Cultural Intertexts

Year X
Volume 13/2023

Special section:

Representations of the Danube in
Literature, Music and Visual Arts

Cultural Intertexts

Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies published under the aegis of:
- ∇ Faculty of Letters – Department of English
- ∇ Centre for *Interface Research of the Original and Translated Text. Cognitive and Communicational Dimensions of the Message*

Editing Team

ISSN-L 2393-0624/ ISSN 2393-0624/ E-ISSN 2393-1078

Full content available at www.cultural-intertexts.com
Abstracting & Indexing: Scopus, ERIH+, CEEOL, DOAJ, EbscoHost, Index Copernicus, ProQuest, MLA

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*** The contributors are solely responsible for the scientific accuracy of their articles.**

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Editor's Note

This year's issue of *Cultural Intertexts* hosts a guest section dedicated to "Representations of the Danube in Literature, Music and Visual Arts", including articles collected and edited by Monica Manolachi, from the University of Bucharest, in partnership with scholars from "Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati.

The impact and avatars of the Danube are tracked in Romanian literature, with emphasis on: the construction of cultural spaces and associated identities in Queen Marie's writing; the limits of fictionality and the narrative challenges of Mircea Eliade's *Miss Christina*; exile, migration, and the trauma of separation with novelists from Banat (Sorin Titel, Miloš Crnjanski, Danilo Kiš, Herta Müller and others); the metamorphosis of the blue Danube into its black counterpart in the poetry signed by detainees in the communist forced labour camps of the Danube-Black Sea Canal. Universal literary texts encapsulating Hungarian culture are also selected in view of highlighting the real and represented river (*The White King* by György Dragomán, *Train to Budapest* by Dacia Maraini, *Under Budapest* by Ailsa Kay and *Los Amantes Bajo el Danubio* by Federico Andahazi). Moreover, the Danube – in shape and ethos – is traced at the level of urban landscapes (Galați, Brăila, Sulina) where natural and artificial watercourses indicate tradition and generate renewal. The river is also cartographied to reveal past realities, which only inhabit collective memory today; the reference is to the island of Ada-Kaleh, which, although no longer on the map, is recreated in popular culture. In music, the Danube is shown to take on additional consequence and to communicate in plural ways, charged with cultural significance; the case studies include Romanian folk songs, Ioan Ivanovici's waltz and George Grigoriu's operetta "Danube Waves", and four film soundtracks. Last but not least, snapshots of the river – which emerges as a shape shifter – are collated from photography, literature and sculpture to unveil colourful waterscapes, latent musical scores and entire worlds in words which tell *her*story.

The second part of the volume, "On Gender and (Re)writing Patterns", comprises articles which cover broader solid and fluid, real and imagined spaces, and which are aimed at: exploring the connections between ghostwriting and spectrality, as emerging from Robert Harris's intertextual

novel with a political substratum *The Ghost*; exposing neoliberalism in the editorial practices of scholarly journals in higher education, and encouraging feminist repurposing; discussing the politics of (re-)representing men and women, as well as the strategies of (re)constructing gender identity in fiction with John Fowles, Kurt Vonnegut, Joseph Heller and Robert Lowell.

The editors of *Cultural Intertexts* wish to express deep gratitude to reviewers, contributors and partners alike. The yearly publication of the series would not be possible without their academic expertise, dedication and teamwork.

Michaela Praisler

PART I

Representations of the Danube in Literature, Music and Visual Arts

Collected and edited by Monica Manolachi

Water Waves, Sound Waves, down the River, up the Staves: Representations of the Danube in Romanian Music

Alina BOTTEZ*

Abstract
The present article is the second part of a study that explores, from a cultural studies perspective, the way in which the Danube has inspired the music of its riparian countries across the ages. The first part, which will appear in another publication, analyses significant works composed in the other nine European countries crossed by the river, while this second part focuses on folklore, urban songs, operetta, and film music composed in Romania – the land of the delta. As chance will have it, the first part will be published later than the second. Starting from the physical and metaphysical kinship between water and sound waves, this article shows how the Danube has constantly loomed large in the musical creation on its Romanian banks, reflecting the way of life of the inhabitants, their customs and traditions, their mentalities and philosophies, also preserving information about long-gone local places and conferring immortality (or at least an afterlife) to ephemeral generations. Stressing the river's function as border meant both to separate and to unite lands and peoples and to bring into bold relief both their similarities and differences, the study underlines another paradoxical duality of the Danube: its versatility and its individuality. Analysing a selection of folk songs, Ioan Ivanovici's famous waltz "Danube Waves", George Grigoriu's eponymous operetta, and four films from the perspective of their soundtrack, the article concludes that it is opportune to tackle the great shapeshifting river through music – a language that needs no translation and a journey that knows no borders – in order to capture one more facet of its cultural significance.

Keywords: *Cultural studies, music, cinema, operetta, mentalities*

Water and sound are organically connected through the way in which they travel – namely wave motion, which is fascinatingly described in physics as the "propagation of disturbances – that is, deviations from a state of rest or equilibrium – from place to place in a regular and organized way. Most familiar are surface waves on water, but both sound and light travel as wavelike disturbances" (Britannica). They share movement, vibration, and oscillation. And this physical as well as metaphysical yearning for balance has rendered

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both of them prone to being associated with emotional turmoil and, thus, with poetry, music, painting, and even sculpture.

In a cultural studies approach, the present article sets out to show how this great river has constantly loomed large in the musical creation on its Romanian banks, reflecting the inhabitants' way of life, their customs and traditions, their mentalities and philosophies, also preserving information about long-gone local places and conferring immortality (or at least an afterlife) to ephemeral generations.

Romania – the country of the Delta, a musical treasure

"All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea *is* not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again" (Ecclesiastes 1:7, King James Bible). Romania contains the largest section of the Danube – 1075 km, more than a third of the whole length of the river. In primary school, pupils learn that their country looks like a bunch of flowers and the Danube is the ribbon that ties and ornaments it. It discharges 6550 cubic metres per *second* into the sea, and yet the sea is *never* full. The beauty of this philosophical question contemplated in the Bible can be considered one of the many everyday miracles of our world. Physical reality mingles with art in the perception of the Danube continuously, and the great poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843) wrote in his epoch-making [1] poem "Der Ister" that "It seems almost / To run backwards: / I'd think it should flow / From the East. / Much could be said / About that," using the Christian symbolic metonymy that light comes from the East and blending it with an entirely cultural and intellectual view that considers Greek classicism to be deeply formative.

If the German imaginarily reverses the course of the Danube to explain how all the legacy of the Orient was bestowed on his country, Romanians feel that the Danube is theirs with its spring *and* its delta, just as the noun *mouth* is ambivalent, suggesting a point of origin when, in fact, in the terminology of navigation, it designates the point of discharge. "How proud today's Romania is of its ancient past, especially of the combative Draker king, becomes clear when you see the Decebalus [2] monument at the mouth of the Mraconia [3], just before the small town of Tekija. The Tabula Traiana [4] is close by, the colossal monument seems like a provocative answer of the historical opponent" (Trötschinger 2013: 271) [5].

Danube-inspired folklore

As the whole width of Romania is crossed by the Danube, folk songs inspired by it have stemmed from many areas. Thus, "Dunăre, Dunăre" ("Danube, Danube") is a girl's song that evokes a (probably faithless) lover whom she has

thrown over a tall maple (no doubt in wishful thinking). She describes him using the discourse of Romania's national folk ballad, *Mioriţa* (*The Little Sheep*), interestingly taking the Danube as interlocutor. She invokes it as "road without dust and without grooves" [6] and blames it for having drained/dried her heart, an image normally associated with droughts, not water. The Danube thus becomes a witness of intimate suffering. But a fascinating metamorphosis has occurred to this song and new lyrics have been written in order to express the brotherhood and good neighbourly relations between Romanians and Serbs, only separated by the Danube. In this version it is sung by a Serbian woman and a Romanian man who switch languages. The Danube becomes a cumbersome barrier that makes it more difficult for the two peoples to come together, even if they are one and the same: "Dunăre, Dunăre, între noi ai închis hotarele! Ne ţii departe cu apele!" ("Danube, Danube, between us you have closed the borders! You keep us apart with your waters!")

The Dobrudjan song "Hai, Dunărea mea" ("Lo, My Danube") makes use of the tradition of the pathetic fallacy in which the girl contrasts the quiet impassibility of the river with her own love torment and longing. All the water in the Danube cannot extinguish the fire of a heart in love.

Another Dobrudjan song, "Dunăre, pe apa ta" ("Danube, on Your Water"), is also a love song intoned by a fisherman's daughter in love with a young fisherman whom she asks to take her in his boat, as she is not afraid of the waves. Living in close symbiosis with the river, human beings seem to turn amphibian.

Entirely different, the fast-paced "Dunăre, Dunăre lină" ("Danube, Smooth Danube"), with a vigorous cimbalom accompaniment, is yet another love song in which the girl asks the good Danube to carry her heavy tears away, as her lover is sailing on a ship and has left without eating or drinking. The same folk area has also engendered "Dunăre cu valuri line" ("Smooth-Waved Danube"), a slower tune on puzzling reflections – "He who sails by ship / Sings and quenches his longing. / He who sails in a barge / looks for his love. / We ride in an ox-drawn cart / And live our love in twain." [7]

Many other songs come to complete the picture of the Danube that accompanies, mirrors or contrasts all aspects of everyday life, such as "Curge Dunărea la Vale" ("The Danube Is Flowing Downstream") or the splendid "Dunăre cu apă lină" ("Smooth-Watered Danube") – an old modal Dobrudjan song in which the waves comfort the love turmoil of the girl, who asks the river to tell her where her lover's house is, if it can speak as well as it can travel.

But not only folk music is profoundly inspired by the Danube in Romania. Light music songs such as "Oraşul de la Dunăre" ("The Town by the Danube") are part of the urban lore. This is an affectionate description of Galaţi, the greatest port on this river.

Ioan (Iosif) Ivanovici's waltz "Valurile Dunării" ("Danube Waves"), 1880

However, the most important musical creation associated with the Danube is definitely Ioan (Iosif) Ivanovici's waltz "Valurile Dunării" ("Danube Waves," 1880). Ivanovici [8] (1845-1902) was born in Timişoara/Alba-Iulia [9], but joined an infantry fanfare in Galaţi. He thus settled in Moldavia and studied music in Iaşi. In 1900 he became general inspector for military music in Romania, and his compositional interests oscillated between dances and military songs – over 300 works – waltzes [10], polkas, mazurkas [11], gallops, quadrilles, marches, many of which are lost today (Caraman Fotea).

In the whole of Europe, *la Belle Epoque* sees the advent of a new genre – urban musical miniatures meant for entertainment in cabarets, cafés-concerts, garden follies, or private parties. In Romania, the main influence was French, but German and Austrian trends left their imprint too and the first felicitously adapted Viennese waltz in Bucharest was "O, du lieber Augustin"[12] (Caraman Fotea 2017).

The power of invention of Ivanovici's composition is truly outstanding, as he chains at least eight waltz themes. Most of them are Western through and through, especially Viennese. Only one of them, in minor key, evinces slightly exotic oriental sonorities and may have influenced the refrain of "Tum-balalaika," [13] one of the favorite folk songs of Eastern European Jews (Ashkenazim) in Yiddish that circulated in Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Moldova, as well as in Israel and the USA. [14]

For Romanians who are familiar with Ivanovici's waltz as part of their national cultural legacy today, it is difficult to realise the degree of universal fame that it has reached after it was first published in 1880 by Constantin Gebauer, with a dedication to his wife. The gate to fame was opened by the fact that, out of 116 musical works written by reputed composers from all over the world, "Danube Waves" won the competition for the great honour of becoming the official 'anthem' of the Paris Universal Exhibition in 1889 [15], the same edition that inaugurated the Eiffel Tower. It was later printed at the Remick publishing house in New York but… as composed by Johann Strauss the Younger! Touring on the territory of today's Romania, Strauss had included the waltz in the repertoire of his orchestra, hence the publisher's mistake. Subsequently, the error was corrected and the waltz appeared at over twenty [16] publishing houses, among which Ricordi, Shot, and National Music. It was performed extensively in Europe, especially in Germany (and in Berlin it was also staged as a ballet), Austria [17] and in Paris. German newspapers called Ivanovici the Romanian Strauss (Caraman Fotea 2017).

An even greater impetus was given to this waltz by its transmediation [18] on screen: Marlene Dietrich appeared playing "Danube Waves" on the piano in Josef von Sternberg's [19] successful 1931 American pre-Code [20]

romantic spy film *Dishonored*. However, the film that consecrated the waltz was the musical *The Jolson Story* [21] (1946), retitling it "The Anniversary Song" with lyrics by Al Jolson and Saul Chaplin. In this variant, the connection with the Danube is completely lost: "Oh, how we danced on the night we were wed / We vowed our true love, though a word wasn't said / The world was in bloom, there were stars in the skies / Except for the few that were there in your eyes."[22] However, it became so popular as to be included in the Billboard Hot 100, where it stayed for fourteen weeks in 1947 and ranked as No. 2. It thus gained such momentum that it was rapidly taken over by great singers such as Guy Lombardo, Dinah Shore, Tex Beneke and Glenn Miller's orchestra, Andy Russell and Paul Weston, Artie Shaw and his New Music orchestra, Django Reinhardt and Quintette du Hot Club de France, a. o. Later, the pleiad of musicians that interpreted it included Bing Crosby, Rosemary Clooney, Eva Cassidy, Mitch Miller, Joni James, Frank Sinatra, Andy Williams, and Tom Jones [23]. Starting with 2001, André Rieu included a "Danube Love Medley for violin & pops orchestra" in his international concert repertoire, made of "Danube Waves" [24] and Lehár's aria "Liebe, du Himmel auf Erden" from his operetta *Paganini* (Dulea 2013, online). "Danube Waves" was popularised in Korea in the 1920s by soprano Yun Shim-doc as "The Psalm of Death" (Lee 2006: 3). Ivanovici's waltz continued to appear on famous film soundtracks such as *Mayerling* (1968), *Falling in love again* (1980), *Avalon* (1980), *Payback* (1999) and Michael Dudok De Wit's *Father and daughter* that won the Oscar for best short animated film in 2000. The whole world, including the Romanian public, could hear it in the famous TV series *M.A.S.H.* (season 9, ep.14) and *Married with Children/The Bundys* (season 1, ep. 6) (Dulea 2013).

To go back to the Danube, Ivanovici's symphonic music succeeds in summoning a visual and kinetic image of the flowing river – ominous in the introduction, then carefree, nostalgic or playful in its many themes. The title was initially "Pe malurile Dunării" ("On the Banks of the Danube"); the lyrics for the first variant were written by A. Pappini [25], and for the second (1888) by Carol Scrob [26], slightly altered by Aurel Felea in 1970 into the text that is generally known today [27] (Dulea 2013). This text – another love poem – is the only one among all those that we have discussed so far that closely associates the Danube with singing and dancing, as the love of the couple is now a waltz that the Danube is said to carry away on its silver waves.

The manuscript of this epoch-making waltz is preserved at the Jewish Community Centre in Lugoj, as the 'muse' who inspired this composition was a little Jewish girl, Sara Fried. Ivanovici met her and years later came back and gave her this "thin cardboard brochure, 78×88 mm in size, on which the composer had written all the five musical stanzas of the famous waltz in miniature," as the late Lugoj-born conductor, composer and musicologist Tobias Schwager testified in an article published on 20 September 1985 in

Revista mea (*My Magazine*) in Israel (qtd. in Dulea). The dedication on this manuscript is "Donauwellen Walzer, von I. Ivanovics für Fräulein Sara, gewidmet und geschrieben für Fräulein Sara"[28] (qtd. in Dulea 2013).

***Valurile Dunării* (*Danube Waves*) – George Grigoriu's operetta, 1974**

All these very few details known about Ivanovici's life and work were carefully assembled and, from revered composer, he also became the character of an operetta whose title and subject are *Valurile Dunării* (*Danube Waves*). The work "pencils the moving personality of the composer [Ivanovici]" (Sbârcea 1985: 291). The author, George Grigoriu (1927-1999), was already known as part of Trio Grigoriu – a vocal group formed of three brothers [29] born on the Danube, in Brăila, who composed the music, wrote the texts, and interpreted their own songs – light music that, as time went by, started borrowing even rock features, which was very forward at that time: "The trio tackled both jazz and light music, Latino, Afro-Cuban, or swing rhythms, while from the point of view of their vocal interpretation style, they used close harmony, being especially influenced by the American vocal groups in fashion at the time" (Andrei Tudor 2023: 30-2).

George Grigoriu, however, continued very serious musical studies and, little by little, besides continuing to write songs for the trio, started orchestrating other composers' music, writing film music [30], and, finally, writing music for great stars of the time – especially Margareta Pâslaru. Subsequently, he started composing much more complex music – "musicals, revue, ballets, choral and instrumental music, 3 vocal-symphonic" works (Andrei Tudor 2023: 77).

At the beginning of the 70s, he wrote music for several films produced by Englishmen, who invited him to Britain and proposed he should settle there and be hired by a cinema studio. He surprised them by saying that he had to go back to Romania and finish the operetta he had started – *Danube Waves*. This opus, on a libretto by Aurel Storin, has absolutely no light music sonorities. Unfortunately, there was only one production – during the 1973-74 season at the Galați Opera House, at a time when operetta was very popular, as it already had a very solid tradition: "From [the nineteenth] century we can talk about the beginnings of an autochthonous lyric theatre due to certain inspired vaudevilles, operettas strewn with pleasant and winning melodies, and operas not devoid of accomplished section" (Popovici 1974: 139). As Moisescu and Păun remark, "Operetta has rich and strong traditions in our country. (…) The pioneers of Romanian theatre saw this form of intellectual activity not as mere entertainment, but as an efficient means to satirise the mores and feuds of the society of the age" (1969: 15). Romanian music, in general, had made a leap and joined the rest of Europe in its modern discoveries: "Receptive to innovation

and profoundly significant changes, the composers extended our audience's horizon of sensibility with ample creations. (…) Pages of intense lyricism, deep meditation (…) gained a steadfast place in the creation of the most important representatives of Romanian symphonism" (Brâncuşi 1969: 206-7).

The action of Grigoriu's operetta takes place in the second half of the nineteenth century in Galaţi, where Ivanovici was working. The libretto opens with this splendid literary introduction:

> This performance starts in the foyer of the theatre. In the folly installed right in the middle of the foyer, a military fanfare is playing promenade music – softly, rockingly. In this neurotic century, haunted by speed and deafened by noises, the waltz – charmingly murmured by the fanfare – will offer the audience the surprise of certain memories that, with the passage of time, seem to become fresher, more persistent. Young people might see the fanfare as a curiosity. But here points of view are of no concern. The fanfare will be placed at the centre; it is only a way, a device, a reality that might express and recompose – from shards of biography and songs, and especially from legends – the figure of Iosif Ivanovici, a brilliant artist and ardent patriot who, to his glory and that of Romanian art, has given *DANUBE WAVES* to the world (Storin 1973, n. p.)

The plot is thus introduced as a story placed midway between reality and legend, while music is not only the medium of the operetta, but also its subject, in an early instance of meta-composition. Certain names are historically accurate, such as Lieutenant Ivanovici, the protagonist, or Carol Scrob – the lyricist (although presented as the first and only author of the text of the waltz rather as the second). Other names are fictionalized, possibly because of the families' reluctance to have their names made public: G(h)ebauer, the name of the initial publisher, and his wife are renamed Mihai and Didona Sterescu, as from the telltale dedication on the original score Storin invents a love story between the composer and the publisher's wife in a typical instance of postmodern retrospective reconstruction. Sara Fried and her mother are rechristened Otilia and Mrs Protopopescu, names that erase all Jewish resonances. The dramatis personae include a copyist, a conductor of the Civic Guard fanfare, a gagis [31], waltzers and… Johann Strauss! The stage directions include poetic indications such as "a frantic overflow of music and dance and colour" or "the city's box of feelings" (Storin 1973: scene I, p. 2). The erroneous publication of Ivanovici's waltz as composed by Strauss is here theatrically 'translated' as a misunderstanding: the fanfare conductor thinks he is to perform Strauss' latest waltz when in fact it is one of Ivanovici's (another waltz at the beginning of the operetta, not *Danube Waves*). Humour, essential to an operetta libretto, is built less coarsely than in other titles of the genre, through genuinely comic gags such as the fact that the trombone player keeps trying to

stand up each time Strauss' name is mentioned – out of respect. The Moldavian accent [32] is another source of fun – in the orderly's speech.

Patriotism is another red thread in the libretto, as Ivanovici tells Sterescu, for instance, that his "heart sings in Romanian" (Storin 1973: scene II, p. 1), while in his first aria, in G major, he sings "Romanian blood flows in my veins." The music does not sound like typical patriotic songs; instead, the chorus intones a folk refrain – "Mugur, mugur, mugurel" ("burgeon"), which enshrouds the whole piece in the traditional ethos of the forefathers. In the same aria, the composer declares that from wherever he might be in the world, he always returns to the Danube banks, and describes Romania as the country where songs bloom (Grigoriu 1973) [32].

Ivanovici's second aria is the famous "Muzica" ("Music"), which has long ceased to be a tenor operetta aria and has turned into a creed for all singers, regardless of their vocal *Fach* [34]. Best known for her superb interpretation of this felicitous miniature is soprano Angela Gheorghiu: "Believe me, it always meets with great success. This aria is the hymn of my life" (qtd. in Andrei Tudor 2023: 81). The text of the aria reveals how, on all the charming paths of life's journey, Ivanovici carries the Danube in his heart.

The scene in which Ivanovici composes the waltz comes at the end of the operetta; its doleful, mournful air is justified as gushing forth from the pain of his impossible love for an honourable married woman. The moment of inspiration is brilliantly captured as he sits down and starts humming the tune and throwing a few chords on the piano. After the prophecy pronounced by Cecală, the copyist, who tells him that the waltz no longer belongs to him, but is a treasure of the whole world (Storin 1973: scene VI, p. 11), the climactic end of the operetta engulfs the audience in the full-blown orchestral version of the *Danube Waves*. The sets disappear and, over walls and the borders of time, dozens of beautiful young couples flood the stage waltzing. Storin poetically concludes that this apotheosis marks the centennial of the waltz, which has survived untouched because of the genius and fervent patriotism of a Romanian artist. This winds up the operetta that was meant to be a portrait of and a homage to the artist who, in a moment of sublime inspiration, gave *Danube Waves* to the world (Scene VI, p. 12).

The most interesting turn of the libretto is its permanent parallelism between Ivanovici and Strauss. The Colonel tells Ivanovici: "I heard that an Italian editor asked Strauss what he thought of your endeavours. 'If he lived in Vienna – the composer answered him – you would ask Ivanovici what he thinks of Johann Strauss' endeavours" (Storin 1973: scene III, p. 4). Ivanovici thanks him for this "legend" which the Colonel has invented. The latter declares: "I am proud that here, near *my* Danube, near this Romanian shred of land, there is a heart that can sing at the level of the great and civilized Europe" (Storin 1973: scene III, p. 4; italics mine). The implication, however, is not

particularly flattering for Romania. Scrob tells Didona that the Danube is full of spells and that he is certain that one of the most bewitched songs will surge from it (Storin 1973: scene III, p. 6). However, the most original is Scene VI, whose action takes place on the Danube bank, "At the Quarantine" – the place where the border quarantine used to be and where the audience incredulously witnesses an encounter between Ivanovici and Strauss in Viennese attire. The latter tells his bewildered colleague that he has come by the blue Danube after having conducted *Die Fledermaus* that evening and confesses to Ivanovici that he envies and hates the latter's famous waltzes that now travel without his consent. However, he advises Ivanovici to write his own autobiography, to step out of his modesty and anonymity before someone else invents a life he thinks the composer has lived. He also advises him to do something spectacular by which he might be remembered: resign from the army, challenge a cuckolded husband to a duel, drown in the Danube, commit suicide by poisoning, or something even more serious – get married. In a postmodern cue, Ivanovici replies that he would be happy if one day his whole biography might be encapsulated in a song – prophesying what we know has already happened. And precisely when Strauss tells him he has the duty to make his small country shine, the orderly comes yelling for Ivanovici and the audience realizes it has all been a dream (Storin 1973: scene V, pp. 1-3) – the agelong narrative technique used both in mediaeval lays and in fairytales.

The music is melodious, inspired, contrasting lyricism, dramatism, humour and merriment. The whole work testifies to the love that composer George Grigoriu had for the great river: "All three [brothers] were masterful swimmers, they would cross the Danube swimming, they would jump into the waves for the Cross [35], Cezar would jump into the waters from the very mast and sometimes they would even put their life in danger out of too much courage in confronting the Danube, escaping from drowning by the skin of their teeth" (Andrei Tudor 2023: 29).

The libretto reflects certain significant institutions and personalities in Galaţi. Thus, in Scene II, Ivanovici says he is in a hurry to get to the Inglesi Café, where he has reserved a seat to see the great artist Matei Millo [36] in a performance.

> Galaţi was for a long time an attractive centre for itinerant theatre troupes that, when hard up, would organise a tour in Galaţi, the town that would more often than not 'save' them. But after Ventura, the so-called theatre – but in fact a sort of cave – was pulled down (…), there was no location left for theatre (…). During summers, in order to respond to this appetite, they would improvise 'arenas' or 'amphitheatres.' (…) Matei Millo came to Galaţi and gave a few performances in the vast hall of the second floor of the Inglesi Café, where the stock market also functioned – more or less across the road from the Port Authority (Massoff 1966: 165-6).

In another postmodern retrospection and fictional reinvention, the libretto mentions the birth of a baby that was to become the greatest Romanian operetta tenor – Leonard [37]. Otilia's uncle, Constantin Naia, a railway mechanic, has just had a son in the Galaţi district of Bădălan. "Listen to the ridiculous name they have given him: Leonard. I am sure that – with a name like that – no woman will ever love him" (Scene VI, p. 6). This strong irony is very efficient, as the whole audience knew that the extremely handsome Leonard had been adored by women: "Women guessed more precisely the reason of his life – he had appeared for them and for the relentless frenzy they have known since the Genesis. That is why, when he passed away – this meteor – they cried bitterly, the beautiful ladies!" (Michailescu 1984: 8) In a more serious book, he is described thus: "Leonard was, perhaps, the greatest artist of the genre. Handsome, harmonious in gestures and movements, a singer, a dancer, an actor, and a dancer at the same time, he was nicknamed 'The Prince of Operetta,' had a miraculous career, becoming an idol to the public" (Nichimiş et al. 2010: 12).

Romanian film music starring the Danube

Due to the spectacular, picturesque, scenic or dramatic riverscapes offered by the Danube in Romania, it has been featured as a significant background in Romanian cinema, with certain screenwriters and directors turning it into a veritable character. Out of the long list of Danube-set films, this article has selected four for closer analysis, not only because they are all noteworthy cinematic achievements, but also because their music was written by great Romanian composers.

***Valurile Dunării* (*Danube Waves*), 1959**

Made in 1959 and released in 1960, *Valurile Dunării* is a black-and-white war film [38] directed by Liviu Ciulei, who also stars as Mihai Strejan, the coxswain of barge NFR 724. The screenplay was written by Francisc Munteanu and Titus Popovici. The film also stars Lazăr Vrabie as Lt. Valentin Toma, an undercover officer [39], and Irina Petrescu – Ana Strejan, Mihai's wife. The music was composed by Theodor Grigoriu (1926-2014), first cousin to George Grigoriu (and the whole Trio), fourteen years before the premiere of the operetta. He was a talented and prolific symphonic and chamber music composer who also wrote many film soundtracks.

Almost the whole action takes place on the Danube – on the barge or on the shores – and the intro music suggests a journey, possibly influenced by Wagner's *The Rhinegold*. The music is quintessential in building up a tense, ominous atmosphere of danger and suspense. The quasi-permanent musical

background heard in the film is symphonic, alternating lyricism with dramatism, and seamlessly inserting non-musical sounds such as the wail of the ship alarm, the bell with which the coxswain summons the sailor, or the sirens of air raids. The beginning, on 9 August 1944, contrasts the gloomy prospect of raking the waters for mines with the mock-serene sound of Ivanovici's waltz, *Danube Waves*, to which the star-eyed newlyweds are listening on a record player on the barge while honeymooning during the demining mission. The voice that is heard is that of the great Romanian actress Clody Bertola [40], who had the low range fashionable at the time, as audiences were so used to associating Marlene Dietrich-like timbres with war films. A boat explodes during the part of the waltz that is in a major key, thus emphasizing the absurdity of life and the element of unexpectedness.

Other songs are heard too, such as Cristian Vasile's well-known tango "Ilona" (1932), used to recreate a cultural and historical atmosphere auditorily, a technique that has a very direct emotional impact. The soundtrack also evinces American influences, or uses very simple double-bass staccati to suggest mystery and suspense.

On the other hand, the splendour of the Danube in sunlight is used to enhance Ana's natural beauty, equally pure. The tension is sometimes alleviated by short attempts at humour, such as Valentin's (mendacious) tale of how he was arrested for whistling in church and condemned to two years' holidays on the Danube. The modern technique of flashbacks is also used, supported by percussion and wind instruments.

The Russian air attack is punctuated with fast, anguished, panic-instilling music. Its visual counterpart is the Danube burning, releasing thick, black choking smoke into the air.

The Danube, presented as a place of danger and death from the beginning through the mines and explosion, now becomes a place of execution, as the two men on the barge finally trust each other with their sincere anti-Nazi feelings and decide to assassinate the German they have aboard. Nevertheless, the murder is not shown, the camera staying on Ana and Valentin. The audience understands what has happened because they *hear* the splash made by the body falling into the water, and also through Mihai's dark humour as he comes back and reports: "He said he didn't mind."

When *Danube Waves* is played again, it brings into bold relief Ana's suffering when Mihai thinks she has cheated on him with Valentin. This utter despair is aurally suggested through the skipping of the record, which obsessively repeats the word Dunărea (the Danube), subliminally connecting the anguish with the river. Moreover, breaking the barriers of realism, the sound of the record goes ever higher in pitch (which is acoustically impossible) in order to suggest the psychological ordeal in which Mihai's nerves are strung like the strings of an instrument when the tuning pegs are turned to stretch

them and raise the pitch. The camera zooms in on Ana's face in Hitchcock style, and then suddenly the whole tension is defused. The lack of adultery is sealed with the bond of political and national alliance between Valentin and Mihai. The political conflict is also translated into ethnic nuances, as the fascists are foreign, while the communists are Romanian.

The Danube becomes a symbol of hope, of escape, and liberation, as the barge illegally takes weapons to the communists. But in the final battle, it becomes a place of slaughter, of theft, of lies, and of betrayal. The parents of a child (who is fond of Mihai) die, as well as Mihai. The Danube is also a place of loyalty and sacrifice, and the trumpet, traditionally used to announce victory, marks the defeat of the Germans. The final scene shows banners with the slogans "We are changing sides against Hitlerism", "Death to Hitlerism", "Long live the Patriotic Guards!" and "Long live the Soviet Army!" (the latter barely discernible). The last line belongs to Ana, who is frantically looking for her husband and asks "Where is Mihai?" The last image shows the victorious troops; grafted upon Ana's line, it conveys to the spectator the idea that the victory has been ensured by sacrifice.

It is very important to underline the fact that Ciulei managed to make a whole politically charged film without once slipping into the dialogues words like communism, socialism, the USSR, Russia, etc. The banners at the end are barely discernible and in a cinema the public would probably not even look at the texts. Theodor Grigoriu's music is 100% of Western filiation, while the Romanian works – Ivanovici's recurring waltz and the other urban songs intoned – all belong to the occidental musical tradition. Thus, the symbolism of the fight for liberation becomes timeless and doctrineless, free from the false propaganda of the time. These quiet subversive techniques, as well as the exquisite script, direction and acting make it both a great social and cinematic achievement. Due to it, Ivanovici's waltz and the image of the Danube travelled all the way to China, where the film was distributed, and where the waltz was translated into Chinese.

Explozia (*The Explosion*), 1972

The Explosion was made by Mircea Drăgan in 1972 on a screenplay by Ioan Grigorescu and produced by Româniafilm. The film relates a real story – the 1970 fire on the Vrachos (a ship renamed Poseidon in the script) that was carrying 3,700 tons of ammonium nitrate and that stood to explode, thus threatening to blow Galaţi and the steel plant (Combinatul Siderurgic) out of existence. The film has an all-star cast: Gheorghe Dinică (petrol firefighter Gheorghe Oprişan nicknamed Gică the Salamander [41]), Radu Beligan (Professor Luca), Toma Caragiu (Ticu Corbea, prime-secretary of the communist county organization in Galaţi), Dem Rădulescu (navy officer

Neagu), Jean Constantin (Tilică the gipsy fiddler), George Motoi (navy captain Marinescu), Colea Răutu (Anghel, commander of the Galați Port), Draga Olteanu Matei (Angela, Salamander's wife), Mircea Diaconu (navy officer Victoraș), Florin Piersic (foreign sailor), Cezara Dafinescu (blond girl), Tatiana Iekel (Ileana, secretary Corbea's wife), and Mihai Mălaimare (a thief in the port of Galați).

The music belongs once again to Theodor Grigoriu. His original soundtrack harks back to the symphonic Western tradition, like the previous one, but this time it is strewn with Romanian *folk* tunes, as well as pieces of oriental origins for local colour, as well as non-musical sounds for an impression of realism. The intro surveys the Danube waters, while the sounds are violent type-writing clicks that suggest the string of urgent communications meant to prevent the disaster. The music in minor key is once again influenced by Wagner and creates a sense of tension.

The whole film is built through the technique of antithesis – between the deadly danger of the explosion and the carefree existence led by the townspeople, who are completely unaware of the impending catastrophe. Thus, a loud wedding party is held on a boat that nears the Poseidon, cheering to a boisterous Serbian dance (*sârbă*). On it, the father of the bride is none other than firefighter Oprișan nicknamed Salamander, and this is the coincidence that will probably save the day, as he selflessly boards the ship and uses his experience in dodging the explosion. Officer Neagu sings an urban song about thirty corpses, which he means to be humorous, but is macabre, as it is simultaneous with the fire on the ship, aurally expressed through repetitive violin sounds, as nerve-racking as a giant mosquito threatening to bite.

The crew of the Panama-registered Poseidon has left the ship and sent a mayday message to the Port Authority in Galați. This highly reprovable behaviour is later explained through the fact that the crew only had one month's experience. All the local authorities realise the imminent danger, as the direct effect of the blast would be combined with a secondary explosion, that of the Liquid Oxygen Factory situated within the steel plant. The brilliant aspect of the script is that all the characters involved in the decision-making process have valid points of view during their brainstorming, even when they clash. Sometimes a point of view may seem narrow-minded or obstinate, but then the professional argument is given and the logic of the character's position is revealed. Compared to the fairytale-like films of the time, in which all communists are good and all capitalists are bad, this fine psychological differentiation between the personae is remarkable. The collective effort, which rings true because it *was* a real situation with which the town had been faced, is truly moving. The victory is a real one, and the example it gives serves the communist doctrine perfectly, just as it is a perfect illustration of Christian abnegation or of lay civic heroism. The moving conclusion is expressed in the

script: Party secretary – "People are different." Professor: "Yes, but they die the same way."

The film depicts several strategic institutions and places of entertainment of the Municipality of Galaţi: the Danube and the Danube Promenade, the steel plant, the shipyard, the television tower, the streets downtown, the Olimpic Restaurant (the oldest in Galaţi), the Prefecture of Galaţi County, Galaţi City Hall, the river station, and the Cocuţa Beach. There were no stunts in the film-making process. The explosions were real, the helicopters belonged to the army, the cars to the Fire Brigade.

The volatile quality of the ammonium nitrate is enhanced by the proximity of certain oxygen tubes nearby (the one thing that does *not* ring true, as such an arrangement in the ship seems profoundly illogical). The dark humour that permeates the film allows the spectator to see a "Do not smoke" sign on the wall.

The wedding party is a constant source of humour and, as Salamander boards the ship, his wife urges the musicians to play thrilling music so that he might regret leaving them. The ensuing melody is a *djampara*, a song of Turkish origins meant to be played and danced after the wedding feast. Its vitality and exuberance create a stark discrepancy with the death lurking in the air.

Comic-key antitheses are also created, as the (very tawny) fiddler (Constantin) has an encounter with the (very blond) foreign sailor (Piersic) and yells, asking that the Viking be taken off him!

The music conveys panic through dissonant and very modern clusters, while noises overlap: water hoses, thuds, crackling fire, sirens, vapour, engines, waves, and blasts.

In parallel, humour is also expressed through puns: Professor – "You must tow the ship. (…) Otherwise we are in God's hands." The Party secretary (in a politically correct phrase): "I do not like God's hands."[42]

The officials decide to allow the ship to pass through the town, while the fiddler sings the very famous urban song: "It's a really jolly life / When you party through the night / And at dawn you're on the outskirts / Under that nincompoop's wife's skirts"[43]. Other famous songs follow, such as "Ionel, Ionelule", and the fiddler roasts his chicken leg in the fire on the ship.

Everybody is saved due to coordinated joint effort, intelligent planning, intellectual competence, and selfless heroism. After the blast, the deserted riverscapes of a very green Danube covered in thatch and complete with swans make the audience think for a second that Salamander is dead, especially because ominous birds are circling in the sky. But, in his Sunday best soaked in mud, he rises like the Phoenix, and the truly moving ending shows his very stout wife running to hug him, an image that is repeated at least ten times. Rather than expressing the joyous victory, the music is meditative and inconclusive, while the text on the screen informs the spectator that this is a

true story and that the film is a homage to all the heroes that live among us. In this splendid film, the Danube is continuously present, both overtly and covertly, as the ship is on it and all the strategies converge towards it.

***Pe malul stâng al Dunării albastre* (*On the Left Bank of the Blue Danube*), 1983**

This film is a masterpiece, perhaps because it relies on three brilliant actors: Gina Patrichi (Zaza Bengescu, former cabaret artist, now an upper-class widow), Gheorghe Dinică (Matei, butler to the Bengescu family, intimate with Zaza), and Stela Popescu (former cabaret artist Zaraza Lopez, Zaza's friend). Directed by Malvina Urşianu [44] on her own screenplay, it boasts a whole stellar cast: George Constantin (Costi Bengescu, land owner, Zaza's brother-in-law), Fory Etterle (M. Guy, Costi's senile uncle), Ileana Stana Ionescu (a relative of Zaza's husband), Virgil Ogăşanu (a relative of Zaza's husband), Geo Saizescu (Teodor "Bobby" Davidescu, Mrs. Davidescu's son, land owner), and Marius Pepino (a Gendarmes sergeant).

It is a war film whose action starts shortly before 23 August 1944 [45], when several persons are looking for a list of Nazi spies that had been hidden in Zaza's country-house, a large mansion that she has inherited from her husband.

The music was composed by Răsvan Cernat (1945–), better known as conductor, but a very talented composer too. The soundtrack alternates high society entertainment music with martial-sounding marches, nostalgic themes, and the urban music popular in Europe in the first part of the twentieth century. As always, various noises complete the soundtrack, and in this case the most shocking are the pistol shots taken by Zaza at the pictures hanging from her walls; the significance of this gesture is unclear – she may be utterly unappreciative of fine arts, or she may consider that she has nothing to lose anymore, or she simply has the disdain for money that the nouveau riche have. The distant – or sometimes close – roar of airplanes creates a permanent sensation of threat and insecurity, counterbalanced by the excitement of foxtrots on the radio or the gramophone.

The definitely decadent life of the idle bourgeoisie is cleverly presented as charming, but strewn with politically-charged remarks: Zaza to the mechanic on her estate – "Do you think the Russians are coming?" His answer: "I think the Germans are leaving." Zaza seems to be incapable of any political thought, so she is only happy to be courted by the German major. However, she reminisces: "I met a splendid Russian man! What a talent at playing the balalaika! What a good sport! What do I have against Russians?" In a conversation with Costi, her brother-in-law, he warns her that the communists are coming. Zaza: "Let them come! I have modest roots." Costi: "If you do, why do you spend time with the Germans?" Zaza: "Because they are refined chaps

and know how to party. I have nothing against them." Costin: "Communists do." Putting it into a nutshell, Eva Sîrbu synthesises: "Gina Patrichi's Zaza is astonishing and paradoxical like the blend between French cologne and the scent of onion and brandy" (qtd. in Căliman 2000: 344).

In the first scene in which the Danube appears, pure breed horses can be seen playing in the water, which turns the river into a symbol of freedom, joy, and escape. No towns or villages are seen in the film, but Creţeşti is mentioned, which makes it obvious the mansion is in Mehedinţi county, not far from Drobeta-Turnu Severin.

But, if geographically it is not clearly inscribed, the film attempts a curious mergence between reality and fiction. For instance, Zaza's friend is called Zaraza and is presented as a former cabaret artist. Although here she is not a gipsy, the reference is to the well-known Zaraza, the seductive gipsy who embarked upon a passionate love story with the famous singer Cristian Vasile in 1944 – the very year of the events in the film. The fact that her surname in the script is Lopez seems to ascertain the fact that this is indeed the woman in the tumultuous artistic life of the capital city, a luxury prostitute immortalized by Vasile's tango, which had in fact been composed by the Argentinian Benjamin Tagle-Lara. The actual existence of the exotic head-turner has never been confirmed; some believe it is utter fantasy, but it led to another myth – that of the rivalry between two famous singers, Vasile and Zavaidoc, the latter intending to murder the former out of jealousy. Any doubt is cast away as Bobby plays a record of Vasile's tango "Zaraza" precisely when the character of the same name comes down the stairs. The frantic dance of the two wanton women who miss the glamour of the city is unforgettable. Even if of doubtful morality, their fresh blood is seen as preferable to the degenerate families, represented by the senile Monsieur Guy. Young Bobby, who should be full of vigour but nods off instead, is further proof of that: he shoots hens for fun, which – according to his mother – is his residual warrior instinct, inherited from his father, who used to shoot peasants and had consequently been forced to leave the country. The same deceased land owner, who did not beat his wife, did however strangle her regularly until she came within a hair's breadth of her death. The fall of the old world and the advent of the new one is auditorily symbolised, as the pop of the champaign cork cannot be told apart from the pistol shot that kills a German in the mansion, and the rumble of the timpani provides a solemn and worrying background. While communists and nazis kill each other in her house, and while her in-laws shamefully mistreat a peasant-girl servant in another part of the mansion, Zaza dresses up elegantly, drinks, and dances to her gramophone records. Drunk, she will be helped out by the communist, who will quietly take over her house. As the corrupt butler attempts to fraternise, saying he is happy that simple folk like him will have a chance now, the wise communist calms him down and, on the one hand seeing

through all pretence, and on the other hand being endlessly benevolent, watches over everybody's safety.

The Danube, mostly distant and concealed, symbolizes the equidistant blindness of history that sees everything happen, understands everything, but does not take sides. Răsvan Cernat's music closely seconds all the themes, uniting them through the recurring melancholy motif that traverses the score from beginning to end.

***Sosesc păsările călătoare* (*The Migratory Birds Are Coming*), 1985**

Romanian cinema has not only used the Danube in tragedies, but in comedies too, and to evoke not only war but also life and science. Geo Saizescu's film on Fănuş Neagu's [46] script grafts a love triangle story onto the everyday life of the Danube delta – fishing, fish farming, research of the flora and fauna, medicine, fine arts, etc. Its cast is formed of extremely well-known and popular actors, if not actors of great art films: Emil Hossu (engineer Radu Cojar, chief of the fish farm in Barza), Rodica Mureşan (Dr Iulia Râmniceanu, Radu's sweetheart from their student years), Tora Vasilescu (Nurse Vera from the village clinic), Octavian Cotescu (landscape painter Joil Dumbravă), Ştefan Mihăilescu-Brăila (Ştefan Brăileanu, mayor of Barza), Sebastian Papaiani (engineer Şerban Pamfil, canoe coach), Geo Saizescu (the photographer of "Foto Bujor"), Jean Constantin (publican Marin Pârvulescu), Rodica Popescu-Bitănescu (Auntie Gherghina, the witch), George Mihăiţă (fisherman Petrache), Ovidiu Moldovan (fisherman Valeriu), Mihai Mălaimare (fisherman), Dan Puric (young Ţâfnă, the 'herald' of the commune), Marius Pepino (professor at the Institute of Medicine in Bucharest), Lamia Beligan (Joil's model), and Mariana Cercel.

The music is signed by Temistocle Popa (1921-2013), famous for film music and songs, among which Romanians are probably most familiar with the *Veronica* films, *Mama*, and "Trecea fanfara militară" ("The Military Fanfare Was Passing"). His soundtrack to *The Migratory Birds Are Coming* is inspired, influenced by the harmony of Russian music. He too inserts separate songs into the soundtrack and, after the first image of thatch, we see Nurse Vera singing "Iubirea" ("Love") accompanied by an accordion.

The film is marked by great artificiality, both in its comic scenes and in its romantic ones. The dialogues have a discursive, philosophical ring that brands them as false: Radu exclaims that he was born to live on that land, which makes Şerban retort that the delta is neither land, nor water. Radu majestically replies: "It is the mixture that begets *life*!" Radu offers to teach Iulia how to talk to the foxes in the delta. There are also symbolic sentences such as "Everything starts beautifully, with a birth!" – the kind of reflections that nobody expresses in such bookish phrases in everyday speech. Artificiality is all-pervasive – not

only at the level of speech, but of action too, and people jump into the water hanging from lianas, like would-be European Tarzans. The communist doctrine is another great source of artificiality. Children must therefore be taught: "The delta has 20,000 hectares of land that will soon be irrigated and covered in grain! (…) It has the widest beach on the Romanian littoral."

The soundtrack, on the other hand, although it too is lavish in pathos every here and there, is truly felicitous, and enhances the visual images of the camera. For instance, there are many images of birds (one of the great assets of the reservation – around 320 species from seven ecosystems): so, the music imitates bird sounds. The camera follows the fishermen's routine, so the music seconds that through repetition. Spectacular sunsets are highly romantic, so the music echoes this, just as the working cranes are accompanied by the music of machines. The music is mostly inspired by American sonorities. It somehow mirrors the artificiality of the film through pompousness, while the heterogeneity of the people assembled in the delta is also reflected in the music they like – foxtrots, dixies, an Apache tango, Serbian dances (*sârbe*), "The Dobrudjan Girl", or the Habanera.

Besides the bewitching images of the Danube and the beautiful music, another redeeming quality of the film is its humour sometimes. Such an instance is the fact that the publican sprinkles salt into the dishes from his very long pinkie nail, and one of the clients tells him to stick it into his neck while he still has it.

In this film, the Danube is a place of danger (as a serious fishing accident occurs), of love (and Radu's character is strangely amoral, trying to entice both Iulia and Vera), of beauty, of artistic inspiration, of everyday life, of humour, and of playfulness.

Conclusion

The Danube crosses the old continent and determines its economic and financial well-being, its communication, transportation, and tourism. It gives it water, food, light, and warmth. In times of war, it protects or exposes it. It traverses ten countries, and its basin includes four more. The river unites them all, drawing a thread from the West to the East, but it also sets borders between them, borders that bring into bold relief both the similarities and the differences between the peoples and lands bathed by the same waters, thus revealing the greatest richness of planet Earth: plurality.

> Science describes borders as transitional spaces between pluralities, as places of mediation between different positions. (…) Every idea of identity means drawing boundaries. Borders are places of transformation and thus of the new. In their function all kinds of borders (political, linguistic, religious, cultural) are equal. (…) Dialogues about borders thus represent the basic principle of

> collective identity formation in Europe. Europe sees itself (…) as a place of contrasts and diversity. As a result, Europe is permanently defining itself through its internal and external borders (Brix: 173-4, 168).

However, despite its miraculous versatility that seduces us with its wealth, what is even more astonishing about the Danube is its formidable individuality; we see it round the corner – a weak stream – but we recognise it like an old friend, even if the last time we saw it it was lofty and wide and confident in its power. I, for one, can safely assert with Nick Thorpe: "I realised that I now carry the whole river within me. (…) Those who fall in love with the Danube do so with the whole river, with her entire body, even those parts they have never seen" (X & 2). So how better to tackle this monolithic giant who mischievously winks at us and demonstrates it can be a shapeshifter than through music – a language that needs no translation, a journey that knows no borders? In a cultural studies approach, the present article has attempted to catch the Danube unawares and explore, as through a kaleidoscope, its many musical hypostases – folk, symphonic, theatrical, cinematic, or popular. If it has managed to reveal some of its mysteries, it has certainly marred none of its charm.

Notes

The translation of the primary sources in Romanian used in this article (lyrics, quotations, etc.) is mine unless mentioned otherwise.

[1] Martin Heidegger analysed it in detail in *Hölderlins Hymne 'Der Ister'*, a lecture series published in 1942.
[2] The rock sculpture of Decebalus is a colossal carving of the face of the last king of Dacia (r. AD 87–106), who fought against the Roman emperors Domitian and Trajan to preserve the independence of his lands. The sculpture is near Orşova, on the Danube bank near the Iron Gates, and twelve sculptors worked on it between 1994 and 2004. It is the tallest rock relief in Europe (55m x 25m).
[3] Convent built between 1993 and 2000 on the site of the old convent erected in 1523. It is on the Danube bank, 15 km away from Orşova.
[4] Memorial plaque placed on the bank by Emperor Trajan to celebrate the victory of the Roman Empire over the Dacian kingdom after the second Dacian-Roman war (105-106).
[5] Quotations from Trötschinger and Brix are provided by Georg Steiner and the "Sustainable mobility linking Danube Travel Stories" project within the larger frame of the Danube Transnational Programme.
[6] "Drum fără pulbere / Şi fără făgaş / Inima-mi secaşi." On the contrary, in the song entitled "Dunăre, potecă lină," the girl sees the Danube as a path and says that her lover hacks a way through it to get to her.

[7] Cine merge cu vaporul / Cântă şi-şi alină dorul. / Cine merge cu barca / Îşi caută dragostea. / Noi mergem în car cu boi / Şi ţinem dragostea-n doi.
[8] Like many other names in the Banat area, his surname was given a Serbian-sounding ending.
[9[Both towns appear as birth places in various sources and there is no indication which one is correct.
[10] "Amalia", "Frumoasa româncă" ("The Beautiful Romanian Woman"), "Alina", "Aurel", "Cleopatra" (D'Alba).
[11] "La balul curții" ("At the Court Ball"), "Pe Dunăre" ("On the Danube"), "Plăcerea balului" ("The Pleasure of the Ball") (D'Alba).
[12] Written in ca. 1800 and recounting the brush with death of balladeer Max Augustin during the Great Plague of 1679.
[13] Rendered famous by Nana Mouskouri in 1968 as "Roule, s'enroule".
[14] The fact that Ivanovici's waltz appealed to the Jewish community in the United States is known from the 1946 film *The Jolson Story* – see Notes [21] and [22] below.
[15] It celebrated 100 years from the French Revolution, so its visibility was even greater than that of other editions.
[16] D'Alba claims over sixty.
[17] Eduard Strauss, Johann Strauss II's brother, introduced the waltz into the repertoire of the Vienna Court Orchestra (D'Alba).
[18] Charles Suhor's term – The process of taking meanings from one sign system and moving them into another (250).
[19] Austrian director, well placed to have been acquainted with the waltz.
[20] Pre-Code Hollywood was the unregulated period in the American film industry between the widespread adoption of sound in film in 1929 and the enforcement of the Motion Picture Production Code of censorship known as the Hays Code in 1934. "Historically, it refers to a specific period between the announcement of the Hays Code and the formation of the PCA to actually enforce it. Culturally, the interregnum represented a fertile few years in which the studios tested the outer limits of propriety with movies of increasing frankness and fearlessness" (Bell).
[21] A fictionalised biography of Al Jolson, a Lithuanian-American singer, actor, and vaudevillian who must have known the waltz from his life in Europe.
[22] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VcQVNw2w78&t=157s
[23] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUhyXr_NGkE&t=5s
[24] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7MDVGNBYIQ
[25] "Bătrân Danubiu, apriga-ți fire se agitează" ("Old Danubius, your fierce nature is stirring") – difficult to conceive how it fit the tune.
[26] "Barca pe valuri saltă usor / Inima-mi bate plină d'amor / Dulcea speranță e-n al meu pept. / Vino, ah! vino, că te aştept" ("The boat is lightly leaping on the waves, / My heart is beating, full of love. / There is sweet hope in my breast. / Come, oh come, I am waiting for you!").
[27] "Barca pe valuri plutește uşor, / Dar cine îngână un cântec de dor? / Nu, nu e vântul, nici Dunărea nu-i, / E lopătarul şi cântecul lui…" ("The boat is lightly floating on the waves, / But who is humming a song full of yearning? / Not the wind, and not the Danube, / It is the boatman and his song…")
[28] "*Danube Waves*, by I. Ivanovics to Miss Sara, dedicated and written for Miss Sara".

[29] Angel (the lyricist), George, and Cezar. The two older brothers studied opera singing at the Royal Conservatoire in Bucharest (Andrei Tudor: 27; all quotations from this book are given in my translation). In 1948 they founded Trio Grigoriu and started singing the light music of the time in cinemas and restaurants in order to be able to support themselves through their studies. But the Conservatoire considered that this was below the dignity of opera students and exempted them, which forced them to become students of the Private Jazz Conservatoire (Andrei Tudor 2023: 30).
[30] He also collaborated with his younger brother, Cezar, who became a film director.
[31] German term for a person who earns gages, which in Romanian has come to mean musician hired in a military fanfare for a salary.
[32] *Și*, *şe* instead of *ci*, *ce*, or *chi* instead of *pi*. *De şe?* instead of *de ce?*, *a chica* instead of *a pica*.
[33] The unpublished vocal score only includes the musical numbers, while the unpublished libretto only includes the spoken dialogues. Complete scores and complete libretti normally include the whole text, both spoken and sung. As they are today, the pages of the score are numbered per each piece – aria or ensemble – so page numbers are irrelevant; the pages of the libretto are numbered per each scene. My thanks go to Mrs. Andreea Andrei Tudor, who has given me a copy of the score from her personal archive, who has obtained a copy of the libretto from the Storin family archive, and who has shared with me all the memories that the family have of the production of this operetta.
[34] Type of voice.
[35] Romanian tradition observed in many settlements on the Danube, including Brăila, and performed on the day of the Epiphany – 6 January – which in Romania is called Bobotează and commemorates the baptism of Saint John the Baptist in the Jordan. The Danube thus serves as an arch in space and time. The religious service is officiated on the banks rather than in church, as usual, and the priest throws a cross into the river. Strong brave men jump into the freezing water and try to bring the cross to the shore. The winner is commended for his bravery and is believed to be protected from disease and troubles all year long.
[36] Great Romanian stage actor and playwright (1814-96), also the author of the libretto of the first Romanian operetta – *Baba Hârca* by Alexandru Flechtenmacher.
[37] Nae Leonard (1886-1928) – Romanian tenor called "The Prince of Operetta," the son of Constantin Nae, a train engine mechanic from Galați, and of Carolina Schäffer, his foreman's wife.
[38] Made by the "București" Cinema Studio and distributed by Româniafilm.
[39] He pretends to be Ovidiu Manolescu, a pickpocket, so that he might be impressed on the barge (that is, to be enrolled in the navy without his consent, which could be done to convicted felons, and even to other categories of men, both in Romania and in other countries. See Herman Melville's and Benjamin Britten's *Billy Budd*).
[40] Married to Liviu Ciulei.
[41] Extant in texts by Pliny the Elder, St. Augustine, and Leonardo da Vinci, the folk European tradition of the salamander presents it as born from the flames and invulnerable to fire. Occultists considered it to be the elemental spirit of fire.
[42] "Dumnezeu cu mila!" "Nu-mi place mila lui Dumnezeu!"
[43] "Ce frumoasă este viaţa / Când te-apucă dimineaţa, / Dimineaţa la şosea / Cu nevasta altuia."

[44] At Casa de Filme Unu and distributed by Româniafilm.
[45] The day on which Romania changed sides in World War II – it ceased its alliance with Germany and joined the Allies (United Nations).
[46] A very well-known Romanian writer.

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The 'Black' Danube: Life and Poetry in the Forced Labour Camps of the Danube-Black Sea Canal

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Abstract

Although the Danube-Black Sea Canal had been one of Ceauşescu's pet projects, used by the communist leader to enhance his image as a visionary prophet of the Golden Era of socialism, the idea of a canal that would connect the Danube and the Black Sea may have been as old as ancient Roman history. It is certainly along one of the lines of Trajan's Wall (Valul lui Traian), running along the Kara Su Valley, that the canal had been imagined, in the 19th century, by various adventurers and travellers. In the 20th century, with the development of technology, the idea turned into a project: in 1922 and 1923, two Romanian engineers (Jean Stoenescu Dunăre and Aurel Bărglăzan) came up with very definite plans of how to create a fourth arm of the Danube, which would help navigation by shortening the distance travelled by commercial ships with about 400 kilometres.

The actual building of the Canal, initiated by Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej at Stalin's orders, was less intended as a technological advancement and more as a pretext to exterminate the interwar elite in the forced labour camps established along the Danube. Work at the Canal began in 1949 and ended in 1953, after Stalin's death. Though only 20 km had been completed out of the intended 70 km, the legacy of the forced labour camps includes a large number of poems written by the detainees, detailing the inhuman treatment they received and making up a shattering testimonial of life in the Communist labour camps.

My paper intends to present and analyse a selection of such poems, showing how they take up the myth of the exiled Ovid and mix it with symbols of Christian suffering. In most of the poems, the colour that is associated with life in the labour camps is black: the blackness of the Black Sea (the inhospitable Pontus, in Ovid's poetry) is thus transferred onto the traditional 'blue' Danube.

Keywords: *Communism, labour camps, prison poetry, Danube-Black Sea Canal*

The project of building a canal that would considerably shorten the distance travelled by commercial ships along the Danube was not the outcome of the strategic planning of Communist leaders. Recent studies show that it had gained momentum after the War of Independence (1877) and that the first

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Romanian plans for a fourth arm of the Danube had been sketched by engineers Jean Stoenescu Dunăre in 1922 [1] and Aurel Bărglăzan in 1929 [2].

The implementation of the project, which started in 1949, was the consequence of a suggestion from Moscow, or, at least, that was the most favoured interpretation of Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej's decision to inaugurate the construction site of the Canal. As no official statement had been released, and information about the construction of the Canal was safely guarded, this interpretation was itself a rumour based on a fictional dialogue between Stalin and Dej, occurring in the first volume of Marin Preda's novel *Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni* [*The earth's most beloved son*] [3] (1980: 196-197). What is certain, as many researchers of the history of Communism agree, is that during that period, economic projects were bound to the programme of building socialism (Stănescu 2012: 125).

Since the idea of the Canal came from Stalin – he had also initiated the construction of the Belomorkanal [4] as the first part of his GULAG project –, it is certainly interesting to note that the first projects [5] connected with such an enterprise had been imagined in the 19th century, as a reaction to the Tsarist Empire's conquest of Sulina, which had given the Russians access to and control over the trade along the Danube. During most of the 19th century, Dobrudja had been a theatre of war between the Tsarist and the Ottoman Empires. Many cities and towns had been affected by the campaigns of the Russian army and the clashes between the two belligerent forces. Following the Peace of Bucharest in 1812, Russia occupied the Chilia branch of the Danube, as well as the territory between the Prut and the Dniester rivers, together with the small uninhabited islands situated between Ismail and Chilia. Five years later, the Russian Empire also took control over the Sulina branch and then occupied the Danube Delta entirely, thus controlling the mouths of the Danube until the Crimean War (1853-1856). Under these circumstances, building a canal between Cernavodă and Constanța along the Kara Su Valley would have allowed any ship journeying from Vienna to Constantinople (a major international route at that time) to circumnavigate 400 kilometres of the area under Russian rule (Ardeleanu 2021: 135).

The first stage of the project, coinciding with the establishment of the forced labour camps, proved to be a total failure: in 1953, when the construction was interrupted, only 20 km out of the intended 70 had been built. It was to be expected; after the economy had been drained during the Second World War, the recently installed Communist regime could not find the necessary resources to finance such an important project. Abandoned by Dej in 1953, after Stalin's death, the project was taken up in 1975 by Nicolae Ceaușescu [6], who managed to complete it and inaugurated the Canal in 1984.

In a transcript of the meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party (May 5, 1949), one of the

Communist leaders defined the purpose of the Canal as a 'laboratory' for the formation of the future Communist propaganda personnel (qtd. in Stănescu 2012: 125). Gheorghiu Dej, in his address to the party brigades sent to oversee the work at the Canal, mentioned, among others, that the Canal would be an experiment in organisation, a laboratory for building the 'new man' of socialism. In another transcript of the meeting of the PB of the CC of RWP, later that year, another purpose of the building of the Canal was clearly stated: the annihilation of the old social and political elites (qtd. in Stănescu 2012: 126). Mircea Stănescu claims that the purpose of using political detainees for this type of work was a triple one: forced labour (to compensate for the lack of existing resources), the extermination of the old and the weak, and the "re-education" of the young (2012: 126). The director of the Canal, Gheorghe Hossu, wrote in an article in *Contemporanul* that "[t]he people build the Canal and the Canal transforms the people" (qtd. in Bîtfoi 2012: 87).

Work at the Canal began in the summer of 1949 and was stopped on 18th July 1953, as part of the aftermath of liberalisation undertaken by Nikita Khrushchev and Lavrenti Beria after Stalin's death. Labour camps were officially established in January 1950 and abolished in August 1952, being replaced with "work colonies" (Bîtfoi 2012: 85). Whereas in 1949 and 1950 the number of detainees fluctuated from around 5,000 to around 7,000, in 1951 the official figures indicated around 15,000, and between 1952-1953, the number increased to around 20,000. These official figures only refer to the number of inmates present in the work colonies. There are no exact data regarding the number of political detainees, but there is consensus among specialists that they were the majority (Stănescu 2012: 128-129). Bîtfoi notes that the number of "enemies of the people" who were to be arrested and sent to work at the Canal was often based on the workforce needed there (2012: 85). Moreover, there are no official data regarding the number of deaths, either for the individual colonies or for the Canal as a whole. From the testimonies of the survivors, it became apparent that the number of deaths varied with the season (more people died in winter, because of the lack of heating and the harsh working conditions) and also with the regime of the colony and its administration, which could go from lenient to brutal or even downright murderous.

Petre Baicu, a detainee at Capul Midia, relates how the officer in charge of the camp forced an old man who was suffering from hernia to fill up and carry a wheelbarrow of sand. The old man fell to the ground after two steps. He died later at a hospital in Constanţa (1995: 98). There are thousands of similar testimonies and stories. It should also be mentioned that, even if the work at the Canal ceased with Stalin's death, labour colonies from the Danube Delta (Noua Culme and Periprava) still continued to function until 1963. Even if work there was not excessively hard – it consisted mainly of gathering reed –, the living conditions were still primitive and the administration brutally

coercive. Cornel Drăgoi, an inmate at Periprava, tells of an incident when, as the detainees were parching under the blaring Dobrudja sun, he asked a corporal for water and addressed him with "brother": the corporal admonished him for not calling him properly "comrade corporal" and beat him until he could no longer walk (Rizea and Drăgoi 1993: 176-177).

Bîtfoi quotes a number of testimonies of survivors who spoke about detainees being buried alive, or about bodies being left to rot in the sun, mutilated by rats (who ate their ears, noses and genitals), or eaten by wild animals. Even dead people were tortured: their mouth was cracked open and their teeth crushed (2012: 85-86). Black humour, notes Bîtfoi, became a strategy of resilience: thus, the new-comers in the camp who had little hope of survival were told by the others: "Penguin, we can see Agaua through your ears!" (Agaua was the village where one of the cemeteries for the detainees was located.) One way of announcing someone's death was to say that he was "released in an envelope" (2012: 86).

Though many detainees left poems about their experience at the Canal, Andrei Ciurunga (pseudonym of Robert Eisenbraun, 1920-2004), a journalist and refugee from Chişinău, published an entire collection "Poemele cumplitului Canal" [The poems of the terrible Canal] (1992), as well as an autobiography ironically entitled *Memorii optimiste* [Optimistic memoirs], which voice his experience and coagulate it into one of the most gruesome testimonials about forced labour as a form of modern slavery. In "Blestem pentru casa duşmanului" [Curse for the house of the enemy], Ciurunga, using the old form of the curse from folk poetry, makes a sociological inquiry into the custom, developed by state security officers, of treating the detainees as slaves, forcing them to perform menial work in their households (2010b: *Poeţi* 207-208). The same idea, of forced labour as a modern form of slavery, is also articulated by Ion Florescu (2010) in the poem "Valea Lacrimilor" [The Valley of Tears] (394-398).

In most of the poems composed (and later written down) by the detainees in the forced labour colonies, the word 'black' is repeated obsessively: "Everything here is black and impoverished", "It's black and dirty, poured in the bowl / the ladle of a tasteless broth", "The water from the mud is black" (Ciurunga 2010f: 164), "The bread is black inside the famished prison / As if the sky had baked it in its tears." (Ciurunga 2010e: 183) "The sky never seemed blacker / than when the alarm was sounded in the camp" (Oniga 2010: 451).

Grey is also mentioned, as part of the spectrum of black:

> Inside the black walls, gathered
> like fir trees in the greyish wood
> is our country, all and everywhere
> in chains, with prison guards around. (Ciurunga 2010a: 169)

Apart from referring to the miserable conditions the detainees had to put up with in the camp and the never-ending torture of the work and the beatings, blackness also worked as a real designation of place, the geographical location of torture symbolically pointing to suffering and death: the Black Water (Kara Su) Valley leading to the Black Sea. The building of the Danube-Black Sea Canal began along the trajectory of the Kara Su Valley, which crosses Dobrudja from East to West. The Kara Su Valley was one of the oldest commercial roads in Dobrudja, connecting the Kara Su Lake to the Danube. After the rains, the valley was flooded by muddy waters (often alluded to in the prison poems), which then flowed into the Danube at Cernavodă (a town whose name contains another 'black' reference). Even the dry and hot wind which sometimes blows over the Dobrudjan plateau is called the Black wind (Kara-yel), or "Empty bag", as it often destroys local crops.

The report of a former detainee at Midia and Poarta Albă, discovered in the archives of Radio Free Europe, details the inhuman working and living regime of the political prisoners. They lived in barracks covered only with tar board, without light or running water. They worked with primitive tools, requisitioned from various parts of the country, or with equipment brought secondhand from the Soviet Union. Work was done only manually, there were no mechanized tools or machines. While the workload required 5,000-6,000 calories per day, they were only given around 2,000 per day – no meat, no fat, only cereals like rye and barley. The toilets were simple holes dug in the ground, inside a roofless barrack, so that, when it was raining, the detainees were simultaneously taking a shower. A former detainee in Peninsula, a camp situated on a strip of land near present-day Mamaia, remembers that, in July 1950, they had no water for washing for more than a month: "Dripping with perspiration, covered by dust, weak and emaciated, we looked like Egyptian mummies. We were in the desperate situation of having to wash ourselves with urine" (Manea 2013: para. 8 of 18). Stoves were only for decoration in some barracks, for the detainees received no heating during the harsh winter months [7] – the famously harsh winters by the Black Sea, of which Ovid wrote so disparagingly. Bîtfoi quotes the testimony of a Jew who had been imprisoned at Auschwitz and who declared that the suffering of the "Canal slaves" was even more atrocious (2012: 89).

The poetry written by the detainees has been described as a poetry of hunger, fear, beating and cold (Cistelecan 2000: 21). Indeed, most poems concentrate on the animalic feelings of cold, hunger and fear – feelings that evoke the bleak conditions under which the prisoners were forced to work. If the project of the 'new man', postulated by the ideologists of the Communist Party of the USSR never came to be fulfilled, still, as Varlam Šalamov notes in his essay "O proze" [About prose], there was a new man born under Communism: the new man of the Gulag, political prisons and forced labour

camps, "a man with a new behaviour, a man reduced to the condition of the animal" (2009 [1965]: para. 48 of 128). For Šalamov the experience of the Gulag was unique in the history of mankind, for he considered it to have been a wholly negative experience for all those involved:

> The author of the *Kolyma Tales* considers the camp a negative experience for man – from the first to the last hour. [...] Not one single man becomes better, or stronger after the camp. The camp is a negative experience, a negative school, a corruption for everybody – for the administrators and the prisoners, guards and spectators, passers-by and readers of literature (2009 [1965] para. 40 of 128).

The complete negativity of this experience called for a new literary aesthetic, able to render the moral changes effected by the camp regime on the people inside it (people who were martyrs, but never heroes, Šalamov remarks), while also having a powerful impact on the larger reading public. The aesthetic of the new prose envisaged by Šalamov would regard literature as a document and the writer as Pluto returning to Hades, not as Orpheus rising from Hades (2009 [1965]: para. 72 of 128). To be more specific, the writer had to have lived the subject of his stories not with his mind, or heart, but, as Šalamov writes, "on his own skin, with his every nerve" (2009 [1965]: para. 46 of 128).

What are the implications of such an aesthetic for the poetic work produced by the detainees? Romantics like William Wordsworth, modernists like T.S. Eliot, and the Russian Formalists theorised, in different ways, poetry as something produced at a certain remove from life, from the immediate and the contingent. On the contrary, the authors of the poetry of detention were both the object and the subject of their poetry, immersed in the negative experience of the camp, and writing, so to say, with their own blood (some poems were literally written with their authors' blood). As the world of the camp was characterised by a penury of things and experiences, the few extant poetic images and ideas are always present like in a cinematic close-up, and an indefinite tension looms behind every word. Hunger, cold and fear become permanent companions, ghosts 'walking' beside the prisoners. In "Marş forţat" [Forced march], Ciurunga notes that:

> It is only the hunger we feel
> that walks with us every day,
> from the dawn when we go out
> till we get back under our blankets. (2010d: 163)

The bowls of tasteless broth that were served as lunch occasion another meditation on hunger, in which the bowl becomes the measure of "blind time", and a symbol for the spoliation of the land by the Soviet regime: "How could my land produce / such poverty? ..." (Ciurunga 2010f: 164).

Allusions to Ovid and his dark poems about the Black Sea are numerous. In what is perhaps the most famous poem about the Canal, Ciurunga writes:

> History, which now flows back,
> Will remember and write in its book,
> This terrible Danubius which spills
> Water through three mouths and blood from the fourth.
>
> And the songs which came out of slavery
> Will make up, in the years to come,
> In the books that will be written,
> A new *Tristia* by the Pontus Euxinus. (2010c: 162)

A poem by Dumitru Oniga, "Într-un lagăr din Deltă" [In a camp in the Delta], has a motto from Ovid's *Tristia*, Book III, Section 2, "Better Death than Exile": "So it was my destiny to travel as far as Scythia, that land that lies beneath the Lycaonian Pole" (2012: 1479). In this poem, Ovid sees himself as imprisoned by "the Pontus, seared by perpetual frost" and confesses that once he "reached the land of [his] punishment", the only thing he cared for was "weeping" (2012: 1479). Using inversion for emphasis, Oniga links the reference to Ovid with the Christian reference to Christ's crucifixion, turning the water into blood:

> Never have I seen a bloodier sun, [...]
> Than when the slaves, in ragged stripes,
> Carried at dusk big bundles of reeds towards the infinite,
> like in a perpetual Golgotha […]
> And a river of blood flew towards us,
> Reflected in ice, water holes and tears (2010: 450).

The same blend of Ovid and Christian martyr symbolism can be traced in Ion Florescu's poem "Valea lacrimilor" [The Valley of Tears]. Florescu's is one of the most detailed poetic testimonials of what life looked like for the detainees working in the labour camps at the Canal. The barracks housing the inmates, located "under hills guarded by evil spirits", where only "vultures, crows and rooks fly", are compared to "collective coffins, thatched with reed", built by the "pharaohs" for their slaves (2010: 394). The barracks have "no hall, no windows, no entrance door", the floor is made up of "earth and stone" and "bugs hidden in the boards". Instead of socks, the detainees had "paper, stuck with thread", and most of them had makeshift shoes: "On the left foot a peasant's flat, on the right one a galosh" (2010: 395).

Arşavir Acterian, a Romanian writer and Armenian ethnic born in Constanţa, who was imprisoned in one of the labour camps at the Canal, made an interesting observation about the nature of that experience in his diary, comparing it with the ordeal of Sisyphus:

> I remember physical pains which I was seemingly doomed to endure forever. The terrible work at the Canal was like that, our way back – tired, exhausted – on a 7-8-kilometre-long road after having worked for ten hours digging, loading wagons, pushing at the wheelbarrows: it seemed as if it would never end. Like in a nightmare, I had the tantalizing, hopeless feeling of the infinity of this condition, this suffering, this experience. Work at the galleys, the ordeals of Tantal, Sisyphus (1992: 142).

The infinite mentioned by Acterian is the bad infinite, the endless cycle of suffering from which, at the time, there were only two escapes: death and literature.

While in the poetry of the detainees at the Canal, the Danube turns black, in the mainstream culture of Ceaușescu's regime in the 1980s (after the infamous July Theses, when the dictator had declared the 'nationalization' of culture) the Danube reappears as blue: in 1984, when Nicolae Ceaușescu inaugurated the Danube-Black Sea Canal, the song which won the Mamaia festival (one of the most important pop music festivals in communist Romania) was "Magistrala albastră" [The blue thoroughfare]. It was performed by Mirabela Dauer and Dan Spătaru, two Romanian pop music stars at the time. Interestingly, in the video, where the Canal is first shown from the perspective of the ship working its way along the still blue waters, Dan Spătaru is wearing the black leather jacket that had become the hallmark of the undercover state security agents, while Mihaela Dauer dons a brown jacket with epaulettes, a reference, perhaps, to the army forces used by Ceaușescu to complete the construction of the Canal. In the song, what had been the death canal is addressed as a "road of waters and dreams", carrying the Romanian soul, "a song without words" ("Magistrala", 1984), towards the sea. The construction of the canal is rendered as a work of love, "lifting the skies above the earth" ("Magistrala", 1984), for one's country. The chorus is a typical propaganda text from the late years of Ceaușescu's rule, designed to symbolically manipulate popular consciousness:

> The blue thoroughfare, a road built by the people
> Which speaks, you know, of present and future
> And great construction works [8]
> As a sign that they will be on this land forever
> That they were and they will be ("Magistrala", 1984).

The completion of the Canal – definitely a great achievement for socialist Romania – nevertheless contributed its share to the supreme leader's megalomania. In a documentary about the construction of the Canal produced by Sahia Films (the official propaganda movie studio), the first episode is entitled "Genesis" [9]. The canal is referred to as "a work of demiurgic

proportions", while the phrases "the epic of the construction of the Canal"/ "the epic of the blue thoroughfare" are repeated every few minutes. The Turkish name of the Kara Su valley is pronounced as one word, thus sounding like the Romanian word for the crucian carp (Carasu): at one point the narrator emphatically announces that: "It was the high mission of the Socialist Revolution […] to make a new geography fit our country's new history". In contrast to the Biblical genesis, the construction of the Canal is revealed to be a modern work of progress: "Every detail of this genesis is a combination of technical and human greatness." Ceaușescu's pet theory of the ethnogenesis of the Romanian people is this time applied to the space of the Black Sea, which, according to the narrator, "centuries before and after A.D. was one of the hottest hearths of the ethnogenesis of the Romanian people". There is no reference to the early work at the Canal, undertaken during Gheorghiu Dej's presidency of the Party and its many victims. Everything happens for the first time under Ceaușescu's enlightened rule: first tests, first explosions, first nails, etc. As forerunners of the project, only the names of two Romanians are mentioned: Ion Ionescu de la Brad and Stoenescu Dunăre (without the French-sounding Jean). The latter's vision is echoed in a sentence celebrating the technical genius of the Romanians: "Here we are, opening up for Europe the prospect of fluvial connections between the North and the Black Sea, between Western and Central Europe and the Near East and Asia." Furthermore, in the episode "Steps", the narrator introduces the topic of the Communist Metamorphosis: "Before obtaining the pure blue of the thoroughfare, first the assault of the mud waves had to be defeated." This Metamorphosis is part of the larger narrative of change on which the socialist revolution is based: "The face of the earth can and sometimes needs to be changed." (*Cum s-a construit Canalul*) The epic is clearly one of hard-won victory against the forces of nature and against history itself: the canal will endure throughout millennia, hard proof of the wondrous "Ceaușescu era".

Thus, it seems, by being united to the Danube through the man-made Canal, (and while the Danube slowly acquires its characteristic of blackness), the opposite will happen to the Black Sea, to whom, from now on, the former "Blue Danube" lends both its colour and its music. In Communist Romania, the song was actually entitled "Valurile Dunării" [The waves of the Danube], with no reference to colour: it was composed by Iosif Ivanovici, an army professional who had added Slavic (Serbian, to be more precise) nostalgia to Strauss's cheerful waltz. In the Sahia Film documentary, "Valurile Dunării" is part of the musical background of the movie, as Danube's blueness is transfered onto Ceaușescu's greatest achievement. It was, no doubt, a great achievement to have materialized one of the oldest technical dreams of the Black Sea space, and the transformation of nature did not stop at the physical level. While the Danube and Danube Delta had been re-imagined as black in

the poetry of the detainees working in the labour camps situated along the imagined trajectory of the Canal, the Black Sea gradually became blue through symbolic contamination with "The Blue Thoroughfare" after its completion in 1984, in an attempt to erase the memory of the victims of the labour camps and project a utopian view of Ceaușescu's own brand of national communism.

Notes

The translation of the primary sources in Romanian used in this article (poems, testimonials and songs) is mine. The translation of the quotations from Varlaam Šalamov's original essay in Russian is also mine.

[1] Stoenescu Dunăre initially published his project in *Analele Dobrogei* [The Annals of Dobrudja]. According to him, a navigable canal between Cernavodă and Constanța, besides shortening the way to the Black Sea, would have enabled, in the long term, a direct connection, via the Danube, between the North Sea (the Rotterdam harbour) and the Black Sea (Constanța), which in its turn could have opened towards the Levant, Egypt, India and the Far East (2005).
[2] In 1929, Aurel Bărglăzan published his bachelor thesis, written in collaboration with Octavian Smigelschi, "Studiul unui canal navigabil Cernavodă-Constanța" [The study of a navigable canal Cernavodă-Constanța] (Bărglăzan and Smigelschi 1929).
[3] After the 1989 Revolution, studies confirmed that Marin Preda's fictional dialogue was not just a figment of his imagination: Lavinia Betea and Paul Sfetcu confirm that Stalin had asked Gheorghiu Dej to start building the Canal during the former's visit to Moscow (1997: 13-14).
[4] The Belomorkanal connected the Baltic to the White Sea – as rumour had it, it had been built without any previous topographical studies and also without proper technical equipment. The construction of this canal was not justified by any economic reasons, as traffic to the White Sea was scarce. The harsh living conditions, together with the lack of technical means led to the death of over 25,000 detainees (Olteanu 2019: 97).
[5] The idea of building a canal along the Kara Su Valley may have been based on the ancient lore about Trajan's Wall. In *Călători la Pontul Euxin* [Travellers to Pontus Euxinus], Constantin Cioroiu mentions an Italian traveller, Giorgio Smancini, who, journeying in the Austrian stagecoaches along the course of the Kara Su Valley, wrote that the valley was allegedly the place where Trajan's canal, meant to connect the Danube with the Black Sea, began (1984: 46). The idea, however, was not considered feasible for many reasons. In 1840, Karl von Vinke, a German officer and politician who had been sent on a mission to Constantinople, criticised the theory, held true by many geographers, that the valley had been an older riverbed of the Danube, and showed that the construction of a canal alongside it would be impracticable and very costly (qtd. in Cioroiu 1984:44). However, in 1841, the British physician and geographer Francis W. Ainsworth, after travelling from Constantinople to Vienna, published an article envisaging that the construction of such a Canal would have brought immense benefits to the traffic along the Danube (Ardeleanu 2021: 136). On the same ship with Ainsworth was the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen, who mentioned the ancient lore about Trajan's canal, but concluded that building a railroad would have been cheaper and more practical (Ardeleanu 2021: 138).
[6] The Canal was part of Ceaușescu's grandiose plans for the economic development of the Black Sea region, which included the construction of an atomic plant in Cernavodă and an oil rig in Midia-Năvodari.

[7] The detainees often referred to the labour colonies along the Danube-Black Sea Canal as the "Romanian Siberia".
[8] In Romanian, the word used to denote 'construction works' is 'ctitorii', an old word extensively used for the founders of the Orthodox churches and cathedrals. Its usage put the construction of the Canal on the same level as the sacred spaces celebrating the rule of local princes and boyars in mediaeval and early modern Wallachia and Moldavia. Tismăneanu speaks of "the Byzantine rites" used to conceal Ceaușescu's neo-Stalinist personal dictatorship (1991: 85).
[9] The episodes are "Genesis", "Steps", "The Last Threshold", "26 May 1984" (the day of the Canal's official inauguration) and "Epilogue", thus building up a narrative of successful civilisation: gradual conquest, appropriation and victory over natural forces.

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--- 2010c. "Canalul" [The Canal], *Poeți după gratii* [Poets behind bars] (Mănăstirea Petru Vodă), 161-162.
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--- 2010e. "Noi n-am uitat" [We have not forgotten], *Poeți după gratii* [Poets behind bars] (Mănăstirea Petru Vodă), 183-184.
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***** "Magistrala albastră" [The blue thoroughfare], composed by Vasile V. Vasilache, performed by Mirabela Dauer and Dan Spătaru, Mamaia '84 <https://youtu.be/YnmBldK9jfw> [accessed 30 May 2023].

The Image of the Danube in Contemporary Novels Associated with Hungarian Culture

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Abstract
The natural elements of inhabited areas often shape people's lifestyles, psychology and worldviews, influencing their moods, decisions and actions. Rivers in particular are often associated with the historical development of human relationships and the emergence of settlements and urban life. This paper explores the representations of the Danube in four contemporary novels by Hungarian authors or set in Hungary: The White King *(2008) by György Dragomán,* Train to Budapest *(2008) by Dacia Maraini,* Under Budapest *(2013) by Ailsa Kay and* Los Amantes Bajo el Danubio *(2016) by Federico Andahazi. The aim of this analysis is to show how the river operates as a framework of "liquid modernity" (Bauman, 2000) in each of these works, it has a representative power of its own and determines people's destinies and human relationships in heterogeneous cultural contexts. It functions both as a natural backdrop for historical events and as a means of expressing and conveying emotions, creating a transnational political identity that is both socio-cultural and deeply intimate.*

Keywords: *liquid modernity; Hungarian culture; contemporary literature; representations of the Danube; transnational literary canon*

Introduction

The research on how rivers appear in literature is not new. In his study on American literary tradition, for example, T. S. McMillin (2011) described literature as "a way of bringing together two complicated systems, rivers and meaning, to see what each can tell us about the other" (xiv) and proposed "a style of thinking that can be of use in investigations of both the meaning of rivers and the nature of meaning" (xviii). Previously, P. J. Jones (2005) examined the image of rivers in Roman literature and culture. More recently, M. Ziolkowski (2020) explored the critical role that five big rivers play in Russian literature, while M. Bozovic and M. D. Miller (2016) edited a collection or articles that approach the poetics and the politics of the Danube from an interdisciplinary point of view.

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From a sociological perspective, M. Schillmeier and W. Pohler (2010) examined "the contested social relevance of the River Danube" (25) as a starting point for new ways of imagining Europe, highlighting the need to reconnect nature and culture at various levels by leaving their traditional separateness behind. Therefore, it becomes necessary to read literature anew, from an ecological and transcultural perspective in order to achieve a better grasp on the possible future of (Central and Eastern) Europe.

Since this article considers the image of the Danube in contemporary novels associated with Hungarian culture, the primary corpus was selected to reflect what critics and academics A. Kiséry and Z. Komáromy (2016) called "the interplay of the national and the intercultural" (17), an approach to the Hungarian literary canon which includes works in Hungarian, possibly influenced by other literatures, along with Hungarian literature in translation, ethnic minorities' literatures and literatures in exile. They propose "the understanding of national culture as a particular, local conjuncture in global flows of cultural exchange and of human migration" (11) and dwell on cultural memory as "a force of identity construction whose stabilizing and confining power is premised on an ongoing process of selection and interpretation" (18). All four novels touch on subjects that affected many people in the past, causing unfortunate death and great suffering then (war, holocaust, deportation, forced labour, forced migration) and fruitless disputes in recent decades.

Drawing on previous conceptualizations of possible forms of remembering and representing traumatic events, T. Kisantal (2020) argued that "the strategies of collective memory in Hungarian discourse after 1989 can be considered as characteristically competitive" (49), with one rhetoric that fights for recognition at the expense of other rhetoric. A distinct approach would be the model of multidirectional memory, "a network where the memory of one event can reinforce other ones, creating a dialogue among these groups and memories" (56). As a result, the selection of the four novels suggests a possible recontextualization of a turbulent past via a liquid way of thinking suggested by the presence of the Danube, "at the same time a cultural *and* a natural object" (Schillmeier and Pohler, 2010: 27).

In the preface to the second edition of *Liquid Modernity*, Z. Bauman (2012) challenged the rapport between solidity and flexibility, between durability and transience as descriptors of the modern human condition: "Modernity without compulsive and obsessive modernization is no less an oxymoron than a wind that does not blow or a river that does not flow" (v). He recognized the processual nature of improvement by using the noun *modernization*, whose root is a verb, an action, a movement, rather than the noun *modernity*, whose root is an adjective, a description, a status quo. Since rivers simultaneously have a fluid substance and usually a fixed route, their literaturization may operate as

a host for a better understanding of the world in which nature plays its own role.

The following commentary focused on novels published over the past two decades is part of a larger practice of incorporating the discursive imagination associated with the Danube into the mainstream political discourse about life in Central and Eastern Europe.

Picturing the Danube-Black Sea Canal

When Tollef Mjaugedal (2007) asked György Dragomán what he thought about the so-called nostalgia for communism, the Hungarian writer said that, given his own family story of forced migration from Marosvásárhely (or Târgu Mureş) to Budapest in 1988, he felt no nostalgia and it was good that there were divergent views on the topic as, in reality, people may have had different experiences.

In his novel entitled *The White King* (2005), he tells several interconnected stories set in the 1980s, through the perspective of Djata, an 11-year-old boy born in the Hungarian community from Transylvania. He is waiting for his father, an engineer who is forced to work for the canal that today links the Danube and the Black Sea. His father is kept in the labour camp for political reasons and sends letters to his wife and son from time to time. When the letters stop coming and they do not receive any news from him, the boy imagines his father has fled the country. His absence is compared with that of another boy's father who "swam across the Danube and went to Yugoslavia and from there to the West, but they hadn't heard a thing from him since then, they didn't even know if he was alive" ("Tulips", para 3). The Danube as a labour camp and as a dangerous water frontier to cross, to escape dictatorship, are two of the most prominent gloomy representations of the river connected with the Romanian history of the 1980s. Dragomán's novel emphasizes the former.

In contrast with the predominantly positive propagandistic communist coverage of the Danube-Black Sea Canal, inaugurated in 1984, the novel describes it as a labour camp associated with hard work and oppression: "You weaklings wouldn't last even a day at the Danube Canal." ("Tulips", para 9) Given the difficult working conditions and the political abuse, the place is depicted as a potential source of infection: "men die of smallpox because that disease still flares up here and there along the Danube Canal, especially in the re-education camps" ("Pickax", para 29). Although the camp is located far away, in Dobruja, the author shows its adverse influence on the main characters' intimate and social life in his town from Transylvania: "my father was taken to the Danube Canal because my grandfather and grandmother didn't like my mother too much" ("Gift", para 1). Such uneasy family relationships, determined by opposite political views, affect both the father's

and the son's destiny. As a result of his father's detention, Djata's friends begin either to envy the boy for his freedom or to deride him for becoming an orphan.

All the above aspects reach a climax when Pickax, a construction worker from the Danube Delta [1], performs a magical bloody ritual, inspired by local Lipovan folklore, to help Djata better "see" his father. The ritual presupposes the use of several elements – a sparrow, mud, human hair and blood – to shape a winged doll, plus a flashlight and a mirror. The last object is particularly relevant because of its metamorphic powers on the boy's imagination: "The mirror now billowed like waves on water, and then all I could see was brown, muddy, wavy water, it seemed I was a bird flying above the water" ("Pact", para 14). When the mirror becomes liquid, it does not simply reflect the objects in front of it, but it functions like a drone equipped with a video camera, which allows the viewer to see the landscape from above:

> suddenly I saw all sorts of ramps and roads scooped into that high clay wall and people working on them, so many people that they looked like ants, they were digging and swinging pickaxes and pushing wheelbarrows, and then the image turned, and there was my father ("Pact", para 14)

At the individual level, the ritual serves as a rite of passage that reflects the boy's coming of age in difficult times for his family. At the collective level, the ritual is meant to make readers better understand the role of a huge engineering project for both people and nature.

French philosopher Bruno Latour begins his book *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (2005) with a cartoon that features the following dialogue between two pupils: "'In the sixth chapter of *Proverbs*, it says: go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise.' 'I tried that. The ant didn't know the answer either.'" (v) Dragomán's protagonist compares the workers with ants, his father being one of them, but he finds it meaningless why his family has to suffer so much while the authorities and the future users do not care.

The change in the flow of the river mirrors the change in Djata's parents' destiny. Redirecting the natural flow of the Danube by building a solid new course for part of its waters, for example, matches Djata's father's change in behaviour and physical appearance towards the end of the novel, when he is brought in a prison van to attend his father's burial:

> his blank stare just wouldn't go away, as if he didn't know at all where he was, his eyes were glittering like glass and it occurred to me that it wasn't Father I was seeing, no, it was no longer him, he didn't remember me or Mother anymore, he didn't remember a thing, and he didn't even know himself anymore ("Funeral", para 22)

As the title of the novel suggests, *The White King* is a parable of masculine authority in the context of three generations (grandfather, father and son), of paternalist state power relations related to a huge engineering project and of strict rules like those of a dictatorship applied no matter what people, like wooden or plastic chess pieces, might feel.

From a thematic perspective, Dragomán's novel covers the importance of the canal as a solid construction, the rigidity of the ruling apparatus and its traumatic effects on individual destinies. However, its picaresque style in the first-person singular, with very long engaging sentences and a predominantly anecdotal and colloquial register, suggests the assimilation of the idea of fluidity and transformation at the level of the aesthetics, coexisting with the urge to share personal stories that could have a therapeutic effect in the communities affected by the harsh working conditions.

A trans-European view of the Danube

In *Train to Budapest* (2008) by Italian novelist Dacia Maraini, young journalist Amara Sironi travels from Florence to several places from Central and Eastern Europe in 1956 to report on post-WW2 life and politics. In parallel, she wants to find out what happened to Emanuele Orenstein, her pre-war childhood friend, who used to write her letters from Vienna between 1941 and 1943, where he moved with his parents, and later from a ghetto in Łódź, where they were taken by the SS troops.

The first letter that Emanuele sends her begins by mentioning the river in the first sentence: "Dear Amara, yesterday we went for an outing on the Danube with our teacher. We skated on the frozen water." (Ch 4, para 1) Although brief, this reference marks the social significance of the river, its socialization, and the "culturalization of nature" (Schillmeier and Pohler, 2010: 26) through literature, and sets the tone for the rest of the novel.

On her journey by train, Amara befriends a man named Hans, based in Vienna, who travels to Poland to meet his daughter. When they reach the border between Austria and Czechoslovakia, she helps him solve his bureaucratic problems by filling out a form in which she writes they are relatives. Otherwise, the officials would have held him for two days. Later, he sends her a letter in which he expresses his gratitude, writes the love story of his parents and offers to give her a helping hand to find Emanuele. In this letter, Hans mentions the Danube and its surroundings as an idyllic site, the perfect place for romance:

> My father was studying music at the famous conservatory in Vác. He wanted to be an orchestral conductor. My mother had studied singing in Budapest and had won a scholarship to Vác to follow a course at the conservatory which was reputed to have produced great singers. One evening they met and walked beside the Danube under a

> huge moon that made their eyes shine and silhouetted them against the long white riverbank. […] They spent all that night chattering. And in the morning, when the sun had warmed them, they decided to take a dip in the river naked. They never even kissed. Just lay close together in the sun without their clothes, then left each other, each going home. But they began writing to each other and after two years of lively correspondence, they decided to get married. (Ch 10, para 6)

Amara's search for Emanuele, her wish to reunite with him although not knowing yet if he is dead or alive and his letters which she keeps in her bag "as her most precious possessions" (Ch 6, para 10) represent her intention to return to an age of innocence, her hope to reconnect with the pre-war times and people. The above representation of the Danube in Vác reflects the same intention, a mnemonic exercise meant to counterbalance the aftermath of the war and the horrors of the holocaust described in the novel.

Another example in which the identity of a river and of a person are brought together is the WW1 story of Emanuele's maternal grandfather. The Austrian emperor made him a hero after he lost an arm when trying to disable an explosive so his fellow soldiers could cross the bridge over Kolubara, a tributary to the Sava River, itself a tributary of the Danube. Whereas his grandfather was a hero of and a contributor to the imperial project—small brooks make big rivers—, Emanuele is rather an antihero who serves as an embodiment of loss and suffering, a reminder of the monstrous effects of authoritarian and belligerent regimes. The destiny of his lost parents is as implacable as the unrelenting force of a big river like the Danube. Individuals cannot fight against its huge natural force alone. Instead, a translocal approach could help individuals as part of multi-sited communities maintain a balanced relationship with its essential dynamics.

Since rivers often determine social life and shape human consciousness, language is sometimes influenced by their everyday presence. When Amara and Hans approach a representative of the police archives in Krakow, where they think they might find documents about Emanuele, the local officer replies: "Water under the bridge, Signora Sironi. The dead are dead." (Ch 12, para 23) In this context, the reference to the river suggests that what happened in the past cannot be changed: if Emanuele stopped sending letters, it may mean he either died or he does not want to see her. However, Amara and Hans continue to search for him, believing the contrary, that history can be rewritten when research is encouraged and there is evidence.

Apart from that, history is not simply water under the bridge: if that were the case, then people might risk repeating it. Even though individual and collective loss may be huge and people may want to forget rather than remember the past, there are voices that emphasize the ethical significance of the events for the new generations. For example, in his address delivered in 1992 as part of the Jean Améry Symposium at the University of Vienna, Nobel

Prize winner Imre Kertész (2011) explained what his idea of the Holocaust as culture means: "The Holocaust is a value, because, through immeasurable sufferings, it has led to immeasurable knowledge, and thereby contains immeasurable moral reserves." (76)

The first Metro line to cross the Danube

With *Under Budapest* (2013), which is part detective novel, part historical novel, Canadian writer Ailsa Kay succeeds in providing a complex reflection on the 20th-century Hungarian cultural identity and to offer readers a page-turner about the 1956 Revolution and its consequences for the present. In short, Agnes and Tibor, mother and son, travel from Toronto to Budapest for different purposes in the winter of 2010. She is searching for her sister Zsofi, whom she lost contact with in 1956. He is a historian taking part in a conference and trying to recover from a love affair with a married woman. Instead, they find a nationalist society, far-right politics, ruthless businessmen and streets rife with crime.

What motivates Agnes to travel to her birth country after about half a century is that another immigrant tells her about her own flight to Canada in the 1950s: "Zsofi and I escaped together. Through the tunnels." ("Gellért Hegy", 1, para 86) The author draws on the history and the mythology of the Budapest underground tunnels to put the events into perspective and to give the narrative more depth.

The network of tunnels under the Castle Hills used to serve military purposes and were used as shelters and storage during WW2, whereas the tunnels under the Castle Garden Bazaar used to be storage spaces for goods. Sections of these tunnels were incorporated into the M2 metro line, whose first plans were made in 1942, but whose construction was suspended after Stalin's death, from 1954 to 1963. That was the epoch when thousands of workers were brought to the capital to reconstruct the city centre and build the deepest metro line in the world at the time, a political decision supported by the Soviet regime. The main message of the propaganda was that commuting via subway would save time and people could watch movies instead. In reality, people needed dwellings and many country people died while working in the tunnels. In the 1950s too, Agnes's father, Miklos, was taken by the authorities and not allowed to go home:

> And then, eight years later, he was arrested and put on trial—a drama, a farce—and found guilty of plotting to sabotage the building of the Szabadság Híd. He was the engineer in charge, and he *loved* that bridge—the utile grandeur of it, its purposeful, elegant, weight-bearing bastions. Plus, he was a good communist. Why would a good engineer and a good communist make a bridge that would only fall down? ("Now or Never", 'Tuesday, October 16', para 66)

Maddened at her husband´s absence and at the psychosis caused by building the tunnels, but feeling he might be still alive, Agnes´s mother, Margit, wanders through the city in the autumn of 1956, trying to help her husband, whom she strongly believes is held underground:

> "Miklos, sooner or later, the revolutionaries will attempt to seize Communist Headquarters. I know it. I'm not hopeful they will win, but they will try, and when they do, you have to be ready." And with that, Margit drops the pistol down. She counts to ten before she hears a watery plunk far, far, far below ground, and then she drops the bullets. "Shoot that door down if you have to, Miklos. But don't get killed." ("Now or Never", 'Wednesday, October 24', para 48)

Besides presenting the Danube as a powerful natural force that needs to be harnessed through political determination and huge investments, so as to improve social life in Budapest, it is also depicted as a constant presence that influences people's personal and inner life. Travelling by metro, Agnes feels overwhelmed when "she's *under* the Duna, under that wide, weighty flow that banks can hardly hold when it floods" ("Gellért Hegy", 3, para 89), a subtle expression of her own guilt over leaving her sister Zsofi in the arms of her former lover and fiancé, Gyula, a student actively involved in the 1956 Revolution, a construction engineer during communism and a businessman after its fall. Agnes and Gyula used to meet on Margit Island, a lovers' favourite place now and in the past. When the two went home, they felt that the river separated not only Buda and Pesta, but also their own bodies and destinies:

> In two hours, she will walk back to her family's dark apartment on Visegradi in a dense part of Pest, while he heads in the other direction, over the bridge to Buda, to the gardens and steep climb of Rozsadomb, where all the party officials live, including his father. ("Now or Never", 'Tuesday, October 16', para 23)

Later, after Gyula is taken to prison for protesting against the Soviet regime, he has enough time to think about his childhood spent down the river:

> When I was little, I imagined living in the Duna. Shimmering windows open into watery rooms. Stairs spiral deeper and deeper, but nothing goes wrong and no one ever falls. I'll make a city like that. No. That's a child's dream and we're not children anymore, are we? ("The Safe Room", para 215)

When Agnes and her son Tibor return to Toronto, she meditates on her hyphenated identity not only as a Hungarian living in Canada, but also as a person with a past and a present very different, difficult to reconcile on her own:

> The photos slide. Agnes narrates. And it helps with that feeling that she'd been living with since Budapest, the feeling that she was two people: one, Agi, the lover of Gyula and sister of Zsofi, and two, Mrs. Agnes Roland, inside this tidy bungalow enclosed in a green lawn, encircled by wide asphalt road. How impossible. How utterly impossible, to live a life so decisively divided. She'd believed that in Budapest she would bridge it. ("After Budapest", para 50)

Besides connecting North America and Eastern Europe, personal life and history, first-generation and second-generation immigrants, real and fictional Budapest, novelist Ailsa Kay makes Hungarian language flow like a tributary into the big river that the English language is. She refers to the Danube as Duna, sprinkles the dialogues with *persze, csókolom* or *egészségedre*, mentions local food like *palacsinta* or *körözött* or nicknames like *Gombas* and uses the Hungarian names of various sites, buildings and publications not simply to hint at the local flavour, but to naturalize the language of a small country with the help of literature.

A transoceanic view on the siege of Budapest

Set mostly in the mid-1940s, the novel *Los Amantes Bajo el Danubio* (2016) by Argentinian author Federico Andahazi tells the love story between Hanna, a woman from the Hungarian Jewish community, and Bora, an aristocratic painter. After being married for several years and residing for a few years in Istanbul where Bora is sent as a diplomat, the wave of antisemitism during the Second World War causes them to grow apart. She starts dating her Jewish childhood friend, Andris, in secret and becomes closer to her ethnic community. Bora and Andris end up fighting in a duel, but none of them loses his life. Eventually, Hanna and Andris get married, while Bora starts a new life with Marga, the daughter of his parents' countryside property's administrator. When mass executions begin, Bora decides to give shelter to his ex-wife and her husband, hiding them in the basement of his villa. When the conflict intensifies, Hanna and Andris are helped to leave the country for Sweden. During the siege of Budapest, Bora and Marga wake up one morning to the sound of an explosion that destroys their house and forces them to flee the country as well. The construction and the style of the novel as well as its suspense and introspective approach prove that, in spite of the political conflict and social psychosis, love wins in the end. What role does the Danube play in this entangled story?

Firstly, it constitutes a silent narrative framework: the first and the last chapters begin with the same words, "A lot of water had passed under…" (9 and 324). It is a subtle hint that the account given in the rest of the chapters is not *agua pasada* or something to be forgotten, but a story to be told and retold. A significant distinction is that at the beginning only the Chain Bridge [2] from

Budapest is mentioned, whereas at the end of the novel Puente Alsino from Buenos Aires is mentioned too, which suggests the novel assembles several domestic and diasporic aspects of Hungarian culture and history.

Secondly, the vocabulary associated with the river, the bridges and water in general is used to describe powerful feelings and sensations and to produce a therapeutic effect. The river is there to mirror various stages of Hanna and Bora's love relationship. The second time they meet in the garden of the Gellért Hotel, they take a leisurely stroll that determines their destiny:

> For the first time, they crossed the Chain Bridge together. They went on foot from Buda towards Pest. In the middle of the bridge, they stopped to look at the Danube, on whose surface the inverted Parliament was replicated. Leaning on the handrail, they looked into each other's eyes and, without saying a word, they wondered how they would continue. They were in the middle of the bridge, too, as far as they were concerned. They could see both equidistant ends. They only had two options: go forward or go back. Even if they wanted to, they couldn't stay halfway forever. (Andahazi, 2016: 53)

When Bora is informed that Hanna lies to him, he follows her by car, crossing the bridge from Buda to Pest, to discover she is meeting with Andris. Hanna's preference for her childhood friend is described as an imagined geography: "She returned to the small island of the past, the same where Andris lived." (167) This brief commentary is an allusion to the history of the islands down the river, especially the Margaret Island, with its Medieval mystical aura and its unthinkable atrocities during the winter of 1944-1945. It might be interpreted as an echo of the Jewish tradition that brings Hanna and Andris together in their small community and which has been a source of cultural resistance in many parts of the world.

As a result of Hanna's betrayal, Bora and Andris duel over her, which reflects the clash between two worlds: the former is an anxious solitary artist coming from a Hungarian family with an aristocratic pedigree, whilst the latter is the resigned embodiment of the average people and of the small details that make humans happy.

Later, while antisemitism rises and Hanna and Andris stay hidden in the basement, the pressure of spending day after day underground is overwhelming: "They would have wanted to cry until they broke down in tears and, turned into water, run free through the drains to merge with the Danube that flowed, mighty, as close as it was unreachable." (24) For months on end, they only have each other and the preserves existing in the cellar: "They embraced like two castaways on a desert island." (165)

Time goes by and Marga comes to accept them in the house and even comes with the proposal that Hanna and she change roles for one day: Marga stays in the basement with Andris, while Hanna and Bora share the villa as if

she still were his wife. When discussing this plan, Marga and Bora imagine the way Hanna will spend her time in the attic, admire the Danubian landscape from the window, feel the breeze, hear the sound of ships and smell the flowers. In reality, this move makes them feel even more anxiety after they go out and cross the river on foot under the eyes of the German sentinels: she becomes paranoid, accusing him of ruthless manipulation, while he bursts into tears helplessly and his desperate weeping is "a cry of several generations" (247), an accumulation of suppressed unhappiness.

Before the Swedish help Hanna and Andris flee the country with false passports, she clings to her religious background and to nature: "Hanna said a few prayers in Yiddish and remembered the blue sky and the waters of the Danube as she had seen them the day she went for a walk with Bora. She wanted that to be her last memory." (251) Shortly after, the day Bora sees his villa bombarded and destroyed, he and Marga leave the city, while the river is there to guide them to a new unexpected direction: "They wandered off along the Danube, dazed, to nowhere." (259) In the end, "nowhere" becomes South America, where Hanna and Bora meet again years later, trying to find an answer to the question "why" which, like Ariadne's thread, takes the reader out of the narrative labyrinth of history: Why did she betray him? Why did he protect her?

As a fictionalized biography of his paternal grandfather, Andahazi's novel focuses on showing the facts rather than telling the answer, on describing individual terror rather than depicting massacres. One way to solve the mystery is to read recent history books such as *The Forgotten Massacre: Budapest in 1944* (2021) in which historian Andrea Pető addresses two important questions regarding the memorialization of the Hungarian holocaust: When did the persecutions of the Jews start? What is the responsibility of the Hungarian state in these persecutions? (7)

The choice of referring to the Danube throughout the novel reminds us that rivers both separate and unite their banks and the people who inhabit them. In 1944-1945, Buda was occupied by the Germans and Pest was invaded by the Soviet Army. Hanna's two lovers, Bora from Buda and Andris from Pest, may seem enemies at first, but the author demonstrates their eventual friendship and strong ties beyond the mundane conception of the human condition as well as the tense interdependence between tradition and modernity. From another angle, born and bred in a rather well-off environment in the countryside, Marga "felt sorry for the river imprisoned between the cement embankments and the bridges" (229). Since she longs for the pastoral atmosphere and feels trapped in the city, she rejuvenates when they end up in the Argentinian countryside, where she gives birth to a boy. Danube is there to remind the readers of natural resources and landscapes in contrast with the sometimes-oppressive cityscapes and the impact of the so-called civilization.

Conclusions

The above analysis is a glimpse into a literary network of fictional characters that take us to several parts of the world, not only to Hungary but also to other countries from Central and Eastern Europe as well as from North and South America and the Middle East, thus facilitating both a regional and a global bird-eye view on cultural hybridity, liquid modernity and transnational belonging.

These four novels allow readers to compare and contrast the problematic condition of individuals and families whose life happened to be linked to the Danube, either in favourable or unfavourable circumstances. For Djata, the river is both a natural spirit that has stolen his father and one that teaches him about social and political responsibility. For Amara, it is a pretext to explore less-known chapters from the history of Central Europe and to find moral value in times of unspeakable hubris. For Agnes and Tibor, the Danube operates as a metaphor for the collective unconscious of Budapest, which silently shapes individual identities and communities. For the characters in Andahazi's novel, the river functions as an indelible feature of belonging, in spite of the transatlantic distance and the terrible memories it may evoke.

From a stylistic point of view, the lens of liquid modernity favours a series of postmodern writing techniques (e.g., self-reflexivity, irony, unreliable narration, intertextuality, fabulation, and temporal distortion) capable of creating meaning out of socially and politically meaningless contexts like detention, armed conflicts, violent mass unrest and massacres. Furthermore, the simultaneous naturalization of history and socialization of the river through fiction eventually contribute to a productive cultural third space where former renegades (e.g., protesters, non-Aryan, anti-communist, exile) can find legitimacy. Having exposed a relative variety of narrative approaches and subjectivities that go beyond the nationalistic discourse, a possible ensuing question is what such heterogeneity is good for, which may be a topic for further research.

Notes

[1] Contrary to what the locals might think, the Danube Delta is rather unknown abroad. Sociologists Schillmeier and Pohler (2010) argued that: "It still represents a *terra incognita* of and for European studies." (35)
[2] The first permanent bridge built across the Danube in Hungary and opened in 1849, the Széchenyi Chain Bridge was blown up by the retreating Germans in 1945 and then rebuilt and reopened in 1949.

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Cartographies of Lost Places: An Oriental Oasis on the Danube River

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Abstract
Situated at the crossroads of East and West, there once existed a small and enchanting island on the Danube River, which separated the Ottoman Empire from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Throughout its lengthy and intricate history, the island had various names and was ruled by diverse forces. Ada-Kaleh now only exists in the memories of those who once inhabited it, many of whom have long since passed away. Submerged in 1970 to make way for the construction of the Iron Gates hydroelectric power plant, Ada-Kaleh continues to pique curiosity and bewitch the imagination of people who have heard of it but have never had the chance to set foot on it. Its disappearance from the map does not mean it has fallen into complete oblivion. Rather, it endures in multiple forms of artistic expression, including exhibitions, documentaries, novels, poetry, and movies. The present endeavour aims to explore the tumultuous history of this long-lost Oriental haven and to examine the various ways in which it has been recreated and reimagined in popular culture.

Keywords: *Ada-Kaleh, Danube, island, islanders, Turks*

> *"Phantom islands exist now as cartographic ghosts, imagined outposts that served as colonial placeholders, border markers, or wayward mythologies."* (Armstrong 2022: 51)

Islands have often been envisioned as remote places, possessing unique ecological and cultural characteristics that set them apart from the mainland. They have been seen either as idyllic, inhabited paradises or as utopian empty places where one can start anew because "[b]oundedness makes islands graspable, able to be held in the mind's eye and imagined as places of possibility and promise" (Edmond and Smith 2003: 2). Despite their confinement within a specific geographical area, islands remain an elusive and unpredictable subject – "the most slippery of subjects", according to Edmond and Smith (2003: 5). Fragmented and isolated, islands are vulnerable to natural

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disasters which could make them disappear in the twinkling of an eye. On islands, time elapses differently and events unfold on a different scale: "On continents, economic and political changes evolve over decades; on islands, a ship appears on the horizon, a seaplane lands in a harbour, a European explorer arrives, and a single day changes everything forever" (Clarke 2001: 46).

Such, too, was the story of Ada-Kaleh, the sunken island paradise on the Danube River, a miniature Atlantis that vanished underwater as if it were only a figment of the imagination. Its history is both fascinating and tragic. Blessed and condemned at the same time by its geographical position, it drew the attention of various conquerors throughout its tumultuous past. Nevertheless, history came to a sharp end for the island when the Communist authorities decided to sacrifice it on the altar of progress and civilization. Forever lost for more than half a century now, Ada-Kaleh is still remembered and researched by historians, anthropologists, ethnologists, etc., and is still reimagined and reinvented through works of literature. This article endeavours to provide a concise overview of the historical events that the island endured throughout its long existence. Additionally, it aims to look at its timely demise and how it has continued to capture the public's interest despite its disappearance from the map.

History interrupted

Ada-Kaleh was a small island situated 3 kilometres downstream from Orşova, between present-day Romania and Serbia. Despite its diminutive size, measuring only 1750m in length and 400-500 m² in width, Ada-Kaleh exuded a grandeur unparalleled by its physical geography. Enjoying a warm Mediterranean climate, its winters were mild, and its summers were cool. This enabled the growth of a lavish vegetation, comprising fig trees, chestnut trees, almond trees, medlar trees, cypress trees, lilac shrubs, roses, oleanders, thick wild vines, apple and pear trees and mulberry trees. The island's fauna was abundant, notably rich in scorpions.

The island's toponymy reflects its rich history. Herodotus called it *Chyraunis* and described it as abundant in olive trees and wild vines (Bărbulescu 2002). In Homer's *Odyssey*, it is mentioned as the dwelling place of Calypso. The island was called *Nymphaia* by the Argonauts, who were impressed by the milk produced by Geryon's famous herds of cattle. The Turks called it *Ada Kale*, meaning "the house of the strong-armed father" and, by extension, "the island fortress" or "the island gate". The Austrians referred to it as *Carolina* or the *Fortress of New Orşova*. At the peak of its fame, the island was known as Ada-Kaleh, a return to its original name according to Bărbulescu

(2002), and it remained so until its submersion by the Communist authorities in 1970.

The history of most islands is one of imperialism and postcolonial narratives. Islands have been the sites of conquest, exploitation, and resistance. Isolated in the middle of the Danube, separating the East from the West and guarded on both sides by mountains that descended abruptly into the water, Ada-Kaleh was destined to play, just like Gibraltar – hence the frequent comparison with the famous strait which links the Atlantic to the Mediterranean Sea –, a strategic role, by controlling and preventing, if necessary, the circulation on the Danube waters. The Romans were the first to set eyes on this small patch of land, so they made it an important trading post. It was home to a significant number of people. On the Serbian shore, the cart road that leads from Techia to Sip is the former path of Trajan's legions, a path that, carved in stone, extends beyond Cazane.

The geostrategic position of the island made it, later on, the bone of contention between two important empires, but not before John Hunyadi had it fortified in 1440, as part of his campaigns against the Ottoman troops which were plundering the southern part of the country. The Hungarians, who occupied the island for a few hundreds of years, strengthened the left bank of the river to ensure navigation on the Danube (Mosneagu 2017). Following the Battle of Mohács (1526), Hungary was defeated by the Ottomans led by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, and Ada-Kaleh became an Ottoman Island. Until 1689, the island remained a Turkish Pashalik, together with most of Hungary. The Turks colonised the island at that time. Yet, almost two hundred years later, in 1718, the Treaty of Passarowitz gave to the Habsburg Empire the Banat together with the island of Ada-Kaleh. General Frederico Veterani spoke about the strategic importance of the island in a report to the Imperial Court in Vienna calling it the key to Transylvania, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria (Mosneagu 2017).

The Austrians fortified the island so that the Turks might never advance on the Danube. The Fortress of New Orşova was constructed under the supervision of Nicolaus Doxat de Démoret, an Austrian colonel of Swiss origin. At that time, the fortress was one of the most important in Europe and occupied the greatest part of the island. The fortress consisted of triangular bastions and casemates that were linked by vaulted brick galleries, forming a larger inner yard at the centre. The entrance was through Baroque-style Eastern and Western stone-framed gates. According to records, there were two underwater tunnels connecting the island to the fort on the Serbian shore. There were also barracks for troops and ammunition depots.

The Austrian rule was short-lived and, in 1739, the Ottoman Empire regained control of the island following the Treaty of Belgrade which ended

the hostilities of the two-year Austro-Turkish war. From 1739 onward, Turks came to settle on the island from the right bank of the river. As a result, the commandant's headquarters was converted into a mosque which led to a decline in the island's previous military significance. Although the Austrians took control of Ada-Kaleh once again in 1789, it was later returned to the Turks after the signing of the Treaty of Sistova in 1791.

One century later, after the Russo-Turkish war (1877-1878), the United Romanian Principalities, Bulgaria and Serbia were liberated from Turkish rule and the fortified places which had belonged to the Turks, including Ada-Kaleh, were evacuated. Yet, the political status of the island was not explicitly addressed: "The island belonged to Turkey, but the peacemakers forgot about it at the Berlin Congress in 1878" (Lengyel 1939: 303). Therefore, the island remained the property of the Sultan of Constantinople but "its future was interpreted in the light of the articles of the Berlin Treaty, which provided for the neutrality of the Danube, its demilitarization, and the management, by Austria-Hungary, of unobstructed navigation." (Grigore, Vainovki-Mihai 2019: 243). The Sultan intervened personally with the Austrian imperial court to take over the protectorate of the island and to detach a garrison there to maintain order and safety. That is why the island – a Turkish fortress – was guarded by 40 Austrian soldiers (Mosneagu 2017). The islanders enjoyed tax and customs exemptions as citizens of the Ottoman Empire and were exempt from conscription.

In 1913, Austria-Hungary declared the annexation of the island and renamed it Újorsova (or Orşova) in the Krassó-Szörény County. Although initially the Ottoman government did not recognize the annexation, Turkey officially relinquished Ada-Kaleh to Romania under Articles 25 and 26 of the Treaty of Lausanne, on July 24, 1923, after Romania declared its sovereignty. When the Communists took power following World War II, Ada-Kaleh was subjected to the same repressive measures as the rest of the country, including the seizing of the islanders' assets. The most devastating blow came in the summer of 1952, when around 60 people were deported to the Bărăgan plain and were placed in penal colonies. The deportations were part of a campaign to rid the Yugoslav border region of ethnic minorities (Christie-Miller 2016). The deportations were overturned four years later, and the islanders returned. Concerned that the islanders would migrate to the less oppressive Yugoslav side of the river, the Romanian authorities limited the access to the island. Tourists were not permitted to stay overnight while the island residents were prohibited from crossing to or from the mainland after 8 PM (Jacobs 2015).

In the mid-20th century, the Communist ruling party began a campaign to modernize the country. As part of this campaign, the government decided to build a hydroelectric dam on the Danube. The inhabitants were offered the

possibility to relocate to Simian, a nearby island, but most of them decided to leave either for the Dobruja region or for Turkey. Some structures, such as parts of the mosque, the bazaar, and the graveyard, were moved to Simian. By 1968, the island was abandoned, and the remaining buildings were destroyed by dynamite to avoid obstructing shipping lanes. Ada-Kaleh was completely swallowed by the waters of the Danube River in 1970. The words of a former inhabitant reflect best the complete uprootedness islanders felt even long afterwards: "Everyone in this world has a homeland. Even if they live far away, they can still visit their place when they want. We don't have that chance." (Tutui 2010: 175).

_À_ la recherche du temps perdu

According to census records from 1930, the population of Ada-Kaleh consisted solely of Turks, totalling 455 individuals. Due to the island's small size, this population count remained relatively stable over time. According to *Anuarul Statistic al Județului Mehedinți,* in the 1966 census, the population had increased slightly to 499, with 239 men and 260 women residing in 166 households.

Life was simple and peaceful on the island and time seemed to elapse at a much slower speed than elsewhere. A visitor on the island recounts his experience:

> After getting off the boat that brought you from Orsova to the middle of the island, in this heaven of permanent tranquillity, in the kingdom of leaves, herbs, and snakes, you walked on a crooked, cobbled path shaded by chestnut trees, under two large gates carved into the walls of the fortifications, gates on which you can still see the enormous hinges that used to close the city every night. Beautiful, always damp grass grows wild everywhere. High fences hide small houses and, behind them, hidden from the indiscreet eyes of the travellers, Turkish women and girls. (Mosneagu 2017, my translation)

The streets were narrow and crooked, with clean and simple houses, almost completely devoid of furniture except for sofas and couches. The floors were covered with Oriental carpets. Each house had two apartments: a *selamlâc* where men would sit, and a *haremlâc*, where women and girls would sit. The islanders lived mainly on agriculture. The fertile soil allowed them to grow a variety of crops, including tobacco, grapes, figs and olives. Fishing was also important as the Danube provided a bountiful supply of fish. Fishermen would set out early in the morning in their small boats and would return later in the day with their catch. Women would prepare the fish for the evening meal, which was often shared with family and friends. Other traditional dishes included *pilaf*, *imambaialdi ani* (a type of lamb roast), *baklava*, *katayif*, *halva,* and

Turkish delight. The locals also survived on tourism and, sometimes, smuggling.

The island had all the necessary facilities: a town hall, a small hospital, a cinema, a cultural centre, a library, a school, a nursery, a post office, two shops, a bread factory, a Turkish delight factory and a cigarette factory formerly owned by Ali Khadri, the last governor of the island. His factory, "Musulmana", processed tobacco manually into 17 varieties of cigarettes which were also exported. Brands such as *RMS*, *Regale*, *National*, *Pasha*, *Harem*, *Smyrna*, and *Sultan* became famous and, soon, Ali Khadri's "Musulmana" became the supplier of fine cigarettes to the Royal House of Romania (Surcel 2018). In its glory days, the company employed 103 islanders. However, following the nationalization that took place in 1948, the number of employees plummeted to 69. In 1967, the impending submersion of the island led to the closure of the factory.

The island – "a slice of the Muslim Orient marooned deep in Christian Europe" (Jacobs 2015) – was primarily inhabited by Turks and their way of life was influenced by the Islamic culture. The call to prayer could be heard echoing across the island five times a day. The mosque was the centre of the community. It was built on a 4-metre-high casemate – a former monastery constructed in the Middle Ages by the Franciscan monks. In 1789, Sultan Mahmud transformed it into a mosque, adding a minaret. An enormous Persian red carpet – the colour of royalty – measuring 14 meters by 8 meters and weighing almost half a ton was gifted to the island by Sultan Abdul Hamid II and completely covered the floors of the prayer hall. The carpet can now be found in Carol I Mosque in Constanta.

Ada-Kaleh in literature

Ada Kaleh's beauty and exoticism have been depicted in a multitude of literary works by Romanian and international authors.

The Man with the Golden Touch (1872) is a much-acclaimed novel by the Hungarian writer Jókai Mór. Part of the action takes place on Ada-Kaleh, which is called "no man's island" because, through a document issued by two major powers – the Ottomans and the Austro-Hungarians – it was allowed to exist outside any borders. The novel is built on an antithesis: on the one hand, there is the profit-oriented capitalist society which promotes competition but corrupts and destroys people's happiness; on the other hand, the pure society on the "no man's island" has eliminated money (influenced by the socialist utopia) and promotes honesty and cooperation among people. Whereasthe first type of society includes most of the characters in their struggle to increase their wealth, the utopian society on "no man's island" is initially formed by

two people only. From this point of view, the novel is a true Robinsonade, featuring most of the elements of this genre: solitary protagonists, a deserted island and themes of self-sufficiency and resilience. The novel was so influential that, as early as 1919, it was turned into a silent movie under the direction of Alexander Korda, a pioneer of Austro-Hungarian cinema.

Nopți la Ada Kaleh (*Nights at Ada Kaleh*) is a novel by Romulus Dianu written in 1931. Against the backdrop of an exotic natural setting, where the inhabitants struggle to make a living by exploiting natural resources and trying to evade increasingly restrictive laws, the figures of some maladjusted personalities are projected – people with ideals who have come from elsewhere and are not integrated into the self-sufficient life of the community. People from all walks of life populate the novel: the old-fashioned Turkish mayor Huzun, his younger partner Yllen, an angelic woman with a troubled past, the tax agent Dobrescu sent by the king himself to tax the tobacco trade, a young engineer, and a smuggler are all present. The desires of the people, exacerbated by the exotic nature of the place, become burning passions, and the apparent isolation of the island turns dark thoughts into unimaginable actions that end dramatically and even tragically.

The beauty of Ada-Kaleh inspired poetry, too. Without naming it but giving the reader numerous clues as to its identity, George Topârceanu describes the island at dusk:

> Down there, above the forest, soon,/ Where shrubberies are dark and wet,/ Rises the handsome crescent moon/ And sparkles from a minaret.// And, as if painted with this goal,/ The island casts its shadow long,/ Cut from the world, playing the role/ Of a mediaeval castle, strong.// Looks like a ship charmed near the shore/ Which anchored at the mountains' feet,/ A wonder dreamed and waited for/ By the old Danube's water sheet! [...]// A floating garden, purest one,/ With trees and birds that sing in tune,/ With flowers laughing at the sun,/ But trembling scared under the moon. [1]

Ileana Roman, a contemporary writer from Drobeta Turnu-Severin, dedicated a poem to the island in her book *The Life and Work of the Ada-Kaleh Island* (2001):

> Underwater lies the island of amber with its paradise:/ Tokai wines, Smyrna tobacco/fig trees and walnuts, festivities, acrobats/anointed with olive oil, sultry women/and muezzins in the minaret for the evening prayer/myths, reductions, a style/Ada-Kaleh /– a land of birds without propellers/ Eugene of Savoy, Bayezid the Thunderbolt/ Maria Theresa/in the eggs of this bird. The flowers and boats/are ivory tears over which we simulate relics. /Nothing remains of Ada-Kaleh/but an "eh" on the banks of the river with butterflies around the world. (*Turbulent Shadows*, quoted in Ungureanu 2020: 2, my translation).

Another work of literature, Claudio Magris's *Danubio* (1986) – an Italian travelogue – reflects, among other things, Ada-Kaleh's unique culture. A type of river book in the vein of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the novel presents the author's journey down the Danube River which he sees as a symbol of Europe's multilingual identity. By the time the book was written, the island had long been gone, its inhabitants scattered to the four winds: "myths, lost voices, history and hearsay have all been put to rout, leaving nothing but this valley of the shadow" (Magris 1989: 242). Magris nostalgically reflects on the loss of the island: "Ada Kaleh has vanished, submerged by the river, and dwells in the slow, enchanted times of underwater things like the mythical Vineta in the Baltic" (Magris 1989: 333).

George Arion, a contemporary Romanian writer, sets one of his novels on Ada-Kaleh. *Umbrele din Ada Kaleh* (*The Shadows of Ada Kaleh*) (2019) tells the story of the love between the beautiful Aiseh and the fisherman Dragomir in an atmosphere which is both grim and magical. Against this background, a criminal investigation unfolds regarding the fate of some young prisoners thrown into a pit on the island.

Mircea Cărtărescu opens his short story *Ada-Kaleh, Ada-Kaleh…* with the memory of a painting of the island decorating the wall of his room: "I still remember the smell of the Ada-Kaleh painting when I jumped out of my bed. The green island with its pale-yellow minaret [...] and the Turkish woman painted in the foreground levitating on the deep green Nile depths of the Danube" (Cărtărescu 2012: 10-11, my translation). His childhood friends had never heard of Ada-Kaleh and they believed that the island was a product of his vivid imagination. One day, he heard on the radio that a large hydroelectric plant would be constructed by the Socialist Republic of Romania together with the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Yet, not a word from the authorities about the fate of the island which had haunted his imagination long before he got to know about it: "It had to first disappear to turn, from a childish myth, into a tangible place that was once inhabited by people" (Cărtărescu 2012: 19, my translation). Towards the end of his story, he evokes a boat trip with an old Turk on the Danube, right where the island was once, and muses:

> We all have an island in the depths of our thoughts, an island that we desperately search for, like the molten diamond of our being. We and our world are deeply submerged in the waters of time and universal memory, like an Ada-Kaleh that will never be real again. (Cărtărescu 2012: 31, my translation)

Conclusion

The search for lost places has enthralled the minds of specialists (be they archaeology enthusiasts, historians, sociologists, etc.) and common people alike. A sunken island is the stuff of imagination and exoticism. Although long vanished, Ada-Kaleh still looms large on the mental map of those few who have ever been connected to it one way or another. The words of a former inhabitant best capture the essence of what Ada-Kaleh once was:

> "My entire childhood was spent in the Ada Kaleh community and there was almost nothing outside of it," he told me. "When you listen to stories about a place that no longer exists, it fuels your imagination. You're able to see it in your mind's eye and you can place all the stories into a kind of theatre set." When first I asked him how he imagined the island, without missing a beat he answered: "Paradise" (Christie-Mille 2016).

Note

[1] Translation available from https://poetii-nostri.ro/george-toparceanu-pastel-poem-pastel-translation-1024/

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The Shape Shifter. The Danube in a Snapshot

Lidia Mihaela NECULA*

@George Nica Photography

Abstract

Although not the longest river in Europe, the Danube has always manifested her existence in a plurality of voices, forms and guises, tempting leaders due to her strategic geographic position and the promise of abundance, thus risking to become a bone of contention on political maps, while revealing herself as an enchantress of colours and shades, of sounds and wor(l)ds beautifully blended in spectacular artistic creations that bring her to the fore. Starting from black-and-white snapshots of the Danube, this paper looks into her occurrences as a Shape Shifter, an Alchemist, a Collector and an Art Muse as they are embodied within literary and/or artistic records.

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Keywords: *microcosm, shape shifter, androgynous, cultural clusters, cultural promenades, collector of memories and feelings, portal to freedom*

Beginnings

A powerful geographic and historic European presence, the Danube resides deep in the collective unconscious of *her peoples* whose personal *histories* are either experienced firsthand or mediated by literary or artistic texts. The stories change as the Danube washes against her banks along and across Europe's lands but what remains the same is the bulk of overwhelming feelings she constantly over-floods. Some may be of sweet nostalgia and happiness while others are of wretchedness and sadness remembering the terrible tragedy of Mogoşoaia [1], thinking of the countless families deprived of happiness for the rest of their lives, or of the men, women and children whose lives were so violently interrupted, turning them into corpses floating down the stream, turning the freezing cold waters of the Danube into an aquatic tomb.

This is why, in all likelihood, these mental mappings of the Danube will always be similar to the one in the photo above: half the Danube is frozen, cold and almost lifeless, an image that so peacefully instills the smell of Death, subconsciously overlapping the images of all those tragedies that have ever occurred on the Danube – most of them in cold late autumns and early winters; the other half is still boiling, flowing and fluid, constantly trying to evade the frozen touch that would entail its death for eternity.

And yet, perhaps not at all surprising, in a setting that is dominated by the presence of the river, the photo above successfully emphasizes her ever-changing nature and Danube's capacity to evoke a sense of wonder and contemplation, *freezing* Danube's (physical) dichotomy (brought about by a natural phenomenon that happens in cold winters); it is this duality (even bipolarity), now captured by the intrusive eye of the camera, that has always been seized and rendered by literary records or artistic representations. [2] After all, being an enlivened organism, the Danube experiences changes throughout the seasons (especially in wintertime), fluctuating water levels, and varying moods: tranquil and serene along half of its length, the Danube flows fast and turbulent along its other half the shades of the old poplars flanking it.

It flows ceaselessly, carving its path through the landscapes it passes, shaping the land and leaving its mark over time. This portrayal emphasizes the river's energy and strength, evoking a sense of awe and respect for its natural power.

Intended not as an overview of cultural representations of the Danube – that would most certainly overlook significant depictions and subjectively favour others – but sooner as a kaleidoscope of overlapping mental images of

the river, the following pages are mapping the Danube in an artistic framework. The approach can be, to a certain extent, seen as ekphrastic, since it… *writerly paints* Cultural Studies. Four categories have been envisaged to this end – they are neither exhaustive nor set in some stone that the river may unturn – but they correlate and connect to each other under the signs of everlasting flow and androgyny. The first one is the mapping of the Danube as a hypertext of sorts, a muse that inspires through constant shapeshifting. It is precisely this chain of metamorphoses that the river goes through that suggested the second mental framing – the Danube as a river of a hundred faces – and the connection to a famous literary figure – Virginia Woolf's Orlando. And then, as Orlando travels through the ages and places, so does the Danube, which entails clustering, connection and cultural togetherness of the riverain countries. Lastly, the tableau is rounded off with the river's actual presence in cultural artefacts, as a character, not just as a mere element of setting. While these four 'portraits' are presented in a succession that the practice of writing imposes, they ultimately blend into one, outlining one frame of the river banks.

The Danube, the Artful Muse

In both literature and visual arts, the Danube, a genuine symbol of connection and unity, serves as a metaphorical thread that connects different countries, regions, and cultures, weaving together a rich tapestry of European history, identity and contradictions, a rich intertext which tells stories of the beauty and complexity of the natural world, and the ways in which it unifies diverse landscapes and their inhabitants, with different languages, customs, and perspectives.

Carving her way through the heart of Europe, leaving behind valleys and cliffs as if chiselled from the very earth, the Danube is the *Shape Shifter*, at times revealing herself like a sculptor's masterpiece, while at others she is like a breathtaking accomplishment of nature created with every bend and turn of unfurled colours.

Writers and poets alike have always used the river as a metaphor for the *human quest* for meaning and knowledge, or as a backdrop for thrilling adventures and suspenseful tales. Pertaining to her inseparable bipolarity, artists have also chosen to depict the Danube in various forms and guises, from scenic landscapes to detailed maps capturing the river's grandeur, while photographers have used the Danube as a subject for stunning black and white images.

Perhaps it is the Danube's beauty, her historical significance, or yet again her cultural importance to the European continent that might have to do with the reasons why the river has always been so popular, and it remains certain

that, no matter the medium, the Danube is a recurrent vivid presence whose lush greenery is only matched by her serene majesty. And when the paintbrush of the eager artist manages to seize the river's reflective surface it is only to highlight the colourful surrounding flora and fauna reflected on the water the banks of which are often lined with tall trees, rolling hills, and picturesque towns.

From scenic beauty to light and atmosphere, from historical to cultural significance, from Romanticism to Symbolism or maybe human presence, the themes recurrent in the works of art (paintings or photographs) [10] featuring the Danube are varied and changing, just like its shifting and bipolar nature. While some paintings focus on showcasing the picturesque landscapes along the Danube winding through lush green meadows, rolling hills, or majestic mountains, others emphasize the play of light and atmosphere which is skilfully captured by the interplay of sunlight and shadows on the river's surface, thus creating a sense of depth and atmosphere. Similarly, while some paintings portray the Danube through romantic and symbolic lenses, mediating her as a symbol of continuity, unity, or longing, other paintings depict people engaging with the Danube, whether it is fishermen, boaters, or local communities – which emphasizes the river's importance in the lives of those who dwell along its banks.

Nonetheless, what becomes clear regardless of the theme, style or period envisaged is that in most paintings Nature's elements recreate a perfect balance of opposites and, being such a powerful element itself, the Danube seems to be a most agile *Shape Shifter* whose duality (and bipolarity) is seen in the river's ability to adapt and transform: wide and calm along some stretches, while narrow and fast-flowing along others, or deep and majestic, while shallow and tranquil, the Danube symbolizes the cycles of birth, growth, and renewal that are inherent to all beings. Moreover, not only does the river's ever-changing nature reflect the ebb and flow of existence, the cycles of nature but she also nurtures life, a vast ecosystem of flora and fauna, supporting diverse forms of *being*, providing habitats for numerous species and serving as a *lifeline* for both wildlife and human communities along her banks.

Hence, while being a moody *Shape Shifter* herself, the Danube eventually has the power to imprint change/ *shifts* in the life forms/ *shapes* clustered around her, entailing ever-changing (non)human experiences, *her-stories* in a constant state of flux, shifting and transforming as time progresses.

The Danube, the River of a Hundred Faces

Famed for her ever-changing path due to natural processes, human intervention, and geological factors, the Danube is a genuine S*hape Shifter* meandering through different landscapes, creating new channels, and altering

her course and appearance over time: she can flood over her banks or shrink in size – just like Alice does after drinking the potion or biting from the mushroom, and, just like an entity, she has the power to grow a new limb, not yet a new body but maybe a limbo that is striving to unite her banks from season to season. But the Danube is also the *Alchemist* who has been washing away the banks of the lands it crosses, transforming them while taking with her traditions and stories and bringing others to renew what was old, to fill in empty spaces and interconnect people and stories, moving her cultural borders and making time elastic.

The Danube, the *Shape Shifter*, reunites all her shapes and all her faces into the microcosm that she is: a cultural envoy and a historical chronicle at the same time, the river still keeps within her banks the stories of the rise and fall of empires, of wars and migrations fostering cultural exchanges of art, music, and traditions since the beginning of times.

Besides being a microcosm that reveals herself in layers (of history, culture, and interconnectedness) that define Europe, the Danube seems to be shedding light on the diversity of each region she crosses, as well as on the challenges of reconciling different identities and cultural narratives of unity and division, of shared experiences, conflicts and aspirations of the people dwelling along her banks.

The River of a Hundred Faces is the *Androgynous River*. Strange as this may sound, this gender duality is reflected in the Danube's own name: it is said to have derived from Celtic, itself derived from Proto-Indo-European. Perhaps it is exactly this interlingual submergence from one culture to another that left an imprint on her name so that, while in Latin it denotes masculinity, the early Germanic name is, on the contrary, feminine. And yet, perhaps, there is no other language that the Danube manifests and embraces her androgynous nature in (moving in and out of cultures and of times) as in Romanian, where the noun "river" is masculine in the singular, but the proper name is feminine, which suggests that a feminine soul (Dunărea) is trapped in a masculine body (the river). And just like Orlando, the protagonist of Virginia Woolf's eponymous novel (1928) [3], the Danube travels across Europe and through different historical periods, thus serving as a symbol of change and continuity. Clearly, the Danube is a river that has witnessed the passing of time, in a manner very much similar to Orlando's, whose experiences indicate life metamorphoses. Transience and transformation, this is what connects the Danube to Orlando, but so is their androgynous nature due to which they can survive and thrive in an ever-changing cultural and geographic landscape. And while individuals and societies may change over time, some elements of the natural world, like the Danube River, remain constant, connecting different historical eras and identities, manifesting *the feminine* or *the masculine* within alternately.

The Danube, the Alchemist of Cultures

Given that she is flowing along and passing through multiple countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the Danube's historical, geographical, and economic significance has made her a unifying element in the region. From Germany to Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, and finally Ukraine, ten are the countries which the Danube borders and naturally links and it is this geographical interconnectedness that allows for and inspires continuous cultural exchange and cooperation.

In some literary works such as *Danube: A Sentimental Journey from the Source to the Black Sea* (1986) by Claudio Magris, or *The Bridge on the Drina* (1977) by the Nobel laureate Ivo Andrić or *The Danube: A Cultural History. Landscapes of the Imagination* (2011) by Andrew Beattie [4], the Danube's role as a connector of cultures and nations is emphasized to further enhance the notion of the river as a *living being* thus allowing for a deeper appreciation of her tremendous power of adaptability. She acts as a bridge between different lands, fostering the exchange of ideas, traditions, and influences so that, while carrying out her knowledge and power to transform elements, the Danube – the *Alchemist* creates *cultural clusters* that interconnect peoples and traditions, but it also spreads *cultural promenades* where games of *quid pro quo* are engaged: it is within these spaces that the *old* willingly allows itself to be contaminated by the *new*, and the *new* acts as a gentle colonizer who embraces the *old* so that the *new* can come to life.

Clearly, such a portrayal underscores the river's ability to facilitate connections and interactions, entailing both a sense of unity and shared heritage among the communities the Danube crosses, both shaping and influencing the world around her.

(Trajan's Column – the Danube bridge - Bing images)

Looking back in history, the first known artistic interpretation of the Danube dates as far back as the Roman times and is found on Trajan's Column, a Roman triumphal monument erected to commemorate Emperor Trajan's victory in the Dacian Wars (101-102 AD and 105-106 AD) [5], in which the Roman Empire extended its control over the regions north of the Danube. Without a doubt, from a strategic point of view, the Danube was a crucial waterway in the Roman Empire, and her importance is more than obvious in the art and monuments of that era.

The Danube's earliest depiction is to be found on Trajan's Column, a bas-relief sculpture that depicts various scenes from the Dacian Wars: a significant element in these scenes, the river is represented as a personified figure with an imperial appearance, thus symbolizing the river's importance to the Roman Empire. The scenes on the relief show Roman soldiers crossing the Danube, conducting naval operations on the river, and interacting with local populations along her banks which makes this depiction of the Danube not only historically significant but also artistically momentous since it serves as one of the earliest accounts of the river, thus highlighting its role as a vital transportation and strategic route in the ancient world.

Moreover, conceptualizing the Danube not only as a *living being* but, more importantly, as a *powerful royal figure or maybe a God* can also entail a sense of mightiness and loftiness, while still entailing empathy and emotional connection: in a similar way to humans, who experience emotions, the river is endowed with human features and certain emotional qualities evoking feelings of wonder, serenity, or even melancholy, depending on the circumstances and the perspective of the observer.

And while engaging herself, her lands and (t)he(i)r people into this cultural *alchemy* the Danube has always allowed for an exchange of people, goods, and ideas, blending and sharing cultures within and outside her *space*: *people moving* means ideas inter-acting, traditions, languages, and artistic expressions fusing and so, while giving rise to a unique blend of heritage, *The Danube, the Shape Alchemist of Cultures* has both the power and the will to alter her borders on geographical maps and also in people's mental representations of her, i.e. in their collective unconscious.

The Danube, the Collector... of Memories

A symbol of freedom for the refugees who swam across her to escape an oppressive communist system or for the Jews who dreamt of a home and a life of their own [6], a ruthless reminder of the dangers that lie ahead when man's only purpose is to dominate man, the Danube is also a *collector of lost souls* metamorphosed into *memories*, the eye of a camera carefully handled by the

crafted photographer, a collector of stories about freedom, escape, adventure, and dangers which might have otherwise remained trapped in a time forgotten space.

> The Danube River that ran red with Jewish blood flowed into the sea, where the blood of the Jews was added to the oceans of the planet. The earth is awash in Jewish blood - literally. Just as it is covered with Jewish ashes - literally. In the time of the Holocaust, the smoke from burning Jewish bodies bellowed into the air for a thousand days from dozens of chimneys. The winds have cast the ashes of those millions of Jewish fathers, mothers, and children over the face of the earth. From that earth we now harvest our bread, and in our bread abide the ashes of the Jewish dead. They are woven into the fabric of humanity, body and soul: the essence of the Holocaust is part of our own essence. (Ozsváth 2010: 14)

In many literary works and poetic interpretations, the Danube River is personified and depicted as an entity, possessing characteristics and qualities akin to a sentient being. This anthropomorphic portrayal highlights the vitality, power, and dynamism attributed to the river: a powerful and mighty force, the Danube is dynamic and ever-changing, not only interacting with its surroundings but also influencing the lives of those who encounter it, eventually becoming a *Collector of memories,* a string of reminiscences about growing up, falling in love, and fighting for survival. Woven into the narrative to create a vivid and dreamlike atmosphere, Mircea Cărtărescu's Danube River often evokes a symbolical and metaphorical sense of place, memory, and identity (*Orbitor*, 2007, trans. *Blinding*) [7]. It plays a similar role in Charles Farkas's novel *Vanished by the Danube. Peace, War, Revolution and Flight to the West. A Memoir* (2013) [8]

Just as in stories where heroes are constantly tried and have to prove themselves worthy of the *Holy Grail*, the Danube has the power to reveal herself differently every time, in keeping with the hearts of the fugitives longing for freedom. 'Perhaps the promise of this innocent water is deceitful, and such a universe does not exist. A visit to a concentration camp seems to ridicule all faith in the great tree of humanity imagined by Herder as one harmonious whole.' (Magris 2008: 41)

The rushing sound of the Danube's waterway is described against the roar of the water as it crashed against the rocks, the wildness of it all filling them with an exhilarating sense of possibility.

In Paul Bailey's novel *Kitty and Virgil* (2000) [9], the Danube is presented as a creature, similar to the magical mermaids whose charming songs would entice sailors and lead them to death by their magical song: to all, the Danube seems to promise a life beyond the drabness of reality; it is their escape route, their adventure.

A spirit akin to the Danube's own, Virgil Florescu, the dissident poet who swims across the Danube to escape Ceauşescu's Romania (Bailey, 2000), becomes the metonymical representation of all those who, in their yearning for freedom, abandon their lives at the mercy of the swift and dark river. Like a dangerous beast, the Danube is waiting to devour the gullible – attracted by its shimmering surface, at times stained by the reflection of the city lights dancing on it. And yet, it manages to recreate balance, in a combination of great force and dynamism, as it launches into a harmonious marriage of contrasts to the steep canyons or rocks that it ultimately breaks, with powerful and mighty force.

With the evolution of the visual arts, the ceaseless paintbrush has gradually given way to the hungry eye of the camera so that it is not long before the river's tranquil and calming qualities get under the focal point of the lenses.

@George Nica Photography

A contemporary photographer famous for his minimalist and poetic approach, George Nica [11] predominantly focuses on landscape photography, capturing serene and contemplative scenes from various locations around Galați. His artistic expression lies in the visual realm through his photographic compositions: it is through this distinctive style that Nica explores the ethereal and atmospheric qualities of the landscapes he photographs. George Nica's photographic representations of the Danube largely capture her as a peaceful and tranquil body of water, featuring her smooth surface, gentle curves, and a

sense of eternal calmness that resonates throughout the images. Many of his images depict the Danube in a timeless, almost otherworldly way.

In his photographs, George Nica often embraces simplicity and minimalism, utilizing a limited colour palette and clean compositions and perhaps it is this aesthetic approach that allows him to distill the essence of the Danube's landscapes, emphasizing their tranquility and timeless beauty. Characterized by a rather limited tonal range, his black-and-white photography encompasses subtle gradations of light and shadow, a technique that enhances the texture and mood of the Danube's surroundings, thus emphasizing the river's serene and contemplative nature.

Watched from an unreal stillness, the Danube is captured in motion, which creates a sense of smoothness and fluidity in Nica's photographs while, by using extended shutter speeds, he can depict the Danube as a flowing, dynamic force, emphasizing its vitality and energy.

George Nica's photographs often convey a sense of symbolism and metaphor since, even though the Danube herself may not be explicitly referenced in titles or captions, his images evoke a broader contemplation of nature, time, and the human connection to the environment. Overall, his photography of the Danube encapsulates a sense of harmony, serenity, and timelessness: through his distinct artistic style and minimalistic approach, he captures the essence of the river's landscapes, evoking a contemplative and meditative experience for the viewer.

Conclusions

Not merely a river, but a fountain of life that keeps us enchanted, the Danube's fluid melody speaks of unity and separation, of the happiness of love and the sadness of loss, of the grace of falling and rising again, of the savagery and brutality she has washed away from the eastern shores of the poverty-stricken police states. This is the *Shape Shifting* Danube, this is the *River of a Hundred Faces,* this is the *Alchemist of Cultures* and the *Collector of Memories* and secrets, of powerful feelings and lingering emotions – all of which are embedded within this mirror-like *Artful Muse* which is seen reflecting the heart and soul of the lands it touches: each and every one of these *identities* at once turn the Danube into a *Grecian Urn*, a vessel bearing on the outside the marks of the time elapsed, while the empty inside is yet to be filled in with the times to come.

https://adevarul.ro/stiri-locale/galati/naufragii-cumplite-pe/dunare/secretele

Notes

[1] Mogoşoaia, Rostok and Transylvania are just a few of the ships that the Danube has claimed *tribute* over the years. Hundreds of people have died and priceless heritage values have gone to the bottom of the river.

The most famous, but also the most tragic shipwreck on the Danube is that of the Mogoşoaia. On 10.09.1989, around 8.20 in the morning, while making the Galați-Grindu trip, the passenger ship Mogoşoaia collided, because of thick fog, with a convoy of barges propelled by the Bulgarian flagged pusher Petar Karamnichev. (MOGOSOAIA | marinarii.ro)

Initially, the departure had been postponed because of the fog on the Danube, but the ship eventually headed for Grindu-Pisica. The collision resulted in the overturning and rapid sinking of Mogoşoaia, the passenger ship, and with it, many innocent lives were suddenly and violently cut short. It took less than three minutes to irrevocably change everything for everyone. (Pleşa, 2006) There were no less than 255 passengers on board. 239 people died and only 16 survived. Some of the passengers were workers who had come off their shift from the shipyard and were going home to Grindu-Pisica. Others (whole families) were going to visit their relatives at the end of the week. While most of the passengers stayed in their cabins because it was cold, the rest were on deck. Some of them managed to step, most probably out of reflex, onto the Bulgarian vessel soon after the collision. Others, those who were on deck, jumped into the water and swam to safety. Those who were inside the ship were pushed to the surface by the pressure created when the ship sank. Such was the pressure that not only did all the glass shatter, but even the benches were pulled out of the bolts in which they were fastened. Cristian Cristea, one of the survivors, was 12 years old in 1989. The pressure pushed him to the surface. He swam to the Tulcea shore but his parents and sister were not that lucky. They died. Five days after the accident, Mogoşoaia was taken out and dragged further down the Danube. It was full of bodies, former human beings whose existence had suddenly got trapped in a timeless photo. (Pleşa 2006)

Despite the never-ending suffering imbued in the waters of the Danube, people seem to have felt the need to give it a palpable body and turn it into a filmic adaptation *The ball of destiny* directed by Dir. Maximilian Popescu**,** (original title *Ghemul destinelor*), and write it into the story of *Mogoşoaia, the history of a tragedy* by Petre Rău (original title *Mogoşoaia, istoria unei tragedii*, 2009)

[2] A short explanation pertaining to my final choice of a feminine pronoun form to refer to the Danube is called forth, especially since I refer to her androgynous nature later on in the text, equally embracing femininity and masculinity. My final decision has been very much influenced by the fact that the way people use language has a profound influence on how we see the world. On the one hand, the fact that English does not allocate gender to words leads to subjectivity and relativity that come to play in the feminine or masculine associations we ascribe to nouns, all the more since there are no grammatical rules to make something either male or female. That is why, most likely, the Mississippi is characterized in America as male, while the Indians refer to the Ganges as female, clearly because the Ganges is a well-known feminine sacred symbol of Indian culture in addition to being the main source of survival. On the other hand, given the fertility of the Danube's instantiations as a River with a Hundred Faces (and personalities I should say) as they are recurrent throughout Europe as well as the fact that what I look into is rather the soul (Dunărea) and not the body (the river) of the Danube, my final decision has been very much influenced by the idea of *fertility of all sorts* as a backdrop. Likewise, perceiving the Danube not as a body of water but as a *body of life* has led me to see her as an anthropomorphic entity whose duality (even bipolarity) is visible in the traces that she leaves on the land she waters and in people's hearts: like a magnet, she manifests, at some times, her *positivity* (joviality and happiness) imprinting it on people's lives, being a source of nourishment meant to quench their *thirst* and satiate their *hunger* (physical, emotional, psychological, and cultural). At other times she manifests her *negativity* (violence and anger) when she turns into a murderess demanding for her human sacrifice to be made. A Shape Shifter and a Mood Shifter, yin and yang, serene and turbulent, happy and sad, the Danube seems to be taking her force and vitality exactly from the duality of her physical nature and from the bipolarity of her psychological nature.

[3] For further reading see Woolf, V. (1928) *Orlando*, UK: Hogarth Press;

[4] For further reading, see:

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[9] For further reading, see:
Bailey, P. (2000) *Kitty and Virgil*, The Overlook Press
[10] See the works of Albrecht Altdorfer (a German Renaissance painter), Károly Markó the Elder, Károly Ferenczy, Bela Ivanyi-Grünwald, Károly Lotz (Hungarian artists) and Oskar Laske (an Austrian painter).
[11] @ George Nica photography

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Disorienting Suspense and Narrative Turns of the Screw in Mircea Eliade's *Miss Christina*

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Abstract
This interpretation of Miss Christina *results from my personal text-oriented criticism in reevaluating the story as well as from my own response to contemporary cultural shifts in recontextualizing major literary works such as Henry James's* The Turn of the Screw. *I consider Mircea Eliade's comments about writing* Miss Christina *as a ghost story in which a young woman returns to the world of the living as a vampire and desires to be loved by a mortal to be a narrative challenge for the astute reader, a provocation similar in a comparative context to James's disclaimers about* The Turn of the Screw *as a mere ghost story. I note that the character doubling of Miss Christina with the beautiful young girl Simina and Egor's failed attempt to impose his own narrative of an unrealizable romance with the vampire and of his search for the truth about the girl Simina are behind the story's dynamic in an oscillating drama that highlights problematic hallucinations; they haunt the text and the Bărăgan plain as much as they haunt Egor's own mind. Finally, I argue that the story's doubling vision becomes a way of representing the horror of Egor's conflicted sexuality and of his search for moral certainty.*

Keywords: *masculinity, vampire, blood, curse, spell, perverse, Bărăgan plain*

Mircea Eliade was fond of saying that the decision to settle in Chicago was linked to his fascination for Michigan Lake. According to his widow Cristinel, this landmark of the windy city reminded him of the Black Sea and echoed the alluring beguilement Eliade felt for dark and still waters like the Danube which he knew well from his early years in Cernavodă, the small town on the Danubian plain where he attended school as a first-grader before his family moved back to Bucharest.

If one is to give credence to Vasile Băncilă's view that the sensibility of great writers is a hybrid of their childhood and of their ancestors' inherited spaces (Băncilă 2000: 15), then Eliade's early life spent along the banks of the Danube played a crucial role in shaping his attraction to the Danubian plain as central setting for his celebrated story *Miss Christina*.

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Known as the Bărăgan, the Danubian plain of Europe's southeastern region is regarded as a natural belt that encroaches on the continent's primeval (his)stories and legends. Beyond Victor Crăciun's comments about the Danube in the work of Fănuş Neagu, which unfold the Bărăgan plain as a vast expanse of land, spotted with forests, vineyards, orchards, and cattle, this land serves in Eliade's *Miss Christina* as the foundation for an imagined community and ideal setting to articulate the interiority of a variety of subjects by acting out masculinity, gender identity, and communal identification with the national imaginary of trauma, violence, and vampire lore. (Crăciun 2002: 33)

In the note to *Trilogia culturii. Orizont si Stil. Spatiul Mioritic. Geneza Metaforei si Sensul Culturii* by Lucian Blaga, the Bărăgan plain appears to Vasile Băncilă as one of the two primordial nuclei of the Romanian spirit, the *mioritic* and the *bărăganic*, and holds a particular fascination for many writers who turned it into "an infinite fabric of artistic invention" (Voiculescu 1986: 8) that transports readers into bewildering spaces. Writing about the Bărăgan in his book pointedly titled *Spaţiul Bărăganului*, Vintilă Horia talks about the Bărăgan plain as a place traversed by the Great River (i.e., the Danube) that fosters a climate of legends and ancient stories, a territory waiting to be further discovered by those joining in the tradition of consecrated writers from Alexandru Odobescu, through Panait Istrati to Fănuş Neagu. (qtd. in Marinescu 2018: 71-72)

With a sense of wonder, Vintilă Horia discusses the infinity of the Danubian plain shaped like "a real labyrinth" with the enclosed space of the Bărăgan that hides like a curtain the shifting perspectives of mirrors reflecting the hazy emergence and sudden disappearance of phantom-like creatures. (Ungureanu 2000: 19)

In Mircea Eliade's *Miss Christina*, the Danubian plain equates the fascinating landscapes haunted by ghosts and vampires in the vein of gothic tradition. Turned into a haunted place that provides a gloomy atmosphere and unsolved secrets in the style of the old house at Bly in Henry James's story *The Turn of the Screw*, the dilapidated country manor inhabited by Mrs. Moscu, Miss Christina's sister, and her younger daughter Simina, the adjacent stables, and the subterranean cellar, as well as the indeterminate village scattered nearby become a bewildering setting that, according to Sorin Alexandrescu, "grows directly from the Romanian folklore: a story with ghosts, in an accursed space, that a young man saves, killing a second time the vampire, with an iron staked through her heart." (Eliade 1996: vi-vii, my translation) [1]

And yet, the year after *Miss Christina* was published, in 1937, Mircea Eliade was fired from his teaching job at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest. Could it be that the archaic universe of the millennial Danubian plain becomes, upon closer examination, a satanic playground that enacts the immutable essence of sexual depravity disguised as vampire lore? In this essay,

I propose to argue a complementary possibility of interpreting *Miss Christina* as a story that violates, in a manner similar to James's famous story, the certainty of respectability and morality by taking very short steps toward our understanding of a forbidden sexuality and a young protagonist's terrible self-revelations enacted far away from the mundane world of respectable courtship and marriage in the space of the beautiful but haunted Danubian plain.

The narrative centres on the painter Egor's visit to his fiancée Sanda's home, a country manor vaguely located in the Bărăgan plain, within a few hours from Giurgiu, one of the town ports along the Danube. From the moment of their arrival, Egor's incongruous curiosity focuses on Sanda's mother, Mrs. Moscu, and especially on her younger sister Simina, introduced by Sanda as "a freakish child… only nine." While dinner is served and another guest introduced as Professor Nazarie begins to talk about his archaeological digging at the neighbouring Bălănoaia, a land that once belonged to the now deceased sister of Mrs. Moscu, Miss Christina, Egor's attention is drawn uncontrollably to Simina.

He marvels at her dark curls that shine in the candlelight, at her "serene brow" and "doll-like cheeks," and admits to himself that "he couldn't take his eyes off her face." Trying with great effort to answer Sanda's questions and having to join in the table conversation, Egor continues to feel uneasy and ends up playing with a knife; it was "something he had to grasp, cold and hard, to squeeze, to relieve his nervousness" (6). [2] It seems that Egor is succumbing to a silent sort of perverse seduction, complete with the implied suggestion of the knife he is fingering and the exquisite perception of Simina's pre-sexual innocence. "He saw Simina's face turned to him. She was considering him with wonder, even with suspicion. As if she were trying to unravel a mystery. It was an absorbing, unsatisfying preoccupation, far beyond childhood" (7)

Egor's perceptions underscore the incipient impulses of a dangerous attraction that Eliade will conceal throughout the narrative underneath the apparent reality of a ghost story through a consistently disorienting turn of the screw. The result is what Shoshana Felman calls "an uncanny reading effect": "whichever way the reader turns, he can but be turned by the text." (1977: 101) Eliade talked about *Miss Christina* as an obsession he had with the death of a young woman who was murdered and returned as a vampire wanting nothing more than to love like a mortal and be loved by a mortal, and about the girl Simina as a monster-like character hiding behind the sweet appearance of a beautiful girl only because she lived in the unnatural world of the vampire (Eliade 1991: 347-349). However, the disturbing power and intensity of the scene indicate that it must have been an artistic calculation, on Eliade's part, to create uncertainty and suspense for his readers. Or, at the very least, it may be an attempt to generate a fundamental ambiguity, a persistent vibration between the stated interpretation of the story and the rather shocking, even

perverse frankness embedded in the text about sexual matters that would have been unacceptable to his contemporary readers.

Adding to the story's tense and gloomy atmosphere, the Bărăgan space depicted in the opening of *Miss Christina* becomes an elaborate and surreal stage for otherworldly occurrences that conceal devilish and ghostly apparitions and cradles tormenting, hallucinatory delusions and forbidden desires. Immediately following the dinner scene in the opening chapter when Nazarie had spoken breathlessly about the beauty of the Danubian plain, the evening drifts into the darkness of the night that infuses the creepy rooms of the manor, with its cherry wooden floors and the bedroom with the balcony overlooking the dark tree where Egor and Nazarie take an uncomfortable refuge. Their conversation focuses once again on the lower course of the Danube and the Bărăgan plain used as perfected narrative imaginary to the story. Nazarie alludes to the great river and the special smell of the Bărăgan:

> "If you keep quite still for a while," Mr. Nazarie spoke, breathing in slowly, without hurry, "you can feel the Danube … I can."
> "It must be quite a distance, though," Egor said.
> "Some thirty kilometres. Maybe less. But it's the same night. You can feel it immediately."
> "It's the same air too," he added, slowly turning up his face and inhaling the air, open-mouthed. "You never lived near the Danube, it seems. Or else, you seldom happen to miss the scent. I can feel the Danube even in the Bărăgan plain."
> Egor laughed.
> "Isn't it a bit too much to say that you feel it in the Bărăgan plain?!"
> "No, it isn't," Mr. Nazarie explained. "Because it isn't the smell of water, it's not a humid air. It's rather a stagnant smell, much like the smell of clay and of thistles."
> "That's vague enough," Egor put in smiling.
> "Yet, you're soon aware of it wherever you may be," Mr. Nazarie went on. "You sometimes feel as if whole forests waff such a scent, both complex and elementary. Formerly there were forests nearby. There was the Teleorman." (Eliade 1992: 8-9)

While providing a realistic, geographical frame to the narrative, the Danube also holds an overpowering, fantastic possession over the Bărăgan plain as an oddly dislocated site and mythical matrix with which the two guests, professor Nazarie and Egor, prepare their identification. In his announced search for the archaeological artifacts and bones of the Scythians who had inhabited this region in prehistorical times, Professor Nazarie suggests the land's archaic humanity. Implied in his name that in Romanian is a derivative of the popular name Gheorghe, son of Gaea (Gaia), the Earth goddess, Egor evokes a spiritual communion with the ageless Bărăgan plain as an eternal kernel forever

vanishing into the hazy landscape and populated by creatures crossing into the unreal.

Coupled with the tension that seemed to strike Egor with all the force of a sexual magnetism he felt for the girl Simina at the dinner table, the wondrous description of the Bărăgan acts like a fine suture in which magic and reality coincide and set the stage for the following day when Egor finds out from professor Nazarie about Miss Christina and later in the evening sees her portrait. According to the report Professor Nazarie gathers in his outings through the neighbouring village, the long-dead young woman is rumoured to have been a creature of unspeakable lust and cruelty, who had been murdered several years earlier during the peasant uprising of 1907 by the land overseer who was also her longtime lover. Based on the stories circulating in the village, Miss Christina engaged in sexual exploits with the peasants she was inviting to her bedroom to satisfy her at the time of the peasants' rebellion; as punishment, Miss Christina was shot in the back while engaged in the reprehensible lovemaking by her enraged lover. The outrageous murder underscores the difference of social class origin, making Miss Christina's depraved behaviour even more scandalous in a formula for moral and psychological vertigo that threatens to collapse the certainty of social and moral boundaries.

When Egor and Professor Nazarie are invited to see Miss Christina's portrait, her putative transgression of sexual limits and social boundaries anticipate the illustration of both horror and sin made even more insidious by the anomaly of the portrait. Having been painted several years after her death, Miss Christina's portrait projects an image of innocent girlhood and virginal beauty that can unleash in the onlooker intensely private emotions. In Professor Nazarie the portrait triggers a fear bordering on terror through the sombre background landscape unto which the professor projects his own impressions of the Bărăgan plain described earlier at the dinner table as "desperate, bare and empty, badly sun-scorched." (5) With a harrowing sense of anticipation, the portrait of Miss Christina awakens in Egor an uncontrollable desire, even if unconsciously sexual, stemming from something incomprehensible and unattainable, persisting in what he perceives to be his artistic calculations of her feelings for him:

> Egor was standing away from the portrait. He was trying to realize the source of so much melancholy and weariness in his soul while facing this virgin who looked him straight in the eyes, intimately smiling as if she had chosen him out of the whole group, to confess to him alone her endless loneliness. (24)

The compensation for that loneliness due to Miss Christina's absence invites an object of affection made in Miss Christina's virginal image, which is the incarnated beautiful girl Simina as a viable substitute. In Egor's case, his

attraction to Simina is not only an amelioration of Miss Christina's absence but a representation of Miss Christina's love and yearning for him. Already manifested in the initial fascination with Simina, Egor's incipient hedonism is unleashed and enacted the very evening of the day when he sees Miss Christina's portrait. During his walk, he comes upon Simina who, according to Egor, feigns fear of the dark and jumps in Egor's arms:

> …suddenly, the little girl threw herself into his arms, quite terrified, screaming. Egor was alarmed at her screams and picked her up. Simina had placed her hands on his cheeks holding his face close to her own… He was carrying her in his arms, fondling her. Strangely enough, her heart did not beat rapidly from fear. Her body, too, was quiet, warm, and cordial. Not one feverish jerk, not one drop of sweat. Her face was serene, composed. (31)

When he reproaches her for merely pretending to have been scared, the girl smiles demurely, triggering another fit of anger from Egor who "grasped her arm and gave her a jerk back to him. The girl acquiesced, putting up no resistance. 'You well know it's a different matter,' he murmured coming close and speaking the words solemnly" (32). Egor's attraction to Simina, which he tries unsuccessfully to fight back, is a violation of a taboo even more outrageous than Miss Christina's depraved behaviour, underscoring a formula for moral and psychological vertigo that collapses the socially accepted authority which Egor, like his fiancée Sanda, is desperate to establish with Simina.

Questions of authority and the girl's independence are embedded in the text contributing to the ambiguity of the story in a manner that echoes James's celebrated tale in the sense that Egor behaves much like the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* who sees herself as a vessel of moral authority, responsible not only for the two children's good breeding but also for their moral virtues in relation to the evil forces, the former governess and the sinister Quinn, who are haunting Bly and prying on Miles and Flora. In Eliade's story, Egor and Sanda discipline Simina from the very beginning when they smile apologetically over the girl's appropriation of her seat at the dinner table, in obvious collision with Professor Nazarie who had unwittingly claimed that same privileged seat, next to Mrs. Moscu. Later in the story, whenever the girl is out of sight, Sanda and Egor "give each other quick looks and blush, as if remembering an evil secret, in spite of themselves." (48) And each time Simina is not present, Egor goes to search for her and makes frantic attempts to redraw the lines of his authority when he finds her. In one instance, after catching up with the girl who had gone in the direction of the stables, Egor becomes violent when the girl asks him if he loves Sanda.

> "You like Sanda, don't you? Am I right?" Simina suddenly asked.

> "I do like her and I'm going to marry her," Egor said, "and you shall come to Bucharest, as my little sister-in-law and I shall raise you myself! You'll see how all these phantoms shall vanish from your mind." (50)

Egor's reply, which hints at Simina's putative attempts to communicate with the ghost of Miss Christina, is filled with deep and inexplicable animosity further magnified by corporal aggression against the girl. In an outburst that reflects Egor's threatened masculinity or perhaps a will to masculinity for which there are no adequate terms other than anomalous desire when projected against a child, he grabs Simina, stoops over her, and whispers wickedly in her ear forcing her to fight back:

> She tried to wrench her arm away. But Egor pressed deeply into her flesh. He felt real joy at thrusting his fingers into her soft, tender, devilish flesh. The girl bit her lips in pain, but no tear softened her cold, metallic eyes. This opposition drove Egor out of his mind.
> "I'm going to torture you, Simina, not just kill you quickly," he whizzed between his teeth. "I'll only strangle you when I have plucked out your eyes and wrenched away your teeth, one by one. With a red hot iron shall I torture you. Go on, tell this, you know whom to tell. Let's see if …"
> That moment he felt such violent pain in his right arm, that he let the girl go free. The strength had oozed out of his body. His arms hung limp along his hips. And he didn't seem to realize where he was, what world he was in…
> He saw Simina shake herself into shape, press the pleats of her frock and rub off the marks of his fingers on her arm. He also saw her smoothing her hair with her hand, set her curls in order, and fasten a hidden hoop that had come undone on the way. Simina did all this without looking at him. She didn't even hurry. As if he had ceased to exist. She made her way to the house with a lithe quick step, displaying a noble grace. Egor looked at her in amazement until her small figure was lost in the shadow of the veranda. (50-51)

Although concerned with Sanda's deteriorating health and insistent upon a rushed engagement to make public their attachment, Egor acts in strange ways each time he interacts with Simina. His increasingly altered behaviour, which has become obvious to the girl, is beginning to alarm the professor who is gradually growing aware of the callous seduction carried out by Simina. In the conversation with the doctor summoned to check on Sanda's deteriorating condition, when Simina voices her desire to join him in the hunting expedition and Egor sees the need to admonish her, the professor notices not only the girl's disdainful smile and her comprehension of Egor's unwarranted harshness in exercising his authority but also Egor's pallor in the ensuing exchanges that no one else in the room other than Simina seems to notice.

> Egor looked up and slowly gazed at Mrs. Moscu and then at Simina.

> "Not at all the thing for a little girl like yourself to go shooting." he said severely. "To see innocent animals dying, to see that much blood."
> In saying these last words, he looked into her eyes, but Simina didn't appear to be embarrassed at all. She lowered her eyes like any well-bred child when snubbed by her elders. Not for a second did she let Egor think that she had gathered other meanings in his speech, something the others did not understand.
> ……
> Simina smiled. Mr. Nazarie recognized her ever-present smile, triumphant, contemptuous, yet discreet. He was beginning to get scared of her, intimidated, sometimes paralyzed by her intensely serious crushing gaze. Owing to what unnatural perverse force did that cold irony show on the angelic oval shape of her face?
> "I am glad that our young lady Sanda shall soon get well and force Egor to paint," Mr. Nazarie suddenly spoke in order to divert the discussion. Egor turned to him, his face bright. His lips however were slightly trembling. He was unusually pale, too. "I wonder why no one should notice such a change?" That same instant he spied Simina's cold, harsh eyes and he blushed; it was as if she had heard him or read his thoughts. "Simina is the only one to notice," he thought upset. (73-74)

With Sanda's inability to leave her sick bed, Egor gives himself up to the inordinate search for Simina and the magnetic attraction of new experiences that duplicate in the encounters with the girl the steamy sexuality of his hallucinatory delusions at night, when Miss Christina appears in his dreams. And each time he is in pursuit of Simina, Egor is pained to detect in her a demonic self that coexists with the girl's uncommon beauty and polite behaviour. Suspecting a trap, or a spell cast through Simina at the time of Sanda's worsening condition, he leaves his dying fiancée locked in the room with the professor and heads for the old stable where he is told that Simina has gone. Unable to find Simina's small body after a careful search "in every corner," Egor decides to return to the house but, as the sun "was sinking far away beyond the border of the fields" (79), he ends up stopping at the entrance of the old cellar. Very soon after his arrival in the dark space which Sanda had shown him on the first day of their arrival, he sees Simina who had been sent to the cellar to bring mineral water bottles for the dinner table.

The ensuing scene catches all the escalating nuances of their increasingly frequent encounters:

> Egor approached and stroked her hair. She had soft, nice smelling, warm hair. Simina welcomed the fondling, lowering her lashes.
> "I shall be sorry for you, Simina, leaving you here to work without help," Egor said "we're leaving tomorrow morning, Sanda and I."
> The little girl slowly drew away from Egor's caress, controlling herself. She looked up at him, surprised.

> "Sanda is ill," she said, "and the doctor won't let her."
> "She hasn't been ill exactly," Egor interrupted, "she was actually frightened. She thought she saw her dead aunt."
> "That's not true," Simina said quickly.
> Egor laughed. … "After all, that's neither here nor there," Egor added, "tomorrow we're leaving."
> Simina put up a smile.
> "Mother is certainly waiting for me to bring the bottle of mineral water," she said thoughtfully. "Would you kindly help me?"
> "She's laying a trap," Egor thought. A shudder passed through him as he pointed to the entrance of the cellar. But the girl considered him with such contempt that he was ashamed of his fear.
> "I shall be glad to," Egor said making his way to the cellar. … [He] could hear Simina's excited breathing as she followed him. "If she's so excited, that means I've fallen into the trap, Egor thought". (80-81)

As Egor is trying to light a match, Simina grasps his arm and accuses him laughingly of being afraid. To Egor, her voice sounds "commanding, sensual, feminine." After blowing out his match and leading the way, Simina scorns both Egor's fear with the sarcastic "our brave Egor" and his threat of "boxing her ears". She challenges him with "Why not now?" and "Just you dare" as Egor starts trembling and feels a strange fever getting hold of him. The girl's laughter on "her small red lips" sounds strange and leads to nightmarish sensations: "Egor felt the poison in his blood: an insane beastly appetite coursing through his body. He closed his eyes trying to remember Sanda's face. He only saw a wave of crimson steam. He only heard the little girl's bewitched voice." (82)

As they advance into the dark, the girl approaches Egor and takes his hand, triggering powerful emotions: "Egor acquiesced, breathing heavily. His eyes grew dim. He was suddenly in a dream, dreamt long ago, vainly trying to remember when he had come out of it, when he had started a new life. 'How snug this is, how snug by Simina's side!'" As he sits on the cellar floor among the bags at the girl's command, "his limbs are burning, his hands shaking" as he feels Simina's body close to him. Frantic about the tight dark space, he asks the girl about the ghost of Miss Christina but the girl laughs and strokes his hair, urging him to calm down while he hugs her. With her lips close to his ears, Simina urges Egor not to lock his door at night, and she laughs and dances, prompting Egor to kiss her hand and to implore her not to leave him. Finally, after declaring that he must not kiss her hand but rather kiss her the way she wants to be kissed, "she pressed her mouth on his, biting into his lips." At that point, we read that "Egor felt unspeakable happiness, heavenly and holy, in his flesh. His forehead backwards, he abandoned himself to that kiss of blood and honey. The little girl had crushed his lips, wounding them. Her

unripe body remained cold, slim, fresh. Feeling the blood, Simina lapped it thirstily." (83)

The scene ends with the girl's utter dissatisfaction with the way Egor kisses her and her demand that he kisses her shoe, not her feet as he had been feebly trying to do. When Egor weakens and falls limp on the sacks, she calls him a bore, asks that he takes off his coat, and starts scratching him:

> Egor undressed slowly, without a thought, his face smeared with dust and tears, a few marks of blood, round his mouth. The smell of blood had maddened Simina. She approached the man's bare chest and began scratching, biting. The deeper the pain in the flesh the sweeter Simina's nail or mouth felt. "And yes, I ought to wake from this dream." Egor thought once more. "It's for me to wake up or I shall go mad. I cannot bear it any longer." (83-84).

But Egor's feeble attempts to run do not materialize. As Simina's scratching continues, "his humiliation dripped in delights he had never thought possible for a human being to taste". With a sense of self-loathing, he finally follows Simina's cold summons to return to the house while she looks on "distant, contemptuous, smiling a wan and bitter smile".

Tragically trapped in the girl's seductive game, Egor can no longer justify his absence from Sanda's room throughout the evening, his dirty clothes or the bloodied lips that the professor notices in horror after the return from the cellar. Under the professor's scrutinizing gaze, Egor "was looking into the void, upon the ground. He dared not raise his eyes too high up." (87) And later, at the dinner table, Egor is terrified by the doctor's accusations that he had been seen walking in the park with an elegant lady. Is the doctor's inquisitiveness, his questions about the hallucinatory scene and seeing ghosts, something that Egor fabricates in his own mind to pacify his tormented thoughts about the cellar encounter with Simina? Is he further deluding himself in the prerogatives of his male condition (a respected painter, a devoted fiancé) by accusing a mortal's inability to save himself from Miss Christina's demonic influence? Is the doubling of Simina with Miss Christina a turn of the screw effected not only by the putative appearance of ghosts but by a duplication which produces refractions of the women in the story (the aloof Mrs. Moscu and the eerie nanny) to account for Egor's depravity?

The ending of the story returns to the gothic mode that has all along been part of Eliade's design. But it does not reduce the story to a tale of demonic possession. My argument that Mrs. Moscu, the nanny, Simina, and Miss Christina are one and that Egor, the professor, and the doctor are also one is based on the view that Eliade saw the ambiguity in masculine hegemony, and focused on Egor as a dangerous person to society due to the incongruity of his maleness and sexuality that put him in peril of displacement, debasement, and destruction.

Eliade's doubling imagination that has combined the girl Simina and Miss Christina into one character and Egor and the professor into another one is rooted in society's splintered vision of maleness and sexuality. On the one hand, Egor and the professor are guardians of morality whom society celebrates. In the haunted Bărăgan plain, they encounter agents of Satan, vampires and ghosts, who threaten innocent souls like the girl Simina, who need their protection and whom they are meant to guard. So Egor supervises Simina and tries to discipline her, but he sustains the vision of the guardian with difficulty. As the evil forces approach him with impunity in the disguise of the girl's putative advances, Egor imagines that he is seduced like a helpless creature by a ghost who places upon him her infernal power through the beautiful little girl.

But his doubt of himself and his voluptuous moves toward the girl waver in his convictions of Simina's secret wickedness which can only be prompted by Miss Christina. Each time Egor encounters the girl he is desperate for justification and even invokes Miss Christina although, in anticipation of their final encounter, he leaves the door to his room unlocked at night, as Simina demands before walking away from him in the cellar. Nevertheless, after prayers with the professor, and before entering the room, Egor is

> calm, clear-headed. He felt strong and fearless. He put his hands in his pockets and began thoughtfully pacing the room. Nearly twelve o'clock, he remembered. … But these ancient superstitions were of no importance. It was his strong faith and hope, his great love for Sanda that kept him lucid and strong. … He passed the door several times but could not decide to lock it. Better like this, unlocked. … He wanted to continue his thought: "should the Lord God and Holy Mother of God help me." But he was unable to finish his hopeful, firm thought. His mind went dark. He seemed to be struggling as if to wake from a dream. He stretched his arms, felling them curved, slightly shivering. He was not dreaming. … He made up his mind: he would not lock the door. He would only close the window. … "Don't lock the door tonight," he accurately remembered Simina's words. (99-100)

After the tapping on the door and Egor's hoarse voice inviting in the guest, Egor drifts into hallucinations and mad lovemaking with what he identifies as the ghost of Miss Christina. As her voice speaks only in his thoughts and his gaze is riveted on what he talks himself into believing to be Miss Christina, Egor sees that "the girl had begun to undress... virgin breasts, they were firm, round, grown freshly, and held very high by the knitted work of her stays." Egor draws "sweet passion" and delights in "love-making as never dreamt of." (105) The confusion between dream and reality or the doubling vision of ghost and girl is magnified as the night draws to its end and the professor and the doctor, who are wandering outside seized with terror, detect Simina outside Egor's room, in the middle of the broad walk. Seemingly unnerved by the

professor who utters in wonder "How on earth could she be here?", the girl starts walking toward the nearby trees, "stubbornly peering into the darkness in front of her, never turning, never hearing anything" (107), while her small body disappears and reappears in a game of hide-and-seek that sets the two men in hot pursuit.

Finally, with the flames consuming Mrs. Moscu's house from the gas lamp he had accidentally overturned, Egor is ready to kill the ghost of Miss Christina. Together with the professor, and with the village peasants following them, Egor proceeds toward the cellar where on the wet ground they find "Simina lying on the soft, scratched earth. She didn't even hear the steps of the two men, and the light of the oil lamp did not seem to wake her out of her trance. Egor began to shake, approaching Simina's small tattered body." With a total lack of concern for the girl or the reasons for her frightening condition, Egor begins to shake her asking frantically about Miss Christina:

> "She is here, isn't she?" he whispered shaking her by the shoulder.
> The little girl turned her head and regarded him without surprise. She did not answer. She clung close to the earth and vainly raked it with her nails, obstinately keeping her ear to the ground, tensely waiting. Her hands were blood-stained, her calves muddy, her dress dirty from leaves that she had crushed, running and frequently slipping in the dark.
> "No use waiting for her, Simina," Egor said harshly. "Christina died once, long ago, and now she's going to die once and for all."
> He rushed at the little girl furiously, brutally lifted her from the ground, and shook her in his arms.
> "Wake up! Christina is now going to hell, and the fires of hell will burn her corpse!"
> A strange turbid feeling came over him as he was saying these words. The little girl was limp in his arms. Her eyes seemed glassy, and she looked at him with a haggard stare. She had bitten her lips and the blood showed. Egor began fretting.
> "I must make up my mind quickly," he thought shuddering, "to save them all I must decide."
> "Hold her in your arms and cross yourself!" he said to Mr. Nazarie, handing him Simina's body, drained of all strength. (131-132)

Trying to extract a confession about Miss Christina's whereabouts from Simina, in a manner eerily similar to that of the Governess demanding to find out from the boy Miles about the nightmarish Quinn in Henry James's *Turn of the Screw,* Egor is assailed by the perverse horror of his own guilt by diffusing the grossness of his conduct on a small helpless creature like Simina, who may have been for Egor a revelation and fulfilment of his own sexual depravity.

Cruel and mad, or maybe pitiable like James's Governess, Egor has discovered not the ghost of Miss Christina, but a projection of his own secret self, a naked representation of his condemnable desires at odds with the social

view of his person as a conserver of morality and defender of faith. In Simina, whom he perceives as a miniature replica of a vampire, Egor sees a menace to the socially accepted definition of class and gender and a testimony to his degradation. In this context, by doubling the presentation of Miss Christina and Simina, Eliade makes the story more daringly subversive of the claims to the admiration of masculine figures praised in the patriarchal social figuration as necessarily commanding authority and respect; rather to the contrary, such honourable males may, in fact, be just as tyrannical wielders of power and insidious destroyers of female selfhood in its innocent stages.

Armed with a sharp iron bar and ready to defend the strong will to his ravished masculinity, Egor

> went up to the spot where Simina had lain, scrutinized it piercingly, as if trying to penetrate into it, to guess the dark treasure that it was guarding against nature. He then grabbed the iron bar and pressed down against it with the weight of his body.
> "Is her heart here, Simina?" he asked, never turning his head.
> The little girl gave him a perplexed look. She began to struggle in the professor's arms. Egor pulled out the iron bar that had only half sunk and planted it near, with growing obstinate fury.
> "Is it here?" he asked again as if strangled.
> A thrill ran through Simina's body. Her body suddenly stiffened in Mr. Nazarie's arms, and her eyes rolled back in her head. Egor felt his arm trembling as he was driving the bar in. "It's in now," he thought savagely. He leaned upon the bar with his full weight, howling. He felt it piercing into the flesh. He was shaking, for this slow transfixing was making him sink leisurely into ecstasy, into fearful frenzy. As in a dream, he heard Simina yelling. He fancied that Mr. Nazarie was coming up to stop him, and so he grew more stubborn, fell on his knees, screwed in with his utmost strength, though the iron was wounding his hands, striking the bones of his fists. Ever deeper, further on, into the heart, into the core of her bewitched life! (132-133)

In a final turning of the narrative screw, the sadomasochistic dynamic of Egor's threatened masculinity is shrewdly underlined in his name that suggests a dark side of his patron saint, George the piercer and slayer of the dragon who threatened Christian values. The violence Egor perpetrates on the putative vampire and on her surrogate Simina is justified as an act of righteous annihilation of the unnatural, what Michel Foucault calls the "counter-nature" bearing death to any avatar of difference (2008: 39). The act of piercing exists to make up for the antecedent of violation in the story's imaginary construct that joins sexuality and violence through the use of phallic substitutes, such as the iron bar and the knife. One reaches for the phallic substitute when the other's evil perpetrated against the land and its people attains proportions comparable

to that of the vampire or its surrogate, who require pre-emptive annihilation in acts of righteous vengeance.

The origin of the land, the Bărăgan plain also present in Egor's name, is tied to the narrative of blood and soil, elements that figure prominently in the text, and becomes visible as the shimmer on the very tip of the protruding stake of the righteous bearer of phallic power (Egor) that pierces the heart of the threatening other, the duality of Miss Christina and Simina as the evil who resides on the other, dark side of the community represented by the villagers. The radical zeal of submitting to a higher aim to defend the morality of good and evil against the darker forces underlies Egor's pathetic bravery in pushing against the heavy metal in the wet soil, only to obscure his own corporeal limitations and the punishment for his treacherous interpellations of social morality and faith communities of the land.

Eliade's story ends with a *frisson* of suspended horror, a horrifying vision of Egor tragically trapped in the prerogatives of his maleness condition.

Notes

[1] All quotations from Eliade's story are extracted from the edition listed in the References.
[2] All translations from *Miss Christina* are extracted from *Mystic stories: The Sacred and the Profane* (translator: Ana Cartianu).

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Representations of the Danube in Queen Marie's Writings. Elements of Identity and Self-identification

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Abstract

Social geography is attached to territory and emerges from social relations and links that people weave with places. A geographical reading of literary works allows us to discover and outline representational strategies for a regional space. It is in this sense that this paper proposes to focus on the representations of the Danube River that Queen Marie of Romania revealed in her writings. Marie, like many other cartographers and scholars, was attracted by the Danube region, and, in her books, the Danube had a specific place. She evoked all her wanderings from plain to mountain, from hill to sea, leading us down to the banks of the Danube (with all its canals and lakes) and to the sea. We followed the itineraries of everyday life, both social and spatial, that the queen traced according to her position in society, her cultural model and imagination. It was a means, among others, of deepening the phenomena of identity (Bratosin 2007: 79) and her works are very rich in this sense, since they give us examples of values associated with these places. At this point, important aspects related to identity will be explored. Phoenix (2010: 298) suggests that "identities are socially constructed, multiple, potentially contradictory and situationally variable".

Identities are, in this sense, processes of becoming rather than of being (Hall 2006). Specific lexical and functional items are used for this purpose, both consciously and unconsciously (Lotte Dam 2015: 31). This paper tries to illustrate how personal pronouns, possessive determiners and pronouns and different adjectives, verbs or structures contribute to the construction of attached identities, all in connection with the way the Queen described the Danube River.

Keywords: *representation, identity, Queen Marie, self-identification, Danube*

Introduction

Social geography is attached to the territory, which emerges from social relations and the links that people weave with places. It strives to retrace the itineraries of everyday life, both social and spatial, that individuals invent according to their position in society, the cultural models that feed the collective memory and the imagination secreted by a socialized conscience. It

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is a means, among others, of deepening the phenomena of identity (Bratosin 2007: 79). Literary works are very rich in this sense, since they give us examples of itineraries and values associated with places.

For centuries, the Danube was an untamed natural space. The river and its banks obeyed the dynamics of water and the changing seasons, occasionally flooding several times a year.

Queen Marie of Romania, like many other cartographers and scholars, was attracted by the Danube region. Whereas Strauss succeeded in making it famous – Beautiful Blue Danube – by associating it with a colour it never had, the Queen described in her writings the Danubian beauty and its geocultural richness and also its strategic position for the Romanian people. In order to grasp all the representations of the Danube River found in her literary works, this study relies on a corpus selected from three of her most important books:

A. *The Country that I Love*, an entire book dedicated to Romania under German occupation during the First World War, which she wrote whilst in exile in Iaşi, encouraged by Nicolae Iorga;

B. *The Story of My Life*, a novel written in the first person – a type of diary of love, patriotism, faith, and life. Having an intradiegetic focus, the action is based on a single point of view, that of the narrator, and the text is constructed by a dominating "I". In the story of her life, she described in a charming, profound and exuberant way, the crucial years in the history of the world, of Europe and of Romania in particular, bringing to light an authentic document of historical, political, literary, religious, psychological and human importance.

C. *My Country*, a hymn like not many others in our beautiful literature, devoted to the splendours of Romania, was widely considered a magnificent evocation of the natural and cultural beauties of Romania, so that the Western reader would get to know and relate to the Romanian tragedy, and would adhere more intimately to the cause of the Romanian nation.

The Country that I Love and *My Country* highlight the main themes of love for nature, peasants, the authentic countryside, the nation, friendship, poverty, and the commune living in early twentieth-century Romania.

The reason for choosing these books as a background for us to catch a glimpse of the Danube in the way it was perceived by the Queen, is that the *Story of My Life* represents her masterpiece, and the other two books specifically depict Romania from the mountains to the coast, from the Danube to hills, plains and towns. This study aims to explore important aspects related to identity, but it also seeks to illustrate the symbolism and the different facets or representations of the Danube River as the Queen envisaged or transmitted it to the reader.

Identity. Theoretical background

This section includes a review of the notion of identity as found in several relevant contemporary works.

For Douglas (2009: 11-19), identity is a complex and fascinating phenomenon. At a basic level, identity is about who we are, and who and what we identify with. However, identity is also about who we want to be, and how we wish to be seen by others. Michael Bamberg (2013: 75-87) offers an even more complex definition, suggesting that identity "designates the attempt to differentiate and integrate a sense of self along different social and personal dimensions such as gender, age, race, occupation, gangs, socio-economic status, ethnicity, class, nation states, or regional territory".

Many narratives have focused on issues of identity, the national and ethnic identities being at the core of social identifications. A "social identity" is "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain groups. These identities result from social groups together with some emotional and value significance to them of the group membership" (Tajfel 1978: 63).

More specifically, the social identity theory proposes that individuals seek a positive social identity, a positive self-concept based on their membership through social comparisons between their own and other groups. The individuals' self-conceptions of who they are, and how they relate to others, is greatly influenced by the interpersonal and intergroup context in which they evolve and in which social comparisons are made (Kessler et al. 2000: 96-97).

Recent research suggests that "identities are never fully and finally "established". Thus, apparently, they are seen always in process, always in a relative state of formation (Rattansi and Phoenix 2005: 105). So, these writings enable us to examine whether these identifications are changing or fixed.

According to Lucy Baugnet (1998), social identity, closely linked to personal identity, is analysed at four levels of explanation: the intra-individual level, the interindividual level, the positional level, and the ideological level.

The theoretical point of departure for our study is the sociological conception of identity, according to which identity is described by Hall (2006) as "a 'moveable feast'; formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems that surround us". Identities, according to this perspective, are stories that we tell ourselves and others about who we are and who other people are. These narratives are often related to our own or to others' perception of being a member of a collective (class, national, ethnic or religious). These stories can change, shift and be contested and are often multiplied.

We can talk about a *process* of identification rather than identity as a fixed essence, claims Stuart Hall (2017), because identification is never complete but

is always in the process: "Identity cannot be a fixed essence at all, as if it lay unchanged outside of history and culture, and this is so for one principal reason: identity is not given once and for all by something transmitted in the genes we carry or in the colour of our skin, but is shaped and transformed historically and culturally"(Hall, 2017: 127).

The external definition is part of our internal self-definition, actively constituting our identity. Jenkins (2008) considers that external labelling is more effective if the process is endowed with institutional legitimacy and governmental authority. Classification of the population and the categorization of people by state agencies is a clear example of such external defining.

Phoenix (2010: 298) suggests that "identities are socially constructed, multiple, potentially contradictory and situationally variable". Identities are, in this sense, processes of *becoming* rather than of *being* (Hall 2006).

The construction of the individual's identity is complex because it is far from being strictly defined. The process plays on both the desire to stand out, or differentiate, but also relying on the need for recognition of a group to which one would like to belong.

The *relational* character of any identity plays an important role. The identity of an individual only acquires meaning and significance in relation to what it is *not* – i.e., in relation to other identities (Rattansi and Phoenix 2005). "Identity is never unilateral; what other people around me think about who I am is no less important than what I think about myself". As Jenkins suggests, "Others don't just perceive our identity, they actively constitute it" (2008: 96).

Individuals are *structurally positioned* within hierarchic economic, political, social and cultural systems. These structural positions shape a person's life opportunities by locating him/her within certain networks of power relations with various resources. When a society is divided by class, gender and ethnic distinctions, individuals find themselves already positioned within a discursive field that is never entirely of their own choosing.

Therefore, we need to talk more about identity construction since identity has transformed into a process. Apparently, this theory fits very well with our Queen's view, because her identity has been a "becoming" all her life. In her writings, Regina notes that she was "happy" in her childhood in the lands of Kent, Malta, or at the court of Tsar Nicholas II but she felt as happy in Romania in her youth.

The functionality of pronouns, verbs, adjectives and other structures in constructions of attached identity

Research regarding identity has shown that communities and identities connected to these are not given by nature, but are constructed socially between human beings through acts and speech. Specific lexical and functional

items are used for this purpose, both consciously and unconsciously (Lotte Dam 2015: 31). One such item is the personal pronoun. What follows illustrates how personal pronouns contribute to the construction of attached identities.

Possessive determiners and pronouns (1st-person singular form)

Possessive determiners either introduce situationally identifiable referents or textually identifiable referents. The former type is marked by first- and second-person possessives, expressing a possessive relation held by the text producer or text recipient. The latter type manifests in third-person possessives pointing to a possessor that is expressed in some previous span of texts (Kunz 2009: 305).

The speaker and the addressee of a communication situation are often marked linguistically by the first- and second-person pronouns. The reference of the singular first – and second-person pronouns is very simple as the referents are normally the speaker and the addressee, whereas the reference of especially the plural first-person pronouns is more complex (Lotte Dam 2015: 34).

Goddard (1995: 99) points to the fact that "the term 'plural' is not used in a clear and consistent way: *you* pl may perhaps represent a plurality of *you* s, but *we* does not present a plurality of *I* s".

This section contains an overview of personal pronouns (possessive adjectives) 1st-person singular form and their identity-constructing functions, using illustrative examples from the two books Marie wrote exclusively about Romania. I will focus primarily, but not exclusively, on singular first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives and pronouns.

> **My Country and people** have passed through the fire (Queen Marie 1925: 138, henceforth QM).
>
> Once I was a stranger to this people; now **I am one of them,** I had just become Queen, and **my people** looked up to me as a great promise, as a hope they believed in (QM 1925: 64).
>
> Little by little I am wandering through every corner of **my country** (Queen Marie 1925: 151).
>
> To put myself entirely at the disposal of **my people**, indeed **my troops** were a Godly sight (QM 1934: 474).

My people, reiterated several times in the text, becomes the leitmotif of the book being also the reason and purpose of her writing. Why could not Marie have used only "the Romanian people"? It is for sure the strong feeling that overwhelmed her, pushing her in, identifying with the fate of this people. So,

it is not any people, but her people, the one she intensely loves, adopts and stays with them till the end of her time (Ungureanu 2022: 53).

Possessive determiners and pronouns (1st-person plural form)

According to Brown and Yule (1983), language has two main functions: transactional (i.e. to communicate information) and interactional (i.e. to socialise). Considering this, it would be interesting to show to what extent language can mirror the kind of social relationship held among members of a community. Therefore, community and identity are important.

The idea of a common identity is not only related to oneself (i.e., identifying oneself with a specific group), but also to other individuals (i.e., constructing identity for other people).

Most recent research in sociolinguistics, social psychology and cultural studies is based on a constructionist view of identity: rather than being reflected in discourse, identity is constructed in discourse (Benwell & Stokoe 2006). According to this theory, people assume or are imposed different identities on different occasions. Thus, identity is not static.

Identity is as much a social and cultural phenomenon as an internal and psychological one, and, as Barker & Galasinski (2001: 1) suggest, language does not mirror an independent object world, but constructs and constitutes it.

The meaning structure of *we* has more complex referential presuppositions than *I*. The pronoun *I* does not imply that the addressee has to do some work to figure out who is meant; it is a pure index. The pronoun *we* at least invites the addressee to think of who else other than *I* is being talked about (Goddard 1995: 107).

We constitutes a metalinguistic act of "same-saying", by which one applies the same proposition to a set of people one has in mind, one of whom is oneself (Dam 2015: 35).

Let us have a look at all the forms ("we", "our", "us") found in the selected texts. Depending on the speaker's intention, "we" is the only personal pronoun that can (a) be inclusive and exclusive and (b) claim authority and communality at the same time.

When Queen Marie utters all the sentences listed below, she speaks as a representative of a group, so the pronoun she uses has an inclusive function. Our text underlines however a very accurate and special meaning whose purpose is the real identification of the Queen, with everything that surrounds her in Romania: our people, our regions, our heroes, our mountains, our hearts, our land, our convents, our situation, our sea-coast, our country, our souls, etc.

> We would set on **our Danube yacht** disobeying the order that no woman might go over the Danube, I paid a flying visit to the Bulgarian side, crossing on one of the boat bridges erected by **our troops** (QM 1934: 537).

Adjectives, verbs or particular structures

Keily et al. (2001: 36) identified ten identity markers that people use to claim or attribute identity: place of birth, ancestry, place of residence, length of residence, upbringing and education, name, accent, physical appearance, dress and commitment to place. It is the moment to see an important marker of Marie's identity in her commitment to the place she cherishes. The table below features a collection of adjectives, verbs and particular syntactic structures used in relation to the river.

Verbs	Adjectives	Structures
That was the **Danube I loved** (QM 1925: 44).	If you are not yet weary of my wanderings from plain to mountain, from hill to sea, I would lead you awhile down to the banks of the Danube, that **great and noble river** which is one of the prides of our land (QM 1925: 37).	We remembered here a church and there a ruin, tiny hamlets by the edge of rivers, undulating **plains leading towards the banks of the Danube, long**, long roads passing many villages, shady corners of peaceful "Luncas"[1] where shepherds guarded their flocks. It was all infinitely dear to us and doubly dear when we felt danger so near (QM 1925: 14).
No one loved the Danube trips more than… (QM 1934: 539).	In our yacht we would steam down the Danube, passing many places more prosperous, to halt here where the world was **so quiet** that you had the sensation of having reached its end (QM 1925: 37).	We were allowed to depart accompanied by many a blessing, the black-robed women standing in a line to bid us farewell. Then back over the long, dusty roads we raced back to **our yacht on the Danube** (QM 1925: 43).
I came back to Cotroceni, Copaceni, Sinaia, Horez; I **sailed again up and down on the Danube**, took possession anew of mountains, hills and plains. I rode once more on my long sea shores—I watched the sunsets, the harvests, the	You followed me in my many wanderings through the country I love; I have led you from plain to mountain, from mountain to sea, **from the broad Danube to** the hills of Vâlcea, where I lingered in the quiet monasteries so dear to my heart, and now I feel that so as not to weary you with too many	Our dearest companion on these Danube trips was Dr. Antipa, for years head of the State fisheries. He was a man unusually short of stature, round, jovial and full of wisdom. Educated in Germany, he spoke German as fluently as his own language and there was nothing that he did not know about water, fishes and birds.

deep winter snows; I have been covered with the dust of our long, endless Romanian roads, now become ever so much longer still (QM 1925: 65).	pictures, I must close these pages. Indefinitely could I go on writing, for rich and wonderful is this country, picturesque, poetical, full of penetrating charm, and doubly precious at its hour of distress (QM 1925: 154).	Antipa was everybody's friend and a trip on the Danube without Antipa lost half its charm (QM 1934: 359).
	I have come upon lovely little places hidden amongst giant pines. On forlorn seashores I have discovered humble hamlets where Turks dwelt in solitary aloofness; near **the broad Danube** I have strayed amongst tiny boroughs inhabited by Russian fisher-folk, whose type is so different from that of the Rumanian peasant. At first sight, one recognises their nationality—tall, fair-bearded giants, with blue eyes, their red shirts visible from a great way off. (QM 1954: 9).	These troops knew me well because I had been with them on the day when they had recrossed the Danube into Romania. I stood on the home side shore. I witnessed scenes of mad elation when the men, eager to feel their native soil again, actually rolled in the dust. I received their first cheers and it was my voice which called out to them the first welcome home. (QM 1934: 555).
	Limpid waters of the **Danube** (QM, 1934: 212).	At the end of the day, she would sink into her deck chair and gather her ladies around her **to rave about the charms of the great river** (QM 1934:539).
	The Danube question… So **important** to us… (QM 1934: 568).	Occasions had to be exploited to the utmost. The **Danube trips were no exception to the rule** (QM 1934: 538).
	I remember a wonderfully picturesque reception somewhere in these **dreamy parts of the Danube** (QM 1925: 38).	One of the most important finds is the remnants of a town with the poetical name of Istros, lately brought to light between Constantza and **the mouth of the Danube** (QM 1925: 33).

All of the above are wonderful descriptions of Romania, showing the Queen not ceasing to discover the country. All these structures emphasise not only the beauty of this country she cherishes so much but also the strong connection she has with this land, this territory, and this river, constituting at the same time real markers of identification. A princess born to British and Russian parents becomes a queen who identifies herself with everything that means Romania.

Representations of the Danube – Romanian land

When the Queen evokes towns, she does not consider all the categories enumerated by the urban sociolinguistics proposed by Calvet (2005), such as the history of the city (i.e. the types of population, their origin (endogenous or exogenous, population growth figures, the status of the city – capital, etc.), the names of neighbourhoods (language trends for new neighbourhoods, etc.), the natives, i.e. the way the inhabitants of the city and possibly those from different neighbourhoods are named, neighbourhood groups (ethnic, linguistic, professional, religious, etc., first languages: number, transmission, etc.), languages spoken on the markets, graphic environment, or urban linguistic forms, such as youth language or slang, or attitudes and representations. She pays, however, special attention to some dear cities with direct connection to landscape, geographical position, cultural heritage and historical events, all having made a deep impression upon her.

For instance, many places in Romania are presented in all their splendour and misery. Among those places, the Danube has a special role. All the Danube images depicted by Marie turn into representations for us, the readers. We, therefore split them into several categories: bond and attachment, beauty of nature, feeling of freedom and recreation, sense of courage and determination, importance and strategic location. In what follows, each division will be revealed using relevant quotations from her texts.

Bond and attachment

When it comes to the Danube depicted by Queen Marie, the positive symbolism of this river in terms of strong attachment is obvious from the very beginning: "a ribbon binding the old home to the new" or "the beginning and the end". Symbolically, her way through life has been traced by the flow of the Danube River, which connected Germany, the home of her studies and of her husband, to Romania, her dear new and last home. There were important stays for Marie in Coburg, Germany. She stayed there regularly in a castle, in Rosenau, another childhood paradise. It was the place where she studied History, Geography, Arithmetic, Botany, Literature, Religion, Natural Sciences, Painting, French, Music and Gymnastics and the place where, every

Sunday, she went to the theatre where opera, operetta, comedy, drama, classical plays took place. This is how she got to know Wagner, Shakespeare, Bizet, Mozart, Verdi, Meyerbeer, or Donizetti. Then, it was Emperor William II who would decide the fate of Marie in 1891. He who organized the first meeting in a castle near Kassel between the 16-year-old princess and the heir to the throne of Romania, Ferdinand de Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. The first time she met her future husband was at Wilhelmshöhe, near Kassel, a beautiful 18th-century castle, where Emperor Wilhelm II received people during imperial manoeuvres. This is how the two young people, Marie and Ferdinand, met for the first time at the Kaiser's table.

> Several centuries old, this ancestral stronghold mirrors its walls and towers in the limpid waters of the Danube. Here but a small stream, quite near its source, it is nevertheless the selfsame river which rolls its mighty waters through that far-off country over which one of Sigmaringen's children was called upon to rule. From west to east, through several lands and over thousands of miles, it is an ever-broadening ribbon binding the old home to the new. A curious coincidence, the beginning and the end … almost symbolic, in fact, to those who like to ponder over the intricacies of human destinies (QM 1934: 213).

> These troops knew me well because I had been with them on the day when they had recrossed the Danube into Romania. I stood on the home side shore: four hours I stood there, as they came tramping over the pontoon bridge. I witnessed scenes of mad elation when the men, eager to feel their native soil again, actually rolled in the dust. I received their first cheers and it was my voice which called out to them the first welcome home (QM 1934*:* 555*).*

These vivid descriptions suggest that the shore of the Danube is also the queen's home. Many paragraphs in her books show her real identification with the Romanian land, forests, rivers, mountains, flowers, etc. and. last but not least, with the irresistible Danube.

Beauty of nature

Marie evokes all her wanderings from plain to mountain, from hill to sea, leading the reader down to the banks of the Danube with all canals and lakes and to the sea. Apparently, when it comes to the Danube and the seashore, she uses adjectives that make one want to visit those places: they are *attractive, full of charm, picturesque, peaceful, tumbling into the sea, with houses scrambling down the steep slopes into the sea, delightfully perched little build*, etc.

> The country around Sigmaringen is varied and attractive and the rocky valley of the Danube is even very beautiful (QM 1934: 90).

> The culminating phase of excitement was reached when from afar the visions of the beautiful Cernavoda bridge would appear painted against the horizon, looming larger and larger as the yacht approached (QM 1934: 539).

Freedom and recreation

The Danube flows southeast for many kilometres passing through or bordering several countries but together with the beauty it creates it gives also a sense of freedom, well-being, recreation, etc. This freedom seems to offer a spiritual dimension, allowing her to escape from reality. For the Queen, the Danube represents a therapeutic realm of dreams, liberty, and magic. She remains loyal to the green space woven with a large spread of water.

> Very characteristic of old King Carol's ideas of recreation were our excursions on the Danube. These were carefully planned with the idea of giving us all a restful holiday (QM 1934: 194).

> For several years in succession, in late spring or early summer, we would set out on our Danube yacht, the Stefan-cel-Mare; Uncle and Aunty, my husband and myself, the elder children, ladies-in-waiting, military followers, an occasional guest and of course a Minister or two, for these in Romania are unavoidable appendages when a sovereign moves about his country or undertakes anything out of the ordinary (QM 1934: 538).

Courage and determination

The dream of all Romanians was also the dream of our beloved Queen: the Union of all Romanians! But courage and determination were required, and these are traits that characterize our Queen. This time, courage is related to crossing the Danube, even if that was illegal. Marie identified herself with the Danube shore because the Danube shore was the home shore.

> Disobeying the order that no woman might go over the Danube, I paid a flying visit to the Bulgarian side, crossing almost secretly on one of the boat bridges erected by our troops (QM 1934: 553).

> Several of my acquaintances had gone out with the Red Cross to organize hospitals and to nurse what they imagined would be the wounded, but they had received the order not to cross the Danube (QM 1934: 552).

> I hurried to Sinaia to talk with Uncle, pleading my cause so urgently that I won from him permission to take over the cholera camp of Zimnicea, one of the principal points where our troops were to recross the Danube (QM 1934: 553).

Importance. Strategic Location

Springing in Germany, the Danube flows eastwards to connect ten European countries and passes through four capital cities, more than any other river in the world. It provides water for irrigation, domestic supply, power generation and industry, and many ecosystem services. But these are not the only benefits. The Danube is more than that. Not only does the Danube connect the Dobruja area and the Black Sea with the rest of the country and also with Western Europe, thereby drawing much traffic and commerce down towards Romania and its only sea port, Constanta, but it has also provided a strategic position for the defence of the country. Therefore, the Danube has always been a strategic location when it came to conflicts and war.

> Unfortunately for the Triple Alliance, Austria-Hungary had two faces, the German and the Magyar; the latter was hated by the Romanians. In spite of repeated warnings sent by King Carol to Vienna, the persecution of our people under Hungarian sway never lessened and this filled Romanian hearts with bitterness. Besides, Hungary invented every possible economic and administrative chicane against our country and was insufferable on the Danube question, so important to us but too lengthy to relate here (QM 1934: 568).

> When King Carol undertook either an excursion or a journey through his lands, even when recreation was the pretext, it was never for pleasure, but always for duty, and as he moved very rarely, these occasions had to be exploited to the utmost. The Danube trips were no exception to the rule (QM 1934: 538).

> Romania considered she had a historical right to the Rustchuk- Varna line in Bulgaria, and if she had entered as an ally, she might have raised her voice, or if she could not stand for her larger demands, have at least become possessor of the Silistria-Balcic line so essential to her for the defense of her great Danube bridge (QM 1934: 549).

> I was brought into sudden contact with this terrible scourge when I went to visit the troops and the Red Cross hospitals scattered along the Danube (QM 1934: 552).

Conclusions

Queen Marie's writings express her own search for identity, her readings of herself and of her life. The theme of identity is a leitmotif in all her works, as she expressed it openly in the foreword to *The Story of My Life*: her private and her public identity are profoundly related to one another. She continually searched within her memory and displayed images and narratives of herself, in her private and public works, fictional or nonfictional (Duna 2021: 93).

Marie identified herself with Romania since she adopted this country, she loved the Romanian people and lived so many moments of grief, sorrow, tranquillity, serenity, unicity, and victory together with them.

Not only does she identify herself with Romania, but she also declares this identity and assumes it in all her actions, without hesitation. As this study has attempted to show, she had a connection with the Romanian land, especially with the Danube region, and the river had a great the significance for her. The Danube represented the queen's bond with the home shore. Besides, it was one of her ways of escaping from reality, transporting her to another world, a realm of freedom, of beauty, of magic moments. Last but not least, the reader can discover in Marie's writings the importance of the Danube, its strategic location and the sense of courage and determination that this river inspired in her. The Danube emerges thus both as a physical and a spiritual corridor.

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The Danube, a Major Natural Element of the Traditional Urban Landscape

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Abstract
The landscape is one of the factors that define the characteristic image of a settlement. The natural settings represent the major and primary features of a site. Highlighting them is a method of revealing its traditional image, given that the relationship between man and nature used to be more significant in the past. Watercourses are almost always adjacent to the historical city centres and water is the natural element along which traditional human settlements were built. For this reason, in the revitalization process of historical city centres, the riverside or maritime site should play important roles. The development of urban watercourses should be a principle of urban renewal. The Romanian section of the Danube River has favoured the development of representative urban structures. The development of the Danube Cliffs in Galați, which restored the connection between the historical centre and the Danube, the street network in the historical centre of Brăila, characteristic of the traditional settlements along the riverbank, and the urban structure of Sulina are examples of traditional settlements in which the major natural element dominates the urban landscape. This paper argues that the traditional principles, by which historical settlements were established, emerging naturally and gradually as a result of the communion between man and nature, should be reconsidered and applied as principles of urban regeneration, through characteristic procedures. These procedures may range from the preservation or reconstruction of traditional urban silhouettes to the introduction of works of art in coherent ensembles, based on projects that complement contemporary studies of urbanism.

Keywords: *urban regeneration, urban landscape, traditional settlements, historical centres, artworks*

The landscape, the characteristic image of a settlement

The landscape is crucial for establishing the characteristic images of a settlement. The natural site reveals the major features of the site and its predominant characteristics. There are situations in which the natural setting gives specificity to the place more than the built surroundings do.

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Highlighting the natural site is a procedure for revealing the traditional image of the place. This return to nature goes in the spirit of preserving tradition because the relationship between man and nature used to be more accentuated in the past.

A principle used in traditional Mediterranean zones was the positioning of a natural element as the head of perspective. It is the perspective with void in the axis, a void that makes space for the natural element, as the final element, the theme of the composition.

The most beautiful spaces in the world have been established through their orientation towards the major natural element of their site: market squares with open sides towards the sea, streets that lead to the sea, a river or a hill, the acropolis that one climbs, finding the sky as the head of perspective.

Figure 1. St Mark's Square, Venice. Opening to the sea
https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piazza_San_Marco#/media/File:Venezia_piazza_s.Marco_2.JPG

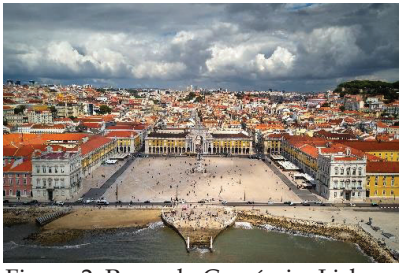

Figure 2. Praça do Comércio, Lisbon. Opening to the river
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Lisbon_main_square_(36622604910).jpg

Figure 3. Lisbon, Wiev from Eduardo VII Park, with Lisbon and the Tagus River in the background

The market square has one of its sides open towards the sea and from this square, the main pedestrian arterial thoroughfare leads in a perpendicular direction towards the seafront.

This connection with the sea was masterly expressed in the composition of the city of Lisbon, through the orientation of the main visual axis towards the sea. The dominance of the natural element, the sea, can also be found in Romanian cities situated on the seashore.

Figure 4. Plan of Constanta 1881/1910 https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/pagini-din-istoria-orasului-constanta-partea-a-vii-a-1859-1896

Figure 5. Constanta, a street that leads to the sea

Streets, which run parallel to the seashore, are intersected perpendicularly by short streets which lead to the sea.

Figure 6. The Acropolis of Athens

On the Acropolis of Athens, the void in the axis appears in a surprising way, after passing through the Propylaea, a "breath of air" after climbing up, after making such a significant physical effort.

Almost always, watercourses are adjacent to the historical centres of towns, water being the natural element along which traditional settlements were established. For this reason, in the revitalization of the historical centres,

there is a need to highlight the riverside or maritime site, each human settlement being born on the edge of water. The development of watercourses, present within or on the edge of historic centres, should be a principle of urban regeneration.

Cities on the Danube

The Danube River, which crosses Romania for the most part, has favoured the development of important urban structures. The old street plans of these cities on the banks of the Danube reveal their orientation towards the dominant natural element: the river.

Through their orientation towards the Danube, the two cities of Galați and Brăila have a comparable development from a visual point of view. Both retain, more or less, an older area and both keep a permanent conversation with the Danube, through their spatial composition.

In Brăila, where the urban street structure is more coherent, the traditional connection of the town with the Danube is more evident.

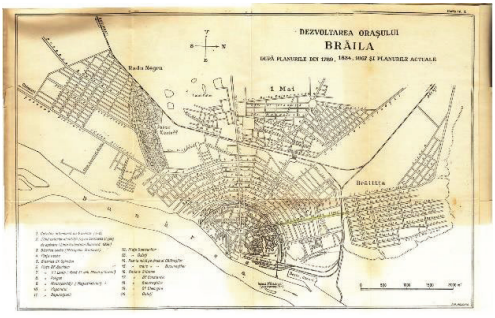

Figure 7. The development of the town of Brăila according to plans from 1789, 1834, 1867 and contemporary plans
http://brailadealtadata.blogspot.com/2011/06/strazile-au-amintiri_24.html

The historical core of the city of Brăila reveals a radial concentric structure orientated towards the course of the Danube, like a handheld fan. This type of structure has allowed for the expansion of the city without affecting its original core, the structure of Brăila being a model of continuity and balance.

The radial streets that intersect with the concentric, ring streets, lead to the banks of the Danube. The concentric streets embrace the Danube as an amphitheatre. Similarly, the main street, on the route of which the market square is located, connects the outskirts of the city with the bank of the Danube, from the west to the east. Traian Square, with its balanced, human scale

composition, extends with the street that leads towards the river, transformed into a pedestrian route.

In Brăila, the Danube embankment, less visually coherent than in Galați, reveals, nevertheless, valuable perspective views towards the town. Here, the developed cliff of the Danube, which is shorter than in Galați, should be continued with pedestrian routes in the old part of the city.

In Brăila, the side of the city which faces the Danube, whilst presenting architectural heritage objectives, loses its impact due to the absence of a coherent composition. This side of the city should be connected with the protected area of the historic centre of the city, thus achieving a better way of highlighting the valuable connection between the town and the Danube.

The city of Galați, without preserving the same coherence in its built historical core, maintains, however, a connection with the river via the main structure of its streets. Still, in Galați, there is not a wide opening of the historical centre of the city towards the Danube in the same way as there is in Brăila. In Galați, the modern city has developed along the Danube.

Figure 8. Galați, the modern city
https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fi%C8%99ier:Galati_-_zona_portului_vechi.jpg

Figure 9. The Danube Cliff in Galați, prior to development
https://arhiva.uniuneaarhitectilor.ro/arhiva/foto-diapo?pag=1

However, Domnească Street, the street that connects the old city with the Danube, preserves old buildings of architectural value which can form the core of a historical area. Esplanade Park connects this zone with the Danube even more clearly. The development of the Danube Cliff, with green spaces and pieces of art, allows the possibility of an even stronger connection between the historic centre and the Danube, preserving an important characteristic of the traditional site: its orientation towards nature.

The city of Galați, more coherent in its pedestrian route, links the landmarks into an easily perceived loop: Brăila Street, the centre, the esplanade towards the Danube, the Danube Cliff and the Botanical Gardens, situated close to Brăila Street. The city earns value through the connection that exists

between the centre and the Danube, made possible by Esplanade Park, which has as the head of perspective a sculpture, from the end of which remarkable views are revealed: Precista Church, Navigation Palace, sights of the Danube.

Another city on the Danube is the city of Tulcea. Although in the past it had periods of stagnation, at the time of the opening of the Sulina Canal, its development restarted. Tulcea, with its dominant core construction being from the modern period, still preserves architectural objects of heritage value and, partially, a traditional street network, which respects the same principle: the orientation of the city towards the dominant natural element. Now, through the development of the cliffs, one of the traditional characteristics of the city is highlighted: its connection with nature.

The town of Sulina, situated at the end of the course of the Danube, has structured its street network in accordance with the two major natural elements: the sea and the Danube. The town constantly follows the arm of the Danube with its long streets being parallel to the Danube and its short streets, perpendicular to the shore. The structure of the street network in Sulina has common points with the structure of the old area of the city of Constanta: streets that are parallel to the water's edge, intersected by short streets, perpendicular to the shore. The main roads in the town of Sulina head towards the sea. This way, Sulina preserves the basic traditional features which are specific to settlements at the edge of the water. The town, although small in terms of the area that it covers, contains buildings of architectural and historical value. The restoration or rehabilitation of these buildings, even just those on the Danube embankment, would reveal the true level of this settlement's cultural and touristic value.

Figure 10. Sulina, Buildings on the Danube Cliff

Moreover, Sulina develops its historic centre right along the Danube, which gives this town its distinctiveness: the watercourse is exposed as the nucleus of this human settlement. The link between the town and the sea should be highlighted with the positioning of art pieces which would connect the landmarks in a coherent ensemble. The development of the coast should take into consideration the dominant character of the major elements of the site: the Danube and the sea. Currently, the development of the seashore blocks

important views from the main route towards the sea and the disorderly, random arrangement of amenities disrupts the magnificent image of a unique seashore in Romania.

Of course, in all these situations, the development of the banks of the Danube should not take place only on the side where the towns are situated but, on both sides, the views from the water allowing panoramic, characteristic perspectives.

In conclusion, in the case of rehabilitating the old centres of the cities, a fundamental principle of urban regeneration is the development of the water banks and the creation of coherent links between them and areas of historical interest. In this way, a traditional feature of human settlements would be reestablished: their reconnection with nature.

The positioning of pieces of art in these coastal areas ensures a necessary visual coherence, contributing to the enrichment of the urban space with new landmarks and meanings.

Urban regeneration through artistic interventions

A form of urban regeneration or rehabilitation involves the addition of pieces of art to the urban fabric in the form of unitary, coherent compositions, either in city centres or other urban zones. These projects could contribute to contemporary urbanism studies.

Usually, the installation of such pieces of art is carried out at isolated urban points or in restricted areas. There are cases, though less recommended, when first of all a piece of art is produced and then a suitable location is found for it to be installed. Inserting pieces of art into the structural ensemble of the city, in the form of unitary compositions, takes shape as a process of realizing the cohesion of the urban landscape. It is a method that can be applied in an urban ensemble that is already established, such as a historical centre or traditional site. Over time, the most beautiful urban spaces took their shape when the overall vision prevailed.

In situations in which unitary artistic ensembles are integrated into historic centres, with major axes of composition and with a coherent theme, the specific character of the site is accentuated, enriching it with new meanings. Works of art, as unique objects, become landmarks, with a symbolic value, to which both visitors and local people can relate. These historical or traditional zones, whether they are more or less homogeneous from a stylistic, environmental or historical point of view, can achieve unity by organizing the coherent artistic compositions from within, as a red, integrative thread.

Inserting the artistic objects needs to be accomplished in accordance with the characteristics of the spatial composition, the style of the space and the architectural objects, and the existing or desired meaning of the space.

Coherence can be found at stylistic, thematic and ensemble levels (axes and centres of composition, hierarchy of the component elements). The works of art may include sculptures, decorations (pavements, picture murals), and surrounding objects (wells, furniture, urban signalling). They may become unifying elements by placing them in unitary compositions.

In this way, in Galați, by installing objects of art on the banks of the Danube, a new axe of development has been created, making an extension of the city centre possible, easy to integrate into a pedestrian circuit, unifying, linking the historical zone with the major natural element, the Danube.

In the contemporary period, the integration of art, architecture and urbanism is necessary if we take into consideration the austerity, the simplicity of the materials, finishings and details, and the departure from the human scale of some new urban ensembles.

In the new centre of Paris, the district "La Defense", for example, several objects of art have been installed, which are made from natural materials (water, stone, wood, ceramics) with figurative forms, compensating for the artificiality of the materials and abstract character of the contemporary forms.

Figure 11. Paris, La Defense Center, Igor Mitoraj, *Le Grand Toscano*, bronze, 1983

This method could also be applied in the embankment areas of the cities along the Danube, where the historical ambience of the traditional site has not been preserved. For example: in Galați and Tulcea.

The level of urban development aiming to achieve two major objectives (the harmonious organization of functions and the establishment of coherent urban structures), the action of introducing works of art at the level of the urban ensemble, is established as an urban cohesion factor. These location studies come to support some principles that are applied in urban planning:

Intervention in areas with maximum development potential. At this level, the integration of artistic objects, in unifying compositions, may contribute to emphasizing the specific character of the settlement.

Structuring the urban space according to major development axes. The identification of urban development axes leads to the idea of arranging the artistic compositions on the route of these axes, as axes of visual composition.

One of these axes is the area of cultural location and action, as an element of identity, urban affirmation. In some existing historical centres, the possible extension of the centre along development axes may be controlled by the positioning of art objects, as a natural connection between tradition and modernity. In Galați, by positioning art objects on the banks of the Danube, a development axis has been created, which makes possible the connection with the historical area of the city.

Strengthening the centre and ensuring urban vitality in other complementary centres (as elements of local identity, urban continuity and balance). Intervention with personalized artistic ensembles contributes to accentuating the structure by centres of the city, conferring identity and meaning of the location. In adjacent zones, elements of visual continuity can be introduced, in the form of artistic compositions, resulting in paths of visual identity.

Highlighting the qualities of natural sites. In structuring the city, it is possible to rely on the natural element, as the common, unifying element. The natural site may be highlighted by the integration of art-nature, placing objects of art in key, characteristic places, (as elements of accent, attraction), choosing the natural paths of the site as locations. The site of the riverbank or seashore should be highlighted, each settlement having been born on the banks of a waterway. The installation of pieces of art along the length of the water always contributed to the enrichment of the settlement with new meanings, the areas being developed and becoming reference points for the city. Coherence given by the permanent nature of the water may be underlined by the coherence of the artistic locations. Usually, the watercourse is adjacent to the historical centre of the city, water being the natural element along the length of which traditional settlements were established.

The principle of synergy, which aims to mobilise the potential of the entire territory by optimally solving the connection between the territories, is realized in the highway system. It is supported by the overall vision in the placement of art objects. The arrangement of artistic ensembles on travel routes must be done according to the particularities of urban perception: as roadway images or as pedestrian images.

At the urban studies level, the insertion of pieces of art into the urban fabric also goes along the lines of identifying the main functions of the town, receptive to this implementation.

The cultural function has pre-eminence in shaping urban images and identities. The integration of artistic ensembles may be done in areas where cultural amenities and actions are concentrated. These areas are formed in a relatively coherent structure, becoming one of the axes of the city. The integration of art pieces contributes to emphasizing the significance of these spaces, passing through them being a history lesson, an applied school.

The touristic function may develop by creating both pedestrian routes and road circuits for tourists, which highlight the principal heritage objects. Filling out these routes with art pieces enriches the urban landscape with new meanings, outlining new areas of attraction, ensuring necessary coherence. Each settlement has as a tourist asset, to a larger or smaller extent, the natural setting. In the cities on the Danube, the water is, of course, the main element of tourist attraction.

Commerce, with its specific features, is a factor of public attraction. The commercial line, as a vector of urban movement, can intersect with cultural routes, doubled by the tourist line. Mixing commercial functions with other urban functions, on culturally relevant pedestrian routes, as well as road routes, can be done in parallel with the insertion of objects of art.

Leisure and sport function is taken into account by identifying the main natural and leisure places, as the practice of revealing nature. At the level of artistic object, insertion into the natural or urban landscape can be done by using local natural materials and other symbolic elements.

At the urban planning level, following the harmonious organization of the functions and the establishment of coherent urban structures, the integration of art pieces at the urban ensemble level creates a unity of urban cohesion.

Conclusions

The principles of establishing traditional settlements, which appeared naturally, over time, as a result of the communion between man and nature, should be reconsidered and applied as the principles of the regeneration and rehabilitation of historical centres.

These principles, together with those currently applied in urban planning studies, can highlight the fundamental cultural and visual characteristics of traditional, old urban areas. The valorization of traditional images of the towns can be attained by highlighting the importance of the natural site, most human settlements having developed on water banks. The natural site can be highlighted by inserting art pieces in key specific places.

An urban regeneration method involves the insertion of art pieces in coherent, unitary compositions. Inserting art pieces in the overall ensemble of the city, in the form of unitary compositions, emerges as a process of achieving cohesion of the urban image. This method can be applied to urban ensembles which have already been formed, such as historical centres or traditional sites. The integration in historical centres of certain unitary artistic ensembles, with major axes of composition and a coherent theme, accentuates the specific character of the site by enriching it with new meanings.

In the context of the rehabilitation of the historical centres of the cities, it is necessary for the water banks to be developed and a coherent link made between these areas and those of historical interest, thus highlighting a traditional feature of human settlements: their relationship with nature.

In conclusion, during the rehabilitation process of old areas in the cities located along the Danube River, the development of the watercourse and its surroundings becomes a primary objective.

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Aesthetic Dimensions in Novels by Writers from Banat

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Abstract
Writers belonging to cultures once subordinated to the Austrian Empire display a dual attitude towards the Centre: both rejection and nostalgia. These circumstances are translated into a multitude of cultural, behavioural, psychological and psycholiterary features, as well as a wide range of literary procedures. Sorin Titel, Miloš Crnjanski – as well as Danilo Kiš, Herta Müller and others – are writers who lived the moment of the disintegration of the Empire, with everything that this meant for the European literature, in general, and for the literature of the Banat region, in particular. This study examines how such writers analyse the history of the nations they belong to and the local perception of the Centre (administration, religion, political leaders) while exploring how they approach themes such as exile, migration, and the trauma of being separated from the place of birth. Moreover, it highlights the aesthetic dimensions of the literature from Banat and the presence of the Danube as a natural link associated with the Central-European space, together with other relevant hydronyms and toponyms.

Keywords: *Danube, Central European Literature, exile, migration, nostalgia*

The variability of a space and a concept: *Mitteleuropa*

This paper started from the idea of a concentrical analysis of the following terms: Central Europe, South-Eastern Europe, Vienna and Banat, together with their location, role, history, the relationship between them, as well as their relationship with the whole continent. When referring to Banat, the goal is to establish the historical, socio-cultural and literary heritage of the region by taking into account the prism of social connections, the exchanges of ideas and the reciprocal influence of various ethnic, religious and social groups.

The research draws on various theories of *Mitteleuropa* formulated by well-known intellectuals like Jacques Le Rider and Victor Neumann, concerning the interculturality and multiculturality of the marginal zones of the former Habsburg and later Austro-Hungarian Empire. The research strategy is comparative and relies on literary history and criticism, analyses the thematic influences, and processes and operates with intertextuality and imagology. At the same time, the strategy refers to myths, literary genres,

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themes and models, characters, and the profiles of the characters. It follows the hypothesis that the literature of the Banat region belongs to Central Europe, because of its spirit, literary topics and motives, character profiles, psychology, cultural archetypes, geographical belonging, etc. When these aspects are carefully considered, the conclusion can be that the literature of the region must be placed in this multicultural frame and not in the "large", patronizing Romanian literature, in which it used to be included more because of political, ethnic and other reasons and less due to intrinsic literary evidence. Indeed, it is much more related and much closer to the Central European literature than it is to the rest of the Romanian literature.

The demarche has a practical purpose. It can prove that impersonal terms such as Europe or Central Europe get substance and life through the valuing of the spiritual creations that reveal their essence. Such terms are valued and understood properly mainly by those living in this area. This research is an opportunity to show the operative value of these theoretical terms by studying the *Mitteleuropäische* literature: Europe's image in the writings of several Central European authors.

Another objective is to bring Central European literature closer to those interested in seeing the affinities between the local literary productions and those from the other regions of the Empire, as there is a lack of studies and translations in the field. The results coming out of the present research might contribute precisely to changing some narrow perspectives on literature and dismissing some stereotypes concerning the assessment of regional literature. Furthermore, it might contribute to people better understanding each other if they realize the similarities of the problems and situations they are confronted with. It might also bring into the public's attention the European integration seen from a transnational point of view, suggested by the presence of the Danube as a river that connects several countries.

The preliminary research findings show that the term *Mitteleuropa* does not reflect only a geographical reality, easy to define. It entered the usual vocabulary (mainly German) at the beginning of the First World War and was introduced by Friedrich Naumann, as noted by J. Le Rider, and it is felt as marked by the pan-Germanic ideology: "the German vital space" and "Drang nach Osten" ("Drive to the East"). The term was often avoided and substituted by *Ostmitteleuropa* or *Centraleuropa* (Le Rider 1997: 21). *Mitteleuropa* contains two different meanings: one is linked to the relatively recent tradition of pan-Germanism and has its sources in the discussions concerning the objectives of the First World War around 1914; the other revitalizes a much older tradition, that of the sacred Roman-German Empire. From this perspective, *Mitteleuropa* presents itself as a project, a myth, or a utopia of harmony in Central Europe. It seems that this region is given different names – accepted or rejected – in accordance with the different perspectives of the nations that once belonged to

the Habsburg Empire. The Poles, the Serbians, the Italians and sometimes even the Czechs reacted critically to this form of governing power, while the Austrians, the Hungarians and, in different contexts, even the Slovenians and the Croats have expressed nostalgia for the Empire, overlapping it with the myth of the paradisiacal time.

While the Western European space was politically organized and consolidated from an economic point of view, the small nations from Eastern Europe were looking for an anchor, for help, to survive the Turkish invasion or the Russian expansion. Vienna was the closest and the most prestigious power centre, around which they could agglutinate to fulfil their destiny as European nations. Through their centripetal movements, they contributed to the extension of the Empire towards the East and the South-East. It was much later when the direction of rotation changed: by accumulating disappointment, the imperial policy was unjust exactly with those who were the most loyal, which led to a centrifugal movement that became more and more visible in literature as well. The fundamental principle that sustained the Habsburg dynastic model was that the ideal "cement" for the building of a multinational state was the harmonious cohabitation of the people, languages and the most various religions. In contrast, the German model of Romantic origin meant that the nation is conceived starting from the ideas of *Volk* and a dominant language as an ethnolinguistic model.

The culture and literature of Banat

Banat is a region that has been part of Romania for more than a hundred years now. By comparison to other parts of Europe, Banat has features that cultivate the balance between different religious influences, traditions, and customs, between different lifestyles. Both its past and its present can be better understood if we take into consideration that the Orthodox and the Catholic churches live together here; the Germano-Austrian world shares the region with the Romanian and the Serbian, and the world of the Hungarian culture and civilization shares it with the Slovakian and the Bulgarian. To all these, we must add the German Jews speaking Yiddish and the Spanish Jews speaking Ladino. The historical and literary writings in Romanian by authors like Constantin Diaconovici Loga, Paul Iorgovici and Eftimie Murgu were ideologically connected with the political and artistic writings of authors from Szeged, Budapest, Vienna, Cluj-Napoca, Braşov or Iaşi. This was possible due to the fact that some of the Romanian authors from Banat used German and Hungarian in their works, having access to the political and cultural environment of the Habsburg Empire. Cultural personalities such as Johann Nepomuk Preyer, Leonhard Böhm, Szentkláray Jenő, Franz Xaver Kappus,

Adolf Meschendörfer, Heinrich Zillich and Erwin Wittstock also belong to Banat (Neumann 1997, 7).

Framed between the Mureş River and the White Criş River in the north, the Tisza River in the west, the Danube River in the south and the Carpathian Mountains in the east, Banat is a region in which several denominations meet (Orthodox, Catholic, Reformat, Lutheran, Mosaic, Muslim) and several languages are spoken (Romanian, Hungarian, German, Serbian, Bulgarian, Yiddish, etc.). Under the impulse of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, a strong and powerful culture emerged in Banat, sustained by representative institutions of the imperial civilization: schools, libraries, and religious orders (Neumann 1997: 11-21).

The culture of Banat is almost exclusively based on printed literature and very little based on folklore, unlike in other parts of Romania. Books in Hungarian and German used to be common in both public and private libraries. A large part of the population used to study in German and Hungarian schools opened in Timişoara, Arad or Lugoj and in the universities from Budapest, Prague, or Vienna. The administration of the region used to be in Hungarian, which led to the acquisition of this language by the great majority of the inhabitants. After it was included in Romania in 1918, Banat was an atypical special region among other regions of the country: it had the best-developed economy and cultural life, in which many people took part. The forms of civilisation characteristic of the West, created at the same time with the colonisation of the region by the Austrians, tried to resist as much as possible even during communism.

The social and individual relationships have the most harmonious form in the entire space of Romania. Banat is a model not only for Romania but also for other European areas situated even farther to the West from a geographical point of view: Slovenia, Bosnia, Galicia (in Poland) and Slovakia. One of the essential questions is what has made these facts possible. I have tried to find the answer mainly in the local literature, although this study refers to other cultural phenomena too. It draws on the artistic and literary imagination of the writers who were born here, who lived here more or less, or of those who just visited the cities. I take into consideration writers of all ethnic origins and from several historical periods: the end of the nineteenth century, the beginning of the twentieth century, the interwar epoch, but also the contemporary period.

The first timid attempts at novel writing in Banat were recognized only in the eighteenth century. Johann Friedel (1755-1789) is considered by specialists as the first poet among the Banat Germans. Yet this acknowledgment is relative because he lived most of his life outside Banat and he did not approach themes related to the region in his work. He is the author of two sentimental novels of Viennese manners but without great artistic value. Karl Wilhelm von Martini (1821-1885) was the representative novelist of the Banat literature in German

until the twentieth century: *Pflanzer und Soldat. Bilder und Gestalten aus dem Banat* (1854) and *Vor hundert Jahren, ein deutsches Lebens und Sittenbild* (1864) focus on the German colonization of the Banat region.

In the second part of the nineteenth century, literature about the birth of the region (*Heimatliteratur*) emerged within the frame of German literature from Transylvania. It should not be confused with the literary trend with the same name, which appeared in Germany and Austria around 1900, although it surprisingly anticipates some of its elements. The novel from Banat belonging to this type of literature features the historical component to a significant extent. Friedrich Wilhelm Seraphin's novel *Die Einwanderer* (1903) is composed around the myth of conquering the land by the Transylvanian Germans (Bockel 1976, 9). There was a similar situation with the German novel form Banat at the beginning of the twentieth century, whose most important representative was Adam Müller Guttenbrun (1852-1923). His most successful novel was *Meister Jakob und seine Kinder* (1918), which has a pregnant autobiographic character.

The main topics in the German language literature from Banat are exile, colonisation, the history of the place, the new life in a new place and getting away from the centre. In contrast, the literature of the region in Romanian, Hungarian or Serbian attests to the fact that the main characters were looking for a centre or wanted to maintain their connections with a protective centre, which guaranteed a safe, quiet and prosperous life. Examples can be found in the works of Ioan Slavici, Miloš Crnjanski or Franyó Zoltán.

An interesting and relevant aspect of this research concerns the approach of the idea of the Centre. The attention of the writers who speak about the new places, where the German colonists built their new lives, is devoted to the present and the future. Life in the new colonies does not feel like a break from the large space of the Empire:

> The journey to the market, to the neighbouring village or to more distant places, to the city, the nearby one, or to Budapest, Vienna, Hamburg, is considered another way to broaden one's horizon of knowledge and understanding of the world and its differences (Vultur 2000: 528).

However, later on, after losing the contact to the Centre:

> The nostalgia for such a world translates into the highly valued aspiration to live together 'like one big family', as people of Banat used to live in the past." (528) [2]

In the works published after the Empire disintegrates, the emphasis is placed on the past, on the history of colonization. The Centre is the horizon which many of the characters in the novels written by authors from Banat contemplate. The Centre is the place they dream of, the place where they wish

to get to, which they value positively or, on the contrary, totally hate or disapprove of, to which they polemically relate themselves. In fact, the Centre may capture their full attention at a time when it does not exist as the Centre anymore, the one it used to be. Therefore, it is no surprise that other places – Paris, Rome, Budapest, Prague – often take over to inhabit the Centre, substituting or replacing Vienna.

After it gained maturity, the literature of Banat seems to have become a synthesis of these various and divergent elements, a cultural aspect that I am trying to demonstrate throughout my study. To prove that it is useful to extend the area of my research and include more writers from the twentieth century, with books considered to be very important for the literature of Banat (I. Slavici, M. Crnjanski, S. Titel, L. Ciocîrlie, Herta Müller) or in the immediate contact zone of the region (L. Blaga, E. Cioran, M. Krleža, S. Márai, D. Kiš).

From the preliminary data accumulated and continuing the hypotheses formulated, these writers configure a distinct literary area, which is difficult to assimilate into any national literature (Romanian, Serbian or Hungarian): although they are recognized as important writers, they are seen and perceived as eccentric and presented accordingly by literary historians and critics.

The intention of this paper is to pinpoint as clearly as possible those literary elements based on which we can speak about the literature of Banat as a buffer-zone literature between the different national literatures situated on both banks of the Danube River. This type of literature harmonizes the contrasts the same as the region of Banat has constantly assimilated, harmonized, and valorised oppositions of every category, the same as the river has constantly connected them, providing the conditions for mutual influence.

Pasărea şi umbra [The Bird and Its Shadow] by Sorin Titel

Two of the representative writers of Central European literature, Sorin Titel (1935-1985) and Danilo Kiš (1935-1989), born in the same year, one in the town of Margina, the other in Subotica, both approximately one hundred kilometres away from Timişoara, the first to the east, the second to the west, come from the outskirts of Banat. It is no wonder that the works of these two writers, who died four years apart from each other, are imbued with the defining baroque spirit of Central Europe, as Elisabeta Roşca stated: "Vienna and the agony of Empire nurtured an extraordinary movement of ideas, of culture in general, from art history to psychoanalysis, from economics to literature; its reminiscences and reverberations marked the literatures of Central and Eastern Europe everywhere." (2000: 22)

The marginality of Titel's hometown can be compared both to the universe of the old Habsburg Empire and to the dominant, powerful Centre, be it Vienna or Bucharest, after a large section of the Banat region became part

of Romania in 1918. Like any margin, it is a place where people imitate, in a specific way, and retain many of the manifestations of the centre; they maintain them long after they have assimilated them. Titel's characters are often marginals, and they are too little (or not at all) adapted to social norms, they seem even exiles. Titel's Romanian universe stretches along the axis Margina – Szeged – Vienna, intersecting the Danube, reaching the castles on the Rhine, then Paris and, later, Deauville, in the north of France. It is a rediscovery and reclamation of Europe from the periphery to the centre, from the south to the north. At least as far as the Romanian prose is concerned, Titel's work represents, perhaps, the most faithful mirror of the multinational Empire.

In his novel *Femeie, iată fiul tău* [*Woman, Here is Your Son*] (1983), the mix of ethnicities reflects the normality of the world, the same as in his novel *Pasărea şi umbra* [*The Bird and Its Shadow*] (1977). In *Clipa cea repede* [*The Fast Moment*] (1979), the ethnic mosaic and the account of the construction of the hotel with the pompous name "Emperor Trajan" refer to the myth of the Tower of Babel. The homogenization of the world is achieved through a centripetal movement, from Banat towards the Centre, through the journeys the characters make. For example, for the young men going to the army, Szeged was the centre of the world, even though that meant, in many cases, only the barracks and the training field, the recruits' unhappiness, the place of their alienation and of their coming of age. Szeged is situated on the Tisza River, an affluent of the Danube, which accentuates the subalternity of the characters. Through other heroes, Titel builds the fundamental chronotope of the Habsburg world: the Imperial Vienna, with its surroundings and points of attraction (Roşca 2000: 23-27).

Sorin Titel's prose preserves the multiethnic aspect even after the collapse of the Empire and the integration of ethnic minorities into national states, a situation that eventually leads to the accumulation of tensions. For Tisu, a character from the novel *Pasărea şi umbra* (1977), the capital of the Empire seems a maximally enlarged version of the cities he knows at home. At the same time, it also seems to him that Vienna is on the verge of sinking into death:

> Vienna seemed to him a rather sleepy city; polite old men, in well-tailored overcoats, were always shuffling with umbrellas for bad weather under their arms, under the chestnut trees with thick shade. He admires the statue of the emperor – in a military cloak, slightly bent forward, lost in thought – while the brass band in the kiosk in the middle of the park plays with great zeal the famous and immortal Viennese waltzes, whose golden age has passed, of course, but which the Viennese do not want to separate in their broken heads. (Titel 2005, I: 1023-1024)

Moreover, in the same novel, Sorin Titel brings together "the authentic artist and the producer of kitsch in the same world of Vienna at the beginning of the century" (Roşca 2000: 54). He does so through the characters Honoriu Dorel Rațiu and Ignasia. In Honoriu Dorel's case, Vienna is the stage of his formation as a painter. The culmination of his initiation is his journey on the Rhine and his experience in one of the castles there. Whereas, in Vienna, the young painter can easily dissociate art from life and fiction from reality, in Mr Günter's castle on the Rhine this operation no longer seems possible. At some point, the host shows him a huge rooster, the product of both nature and its owner's intervention. The episode seems to contain the idea that nature can surpass any imagination and that one of an artist's roles is to render this quality of nature, to observe how reality reveals its fantastic: "With the insatiable eye of a painter, Honoriu Dorel looked at the living model in front of him: so real and at the same time almost fantastic."(Titel 2005, I: 1062) The Romanian painter looks for the uniqueness, the particular and the essence of the model, while his artistic double, the Polish Ignasia, does nothing but endlessly reproduce the same Madonna, surrounded by angels and playing with the baby in a field with flowers, under a sky with diaphanous clouds above: "Everywhere in the world, in the banks, you can admire paintings of the same value", remarks the narrator. Ignasia participates with one of her works in a competition which, as the narrator says, "proposed to reward the strangest or most bizarre artworks" (Titel 2005, I: 1041), and she is awarded the second prize. This is possible in the agonizing imperial Vienna, in the apocalyptic atmosphere of the great capital cradled by the lazy, feminine Danube. However, this is unthinkable up the Rhine, the river of mighty warriors, where young Rațiu completes his initiation.

Despite the calm atmosphere of Vienna, despite its order and the obvious routine, it may seem threatening to the newcomers. For example, a simple poster scares Tit Liviu, a character from *Femeia în roşu* [*The Woman in Red*], an interesting Banat novel by M. Nedelciu, A. Babeți and M. Mihăieş. His panic and feverishness when reading the poster causes him to "see things slightly distorted" (Nedelciu, Babeți, Mihăieş 2011: 214). After three years, however, when he returns to consolidate his medical studies and with a lot of money in his pockets, Tit Liviu has a different perspective on the capital city situated on the Danube:

> He will then wander for weeks on end through this Timişoara, which is two or three stories higher, or through this Budapest, which is one story higher [...]. To have no one know you in such a city, to have this freedom about yourself, about how you look, how you move, about your own thoughts, to be so alone and free among thousands of people who seem like prisoners of friends, acquaintances and neighbours, to be able to think what you want while seeing others struggling to think only of what is necessary for their survival and their image, their

> prestige – here is a way to expand freedom to the threshold of a special madness, a madness that would not even be noticed from the outside (Nedelciu, Babeţi, Mihăieş 2011: 217-218).

For the sake of comparison, in almost all of Herta Müller's prose, the Danube is a border, a Styx that must be crossed in reverse: those who want to escape the communist block must cross the river. In spite of the fact that the Danube was a place where one could die, shot by the border patrol or drowning in its dangerous waters, many people took the risk of trying to cross it, armed with the aim of living in a free land. Unlike Titel, Herta Müller does not remember the names of small, local rivers, but only that of the Danube, which has a terrifying resonance for her. Or it is used within standard expressions, as in the following example: "'My family was sad rather than superficial. After the years spent in the camp, our house was no longer very happy.' 'But a lot of water has flowed on the Danube since then, that was long before your life now.'" (Müller 2014: 118)

For the Banatian people, therefore, the space between their hometown and Vienna or the area of the Middle Danube is rather familiar, calm, and soothing—if peace reigns—, it is recognizable, established and part of their personal experience. Being exiled in cities on the Danube like Vienna or Budapest, or further north in Prague, is nonsense as these cities are perceived as being close enough to Banat. The Upper Danube and the Lower Danube can be brought together by this type of in-between literature of *Mitteleuropa.*

Migrations by Miloš Crnjanski

The characters in the novel *Migrations* (1929) by Miloš Crnjanski relate differently to the same space. With a structure obviously built on oppositions, between human types, spatial or cultural typologies, between religions or ways of relating to history, apparently historical (Vintilă 2001: 102-103), the book is an essential piece of Central European literature. The time span of the novel, which covers the spring of 1774 and the summer of the following year, centres on Major Vuk Isakovič:

> Almost two weeks had passed since the message arrived from the Marquis Ascanio Guadagni, the commander of the city of Osjek, to equip three hundred soldiers, carefully chosen, to start the war against France. […] That's how Vuk Isakovič set off to war in the spring of 1744. (Crnjanski 1993: 7-15, *passim*)

The war is seen both from the perspective of the central character and from that of the narrator. The same occurs with the imperial central institutions and their representatives (orchestrators of the conflict), the misery of Vuk Isakovič's places and soldiers, or the well-being of the lands through which his

army passes. Without excessive sympathy for the Centre, Vuk Isakovič is a soldier by vocation and a gifted commander, with a sense of duty and responsibility, even though he has the impression that he is always marginalized. The images of the Empire, the Court of Vienna and the representatives of the administration (governors, high officers or prelates) are mediated, alternatively or simultaneously, by two filters: the consciousness and voice of the narrator and those of the character Vuk Isakovič.

The novel is set in a vast territory between the Danube and the Rhine, toponyms with the highest frequency in the text: 36, respectively 32, occurrences, marking an obsession with the border through accentuated repetition. *Migrations* can be considered a mapping of eighteenth-century Europe. The text abounds in toponyms, which contribute to creating the impression of historical veracity and literary realism, and to sketching the routes followed by the protagonists on the Romanian territory and beyond, superimposed on the real, geographic one. Some toponyms form pairs: the Danube and the Tisza, Wallachia and Turkey, Trieste and Venice, Worms and Mainz. In other contexts, they form oppositions: the Danube versus the Rhine, Belgrade (or Zemun) versus Vienna, Serbia versus Austria (or Styria), Serbia versus Russia, etc. On the banks of the Danube, the "Slavo-Danube regiment" is formed, to be decimated on the banks of the Rhine. People leave Serbia when it falls under the Turks and return only when it is liberated. Vuk Isakovič dreams of a time when he can leave for good, with his people, to what seems to him to be the promised land: Russia. However, as the bitter irony of life goes, Vuk and his Serbian soldiers end up not in the East, but in the West, because they never did what they wanted, but only what others forced them to do. In other words, migrating to the East is a utopia, while migrating to the West is always possible, but undesirable.

The opposition between poor Serbia and Austria – the rich, highly civilized Styria, more precisely – is clearly highlighted by the perplexity of Vuk's soldiers, peasants from the Middle Danube, feeling troubled in front of the apparent miracles existing in the places they pass through:

> They heard music and they couldn't explain where it was coming from, because it was coming from the walls of the houses. […] This new country, green and cool […], took the other one, the land of the winds, out of their hearts. [...] Dirty and wretched, they passed through cobbled, country fences, places full of hay and animals, and they felt how bright their poverty was and how endless the mud of the villages where they had been born. (Crnjanski 1993: 77)

From the perspective of Vuk Isakovič (and of the narrator) – and in contrast with that of his brother, Archangel – the European space seems structured in three large segments: the East (Russia, Turkey, and Wallachia), the West (beyond the Rhine, France) and what we can call the Centre (Austria, Italy,

Hungary, Serbia, Banat, represented by the citadel of Timişoara). One strongly marked opposition is that between the utopian East – Russia, the homeland of "sweet Orthodoxy", the country to which Vuk, like a new Moses, dreams of taking his people – and the Centre, where the Serbs, and others like them, feel treated as outcasts. A second opposition configured on spatial coordinates is between the West and the Centre: they are lands divided by war.

The first plan of the novel, with the war as its central axis, the history of masculinity par excellence and the History in capital letter, is counterbalanced by a second plan, the history of femininity, the small, domestic history, which pivots around the boring life, consumed in waiting, chatter, fear and uproar, of Dafina Isakovič, Vuk's wife:

> She sat for a long time at the large, latticed window that faced the river. In the early days, she chose this place to cry. Day and night, the wide, silky river flowed here. And in it, her shadow. […] Zemun learns from her that the olive oil boiled with sugar was an excellent remedy against gallstones […] After that, Zemun also found out that she had been an orphan [...]. This is how Mrs. Dafina Isakovič met Zemun and Zemun met her. She never went out and she cried a lot. (Crnjanski 1993: 47-48)

It is possible that, from the perspective of the traditional reader of historical novels, often considered constructions of the history of masculinity, Dafina should embody the emblematic traitor. The author stretches the narrative thread in such a way that this sensation is realized with sufficient strength, to constantly relativize it via poetic reflections and references to natural elements such as the Danube River.

Dafina's fate is cruel, her life is sad and short, her pleasures are just a few, guilty and dangerous. Abandoned periodically by her warrior husband, left alone with her two little girls, seduced by her brother-in-law, torn by longing, regrets and expectations, still lucid, saved by the author from falling into a bovarism of dubious taste, she is as powerless as the feeling of living in vain, of failure. The illusion that the young woman still clings to, before ending her days in such a deplorable way, could be understood as a last form of resistance to the revelation of the waste of life:

> In her heart, Dafina felt that she was equally hesitant in both big and small affairs. […] Under the influence of her memories regarding the way her brother-in-law made love to her, she wanted, on the last day of her life, to convince herself that she had set out for a pleasant, tremblingly pleasant life, which was waiting for her next to Archangel Isakovič. In short, a life without which her previous life had proved to have been not only unhappy, but also futile, terribly futile: a childhood next to a stepfather, adolescence next to an aunt, a marriage, births, and the passage of time, which, along with absences and moves, had been so monotonous and limited. (Crnjanski 1993: 147)

Archangel Isakovič, Vuk's older brother, "a merchant known for his wealth across the meadows of the Danube and the Tisza" (Crnjanski 1993: 8), completes the triad of the main characters. Archangel is a double of Vuk. The major's dream is to move his village people to Russia, in order to get them out of the general misery in which they live (the muddy plain, periodical floods, small houses made of earth, poor and bad food quality, etc.), an act meant to fulfil the dream of pan-Slavism, but also to consecrate the integration into the great religious community of Orthodoxy. Archangel Isakovič wants to keep the people in the village, to prevent migrations:

> Moving from place to place, ever since his father was still alive, constantly watching over his impudent brother, Archangel Isakovič thought that the life of his family, of the nations and of all these people, who had moved away from Serbia and then moved again back to Serbia, seemed like real madness. Seeing swamps and mud all around, people living in huts dug into the ground so that, once the spring has come or before the first snow, they could move on, Archangel Isakovič felt the wild need to put an end to all these things, to settle somewhere and force others to do the same. (Crnjanski 1993: 71)

While Vuk appears as a utopian character, a dreamer, but also a civilizing hero for the community he leads, Archangel is far from an idealist. He embodies the new spirit of Europe, valuing money, time, goods, and the practical spirit, even if that meant, not infrequently, pulling the strings of business partnerships. Archangel is the merchant, the capitalist, the entrepreneur who dreams of rebuilding the world in which he lives according to the standards of living in countries where there are many like him. He aims at the West and does not want the East at all:

> He felt a certain supernatural power in his thalers as well, because where he took them out of his bag, there the ships stopped, and the houses became his. The thalers circulated according to his desire and imagination, and soon it seemed to him the rain fell and the springs were born whenever he wanted and as he wanted [...]. He had recently bought one house in Požun and one in the city of Buda. A large, huge stone building with storehouses and cellars on the riverbank, above the water. He didn't even want to hear about returning to Turkey, much less about any migration to Russia. (Crnjanski 1993: 72)

His pragmatism is evident in his love relationships and in his relation with the church as well. Despite his name and his generous contributions to the church treasury, Archangel is far from what we usually understand by a religious person. What is more, several passages in the novel outline the idea that Archangel would embody the opposite of what his name denotes.

Both Isakovič brothers experience a sense of loss – "nothingness was his future and vanity his past" (Crnjanski 1993: 142), Vuk thinks – just as both undergo a process of transformation: one following the war in which he participates, while the other due to the death of the woman he seems to really have loved. Vuk, the eternal fighter, in love with war, comes to love freedom and peace, while his promiscuous brother is looked upon by divine grace.

To use the literary terminology proposed by Gérard Genette, Crnjanski's novel is a heterodiegetic narrative, and the perspective is, for the most part, typical of non-focused storytelling. Not infrequently, Crnjanski also resorts to internal focus, as in the lines in which the reader is suggested the sensation of Dafina's demonism, thought and experienced by Archangel: "Avoiding her in the first year, as one runs away from a calamity, he muttered irritated: 'Go away, you wretch.' [...] He was afraid for his brother from the first moment, seeing that he had brought the devil into his house. (Crnjanski 1993: 41)

A modern novel in all its details, Crnjanski's *Migrations* gently guides the reader not only towards an epic universe, as it may seem at first glance, but also to the purest lyric.

Conclusion

Geographically speaking, the Danube connects two worlds: Western and Eastern Europe. Over the past century, from Vienna to the entrance of the river into the gorge of the Carpathian Mountains, there has been an intensely speculative space of aesthetic endeavour, including the emergence of the Central European novel. The artistic forms specific to the area have tried to harmonize the two intertwined civilizations and make them bearable to each other. Although the Danube is rarely mentioned in Sorin Titel's prose, it represents a majestic natural presence that is always implied, closely connected with the big cities down the river such as Vienna and Budapest, shaping them harmoniously. Otherwise, the hydronym Titel most often mentions is the Timiş River, the local, simpler, more provincial river, a tributary of the Danube, into which, like people who aspire to the Centre, many small rivers flow. In Miloš Crnjanski's works, the Danube and the Rhine are fundamental spatial landmarks since the life of many Europeans seems to be concentrated between these ancient rivers. Between these spatial watersheds unfold the dramas of the post-war years – deportations, abuses, crimes, denunciations, betrayals, etc. – favoured by the monstrous, demonic or inhuman characters of the time. Nonetheless, writers always take refuge in balanced views, in beauty and the arts, showing the humanity that exists in muddy waters.

Note

All excerpts quoted are translated by the author of this article.

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PART II
On Gender and (Re)writing Patterns

From Postmodernism, with Love: Neo-Victorian Sexual/Textual Politics in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

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Abstract
Against the backdrop of the sexual revolution that the world was undergoing and of the textual experimentation that literature was undertaking in the late 1960s, the silence of the female characters populating Victorian fiction became nothing less than audible – the source of the debate around the 'sexual/textual politics' to have dominated the end of the twentieth century. With The French Lieutenant's Woman, *John Fowles gives a voice to his central character, Sarah Woodruff, and, in so doing, constructs a woman who deconstructs the (predominantly male) canon. Moreover, the novelist weaves her tale into his story and thus builds successive layers of fictionality for the interrogation of outmoded patterns of thought and the associated narrative strategies – symptomatic for the late Victorian era, yet lingering in the mindset of readers a century later. To illustrate the general postmodern 'dis-ease' with tradition and the particular subversive manner in which Fowles challenges expectations, the present study lays focus on the cultural production of early Neo-Victorian novels, highlights parody and metafiction as recurrent modes of writing, with frequent incursions into text, context, and intertext.*

Keywords: *Fowles, Neo-Victorianism, Postmodernism, parody, metafiction*

Neo-Victorianism – a symptom of the "postmodern condition"?

Neo-Victorianism, as a cultural phenomenon, encompasses cultural works that somehow engage with the Victorian era and its art, literature, science and history. A relatively new, yet dynamic academic subfield of literary studies, New Victorianism is still to establish itself as a definitive branch of critical literary studies, but the telling signs of its significance have been increasingly made obvious by the publication of more and more scholarship interested in how Postmodernism and Post-postmodernism relate to, take inspiration from

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and, above everything else, play (parodically, Hutcheon would say) with the Victorian text to create new moulds. It is noticeable at a glance that all scholars who share an interest in Neo-Victorianism approach it in a manner that denies the limitations based on artistic form, transcending the boundaries of genre and focusing on literature, film, culture, history and heritage as closely intertwined. Shall we call Neo-Victorianism postmodernist? We can, of course, but would it suffice without interrogating postmodernism first? We may come (too) early in the process to the famous conclusion drawn by Jameson, that "one of the most significant features or practices in postmodernism today is pastiche" (Jameson 1998: 4), which may, in turn, narrow our critical judgment of these so-called Neo-Victorian works to just that: derivative 'copies' of a recipe which has proven the most successful one in the history of the novel. In a nutshell, this inference would, consequently, lead to erroneously regarding these novels as illustrating the world outside rather than the inner dimension, in a bird's eye view over a chronologically built plot populated with objectively portrayed metonymical characters, who are either moved through their world by a godlike puppeteer who also assumes the role of the omniscient storyteller, or narrated from the perspective of a distanced, objective, more mature *I* (Praisler 2005: 14-15). But Neo-Victorian novels are not anything like this very brief characterization of the late nineteen century ones; there follows that they are not pastiches, at least not in the sense that Jameson gives the term:

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter (Jameson 1991: 17).

Fredric Jameson regards postmodern cultural productions – to which the Neo-Victorian novels are (at least) chronologically ascribed – as "the cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion, and […] the increasing primacy of the 'neo'" (Jameson 1991: 18). Mind the prefix 'neo' and the negative connotation it implies with the same force as the noun 'cannibalization', with which it is paired – repetitiveness, lack of originality, even theft/plagiarism, if not the downright *assassination* of the original. A lot more useful it would be if one looked into Hutcheon's understanding of such texts as parody or parodic self-reflexivity instead of pastiche, in her words, as "imitation with a critical difference" and "a form of inter-art discourse" (Hutcheon 2000: 2) instead of just mere potentially reverential imitation. When the prefix 'neo' comes into play, one can speak, much more directly than in other cases, of textual appropriation and influence. The intertextual nature of anything that contains a 'neo' in its name is assumed and embraced. Even the title of this chapter should be indicative of the creative force of the parodic cultural intertext, as inspired by a song titled 'From Sarah, with love' – and the

research subject below will make it obvious why the elided/replaced 'Sarah' matters – to which the title of an influential feminist study by Toril Moi was appended with a view to orienting the reader towards the authors' obvious feminist intentions. "[H]owever, we see influence as a burden – Bate 1970 – or as a cause of anxiety – Bloom 1973. Parody is one way of coming to terms with the texts of that rich and intimidating legacy of the past," (Hutcheon 2000: 4), a means to *re-functioning* the artistic forms of overwhelming heritage so that they suit novel needs. Neo-Victorian novels seen as postmodern parodies of the grand Victorian narratives may, therefore, seem a fortunate and appropriate way of looking at them from a critical perspective, of sending them back in time with the mission of helping us "experience history in some active way," (Jameson 1991: 21), as they can be easily proven to be "self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians" (Heilemann and Llewellyn 2010: 4). All these *re*-s are obviously in line with the politics of postmodernism that requires that its texts return to the past, rewrite it, and reassess its historicity from the vantage point of a hundred years' distance and progress. Whether this is a "postmodern condition", in Lyotard's terms, viewed either as *disease*, as the subtitle of this section implies, pointing, albeit misleadingly, to a form of artistic degradation, or as merely a circumstance or state, is less important for the present discussion. What matters, on the other hand, is that they display that "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard 1984: xxiv), where the latter embody totalizing truths legitimised by the authority of tradition, myths, political power, even culture, being, instead, telling examples of *petits récits* (Lyotard 1984: 60) – fragmented, disjointed texts that disregard omniscience and the singularity of the point of view. Without necessarily expressing it in these terms, the views of Neo-Victorianism scholars like Heilemann and Llewellyn (2010, see *supra*), Hadley (2010) and Kaplan (2007) converge on the idea that this literary/cultural phenomenon, which we insist to consider postmodernist, is "a scene of dissolution, a vertiginous melting-pot where the old canons of literature are invaded by textual stuff from psychology, philosophy, law, medicine, geography, and the old generic boundaries are down, and the distinction between 'literary' and 'non-literary' goes, and old minor or marginal texts (authors' jottings, essays, fragments, versions…) cease to lurk in the supplementary shadows and come busily in from the margin and the cold to receive equal treatment with what were once thought of as the main objects of concern, the poems and novels and plays, the published stuff, the final versions, and so on" (Cunningham 1994: 6).

Just a Victorian setting is not enough, however, for such writings to be considered Neo-Victorian, as critics also speak of nostalgia and fetishization/commodification: "rewritings of Victorian culture have flourished because the postmodern fetishizes notions of cultural emergence

and because the nineteenth century provides multiple eligible sites for theorizing such emergence" (Kucich and Sadoff 2000: xv).

This proves the validity of the points made by New Historicists and Cultural Materialists, who claim that literature, pertaining both to the wider cultural system and to the individuals that create it, functions in three ways: "as a manifestation of the concrete behaviour of its particular author, as itself an expression of the codes by which this behaviour is shaped, and as a reflection upon these codes" (Greenblatt 2005: 4). History, just like literature, is a discursive formation that constructs rather than reflects the past. In connection to this view on history, Louis Montrose coins the chiasmus "textuality of history – historicity of text" in his essay 'Professing the Renaissance: Poetics and Politics of Culture'. By historicity of texts, Montrose understands "the cultural specificity, the social embeddedment of all modes of writing", whereas textuality of history suggests the very idea of a subsequently constructed and mediated discourse which is assumed to be "merely contingent and partially consequent" with/to an authentic past which contemporaneity has access to through texts only (Montrose 1989: 20). In turn, this interplay of history and literature at work in Neo-Victorian works gives way to analyses that go beyond the mere necessity of accessing history through all kinds of texts (literary ones included), and that which applies concerns of the present to fictionalized events of the past. Apart from accounts of the *then* ideology filtered through an ideology of *now* and historical contexts (political, social, economic and cultural), such critical readings can and do find fertile grounds in postcolonial studies or gender studies, for the simple reason that "the dwellers of phenomenal history, of the fact in its development, attempting to control the real and subject it to their own needs, use representational codes to synthesize and appropriate it" (Cuțitaru 1997: 13, our translation). Accordingly, as is the case here, Neo-Victorian fiction is tackled as a temporally and ideologically mediated cultural representation of the Victorian age, with emphasis on the intricate texture of postmodernist untruths it conveys.

Sexual/textual politics and the early Neo-Victorian novel

In a theoretical article on what is and what is not Neo-Victorian fiction, published in the flagship journal of this branch of literary scholarship, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, Samantha J. Carroll stresses that, in the Neo-Victorian novel,

> the representation of the Victorian past is also the lens through which a variety of present concerns are examined: the interaction of advances in cultural theory and developments in postmodern criticism; the deliberate complication of the supposedly separate jurisdictions of history and fiction; metafictional commentary on the mechanisms of fiction and the effect of narrative techniques on the construction of historical discourse; and, the imaginative restoration of

> voices lost or constrained in the past, with repercussions for the present (Carroll 2010: 180).

The point the Australian scholar makes, and to which the present study adheres, at least for the case under the lens here, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, if not for the plethora of writings catalogued as Neo-Victorian after the immense and rather unexpected success of A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990), is that, instead of being sorry clones of the Victorian modes of writing, therefore anachronical through their publication in the latter half of the 20th and in the 21st century, such novels "triangulate history, fiction and postmodern critical thought" (Carroll 2010: 182). They are indeed examples of what Linda Hutcheon terms "historiographic metafiction" (1988: 5) and Brian McHale calls "postmodernist revisionist historical fiction" (1991: 90), and it is with this understanding in mind that the contextual associations are made further.

It has been sixty years since the sixties, so it is only natural that the topical issues of that time now appear like concerns of the yesteryear. Postmodernism has come and gone, making one wonder what is this that we are going through now, what the after of an after should be called. Women's Rights (as Human Rights, to paraphrase the famous sentence Hillary Clinton used at a United Nations conference on women in September 1995, in Beijing) are now in place and feminism is moving steadily into its fourth phase (or wave). Censorship still exists, but it has found new targets. The contextual framework of the publication of *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* in 1969, feels like writing a bit of the history of the cultural (and sexual) revolution.

In the foreword to the revised edition of his 1965 magnum opus, *The Magus*, Fowles hints briefly at the reason that prevented him from being too sexually explicit in the first version: "The erotic element is stronger in two scenes. I regard that as merely the correction of a past failure of nerve" (Fowles 1978). Predictably, Fowles's admission is placed in connection with the enforcement of the Obscene Publication Act (29th July 1959), "an Act to amend the law relating to the publication of obscene matter; to provide for the protection of literature and to strengthen the law concerning pornography," which had led to the (in)famous trial for banning D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1960) on the grounds of being a "violation of the natural and social order". Natural order, Salami maintains in his study, *John Fowles's Fiction and the Poetics of Postmodernism*, was permissible, while deviant or 'unnatural' sexuality was evil and had to be banned (Salami 1992: 97). According to Cultural Materialist critic Jonathan Dollimore, the trial of Penguin Books *de jure* and of a fictional work *de facto* represented "the intersection of literature, sexuality, politics, ideology and law" (Dollimore 1983: 52), and this can be one explanation for the lack of eroticism in a novel that could have easily qualified as erotica. Another one, most certainly, could be its "entangle[ment] in the

Victorian culture and society that it originally sets out to challenge, to question, and to contest" (Salami 1992: 107), although this contestation could have been supported by a more accentuated subversion of Victorian prudishness through explicitness. Was it also a "failure of nerve" on the part of Fowles that "in deliberate contrast to the unexpurgated D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Norman Mailer and Henry Miller, sailing off the shelves of the bookstores in the late 1960s, sex as a described event is barely present in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*" making it "a disappointing read for anyone looking for explicit erotic detail"? (Kaplan 2007: 89)

But "the times, they are a-changing," as Bob Dylan would say (and Fay Weldon would later develop in *Big Women*) (Weldon 1998: 101), and with them, throughout the sixties and the seventies rages what now cultural history has retained under the synonymous concepts of 'sexual revolution' and 'sexual liberation'. Underpinned by second-wave feminists, women's sexual liberation was based on the assertion that the primacy of sexuality would be a major step towards the ultimate goal of their liberation. In 1970, Germaine Greer was giving the world *The Female Eunuch*, a daring, open taboo smasher, advertised as "the ultimate word of sexual freedom", which maintained that

> [r]evolution ought to entail the correction of some of the false perspectives which our assumptions about womanhood, sex, love and society have combined to create. […] It might even be thought to suggest that women should be deliberately promiscuous. It certainly maintains that they should be self-sufficient and consciously refrain from establishing exclusive dependencies and other kinds of neurotic symbioses. Much of what it points to is sheer irresponsibility, but when the stake is life and freedom, and the necessary condition is the recovery of a will to live, irresponsibility might be thought a small risk (Greer 2008: 22).

Another important feminist theorist, Bell Hooks, remarks in her book, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center,* that, during the early stages of the second-wave feminist movement "it has been a simple task for women to describe and criticize negative aspects of sexuality as it has been socially constructed in a sexist society, to expose male objectification and dehumanization of women, to denounce rape, pornography, sexualized violence, incest, etc. It has been a far more difficult task for women to envision new sexual paradigms, and to change the norms of sexuality (hooks 1984: 147).

This changing (or challenging) of the norms of sexuality (and textuality) can be perceived at the level of the Neo-Victorian novels written at that time. Jean Rhys's *The Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) are generally considered to be the "ur-texts" of the genre (MacDonald and Goggin 2013: 1) that look into femininities of the past, more precisely, into the role of Victorian women from a completely different

standpoint, one that places them into 'the world' and has them "react to the circumstances outside the text" (Salami 1992: 109). In Fowles's case, who was "not trying to write something one of the Victorian novelists forgot to write" (Fowles 1998: 15), it all began with an image: an enigmatic portrait of "a woman stand[ing] at the end of a deserted quay… star[ing] out to sea" (Fowles 1998: 13). This image/woman, which, to Fowles's mind, *had to* be Victorian, always with her back turned, with no face and no sexuality, as "a reproach on the Victorian age", was soon to develop into one of the most famous feminine characters of postmodernist literature, Sarah Woodruff, the French Lieutenant's Whore (in-text)/ Woman (on the cover, probably to appease some yet unextinguished Victorian prudery still dwelling in the 1960s, despite the loud claims of the advocates of the sexual revolution). Her story, inside the story of 'the author', inside the story Fowles sent out in a world that had recently been through the Paris civil unrest (1968) and the Woodstock Music and Art Fair (1969) but that was still living under the provisions of the Obscene Publications Act of 1959, deconstructs and reconstructs Victorian modes and moods of storytelling/novel writing, femininity, sexuality, in an almost feminist vindication of women's rights, to be more than just dully, righteously, greyly represented in fiction.

The postmodernist game in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

Within the multiple frames John Fowles provided to his 1969 novel, a woman's silence narrates the private and the public, highlights prejudice and stereotype, reveals the inner workings of manipulation, interrogates the contamination of the real by the illusory, and offers food for thought on (un)expected literary representation. The text is contextualised, with overt and covert intertexts seeping through each and every section. The novel's sixty-one chapters are introduced by mottoes from authors like Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, Alfred Tennyson, Lewis Carroll, Jane Austen, Arthur Hugh Clough, William Barnes, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Matthew Arnold, Leslie Stephen, George Malcolm Young, but also from newspaper articles and documents issued at the time: *Report from the Mining Districts*, *City Medical Report*, *Children's Employment Commission Report*, *A Letter in The Times*, *A Mid-Victorian Advertisement*. They bring the literary, historical, political, economic, journalistic standpoints of the era to the foreground, supporting Fowles's own twentieth-century re-writing, with clues into the goals and the practices of his Neo-Victorian demarche.

The architecture of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is reinforced further by the two diegetic levels which accommodate the past and the present, and allow the central metafictional debate on how the *then* was translated into fiction and how the *now* is capable of dismantling the inner mechanisms of the translation. As Fowles advises, "Remember the etymology of the word. A novel is

something new. It must have relevance to the writer's now – so don't ever pretend you live in 1867, or make sure the reader knows it" (Fowles 1998: 15). The pastiche slowly turns into parody as the Victorian mode of writing melts into a critical commentary on outdated world views, obsolete patterns of behaviour, as well as on the declared 'realist' mirroring of the status quo. Sarah and Charles's affair, propelled by that of Sarah and Varguennes, the French lieutenant, is revealed as resulting from the misreading of fiction as reality and is then subverted by the actual intrusion into the novel by the novelist, whose avatar is the 'author', indicating the postmodernist game while attempting to make the hermeneutical act transparent, even credible. The first intrusive section is shrewdly reserved for 'Chapter Thirteen', and its unexpected insertion at this point carries the additional weight of the (self-)irony deriving from the associated superstitious 'bad luck' (of the reader's being disillusioned).

> I have disgracefully broken the illusion? No. My characters still exist, and in a reality no less, or no more, real that the one I have just broken. Fiction is woven into all, as a Greek observed some two and a half thousand years ago. I find this new reality (or unreality) more valid; and I would have you share my own sense that I do not fully control these creatures of my mind, any more than you control – […] your children, colleagues, friends or even yourself (Fowles 1981: 86-87).

The entire exploration of controversial issues like the limits of fictionality and the presumed omniscience/omnipotence of authors is aided by references (Fowles 1981: 85) to Alain Robbe-Grillet (*Pour un nouveau roman*. (Paris: Minuit, 1963) and Roland Barthes ("The Death of the Author"/ "La morte de l'auteur". Aspen, no. 5-6 (1967) / Manteia, no. 5 (1968)) – which, on the one hand, sheds light on the experimentation and the unsolved puzzle of the new(er) novel and, on the other hand, invites at distancing from authorial intentionalism and the biographically inspired decoding of ultimate literary meanings. In questioning authority and empowering the reader, Fowles also judges, though indirectly, the Victorians and their proclaimed realist novels, an endeavour supported by many writers at the time. A relevant case is that of Doris Lessing who, in the 1971 "Introduction" to one of the editions of her *The Golden Notebook* (1963), complained that, in searching for themes,

> [i]t was not possible to find a novel which described the intellectual and moral climate of a hundred years ago, in the middle of the last century, in Britain, in the way that Tolstoy did for Russia, Stendhal for France. […] To read *The Red and the Black*, and *Lucien Leuwen* is to know that France as if one were living there, to read *Anna Karenina* is to know that Russia. But a very useful Victorian novel never got itself written (Lessing 1999: xv).

What Lessing appears to be stressing is the absence of the novelists' skill to render the overall atmosphere of the Victorian Age and the incapacity to actually immerse readers in the world they reconstruct with words. In short, the 'useful portrayal' of ideology and psychology – governing individual manifestations and impacting the inner dimension – is missing from their superficial canvassing of an era and their moralising tendencies focus predominantly on metonymical characters and unresolved social issues, which probably also prompted Virginia Woolf to write the following:

> The machine they describe; they succeed to some extent in making us believe in it; but the heart of it they leave untouched – is it because they cannot understand it? At any rate, we are left out, and history, in our opinion, lacks an eye (Woolf 1979: 36).

To this identifiable absence and acknowledged flaws, Fowles adds the criticism of the Victorians' passive, silent women, avenging the misdeed by constructing a female character who is not simply a crafted storyteller, but an excellent judge of human nature and societal norms. Without employing an inherently feminist prism to re-imagine his fictional universe, John Fowles seems to weave feminist politics into his (parodic) patriarchal aesthetics as Toril Moi (1988: 16, 69) would say. The novelist exposes the inner workings of manipulation through the act of telling, and his textual practice hints at sexual bias through the deliberate reversal of stereotypical gender and power roles: the teller is female, the listener is male. Angel and monster, Sarah Woodruff apparently embodies the nineteenth-century eternal feminine (seraphic beauty and sweetness) assumed to be passive, docile and selfless, yet is revealed firstly as rejecting the attributed role and the imposed submission, and secondly as potentially duplicitous because she has a story to tell, which gives her the choice of omission, deletion, transformation, generalisation, etc. (Gilbert and Gubar 1979); (Moi 1988: 58). This metamorphosis from victim to victimiser is juxtaposed to Charles Smithson's, in reverse. He falls into the traps set out by her narrative, epitomising the traditional reader – prisoner of "a convention universally accepted at the time of [the] story: that the novelist stands next to God. He may not know all, yet he tries to pretend that he does" (Fowles 1981: 85). It is Charles, nor Sarah, that Fowles develops his metafictional commentary around and that he uses to pinpoint the fundamental hypocrisy of the nineteenth century, especially in relation to women.

> What are we faced with in the nineteenth century? An age where woman was sacred; and where you could buy a thirteen-year-old girl for a few pounds – a few shillings if you wanted her for an hour or two. Where more churches were built than in the whole previous history of the country; and where one in sixty houses in London was a brothel (the modern ratio would be nearer one in six

> thousand). […] Where the female body had never been so hidden from view; and where every sculptor was judged by his ability to carve naked women (Fowles 1981: 231).

In so doing, the novelist breaks the established norms and reformulates the ruling sexual politics. By addressing a twentieth-century reader, the irony is amplified, the criticism is honed, and the goal is readily attained. The dialogue is carried through, and the indeterminate speaker in Chapter Thirty-five gradually takes shape in the novelist/author having entered fiction, in Chapter Fifty-five – a "massively bearded", "decidedly unpleasant man […], so typical of the age", with "something aggressively secure about him" (Fowles 1981: 346) – sitting across from Charles in a train carriage, inspecting him. The scene, resonant of Virginia Woolf's *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* (1924), reiterates the contempt for Victorian (male) authority, omniscience and omnipotence, rendered palatable by self-irony.

> You may one day come under a similar gaze. And you may – in the less reserved context of our own century – be aware of it. The intent watcher will not wait till you are asleep. It will no doubt suggest something unpleasant, some kind of devious sexual approach… a desire to know you in a way you do not want to be known by a stranger (Fowles 1981: 347-348).

The violation, the use and the abuse committed by the Victorian realist become focal points in the discussion on novel writing, matching and justifying the characters, the stories, and the themes of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Along these lines, Sarah's invented sexual misadventure may be read as an unwelcome Frenchifying contamination of English fiction – easy prey since left undefended by either very innocent or very inert contributors and audiences. And yet, it functions as the perfect bait due to at least three unanticipated, unwarranted ingredients: a female narrator, an inappropriate subject, and an open ending. The successive diegetic layers it is enveloped in do not efface it; on the contrary, they replicate it, recycle it, and ultimately return to it. Sarah's riddle, like that of a deceitful Greek sphinx – hinted at in the closing paragraph –, is not answered by Charles or anyone else, possibly for fear of retribution. Neither is the novel provided with one absolute resolution; it advances three possible endings, giving readers the (limited) freedom to choose, the possibility to throw the dice and take their own risk of being devoured.

Concluding remarks

Granted that all texts are engaged, as are their readings, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* emerges as an exercise in experimenting with textual and sexual politics, using the tools of postmodernist metafiction, in the

tradition of anti-Victorian Neo-Victorianism. Ludic and intertextual, the novel plunges into past literary representations and non-literary concerns, interrogating the traces left on their contemporary counterparts. Its structure reveals careful deliberation, and its content gravitates towards the fuzzy frontier separating fiction from history, where women are constructed and where they fight back the construction, especially in relation to sexuality and sexist objectification. Despite the fact that, as Toril Moi suggests, analysing sexual politics does not actually take place outside "depoliticizing theoretical paradigms" (Moi 1988: 87-88), the respective undertaking seems relevant in the case of this particular novel, in which Fowles brings theory and practice together, while successfully marketing the book as a romance with a mysterious woman at its core, and efficiently employing the strategy of declaring but deferring eroticism.

Opening up the hermetic novel of the nineteenth century by creating one only to dismember it, John Fowles manages to outline, in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, a mini literary history, to which he adds 'herstory' with a vengeance. Mediating between world views and literary modes of writing one hundred years apart, he spotlights (Victorian) dominance and control, offers more gratifying (Postmodernist) alternatives, thus liberating readers from the unease of imposition and women from the thrall of misrepresentation.

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Ghostwriting and Spectrality in Robert Harris's *The Ghost*

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Abstract
A critique of Tony Blair's collaboration with George W. Bush in the War on Terror, Robert Harris's The Ghost *(2007) goes beyond its topical subject by exploring the connections between ghostwriting and spectrality. The unnamed protagonist of Harris's novel is a professional ghostwriter who, after being commissioned to revamp former Prime Minister Adam Lang's memoirs, becomes enmeshed in various forms of spectrality. While isolated with his hosts in a fortress-like compound on Martha's Vineyard during the island's bleak off-season, the ghostwriter experiences the Uncanny firsthand. In the end he compiles a 160,000-word book, not realizing that with the project's completion he is signing his own death warrant by writing a work about the pursuit of truth. The novel's coda differs from that of Roman Polanski's 2010 film adaptation, but Harris's narrative captures the universality of literary Gothicism.*

Keywords: *ghostwriting, spectrality, Gothicism, redaction, palimpsest*

In the opening chapter of Robert Harris's *The Ghost* (2007), while the literary agent of its unnamed protagonist is trying to interest him in rewriting a former British Prime Minister's memoirs drafted by an aide, the ghostwriter plumes himself on his skills as a probing and inventive scribe. Although admitting that his career is "undistinguished" (previous clients include a television magician, a rock star, and a professional soccer player), he routinely tries to draw out his subjects by asking, "How did it feel?" (Harris 2007: 5, 6). Because his interlocutors usually cannot answer this question, the Ghost, as hereafter I shall refer to Harris's narrator, explains that "they have to hire me to supply their memories." The vicariousness involved in such sessions then prompts him rather smugly to confide:

> [B]y the end of a successful collaboration I am more them than they are. I rather enjoy this process, to be honest: the brief freedom of being someone else. Does that sound creepy? If so, let me add that real craftsmanship is required. I not only extract from people their life stories, [but] I [also] impart a shape to those lives that was often invisible; sometimes I give them lives they never even realized they had. If that isn't art, what is? (Harris 2007: 6)

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Midway through the novel, launching into the arduous task of revamping Adam Lang's scripted autobiography in only two weeks after the publisher accelerates the timetable to take advantage of publicity concerning the ex-politician's complicity in the American "War on Terror," the Ghost scales back on his earlier claim about "art" by asserting that "In the absence of genius there is always craftsmanship" (Harris 2007: 153). Forty-two pages later, mystified by discrepancies in source accounts of what first drew Lang into politics, he revises again his vocational self-image. "I see myself," he now admits, "as the literary equivalent of a skilled lathe operator, or a basket weaver; a potter, maybe: I make mildly diverting objects that people want to buy" (Harris 2007: 195).

This decline in the narrator's assessment of his occupation derives from his having to grapple, like the outsider in a Gothic psychodrama, with various forms of spectrality on this particular assignment. Aside from the fact that he is Lang's "ghost," as he maladroitly identifies himself upon meeting the former Prime Minister, Harris's protagonist is wrestling with the revenant of Michael James McAra, long-time legislative assistant to Lang, who before his mystery-shrouded death at age fifty by drowning in Nantucket Sound had cobbled together a factual but uninspired account of his supervisor's life for Rhinehart Publishing. The "whole book" as compiled by McAra and based heavily on archival research "somehow felt false, as if there was a hollow at its center" (Harris 2007: 58), decides the Ghost. Unable to identify exactly what this lacuna is, though suspecting that it has something to do with the "phantom presence" of Lang's formidable wife Ruth in the manuscript (Harris 2007: 185), he later is haunted by a nightmare of his drowned precursor's urging him to "*go on without me*" before McAra's bloated corpse washes up, unaccountably given the prevailing currents, at remote Lambert's Cove (Harris 2007: 201, italics in original). In the background hovers a throng of other wraiths, among them four suspected Al Qaeda terrorists, all British citizens, who five years earlier were targeted in Operation Tempest for extrajudicial rendition from Pakistan by then Prime Minister Lang, acting in league with President George W. Bush, and subjected to torture by waterboarding, or simulated drowning, at Guantánamo Bay. One of these men, Nasir Ashraf, died under interrogation. Reporting that Lang is being arraigned by the International Criminal Court in The Hague for these violations, news media also announce yet another suicide bombing in London's underground transportation system that leaves eight people dead. All these casualties as well as McAra's death are looming specters that haunt the margins of the narrative Harris's ghostwriter has been commissioned to redact for $250,000.

Discussing the Freudian concept of *das Unheimliche* or the Uncanny, Avery F. Gordon observes that among the "characteristic features of haunting"

is that "the ghost imports a charged strangeness into the place or sphere it is haunting, thus unsettling the […] lines that delimit a zone of activity or knowledge" (Gordon 1997: 63). Harris's novel captures this eerie atmosphere well when its setting shifts in the third chapter from London to Martha's Vineyard, where the Langs and their small retinue are guests at publisher Martin S. Rhinehart's vacation house during the largely deserted island's midwinter off-season. After a ferry ride from the Massachusetts mainland, the narrator is taken by a deaf-mute taxi driver to his portside Edgartown hotel, the journey and vista making him feel "as though I'd come to the edge of the earth" (Harris 2007: 44). The next morning proves even more ominous. Driven by the same cabby to the Langs' temporary residence in nearby West Tisbury, the Ghost arrives at the Rhinehart compound that "somehow resembled a holiday home designed by Albert Speer" (Harris 2007: 53), its brick chimneys being said to resemble those of a crematorium. The environs of this lair are no less oppressive. Surrounded by scrub oak and sand dunes bordering empty stretches of oceanside beaches, the house itself with a "wall facing the coast [. . .] made entirely of glass" offers only a bleakly "primordial" view (Harris 2007: 56). Moreover, a weekly security drill called "Lockdown" causes steel shutters to descend suddenly over all exposed windows, turning the retreat into a fortress-like prison (Harris 2007: 95). Such details combine to suggest the claustrophobic architecture etched by Giovanni Battista Piranesi in *Le Carceri d'Invenzione* (1750, 1761) and projected by Horace Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).

Because Harris's thriller primarily concerns its narrator and the act of writing, it is significant that the novel emphasizes a pattern wherein the process of ghosting "become[s] a form of doubling" (Paulson 2011: 128, 131). Upon sitting down with Adam Lang for a full day of interviews, for example, the Ghost discovers that in the course of their sharing preliminary reminiscences about "the minutiae of English life nearly half a century earlier"—things such as Raleigh bikes, radio comedies, the 1966 World Cup Final, and Beatles singles—"this was not just his childhood we were itemizing but mine and that of every boy who was born in England in the nineteen fifties and who grew to maturity in the seventies" (Harris 2007: 90, 91). In "pool[ing]" their experiences, he goes on to say, "a few of my memories inevitably became blended into his" (Harris 2007: 91). This identification expands in the next chapter when Lang's ghostwriter breaks from his usual practice with clients by indulging in a limited degree of self-revelation. Disclosing that he lost his parents at about the same age as his subject did, Harris's narrator recounts how he had been a student at Cambridge not long after Lang and, like him, enjoyed its many venerable traditions. Earlier in the novel, "beginning to get into Lang's skin" by reading about his life (Harris 2007: 34), he enumerates these parallels in background, indicating that in his spectral role the Ghost "loses touch with his

own role as a 'literary [*D*]*oppelgänger*'" (De Michelis 2012: 78). A certain vacancy or insubstantiality, moreover, typifies both main characters. For his part Andrew Lang had hoped at one time for a career in theater, his virtuosity in the title role of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* at age seventeen having "confirmed him in his desire to become an actor" (Harris 2007: 92). Unemployed in a professional stage capacity after his university years, he pursued that ambition via a different route, his "genius" being to "refresh and elevate the clichés of politics by the sheer force of his performance" (Harris 2007: 13). A similar kind of lateral drift occurred in the narrator's life. Although the novel does not specify his postgraduate aspirations, it does mention that Lang's collaborator also once shared "a passion for student drama" (Harris 2007: 35), after which he presumably entered the ranks of nondisclosure-agreement-signing freelance writers. A further parallel is the two men's relationships with women. Besides the fact that Adam Lang is currently having an affair with personal assistant Amelia Bly, *The Ghost*'s ending reveals that for more than three decades he has been essentially the puppet of his CIA-affiliated wife Ruth and "Medusa-like" mother of their children (Harris 2007: 60). The bachelor narrator's sexual life is not altogether dissimilar. Apparently given to temporary liaisons, he is having a relationship in the fictional present with a politically left-leaning woman named Kate whom he alienates without compunction or remorse by agreeing to write Lang's memoirs.

In light of what I have called the vacancy of these mirrored characters, it is fitting that Harris's sixth novel, which won the 2008 International Thrillers Writers Award, departs radically from his earlier fiction set in antiquity and privileges *écriture* over narratological immediacy. At the virtual center of the text is Mike McAra's 621-page original manuscript which, after extensive emendations, the Ghost eventually rewrites as the 160,000-word *Memoirs by Adam Lang*. Before his completion of the project pursuant to Lang's assassination, however, a digital file of McAra's typescript that the narrator surreptiously emails to himself as an attachment in order to work on it at his Edgartown hotel vanishes in cyberspace, alerting the ghostwriter to the fact that his Internet communications are being monitored by parties unknown. This vanishing of his source material indicates to Harris's scribe that he is enmeshed in a potentially dangerous situation. The development also suggests that he is caught up in the trammels of metatextual aporias like those associated with Jorge Luis Borges's labyrinthine *ficciones*.

The regnant model here is that of the palimpsest, which as a paradigm for *écriture* derives from Part I of *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845), Thomas De Quincey's autobiographical sequel to *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821-22) written after his Gothic novel *Klosterheim; or, The Masque* (1832). In *Suspiria*, asking "What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain?" De Quincey answers with this peroration:

> Everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings, have fallen upon your brain softly as light. Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet in reality not one has been extinguished. And if, in the vellum palimpsest, lying amongst the other *diplomata* of human archives or libraries, there is any thing fantastic or which moves to laughter, as oftentimes there is in the grotesque collisions of those successive themes, having no natural connexion, which by pure accident have consecutively occupied the roll, yet, in our own heaven-created palimpsest, the deep memorial palimpsest of the brain, there are not and cannot be such incoherences. The fleeting accidents of a man's life, and its external shows, may indeed be irrelate and incongruous; but the organizing principles which fuse into harmony, and gather about fixed predetermined centres, whatever heterogeneous elements life may have accumulated from without, will not permit the grandeur of human unity greatly to be violated, or its ultimate repose to be troubled in the retrospect from dying moments, or from other great convulsions. (De Quincey 2003: 175)

In this passage, which inaugurated "the substantive concept of the palimpsest" that has endured "from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day" (Dillon 2007: 1; see also Maniquis 1985), De Quincey is positing a metaphor of cryptic, antecedent inscription in the human brain that counters the self's spectralization over time and underwrites ontological unity. The panegyric attests to the urgency De Quincey feels for some assurance of life's ultimate cohesion, but as extrapolated in Harris's novel the palimpsest of Mike McAra's foundational text points only to a deepening abyss of mystery that culminated in his death. The task of the Ghost, puzzled by the official account of Lang's induction into politics, soon becomes that of decoding or peeling back the layers of McAra's narrative, which he undertakes by first tracking down the fate of its author.

At its exact midpoint, once Harris's protagonist finds himself beguiled by the idea of a "secret document" that McAra may have left behind (Harris 2007: 156), the novel morphs into a classic story of investigative sleuthing or detection. Discovering a photograph, retrieved through his precursor's archival research, of the Footlights Revue cast taken during Lang's undergraduate years at Cambridge, the Ghost notes that on its reverse side is scrawled a telephone number, which he learns upon dialing it belongs to Richard Rycart, the former Prime Minister's ousted Foreign Secretary and now a United Nations envoy for humanitarian affairs, who is leveling charges against his former employer for ordering the illegal handover of suspects for torture by the CIA. That puzzling coincidence prompts the Ghost to steal away from the Rhinehart compound, where he has been confined to McAra's quarters, by way of bicycle during a torrential rain storm. An old Lambert's Cove resident's skeptical report of how Mike McAra's corpse washed up there three weeks earlier compels the narrator to visit the scene, where to his surprise

he sees Ruth Lang and her security guard struggling down the beach toward him. Later that evening, after interrogating him at the Langs' temporary retreat, "Lady Macbeth" seduces the inquisitive ghostwriter while her husband is absent in Washington, D.C. (Harris 2007: 200). The next morning he expects her, succubus-like, to have left his bed, "as keen as a vampire to avoid the unforgiving rays of dawn" (Harris 2007: 205), but not so the redoubtable Mrs. Lang. The disoriented narrator now feels an urgent need to "get out of that house," the equivalent of a Gothic castle, and "put some distance between myself and their destructive ménage à trois before I ended up as crazed as they were" (Harris 2007: 207). In his desperation to escape the Langs' baleful influence, the Ghost commandeers the Rhinehart compound's Ford Escape SUV and is directed by its satellite navigation system to follow the route to Mike McAra's last destination. Here again surfaces the novel's Gothicism, now in the form of the dead's directing the actions of the living. It is reinforced when in a Boston suburb the protagonist arrives at a sequestered house, the access to which is barred by an electric gate under surveillance by tree-mounted cameras bearing the name of Cyclops Security.

The owner of this residence is like many prototypes in the *Schauerroman* tradition arrogant, supercilious, and vaguely sinister. Paul Emmett, formerly on the faculty of Harvard University and President Emeritus of the right-wing Arcadia Institution headquartered in the nation's capital, displays such qualities not only by his condescension but also by his evasiveness when the Ghost presents him with McAra's photograph showing Emmett as well as Lang in the Footlights Revue ensemble at Cambridge, where the former was at the time a doctoral researcher at St. John's College. Eager to appropriate this evidence of his youthful association with England's future Prime Minister, Emmett ushers his visitor into a study filled with memorabilia including citations, prizes, honorary degrees, and images of him alongside such luminaries as Bill Clinton, Margaret Thatcher, and Nelson Mandela. After minimizing his earlier association with Andrew Lang, the Arcadia Institution's *éminence grise* summarily ends the colloquy, after which the Ghost leaves but avails himself of the Internet for background on Emmett. Among other things he discovers is that, besides being the author of several books on the U.K.'s "special relationship" with the U.S. leading up to and extending beyond the 2003 declaration of war against Iraq, Emmett was involved with the Hallington Group (read Halliburton), which owns the Gulfstream jet that transported four suspected terrorists to Guantánamo. This happens also to be one of the same company's fleet of private aircraft on which the narrator earlier saw Lang arrive back in Martha's Vineyard from a trip to New York (see Harris 2007: 67-68). In addition, the Ghost learns that Yale graduate Paul Emmett joined the CIA in either 1969 or 1970 and was assigned to its Foreign Resources Division, at which point he follows the clues a step further by calling Richard Rycart's

number again, knowing all the while that he is committing "professional suicide" by breaching his confidentiality agreement with Rhinehart Publishing (Harris 2007: 252).

The last eighty pages or so of Harris's novel, not including its epilogue, draw the narrator ever more inextricably into knowledge of Anglo-American collusion during the War on Terror. When he meets with the wary Rycart in a hotel room on the perimeter of LaGuardia Airport, Lang's ghostwriter protests that he knows nothing about politics but now feels as though he has "stepped through the looking glass" (Harris 2007: 262). The allusion to Lewis Carroll is meant, of course, to convey his growing sense of the Uncanny, which is heightened when he learns that it was the disillusioned McAra who had provided Rycart with the hard evidence he needed in the form of a top-secret memorandum about Operation Tempest to indict Lang on war-crime charges in The Hague. A further discovery made by McAra in his year-long course of archival research and communicated to Rycart is that he had come across something even more portentous. "The only thing he would say," summarizes Rycart about his telephone call from McAra a week before the latter's suspicious death, "was that the key to it could be found in Lang's autobiography, if anyone bothered to check, that it was all there in the beginning" (Harris 2007: 267). This embedded revelation, readers of Harris's novel find out at the end of his penultimate chapter, is "like a message from the grave" encoded in the first words of McAra's sixteen chapters: "Lang[']s Wife Ruth Studying In Seventy-six Was Recruited As A CIA Agent In America By Professor Paul Emmett of Harvard University" (Harris 2007: 330). Textuality thus becomes its own palimpsestic gloss despite the ghostwriter's attempts to manipulate it. If this previously self-aggrandizing craftsman finds himself subordinated to the authority of McAra's otherwise pedestrian manuscript, he also is told that, because Rycart has tape-recorded their conversation, he henceforth will be working for Lang's political archrival, further deepening his authorial displacement.

Increasingly haunted by a whorled story beyond his ken, Harris's narrator struggles to maintain some degree of personal autonomy even while sensing that he is lapsing into "the ghost of a ghost" (Harris 2007: 310). Referenced obliquely here is Lang's assassination upon flying back to Martha's Vineyard from New York, toward the end of which flight the former Prime Minister realizes that his ghostwriter has been compromised by whistleblower Richard Rycart. The novel's climactic scene fulfills all the expectations of a modern thriller. Knowing that "it was the end of everything" after his conversation with the Ghost (Harris 2007: 302), Adam Lang before exiting from the Gulfstream jet bows to those on board and theatrically declaims, "Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, and good night." Stepping out onto the plane's gangway and waving to his wife Ruth in the terminal's reception area, Lang

then hears a "fellow countryman" on the tarmac shouting his first name. Ever the responsive politician, he strides toward the presumed supporter. Then comes the narrator's report on what he witnessed: "And that is my final image of Lang: a man always with his hand held out. It is burned into my retinas—his yearning shadow against the expanding ball of bright white fire that suddenly engulfed him" (Harris 2007: 304). The perpetrator, identified a few pages later, is one George Arthur Boxer, "a former major in the British army, whose son had been killed in Iraq and whose wife had died six months later in a London suicide bombing" (Harris 2007: 307). The fact that Boxer learned his tactics from jihadist websites only compounds the *peripeteia* of what Lang's decision while Prime Minister, in deferential collaboration with President George W. Bush, ultimately precipitated. A few days later the Ghost, while watching Lang's funeral on CNN from his hospital bed, is seized by a sense of guilt. "I was the one at fault," he reflects. "It wasn't just that I'd betrayed my client, personally and professionally; it was the sequence of events my actions had set in motion" (Harris 2007: 310).

However laudable this self-indictment may seem, Adam Lang's ghostwriter is still deluded about his importance in this unfolding drama of geopolitics and its unanticipated consequences. That initial reaction soon wanes, however, when the convalescent returns to London and for the next six weeks withdraws from the world. During that interim, turning down media requests for interviews, he ironically discovers that with Lang's death he can intuitively ventriloquize his voice while at the computer keyboard. "I was like a screenwriter producing lines with a particularly demanding star in mind," the Ghost reports. "I knew he might say this, but not that; might do this scene, never that" (Harris 2007: 312). The artifice of theater carries over like an infection from his subject to the telling of his story in *Memoirs by Adam Lang*, replicating McAra's sixteen chapters, which the dutiful hack completes in six weeks by hammering out an average of 3,400 words per day before "collaps[ing] like an empty suit of clothers" (Harris 2007: 315). In this encapsulated history of authorial transmission and redaction a later text reprises an antecedent text, both being based on a cunning imposture by a stage-minded politician. Little wonder, then, that Mrs. Ruth Lang, now elevated to "Baroness Lang of Calderthorpe, the government having just given her a seat in the House of Lords as a mark of the nation's respect" (Harris 2007: 314), should as the CIA-sponsored architect of her husband's career compliment the ghostwriter on his having published "*a proper book*" (Harris 2007: 315; italics and underlining in original). Fictionality thus becomes elevated as existential truth.

At this juncture Harris's novel moves compellingly to a close, one which underscores in the words of Lidia De Michelis "a condition that—at both a literal and figurative level—can only be escaped at the cost of the *death of the*

author(s) and the coterminous *birth of their texts*" (De Michelis 2012: 78; italics in original). This critic is referring to the development that, while attending (without benefit of an invitation) a reception with Amelia Bly upon the release of Lang's autobiography, the ghostwriter again encounters Paul Emmett and learns he was Ruth Lang's CIA recruiter roughly three decades ago when she was a Fulbright scholar at Harvard. The revelation prompts Harris's narrator to flee from the hall "into the hollow, imperial grandeur of Whitehall" (Harris 2007: 328), outside which another bomb has gone off near the National Gallery. The "vampirization" to which De Michelis refers, however, materializes only in the novel's epilogue or five-page seventeenth chapter, significantly one chapter longer than McAra's original manuscript as though it is a codicil. Having abandoned his former flat and doubting his sanity while moving from one seedy hotel room to another, the Ghost hears on the midnight news that former Foreign Secretary Richard Rycart has been killed in a New York City car accident. "I knew after that," he remarks, "that there was no going back" (Harris 2007: 331). After replaying over and over again the tape of his final conversation with Lang, Harris's protagonist wraps up his first-person *récit*, the one we are reading, by saying that he has entrusted former consort Kate with his confessional text. "Only if she doesn't hear from me within a month," he adds, "or if she discovers that something has happened to me, is she to read it and decide how best to get it published" (Harris 2007: 335). Lang's ghostwriter is now a full-fledged spectre, his manuscript as fashioned by Harris confirming the death of its author.

The compositional history of *The Ghost* itself parallels almost uncannily this parable about the hazards and contingencies of authorship. In a piece on Roman Polanski's 2010 film based on the novel, Philip Horne discloses that Harris wrote it while working with Polanski on the screenplay for a never completed adaptation of an earlier book. Moreover, so influenced was Harris by his director friend that his novel can be read as "'ghosting' Polanski [. . .], creating an auteur work by digesting and recombining elements from many of his films" including the extraordinary noir classic *Chinatown* (Horne 2010: 40). "Given this osmotic relationship," continues Horne, "one could say that the novel is as much an adaptation of Polanski as the film is an adaptation of Harris" (Horne 2010: 41). While that claim about the reciprocity of creative influence may well be true, Ronald Paulson's meticulously detailed comparison of the two works establishes that their endings diverge significantly. After the launching party for *Memoirs by Adam Lang*, observes this scholar, Polanski shows the Ghost walking out into the street in order to hail a taxi and being run down by a black car that had been trailing him earlier. The scattered pages of McAra's coded manuscript then float back to screen left, "the only remaining traces of the Ghost" who "merges with McAra in the white spectral sheets" (Paulson 2011: 132). In stark counterpoint Harris's ending

suggests that his protagonist has finally written "a real book" about "the pursuit and attainment of truth" (Paulson 2011: 133), thereby achieving "a kind of redemption" associated with art and not mere craftsmanship (Paulson 2011: 128).

Academic discussions of spectrality's role in literature are not always very illuminating, dominated as frequently seems to be the case by rarefied extrapolations of theoretical texts. At the other end of the spectrum are book reviewers who, aware of Harris's former employment as a political journalist admitted to Tony Blair's inner circle during New Labor's 1997 election campaign, and having little interest in academia's exaltation of theory, center their responses to his novel on its being primarily a disgruntled attack on Blair by a one-time admirer (see Freedland 2007, Griffiths 2007, and Steyn 2008). It would be a welcome change to entertain the possibility that a popular, well-conceived, and rewardingly intertextual novel such as *The Ghost* might be more than just grist for those with narrowly exclusionist viewpoints. Harris's ability to master the defining elements of literary Gothicism and recognize their pertinence in twenty-first-century contexts reminds us once more of its universality and timelessness. Moving beyond that, this popular writer's 2007 novel projects a model much like the palimpsest in its story of a professional ghostwriter's discovering the primacy of *écriture* over narratological immediacy. Textuality for this significantly unnamed scribe, who initially prides himself on an ability to get inside his subjects' psyches, proves ultimately to be the source, if not quite the cause, of his undoing. Reading Harris's narrative in terms of literary theory, it is tempting to draw a connection with Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author," but in the end *The Ghost*'s strength is that it requires no such scaffolding.

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Cultural Contexts and Masculinity Shifts

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Abstract
Masculinity and men's studies, initially seen as one particular section of explorations of what it means to be a man, appeared as a secondary field, even if linked to Simone de Beauvoir's "the first sex." In de Beauvoir's feminist manifesto of the second wave, "woman" apparently had an identity of her own, but was only defined as being the absence, the "lack," the Other, against which man defined himself. The current essay examines the historicity of gender roles and the developing contexts in which perceptions of them and theories about them are largely defined by new contexts for which the activation of hegemonic or feminine masculinities, for example, is more than a reasonable choice. The last section engages with literary responses to masculinity as articulated by Lowell, Vonnegut, and Heller in a less-than-heroic age where significant masculinity shifts emerged in American fiction as well.

Keywords: *Hegemonic masculinity, female masculinity, patriarchy, men's studies, the masculine mystique*

The historicity of men's and masculinity studies

In gender studies, part of the interdisciplinary field of identity studies, with a focus on identity politics, men's studies is usually considered a complement to women's studies. Women's studies assumed primacy in the 1960s and went on to deconstruct gender and sex's prevailing cultural certainties. Men's studies and masculinities followed suit from the 1970s onward. If men's studies and masculinity studies as a whole, for the time being, is a complement to women's studies, where should one start its examination of specific identities, since feminism and women's studies is such a bewildering, puzzling and diverse constellation of attitudes, views and orientations?

Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* (1998) may be considered a starting theoretical landmark for masculinity studies in this context, as her book highlighted new perspectives on masculine patterns of behavior and identity, indicating new paths in the development of what would be queer scholarship. In Halberstam's opinion, female masculinity is not an imitation of virility, but a vivid and dramatic performance of hybrid and minority genders.

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The "female masculinist" scholar addresses a repertoire of female masculinities, centring on queer examples, from *tomboys, butches, femmes*, to *drag kings*. In her approach, masculinity is no longer hegemonic masculinity, but a multitude of masculinities. Apart from some "masculine masculinities," so to speak, many of these are… female masculinities. Halberstam is quick to state her goal, seeing how female masculinity sheds light on how masculinity is articulated as masculinity. She deals with how "female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing" (Halberstam 1998: 1).

One might think that Halberstam's idea of masculine femininities was inspired by such challenging cultural products as the previously aired (1995) TV series *Xena: Warrior Princess*, promoting a strong female protagonist, and creating both a wide fanship and a number of similar "female masculinist" narratives, including video games for internet-addicted young audiences, such as PlayStation Xena.

Alternatively, the roots of masculinity studies may be traced to other female writers as Gail Bederman in a book whose title reminds one of Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*, while also examining the patriarchal dimension of "civilization" and its contribution to what would be called hegemonic masculinity. Bederman's critical response to hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy in general may be seen as starting from an undeclared challenge of her full name. If the surname *Bederman* clearly indicates a man's mark, *Gail* is a Hebrew name whose meaning is "my father rejoices." Bederman's *Manliness and Civilization* (1995) is an account of the emergence and development of a very influential identity narrative that the majority of Americans took for granted in the period from the end of the Civil War to World War I. This narrative claimed that identities, including sex and gender identities, are historically constructed and liable to change under specific circumstances. The aim was to promote an ideal, white masculine identity, the best expression of human progress. Set to illustrate the social Darwinism of the survival of the fittest, this ideal man was bound to control the world, foreshadowing the rise in Europe of the post-Nietzschean, Nazi *Übermensch*.

In the volume, Bederman acknowledges the contribution of four critical voices that challenged the myth of white male supremacy, some for the better – Ida B. Wells, the militant African-American journalist, who fought for racial justice, others for the worse. Among the latter voices, Bederman singles out the figure of Theodore Roosevelt, who, under the flag of *manhood, nation* and *civilization*, afraid of racial alterity as a challenge to what R. W. Connell will call *hegemonic masculinity*, viewed Native American men as demons, Blacks as inferior people, and the Japanese as dangerous rivals and competitors on the global stage. Another male voice following in Teddy Roosevelt's hegemonic

masculinist footsteps and mentioned in Bederman's volume belongs to G. Stanley Hall, another "patriarch." Hall, like T. Roosevelt, advocated the benefits of civilization "to assert the power of white manhood" (Bederman 1996: 217).

It comes as no surprise to many that even male authors have contributed to the rise and institutionalization of Men's Studies. One of the important voices is that of Michael S. Kimmel, who examines manhood over the whole history of America. Kimmel has been instrumental in the establishment of *Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities* in the examination of identities in Gender Studies, in the company of such theorists as Harry Brod, Bob Connell, Jeff Hearn, Joe Pleck and others.

Kimmel's second edition (2006) of *Manhood in America* provides an intellectual history of constructions of gender, while also acknowledging a significant realization of an important increase in a gradual shift in the field. This trend which, since the first edition, had become prevailing, was and still is from *anxiety* to *ange*r, a shift that Kimmel goes on to describe in what he maps out as four distinct, historical developments of the masculinity identity narrative in America.

According to Kimmel, the construction of the masculinity identity stereotype of the "self-made man" – a phrase so much entrenched in hegemonic masculinist ideology that an alternative "self-made person" has never been used, at least to my knowledge - took place in the historical space of time from the Revolutionary War to the end of the Civil War. The various avatars of the Self-Made Man contributed to the construction of the two competing identities for the "soul" of American manhood, according to Kimmel.

Its first notable reflection in artistic identity narratives was, Kimmel notes, in a "very American" play premiered in New York in 1787. Denouements of artistic texts might bring conclusions, but this play's drift may be guessed from the very title: *The Contrast*. The play contrasts a "manly" American officer – the name of the character is… Manly – and an effeminate, anglophile, womanizing *fop* or *dandy* whose name, in the same *avant-la-lettre* Dickensian fashion, says it all: Dimple. Colonel Manly and Billy Dimple are rivals for the hand of the same American young woman, and it is not difficult to guess what the ideological message is, and what kind of masculine American identity is promoted, at the expense of an imagined, and imaginary, British identity.

This is just one more illustration of the fact that intersections of gender with other types of group identities are always possible and probable. Here, the *manly* vs. the *effeminate* is meant to contrast not only a very masculine individual and his opposite, but also American and British national identities, and even New World vs. Old World, distinctly geopolitical identities.

Masculinity and class at the time of the age of the American Revolution displayed other distinctions and identity oppositions apart from those noted by Kimmel in the shape of the opposite characters of Colonel Manly and Billy Dimple. In his essay on compromised manhood and provincialism that focuses on the 1740–1781 time span in (pre- and) Revolutionary America, starting from the lyrics of the "Yankee Doodle" song, Eran Zelnik singles out and deals with such "compromised" identity types as the Yankee, the Doodle, the Fop, and the Provincial. He goes on to examine how masculinity and social status were loose, yet key forms of cultural capital in power games played between centre and periphery and between gentlemen and commoners in pre-Revolutionary America, how these came to amount to more than gender and class distinctions, to an American vs. British identity power game:

> "Yankee Doodle" stood at the centre of a contested cultural conflict over manhood and class status in the North American British colonies leading up to and during the American Revolution. Although both sides over these years of colonial struggle between American insurgents and the British reveled in the song as they hurled rhetorical shafts at their foes, its references to compromised manhood proved more potent in the hands of Patriot rebels than in the hands of British troops and Loyalists (Zelnik 2018: 514).

Gender identity constructions are always relational, often oppositional. In Post-Revolutionary America, the masculinity contrast represented in… *The Contrast*, gradually took the form of the opposition between the tough Heroic Artisan and the Genteel Patriarch, with "exquisite tastes and manners and refined sensibilities" (Kimmel 1994: 13). But these constructions and oppositions would soon define the Heroic Artisan masculinity stereotype of the Self-Made Man against women, immigrants and black slaves as well.

This first stage in the construction of American Manhood may be contrasted to previous developments back in England (turning into Britain at the beginning of the 18th century). Alexandra Shepard undertakes her own outline of British masculinities extending over the previous centuries in her "From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, circa 1500–1700." In it, she surveys the transition from the first to the second masculinity identity evoked by her essay's title in terms of "a profound change in the meanings of manhood" (Shepard 2005: 281) within the above-mentioned historical interval. This goes on to show that masculinities had a tendency to change throughout history, not only during the revolutionary years of modern identity politics.

The second out of the four stages in the development of American manhood in Kimmel's narrative takes place in the Reconstruction, post-Civil War age, when America moved from an agrarian to an increasingly industrial nation. The self-made man, who was largely self-employed at the beginning of

the 19th century, tended to become the "organization man" in what Alan Trachtenberg called "the incorporation of America" in his eponymous volume. This second stage is called by Kimmel "the unmaking of the self-made man" (Kimmel 1994: 57-126), but, far from the disappearance of the hegemonic masculinity identity, it branches out into the competitive captain of industry, of which Carnegie, Morgan or Rockefeller became emblematic. These captains of industry were alternatively seen by less sympathetic people to their remarkable business in the Gilded Age as *robber barons*. In addition to the captain-of-industry variant of the self-made man, the spectrum of turn-of-the-century masculinities also featured the white-collar and the faceless crowd.

"Muscles, Money and the M-F Test" is the title of the first section of the next episode in the story of American manhood. The "M-F" in the title is what Hemingway used as abbreviation for his *Men Without Women* short story collection in a letter to Maxwell Perkins, and a short passage from it shows young Hemingway's fascination with rough and tough masculinity: "Want to call it Men Without Women [because] in all of these [stories], almost, the softening feminine influence through training, discipline, death or other causes [is] absent" (qtd. Kimmel 1994: 127).

There follows a description of postwar developments, in which Kimmel casts as significant characters the equivalent of the male types of what Trachtenberg had associated with the incorporation of America in the Gilded Age at the end of the 19th century, in the context of "the shift from one form of capitalism to another, from predominantly self-employed proprietors to corporations run by salaried managers" (Trachtenberg 2007: ix), from initial initiative to mindless subordination, thus undermining the myth of American individualism.

The employees in the rising American corporation of the age are the white-collar conformists, having forgotten about the rugged individualism of the self-made ancestors, choosing to follow the directions of the Power Elite, the famous group that C. W. Mills defines as the post-war ruling class in corporate America. One of the singular figures of the age of the postwar incorporation of America is that of Willy Loman, a figure that stands for, in Kimmel's opinion, "the most compelling portrait in literary history of the pathos of middle-class manhood and its consequences" (Kimmel 1994: 154).

Other authors, such as Cynthia S. Hamilton, had particularly focused on the period between the closing of the Western frontier at the end of the 19th century and World War II for the emergence of the Western and of the hard-boiled novel, with Hamilton noting that the two genres take shape "around the testing and confirmation of key American values, especially individualism, and are closely tied to the myth of the American dream" (Hamilton 1987: 1).

Kimmel uses the increased popularity of the Western in the 1950s in relation to one particular expression of redefinitions of American masculinities

at a time of stifling conformism. At that particular time, middle-class white men turned to what Kimmel calls "fantasies of escape" from their conventional, boring, "unmanly" routines in Corporate America. Westerns, both fictional and filmic representations, set at the boundary between civilization and savagery, promoted the rugged identity of "real men, men who were good with a horse and a gun," and who "triumphed over unscrupulous bankers and other rogue versions of Self-Made Manhood" (Kimmel 1994: 165). The most influential masculinity icon of the age is linked to an American called Marion Michael Morrison. As the name Marion had too many syllables and did not look and sound "masculine" enough, the icon was marketed under the much more glamorous name of John Wayne. Thus, Westerns transformed both Mr. Marion Morrison's identity and the identity of the conformist employees, dutifully doing their office work and then engaging in fantasies of escape in their viewing of heroic narratives featuring representations of American male individualism.

In an age of affluence and conformism, among the diversity of masculinity figures, apart from the macho Western icon, Kimmel also identifies the Suburban Playboys, the suburbs having become the new arena for proving the "American manhood" at that particular time, and *Playboy* magazine one of the most important contributions to flights of sexual fantasies in redefinitions of postwar masculinity. American males had now another distinction to make in the ways in which they viewed women: apart from wives and mothers, necessary evils in a society in which "wife-beating was an American tradition" (Peterson 1992: 97-118), now they had the *Playboy* fantasy women. Kimmel duly acknowledges the revolutionary and historic impact of the magazine's appearance in December 1953, soon becoming "the Bible for the beleaguered male" (Kimmel 1994: 167).

In addition to the above-mentioned historic and historical development, the acceptance of gay culture as part of the story of masculinity in the postwar age is another important development. The male Beats' fantasy of escape paralleled the one of the Suburban Playboys, although their special gay identity was based less on luxury and consumption and more on "a romantic notion of the free hobo, unencumbered by possessions – a free spirit roaming the road" (McDowell 1996: 413).

Today, in an age in which LGBTQ has become an established part of identity studies, the particular impact of the Beats and of the Beatniks on the reshaping of masculinity from the gay perspective of the "best minds of Ginsberg's generation" is also to be taken into account.

The contemporary crisis of masculinity is dealt with in the last section of Kimmel's seminal volume, beginning with a response to Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* in the shape of … "the Masculine Mystique" (Kimmel 1994: 173 – 191). Kimmel claims that constructions of masculinity have always been

problematic or in some sort of crisis.

In her *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (2000), Robinson completes the picture of the masculinity crisis, claiming that white men are attracted by the possibilities of pain and grief and the unexpectedly thrilling tensions that come from living in crisis, and her illustrations come from both popular culture and from such well-established fiction authors as Philip Roth, John Irving, John Updike, somehow appearing to be unaware that good fiction has never attempted to confirm stereotypes and identities, preferring to represent characters in conflicted and conflicting situations. In a way, most fiction writers are "marked men or women" writing about "marked characters" in difficult situations, one might be tempted to believe. Nevertheless, Robinson specifically deals with such issues as the pains "suffered by ordinary Middle American men attempting to come to terms with the radical changes wrought by the civil rights and sexual liberation movement" (Robinson 2000: 23).

In his account of the contemporary crisis of masculinity, Kimmel also mentions the collective trauma linked to the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. The aura of energetic and youthful masculinity created around his personal identity was quick to turn into myth. That tragic end appears to have relegated to the background of history the failed Bay of Pigs invasion or the early stages of America's escalation of the Vietnam War.

All in all, the last decades of the 20th century witnessed middle-class masculinity becoming the object of derision, rather than a hegemonic and awe-inspiring identity construction. Among the more influential representations of the masculinity crisis features the *Star Trek* TV show, while a new vision of fatherhood announcing some sort of masculine redemption, although somewhat "feminized," is due to Dustin Hoffman's portrayal of Ted Kramer (*Kramer vs Kramer*, 1979).

The prominent political figure of the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan, apparently redeemed masculinity in his confrontation with the "Evil Empire," in the imagination of many Americans, much in the same way in which the illustration of the female masculinity of the Iron Lady across the Atlantic completed the duo of the special relationship between the U.S. and the U.K. in the final stages of the Cold War. Nevertheless, Kimmel is not impressed, seeing in the masculinity recovered by Reagan "the compulsive masculinity of the schoolyard bully" (Kimmel 1994: 192). He claims that at that particular time, in the 1980s, masculinities were even more confused than before, which, one may already anticipate, led to the emergence of masculinity studies as a response to this uncertainty, crisis, and confusion, in which wimps, whiners and weekend warriors, as Kimmel describes some of these special masculinities, proliferate. In this context, Bryce Traister notes

> […] a two-pronged "crisis theory" of American masculinity: one is rooted in a new historiography of American masculinity that locates instability at the base

> of all masculine identities constructed within American cultural matrices; the second is derived from Judith Butler's influential theoretical account of gender as always performative and contingent (Traister 2000: 276).

If the second trend follows the orientation pursued by Judith Butler, the first is obviously the one promoted by Kimmel, whose work may safely be taken as a reference historical account of the metamorphoses of American masculinities.

Raewyn Connell is one of the most authoritative voices in the field under examination here. In the 1994 volume, *Theorizing Masculinities*, edited by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, Connell contributed his own essay, taking pride of place, "Psychoanalysis on Masculinity," at that time still using the singular of the central concept under investigation (compare it with his own first edition of *Masculinities* (1995), whose second, updated edition was published ten years later. Connell first notes the paradoxical situation occasioned by discussions of masculinity at that particular time: "Psychoanalysis was the product of an incisive intelligence and a profound commitment to science. Yet psychoanalysis gave birth to the confused irrationalism that now shoulders aside all claims of science in popular discussions of the 'deep masculine'" (Connell 1994:11). Connell goes on to claim that, although psychoanalysis had provided new insights for Marxism, surrealism, existentialism, feminism (and numerous other –isms), it had also turned into an instrument promoting surveillance and conformity, "acting as a gender police and a bulwark of conservative gender ideology" (Connell 1994: 11).

Connell refers to Freud's 1905 *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* as the classic of modern sexology, as the texts claimed that individuals had tendencies to be bisexual, as a way of thinking about sexual inversion. Homosexuals called "male inverts" retain the mental quality of masculinity. Freud is shown to note the distinction between the choice of a sexual object, which amounts to the pattern of an individual's emotional attachments, and the respective individual's own character traits. Connell notes how Freud comes up with an identity narrative of psychodynamic sexual growth from early childhood to adulthood, claiming that the distinction between boys' sexuality and that of girls is clearly demarcated only in their teen years. Choice and constructedness are thus anticipated by Freud from his early theories of sexuality, with masculinity included. The three essays assert that adult sexuality is shaped by a prolonged and conflict-ridden series of processes, original features undergoing combination and transformations in an apparently unexpected manner. These processes may show sudden, unexpected shifts (perversion), as well as featuring possible forms of fixation or regression at any stage in their "sexual identity itinerary," so to speak. One of the conclusions that Connell draws underlines subsequent views on developmental constructions of sexuality in general, of masculinity identity in particular: "It follows that adult

masculinity, as an organization of character around sexual desire, must be a complex, and in some ways precarious, developmental construction. It is not given a priori in the nature of men, as European culture generally assumed" (Connell 1994:13).

The second 2005 edition of Connell's previous, book-length study *Masculinities* offers an informed comprehensive perspective and an update of the author's original edition with the significant changes that occurred since then. The volume in turn offers an outline of the modern investigation of masculinity, going on to present the author's own theory which relies on a social theory of gender identity.

In addition to summing up the history of masculinities and their political expressions in the Western world, Connell promotes the politics of gender equality, while starting from the concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, introduced previously, used in the first edition as well. The concept refers to the practices that confirm men's hegemonic position, thereby legitimizing the subordination of women, but also of other marginalized masculinities.

Within the broader framework of gender as a structure of social practice, as already assumed by Connell in previous works, masculinities are seen as displaying a complex set of relations, in which hegemonic masculinity is only one practice, the other ones involving subordination, complicity and marginalization. Violence and critical tendencies have marked the historical dynamics of these relations. Connell is interested in exploring the roles of men and masculinities in what is considered to be the politics of violence, placing the research of masculinity power relations within the framework of global developments.

The Australian author's own identity narrative illustrates the fluidity and constructedness of gender coordinates in general, of masculinity in particular, showing that gender identity is a large-scale social structure, but also a matter of personal choice, involving agency. Connell chose to become a *trans woman* late in her life and career, after the death of her partner, a prominent feminist activist, Pam Benton.

The most stable, until very recently, at least, features of the sexual division of labor have been confirmed and legitimated through the gendered associations of war and military action. In terms of this gendered division of labor, specific expectations, Morgan believes, "define not only who does what but who is what; the very nature of gender itself seems to be forged and reproduced in such socially constructed but very widespread and deeply pervasive divisions" (Morgan 1994: 166).

Images of the brave soldier leaving for war, saying farewell, not to arms, but to a crying wife and children consolidate the gendered division between strong, protective masculinity and protected femininity. Apart from such touchingly pathetic scenes, rape and sexual aggression in times of war also

confirm other well-entrenched gendered divisions between aggressive masculine animality and female vulnerability. What is more, homophobia has also been usually added to this gendered distinction of masculinity vs. femininity in the context of systemic and systematic violence, almost replicating the systemic sexism of hegemonic masculinity in patriarchal societies: "aggressive heterosexism and homophobia seem to lend support to the argument that masculine group solidarities organized around violence (legitimized or otherwise) serve as a defense against homosexuality" (Morgan 1994: 167).

A variety of long-term trends contributed to the deterioration of the masculinity image of the warrior and the heroic qualities going with it. Such trends, Morgan thinks, include the rationalization of warfare mechanisms, with technology creating a greater distance between the warrior and the means of destruction. What is more, trench warfare and close combat on a large scale have been replaced by small elite groups acting in surprise operations, their actions usually being kept secret, the stuff some audiences might be interested in as part of popular entertainment through viewing action-packed TV series and movies.

Apart from technology and cultural industries removing the authentic glamor of masculinity, such terrible historical episodes as World War II featuring incredible amounts of rationalized human slaughtering through weapons of mass destruction and such death factories as the German concentration camps, as well as the unpopularity of certain military operations, such as the involvement in the Vietnam War, led large sections of society, men and women alike, to develop increasingly powerful negative perceptions of war and heroic masculinity.

Some negative artistic responses to the problematic of heroic masculinity

Robert Lowell's "Memories of West Street and Lepke," in *Life Studies* is usually read as confessional poetry, with readers generally assuming that the persona at the centre of the text bears a strong resemblance to, if it does not faithfully represent, the identity of the author, very much like in the Romantic poetry of previous times. The speaker appears to be Robert Lowell himself, reminiscing about his time in prison during World War II as a conscientious objector. Some conscientious objectors might cut just as heroic, masculinist a figure as hardened warriors if they staunchly defend their principles. However, in the poem, the figure of the protagonist in his youth appears as the pathetic image of a "fire-breathing Catholic C.O" (Lowell 1970: 85) who, in prison, "yammers metaphysics with another equally "unmasculine" figure, Abramovitz, "a fly-weight pacifist, / so vegetarian, / he wore rope shoes and preferred fallen fruit" (Lowell 1970: 86) The text of the poem consistently represents both the

speaker and Abramovitz as far from manly creatures. Images of weakness and vulnerability abound in the poem, a good illustration of confessional poetry "at its worst," showing, in the opinion of M.L. Rosenthal, "the inventor" of the concept of confessionalism: "a series of confidences, rather shameful, that one is honor-bound not to reveal" (Rosenthal 1965: 231).

That war that was perceived by many Americans and most Europeans alike as a just, heroic war shows the persona as deficient in the martial attributes of heroic masculinity, but Lowell will soon change the perspective in a subsequent poem, "For the Union Dead," dedicated to a figure closely related to his forebears, Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, one of the heroes of the Civil War.

The figures of the white colonel and of his black soldiers represented on the Robert Gould Shaw Memorial in the center of Boston, Massachusetts and Robert Lowell's poem's depiction of the Civil War officer are memorable illustrations of heroic masculinity. The poet contrasts the heroism represented by the tragic story that the monument commemorates with what he sees as the unheroic, corrupted Boston of the 1950s (the city appears to "slide by on grease"). On the monument, Colonel Shaw is shown, with admiration, as he "rejoices in man's lovely, peculiar power to choose life and die" (Lowell 1970: 71), while he leads his soldiers to an attack spelling certain death. If one person's perception of martial (not *marital*, as those who have read *Life Studies* know) masculinity can be as flexible, and attitudes to it can be so diverse, it comes as no surprise that masculinities, including heroic, *macho* masculinities are culturally constructed and subject to change, depending on circumstances.

In the 1960s, as the Vietnam experience had seriously affected the perceptions of many Americans on "just wars" and their glamorous heroes, the publication and success of such war novels as Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse–Five* and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* were made possible.

The beginning of *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s long subtitle ("The Children's Crusade") and the dedication of the novel to Mary O'Hare foreshadow the deconstruction of heroic masculinity in what is to follow. In the first, autobiographical section of the book predating the bewildering combination of war situations and science-fiction adventures, Vonnegut visits a former war buddy, Bernard V. O'Hare. He is planning to write his "war novel." O'Hare's wife cannot hide her hostility. She believes that Vonnegut will create a book that will feature manly characters, thus glamorizing war, leading to film versions with such masculinity icons of the time as John Wayne and Frank Sinatra. But Vonnegut makes a promise to Mary O'Hare and he keeps his word. His book will portray unheroic characters, and will represent a "children's crusade," not meant to make other younger children fantasize about martial masculinity and future opportunities to show their manhood in wars (Vonnegut 1981: 13).

Again, in Heller's *Catch-22,* the links between masculinity and war may

be seen as being called into question in America specifically at the time when the image of the good war, World War II, waged by America and its allies, was being replaced by more unpopular war conflicts, from Korea to Vietnam.

Masculinity is dealt a mortal blow here, although not in the same way as in Vonnegut's novel, where the warriors were seen as innocent children, sent to wage war away from their moms' homes. *Catch-22*, like *Slaughterhouse-Five,* does not have tough men fighting in deadly combat with equally tough enemies on the other side of the no man's land. The enemy appears to be on "our" side, not on "their" side, with officers like Colonel Cathcart being more dangerous than the invisible Germans.

Another blow to masculinity here is to be seen starting from Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity as central to patriarchy. Hegemonic masculinity, according to Connell, asserts its centrality "by its claim to embody the power of reason" (Connell 2005: 164). In Heller's novel, apparently, the insanity of war deprives men of their manhood, turning most of them into figures of fun, unlike "the men of reason" representing hegemonic masculinity.

Nevertheless, a significant "masculinity shift" occurs in the novel. If initially Captain Yossarian is shown to be hysterical, telling everyone that the Germans are trying to kill him, which is understandable in a war in which the Germans stand for the enemy. He is also shown feigning an absurd illness to stay in the hospital and avoid getting killed in combat (therefore displaying cowardice, which amounts to a lack of manhood). Nevertheless, the plot comes up with an unexpected twist, the novel ending with the protagonist openly defying the "enemy" (his superiors) who only want him to "like" them and then be honourably discharged. That would mean Yossarian becoming an accomplice of his superiors who will keep raising the number of missions his other war comrades will have to fly after they have done their normal share. That would mean life for him and almost certain death for them. Instead of choosing safety, saying a farewell to arms the way his superiors want him to, he defies them, runs away from his Air Squadron in the middle of the Mediterranean, in an otherwise foolish attempt to sail in a rowboat all the way to … Sweden and to the attractive women there. It takes guts to do that, even in an absurd fictional world, and the expression of masculinity finally takes shape in the novel, not to be challenged again.

Conclusion

This essay started from significant female voices critically examining masculinity constructions, exposing power inequalities but also vulnerabilities and crises that displayed the diversity of the power dynamics of the field. Masculinities may also be approached from such dramatic contexts as war, combat, and the military, where the warrior is seen as a symbol of masculinity,

thus highlighting the violence involved in this gender identity area.

In his essay, "Theater of War: Combat, the Military, and Masculinities," David D.J. Morgan starts from this obvious realization: "Of all the sites where masculinities are constructed, reproduced, and deployed, those associated with war and the military are some of the most direct" (Morgan 1994: 165). The gendered connotations of this are all too obvious in war movies, paintings, and monuments, including equestrian statues of male heroes (Joan of Arc might be one of the few exceptions, but she would illustrate Halberstam's idea of *female masculinity*). The masculine postures, expressions, the carried weapons, and the military uniforms stressing group identity, absorbing individualities "into a generalized and timeless masculinity" (Morgan 166) stand for indomitable courage, aggression, willingness to fight to the end for an ideal usually associated with national identity. There are times in history when such identities, otherwise left to lie dormant in increasingly gender-sensitive contexts, regain particular prominence, and the war raging in Ukraine these days provides good illustrations. This confirms, once more, the realization that gender is differently experienced at different times and in different socio-cultural and political contexts making specific statements about specific episodes and chapters in a community's identity narrative.

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A Case for Using Feminist Editorial Practices in Scholarly Journals: An Analysis of *Computers and Composition*

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Abstract
Neoliberalism influences are evident in the editorial practices of many high-ranking scholarly journals. Given the importance that journals have in tenured/tenured-track academics' careers, they are an important arena to analyse and in which to implement best practices. I argue that Shari Stenberg's (2015) concept of feminist repurposing can be used to make visible the impacts of neoliberal practices and also helps to disrupt them by enacting different alternatives in the university system, of which scholarly journals are a part. In order to illustrate what a feminist ethics of editing would look like, I analyse the feminist-inspired practices of Computers and Composition's editorial staff. Drawing on published interviews and survey I administered, I show how feminist repurposing editorial roles from gatekeeper to colleague and mentor have beneficial impacts on the scholarship produced.

Keywords: *Neoliberalism, feminist repurposing, editing practices, scholarly journals, university system*

Introduction

Neoliberalism is an increasingly powerful logic governing the university system and all that intersects with it, including scholarly publishing. Scholarly journals play a significant part in defining the boundaries of a discipline. Editorial practices of journals are, therefore, impactful because they determine who and what gets published. All too often, exclusionary, gatekeeping practices are used by high-ranking journals so that their reputations are based on whom they exclude rather than on the quality of the ideas presented (Starbuck 2005). Theories that challenge neoliberalist principles can help to raise necessary critiques of these problematic practices. Equally as important as critiquing the current status quo is imagining alternatives to those practices. Once we challenge the current system, we need to envision what we want to replace it with. Feminist theories are useful in both regards. They can help us both critique and create.

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In this article, I draw on Shari Stenberg's (2005) theory of feminist repurposing in order to both critique and create. Feminist repurposing is "a practice that involves 1) attending to and challenging the habitual or status quo, 2) drawing on and departing from these existing conditions, and 3) moving to articulate and enact new purposes" (Stenberg 2015: 17). When they use this practice to frame their work with both authors and texts, journals' editorial staff [1] can challenge neoliberalist approaches to scholarly editing and encourage more diverse and inclusive research that reflects the best thinking of the communities in which scholars are situated.

Since its inception in 1983, *Computers and Composition* has evidenced the use of feminist principles in its publishing practices. Its three founders are heavily steeped in feminist theories and value enactment of them through actions such as collaborative editorial decisions, extensive mentoring of new authors, inclusion of diverse topics and methodologies, creation of a diverse editorial board who were supportive of innovative scholarship, encouragement of a diverse range of authors, and the use of non-traditional required citation format practices (a modified APA style). Drawing on published interviews with the editors of the journal along with surveys I distributed to both editorial board members and authors [2], I map out what feminist editing practices can – and *do* – look like in order to make an argument for embracing feminist editorial practices that position the editor as mentor and colleague rather than as neoliberalist gatekeeper.

Traditional publishing approaches in the Neoliberal university

Publishing in high-ranking journals is a central feature of how success is measured for tenure-track and tenured professors in universities (Anderson 2017; Levin & Aliyeva 2015; Ozkazanc-Pan 2012). Despite the fact that professorial positions in higher education are typically based on the triumvirate of research, teaching, and service, many colleges and universities privilege research over the other two; as a result, publications play an increasingly significant role in tenure-track and tenured careers and can ultimately make or break a person's career (Levin & Aliyeva 2015). As Stephen McGinty (1999: 2) posits, "much of the intellectual commerce of higher education takes the form of published literature. Individual scholarly reputations are built around work that carries the results of study out into an audience of colleagues." Despite the critiques raised about the workings of journal ranking (Merilainen et al 2008; Ozbilgin 2009; Starbuck 2005), "increasingly, for tenure-track faculty to achieve tenure and promotion, they have to not only publish in journals but in certain prestigious journals that become gatekeepers to success in the academy" (Anderson 2017: 1009). A reliance on journal ranking systems that use external metrics to evaluate the

impact of journals has become increasingly problematic and results all too often in the marginalization of important scholars and work.

Like all aspects of higher education, the scholarly publishing industry has been affected by neoliberalist pressures. Dave Ghamandi (2018: 7) argues that in the neoliberal university "scholarly publishing has been part of a system that moves away from social justice, increases income and wealth inequality, consolidates economic and political power among the elite, cuts social services and programs, and creates disposable workers." Henry Giroux (2002: 434) paints an equally grim picture of the impact of neoliberalism on scholarly publishing, positing that "as large amounts of corporate capital flow into the universities, those areas of study in the university that don't translate into substantial profits get either marginalized, underfunded, or eliminated. Hence, we are witnessing both a downsizing in the humanities and the increasing refusal on the part of universities to fund research in services such as public health that are largely used by people who can't pay for them." While they have long been a part of professors' workload in higher education, publications are becoming increasingly valorized in this neoliberalist environment that quantifies individual performances and commodifies knowledge construction (Anderson 2017; Levin & Aliyeva 2015). As scholarly publishing is increasingly consolidated by for-profit publishing conglomerates (Lariviere et al 2015), neoliberalist publishing trends are becoming ever more troubling, especially when we consider their impact on the range of perspectives and approaches privileged within that framework.

Of the various venues for scholarly publication, journals have a particularly significant role in this system. Scholarly journals play an integral part in constructing and maintaining – policing, even – the boundaries of disciplines. A study of high-ranking journals' editorial practices illustrates that neoliberalist principles frequently guide these practices. While some journals publish the work of a diverse range of disciplines' researchers, frequently the common editorial practice employed by editorial staff act, as Hugh Wilmot (2011: 429) argues, "like a suffocating ligature as we are pressured, incentivised and/or (self)-disciplined to squeeze our research activity and scholarly work into the constricted mould of the journals accorded the highest ranking." These practices place significant restrictions on what and who gets published in the journals and position a journal's worth as measured by whom it excludes (e.g., rejection rates) rather than by the quality and/or usefulness of the scholarship presented (Starbuck 2005). As Wellington and Nixon (2005: 650) argue, "increasingly the quality of a journal is rated on the quantity of its rejections as a proportion of its overall submissions. It is difficult not to conclude that rejection is part of the rules of the collective game in which we all play a part: exclusivity drives some abstracted notion of standards from which normative values are then derived."

Neoliberalism in publishing translates not only into the privileging of particular perspectives and research methodologies that contribute to the continuation of neoliberalism – particularly positivist, technicized approaches (Anderson 2017: 1007) – but also to the marginalization of critical research that raises challenges to the status quo. One way that high-ranking journals' editorial staff police disciplinary boundaries is by not publishing articles whose arguments run counter to the principles that support neoliberalist principles (Ozbilgin 2009; Ozkazanc-Pan 2012; Starbuck 2005; Wellington & Nixon 2005; Wilmott 2011). In this way, journals are directed by a logic of methodological closure in which editorial practices prioritize a limited set of methodologies (typically positivist in nature) and treat "non-positivist methodologies as suspicious, capricious, or subjective" (Ozbilgin 2009: 116). Further, these high-ranking journals tend to publish only well-known scholars, making it difficult for novice scholars and newcomers to the discipline to publish their work, unless they collaborate with someone who is well-known and/or publish conservative positions on widely accepted topics (Hart 2006: 53; Ozbilgin 2009: 114). Further complicating the situation is the fact that neoliberalist principles often lead editorial staff to obscure the norms under which they operate. Mustafa Ozbilgin (2009: 116) argues that while journals' stated editorial policies may suggest that they publish a wide range of topics and methods, "in practice… insiders know very well what kind of themes and what particular methodological approaches would be appropriate for these journals, while outsiders (novices, junior, and international scholars) are sent on wild goose chases or guessing games" which can lead to significant delays in the publishing of important critical work. Through these neoliberalist strategies, hegemonic approaches to scholarship are secured.

Feminist critiques of Neoliberalism in scholarly publishing

Feminists have raised strong critiques of neoliberalist principles in higher education and have worked to make visible the detrimental effects of relying on those problematic practices (Hart 2006; Jenkins 2014; Lund 2012; Newman 2013; van Anders 2004). These scholars have highlighted that a key problem with neoliberalist approaches is the ways in which they are hidden from view by being positioned as neutral "givens." As Stenberg (2015: 9) argues, feminist theory is particularly useful in revealing the effects of neoliberalist practices "due to its long history of highlighting and challenging notions held to be natural and neutral, and instead pointing to how these constructs are ideologically, socially constructed, and – as contemporary scholars argue – enacted through specific practices." Feminists have contended that an important first step toward countering neoliberalism's effects in the university system is to make visible the practices that repeatedly support neoliberalism.

In order to bring about change within these spaces, Sara Ahmed (2017: 96) argues that "you have to work the system by working out the mechanisms whereby the system is not transformed. You have to work out where things get stuck." She argues that feminists are "institutional plumbers" who "develop an expertise in how things get stuck, as well as where they get stuck" (Ahmed, 2017: 96). The journal publishing system is one of these sticking points where university practices are enmeshed in neoliberal principles and, consequently, one place where changes need to be enacted.

In order to challenge neoliberalism's hold in the university system, Stenberg (2015: 2) argues for a feminist repurposing which is "a practice of locating and enacting imaginative possibilities for change and agency within – and often out of – prohibitive and even damaging cultural conditions." As she argues, "illuminating normative neoliberal assumptions allows us to break familiar repetitions, working toward purposes and practices in keeping with feminist values" (10). Feminist repurposing helps us to see neoliberalism not as a neutral given but as one ideologically infused way of organizing the practices of the university. In addition to bringing to light the impacts of neoliberalist practices, "feminist repurposing also involves inquiring into and analyzing social context to consider where possibilities exist for working both within and against current structures, systems, and practices" (10). Once these neoliberalist practices are illuminated for what they are and do, feminist repurposing can disrupt the performative actions that are repeatedly producing the status quo; it can help us explore other possibilities for organizing the university systems we inhabit. The goal of feminist repurposing then is to "create something new out of existing conditions" (11). It provides a framework to think through ways to practice the university differently.

Computers and Composition: An International Journal for Teachers of Writing is an example of a journal in which the editorial staff uses their positioning to repurpose neoliberalist-based publishing practices. In the next sections, I analyze the editorial practices of the journal to see how the editorial staff have worked within the current system of scholarly publishing in ways that have allowed them to achieve a high ranking while at the same time challenging neoliberalist logic that plagues the system. Relying on material from the journal's website, several published interviews with the editors, and surveys I conducted of the journal's editorial board members and authors, I illustrate how *Computers and Composition* provides an example of a repurposed approach to scholarly publishing – one that is more inclusive and diverse.

Feminist vision of *Computers and Composition*

Computers and Composition: An International Journal for Teachers of Writing started in 1983 as a short newsletter. Its founders, Kate Kiefer and Cynthia Selfe,

wanted to create an idea-sharing space for a newly forming community of scholars and teachers interested in the ways that computer technologies were impacting the teaching of writing (Blair et al 2009: 160). Selfe (Beck 2013: 350) describes the initial goal of the newsletter: "Our whole goal was to create some sort of publication vehicle around the topic of computers ad composition so that people could share information." At that time, computers were new to the writing classroom, and teachers were just learning to use them in ways that benefitted students. As that community of scholars and teachers rapidly grew, in part due to the journal's help (Moran 2003: 344), the newsletter was soon transformed into an official journal in 1985. Selfe (Beck 2013: 350) explains the importance of the shift from newsletter to journal: "Certainly in the early days when the journal was a newsletter, Kate Kiefer and I wanted to share information with each other, but later on, we wanted a place where computers and composition folk could get published. That wasn't happening at the time in the journals." Therefore, they transitioned into a journal that has since become a high-ranking one in English Studies that focuses on, according to the journal's website, "issues connected with writing and computer use, as well as information about integrating computers into writing programs on the basis of sound theoretical and pedagogical decisions and empirical evidence." In 1996, the enterprise again expanded with the creation of the companion online journal, *Computers and Composition Online*. Wishing to make scholarship more widely available, in 2007 the journal's editors created an open-access digital press that is, according to the editors, a version of "scholarly activism."

Despite the growth of the journal's venues for publishing sites and changes in the editorial staff (Gail Hawisher replaced Kiefer in 1988, Kris Blair replaced Hawisher in January 2011 and became the sole editor in August 2011 when Selfe retired), the guiding purpose for the journal has remained remarkably stable: a desire to build a community of scholars and teachers who are invested in sharing the best ways to incorporate technologies into the teaching writing. This spirit has infused not only the publishing venues but the field of computers and composition (sometimes called computers and writing) more broadly. Charles Moran (2003: 345) explains that "As a community, we reflect the values of our leaders (they'd hate to be called this, but they are and they have been) – three generous, energetic, and hopeful teacher-scholars: Kate Kiefer, Cynthia Selfe, and Gail Hawisher. These remarkable teacher-scholars have drawn to their work others who share the same generosity, energy, and optimism. This group, call it a de facto (and partially *de jure*) editorial board, has shaped the journal and the community, infusing both with temperament, enthusiasm, and vision."

Since the beginning of the journal and the development of the field itself, this vision has been a feminist one, as the editors are quick to emphasize when discussing the journal. Hawisher (Beck 2013: 355) explains that

> even though this field is about technology, the pioneering efforts of so many, especially women, have made some of the major contributions to building this field. I would say that without women, we would have been a field that might have talked primarily about the tools rather than concentrating on what Kris [Blair] says so well. There is an ethic of care involved, and this ethic of care is central to all we do in computers and writing among both women and men.

This ethic of care is expressed through a focus on the humans behind the computers, as Selfe (Beck 2013: 350) states: "In and around technology or digital environments, if you aren't paying attention to people, and how they interact and what's happening, then you are missing a big boat." She (Beck 2013: 352) argues that this emphasis on the human aspects of using technology comes from a feminist perspective. Blair illustrates that this focus on feminist principles shapes the editorial staff's interactions with authors and texts in all of the publishing venues: "I would definitely consider *Computers and Composition Online* a feminist journal, simply because we have engaged in review processes/support processes for graduate students who work on the journal as well as new and established authors who submit to the journal in ways that are more supportive and nurturing rather than 'Oh, you submitted; this isn't working, we must reject it.'" Arguing that this same philosophy is also evident in the print *Computers and Composition*, Blair emphasizes that the editorial staff seek to ask "How can we make this a mentoring moment?" rather simply rejecting a manuscript – or "the squash like a bug mode." As such, Blair insists that the journal is "feminist because it's non-hierarchical; it emphasizes collaboration; it emphasizes mentoring. And it's not just because you have a woman as an editor – I think that that could be done by male editors as well. I think it's a matter of what we see journal editing to be. Is it a dialogue? Is it a conversation? Or is it gatekeeping?"

I analyze *Computers and Composition*'s editorial practices in order to show that the editorial staff have largely responded to those questions through the continual performance of feminist practices. They have repurposed their positions within the journal publishing system so as to emphasize a community spirit that embraces diversity, inclusivity, and embodiment. Their editorial practices provide us with one example of how we can use feminist repurposing principles in order to "unstick" (Ahmed 2017) journal publishing from limiting neoliberalist principles. The community spirit that was at the heart of the creation of *Computers and Composition* is still strongly evident in current editorial practices that continue to focus on community good rather than commodified market interests.

Transparency and mentoring

One way the journal's feminist community spirit is enacted is in the transparency of the journal's editorial practices. Instead of being opaque about what they consider to be publishable or misrepresenting themselves as being open to a wider range of topics and methodologies than they are, *Computers and Composition*'s editorial staff actively work to make their publishing practices clear to those wishing to publish in the journal. The collaboratively written "Style Manual" published on the journal's own website is evidence of the priority given to transparency by the editorial staff. Written and maintained throughout the years by the journal's associate editors, the thirty-three-paged "Style Manual" serves not only as a guide to publishing with *Computers and Composition* but also as an overview of academic journal publishing more broadly. In addition to providing nuts-and-bolts information for authors (for instance, the manual tells authors that submissions will not be sent out for peer review unless they are written in APA format), the "Style Manual" provides descriptions of how the larger publishing industry works. One way they do this is by introducing potential authors to the journal's editorial staff positions, describing in detail the responsibilities associated with each position. For instance, the manual describes the assistant editors' positions in the following way: "*Computers and Composition* provides practical experience to graduate students who express an interest in journal editing. Assistant editors take responsibility for the copy editing of three to four articles per year; copy editing entails formatting the article in the house style, correcting grammar and punctuation errors, "tightening up" the prose, and working with the author to produce a high-quality article." Providing explanations like this one helps to demystify the publishing process and works to open up the community to newcomers.

Further, in the "Style Manual," the editorial staff invite feedback from the community, encouraging them to let the editors know of any additional information that would be helpful to them as they prepare work for the journal:

> We welcome any suggestions for changes and advice on how we can clarify or extend our commentary to assist you in accomplishing your editing tasks, regardless of whether you are a guest editor or working with us for the first time. Only if you tell us what you need to know, can we make these manuals living, useful documents. As *Computers and Composition* matures, we make changes in our conventions and procedures. Thus, the manuals are also maturing; please inform us of what you see as needed improvements.

This invitation reflects an openness that is central to feminist repurposing. As Stenberg (2015: 77) argues, "one must be willing – indeed, to view it as a responsibility – to listen with the purpose of movement between one's

established knowledge and positions." By inviting community feedback into the journal's practices, the editorial staff are taking on the responsibility of continuing to listen to and learn from the community for which the journal was created. Instead of a top-down hierarchical approach to editing authority, then, the journal's editorial staff strives to work with the community, acting out of a sense of responsibility to the community rather than profit-driven motives.

Mentoring practices

Another way the journal's community spirit gets enacted is through the extensive mentoring of authors. When the editorial staff see a promising yet not thoroughly realized argument in a submission, they are willing to extensively work with the authors to help them develop their work into a publishable piece. Although also present in the interactions with those who submit to the print journal, this kind of mentoring work is particularly evident in the way the editorial staff helps authors create digital scholarship for the companion journal *Computers and Composition Online.* The editorial staff recognizes that the production of digital scholarship can be quite time-consuming and requires a skill set that not all authors have. Therefore, they frequently work with authors on the development of their texts: "Rather than automatically reject submissions that are not Web-ready, online editors of content sections… help bring authors to a better understanding of what goes into effective digital scholarship" (Blair et al 2009: 164). The editors see multiple benefits of their approach for the authors, the journal, and the discipline: "This mentoring model bolsters the integrity of peer review and at the same time encourages new voices in new media to contribute to the academic community. Equally important, it levels the generational playing field, given that graduate students and junior faculty members tend to be the most proficient in digital literacy specialties" (Blair et al 2009: 164). Instead of acting like a gatekeeper and establishing a reputation as a high-ranking journal through whom it excludes, the journal's editors repurpose their roles into that of collegial mentors. Through moves such as these, the editorial staff break the "repetition of normative roles" (Stenberg 2015: 111).

Advocacy practices

Further, the editors' sense of responsibility to authors does not end at the point of final publication; instead, the editorial staff of *Computers and Composition* perceive it to be part of their responsibility to serve as advocates for the work that is published in the journal. They thus work to help review boards and tenure/promotion committee members understand the significance and impact of the important scholarship that is being done by those who publish in

the journal – in all its venues. As the editors explain, "we want all authors – writing alone or with others – to receive the recognition and attention they deserve, and we take it as our responsibility that their scholarship with us – whether alphabetic in its reliance on print presentation or multimodal in its reliance on new and mixed media – should count at critical junctures like tenure and promotion" (Blair et al 2009: 161).

Through all of these practices, which are based in feminist philosophies, *Computer and Composition*'s editors repurpose the role of the editor from gatekeeper to a colleague who is, at times, also a mentor. As one of the authors in my survey said, "I do not see them [editorial staff] as gatekeepers but as colleagues trying to help." The editor's positive and supportive approach performs a community spirit instead of the commodified, individualist, and exclusionary perspectives valued by neoliberalism. Through transparency and mentoring, the editors repurpose editorial practices to foster diversity and inclusion. Instead of policing the boundaries to keep people and ideas out, newcomers are mentored and fresh approaches to writing technologies are encouraged and supported by the community.

Editorial board members' repurposed roles

The editorial board members work to enact the editors' vision for the journal. In their responses to a survey that I sent to the current editorial board members of *Computers and Composition*, they unanimously stressed the importance of working with authors to help them make their scholarship as strong as it could be. Acknowledging that her/his first role was to be of service to the editors, one board member claimed that "I envision my secondary role as supporting the authors, by hopefully providing meaningful, engaged, and productive responses to, comments on, and recommendations regarding their scholarship." The emphasis on being supportive of authors was evident in this and many other survey responses that spoke more about helping authors than judging them. Another survey respondent also stresses agreement with the editors' emphasis on diversity and inclusion: "I feel my role, as a board member and reviewer, is to foster those diverse perspectives and projects by offering authors/researchers concrete advice on revising their manuscripts for publication." Rather than viewing her/his job as either accepting or rejecting the article, this reviewer felt her/his job was to serve as a mentor and help guide the author's revisions.

These stances reflect not only a practice but also a feminist philosophy. Although the peer review procedure for the journal is still the traditional, double-blind system, the members of the community have found ways to repurpose the space of peer review in order to make the review process more collegial, inviting, and supportive. The board members position themselves as

mentors, not necessarily evaluators. This collegial performance interrupts the repetition of neoliberalist publishing practices which privileges exclusion through high rejection rates. In the neoliberalist framework, "the burden, then, lies on individuals to acclimate to the existing structures of the institution, since they will be accepted only to the extent, as Jones and Calafel put it, that they remain 'docile, unthreatening, and invested in self-commodification" (Stenberg 2015: 99). *Computers and Composition*'s editorial board members work to position themselves differently so as to understand the authors' goals and to help them achieve those, rather than making them fit within a fixed norm. Based on their responses to my survey, the editorial staff value the diversity that the authors bring with them and work to help the authors best achieve their goals.

Author's responses to repurposed editorial practices

To determine how authors perceived the engagements with the editorial staff at *Computers and Composition*, I also surveyed the authors who had been published in *Computers and Composition* within the last five years (2015-2020) to determine their sense of how these editorial practices have influenced them. The authors who responded to my survey questions about their experiences publishing with the journal overwhelmingly expressed gratitude toward and respect for the quality of engagements they had with the editorial staff throughout the process. One respondent wrote: "My experience with the editorial process in *Computers and Composition* was far more pleasant than my experiences with other journals. Everything was done in a timely manner; feedback was always constructive and helpful, even if necessarily critical; and editorial support was always available." In addition to emphasizing the positive tone set by the journal's editorial staff, this author also emphasized another aspect of the process that was frequently commented on by my survey respondents – the ready availability of editorial support. When asked to compare their experience with *Computers and Composition*'s editorial staff to other journals' editorial staff, the authors repeatedly emphasized that not only was the editorial staff positive, but they were supportive and available. One respondent wrote that "my *Computers and Composition* experiences have definitely been far more positive than almost every other journal experience, combined. I also do not think this has in any way lessened the quality of the work they publish […] So, the C&C model is proof that you can be constructive (as opposed to destructive) with authors without hurting the quality of your publication."

Other survey respondents emphasized the significant impact that editorial input had on her/his final product. A representative comment summarizes the position taken by several of the authors who responded to my

survey:

> Reviewer feedback was critical for me in terms of helping me clarify the central argument and really hone in on actionable recommendations and conclusions, and I found this a positive "R&R" experience. The review process definitely helped sharpen the blunt edges of my manuscript. I found reviewer commentary to be developmental, specific & actionable, and largely positive in critique. And I'll repeat that emphasized bit again—reviewer feedback was specific and actionable, and this facilitated my revision A LOT.

These authors' experiences suggest that editorial staff can practice an ethic of care and, at the same time, achieve high-quality publications. In fact, the survey respondents emphasize how the ethic of care performed by the editorial staff actually increases the quality and potential impact of the scholarship featured in the journal. So, the repurposed editorial practices seem to have the impact of creating better engagements between editorial staff and authors and, as a result, also leading to stronger scholarship. Thus, quality is not sacrificed when editorial roles are repurposed to be performed differently than neoliberalist approaches to editing.

Repurposed editorial decision-making

Another practice that *Computers and Composition*'s editorial staff have repurposed relates to how decisions are made about what and who gets published as well as how that research is presented. By including diverse topics and voices, the journal's editorial staff works to enact their feminist-inspired practices that create a space for a diverse, thriving community of scholars and teachers. Through their practices, *Computers and Composition*'s editorial staff implement their desire "to foster a space of inclusion, diversity, and voice around […] not only the issues themselves – whether it be sexuality or multilingualism – but certainly the people who get to talk" (Blair 2013). At the heart of their practices is a commitment to a view of research that positions knowledge as socially constructed rather than as disembodied, objective truths.

Computers and Composition's editorial staff strive to re-embody research in ways that challenge neoliberalist privileging of those kinds of disembodied, objective perceptions of research. Neoliberalism positions knowledge as being "transcendent, detached from the knower and therefore from responsibility and accountability" (Kember 2014: 110). *Computers and Composition*'s staff's editorial practices challenge this view of knowledge and scholar, instead embracing a feminist view in which "knowledge is situated, not detached but attached to an embodied knower who is therefore accountable for what she produces" (110). *Computer and Composition*'s feminist-inspired desire to re-embody research is evident in the types of topics and methods published in the

journal. The journal's editors frequently accept articles written on issues of interest to feminists (e.g., ""Understanding 'Zoom Fatigue': Theorizing Spatial Dynamics as Third Skins in Computer-mediated Communication" by Robby Nadler). The scholarship published also frequently uses feminism as an analytical lens to study topics related to technology use (e.g., "Acting with Algorithms: Feminist Propositions for Rhetorical Agency" by Heather Brooke Adams, Risa Applegarth, Amber Hester Simpson). The journal also often publishes research that uses feminist research methodologies (e.g., "People as Data? Developing an Ethical Framework for Feminist Digital Research" by Brandy Dieterle). Clearly, then, the journal's editorial staff have embraced feminist perspectives – even going so far as to include perspectives that critique the journal itself (e.g., "'Feminist Leanings:' Tracing Technofeminist and Intersectional Practices and Values in Three Decades of *Computers and Composition*" by Lori Beth De Hertogh, Liz Lane, and Jessica Ouellette).

Even when the topics published are not directly about feminism, the editorial practices still privilege diversity and inclusion in a way that is marked by feminist theories and priorities. Instead of focusing only on positivist methods, the journal publishes work that uses a range of methods from empirical studies to interviews to quantitative surveys. What is common amongst the articles published in the journal is that researchers situate themselves within their research so that instead of presenting themselves as disembodied knowers, they illustrate the ways that research is partial and socially constructed.

Diversity of authorship

This editorial privileging of diversity and inclusion also extends to whose work is published in the journal. In conjunction with the neoliberalist view of research as disembodied is a similar view of the researcher as an "ideal academic," one that is "disembodied and reproduces a public-private dichotomy – and with quality journal publications as the most central feature of this construct" (Lund 2012: 219). If research is embodied, it means that the subjectivities of the researchers matter. Thus, there is a need to expand the diversity of those who have agency within the scholarly publishing system. To respond to this challenge, the editorial staff of *Computers and Composition* work to publish research created by a diverse range of scholars – from graduate students to teachers to tenured professors – the journal also embraces authors whose academic homes are outside the humanities and even outside the U.S. Instead of policing the boundaries to keep people out of the community, then, their editorial practices are repurposed to operate out of a recognition that they are not the only group working on issues related to technology and writing; therefore, there is a certain level of humility reflected in the recognition that

they can learn from other groups and disciplines. As a result of editorial decisions that place value on diversity and inclusion, the field is kept infused with fresh perspectives and insights.

Repurposed citation styles

Feminist principles of editing also shape the way research is presented in *Computers and Composition*. Further evidence of these feminist-inspired editorial practices can be found in the journal's repurposing of citation styles in ways that likewise emphasize the embodiment of researcher and researchers. Calling for all authors to use a modified approach to APA citation style, the editorial policy asks authors to include the first and last name of the sources cited in their articles both the first time they use the source in the pages of the article and on the references page. The underlying reasoning for this policy is the editors' position that the traditional APA citation format erased gender and by doing so masculinized the presentation of research (Hawisher, personal communication, December 12, 2018). As Acker (1990: 150) argues, when gender is not acknowledged, the default is masculine. *Computers and Composition*'s editorial staff assert that through the elision of first names, the traditional APA citation style disembodies authors and erases gender from the text. *Computers and Composition*'s modified APA style puts first names back into the mix, thus working to re-embody texts. This use of a modified APA citation format not only makes gender evident in the pages of the journal but also foregrounds the importance of feminism in research more generally. By calling authors' and readers' attention to the gendered practices that govern legitimation in research, the editorial policy brings to the forefront the ways in which practices like citation style are often positioned and adhered to neutral requirements. As Stenberg (2015: 133) argues, "feminist repurposing begins with illuminating as value-laden and situated that which has been deemed natural or 'objective.'" Challenging the supposed neutrality of citation style, then, potentially opens up consideration of other seemingly neutral practices involved in scholarly journal publishing. Thus, the *Computers and Composition*'s editorial policy foregrounds the ideological and value-laden nature of publishing and publishing decisions.

Conclusion

Neoliberalist approaches to scholarly journal editing need to be critiqued and alternatives must be sought. There is hope, however. As Banu Ozkazanc-Pan (2012: 215) argues, "rather than feel disenfranchised from a publication system that values myopic managerialist contributions or dictates the form of research, as critical scholars we need to become change agents through activism."

Computers and Composition is one example of a journal whose editorial staff demonstrate how editing can be a form of activism through their repurposing of neoliberalist approaches to editing. An analysis of the editorial practices of *Computers and Composition* highlights the ways in which feminist theory can be used to repurpose editorial practices in order to shift the positioning of the editor from gatekeeper to colleague and mentor and embrace diversity, inclusivity, and embodiment in scholarly publishing. The journal's editing practices also illustrate that resisting the neoliberal logic that links status to high rejection rates. Instead of defining its worth on whom it excludes, *Computers and Composition* creates a dynamic, multi-voiced space in which committed scholars and teachers invested in the intersections between writing and technologies can gather in print and online to construct and share knowledge. Now, almost 40 years after its first issue appeared, *Computers and Composition* retains the community-based focus that established it. It provides a road map of how other journals' editorial staff can enact a feminist ethic of publishing.

Notes

[1] In the term "editorial staff," I am referring to the editors (past and present), assistant editors, associate editors, and editorial board members.
[2] This study (The Ethics of Journal Editing, Study #00013195) received institutional review board approval on 1/14/2021 at Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona. The approval allows me to anonymously cite material gathered from the surveys in my research intended for publication.
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