

A STYLISTICS OF EXILED LIVES

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ABSTRACT. *A Stylistics of Exiled Lives.* The article explores the correspondence between the particular stylistics of exiled lives (specific ways, manners, and forms of living developed during exile) and a specific critical method (para-biography). While all exiles can be perceived as people with underachieved destinies - exile is, in this case, comparable to premature death, lost works, imperfect style, sterility, etc. - the biographer who endeavors to "capture" the ways of the exiled should rely on a critical faculty fit to such uncompletedness, yet a faculty mostly uncommon to his own lot: *imaginativeness* or *critical imagination*. Such correspondence between the unique situation and the para-biography of the exiled has been suggested by Iliana Gregori's books on three personalities (Mihai Eminescu, Emil Cioran and Matila Ghyka) who turned their own experience of exile into particular expressions.

Keywords: *exile, form of life, critical imagination, imaginativeness, para-biography, forma vitae, lieux de mémoire.*

REZUMAT. *O stilistică a vieții în exil.* Articolul explorează corespondența dintre particularitățile stilului vieții în exil (i.e. feluri și maniere de a trăi, forme de viață dezvoltate în perioada exilului) și o metodă critică specifică (para-biografia). Dacă figurile de exilați pot fi percepute sub specia destinului neîmplinit - exilul este, într-o traiectorie obișnuită, asimilabil unor accidente precum moartea prematură, opere pierdute, stil imperfect, sterilitate etc. - atunci biograful care încearcă să surprindă un mod de viață specific existenței în exil trebuie să activeze o facultate critică potrivită destinelor incomplete, în orice caz, mai puțin utilizată și întâlnită: *capacitatea de imaginare* sau *imaginația critică*. O astfel de corespondență între (situația) exilatului și para-biografie mi-a fost sugerată de ultimele volume semnate de Iliana Gregori și consacrate unor personalități care au transformat experiența exilului în expresii particulare: Mihai Eminescu, Emil Cioran și Matila Ghyka

Cuvinte cheie: *exil, formă de viață, imaginație critică, capacitate de imaginare, para-biografie, forma vitae, lieux de mémoire.*

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Noble exiles

Is para-biography more suited to our current, “de-territorialized” or “dis-enclosed” definition of Life? This is the question that first came to my mind when, disposed towards a *patient* and *responsible* hermeneutic by the author herself, I finished reading Iliana Gregori’s latest book, *Păstrat în uitare? Matila Ghyka – Numărul și Verbul / Kept in Forgetfulness? Matila Ghyka – The Number and The Verb* (2018), devoted to the Romanian polymath Matila Ghyka.

But who is this Matila Ghyka and why should he be fished out from the deep and muddy waters of forgetfulness (*Păstrat în uitare? Matila Ghyka – Numărul și Verbul* 9-19)? A Moldavian prince and a citizen of the universe, a tireless and passionate traveler journeying around the world, a famous novelist of his own times, awarded with the prize *Rester Jeunes* in 1934, and an anonymous factory worker embarked on achieving the American dream under the funny name of a marionette (“Maximilien Eulert”) - all of them at the same time, to and fro, always on the move, like an electron... A close friend to Paul Valéry, Léon-Paul Fargue, Marcel Proust, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Lucien Fabre, Henri Poincaré, Claude Farrère, Salvador Dali, and Gustave le Bon - yet, friendships aside - he himself was a fascinating figure of the Romanian diaspora of the 50’ and 60’s. Despite these beacons of celebrity, he was a personality rather unknown to his fellow countrymen not only because of the Communist censure and a certain disregard for migrant authors, but also because of a strange fate that wiped out his traces.

Indeed, side by side with Gregori’s critical focus on Matila Ghyka’s posthumous oversight, disregard and, eventually, forgetfulness, all seven chapters extend the explicit aims of the book by diving into philosophical interrogations. What are the ancient grounds of (our) European-ness? Is there a common source of both recollection and forgetfulness? How can one sense the vibration and aura of absent things and absent persons? Does the vanishing human experience have a phantasmal, thus traceable, core? Are there really “invariants” to be found in both art and life, as Matila Ghyka assumed in his theoretical works?

Gregori’s critical style is so suggestive and rich that the aforementioned topics could be developed - by departing from and returning to what is called “*the Matila Ghyka universe*” (34) - into quasi-autonomous *glossae*. I will not begin whatsoever by commenting on the apparent structure, arguments, thesis, and aims of this para-biography. It is enough to notice that the reader is warned that Matila Ghyka’s posthumous destiny has something to do with his spectacular life, with his Life’s textualized “postures” as aesthetician, as memorialist, as diplomat, and as novelist. More important than anything else is the fact that Gregori’s

book delivers a method of reading, of orientation into the complexity of “the Ghyka universe.” So, the critic’s explicit endeavor is to encourage a reader’s patient and responsible appreciation, which could bring into being nascent galaxies of meanings or, according to Nietzsche’s remark - quoted by Gregori several times - “the dawns that have not shined yet [upon us]” (254).

Mutatis mutandis, the intrinsic and extrinsic convertibility of *invariants* from Ghyka’s “vessel-like” work - the simile belongs to Paul Morand but only with respect to the novel *Pluie d’étoiles* - drives the patient reader not only to the Prince’s elegant disguises and acrobatic lunges as novelist, memorialist, diplomat, aesthetician, naval engineer, mathematician, etc., but also to Ilina Gregori’s previous monographs: the poet Mihai Eminescu in *Știm noi cine a fost Eminescu? Fapte, enigme, ipoteze / Do We Know Who Eminescu Was? Facts, Enigmas, and Hypotheses* (2008), and respectively the philosopher Emil Cioran in *Cioran. Sugestii pentru o biografie imposibilă/ Cioran. Suggestions for an Impossible Biography* (2012).

Like Prince Matila Ghyka, Eminescu and Cioran are “exiles” - the former living in the booming, imperial Berlin of 1872-1874, the latter, in the post World War II Paris - who, as the Gospel says, *leave their homelands and go into far countries to receive for themselves their deserved kingdoms and then return home* (*Păstrat în uitare? Matila Ghyka – Numărul și Verbul* 55, 357). But are they all “noblemen,” as Luke’s Gospel has prophesied? Definitely! Yet, first and foremost, they are prototypical “exiles,” who challenge the critic’s methods, by claiming a good balance between the thematic approach, the aesthetic appreciation of particular works, national memory, cultural translatability, cosmopolitan aspirations, on the one hand, and a *fallenness* that is inherent to the difficult concept of *identity*, on the other (Vrăjitoru-Andreasen 3-43).

This type of focus on the exiles’ condition seems to require a fine reconsideration of adjacent concepts such as *hybridity*, *in-between-ness*, *de-territorialisation* (Fotache 121-35), or even of what has lately been called *exilience*. Alexis Nouss, for instance, theorizes the concept of *exilience*, defining it as *exile* + (articulated) *experience*. Compared to migration, which is characterized though patterns of return, *exilience* designates a linear trajectory leading only to the final *exit*. So, *exilience* implies not only a problem of acknowledging alterity - not only “an exit from Self” (as Said claims) - but also a tragic existential and experiential core that needs to be passed on to the others through discursive means (Nouss 53-101). I would add that this type of (exilic) experience is also recognizable in a particular stylistics of life: the exiles’ typical forms of life, daily rhythms, ways of being, manners of dealing with the effects of (fallen) identity, practices, uses of languages and objects (Macé 11-54).

Lives on the brink. Primitivism and elegance

Beyond the aforementioned posture as “exiles” for a span of time, for a lifetime or forever, Eminescu-Cioran-Ghyka form a subtle lineage due to their problematized relationship with the universal Knowledge / Memory. Endowed with a Renaissance-like curiosity and with a tremendous ambition, they always keep on the brink the relationship with “the universal knowledge”, negotiating between its barbarian / primitive and its refined / comprehensible acceptations. Better said, extensive knowledge represents, in all these three cases, a contrast agent for a deeper, primitive soul or for a transpersonal instance.

Ostensibly, the critic’s *mise en scène* builds upon tensions, paradoxes, and aporiae. Eminescu’s stay in Berlin, in particular “the information crisis” regarding his life in the capital of the German Empire, is dealt with by using *the urban unconsciousness*, “a part of unconsciousness that is implied in the perception of urban environment” (*Știm noi cine a fost Eminescu? Fapte, enigme, ipoteze* 9). Cioran’s life in Paris, in particular “the infoxication” produced by the philosopher’s daily comments jotted down in his *Notebooks*, is sorted out by the critic who focuses on “the true history of one’s soul” (*Cioran. Sugestii pentru o biografie imposibilă* 236). Similarly, Ghyka’s journey around the world - in particular his engagement with the ebbs and flows of the European past that led his critical posterity into treating his works as *nonexistent objects* (Parsons 10-55) - is analyzed by Gregori who searches for the Prince’s transpersonal identity, that is, for his genuine, aristocratic and irreducible European-ness (*Păstrat în uitare? Matila Ghyka – Numărul și Verbul* 331).

This is the reason why the critic must extend her area of analysis from an imaginative appreciation of Art to an in-depth - even paleontological - reflection on Life, defined both as invariant *forma vitae* and as manifold experience. In fact, the Romanian scholar defines her critical pursuits as philosophical practice as well as the experience of “inter-subjectivity” (*Cioran. Sugestii pentru o biografie imposibilă* 134). While the former resides in delineating “the writer’s most profound Self” or “the Self of Selves” whose seat is common (cultural) memory, the latter is permanently percolated by the varieties of alterity and by forgetfulness. “Who am I?” is a question explored in all of Gregori’s books, a sort of musical motif, imprinted in the most personal articulations of her critical commentary.

Para-biography and critical imagination

In what follows, I will present - beyond the punctual hypotheses and the arguments from the three monographs - Ilina Gregori’s most personal way

of driving to the limit, even radicalizing, the para-biographical account, through an appeal to the royal, yet most risky, way of oneiric investigation. The critic's preference for the "lives" and "figures" of exceptional personalities such as Mihai Eminescu, Emil Cioran, and Matila Ghyka, for geniuses hanging between memory and forgetfulness, for works in-between polished perfection and incompleteness, for *la condition exilique* of the human being, in general, activates *imaginativeness*, the critic's most trained faculty. Following Alexandre Gefen, I notice that not only *les vie imaginaires* (as genre), but also the critical imagination (as faculty) develop against the background of uncompleted or surcharged destinies (Gefen 28-33), such as those of Eminescu-Cioran-Ghyka.

Why would a critic need "to dream", "to fancy" or "to imagine" as long as his / her most hailed faculties have been considered - starting with nineteenth-century positivist impetus and coming near to Arnold Isenberg's fans - verdict, reason, norm, objectivity, reliability, professionalism? The dream, Gregori suggests, "is a *mise en abîme* not only for the day that has passed, but also for the day that is coming" (*Păstrat în uitare? Matila Ghyka - Numărul și Verbul* 355). Thus only a hybrid critical method, a kind of "oneiro-biography" can open the way to true visionary criticism. A still more detailed answer may be found in all the theories of *critical imagination* devised from Addison and Hume to Poe, Baudelaire, Wilde and Pater, then to, say, Roger Scruton and James Grant. Indeed, aside from rhetorical skill, *critical imagination* - in fact, "imaginativeness", as James Grant spells it out, implies a high sense of *appreciation*. In its turn, the ability to communicate one's appreciation for the Other stands on *good sense, delicacy, practice* (experience in contemplating the others' works), *comparison skills*, and, last but not least, *freedom from prejudice* (Grant 29-53, 65-67).

It is not by chance that, in all her para-biographical accounts, Gregori proves an obvious *gusto* in "staging" figures, faces, situations, and arguments. Typical *lieux de mémoire* (chiefly museums) are used in a quasi-theatrical fashion in order to publicly burn the established prejudices. In Eminescu's case, the critic enhances the importance of Lepsius' museum of Egyptology. In Cioran's case, she underlines the imaginal value of the philosopher's visits to the Gallery of Paleontology in Paris. In Matila Ghyka's case, a visit to a museum of ichthyology hosted by an ex-Jesuit church (in a fictional sequence of the novel *Again One Day / Pluie d'étoiles*) is enough to unveil the aesthete's theory of invariants (genetic, figural, verbal). All three instances provide an intellectual pleasure in exploring the virtual openings of one's actual biography by gliding up and down on the biological ladder, from species, genus, family, order, and class - to Life, as a whole; by gliding up and down on the metaphysical ladder from Life's Matter to afterlife phantasmal appearances.

In this frame of thought, I could easily understand Gregori's preference for para-biographic information: details imported from personal circumstances, bibliographic coincidences, spontaneous constellations of meaning, etc. As Prince Matila Ghyka notices, *les voies du destin ont parfois une certaine élégance*. Paraphrasing Ghyka, *les voies d'un patient lecteur ont parfois une certaine élégance* - and, indeed, there is a certain elegance secretly underlying the discrete continuities among all of Gregori's books. Perhaps this is, but only *en creux*, the elegant outline of the critic's intellectual destiny, her experience of *la condition exilique*.

For instance, the revelation of "Tat Tvam Asi"² (through Schopenhauer's interpretation) is tracked in both Eminescu's and Cioran's lives. According to Gregori, the subtle relationship between Cioran's warning "*l'homme se resingera*" (*Cioran. Sugestii pentru o biografie imposibilă* 214-15) and the saddening image of the great Schopenhauer hugging an orangutan at the fair of Frankfurt (*Știm noi cine a fost Eminescu? Fapte, enigme, ipoteze* 321) can be interpreted as a picture in the "negative" or, maybe, as a paleontological version of the Sanskrit phrase. The critic goes even further. Cioran's great passion for essential portraits and Matila Ghyka's pictures opening his two volumes of memoirs (as a young sailor and as a diplomat) are linked through their shared intuition of Life's phantasmal latencies. It seems that, as political exiles - the former, an aspirant to the glory of French letters, the latter, a former VIP of the same literary space - Cioran and Matila Ghyka intersected their ways and also their "exiled" ways of life.

Gregori's "patient readers" must take into consideration that Eminescu's figure is extremely "present" for Matila Ghyka, too. For the Moldavian prince, the poet's face should not be associated exclusively with his mortuary mask (indeed, Eminescu scholars have always been secretly fascinated by the genius' mold in plaster), but with a statue's monumental and grandiose form. According to various testimonies provided in Dim. Sturdza's tome *Familiile boierești din Moldova și Țara Românească* (251-327), it seems that the poet's bust was placed in the park of the Balș estate (where Matila used to play as a little child and relax as a young adult) in order to emphasize that Dumbrăveni and not Ipotești was Eminescu's real place of birth and that his spirit was still roaming there.

In one of her 2014 articles, Gregori declares herself "a biographer by necessity and *irremediably debutante* [emphasis added]" (*La biographie à*

² *Tat Tvam Asi* is a Sanskrit phrase, translated as "Thou art that," (or as *That thou art, That art thou, You are that, That you are, You're it*). It appears at the end of an Upanishad section, and is repeated at the end of the subsequent sections as a refrain. The meaning of this saying is that the Self — in its original, pure, primordial state — is wholly or partially identifiable or identical with the Ultimate Reality that is the ground and origin of all phenomena.

l'épreuve : plaidoyer pour l'expérimentation 42). Is this bitter self-irony or, on the contrary, a defiant declaration of never-declining, bold, and always ingenious critical imagination? Perhaps both. Nevertheless, all her books provide evidence for her being an essentially patient reader who fights back darkness and hails the dawns of texts that have not shone upon us yet. This should be enough to bring books back from exile or, better, to save them from their *condition exilique*. Perfectly aware that today's approach to Life (as simulacrum, something non-consistent and essentially fragmented) dictates, as a reaction, "a reinvention of the individual as exception" (Gefen 17), the Romanian critic defies post-human skepticism and proves an exceptional intuition of the vital totality.

"Irremediably debutante" or not, Iliana Gregori seems to be one of the most equipped Romanian critics for the "battle" with *monstres sacres* such as Eminescu, Cioran and Matila Ghyka. Due to her outstanding *critical imagination*, the lives of Gregori's subjects emerge as essential - thus, necessary - aesthetic *forms* on the surface of our troubled sense of values.

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