designed by O’Brien & Toms (2008), I have synthesized a general scheme of analysis of video games as cultural artefact.

The Attribute	The object of investigation
Interface study	The game ecosystem and the aesthetic and sensorial appeal created by the graphical details
Narration	The story that triggers moral or ethical justifications on which the need of making choices, being built in the specific game spatial-temporal universe.
Game Goals	The general game goals (if any) and systemic goals that may generate players' choices.
Interaction Maps	The player's choices when interacting or not with the game objects such as: commands at players' disposal, out-of-the-game information that are given about the goals and missions of the games, clues that appear or helpers (other players or NPC).
Degree of (perceived) freedom	The degree of freedom that players have in the balance between user input and game rules.
Character and object structure	Characters and the system of objects exploration through emergent behaviours or situations and their influence on the players' choices and feelings.
Feedback	Any information (visual, acoustic or tactile) communicated to the players about: actions, type, frequency and scale of the rewards used by the game developer to motivate and to engage them with the challenges and choices in the game.
Game-playing	Any pre-requisite of prior experience, or if there are increasing challenges in proportion to game-playing skills.

Table 1 The general scheme for analysis and its topics of interest

As Table 1 particularizes, this general scheme of analysis is structured on eight topics of interest. Similar attributes have been brought into discussion during the face-to-face in-depth interviews with industry's professionals.

Validation for the general scheme of analysis

I have applied this grid for analysing two games that are influencing gamers' community and generate reactions from game designers: *DayZ* (Bohemia Interactive, 2013) and *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream, 2005). Both video games have been previously reviewed by specialized sites (www.gamasutra.com, www.gamesradar.com) and have been included in several academic studies (Soetaert, et al., 2011 (Backe & Aarseth, 2013) (Carter, et al., 2013) (Carter, 2015)). Yet, the added value of my analysis is a better understanding of the challenges raised by those games in terms of game design and story and of the triggers that engage players.

Comparing and assessing those games on each of the categories outlined in the scheme for analysis enabled me to search for design or story specifics that may or may not stimulate the players' engagement. The assessment of the interface shows differences in: graphical details, the genre of the film that served as source of inspiration, mood and background music, the level of body language and the emotional reactions useful for players to make decisions, the dialog boxes used for communicating with the players. The engagement is related to the entertainment value of experience which depends on how a player controls a game character (*DayZ*) or a number of characters (*Heavy Rain*). These characters have a history and a significant interaction with others, allowing players to gather "life experience" (while judging their characters' choices). The degree of agency over the character also influences, as Sicart suggests (2009), the scale of engagement.

From a narrative point of view, the games do not exclude antisocial materials (i.e. in *DayZ* killing is a vital part of the experience and the bandit behaviour is not restricted). On the contrary, they include it in a form that can be approached, reshaped or corrected if players choose to. The game designers did not encourage or reward advanced social relationships between strangers. In *DayZ* there is no decisive plot to be discovered, but it can be configured by the players. In the case of *Heavy Rain*, there is a plot, but the drama of the story is not clear until the end of the game, when the players are able to understand the whole story, including their own part in it. As Ryan demonstrates (2004: 349), the narrative success of the games lies in their ability to move the plot forward by solving problems. The difference between the assessed games resides in the problems tackled (own survival or saving someone else's life) and in the induced emotions (fears, trust, hope, hate, love, friendship). The immersion is stronger in the case of the first-person (FSP) mode (*DayZ*), that allows the player to internalize behaviours and feeling. In the case of switching from FSP to third-person perspective (*Heavy Rain*), because of multiple characters playing, the immersion and engagement are affected sometimes, since the protagonist does not always do what the player would have wanted him to do. For *Heavy Rain's* degree of freedom, arguments state the fact that there are a reduced number of choices, always displayed on the screen like a "shopping-list", among which the players must choose. For *DayZ*, the formulaic elements, the clear mechanics, the open-story and open-options create for the players the feeling that they are making their own decisions even when AI (artificial intelligence) detects them and pulls them out from the free character status, obliging them to interact, to make decisions and choices. The challenges, including moral dilemmas, allow players to work on and to amplify their own feelings, beliefs and axiological values in a way that would be impossible in the real-world.

Feedback, as the information communicated to players about results they achieved or the choices or actions they have taken, is visual or auditory. The lack

of feedback for some actions can disturb attention and elicit question marks for the player. It may be the case of the lack of body language or emotional reactions of other characters, or the earned trophies only at the end of each chapter (*Heavy Rain*), and not in the very moment the player obtained it (health status in *DayZ*). Feedback is, as demonstrated by O'Brien and Toms (2008), a strong engagement tool that motivates players to continue, to set their own intermediary objectives, to pursue further with the story. As Istrate (2014) suggests, feedback can be a reward for the player, a trigger to make decisions or to do specific actions in a game. This does not mean it has to be explicitly obvious for the player, but it must be observed in order to help him or her to understand the gains of meeting the game challenges. In the case of *DayZ*, the longer the players survive, the more skills they learn, being able to adapt better to the zombie apocalypse. In addition, the loot is a reward and killing another survivor offers access to resources, with no in-game consequences. Yet, if a player decides to experience the game ethically, there is no positive feedback for his actions.

Applying this grid of analysis leads to the conclusion that a key for success is to focus on how to design immersive mechanics, while showing a compelling story. Game designers should not use interaction to deliver a multitude of choices ("shopping list"), but instead they should reinforce the immersion feedback loop. Nevertheless, allowing the players to configure the path they want to follow has a decisive role in building engagement.

Conclusions

Like any other young research field, looking for its own academic identity, the study of video games is based on approaches, findings and concepts borrowed from other domains, its necessary inter- and trans-disciplinarity creating a terminology and a methodology built from previously formulated ones. A positive aspect of this academic exchange of knowledge and methods of analysis is the use of already validated and trusted instruments. Yet, some specifics of various research communities and their insufficient elaboration may lead, as Mäyrä notes, to confusion and conflicts in between partners and parties (2009: 313). For example, the signification of video games stands in the midst of the narratology-ludology dispute.

On the other hand, the rapid development of game studies has produced a theoretical corpus focusing on these cultural artefacts from diverse angles: from game elements to the player and play experience, from signification and cultural materialization to a procedural rhetoric perspective. An overview of the main research directions defines and delimitates fundamental concepts and methodologies for the domains that do not appear to be in the sight of contemporary researchers.

The critical review of the literature in the field, aiming to find an instrument for the study of video games as cultural artefacts, helped me to build a general grid of analysis comprised of: the play interface, the narrative, the game objectives, the interactions map, the perceived degree of freedom, the structure of the characters and objects, the feedback and the gameplay. These eight attributes can be applied to an analysed object in order to understand the video game experience.

A limitation of this grid of analysis is the need of assessing cautiously the results because every time a “(part of a) game is played, the output that appears on the PC or console screen is different from any previous time, even if it is played by the same player under similar circumstances” (Malliet 2007). This creates difficulty in defining what belongs to what the game designer intended and what comes from the configuration chosen by the player.

Note

I have preferred the term *video games* versus computer games because nowadays these games are available on a large variety of platforms and structures form games consoles connected or not to a TV set, to apps for desktop computers or for mobile phones.

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Martha Bibescu – *Jurnal berlinez '38*: From History to Self

Lucia-Luminița CIUCĂ*♦

Abstract

Jurnal berlinez '38 [‘38 Berlin Diary] is a diary sequence which Martha Bibescu, an emblematic and controversial figure of the political and literary circles in Romania at the turn of the twentieth century, did not intend for publication at the time of its writing, and which presents her visit to Berlin where her husband, George Valentin Bibescu, was invited as the president of the Congress of the International Aeronautic Federation. As she was in connection with many diplomats and historical figures, Martha Bibescu wanted to record in writing a few moments of the history of that time, together with some glimpses of her private story. This travel diary impresses by the subtlety of the author’s observations, the inventiveness and originality of the logical connections made in the description of some characters, acid irony, but also by the presentation of the Nazi Reich. The identity of the woman who relives the memories of her youth and remarks the changes in her and the others is built from behind the narrated events.

Keywords: Martha Bibescu, travel diary, identity, historical figures, Berlin

Martha Bibescu is a controversial feminine figure of the early years of the twentieth century, both at the social and cultural level, thanks to her origin and to her relationships with important political figures of the time, but also to her literary works, written mostly in French. Born in 1898, she was the daughter of Ion Lahovari, a great landlord and politician, former Minister of Agriculture between 1912 and 1913, in Carp’s and Maiorescu’s governments, and of a descendant of the Mavrocordat family. At the age of 2, she was sent to Paris, where she lived and studied. She married young, and her husband was Prince George Valentin Bibescu, the son of the former Wallachian prince, a worldly man, industrialist and aviator. A daughter, Valentina, was born out of this marriage, which was not a happy one, as the husband used to constantly cheat on her. They separated on their own accord. Martha Bibescu had her debut in 1908, in Paris, with the work in prose *Les nuits paradis*, awarded by the French Academy. She was a worldly figure of Bucharest, ever present at parties, where she amazed the participants with her beauty.

Her noble descent enabled her to travel and get acquainted to many important national and international figures. This is also the reason why her work, also signed with the pen name Lucile Decaux, comprises a series of autobiographical or historical novels, literary portraits of some personalities, travel notes, poems in verse or in prose, essays, letters, and historical biographies. *Jurnal berlinez '38* [‘38 Berlin Diary] is a diary sequence which the author did not

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intend for publication at the time of its writing, edited and brought to light by Dumitru Hîncu. It presents a visit to Berlin, where her husband, George Valentin Bibescu, is invited as the president of the Congress of the International Aeronautic Federation, after the Nazis' coming to power. It is the year preceding the outbreak of World War II. The author focuses on her impressions of the week June 21-27, 1938, which she spent in Berlin without the slightest idea about the storm of blood that would sweep Europe and then the entire world for the next six years.

On a close reading, the text reveals a constant movement between past and present, the present bringing back to the writer representative images and events of her life and even of the historical moments she witnesses, which she lucidly and somewhat ironically analyses, in terms that betray a sense of superiority at times. She surprises the reader with her ability to assert certain ideas, without fearing repercussions, but also with her mixture of three foreign languages: English, German and French. The text also emphasises the construction of the author's identity as an educated woman, with a good social position, an influential person with noble roots in the Romanian society, which she does not deny but proudly affirms, although she belies some figures, such as Queen Marie, Elena Văcărescu, Nadège Ştirbey.

Her Berlin journey sets out on Tuesday, June 21st, 1938, when her husband picks her up from her apartment in Paris to drive her to Berlin. From the very beginning, the text strikes by its literariness: „*Apele Senei reflectă ca într-o oglindă, casele Parisului. Impresia de vară pe care n-am avut-o niciodată.*” [The Seine waters reflect, like a mirror, the houses of Paris. That leaves me the summer impression I have never had] (Bibescu 2009: 9). She wishes she had some peace before leaving Paris to prepare herself for this journey which she names “Phoenix”, the rebirth of the one she once was, of those memories she thought she had lost for good, but she is disturbed by the presence of a Turk claiming to be an Egyptian. Moreover, she has to listen to his political laments about the Egyptian government - „*trebuie să ascult înşiruirea tuturor erorilor săvârşite de actualul guvern egiptean, de rege, sub influenţa mamei, de consilieri nerozi şi toate astea [...]*” [I must listen to a list of errors made by the present Egyptian government, by the king, under his mother's influence, by the stupid counsellors and all that] (10) - which culminate in his expressing the belief that “*naţionalismul e o ciumă a spiritului*” [nationalism is the plague of the spirit] (10).

She regrets leaving Paris: „*Las îndărătu-mi, la plecarea din scumpul meu Paris, eterna cetate, o dungă lungă, albăstruie, de fum târâtor. Rândunelele m-au însoţit cu un cântec de adio*” [Upon leaving my beloved Paris, the eternal city, I leave behind a long, blue line of crawling smoke. The swallows accompanied me with a farewell song] (11). Yet the flight to Germany means regaining her lost youth, in another historical context: „*De la Paris la Berlin, pe calea aerului, pe nerăsuflăte, către întâlnirea cu cei douăzeci de ani pe care i-ai avut. Ca să regăseşti Imperiul sporit de victoria Aliaţilor*” [From Paris to Berlin, by plane, in no time, towards the encounter with your twenty years that have gone. To find again the Empire enhanced by the Allies' victory] (11). To be more convincing, she recounts the story of the Russian-

German marriage between Kira, the daughter of the Grand Duke Kiril, the “ghost-emperor” of Russia, and the nephew of the “ghost-emperor” of Germany, Ludwig Ferdinand, in view of concluding a political truce.

Martha Bibescu intends to render a private, intimate experience; however, what she actually achieves is to describe a page of history, which she comments on without fear of any repercussions. Arriving at Meusa, on the Rhine, she sees the pile of ore, and hears Enescu announcing: “Cologne”. Then she thinks of Rome, which she associates with the Germans’ desire to turn the Jews into a colony: „*Colonia! anunță Enescu în portavocea lui. Și anunțul răsună ca un ecou al Romei. Colonia. Colonia. Germanii cer colonii.*” [‘Cologne’, Enescu announces with his speaking trumpet. And his announcement resounds like an echo of Rome. Colonia. Colonia. The Germans claim colonies] (13). Along the same lines, she asserts that the German people loved the Jews, the Benedictines, the Dominicans, all Catholics, „*dar în același timp îi și detesta și era gata să-i persecute [...]* În Hitler, *poporul german a aflat o unealtă și mai perfectă a imbecilității sale*” [but at the same time detested them and were ready to persecute them. [...] The German people have found in Hitler the perfect tool of their idiocy] (14). The Jew Heine finds an explanation for this, which Martha Bibescu quotes in English:

Hit a man that hit you back. Precisely what they must not do. Because if they hit the man who can give it back that means war. If they hit who cannot give back they can hit comfortably at home and that means peace (14).

Then, Martha Bibescu mentions the blackmail of the Jews: “*Plățiți sau vă gonesc. Și plătesc. După care-i închid, pentru că sunt evrei săraci*” [Pay or be gone. And they pay. Then, they are arrested for being poor Jews] (15). As a conclusion to all these, Martha Bibescu ironically accounts for the etymology of the word “German”, invented by the Franks – „*cel care nu pricepe, nătărăul. Iar germanul își spune Deutsch, care vrea să însemne: cel care știe*” [the one who cannot comprehend, the dupe. And the German calls himself *Deutsch*, which means: the one who knows] (15-16) – and she voices a philosophy of life: „*Dacă aș putea să vă cumpăr la prețul pe care vi-l dau ceilalți și să vă vând la prețul pe care singuri vi-l dați, aș deveni bogat*” [If I could buy you for the price the others give you and sell you for the price you put on yourselves, I would be rich] (16).

The flight to Berlin awakens the ghost of her youth, of her twenties, to be more specific, in her memory, a time when many things happened - firstly, World War I, and secondly, the abolishment of monarchy in Germany – bringing about a multitude of changes in history: „*N-am mai venit în țara asta din cealaltă lume, cea care se chema înainte de război*” [I haven not been to this country since the time of the other world, the one before the war] (Bibescu 2009: 17). The author considers this period one of an absurd history, like “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”, as she puts it quoting from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (V.5.26-28), which means that not even the most intelligent and informed people can predict what the future may have in store for them.

The cultural and identity-related references continue: the turbulence she experiences when the plane flies above Russia is associated with the rebelliousness of the Russian people. Upon her landing on the airport, she is annoyed by a woman pilot who asks for her support in Bucharest, and she calls her „tarantulă românească” [a Romanian tarantula] (18). She assumes an arrogant and detached attitude, even at the declarative level: „Nu sunt prea amabilă” [I’m not too kind] (17), „abia am putut să-i zâmbesc” [I could hardly smile at her] (18).

On the first contact with Berlin, she notes that the city is unchanged, despite the people’s efforts to change it, that her youth comes to her mind involuntarily, and that the roses in the streets ruin the magic of the city: „*Mixtura de trandafiri și tramvoaie nu-mi face plăcere. În general, nu-mi plac trandafirii pe drumurile publice [...] Îmi vine să vărs.*” [The mixture of roses and trams is unpleasant. I generally do not like roses on public roads (...) That makes me throw up] (18). She associates this image with the gardens of Romania, designed by Germans, but also with the gardens of Queen Maria, considered by Philippe L. to have „*prea mult roz*” [too much pink] (19). Yet she loves the old, small houses with large roofs and enclosed gardens, as she sees herself in them. This mix makes her compare a large town with a capital city:

Ceea ce caracterizează o capitală e înfrigurarea, o anume agitație continuuă a oamenilor, care durează toată ziua și toată noaptea. Asta-i Londra, New York-ul și un pic și Parisul; tot restul, oricât de mare ar fi, e provincie sau, oricum, oraș patriarhal. Curtea, reședința stăpânului. Asta-i Viena, Nancy-ul, Berlinul a rămas un oraș patriarhal, în întregime marcat de curte. [What characterises a capital city is the fever, a certain permanent agitation of the people, which lasts all day and night. This is London, this is New York and, to a little extent, this is Paris too; anything else, no matter how big, is a provincial or, anyway, a patriarchal town. It is just the court, the master’s residence. This is Vienna, this is Nancy. Berlin has remained a patriarchal town, completely dominated by the court] (19).

Martha Bibescu is welcomed by Mister von Gronau, whom she ironically describes in detail: „*Are o mutră caraghioasă de angoulevant, cu un cioc ce se lățește de la o ureche la alta și niște ochi spălăciți, naivi și hotărâți.*” [He has a funny face of an *engoulevant*, with a goatee spreading from one ear to the other and some bleary, naïve and determined eyes] (17). In her hotel room, she finds a lot of flowers sent by the gentlemen present at the meeting, as a sign of appreciation. From this moment on, she starts going to various dinners and meetings, where she takes delight in analysing the menus or the people around her. Thus, during the first dinner, she comments ironically on the way in which the French react to the menu and to the Germans’ custom of not eating bread: „*N-am să uit niciodată fața francezilor la servirea primului fel. Pepene și, pe fiecare felie, o crevetă subțirică*” [I shall never forget the Frenchmen’s faces when they saw the first course. Watermelon and, on each slice, a thin shrimp] (21). After dinner, she changes into a black taffeta tailor-made suit, a Lanvine creation in vogue in Germany; as a matter of

fact, dressing by the fashion of the host country is a rule she constantly abides by, advising her friends to do the same.

The most awaited encounter is that with Wilhelm III, the one who might have been king if the war had not dramatically changed the face of Europe and the rulers of Germany. The meeting, held in Potsdam, in his private residence, takes place after many arrangements and after a phone call she receives during her dinner with the Belgians, ironically, in the same way in which she received an invitation back in 1912 while in a hotel room almost identical with the one she is in now, except that now the invitation is made anonymously. The prince's voice, although warm, seems completely strange to her: „*Era un glas cald, bărbătesc, bien posé.*” [It was a warm, manly, *bien posé* voice] (24). At the Kronprinz's request to come accompanied and dressed in an evening gown, she humorously announces him that she looks like a *Grossmutter* and that she cannot guarantee for Georges. Nevertheless, he compliments her with a poem in German, and she ironically replies, showing familiarity with the one who was once the second man in his state.

*Ernst und stille Gedanken
Mir durch die Seele ziehen,
Dann weiss ich dass in Franken
Meine geliebten Rosen blühen.*
[Grave and silent thoughts
Wander through my soul
And I know that in the land of the French
My beloved roses are in bloom] (25).

She returns to the table, and continues to talk politics, apparently calm, but her soul vibrates with the emotion of the meeting. She gets involved in the discussions about the election of a Turk as the vice-president of the International Aeronautic Federation, as Kinski, who became the president of a German aero club in Austria, can no longer be the vice-president after Anschluss [Austria's annexation to Nazi Germany in March 1938] (25).

The next day, she starts preparing for the next meeting, taking an almost identical course with the one she took twenty-five years ago. Aware of her age, and reliving the past nostalgically, she feels that every detail is as it was back then: the morning light, the hotel room, the walk through the town. Before the 'big' encounter with the Crown Prince Wilhelm, Martha Bibescu visits the Berlin museums to see Nefertiti, with her long neck, the relics of Babylon and Pergamum, which occasions the mischievous remark „*ca să vedem de ce mor imperiile*” [to see why empires die] (as is the case with the German Empire, shred to pieces by World War I). Then, she admires the paintings by Albert Durer and Holbein. The honour of finding herself in the company of important figures flatters her:

În toate țările sunt mărimi ale acestei lumi, iar eu resimt puternic și retrospectiv cinstea de a mă plimba cu Mr. Cabot și cu fiica lui, Mrs. Bradley, născută Cabot, prin străzile acestui Berlin în care gloria Hohenzollernilor a apus. [There are great people of this world in every country, and I strongly and retrospectively feel the honour of walking with Mr Cabot and his daughter, Mrs Bradley, née Cabot, on the streets of this Berlin where the glory of the Hohenzollerns faded] (28).

She has dinner with the Romanian minister plenipotentiary Neagu Djuvara, whom she parodically portrays: „*Nespus de caraghios. Cravata, părul, fanfaronul congenital.*” [Incredibly funny. His tie, his hair, the congenital braggart] (28). His theory of Romania illustrated by dominating women, such as Anna de Noailles, Didina, Elena Văcărescu and herself, is cumbersome for both her and her husband. What saves this meeting is the Romanian caviar, but also the fact that they are treated with deference by the waiters, who call them *Königliche Hoheit* (Royal Highness).

In the evening, Martha Bibescu's main concern is choosing a dress for the next day, which proves a difficult task, as the dress must have certain significance but also match the princess's age and status. The first chromatic choice is black, so as to suggest to the Kronprinz what are her feelings, the suffering gathered during the past years, the injustice and prejudices that targeted at both of them her host and herself:

Negru pentru doliul monarhiei, pentru îngroparea tinereții? Doliu pentru a fi Electra? Sau, mai bine zis, pentru a fi Cassandra? Să-i spun ce s-a întâmplat? Oare să nu-l fac să înțeleagă că pregătirea nu înseamnă nimic, căci zeii nu pun la cale decât întâmplări neprevăzute? Poate că doliul ar fi fost cel mai nimerit pentru toate acestea. Doliu pentru insultele revărsate asupra-mi de bunii mei prieteni din cauza lui și a prieteniei cu el. Doliu pentru înțelepciunea nimicită de ură și prejudecăți? Doliu pentru mândria înfrântă și, mai mult, pentru mândria șocantă a celor victorioși? Doliu pentru că atât de des a fost numit „măcelarul de la Verdun”. [Black for the mourning of monarchy, for the burial of youth? Mourning to become Electra? Or, better said, to be Cassandra? Should I tell him what happened? Should I not make him understand that preparation means nothing, for the gods only conspire to engender unpredictable events? Perhaps mourning would have been the most appropriate for all these. Mourning for the insults poured out on me by my good friends because of him and my friendship with him. Mourning for the wisdom shred to pieces by hatred and prejudice? Mourning for the defeated pride, and moreover, for the shocking pride of the victors? Mourning for him being called so often ‘the butcher of Verdun’] (30).

She eventually chooses white, a lace dress by Lanvine, the virginal aspect being toned down with emerald jewellery and a dark-red, almost black, rose on the lapel, „*semn că fac parte din trecut*” [a sign that I belong in the past] (30). The car arrives on time, and everything is surrounded by mystery, as no one mentions the prince's name. The road she takes is a road down the memory lane: „*Revedeam periferiile idilice ale tinereții mele, arborii de soc, tufele de liliac ale tinereții mele, parfumul acelei vremi, parfumul tuturor vremurilor.*” [I saw again in my mind's eye the idyllic

outskirts of my youth, the elder shrubs, the lily bushes of my youth, the perfume of those time, the perfume of all times] (31-32). The short sentences betray her emotion of coming near the prince, and, against the background of her concerns with her attire and coiffure, she feels the thrills of youth and coquetry awaking. She compares herself with the other women writers of the time, resorting to the words of her friend, the French Symbolist poet Robert de Montesquiou: „*Tarantula balcanică o înțepa pe Anna, o înțepa pe Vaca, ba până și pe regina Maria. Doar prințesa Bibescu a scăpat de mușcătura iritantei insecte.*” [The Balkan tarantula used to sting Anna, Vaca[rescu] and even Queen Marie. Only Princess Bibescu escaped the bite of the irritating insect] (33). In this understanding, “the Balkan tarantula” signifies the Balkan spirit, construed as inferior to the Western spirit.

Neither does the prince escape her thorough analysis, as Martha Bibescu makes him a detailed portrait:

[...] *iată-l în picioare, îmbrăcat tot în alb, parcă spoit cu var de sus până jos, inclusiv părul; aceeași prelungă siluetă, elegantă, dreaptă, cu gâtul lung, cu micul chip ascuțit, cu ochi albaștri, bridați, atât de aproape de ivirea nasului mic, nasul ascuțit al Marelui Fritz, cu un aer ironic, fine mâini mici, picioare sprintene, statura înaltă și ușoară, același, doar cu douăzeci și cinci de ani mai mult; douăzeci și cinci de ani invizibili, căci părul îi era gri argintat și la tinerețe, iar acum pare să fi fost doar pudrat ca pentru bal mascat. Abia apoi văd și amănuntele, epoleții aurii, steaua ce țâșnește din gâtul drept în loc de cravată, mica claviatură a decorațiilor pe uniforma de pânză, uniforma de vară. Prima impresie e ca o străfulgerare. Un tânăr înalt, alb de sus și până jos. Iar eu îmi repet în străfundurile memoriei: Măcelarul de la Verdun, spaima lumii, asta a fost bărbatul ăsta în alb, tânărul ăsta, vechiul meu prieten, fâgăduială de veșnică amiciție, în ciuda tuturor, fâgăduiala de a rămâne puri, de neatins. O planetă de care se va aminti...* [Here he is, standing, dressed in white, as if he were whitewashed from head to toes, including his hair; the same long, elegant, straight figure, with his long neck, his little sharp face, his blue swollen eyes, so close to the small nose, the pointed nose of Great Fritz, with an ironic air, fine small hands, agile legs, tall and light stature, the same, but twenty-five years older; twenty-five invisible years, as his hair was silver-grey when he was young too, and now it seems as if it were powdered for a masked ball. Only afterwards I can see the details, the golden epaulettes, the star that springs from his neck, instead of a tie, the small keyboard of insignia on the fabric uniform, a summer uniform. The first impression strikes me. A tall young man, white from head to toes. And I keep saying to myself, in the depths of my memory: the Butcher of Verdun, the terror of the world, this is what this man in white was, this young man, my old friend, the promise of an eternal friendship in spite of everybody, the promise to remain untouched forever. A planet to remember...] (33-34).

The joy of re-joining a friend is, as one can easily notice, shadowed by the memory of the horrors of war. Mindful of etiquette, she curtsies in front of Wilhelm, as in the good old days, and he, surprised, shows her gesture to his wife, Cecilie, who knows that a German woman is not allowed such a manifestation of politeness. The princess's reaction is prompt, in her natural style: “I am not a German woman. I was born a free woman” (34). To her, the encounter with Wilhelm III is like a descent into the abyss.

The royal family house has been designed by her and the prince together, and the admiration for Englishness, which is obvious from its aspect - „Îmi spun că sălașul lui Alaric trebuie să fi fost croit pe același calapod cu o casă romană” [I always think that Alaric’s abode must have been tailored after a Roman house] (36) - makes her assert with reference to the Germans’ attacks on England that: „Mereu ucizi ce iubești... Nu totdeauna” [One always kills what one loves... Not always] (35). They tease a little bit, the prince gazes at her insatiably, he takes her hand into his, then he gives her his arm. The meeting with Wilhelm’s wife is equally impressive, and she is also portrayed with a glimpse of irony:

E aceeași femeie, înaltă, brunetă, mult îngrășată dar, ca o compensare a acestei greutate, o proșpețime a tenului bine păstrată [...] Pieptănătura i-a rămas aceeași. Pieptănată ca sora mea Jeanne, moartă în 1912. Părul adunat în creștet și o buclă care-i cade pe frunte. Și-a păstrat frumoșii ochi umezi de rusoaică, pomeții înalți, zâmbetul, gropițele, statura-i frumoasă, un pic bărbătească. Îmi place, mi-a plăcut de când o știu. [She is the same woman, tall, brunette, a lot of extra weight, but as a compensation for her weight, she has a fresh, well-preserved complexion [...] Her combing has remained the same. She is combed like my sister, Jeanne, who died in 1912. The hair up her crown and a small lock of hair falling down her brow. Her wet Russian eyes are still beautiful, and so are her cheekbones, her smile, her dimples, her beautiful figure, a little bit manly. I like her; I have always liked her] (36-37).

She admits whimsically that she is analytical and that she is unable to memorise names: „Ca de obicei, n-aud numele când mi-e prezentat cineva, prea ocupată să văd [...] O economie involuntară. Nu rețin cu plăcere numele figuranților pe care n-am să-i mai revăd niciodată.” [As usual, I do not hear the name when someone is introduced to me; I’m too busy watching. [...] An involuntary economy. I do not joyfully remember the names of the extras that I shall never see again] (37). She enjoys Cecilie’s politeness as she allows her to walk in front of her, while despising Romanian royalty - „grobianele noastre prințese din România” [our boorish Romanian princesses] who would have never done this. She also appreciates the way in which the table is laid, as well as the meals: crabs and ice champagne.

The conversations at table concern the royal family’s lamentations that they do not get the attention they used to get, that they are no longer invited to various events and that Hitler does not ask for their opinion. They speak about Nazism, fascism, Hitler and Mussolini, about their similarities and differences, about their actions, and about the frustrations of a royal heir: „Niciun german nu mai are voie să se încline în fața regalității.” [No German is allowed to bow before royalty any more] (39). The hosts are encouraged to share their opinion about H, as they repeatedly call Hitler, their reaction being disapproving of the fact that he is striving to erase their image from the collective mindset. However, they show their appreciation for Mussolini. The Prince expresses his opinion on both Hitler and Mussolini, but what impresses Martha Bibescu is the speaker himself: „Ce-i mai plictisitor la omul ăsta (aluzie la Hitler) e că n-are simțul umorului. Înghite orice, dacă e laudat. Lauda nu-i e nemicând destulă. Iar Goebbels întrece măsura (aici face un gest). Deci îl detestă”. [What is

the most boring about this man (allusion to Hitler) is that he has no sense of humour. He swallows everything as long as he is praised. He has never enough praise. And Goebbels goes overboard (he gestures). So he detests him] (42). Next, he complains that he is never invited to any public manifestation, although he is a general, and Princess Bibescu tells to herself that:

excesul de naționalism e totdeauna dovada unei profunde nemulțumiri de sine. Inșii respectivi se afirmă în numele națiunii lor și când își dau seama că nu și-au făcut prieteni, folosindu-se de subterfugii, de cel mai mărunț german, se înfurie și afirmă că sunt cel mai mare popor din univers. [The excess of nationalism is always a proof for a profound discontent with oneself. The respective individuals affirm themselves in the name of their nation, and when they realise that they have not made friends, by using subterfuges or the least important German, they get mad and claim that they are the greatest people in the universe] (57).

Martha Bibescu seems to try to give solace to her hosts with bitter, ironic comments on Hitler and Mussolini:

[...] eu le relatez propria mea viziune asupra celor doi, pe care nu demult i-am văzut la Centocello suprapunându-se pe același fond de cer, urmăriți de la cincizeci de metri cu lornieta, vreme de două ore. Le ofer dar concluziile mele. Le spun că, pe moment, i-am conceput, pe M și pe H, ca pe un cuplu. Ca la o însurătoare, iar îndărățul lor la zece metri, Goebbels, Ribbentrop, Starace, Ciano, de Bono etc ca domnișoare de onoare. Soțul era M și mireasa H. Cu trăsături nedefinite, cu spatele îndoit, cu umerii căzuți. Pe când celălalt, cu pumnul în șold, aducea a mascul triumfător. Și spre a completa tabloul, cinci mii de trompeți intonând marșul nupțial din Lohengrin. (...) Există țări masculine și țări femele. Italia este o țară femelă, de unde și adorarea lui Musso. Germania este o țară mascul care cade în transă în fața unei femele. Aceeași poveste ca și în cazul Angliei și al reginelor ei. [I share my own vision of the two, whom I had recently seen in Centocello, against the background of the same sky, from 50 meters, watching them through my lorgnette for two hours. I give them my conclusions. I tell them that, at that moment, I perceived M and H as a couple. As in a wedding, and, ten meters behind them, Goebbels, Ribbentrop, Starace, Ciano, de Bono etc., as maids of honour. The groom was M and the bride was H. With undefined features, with his back bent, and his shoulders down. Whereas the other, with his fist on his hip, seemed like a triumphant male. And to complete the picture, five thousand trumpets played the nuptial hymn of Lohengrin. (...) There are male countries and female countries. Italy is a female country, hence their adoration of Musso. Germany is a male country worshipping a female. The same story with England and its queens] (41).

One may easily notice that political names are avoided: N for Nazism, M for Mussolini, and H for Hitler. Another attempt to give solace to the royal family is a parable of Michel, which in German means 'churl' or 'stooge'. Then she remembers a moment from her youth when she was required by a Frenchman to give information about Wilhelm III, and she provided the portrait of a much more humane emperor than the emperor of Prussia. She also reminds him of the

captivity years. Wilhelm III's admiration for Martha Bibescu has remained unaltered: he tells his guests that he was mesmerised by Martha's huge eyes when he first met her, while she secretly remembers the feminine envy she stirred back then, and the attention she received from the son of the last emperor of Germany, during his visit in Bucharest, before World War I. Queen Maria herself was so jealous that she plotted, telling Cecilie, the heir's wife, that Martha would try to steal her husband from her. She found out about these schemes from Cecilie herself, as the German royal couple have always trusted Martha and have had good relationships with the Bibescu family.

The hosts ask her about the state of monarchy in Romania, as they are informed (being relatives of the Hohenzollerns) of the failure of the relationship between Carol II and Helen of Greece. They side with Helen, whom they see as a victim, neglected by the Romanian heir. However, Martha thinks otherwise, that Carol has been neglected, which led to the dissolution of the relationship: „*Dacă doamna Simpson s-ar fi comportat ca dânsa, n-ar fi existat o abdicare în Anglia.*” [If Lady Simpson had behaved like her, there wouldn't have been an abdication in England] (58).

After such an evening, Martha and Georges reach the hotel having a sensation of joy and fulfilment: „*Odată ajunși în camera noastră, ne-am simțit amândoi obosiți, dar satisfăcuți [...]* *Ilustrare a vieții mele, singurul lucru pe care-l simțeam este bucuria.*” [Once returned to our room, we both felt tired but content. [...] The story of my life – the only thing I could feel was joy] (64).

The next day, Martha Bibescu is at the airport, anxiously waiting for her friend Lady Londonderry and for her daughter, to stop feeling lonely and to have someone to share thoughts on fashion, fashionable places to visit, and even politics. They go together to some dinners with the people invited to the Congress, until the meeting held on June 24th. She supports her husband, listens to his speech and gives him suggestions for his presentation. The Congress hall, House der Flieger, is a garish one. „*Teama de prost gust duce la totală lipsă de gust.*” [The fear of tastelessness leads to complete tastelessness] (67). She is not happy with her attire, with a blue silk tailored-suit and a flat hat. She criticises everybody's speech but praises her husband's: „*Mestecă fier și scuipă pietre. Apoi e rândul lui von Gronau, în franceză [...]* *vine rândul lui Georges să răspundă. Glasul lui are un efect adorabil după ceilalți doi.*” [He chews iron and spits rocks. Now it is von Gronau's turn, in French [...] it is Georges' turn. His voice has an adorable effect after the previous two] (68). The blue and white attire is compulsory for dinner. Of course, the headliner of the meeting is Hermann Göring, who, as an aviator and the leader of German aviation, is the host of the International Aeronautics Congress. He is „*gras, cu un cap frumos, ochi albaștri adânc înfundați în orbite și căutătură magnetică*” [a fat man with a handsome head, blue eyes deepened in their eye pits and a magnetic look] (70). He welcomes the most important guests with a reception at his castle, Karinhall. Martha's moment of glory is when she opens, together with Göring, the dinner organised by the Third Reich on the occasion of the Aviation Congress of Berlin. During this dinner, she notices many details and gestures made by the

Görings, as well as their satisfaction with the recent birth of their first child. She writes ironically: „... fenomenala fetiță care a căpătat același prenume ca nepoata lui Mussolini, a permis părintelui ei să măsoare adâncimea, lărgimea și înălțimea dragostei pe care i-o poartă poporul german și va fi botezată, la Karinhall, de însuși Fuhrerul” [the phenomenal little girl who got the name of Mussolini’s niece has allowed her father to measure the depth, the width and the height of the love of the German people and will be christened in Karinhall by the Fuhrer himself] (77). They open up to one another and discuss about Carol II, and, whistle a lilt together. When Lady Londonderry proposes to give the little girl a dress with Irish lace, she also proposes to give her a dress with Romanian embroidery.

During the dinner, the Görings display their jewellery, as they seem to treasure the precious gems. This determines a new irony of the princess, who compares their manners and level of civilisation with those of the English, the French or the Italians.

Această manieră de a face cunoștință arătându-și bijuteriile îmi amintește de haremul din Persia și de obiceiurile verișoarelor austriece și ungueroaice de la Buftea. Atunci când copiii vor să stârnească admirație sau invidie își arată jucăriile, după care le iau înapoi. E o scenă care nu s-ar putea petrece în niciun salon franțuzesc, nici într-unul englezesc, nici la italieni. Naivitate și sălbăticie. Și cum asta facilitează mult conversația, sunt hotărâtă ca mâine, la Karinhall, să mă acopăr cu pietre colorate și bijuterii istorice, cu atât mai mult cu cât mi-am dat seama că asta îl distrează și pe Georges. [This manner of getting acquainted to someone by showing your jewellery reminds me of the Persian harem and the habits of the Austrian and Hungarian cousins in Buftea. When children want to stir admiration or envy, they show off their toys, and then they take them back. It is a scene which is impossible to take place in a French or English hall, or even at the Italians. Naiveté and barbarity. And, as this eases the conversation a lot, I am determined to cover myself in coloured gems and historical jewellery, tomorrow, at Karinhall, all the more as I have realised that it is funny for Georges too] (79).

Martha Bibescu’s note is not triggered by envy, as she owns famous emerald jewellery herself, which she mentions as a small, useful and coquettish detail:

Diadema de smaragde, pălăria mea verde, care-mi permite să fiu prost coafată. Sau cea puțin neondulată, întrucât duminica nu-i chip să ai parte de un coafor sau de o coafeză. Mă consolez, înfundându-mi pe cap casca mea de smaragde, care ascunde tot și suprimă meșele... [My emerald diadem, my green hat, which allows me to go out with a bad coiffure. Or at least without curls, as on Sundays it is impossible to get a hair dresser. I shall comfort myself by stuffing my emerald helmet on my head, as it hides everything and suppresses the hair pieces...] (79).

After the display of jewellery, Martha Bibescu, who sits next to Göring at the table, does not miss the opportunity to briefly mention to him of Carol II’s opening towards negotiations, but also of the poisonous influence of Nazism in the Romanian internal affairs. She does not give him a speech, but she only utters three well-targeted sentences, and Göring seems to appreciate her honesty.

The next day, with the Bibescus' visit at Karinhall, Göring's hunting palace, is a perfect continuation of the climax at the ball, especially as the invitation has been made by Göring to impress Martha. A true connoisseur of good taste and art, Martha Bibescu mercilessly and ironically mocks almost everything she sees in Karinhall.

The visit has the opposite effect of what Göring expected, beyond the apparent politeness of the princess, who scrutinises everything with her acute sight hidden by the lorgnette.

The new meeting with Prince Wilhelm is as moving as the previous one. Unlike 1909, when the prince was well-known and worshipped, now the courier who delivers the envelope does not even recognise him. The two talk politics and what would have been if he ended up a king, but she mourns his fate: „*Iar acum iată-l dispărut dintr-o lume care era a lui*” [And now he is gone from a world that used to belong to him] (81). Upon leaving, she offers him a blue-button, Queen Louise's flower. Because of this meeting, she is late for the reception and misses the flight of the first glider plane and is admonished by von Gronau. Then she takes part in a fashion gala which disgusts her, as everything is a cheap, tasteless copy:

Evantaie din pene în vogă la Paris acum zece ani. Contrafaceri după Worth, Moulineux-uri trucate, stângace, imitații ale rochiilor Lanvin, culori oribile, țesături care au grația hârtiei, suplețea cartonului și moliciunea glaspapirului. [Feather fans en vogue in Paris ten years ago. Counterfeited Worth, heavy-handed fake Moulineux, imitations of Lanvin dresses, horrid colours, fabrics with the grace of a sheet of paper, the gracefulness of a cardboard and the finesse of sand paper] (92).

Her reaction, though not verbalised, is particularly violent: „*Necioplitelor, mocofanelor, înapoiți-vă în caverna voastră!*” [Churlish, gawky women, back to your cave] (92).

After a few more meetings dedicated to the event, on June 27th 1938, her husband allows her to leave home alone, as she was not feeling very well. Behind the events, Martha Bibescu builds her identity as one who relives the memories of her youth and notices the changes in her own self and the others. By painting the Nazi Reich, she manages to turn her text into something more than a mere description of her private experiences, producing a 'document' which displays a genuine fresco of Berlin in 1938. “Why do I write? For fear that I might forget life.” (131). As she states, Martha Bibescu is not interested only in presenting certain events which she experienced directly, or in mapping an uproarious age or Germany's situation before World War II, but also in 'engraving in time' important glimpses of her existence, thus reliving them.

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Modernist Fiction from Sin to Art

Liliana COLODEEVA*

Abstract

The article highlights the influence of the novelists and philosophers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on the emerging and development of the modern novel as a free and outstanding form of literature, and what is more – as a form of art. The paper points out the impact of such names as Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad, Arnold Bennett and Malcolm Bradbury, personalities that sought to change the status of the novel through their works. Due to these authors there appeared and flourished the tradition that we now name the “modern” novel. By the turn of the century, the novel was shifting to art; it was becoming a more interesting and more influential form of literature; it was aspiring to become a far more complex, various, open and self-conscious form, one which, in a new way, sought to be taken seriously as “art”.

Key words: modern novel, art, fiction, self-consciousness, stream of consciousness

Many novelists of the turn of the twentieth century attempted to give a perfect definition for the ‘modern’ novel. Some of these novelists are mentioned in the present paper: Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, and others. The most convincing and influential in his attempt was the ‘literary master’, Henry James. He was concerned not only with the process of writing the novel, but also with its niche in literature. For Henry James, the novel was an art form, which in the skilful hands of the artist could enhance the perception of human experience: “the Novel remains still, under the right persuasion, the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms” (James, 1998: xlvii).

The changes that influenced and transformed the novel are thoroughly presented by Bayard Tuckerman in *A History of English Prose Fiction* (1894), by Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel* (1970) and by Michael McKeon in *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (2002).

In the 17th century, as stated by Bayard Tuckerman, to puritans, fiction was an invention of the Evil One. The prose of the time was chiefly polemical; it instructed and guided; it provided spiritual insight, but its aim, by no means, was to entertain. Further, as stated in *Prentice Hall Literature: The American Experience* (1994), the puritans produced neither fiction nor drama, since they considered both sinful. They valued a plain style of writing, as they considered clear statement to be the highest goal (Tuckerman, 1894).

Later, in the 18th century, the English Literature gained the perfection of prose forms of the highest importance and beauty due to such notable writers as Swift, Defoe, Addison, Bolingbroke, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Hume. At the end of the 18th century, the novel had become established as a popular form of

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literature, as stated by Tuckerman: "In the hands of Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, and Goldsmith, it reached a high position as a work of art" (1894).

The works of fiction of the 19th century have achieved a rank of dignity which seems to remain incomparable owing to such writers as Sir Walter Scott, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Charles Kingsley, Anthony Trollope, and very many others (Tuckerman, 1894).

The English author and academic, Malcolm Bradbury, was also concerned with the condition of the modern novel. In his work *The Modern British Novel* (1994), Bradbury claims that the essential secret of the modern novel is that it "came, but the Victorian novel did not completely go away" (5). "The powerful tradition of Victorian fiction - moral, realistic, popular - began to die, and something different and more complex came to emerge: the tradition of what we now name the "modern" novel" (Bradbury: 1). "The novel was aspiring to become a far more complex, various, open and self-conscious form, one which, in a new way, sought to be taken seriously as "art"" (Bradbury, 1994: 2). Henry James wrote his essay *The Future of the Novel* in 1899, where he concluded that the novel was at last coming to "self-consciousness", and becoming a complex, speculative and modern art (Bradbury 6). When Virginia Woolf wrote her audacious essay "*Modern Fiction*" in 1919, she believed that the modern novel was ready to claim freedom from old convention that was just like a political revolution" (Bradbury 2).

At the end of the nineteenth century, the novelists transformed the act of writing fiction into "an overflow of story-telling gift". Novelists like Henry James, raised fiction to the art form "by casting a glance at "the mystery of storytelling"". The standards established by James's theory of the novel, and specifically his view on narrative perspective "played a considerable part in the definition of the new conventions of the modernist novel" (Dobrinescu 2003: 203).

Paul Polplawski (2012) considers that Henry James is an important key transitional figure for long-term literary innovation as he played an important role in the development of 19th and 20th century English literature. Although American by birth, he settled in England in 1876. His novels, "with their broad social realism and their detailed depiction of the mores and manners of polite society" (2012: 551) depict the peculiarities of the both the New World and the Old World. James embodied in his work the traits and specific features of the 19th century novel as well as the 20th century one. Moreover, his novels mirror cultures and traditions of both American and English societies.

Henry James is obviously a pioneer of modern fiction as he was highly concerned "with style and form" and the point of view, and also due to his "experiments with narration, his interest in psychology, his fascination with the involved complexities with consciousness, perception and interpretation" (Polplawski 2012: 551).

In seeking a new psychological dimension of realism in the depiction of the workings of consciousness, Henry James pushed fictional realism to a limit at

which no further development was really possible without moving into a sort of experimentation associated with later novelists such as Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf (Poplawski 2012: 552).

Henry James's essay "*The Art of Fiction*", published in 1884 in Longman's Magazine, can be considered one of the most significant statements on the theory of the novel. Previously, the novel was regarded as a minor literary form, unworthy of serious critical analysis. James's theoretical approach to fiction marks a departure from the earlier nineteenth century fictional theories. He surely anticipates the condition of the twentieth century theory of fiction.

An attentive perusal of Henry James's essays on the theory of the novel reveals his predictions on the condition of the novel in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to James, a novel has to be artistic, and, first of all, it has to be interesting. There is only one classification of the novel that he can accept: that based on the reader's interest in the novel. It is about liking or not liking a novel, as he points out:

Some people, for excellent reasons, don't like to read about carpenters; others, for reasons even better, don't like to read about courtesans. Many object to Americans. Others won't look at Italians. Some readers don't like quiet subjects; others don't like bustling ones. Some enjoy a complete illusion; others revel in a complete deception. [...] So that it comes back very quickly, as I have said, to the liking (1984: 58).

James argues that a good novel derives from the fact that the writer has to possess "the sense of reality", and considering that "reality has a myriad of forms", it is the experience of the narrator that makes the difference. Experience, "the very atmosphere of the mind" – is the one that helps to see the unseen and to "judge the whole piece by the pattern" (1984: 52).

He, finely, defines the novel as a "work of art", a "free and serious branch of literature" (1984: 48). He insists that the literary work reflects the "quality of the mind of the producer" and that "no good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind". James claims that the novel represents life itself, therefore he blames Trollope for depriving the novelist of his honour to narrate, as a historian does, the events that really happened. According to James "the novel is history" (1984: 45). While to James the novel is history, to Frank Norris, the novel is not just history; it is the instrument of the novelist as "it expresses modern life better than architecture, better than painting, better than poetry, better than music" (Norris 1903).

It is as necessary to the civilization of the twentieth century as the violin is necessary to Kubelik, as the piano is necessary to Paderewski, as the plane is necessary to the carpenter, the sledge to the blacksmith, the chisel to the mason. It is an instrument, a tool, a weapon, a vehicle. It is that thing which, in the hand of man, makes him civilized and no longer savage, because it gives him a power of durable, permanent expression (Norris 1903).

Frank Norris conveyed the same beliefs regarding the modern novel in his essay "The Responsibilities of the Novelist" (1903). He claims that truth in fiction is of paramount importance, as:

The People have a right to the Truth as they have a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is not right that they be exploited and deceived with false views of life, false characters, false sentiment, false morality, false history, false philosophy, false emotions, false heroism, false notions of self-sacrifice, false views of religion, of duty, of conduct and of manners (Norris 1903).

Henry James "pleads in favour of fiction being autonomous, thus entitled to exist in its own rights and by its own rules, and not as an offspring of reality" (Dobrinescu 2014: 68). Dobrinescu notices that "half a century later, Virginia Woolf expressed ideas similar to James's in her essay also entitled 'The Art of Fiction'. For modernist Woolf "theory and theorizing upon the novel" seems to be of paramount importance too. If James only appreciates whole-heartedly the artistic performance of novelists like Charles Dickens and Makepeace Thackeray, "Woolf is more explicit in her establishing the relationship between the modern and the old art of the word" (Dobrinescu 2014: 93).

With their simple tools and primitive materials [...] Fielding did well and Jane Austen even better, but compare their opportunities with ours! [...] We do not come to write better; all that we can be said to do is to keep moving, now a little in this direction, now in that, but with a circular tendency should the whole course of the track be viewed from a sufficiently lofty pinnacle (Woolf 1925).

In another essay, written by Henry James "*The Future of the Novel*" (1899), the novel earns the name of "prose picture". To this extent, James again makes reference to art while speaking of the novel. He compares the process of creating a novel, with that of creating a picture, only the novel is rated much higher, for the reason that it has a great advantage: it "is the most comprehensive and the most elastic "picture". It will stretch anywhere" (James 1988: 106). What the craftsman – or the novelist has to do, according to James, is to feed the reader's general hunger for a "picture" – or the novel. The reader, in his/her turn, is somewhat a sly person, even an artful consumer of the content of the novel.

... man combines with his eternal desire for more experience an infinite cunning as to getting his experience as cheaply as possible. He will steal it whenever he can. He likes to live the life of others, yet is well aware of the points at which it may too intolerably resemble his own. The vivid fable, more than anything else, gives him this satisfaction on easy terms, gives him knowledge abundant yet vicarious. It enables him to select, to take and to leave ; so that to feel he can afford to neglect it he must have a rare faculty, or great opportunities, for the extension of experience – by thought, by emotion, by energy – at first hand (James 1984: 102).

Another advantage of the novel lies in its strength, on the grounds that it "can do simply everything". James makes his predictions on the future of the novel based on his opinion that the future of the fiction is tightly connected with the future of the society that "produces and consumes it". So, the quantity supplied depends on

the quantity demanded, as there is no such a literary work, that “any human being is under the smallest positive obligation to like” (1984: 104). Apparently, the novelist, in order to succeed, should have a huge experience of life, the experience that will be the source of the imagination for his work.

Joseph Conrad also conceives literature as a piece of art. He argues that “acquaintance with Mr. Henry James’s work brings a sense of happiness into one’s artistic existence” (1905). Moreover, Conrad appreciates James’s writings and compares them “to a majestic river” in his essay “Henry James - An Appreciation”:

The artistic faculty, of which each of us has a minute grain, may find its voice in some individual of that last group, gifted with a power of expression and courageous enough to interpret the ultimate experience of mankind in terms of his temperament, in terms of art. [...] The artist in his calling of interpreter creates (the clearest form of demonstration) because he must (Conrad 1905).

Conrad asserts that James’s novels spring from “the stream of inspiration” that “flows brimful in a predetermined direction” (Conrad, 1905).

On the whole, Henry James had a great impact on the modernists to come, and, so did his brother, William James, who was a psychologist, and, who, in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), coined the phrase ‘stream of consciousness’, which will signify the modernist narrative technique.

“William James was the first American thinker to argue that while ideology, or something very much like it, colours the whole of our conceptual life as human beings, it does not, or at least need not, determine all the ways we can reflect on this process” (Gunn 1995: 144).

The liaison between the novelist (Henry James) and the psychologist (William James) grew thereafter into the creation of the James literary and psychological heritage. William James had a great influence on his brother. This is obvious due to their tight family relationship and their correspondence. More than that, the beliefs and concepts discussed by William James in his *Principles of Psychology Vol. 1-2* (1890) are further taken up by his brother in his novels, essays, and also in the prefaces to his novels. For instance, William’s empiricist view of life is discernible in Henry’s preface to his novel *The Portrait of a Lady*. Henry James argues that the novelist should write from his own “impression or perception of life” in order to give the literary work the plentiful validity, genuineness, and sincerity:

There is, I think, no more nutritive or suggestive truth in this connexion than that of the perfect dependence of the ‘moral’ sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it. The question comes back thus, obviously, to the kind and the degree of the artist’s prime sensibility, which is the soil out of which his subject springs. The quality and capacity of that soil, its ability to ‘grow’ with due freshness and straightness any vision of life, represents, strongly or weakly, the projected morality. That element is but another name for the more or less close connexion of the subject with some mark made on the intelligence, with some sincere experience. [...] Here we get exactly the high price of the novel as a literary

form – its power not only, while preserving that form with closeness, to range through all the differences of the individual relation to its general subject-matter, all the varieties of outlook on life, of disposition to reflect and project, created by conditions that are never the same from man to man (or, so far as that goes, from man to woman), but positively to appear more true to its character in proportion as it strains, or tends to burst, with a latent extravagance, its mould (Henry James 1995: 7-8).

In his work *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), specifically in his chapter on Imagination, which is definitely indispensable to the process of fiction writing, William James is completely sure that sensations and perceptions once experienced are likely to produce the same emotions and feelings even if generated by copies of them.

Sensations, once experienced, modify the nervous organism, so that copies of them arise again in the mind after the original outward stimulus is gone. No mental copy, however, can arise in the mind, of any kind of sensation which has never been directly excited from without (William James 1890).

If to William James the sensations are the source of experience, to Henry experience is the key to writing, as long as “one must write from experience” (James, 1888). Henry James reverses it so that impressions are the experience that brings an immense sensibility which, in its turn, leads to imagination and therefore to revelations.

As reported by Giles Gunn, William James “differentiated his own position from that of many contemporary ideological critics who take their cues from an Althusser or a Macherey – Bercovich among them – by insisting that our needs do not thereby inevitably imprison us within our notions” (1995: 145). Gunn argues that “James reasoned that even if we cannot determine whether these inventions or interpretations of ours, these ideological “Others” or “Thats,” possess any absolute or real structure – or if they have any, whether that “structure resembles any of our predicated *whats*” – we can assisted by their critical imagination, determine the difference it makes to think so, or the alterations in experience that would be necessary if we thought otherwise” (Gunn 1995: 145).

On the whole, regarded as sinful by the puritans in the 17th century, fiction, had undergone profound changes in the 18th and 19th centuries, and was elevated into an art form in the early 20th century through the influential works of Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad, Arnold Bennett and others. Modernist fiction was placed on the same level with philosophy, history, painting and music. In a period when old traditions and values in literature were disappearing, new approaches and knowledge were gaining ground. By the turn of the 20th century, the novel was shifting to art; it was becoming a more interesting and a more influential form of literature.

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The Symbolic Advertising Communication in the New Integral Reality

A symbolical assessment of the technology impact on a brand icon

Vasile HODOROGEA*

Abstract

The new impressive technological advancements we are leaving change our cultural, social and economical consumption habits and needs. We have cumulatively evolved, as Hartley (2012) states, from a Newtonian, modern knowledge to a quantum, postmodern one and then rapidly to a network, universal type of knowledge that no longer requires nations, countries or regions but "everything known on earth", as in Google's business plan. The brands' or the companies' (or governments) communications must adapt to the new vehicles and platforms such as mobile applications and dramatically more dynamic digital endeavors (responsive websites, social-media). In this context, there are several questions that rise up: how does the commercial message of the brand adapt to the new vehicles? Is advertising going to be an integral reality as Baudrillard (2005) described it, filled with perfect images and sounds, ready for an integral man to consume it? In a programmatic communication strategy of omnichannel consumer interaction, is there still a need for message coherence, and correctly targeted audiences? Or will the AI, the big data and the IOT change entirely the whole communication industry? To answer these questions, I examined the impact of the digitalization on a brand icon (the Ursus bear) evolution by assessing the new types of brand content in the relationship with the content consumption and the new types of exposure and new "planes of expression".

Key words: technological determinism, communication, advertising, culture, semiotics

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Introduction

Present times are characterized, due to the digital technologies used for creating and communicating virtually universally available information, by an "uncertain" relation with the information. In the terms proposed by Hartley (2012: 159-161), culture moved with the help of technology from modern archives, like museums and galleries, to post-modern archives like the broadcast television systems and then to network archives, like the global digital network. Technology embeds everything around us today. We can only imagine non-technological landscapes

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and this imagination is based on fewer and fewer documentaries about third world environments that we watch, paradoxically, on the smart screens of our next generation TV sets, tablets or phones. Choosing to live in an urban landscape and to access any form of communication, we may feel quite often that technology has conquered our world.

The democratization of the access to the information has empowered the individual to create, disseminate, collect and share information. This individual, has not been considered in a good while now (Hall 2006) an obedient receiver of information but a curator, selecting the information that scores best in terms in relevance, credibility, liking or functional interest. From this angle, the information is the one that has to adapt to this consumer, to his or her characteristics. His or her should be emphasized here, because the audiences, as Hall started to describe the term and as the marketing theory used it for decades are more and more fragmented (Kotler & Keller 2012). They consume various vehicles of even the same media. More communication vehicles mean more audiences and, as well, a fragmented consumption of information, due to the potential of the digital media. The one TV set present in a household just two decades ago allowed at that time a group consumption of the media message (with the family, close friends or neighbors). Today, a display in every room of the household and the consumption of the TV programs on the computer, while using a mobile device, running a messaging app or an second screen app (app allowing a direct interaction with the TV content or its producers) – all these actualize an individual consumption and a virtual sharing and interaction even with the TV program and its entire audience. In such a realistic scenario [1], the individual must cope with advertising messages that come across in various forms and shapes: video commercials (TV, internet, mobile app), animated online banner (internet or Large Electronic Display billboards), text notification (any mobile devices, smart watches). This very heterogeneous media context obliges any brand to have the right message, in the right touch-point with the right consumer. Moreover, the multiple expression forms driven by today's technological capacities must resonate with consumers' expectations.

In this context, the objective of the present analysis is to understand how the commercial message of the brand adapts to the new media vehicles. As well, I will investigate the impact of the digitalization on a brand icon evolution aiming to identify how the commercial communication (advertising) merges into an "integral reality" (Baudrillard 2005). To answer these research questions, I will analyze critically the literature about technological determinism and its impact on the message. This will allow me to assess the symbolic communication of a well-known brand icon in Romania (the bear, the icon of URSUS beer, a SABMiller brand) that tried to adapt its identity to the new technologies. The evaluated pieces of communication were used by the assessed brand in 2012-2013. The used method is the semiotic analysis included into a case study that focuses on how the brand icon is declined on several media (adaptation to the technological possibilities) while resonating with the symbolic universe of consumers. For better

understanding the intention of the brand owner, I took into consideration also some opinions of the company's officials.

The technology empowered communication

Technology in general and especially the communication technology are essential for the development of human society, both as form of social organization and as civilization. Many theorists have dedicated great efforts to the study of this technological determinism. One approach in this productive field of study states that writing, printing, television, computers and mobile communications have changed, each in its time, society, and will continue to influence its characteristics and functions on every level, be it the institutional level, the level of social interactions and phenomena, the individual level or the one of culture. The human factor and the social arrangement often receive a secondary role and, according to Daniel Chandler (1995), even Karl Marx is considered sometimes a technological determinist due to isolated quotations such as "the windmill gives you society with the feudal lord: the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist" (from his famous work of 1847, *The Poverty of Philosophy*). The technology used in and for communication could be approached in the spirit of Walter Ong's book from 1986, *Writing is a Technology that Restructures Thought*, considering, as Chandler (1995) mentions, that a "technological relationism" is a tendency of growing communication technology that moves from a marginal status of social support, to a position of interaction with social structures and individual practices. This approach grants it an important social role and may be seen as justifying the doctrine of the technological primacy as described by the anthropologist Leslie White:

We may view a cultural system as a series of three horizontal strata: the technological layer on the bottom, the philosophical on the top, the sociological stratum in between... The technological system is basic and primary" (White 1949: 366).

But if we accept that technology determines a cultural system as a whole, we should most probably revisit the Marx and Engel's historical materialism (Marx & Engels 1967), and see that the supra-structure of a society (politics, education, family and culture) depends on an economic base, that cannot exist without technology.

Technology can also be taken as a single, homogenous material thing, an attribute of the contemporary society and its culture. Jacques Ellul, for example, used a conceptual umbrella of "technique" to refer to the "totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency... in every field of human activity" [2] (Chandler 1995) But this perspective may appear as a superficial treatment of very abstract categories and cannot evaluate the social context where each technology is used. Other approaches focus on the technological autonomy (Winner 1977: 19), and raise the issue of the human-technology role exchange and of the technology dominance. Along with technological anthropomorphism or

animism, this issue is again on the table in the last few months, in the public debates about the killer robots [3] (conscious war machines designed to be able to decide on their own if and when to kill the human enemy on the battlefield) or in the new programmatic communication strategies in which advertising (for the moment) is served by mega-computers to no longer private consumers who are connected and inter-connected through many devices to a planet wide informatics system. The inevitable progress that, once started, will continue on its own regardless of the individual or social will is a pretty alarmist perspective, stating that technology implies a progressive and unavoidable revolution, similar to the one described by the Sci-Fi genre. Such revolutions may ease the transition to new eras (of the machines, of the computers) but history has proven that there are no radical mutations: TV did not kill the radio nor did the computer replace the books.

The cognitive consequences and the ideological influences of technology were emphasized by probably the most famous theorist of the current, Marshall McLuhan, who equals communication technology with language, showing that both influence the human perceptions and thoughts in the same amount. Major changes in society, culture and even on individual level are shaped by the changes of the dominant media of a historical moment – the print, for example, has shaped society in terms of individualism, intimacy, specialization or national feeling (Angel 2001, McLuhan 1994: 7-21).

In summary, if we are to evaluate the current speed of transmitting the information or the new affordances in the terms of multimodality (Bezemer & Kress 2008), technology empowers communication and its vehicles.

The technology empowered message

Technology also allows messages to be localized on certain predetermined geo-coordinates, transforming the message in a target in itself. This way, a piece of branded content can be accessed only in a specific spot, contextualizing the communication. Another example is Vine, that allows its users to share 6 seconds of recorded video content while the applications that followed it allow the real time broadcast of video materials with no duration limit. In this temporal perspective, from TV to YouTube and then to video apps, one could evaluate how messages evolved in both the plane of expression and the one of the content, maintaining their coherence or not. The rule of thumb suggests that in fact nothing changes, because the core of the message is still a moving picture accompanied by sound. And its message is still constructed by all the stylistic devices, narratives and the rest of the elements that make a video message that were always used for this purpose, since video manage to gain thrust.

The present technological era can for sure be misleading from the point of view of the support of information. A new medium is born each generation, even if it is a better and improved version of an old one (like the 3D television or the 4DX cinema). Almost every object around us can be turned into a message carrier and, since everything is “saying” something, it becomes a difficult task to

determine which vehicle belongs to which media. An illustrative example for this is a website built on a mobile responsive platform so that it can be read on smartphones or the social-media apps that collect and show messages from wearable devices such as smart-watches and smart-bracelets.

Viewed from the determinist angle, the interconnection previously depicted can appear as creating that new integral reality that Baudrillard (2005) was warning about, in which real reality disappears and the human species is obliged to consume the representation of the representation itself. Ever-duplicated messages produced by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and spread by the Internet of Things (IOT) would most probably change the very essence of humankind in a few generation and all efforts to understand the meaning and its cultural infrastructure would then be futile. Yet, all the above is merely an infrastructure, a "yellow bricks road", as it ever was, since the Lascaux drawings and even earlier. In this context, I challenge this view: in a simple communication diagram, a producer codes a message and sends it through a channel to a receiver who decodes it. This channel is "the yellow bricks road" that we need to evaluate correctly. In other words, using a metaphor, until two centuries ago, this was a "dirt road" and the vehicles on it were horse drawn wooden wagons. A century ago, it evolved to a paved road and it allowed cars to move along. Two decades ago, a new wide roadway appeared, allowing the cars, busses and trucks to speed up and to be more effective. Today, we see a hyper-highway supporting incredible high-speed sport cars and limos. Even though the speed and the conditions for transport are different from one "road" to another, the meaning is the same: moving a load from one point to another. In a similar way, I consider that, despite the technologies used, the media IS NOT the message.

Media IS NOT the message

The overused point of view of Marshall McLuhan about the influence of technology over the message became a cultural axiom that stood in the center of the scholars' studies and professionals' creations for decades. Yet, the discussion should cover a larger area of consequences "positive and, also, negative" (Ellul 1990: 35). The intrinsic structure and the symbolic forms in which information is coded on each technological empowered medium have intellectual and emotional consequences upon the individual; their accessibility and speed of dissemination create political consequences. The physical form of the media has consequences on the individual senses while social consequences are influenced by the usage conditions.

Technology is a mediation factor of individual and social phenomena, it influences but it is also influenced by a plethora of other factors. Its characteristics facilitate more or less different types of usages and that these usages are in fact attracting consumers. For example, the already mentioned live-streaming applications were adopted successively both by consumers and the content producers. Just one day after the launch of *Periscope*, the newest live-streaming app, four international brands decided to use it too, along with other similar apps,

to distribute their advertising messages [4] with the objective to test its capacities and, of course, to be among the first visible brands on a new vehicle with a certain potential of large scale adoption by a growing audience, even if fragmented. A more attentive analysis reveals to a curious eye that the main difference in between *Periscope*, its competition (*MeerKat* and *Stre.am*) and the previous apps designed for video socialization (like *Vine*) resides in the power of computation of the servers, meaning the capacity of compacting of the filmed material, the speed of transport and access over the informatic network and the storage capacity of virtual servers. The video content remains video content, the message it carries has little connection to its form, all that really matters is the computing power – as soon as an investor will finance bigger and better servers and a larger team of programmers, a new application and maybe a new channel, will attract like a magnet those consumers and brands that are keen to create and share video content. Video content will keep its position on the preferences scale, position gained over the last 100 years. It just spread from cinema to TV, then to computer and internet, and then to mobile devices, adapting its power relations along the way, especially in the last two decades.

Communication in general, and advertising in particular, seems to be trapped in the course of the technological development: new types of promotional content are developed daily for new types media and new vehicles. Creative use of technology seems to have overthrown the creative use of content and the advertising agencies are more than happy to propose daily new technological inventions to their innovation-hungry clients.

Case Study: The technology impact on the symbolic universe of the Ursus bear

Given the explorative character of this research, the chosen approach is a qualitative one, focusing on the semiotic analysis of a brand icon. The selection of the research corpus is based on relevancy given by the fact that the new technological context triggered a change of a brand icon used in different media. The analyzed corpus includes two TV commercials, a mobile app and the packaging used by Ursus (SABMiller brand) between 2012 and 2013. My intention was to enrich the semiotic analysis with information from the brand owner, yet the company did not agree to provide information about their decisions.

The case-study focuses on the representation of a brand icon, a bear, in different media. Ursus beer is a well-known brand in Romania, owned now by SABMiller, positioned as “the king of the beers”. Its key iconic symbol, the crowned bear, has been used on the packaging and in the main brand communications since its launch. A new image campaign had been aired in 2012, using the bear as a character in commercial communication. As well, there was an attempt to give a technological boost to the brand by developing an application featuring Augmented Reality, which places virtual, digital content in the “real” reality as seen through the display of a smart mobile device.

In the new campaign, the bear have been used in three stances: the TV commercial showed in the end a live bear gazing at a hot-air red balloon carrying

a beer bottle (figure 1), the Augmented Reality illustrated a 3D animated bear (figure 2), and the 2D representation of the bear on packaging – URSUS itself, the logo used for decades (figure 3).



Figure 1 – captures from the TV commercial featuring the live bear

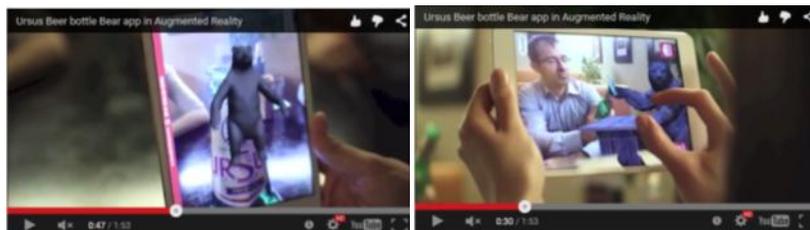


Figure 2 – captures from the demonstration movie of the Augmented Reality application



Figure 3 – the sketch of the bear present in the logo

At the same time, a second TV commercial was prepared for the 135th celebration of the brand, featuring a very futuristic and robotic bear (figure 4).



Figure 4 – capture from the anniversary TV commercial

Four bears were now impersonating the brand: the sketch from the logo, the live bear from the TV commercial, the robotic one from the second TV commercial and the 3D animated one from the mobile application. While the coherence of the entire campaign is not in the scope of the present research, the consumers' acceptability of the representations of the bear was evaluated through a semiotic

analysis. The sketched logo reveals the bear in the position of a trophy and its consumer in the position of the hunter who enjoys the well deserved reward, the beer. The live bear from the first TV commercial starts already to raise the question of the missing trophy and of the unsuccessful hunt. But the bear is in the distance and the consumer could feel that he is a brave explorer who has faced a potential danger and deserves a beer. The robotic bear is already a threat: it looks like a robot, it is clear that it has evolved using some special technology. And it is free, in the woods, just like the bears that make the news every winter by feeding themselves at the city limits. No longer can a man hunt this bear and make it a trophy. The 3D animated one, while appearing in the live-view of the smartphone's camera, is in the same time too friendly and it acts like a circus bear. In all the three messages, the bear is no longer in the safe place, on the wall, and in two of them, comes to close to the real life, to the places and occasions when consumers would rather feel they deserve something else than a representation of a bear wandering around.

As much as technology would have been promising in terms of realization and actualization of the message, I consider more important the potential meanings of the bears. Its semiotic territories spread culturally, in the minds of the audiences, from a tamed animal to a hero-bear, from the king of forest to the wild animal, from the wise bear to the friendly toy, including the gentle giant and the hunter's trophy. These are all connotations of the bear idea, present more or less in the background knowledge, as described by Barthes (1964/67) of virtually any consumer who has gone through basic school and watched TV for a few days. A great description of this cultural span of the bear concept comes from Umberto Eco, who shows in a short story from his 1992 second journal what kids understand from the bear concept mainly because of the schooling system (Eco 2003). Myths and legends, cartoons and fairy tales, films and books, all the contemporary culture and all the advertising that has ever used the image of bear, all contribute in the creation of a bear image that may or may not work well together with a certain brand. The content has to be constructed with meanings that are already in the mind of the consumer, and that can be manipulated as to create a favorable new meaning. The company reached this conclusion internally and decided to retire the "live" bears (the 3D animated one was never even promoted, even though the application was uploaded in the application stores).

The message was already there, in the context of its consumers: the bear remained a trophy and the beer returned to be a good pretext for socializing or an excellent party fuel. The company did not agree to provide any information regarding the process that led to this decision.

Conclusions

The commercial message of the brand has to adapt to the new media vehicles and the technological progress. Yet, the digitalization impact on a brand icon should never occur on the meaning level. The case study presented shows that changes in meaning for the sake of the technology can alienate the consumers. The decision of

dropping the campaign and returning to the initial meaning supports this hypothesis. The symbolic territories of a brand icon, deeply seeded in the cultural background of its consumers, cannot produce meanings in an “integral reality”, not even with the support of technology.

The technological potential may look permissive and the opportunities to change the way a message looks or feels are extraordinary. However, the meaning, the core of the message cannot be reached by technology. A text will remain a text (on a rock, on paper or in an SMS) and the technology will only influence its expression, just as well as the good hero in every story has an adjuvant to help him along the “yellow brick road”.

Notes

[1] TNS/Google, 2014, Connected Consumer Study - Global Results, published online at: <https://goo.gl/f2Q3Y0>, last accessed 30.05.2015.

[2] The Technological Society, published in 1964 in New York, is a translation of the French original titled even more suggestively, *La Technique: L'enjeu du siècle*.

[3] *Killer robots: No one liable if future machines decide to kill, says Human Rights Watch*, article published by The Independent on April 9th, 2015, online: <http://goo.gl/OKjFTB>, last accessed: May 2nd, 2015.

[4] The article was published by Adweek.com on March 27, 2015. Source: <http://goo.gl/ybnZwB>, last accessed: March 30, 2015

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Devised Theatre: A Change of Paradigm in Romanian Theatre

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Abstract

This paper proposes an overview of the contemporary trends in the creation of dramatic text and performance. Starting from ingrained, traditional practices, which are more often than not centred on the director, it then focuses on a more recent approach to drama and performance, "devised theatre", outlining its specificities, and commenting on its increasing occurrence in the Romanian contemporary theatre.

Keywords: devised theatre, collaborative creation, directing, dramatic text, performance

The working methods and practices engaged in creating the dramatic text always influence, at both aesthetic and structural levels, its final form. *„Definirea teatrului ascultă însă prioritar de contextul socio-politic, ca și de procesualitatea internă a creației”* [However, the definition of the theatre mainly abides by the socio-political context, as well as by the internal processuality of the creation] (Banu 2011: 15). In the domain of the theatre, the professionals' practices are particularly diverse. The twentieth century foregrounds the director's authority. *„Dacă pe parcursul secolului nu descoperim autoritatea unui mod, frapează însă aceea a unei funcții: Regia”* [If, along the century, one does not find a certain mode to be dominant, the authority of a function – directing - is nevertheless arresting] (17).

Deeply ingrained in the artistic culture, the classical model of constructing a theatrical performance implies a number of stages. More often than not, these may be encountered in repertoire theatres, whether institutionalised or private, giving their managers and artists safety in what concerns the working hours and the opening date – it is a safe and efficient organisational structure embedded in an unstable environment, that of artistic work. Conventional practices are almost exclusively based on a dramatic text previously written by an author. The text is then approached by the director, who extracts its essence, themes and concepts, and constructs his or her view on the play. (S)He establishes the setting and the general tone of the performance together with the art director, may operate changes at the textual level or may even rewrite it, with the help of a performance writer (as dir. Thomas Ostermeier (2015 online) usually does). Only afterwards is the text made available to the actors. Furthermore, the actors and the director collaborate during a few other stages to reach the final form of the upcoming performance. The first stage, known as “table read” or “read-through”, aims at

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deciphering the text, at the understanding of its logic, of the characters and the relationships between them. Here, the basic psychological traits of each character are outlined, and this stage ends with the actors learning the text. After this phase, the creation team walks on stage, where, depending on the pre-established space, mise-en-scene is created. The last but one phase is that of the general rehearsals, in which final adjustments are operated, and after that, the theatrical show is ready for performance in front of an audience.

The book *Arta regiei teatrale [The Art of Theatre Directing]* by Horia Deleanu features two diagrams by Meyerhold which define the relationship of the director with the text, the author and the audience.

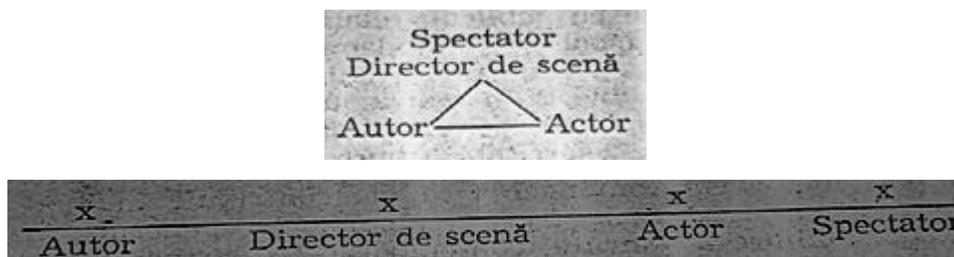


Fig. 1 (Deleanu 1987: 107)

In the 20th century, „regia marchează desprinderea actului teatral european de sub autoritatea indiscutabilă a dramaturgului, el aspirând la regimul propriu oricărui artist: acela al elaborării unui limbaj ce transmite informațiile piesei în funcție de o opțiune artistică” [directing is what makes the European theatrical act escape from the indisputable authority of the playwright, aspiring to a regime inherent to any artist: that of creating a language that sends the information of the play according to a pre-established artistic choice] (Banu 2011: 17).

Thus, the preference for the second form of creation - that of the straight line (author-director-actor-spectator) - becomes fully justified.

Acceptând ca justă soluția teatrului „liniei drepte” considerăm însă că ambele soluții enunțate au darul de a atrage atenția insistent asupra relațiilor necesare, esențiale ale regizorului cu publicul.

[While acknowledging the solution of ‘straight line’ theatre as just, we, however, consider that both solutions are bound to assiduously draw attention to the necessary and compulsory relationship between the director and the audience] (Deleanu 1987: 108).

This approach to the creation and production process inherently triggers working relationships at the level of the host institution and its creative team.

„Diviziunea muncii” în teatru e de dată recentă (regizorul e o apariție europeană a celei de-a doua jumătăți a secolului al XIX-lea), iar înlocuirea, în poziția dominantă, a dramaturgului prin directorul de scenă – care-i plasează pe toți ceilalți participanți la munca de spectacol în postura de executanți – e, în România, rezultatul celor două valuri ale teatralizării și reteatralizării, aceasta din urmă datând din anii ‘60.

[The 'division of labour' in the theatre is a recent phenomenon (the director appears in the European theatre in the latter half of the nineteenth century), and replacing the author with the director in the dominant position – which turns all the other participants in the show into mere performers – is, in Romania, the result of the two waves of theatricalisation and re-theatricalisation, the latter dating since the 1960s] (Popovici 2015a: 1).

By turning the artists into “mere performers”, this organisation creates, indeed, a solid hierarchy which ensures the efficiency of the working process and its final result, but can it really work within a vocational environment? What about the personality and interests of the actors who, bounded by the legal status they have as employees of an institution, must adopt a single person's views and rhythm? Can they be truly involved in an undertaking which has nothing to do with them as individuals but only as professionals? Does this practice have any kind of negative impact on the artistic act?

A public debate has been recently stirred in the Romanian theatre, discussing a phenomenon occurring as a consequence of this pattern of sovereignty of the Romanian director. The analysis centres on the production of more theatrical performances which, staged by the same director, display the same vision and are often faithful replicas of the first staging.

Copy/paste-ul, refacerile, reluările sunt rezultatul unei anume interpretări a relațiilor de muncă, codificate în concepția ideii de auctorialitate revendicată exclusiv de regizor. „Cine e autorul?” e, în plin secol al „morții autorului”, întrebarea centrală în jurul căreia se distribuie tensiunile sistemului teatral – și nu doar în România. Începutul contestării acestei practici a autoreluărilor înseamnă, în realitate, contestarea modelului unui teatru al regizorului și de interpretare care pare că și-a atins propriile limite.

[Copy/paste shows, remakings and revivals are the result of a peculiar interpretation of working relations, encoded in the idea of 'authorship' applying exclusively to the director. 'Who is the author?' is, in the century of 'the death of the author', the focal question which concentrates the tensions of the theatre system – and not only in Romania. To start challenging this practice of the remaking actually means to challenge the pattern of a theatre centred on a director and his/her interpretation which seems to have reached its limits] (Popovici 2015a: 1).

Leaving all these aside, this unique pattern of linear production, primarily represented by the director, has its shortcomings and negative consequences, visible at the contextual level but also within a wider framework. With regard to the director's position, George Banu's remark may function as a wake-up call, unmasking the hidden face of this theatrical archetype: *„Consecință va fi exorbitantul apetit de putere care vizează constituirea unui regim dictatorial ce contrazice flagrant caracterul colectiv al teatrului”* [A consequence will be the immense appetite for power which aims at imposing a dictatorial regime that flagrantly goes against the theatre's collective character] (2011: 25).

At the international level, the deleterious consequences on the artistic art of the director's status determine some of the greatest creators of the twentieth century to challenge this formula or, at any rate, its interpretation and application in the working process. „*Când teatrul e sănătos, el nu e niciodată expresia unui singur punct de vedere... Unitatea distruge teatrul*” [A sound theatre is never the expression of a unique point of view. Unity destroys theatre] (Brook 1970 qtd. in Banu 2011: 27).

The good news is that, even in Romania and even though almost half a century later, there is public debate on challenging this practice. It is also worth mentioning that, at the boundaries of 'mainstream theatre', young artists work in the spirit of the contemporary practices, trying to adjust to the requirements of the new social and cultural realities, which can no longer allow, in the postmodern age, a romantic model of the director's theatre.

Or, aici intervine una dintre cele mai importante tensiuni de pe scena teatrală românească – cea între modelul teatrului de artă și de regie și modelele contemporane ale creației colective, de grup, ale „autorului de spectacol” (care încetează să reproducă schemele de putere clasice, cu regizorul la manșă), ale creației interdisciplinare sau ale renăscutului teatru de actor.

[Notwithstanding, here is one of the greatest tensions on the Romanian theatrical stage – the one between the patterns of art-theatre and director's performance and the contemporary models of collaborative creation, group show, “performance writer” (which cease to reproduce the classical power schemes, with the director in control), of interdisciplinary creation or of the reborn actor's theatre.] (Popovici 2015a: 1)

One of the practices of textual and performance creation which rejects unity is devised theatre. In the following section, the rules and methods specific to this creation type will be analysed and its emergence at both international and national level will be contextualised. Devised theatre becomes a more than necessary tool in a cultural space like the Romanian one, which seems to have been at a dead end for a while.

It should also be clearly understood that the denial or the departure of the contemporary artists, as well their attempt to break free from the totalizing auctorial tutelage of the director is as natural as the way in which “the drama crisis” generated this now contested model back in the nineteenth century. Hans-Thies Lehmann brings out this aspect, stating that:

The autonomization of theatre is not the result of the self-importance of (post)modern directors craving recognition, as which it is often dismissed. The emergence of a director's theatre was, rather, potentially established in the aesthetic dialectics of dramatic theatre itself, which in its development as a 'form of presentation' increasingly discovered the means and devices that are inherent to it even without regard to the text (Lehmann 2006: 50).

At the same time, using the techniques of collaborative creation, the director gives up some of his or her tasks while taking over some of the playwright's tasks, which s/he further shares with the team, and thus emerges the idea of the "performance creator" (Popovici 2015c, online). When they do not stage their own text, performance creators need to use 'devised' techniques to create.

Devised theatre

This phenomenon emerged in the UK in the latter half of the 20th century but critics have noticed the presence of similar practices in France and the United States. The first terms used to denote this type of theatrical practice were "creation collective" or "collaborative creation" (Radosavievlic in Popovici 2015b: 17).

Devised theatre is defined in relation to the new theatrical forms emerging in the UK, which are based on the rule of 'text-less' artistic creation. This is why it is important to mention Duska Radosavievlic's statement that places the term 'devised' in connection with "a sector of performance arts in the United Kingdom that was not based on playwright and text" (in Popovici 2015b: 21). It is also why the same author suggests the departure from this term in European contexts, in which director's practices often include the team in the creation process. He considers that the overuse of this term has led to the merging of the terms of devising and troupe. He further makes his position clear by stating that 'devised' should be construed as "a ubiquitous creative method and not as a type of performance which is not based on text" (Ibid.).

It is neither a matter of aesthetics, nor a revival of experimental avant-garde practices: it is a change in the production mode which provokes/subverts the traditional power hierarchy in theatre (Popovici 2015b: 7).

The emergence of this new form of creation and production at the European level invites to analysis and debate, in order to understand to what extent this new hierarchy is representative, and also if it should be preferred to the classical approach. What are the possibilities of this new means provided by devised theatre or collaborative creation, and how can they redefine Romanian theatre in the following years, considering that more and more artists choose to experiment using the 'devised' principles?

For a full grasp of the possible effects of this new formula, we need to understand how it manifests and is defined:

Devised theatre can start from anything. It is determined and defined by a group of people who set up an initial framework or structure to explore and experiment with ideas, images, concepts, themes or specific stimuli that include music, text, objects, paintings, or movement. A devised theatrical performance originates with the group while making the performance, rather than starting from a play text that someone has written to be interpreted (Oddey 1994: 17).

The idea of devised theatre is inherently connected with that of an original production. If, in the classical performance model, originality used to be the imprint of the director who, through his/her views on a classical or contemporary dramatic text, would prove his/her ability to innovate, in the case of devised theatre, innovation is the fundamental factor. If the classical theatrical performance is representative for the artistic personality of its director, devised theatre is representative for a group of artists who succeed in self-defining in relation to their cultural and social interests and in conformity with the psychology, ideology and mentality of their culture. This new formula is inherently related to the ideas of knowledge and self-knowledge.

The artists who create collectively, based on their humours, culture, cultural and values, become representative for a community which is used as a tool, helping the spectator better understand the context. Theatre as “a mirror of society”, the old cliché, acquires, in the case of devised theatre, a much more profound and revealing form than that which used to present society through the eye of a sole representative, the director.

Another trait which suggests the essence of collaborative creation is freedom. Both as a practice and as a feeling, collaborative creation is at all times faced with a wide range of possibilities of research and expression, exponentially greater than those of the theatrical performance based on the straight line or the triangle (see Deleanu above). At the same time, it infers a necessary condition: the artistic team or community, the group of artists united in diversity must have the same aims and goals but must also make their contribution to the development and definition of the final production.

In what hierarchy and authorship are concerned, they are more ambiguous and harder to define in the case of devised theatre. The roles of the playwright, the director, the actors and, in many cases, the audience, are not clear-cut when the ‘paternity’ of the text or performance is in focus. This concept reveals new traits of each of these professions, which seem to merge with all the others. The boundaries between the ‘job descriptions’ of the actors, directors and playwrights get more and more blurred, whilst multidisciplinary comes first. This is what Duska Radosavievlic terms “deprofessionalisation”, which should not be construed as the absence of creative skills but as involving “the integrative approach to more roles” (Radosavievlic in Popovici 2015b: 25).

The actors’ role becomes more than that of simple performers: they may become “equal team-members” (26). At the same time, the playwright profession tends to depart from the literary area, whereas the theatrical performance “becomes more and more an instable entity, a deliberately open structure, tangent to the audience’s reaction, and not a sketch for the spectacle.” (*Ibid.*)

Any definition of devised theatre must include process (finding the ways and means to share an artistic journey together), collaboration (working with others), multivision (integrating various views, beliefs, life experiences, and attitude to changing world events), and the creation of artistic product (Oddey 1994: 17).

This artistic pattern may generate a wide range of theatrical forms. It may become an educational theatrical performance for and using students, it may be a 'site-specific' performance devised for a certain space, a dance-theatre performance, it may often include the audience as an active and integrative part of the show, which gets adapted in real time, and it may also be a 'mainstream' performance which is by no means different from the classical forms of expression. It depends on the choice made by the members of the creative team. Therefore, one of the most important aspects of this formula is the group, its dynamics, and the professional and personal relationships between the team members. Artists with various preoccupations must have the same convictions in order to be eventually able to create a complex and 'seamless' artistic product.

In what production is concerned, collaborative creation allows the actors' team or company to develop their own formulae, in relation to their proposed aims. They may take any road they want in the creation process: there may be workshops on various themes, documentation activities, such as interviews or questionnaires addressed to a target group. Improvisation is an almost permanent element of collaborative theatrical creation. The actors have the freedom to build their characters starting from a real context or situation, and to place them in relation to other characters, without having a text at hand. Thus, the actors assume a part of the writer's role, whilst the playwright may select the lines to be used. It is the case of Catinca Drăgănescu in the show *Don't Cry, Baby*, and of Mihaela Michailov in the show *Familia Offline [Offline Family]*.

A stage of research and creation is always the foundation of a devised performance. This stage sometimes requires working with didactic, educational aspects, constantly taking into consideration the creative resources which may be employed by the team members. Among the first steps proposed by Alison Oddey for the initial stages of a devised performance, there are the acting exercises specific to the first year of study in Acting.

Group practical work and getting to each other exercises are vital to that exploration. Exercises in communication, concentration, trust, sensitivity, movement, voice, and improvisation are all required for group development (Oddey 1994: 41).

It is not at random that theatre educators use these exercises for group development in the Actor's Art discipline. In the Romanian faculties of acting and performance, students are organised as a theatrical company. Spending three years together, their personal evolution is closely connected with the dynamics and development of the group. As acting is an art of communication at the highest level, it requires a high degree of safety within the artistic group. The artist's creative personality, in a metaphysical sense, cannot manifest in a sterile and aggressive environment, constantly restricted by pressure.

Ion Cojar, one of the greatest Romanian theatre educationalists, tributary to Stanislavski's method, proposes the syntagm „*Procesul, nu succesul*” [Process,

not success] (1996), referring to processuality in relation to the emergence of artistic expression. Expression may be ordered, controlled or 'acted', in which case the actor becomes a puppet of his/her own reason, subordinated to the aesthetic requirements of the director. Consequently, the actors seem sometimes 'histrionic' – in many cases depleted of human meaning and obviously acting. But when the aim is „*adevărul concret al sentimentelor*” [the concrete truth of feelings] (Banu 2011: 25) as a form of expression, it can no longer be either ordered or controlled, and appears as a result of „*proces psihologic efectiv*” [an actual psychological process] (Cojar 1996) performed by the actor during a theatrical present, in which s/he has already assumed the situation, the psychological condition and the thinking patterns of the character. In this case, expressing emotions is no longer an end in itself, but a consequence of a process. The performance effect is acquired by going from one psycho-emotional condition to the next in real time, under the eyes of the audience.

At the level of theatre production, these stages of research and analysis, the discovery of the various nuances of every form of performance expression become one of the main components of devised theatre.

Thus, in what the length of the show production is concerned, it must be subordinate to the unpredictability of the emergence of revelations or crystallised expression forms of various theatrical languages. The process may last from a few days to a few months or even a year (or more), according to various factors, such as: the availability of the creative team, financial resources or new discoveries which may trigger the restructuring of the entire initial plan. It may be said that 'collectively creating' entails a risk. But the absence of hierarchy within the creative group does not also imply an absence of administrative hierarchy, a factor which may also influence the production to the same extent as resources, time, and rhythm. Most of the time, risk acts as a motivation factor for the team members, and the research, development and experiment stages provide substance and depth to the final product. One of the best known representatives of this type of theatre, Mark Long, member of *The People Show Theatre Company*, suggests to his fellow artists: "You have to trust yourselves as artists, trust your art. Allow a situation where the sub-conscious of the group is enabled to emerge" (Long 1990 qtd. in Oddey 1994: 41).

Devised theatre in Romania

The scarcity of artistic groups which adopt devised methods in Romania may be the outcome of both a historical and political context. In the UK, this practice has emerged as the result of "the strong desire to work in an artistically democratic way" (Oddey 1994: 24), and is closely related to the emergence of "theatre in education" in 1965, which required a different approach for producing new dramatic texts and scripts which were, in this particular case, based on the curriculum.

In an interview for *Aurora Magazine*, Ștefan Peca identified as early as 2008 a possible beginning of the devised techniques in Romania:

Tanga se deosebește de dramAcum pentru că nu e o platformă deschisă de dezvoltare de text neapărat ci un grup de artiști (nu numai dramaturgi sau regizori, dar și actori, scenografi și visual artists) care crează teatru puternic ancorat în realitate/comunitate – cred că e una din primele tendințe de devised theatre din România. [Tanga is different from dramAcum because it is not necessarily an open platform for text development but a group of artists (not only playwrights or directors but also actors, art directors and visual artists) who create a theatre in strong connection with reality/community – I think it is one of the first attempts at creating devised theatre in Romania] (2008 online).

Nevertheless, devised theatre has not evolved so much in Romania to the extent of giving up the playwright. Referring to independent theatre, Iulia Popovici asserts that “independent theatre is either text-theatre or group-theatre, the textual support being, in most cases, original Romanian text, a context in which also emerges the figure of theatre creator” (2015b: 57). She further clarifies the group-theatre term, adding: “Not ‘devised’. The collective-collaborative aspect is in regard to the performance construction, the control over the text being preserved by those artists who are given the part of the playwright inside the group” (Ibid).

In an interview for *Dilema Veche*, Saviana Stănescu associates the term ‘devised’ with the creative process, even in the presence of the playwright:

Devised theatre este un tip de teatru centrat pe procesul de dezvoltare a textului și a spectacolului cu toată echipa de actori, cu dramaturgul la repetiții, cu regizorul care coordonează această muncă de ansamblu. De obicei, există o temă care este explorată din mai multe perspective. De multe ori textul/spectacolul se bazează pe interviuri cu membri ai unei comunități, pe un anumit subiect. Alteori se pornește de la zero și tema apare în repetiții, din improvizările actorilor, din discuții facilitate de dramaturg sau regizor, care poate aduce niște întrebări și exerciții creative ce stimulează răspunsurile actorilor. Se poate porni și de la o imagine sau de la muzică și peisaj sonor. Important este faptul că dramaturgul creează textul prin acest proces de colaborare, nu stă acasă, în mansarda sa de fildeș, scriind o piesă pe care o trimite teatrelor. Sigur că scrii acasă de cele mai multe ori, dar materialul inițial brut îl dezvoltă în repetiții cu actorii și regizorul.

[Devised theatre is centred on the process of textual and performance development with the entire team of actors, with the playwright taking part in the rehearsals, with the director who coordinates this group work. There is usually a theme explored from several perspectives. In many cases, the text/performance is based on interviews on a given topic with members of a community. It also happens to start from scratch and the theme emerges during the rehearsals, from the actors’ improvisation, from discussions stirred by the director or the playwright, which may trigger some stimulating questions or creative exercises. It is also possible to set out from an image or from music and sound. It is important, nonetheless, that the playwright creates the text within this collaborative process; s/he is not at home, in his/her ivory loft, writing a play to send it to theatres afterwards. Of course, one writes at home in most of the cases, but one develops

the raw material during rehearsals, together with the actors and the director] (2008 online).

Therefore, in this context, the present paper considers devised theatre in the Romanian cultural space in the sense advanced by Saviana Stănescu, making reference only to performances with a strong collective and collaborative character of the creation process which also involves a playwright's presence. According to this definition, one may find devised theatre in the productions of more Romanian artists, such as Bogdan Georgescu, Geanina Cărbunariu, Mihaela Michailov and Leta Popescu. In Geanina Cărbunariu's case, representative is the performance entitled *20/20*, while in Mihaela Michailov's case, one finds devised principles in the educational theatrical performance *Familia Offline*. *Parallel* is an important Romanian performance based on devised ideology in terms of both authorship and working process.

Concept/ Choreography: Ferenc Sinkó

Directed by: Ferenc Sinkó and Leta Popescu

Text: the team

Scenography: Valentin Oncu (Official website)

As the quotation above shows, the text is attributed to "the team", and thus the performance is perfectly framed under the devised theatre umbrella. The performance is based on „*experiențele protagonistelor Lucia Mărneanu și Kata Bodoki-Halmen. Creat din propunerile celor două artiste și din texte scrise de întreaga echipă*” [the experiences of the protagonists Lucia Mărneanu and Kata Bodoki-Halmen, created at the suggestion of the two artists and made up of texts written by the entire team] (official website).

This performance was awarded the Uniter Prize for director debut, and was also a nominee in other categories. It is a performance which explores the LGBT condition in Romania, a show which combines theatre, performance and dance-theatre, speaking about sexual orientation.

Într-o societate dominată de maxima ipocrizie în materie de sexualitate umană, e foarte la îndemână să nu vezi că în această poveste despre ce înseamnă să fii gay (în România) se înghesuie toate micile istorii ale lui „a fi altfel” (sărac, vorbitor de altă limbă, handicapat, mamă minoră, infectat cu virusul HIV, blondă...) – iar asta începe cu faptul că homosexualitatea din Parallel e una feminină.

[In a society dominated by maximum hypocrisy when it comes to human sexuality, it is convenient not to see that in this story of *what it means to be gay in Romania* are crowded all the little stories of *what it means to be different* (poor, a speaker of another language, an impaired person, an underage mother, an HIV-positive person, a blonde woman...), and this starts from the fact that homosexuality in *Parallel* is a *feminine one*] (Popovici 2014 online).

The performance becomes a model for Romanian artists not only through its aesthetic value and success but also through its attitude towards theatre and

theatre-making. In a theatrical context in which “acting schools only prepare you for entering the institutionalized system”¹, a system that is repetitive in terms of aesthetics, themes and approaches alike², *Parallel* significantly contributes to the change of cultural paradigm in Romania.

All performances created following the principles of collaborative creation in Romania, whether they are as successful as *Parallel* or not, have begun to alter the image of Romanian theatre, and the consequences will be seen in a future in which the ideological and legislative framework will finally adapt to the contemporary realities.

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Notes

[1] Unpublished interview, September 2015

[2] Iulia Popovici (Sep. 2015): “Theatre in Bucharest” – unpublished official text for ArCub, a diagnostic for the situation of theatres in Bucharest: „*E vorba, însă, de un eclectism repertorial care nu presupune o maximă diversitate a ofertei în teatre diferite, ci reproducerea aceleiași tip de ofertă (texte de factură similară, dacă nu chiar ale aceleiași autor, preferințe tematice asemănătoare, o aplecare generală comună către comedia de situație, alternarea aceluiași regizori)*” [We are talking about eclecticism in repertories which does not entail maximum diversity of the offer in various theatres but the reproduction of the same type of offer (similar texts, even belonging to the same author, similar thematic preference, a common inclination for situation comedy, the alternation of the same directors).]

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The Imagery of Max Blecher's Text

Nicoleta HURMUZACHE*

Abstract

Using Hans Robert Jauss' grid, the present paper goes through the three levels of reading (reading, re-reading, post-reading) in order to understand the meanings of the literary work and to discover the metatextual and the hypertextual significances of the novel *Adventures in Immediate Unreality* by Max Blecher.

Key words: imaginary, discourse, psychoanalysis, ipseity, Magritte's paintings

A book is the Philosopher's stone that requires to be discovered by the neophyte who climbs the steps of knowledge, initiating himself into a game of transcendence from reality to fiction through *corpus callosum*, resorting to guided thinking that becomes phantasmal thinking through the act of reading. The psychoanalyst Gustave Jung defined the concept of "metaphorical, symbolic, imaginative" thinking (Samuels, 1986: 91), associating it with the image, whose interpretation lies on the mutual relation between the conscious and the subconscious. However, what part of the ego will authentically live the aesthetic experience, what instance of the human psyche will enjoy the privilege of the literary delight? Of course, the literary product imposes a certain attitude on us – lucid, reflective, meditative, dreamy, lunatic, and why not, playful, the meeting of the text enabling the epiphany to occur. Thus, the reader transfigured into an alchemist will decipher this sacred object even more carefully and, pushed by curiosity, will save his species from ingratitude and ignorance. He will take the role of the actor, a bit shy at the beginning, who listens to the voice of the text, and then he will subject it to his own requirements, reporting it to his personal vision of the world. He will become the "critical spider" and the cobweb woven will be "the critical vibratext" (Ursa 2005: 7) that facilitates the decoding of the literary work message.

Like a vigilant observer of literary writing, the reader always goes back to the texts that have marked his existence and offered him the pleasure of choice, of complexity and complicity of finding himself in his latent states, willingly encrypted and locked in the temple of his being. It is important to remember the plea for the multiple reading invoked by Vladimir Nabokov, who tells a great truth: "One cannot read a book, one can only re-read it", statement that Matei Călinescu turns into a paradox, being an amusing rephrasing of the famous hermeneutical circle: to understand the whole, one must understand the parts, but to understand each part, one must previously understand the whole." (2003: 34).

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An eloquent example is the novel *Adventures in Immediate Unreality* written by Max Blecher, which requires re-readings for reliving the discursive imagery, that capacity of the verbal matter to transpose the visual matter. Resorting to a playful exercise dictated by impulse, instinct and appealing to the voluntary memory, the reader tries to remember what he has already forgotten and what has come back to him has matched his expectations: "the imaginary, the surrealistic, oneiric or mythical eye" (Manolescu, 2001: 561).

By adopting Hans Robert Jauss' grid, the present paper goes through the three levels of reading (reading, re-reading, post-reading) in order to understand the meanings of the literary work and to discover the metatextual and the hypertextual significances of the novel. The fragment in focus here captures the visit the narrator-character pays to Edda, moment that ennobles the protagonist, enlightens him in terms of his introspection. By calling forth the prototype of the ideal woman, the character lives the present moment somewhere between reality and unreality, which offers him the honourable position of being the messenger of his own reveries.

Thus, the first reading presupposes comprehension that has led to a progressive orientation of what the discourse tries to convey. The initial reception impresses through the unusual, almost absurd, situation in which the character is and, out of the desire to break out of his own body, he is capable of surprising visions. Moreover, a question arises: who has never imagined oneself being a tree, yes... a tree from the top of which to be able to see the whole world? The view is always changing; the bird's eye view offers stunning perspectives on the reality that are progressively turning into miracles. Thus, from the treetop, one comes to see red dahlias, and, the moment the frame of reference moves several centimetres away, one notices with stupefaction that they are really red scarves. This is, on short, the intense experience of the character in "*Adventures*" who strongly believes in an immediate reality called unreality. Ada Brăvescu brings together the concepts "unreality", "fantastic", "lucidity", when she deals with Blecher's universe, invoking some literary critics' opinions, and concludes that Blecher's world lies on "the exasperating lucidity, hallucination and dementia and last but not least on the dream" (2011: 68). In fact, this sequence, or, any other, randomly taken from the debut novel, is an authentic representation of what the title allows us to understand: "the fantastic reality of things, this reality that is itself an appearance, is closer to the ultimate, essential reality than the everyday factual reality that disturbs the hero" (Ionescu 1936: 2).

Re-reading the fragment has led to an in-depth interpretation, in the context of a retrospective orientation in which the language has acquired another valence, related to the multitude of the textual approaches. The hypostasis of the character in the image of a tree offers his pantheistic vision to soar spiritually by expelling the being way beyond the skin, by exacerbating the ego. Paradoxically, the man reminds of the vertical position of the tree that soars to the sky, but this ascent is obstructed by fears and complexes dictated by an unstable subconscious.

The revival occurs suddenly and the energy transfer is visible, at least at the level of wishes: “calm, confident, full of light... I wanted, at least once, to come in front of someone complete and unfaltering... Silent and superb like a tree” (Blecher 2014: 86). The road to oneself is sinuous, labyrinthine, and full of obstacles. It reveals uncertainty, the character’s timidity: the heavy wooden door, the cold darkness of the room, the strange clink of the bead curtain, the slow steps, the abstract being that advances on the impulse of one’s thoughts and leaves behind the real self. The state of abstruse loneliness offers the primordial image of the ascetic on the edge of the world: “the sensation of extreme balance, on top of the pyramid of chairs.” (Ibid.) Re-reading the text captures the two hypostases of the character, the abstract ego and the real ego that coexist within the same body, but for several moments the identity split occurs. Looking back on the text, at the level of the phantasmal thought, this moment overlaps with the beginning of the novel, which presents the schizoid episode of the human being, “the abstract character” and “my real character” (Blecher 2014:19), by focusing on a point on the wall. Thus, one learns about the protagonist’s obsession with breaking out of his physical body and with creating another identity capable of giving his interior balance back. With Blecher, otherness is not possible, as Nicolae Manolescu or Simona Sora claim, bringing up Blecher’s pain due to “ipseity” (Manolescu 1998: 573) or to “idem-identity” (*mêmeté* – concept taken from Paul Ricoeur) (Sora 2008: 185). This withdrawal within oneself causes an ontological crisis, an existential confusion kept by the inconsistency of the material that cheats the lost eye. The ontological game of splitting, and then of egos’ overlapping is possible in a cursed or favourable topos that entails a distorted Kronos.

Time loses its coordinate, it starts oscillating, contracts and expands until it liquefies and physically and mentally abuses the character that lives in the immediate unreality. The interior voice shapes the alter-ego that is having an absurd discussion with Edda when he confesses his secret of being a tree:

- ‘Edda, do you know what I am?’
- ‘What are you?’
- ‘A tree, Edda, a tree. (Blecher 2014: 87)

But the thoughts are repressed, and Edda’s stare intimidates him, therefore he looks for a subterfuge to mask the time syncope between them. The epiphany of noticing on the shelf a huge bouquet of flowers is redeeming for the one who persistently refuses communication. He resorts to minimal gestures that make up such a symbolic non-verbal language that the message sent should resonate mentally. The visual inconsistency discourages him, cineaste flashes disturb his sensations and perceptions. He looks away to some place and sets his eyes again on the revealing object, making sure that this is a reference point in reality. Certainty soon becomes uncertainty, and he doubts that his body will react to exterior stimuli due to the self-imposed censorship. The uttered words amaze not only the interlocutor but also the character that had simulated the dialogue. He

admires the red dahlias on the shelf, but Edda denies the existence of these flowers. The reflex of touching his own vision certifies the uncertainty and he finds, to his surprise, instead of the dahlias a red scarf. There occurs the ultimate split between soul and body, and he is painfully aware of the illusion of the interior balance outlined by the image of the tree. Time is revengeful on the one who wants to dominate it; now it accelerates with the biological rhythm of the heartbeats similar to the smashing hammerings, causing the character's immobility, turning him into an immovable object, a statue. And yet, these sorrowful experiences are so authentic that the character's existence goes beyond the limits of the artlessness, the natural, the concrete, and transposes him into the metaphysic, into that secondary artificial reality, much more palpable than the primary reality.

The post-reading may offer the reader the most eloquent critical vision on the discourse, that is the text has been projected on the frame of the variations of horizon that have marked the range of interpretations. The language Max Blecher adopts is suggested/ insinuated and, although the words removed from the texture of the page are devoid of connotative meanings, reunited in the economy of the phrase, they become symbol lexemes. This is possible due to the reconstruction of this literary jigsaw that has the capacity of rendering visionary sequences, surrealistic paintings in which the narrator's reveries are transposed. Real paintings of words with a psychoanalytic substrate are obtained. Thus, "the surrealism of Blecher's literary work goes through a pictorial channel into a structural aesthetic oneiric character, coloured by expressionist marks." (Brăvescu, 2011: 214). This conversion of the word into image seems to be more like a republication of the *alphabet-paintings* of René Magritte, in which he confronts words with images. The painter wants to break the general principle according to which words represent the objects they define. One can notice an absurdity concerning the connection between reality, object and the name it represents, but let us not forget the fact that Surrealism is the artistic movement that promotes the game of the random associations, so that the effect should be undiscovered and surprising. The creation method is the hazard, and the invented world belongs to the surreal, mistaking dream for reality. One may find the same vision of the world in Blecher's novels too, when the character's two ontological dimensions overlap and he creates his own world: "It is, I think, the same thing to live or to dream about an experience" (Blecher 2014: 241).

Thus, the plastic works *The Lost world*, *The Book of Dreams*, *Two Secrets* or *The Betrayal of Images* make up a bizarre poetic world. If dahlias may prove to be a red scarf, why should Magritte's pipe painted in a surrealistic way in *The Betrayal of Images* not be the object in itself, but a presupposed representation that hides behind symbols encrypted to an amateur beholder. It is about the obsession of the veil that distorts reality, because every painting or every word is debunked by what is beyond the borders imposed to the visual. Everything starts from the

absurd assumption of the artist (either a writer or a painter) of considering the image of a reality the reality itself.

Magritte's paintings underline, in fact, the existing difference between the object and its two-dimensional illustration. The artist resorts to two representations, the over-dimensional pipe projected on a background of timelessness and the discourse: "*This is not a pipe.*" We will accept both the object and the statement because we refer to a familiar code of meanings. By separating these two graphic representations, we get another side of reality: the words do not make up a pipe, and neither does the painted object represent a definition of a pipe. So, why can we not accept the fact that Edda's red scarf is a bouquet of red dahlias after all? This is where the paradox of contiguity, of the object, image and word play forms itself with Max Blecher.

The correspondences between Blecher's text and Magritte's paintings are the proof of the *language universalities* (Dacoromania 2002-2003: 15) (literary/pictorial), taking into account the fact that the imagery base of the analysed novels is one exclusively surrealistic. Both Blecher's literary work and Magritte's paintings shock any beholder by direct confrontation with the unusual situation and the ambiguous object displayed in the world prone to unreality/surreal. For these to be thoroughly understood, the beholder is required to know the aesthetic receptiveness capable of going beyond the normality, the concrete and the customary line. Blecher's red dahlias and Magritte's pipe are objects removed from reality, but the context of their manifestation gives them the status of symbol that attracts the eyes and thus, the intrinsic will is born, the will to touch them with an invisible finger, exploring parallel worlds. We want to discover that Borges' Aleph, the inhabited interior of the object so that we can capture within a circular vision the expanding universe. In his research, "Art and Visual Perception" Rudolf Arnheim speaks about eyesight as an active exploration: "we go to remote places which we feel, catch, search their surface, follow their outline, explore their texture. The perception of the shapes is an especially active process" (2011: 52). And then the beholder/spectator/ reader goes beyond the visual area and representation and places himself within this world, he vibrates, breathes with the artistic performance, the aesthetic experience being fully accomplished. Synthesising, the knowledgeable eye (aisthesis), the recognizing eye (anamnesis) will determine the affective involvement of the subject of the eye, allowing his own disturbed passions to run free, passions whose pleasant release makes him feel at peace with himself, as if he has recovered from an illness (Katharsis)" (Jauss).

To return to Max Blecher's novel, one must notice the fact that this interpretative exercise, following the reading steps outlined by Hans Robert Jauss, has underlined the imagery power of the discourse that is assimilated to the surreal through the "holy trinity: infantile ingenuity/dream/lunacy" (Horodincă 1970: 72). To conclude, let us add that any critical act is eventually a possible

reading that resembles Roscharch's test, the text functioning like the "ink spot" (Ursa 2005: 16) that needs to be deciphered.

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American Science Fiction Film – A Bird’s Eye View

Petru IAMANDI*

Abstract

This work approaches the themes and trends, many of which have fundamental social, political and philosophical significance, that have marked the evolution of American science fiction film, and it points out how the genre has influenced and been affected by the culture in which it has been produced, often in a context that makes it more real than reality - problems such as environmental degradation; overpopulation and pressure on space and goods, friction between the sexes, races, and nations; and the difficulties caused by computers, robots, clones, and aliens. The versatility of American science fiction film has allowed it to address a wide variety of audiences, from filmgoers looking for simple, escapist entertainment, to those eager to have their minds challenged. American science fiction film has also moved to the forefront of filmmaking technology, particularly in the field of special effects.

Key words: *science and technology, visions of the future, alien invasion, nuclear apocalypse, space travel*

1. The Beginnings

The “roots” of the American science fiction film can be traced back to a variety of sources. After the popular and inexpensive “dime novels” of the nineteenth century, came the “pulp,” then the science fiction comic strips and comic books of the first half of the twentieth century. It was comic strip heroes and superheroes such as Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon that crossed over into science fiction radio serials and later into the cinema serials. The cinema serials were low-budget films aimed at a young audience, with 12-15 episodes which were 15-20 minutes long. Cinema serials like *The Shadow of the Eagle* (1932), *The Phantom of the Air* (1933), and *The Lost City* (1935) featured robust heroes battling with evil opponents.

Technological innovation was also a central feature of these serials, but it was not until *Flash Gordon: Space Soldiers* (1936) that the science fiction genre really came into its own. *Flash* was followed by *Buck Rogers Conquers the Universe* (1939) and the later superhero serials, *The Batman* (1943) and *The Adventures of Superman* (1948). There were very few science fiction feature films produced in the US during the 1930s and 1940s, so in terms of numbers the serials remain the most prominent example of the American film genre before the 1950s. The serial was plotted to a set formula that required a fast pace, colourful characters, and regular “cliff hangers” to tempt children back to the cinemas to see the next episode. (Booker 2010: 238) Many of these characteristics found their way into later feature

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films and so the genre became inextricably linked with sensation, commercialism and a juvenile market.

2. The First Golden Age (1950-1960)

The science fiction feature film emerged in the 1950s as a response to an America transformed by public recognition of the power and socio-political consequences of advanced science and technology, by a new consciousness of the relativity of spatial and temporal distance, and by a sense of political enmity and geophysical vulnerability. The Cold War period was marked both by the threat of nuclear annihilation and the promise of new technologies such as television and the computer.

The two key films that initiated the genre's first "Golden Age" were exemplary in figuring the positive and negative attitudes about the technologized future. *Destination Moon* (1950), with its narrative of a manned space mission, was optimistic about an expansionist future enabled by the cooperation of hard science, high technology, and corporate capitalism. In images filled with glittering futuristic technology, a sleek spaceship, the beauty of limitless outer space, and "special effects," the film "merits special mention for its relatively accurate and convincing depiction of a moon expedition." (Telotte 2004: 100)

The Thing (1951), however, was pessimistic about both rational science and the future. The film's narrative about a murderous alien creature on an Arctic military outpost was xenophobic and anti-science, privileging technology only for the weapons it provided against alien attack. Indeed, with its dark *mise-en-scène* and caution against obsessive scientific curiosity, *The Thing* envisioned the future in terms of merely staying alive and safe. Its paranoid last warning was: "Watch the skies; keep watching." (Telotte 2004: 181)

This negative vision of the future developed in several directions: "creature features," alien invasion fantasies, and films about the fear of radiation and nuclear apocalypse. "Creature features" foregrounded atomically awakened or mutated creatures that embodied the present threat of nuclear annihilation in "prehistoric" figures. Primal beasts and giant insects caused mass urban chaos and, through special effects, brought to the screen the imagination of disaster and the aesthetics of destruction. *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), *Them!* (1954), *Tarantula* (1955), *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955), *The Deadly Mantis* (1957), and *The Black Scorpion* (1957) showed creatures that held in their gigantic size and acts of destruction the suggestion of humanity's post-apocalyptic future as a regression to prehistory.

At the same time, however, these primitive creatures drew attention away from the advanced science and technology that gave rise to them, thus allowing scientists and the military to use that science and technology to "save" humanity. Hardly regarded as works of art or social commentary, these films were nonetheless culturally significant. Ritualistic in their simple plotting and repetitive structure, they were mythic in function, resolving intense and contradictory

feelings about scientific rationalism and advanced technology, and their historically new destructive applications.

The alien invasion films dramatized another cultural anxiety: the popular fear of Communism as a dehumanizing political system bent on destroying individual subjectivity, committed to world conquest, and using new forms of “invasive” and “invisible” domination like “brainwashing.” These films disguised Cold War nightmares about being “taken over” by powerful, inhumanly cold and rational others, who would radically flatten human emotion and transform consciousness into a collectivity, and they did so in two quite different forms.

Like the “creature features,” one type of invasion film developed the aesthetics of destruction in an urban America under attack – but here from aliens, whose superior weapons blast such distinctly American landmarks as the Washington Monument. At the same time the invasion was seen through newspaper and television montage as global in scope. *War of the Worlds* (1953) and *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* (1956) dramatized radical xenophobia, fear of planetary annihilation through high-tech weaponry, and a contradictory yearning for both a peaceful global coalition and another morally clear-cut world war. Only *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) took a critical view of the period’s xenophobia, its extra-terrestrial protagonist speaking out against irrational fear and militarism, and emphasizing the “follies of the nuclear arms race.” (Booker, 2010: 28)

The second type of alien invasion film dramatized cultural anxieties about the more “invisible” threats of Communism: infiltration of the US by a subversive “fifth column” and ideological “brainwashing.” *Invaders from Mars* (1953), *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958), and *The Day Mars Invaded the Earth* (1963) located themselves in the ordinary and familiar worlds of small-town and suburban America where aliens “took over” the bodies of family members, police officers, doctors, workmen, and lovers. These films created a paranoid style in which alien “difference” was marked not by special effects but by the stiff demeanour and small failures of the human-looking aliens to respond appropriately in ordinary human situations: not blinking at the sun, not responding maternally to a child, or passionately to a kiss.

Science fiction post-apocalyptic fantasies played out anxieties of yet another kind. Fear of radiation’s effects on the human body were poeticized in extreme dramas like *The Incredible Shrinking Man* and *The Amazing Colossal Man* (both 1957), while visions of life after nuclear apocalypse were set in recognizable urban contexts, now ghost towns emptied of people but for a few survivors. Structured around loss and absence, *On the Beach* and *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* (both 1959) starred significant Hollywood actors and were received less as science fiction than as serious adult drama. Other films like *Five* (1951) or the later *Panic in the Year Zero* (1962) also foregrounded moral questions of the period about what “survival of the fittest” might mean in actual post-apocalyptic practice.

3. The Decline (1960s - 1977)

At the end of the 1950s, science fiction film went into major decline, the reasons being linked to dramatic changes in both the motion picture industry and American society. The 1960s saw the economic collapse of the monopolistic Hollywood studio system and major changes in production and exhibition. Television was also providing audiences with a major entertainment alternative, offering science fiction in well-written series such as *The Twilight Zone* (1959-64), *The Outer Limits* (1963-69), and *Star Trek* (1966-68). Although, in response, the film industry introduced wide-screen and experimented with 3-D films such as *It Came from Outer Space*, there was now little theatrical place for the “low” genre of science fiction.

The cultural taste for science fiction clearly changed in the 1960s. Life in the nuclear shadow became normalized and “new” technologies were no longer quite so exciting. Most Americans were less concerned with nuclear annihilation than with domestic problems, “alien threat” coming not from the USSR or outer space but from black Americans demanding their civil rights; flower children rejecting parental values and “spacing out” on drugs; angry feminists; and protesters against the war in Vietnam.

Although the science fiction film did not disappear between the 1960s and 1977, it did recede in popular consciousness. Exceptions were Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr Strangelove: or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), a black comedy about the onset of nuclear war, and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), a critically acclaimed epic that set new standards for cinematic effects and ironically foregrounded the increasing banality of technologized human being against the grandeur and possibilities of an unknown universe, “using a classical music soundtrack and special visual effects of unprecedented sophistication to help produce a film that was self-consciously intended to be a genuine work of art, rather than mere entertainment.” (Booker, 2010: 44) 1968 also saw release of the very popular *Planet of the Apes*, which combined a post-apocalyptic theme with space and time travel to displace and explore American race relations.

Indeed, it may well have been science fiction’s narrative inability to sufficiently transform and displace contemporaneous mundane concerns in post-1968 American culture that kept viewers away. More adult, socially relevant, and mainstream than it had been previously, science fiction was hardly escapist, dealing with overpopulation, food shortages, urban blight, and aging in films like *Soylent Green* (1973), or with the consequences of corporate capitalism and media violence in films like *Rollerball* (1975). Certainly, between 1969 and 1974, the years of Richard Nixon’s presidency, space travel and extra-terrestrials seemed irrelevant to a future threatened more by domestic political corruption, reckless consumption, and corporate greed than by the possibilities of alien attack.

4. The Second Golden Age (1977-)

Yet, in 1977, it was precisely space travel and extra-terrestrials that marked the inauguration of science fiction's second "Golden Age." The statement that began Gerald Ford's short presidency (1974-1977) - "Our long nightmare is over" - seemed fulfilled by its end in two extremely popular, visionary and benign science fantasies: George Lucas's *Star Wars* and Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, both of them "a refreshing change to the nihilism of the period [...] and critical of the national condition in their respective depictions of faceless, bureaucratic, and fascistic governments." (Geraghty 2009: 15) Radically different from their more baleful predecessors, *Star Wars* was an epic space adventure and coming-of-age film set in a mythic past "long, long ago," but realized futuristically in a galaxy "far, far away"; while *Close Encounters* was an epic domestic adventure about an ordinary man's search for "something important" and "wonder-full" that culminated in a spectacular and joyful encounter and communication with child-like yet technologically advanced extra-terrestrials.

Both films were positive and enthusiastic about the future of human beings and envisioned alien life forms as potentially friendly allies in adventure. Both were also playful, often comic, and reflexive about their own generic existence and history. And, more radically, both films transformed science fiction's "objective" and rational vision of a high technology promoted through special "effects" into a "subjective" and emotional expression of new technological "highs" and special "affects."

What accounted for this sudden change in popular attitudes towards the genre - not just these two inaugural blockbusters but the large number of mainstream science fiction films that followed through the 1990s - were the first two years of Jimmy Carter's presidency (1977-81), a time of national "healing" and middle-ground compromise. As "losers" in Vietnam, popular culture reinvented Americans as valiant "underdogs" and, in a paradoxical turn, identified with the "little guys" against big "Evil Empires." American culture began to sentimentalize the recent past, seeking alternatives in escapist science fantasies that promised something better "far, far away." First wave feminism's interrogation of gender roles as well as military defeat also prompted popular reappraisal of "masculinity." Thus, it was no accident that in *Alien* (1979), Ripley was a fiercely intelligent and independent female protagonist embraced by women not only in the audience but also in the academic community. In sum, for the first time since the 1950s, the genre began to recognize and reflect the somewhat changed position of women in American society.

In 1981, an increasingly bad economy ceded the Carter presidency to Ronald Reagan. Promoting big business and America as a world power, Reagan served until 1989, rearticulating the historically regressive terms of the Cold War in science fictional rhetoric. Indeed, in 1985, he explicitly connected his plans for a satellite defence system to *Star Wars* and told America, "The force is with us." It was a decade of corporate expansion, high technology, and media fiction - and the height of the science fiction film's renaissance. But massive deregulation of greedy

corporations and an enhanced military budget led to an increasing national deficit; furthermore, AIDS became epidemic and, connected to homosexuality, was popularly conceived as an “alien” disease. Thus, parallel to (and eventually overtaking) the more sanguine science fiction of the decade were films from the “dark side” of the “force.”

The early 1980s were dominated by a sort of cultural longing for a simpler and more innocent world, one in which technology is generally benign and often emotionalized, in which “alien” others are sentimentalized, spiritual mentors who are kinder, gentler, and more enlightened than humans. Films such as *Star Man* (1984) and *Cocoon* (1985), in which aliens were figured as innocent lovers and spiritual friends, seemed to fulfil the culture’s need to escape a complex and heterogeneous world that refused both moral and ideological simplification.

This cultural desire for a return to the innocence and simplicity of childhood found its apotheosis in Spielberg’s hugely popular *E.T.* (1982), “the first commercially and critically successful science fiction film to be made primarily for children.” (Booker, 2006: 158) The story of a suburban boy’s friendship with a small and cuddly alien was science fiction with a “heart light,” and had an emotional appeal more to do with resolving family problems than with the rational science and high technology previously associated with the genre.

Like the aliens, technology had also become increasingly domesticated, both in - and out of - the new science fiction film. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, consumer electronics were a part of everyday American life, and science fictional items such as digital watches, microwave ovens, and VCRs were commonplace. The large computers initially associated with the secretive military-industrial complex became small, affordable, “user-friendly,” and “personal.” In the early 1980s, the teen hero of *Wargames* (1983) “hacked” his way into a computer game called “Global Thermonuclear War,” only to find out it was not a game at all; and the protagonist of *The Last Starfighter* (1984) was a teen video game champ whose skill enabled him to save the universe. Those “family” science fiction films ended happily and figured not only the proliferation of electronic gamesmanship, but also the rhetoric that zapped Americans into and out of real space and game space.

In the mid-1980s, this “domestication” of science fiction led also to a second category, quite different in tone and terrain from the first. A significant number of independent, “quasi-science fiction” films emerged on the margins of the genre as a counter-cultural critique. Using visibly cheesy special effects, *Liquid Sky* (1984), *Strange Invaders*, *Brother from Another Planet*, *Repo Man*, *Night of the Comet* (all 1984), and *Uforia* (1986) dramatized American culture as pervasively “science fictionalized” and “alienated” - indeed, more anthropologically bizarre than anything mainstream science fiction could dream up. In those films, extra-terrestrial aliens were easily “integrated” into black Harlem, run up against the drug subculture and punk scene, and confronted with their image in the newspapers and magazines. Their science fiction “plots” were also played out in the familiar yet estranged spaces of convenience stores, suburban shopping malls,

and supermarkets. Often called “postmodern” because of their use of irony and pastiche, those films played up their own “B” film status and many went quickly to video stores and cult status.

From its beginnings, however, the second “Golden Age” of science fiction film also had a dark side. Thus, the third category of the genre ignored benign suburban landscapes and starry spacescapes, while paranoia, schizophrenia, and anxiety outweighed parody. Urban clutter and blight or confined and claustrophobic spaces set the *mise-en-scène* not only for remakes of several 1950s films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1979), *Body Snatchers* (1994), and *The Thing* (1982), but also for historically particular cinematic responses to consumerism, economic crisis, the immense power of multinational corporations, and the increasing surveillance in every sector of society.

Much more troubling, perhaps, than predatory creatures, alien or terrestrial, like in *Predator* (1987), and *Predator 2* (1990), were more domestic and intimate threats to the human being and the quality of contemporary existence. Thus, this third, and darkest, science fiction category traced a unique – and “postmodern” – ambivalence about what was perceived as a degraded future. Perhaps best characterized by *Blade Runner* (1982), “a seminal postmodern film, not only in terms of the cluttered and ‘retrofitted’ dystopian cityscape it offered the spectator, but also in the ways that it dealt with emerging questions of human subjectivity within a postmodern, post-industrial environment” (Cornea, 2007: 154), these films both criticized and eroticized the urban blight in which they were set, finding peculiar beauty in garbage, decay, industrial exhaustion, and a cityscape saturated both by acid rain and advertising. In these films, “new” technology and “modern” architecture looked “recycled” and shabby. Dark in tone, filled with highly atmospheric pollution, *Escape from New York* (1981), *Blue Thunder* (1983), the extremely popular *Terminator* films, *Robocop* (1987), and *Total Recall* (1990) stood as celebratory monuments to the consumer culture of late capitalism even as they ironically lamented it.

Although inaugurated in the 1980s, this paranoid strain of science fiction became particularly dominant in the late 1990s and has continued into the first decade of the twenty-first century. 1999 saw the release of *The Thirteenth Floor*, which figured “ordinary” reality as a manufactured illusion; *EXistenZ*, which blurred the boundaries for both characters and spectators between “real” life and virtual game life; the extraordinarily popular *The Matrix*, which posited “real” life the creation of a computer program and real “real life” as a passive and unconscious existence; and, *Fight Club*, in which male passivity and consumerism met in ambiguous space. These critical thematics and confusions continued not only in the *Matrix* sequels (both *Reloaded* and *Revolutions*, 2003), but also in *Solaris* and *Minority Report* (both 2002), and *Paycheck* (2003).

The fact that special effects technology is no longer linked to rationalism or science, explains to a great extent the slippage of science fiction “proper” into quasi-science fiction/fantasy comic book films or its subsumption by fantasy. Thus, in the present period, the science fiction genre is matched by “superhero”

films such as *X-Men* (2000) and *X2: X-Men United* (2003); *Spider-Man* (2002) and *Spider-Man 2* (2004); and *Hulk* (2003) – and countered by fantasy films such as the *Harry Potter* series (2001-11) and the extraordinary *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-03).

Conclusions

Nonetheless, science fiction continues as a popular American film genre, paradoxically no longer confined to the cinema-hall. Video games, CD-ROMs, and DVDs; interactive films and television; and science fiction adventures in the perceived depth and motion of virtual space in arcades and theme parks – all promise the film genre a future that exceeds the very mechanisms and industry that gave it birth. In sum, from 1950 to the present day, the science fiction film continues to give concrete narrative shape and visible form to America's changing historical imagination of technological progress and disaster, and to the ambiguities of being human in a world in which advanced technology has altered both the morphology and meaning of personal and social existence.

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Truth as Its Counterpoint

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Abstract

From A. H. Maslow's remark that "science is the only way we have of shoving truth down the reluctant throat. Only science can overcome characterological differences in seeing and believing. Only science can progress." (in Aldous Huxley, *Literature and Science*, 1963), to Aldous Huxley's "we now find ourselves from the very start in the midst of a dialogue between nature and man, a dialogue of which science is only one part, so much so that the conventional division of the world into subject and object, into inner world and outer world, into body and soul, is no longer applicable and raises difficulties." (*Literature and Science*, 1963), one may realize that truth is to be found rather as a construct oscillating between conventional forms that the régimes of truth characterizing every societal arrangement build and personal interpretations of reality specific to any human creature. In brief, the present article explores the different 'shades of grey' that the birth of truth presupposes in a process of transactional interplay which appears most often under the form of contrapunctual exchange, with a reliance on Huxleyian texts read mainly through Foucauldian lenses.

Key words: truth, counterpoint, knowledge, understanding, tension.

Introduction

When it comes to truth and reality, knowledge and understanding, the central question – and probably the only one that may be needed to be asked – is this: how do we do to reach the truth? Attention should be paid to the verb. If one asks 'how do we *discover* the truth?', one automatically sets off relying on the idea that truth is something that already exists and is simply waiting to be revealed. However, the answers to this question may vary according to the way knowledge and understanding are envisaged.

One way that is believed to conduct to truth is via knowledge. But knowledge is such a vast domain that a series of considerations must be made about it. For example, if scientific knowledge is taken into account, it may be said that a large number of information came to be considered true as to the laws of nature. The data in the numerous fields of science are proof of this.

Another way taken into consideration as being one that leads the way to truth is via understanding. The experience has been given different names by different authors in the long run. Huxley refers to it as direct understanding, intuition, mystical revelation. The name that is given to it is not actually so

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important. For example, in *A Taste for the Secret*, Derrida comments on the position and function of proper names in philosophy arguing that they act as authorities in the field via a chronological priority or simply because they are others. And, as he shows earlier in his book, simply acknowledging the others, one necessarily finds oneself “disarmed before the other” and, thus, one accepts whatever ‘the other’ turns out to be. The same goes evidently with any other, especially if that other has a name – like God. What he says of Socrates may very well be applied to God: “I have to try to respect the very thing that is untranslatable in the event that carries the name of Socrates. Weakness before the 'there has to be the other' passes in philosophy through the existence of proper names” (Derrida 2001: 68).

This attitude of ‘weakness’ proves to be the most appropriate, just like Huxley said in *Names and Things*: “Modern thought is preponderantly Nominalistic; [...] men are muddleheaded creatures who imagine that, because they have invented a name, there must be some real objective thing to correspond to it” (Huxley 2001: 98).

So, it is not about the fact that knowledge and identity do not or should not exist, but that they need to be suspended so that one can be able to identify with the divine ground, God, the other world, or whatever name is given to it. The name of the divine has so little importance that indeed it is not the identification of the divine by the aid of its names or descriptions that is of any help. It is the direct experience of it – which has been reported so many times that cannot be successfully rendered in words – that counts and is able to reveal the truth.

Pluridimensionality – the new perspective

With Huxley, all these paths are reliable to a certain extent and it is through counterpointing the results of all of them that one may get greater chances to reach the truth. Restless as he is, he cannot think but contrapuntally. His essays and his novels are the expression of his manner of ratiocination. Once he has an idea, he inevitably comes against it with an opposite one, sometimes succeeding in harmonizing them, sometimes not. This flow of arguments, of ideas fighting each other in a debate, is the main mechanism of his writings, just like they are of his thinking. There does not exist, of course, a singular theme around which his thinking revolves, but a multitude of them intersecting each other; this is the reason why his novels render the diversity and multiplicity of life by the large number of interlinks of themes and plots. The characters are numerous and diverse, too, for they stand for the same pluridimensionality inherent in the human nature. Each character voices his inner diversity, and together, the diversity of the human species at large.

His contrapuntal structures are only instances from a network of reasoning which converge and separate again and again in their movement. It has to be also mentioned that they must not be envisaged as ending processes, but rather as live,

growing spirals. An association that could best render plastically the whole picture is the DNA chain made of two vertical strings connected at intervals by horizontal links, a chain that moves as if upwards and circularly, endlessly. He explains it in terms of the musicalization of fiction: "In sets of variations the process is carried a step further. The whole range of thought and feeling, yet all in organic relation to a ridiculous little waltz tune" (Huxley 1928: 78).

The link existing at all times between the two strings, and among the multiple range of chains, is a critical one, e.g. one that is itself a crisis, a tension, sometimes even a war. It appears that it could not be otherwise for it is only such a connection that can make the spiral move; when things are settled – the adjective itself is self-speaking – movement is impeded. The major framework in which Huxley constructs his fiction and non-fiction is a world in which there is a permanent search for equilibrium – spiritual and psychological, social and economic – but in which the adoption of inadequate standards leads to a failure in striking a balance. This is the case for Westerners. Instead, due to his vast study in psychology and parapsychology, mysticism and Oriental philosophy, he creates a very personal hybrid criterion of spiritual welfare which can be also the basis for the balanced progress in any sector of life.

Because they are closely knit aggregates rather than completely unified and indissoluble wholes, human beings are capable in some degree of temporary self-transcendence and can therefore come to at least a partial knowledge of the transcendent Spirit. But during most of their existence it is impossible for them to be aware of Spirit except as immanent in themselves and in the minds and lives and things outside them. Divine immanence is possible only because there is divine transcendence. There can be no indwelling of one piece of matter within another piece of matter; and, they may overlap, minds can never fuse, never wholly possess one another. But Spirit, which is of another order of being, can be completely co-extensive with bodies, co-active and co-conscious with minds. For this reason the realm of nature is always, potentially, the realm of grace. For the potentiality of grace to become actual, or for an actualized gratuitous grace to become permanently effective, there must, of course, be collaboration by the will (Huxley 2002: 115).

Although the sensation system through which human beings have experiences is common to all members, the cumulus of experiences and what people make out of them is different from person to person. Huxley puts it beautifully, again in musical terms: "In the human fugue there are eighteen hundred million parts. The resultant noise means something perhaps to the statistician, nothing to the artist" (Huxley 1928: 23). The reasons for this difference are multiple – body condition, environment, upbringing, etc.

Reality is what one makes of what one experiences. An example is to be found in *Point Counterpoint* where Huxley argues that an artist may have "the revelation of profoundest truth" when hearing a girl singing, an experience which

in turn, gives rise to the creation of another song which is “a slow and lovely meditation on the beauty (in spite of squalor and stupidity), the profound goodness (in spite of all the evil), the oneness (in spite of such bewildering diversity) of the world” (Huxley 1928: 24). The realm that the artist discovers transcends what is held as evident reality if a scientific or purely intellectual view of things is taken. But, Huxley maintains, this does not make the discovery less reliable: “It is a beauty, a goodness, a unity that no intellectual research can discover, that analysis dispels, but of whose reality the spirit is from time to time suddenly and overwhelmingly convinced” (Huxley 1928: 24). All the more so if one is to take into account that

[s]cientific hypotheses can be brought to experimental tests by the senses; metaphysical hypotheses cannot. We believe or disbelieve in a philosophy because we either do or do not feel as the philosopher felt about the world at large. Now, the senses are fairly uniform throughout the human race. [...] But man’s feelings about the world at large are not at all uniform. There is no single norm about such experiences. Hence there can be no single universally satisfying philosophy. [...] Each, so far as he himself is concerned, is right. Given the question, both answers are true. But this question of providence, along with all the other cosmic riddles, is almost undoubtedly wrongly posed. The traditional method of rationalizing our experiences is faulty. Our experiences are real but our rationalizations of them are fantastic (Huxley 2000: 301).

Another reason for the diversity of interpretations is that

[a]ll men have similar sensations, but not all have similar intuitions. Religious intuitions differ in intensity, not only as between man and man, but in the same man at different moments. Given light and normal eyes, all of us on all occasions see very much the same things – which does not mean, of course, that we make the same use of what we see, or that these more or less identical sensations carry an identical meaning for each beholder (Huxley 2000: 245).

Modernity with Huxley means a fusion of two apparently contrapuntal stances – unity in diversity in diversity in unity. One the one hand, with him

the essence of the new way of looking is multiplicity. Multiplicity of eyes and multiplicity of aspects seen. For instance, one person interprets events in terms of bishops; another in terms of the price of flannel camisoles; another, like that young lady from Gulmerg, ' he nodded after the retreating group, ' thinks of it in terms of good times. And then there's the biologist, the chemist, the physicist, the historian. Each sees, professionally, a different aspect of the event, a different layer of reality. What I want to do is to look with all those eyes at once. With religious eyes, scientific eyes, economic eyes, homme moyen sensuel eyes' [...] Because everything's implicit in anything. [...] nothing could well be queerer and that no picture can be queer enough to do justice to the facts' (Huxley 1928: 192).

On the other hand, each makes a different unique thing/reality of the same experience, just the way his characters do: “And Walter would be woken from his dream of love into a reality of what Lucy called ‘fun,’ into the cold daylight of sharply conscious, laughingly deliberate sensuality. She left him unjustified, his guiltiness unpalliated” (Huxley 1928: 201). This feeling basically explains what Huxley means when he says that the events and the experiences may be the same with all individuals, but it is what each makes of them that gives different shapes to those moments, to reality, to identities, to lives. It is not, thus, wrong, to say that there can be novelty, after all. As Derrida remarks later in the 21st century, there is a kind of *a priori* when he says that philosophers like Descartes or Kant claim that they try to begin from scratch, “to recover the *arche*, the beginning” for whatever is, “has already begun” (Derrida 2001: 68). And yet, in spite of the existence of an *a priori*, and in spite of repetition, this last one will never “exhaust the novelty of what comes” (Derrida 2001: 70) precisely due to the newness that the incalculable presupposes. Eventually, everything can be summed up in mathematical terms – there is knowledge about the existence of figures and about their possibility to combine *ad infinitum*, but when there exist unknown elements in the equation, the resultant combination is completely unpredictable. Therefore, in Eminescu’s words, “Time goes, time comes, all is new and old are all” (*Vreme trece, vreme vine, Toate-s vechi si noua toate*) because “even if one were able to imagine the contents of experience wholly repeated – always the same thing, the same person, the same landscape, the same place and the same text returning – the fact that the present is new would be enough to change everything” (Derrida 2001: 70).

Another stance towards knowledge and reality is at the other extreme, where there are people like Everard in *Point Counterpoint* who “hated situations that were neither one thing nor the other [for] he preferred definite knowledge, however unpleasant, to even the most hopefully blissful of uncertainties” (Huxley 1928: 367). But again, this kind of knowledge may be gained only with the brain, in which case a complementary process of “suppressing [...] heart and bowels” inevitably takes place. Rampion clearly sets the two outcomes in the balance: “All that happens in the process is that they're transformed from living organs into offal. And why are they transformed? In the interests of what? Of a lot of silly knowledge and irrelevant abstractions” (Huxley 1928: 397).

As mentioned earlier, tension is necessary in order to initiate movement. As to Huxley’s characters, each of them deals with the crises in his own way and the reader is offered the possibility to observe a wide range of experiences and reactions. Reality may be viewed as a diamond with millions of sides; through the *punctus contra punctum* technique the reader is exposed to a variegated range of alternatives for “Reality, as we know it, is an organic whole. [...] The observed solution of continuity are [...] rather between different states of the total reality as experienced by different individuals, and by the same individual at different

times" (Huxley 2000: 369). The benefits of this technique are enormous; as an individual, any reader occupies a position on this diamond called reality and therefore, is unable to see all its facets; but as a Huxley reader, every individual is provided with the trespassing of subjective boundaries and able to see the whole range of sides of the diamond, that is, of reality. The writer character Philip Quarles in *Point Counterpoint* considers that the artist should 'counterpoint' different strata as 'a new way of looking at things' (Huxley 1928: 191). It appears quite seeming, thus, that Huxley was greatly influenced by the theory of relativity when displaying ideas from so diverse experimental standpoints. Huxley was fond of the idea that "the same person is simultaneously a mass of atoms, a physiology, a mind, an object with a shape that can be painted, a cog in the economic machine, a voter, a lover etc." (1933: 274-5) So, either it is via his mouthpiece characters, or directly through his words, it is ideas and this pluriperspectivism that matter to him and are desired to be transmitted. And he does transmit them consistently both in his novels and in his essays because he wishes himself and his reader to look at reality "with religious eyes, scientific eyes, economic eyes" (Huxley 1928: 192). In brief, the contrapuntal form of the written piece reflects the plurality that Huxley believed and argued that exists in the micro- and the macrocosm.

According to Michel Foucault, this will to knowledge has been accounted for in a great number of ways along the years; Foucault finds it interesting to analyse only two of the models – the Aristotelian and the Nietzschean ones – as he believes them to be at the antipodes.

With Aristotle, it is the satisfaction of the visual perception the one that renders plain the connection between knowledge, pleasure, and truth. Besides, this basic desire to know which is manifested through seeing is also complemented by and satisfied more deeply in the pleasure of contemplation, which may be considered as the other extreme in the range that is the will to know.

Conversely, with Nietzsche, knowledge appears where there is disharmony between desire, fear, pleasure, instinct. Huxley remarks that "the poor in spirit are less successful than the rich in spirit, but they are for that reason more liable to be saved. Thanks to their poverty, they are actually unaware of many of the possibilities of discord which it is so easy for the richly gifted to turn into actual disharmony" (Huxley 2001: 121). Moreover, knowledge is dependent on interest, and truth is thus the result of the interplay of different pursuits of benefits, as Huxley sensibly observes, as well: "No philosophy is completely disinterested. The pure love of truth is always mingled to some extent with the need, consciously or unconsciously felt by even the noblest and the most intelligent philosophers, to justify a given form of personal or social behavior, to

rationalize the traditional prejudices of a given class or community” (Huxley 2001: 368). “For myself,” Huxley confesses,

as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. [...] After the War the philosophy of meaninglessness came once more triumphantly into fashion. [...] The universe as a whole still remained meaningless, but certain of its parts, such as the nation, the state, the class, the party, were endowed with significance and the highest value. The general acceptance of a doctrine that denies meaning and value to the world as a whole, while assigning them in a supreme degree to certain arbitrarily selected parts of the totality, can have only evil and disastrous results. ‘All that we are (and consequently all that we do) is the result of what we have thought.’ We have thought of ourselves as members of supremely meaningful and valuable communities – deified nations, divine classes and what not – existing within a meaningless universe. And because we have thought like this, rearmament is in full swing, economic nationalism becomes ever more intense, the battle of rival propagandas grows ever fiercer, and general war becomes increasingly more probable (Huxley 2001: 369-370).

The Nietzschean model makes both Huxley and Foucault reach the conclusion that knowledge is rather linked to politics and justice systems for it appears that truth is something that follows a worldly order and that the espial of this functioning is cathartic in itself. It is important to be studied all the more because it is this kind of avowal of truth that turned out to be fateful for the Western knowledge. According to an Albert Einstein quote, what one knows is up to the theory one uses. From this, it results that the access to truth is possible only through the filtration of data through a systematic web of conceptualizations. Moreover, when adding Foucault’s reading of Nietzsche, it becomes evident that knowledge is not necessarily an amount of information external to the microcosmic level of the human mind that is accessed by individuals, but actually it is something created, as it were, by the human systems of thought and disseminated into the society. It, therefore, follows that issues like authority and power must be considered, both at the individual and the societal levels, since the shape truth is given depends on them.

Consequently, Foucault reckons that an analysis of the relations of power should be undertaken in the economy of this study for it is this kind of schemata that shape the knowledge and the truths in the Western world. Huxley, too, expresses his discontent again and again towards the power that scientists, for example, gain because of the possibility they have to “control, direct, and modify” to a great extent the world around them. It is in this sense that Francis Bacon’s famous words – ‘knowledge is power’ – ought to be interpreted in Huxley’s context. “Knowledge is power and [...] it is through their knowledge of what

happens in this unexperienced world of abstractions and inferences that scientists and technologists have acquired their enormous and growing power to control, direct, and modify the world of manifold appearances in which human beings are privileged and condemned to live" (Huxley 2002: 94). But if we are to consider the notions of knowledge and power from a Foucauldian perspective, it will become obvious that the relation between them is not appropriately displayed by the verb 'to be' (since it is not one of equivalence), but rather by the slash sign as Foucault wisely uses. More explicitly, it is not so much sovereignty (envisaged as a relation of subjectification by natural right or original power) that has to be looked into; in other words, it is not the basic terms that found such a power relation that are relevant, but the relation itself "inasmuch as the relation is what determines the elements on which it bears: instead of asking ideal subjects what part of themselves or what powers of theirs they have surrendered, allowing themselves to be subjectified [*se laisser assujettir*], one would need to inquire how relations of subjectivation can manufacture subjects" (Foucault 1997: 59). As mentioned before, a contrapuntal analysis is the best choice, and Foucault is actually pleading for

looking for the single form, the central point from which all the forms of power would be derived by way of consequence or development [only under condition that] one must first let them stand forth in their multiplicity, their differences, their specificity, their reversibility: study them therefore as relations of force that intersect, interrelate, converge, or, on the contrary, oppose one another or tend to cancel each other out (Foucault 1997: 59).

Going to War in Search of Truth

For the French philosopher, this strategy of analysis of knowledge based on the study of war seems so efficient that he strongly recommends that such views as Hobbes' - domination is instituted not by war but rather by "a calculation that allows war to be avoided" be dismissed (Foucault 1997: 63). As a further argument, he backs up his standpoint with the evidence found in the works of Augustin and Amedee Thierry which deploy two relevant interpretations of history - one regarding class struggle, the other focusing on biological confrontation (Foucault 1997: 64). Again, the linchpin of the discussion is the very relationship developed in the intercourse, which is given the sensible name of 'governmentality', rather than the fundamental elements that constitute it and make it appear. The relation is crucial for it is it that correlates sides, counterpoints, be they different states, peoples, or, in a deeper sense, the self and the others. It is only by understanding the relationship and the governmentality that one can comprehend how knowledge and truth are constituted. And this understanding must necessarily be contrapuntal in order to give the most of its

benefits; in Foucault's own words: "analyse it rather as a domain of strategic relations focusing on the behavior of the other or others" (Foucault 1997: 88).

In brief, it is such a contrapuntal perspective of the opposites and, as a matter of practical fact, of all the voices manifesting in the game that may reveal the knowledge and the truth emerging *in medias res*, along with an understanding of them, if one is to think optimistically.

As noted by many, things just get repeated in the long run; it is most often the justificatory theory that may alter, but it is inevitable, apparently, to avoid arriving at the same conclusions, the same answers, the same solutions. What varies, actually, would rather be knowledge and not wisdom:

The experience of past generations is 'culture,' and culture 'can be analysed into two ingredients – knowledge and wisdom, or, in other words, science and value.' Science, of course, has its own categorical imperative – the duty to follow wherever the facts may lead, to seek the truth without reference to current interests, preconceived notions, or even social needs. Wisdom, then, has a good right to be taken seriously as knowledge. But whereas knowledge can be traded, stored and compounded, wisdom (in Hubble's words) 'cannot be readily communicated, hence it cannot be pooled and it does not accumulate through the ages. Each man acquires his own experience (Huxley 2002: 30).

Huxley's urge to make the best of both worlds is a leitmotif of his entire work, his creed, as a matter of fact. He is completely convinced that human beings are amphibians, in other words, that the macrocosm and the microcosm are multi-layered structures. Therefore, they need to be experienced in their totality – that is to say, at all their levels. Abstractly, he wants people to live simultaneously and coherently as if they were in an animated spiral whose strings are infinite and whose movement is never-ending. Practically, the worlds or the layers or the strings that he wants people to intertwine in the spiral of living are the one made of knowledge (as it comes from scientific and intellectual progress) and the one made of understanding of the non-explainable.

To be fully human, we must learn to make the best of [...] [both worlds]: the world of books, of the social heredity of steadily accumulating knowledge, of science and technics and business, of words and the stock of second-hand notions which we project upon external reality as a frame of reference, in terms of which we may explain, to our own satisfaction, the enigma, moment by moment, of ongoing existence. Over against it stands [...] the world of sheer mystery, the world as an endless succession of unique events, the world as we perceive it in a state of alert receptiveness with no thought of explaining it, using it, exploiting it for our biological or cultural purposes (Huxley 2002: 310).

In short,

will and reason were not sufficient and [...] the individual could not, unaided, live as he ought to live, much less be 'saved,' or 'made-perfect.' His 'I' knew that it

needed help of some benevolent not-I more powerful than itself. And such help was actually forthcoming. The insufficiency of the 'I' was a matter of immediate experience; but so also was grace, so was inspiration. 'Communication of the Spirit with our spirit is a true psychological fact and not a mere matter of faith' (Huxley 2002: 97).

All the more limited are the possibilities of the human cogito since "according to the distinction between phenomenon and noumenon, everything visible – ourselves included – could be nothing but memory and phenomenalization" (Derrida 2001: 104). In Spinoza's words, we may run the risk similar to that of the stone: "if a stone that is falling could think, it might think it was doing so freely" (Derrida 2001: 142). So, one should better take a closer look at what Huxley explains:

If reality is to be understood in its fullness, as it is given moment by moment, there must be an awareness which is not limited, either deliberately by piety or concentration, or involuntarily by mere thoughtlessness and the force of habit. Understanding comes when we are totally aware – aware to the limits of our mental and physical potentialities. This, of course, is a very ancient doctrine (Huxley 2002: 225).

So, "the 'care of oneself' [is] understood as an experience, and thus also as a technique elaborating and transforming that experience" (Foucault 1997: 88). In Huxley's formulation: "Experience is not what happens to a man. It is what a man does with what happens to him" (Huxley 1993: 5). "Now it becomes a matter of attending to oneself, for oneself: one should be, for oneself and throughout one's existence, one's own object. But the impulse by which one's gaze is drawn 'aloft' – toward the divine element, toward the essences and the supracelestial world where they are visible" (Foucault 1997: 96). Experience and the turn to the self are prerequisites on the way to the truth for

[t]ruth can be defined in many ways. But if you define it as understanding (and this is how all the masters of the spiritual life have defined it), then it is clear that 'truth must be lived and there is nothing to argue about in this teaching; any arguing is sure to go against the intent of it.' This was something which Emerson knew and consistently acted upon. To the almost frenzied exasperation of that pugnacious manipulator of religious notions, the elder Henry James, he refused to argue about anything. And the same was true of William Law. "Away, then, with the fiction and workings of discursive reason, either for or against Christianity! They are only the wanton spirit of the mind, whilst ignorant of God and insensible of its own nature and condition. . . For neither God, nor heaven, nor hell, nor the devil, nor the flesh, can be any other way knowable in you or by you, but by their own existence and manifestation in you (Huxley 2002: 219).

Derrida further explains that in the relation with the incalculable, the occasion, the event, the chance, the aleatory, being weak means "exposing ourselves to what we

cannot appropriate" because "it is there, before us, without us - *there* is someone, something, that happens, that happens to us, and that has no need of us to happen (to us). And this relation to the event or alterity, as well as to chance or occasion, leaves us completely disarmed." Moreover, he insists that things must be left that way because if the situation were different, then nothing would eventually happen, would not have the chance to happen. "one has to be disarmed. The 'has to' says yes to the event: it is stronger than I am; it was there before me; the 'has to' is always the recognition of what is stronger than I. And there has to be a 'has to'. One has to have to. One has to accept that 'it' [*ca*] (the other, or whatever 'it' may be) is stronger than I am, for something to happen. I have to lack a certain strength, I have to lack it enough, for something to happen. If I were stronger than the other, or stronger than what happens, nothing would happen" (Derrida 1997: 63).

The whole point is that, ultimately, it is precisely that third space that Derrida speaks of (which is the same with Huxley's divine ground and Foucault's supracelestial world) that contains the truth, that is, reality and that everyone reaches the same ultimate reality but at different paces, according to the potentialities they develop, the strength of will, the level of awareness. It is just a matter of time, timing and pacing; eventually, everybody will reach the same destination the moment awareness dawns on us.

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“Retro-modernism” in *Viața cea de toate zilele* by Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu

Elena PANAIT*♦

Abstract

“Retro-modernism” is a concept coined by critic Paul Cernat (Modernismul retro în romanul românesc interbelic [Retro-Modernism in the Romanian Inter-War Novel], Art Publishing, 2009) in view of defining a type of novel developed during the inter-war period as an alternative to prospective modernism, excessively used at that time. The “retro-novels” identified and analysed by Paul Cernat possess a distinct aesthetic physiognomy, marked by nostalgia for the atmosphere at the end of the nineteenth century, despite the modernist techniques employed at the level of the narrative discourse.

*Little known in the present day cultural space, Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu (Lily Teodoreanu) tackles the question of the peripheral and provincial environments, suffocated by the lack of perspective in the characters’ destinies, especially in the case of feminine characters. *Viața cea de toate zilele* [Daily Life] (1940) may be described as retro-modernist, as the writer moderately approaches the theme of the woman’s condition, avoiding the excesses of militant and declarative feminism. The novel’s protagonist overcomes an identity crisis by assuming a superior understanding of the idea of commitment to her family. The reference points of the patriarchal organisation of the world are imperceptibly shaken by the heroine’s drama.*

Key words: *retro-modernism, femininity, psychologism, identity, discourse*

Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu (1897–1995) is little known nowadays by the general readership [1], to whom she is resonant only according to her status as the wife of the author of *La Medeleni*, Ionel Teodoreanu. Born in France, this woman writer (also known as Lily Teodoreanu) attended primary school in Paris, and then completed her education in Iasi and Bucharest during the troubled years of the First World War. Marked by the atmosphere of the *Viața românească* journal, somehow indirectly, through her husband, an assiduous participant in the meetings of the Iasi literary circle, Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu made her debut in 1929 in Tudor Arghezi’s cultural magazine, *Bilete de papagal*, with short pieces of prose, later collected in the volume *Cloșca cu pui* [*The Brooding Hen with Chickens*] (1941). She also collaborated with the magazine *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*. Her readings from Rabindranath Tagore, Ivan Turgenev or Lev Tolstoy are obvious in the general atmosphere of her novels, at the character construction level and in the artistic message they transmit.

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♦ Translated by Oana Gheorghiu and Steluța Stan

Viața cea de toate zilele [Daily Life] was published in 1940 by Casa Românească Publishing House, as the author's second novel after *Calendar vechi* [Old Calendar] (1939; a Romanian Intellectuals Association Award winner). Among other writings signed by Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu one should mention the novels *Acasă* [At Home] (1947) and *Căminul* [The Home] (1971), and also the memoir *Ursitul* [The Fated One] (1970) and the poetry volume *Șoapte într-un asfințit* [Whispers in the Dusk] (1981), which ends her writing career. Resigned with noble discretion in the shadow of her husband's figure, Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu opted after the Second World War for an impressive career as a translator. She translated especially Russian literature, both classic and modern writers (Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Gorki, and Goncharov).

There are few and contradictory critical assessments of the works by Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu, because of their being insufficiently known. Only a few works of history of the Romanian literature mention her name. Dumitru Murărașu (1943: 413) only associates her name with a few titles: "*Dela 'nceput biruitoare în epica noastră se arată Ștefana Velisar-Teodoreanu prin Calendar Vechiu (1939), Viața cea de toate zilele (1940) și Cloșca cu pui (1941)*" [Ștefana Velisar-Teodoreanu proves triumphant from the beginning in our epic creation with 'Old Calendar', 'Daily Life' and 'The Brooding Hen with Chickens'], novels which Al. Piru (1981: 42) thematically assesses as "*romane sentimentale privind copilăria, adolescența și relațiile dintre soți în mediul provincial*" [sentimental novels of childhood, adolescence and marital relationships in the provincial environment]. Bianca Burța-Cernat (2011: 61) labels Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu as a minor prose writer, considering that her novels "*sunt deficitare epic și, chiar dacă «realiste» în intenție, au ceva (involuntar) atemporal*" [are epically deficient and, although intentionally 'realist', possess an (involuntary) timelessness]. According to Cornelia Pillat, poet Ștefan Nenițescu considered Lily Teodoreanu "*cea mai talentată dintre Teodoreni*" [the most talented Teodoreanu] [2]. In a preface to the novel *Acasă* [At Home], George Gibescu (1972: V) evaluates Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu as "*excelentă prozatoare a vârstelor și a mediilor*" [an excellent prose writer of ages and environments], an exception from the specificities of feminine writing, unable to render "*dimensiunea metafizicului*" [the metaphysics dimension], constantly tributary "*erotismului, percepției epidermice a vieții*" [to eroticism and the epidermal perception of life]. Liana Cozea (1994: 21) succinctly comments two of her novels in the following terms:

O anumită cruzime se manifestă în relațiile autoarelor cu personajele lor, dublată de înțelegere și compasiune plină de tristețe, ca în romanul Acasă (1947) și Căminul (1970) de Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu, dacă aparțin sexului feminin și de neîndurare față de sexul opus, ca într-un ritual necesar și dureros de exorcizare.

[A certain cruelty manifests in the relationships between women writers and their characters, doubled by understanding and sad compassion, as in the novels *At Home* (1947) and *The Home* (1970) by Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu, if they belong to

the feminine gender, and by mercilessness for the opposite sex, as in a painful and necessary exorcism ritual.]

The present study proposes a reading of the novel *Viața cea de toate zilele* [Daily Life] through an original grid, acknowledged by Paul Cernat as a distinct typology of the Romanian interwar novel: retro-modernism [3], a category in which the critic includes works such as *La Medeleni*, by Ionel Teodoreanu, a few 1930s novels by Mihail Sadoveanu (e.g. *Locul unde nu s-a întâmplat nimic/ The Place Where Nothing Happened*) and Cezar Petrescu (*Oraș patriarhal/ Patriarchal City*), *Craii de Curtea-Veche/ The Old Court Libertines* by Mateiu Caragiale, *Adela* by Garabet Ibrăileanu, *Enigma Otiliei/ Otilia's Enigma* by George Călinescu and two novels by Mircea Eliade (*Domnișoara Christina/ Miss Christina* and *Nuntă în cer/ Marriage in Heaven*). These are the works which the critic considers to be retro-novels, "relevante pentru înțelegerea modului în care mentalitatea «secolului al XIX-lea» a fost modernizată à rebours de prozatorii epocii interbelice" [relevant for the understanding of the way in which the 19th century mentality was modernised à rebours by the writers of the interwar period] (2009: 11). Aside from central patterns, represented by the realist-objective formula exercised by Liviu Rebreanu and the analytical-psychological one in the novels of Camil Petrescu or Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, the critic identifies on the map of the modern Romanian interwar novel a specific typology which illustrates "un alt modernism decât cel prospectiv, orientat către inovație și actualitate, un modernism retrospectiv" (emphasis in the original) [a modernism different from the prospective one, oriented towards innovation and actuality: a retrospective modernism] (Cernat, 2009: 11). It is about those novels which, although written in a period of complete assimilation of modernist patterns, possess a different aesthetic physiognomy, attempting to recover the air of a past era, the end of the nineteenth century:

(...) prin recondiționarea unor convenții literare vetuste (balzacianismul, simbolismul decadent, idilismul postromantic ș.a.) sau a unor coduri de comportament devenite între timp desuete (pudoarea, idealismul romantic, manierele «boierești», patriarhalismul mic-burghez). (...) Nu avem de-a face totuși cu un paseism epigonic, întrucât autorii inovează à rebours privind înapoi. (...) Evident, prozatorii în cauză nu mai pot fi niște realiști autentici, în sensul social-istoric, voluntarist și pozitivist al secolului al XIX-lea. Nu mai au suficientă credință pentru asta. Sunt, în schimb, niște autoiluzionați lucizi și niște bovarici paradoxali, conștienți de propriul bovarism. Modernismul lor retro are, prin excelență, un caracter nostalgic, evazionist și fantasmatic, fără a pierde însă total contactul cu mimesis-ul traditional.

[...] by reconditioning some outdated literary conventions (Balzacianism, decadent Symbolism, Postromantic idyllism, etc.) or some behavioural codes become obsolete (decency, Romantic idealism, the manners of the boyars or the petite bourgeoisie patriarchy). (...) However, it is not about an epigonic cult of the past, as the authors make à rebours innovations while looking back. (...) Obviously, these writers cannot be authentic Realists in the social-historical, volunteering and positivist sense of the nineteenth century anymore. They no longer have enough faith for that. They are, on the other hand, lucid self-illusioned and paradoxically

Bovarists, aware of their own Bovarisms. Their retro-modernism has, par excellence, a nostalgic, evasive and phantasmatic character, without completely losing contact with traditional mimesis.] (Cernat, 2009: 17).

It follows that “retro-novels” are meant to ensure the balance of the evolution of the Romanian modernist novel by counterbalancing the modernism *à outrance* practised by some authors in the interwar decades.

The novel *Viața cea de toate zilele [Daily Life]* by Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu may be framed within this hybrid area of the Romanian inter-war novel, as, despite its processing of modernist narrative techniques, which keep it in the dominant literary paradigm of the time, it also displays an approach *à rebours* of a theme specific to the latter half of the nineteenth century: the social and cultural condition of women, tackled in a pronounced feminist register by the women writers of the time. Paraphrasing Paul Cernat, we can consider the novel under the lens representative for a form of *retro-feminism*. Whilst her congeners (Henriette Yvonne Stahl, Cella Serghi, Ioana Postelnicu, Anișoara Odeanu, Lucia Demetrius, Sorana Gurian or the canonical Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu) were writing in the 1930s novels which, in their deep structure, asserted the emancipation of the modern woman from the arbitrariness of some phallogocratic laws and conventions, Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu goes against the grain of the interwar women’s literature, being sooner ascribable to the previous generation of women writers, who were still concerned with redefining gender social roles and with women’s cultural visibility.

Through their configuration of an incipient phase of Romanian women’s literature, some nineteenth century women writers, such as Emilia Lungu, Sofia Nădejde, Constanța Hodoș, Bucura Dumbravă, Elena Hartulari, Cornelia Emilian or Iulia Hasdeu, contributed to the dissolution of the local cultural gynaeceum and to the affirmation of women in the public space. In their novels, the feminine characters are projected against the background of an idyllic-patriarchal world vitiated by their Bovaric aspirations and by the permanent negotiation of their freedom (including their inner freedom).

Odată cu apariția romanului și dramaturgiei realiste, personajul feminin își redobândește individualitatea treptat, în cadrul conflictului ce destramă cuplul ori familia. Noțiunii de femeie și de feminitate i se adaugă ideea de feminism. Apar opere literare în care personajul feminin devine un personaj-pledoarie pentru emanciparea femeii într-o societate în care se află într-o poziție de inferioritate. Crește preocuparea pentru psihologie în cadrul romanului și dramei familiale care se alătură romanului de dragoste.

[With the emergence of the realist novel and drama, the feminine character gradually regains its individuality inside the conflict which disintegrates couples or families. The idea of feminism comes to add to the notions of woman and womanhood/ femininity. There are published literary works in which the feminine character becomes a character-plea for women’s emancipation in a society in which they are viewed as inferior. The preoccupation with psychology increases in the family novel and drama, adding to the romance novels] (Radian 1986: 9).

Similarly, in *Viața cea de toate zilele* [*Daily Life*], the protagonist of the novel claims a new identity for her, renouncing the comfortable but unexciting life of a marriage in a provincial town for a much harsher life, amidst the peasants in a village still lacking the benefits of civilisation.

Viața cea de toate zilele [*Daily Life*] (a Romanian Academy Award winner) is set in the years 1936-1937, in an anonymous Moldavian borough where boredom prevails, perfectly fit for reducing failed lives to nothingness: “*Mediu care, în viziunea multor prozatori români (de la Sadoveanu și Brătescu-Voinești încoace) poartă ca un stigmat al fatalității, amprenta elegiacului. E locul unde, prin tradiție, nu se întâmplă parcă nimic*” [An environment which, in the eyes of many Romanian writers, starting with Sadoveanu and Brătescu-Voinești, bears the elegy imprint as a stigma of fatality. It is the place where, by tradition, nothing happens] (Martin 1969: viii). Other researchers maintain that this scarcity of events at the level of the plot is a feminine writing specificity:

Les écrits féminins procèdent à un traitement particulier du temps et de l'action. On parle d'une relative carence de l'événement dans le roman féminin. La présence de l'événement dans le récit n'est pas conçue de la même façon par l'homme et par la femme; les romancières aiment à suggérer la vie dans ce qu'elle a d'infime, de quotidien

[Feminine writings deal with time and action in a particular manner. Many mention a relative scarcity of the events in the feminine novel. The presence of the event in a novel is not constructed identically by men and women: women writers prefer to suggest life in its minor, daily aspects] (Milea 2009: 263).

A few scenes are transposed to Bucharest but the evocation of the life in the metropolis is craftily avoided, as it would not have matched the slow rhythm of the novel. In the latter half, the narrative topos is Butuci village, where there is a vineyard (a family estate) in whose rehabilitation the protagonist, Elisabeta Scutaru, known as Baba (a nickname she took in childhood) chooses to get involved.

The novel sets out with a family scene: four characters have dinner on Sunday in an atmosphere of complete indifference and apathy. Mother of a 17-year old (Nucă), Baba is a 36-year old woman who has reached a critical point of her inner existence: married to Mircea when she was very young, Baba has led a life completely dedicated to her family, gradually giving up her own ideals and also her own identity: “*Dacă n-ar fi Dadaia, pe care o am de la bunica mea, aș uita și cum mă cheamă*” [If I didn't have Dadaia from my grandmother, I'd forget my own name] (Velisar Teodoreanu 1969: 7). This tragic life experience has been long concealed behind the appearances of an idyllic-patriarchal life of resignation of the woman and retreat to the routine of a life fully subjected to serving the others. The belief that “there might be an error somewhere”, that, despite the comfort of her family life, her settled existence risks missing the essence of life, starts assaulting her more and more aggressively. Having reached a critical age, Baba sees herself forced to renounce self-censorship and look for solutions for an existential

problem which, in the eyes of her husband, is simply “neurasthenia”. In the novel’s inner structure, the writer subversively weaves feminist accents of revolt against the historical and cultural condition of women of all times, condemned to silence, anonymity and passivity. Baba’s desire to get away from the suffocating space of her home’s intimacy and to affirm her identity in a proper environment is subjected to the irony of her husband, who is unable to comprehend her inner turmoil:

(...) *Atâtea gânduri și vorbe roiesc în mine și se revoltă, că le țin închise. Mă tem să nu-mi scape odată, să nu le mai pot struni. Mă servesc de prea puține acum, cât i-ar trebui unui copil de 7 ani, binecrescut. Când mai scot din celelalte, Mircea zice că sunt absurdă, romantică și provincială, că-i pregătesc o scenă. A fost un timp când vorbeam amândoi*
 [So many thoughts and words swarm inside of me and revolt for keeping them shut. I’m afraid I might let them loose and not be able to control them at some point. I use too few now, not more than a well-behaved seven-year old child would need. When I pull out some of the others, Mircea says that I’m absurd, romantic and provincial, that I’m making scenes. There was a time when we conversed] (11).

With his thinking, dominated by patriarchal-conventional principles, Mircea provides an exemplary definition of uncomprehended femininity:

Imposibil de vorbit cu tine. Reduci totul la ființa ta. O susceptibilitate bolnăvicioasă, de care mă împiedic la orice pas. O viziune romantică a vieții, cu care nu pot lupta. Ai vrea să ne plimbăm mână în mână, în grădină, pe câmp, să mergem la sindrofii, spectacole, să ne spunem vorbe dulci, o perpetuă logodnă!
 [You’re impossible to speak with. You reduce everything to yourself. A sickly susceptibility on which I stumble over at any moment. A romantic vision of life which I cannot fight. You’d like us to walk hand in hand, in the garden, in the field, to go to gatherings, shows, to tell each other sweet nothings, a perpetual betrothal] (101).

Although she passes for an exemplary wife and mother, Baba acutely feels the bitter taste of self-unfulfilment, suspecting her own life of artificiality and mediocrity:

S-au lipit încet pe mine multe etichete. Singură nu mai știu care-mi corespund, care s-au întipărit în mine, care m-au îmbrăcat în altcineva care mi-i atât de strâmt, că nu mai pot face o mișcare naturală.
 [Many labels have been slowly put on me. I myself don’t know which ones really fit me, which ones have imprinted on my mind, which ones have dressed me in someone else who is so tight that I can no longer move naturally] (11).

Baba’s condition is emblematic for the woman’s status in a society built on patriarchal patterns, in which her aspirations towards emancipation and personal affirmation is ignored, minimalized, disdained and silenced. When confronted by a family friend with his wife’s drama, Mircea suggestively admits: “*Aș vrea-o mai simplă...*” [I wish she were simpler] (246). The action of the character to set herself free from the tutelage of a preordained order is one of discrete modernity, in

opposition with the dominant character of the novel, faithful to some ancestral rigorous social conventions in what concerns what today is known as segregation of gender roles: “*Cu ce drept pretindea la ceea ce n-avea nimeni: un rai utopic, în miniatură, comod și casnic. (...) Ce nerozie! Femeia e făcută să fie pasivă în toate. De ce se revoltase Baba?* (my emphasis.)” [What right did she have to claim something that no one had: a miniature utopic paradise, comfortable and domestic? (...) How stupid! **Woman is made for passivity. Why had Baba revolted?**] (159).

The novel *Viața cea de toate zilele* [Daily Life] may also be read as a treatise of feminine psychology, many pages vouching for the complications of the feminine soul, stylised through their connections with some ideas in Tolstoy's novels. The way in which Baba's identity crisis is resolved reminds of Tolstoy's plea for the simple life in nature, amidst the peasants and in their service: Baba finds refuge in Butuci, saves the overgrown vineyard destroyed by the negligence of a drunkard administrator. She wins the trust of the peasants with her fairness and with her talent in caring for the sick (one may infer from here, though not clearly specified, that she had previous medical training). The field work, the daily privation, the hard life and the initial reluctance of the peasants do not scare away the woman accustomed to a much more comfortable environment; on the contrary, they provide her the necessary framework for regaining herself. By bringing the vineyard back to life, Baba also rebuilds herself, through work and solidarity with the peasants of Butuci. Symbolically, her experience lasts for nine months, the period of gestation for a new understanding of life, but also for a new feminine identity. Baba expresses her inner drama as an illness of the soul: “*Mi-a fost sufletul bolnav...*” [My soul was sick...] (238), to Luca Trofim, the father of Haralambie (Harap), a neighbour fallen in love with her and willing to save her from the twists and turns of an existence without any horizons. But Harap, just as Mircea, is incapable of perceiving the woman's soul in its essence, assimilating it to “*psihologii specific feminine, de sacrificii mărunte, nesfârșite, fără folos pentru nimeni*” [a feminine-specific psychology of trifling, endless sacrifices, useless for everybody] (129). The conversations between Baba and Luca are declarative, with serious themes such as the benefits of suffering, the need for progress through culture, or the co-existence of the good and the evil inside the human being.

The woman's “healing” comes from a superior understanding of the idea of devoutness and commitment, conscientiously assumed and not imposed by virtue of some preordained rules. Completely freed from these constraints, Baba revisits her past life and suddenly has the revelation of the true reasons for her and her family's drama. In this point of the discourse, the writer introduces a purely modernist artifice; the general scheme of the novel is revisited in its most significant points, giving the reader access to the novel's creation laboratory. Together with the reader, the author experiences a regression to an incipient stage of the book writing, when she was trying to find possible courses for the organisation of the narrative material:

Mircea și Baba. Căsătorie între oameni prea tineri. Iubire-pasiune. Lumea descoperită mână în mână. Epoca raiului. Se naște copilul. (...) Baba e prinsă de instinctul maternității (...). Mircea cade pe planul al doilea. (...) Surovine o boală grea, care o scoate pe Baba din joc pentru un timp. Vine sora mai mare în casă. O acalmie. Sora se devotează surorii mai mici și copilului. Prinde slăbiciune pentru copil. (...) Începe o luptă ascunsă între surori pentru copil. (...) Bărbatul nu vede nimic. E mulțumit. Atmosfera se schimbă treptat. Altă lumină. Femeia pălește din ce în ce, alunecă pe un plan secundar. (...) Fiecare este alterat, egoist în felul lui, sclav al ideii greșite și necontrolate despre el însuși. (...) Bărbatul se simte frustrat de partea lui de bucurie. Nu pricepe de ce. Devine pesimist. Se refugiază în muncă. Sora mai mare e descurajată (...)

[Mircea and Baba. Marriage between two too young people. Love-passion. The world discovered hand in hand. The age of paradise. The child is born. (...) Baba is caught by the maternal instinct. (...) Mircea comes second now. (...) A serious illness puts Baba out of action for a while. An elder sister comes to their house. Calm. The sister is dedicated to her younger sister and the child. She has a soft spot for the child. (...) A hidden struggle for the child begins between sisters. (...) The man sees nothing. He is content. The atmosphere gradually alters. Another light. The woman pales more and more, she slips to the second position. (...) Each one is altered, selfish in his own way, a slave of an erroneous and uncontrolled idea about himself. (...) The man feels frustrated of his part of joy. He can't understand why. He turns pessimistic. He finds a refuge in his work. The elder sister is discouraged...] (211-212).

Some of these narrative courses are further developed in the novel, whereas some others remain unused (e.g. the rivalry between the two sisters for the love of the child). These notes, written in the present tense, concentrated on a few pages as Baba's objective assessment of her own life, indirectly reveal the structure of the novel, the mechanisms for generating the main axes of the plot. Intentional or not, this discursive practice is suggestively compared to a medical radiology and draws Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu's novel closer to the modern formula of the meta-novel.

Baba se înfioară. Niciodată n-a gândit astfel, despuiat, uscat, științific oarecum. E o impresie macabră, pe care a mai cunoscut-o asistând la radioscopii, uitându-se la scheletul omului viu mișcându-se sub placa de sticlă."

[Baba flinches. She has never thought like this, bare, dry, somehow scientific. It is a macabre sensation which she experienced before, when she witnessed radioscopies and saw the skeleton of the man moving under the glass plate] (214).

After these lucid reflections that Baba makes of her own existence (which, as stated above, have also a discursive aim, entailing a modern, interactive relationship between author, narrator, character and reader), the woman diagnoses it as a "phony game of mirrors" in which she has indulged together with her dear ones (husband, son, and step sister), and decides to fix everything through the power of her personal example, with the belief that a man's acts reverberate in the becoming of the others. The end of the novel is

programmatically optimistic, communicating the writer's faith in general human values such as solidarity, tolerance, power of maternal and marital love. The novel ends symmetrically with another scene of a family dinner, but this time it is transposed in a different register – one of freedom, hope and communion. "*Baba, în picioare, la un capăt al mesei pătrate, le făcu semn să se așeze: Mircea, în fața ei, ca stăpân al casei. Ceilalți, în părți. (...) Mâna Babei, fără să știe, făcuse astfel semnul crucii, blagoslovind masa*" [Baba, standing at one end of the square table, gestured towards them to sit down: Mircea, in front of her, as the master of the house. The others, on the sides. (...) Unknowingly, Baba's hand had made the sign of the cross, thus blessing the dinner] (278). The apathetic woman at the beginning of the novel is contrasted with the image of an Amazon landlady in the end. Baba is completely transformed, to the amazement of her family and friends. However, the true owner of the Butuci domain and the true family leader remains Mircea, the husband whose authority Baba continues to respect unreservedly.

In contrast with Baba's evading aspirations, another feminine character, Maia, represents the resigned femininity who interiorises her suffering as a means of compensating for a tragic guilt: "*Ispășesc păcatele mele, și asta o fac din toată inima, atâta merit am*" [I atone for my sins with all my heart, it's my only merit] (73). When she was young, Maia married the wrong man, although in love with his brother, and destroyed his life. In the conversations between Baba and her friend, Maia, are timidly inserted allusions to a series of Humanist-Christian ideas about purification through suffering and the serene acceptance of an eventual divine punishment. The mystic Maia represents to Baba an existential alternative which inspires her in her process of identity reconstruction.

Another hypostasis of femininity in the novel is Eleonora (Nora), Baba's elder step sister, present in her life since the latter's childhood, following the death of their father. Eleonora represents failed femininity, despite her perfect beauty. She also has a love secret, as she was the protagonist of a love affair in her youth. This is the reason why she isolates herself in an existence dominated by routine and banality, fully dedicating to her sister's family life. Maia and Eleonora are mirror reflections of Baba, concentrating in their essence some possible courses for the evolution of the protagonist: the dedication to family, motivated either by spiritual-Christian imperatives (as in Maia's case), or by conventionalism (as in Nora's). Nevertheless, Baba makes a symbolic choice, freed from external motivations and fed by inner resorts which pertain to her own world vision.

Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu's novel discourse in *Viața cea de toate zilele* [Daily Life] distinguishes itself through a few timid technical innovations. The narrative levels are metaleptically substituted, the third person being often replaced with the first person, in a subtle game of objectivity and subjectivity, specific to psychological prose. Baba's interior discourse, alternating with the main course of the narrator, gives the reader access to her inner movements and intentions, as well as to the information necessary to understand her drama:

Cu Mircea nu mă pot lămuri. Mi-e frică de vocea lui stăpânită. Mă întrebă ca un străin: «Ce vrei de la mine? Cu ce ți-am greșit? Nu pot fi un erou de romane, sunt un biet magistrat de provincie și un istoric ratat». Ca și cum ar avea vreo importanță slujba, treapta, locul! Doar ne-am luat din dragoste.»

[I can't reason with Mircea. I'm afraid of his restrained voice. He asks me like a stranger: 'What do you want from me? What have I done wrong? I can't be a novel hero; I'm just a poor provincial magistrate and a failed historian'. As if his job, his position or his place mattered in any way. But we married for love] (21).

Another element of modernity of the narrative discourse practised by Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu in *Viața cea de toate zilele* [*Daily Life*] is the introduction of some subtle reflections on feminine writing and on the condition of the woman-writer forced to use expression techniques which are not in tune with her vision and artistic sensitivity. Thus, the effort of women writers to draw the attention of a male receptor (reader, critic, fellow writer) is subversively bemoaned in an oblique commentary of a letter Baba sends to Haralambie:

Îi scrise, cum știi numai femeile, învățate să-și ascundă rănilile sub zâmbet, să câștige victorii dureroase, măgulind orgoliul masculin, supunându-se judecății lui, lăsându-l să creadă că tot eroismul și puterea erau de partea lui. Din afecțiune, mândrie, milă, ori milenară diplomație feminină? Din fiecare câte ceva, probabil.

[She wrote to him as only women know how to write, in their habit of hiding their wounds with a smile, of winning painful victories by flattering the male ego, subjecting to his judgement, making him believe that all heroism and power are his. Was it endearment, pride, mercy or millennial feminine diplomacy? Probably all of them] (134).

Elsewhere, the inability of words to truly communicate people's vision of the world is blamed:

Prin vorbe e greu să-ți dai seama de diferența dintre viziunea ta și a altuia. Fiindcă vorbele au fost educate să se îmbine în scopul nivelării expresiilor umane. Chiar îmbinările cele mai neașteptate, subtile, originale nu sunt astfel decât relativ la expresie, nu la simțire. N-avem altă monedă de schimb între noi, trebuie să aibă înfățișare obișnuită ca s-o putem recunoaște și folosi. Vorbele sunt opace de felul lor, greoaie, decolorate, uzate, exacte numai într-un sens necioplit față de simțire.

[It's hard to understand the difference between your vision and the other's just through words. Because the words have been educated to conjoin in view of levelling human expressions. Even the most unexpected, subtle and original joints are this way only in relation to expression, not to senses. We don't have other currency to exchange, it has to possess a familiar aspect to be able to recognise and use it. The words are opaque by nature, dull, weathered, worn out, exact only in a way rough to the senses] (171).

Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu seems to indirectly affirm the necessity for a language of difference as a tool capable to render the distinct nuances of every individual's sensitivity, as well as the need for genuine communication among the people, fed from within. Such commentaries prove the writer's complete literary conscience

and her understanding of the mechanisms of artistic writing and psychological prose [4].

Although, in the preface to the 1969 edition of the novel, Aurel Martin identifies a “deliberate delimitation” of the writer from the aesthetic formula of her husband, Ionel Teodoreanu, one cannot disregard, at least at the level of some metaphors’ constructions, obvious similitudes in vision and artistic sensibility. An image such as “Cozile și sâmburii de cireșe: vraf încâlcit de note fără sens, alfabet dezarticulat. Pierduse cheia desigur.” [Cherry stalks and kernels; a straggly pile of meaningless notes; an inarticulate alphabet. She had lost the key, of course] (8) seems to be taken directly from *Alunele veveriței* [*The Squirrel’s Peanuts*], the metaphor notebook of Dănuț Deleanu in *La Medeleni*.

With *Viața cea de toate zilele* [*Daily Life*], Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu remains captive “într-o zonă crepusculară, bântuită de imaginile și ecourile unui timp «pierdut»” [in a twilight zone haunted by images and echoes of a ‘lost time’] (Cernat, 2009: 17). In what the condition of the modern woman is concerned, the writer completely disregards matters such as corporeality, erotic lack of inhibition, intimacy, exercising some rights that used to be considered inconceivable back in the days (pursuing an education, own choosing of a profession, adopting a personal career plan, deciding the share of personal investment in work and family). Elisabeta Scutaru overcomes her identity crisis in a rather artificial manner, as the change she triggers in her life is only superficial: she resumes her domestic activities, but this time they are conscientiously assumed, against the background of the interiorisation of certain existential Humanist-Christian beliefs. The novel voluptuously breathes in the nostalgia for the directions of a patriarchal making-up of the world, imperceptibly shattered by Elisabeta’s drama. This mentality and its fondness of the past are what inscribe the novel in the “retro-modernism” formula. The reading of Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu’s novel through this grid allows for the revalorisation of the works of this writer, unjustly minimized at “the stock exchange of literary values” (in Paul Cernat’s words), just as many other retro-novels.

Notes

[1] In 2010, Humanitas publishes in the collection *Convorbiri. Corespondențe. Portrete* [*Conversations. Letters. Portraits*] the volume *Minunea timpului trăit* [*The miracle of the time spent*], with pages from the letters exchanged by Monica Pillat and Lily Teodoreanu with Pia Pillat, which also features an evocation of Lily Teodoreanu (Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu, named Lady Lily by Mihail Sadoveanu and Garabet Ibrăileanu) written by Cornelia Pillat. The portrait (pp. 323-330) is reproduced after the article *Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu – Corespondență inedită: Scrisori din roase plicuri* [*Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu – Unpublished Mail: Letters from Time-Worn Envelopes*], published in *România literară* no 20/23-29 May 2001, pp. 12-13, available from <http://www.romlit.ro>

[2] According to Cornelia Pillat, *art. cit.*

[3] Paul Cernat, *Modernismul retro în romanul românesc interbelic*, Art Publishing House, București, 2009

[4] Aurel Martin considers that *Viața cea de toate zilele* sets out as a regional novel, to further evolve into a psychological novel and into a novel of communication breakdown and alienation, followed by disalienation – in Preface to Velisar Teodoreanu, Ștefana, *Viața cea de toate zilele*, p. IX

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Victorian Novel Discourses: Julia Kavanagh's *Rachel Gray*

Alina PINTILII*

Abstract

Many Victorian novels have been shunted to the margin of literary history, as they were written by neglected women writers. The great interest in women's history produces nowadays an increased concern for researching these relatively obscure novels. One of them is Julia Kavanagh's Rachel Gray. This paper is intended to show how the handling of Genettian narrative discourse categories helps the reader reach the major themes of Rachel Gray and how it is useful in finding out where the novel is situated on the trail between the classical concept of the novel and the modern one. Analyzing Rachel Gray according to Gérard Genette's grid, one can notice that his structuralist categorization of narrative discourse is very useful to disclose the novel's preoccupation with family issues. Furthermore, it contributes to determining that Rachel Gray, even if a realist novel, is inspired from the previous Romantic Movement and announces the subsequent arrival of modernist fiction.

Keywords: Victorian novel, Realism, Gérard Genette's narrative discourse, father-daughter relationship, romantic and modernist influences

Even if esteemed by her contemporaries, popular and internationally-acclaimed during her lifetime, Julia Kanavagh is little known by the modern reader. This is not surprising, as many women writers of the nineteenth century share the same portion. Conversely, there is a great concern for their works nowadays. Eileen Fauset states that: "Critical enquiry into neglected women writers is a consequence of comparatively recent interest in women's history and the subsequent cultural perspectives which have marginalized many writers into relative obscurity" (2009: 4). As a result, "after one hundred years since she was reprinted, Kavanagh's works have now been reissued" (Fauset 2009: 8). One of them, researched from different standpoints by present-day scholars, is *Rachel Gray* (1856). For instance, Sally Mitchell points out this novel's strong social criticism (1988/2011: 421). Lynn Mae Alexander considers it "the culmination of the seamstress novel" assimilating it with Gaskell's *Ruth* (2003: 152). Joseph A. Kestner adds one more dimension of "the faceless proletariat" displayed in *Rachel Gray*, that of the failed shopkeeper. Moreover, the professor states that "Kavanagh does not focus on the working existence of her seamstress but rather on the other elements of her life: her relationship with her stepmother, her unloving father, a

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distressed neighbor" (Kestner 1985: 189).

Rachel Gray is a novel whose eponymous heroine is a twenty-six year old dress-maker living with her stepmother "[i]n one of the many little suburbs which cling to the outskirts of London, [on] a silent and grass-grown street..." (Kavanagh 1856: 1). The novelist focuses on one street only, thus she "differs from writers like Dickens on London or Gaskell on Manchester, who conceive of the entire city as impinging on the characters' lives" (Kestner 1985: 190). This introductory part continues with the description of some houses found on this street and, especially of Rachel Gray's dwelling, whose interior is also presented together with the portraits of Mrs. Gray and her step-daughter. The introductory "descriptive pause"- Genette's term - prevents the narrative thread of the story from advancing, thus inducing an absence of story duration. Genette's elaboration on the subject seems to suit the narrative development in this novel too: this is an "extratemporal descriptive canon [...] where the narrator, [...] in his own name and solely for the information of his reader, [describes] a scene that at this point in the story no one, strictly speaking, is looking at" (Genette 1980: 100). There is an explicit indication proving the existence of this narrative movement in the novel: "They had opened to light in the dingy parlour within, and which *we will now enter*" (Kavanagh 5, emphasis added).

It should be noticed that the beginning of the novel is written in the present tense, creating the impression of a relative contemporaneity of the narrating and the story. Nonetheless, there is no simultaneity of narrating time and story time, explicitly acknowledged by the implied author: "The solitary exception to which we have alluded, exists, or rather existed, for though we speak in the present, we write in the past by some years, in one of the smallest houses in the street" (Kavanagh 4). Similarly, at full length, in the last three pages, the past tense employed to narrate events is replaced by the present tense. This final convergence is introduced by the sentence: "And now, reader, one last picture before we part," which begins as follows: "It is evening, as you know, and three are sitting in the little parlour of Rachel Gray" (Kavanagh 334). The temporal gap of the narrative at the beginning of the novel, consisting of a number of years, differs from the final one, which cannot be determined on the account of an ellipsis "And thus quiet and happy years had passed away, and nothing had arrested their monotonous flow" (Kavanagh 331).

In contrast with the precise geographical location in which the story unfolds, there is no definite evidence about the temporal setting in the introductory part of the novel. However, there is a hint regarding the time of the story later in the novel, when the characters discuss the Chartists and the tenth of April. Historical records reveal that April 10, 1848 is known for the organization of a mass meeting by a new Chartist Convention which turned out to be a crucial twist for Chartist movement (Goodway 1982: 74, 79), and the period is

acknowledged as a complicated one for Julia Kavanagh, because of her tensioned relationship with her father. According to Michael Forsyth, there is a strong biographical inference in the novel: "It is difficult to avoid the likelihood that much of the background, and a significant plot element, of *Rachel Gray* has its origins in the circumstances, some years earlier, of Kavanagh herself. That significant plot element is the relationship between Rachel Gray and her father Thomas" (1999: 142). Indeed, Kavanagh was abandoned by her father and lived afterwards only with her blind mother whom she supported from her writings, experiencing meantime difficult moments as regards her detached parent (Fauset 2009: 11-13).

Undoubtedly, the relationship between Rachel and Thomas Gray is what holds the novel together. The major conflict between them is based on unshared love on the part of the father, which determines Rachel to have a special attitude towards God. The struggle is displayed in the narrative through the heroine's inner voice: "Oh! my father, my father!" she cried within her heart, "why must I stand here in darkness looking at you? Why cannot I go in to you, like other daughters to their father? Why do you not love your child?" (Kavanagh 27). The implied author considers necessary to shed light on the previous life of the heroine in order to disclose when and why the conflict appeared. In this respect, a great number of analepses are used, having an important role in the novel and serving as a foundation for the considered father-daughter relationship. Without them the reader would not be able to understand what caused this familial distance and many questions would thus be raised. From one of these retrospections, the reader finds out about the nature of Rachel's relationship with her parents:

Rachel Gray was the daughter of the grey-headed carpenter by a first wife; soon after whose death he had married again. Mrs. Gray was his second wife, and the mother of his youngest daughter. She was kind in her way, but that was at the best a harsh one. Rachel was a timid, retiring child, plain, awkward, and sallow, with nothing to attract the eye, and little to please the fancy. Mrs. Gray did not use her ill certainly, but neither did she give her any great share in her affections. And why and how should a step-mother have loved Rachel when her own father did not? When almost from her birth she had been to him as though she did not exist – as a being who, uncalled for and unwanted, had come athwart his life. Never had he, to her knowledge, taken her in his arms, or on his knee; never had he kissed or caressed her; never addressed to her one word of fondness, or even of common kindness. Neither, it is true, had he ill-used nor ill-treated her; he felt no unnatural aversion for his own flesh and blood, nothing beyond a deep and incurable indifference (Kavanagh 28-29).

This analepsis is partial, that is, it covers only a part of the time that passed by and, as a result, a gap is created between it and the first narrative (Genette 1980: 62). Yet, the attitude of both her stepmother and her father towards Rachel remains the same during their lives. Nonetheless, the emphasis is laid on Rachel's

desire to improve these faulty family connections. On the one hand, she has to cope with her domestic sufferings introduced analeptically again in a single sentence: "For all this time, and especially since the death of her sister, she suffered keenly from home troubles, from a little domestic persecution, painful, pertinacious, and irritating" (Kavanagh 52). From there on, the narrative continues with an explanation for these complicated circumstances:

Mrs. Gray vaguely felt that her daughter was not like other girls, and not knowing that she was in reality very far beyond most; feeling, too, that Rachel was wholly unlike herself, and jealously resenting the fact, she teased her unceasingly, and did her best to interrupt the fits of meditation, which she did not scruple to term "moping." When her mind was most haunted with some fine thought, Rachel had to talk to her step-mother, to listen to her, and to take care not to reply at random; if she failed in any of these obligations, half-an-hour's lecture was the least penalty she could expect (Kavanagh 52-53).

As it is obvious in this excerpt, such occurrences were numerous. So, frequency – Genette's term – at work in the novel points out to the burden Rachel has to bear. Thus, every time her mother scolded her, she submitted to her will, often giving no answer or just smiling. In this way, the heroine always manages to prevent Mrs. Gray's wrath or to put an end to the tensions between them.

On the other hand, what troubles this character indeed is the relationship with her father. This is easy to notice, as, besides other indirect clues, there is explicit evidence like the following one:

She was devoted to her step-mother; she had fondly loved her younger sister; but earlier born in her heart than these two loves, deeper, and more solemn, was the love Rachel felt for her father. That instinct of nature, which in him was silent, in her spoke strongly. That share of love which he denied her, she silently added to her own, and united both in one fervent offering (Kavanagh 34-35).

Kavanagh, analeptically again, finds a solution to the extreme concern that continues to tear apart Rachel's heart up to the end of the novel. It is a recall covering the temporal interval from the father's leaving to the day Jane died. This period of time was included in the aforementioned retrospection as well; nonetheless, another aspect is outlined here: Rachel's thinking of her father or her love for him prompts the heroine to visit him many times:

Free, as are all the children of the poor, she made her way to the street where he lived, and *many a day* walked for weary miles in order to pass by her father's door. But she never crossed the threshold, never spoke to him, never let him know who she was, until the sad day when she bore to him the news of her sister's death (Kavanagh 35-36, emphasis added).

This shows iterative narrative with indefinite specification at work, but with more or less definite determination. Its beginning is set some time after the moment

Rachel finds out that her father returned from America. Conversely, the ending is not clearly indicated in the last clause of the excerpt above, as it appears at first sight. She never spoke to him until that day, but she continued to visit him after that, too. Throughout the entire length of the narrative, four such appointments are reported. During the first one, she only gazes at her father, without having the courage to enter and speak to him. Thenceforth, the narrator is silent about the relationship between Rachel and Thomas Gray to the point when another father-daughter relationship is introduced: that between Richard Jones and Mary. This case is totally different, because the person who loves is the father, while the daughter, being spoiled, does not fully appreciate this affection. An external analepsis reveals the way Mr. Jones took care of Mary after her mother's death one year after giving birth: "His child slept with him, cradled in his arms; he washed, combed, dressed it himself every morning, and made a woman of himself for its sake" (Kavanagh 78).

Being a witness to such enormous paternal love, Rachel often pondered on her own father's reluctance to manifest affection towards her. On the other hand, it "inspired her with involuntary hope" (Kavanagh 105) and gave her boldness to go and speak to her father. So, on their second meeting, the heroine introduces herself and they have a discussion. Unfortunately, it is unsuccessful, as Rachel "sought for something there, not for love, not for fondness, but for the shadow of kindness, for that which might one day become affection – she saw nothing but cold, hard, rooted indifference" (Kavanagh 129). This coldness is extremely painful for her and hard to overcome.

One important thing to notice is that the protagonist does not discuss her feelings or thoughts with anybody. She never tells Mrs. Gray or her apprentices about her longing for her father's love. Consequently, the richest sources providing such information are the author's commentaries and the main character's interior monologue. The reader can notice that throughout the novel there are ten occasions upon which the heroine's sentiments are revealed in this way. Intensely and intently rhetorical is her inner cry: "O! my father, my father", which is reiterated four times in the novel. On the other hand, there is one single occasion when the protagonist confesses her strong desire of being together with her parent. It is their third meeting recorded by the novel, when, after Mrs. Gray's death, Rachel dares to visit her father one more time and ask him to allow her to live with him trying to convince him in the following way: "I am now your only child, [...] the only living thing of your blood, not one relative have I in this wide world; and you, father, you too are alone. Let me come to live with you. Pray let me!" (Kavanagh 198). Rachel is ready to do anything just to be with her father: to help him when necessary or to be as quiet as a mouse and not to interfere in his affairs if that is what he wants. Despite this self-sacrifice, Thomas Gray chooses to be alone. He considers himself healthy enough to need no help and refuses to

accept his daughter's offer. At first sight, this second discussion between Rachel and her parent is just as fruitless as the first one. However, it represents the only piece of dialogue within which the heroine externalizes her feelings towards her parent. This discussion along with that connected to Mary's last days are the two longest and most detailed dialogues in which Rachel was involved. In reporting these crucial events which mark the turning points of the two father-daughter relationship stories, the narrative speed is slowed down towards giving the "scenes" the necessary narrative poignancy. So, this particular game with narrative time is meant to emphasize the intensity of the truly important events of the novel in order to get the reader's sympathy. Consequently, the attention is drawn more to these slowdowns rather than to the multitude of narrative accelerations. In this respect, it is worth observing that the construction of the narrative discourse follows the principle according to which "the strong periods of the action coincid[e] with the most intense moments of the narrative while the weak periods [are] summed up with large strokes and as if from a great distance" (Genette 109). In other words, the detailed scene corresponds to dramatic content which alternates with short summary standing for insignificant parts of the narrative. Of course, in *Rachel Gray* there are no such examples when a couple of hours are reported on hundreds of pages as in modern novels. However, in comparison with the overall speed of the narrative and with explicit ellipses covering long periods of time as "nine months" (Kavanagh 204) or "years had passed away" (Kavanagh 331), scenes like the aforementioned ones can be considered the climactic moments of the story.

The events referring to Mary's last days are described at length, as this occurrence represents the end of one story of relationships between father and daughter. The narrator proleptically discloses Richard Jones's sufferings: "But it was not to be; he had but tasted the cup of his sorrows; to the dregs was he to drink it; the earthly idol on which he had set his heart was to be snatched from him; he was to waken one day to the bitter knowledge: 'there is no hope!'" (Kavanagh 293). Ambition and love dwell together in his heart and are displayed in the novel as strongly interrelated. Moreover, the failure of his business coincides with his daughter's death. This is an indication of the fact that the Victorian society, and consequently novelists of the thirties, forties, and fifties, were interested as much in family problems as in "[t]he consequences of the commercial spirit on private lives" (Kestner 1985: 200).

Rachel Gray is also characterized with reference to her occupation. Nonetheless, being created as a model to follow, she is not portrayed as worried about the financial problems or about some other material things. The heroine is concerned only with the spiritual dimension of her life. She has to cope with her harsh stepmother and oppressive Mrs. Brown. The trials are numerous, yet every time she struggles to submit, being thus triumphant. The events in which the

heroine is involved and the way in which she acts reveal her nature, her personality. Iterative narrative has a significant role in emphasizing the perfection of Rachel's character. By contrast, the traits referring to physical aspect, even if repeated throughout the novel, make the reader keep in mind that the external appearance remains the same. Hence, the emphasis is not on the physical development of the protagonist, as Victorianism claimed, but on her inner world, a characteristic common for both previous and subsequent literary trends. Rachel's main task is to accurately control her thoughts and feelings. A good example of how watchful she is in this respect can be the situation when Mrs. Brown, who lived in Rachel's house, is absent for a few weeks and the heroine feels a "positive relief". She is discontent with herself on that account: "Internally, Rachel accused herself of ingratitude because she felt glad. "It's very wrong of me, I know," she remorsefully thought, [...]" (Kavanagh 195). Her apparently inexplicable love for an indifferent father and the courage to try again and again to win his affection reinforce the idea inferred from the above that Rachel Gray is an idealized character (feature which proliferated in the Romantic Movement). Therefore, it is not surprising that, when the protagonist visits her father for the fourth time and finds him motionless in a chair, she brings him to her house, even if she understands that, from that moment on, the desire of her heart can never be fulfilled. This is the turning point of the story, when it seems that the protagonist has no possibility to resolve the conflict. Indeed, the subsequent events show that there is no hope for Rachel to have a father to love her completely, even if one day Thomas Gray utters her name and she considers this to be an expression of his affection.

Therefore, this novel deals with two stories referring to father-daughter relationships. Beginning with the moment when the narrative is interrupted to introduce the analepsis revealing Mr. Jones's past, the plot is divided into two lines of narration till Mary's death, which represents the end of one of these stories. There is only one line of narration from this event forward. This last section of the novel is truly significant, as Rachel is the connecting element, acting as a devoted daughter to both Thomas Gray and Richard Jones. Moreover, within it, one can find the answer to the question from the complication, which represents the resolution of the conflict. Since the heroine "ha[s] set [her] heart on human love" (Kavanagh 336), she is deprived of a true father. Perhaps, it does not provide a desirable disentanglement of things, but, Rachel finally accepts the idea that she will never have a completely loving father on earth. It is the same for Richard Jones. He loses his daughter, because she is an idol for him. Therefore, these two stories, which are at first sight in contrast, still have much in common. Paternal love is the essential ingredient joining them. Too much love is as bad as the absence of love.

In order to convey this message to the reader, the narrative discourse

abounds in what Genette calls pauses. Some of them are commentaries, which allow the foregrounding of the implied author, meditations written in the present, first person plural or third person singular, concerning various aspects of life, such as love, poverty, wealth, suffering:

Reader, if you think that we mean to cast a stone at the great shop, you are mistaken. We deal not with pitiless political economy, with its laws, with their workings. The great shop must prosper; 'tis in the nature of things; and the little shop must perish—'tis in their nature too (Kavanagh 272-273); For the past is our realm, free to all, high or low, who wish to dwell in it. There we may set aside the bitterness and the sorrow; there we may choose none but the pleasing visions, the bright, sunny spots where it is sweet to linger. The Future, fair as Hope may make it, is a dream, we claim it in vain. The Present, harsh or delightful, must be endured, yet it flies from us before we can say "it is gone." But the Past is ours to call up at our will. It is vivid and distinct as truth. In good and in evil, it is irrevocable; the divine seal has been set upon it for evermore (Kavanagh 10-11); The rich man has his intellect, and its pleasures; he has his books, his studies, his club, his lectures, his excursions; he has foreign lands, splendid cities, galleries, museums, ancient and modern art: the poor man has his child, solitary delight of his hard tasked life, only solace of his cheerless home (Kavanagh 75).

Others, recorded in the past, third person singular, reveal, through the narrator's voice, the heroine's nature, thoughts and feelings which are much involved with the love for her earthly father:

Her mind recovered its habitual tone; old thoughts, old feelings, laid by during the hour of trial and sickness, but never forsaken, returned to her now, and time, as it passed on, matured a great thought in her heart. "Who knows," she often asked herself, in her waking dreams, "who knows if the hour is not come at last? My father cannot always turn his face from me. Love me at once he cannot; but why should he not with time?" Yet it was not at once that Rachel acted on these thoughts (Kavanagh 195-196).

These intrusions into Rachel's soul are instruments effectively building reader sympathy and creating textual cohesion.

In assuming this, one can remark that *Rachel Gray* is forwarded along two narrative levels. Predominant is the intradiegetic level, but there are numerous shifts to the extradiegetic level, indicated by pauses/ (implied author's) commentaries on the novel as such written in the present. Some examples will be useful: "And now, if she moves through this story, thinking much and doing little, you know why" (Kavanagh 55); "We are not called upon to enter into the history of his struggles" (Kavanagh 83); "We must apologize for using italics, but without their aid we never could convey to our readers a proper idea of the awful solemnity with which Mrs. Gray emphasized her address" (Kavanagh 71-72). It is also worth emphasizing that these two levels are still separate. Therefore, no

metalepsis – violation of the narrative levels – occurs in here, as it commonly happens in modern novels (Genette 235).

The use of external focalization allows the possibility of emphasizing specific ideas and themes to satisfy the needs/ expectations of the Victorian middle-class readership. Despite the shifts from third-person sections of narrative to first-person ones, the narrator, that also functions as an external focalizer, is heterodiegetic, depicting the characters from an external standpoint, knowing and saying less than the characters know: “Whether Mrs. Gray understood him [Milton] in all his beauty and sublimity, we know not, but at least, she read him, seriously, conscientiously – and many a fine lady cannot say as much” (Kavanagh 96); “How he [Richard Jones] felt we know not, and cannot tell: none have a right to describe that grief save they who have passed through it; we dare not unveil the father’s heart: we deal but with the external aspect of things, and sad and bitter enough it was” (Kavanagh 293). The objective narrator, which is specific for many “serious” nineteenth-century novels (Genette 190) and represents an important feature of Realism, is not the only type encountered in *Rachel Gray*. It is subjectivity that marks the description of the protagonist, whose feelings and thoughts, which are imperceptible to other characters, are revealed to the reader. The latter is strongly manipulated by this device, along with the aforementioned ones, which are also used by the novelist to satisfy the demands of Victorian popular taste.

Concluding remarks

Read in Genettian terms, Julia Kavanagh’s *Rachel Gray*, seems to be a novel of great value, as it deals with the entire range of themes which preoccupied the Victorian society, such as family issues and the disreputable conditions of the lower-middle-class life. Furthermore, it bears witness to the status of the nineteenth-century Victorian novel which is not purely realistic, but preserves certain features from the previous literary trend and contains specific seeds that will develop within the subsequent modernist literary movement.

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Revivals

Aesthetic Desire: Edgar Allan Poe, Nikolaos Episkopopoulos and the Death-of-a-Beautiful-Woman Motif

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Abstract

*The purpose of the present paper is twofold: firstly, it aims to shed light on the influence Edgar Allan Poe exerted on the work of Nikolaos Episkopopoulos by providing evidence of the Greek writer having read Poe's short fiction. Specific attention is given to the development of the aesthetic tradition in Greece, a tradition to which both Poe and Episkopopoulos are closely tied. Secondly, it explores the possible intertextual relations and parallels between Poe's female ideal and Episkopopoulos' fictional representation of women as this is exemplified in the latter's *Ut Dièse Mineur* (1893). The side-by-side examination of the female heroine appearing in *Ut Dièse Mineur* reveals significant links between Episkopopoulos' tales and Poe's, highlighting the similar manner in which both writers develop the image of a sensuous female persona.*

Keywords: Aestheticism, American and Greek short fiction, Greece, intertextuality, femininity

The influence of Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) on Nikolaos Episkopopoulos (1874–1944) is quite evident and emerges in several aspects of the latter's work. At a first glance, most readers would easily recognize the similarities in style, setting and atmosphere in the work of both writers, as well as their preference for a pompous language that resonates meaningfully with the gruesome nature of their plots and crooked machinations of their characters. Existent criticism has tended to concentrate on a specific dimension of the Greek author's work: his inclination toward the macabre and the grotesque. While critics continue to explore Episkopopoulos's indebtedness to Poe, my interest lies in making sense of the ways Episkopopoulos's writing speaks back to Poe's in terms of the representation of women. In the following analysis, I will consider Episkopopoulos's *Ut Dièse Mineur* (1893) alongside an array of Poe's tales in an attempt to demonstrate that it incorporates Poe's death-of-a-beautiful-woman motif. The incorporation of this particular motif by Episkopopoulos has special significance as it leads to the development of a literary motif in the Greek writer's work, that of the beautiful, erotic, exotic, less tied to the mundane woman who perishes at the end.

In pursuit of this end, I will first make reference to Episkopopoulos's 1893 article wherein he praises Poe's artistry as a tale-writer, which proves that Episkopopoulos had read Poe's works. Next, I will focus on the development of the Aesthetic movement in Greece in order to provide an appropriate comparative and literary context for the investigation of Poe's influence on the Greek writer

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and to shed light on the literary and cultural context within which Poe was introduced to Greece. In fact, I argue that Episkopopoulos's works can be considered along the lines of the European Aesthetic movement quite at odds with the literary conventions of the time. This will preface a reading of Episkopopoulos's "Ut Dièse Mineur" (1893) alongside Poe's feminine ideal. The exploration of the female figure appearing in "Ut Dièse Mineur" alongside Poe's fictional ladies will show that the Greek writer's text incorporates Poe's death-of-a-beautiful-woman motif.

Episkopopoulos's Tribute to Edgar Allan Poe's Literary Merits

There is particular appropriateness in beginning an examination of Episkopopoulos' indebtedness to Poe with reference to the former's 1893 article wherein he pays tribute to the American author. In his article entitled "Το Σύγχρονον Διήγημα "The Contemporary Short Story" (my translation), that appeared in the high-profile periodical *To Asty*, Episkopopoulos provides an account of major practitioners of the fantasy genre such as E.T.A. Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. He then openly acknowledges Poe's brilliance as a tale-writer and praises Poe's unique ability to fuse imagination with mathematical accuracy:

Όλους ὁμως τοὺς ὑπερέβη με τὴν πλουσίαν, τὴν ἀνεξάντλητον φαντασίαν του, τὴν ἀκριβῆ, τὴν βαινουσαν μαθηματικῶς, τὴν ὡς κανόνα ἔχουσα τὴν λογικὴν, καὶ με τὴν περιγραφὴν του τὴν ἐπιμελημένην ὁ Πόου, ὁ μεγάλος συγγραφεὺς τῶν «Παραδόξων Ἱστοριῶν», ὁ ἀριστοτέχνης τῆς «Βερενίκης», καὶ τοῦ «Μαύρου Γάτου», καὶ τοῦ «Χρυσοκαράνθου», ὁ κατέχων εἰς ὑψιστον βαθμὸν τὸ δῶρον τῆς φρίκης καὶ τοῦ φόβου, ὁ ἐνοσιεῖρων εἰς τὸν νοῦν μας τὴν ἀμφιβολίαν, με τὴν ἀκρίβειάν του τὴν μαθηματικὴν, ὁ καταπλήσων ἡμᾶς με τὰς μυστηριώδεις ἀναλογίας καὶ τὰς συγγενείας τὰς ὁποίας ἀνευρίσκει μεταξύ τῶν διαφορετικωτέρων ἀντικειμένων. [It is Poe however who exceeds all others with his rich and boundless imagination that is blended with mathematical accuracy as well as with his elaborate descriptive power. It is Poe, the great author of *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, the master of "Berenice," of "The Black Cat," and of "The Gold-Bug." It is Poe who exceeds all others with his intrinsic capacity to engender terror and fear. It is Poe's skill in endowing his writings with mathematical precision that bewilders us. And it is Poe's skill in drawing mysterious analogies and connections between entirely different things that astounds us] (Episkopopoulos 2011: 102-3) (my translation).

This passage is highly revealing of the specific qualities that Episkopopoulos values in Poe: firstly, for him, Poe's works differ by their exaggerated and detailed imagery as well as the elaborateness of expression. Secondly, the Greek writer is captivated by Poe's writings that offer a disordered and fragmented world where nothing is what it appears to be; the universe in Poe's fiction, according to Episkopopoulos, is one in which mystery and logic merge, creating a reality that confounds Poe's readers. In addition, Poe's way of grounding his literary creations

in reason and mathematical accuracy, which Poe had inherited from the neoclassical period's impulse towards reason and rationality, enthral Episkopopoulos. Inspired by Poe, Episkopopoulos himself has created stories that yield both fantastic and rational interpretations thus leaving the readers in a state of bewilderment. In his comments on Poe, Episkopopoulos accomplishes two significant things: on the one hand, the Greek writer directs attention to Poe's elegant writing style and, on the other hand, he indicates Poe's writing technique with which he aligns himself. As well as confirming Episkopopoulos's adulation of and admiration for Poe's literary merits, this article suggests that the Greek writer's works must be considered in relation to the nineteenth-century movement of aestheticism and Poe's aesthetic aims.

Episkopopoulos's Aesthetic Philosophy and Edgar Allan Poe's Legacy

With realism in vogue, there was also an alternative set of concepts fermenting in the works of certain Greek men of letters: including refined language, poetic form, musicality and evocation of the deep feelings of the individual's inner world. The attempt to explore the psychological state of the individual as well as the notion of art as a realm separate from the praxis of the outside world are associated with what Apostolos Sahinis and Lena Arampatzidou call the aesthetic movement, that is to say, a particular form of fiction produced from 1892 or 1893 onwards which takes the publication of Episkopopoulos's short stories as its starting point (Arampatzidou 2012: 27; Sahinis 1981: 13).¹ Dallas even sees the movement of aestheticism as an expression of the Greek nation's call for renewal and modernization as the movement emerged alongside a series of unfortunate events such as the financial bankruptcy and the national defeat in the Greco-Turkish war of 1897.² Emerging simultaneously with tensions such as the economic crash and the defeat by Turkey, the movement of aestheticism became the repository for everything from which the Greek nation wanted to dissociate itself and it represented a sense of renewal and hope (Arampatzidou 2012: 37).

When it comes to subject matter, the desire for renewal, the emphasis on sensual pleasure and the attempt to explore the inner workings of the human mind appear in the works of the Greek aesthetes (Arampatzidou 2012: 37).³ As regards Episkopopoulos in particular, the essential drama inherent in the heroes of his short fiction is that of the individual mind orchestrated and ordered by the life of the senses (Arampatzidou 2012: 20-21). Episkopopoulos's adherence to the dissident Aesthetic tradition is essential because it sets the Greek author apart from his fellow contemporaries, reveals his cosmopolitan way of thinking and writing, and provides a rationale for reading him parallel with Poe whose name has long been associated with aestheticism and the *l'art pour l'art* (art for art's sake).

In his 1848 lecture entitled "The Poetic Principle," Poe touches upon the idea of *l'art pour l'art* asserting that literature's aim is not to mirror external reality but to generate pleasure. Speaking about poems, in particular, Poe advocates that they should be written "solely for the poem's sake," a statement that places Poe at the

heart of the aesthetic tradition. For Poe, art is not an end in itself and should not be assessed on the basis of its function to instruct, elevate readers and mirror external reality. Poe's articulation of art as being impossible to dissociate from the sphere of external reality constitutes an essential characteristic of Episkopopoulos's aesthetic philosophy too. Episkopopoulos's most explicit remarks on the relation between art and external reality are made in his 1901 article, entitled "To Dendron tis Gnoseos [The Tree of Knowledge]" (my translation) where he denounces any didactic or moral incursion from the sphere of art. Episkopopoulos reconsiders the relationship between art and life which "is the key concern of all Aesthetic criticism" (Small 1979: xii). The Greek writer offers a series of incidents to demonstrate that novels, and art by implication, can have a tremendous and in some cases devastating, impact on the readers. In so doing, Episkopopoulos contends that the experiences of life imitate art. Episkopopoulos's perspective that literature, despite being detached from the realm of everyday life, is superior to life is important for two reasons: firstly, Episkopopoulos denounces any didactic or moral implication from the sphere of art. Secondly, he points towards the language of Aestheticism and Poe who, as mentioned earlier, laid emphasis on the aesthetic values of art. Like Poe's, Episkopopoulos's aestheticism is designed to clear a theoretical space for art to function free from accountability to morality, didacticism or social uplift.

Episkopopoulos's Vision of the Feminine Ideal and Poe's Fictional Ladies

Episkopopoulos's vision of the feminine ideal is apparent throughout his longer narratives as well as his short fiction. A remarkable proliferation of feminine figures inhabits Episkopopoulos's narratives; these figures weave a spell over male protagonists, gaze intently at their lovers, perish unexpectedly or mysteriously, seduce the male characters and muse their way through Episkopopoulos's pages. Some of Episkopopoulos's stories feature delicately beautiful and erotically desirable women, while others represent emaciated and prone-to-death heroines. Some of Episkopopoulos's fictional females lack individual development and pass silently away, rarely expressing their sentiments; yet, the whole story revolves around them as they become the object of fear and desire of the male protagonists. Others have a mind of their own; suffer doubtful deaths and ensuing resurrections returning from the dead as active agents to inspire fear and terror. In either case, upon a close reading of the texts in which such female characters appear, one can come to the following conclusion: Episkopopoulos's male protagonists may idealize, be obsessed with, sublimate, disfigure or objectify women, often deny voice to women and eventually kill them. To illustrate Episkopopoulos's vision of female ideal, I will focus on Episkopopoulos's most celebrated female character, i.e., Myrrha in "Ut Dièse Mineur", as it bears a close resemblance to Poe's female ideal and represents the aesthetic female ideal that views women as an object of desire. My contention is that representations of femininity in "Ut Dièse Mineur" embody the aesthetic ideal of an erotically desirable woman who allures the narrator with some kind of

supernatural attraction; as such, in this story Myrrha plays no major part and appears as simple object of desire, but also of fear lacking specific individuality; she is only there in order to serve the representation of the narrator's emotional excesses, as object of ultimate fear and suppressed desire at once. Instead of simply fulfilling male desires, the heroine also stands for mystery and strangeness as she poses a riddle to the narrator. It is here that I find a strong connection with Poe who, as it is well known, has been very consistent in his exploration of woman as a figure of death and desire.⁴ Poe's Ligeia, Morella, Madeline and Berenice all sicken, suffer doubtful deaths and eventually perish⁴. In the context of Episkopopoulos's short fiction, Myrrha, like Ligeia, who is of "gorgeous yet fantastic beauty!" (Poe 1965: 130), is beautiful but gets brutally murdered at the end of the tale.

The death-of-a-beautiful-woman motif in Episkopopoulos's short stories, especially when we recall Myrrha, not only exemplifies his philosophy of beauty, but it also relates closely to Poe's notion of female beauty. In "Philosophy of Composition" (1846), Poe's own philosophy of beauty is expressed in the following way: "When, indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect—they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of soul —*not* of intellect, or of heart —upon which I have commented, and which is experienced in consequence of contemplating 'the beautiful'" (Poe 1984: 16). In other words, for Poe, Beauty is "an effect," and an "intense and pure" one. Poe here implies that Beauty concerns the readers' or listeners' reaction to a specific work of art. When it comes to Poe's fictional ladies, his theory of Beauty interpolating with sorrow and death becomes evident. More specifically, Poe's assessment in "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846) is that "[b]eauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones" (1984: 17). And Poe adds up to this melancholic sensibility by arguing that the death of a beautiful woman is "unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" (1984: 19). What makes the death of a beautiful woman "the most poetical" of topics is the fact that it is related to the element of desire: irresistible loveliness and the impossibility of its recovery. In designating the death of a woman in such terms, Poe makes reference to the poet and to the state he finds himself in when he loses a lover. The death of a woman certainly generates grief but it also makes the poet experience a supreme sense of self-awareness. Each time the poet reflects with sadness upon his lost love, then, another type of beauty, a sorrowful one, is created (Magistrale 2001: 10). Karen Weekes's observation is particularly instructive on this point: "[t]he woman must die in order to enlarge the experience of the narrator, her viewer" (2009: 148). Consider, for example, Berenice who ironically becomes increasingly beautiful, and her lips redden and become more desirable as her skin pales and she perishes. Poe here suggests that, through the physical transformation, women attain an eternal beauty and theoretically at least the corpse of the dead woman briefly incarnates ideality. Given, however, that death presupposes physical decay, beauty is intertwined with terror.

The conflation of beauty with misery and disease, in my opinion, supplies Episkopopoulos with an aesthetic rationale for his fascination with dying women and provides links with Poe's own theory on beauty. By killing off his ethereal ladies, Episkopopoulos establishes a close relationship between beauty and misery and illness that is firmly entrenched in the aesthetic philosophy: for the proponents of the aesthetic movement and, of course for Episkopopoulos, beauty is aligned with sorrow, decay and even infirmity (Arampatzidou 2012: 19). The character of Myrrha in "Ut Dièse Mineur" is unparalleled in demonstrating the conjunction between death, aesthetics and Poe's female ideal: she presents a spectacle at once irresistible and unbearable for the male protagonist. She also becomes a receptacle for the narrator's angst and guilt, a tabula rasa on which the narrator inscribes his needs and emotional excesses. The conjunction of death, aesthetics and Poe's female ideal functions as an essential encounter between Poe and Episkopopoulos, as will be shown in the following section.

Morbid Attraction and Immorality in Episkopopoulos's "Ut Dièse Mineur"

Read in relation to Episkopopoulos's aesthetic ideal, "Ut Dièse Mineur" prefigures by several years the writing of his critical principles, but offers an aesthetic of synaesthesia with the merging of multiple senses. "Ut Dièse Mineur," as he titled this story, is most probably linked to Beethoven's sonata inspired by the composer's unshared love for his pupil Giulietta Guicciard. The plot developing along the lines of Beethoven's music perfectly complements the plot in "Ut Dièse Mineur" thus creating a remarkable aesthetic effect. However, beyond its aesthetic import, Episkopopoulos's story depicts a world of gross distortion, of violent and immoral behaviour. In fact, it is a tale of homicide that owes much to Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart." Similarly to Poe's story, "Ut Dièse Mineur" represents an immoral male-protagonist who commits a murder in cold-blood. In the narrator's distorted moral world, the heroine's eyes are the cause of his obsession and hatred as well as the justification of his revulsion, as is the case in "The Tell-Tale Heart." The description of the female protagonist's eyes and her physical appearance in general is a defining feature in the story for it allows Episkopopoulos to relate a gripping story of terror under the guise of aestheticism.

In addition to providing an insider's view of the murderer's mind, "Ut Dièse Mineur" also revolves around the character of Myrrha, a beautiful, sustaining, illuminating, yet voiceless presence. Through the character of Myrrha, Episkopopoulos is reiterating a connection both with the Aesthetic movement as well as with Poe's feminine ideal [5]⁵. Typical to other fated ladies in Poe's fiction, Myrrha is an admixture of beauty and awe, an object of desire and fear. For nearly the first page and a half of this tale, the male protagonist describes in detail Myrrha, the female protagonist with whom presumably the narrator has a love obsession. Like several of Poe's heroines and much like Berenice who is described as being a woman of "gorgeous yet fantastic beauty!" (Poe 1965: 643), Myrrha is also of outstanding beauty:

Ἔβλεπον ὡς ἑκαθήμην δεξιόθεν τὸν λεπτὸν καταφώτιστον χνοῦν περιστρέφοντα λαμπρῶς διὰ χρυσοῦς αἰγλῆς τὴν φευγαλέαν κατανομήν τοῦ παιδικοῦ τῆς προσώπου. Τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆς τόσοσιν μεγάλους καὶ ὑγροὺς σύμβολον τῆς θελήσεως καὶ τῆς ἰσχύος τῆς καλλονῆς τῆς, καὶ τὰ χεῖλη τῆς ἐρυθρά, ἐρυθρά, προτεταμένα ὀλίγον, σύμβολον τῆς ἡδονῆς. [Sitting on the right, I was staring at the thin, luminous hair that gloriously revealed the evanescent quality of her youthful face. I was staring at her huge and lustrous eyes, symbolic of her volition and overwhelming beauty, as well as at her slightly parted, scarlet, scarlet lips, symbolic of pleasure] (Episkopopoulos 2002: 246) (my translation).

Further on in the narrative, the male protagonist also refers to Myrrha's "λεπτοὶ καὶ ἐπιμήκεις δάκτυλοι [slim and long fingers]" (Episkopopoulos 2002: 246) (my translation). By using particular language conventions — large eyes, round mouth, delicate postures — conventions that, according to Psomiades, pertain to the aesthetic movement (1997: 7), Episkopopoulos manages to represent Myrrha as a seductive object of adoration. The presentation of Myrrha's ethereal beauty is not coincidental, but it is a rather succinct expression of Episkopopoulos' aesthetic philosophy. Myrrha represents the Aesthetic female ideal that perceives woman as an "irresistible object of desire" (Psomiades 1997: 4).

Myrrha is as remarkable for her beauty as for her ability to allure the narrator. Indeed, she maintains a remarkable power over the narrator who cannot resist her, even though he wishes to: "Ἡσθανόμην ὅτι ἡ δύναμις, ἡ γοητεία, ἥτις μὲ συνεκράτει ἀρρήκτως συνηκωμένον μετὰ τοῦ πλάσματος ἐκείνου ἦτο ἀκατανόητος, καὶ ἠθελα νὰ σωθῶ, καὶ ἤξευρα ὅτι δὲν ἐδυνάμην. [I felt that her power and charm, that held me inextricably bound up with this creature, was unfathomable and I wanted to save myself, and I knew I could not]" (Episkopopoulos 2002: 250) (my translation). As a result, the hero claims that, because of her eyes' allurements, he was "μέ ἐκαμνε νὰ μὴ βλέπω τίποτε, τίποτε νὰ μὴ ἀκούω, καὶ νὰ μεθῶ αἰωνίως καὶ νὰ διψῶ τὸν ἔρωτὰ τῆς [unable to see anything, unable to listen to anything else but only be eternally inebriated by and lust for her love]" (Episkopopoulos 2002: 245) (my translation). The narrator becomes a powerless victim of the beautiful Myrrha who is more of an aestheticist object of adoration than an active participant in the story. As such, Myrrha lacks a basic quality: a voice. Much like many of Poe's heroines, Ligeia, Madeleine, Berenice to name only a few, Myrrha remains voiceless throughout "Ut Dièse Mineur"; in his tendency to objectify Myrrha as a composition of aesthetic attributes and associations, Episkopopoulos also endows her with an air of mystery and enchantment.

This atmosphere of strangeness is evident in the description of Myrrha's eyes, a description reminiscent of Poe's descriptions of "Ligeia." Lady Ligeia is depicted as having large and extraordinary dark eyes, expressive eyes that chiefly fascinate the narrator who devotes a lengthy description to them: "Those eyes! Those large, those shining, those divine orbs!" (Poe 1965: 656). Apparently, Ligeia's eyes assume an exceptional size and, as Lopes notes, "constitute indeed the uncanny body part that triggers the suspicion that Ligeia stands for more than what is shown. Thereby, the expression of Ligeia's eyes becomes a riddle to be

deciphered, a challenge that persists obsessively in the narrator's thoughts" (2010: 41-42). Ligeia's expression then is what chiefly fascinates the narrator and requires him to decipher. The reason is that Ligeia's eyes are endowed with an uncanny quality that cannot be easily explained by the male hero in his quest to interpret the mystery that they evoke, so the narrator equates the eyes with the well of Democritus: "What was it — that something more profound than the well of Democritus — which lay far within the pupils of my beloved" (Poe 1965: 656). Thus, the narrator is figuratively talking about death that entails an absence, an abyss (Lopes 2010: 42). In this respect, the mystery surrounding the heroine's eyes stands for death, a recurrent theme in Poe's work. The atmosphere of death and strangeness that Ligeia's eyes trigger can be aligned with that in Episkopopoulos's "Ut Dièse Mineur". As is the case in "Ligeia," Myrrha's eyes epitomize not only her beauty, but again evoke an air of strangeness. Episkopopoulos endows his fictional Myrrha with strangeness for the readers are told about "Τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆς τόσοῦν μεγάλους καὶ ὑγροῦς, σύμβολον τῆς θελήσεως καὶ τῆς ἰσχύος τῆς καλλονῆς τῆς [her huge and lustrous eyes, symbolic of her volition and overwhelming beauty]" (Episkopopoulos 2002: 246) (my translation). Ineffable and inscrutable, Myrrha's large and expressive eyes reflect her strong will that underpins Myrrha's dynamic presence in the story. Throughout the story, Myrrha stares intently at the narrator who cannot realize why he feels so attracted to her. The way Myrrha's eyes challenge the narrator with their reiterated strangeness suggests a connection to Poe's Ligeia; the physical consistency of both Ligeia and Myrrha creates an aura of strangeness when the texts are read in succession. It is as if Episkopopoulos is trying to textually represent the image of Myrrha as a figure of beauty, desire and mystery, an object inspiring desire and fear at the same time, a figure emblematic of most Poe's heroines.

Final Remarks

This paper has attempted to place Poe's work in a Greek context by shedding light on the American writer's influence on Nikolaos Episkopopoulos. To this effect, special emphasis has been given on the Aesthetic movement and the ways both writers are associated with it. Both writers' association with the aesthetic movement's principles is discussed in terms of the fictional representation of femininity and the concept of beauty being interpolated with death. Representations of femininity, for Poe, embody the aesthetic ideal of an erotically desirable woman who allures the narrator with some kind of supernatural attraction. Pointing to Poe's female ideal, the paper analyses how Myrrha, the female figure inhabiting Episkopopoulos's "Ut Dièse Mineur," is very much like Poe's fictional ladies in appearance and in character. Myrrha epitomizes Poe's vision of the female ideal, thus perpetuating Poe's death-of-a-beautiful-woman motif: she plays no significant part in the story, appears as mere mechanisms of the plot, without character or individuality, and as a simple object of desire, she permeates an atmosphere of strangeness and eventually dies. In addition to demonstrating Episkopopoulos's indebtedness to Poe, "Ut Dièse Mineur" is

important from a literary perspective because it provides the first specimen of Aesthetic style as manoeuvred through the final decade of the nineteenth century in Greece.

Notes

¹ For a more thorough analysis of Aestheticism, see M.A.R. Habib, *A History of Literary Criticism: From Plato to the Present*.

² For additional information on the social and financial conditions of the time, see Roderick Beaton, 1999: 66-127.

³ Other Greek authors who embraced the principles of Aestheticism are Konstantinos Christomanos (1867-1911), Pavlos Nirvanas (1866-1919), Pericles Yiannopoulos (1869-1910) and Platon Rodokanakes (1883-1919). See Arampatzidou 2012: 37; Dallas 1997: 13; Sahinis 1981: 170; Xefloudas 1957: 12. For additional information on these specific writers and their works, see Stelios Xefloudas, *Nirvanas, Christomanos, Rodokanakis and Others*.

⁴ In order to understand Poe's obsession with female characters one ought to consider his own biography: Poe lost his mother, Eliza Poe; his foster mother, Fanny Allan; the mother of one of his friends, Jane Stanard; and his own spouse, Virginia Clemm. The bibliography on Poe's life is immense; some recent sources include: Fisher, B. *The Cambridge Introduction to Edgar Allan Poe*; Hayes, K. *Edgar Allan Poe*; Hutchisson, J., *Poe*.

⁵ Myrrha's name is subject to varying interpretations. Arampatzidou and Kalliopi Ploumistaki suggest that it could either evoke the Greek word myrra meaning "perfumes" or the Greek word moira meaning "fate." In the first case Myrrha's name connotes lust and feminine vanity, whilst in the second Myrrha's name is indicative of the impending fatal event of the story (Arampatzidou 2012: 189; Ploumistaki 2008: 184). In my view, Myrrha's name is a fine example of Episkopopoulos's carrying over into his prose fiction the lyrical effects that are associated with poetry. As I mentioned earlier, Episkopopoulos's fictional writings are more like rhythmical prose poems rather than rigid prose narratives. In this story, Episkopopoulos develops his philosophy that the artifact's literary form and its idea or, as he says, its lyrics should be in perfect harmony. In choosing a name that alludes to a sensory output, the Greek author probably wishes to endow his heroine with certain characteristics, i.e., make her sensual, pleasing, beautiful and erotic; these attributes are closely aligned with both the story's central theme and its aesthetic implications. Whatever the case, the Greek transcription of the heroine's name—Myrrha—is closer to the word "perfume."

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PhD Thesis Review

Pompiliu Ștefănescu, *Representations of Cultural Identities in the Poetic Discourse of Ezra Pound: a Study into the Imagery of the Other* (unpublished PhD thesis, Galați, 2011)

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Dealing with the cultural images of the foreign (or the Other) and with his imaginary/ imagined projections, imagology was crystallised in the latter half of the twentieth century as an interdisciplinary approach which combines history of mentalities, ethnology, anthropology and sociology, in its investigation of the questions of alterity, identity, acculturation, deculturation, cultural alienation or the social imaginary. In what literature is concerned, literary image is also a carrier of a collection of ideas about the foreign Other, which, in time, goes through a socialising and literaturising process. Especially targeted by imagology are: travelogues, essays, drama and literary prose, and less, if at all, poetry.

Pompiliu Ștefănescu’s doctoral thesis, *Representations of Cultural Identities in the Poetic Discourse of Ezra Pound: a Study into the Imagery of the Other*, elaborated under the supervision of Professor Michaela Praisler, and defended in 2011 at “Dunarea de Jos” University of Galati, Faculty of Letters, is a pleasant surprise, precisely because it sets out (starting with the title) to refute this latter aspect: poetic discourse cannot be either omitted or underestimated as a source or as an archive of representations of some cultural realities, of the images which translate a social, cultural, ideological and imaginary space in which the Self may perceive itself in relation to the Other.

The case study proposed is that of the American poet Ezra Pound, whose overwhelming role in defining and promoting a modernist aesthetics in poetry is considered as being double-articulated: on the one hand, Pompiliu Ștefănescu refers to “his innovations in poetic art”, as a promoter of Imagism (in which language is distilled down to its essence by an acerbic suppression of lexical ballast, and in which visual image becomes fundamental for the poetic expression), but, on the other hand, underlines the fact that Pound “would have created a poetics of imagist representation at more levels of signification” by which the apparent referentiality of the actual image is concentrically overlapped with imagological meanings and, last but not least, with cultural symbols. This also justifies the complementary resort to cultural anthropology, which, in turn, may reveal the engagement of the poetic persona in an operational scheme

originating from the cultural history of mankind, a mechanism by which the poetic discourse resemanticises, rewrites and recontextualises a diverse cultural memory, exploding in “multitudes of significant selected from a wide range of cultural contexts”. At this level, the image, as a symbolic language within a literary system, becomes not an exercise in mirroring the self in alterity but a reconfiguration or, better said, an annihilation of that *écart* (in Daniel-Henri Pageaux’s terms) or tempo-spatial distance which separates various cultural realities, owed to the use of poetic masks, by which Pound “places his *persona* somewhere between the position of the perceiving self and the reflection of the self”, anticipating the ambivalence of what Homi Bhabha would term “the hybrid condition”. In the author’s view, it is precisely this hybridisation – which has a dual character, being at the same time “aesthetic and cultural” – that explains the heterogeneous and de-territorialised writing, able to assimilate cultural diversity through its inoculation in the matrix of Pound’s modernism.

Therefore, aside from the second chapter (*Imagology, Cultural Anthropology and the Discourse of Ezra Pound*), which is mostly theoretical, aiming at explaining the directions, methods and concepts of imagology - as defined in the programmes of the French (Jean-Marie Carré, Marius-François Guyard, Gilbert Durand, in Grenoble, or Daniel-Henri Pageaux, in Paris) and the German comparatists (Hugo Dyserinck, in Aachen and Joep Leerssen, in Amsterdam) -, of cultural anthropology, in the footsteps of Leo Frobenius and Claude Lévi Strauss, and also of postcolonial studies (primarily dealing with Said’s *Orientalism*), another direction of image studies necessary to the proposed approach, the undertaking advances a configurative, iconic and, last but not least, polyphonic analysis of the modernist discourse of the poet considered to have set out “from the centre of an American reality marked by cultural provincialism towards the margins of the European continent, always in search for the roots of cultural tradition, farther and farther to the East”.

Thus, the first chapter (*Ezra Pound Between Wor(l)ds. A Multiple Perspective*) redesigns the biographic trajectory of an extravagant and diversified life, as Pound’s life seems to be through its melting of cultural self-exile with the visionary spirit, of self-erudition with fascist collaborationism, or of genius with madness or the violent depressive crises which darken his last years. It follows that Pound may be read as an exemplary modern subject, fragmented between two worlds, between centre and periphery, between tradition and novelty, prosaic and sacred, history and dream. This is what determines both duality and the obsession for searching for a past able to absorb the present, for a centre able to embed the margin, or for an identity able either to integrate or to multiply in the diversity of the Other. In this configuration, this hypothesis (and leitmotif of the thesis) is contextualised by reference to a consistent and carefully selected corpus of critical studies which reflect the present state of the art of Pound’s exegesis. Then, it is tested through the decoding of Pound’s poetics (combining the perspectives of relational semantics, semiology and pragmatics) as both “(inter)cultural discourse” and “representation form of some structures of

authority”, owed to the intertextuality specific to Pound’s poetry, which combines literary collage and complex allusions with minute juxtaposition techniques and multiple points of view in the fragmentary and fragmented image flow, with an impact that is almost physical and aggressive to the reader.

Although Pompiliu Ștefănescu wishes his research to be supported by various Poundian texts, “including his poetry and prose, his literary guides, his contributions to periodical and even his radio speeches”, the two large chapters which apply the imagological and anthropological perspectives in the textual analysis (*Textual Representations of Self vs. Otherness in the Discourse of Ezra Pound* and *The Masks and the Mirrors*) mainly focus on the ample poem designed along the lines of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, i.e. *The Cantos*.

On the one hand, reference is made to the artist’s exile experience, essentially defined as a state of mind whose values inherently correlate with separation and rupture. Thus, exile becomes an important catalyst of poetic imagination, which strives to retransform the image of rupture into an image of connection, often recollecting or projecting the reality of another place (be it distant in time and space) on the land of exile. This explains the co-existence of “the auto-images of identity and American cultural space” and “the hetero-images of the European and Asian spaces” as a recurrent topos of *The Cantos*, read by Pompiliu Ștefănescu as an imagotypical text which subverts its spatial and temporal landmarks through the poet’s “two-directional perspective” (viz. dichotomies such as America-Europe, East-West) and through the use “of time as double, past and present, thanks to frequent temporal leaps which engage a transfer of meaning between different historical episodes and cultural realities”.

On the other hand, the thesis tackles the question of the seduction of the poet’s duality through mirrors (faithful to the subject, the projection is real and, at the same time, it is a phantasm, a metaphor for the ambiguity of the relation between spectant and spected), as well as that of his transfiguration through the use of masks (which ensure the metamorphosis of the subject into a new identity, having, at the same time, protecting and transcendental valences). Inspired from the Japanese *Noh* theatre and the poetry of Provençal troubadours, from the Latin classical or Oriental poetry, these poetic masks/ voices are as many hypostases of the diversity interiorised as theatre of the self, inasmuch as, in the author’s opinion, they call forth “episodes accumulated in cultural memory” of mankind, in view of “expanding the frame of reference” of Pound’s texts into the universal. A writing permanently rejecting its framing, its rooting in a single national cultural tradition is symptomatic, as Pompiliu Ștefănescu rightfully remarks, for the internationalism promoted by the aesthetics of Pound’s modernism. However, the polyphony of *The Cantos*, which suggests an identity that speaks itself through the multiple voices of the Other, also leads to the depersonalisation of the poetic discourse, which appears “divided between the various voices present in his texts and the author’s role to permanently (re)interpret and (re)read his texts”. It is also what triggers “the alienation sentiment” which “penetrates Pound’s lines”, as well as the programmatic sealing of the poet into language, which turns him into “the

prisoner of his own techniques, being no longer able to control the unleashed meanings presented by the *images* of his texts." An invitation to reconsider the antonymic relations between Self and Other, subject and object, interpret-text and reality, dominated and dominant as reversible, with interchangeable terms.

To conclude, the thesis (re)presents itself as an intellectual, captivating study based on a solid and complex bibliography, synthetized but also "speculated" in the logical and coherent argument of the proposed case study. Perhaps it might be opportune, in the palimpsest of images identified and analysed by Pompiliu Ștefănescu, to identify a (better represented) exercise in recovering the history of the reception of an already canonical writer, and a possible excursion into the extra-literary semiosis, to discuss the negotiation of Pound's image at the level of the public discourse. This is just a suggestion for the published version of this thesis which is, nevertheless, an original and valuable contribution to the exegesis of Ezra Pound's works.

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