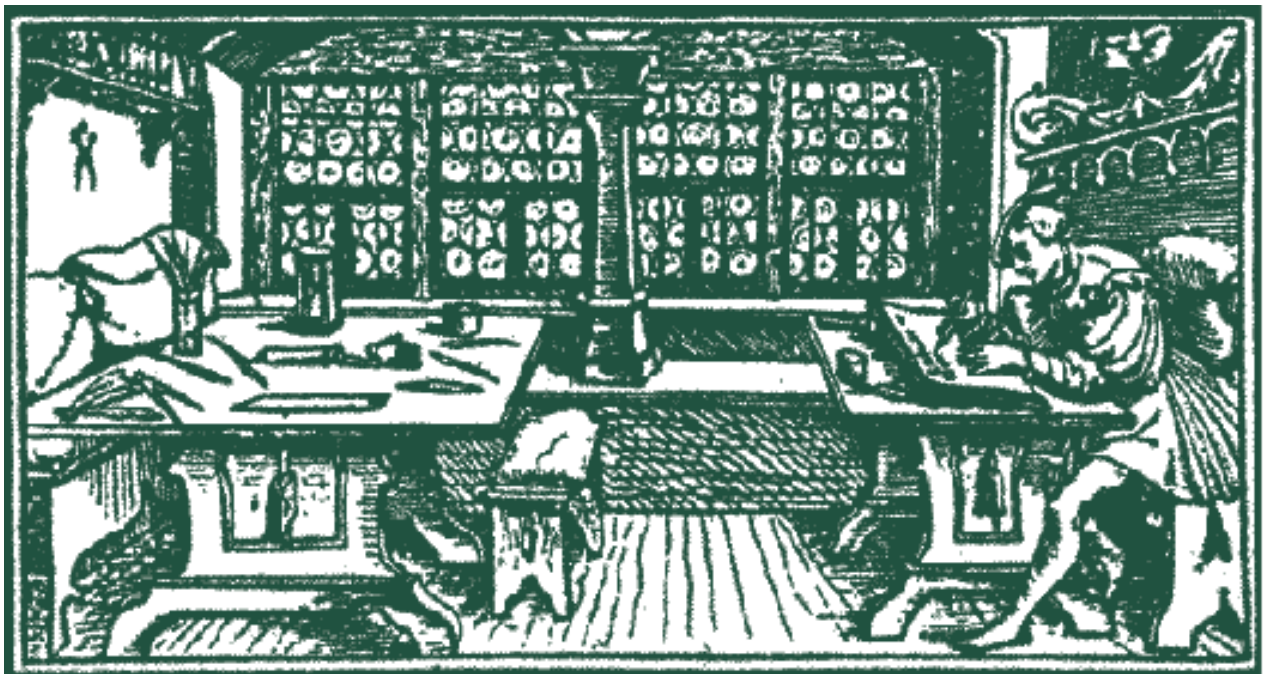




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DEATH REPRESENTATION IN LITERATURE. CULTURAL ILLUSIONS AND THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES

ADRIANA TEODORESCU*

ABSTRACT. *Death Representation in Literature. Cultural Illusions and Theoretical Principles.* Our study focuses on exploring the main aspects of death representation in literature as a simultaneous socio-cultural and aesthetic process, and on highlighting the existing close relationship between, on the one hand, the cultural illusion of transcendency or relativity of power and reality of death and, on the other hand, the major theoretical principles under which literature is or has been viewed. Based on current literature theorists, we define literary representation as an average between *mimesis* and *semiosis* and we examine the impact of this fact on death as object of representation. We discuss about language as a primary literary instrument as being remoteness from death, as well as a thanatic form *par excellence*. We also analyze critically several theories and perspectives of literary representation in general, theories and perspectives built on the literature-death binomial, pointing out that, generally speaking, there are two significant orientations of interpretation – of excessive vitality and death surplusage, detecting the cultural illusions they extend. The last chapter takes into account death status and functions in literature, aiming, among other things, to reveal some prejudices and stereotypes concerning the two orientations.

Keywords: death, literature, cultural illusion, representation, mimesis, semiosis, language.

REZUMAT. *Reprezentarea morții în literatură. Iluzii culturale și principii teoretice.* Studiul nostru își propune să examineze aspectele principale ale reprezentării morții în literatură, ca proces simultan socio-cultural și estetic și să sublinieze existența unei relații strânsă între, pe de o parte, iluzia culturală a transcenderii ori relativizării puterii și realității morții și, de cealaltă parte, principiile teoretice majore sub care literatura este sau a fost privită. Pe urmele unor teoreticieni actuali ai literaturii, definim reprezentarea literară ca o medie între *mimesis* și *semiosis* și cercetăm ce impact are acest lucru asupra morții ca obiect de reprezentat. Discutăm despre limbaj, în calitatea sa de instrument literar primar, ca fiind atât o îndepărtare de moarte, cât și o formă thanatică prin excelență. De asemenea, analizăm critic unele perspective și teorii ale reprezentării literare în general, perspective și teorii construite pe binomul literatură-moarte, arătând că, în general, este vorba despre două direcții semnificative de interpretare, cea a vitalității excesive și cea a surplusului de moarte, și surprinzând iluziile culturale care le subîntind. Ultimul capitol de dinaintea concluziilor are în vedere

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statutul și funcțiile morții în literatură, urmărind, între altele, să lămurească anumite prejudecăți și stereotipuri cu privire la acestea.

Cuvinte cheie: moarte, literatură, iluzie culturală, reprezentare, mimesis, semiosis, limbaj.

1. Introduction.

Issues of death representation in literature

Death representation in literature uses the same issues regarding literary representation in general, to which we add those due to the nature of death as object of research and problematic representation, impossible to catch in a unique formula,¹ characterized by a structural inconsistency and opaqueness.

Briefly speaking, there are two major cultural apprehensions on representation. Starting with Plato representation has been assimilated preponderantly with *mimesis* that is imitation. To all intents and purposes, the represented object or phenomenon was inferior to the represented reality – be it the case of an artistic or literary work, a background, any object or, speaking in Plato's sense, the being itself. A principle of a strong reality is asserted both incorruptible in the sense of the representation, and folded. Art (thus literature also) was gradually overestimated after being freed from Plato's critique of the copy, after acquiring meaning and respect, an overestimation of realism through the judgement – from a semantical and value perspective – of the artistic work based on the degree of rendering and encompassing reality.² The structuralist as well as the French³ post-structuralist movement focused from *mimesis* to *semiosis*, from representation as imitation to representation as self-representation. There is an extreme discontinuity inserted here, which is welcome at first, but which then tends to grow exaggerated. In a strong structuralist comprehension, representation doesn't preserve the object through which it has been generated, betraying it. Theorists like Antoine Compagnon⁴ or Umberto Eco⁵ succeed in putting an end to all nimieties and conceit of the first interpretation of representation, as well as to those of the second manner of interpretation, showing that representation - both on the artistic tangible level, and on the imaginary level – isn't a truthful copy of reality, developing

¹ Louis-Vincent Thomas, *La mort*, Paris, PUF, 1988, pp. 7-8.

² Platon, *Republica*, Prahova, Editura Antet, 2005.

³ See also: Roland Barthes, „L'Effet de réel”, in *Communications*, n° 11, 1968. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Curs de lingvistică generală*, tranlasyon by Irina Izverna, Iași, Polirom, 2007 [*Cours de linguistique générale*, 1914].

⁴ Antoine Compagnon, *Demonul teoriei – literatură și bun simț*, translation by Gabriel Marian and Andrei-Paul Corescu, Cluj, Editura Echinoc, 2007, p. 114 [*Le Démon de la théorie*, Paris, Seuil, 1998].

⁵ Umberto Eco, *Limitele interpretării*, translation from Italian by Ștefania Mincu and Daniela Craciun, Iași, Polirom, 2007 [*I limiti dell'interpretazione*, 1990].

distinct features and characteristics, being instead at once capable of bringing the possibility of its cognition. Thus, representation does not mean the complete equivalence of what is represented (the element to represent) with the environment/element that represents, but neither is it total disruption, which is a valid aspect at the process level and at the result or product level.

Further on, we will investigate several theoretical principles of death representation in literature with a view to discovering, while analyzing their thanatic dimensions, how these principles are bound to the cultural illusion of defeating death through a total representation of the mirror type (emphasizing *mimesis* as a coordinate of representation) or, on the contrary, through an incomplete death representation, which ends up in literature, torn from the reality of death, otherwise difficult to grasp (emphasizing *semiosis* as a coordinate of representation). Besides, we seek to reveal the functions of the literary representation related to death if we deal with an acceptance of death or, on the contrary, with defiance of death.

2. Language and death.

Between the linguistic being of death and the thanatic being of language

Language contains, *in nuce*, all the problems of representation and those of the death-culture relations. Language and its prime unity, word, are the most elementary forms of world representation. As Eco puts it, in a pragmatic understanding, on several occasions, there is a permanent operation of growth and transformation of significances within a word, not only on a temporal axis, but also on a synchronical axis. Language is also the main means through which culture has been established, and which has ensured its dynamics. Nevertheless, language does not occupy the entire space in culture, but it instils in all its areas, being, in its implicit state, always present and relating with other symbolic systems. The above mentioned Antoine Compagnon states that: *every sign, every language is fatally transparency and obstacle.*⁶ That is why, especially in the context of representation in literature, it is worth exploring the core that conditions it, and upon which literature has exerted and traced its own influences and conditions: language.

The relationship between language and death seems appropriate for a study starting from death towards language – observing those features of death, which participate in language structuring and functioning, but, symmetrically, from language towards death – in the sense of capturing a linguistic nature of death.

Immolating the nuances, there are two major perspectives on language. Either we choose to consider that language – in its potential form, not enabled properly, but also under its manifested forms of speaking and writing – reveals a principle of death, extracting the object from the environmental reality, depriving it from its substantiality. Or, on the contrary, we incline towards the other party, and

⁶ Antoine Compagnon, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

consider language a force opposed to death, which, through its linguistic baptism over the world, gets rid of its specific degradation and has the chance of another body. The disjunctive approach of the language-death relation is not yet necessary and it should be overcome. There is a demonstration offered by Françoise Dastur in a chapter entitled *Death, word, laughter* from his 1994 work.⁷ Language “manifests in the most radical way our finiteness. If, in the manner Hegel recognized it, language is in itself a power of death – as imposing a name to things means bringing them from nothingness to their real existence – this fact means – as Blanchot says, commenting on Hegel – that «when I talk, death is talking through me» and that death is what, at the same time, disconnects me from being and binds me with it”⁸. But, the same language represents, through Dastur, a *technique* of facing the limit of our existence and of our world, existence that is based on *abyss*. Moreover, language is the the most powerful means in fighting death, a fight that occurs through *utterance*.⁹ We are to be convinced further that language is both a source of death, a receptacle of death, and a force that is opposed to it permanently.

The linguist Michel Arrivé¹⁰ describes the language-death relation from three perspectives. The first one is that of the grammatical system of a language (of the French language mostly, but the notes are valid for most of the languages). Here, death is not present, except for the word *feu* – the archaized adjective that means *deceased*. Otherwise, the grammatical system does not contain categories that would separate what lives from what is dead, neither the spirited from the unspirited – although it seems that, at the origin, the distinction between neuter, masculine, and feminine was a mark of this separation – as it contains categories for marking the difference between singular and plural, or between feminine and masculine. The author’s conclusion is that, on the grammatical level, we *are immortal*.¹¹ On the lexical level we encounter a different situation. Languages “have an extremely large inventory of words to designate death and especially the act of dying”.¹² A French dictionary may provide up to 38 substitutes for the verb *to die*, among which to disappear, to de cease, to stop or even 103 in a dictionary that takes into account euphemisms or slang expressions, while for *to live* there are much less – 14 in the same dictionary that returns 38 synonyms. It seems that the vocabulary of death is characterized by a tendency for proliferation, which is explained by Arrivé through a taboo regarding the name of death and through the grammatical deficiency of the language related to death, although it is possible that this is not only a consequence of a cultural denying of death. Actually, the

⁷ Françoise Dastur, *Moartea. Eseu despre finitudine*, translation by Sabin Borș, București, Humanitas, 2006, pp. 85-95 [*La mort. Essai sur la finitude*, 1994].

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 109-110.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 109.

¹⁰ Michel Arrivé, “Langage”, in Philippe di Folco (ed.), *Dictionnaire de la mort*, Paris, Larousse, 2010, pp. 610-614.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 614.

¹² *Ibidem*.

grammatical aspect of death is due to a deeper layer – the subconscious of the language. Arrivé combines the Freudian theory of immortality that defines the unconscious (death being in Freud's conception a too abstract concept with a contents that is denial itself¹³ for it to be able to find its correspondent in the unconscious), which demonstrates the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign and shows that the language essence is negativity and difference,¹⁴ thus ending the analysis dedicated to the death-language relationship, underlining the thanatic principle and origin of language: "If death is the one that constitutes the origin of negation, then it is necessarily at the origin of language."¹⁵

Michel Picard does not aim to grasp an intrinsic death principle of language, the way Dastur approaches this matter, and he doesn't consider, in a Freudian interpretative line, as is the case of Arrivé himself, that death is too abstract a concept for it to void, linguistically, the contents till it reaches its pure negativity. Placed at the intersection between psychism and the social, between the imaginary and the symbolic, between *my death* and *the other's death*, death is in language neither a theme, nor a concept, nor a diagram, but simply a structure, or a form, a relation characterized by excellence of tension.¹⁶ It is not the abstract character of death that which determines, in Picard's opinion, the emptying of contents of the word *death*, and the dissolution of the referent, but, on the contrary, the richness and complexity of the reality of death, which cannot organize itself in a concrete referential formula. Another cause is the continuous defeat of the death-related thinking.

But Picard's position is very interesting and worth keeping in mind, as he places the problem of death within language somewhere at mid distance between the two directions analyzed previously. Starting from describing the word or words denoting death in terms of having as contents a vacant structure that functions, seemingly, as a *joker*, Picard wonders whether the power of metaphorisation of this joker is infinite and, moreover, arbitrary. And the answer he gives is that the figures death refers to in general, not only in literature, are reduced to a small number which may be articulated into a logical system, and which has closer connections with literature than we may be tempted to imagine.¹⁷ Thus, death, at least when it doesn't abuse its substitution qualities as a joker, doesn't embody a hermetic semiosis,¹⁸ but neither does it embody a void concept, functioning idly,

¹³ Sigmund Freud, *Opere 3. Psihologia inconștientului*, translation by G. Lepădatu, G. Purdea, V. Dem, București, Editura Trei, 2000.

¹⁴ Ferdinand de Saussure, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

¹⁵ Michel Arrivé, *op. cit.*, p. 614.

¹⁶ Michel Picard, *La littérature et la mort*, Paris, PUF, 1995 p. 35.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

¹⁸ Cf.: Umberto Eco, *Op.cit.*, pp. 348-361. The concept of illimited *semiosis* is borrowed by Eco from Charles Sanders Peirce and developed, from a semiotic code into to a textual code, while the concept of hermetic semiosis appears as a placement, in the representation mechanism, of the hermetism principles, semiosis being an interpretative practice of text and world. The hermetic semiosis may give birth to

as it retains its own limited semantic area. Nevertheless, death has a high degree of dispersion through the existence of one of its most powerful attitudinal correlatives, the fear of death – regarded by Picard with reserve (as he is not a very flexible follower of the modern tabooization of death)¹⁹ –, which triggers in language a phenomenon of migration of the image of death in areas of language which, theoretically, do not imply it.²⁰ A phenomenon that does not bother Picard as it doesn't imply more than the author assumes: “preponderantly a cultural phenomenon, death is, in fact, before anything else, a linguistic being.”²¹

Picard's perspective seems to us a little *too* optimistic and indebted to a cultural illusion of transcending death through literature. First of all, due to the fact that the semantic stability of death in literature and in culture as well, generally speaking, doesn't confine to the stability of the word, but it takes into account an entire linguistic context of relating the word *death* with other words, and this is not only in the phrases that partially borrow some images of death, but actually in contexts that take into account death or related phenomena as dying, mourning, agony. Another reason why we deem Picard's optics as too optimistic is related to the manner in which he treats death in literature, which conceals, in essence, an encapsulation of the hermetic semiosis principle in the principle of the literary representation of death.

3. Thanatic articulations and vitalistic articulations of literature. Between murder and the slap in the face of death

Before we start exploring the ways in which death is represented in literature, as well as the motivations and logic of functioning of death representation as a process, we will concentrate on the thanatic articulations of literature, as we did in the case of the representation and language, and we will attempt to draw a map of the literary realm in order to make them visible.

Undoubtedly, the first region in literature where we can identify a principle of death is that of language, thus the magma itself, the mere literary substance. What has been said about language reaches literature itself as, on the one hand it is valid for its contents (literature being, in fact, a language), and on the other hand it retains the same possibility of strongly polarized interpretation, as in the case of language. From a certain point of view, literature, and its mere existence, is an

hermetic deviation. And this would be explained in the following manner: not only a text, a reality is interpreted abusively, but that text, respectively that reality, risks being disintegrated under the action of over-interpretation. Otherwise, massive over-interpretation has, as a result, the annihilation of the object that had generated it, a detachment from it and passing into irrelevance of the possible information connected with it. There are big chances that the ludic and creativity would manifest freely within this leeway, but not so big as to maintaining a correct representation of the object or of the initial text, giving birth to a series of incontinent representations and portraying a sort of *impulse* of representation.

¹⁹ See also: Philippe Ariès, *L'Homme devant la mort*, Paris, Seuil, 1977.

²⁰ Michel Picard, *op. cit.*, p. 33. One of the examples offered by Picard is “petite mort”.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 35 (our translation).

evasion from the natural temporality of the world, and an abeyance of both the creator, during his moments of writing, and the reader, during his moments of reading, out of reality itself. As Albert Camus puts it, there is a time of living and a time of confessing, and there is, of course, a time of writing, but it is the most unnatural of all, an un-immediate time that betrays the other two.²² Besides, literary worlds, once created, are something else than the real ones, and if we may talk about their ontology, this is, obviously, a fictional one²³, which means, if not death itself, at least a periphery of the living. They are not ontologically autonomous, being (in line with the reading theories of the last decades)²⁴ incapable to exist without the reader's real physical sustentation. On the other hand, due to the selection and isolation activity of some events from the real world or from the author's interior forum, and through the (conscious or not) processing for incorporating it in the literary work, death is brought to the foreground, as it happens also if we embrace Freud's position on the artistic work as sublimation, mentioning though that sublimation may not necessarily refer to the sexual pulsation, also including the death pulsation.²⁵ In fact, almost the same aspect must have been pointed out by Jean Duvignaud, when he observes that to write means to detach traumatically, through betrayal, from the violence of nature and, implicitly, of death, but it also means to render this violence, as writing involves itself a destroying act specific to the entire culture.²⁶

On the other hand, things are not easier for the author either, as he experiences his death through self-fictionalization²⁷ (when he intends to mirror himself in what he writes), and, generally speaking, the death he experiences is even more consistent, through its absorption in the literary work²⁸ - a death, that in a post-structuralist view, acquires a sacrificial dimension, as the author must die on behalf of the reader²⁹. Ruth Menahem expresses this reality of the author's death in the harsher terms of murder: "Every creation is a murder; it signals its creator's death."³⁰ In his book dedicated to Blanchot's work, Jean-Philippe Miraux states on

²² Albert Camus, *Fața și reversul, Nunta, Mitul lui Sisif, Omul revoltat, Vara*, translation from French by Irina Mavrodin, Mihaela Simion, Modest Morariu, București, Rao, 2001 [*Noces*, 1939].

²³ Toma Pavel, *Lumi ficțională*, translation by Maria Mociornița, București, Editura Minerva, 1992.

²⁴ See also: Wolfgang Iser, *Actul lecturii. O teorie a efectului estetic*, translation from German by Romanița Constantinescu, Pitești, Editura Paralela 45, 2006 [*Der Akt des Lesens*, 1976].

²⁵ See also: J. Havelka, "Death and Creativity", in Morgan, Mary Ann; Morgan, John D. (eds.), *Thanatology: A liberal Arts Approach*, London, Ontario, King's College, 1988, pp. 155-162. In J. Havelka's opinion, the unconscious manifests in the artistic work, influencing directly the artist's creativity. The unconscious, headquarters of death anxiety and pulse of non-being is, through art, integrated in a symbolic order of the one that receives art to be faded away and overcome in his negativity. Death is somehow remote.

²⁶ Jean Duvignaud, *Fêtes et civilisations, suivi de la Fête aujourd'hui (essai)*, Paris, Actes Sud, 1991, p. 229.

²⁷ Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils*, Paris, Galilée, 1977.

²⁸ Michel Foucault, *Ce este un autor. Studii și conferințe*, translation by Bogdan Ghiu și Ciprian Mihali, Cluj, Idea Design & Print Editură, 2004 [*Dits et écrits*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994].

²⁹ Roland Barthes, *Le bruissement de la langue*, Paris, Seuil, 1984, pp. 61-67.

³⁰ Ruth Menahem, *La mort apprivoisée*, Paris, Editions Universitaires, 1973, p. 164 (our translation).

the account of the non-symmetrical relationship between the writer and his work that: "The author signs his work, but the work doesn't designate him."³¹

And, since we've mentioned Maurice Blanchot, it is worth presenting his theory on literature and language. In his 1949 work³² the French writer adopts a Hegelian perspective on language and literature, highlighting the fact that, through its entering the word, the real world undergoes a process of dispart and displacement that implies an experience of nothingness, of death. Blanchot explains this fact through the linguistic dimension of the abstract, which de-realizes initially the real presence that it takes over,³³ but for the human being, in general, and especially for the writer it represents the exertion of power over the world, a domination of a reality that is no longer that reality. Blanchot gives a simple example: the word *cat* accumulates the non-existence of a living cat with its linguistic existence.³⁴ The negative power of literature consists in the transformation of the world and has as a consequence the dissolution of representation and the emergence of presence. Literature, through the death it is responsible of, no longer represents the world which triggered it, to which it preexisted, and presents itself as a reality of a different kind: if in the extraliterary space the word gives meaning to the object, in literature the meaning functions as an object, achieving textual materiality. But isn't this consequence in itself a mark of the literature negativity (which is indebted to the language negativity, wrapped in the act of designation),³⁵ but an expression of its positivity. Thus, in Blanchot's theory, death is a functional principle of literature, with undoubtable benefits, ensuring the validity of the signification process and literary existence. We can even dare to say that for Blanchot death is a phenomenon belonging more to the text than to the subject, which is always frustrated by death: "As long as I live, I am a mortal being, but, when I die, I cease to be a being, I cease also to be mortal, I am no longer capable of dying, and the death that lies ahead horrifies me, as I see it the way it is: ceasing to be death, it is the impossibility of dying,"³⁶

A consistent position concerning the thanatic force of literature we encounter in Diana Fuss' article, published in 2003.³⁷ The work focuses especially on the corpse representation in literature, more exactly in poetry, defining the concept of *corpse poem* as a poem written in the first person, on behalf of the deceased, but also contains general appreciations regarding the connection of death to literature. *Corpse poem* is a lyric subspecies of the 19th century, becoming recently a comic or theologic formula, which transforms in the 20th century into a

³¹ Jean-Philippe Miraux, *Maurice Blanchot. Quiétude et inquiétude de la littérature*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2005 (our translation).

³² Maurice Blanchot, *La part du feu*, Paris, Gallimard, 1949, pp. 305-345.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 327-328.

³⁵ Cf.: Philippe Miraux, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

³⁶ Maurice Blanchot, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

³⁷ Diana Fuss, "Corpse Poem", in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Autumn, 2003), pp. 1-30.

species that follows the utterance of certain critical attitudes towards the political movements, towards the historical context or the literary genre itself. This species is characterized by Fuss as a mixture between a poetic art (as writers can violate the frontier of death in order to do something that no man is allowed – to speak as dead, from the grave) and an *ars moriendi*, prompting the oxymoronic formula: *Ars essendi mortis*. Among those who used this literary species Fuss enumerates Emily Dickenson, Thomas Hardy, Randall Jarell and Richard Wright. The author notices two major aspects of this species, casting lights that may seem contradictory at the first sight, extrapolating over literature in its relation to death. First of all, she identifies cultural and social functions in the poems analyzed, and among the most important is the subtle implicit critique of the way the 20th century society related to a corpse, driving it away from the representation sphere and from the public discourse. The critique undertaken by the *corpse poem* materializes, on the level of form, through the compensating presence of the body that, as in Dickenson's poem, becomes weak, defenceless, haunted, and not the other way round. We must note, thus, that the relationship between literature and reality doesn't have to have as a consequence a miniature, mimetic representation of the latter. The literature-reality rapport may be direct or in inverse proportion, and, as the rules of literary representation are less easy to decode, what matters is that this relation exists. Although, this capacity of literature to place itself in a ratio, which includes a disruption from reality, is also a proof of a relative autonomy of literature towards reality, of an existence of a certain literary specificity, partly adjusted by a principle of death. Fuss states this herself, referring to the *corpse poem*: "the poem may absorb the deceased, because literature, as an environment, has already incorporated death."³⁸

Yet, from a different angle, we discover the living pole of literature. Writing literature may be the equivalent, after all, with a protection against death, as writing doesn't involve dying and persevering in this activity may create an impression of remoteness and even disappearance of death. Douglas Davies conceives literature in terms of *words against death*,³⁹ and according to more recent literary theories, the author doesn't find his end in his work, the latter constituting only its beginning under the shape of what is not purely conscious intentionality. For example, Compagnon believes that, no matter how inexhaustible and qualitatively superior a literary work would be, it cannot discount the original meaning, which had functioned as a stimulus for this.⁴⁰ In fact, the author's presence in his own text functions as an interception of the interpretational bleeding, that is, pushing it a little, of death, of sacrificing the legitimate significances in favour of those degenerated, néoplasique.⁴¹

³⁸ Diane Fuss, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

³⁹ Douglas J. Davies, *Death, Ritual and Belief. The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites*, London, New York, Continuum, 2002, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Antoine Compagnon, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁴¹ See also: Umberto Eco, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

The only way of understanding and encountering once again the lost time is, as Proust proves it, by writing. And we can imagine the effort: searching for the lost time means seven volumes.⁴² An effort that ends though⁴³ by finding that time again. And the paradox is impressive. What Marcel had lost (finally nothing else but himself, among the fragments) has been found by Proust, the author, who gave up on himself, socially speaking, in order to save Marcel. This is a mutually accepted compromise, and both of them are simultaneously dead and alive. And this paradox is sensed in the appreciations, slightly contradictory, on the literary work, which meet in the last volume. Although he sees literary work, in the long run, as a *large cemetery* with graves from which nothing can be read anymore, the author speaks and traces the rules of writing demeanour regarding his own work in the following way: any hour lost on behalf of literature and writing, as in the case of a *small talk* with an acquaintance is immolating a reality for something that doesn't exist.⁴⁴ We may understand from these words that the true life of a writer is when he creates, and that his work itself is the *real* world, not its pre-existent context. But Proust doesn't praise literature in general, as not of any type of literature has the capacity of sifting the essential, the specific of one existence from the stereotypical and its irrelevance. The descriptive literature, which attempts to duplicate the entire fabric of *lines and surfaces* is considered by Proust as the most remote from reality and this is due to the fact that it abolishes the possibility of experiencing for the profound ego throughout the past and the present – an ego that may be author's and the reader's, too.

In his work, J. Havelka investigates the manner of intersection between death and literature as functioning principles.⁴⁵ Moreover, literature is placed under the more comprehensive sign of creativity. This is characterized, from a structural point of view, through a *refusal of death*, refusal that must be separated from any form of pathology,⁴⁶ basically, a denial specific to culture itself. Concerning this aspect, Havelka distinguishes between creativity and the natural strategies of defence of the individual and society, strategies that imply a bigger effort and a great amount of energy. We conclude thus that the literary and artistic work are born aiming towards immortality and, paradoxically, they have, at once, the advantage of prompting a meeting with death, which ends not through retention, but through overcoming, as, when the artist creates, he is oriented towards a semantically consistent world, inside which death is just a reality among others, and the temporality is different from the real one.⁴⁷ In Havelka's opinion, the world is for the artist a way of a *creative* updating of the self,

⁴² Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, 1913-1927.

⁴³ Marcel Proust, *Timpul regăsit*, translation from French by Radu Cioculescu, București, Editura Minerva, 1976 [*Le temps retrouvé*, 1927].

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ J. Havelka, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ See also: Louis-Vincent Thomas, "La mort au XX^e siècle", in Serge Bureau (ed.), *Aujourd'hui, la mort*, Québec, Radio-Canada Chaîne Culturelle FM, 1996, p. 40.

⁴⁷ J. Havelka, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-156.

although it isn't characterized by safety,⁴⁸ being not the prerogative of the weak ones, but implying, on the contrary, a lot of courage. The explanation regarding the actual contents of this courage remains unclear. If creativity doesn't have some nuances and it is just a monolithic force, an *expanded reality*,⁴⁹ and therefore with no abrupt encounter with death and no direct relationship with the creator's intellectual or spiritual identity, but with obvious benefits for the personality of the creator, who frees himself of anguish, what is the reason for which assuming this creativity supposes courage? It is true that, as Havelka observes, the risk of failure is there but the courage would mean that these risks should be realized at the fullest. Then, it is interesting though to investigate how this theory of expanded reality would cope with the literature or art that represents death. A convincing conclusion would be that what is represented is not death, as a literaturization or artisticization of death had occurred, an estrangement from the real object 'death', and yet, the question still remains – in what way is affected the expanded reality? Is it limited? Is it encouraged? We tend to believe that, most likely, everything depends on the type of literature and representation, and that there's no general rule concerning this aspect. Returning to the issue of creativity, we could say that its definition as expanded reality, as well as its ontological attributes of altering the creator's being and reality through the artistic work resembles the hermeneutical definition given by Gadamer to the artistic work as *enhancing the being*⁵⁰ and the way Eco interprets it, referring mostly to the reader, as the capacity of the literary work to compensate for *our metaphysical scarcity*.⁵¹

A similar perspective, but stressing the traits of the literary and artistic work more than the conditions and energies it generates, is to be found with Jacques Drillon.⁵² He regards the literary work as an exception from death which adjusts the human world, an absolutely defiant exception, being a *slap in the face of death*.⁵³ Drillon attempts to explain this thing and to get rid of potential stereotypical approaches, which would have as an inconvenient taking the immortality of the literary work for granted. What represents the basis of the immortality of the literary work is the *consubstantial limitless*.⁵⁴ The dynamics of the work gets so close to one of a human life that it borrows from it character of *being*: "Masterpiece is a being. If I say «Rimbaud», who is designated? Little Arthur, breastfed by his mother, the young genial poet, or the love merchant? Do I

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*. p. 156. The sum of risks that meet the creator on the path of creative self-expression is put under the sign of what Havelka names, taking over the term of Maslow – Johna's syndrome, defined by an anxiety invasion that becomes repressive. See also: Abraham Maslow, *The Further Reaches of Human Nature*, New York, Viking, 1971.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*. p. 157.

⁵⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Adevăr și metodă*, translation by G. Cercel, G. Kohn, C. Petcana și L. Dumitru, București, Editura Teora, 2001 [*Wahrheit und Methode*, 1960].

⁵¹ Umberto Eco, *Șase plimbări prin pădurea narativă*, translation by Ștefania Mincu, Constanța, Pontica, 1997.

⁵² Jacques Drillon, "L'œuvre est une non-mort à elle seule", in Frédéric Lenoir, Jean-Philippe Tonnac (éds.), *La mort et l'immortalité. Encyclopédie des savoirs et de croyances*, Bayard, 2004, pp. 967-979.

⁵³ *Ibidem*. p. 967.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

speak of the same man, compared to his sister's talking about him? «Rimbaud» doesn't exist only in a movement of being. (See Bergson, Proust). Masterpiece never ends, just as the being never ends."⁵⁵ Nevertheless, death isn't entirely made impossible by and for the masterpiece, says Drillon himself, as "it may die, just like the human, but it is never completed."⁵⁶ The difference resides in the fact that, without being finite, which is specific to the human condition, the death of the artistic work is relatively benign: it starts, it exists and, at a certain point, it may also end.

On the whole, our conclusion is similar to our statement on the account of language. In other words, literature is a surplus of life, just as it is a surplus of death, and existence in excess, contained by literature, evolves simultaneously with death which runs through literature. Probably one of the most inspired metaphors may be that of the *face* and of the *reverse*, employed by Camus in order to designate the relationship between life and death, between the joy of living and the terror of knowing that everything that happens during lifetime is dying.⁵⁷ In this way, over the thanatic map of literature superposes the map of life, while the perspective of literature and art (understood not just as death, but as murder) are associated with that makes from literature and art a potential access to immortality, contributing, in its turn, to feeding the mythology of immortality through the artistic work. All essential points in literature have double valencies: the author, the reader, the act of writing, the reading, the literary work itself. Culture, in its different moments, various literary artistic and philosophical movements, through their poetics and methodologies developed for exploring and explaining the reality, all these may emphasize, more or less, any one of the two directions. Literature re-states, at a smaller scale, the cultural problematics of death.

4. The status and functions of death in literature

Historian Michel Vovelle considers literature to be one of the most privileged means of death representation, and maybe mostly in the novelistic area. Which is only normal, he states, as death is the essential condition of any human adventure,⁵⁸ a condition that literature attempts to respond to, in its own way. But which, in fact, is this specific way of literature, as we are about to demonstrate in this section. Just as Paterson⁵⁹ reveals, we may also state, at first, that death representation in literature is different from the telecasted death.⁶⁰ Analysing death in literature isn't just about examining (and it doesn't even necessarily imply this

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*. p. 975 (our translation).

⁵⁶ *Ibidem* (our translation).

⁵⁷ Albert Camus, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸ Michel Vovelle, *La mort et l'Occident de 1300 à nos jours*, Paris, Gallimard, 2001, [1983], p. 726.

⁵⁹ Gary H. Paterson, "An Approach to the Treatment of Death in Literature", in Mary Ann Morgan, John D. Morgan (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 170.

⁶⁰ See also: Glennys Howarth, *Death and Dying. A Sociological Introduction*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2007, pp. 103-116.

aspect) the manner in which the writer relates to the death depicted in his work, the degree of nearness through the theme of death of the reader to the text, aspects considered very important by Paterson. But, as he further specifies, it is also significant the literary direction according to which the representation of death is shaped. Paterson doesn't insist that much on this particular aspect, offering as an example of investigation methods such leads as: ways in which the emotional and psychic trauma of death and dying are graphically concentrated, the existence or inexistence of signs of a symbolism of immortality, minimizing or overbidding the presence of death in the masterpiece, aspects that don't say much about the representation of death in literature.

First of all, there are types and types, categorially speaking, of literature, which contain a predefined set of world relating and implicitly, death relating modalities. For example, death in the police novels contributes to action deployment, being, generally, reduced from the point of view of its signifieds, and standardised. The situation is similar in the case of adventure novels for young people, or not necessarily, while at the other end stand tragedy and elegy. Another factor which should make us aware of the fact that, when we approach the problem of death representation in literature, generally speaking we can do that only if we admit a considerable approximation is the qualitative difference of literature. When we say *literature* we make, in most of the cases, an inherent axiologic judgement and we consider literature as an art species with value *per se*. An exercise that could reveal the fact that we deal with massive abstractization would be to imagine that when we say (using more precious formulas) that *literary death is a slap in the face of death*, that literature means words against death, or even that death, in its linguistic quality, is a tension, an obstacle in the way of its narrative, we refer to the most prosaic death of an adventure novel – e.g. the murder of the musketeer X in d'Artagnan's troupe, etc. The effect of such an exercise is humourous and it may help us to conclude the following. Firstly, not any literary work is a *slap in the face of death*, as there is good and bad literature, and secondly, not any death representation, even if belonging to the best literary work, is mandatorily extremely relevant to knowing death, as, beyond principles, death representation means *representations* of death. Thus, we should avoid the idea that risks taking the form of a prejudice, according to which the simple death representation in literature would inherently involve the courage of confronting death.

Now that we've taken all the necessary precautions and we've paid the necessary attention to the particular and the relative, we return to our discussion on death representation in literature in general, as there are, obviously, widely valid features of this process through which death enters literature. What is so remarkable in literary art is that it manages to unite the human particular, even the most atypical, with the human general, the aesthetic, which is a category that rejects the brute reality (and it may exempt from ethical and ontological) with the real. We notice thus that there is a functioning affinity between death and literature, death

being itself, like literature, the incredible average between the typical and the particular, between the perfect exteriority and total interiority.

It's time we returned to Michel Picard and to the fact that we have called his attitude regarding the semiotic stability of *death* as being too optimistic. As we have pointed out above, Picard isn't afraid of the fact that death, as a linguistic structure, could know the semantic metastasis that isn't extraneous to literary representations, and he considers that there is a limited number of figures to which literary death could point. We will see how this optimism lacks any foundation two times – firstly, because, in his desire to separate the literature from the sciences of *reality*, Picard throws it in the arms of psychoanalysis, which raises some questions on the *literarity* of death which Picard discusses, and secondly, because, despite the limitation of significances that death would acquire in literature, the French author incorporates, through his explanations, the hermetic semiosis principle in the functioning principle of literature.

Actually, in his book, after the first part, which is preponderantly theoretical, he attempts to demonstrate that there is a limited number of significances of death from a perspective that seems to combine Freudian and literary theories. His demarche, following which death at the first person, in Jankélévitch's⁶¹ formula, proves to have a stable connection with the death of the Father, while the death of the other is a replica, from the imaginary area, to the death of the Mother,⁶² and, as a consequence, the same demarche concluding that fear of castration precedes fear of death⁶³ becomes suspicious. And this is not because such an approach wouldn't be justified, or because it wouldn't bring enough information for the first theoretical pages on death representation in literature, but because it betrays the author's desideratum to grasp what is specific to death in literature, without subduing it to reality or to other thinking systems and world interpretation systems. Picard states that there are (and we cannot avoid noticing that, in many aspects, he is thoughtful enough in intercepting problems neglected for a long time by researchers of death and literature) three major evils that influence literature: the hegemony of literary history, the referential illusion and the methodological empiricism.⁶⁴ The referential illusion is among the most contested issues by Picard as it is also the source of the methodological empiricism because of the lack of knowledge for the area and the object of research. By referential illusion the author understands the classification of the literary texts as forms of reality (here are to be included ideologies and thinking systems), lacking specificity and investigating according to this assumption.⁶⁵ This is Picard's reproach to the historians. It would be fair enough if things would stay here, but, for example, he

⁶¹ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *La mort*, Paris, Flammarion, 1977.

⁶² Michel Picard, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 13-14, p. 18.

reproaches Montaigne his conception of death, indebted to his thought system.⁶⁶ And, after all, the psychoanalytical concepts which the author uses in order to delineate the main death significances in literature are indebted to a certain system of thought, to a set of references that originate outside literature itself. The psychoanalytical vocabulary is obvious also in describing the process where death enters literature: figuration, displacement and condensation.⁶⁷

It is also paradoxical that, on the one hand, Michel Picard focuses on the evanescent aspect of death: “«Death» in general doesn’t exist, therefore, when we talk about it, we talk almost always about something else,”⁶⁸ but on the other hand, he insists frequently on the consubstantial connection, which is exceptional in its strictest sense, between literature and death.⁶⁹ The resulting confusions are not few. If death doesn’t exist and any expression denies it and *displaces* it, then literature does the same, too, a fact that abolishes the principle of restricted significances, stated above by Picard, and demonstrates that the author considers, at least to a certain extent, that the action of hermetic semiosis in literary death representation is inherent. Again, if there is a difference between death in literature and the real death, the one searched vainly by the historians in literary texts, as even Picard seems to believe, then there’s no point in talking about similarity, and under no circumstances such a categorical and dramatical similarity, as the author understands it, between literature and death as an effective reality. We might talk about similarity between literature and literary death, a fact that would be bizarre enough, taking into account that literature ensures and imposes upon death a certain face, as Picard pleads. We are tempted into thinking that at the basis of these incomplete logic statements is the author’s desire of cleansing literature of the mimetical approaches of literary theories and of the common sense, approaches that could become even more unpleasant when death is in question, as well as perspectives of death researchers, most of them historians, anthropologists or sociologists, who neglect the specificity of literature. Death in literature, says Picard, “can be anything but verbal,”⁷⁰ “always metaphorical.”⁷¹ But new traps lie ahead once again, as, what does actually mean *only verbal*? Is it outside reality or just having a supplementary feature – *verbal, metaphorical* – capable of manifesting also in the disrupton towards reality?

Death in literature, and this aspect is obvious with Michel Picard, too, doesn’t lend itself to one referential interpretation, but also to an aestheticized interpretation through the literary theories that, based much on the linguistic nature of literature, emphasize the differences – structural, functional, of reception – that intercede between literature and the real world, those theories that coagulate around the semiotic nucleus of literature, abandoning that of mimesis. From such a perspective, as literature has so

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 151-172.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 187 (our translation).

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 188.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 39 (our translation).

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

little in common with the reality (that constitutes only a static framework) and whose influence, if it exists, is covered by the literality of the text, death can be no more than a matter of aesthetic effect. At the same time, yet, we don't want to create the impression that we would deny such a process of aesthetization and its relative legitimacy. This process does exist and it is traceable in the hermetic semiosis and even in the unlimited semiosis as a processes specific to the language as well as a potential danger to the literary and artistic representation.⁷² Literature has this fascinating power of transforming the world, of intervening on it, and of re-creating it. But this doesn't necessarily imply that its connection with literature dissolves. We've already seen while discussing Diana Fuss' conception on death in literature that the relation between reality and fiction may be indirect, reversed, compensative on behalf of literature, distorted, without becoming irrelevant, and semantically void. Despite the fact that reality is residual in relation to literature, but also literature in relation to death, death in literature may provide information concerning the reality, the attitudes of the individual and of society towards death, concerning the writer's perspective, a direction or literary species regarding death in the same way, as, for example, the funeral social practices reveal their connection with the imaginary or with the religious literature. It is not the literature – reality, death literature – reality of death relations that should be questioned, but the methods of analyzing them. It is certain that including notions about death in reality will not ruin anything, when studying death in a literary text, and this thing is even more difficult, as this is a topic around which great precautions are taken, with the possibility of reaching ignorance or, on the contrary, to the total disappearance of precautions, clearing the way for clichés and preconceptions. But when the human attitude towards death and its representation is analyzed, we should take into account the specific means of death representations in literature, as literature fills its own space within the vast scope of reality. That is why literature, in a general way, and literary representation of death have not only an aesthetic function (for knowledge, or cathartic),⁷³ but also an ontological and super-aesthetic function,⁷⁴ which is greatly highlighted by the Romanian poet Horea Bădescu: "I've brought into this world so many things/ and I didn't know/ that death itself may be born/ through words"⁷⁵ or by Albert Camus: "As a creator I gave life to death itself. This is all that I had to do before dying."⁷⁶

⁷² Sandra-Marie Glatigny notices that the solution for the significances bleeding, for which we could blame death in literature, is myth usage, whose structure has a curdling role and allows a layered understanding of the world. ("Littérature et mythe", in Philippe di Folco (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 635-637).

⁷³ This is the function that many have in mind when they consider that simple representation of death has been already a courage in facing death.

⁷⁴ See also: Umberto Eco, *Opera deschisă*, translation by Cornel Mihai Ionescu, Pitești, Paralela 45, 2002 [*Opera aperta*, 1962]. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Op.cit.* Matei Călinescu, *A citi, a reciti. Către o poetică a (re)lecturii*, translation from English by Virgil Stanciu, Iași, Polirom, 2003.

⁷⁵ Horea Bădescu, "Cântece de viață și de moarte", in Basarab Nicolescu (ed.), *Moartea astăzi*, translation from French by Mirabela Fătu, Curtea Veche, 2008, p. 9.

⁷⁶ Albert Camus, *Carnete*, translation from French by Micaela Ghițescu, București, Editura Rao, 2002, p. 450 [*Carnets I*, 1962. *Carnets II*, 1964. *Carnets III*, 1989].

5. Conclusions. Death, literature – a (too) complex relationship

The literary representation of death is not situated exclusively on the side of the *mimesis*, just as it cannot be subdued only to the representation understood as *semiosis*. In other words, both ideas that literature neutralizes the knowledge of death, projecting the reader in an environment of immortality as a result of activating the anti-thanatological forces of language (as a means of building literature or due to other mechanisms of literature that develop a disrupting relation with the reality) and the fact that death may be perfectly illustrated by literature, becoming a direct source, beyond any literarity are false for anthropologists or historians of death if they are analyzed to their full extent. Behind each of them we find theoretical principles, doubled by the cultural illusion of controlling death, either through circumscription or framing, or through transcending or relativization. The cultural illusions (as an anthropological fact and result of the confrontation between man and death) generated by the idea of literary representation of death are inevitable and might even become dangerous. For instance, when they become stereotypes, as in the case of the *slap in the face of death*, which we have discussed above. As a consequence they must be inferred in the logic and structure of certain theoretical functioning principles of literature in general and of literary representation of death in particular, being supervised without contesting their legitimacy. The relation between literature and death exists, it is permanent and complex but, isolated of any literary and/or theoretical context, as death representation in literature doesn't translate the courage of facing death, as well as it doesn't show indifference towards death. That would be much too easy.

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UTOPIA AND UTOPIC CONSTRUCTION IN PLATO'S *THE REPUBLIC*

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ABSTRACT. *Utopia and utopic construction in Plato's The Republic.* The paper outlines the complex process of conceiving an ideal construction of the city in Plato's *The Republic*. Utopia becomes for Plato a true method of knowing a reality founded on the Idea. Imaginative freedom, control and ideal purging circumscribe such an approach.

Keywords: Plato, *The Republic*, utopia, ideal city, reason, cardinal virtues.

REZUMAT. *Utopie și construcție ideală în Republica lui Platon.* Articolul evidențiază procesul complex al conceperii unei construcții ideale în cetatea din *Republica* lui Platon. Utopia devine la Platon o adevărată metodă de cunoaștere a realității fundamentate pe Idee. Libertatea imaginativă, controlul și purificarea prin ideal circumscriu o astfel de abordare.

Cuvinte cheie: Platon, *Republica*, utopie, cetatea ideală, rațiune, virtuți cardinale.

“Pamphila in the twenty-fifth book of her *Memorabilia* says that the Arcadians and Thebans, when they were founding Megalopolis, invited Plato to be their legislator; but that, when he discovered that they were opposed to equality of possessions, he refused to go.”¹ This is how Diogenes Laertius presents, in his popular *Lives and opinions of eminent philosophers*, the principled response of the Athenian philosopher to an offer not at all trifling. Ultimately, such an offer would have integrated in Plato's horizon a central wish of his philosophy and engagement: the possibility of an actual construction of a city, according to the imperatives and standards of excellence in his metaphysical-political philosophy. Then, where does this surprising refusal come from? The reason stressed above, that is, the refusal of the Theban nobility, in concordance with the precepts of its tradition and with its interests, to establish community equality of ownership, provides a momentary illumination of the exigencies that would safeguard such a socio-political construction. If an undertaking of this kind is to be achieved, then the founder of this feat of social engineering must not proceed by half measures.

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¹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and opinions of eminent philosophers*, (books 1-5), translated by R. D. Hicks, Cambridge, Harvard U. P., 1972, online at: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0258>.

A similarly uncompromising note of this imperative is heard in the entire theoretical corpus that Plato's seminal *The Republic* develops. One of the dialogues from the age of Plato's mature thinking, *Politeia* represents the first and foremost the *magnum opus* of exoteric Platonism. The complexity and richness in this dialogue about justice provides openings towards most of the essential dimensions that constitute Plato's philosophy. From aspects of morality to elements of epistemology, from metaphysics to aesthetics and politics, not to mention rhetoric, stylistics and mytho-poetics, all the capital themes of his thinking are touched upon here in their most important articulations. In this paper, I propose to outline a brief series of meanings and ideas correlated with the gesture of refusal mentioned by Diogenes Laertius. We shall delineate how, in *The Republic*, a truly utopian method of knowledge is configured, a path that leads from a mere exercise of imagination on the ideal city to the visionary metaphysical nucleus of the philosopher.

The Republic is undoubtedly one of the original sources of an entire tradition of thinking about *eu/ou-topos*, that is, a virtual space which is concomitantly ideal/good/optimal, and is nowhere, in which an ideal community or state is fostered. The utopian exercise is defined, even with Plato, as dreamwork performed within the interval between an optimal social structure and a city suspended in the rarefied unmapped space of mental engendering. This is the profile of an interstice engineering, in which coordinates are circumscribed by the very limits within which such action unfolds: utopia becomes with Plato a bizarre synthesis between ideal desire and ideal knowing, between the pleasure of creation and the responsibility of reflection, between a desideratum of the prototype and a critique of the social-political actuality.

The construction of the ideal *polis*, the *Kallopolis*, as Plato calls it at a certain point, is initiated in *The Republic* as an auxiliary undertaking, by which the identification of the eidetic structure of justice could be accomplished. I argue that the founder of the city will gradually and puzzlingly be pushed by a hubris of reason, one which can only occur under the permissive accolade of such dreamwork. The logical progression of a sketch of the utopian city will sway the dialogue, at least quantitatively from the theme of virtue under consideration towards the necessary conditions for the social construct. Let us consider relevant the types of relations established between the founder, the one who imagines the utopia, and the product itself. It is as if Socrates were discovering a type of freedom and a new responsibility when he sets off on this imaginative path. The transformation is reciprocal. One could say that books I-VIII articulate knowledge by utopia, a knowledge of human nature as well as of the metaphysical principles that watch over good governance. Utopia is revealed as a clarifying lens for the Idea. At the beginning of book VII, after tracing the essential contours of the leaders of the ideal city and of their paideutic itinerary, Plato urges the governing philosophers thus:

So you must go down, each of you in turn, to join the other in their dwelling-place. You must get used to seeing in the dark. When you get used to it, you will see a thousand times better than the people there do. You will be able to identify all the images there, and know

what they are images of, since you have seen the truth of what is beautiful and just and good. In this way, the government of the city, for us and for you, will be a waking reality rather than the kind of dream in which most cities exist nowadays, governed by people fighting one another over shadows and quarrelling with one another about ruling, as if ruling were some great good.²

I interpret that “for us and for you” above means that a utopian construction as conceived in the dialogue is an undertaking that only a transformed, enlightened philosopher can take to its completion. Plato demands a very special position for he who is engaged in constructing it – he will have to be effectively subjected to a responsible and rational distance, a dimension of the full value that the knowledge of truth by means of ideas reveals. The ideal city can be neither a freeplay of imagination nor a wild founding by desire, since desire sits dangerously close to the structure and pulsating life of Plato’s Idea. To take such a project upon oneself means to acquiesce to a true praxis of purification and molding towards what is preeminently Real.

The founding moment of the utopian undertaking in *The Republic* occurs in book II. It follows from a self-standing dialogue similar to the aporetic dialogues of Plato’s youth. During this introduction to the problem Socrates intersects his argumentative allure with Cephalos, Polemarchos, and Trasymachos, as well as listening to the provocative reformulations of Glaucon and Adeimantos. The last two demand that Socrates show adequately and positively what the intrinsic good and evil are in justice and injustice. In this way, the position of the traditional opinion on justice, which conceives justice as a virtue of appearances, a useful mask, as Glaucon points out by way of the myth of Gyges, needs to be deconstructed so that the true nature and the self of justice as prime virtue should come to the fore. Richard Kraut³ observes in this sense that the unifying theme of the dialogue remains the idea that justice must be considered independently of its consequences, and that life regulated by justice will bring authentic happiness.

In the context of this necessity of a positive apology of justice, Plato introduces an imaginative exercise which has an epistemic role and helps to discern better that which is sought. Socrates’ proposal is to examine the configuration of justice in an extended environment so that, upon reaching a clear structure of virtue, it can be applied to the individual soul as well. Or, this extended environment will be precisely the ideal city whose limits shall be traced in the horizon of the common good. The analogy that Socrates uses to motivate the translation from justice in the soul to justice in the state is that of passing from lower case letters to capital letters. The founding metaphor for the construction of the ideal state reveals a background presupposition: the homology between the two tiers, a) individual soul and b) the public domain of the *polis*. As the city is a product of man, it will be in his image and shall inherit his nature. On the other

² Plato, *The Republic*, edited by G. R. F. Ferrari, translated by Tom Griffith, Cambridge U. P., 2000, p. 226.

³ *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 311.

hand, it presupposes here a universalist attribute that the participation of different registers to an idea indicates: there is only one perfect structure of this virtue at the eidetic level and, consequently, whatever the dimensions of its manifestation, the same common pattern will emerge. Plato's belief in the transversal coherence impressed by Forms unto the Cosmos renders such an imagining of an ideal state possible, which, in its turn, will bring the contours of justice into focus. To build in a utopian way means for Plato to construct a "hypothetical city, from the beginning"⁴, that is to simulate an ideal genesis in a virtual mental space. We could compare the profile of this construction to a strategy computer game, in which the player seeks to develop a fictional community starting from limited resources. With Plato, the "software" is regulated by this ideal imperative of justice – the *polis* will be developed with the purpose to express as best as it can the modus of justice in a community.

The birth of the city comes from people's effective lack of autarchy and from a stringency of needs. Its dynamics stem from a basic economic need. The impulse appears to be, puzzlingly, a lack that defines man. That is why the primary purpose of the city is mutual help. What is visible from the very first lines of the sketch is that its description occurs in an ideal space. Plato sets a stage devoid of historical concreteness, by engaging the elementary population exclusively in production activities. Food, the need for shelter and clothing are the basic needs and the network of interdependences that pushes people to cooperate. The ideal construction cannot proceed without a regulating principle, which Plato introduces from the very beginning. This is the principle of efficient specialization (*oikeiopraxia*), according to which each individual participating in the foundation of the city is defined as produce and must perfect himself in a single functional activity to support the city. Thus, the activity of each pawn regards not only satisfying his own needs, but also engaging in a wider activity that will ensure the other members obtain his product. We could argue that Plato accepts an original differentiation of people, but this is tightly connected to the interdependent roles that weave the basic texture of the city's maintenance. Although the basic cell of the elementary *polis* consists of builders, farmers, weavers, cobblers and other workers, it will progressively become more complex. The principle of specialization will introduce other maintenance functions. The basic cell needs to expand in order to function. The process is one of multiplication and interconnection, bringing in the group of the ideal community carpenters, blacksmiths, stock breeders, shepherds, merchants and market sellers. Ultimately, the city is integrated into a plural geography, in which the interconnection of exchange dominates.

The city imagined by Plato undergoes a logical progression based on economic necessities, but it belongs to a specifically Greek *Umwelt*, in which an archipelago plurality is pre-supposed, involving coexistence and interaction between different cities. Such a community will be compelled to diversify roles in

⁴ *Republic*. p. 51.

order to survive in the archipelago. Merchants, transporters (sailors and carriers) will be included, as well as the elements specific to an exchange market: coin and the personnel needed for trade. The first progressive move of the utopian imagining consists therefore of identifying the basic conditions for the emergence of a city, the growth of the population and the complexification of the initial cell, starting from a necessity immanent in it. The original class that constitutes the ideal city is the class of producers; it provides the substratum on which the layers of subsequent class may be constituted as superstructures related to a special function of the city. As the producers are stimulated by the material appetite, they are free to associate in families and tend toward a limited accumulation of wealth. Unlike the other classes that will appear, there's a slight lenience in Plato towards this particular class; the founder does not elaborate on their education or social obligations beyond productivity. Still, their entire activity will prove to be very tightly controlled within clearly defined boundaries: producers have no political, representative, cultural and educational rights. One of the defining attributes for this stage of the utopian simulation is simplicity. In a way, this first imprint of the ideal city stays close to a desideratum of simplicity and health, which is nonetheless insufficient for developing virtues at the level of the *polis*. Nevertheless, when prompted by Glaucon to move on from this "city of pigs" to a luxurious city much closer to the concrete historical image of the Greek cities, Socrates observes: "I think the true city – the healthy version, as it were – is the one we have just described. But let's look also at the swollen and inflamed city, if that is what you prefer. We can easily do that. What's to stop us?"⁵

We can notice that the process of utopian construction consists of several stages. The first regards a purely ideal foundation and the simulation of a city's growth based on an imperative of necessity, cooperation and interdependence, and on a principle of efficiency with regard to the work of each participant.

The next moment consists of transforming that image so that it approximates a concrete image of the real cities. The transformation involves passing from a city that is semi-idyllic, healthy but unlikely because simplistic, toward a "luxurious" one. Crossing the boundary of the "matters of necessity" means enriching life with a multitude of different dimensions and multiplying assessments:

So once again we must enlarge our city, since our first, healthy city is no longer big enough. We must fill it with a great mass and multitude of things which are no longer what cities must have as a matter of necessity. For example, we must have hunters of all kinds, artists, all those using figure and colour for their imitations, and those using music, poets and their assistants – reciters, actors, dancers, producers – and the makers of all sorts of goods, especially those used for making women look beautiful. What's more, we shall need more people in service. Don't you think we shall need attendants for our sons, wetnurses, nannies, hairdressers,

⁵ *Republic*, p. 55.

barbers, not to mention cooks and chefs? And beside those, we shall need people to keep pigs as well. We didn't have them in our earlier city, since there was no need for them. But in this city, there *will* be a need for them...⁶

For Plato, the process of utopian growth is not foreign from the luxurious life of the city. In a way, nothing of the variety of a good life should be lacking in the ideal city. However, what is characteristic to Plato's utopian construction is a discerning filter that separates the elements that make the city healthy from those that damage it. Hence the process of hygienic purge which the founder will initiate shortly after. As Nettleship pointed out⁷, this is a social refining in which to the expansion of human nature other needs beyond those merely necessary are added. And it is because of these that Plato's ideal city can reach its maximum development, in which a proto-spiritual aspect emerges in the variety of arts and the leisure of luxuries. Yet, besides such proto-spirituality founded on imitation, in the new luxurious city another class also appears that will be defining what the ideal city means for Plato. It is the class of guardians, the internal and external defenders of the *polis*. From the earlier exchange and interdependence of cities, with the expansion and increase in wealth of the city, conflict and war appear.

If the first move was ideal, now the acceptance of luxury and wealth indicates that the second normalizing move is implicitly a process controlled by devolution, so that the state reaches normal dimensions. The symbol of this devolution is war, and the new and extremely important class for the continued existence of the city is the army. From the army the guardians will emerge, and later on the guardian leaders. Julia Annas speaks⁸ of a truly prosaic beginning for those that will go on to illustrate the highest development of reason within the ideal *polis*. The army is surely subject to the principle of specialization, which will create professionals and the efficiency of those that defend and expand the borders of the city. Further on in the dialogue, two other aspects will emerge that characterize the condition of the guardians. These, unlike the producers, do not have the right to acquire property, to transact and own wealth. There is a total separation, as Bobonich has observed⁹, between the profiles of the producer and of the guardian. The guardians must be integrated in a community in which most activities and goods are shared. Plato's communism with regard to the guardians is a technique to eliminate the baser desires for material gain and pleasure. Guardians will receive food, clothing and all they need, and share them, in exchange for the protection service they perfect. This type of communism extends to the family level, as Plato rejects the traditional model of aggregating guardians in separate families. For the guardian, there should only exist a single large family, that of its

⁶ *Republic*, p. 56.

⁷ R. L. Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*, Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, London, 1965, p.72-73.

⁸ Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1981, p.77.

⁹ Cristopher Bobonich, *Plato's Utopia Recast*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2002, p. 42.

city, of its fellow guardians. Familial love is replaced by the love of friends. Women and children are also integrated into the model. Guardians have access to women for reproduction, but Plato wants the dissolution of individual sentimental ties between them. The model that springs to mind in relation to Plato's communism is the Spartan one. Unlike the Athenians, the Lacedonians perfected this community profile, where the soldiers are raised in from childhood. However, with Plato there is a superimposition between this military model and a model of a community of initiates of Pythagorean extraction. In a way, guardians and, later, the leaders that will emerge from amongst them, are meant to coagulate in a community of force as well as of virtue, a brotherhood of courage as well as of restraint and knowledge.

To get to the gist, let me say that the utopian image in Plato is not a description of the natural genesis of a city, but a controlled construction following the course of necessity – normalization and growth on the basis of a specific code (the principle of specialization). From the very beginning, the city is an artificial product with a view toward identifying justice. The constructor of the *polis* assumes the authority that “prescribes”, “forbids”, and “grants”, becoming an instance of control external to the image as a whole. The role of absolute censor of the one who imagines the city becomes evident in the importance and the attention that he devotes to guardians. We can understand, therefore, that we have reached a function representative for the whole of the city. The guardian becomes the *analogon* of the whole *polis*, since his function depends on the limit and the place where the community is profiled. He is the parting membrane between everything that belongs and everything that doesn't belong in the city. His essence is aggressiveness or inflamed bravery (*tumoeides*), but also the protective attention towards other inhabitants. Socrates' preferred comparison with regard to guardians is that of the philosophical nature of dogs. Guardians are a discriminating instance between what is of the city and what is foreign to it. Starting from this guardian who takes upon himself the activity of the city as absolute unity, there will develop within the class, by means of an educative sublimation in time, a final subclass, that of the philosopher guardian, of the leader guardian, who embodies the true philosophical nature:

‘Then will the person who is going to be a good and true guardian of our city be a lover of wisdom, spirited, swift and strong?’
‘He certainly will.’¹⁰

The philosopher guardian is the element that forms the nucleus and essence of the ideal state and of the utopian process. The *polis* deploys according to the principles and hierarchy of an enlightened monarchy, supported by a meritocracy regulated by the access to knowledge and truth. The access to the metaphysical and intellectual-hierarchical foundations on which the city is built in *The Republic* is offered in the very image of this leader who engages over the years in all areas of knowledge: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music, and, of course, dialectics. The

¹⁰ *Republic*, p. 60.

leader guardian is a *sophos*, and first and foremost a dialectician. Robin very pertinently outlined¹¹ the deindividuation and spiritual purification that the philosopher undergoes in the decades of his training. In a way, the whole purpose of philosophical paideutics is to detach oneself from the concrete representations and the illusory aberrations of the realm of the sensible, and to ascend toward the unconditioned and ineffable foundation that gives birth to the world of Forms.¹² There is practically a superimposition between the founder of the *ou-topos* and the dialectician as an initiate in the *ou-typos*, as both instances must have broad vision, a capacity for division and dialectic grouping, as well as an unconditional attachment to a world enlightened by the idea of the Good and the organicity of the ideas. Other natural aspects of the philosopher leader are¹³: a passionate enthusiasm for eternal truth, an insurmountable aversion towards falsity, scorn towards the satisfaction by the senses and material goods, horror in front of injustice and malice, other uncommon intellectual aptitudes such as an easiness of learning and a good memory. The balance between the contemplation of ideal organization and the practical wisdom that comes from experience is indispensable to the leader magistrate. The philosopher guardian is an analogon of the superlative position of the Good in Platonic metaphysics. The founder and then the leader are the holders of knowledge and the only ones who could translate the utopian model in historical reality. Only through them can the unity and the primacy of the *polis* be maintained.

We now have a complete image of the three classes that constitute the Platonic ideal city: a) producers, the main body of the population and its extended substance; b) guardians, the membrane that surrounds and protects – the limit that gives unity to the whole; c) the philosopher guardians positioned at the centre of the city, taking on the role of authority that decide for the good of the whole *polis*. These classes are divided functionally according to the three capital dimensions of Plato's city. Because of the principle of specialization, these three functions will be taken to their maximum potential. Producers will satisfy the economic function, by offering a wide range of goods and services. The guardians will perfect the activities of armed protection and assault. The philosopher guardians will watch over the inherent order of the city, over its development and ideal governance. One can observe a complete separation between the types of activity each class undertakes. Analytical reason and functionality in synthesis characterize the unity that Plato seeks to give to the city in accordance with a model of the *logos*. Material productivity, bravery and inflammation, moderation, knowledge and the practical art of government, wisdom – these are the defining attributes of the Platonic utopia. They are deployed in an obvious hierarchy, in which each of the parts strictly keeps to its own place. It is only in this manner that a quasi-organic harmony may be reached within the Platonic model.

¹¹ Léon Robin, *Platon*, (trad. L.M. Dumitru), Teora, București, 1996, p. 74.

¹² See the line of knowledge and the myth of the cave, in *The Republic*, pp. 217-9 and 220-3.

¹³ Robin, p. 80.

The extensive development of the ideal city ends here, and, as I have already pointed out, it presupposed a process of complexification by which an elementary image of a community was transformed into an extended and strong model. Intensive development follows extensive development, by 1) the general education of guardians and 2) the education and specialized selection of leaders in the class. Forming the character of the guardian, together with the quantum of knowledge that the philosopher guardian must possess, lead toward the essence of the ideality of this utopian construction.

‘Well, so much for nature. But what about the upbringing and education of our guardians? What form will those take? Will looking into that question be of some use to us in finding the answer to our main inquiry, which is how justice and injustice arise in a city? [...]

‘Very well, then. Let’s imagine we are telling a story, and that we have all the time in the world. Let us design an education for these men of ours.’¹⁴

Responsibility and imaginative freedom are subtly woven in this second stage of the utopian construction. The founder, the one who has “all the time in the world” and educates them in his mind appears separate from what he imagines. The only stringency is the imprint of justice which he seeks to impress upon his city. The effort is, on the one hand, that of a city planner, a modeling of the whole – where the material is the individuals exclusively engaged in their public tasks. On the other hand, the founder will also become a mentor that decides and canonizes the paideutic problem of the city. To think the ideal city also means to think the production, the *Bildung* of a character positioned at the centre and at the limit of the city, who represents symbolically the city itself. We notice thus how the virtual construction of the city is divided into two major actions: a) imagining the overall urban and functional structure and b) conceiving the traits of a culture fit for the ideal intended.

The education proposed by Socrates covers the whole development of guardians from childhood to adulthood. It is not conceived as a process of absorbing information or learning skills, but as a total training of character; it is an exhaustive art of engineering and production of the human soul so that a mature, moral personality may emerge, who will be responsible for the good of the city. The education of guardians is all the more important as we realize that it seeks to control the inflamed, explosive substance specific to the class. That is why control must be exercised from early childhood until maturity, in order to channel the force towards maintaining and developing the *polis*. The education of guardians represents a symbolic value sphere meant to become a natural comfortable part of their everyday life. Achieving the right typology also depends on achieving the right balance between general-intellectual education (the arts of the muses) and physical education (gymnastics).

In another line of thought, in the education of guardians the restrictive, controlling aspect of the utopian process becomes visible. The education proposed

¹⁴ *Republic*, p. 60.

is authoritarian, and it sculpts the impulses of individuals according to a pre-established chart. The educational system will impose upon the subjects a singular set of values that practically eradicates autonomy and critical reflection, which are reserved for a small circle of initiates who will lead the city. By following the disposition of the elements of censorship, and then of the positive canon of the arts, we notice that individuality is to be replaced with an impersonal, univocal profile. Consequently, what is intended is the formation of a culture based on a univocal ideology.

Plato makes a surgical, sanitary incision in the nucleus of the Athenian cultural tradition, by which he manages to rework the basic myths of his culture and contest the authority of Hesiod and Homer. The reformation is manifest at the level of popular theology, cosmogony, legends about heroes, the image of man in general, the erotic and affective relations, the modes of expression and coagulation of subjects. We understand that for Plato there is direct causality between what one accepts as aspects of education and character feedback. Consequently, he intends to create a civic naivety by means of a cynical art of eluding and embellishing each profile of values in the city. Also, each canonized aspect – imposed by the founder – reflects the ideal image he wants to impress upon the city. The gods only do good; they cannot be the agents and promoters of evil and illusion; while heroes embody the quintessence of virtues barely troubled and changed from outside. Lying, duplicity, illusion, cheating, versatility, these are real dangers for the ideal city, and their main promoters – the poets – must be forced to change their contents and forms of expression. What matters here before anything else is the unity of thinking and the avoidance as much as possible of the dismantling of one's character into a multitude of voices with which the guardian may empathize. The right poetry and the right art will provide perceivable representations of the ideal and of concepts in a form that can be appreciated by those not capable of pure intellectual understanding. Plato seeks to create a regime of permanence, of quietude, as well as to eliminate everything excessive. His reform turns finally into a reform at the level of the basic *Stimmung*, or mood, of the city, of the feelings that guardians can have. In the course of projecting their education, every cardinal virtue that should become defining for the city is checked: truth, knowledge, bravery, restraint, justice. It is a progressive discovery of the rationality of the construction, which concomitantly means an elaboration and a refining of the rational vision, a purging and development of a virtuous city. In unfolding his construction program according to ideal principles, the founder accomplishes at the same time an act of knowledge of what virtue and reason mean. In his turn, Socrates discovers himself engaged in an intellectual hubris, as a simple instrument of the impersonal rationalization of the city itself. Depersonalization touches him also, since he doesn't know where the progression will lead him: "I don't know yet, but we have set sail, and must go where the wind, or the argument, blows us."¹⁵

¹⁵ *Republic*, p. 83.

As we have seen, with Plato, utopian engineering implies that the founder sets himself outside the construction, and from there he imagines the progressive development of a circular city in which the elements are interdependent and not autonomous. As performer of the program of the *logos*, the founder is himself integrated in an impersonal hierarchy which exceeds him. The whole program of the guards' education culminates with two images that depict its essence. On the one hand, Plato unveils the regulating myth in the background, which will reign over the whole *polis*: the myth of the three classes, and, on the other hand, we are given the epitome of the whole city and the element that makes its accomplishment possible: the leader guardian. This myth will be used for the entire process of selecting and decanting types of people, so that they end up performing the functions that correspond to their nature. The myth thus supports eugenics and the selection of children. It becomes the framework and the endpoint of education – the founding myth for the structure of the ideal city. This is a foundational lie that only the founder is aware of as lie. The duplicitous and quasi-cynical character of using important elements of culture to regulate the structure of the city becomes a delicate problem in Plato's utopian construction. If guardians are required to be totally honest, the founders and leaders are allowed to use political and cultural lies. In his turn, the leader, as we have pointed out, defines the nucleus, the gist of what the ideal city should be. He is wise, able and caring for the city, intensifying the old age attributes of guardians. Those who know and love truth are the one who are able to guard best, the ones who perfect this task, by internalizing the rhythm and harmony specific to reason. If justice will be proved by means of the ideal construction to be a harmony of the whole and a hierarchical fulfillment of roles for each participant, the leaders stand on the controlling summit that predetermines such harmony. Only they, not a constitution or a code of laws, can by their experience lead this utopia to fulfillment. Here again, a superimposition makes itself manifest between the figure of the founder and that of the leader of the city. The intention is to achieve a transfer from the special and free-responsible condition of he who imagines but is in his own turn transformed by the process towards the one who leads and has formed his wisdom in the service of the supreme good of the *polis*.

I prefer to leave aside some aspects regarding Plato's utopianism, such as the relation between utopia and metaphysics, or the devolution of the utopian ideal, since in the present paper, the intention was to offer just the structure and the overall progression of utopian imagining in *The Republic*. For Plato, utopia is a segmented process to access a rational and harmonic ideal of virtue. The position of the utopian architect has proven to be one that takes upon itself the responsibility of integration in an ideal hierarchy. The analysis of the entire utopian construction would require more space for exposition, and is beyond my purpose here, which is to profile the utopian process and pinpoint the ideas of its emergence.

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LA CRITIQUE DE L'ÉTAT INEXISTANT : LE STATUT DE L'UTOPIE EN FRANCE DANS LA PREMIÈRE MOITIÉ DU XVII^E SIÈCLE

RADU TODERICI*

ABSTRACT. *The Condemnation of the Absent Commonwealth: the Status of Utopia in France during the First Half of the 17th Century.* While Thomas More's *Utopia* gave rise to numerous imitations during the 16th and early 17th centuries, eventually laying the foundations for a new literary sub-genre, its core political ideas were largely ignored by early modern political theorists or were mentioned only so far as they seemed to put forward in a new manner some of Plato's radical political theories. So long as More's ideal commonwealth was regarded as an imitation of Plato's political model, both projects were criticized mainly for advocating common property and community of women and children. However, towards the end of the 16th century, a different argument was raised against utopia, from the standpoint of its practical utility. From Jean Bodin to Vincent Cabot and François de La Mothe Le Vayer, a theoretical distance separates the ideal commonwealth from the aims and purposes of mundane politics. Undoubtedly, this adverse attitude towards utopia served as a rhetorical strategy for legitimizing these authors' approach to politics or, as in La Mothe Le Vayer's case, for justifying his own skepticism towards it. Nevertheless, far from being only a commonplace, the rejection of utopia as pure theory may be also fitted into the context of early modern political theory; as such, this prevalent criticism of the ideal commonwealth coincides both with a shift towards absolute monarchy in French political treatises and with a rebuttal of the classical theory of the "mixed" government.

Keywords: utopia; early modern France; ideal society; political theory; Plato.

REZUMAT. *Critica statului inexistent: statutul utopiei în Franța în prima jumătate a secolului XVII.* Cu toate că *Utopia* lui Thomas More a prilejuit apariția unui număr impresionant de imitații în secolele XVI și XVII, ducând în cele din urmă la crearea unui nou sub-gen literar, ideile politice definitorii pentru textul lui More au fost în bună parte ignorate de către teoreticienii epocii sau au fost menționate doar în măsura în care păreau să continue într-o nouă direcție unele teorii mai radicale ale lui Platon. Atâta vreme cât comunitatea ideală a lui More a fost înțeleasă în continuarea modelului politic platonician, ambele proiecte au fost criticate mai ales fiindcă susțineau proprietatea comună și punerea în comun a femeilor și a copiilor. Înspre finele secolului XVI, un nou argument împotriva acestor comunități ideale își face însă apariția, de data aceasta din perspectiva posibilității punerii lor în practică. De la Jean Bodin la Vincent Cabot și François de La Mothe Le Vayer, o distanță teoretică începe

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să separe comunitățile ideale de practicile politice pragmatice. Fără îndoială, o astfel de atitudine ostilă față de utopie are la acești autori și rolul important de a le legitima retoric poziția față de practica politică sau, în cazul lui La Mothe Le Vayer, scepticismul față de ea. Cu toate acestea, departe de a fi un simplu loc comun, fenomenul de respingere a utopiei, înțeleasă ca pură teorie, poate fi integrat în contextul evoluției teoriilor politice din modernitatea timpurie; astfel, critica acerbă a comunităților ideale ar coincide atât cu o deplasare a accentului teoretic înspre modelul monarhiei absolutiste, cât și cu o depreciere a modelului clasic al formei de guvernare „mixte”.

Cuvinte cheie: utopie; Franța secolului XVI și XVII; comunitate ideală; teorie politică; Platon.

Le problème de la relation entre la *République* de Platon et l'*Utopie* de More

Probablement l'un des plus répandus et persistants lieux communs liés à l'*Utopie* de Thomas More concerne la relation entre ce texte et la *République* de Platon. Nous sommes déjà habitués à voir dans la *République* une des sources de l'*Utopie* ; tout comme la cité idéale décrite par Socrate est évoquée presque de manière obligatoire comme l'une des premières utopies. Dans un certain sens, coupable pour cette lecture parallèle de la *République* et de l'*Utopie* est le texte même de More (le protagoniste du dialogue, Raphaël Hythloday, renvoie plusieurs fois à la *République*, lorsqu'il décrit la communauté idéale des Utopiens) ou les textes liminaires qui accompagnent les premières éditions de l'*Utopie*¹. Une telle interprétation, même si elle justifiée, a deux désavantages. Elle met en exergue les références explicites de More à la *République*, mais néglige la relation moins évidente entre l'*Utopie* et un autre dialogue platonicien, *Les Lois*, qui aurait pu servir aussi bien de modèle pour le deuxième livre de l'*Utopie*². Ensuite, cette interprétation peut déformer rétrospectivement la manière dont la réception de l'*Utopie* a été faite au XVI^e et XVII^e siècle. Comparant la *République* et l'*Utopie* aujourd'hui, nous avons accès à un corpus de textes, qui forment un genre particulier et pour lequel le dialogue de More sert de modèle ; dans ce cadre, nous pouvons considérer la *République* comme une utopie avant la lettre. Cette perspective renverse le rapport entre les deux textes, tel qu'il apparaît dans les traités du XVI^e et XVII^e siècle dans lesquels il existe des références à l'*Utopie* de More. Pour les auteurs de ces traités, la communauté imaginée des utopiens imitait la république idéale de Platon, tandis que les intentions du texte de More étaient

¹ Voir en ce sens Thomas I. White, « Pride and the Public Good : Thomas More's Use of Plato in *Utopia* », in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, no. 4, vol. 20, 1982, p. 335, n. 13, pour la référence à l'« Hexasticon » de Pierre Gilles, où il décrit l'*Utopie* comme un texte rival de la *République* de Platon.

² Voir en ce sens les remarques introductives du même Thomas I. White, dans *ibidem*, p. 330.

asservies aux théories politiques de la *République*. Aussi, la réception de l'*Utopie* dans les deux premiers siècles suivant son apparition ne peut être comprise qu'en traçant une parallèle avec la réception des idées politiques platoniciennes ; les premières critiques de l'utopie en tant que projet politique, réalisable ou non, étant en grande partie les critiques d'une théorie qui a son origine dans les dialogues platoniciens et pour laquelle l'*Utopie* ne représente que la version la plus récente.

Deux de ces critiques sont reprises constamment tout au long du XVI^e siècle et le XVII^e siècle en a ensuite hérité. En premier lieu, l'*Utopie* et la *République* présentent des sociétés idéales et, donc, irréalisables ; au cas où les prétentions de Platon et More ne soient pas rejetées comme chimériques, les communautés qu'ils imaginent ne peuvent avoir au mieux que la fonction de modèle idéal pour les états existants. Ensuite, l'*Utopie* reprend deux des idées les plus contestées des dialogues platoniciens : la propriété commune et la communauté des femmes et des enfants³. Dans certains cas, comme par exemple chez Jean Bodin, dans *Les six livres de la République*, nous pouvons retrouver les deux critiques ; Bodin rejette, comme nous allons le voir, aussi bien l'idée d'un état abstrait, imaginée à la manière de Platon et More, arguant pour une approche empirique de la politique, que la possibilité d'une propriété commune⁴. D'autres fois, More est mentionné seulement dans la mesure où il partage la vision de Platon en ce qui concerne la propriété commune. Le traité de Guillaume de La Perrière, *Le miroir politique* (1555), en offre l'exemple typique ; après avoir exposé de manière systémique les formes de gouvernement, La Perrière dédie tout un chapitre à l'idée de propriété commune⁵. Polémisant avec Platon et ajoutant aux arguments qu'Aristote fait, dans le deuxième livre de la *Politique*, contre la propriété commune, la position chrétienne relative au sujet, *Le miroir politique* fait également référence, de manière succincte, au projet utopique de More. Selon La Perrière, ce n'est que dans des états imaginaires comme ceux de Platon et More,

³ Pour une histoire des arguments contre Platon et, subsidiairement, contre More, concernant ce sujet, voir Jean Céard, « Le modèle de la *République* de Platon et la pensée politique au XVI^e siècle », in *Platon et Aristote à la Renaissance. XVI^e Colloque international de Tours*, Paris, 1976, pp. 176-190.

⁴ Pour les arguments de Bodin contre la communauté des biens, voir *Les six livres de la République*, V, II, « Des moyens de remédier aux changements des Républiques, qui adviennent pour les richesses excessives des uns, et povreté extrême des autres », dans Jean Bodin, *Les six livres de la République*, Paris, Fayard, 1986, t. V, pp. 59-84 ; à remarquer que Bodin fait référence tant au texte de More, qu'à celui de Platon : « Voila pourquoy plusieurs anciens Législateurs divisoyent les biens également à chacun des subjects: comme de nostre mémoire Thomas le More Chancelier d'Angleterre, en sa République, dit, que la seule voye du salut public est, si les hommes vivent en communauté des biens: ce qui ne peut estre faict où il y a propriété. Et Platon ayant pouvoir d'establir la République et nouvelle colonie des Thebains et Phocenses, du consentement des subects [sic!] qui luy decernerent ambassadeurs à ceste fin, s'en alla sans rien faire, parce que les riches ne vouloyent point faire part de leurs biens aux povres », *ibidem*, p. 61.

⁵ Guillaume de La Perrière, *Le miroir politique, contenant diverses manieres de gouverner et policer les republicques, qui sont & ont esté par cy devant*, Paris, Pour Vincent Norment & Jeanne Bruneau, 1567, pp. 53-56.

que la communauté des femmes et des enfants peut être appliquée, tandis que l'histoire ne consigne aucun état qui aurait implémenté une telle mesure⁶. Alors qu'un auteur comme François de Rosières inclut un chapitre critique sur la communauté des biens, des femmes et des enfants, dans les *Six livres des politiques* (1574), sans cependant mentionner More⁷, la référence à ce dernier réapparaît au début du XVII^e siècle dans un résumé des théories politiques de type scolastique rédigé par Théophraste Bouju, dans le deuxième volume du *Corps de toute la philosophie* (1614). Dans les six livres dédiés à la politique, Bouju essaie de reformuler la doctrine d'Aristote, la défendant contre une critique moderne, représentée particulièrement par Bodin ; il n'est donc pas étonnant que dans le chapitre concernant la communauté des biens il garde les limites de la démarche aristotélicienne, commentant des passages du deuxième livre de la *Politique* et utilisant des arguments qui étaient déjà devenus des lieux communs au XVI^e siècle⁸.

Cependant, il serait intéressant de voir la manière dont Bouju interprète la démarche de More ; l'*Utopie* offrirait, d'après celui-ci, un bon exemple de correction de l'erreur de Platon et une limitation de ce qui peut être mis en commun ; mais, même dans ce cas, ajoute Bouju, la forme de gouvernement proposée par l'*Utopie* n'est réalisable que dans un endroit qui ne connaît pas les différences sociales et les formes de gouvernement basées sur ces différences ; conditionné de cette manière, le projet utopique est poussé à la périphérie du monde connu, dans un lieu hypothétique, où les relations de domination et de soumission ne sont pas encore apparues :

Thomas Morus voyant aussi les défauts de la communauté de la république de Platon, introduit une autre sorte de communauté en sa république d'Euthopie, dont il a écrit : à sçavoir és biens, en l'institution de la jeunesse, és labeurs de la terre, & en plusieurs autres choses, sans que celles des femmes y soit. Ce qu'il fait qu'elle pourroit estre établie en un païs où le peuple n'auroit point encore esté réduit & accoustumé sous une autre forme de gouvernement, ni distinguez en nobles & routuriers. Mais és républiques desja formées, le meilleur c'est d'estudier non à egaler principalement les patrimoines, mais les cupiditez par la vertu & par les loix.⁹

Bouju est loin d'être le dernier commentateur de l'*Utopie* qui suggère une équivalence, encore que partielle, entre les idées de More et celles de Platon en ce qui concerne la communauté des biens. Son texte, qui insiste déjà sur une des différences qui séparent la démarche de More et celle de la *République*, peut cependant

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 54 : « car telle République (comme sous le nom de Socrates, Platon en son imagination forgea) ne fut jamais mise en effet, ains est plus imaginaire que Reale, comme par similitude nous pouvons dire de la République fainte, que Thomas Morus décrit en son Vtopie ».

⁷ François de Rosières, *Six Livres Des Politiques*, Rheims, Par Jean de Foigny, 1574, cap. XIII, « De la communion des femmes, enfants, serviteurs, & biens, pernicieuse, & evitable en toutes especes de République és Cités : & de l'égalité louable en icelles », pp. 54r-56.

⁸ Théophraste Bouju, *Corps de toute la philosophie. Seconde partie...*, [Paris], [Marc Orry], 1614, V, II, « Refutation de la communauté de Platon en la république », pp. 416-419.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 419.

nous mettre devant un dilemme : l'*Utopie* était-elle vue simplement comme une version moderne de la *République*? L'absence relative des références à l'œuvre de More dans les traités politiques du XVI^e siècle, à l'exception de quelques paragraphes notables chez Barthélemy Aneau et La Perrière, ou des annotations successives dans *Les six livres de la République* de Bodin¹⁰, ne nous permet pas de donner une réponse claire à cette question. Certes, il y a des traités qui, de manière plus ou moins ludique, intègrent l'*Utopie*, en tant que texte autonome, dans un effort plus ample de décrire et classer la diversité des formes de gouvernement. Ainsi, Francesco Sansovino, dans la deuxième édition de *Del governo e amministrazione di diversi regni et republiche, cosi antiche come moderne*, paru à Venise en 1652, inclue dans le XXII^e livre une paraphrase de l'*Utopie* ; tandis que Gabriel Chappuys clôt son *L'Estat, descriptions et gouvernements des royaumes et des républiques du monde, tant anciennes que modernes* (1585), traité qui imite en grandes lignes la démarche de Sansovino, avec un livre qui contient sa propre traduction du texte de More. Si Sansovino ne fait aucune référence à Platon dans la préface du XXII^e livre, Chappuys cependant, ne néglige pas de mentionner le fait que la république des utopiens « semble estre beaucoup plus resoluë & parfaite, que celle de Platon »¹¹ et que l'introduction d'une république imaginée à la suite d'un traité qui se limite à la description des états existants (voir en ce sens l'Avant-propos de l'auteur) a l'avantage d'offrir, par la comparaison, une lecture utile (« le lecteur considérant les choses vrayes, qui sont contenuës aux précédentes Républiques, puisse voir, que l'on peut tousjours, en la reformation ou constitution d'une nouvelle République, trouver quelque chose de nouveau qui soit bonne & profitable »¹²). À part Sansovino et Chappuys, il y a peu des références à la politique autonome de l'*Utopie* ; Bodin rappelle quelques propositions de More au cours des *Six livres de la République*, concernant l'habitude des utopiens de proposer une loi un jour avant qu'elle soit discutée¹³, la limitation des fonctions à une année¹⁴, le contrôle du nombre d'enfants par famille¹⁵, ou le recrutement des artisans pour la guerre¹⁶. Quoique la plupart des références de Bodin soient critiques, son traité accorde une importance sans précédent au contenu de l'*Utopie* et ne se limite pas à analyser le texte de More du point de vue de la communauté des biens. Au XVII^e siècle, à l'exception de Vincent Cabot, qui construit sa théorie politique dans une évidente filiation bodinienne, les traités politiques

¹⁰ Pour la réception de l'*Utopie* au XVI^e siècle français voir Jean Céard, « La fortune de l'*Utopie* de Thomas More en France au XVI^e siècle », in *La fortuna dell'Utopia di Thomas More nel dibattito politico europeo del '500*, Firenze, Olschki, 1996, pp. 43-74.

¹¹ Gabriel Chappuys, *L'Estat, descriptions et gouvernements des royaumes et des republiques du monde, tant anciennes que modernes*, Paris, Chez Regnault Chaudiere, 1598, p. 298.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 298.

¹³ Jean Bodin, *op. cit.*, III, I, t. III, p. 13, 33.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, IV, IV, t. IV, p. 120.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, V, II, t. V, p. 61

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, V, V, t. V, p. 164.

ignorent les idées de More ; à la place de ces lectures, quoique critiques, les auteurs français du XVII^e siècle préfèrent insister, lorsqu'ils font référence à l'*Utopie*, sur l'impossibilité de la mise en place d'un tel projet.

L'événement qui semble signaler l'apparition d'une perception différente du texte de More par rapport à ses sources platoniciennes est la tentative de classification des traités politiques entreprise par Gabriel Naudé dans sa *Bibliographia politica* (texte paru en latin en 1633 et traduit ensuite en français en 1642 sous le titre de *La bibliographie politique du Sr. Naudé*) et par Charles Sorel dans la section dédiée aux œuvres politiques de *La bibliothèque françoise* (1664). Tant Naudé que Sorel recommandent la lecture des Antiques, mais consignent un nombre considérablement plus grand d'œuvres qui appartiennent au XVI^e et même au XVII^e siècle ; en plus, au moment de la parution de leurs traités, il y a avait déjà d'autres textes utopiques qui imitaient formellement la structure du texte de More ; Naudé rappelle *La Cité du Soleil* et *Mundus alter et idem* de l'Anglais Joseph Hall, tandis que Sorel recommande, à part l'*Utopie*, le traité anonyme paru en français sous le titre de *Histoire du grand et admirable royaume d'Antangil*. Les deux auteurs ne font pas un inventaire exhaustif des œuvres qui ressemblent à l'*Utopie* de More, mais ils offrent des exemples, qu'ils cherchent pourtant à clarifier séparément à l'intérieur de la littérature politique et à grouper autour d'un critère : pour Naudé, *L'Utopie*, *La Cité du soleil* et *Mundus alter et idem*, contiennent « la forme ou plutôt l'idée de quelque véritable & parfaite République »¹⁷ (évidemment, dans un sens négatif chez Hall), pendant que Sorel regroupe, à côté de *L'Utopie* et d'*Antangil*, une série des projets politiques réformateurs, comme *La monarchie aristocratique* de Louis de Mayerne Turquet ou *Le nouveau Cynée* d'Emeric Crucé, sous le syntagme de « gouvernemens imaginaires »¹⁸. Mais ni Naudé ni Sorel ne font aucune référence à Platon lorsqu'ils décrivent ces œuvres similaires ; au contraire, Naudé signale que More a été le créateur de ces républiques imaginaires (« Le premier qui se trouve avoir mis par écrit la forme d'une telle République imaginaire ; ç'a été le tres docte & au jugement de tous le tres-sage Thomas Morus Chancelier d'Angleterre... »¹⁹). Cela ne veut pas dire que les références à Platon disparaissent à partir de Naudé ; l'utopie continuera à être définie au cours du XVII^e et XVIII^e siècle dans une série d'œuvres exemplaires, parmi lesquelles la *République* de Platon occupe une place quasi-obligatoire²⁰. Au fur et à mesure que le nombre d'utopies augmente, et que le voyage imaginaire devient un élément essentiel du genre, l'accent commence à se déplacer vers l'*Utopie* et les textes qui s'étaient inspirés initialement de celui de More (*La Cité du Soleil* et *La Nouvelle*

¹⁷ Gabriel Naudé, *La bibliographie politique du Sr. Naudé*, Paris, Chez la Vesve de Guillaume Pelé, 1642, p. 43.

¹⁸ Charles Sorel, *La Bibliothèque françoise*, Paris, Par la Compagnie des Libraires du Palais, 1667, pp. 73-74.

¹⁹ Gabriel Naudé, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

²⁰ Voir notre article, « L'utopie à l'âge classique. Quelques éléments pour la fondation d'un genre littéraire », in *Cahiers Echinoc*, vol. 22, 2012, pp. 257-268.

Atlantide de Bacon étant parmi les plus souvent mentionnées) ; textes qui vont devenir les œuvres canoniques du genre utopique, tandis que la *République* va perdre graduellement la position de référence à l'intérieur de celui-ci.

L'Utopie, la République et la forme idéale de gouvernement

Un des paradoxes liés à la réception de l'*Utopie* au XVI^e et XVII^e siècle est associé à la manière dont les commentateurs ont compris les intentions du texte de More. Le titre choisi par celui-ci, qui renvoyait à la meilleure forme de gouvernement d'une communauté (*de optimo reipublicae statu*), était moins équivoque que le contenu du dialogue ; ainsi, à la fin du deuxième livre de l'*Utopie*, le personnage « More » exprime ouvertement ses doutes par rapport à certaines proposition que Raphaël Hythloday expose. Cette ambiguïté transparait également dans les remarques ultérieures concernant l'*Utopie* qui apparaissent dans les écrits français sur la politique ou la jurisprudence. Même si l'*Utopie* est considérée à l'époque comme un exercice à l'intérieur d'un genre qui la précède et qui trouve ses origines au Moyen Âge, un genre qui produit un discours sur le meilleur état possible²¹, elle est rarement traitée de cette perspective. La communauté décrite par l'*Utopie* n'est pas réalisable, selon certains interprètes, dans le cadre d'un état existant. Aussi représente-t-elle une des limites du discours politique de l'époque. Ces critiques de l'utopie du point de vue de l'inadaptation au réel représentent une position rhétorique commune et unifiée, de Bodin à Vincent Cabot. Les auteurs déclarent tous la même chose, au nom d'un pragmatisme assumé – les théories qu'ils discutent concernent exclusivement un état réel ; il est donc inutile en ce cas de construire des formes de gouvernement idéales, qui ne pourront jamais être mises en application. Bodin se détache de cet état idéal dès le premier chapitre de *Les six livres de la République*. Menant sa démonstration vers une définition juste de la république (dans le sens de communauté politique) par rapport aux positions canoniques des Antiques, il élimine de ses exemples, ces républiques qui ne prennent pas en compte la réalité politique factuelle ; l'*Utopie* et la *République* deviennent, en conséquence, des cas typiques, illustrant des formes de gouvernement qui prétendent être les meilleures, mais qui ne pourront jamais fonctionner de manière efficace :

Par ainsi nous ne mettrons pas en ligne de compte, pour définir la République, ce mot, heureusement: ains nous prendrons la mire plus haut, pour toucher, ou du moins approcher au droit gouvernement: toutesfois nous ne voulons pas aussi figurer une République en Idee sans effect, telle que Platon, et Thomas le More

²¹ Voir en ce sens, la discussion de Quentin Skinner, « Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* and the Language of Renaissance Humanism », in Anthony Padgen (éd.), *The Language of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe*; Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 123-157; pour une critique ponctuelle des opinions de Skinner, voir George M. Logan, « Interpreting *Utopia* : Ten Recent Studies and the Modern Critical Traditions », *Moreana*, no. 118-119, vol. 31, 1994, pp. 208-215.

Chancelier d'Angleterre ont imaginé, mais nous contenterons de suivre les règles Politiques au plus près qu'il sera possible.²²

Un demi-siècle après la parution du livre de Bodin, le traité politique de Vincent Cabot, édité posthume par un ami de celui-ci, Léonard Campistron, s'ouvre par une remarque similaire. Cabot est pourtant un peu plus explicite en ce qui concerne l'angle à partir duquel il critique les communautés idéales de Platon et More, aussi bien qu'une série d'autres projets politiques appartenant aux Antiques et aux Modernes, qui manqueraient tous d'une méthode appropriée pour traiter de la politique. Cette consigne est doublée immédiatement par d'autres trois, que nous pouvons déduire de la critique que Cabot fait à Machiavel – *Le Prince* serait déficient au niveau de l'« intégrité » (un bon rapport à la morale) et de la « science » (une bonne connaissance des données historiques) – et à Bodin – tournant la politique de ce dernier contre lui, Cabot accuse Bodin d'avoir traité les problèmes politiques d'un point de vue purement théorique, sans égards pour la pratique. L'état imaginé par Platon et, suivant son exemple, celui théorisé par More, sont opposés encore une fois à une manière pragmatique de voir la politique :

Les anciens qui ont traité la Politique, ou ils se sont amusés à feindre quelque République à leur fantaisie, comme Platon & avant lui Phaleas Chalcedonien, Hippodame Milesien, & quelques autres, au rapport d'Aristote ce qui a été imité de notre temps par Thomas Morus Chancelier d'Angleterre; ou se sont contentés de donner quelques préceptes du Gouvernement, lesquels ont été reçus par certains peuples, tels que ceux qui se trouvent avoir été donnés par Pythagora & autres de sa secte aux Crotoniens, Tarentins, & Locriens; ou bien se sont seulement attachés à discourir de la forme & de l'espèce de République qu'ils établissent en l'Etat auquel ils avoient quelque commandement, ou au gouvernement duquel ils participoient comme Citoyens; mais il ne s'en est point trouvé entre eux, qui en ait traité généralement par art & par méthode, pour en enseigner le tout avec ses parties.²³

Cabot n'est pas aussi explicite en ce qui concerne les caractéristiques de la *République* ou de l'*Utopie* qui empêchent leur mise en pratique ; dans un seul paragraphe ultérieur, il offre une justification pour ses critiques, sous la forme d'un argument similaire à ceux de Bodin : « Par ainsi toutes ces républiques imaginaires de Platon, Thomas Morus, & autres, & toutes ces *définitions de territoire certain, & de nombre de Citoyens qui ne puisse pas être accru*, ne sont que purs songes, auxquels on ne se doit nullement arrêter comme nous montrerons cy-après plus

²² Jean Bodin, *op. cit.*, I, I, t. I, p. 31. Voir également la paraphrase de la définition bodinienne de la „république” que Laurent Bouchel inclut dans le compendium de textes juridiques *Bibliothèque ou Trésor du droit François*, paru initialement en 1615 et réédité plusieurs fois au cours du XVII^{ème} siècle ; Bouchel transcrit mot-à-mot la sentence de Bodin concernant le statut de « République en Idée sans effect » des états imaginées par Platon et More, Laurent Bouchel, *La Bibliothèque ou trésor du droit français*, Paris, Chez Jacques Dallin, 1667, t. III, p. 253.

²³ Vincent Cabot, *Les Politiques*, Tolo[u]se, Par Pierre Bosc, 1630, I, I, pp. 1-2.

amplement »²⁴ (*nous soulignons*). More n'est pas mentionné dans le chapitre que Cabot consacre à la réfutation de l'idée platonicienne de propriété commune (III, III), mais le premier chapitre des *Politiques* suggère assez clairement le fait que l'*Utopie* est une imitation de la démarche platonicienne.

Il est très difficile de trouver des textes qui soulignent si nettement leur distance face à ces modèles purement théoriques que ceux de Bodin et Cabot. La rhétorique de la réjection de ces états est cependant présente à l'époque, même si elle apparaît dans le contexte de quelques problèmes extrêmement spécifiques et offre parfois en guise d'exemple uniquement la communauté imaginée par Platon. Un cas de ce type de rhétorique peut être trouvé dans une lettre d'Antoine de Laval, publiée en 1612, dans laquelle celui-ci se prononce dans le problème de la durée des fonctions administratives ; arguant pour le maintien des magistratures à vie, Laval attaque l'opinion contraire d'Aristote, et se lance dans une digression sur le caractère imaginaire de l'état esquissée par celui-ci (« c'est qu'après qu'Aristote s'est bien moqué de la République imaginaire de Platon son maître, il an [sic!] imaginé luy-même une autre aussi fantastique comme celle qu'il reprend »²⁵), faisant, en vertu de la similarité, une référence à l'*Utopie* de More (« le songe de l'*Utopie* de Thomas More, lequel trouvoit dans sa République Ideale les Commissaires à son goût, fondé sur ce même passage d'Aristote »²⁶). Une décennie plus tard, un auteur comme Emeric Crucé défend son projet de pacification de l'Europe exposé dans *Le Nouveau Cynée* (1623) par la délimitation des autres théories politiques chimériques, par rapport auxquelles les idées platoniciennes servent toujours d'exemple : « Les esprits trop deliez n'y prendront point aussi de goust, & le compareront peut-estre à la République de Platon qui ne fut jamais qu'en l'idee & l'imagination de son Autheur »²⁷. La prudence de Crucé peut à peine être considérée inutile, pas seulement parce que son traité va finir par être placé dans la proximité de l'utopie (Sorel le mentionne dans le même paragraphe dans lequel il parle de l'*Utopie* et de l'*Histoire du grand et admirable royaume d'Antangil*), mais aussi en raison des hostilités avec lesquelles on accueillait les projets de réforme politique dans la première partie du XVII^e siècle (*La monarchie aristodemocratique*, traité publié par Louis Turquet de Mayerne en 1611, en offre un exemple typique). Cette hostilité face à la nouveauté transparait dans l'allégorie satyrique de Jean de la Pierre, *Le grand empire de l'un et l'autre monde* (1625) ; de la Pierre indique parmi les signes distinctifs du royaume déchu des aveugles, réflexion flagrante des vices contemporains, l'éternel désir de nouveau, de ce qui est à la mode, et classifie les projets politiques idéaux dans cette catégorie : « il nous font & refont, forgent & reforgent à plaisir les principes des sciences, les maximes d'estat en

²⁴ *Ibidem*, III, II, p. 229.

²⁵ Antoine de Laval, *Desseins de professions nobles et publiques*, Paris, Chez la Veuve Abel L'Angelier, 1612, p. 217r.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 217r.

²⁷ Emeric Crucé, *Le Nouveau Cynée ou Discours d'estat representant les occasions & moyens d'establiir une paix generale, & la liberté du commerce par tout le monde*, Paris, Chez Jacques Villery, 1623, « Preface ».

songeant, & des républiques de Platon en resvant »²⁸. En plus, de la Pierre place dans le royaume des borgnes, dans le voisinage du royaume des aveugles, une série d'autres figures vicieuses, parmi lesquelles on trouve aussi : « les mauvais Politiques & hommes d'Etat », qui s'impliquent dans la vie politique par ambition pure et qui forgent des « républiques de papier »²⁹ chimériques. Leur principal défaut, selon de la Pierre, est celui de ne pas adapter les théories à la nature singulière et organique du corps politique : « ainsi en sont ceux se forgent un Estat abstract, comme des idées de Platon, & au lieu d'appliquer le remède aux membres malades en particulier, ils l'appliquent à une abstraction Métaphysique... »³⁰.

Même si, dans les premières décennies du XVII^{ème} siècle, les arguments comme ceux de Jean de la Pierre que nous venons de voir, pouvaient être utilisés contextuellement pour légitimer l'absolutisme français, à l'origine, sous la forme que nous retrouvons chez Bodin, ils sont liés à une forme d'autolégitimation des auteurs qui écrivent des traités sur l'art de la politique. Comme Nicolai Rubinstein le prouve, ils peuvent être retrouvés dans la première partie du XVI^{ème} siècle, dans les traités des auteurs italiens, et apparaissent comme une réaction à une première tentative de définition de la politique qui prend comme point de départ l'idée de prince parfait et celle connexe, de communauté idéale, platonicienne ; Machiavel, dans le chapitre XV du *Prince*, mais aussi un auteur moins connu comme Francesco Patrizi, proposent tout au contraire une approche de la politique fondée premièrement sur l'observation des états existants³¹. Un autre auteur notable qui s'oppose à cette rhétorique est Innocent Gentillet (1576) dans son *Anti-Machiavel*. Gentillet veut avant tout combattre une des thèses du chapitre XV du *Prince*, conformément à laquelle, si l'intérêt le demande, le prince peut agir sans tenir compte d'un certain idéal extérieur de vertu. Cependant, à l'intérieur de la démonstration, Gentillet réaffirme aussi le besoin d'un modèle théorique, parfait, de l'état, par rapport auquel l'état réel se trouve dans une position plus ou moins accentuée d'inadaptation :

Et quant aux idées des républiques et monarchies parfaites, dont aucun philosophe ont écrit, ils n'ont pas traité ce sujet, pour dire qu'il s'en trouve de telles, mais pour proposer un patron à imiter aux monarques et aux gouverneurs des républiques. Car quant il est question de proposer un patron à imiter, il le faut dresser le plus parfait et le mieux fait qu'on peut: et puis après chacun qui s'adonne à l'imiter en approche au plus pres qu'il peut, les uns plus les autres moins.³²

²⁸ Jean de la Pierre, *Le grand empire de l'un et l'autre monde divisé en trois royaumes, le Royaume des Aveugles, des Borgnes & des Clair-voyants*, Paris, Chez Denis Moreau, 1625, p. 75.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 212.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 218.

³¹ Nicolai Rubinstein, « Italian Political Thought, 1480-1530 », in J.H. Burns, Mark Goldie (eds), *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 30-65 ; pour les cas de Machiavel et Brucioli, voir p. 44, 63.

³² Innocent Gentillet, *Anti-Machiavel. Édition de 1576, avec commentaires et notes par C. Edward Rathé*, Genève, Droz, 1968, p. 531.

L'apologie de Gentillet pour une forme théorique de l'état idéal met en exergue une attitude générale vis-à-vis des projets utopiques, à la fin du XVI^{ème} siècle et au début du XVII^{ème}. Farouchement critiqués, placés dans un ailleurs hypothétique et remis à un jour invraisemblable, ces projets sont presque toujours envisagés comme des constructions purement théoriques. Lorsque Naudé fait référence à la fonction des textes qui présentent des communautés imaginées, il met en relief le côté critique, de modèle qui fait ressortir, par la comparaison, les imperfections des états existants :

Ces Auteurs ayant formé ces illustres desseins avec la mesme intention que Galien a décrit la santé parfaite, Fernel la temperature cu corps produite par une esgale harmonie de qualités contraires justement balancées les uns avec les autres, Xenophon le Prince, Ciceron l'Orateur, S. Paul un Evesque, afin qu'ayant continuellement devant les yeux ceste véritable, premiere & originelle image de perfection, l'on peut plus aisement recognoistre & corriger ce qu'il y avoit de vitieux & defectueux en la copie.³³

Naudé évalue en ce cas des utopies comme celles de Morus et Campanella par l'intermédiaire d'un lieu commun extrêmement populaire dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle ; ceux qui l'utilisent ont l'habitude de souligner l'impossibilité de toucher un certain idéal de perfection, en donnant comme exemple une série des figures antiques et modernes de celui-ci (*La République* de Platon, l'orateur cicéronien, le roi de Xénophon, le courtisan de Castiglione) qu'il oppose à la pratique quotidienne. La variété de contextes où apparaît ce lieu commun le rapproche du statut de passe-partout. À l'aide de Marin Le Roy de Gomberville, il rejette les prétentions théoriques des Antiques dans le domaine de la politique et de la rhétorique³⁴ ; dans son discours qui traite des difficultés concernant l'écriture de l'histoire, Gomberville reprend et modifie un argument qui était paru 15 ans avant, chez l'historien Pierre Matthieu³⁵ ; une liste d'exemples identique avec ceux de Matthieu apparaît également chez le juriste Bernard de La Roche-Flavin, dans un paragraphe concernant l'inexistence du magistrat parfait³⁶ ; à son tour, Pierre Molinier

³³ Gabriel Naudé, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

³⁴ Marin Le Roy de Gomberville, *Discours des vertues et des vices de l'histoire, avec la maniere de la bien escrire*, Paris, Chez Toussaint du Bray, 1620, pp. 162-163 : « Platon ne se montre pas si grand homme d'Etat en son livre de la Republique, qu'il s'y fait voir hypocondriaque, ou pour le nommer plus doucement, Enemy de la raison, de l'usage, & de l'apparence. Ciceron n'est pas moins insupportable en son Orateur : & à n'en point mentir, faire des livres comme cela, c'est monter l'impuissance qu'il y a de parvenir à ce que l'on désire, au lieu de nous laisser les moyens de s'en rendre capables ».

³⁵ Pierre Matthieu, *Histoire de France & des choses mémorables advenues aux Provinces estrangeres durant sept annees de paix*. Paris, Chez Jamet Metayer et M. Guillemot, 1605, « Advertissement » : « estant aussi difficile de trouver un Historien parfait, comme de veoir une République, un Roy, un Orateur, un Capitaine, un Courtisan, un Ambassadeur, avec tous les qualités que Platon, Xénophon, Cicéron, Onosandre, Castiglion & Tasso lui desirent ».

³⁶ Bernard de La Roche-Flavin, *Treize livres des parlements de France, esquels est amplement traicté de leur origine et institution, & des presidents, conseillers, gens du roy, greffiers, secretaires, huissiers &*

démarque par un argument similaire la prudence parfaite³⁷. Le fait que le courtisan de Castiglione se trouve sur la liste des figures idéales est un reflexe intéressant à la manière dont l'auteur italien argumentait initialement son traité, assumant une certaine affinité avec les théories idéales de Platon, Cicéro ou Xénophon³⁸ ; d'ailleurs, il est possible qu'une des sources du lieu commun discuté ici soit *Le Courtisan* même. En théorie, les auteurs qui reprennent la même liste stéréotypée de noms pour se distancer de la politique traitée du point de vue théorique et abstrait invoquent la pratique ; en fait, ils font référence à l'histoire récente, rejetant les prétentions d'universalité des modèles rappelés³⁹. Il est facile d'observer que la république imaginaire de Platon, devient chez Matthieu, Gomberville ou Molinier synonyme du projet politique qui ne rend pas compte des données du réel. De l'autre côté, il est manifeste que ces références à une forme idéale de gouvernement remplissent surtout une fonction rhétorique à l'intérieur des textes dont ils font partie. La première moitié du XVII^e siècle consigne, comme nous l'avons déjà vu, très peu d'analyses ponctuelles des projets utopiques ; c'est pourquoi, le débat concernant la forme idéale de gouvernement confronte deux visages du même argument – une société idéale, organisée à partir d'une série des principes moraux, transformés en lois, a peu de chances d'exister. Cette conclusion, presque unanimement acceptée peut servir de point de départ pour une réfutation totale des projets utopiques (dans la mesure où ils contreviennent à un ordre naturel déjà existant) ou pour leur définition en tant que modèles qui transgressent l'ordre politique des états proprement-dits.

autres officiers ; & de leur charge, devoir, & jurisdiction : ensemble de leurs rangs, seances, gages, privileges, reglemens & mercuriales, Geneve, Par Matthieu Berjon, 1621, p. 720 : « il est aussi difficile de trouver un Magistrat parfait, comme de voir une République, un Roy, un Orateur, un Capitaine, un Courtisan, un Ambassadeur, avec tous les qualités, que Platon, Xenophon, Ciceron, Onosandre, Castiglion & Tasso lui désirent ».

³⁷ Pierre Molinier, *Les politiques chrestiennes, ou Tableau des vertus politiques, considérées en l'estat chrestien*, Paris, Chez Martin Collet, 1621, p. 81 : « mais ce qu'on dit [...] de l'Orateur des Anciens si chanté, & jamais oüy, ou bien de la République des Philosophes, dont l'idée si bien depeinte n'a peu sortir en œuvre ; le mesme faut-il dire de ce parfait prudent... ».

³⁸ Nous citons de la préface de la traduction de Chappuys de 1585, Baldassare Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan du comte Baltasar Castillonois*, Paris, Chez Nicolas Bonfons, 1585 : « je me contenteray avoir failly avec Platon, Xénophon & Marc Tullis, laissant la dispute du monde intelligible & des Idees, entre lesquelles, comme (selon cette opinion) est l'Idée de la parfaite République, du Roy parfait, & du parfait Orateur : aussi est pareillement celle du parfait Courtisan... ».

³⁹ Cette chose transparait dans une critique du *Courtisan*, de Pierre de Rostéguy L'Ancre, dans laquelle celui-ci reproche à Castiglione le caractère théorique de son texte. Il lui reproche également que les vertus énumérées par lui collent trop fidèlement aux pratiques politiques d'Italie, voir Pierre de Rostéguy L'Ancre, *Le Livre des princes, contenant plusieurs notables discours, pour l'instruction des roys, empereurs & monarques*, Paris, Chez Nicolas Buon, 1617, p. 456 : « Pour le Courtisan, quoy que Balthasar Castiglioni Italien en ait formé un à plaisir, l'ayant paré de tant de beaux ormemens, & obligé à tant de vertus pour le rendre parfait & agreable à toute sorte de nations, que comme on dict de la Republique de Platon, qu'il nous a donné seulement en idée : & de l'Orateur de Cicéron, qui ne s'est encore jamais peu voir comme il la depeint : je tiens qu'il est impossible d'en trouver un pareil... ».

Cette oscillation entre la critique de la théorie coupée de la pratique et l'apologie du modèle moral de l'utopie peut être observée, selon la démonstration de Simone Mazaauric⁴⁰, dans les interventions consignées à l'occasion des conférences publiques initiées dans la quatrième décennie du XVII^e siècle par Théophraste Renaudot à Paris. La *République* et l'*Utopie* peuvent être comprises comme des modèles idéaux du comportement politique, affirme un des interlocuteurs anonymes⁴¹ ; en même temps, dans une discussion concernant la communauté de biens, ce modèle entre en contradiction avec le fonctionnement de l'état (chez un interlocuteur qui paraphrase les arguments contre Platon de la *Politique* d'Aristote) ou il doit être resserré en fonction des limitations du comportement humain (une intervention mentionne le fait que Platon a construit un deuxième modèle politique dans *Les Lois* justement pour adapter les principes de sa *République* aux exigences du gouvernement⁴²). Les participants aux conférences publiques initiées par Renaudot mentionnent seulement au passage un exemple moderne d'application des idées platoniciennes (et chrétiennes) de la communauté de biens, celui des Anabaptistes de Münster, qu'ils accusent d'avoir servi uniquement de prétexte pour leurs positions hérétiques ; pour le reste, ceux qui interviennent se contentent de parcourir encore une fois la liste des références antiques obligatoires. Cependant, les conférences de Renaudot laissent transparaître une ambiguïté concernant le statut des idées platoniciennes à l'intérieur de la pratique politique. Deux décennies après, les conférences initiées par Jean Richesource, à l'instar du modèle de Renaudot, ne contiennent plus qu'une seule référence au statut purement théorique des projets utopiques, à l'intérieur d'une critique sur l'intervention des philosophes dans l'établissement des principes de gouvernement⁴³. La deuxième partie du XVIII^e siècle va cultiver l'image d'un Platon qui s'intéresse, dans *La République*, plutôt à la morale qu'à la politique ; la communauté imaginée par le philosophe grec n'aurait, dans ce cas, aucun correspondant dans la réalité immédiate et représenterait uniquement un exercice théorique.

⁴⁰ Simone Mazaauric, *Savoirs et philosophie à Paris dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle: Les conférences du Bureau d'adresse de Théophraste Renaudot, 1633-1642*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1997, pp. 209-211.

⁴¹ « Et de mesme qu'en la pluspart des sciences & des arts les hommes se sont feints des prototypes & paragons pour leur servir de patron & de modelle : en la Politique, une République accomplie, telle que Platon, Thomas Morus, & quelques autres se sont proposée : en la Médecine, un tempérament au poids : en l'Eloquence, l'Orateur parfait : ainsi ceux qui ont voulu parler de la beauté en ont imaginé une parfaite... », Théophraste Renaudot, *Première centurie des questions traitées ez conférences du Bureau d'adresse*, Paris, Au Bureau d'Adresse, 1638, « Vingt-sixiesme conférence », p. 213 ; voir aussi Simone Mazaauric, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

⁴² Théophraste Renaudot, *Seconde centurie des questions traitées ez conférences du Bureau d'adresse*, Paris, Au Bureau d'Adresse, 1638, « Septant-sixiesme conférence », p. 216.

⁴³ Jean Oudart de Richesource, *La première partie des conférences académiques et oratoires*, Paris, Chez l'Auther, à l'Académie, 1663, pp. 603-604 : « Les Philosophes, Messieurs, ne doivent régner que dans les espaces imaginaires, dans le monde de la lune, dans la République de Platon, ou dans celle de Thomas Morus, & comme ils font une crime, quand ils examinent le gouvernement de nos Princes, je ne veux aujourd'huy que le louer ».

Le modèle de cette interprétation, qui est loin d'être nouvelle et qui ne fait que reprendre les conclusions des commentateurs de Platon du XVI^{ème} siècle, peut être retrouvé dans le « Dialogue traictant de la politique sceptiquement » de François de La Mothe Le Vayer, paru pour la première fois en 1631. L'un des protagonistes du dialogue, Orontes, utilise parmi d'autres exemples la *République* pour démontrer l'inadéquation de la politique à la réalité ; Platon aurait d'ailleurs écrit ce texte concernant la politique parce qu'il n'avait pas réussi à élaborer des lois concrètes pour les Thébains et les Arcadiens⁴⁴. Il serait donc inutile pour les interprètes de chercher des modèles correspondant à la communauté idéale de Platon, affirme Orontes⁴⁵ ; pour le philosophe grec, *La République* n'est pas autant un « passe temps [...] qu'une sérieuse occupation Politique », tout comme les desseins modernes de More, Campanella ou Bacon (« L'Utopie de Thomas Morus, la cité du Soleil de Campanella, & l'Isle de Bensalem du Chancelier Bacon, n'ont esté chimerisées en nos jours que par un semblable caprice »⁴⁶). Même s'il est difficile à établir dans quelle mesure le texte de La Mothe Le Vayer était connu à la fin du XVII^{ème} siècle, avant sa réédition en 1716, ses conclusions semblent être partagées par une grande partie des auteurs qui interprètent les théories politiques de Platon. Si Claude Fleury⁴⁷ ou André Dacier⁴⁸ soulignent les intentions purement morales ou théoriques du texte de Platon, l'abbé Laurent Bordelon problématise dans un dialogue justement le caractère ambigu de la *République* platonicienne, mettant en évidence encore une fois la distance entre la pratique politique et les idées du philosophe grec⁴⁹. Il est vrai qu'il manque à ces textes une référence

⁴⁴ François de La Mothe Le Vayer, *Dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens*, Paris, Fayard, 1988, p. 390 : « sachant qu'il estoit impossible de les reduire à cette esgalité, sur laquelle il se contentoit de former ses Républiques idéelles en l'air, semblables au siecle d'or des Poëtes, à l'estat d'innocence des Patriarches, ou à la Hierusalem delivrée des Saints Prophetes »,

⁴⁵ L'auteur visité ici est, principalement, Marsile Ficin, qui fournit d'ailleurs également les exemples chrétiens pour la communauté platonicienne des biens ; La Mothe Le Vayer va reprendre la polémique contre Ficin sur le même sujet dans *De la vertu des payens* (1642), voir François de La Mothe Le Vayer, *De la vertu des payens*, Paris, Chez François Targa, 1642, pp. 114-115.

⁴⁶ François de La Mothe Le Vayer, *Dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens*, p. 390.

⁴⁷ Claude Fleury, *Traité du choix et de la méthode des études*, Paris, Chez Pierre Aubouin, Pierre Emery & Charles Clousier, 1686, « Discours sur Platon », p. 331 : « Dans la république Socrate propose l'idée qu'il avoit d'un état parfait ; simplement comme une idée, d'une chose possible, mais trop difficile, qui n'a peut-être jamais été, & ne sera peut-être jamais ; & qu'il n'examine que pour trouver les fondemens de la morale ».

⁴⁸ Voir un commentaire à la traduction de celui-ci, d'après Marc Aurèle dans Marc Aurèle, *Réflexions morales de l'empereur Marc Antonin*, t. II, Amsterdam, Chez Abraham Wolfgang, 1691, p. 150 : « Aussi Platon n'a-t-il fait cette description que pour donner le modele parfait d'un gouvernement tres-juste, afin que tous les Etats puissent sur ce portrait juger des vices & des vertus de leur police. Que donc faire un Prince qui desespere de pouvoir porter les choses à cette perfection ? Il faut qu'il fasse ce qui depend de luy, qu'il obeisse à Dieu, & qu'il luy laisse le soin du reste ».

⁴⁹ Laurent Bordelon, *Theatre philosophique sur lequel on represente par des dialogues dans les champs Elisées les philosophes anciens et modernes*, Paris, Chez Claude Barbin & Jean Musier, 1692, « Dialogue XV », pp. 204-205 : « PLATON : Pensez-vous que j'aye sérieusement espéré voir un jour ma République établie ? ARCHELAUS : Je le pense, parce que vous en avez trop bien parlé pour le croire autrement. PLATON : Est-ce qu'on parle quelquefois mal des inventions de son esprit ? Et voulez-vous qu'après avoir

explicite aux textes modernes qui reprennent les idées platoniciennes sous la forme des communautés utopiques ; mais, en échange, ils laissent entrevoir les limites auxquelles les critiques pouvaient se heurter dans la compréhension de ces projets théoriques de reformation de la société et les réactions critiques qu'ils auraient pu susciter.

La République de Platon et *L'Utopie* de More ne sont pas accusées seulement de privilégier la théorie au détriment de la pratique ; pour les critiques, elles représentent aussi une forme de gouvernement que les théoriciens politiques, à partir de Bodin, essaient de combattre : l'idée de la république mixte. Dans la deuxième partie du XVI^e siècle, et au cours du XVII^e, les discussions concernant la meilleure forme de gouvernement, comparent de façon stéréotypée trois modèles idéaux : la monarchie, l'aristocratie et la démocratie. *La République* platonicienne, comme la forme de gouvernement des Utopiens, n'appartient, cependant, pas à une de ces formes pures, mais représente un modèle de distribution de la souveraineté ; en ce sens, Bodin décrit le régime institué par « Thomas le More en sa République » comme une forme de gouvernement mixte et dans la même catégorie il ajoute d'autres modèles, proposés par Cicero, Contarini ou Machiavel⁵⁰. Ainsi, il est facile de comprendre pourquoi les discussions concernant la meilleure forme de gouvernement n'incluent pas, au cours du XVII^e siècle, l'utopie. Les auteurs des traités politiques du XVII^e siècle pouvaient s'inspirer de Bodin ou de ses disciples pour prouver que la monarchie est la meilleure forme de gouvernement parmi les trois types idéaux ; un auteur comme Juste Lipse pouvait leur offrir, cependant, une meilleure synthèse des arguments des Antiques concernant ce sujet. Dans *Politicorum sive civilis doctrinae libri sex*, traité paru en 1589 en latin, et traduit en français l'année suivante par Charles Le Ber, Lipse offrait quatre arguments pour la monarchie : elle est (en accord avec Aristote) la plus ancienne forme de gouvernement ; elle représente également le régime qui est le plus en accord avec la nature et la raison ; et finalement la monarchie élimine la discorde constitutive de l'aristocratie et de la démocratie⁵¹. Dans la mesure où ces arguments ne réapparaissent pas seulement chez les imitateurs de Lipse, comme Jean Baudouin (*Le Prince parfait*, 1650), mais aussi dans la plupart des traités politiques français d'après 1650, les formes de gouvernement mixtes comme la république platonicienne ou *l'Utopie* de More étaient placées à la périphérie des discussions qui traitaient de la meilleure forme de gouvernement ; le verdict d'Abraham Amelot de la Houssaye relatif à *la République* de Platon et à *l'Utopie* de More,

inventé de si beaux reglemens, & de si extraordinaires ordonnances, j'allasse faire croire qu'il étoit très-difficile, pour ne pas dire, impossible de les mettre en pratique ? ARCHELAUS : Moy ! Je ne veux point cela, mais je voudrois seulement que les Sages & les Divins comme vous, songeassent plutôt à enseigner ce qu'on doit faire, & les moyens de le mettre en pratique, qu'à dire des choses extraordinaires ».

⁵⁰ Jean Bodin, *op. cit.*, t. II, p. 9.

⁵¹ Voir l'édition de 1594, traduite par Simion Goulart, Juste Lipse, *Les Politiques de Juste Lipsius*, Genève, Par Jehan Le Preux, 1594, II, 2, pp. 54-59.

dans une annotation de son édition des *Annales* de Tacite, ne faisait que confirmer cette position à la fin du XVII^e siècle⁵². Un auteur comme Vincent Cabot défend, contre Bodin, une autre forme idéale d'état, qui est une fusion entre la monarchie, l'aristocratie et la démocratie et dans laquelle la monarchie semble prédominer⁵³; cependant, après Cabot, les traités politiques omettent la forme de gouvernement mixte ; de Philippe Fortin de la Hoguette à Bossuet, on affirme, d'un commun accord, que la monarchie est la forme idéale de gouvernement. Traitée comme une espèce marginale de la littérature politique par des auteurs comme Naudé ou Sorel, l'utopie se trouve, à la moitié du XVII^e siècle, à l'ombre de la monarchie ; seul son statut de modèle moral atemporel justifie encore son apparition accidentelle dans les textes politiques ou philosophiques.

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⁵² Corneille Tacite, *Tacite avec des notes politiques et historiques*, La Haye, Chez Henry van Bulderen, 1692, t. II, p. 274 : « Un Gouvernement, qui auroit ce qu'il y a de meilleur dans la Monarchie, l'Aristocratie, & la Démocratie, seroit parfait ; mais, selon Tacite, cete perfection est impossible, non pas dans la théorie, mais dans la pratique. La République de Platon, & l'Utopie de Thomas Morus, sont des Etats parfaits, mais qui n'ont jamais été que dans leur imagination ».

⁵³ Vincent Cabot, *op. cit.*, V, XVI, pp. 576-600.

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ANTIUTOPIES ASTRALES SPIRITISTES À L'ÂGE CLASSIQUE

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ABSTRACT. *Astral Dystopias in the Classical Age.* In classical literature, with the heliocentric revolution and the theory of the infinite universe, the planets of our solar system, and then the different stars of the sky ceased to be pure and fiery spiritual astral bodies and became material habitable worlds. The authors of utopian and extraordinary voyages began to explore the possibility of sending their characters outside our terrestrial known globe to other planets. One of the means for such journeys, beyond different human artifacts, was the out-of-body experiences, spiritual trances, which became fashionable with the spread of different classical spiritualists sects. Our paper argues that the planets explored were not always inhabited by ideal societies, as in classical utopias, but by nightmare, evil and sometimes monstrous populations, creating a unique species of classical dystopias.

Keywords: French and English classical literature; Utopias; Dystopias; Astral voyage; Margaret Cavendish; Voltaire; Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert; Tiphaigne de la Roche.

REZUMAT. *Antiutopii astrale spiritiste în literatura clasică.* În literatura clasică, o dată cu revoluția heliocentrică și cu apariția teoriei universului infinit, planete sistemului nostru solar, și apoi stelele bolții înstelate au încetat să mai fie corpuri astrale spirituale, pure, de natură ignică, și au devenit lumi materiale locuibile. Autorii de călătorii extraordinare și utopice au început să exploreze posibilitatea de a-și trimite personajele în afara planetei noastre, către alte planete. Unul din mijloacele pentru asemenea călătorii, în afara a diverse artefacte umane, a fost decorporalizarea, transa sufletului, temă ce a devenit foarte la modă o dată cu apariția diferitelor secte spiritiste clasice. Lucrarea noastră susține că planetele explorate nu erau întotdeauna locuite de societăți ideale, ca în utopiile clasice, ci adeseori de populații de coșmar, malefice sau monstruoase, încadrându-se într-un subgen aparte al antiutopiilor clasice.

Cuvinte cheie: Literatura franceză și engleză clasică; Utopie; Antiutopie; Călătorie astrală; Margaret Cavendish; Voltaire; Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert; Tiphaigne de la Roche.

Avec la révolution héliocentrique et la théorie du monde infini, les planètes de notre système solaire, puis les autres étoiles avec leurs planètes, ont cessé d'être

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vues comme appartenant à un autre règne ontologique, igné, immuable et parfait¹. Observées avec les lunettes nouvellement inventées, elles dévoilaient, de même que la Lune, une surface similaire à celle terrestre, donc habitable. Il est vrai que, pour les visiter, les simples véhicules de transport aéroportés utilisés pour monter à la Lune (oiseaux de haute altitude, fioles avec des substances attirées par notre satellite, chariots volants, montgolfières, etc.) ne suffisaient plus, qu'il fallait imaginer des moyens plus complexes, capables de franchir les distances astrales.

La solution la plus simple pour le problème des voyages interplanétaires, avant l'avènement de la science-fiction, a été d'extrapoler les rapports de proximité très propices entre la Terre et la Lune aux distances entre les autres planètes et leurs satellites respectifs, puis entre les planètes et finalement entre les étoiles elles-mêmes. Cette conjecture est exposée, par exemple, dans *Telliamed, ou Entretiens d'un philosophe indien avec un missionnaire français sur la diminution de la mer, la formation de la terre, l'origine de l'homme, etc.* de Benoît de Maillet (1748). Discutant sur la pluralité des mondes, Telliamed rapporte les théories de deux Anglais, « pas moins prévenu(s) que Huygens ». Le premier de ceux-ci, se référant à Saturne et ses deux Lunes, affirme que la première Lune « rase Saturne de si près, que les habitans de l'une et de l'autre placés sur le sommet de leurs plus hautes montagnes pourroient presque se donner la main, du moins se voir et se parler ». Bien plus, les distances sont si opportunes que les habitants de chaque Lune peuvent sauter sur Saturne et réciproquement. Le deuxième Anglais surenchérit, alléguant que les étoiles de la Voie Lactée, cette « pépinière des Soleils et des globes opaques », doivent « presque se toucher dans les cercles qu'ils décrivoient autour des Soleils dont ils étoient régis ; ensorte que leurs habitans respectifs dévoient se connoître, et se rendre de fréquentes visites² ». Les voyages interplanétaires sont donc possibles, très convenablement, par des sauts d'une orbite à l'autre, au moment de proximité maximale de astres.

L'un des premiers astres les plus proches de la Terre à être exploré dans un voyage extraordinaire est *The Blazing World* de Margaret Cavendish (1668). Ce « monde de flammes » est homologué aux *États et Empires du Soleil* de Cyrano de Bergerac (1657)³, puisque les deux astres sont des habitats brillants, irradiants. La duchesse de Newcastle imagine une planète étrange, partant d'une série d'hypothèses apparemment fantaisistes, mais non sans une logique ou une intuition scientifique assez inquiétante. Le protagoniste du récit, un femme, enlevée sur un navire et emportée en dérive vers le Pôle Nord, apprend d'expérience que, s'il est possible de naviguer sur le globe terrestre d'Est en Ouest, au contraire il est

¹ Voir Arthur Koestler, *Les somnambules. Essai sur l'histoire des conceptions de l'univers*, Paris, Presses Pocket, 1985.

² [Benoît de Maillet], *Telliamed, ou Entretiens d'un philosophe indien avec un missionnaire français sur la diminution de la mer, la formation de la terre, l'origine de l'homme, etc.*, Paris, 1984, p. 236-237.

³ Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac, *Histoire comique des états et empires du soleil*, in *Œuvres complètes*, Texte établi et présenté par Jacques Prévot, Paris, Librairie Belin, 1977.

impossible de le contourner d'un pôle à l'autre. Les auteurs de voyages souterrains, comme par exemple Casanova dans son *Icosaméron* (1788), court-circuiteront les pôles par une descente aux entrailles de la planète et une traversée intérieure suivant l'axe de rotation⁴. Margaret Cavendish imagine un trajet complémentaire, qui suppose la sortie en dehors du globe terrestre, dans l'espace astral.

Plus précisément, elle affirme que la Terre est en contact, au pôle Nord, avec une planète similaire à la nôtre. Bien que ce corps connexe, « le monde flamboyant », ait les mêmes dimensions que le nôtre et bénéficie de son propre soleil, il est invisible depuis la Terre à cause de sa position polaire et de la lumière de notre soleil, qui obscurcit les autres étoiles⁵. Margaret Cavendish transforme notre système solaire en un système double en revisitant un schéma imaginaire de la géographie médiévale. Utilisant les mappemondes de la fin du Moyen Âge, Christophe Colomb partait en navigation autour de la terre d'Occident en Orient, espérant joindre, par la traversée de l'Océan, un bout de l'*oïkoumène* (l'Espagne) avec le bout opposé (les Indes). Pourtant, son expédition s'était heurtée à un immense continent inconnu, le Nouveau Monde. La voyageuse de Margaret Cavendish refait la même expérience, se heurtant, dans son voyage inter-polaire, non à un continent, mais à une planète inconnue. Le *Blazing World* est un nouveau Nouveau Monde, et l'héroïne du récit peut poser en nouveau Colomb⁶.

Comme nous l'avons démontré dans un autre travail⁷, le « monde flamboyant » est un successeur du *topos* médiéval du ciel empyrée ; la planète parallèle est un jardin édenique ; sa capitale s'appelle Paradis ; et le palais impérial, où la héroïne se marie à l'empereur, est une Nouvelle Jérusalem par la richesse de gemmes et d'or⁸. Affirmant que le « monde de flammes » est littéralement le jardin biblique, Margaret Cavendish donne une interprétation ésotérique-scientiste de la *Genèse*. Bien plus, sur l'exemple de la *Nouvelle Atlantide* de Bacon, et de la Société Royale (qu'elle avait visité en 1667), elle insuffle à son personnage, devenue une impératrice illuminée, le désir d'élaborer une « cabbale », une « pansophie », une science secrète globale. Ses scribes seront les esprits d'Aristote, Pythagore, Platon, Épicure, Galilée, Gassendi, Descartes, Van Helmont, Hobbes, etc., tous dirigés par

⁴ Giacomo Casanova, *Les vingt journées d'Édouard et d'Élizabeth [Icosaméron]*, Roman inconnu adapté par J.-M. Lo Duca, Paris, Éditions Pygmalion, 1977.

⁵ Margaret Cavendish, *The Description of a New World called the Blazing World and other Writings*, Edited by Kate Lilley, London, William Pickering, 1992, p. 126.

⁶ Il est difficile de dire si l'homologie peut être poussée plus loin. Après avoir traversé les Amériques, les voyageurs d'Ouest en Est ont tout de même la possibilité de rejoindre l'*oïkoumène*, le continent euro-asiatique. Qu'en est-il des voyageurs de Nord en Sud de Margaret Cavendish ? Est-ce qu'ils glissent tout simplement par le pôle Nord dans un monde parallèle, ou est-ce qu'ils ont aussi la chance de redescendre, après une circonvolution du « monde de flammes », par une topologie paradoxale, au pôle Sud de notre globe ? Ou est-ce qu'au pôle Sud la Terre touche à une troisième planète ?

⁷ Corin Braga, *Du paradis perdu à l'antiutopie aux XVI^e-XVIII^e siècles*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2010, p. 148-150.

⁸ Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World*, Londres, 1992, p. 132.

la duchesse de Newcastle elle-même, qui, « bien qu'elle n'est pas la plus savante, éloquente, pleine d'esprit et ingénieuse, est tout de même un écrivain complet et rationnel⁹ ». Plus qu'une auto-flatterie narcissique, Margaret Cavendish construit une mise en abîme surprenante et très (post)moderne, où le personnage convoque son auteur dans le monde fictif.

Les caractéristiques paradisiaques du « monde flamboyant », supérieur au nôtre (l'impératrice intervient avec une armée surnaturelle sur la Terre, garantissant la suprématie de l'Angleterre sur ses ennemis), le qualifient comme une utopie. Cependant ce monde exhibe aussi des traits assez angoissants. Suivant la théorie cartésienne de la séparation des deux substances, la matière et l'esprit, l'animal et l'ange, Margaret Cavendish imagine que le « monde de flammes » est peuplé par deux espèces d'êtres. Les uns sont des esprits, c'est-à-dire des êtres supérieurs, détenteurs des secrets du monde immatériel, génies qui conseillent et illuminent les savants terriens. Les autres sont des hommes-animaux, hommes-ours, hommes-vers, hommes-araignés, hommes-mouches, etc. Et bien que, à leur tour, ils soient les maîtres des secrets du monde matériel, par leur condition hybride, par le renversement de position entre l'homme et l'animal, par leur « monstruosité », ils suscitent des craintes inconscientes et des fantasmes tératologiques qui projettent une lumière plutôt antiutopique sur ce « *blazing world* ».

Les planètes du système solaire, puis des autres étoiles, ne tarderont pas beaucoup à attirer l'imagination des utopistes. L'un des premiers explorateurs planétaires est le Chevalier de Béthune, dans sa *Relation du Monde de Mercure* (1750). Partant de l'argumentation de Fontenelle en faveur de l'habitabilité des planètes¹⁰, le Chevalier développe ses propres raisonnements, qui combinent le principe de l'économie créatrice et le « principe anthropique » : si Dieu a créé la Terre pour l'homme, est-il possible qu'il ait créé le reste du monde stellaire pour le laisser dépeuplé ? « Est-il possible que Dieu ait fait avec tant d'art un si grand nombre d'inutilités ? Peut-on s'imaginer qu'en formant ces masses prodigieuses de matière, il n'ait daigné créer que des déserts immenses et d'effroyables solitudes ?¹¹ ». La conclusion est que, si ce n'est que par principe d'homologie, Dieu doit avoir créé des êtres vivants sur chaque astre. En tant que couronne de la création, l'homme et ses homologues astraux doivent obligatoirement occuper la place qui leur a été assignée sur leur propre planète, dans leur milieu spécifique.

Que ces milieux soient très différents et incompatibles, ne permettant pas la transposition des espèces d'un astre à l'autre, n'est pas un argument de nature à infirmer l'existence de la vie sur les autres planètes. Ainsi, si on discute par exemple l'habitabilité du Soleil, Dieu « ne sera point embarrassé à créer des êtres

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 181.

¹⁰ Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes habités* [1686, 1687 éd. revue et corrigée], Texte revu par Alain Niderst, in *Œuvres complètes*, tome II, Corpus des œuvres de philosophie en langue française, Paris, Fayard, 1991.

¹¹ [Chevalier de Béthune], *Relation du monde de Mercure*, Genève, Barrillot et fils, 1750, p. VII-IX.

auxquels le feu sera aussi nécessaire pour la conservation de leur vie, que l'eau est nécessaire aux Poissons, et l'air aux Habitans de notre Terre¹² ». Les éléments aristotéliens et leurs habitants ou esprits spécifiques (salamandres, mandragores, sylphides, sirènes, etc.) sont invoqués par le Chevalier de Béthune comme preuves pour une théorie physique et astronomique qui prétend pourtant n'appartenir plus à la pensée magique, mais à la science.

De fait, la *Relation du monde de Mercure* ne s'insère pas dans le genre des voyages extraordinaires qui annoncent la science-fiction, mais dans une autre variété, celle que Charles-Georges-Thomas Garnier appelle « romans cabalistiques »¹³. Voguant dans le mouvement ésotérique occulte qui, au XVIII^e siècle, faisait pendant au courant illuministe¹⁴, le Chevalier de Béthune utilise, non sans ironie d'ailleurs, les grands thèmes de la théosophie de l'époque. Le protagoniste du récit est contacté, pendant qu'il observe la planète Mercure, par un étranger qui lui offre un « microscope philosophique », capable de rendre « visibles les objets les plus éloignés, comme les plus proches, aussi-bien que les plus sombres et les plus éclairés¹⁵ ». Le visiteur se dévoile être un rosicrucien, donc un membre de ces sociétés ésotériques que l'utopie avait déjà adapté à ses propres buts (à commencer par la Maison de Salomon de Francis Bacon). Initié à la pansophie, le rosicrucien, qui se trouve « presque à la tête de tout l'ordre », invite le narrateur à adhérer à la société et lui impose comme épreuve initiatique un périple astral. Le voyage se passe comme un « *raptus animae* », le protagoniste se retrouve hors de son corps, s'incorpore dans un myrte (le choix du réceptacle floral est décidé par les « sympathies électives » qui rapprochent hommes et plantes), qui à son tour est consommé par un feu mystique. Rajeuni et fortifié, l'initié gagne la *pansophie*, le savoir instantané et total, qui lui permet de donner une « relation du monde de Mercure ».

Le Chevalier de Béthune construit une théosophie spiritiste, évoquant les grands thèmes des « illuminés » du XVIII^e siècle et des philosophes mystiques préromantiques et romantiques. À cette époque, toute une pléiade de théosophes, dont Saint-Martin, Joseph de Maistre et Ballanche, ont réussi à adapter la philosophie néopythagoricienne, néoplatonicienne et hermétique de la Renaissance aux théories de la nouvelle science, comme celle de la pluralité des mondes, et à l'évolutionnisme naissant¹⁶. Ainsi, Saint-Martin organise, dans *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité* (1775), les mondes astraux sur la « grande chaîne des êtres » et conçoit leur enchaînement dans les termes d'une évolution de l'esprit sur des échelons de plus

¹² *Ibidem*, p. IX-XI.

¹³ Charles-Georges-Thomas Garnier (éd.), *Voyages imaginaires, songes, visions et romans cabalistiques*, Amsterdam & Paris, 1787-1789.

¹⁴ Voir le travail d'Auguste Viatte, *Les sources occultes du Romantisme*, Paris, H. Champion, 1979.

¹⁵ [Chevalier de Béthune], *Relation du monde de Mercure*, p. 3-4.

¹⁶ Voir Brian Juden, *Traditions orphiques et tendances mystiques dans le romantisme français (1800-1855)*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1971.

en plus proches de Dieu : « Sans doute il y a plusieurs mondes, puisque le plus petit des être en est un, mais tous tiennent de la même chaîne et comme l'homme a le droit de porter la main jusqu'au premier anneau de cette chaîne, il ne saurait en approcher, qu'il ne touche à la fois tous les Mondes¹⁷ ». Les esprits se réincarnent de planète en planète, à des conditions toujours meilleures, dans une transmigration que Ballanche appelle « palingénésie sociale » : « L'homme, au sortir de cette vie et de cette planète, sera pourvu de facultés plus étendues, se trouvera placé dans un autre milieu, et verra changer les proportions de ses nouveaux organes avec les objets nouveaux qui se manifesteront à lui¹⁸ ».

Le Chevalier de Béthune met cette anthroposophie évolutionniste dans la bouche des habitants de Mercure. Selon ceux-ci, le cosmos est composé d'une multitude de tourbillons stellaires, qui est chacun l'habitat de divers êtres dans divers stades d'évolution spirituelle. L'origine et en même temps l'anneau final de la chaîne des êtres habitant notre système solaire est le Soleil. L'éloignement des planètes sur leurs orbites respectives indique divers degrés de perfection, de manière que Mercure, la plus proche du Soleil, est aussi la planète la plus évoluée. Chaque âme est obligée de s'incarner, pendant un cycle de mille ans, dans les différentes espèces animales peuplant chaque planète. Pour la Terre, l'espèce la plus évoluée de la chaîne des êtres est l'humanité. Au terme du « grand pèlerinage » par les planètes, les âmes deviennent des « salamandres, c'est-à-dire, enfans d'un des habitans du Soleil¹⁹ ». Leur progression ne s'achève cependant pas par une intégration dans le feu solaire, puisqu'ils doivent continuer de voyager dans toutes les planètes, pour s'instruire et se fortifier par l'expérience.

Si le Soleil est en quelque sorte l'avatar « spiritiste » (dans l'aval de la mystique solaire de Ficin et autres philosophes de la Renaissance) du ciel empyré chrétien, la planète Mercure, qui y touche, correspond au Paradis terrestre, l'antre du Paradis céleste. Par cette équivalence, Mercure hérite des thèmes du jardin divin. L'ardeur du soleil acquiert le rôle d'obstacle infranchissable que jouait la zone torride pour le Paradis terrestre dans la mythologie médiévale. En plus de sa fonction protectrice, le Soleil purifie les maux et assure la fécondité édenique de la planète, il « dissipe les vapeurs nuisibles, qui pourroient se former dans l'air, et la terre, toujours pénétrée des premiers rayons de la lumière, n'exhale jamais qu'une rosée bienfaisante. La nourriture y est toujours également saine et pleine de suc, et les soins pénibles qu'il faut prendre dans notre monde pour acquérir les choses utiles, sont bannis dans cette Planète²⁰ ».

Comme la terre fournit à tous les animaux la nourriture qui leur convient, la faune mercurienne vit dans une paix universelle, de manière qu'on « est assez

¹⁷ Saint-Martin, *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité*, Edimbourg, 1775, p. 402.

¹⁸ Ballanche, *Palingénésie sociale*, p. 136, apud Brian Juden, *Traditions orphiques et tendances mystiques dans le romantisme français*, p. 276.

¹⁹ [Chevalier de Béthune], *Relation du monde de Mercure*, Genève, 1750, 1750, p. 227.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 32-33.

peu surpris dans Mercure de voir un Tigre faire l'amour à une jolie Biche et l'épouser, [ou] un loup s'adoucir auprès d'une Chèvre²¹ ». Parlant un « langage muet, composé de mimes, d'actions et de différentes postures qui ne sont moins intelligibles que la parole²² », langue comprise par les Mercuriens aussi, les animaux sont les meilleurs amis, aides et alliés des hommes : les renards, les lapins et les taupes creusent les fondements pour les maisons, les castors coupent et façonnent les arbres, les ânes, les boucs et les éléphants se chargent du transport des matériaux, les poissons tirent les bateaux par des amarres²³. Un vrai pays de Cocagne au bien-être duquel les bêtes participent allégrement.

Les Mercuriens eux-mêmes sont une population angélique-spiritiste. Si les Solairiens (les « salamandres ») n'ont point de corps et sont des intelligences pures, ignées, les Mercuriens ressemblent « pour les traits du visage, et pour la forme du corps, aux idées charmantes que nous nous faisons des Zéphyrus et des Génies. Leur beauté ne se fane qu'auprès plusieurs siècles : la fraîcheur, la santé et la délicatesse y paroît comme inaltérable²⁴ ». Doté de petites ailes, ce petit peuple est donné par le Chevalier de Béthune comme le véritable objet des superstitions populaires sur les fées, les mages, les rosicruciens, les génies, les silphes, les gnomes, les ondines et autres êtres fabuleux. Même les diables ne seraient que les habitants mauvais et malheureux des roches et des astéroïdes calcinés qui gravitent dans l'espace. La matière féérique des « âges enchantés » est ainsi projetée dans l'espace astral.

Vivant selon les « conseils de la raison » et les « intentions de la nature », les Mercuriens font rayonner leur conduite morale dans leur aspect physique. Selon les principes d'une telle éthique somatisée, l'engourdissement de l'âme, la paresse, la nonchalance et l'ennui sont des maladies nuisibles et contagieuses, alors que le respect des vertus assure une santé sans faille et une longévité illimitée. Les Mercuriens se meurent seulement quand ils succombent au désir de quitter la planète et de se réunir au « grand principe, c'est-à-dire d'aller peupler le Soleil²⁵ ». Les vertus, en tant que biens spirituels, ne se perdent même pas, puisqu'à la mort les Mercuriens peuvent distribuer leurs « talents » acquis aux parents et aux amis.

Quant à la société mercurienne, de nature utopique, elle paraphrase les excellences de la Jérusalem céleste. L'établissement de l'empire mercurien se doit à une révélation et à une épiphanie solaire. Dans un passé mythique, un nuage de lumière est descendu sur la planète et a engendré une cité miraculeuse : « On entroit par cent portes toujours ouvertes dans ce séjour enchanté : cent rues conduisoient de ces portes à la place du Palais de l'Empereur. Elle étoit fort grande, et magnifiquement ornée : mais la maison qui occupoit le milieu de cette place, étoit si magnifique et si agréable, qu'il est plus aisé de l'imaginer, que de la

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 71-72.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 66-67.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 77, 82.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 39-40.

décrire²⁶ ». Les matériaux utilisés par les Mercuriens sont des variantes des pierres précieuses du royaume du Prêtre Jean, présentées comme des substances alchimiques. Les édifices sont construits d'un métal maniable et ductile, qui n'est autre chose que « l'alliage des Philosophes » ; la monnaie courante est représentée par des gemmes qui ont des pouvoirs magiques (elles peuvent produire des météores, exciter les orages, calmer les mers, rendre invisible, etc.) ; les habits sont faits d'une étoffe ignée, qui rappelle la mythique peau de salamandre. Quant à l'empereur de l'utopie mercurienne, il est un Solairien incarné, « plus parfait que les autres », souverain « illuminé » qu'on pourrait caractériser, par allusion à Louis XIV, comme un « roi de droit solaire ».

Par rapport à la terre, Sirius et Saturne du *Micromégas* de Voltaire (1752) devraient être des utopies aussi. L'auteur de *Candide* utilise dans ce « roman philosophique » l'échelle progressive des dimensions cosmiques pour mettre en question la condition de l'homme. Reprenant dans un registre ironique les angoisses que l'idée d'univers infini suscitait chez les philosophes du XVII^e siècle, Voltaire manie l'hyperbole et la litote des mondes infiniment grands et infiniment petits pour relativiser la position de l'homme et satiriser ses prétentions scientifiques et spirituelles. Micromégas, « nom qui convient fort à tous les grands » (le personnage est haut de huit lieues), vient de l'étoile de Sirius, par rapport à laquelle la Terre ressemble à une « petite fourmilière²⁷ ». Se servant des rayons du soleil, des comètes et des aurores boréales comme des berlines, il saute de planète en planète, jusqu'à Saturne. Accompagné par un Saturnien (un nain, comparé au Sirien), Micromégas finit par débarquer sur la Terre, au nord de l'Europe, en l'an de grâce mil sept cent trente-sept.

La différence de grandeur entre le Sirien, le Saturnien et les Terriens (qui sont littéralement des microbes par rapport aux visiteurs) sert à écraser l'orgueil narcissique de la race humaine. Sirius et Saturne apparaissent comme des mondes supérieurs au nôtre dans un rapport de simple, mais très spectaculaire multiplication mathématique. Par rapport à l'étoile de Micromégas, notre globe est vingt et un millions six cent mille fois plus petit, la Méditerranée est une mare, l'*oïkoumène* une taupinière et l'Océan un étang qui mouille à peine le talon du Sirien et arrive à mi-jambe du Saturnien. Par rapport aux hommes, les Saturniens ont soixante et douze sens et vivent quinze mille ans, alors que les Siriens ont mille sens et vivent sept cents fois plus que les Saturniens. Ces caractéristiques grotesquement grandes n'empêchent pas les visiteurs de se concevoir comme des « gouttes d'eau dans un océan immense » : « notre existence est un point, notre durée un instant, notre globe un atome. À peine a-t-on commencé à s'instruire un peu que la mort arrive avant qu'on ait de l'expérience²⁸ ». Depuis cette perspective,

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 21-22.

²⁷ Voltaire, *Micromégas*, in *Romans et contes*, Édition établie par René Pomeau, Paris, Flammarion, 1966, p. 131.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 134.

les prétentions au savoir universel des savants terriens (« des mites ») interrogés par Micromégas ne peuvent être que dérisoires, le Sirien se sentant « un peu fâché dans le fond du cœur de voir que les infiniment petits eussent un orgueil presque infiniment grand²⁹ ».

Le jeu intellectuel avec les dimensions relatives auquel se prête Voltaire met la Terre dans une position insignifiante, et Sirius dans celle d'une hyper-utopie obtenue par l'agrandissement mécanique des caractéristiques positives. Malgré cela, la satire inhérente à tout dispositif utopique joue dans les deux sens. Faisant les géants extraterrestres se plaindre du « *fugit irreparabile tempus* » et du « *contemptus mundi* », Voltaire ironise non seulement sur l'importance et la vanité des humains, mais aussi bien sur la philosophie baroque, la peur du vide, le scepticisme existentiel, la sous-évaluation de la condition humaine. Paradoxalement, la confrontation avec la logique froide des vides astraux amène le philosophe des Lumières, par excès et finalement par autodestruction du relativisme, à revaloriser la condition humaine. Face au savoir exhibé par les « animalcules philosophes », Micromégas conclut qu'il ne « faut juger de rien sur sa grandeur apparente³⁰ ».

La réversibilité de l'ironie met un bémol aux utopies de Sirius et de Saturne. Il est vrai que Micromégas, écœuré, de même que le roi de Brobdingnag de Swift, par ce qu'il vient d'apprendre sur les guerres et la fourberie des hommes, s'abstient à peine de ne pas écraser « cette fourmière d'assassins ridicules³¹ ». Mais en fait ce qu'il raconte de Sirius ne vaut guère mieux, puisque Micromégas est parti en exil après qu'un « muphti » de son pays l'a fait bannir comme hérétique à cause d'une dispute sur les ressemblances entre les puces et les colimaçons. Quant au Saturnien, il est encore plus borné d'esprit, du moins face à la sagesse du Sirien.

Voltaire attaque par la satire les deux pôles du dispositif utopique, l'ici terrestre et l'ailleurs astral. Si, d'un côté, il présente la Terre comme une taupinière risible, de l'autre il ne se prive pas de projeter sur Sirius et Saturne les traits déplaisants de la société terrestre. Au lieu de rester concentré dans l'ici, donnant naissance à une utopie astrale simple, le mal s'insinue dans l'ailleurs aussi, lui donnant une nuance dystopique. Le résultat final d'une telle expansion du négatif dans les deux sens serait une antiutopie totale, où le vice occupe simultanément les deux pôles, l'ici et l'ailleurs, notre monde et le monde astral.

Le système solaire en tant qu'antiutopie multiple et polymorphe est le thème du prolix *Voyage de Milord Céton dans les sept planètes, ou Le nouveau Mentor* de Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert (1765). Le roman étend sa vision désenchantée à toutes les planètes traditionnelles et les peuple de différentes sociétés dystopiques. Par le mécanisme de la réversion, les cieux de la cosmologie chrétienne deviennent des habitats infernaux, comme si, dans les voyages extraordinaires modernes, le Paradis et l'Enfer avaient changé de place. Dans son

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 147.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 145.

Mundus alter et idem (1605), Joseph Hall avait déjà créé une antiutopie qui transformait les cercles de l'Enfer en royaumes exécrationnels du continent austral inconnu³². Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert envoie les bolges dantesques hors de la Terre, dans l'espace astral.

Sans innover par rapport à des prédécesseurs comme Johannes Kepler³³, Cyrano de Bergerac³⁴ ou le Chevalier de Béthune, le *Voyage de Milord Céton* utilise le prétexte très commode du récit révélé dans un songe mystique. Dans la Préface, R.R., la narratrice, raconte avoir été visitée dans son cabinet de travail par un « homme de feu, ou [...] démon ». L'apparition surgit de la cheminée et abîme les meubles de la chambre. Le lutin se présente comme une salamandre, génie du feu venu pour assouvir les anxiétés de l'écrivaine concernant son travail, la condition de la femme intellectuelle et les valeurs de la femme en général. Ainsi, le génie est un personnage qui met à jour, dans le cadre de la philosophie spiritiste, la vénérable figure de la muse inspiratrice. Son rôle est de donner à R.R. les meilleurs conseils de poésie³⁵.

Après le départ du visiteur, la narratrice a l'impression qu'elle a dû faire un rêve ou qu'elle a été en proie à des hallucinations hypnagogiques. Toutefois, la salamandre lui laisse pour preuve de sa visite un document palpable, le manuscrit de Milord Céton, que R.R. s'empresse de traduire de l'anglais. Le récit se passe au temps de la dictature de Cromwell. Obligé de fuir en exil, le lord Céton dispose que ses deux enfants, Milord Céton et Monime, soient élevés par un oncle très sévère de la secte des Quakers. Ce milieu hostile et restrictif sera, pour les deux enfants, la meilleure rampe de lancement pour un voyage extraordinaire. C'est une belle métaphore pour la pression sociale et psychologique qui se trouve souvent à l'origine des évasions utopiques.

Un jour, égaré, Milord Céton tombe sur un château isolé et est accueilli par un vénérable vieillard, l'ancêtre de leur famille. Les deux frères se réfugient chez leur aïeul et sont mis sous la protection d'un génie appelé Zachiel. C'est cet esprit, le « nouveau Mentor », qui instruira les deux jeunes dans les secrets de l'univers et les emportera à visiter les mondes planétaires. « Roman cabalistique », *Les voyages de Milord Céton* développent la même cosmologie théosophique que le Chevalier de Béthune dans sa *Relation du monde de Mercure* (1750). Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert combine l'astronomie pythagoricienne à la physique cartésienne, la théorie

³² Joseph Hall, *Another World and Yet the Same*, Bishop Joseph Hall's *Mundus Alter et Idem*, Translated and edited by John Millar Wands, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1981.

³³ Joh. Keppleri mathematici olim imperatorii, *Somnium, seu Opus posthumum de astronomia lunari*, divulgatum a M. Ludovico Kepplero filio, medicinae candidato, Impressum partim Sagani Silesiorum, absolutum Francofurti, sumptibus haeredum authoris, Anno MDCXXXIV [1634].

³⁴ Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac, *L'autre monde*, in *Œuvres complètes*, Texte établi et présenté par Jacques Prévot, Paris, Librairie Belin, 1977.

³⁵ Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert, *Voyage de Milord Céton dans les sept planètes ou Le nouveau Mentor*, Traduits par Madame de R. R., À La Haye, Et se trouve à Paris chez tous les Libraires qui débitent les Nouveautés, MDCCLXV [1765], vol. I, p. XVI.

aristotélicienne-hermétique des éléments au spiritisme moderne, la métempsychose orphique à l'évolutionnisme du XVIII^e siècle. Zachiel explique à Monime qu'il y a plusieurs sortes de Génies, en fonction des éléments qu'ils habitent (Silphes, Gnomes, Ondins, Salamandres) et de leur degré d'évolution (supérieurs et inférieurs, équivalant aux anges et aux démons traditionnels). Intermédiaires entre un Dieu inaccessible et la nature créatrice, ayant un corps « phantastique » qu'ils peuvent abandonner et revêtir à leur gré, les génies sont l'échelon supérieur à l'humanité dans la « généalogie des êtres qui remplissent l'univers ».

Chaque planète est peuplée de plusieurs espèces animales et humaines, qui sont autant de maillons de la grande chaîne des êtres. Le destin de tout un chacun est de se réincarner à sa mort dans l'espèce la plus proche des tendances dominantes de son caractère : « sans entrer dans les circonstances détaillées de ces métamorphoses, je dirais seulement que les premiers hommes, qui pendant leur vie montrèrent trop de faiblesse & de timidité, furent changés en femmes ou en coquillages ; ceux qui voulurent examiner avec trop de curiosité les sciences divines, en cherchant à percer dans les mystères de la Nature, le furent en oiseaux, & ceux qui se plongèrent dans des plaisirs bas et grossiers le furent en quadrupèdes ; & qu'enfin ceux qui passèrent leur vie dans une ignorance stupide furent changés en poissons³⁶ ».

Selon cette « métempsychose astronomique », les âmes sont censées passer, pendant des millions d'années, par cent portes consécutives, composées de métaux différents et placées sur les planète respectives qui président à chaque métal. Pour arriver au Soleil, qui représente le séjour des bienheureux, elles doivent parcourir l'« échelle très-haute divisée en sept passages consécutifs ; c'est ce qu'ils appellent la grande révolution des corps célestes & terrestres, ou l'entier achèvement de la nature ; se persuadant que les âmes vont habiter successivement toutes les planètes & les étoiles fixes qui sont autour du Soleil, & qu'elles se purifient dans ces passages par une vertu secrète à mesure qu'elles approchent de cet astre qui est le centre de la félicité³⁷ ».

Les mondes planétaires sont des habitats qui abritent les différentes espèces selon leur degré d'évolution. Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert reprend la corrélation astrologique traditionnelle entre les caractères et les astres, mais, à la différence d'un Dante, elle associe les planètes non aux vertus des élus, mais aux vices des damnés. C'est ainsi que la Lune, Mercure, Vénus, le Soleil, Mars, Jupiter et Saturne deviennent les réceptacles de plusieurs sociétés dystopiques que Milord Céton et Monime, réduits par leur guide Zachiel à des corps fantastiques (des mouches de feu), visitent une à une traversant les « déserts immensurables du vuide ». Les sociétés planétaires sont autant d'images satiriques de la terre, construites par la sélection des caractéristiques négatives et critiquables associées aux planètes respectives.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, vol. I, p. 43-44.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, vol. III, p. 259-260.

La première planète visitée, la Lune, symbolise l'inconstance et la superficialité. Monime découvre qu'il n'y a, « dans toute l'étendue du globe de la Lune, que sottises, fol orgueil, vanité, opiniâtreté, [...] balourdises, que projets mal conçus, & encore plus mal exécutés ; en général, cette Planète n'est remplie que d'hommes foibles, légers, inquiets & passionnés pour de nouvelles bagatelles ; enfin des gens dont les inclinations sont basses, puériles, folles ou ridicules³⁸ ». Satirisant les « petits-maîtres » dans une suite de scènes de caractères, la narratrice exprime directement son jugement moral par les noms qu'elle donne aux Lunaires : le baron de Farfadet, le comte de Lourdaud, Cornalise la vieille coquette, le baron de Fanfaronnet, le comte Frivole, etc. Cette superposition des opinions de l'auteur et du narrateur rate évidemment les effets de l'ironie mordante d'un Swift, bien que Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert invente, sur le modèle de l'Académie de Lagado de Swift, un « château sublime », « logement de tous les gens à systèmes, & de tous les faiseurs de projets qu'on entretenoit au dépens de l'État », caricatures des « projecteurs » de la nouvelle science.

Pour comble de l'allégorie pamphlétaire, les Lunaires, représentant la superficialité de l'esprit, sont doublés d'une deuxième espèce, les Fibulaires, connotant l'animalité. Il s'agit d'hommes sans tête, ayant la bouche sur la poitrine, anatomie suggérant le manque d'esprit, la décérébration. On le voit bien, comme dans tous les voyages extraordinaires, *Le voyage de Milord Céton dans les sept planètes* se nourrit librement de la tradition médiévale, les Fibulaires étant les descendants directs des *blemmyes* que les encyclopédies et les bestiaires du Moyen Âge plaçaient dans les Indes fabuleuses.

Le second arrêt des voyageurs astraux est sur une comète. Ici l'imagination utopique (ou antiutopique) cède le pas à l'imaginaire proto-scientifique (dans la descendance du *Somnium* de Kepler), combiné à l'imaginaire magique et hermétique. La comète est un enfer céleste, occupant dirait-on la place de la planète maléfique Lilith. « Plaine sombre et aride », immergée dans une « nuit affreuse », avec les vents enfermés dans une « prison d'airain », les fontaines muettes, les poissons enchâssés dans du verre et les animaux statufiés, la comète est un monde mort, formé des « noires exhalaisons qu'elle attire de la Lune et de Mercure³⁹ ».

Elle est toutefois habitée par un vieillard magicien et nécromancien, qui est capable de tous les prodiges de la magie noire : inciter des guerres, utiliser des poupées magiques et des talismans, organiser des nuits de Sabbat, inspirer les devins, mettre au travail les démons familiers, les gobelins, la mule ferrée, les lémures, les farfadets, les ombres, les mânes, les spectres et les fantômes. Se présentant comme le Juif Errant, le magicien incarne la figure du sage païen dans une pseudomorphose négative. Roi de l'imaginaire nocturne, patron des visions sataniques de la pensée occulte et des superstitions populaires, il est l'incarnation

³⁸ *Ibidem*, vol. I, p. 269-270.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, vol. I, p. 280-292.

de ce que C. G. Jung appelle l'ombre collective. En effet, pour confirmer son rôle négatif, de contre-soleil, l'habitant de la comète est combattu par un être de lumière, un jeune homme chevauchant un aigle et un lynx avec un glaive de feu.

Après cet épisode à valeur emblématique, une véritable effigie du système planétaire théosophique, Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert enchaîne par l'exploration des autres planètes, autant des dystopies à odeur infernale. Mercure est le « séjour de l'opulence, du luxe, du faste, & de toutes sortes de magnificences ». Les habitants de ce monde ne reconnaissent d'autre divinité que la Fortune et leur seul Dieu est l'argent. Appelés Cilléniens, ils sont espions, délateurs à gage, calomnieux, escrocs, joueurs, filous, banqueroutiers, voleurs, séducteurs, et aussi nouvellistes impertinents, esprits forts, faux savants, hypocrites, médisants, railleurs⁴⁰. L'énumération est accompagnée d'une galerie de portraits typologiques, avec leur petite histoire morale : le Grand-Prêtre de la Fortune, le Libertin, Monsieur Forban, Prodiges, Fourbison, Louvette, Finette. Le schéma de construction de ces bolges planétaires est le catalogue des vices et des personnages qui les incarnent, tel qu'il avait été parfait par Dante.

La planète Venus est plus ambiguë, puisque la passion de l'amour qui lui est associée traditionnellement est vue autant sous son aspect répulsif, de sexualité démoniaque, que sous son aspect charmant, d'instinct naturel. De ce fait, la planète profite de l'équivoque du Jardin des délices d'un Bosch. D'un côté, elle est un paradis terrestre, « plaine émaillée des plus précieux dons de flore », arrosée par les fleuves du délice et de la volupté, avec le soleil resplendissant sur une mer de jaspe. Au centre se trouve le Temple de l'Amour, où coule la Fontaine de Jouvence et le fleuve de l'Oubli et pousse l'Arbre de l'Amour⁴¹. Ces renvois à la mythologie biblique sont doublés d'allusions classiques. Ida, le royaume central, est un pays des Amazones, gouverné par les femmes, la reine des Idaliennes vit dans un palais magique qui évoque pour les protagonistes l'île enchantée d'Armide, et l'archipel adjacent, habité par des bergers et bergères purs et ingénus, est une utopie arcadienne.

De l'autre côté, Venus est une planète de perdition aussi. Zachiël enseigne à ses protégés que « dans ce monde le libertinage rend les hommes & les femmes illustres ». Sa souveraine, la déesse Passion, a pour suivantes la Folie, la Méfiance et la Jalousie, donc tous les faux chemins et vices dans lequel l'Amour peut échouer. Sa concurrente est la princesse la Raison, qui incite à la vertu et modération. Plus qu'une allégorie éthique stéréotypée, le récit recouvre peut-être des fantasmes ingénus de l'écrivaine. La protagoniste, Monime, est transformée par le génie en une nymphe, avec « la taille & la majesté de Diane, la jeunesse de Flore, la beauté & les grâces de Venus, avec l'air riant de l'Amour⁴² ». Courtisée par le Prince Pétulant, elle découvre cependant que son amour véritable, sa « tendresse », va vers Milord Céton. L'inceste pharaonique entre les deux frères

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, vol. II, p. 5-6, 68, 255-256.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, vol. III, 2-4, 107-108, 108-109, 126.

⁴² *Ibidem*, vol. III, 11, 17-18.

refait le mythe de l'amour surnaturel entre le Soleil et la Lune, Mars et Venus (il est vrai qu'à la fin Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert déculpabilise la relation des deux personnages, les faisant découvrir, très convenablement, qu'ils ne sont pas frères, que Monime est fille du roi de Georgie).

La planète suivante, Mars, apparaît elle aussi sous une lumière équivoque, Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert hésitant de trancher entre les valeurs traditionnellement associées à ce dieu (gloire, héroïsme, courage) et ses appréhensions et anxiétés personnelles envers la belligérance. Milord Céton y fait son initiation militaire et participe même à un conflit, aidant le prince des Martiens à défaire ses ennemis. Il s'agit donc d'une « bonne guerre » et, en effet, sur les murs du Temple de la Gloire sont exposés les tableaux de plusieurs figures historiques, Cyrus, Romulus, la Pucelle d'Orléans, Achille, César, Alexandre, Montezuma, Henri IV. Mais un bémol est vite mis à ces louanges de l'héroïsme, la narratrice observant que l'amour propre a toujours grevé les grands héros, qui sont « presque tous devenus plus méchants que les heureux succès qu'ils ont eus⁴³ ». Les exemples de tyrans, scélérats et hommes pernicioseux n'y manquent pas, dont Cassius, Brutus, Totila roi des Goths, Attila et Cromwell. Si on ajoute à tout cela les intérêts mesquins et ignobles des soldats et des mercenaires, petite racaille prête à tout piller ou à prendre la fuite et à trahir, les bienfaits du penchant martial paraissent bien douteux.

À partir de l'astre suivant, le Soleil, en accord avec l'idée d'évolutionnisme planétaire, Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert conçoit des images plus sereines, qui passent dans le domaine des topies positives. Le Soleil, en tant que point d'aboutissement de la métempsychose spirite, apparaît comme un paradis rationnel, comparable aux Îles Fortunées. La description traditionnelle du jardin divin, avec ses plaines émaillées, vallées fleuries et air subtil, reçoit des valences swedenborgiennes, puisque les éléments du paysage sont des concepts et fonctions psychologiques hypostasiées : fleuves de la Mémoire et de l'Imagination, canal du Jugement, mer de l'Espérance, palais d'Apollo ou de la créativité, forêt des arbres du bon sens et de l'esprit, etc. Ce monde ne peut être peuplé que de sages, de savants et d'oracles, qui « pensent ce qu'ils disent, [...] exécutent ce qu'ils promettent ; presque tous philosophes éclairés par la raison⁴⁴ ». Cette docte compagnie habite un Palais des Philosophes (emprunté directement des Limbes dantesques et transporté dans le Soleil), ayant comme fondement des pierres philosophales.

La planète de Jupiter est une dystopie modérée, qui permet à Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert de faire une critique tempérée, sur des bases conservatrices, de la monarchie française du XVIII^e siècle. Le repère paraît en être l'image idéalisée du Roi Soleil, en tant que prototype du souverain éclairé, « le meilleur de tous les Princes : il est bon, il est ami tendre, compatissant, bienfaisant ». Sa résidence, le Palais du Goût, « surpasse en beauté & en magnificence tout ce qu'on peut imaginer de plus

⁴³ *Ibidem*, vol. IV, p. 262.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, vol. V, p. 106.

merveilleux⁴⁵ ». Ses sujets, les Joviniens, appartiennent à « l'ancienne noblesse » et sont affables, humains, sans arrogance et sans fierté. Cependant les « nouveaux nobles » « semblent avoir sucé avec le lait de la vanité, l'orgueil & la fierté ; ils se croient seuls respectables, exigent des soumissions, se méprisent entre eux, se portent envie & se haïssent⁴⁶ ». Aveuglés par leur frivolité, ils ont rempli le pays de jardins exorbitants et superflus, alors qu'à la campagne le grand peuple vit dans la misère.

La dernière planète, Saturne, hérite de la fonction de son dieu tutélaire, Chronos, patron de l'Âge d'Or. Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert y place une utopie prélapsaire : « En admirant toutes ces beautés de la nature, je crus être dans la jeunesse du monde, c'est-à-dire, lorsque les hommes n'étoient point encore corrompus, & lorsque les premiers germes des arts naissoient de la nature ou des besoins peu nombreux de l'innocence ». Proches de la nature, les Saturniens mènent une vie eudémonique, avec des passions et des plaisirs tempérés, voluptés tranquilles, dans une pureté, frugalité, vertu et félicité inaltérables⁴⁷. La condition pour l'établissement d'une telle Arcadie illuministe est un système d'éducation utopique, qui cultive la constance, la fermeté, la tempérance, la modération, bref « toutes les vertus qui forment les hommes, qui élèvent l'âme & la mettent en garde contre les illusions de l'amour propre⁴⁸ ».

Récapitulant le périple de Milord Céton et de Monime dans les sept planètes, on peut hiérarchiser les « échelles très-hautes » de la « métempsychose astronomique » imaginées par Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert dans l'ordre ascendant suivant : la comète infernale, Mercure, la Lune, Vénus, Mars, la Terre, Jupiter, Saturne et le Soleil. Seules l'Arcadie saturnienne et l'utopie solarienne se placent dans le champ positif du schéma utopique, les autres sont des antiutopies qui recueillent, dans divers degrés, les éléments négatifs du *mundus*. Et bien que succédant au topos de l'Enfer, souterrain ou astral, ces planètes sont des allégories de la société humaine contingente, sans arrière plan mythique ou métaphysique, et les vices qu'elles réunissent sont rapportables intégralement au comportement des humains.

Une belle parabole de la réattribution vers les hommes des défauts moraux traditionnellement assignés aux diables est l'épisode où Zachiel, le « nouveau Mentor », blâme Astarophe et ses légions de démons de corrompre la société déjà très avariée des Mercuriens. Et à l'archi-démon de répondre : « sois certain que ceux-ci, naturellement portés au mal, n'ont pas eu besoin de nous pour se corrompre, puisque ce Monde nous a toujours fourni abondamment autant de sujets que le Prince des Ténèbres en peut désirer pour l'entretien de sa table ». Cette observation s'accorde avec l'attitude de tous les Méphistophélès des Lumières, comme ceux de Klinger, de Müller ou de Goethe, qui décident qu'ils n'ont plus grand-chose à faire parmi les humains puisque ceux-ci arrivent à se faire damner

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, vol. VI, p. 290-291, 151-152.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, vol. VI, p. 39-40.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, vol. VII, p. 26, 28, 30.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, vol. VII, p. 44-45.

par leurs propres efforts. Pire encore, l'Enfer a été submergé par la « nuée de gens que la Discorde y a poussés : ces gens, semblables à des serpens, se sont tellement accrus par leur nombre & leur grandeur, qu'ils ont pensé être assez forts pour agir en maîtres »⁴⁹. C'est pourquoi Pluton, ennuyé et furieux, aurait décidé d'exiler ses généraux, Lucifer, Belzébuth et Astarophe, sur Mercure, pour s'y recycler et perfectionner.

Finalement, la variante spiritiste la plus élaborée de l'(anti)utopisme astral est fournie par Charles-François Tiphaigne de la Roche, dans son *Amilec, ou la Graine d'hommes* (1754). Le prétexte narratif est, comme chez Kepler, Cyrano de Bergerac ou Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert, une visitation surnaturelle. Pendant qu'il lit dans son cabinet un traité sur la création et l'évolution des espèces, le narrateur est visité par Amilec, un « jeune homme d'une taille extrêmement avantageuse, & qui avoit dans la physionomie quelque chose au-dessus de l'humanité ». Se présentant comme le « Génie qui préside à la multiplication de l'espèce humaine⁵⁰ », l'esprit invite le narrateur à se laisser initier aux secrets de la génération universelle.

Le voyage astral (un rapt swedenborgien) qui s'ensuit donne à Tiphaigne de la Roche l'occasion de développer une cosmologie de facture théosophique. Reprenant le concept stoïcien de « *logos spermatikos* », que les docteurs ésotériques Basile Valentin et Van Helmont avaient réélaboré sous le nom d'« *arkhé* », l'auteur imagine la genèse universelle comme une panspermie : « cette multitude innombrable de tourbillons, de soleils, de terres habitables, qui composent ce vaste univers, tout cela [...] a été autrefois contenu dans un grain dont la grosseur égalait à peine celle d'un pois. Le développement s'en est fait peu à peu, mais il n'est pas encore terminé. Il est bien des mondes qui ne commencent, pour ainsi dire, qu'à germer. Ces amas d'étoiles, ces taches blanchâtres que vous autres habitans de la Terre apercevez dans la voûte des cieus, & que vous appelez voies de lait, ne sont autre chose que des paquets de petits mondes, qui ne sont sortis de leur coque, que depuis soixante ou quatre-vingt siècles⁵¹ ». On dirait que le monde de Tiphaigne de la Roche est une variante anticipatoire, de nature organique, biologique, de la théorie actuelle du Big Bang et de l'expansion universelle.

Notre système solaire est en plein processus de maturation, les planètes les plus proches du soleil (Mercure, Vénus) étant les plus « mûres ». Les plantes, les animaux et les hommes de chaque planète proviennent eux aussi de la panspermie universelle. Chaque individu est porteur d'une multitude de spores qu'il répand continuellement et qui germent dans des nouveaux individus. Dans le cadre du débat sur l'ontogénie au XVIII^e siècle, qui opposait les épigénéistes (selon lesquels la vie est apparue par l'agrégation de molécules organiques, par un processus

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, vol. II, p. 264, 265.

⁵⁰ Charles-François Tiphaigne de la Roche, *Amilec, ou la graine d'hommes*, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, l'Arbre, 1985, p. 3-4.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 15-16.

d'« emboîtement ») et les préformationnistes (selon lesquels la vie est née de germes préexistants, par « dissémination »), Tiphaigne de la Roche prend la part des derniers⁵². En tout cas, aujourd'hui son discours paraît annoncer la théorie de l'ADN et celle de la multiplication fractalique (Tiphaigne de la Roche s'était d'ailleurs déjà gagné une réputation de visionnaire, en tant qu'anticipateur du daguerréotype).

La distribution, la germination et le mûrissement des « raisons séminales » ne sont pas aléatoires, mais strictement surveillés par des génies spécialement affectés à cette tâche. Tout comme les hommes sont des jardiniers et des agriculteurs, chaque génie est le moissonneur des spores d'une espèce bien définie. Amilec est un génie « humano-culteur » qui prend soin des graines d'hommes et de femmes. Pour instruire son protégé, Amilec l'emmène dans son magasin ou dépôt de germes, à contempler « les provisions du Grand-Maître de la Manufacture des hommes⁵³ ». Traitée légèrement, dans un style badin, l'image de la race humaine, élevée à l'instar des plantes dans une ferme, a cependant un potentiel angoissant, que ne manqueront d'exploiter, un siècle plus tard, les auteurs de science-fiction, à commencer par H. G. Wells.

Au-delà de l'appréhension subliminale qu'elle provoque, la fiction de Tiphaigne de la Roche a aussi un caractère consciemment et délibérément antiutopique. L'inspection du stock de graines donne au narrateur l'opportunité de remarquer que l'humanité est le résultat d'une sélection génétique négative. Dans la grande « manufacture des hommes », les différentes spores humaines sont classées, comme dans une incubatrice, suivant la caractéristique dominante du futur individu. Or, l'humanité en miniature patronnée par Amilec paraît le résultat d'un tri cathodique, qui n'a retenu que les traits négatifs. Les germes majoritaires sont ceux de « femmes qui se coagulent en pelotons autour des germes de petit-maître, de gens de robe, de conquérans », de héros (pourris en grande partie), d'étourdis, d'avarés, de jaloux, d'orgueilleux, de violents, d'auteurs (qui doivent être blutés au vent), d'ecclésiastiques (il s'agit de faux germes, pour la plupart, commente Amilec), d'aristocrates et de financiers (qui doivent être mêlés pour se conserver réciproquement), alors que les germes de femmes fidèles sont très rares, et ceux de juges irréprochables – introuvables.

Par une série de métaphores filées, Tiphaigne de la Roche construit une vaste allégorie antiutopique, dans laquelle la race humaine apparaît comme la piètre vendange d'un agriculteur sans succès. Il réécrit ainsi le « *vanitas vanitatum* » de l'Ecclésiaste dans les termes d'une anthroposophie sceptique : « Précieux dépôt de la Nature, j'ai l'avantage de vous contempler. Le voile est déchiré, j'ai remonté à la source des êtres, & je les vois dans leur essence. Générations passées que vous vous êtes terminées à peu de chose ! Races futures, que vous tirerez votre origine d'un principe léger ! Microcosme, abrégé des merveilles de l'Univers, ô homme,

⁵² Voir Jacques Marx, *Tiphaigne de la Roche. Modèles de l'imaginaire au XVIII^e siècle*, Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1981, p. 44.

⁵³ Charles-François Tiphaigne de la Roche, *Amilec, ou la graine d'hommes*, p. 71.

que tu es petit à mes yeux ! Un germe échappe du néant entre des millions d'autres qui y retombent, se développe & tu prends naissance. Qu'il s'en est peu fallu que tu n'aies jamais existé !⁵⁴ ».

Entre toutes les planètes, c'est la Lune, complément de la Terre, qui porte la charge négative la plus massive. Ensemencée avec les « graines d'étourdi » qui y sont montées de notre globe, la Lune est une Terre renversée, un monde à rebours, succédant dans ce rôle aux antipodes de la tradition médiévale. Comme l'observe Jacques Marx, nous retrouvons ici le mécanisme pur de l'antiutopie : « au lieu, comme ce serait le cas dans une utopie de type traditionnel, de critiquer le monde irrationnel du présent pour y substituer une antithèse rationnelle, l'auteur dresse un tableau grotesque de notre monde sous les dehors d'une extrapolation logique. La lune de Tiphaigne est un antimonde. [...] À tous points de vue enfin, c'est un monde à l'envers dont la description vise à nous persuader que le nôtre, qui se targue de marcher à l'endroit, va en réalité tout de travers⁵⁵ ».

De ce fait, le miroir en noir de la Lune ne livre pas une image blanchie de la Terre, puisque Tiphaigne de la Roche se délecte à utiliser l'inversion catoptrique pour construire des figures d'esprit et des pointes morale à double tranchant. La mise en reflet ne profite à aucun des pôles du mécanisme (anti)utopique : « on a établi dans la Lune des Écoles de Folie ou d'Étourderie, où l'on profite beaucoup ; comme on a établi sur la Terre des Écoles de Philosophie & de Sagesse, où l'on ne profite guère ». Le discours sur les deux planètes enfile une suite de considérations à la Oscar Wilde : « on s'égare sur la Terre, parce qu'on veut trop approfondir les choses ; on s'égare à la Lune, parce qu'on ne les approfondit pas assez » ; « on est malheureux sur la Terre, parce qu'on n'est pas assez sage ; on est malheureux à la Lune (car la félicité ne se trouve nulle part) parce qu'on n'est pas assez fou⁵⁶ ». Le fondement du scepticisme social et humain, spécifique des Lumières, de ces antiutopies astrales est dévoilé justement dans la petite parenthèse de la citation précédente sur la nature insaisissable du bonheur.

À faire le bilan de toute la série de voyages extraordinaires et de topies délocalisées de l'âge classique, renvoyées en dehors de la surface de la Terre soit dans les entrailles de notre planète⁵⁷, soit dans l'espace astral, on arrive à une conclusion un peu étrange. Les souterrains et les globes intérieurs, bien qu'ils héritent de l'imaginaire traditionnel des enfers, ont engendré plutôt des topies positives, alors que la Lune et les planètes, bien qu'elles succèdent aux cieux du Paradis chrétien, ont eu la tendance d'accueillir plutôt des topies négatives.

Cette valorisation sceptique de l'espace astral pourrait être expliquée, à la rigueur, par le transfert du thème du « *mundus inversus* » des antipodes à la Lune et

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ Jacques Marx, *Tiphaigne de la Roche. Modèles de l'imaginaire au XVIII^e siècle*, p. 45-46.

⁵⁶ Charles-François Tiphaigne de la Roche, *Amilec, ou la graine d'hommes*, p. 44, 46.

⁵⁷ Voir notre travail « Le voyage souterrain: Jules Verne et ses précurseurs », *Les Valenciennes*, no. 40, Presses Universitaires de Valenciennes, France, 2007.

aux planètes. Les mondes habitables des cieux sont devenus le grenier de l'inconscient européen, le dépotoir pour les fantasmes et les angoisses que la mappemonde terrestre, avec ses continents et océans de mieux en mieux connus, ne pouvait plus receler. Les races monstrueuses dont les Européens peuplaient les Indes fabuleuses, puis le Nouveau Monde et le Continent Austral Inconnu, non rencontrées et introuvables sur la Terre, ont été transportées dans l'ailleurs stellaire. Sociétés moralement inverses à la civilisation terrestre, les antiutopies célestes sont les précurseurs des races terrifiantes d'« *aliens* » de la science-fiction contemporaine.

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LIFE AS FORM OR AS ENERGY IN THE UTOPIAN APPROACH OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

- A CASE STUDY: *THE HISTORY OF RASSELAS...*, BY SAMUEL JOHNSON -

ȘTEFAN BORBÉLY*

ABSTRACT. *Life as Form or as Energy in the Utopian Approach of the Enlightenment.* For many distinguished intellectuals of the past and the present, Paradise equals with the nostalgia for a utopian existence. We usually say – and this is a strong stereotype of the scholarly literature dedicated to utopia and dystopia – that the longing for a perfect land is a sort or reenactment of Paradise, a wishful regression. The paper demonstrates that the stereotype of regression does not function in one of the most representative dystopian texts of the Enlightenment, Dr. Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*, which advocates, on the contrary, an escape from Paradise, as a prerequisite of any authentic existence, conceived as struggle, dynamic experience and active search for knowledge.

Keywords: Samuel Johnson, Enlightenment, *Rasselas*, utopia, dystopia.

REZUMAT. *Viața ca formă sau ca energie în textele utopice ale Iluminismului.* Pentru mulți distinși exegeți de ieri și de azi, Paradisul reprezintă nostalgia pentru o existență utopică. Se spune îndeobște – printr-o stereotipie durabilă a literaturii exegetice dedicate utopiei și distopiei – ca aspirația către un ținut perfect echivalează cu un soi de retrăire a Paradisului, cu o regresie fericită. Textul de față își propune să demonstreze că stereotipia regresiei nu se aplică unuia dintre cele mai reprezentative texte distopice ale secolului al XVIII-lea, *Rasselas* de dr. Samuel Johnson, care pledează, dimpotrivă, pentru o fugă de Paradis, înțeleasă ca o precondiție a existenței autentice, definită ca sforțare, experiență dinamică și căutare activă a cunoașterii.

Cuvinte-cheie: Samuel Johnson, Iluminism, secolul al XVIII-lea, *Rasselas*, utopie, distopie.

It is generally admitted that Modernism began with the dissolution of the Middle-Ages and has progressed, through time, up to the subtle and highly complex eschatology of postmodernism. According to Petrarch and his followers, being modern means accepting – in Alfred Adler's terms – a “minus-situation” or a handicap: there have been, as the early modernists used to say, only two perfect

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ancient civilizations – Greek and Roman –, and since our time is not as substantial as theirs was, we have to compensate the gap by constructive effort, imitation and will. To put it differently, we have to act in such a noble way as to build a society and culture similar to those accepted as models. Excellence is given to us, and all we have to do is reach up and grasp it.

The problem is that this is not easy, because apart from the natural purity and the alleged moral simplicity of the Greek and Roman civilizations, the Christian mentality of the Middle Ages was pre-determined by the Biblical idea of sin. As we know it from the Book, God fixed it by expelling Adam and Eve from Paradise, thus turning them into mortals. Consequently, by aiming to imitate cultures which had no idea or experience of the Biblical sin, we act downright foolishly because we ignore not only the original fallout, but also the generally accepted truth that only baptism could bring forth salvation. Besides, the Greeks and the Romans were not baptized, remaining, in spite of their formidable cultural and moral achievements, outside any possibility of trans-substantiation.

The dilemma was solved by resorting to *Imitatio Christi*, by fuelling dogma and practice into the riddle. Christ had to die in order to show the way and to rid us from our sins. A good Christian has death inside his soul, which guides him: it's Christ's death, a necessary death as reenactment, through which one can attain salvation and perfection. In a parallel genuine understanding, the best thing about the Greek and the Roman cultures is that they are dead cultures: a death confirmed by ruins, extinct habits and morals, by dead manuscripts and dead symbols which belong definitely to the past. They had died – the pious fathers said – in order to make Christian culture possible: to prepare its grounds, to foster its strivings, similar to Christ, who died in order to bring to life a new and superior form of understanding and living, the Christian existence.

“The ancients,” Peter Gay says, “have looked to death as the confirmation of life.”¹ Well, not exactly: not as a mirror of life, as a counter-reality of it, or as an opposition, but rather as a precondition of it, a narrow gap which allows for substantiation and purification. The ancient conception of death was far too plural and diverse to yoke it down in a single formula. Let's take, for example, the case of tradition. It meant, in the beginning, a long series of illustrious dead figures which set the path for a given action, way of living or scenario. They instilled paradigms, which cannot be ignored, surpassed or modified: according to some sayings, the first Roman king, Numa Pompilius, died because he had forgotten an obligatory ritual formula. The reenactment of the past was not only possible, but compulsory, as it happens in some organic societies nowadays (especially in the rural ones), which say that they make that precise gesture or perform that precise dance because of the paradigm imposed by the ancestors.

¹ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Science of Freedom*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York – London, 1996, p. 92.

In many ancient or even modern societies, the form of life has been understood as a reenacted form of death: no sadness because of this, no mourning or exasperation. It is customary for a son to reenact the life of his father by taking over his assets, residence and career. Nowadays, we condemn professional and social cloning as lack of originality or as a propensity towards robotization. Tradition does not confirm that: heredity, wherever it happens, and regardless of its form and manifestation, is a play of life as death, an identification with death and an acceptance of its biological, economical and psychological caprices. The main idea in all these occurrences is the pre-determinative acceptance of the past and of death, the necessary dialogue with them. Men act by limiting themselves by death. That is why the Christian dictionaries speak of *via negativa* as an elected form of *mortification*: that is, feeling that death is an aim, and accepting it as a limit. Living Christ not as a limit, but as a limitation – as Nietzsche used to say.

A similar limit of the humans is Paradise, the well-known Garden of Eden. For us, and for many distinguished intellectuals of the past and the present, Paradise equals with the nostalgia for a utopian existence. We usually say – and this is a strong stereotype of the scholarly literature dedicated to utopia and dystopia – that the longing for a perfect land is a sort or reenactment of Paradise, a wishful regression. Men – this type of exegesis says – tend to compensate for the poor status of their condition by imagining that Paradise is still existent somewhere in a distant time or space, and that Paradise is inhabited by a perfect civilization. The separation between them and us is a specific limit, which is not theirs, but ours.

Starting from such a basic assumption, the visionary and utopian literature of the Enlightenment shifted from a happy past to a happy future, with progress in between them. The superiority of our era – they used to say – is measured in the advancement of scientific discoveries, of knowledge and of geography, which will be funneled into the advancement of morals, understood as a separation by progress from any kind of superstition, popular belief and uncontrolled imagination. Let's take, for instance, Condorcet's essays on the improvement of mankind, as analyzed by Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel in *Utopian Thought in the Western World*²: "If men were left to operate freely, 'naturally,' they would, he [that is: Condorcet] believed, produce a series of functional innovations which continuously increased their happiness."³ Condorcet – Manuel & Manuel say – "democratized the idea of progress,"⁴ by suggesting that it is accessible to everyone due to some sort of "natural" order, intrinsic to every human being. But is it to be understood as a really "free" development, capable of carrying men from underdevelopment to progress in a spontaneous, uncontrollable way?

² Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 7th printing, 1997. Chapter 20, *Condorcet: Progression to Elysium*, pp. 487 – 518.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 495.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 500.

No, the thinkers of the Enlightenment considered, nature is an “organism,” that is something which has been organized, pushed towards his own perfection by being controlled by the Supreme Being and oriented. The basic assumption, concerning utopia, is Thomas Morus’ famous pioneering text: his utopia is there, it is given, as a permanent existence, all we have to do is to discover it and to learn from its perfection. On the contrary, within the Enlightenment, utopia is not something which is given to us, but something which has to be organized, called to existence through planning and engineering, rationally constructed. The new utopia is a “scientific society,” not a spontaneous one: “Drawing his inspiration from Francis Bacon’s description of the activities of Salomon’s house of science of New Atlantis,” Manuel & Manuel remark, “Condorcet proposed a voluntary organization of world scientists acting under a common direction and in accordance with a ‘perpetual’ plan of research.”⁵ Humanity as utopia would be their sublime playground, as the outcome of a perfectly organized society, with no mistakes, errant drives or nostalgia towards the past.

Accordingly, the classical utopian literature from the past was considered the embodiment of a specific frustration in the eighteenth century, derived from the assumption that our civilization cannot attain perfection because of its inherent limitations. Mankind is fatally lame and retarded, since it can only evolve within the scope of its imperfection. It becomes obvious that the good fathers of the Enlightenment were flabbergasted by this absurd idea, which contradicts infinity, the laws of universal reason and evolution. “I know not how to conceive anything without extension” – the protagonist says in *Rasselas, the History of the Prince of Abyssinia*, by Samuel Johnson (1759; the original title was: *The Prince of Abyssinia: A Tale*), one of the first dystopias accepted by scholars. Extension is practically limitless, because reason itself is also without limits. The best example is Nature, since – it is also written in “the little story book,” as Johnson used to call *Rasselas*... – “the deviation from Nature is a deviation from happiness.” It is proper for Nature to evolve incessantly, to offer only growing structures: “Our minds, like our bodies, are in continual flux – Samuel Johnson asserts in his novel. - ; something is hourly lost, and something acquired. To lose much at once is inconvenient to either, but while the vital power remains uninjured, nature will find the means of reparation.”

Let us remember “the continual flux,” “the vital power,” in order to associate them with the idea of utopia as paradise or as a perfect structure. Paradise is, in Samuel Johnson’s terms, an “ideal form,” which has already reached the margins of its “extension”: it’s a realm of “uniform delight,” “uniform hardship” and uniform human harmony, but it cannot go further, it cannot evolve. The privilege of perfect uniformity is that it transforms the whole society into a perfect elite; the good example is Thomas Morus’ *Utopia* (1516), while the bad one is Leibniz’s

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 506.

assertion that we live in “the best of all possible worlds,” also satirized by Voltaire in *Candide*. Accordingly, the regression towards Paradise – or to the Garden of Eden, the perfect structure – is one of the greatest mistakes the human condition can express, because it traps it into immobility and inconsistency. In other words, let’s praise the Lord for having *expelled* Adam and Eve from the perfect structure, because He provided them with the energy of self-construction and extension. In a similar way, utopia is a dead end, and dystopia, on the contrary, a solution: the history of the literary genre has offered itself the logic outcome from the distress of stereotypes, lack of involvement and fixation.

No surprise, then, that the Modernism of the Enlightenment launched a devastating attack against those who embodied that limitation in real life, against the clergy, the guardians of the “perfect life” conceived as monasticism. “No class of men on earth was more destructive than the priesthood,” Andreas Riem wrote in one of the most embittered pamphlets of the period, first published as an anonymous text in Berlin in 1788.⁶ They are destructive not only because they are the “opponents of enlightenment” and of reason, because they preach misery and “stupid frailty,” but because they are the functionaries of death, that is of a value which is, as such, but cannot evolve. “Mortification – the protagonist of *Rasselas* says after discovering that he has spent more than two years amidst the ruins of Egypt and has seen none of them – is not virtuous in itself,” which explains, on the other hand, that monasticism is contrary to human self-perfection and existence: “He that lives well in the world is better than he that lives well in the monastery.”

Enlightenment – the scholars of the eighteenth century do not hesitate to remind us – is about dynamics and growing, not about mortification. “If it is asked – Immanuel Kant says in a seminal essay – ‘Do we live in an *enlightened* age?’, the answer is ‘No, but we do live in an age *of enlightenment*.’”⁷ That is, the age must be understood as a process, as an embodiment of continuous movement and progress, and not as a point of arrival: things and beings grow incessantly, contemplating the rudeness left behind, their formal incompleteness. Being an enlightened human means to accept one’s evolution, be part of the process of someone’s refinement and openness to progress. “Enlightenment – Andreas Riem says – produces genuine dignity,” which means that death should obey the same rule of being a process of gaining transparency, not discouragement and mourning. Men should live enlightened, guided by reason and nourished by tranquility in order to reach an “honorable burial,” which means the transference of their deeds into public esteem and respectability. Nothing is more serene than a “clean conscience in the hour of death”: the idea resembles, of course, the teachings of the old Stoics. Accordingly, Riem speaks about the “noble strivings” of

⁶ Andreas Riem, *On Enlightenment: Is It and Could It Be Dangerous to the State, to Religion, or Dangerous in General? A Word To Be Heeded by Princes, Statesmen, and Clergy*, in: *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*. Edited by James Smith. University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, 1996, p. 181. Translation by Jane Kneller.

⁷ *An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?* In: *ibid.*, p. 62. Translation by James Schmidt.

death, also mentioning that “the true consolation of life and death springs from the testimony of a good conscience.”⁸ The more rational a man is, the better he can understand that death is a serene slip into the radiant immensity of the universe. Rational people do not cry when death is approaching, because they know that it is a part of the process, not something opposed to it.

The Mediaeval pedagogy of death has been anxious and turbulent, very noisy and deliberately impure or grotesque. On the contrary, the eighteenth-century pedagogy of death is serene and calm, because it presupposes the full blossoming of the being. Death accepted as part of the organic process of progress and decay means that it can be prolonged into contemplation, extracting it from any form of impurity, psychological torment or despair. Civilizations come to existence, they develop and then fall into decay, completing the cycle of existence, which means that evolution and death go together, as an integrating image. “What you can no longer procure from the living may be given by the dead” – Samuel Johnson says in *Rasselas*, sending his protagonist to visit the pyramids, not as a source of vivid wisdom, but as the magnificent place of universal futility. The Prince is reluctant: his “business is the man,” the vivid being, not something which has already stopped. Similar to the hermits, the dead “have lost so much, and have gained so little.” Accordingly, the secrecy of the hieroglyphs, the radiant imagery of the funeral chambers does not interest him at all, because death is not a message, but only an entrapment. Since experience is defined as “change and variety,” the sole role of the pyramids in Samuel Johnson’s story is to push the action forward, to add a new task to the “desire” of living: Pekuah, the Princess’s favorite servant is abducted by an extremely civilized and cultivated Arab wrongdoer, offering the protagonists a new determination for their “choice of life.”

In the terminology of the Enlightenment, real serenity means understanding that the universe is a “*spectacle*,” and that you are its “*spectator*,” sitting back in rational contemplation, and sharing with your peers the coming and going of endless images. “Natural History, taken in its full extent,” Buffon writes in 1749, in his famous *Histoire Naturelle*, “is an immense History, embracing all the objects that the Universe presents to us. This prodigious multitude of Quadrupeds, Birds, Fish, Insects, Plants, Minerals etc., offers a vast spectacle to the curiosity of the human spirit; its totality is so great that it seems, and actually is, inexhaustible in all its details.”⁹ Since the “spectacle” is complete, everything has been integrated into it, that is life and death together, because death – or decay – is the organic component of any transformation process: “The hand of the Creator” Buffon goes on “seems not to have opened to give being to a certain fixed number of species; rather, it seems that it has thrown out, all at once, a world of beings related and unrelated, an infinity of harmonious and unharmonious combinations, and a perpetual destruction and renewal.”¹⁰

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 181.

⁹ Apud Peter Gay, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-153.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

If we understand it correctly, evolution is seen here as an endless chain of combinations of forms of life and forms of death, which means that each form of life evolves organically until its destruction. Beyond them is the “divine Power” of Nature itself, Samuel Johnson’s famous “vital power,” which remains “uninjured” irrespective of the transformations it goes through. The vital power is not a form, but energy: “a living power, immense, which embraces everything, animates everything.”¹¹

The key process behind all these considerations is the understanding of Time as an embodiment of this “divine Power.” Logically, it has to flow, continuously and uninterruptedly, its expression within existence being the “experiment”: the continuous acquisition of the senses and of knowledge, the “desire” to experiment more and more, and the refusal to stop experimenting. Accordingly, no being is less hated in this complex than the one who limits the infinity of existence, whether one is a living fellow being, an ancestor – or even God, the dubious master of the ancient Paradise. It is to state again that in the “enlightened” understanding of utopia, God, who expelled man from Paradise, is more relevant than the Supreme Being who provided him a perfect realm of living, because perfection is sterile, a mere dead end, which cannot evolve.

Later on, the greatest demonstration of this paradox will be H. G. Wells’ *The Time Machine*, in which the future dystopian geography visited by the Time Traveler is divided between the fragile and pretty “Eloi,” who live in the Upper-World, and the frightening “Morlocks,” “the bleached, obscene nocturnal Things,” who inhabit the Under-World, and prey upon “the graceful children” of daylight and serenity. The Eloi are really wonderful, the Time Traveler says, they are illiterate, they share a “Dresden-china type prettiness,” live happily in a “ruinous splendor of the world,” but their excess of harmony is nothing but weakness: “I thought of the physical slightness of the people,” the Traveler meditates, “their lack of intelligence, and those big abundant ruins, and it strengthened my belief in a perfect conquest of Nature. For after the battle comes quiet. Humanity had been strong, energetic, and intelligent, and had used all its abundant vitality to alter the conditions under which it lived. And now came the reaction of the altered conditions. Under the new conditions of perfect comfort and security, that restless energy, that with us is strength, would become weakness.” Or, to put it differently, from the same text: “The too-perfect security of the Upper-worlders has led them to a slow movement of degeneration, to a general dwindling in size, strength and intelligence.”

Therefore, the starting issue of *Rasselas* is the denial of Paradise and the utopia which comes with it, not the longing to reenact its felicity: “a sea foaming with tempests and boiling with whirlpools” – this is the definition of life! – is always better than an “unemployed life,” spent in pleasures and lofty illusions.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

What we have here is not an “escape *from* freedom,” as Erich Fromm defines it, but an “escape *to* freedom.” In Samuel Johnson’s novel, geographically inspired by Jeronimo Lobo’s *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, which Dr. Johnson translated a few years earlier, the starting point resembles a situation from the central mythology of Buddhism: “according to the custom,” Rasselas, the fourth Prince of Abyssinia is “confined in a private palace” by his father, “till the order of succession should call him to the throne.” Fenced by high mountains like a fortress (“the fatal obstacle that hinders at once the enjoyment of pleasure and the exercise of virtue”), and sealed at its own entrance by an “iron gate” which “was not only secured with all the power of art, but was always watched by successive sentinels,” the “Happy Valley,” as it is called, provides a perfect life of “delights,” pleasures and “superfluities”: “all the diversities of the world were brought together, the blessings of nature were collected, and evils extracted and excluded.” It’s a Garden of Eden, not one you can enjoy, but one which acts against you, restricting the “choices of life” and anybody’s universal right to freedom.

The “choices of life” are essential to Rasselas, the most prominent prisoner of the Happy Valley, because they mean freedom, option and even mistake, and the natural order of the free will. Being encircled by the “fatal obstacles” of the high mountains, Rasselas lives like a “beast,” and not like a man: he has a felicitous, but “unemployed life,” and nothing to “desire.” “Some desire is necessary to keep life in motion,” Imlac the poet tells him, and he also suggests, from the whole experience of his personal life, that there are two kinds of Paradise people can imagine. The logical one comes at the end of somebody’s life of continuous “choices,” torments and treacherous challenges, wished and accepted as a pleasant refuge from the overwhelming fatigue of existence. The other one represents an ambivalent imprisonment, functioning as an illusory filter between perception and experience. It is the paradise you are obliged to leave if you want to complete the materialistic endeavors of existence. “While you are making the choice of life,” Imlac the poet tells Rasselas, “you neglect to live.” That is, in other words, to experience life as both misery and happiness, and to understand the profound mechanism of life, which says that you can reach happiness only by experiencing misery and by learning how to silence or refute it. In this respect Dr. Johnson’s favorite hobby-horse is marriage, or “connubial infelicity,” seen as “one of the innumerable modes of various forms of human misery” one can imagine. There is “no house,” he considers, “that is not haunted by some fury that destroys their quiet.” Streets and clubs are therefore better than calmly reassuring homes, because they do not hinder life, obstructing it through flower fragrant illusions.

Nothing is refused to the prince in the Happy Valley, he is eventually visited by his father once a year, when the iron gate opens solemnly, but he soon discovers that his life is “unemployed,” because he has nothing “to desire.” He is given everything he wants, but his life cannot “expand.” Utopia is confinement, a dead end, and an entrapment into an anti-fluid fixity. So the Prince decides to leave

the Happy Valley secretly, accompanied by his sister, Nekayah, by the poet called Imlac and by several servants. The sister's name derives from the Greek *Nekyia*, which designates the journey into the underworld. No utopia is wanted any more, but, on the contrary, the novel is built on the active denial of any utopian felicity and perfection, suggesting that life is the refusal of any imaginary regression and nostalgia. Adam and Eve, of course, driven by a sort of enlightened melancholy: not unhappy because of their expulsion from Paradise, but enchanted because of the challenge given them by the mercy God...

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UTOPIA, IDEOLOGY AND ANTI-UTOPIA

SIMINA-ELENA RAȚIU*

ABSTRACT. *Utopia, Ideology and Anti-Utopia.* This study performs an incursion with a view to configuring the concepts of utopia, ideology and anti-utopia and their relations. Thinking in a progressive scheme, which marks and nuances the differences and relations discussed in this study, as well as the functions exercised, utopia, ideology and anti-utopia are studied also under the aspect of discursive forms. One of the stakes of the study is to establish whether there is a totalitarian propaganda, and which are the strategies it operates with.

Keywords: utopia, ideology, anti-utopia, manipulation, deformation, criticism, ascendent scheme.

REZUMAT. *Utopie, ideologie și antiutopie.* Studiul de față își propune o incursiune în configurarea conceptelor de utopie, ideologie și antiutopie și a legăturii dintre acestea. Gândite într-o schemă progresivă, care marchează și nuancează diferențele și legăturile discutate în acest studiu, precum și funcțiile exercitate, utopia, ideologia și antiutopia sunt privite și din perspectiva formelor discursive. Una dintre mizele lucrării este aceea de a stabili dacă există o propagandă totalitară și care sunt tehnicile și strategiile prin care operează aceasta.

Cuvinte cheie: utopie, ideologie, antiutopie, manipulare, deformare, critică, schemă ascendentă.

Introduction

In this paper I will try to follow the way utopia and anti-utopia relates with the historic reality, and, more exactly, with the political speech. I am starting from the hypothesis that the utopian speech is not just literature, totally alien from immediate historicity. I have in mind all the subversive, manipulative and mystifying charge of the socially engaged speech.

I wish to specify that I am not referring to the classical mythical sense of utopia, that of “opening an imaginary world, outside the time and space historically and geographically (...) built on the foundation of some different principles to the fiction about the real world.” (Ruyer:3). The end of the nineteenth century and the

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beginning of the twentieth century, when the two papers I chose for my study were written and published (*The Iron Heel* – 1906, *The Sleeper Awakes* – 1899), is a period when the utopian projections are extremely charged ideologically and socially. Therefore, I shall refer to utopia as a projection of a perfect society, of a world with a social order and a form of government in accordance with the highest expectation of its inhabitants. In other words, I focus my attention on utopia as an imaginary socio-political world. I will call anti-utopia the utopia upside-down, that is the projection of a world that initially proposes a perfect form of governing, and then causes its self destruction. Obviously, there is an intrinsic dialogue between utopia and anti-utopia, as anti-utopia is built as a critical reaction, as an answer to the utopian projection. The ideological speech from *The Iron Heel*, meant to convince the reader of the perfection and fulfilment that can be brought to the world if socialism were imposed, is deconstructed in *The Sleeper Awakes*. The world governed by communism from the Wells' volume is a world that is self destructing. The utopian optimism is transformed in dystopian pessimism, while the socialist ideology is treated as an issue and cause of evil.

Beyond these considerations I will see to what extent ideology relates to utopia and anti-utopia, when those two are considered in opposition.

Utopia. Ideology. Anti-utopia – concepts and functions

Vita Fortunati, in her study, *Fictional Strategies and Political Message in Utopias* (Fortunati: 18), establishes a clear distinction between utopia and the political treatise, the legal code and the reforming government systems. Though, she does not deny the fact that the utopian literature has imposed a certain form of literary expression, which gave to the utopist the possibility of free expression regarding certain subversive themes. Ideas connected to the time and place the writer lives in, which could be denoted as heretical or aggressive, can be expressed with entire freedom in the utopian writings. Besides, the disadvantage that Vita Fortunati observes in the case of the utopian literature is related to the difficulties in deciphering the utopian message against the reader's decoding strategies of the hidden message, strategies that are not always taking into account its subversive character, which is critical to society. The author sets the utopian writing in a kind of speech with double signification: on the one side it is a *jeu d'esprit*, a dream that offers a relaxing digression from reality, and on the other side a criticism of the society, a subtle one, hidden beyond that dream of perfection. In the author's view, in order to decode and use that side of the utopian speech, the reader's desire is a prerogative.

In the interpretation provided by the author, utopia travels far from the rules of the real world, being more of an artistical creation than a political treatise, yet it always hides a link to the social.

A very interesting thesis, diverging from that of Vita Fortunati, is offered by Karl Mannheim (Mannheim: 184), which is invoked and thoroughly explained by Raymond Trousson and Sorin Antohi. Mannheim is making a fundamental distinction between ideology and utopia, a distinction that can be realized only from the point of view of a history retrospective, and by applying the only criterion that could throw any light on the differences, that is putting them into practice. Thus, utopia is achievable in the future, and contains the ideas of a rising class that can be achieved in the social order in which they are born, while ideology is part of the ideas that throughout the history prove to be just some distorted representations of a past or a potential social order.

Mannheim's demonstration brings two new elements to our study. Firstly, the author places utopia not in the space of the perfect organized world from a social point of view, whose achievement is impossible in the real world, but, surprisingly, he is considering giving it credit in terms of a fulfilment potential. This innovative point of view opposes the classical definitions of utopia. Secondly, utopia is not seen anymore, like in the study of Vita Fortunati, in terms of retaining a hidden sense, which must be looked for, identified and unburied by the reader. Utopia has an obvious speech, a clear projection of a possible world.

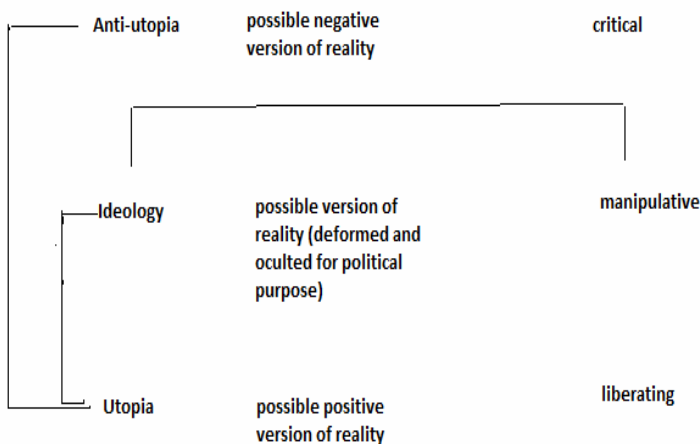
Holding to Mannheim's speech, Sorin Antohi (Antohi: 22) criticizes this unique criterion of making a strict distinction between utopia and ideology, considering that "the history does not make an objective lecture of the reality objectivity". Moreover, he reveals an intrinsic characteristic of ideology, the one of "occulting/ mystification of reality", mystification that is manipulating and acting subversively. Interpreting the distinction made by Mannheim, Sorin Antohi considers that ideology is "a particular case of utopia (the negative one)", operating with those concepts in a logic of subordination. Therefore, ideology would be only that part of an utopian project that has a subversive scope, socially involved and deliberately manipulative and mystifying. We can say that Antohi considers that ideology is nothing but the rewriting of utopia in terms of *deformation* and *occulting* (Antohi: 85) of the interest of some classes. The author refers first to the deformation and occultation of the "real reports between classes (especially to the production reports, the main stake of the class struggle according to Marx)" (Antohi:85). We intend to see in this study how does the ideology of the relation between classes and the papers announced previously manifest.

Raymond Trousson (Trousson: 32), when considering Mannheim's book, leaves behind this manipulative and mystifying characteristic of ideology, considering it just the ideas of the dominant class, of the power groups. Those ideas are "conservatory, static" (Trousson: 32), while utopia has a dynamic role in contesting the existent reality. This feature that Trousson brings into discussion is setting utopia in the field of marginality and is transforming it in a social reaction of the groups that are not in power, which is triggered just because of the

“diagnosis set to the social and economical situations”. Trousson’s reading, as well, is losing the manipulative tendency of ideology, observed and followed by Antohi, but delicately inserted by Mannheim in his thesis.

Going beyond the theme of the manipulative role of ideology, or of the difference between utopia and ideology, Verdery places in the same category all the projections regarding possible worlds or social organizations, regardless if they were of the dominant class or of some marginal groups: “the ideologies, there are always more than one, consisting of ideological and discursive fields are beliefs or ideas materialised in action, always in a political conflict and always in a discursive form” (Verdery: 28).

In my paper I shall employ Sorin Antohi’s conception in line with the meaning of those two concepts, considering that ideology, unlike utopia, manipulates occults and distorts ideas. Having in mind that anti-utopia, in line with the meaning previously announced, is the opposite of utopia, including it and deconstructing it, I can conclude that in a scheme of characteristics and functions of the three aspects (utopia, ideology, anti-utopia) anti-utopia would be the one that comprises the first two ones, using and deconstructing them at the same time. Also, in a short classification of the functions the three concepts have, we should mention the liberating function of utopia; the manipulating function of ideology, and the critical function of anti-utopia. Utopia is liberating due to its character to express the conscious and unconscious projections over a perfect world, an aspect which is discussed by Vita Fortunati, and due to its function of disputing the existent reality (Trousson: 32). Ideology, as I have already shown, is utopia undisclosed and distorted in a persuasive scope.



Expression and Ideology

This discursive form, presented by Verdery and quoted previously, through which ideology manifests itself, is exhaustively analyzed by Alina Mungiu. Argumentation is ideologically fulfilled through propaganda and persuasion, persuasion being subordinated to propaganda. The author explains the meanings of these two terms. Some of the definitions are: “propaganda is the deliberate and systematic effort to create perceptions, to manipulate cognitions and to direct the behaviour for obtaining an answer that corresponds to the propagandist’s interests” (Jowett and O’Donnell in Mungiu:15), while persuasion (beyond multiple quotations and definitions) consists in the “wilful successful effort of influencing the other’s state of mind by communicating in the condition the receiver is having a certain degree of freedom” (Mungiu: 15). The differentiation the author makes between the two concepts is given by the fact that in the case of persuasion “both parts are satisfying their interests”, while “the propagandistic speech is following only the interest of only one side and the manipulation of the other one” (Mungiu: 15). This theory represents the background for analysing the texts proposed to be discussed herein.

Considering that: “the speech is the most common form of significant practice through which the ideological processes has appeared” (Verdery: 28), I shall try to answer the question “is there a totalitarian propaganda?”, while observing how the characters’ speech is built and to what extent it functions manipulatively and subversively. I shall also study its structure, fully linked to the utopian and anti-utopian structure. I shall observe the discursive modifications recorded according to the utopian optimism or the dystopian disappointment. I shall also stress some ideological elements, trying to see to what extent the ideas and beliefs in the two novels I shall consider are utopian/anti-utopian, and where it passes to ideology. All along the demonstration I shall resort to Alina Mungiu’s paper, as there, having deeply rooted her study in the critical bibliography, she makes a synthesis of the propaganda strategies and of the possible answers in her persuasive study.

Utopian and Anti-utopian Prefigurations (*The Iron Heel* and *The Sleeper Awakes*)

The first paper I will concentrate on is *The Iron Heel* (Jack London), a utopia which was published at the beginning of the twentieth century. It draws an antithesis between an extremely privative capitalism and the ideas and beliefs of the socialist programme whose scope and competence is to give the world’s coherence back to people. The novel is written as a praise of socialism, being packed with ideology and with techniques of manipulation and persuasion of the possible reader. The narrative speech, as well the characters’ lines, have an obvious subversion. Beyond the structural integration within utopia as a literary form (the project of a world perfectly organised from the social point of view is presented),

The Iron Heel is built from the narrator's alert and careful perspective, as he judges and issues comments regarding the main character's memories. Under the excuse of reading a paper written seven centuries before its being found and made public, the narrator establishes the kind of speech that admits and states the possibility of putting into practice the ideas issued in the text. This strategy goes perfectly with the judgement issued by Mannheim in his attempt of defining utopia: the retroactive perspective, the possibility of "adequate achieving in the social order they appear" (Mannheim: 184): "Looking back across the seven centuries that have lapsed since Avis Everhard completed her manuscript, events, and the bearings of events, that were confused and veiled to her, are clear to us. She lacked perspective. She was too close to the events she writes about. Nay, she was merged in the events she has described." (London: 3).

Once established the fact that the novel discussed herein goes as an utopia (in the sense formerly discussed of ideas and beliefs that can be put into practice) I shall follow the type of speech and its manipulative strategies.

In any totalitarian speech manipulation is carried out through propaganda. It is obvious that the main objective of any propaganda is that of persuasion; yet the main objective of persuasion is to change the receiver's reaction. In order to reach such a level of efficiency, propaganda will use the so called "anchors" (Mungiu: 17), which can be beliefs, values, attitudes of a community, the ones it is giving credit to, and the ones they feel unconditionally attached to. It is therefore revealing the speech given by Ernest Everhard, the main character from *The Iron Heel*, the one proposing the socialist philosophy. In the main speech at the beginning of the novel, which is meant to shake the beliefs, values and attitudes of the most prominent characters of the time, who were present at the fatidic dinner in the house of John Cunningham, Everhard is using all the strategies mentioned and theorised by Alina Mungiu in order to convince the auditorium of the injustice, cruelty, and the absurdity with which capitalism works. The persuasion is built by Everhard within the conceptual terms of the auditorium, while using those anchors I mentioned earlier, because "for persuading the receiver and making him have new beliefs and change the old ones, the persuasion must be built on the beliefs that are already there. The trial of soliciting a global change in behaviour, attitudes, and beliefs are doomed to fail" (Mungiu: 17). The strategies of propaganda such as "giving information in key moments", "communicating the information to a selected public" and "giving information overlapped with other information that can influence its public perception" (Mungiu:19-20) lead to the general (and main) objective of the totalitarian speech: manipulation. Thus, the characters, victims of the protagonist's persuasive speech, are in the situation of not knowing what to believe, being completely "overwhelmed" by the "hammer strokes" (London: 39) of the socialist reformer.

As well, "the emitter can, of course, deceive the audience about his intentions. (...) This exploitation by the propagandist of the public interests and

prejudging is more frequent than the main manipulation, in which the public does not realize the propagandist's intentions" (Mungiu: 20-21). This strategy is fully used in the character's speech, promoting the socialist values. The apparent shyness, the initial refrain from issuing any opinion, the expectation for the initial challenge are good strategies for manipulation. Beyond the aspect of projecting a society with a perfect governmental form, the persuasive speech, with all the inherent manipulation techniques, makes the jump from utopia to ideology.

If in *The Iron Heel* ideological language is present, being loaded with manipulation and persuasion techniques of the possible reader, in *The Sleeper Awakes* the same persuasive language, with the same manipulation techniques has a different purpose. The ideological process is baffled and seen in terms of a study object. The line imposed to the main character by Ostrog, the revolutionary leader, "I am awakened and my heart is with you." (Wells: 319) is just an implicit link to utopia, a sample of propaganda presented against its deconstruction. The world governed by the "red uniforms" (Wells: 285), projected as utopia and ideologically amplified in *The Iron Heel*, is projected in *The Sleeper Awakes* as its own self-destruction. The Savior's image, embodied by Graham (the Sleeper), an unconscious projection of collective dreams and wishes, fails in a character's fiction who discovers by accident he owns half a planet, a puppet of the two political forces, contesting their power (called metaphorically in text the "red uniforms" and the "blue uniforms"). Any trace of utopia is transformed and critically assumed by the anti-utopia.

Conclusions

As a result of our analysis I will resume my approach in the study and its results.

In this paper I sought to demonstrate that utopia, ideology and anti-utopia interact. I observed that subversive ideas are hidden under the utopian projection (Vita Fortunati), and that the only criterion of differentiating between utopia and ideologies is the possibility of putting into practice the utopian/ ideological projections from the point of view of a historical retrospective. Quoting and nuancing Mannheim's thesis, Raimond Trousson helped me discover the function of utopia (the one that contests the existent reality, so liberating), and Sorin Antohi offered me the perspective of the function of ideology (manipulative). We succeeded, in this way, to formulate the thesis proposed here in a scheme of characteristics and functions of the three concepts herein discussed, that anti-utopia crosses utopia and ideology, deconstructing them simultaneously. Thus, we can conclude that anti-utopia is firstly characterized through its critical character against utopia and ideology.

Bearing in mind that all of them – utopia, ideology and anti-utopia - are functioning in a discursive form (Verdery), I tried to follow if there is a totalitarian

propaganda and how it functions in utopia/ anti-utopia. I have seen that the occulting and deforming techniques and strategies (totalitarian) described by Alina Mungiu are fully used in the utopia I have analyzed, while anti-utopia treats them discursively, alienating and deconstructing them. This observation makes nothing but certify and prove the progressive classification of the three concepts discussed in my previously elaborated scheme.

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FRACTURING THE MONSTROUS GEOGRAPHY OF GEORGE ORWELL'S *1984* AND ALDOUS HUXLEY'S *BRAVE NEW WORLD* – EROTICISM, DISSIDENCE AND INDIVIDUALISM

NICULAE GHERAN*

ABSTRACT. *Fracturing the Monstrous Geography of George Orwell's 1984 and Aldous Huxley's Brave New World – Eroticism, Dissidence and Individualism.* The paper deals with the issue of monstrous geographies within the context of Orwell's *1984* and Huxley's *Brave New World*. It deals more particularly with the reaction of certain characters to the process of mental and/or physical disintegration and dehumanization caused by the influence of such spaces. The geography corresponding to dystopian fictional worlds is subjected to a process of fissure from within by the independent action of characters that break apart from the controlled mass in an attempt to assert individual freedom denied by the dominating discourse. Researchers so far discussed the ways in which the natural is marginalized while the artificial is placed at the center of dystopian fictional worlds. However, the consequence of such repression, the re-emergence of the natural has not yet been assessed. The eruption of suppressed human nature causes brief fissures within the topographical frame of influence. Whether such a "spatial/mental revolution" is succeeded or not is less relevant to the project than acknowledging and examining the ways in which even if only for brief moments the cohesion of monstrous geography is being undermined from within.

Keywords: Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, dystopia, eroticism, dissidence, individualism.

REZUMAT. *Subminarea coeziunii geografiei monstruoase în operele 1984 (George Orwell) și Minunata Lume Nouă (Aldous Huxley) Erotism, Dizidență și Individualism.* Obiectul studiului de față este o analiză a spațiilor geografice proprii universurilor distopice create de Orwell și Huxley. În particular este o analiză a reacției anumitor personaje în fața procesului de dezumanizare și dezintegrare psihică cauzat de influența acestor spații. Studiul își propune a arăta modul în care coeziunea spațiului literar distopic este subminată de acțiunea independentă a figurilor literare care se îndepărtează de cultura masificată specifică universurilor ficționale de acest tip. Cercetătorii au observat modul în care, în cadrul lumilor ficționale distopice, naturalul este marginalizat și înlocuit cu artificialitatea impusă a orașului distopic. Putem însă de asemenea observa, ca o consecință a acestei marginalizări, puncte/spații de erupție ale naturalului reprimat care sunt reprezentate de autori fie la nivelul geografiei simbolice a lumii ficționale, fie la nivelul psihicului individual în cazul anumitor personaje. Aceste puncte au potențialul de a submina temporar influența negativă a spațiului

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geografic dominant. Reușita unei astfel de revoluții spațial-mentale este mai puțin relevantă pentru studiul de față, importantă fiind mai degrabă inventarierea și analizarea celor care par a perturba ordinea și organizarea obișnuită a lumilor ficționale distopice din interior. Studiul își propune să arate cum erotismul și individualismul sunt două astfel de puncte strâns legate de topografia celor două universuri ficționale puse în discuție.

Cuvinte cheie: Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, antiutopie, erotism, dizidență, individualism.

The twentieth century has seen its share of political regimes that resulted in a diminishing of individual freedom. Most classic dystopias have been read in connection with these, however not only as literary allusions to regimes from the past but also as warnings for the future. Some dystopias, like Yevgeny Zamiatin's *We* or George Orwell's *1984* have been connected with authoritarian communism, while others like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* are currently considered criticisms of regimented consumerist societies.

In this article I aim at discussing the reaction of certain literary characters to the process of mental and/or physical disintegration and dehumanization caused by the influence of dystopian spaces. In my opinion we are dealing with two different types of geography. At a macroscopic level we have the geography of the outer world, represented by the dystopian city with its strict rules and regulations but also marginalized locations that somehow escape the manipulating influence of the dominant discourse helping to trigger the emergence of individual consciousness in the case of certain characters. Secondly, we have the inner world of the characters that is constricted by or reacts against pressures from the monstrous geography outside. My thesis is that the influence of the monstrous geography corresponding to dystopian fictional worlds is subjected to processes of temporary fracture by the independent action of characters that break apart from the controlled mass in an attempt to assert individual freedom denied by the dominating discourse. This is one of the main reasons for which the dominant discourses react so violently to any element that may disturb the carefully regulated world, the reason for which dissent from the norm is eliminated within literary dystopias. Researchers so far have discussed the ways in which nature (whether we mean by the term human nature or nature as outdoor environment opposed to the dystopian city), is marginalized while the artificial is placed at the centre of dystopian fictional worlds. Certainly it is a most pertinent observation. In *Brave New World* people are conditioned from birth to hate nature and behave conforming to an imposed specific pattern, opposed to what one may call instinctual or individual, while in *1984* the concepts of *thoughtcrime*, *doublethink* or *newspeak* severely diminish the possibility of individuals to behave according to

their inner impulses. Instead, the individual is assimilated into the body of the state losing his identity, conditioned to know no other master besides it.

However, the long-term inescapable consequence of such action, the re-emergence of the natural has not yet been assessed. The eruption of suppressed individual impulses seems to temporarily provoke destabilizations of the strict geometricity of monstrous geography. It cannot be said that these fluctuations are so powerful as to cause a paradigmatic "spatial/psychological revolution"; however what interests me is a close examination of their cause and of what the link is between textual geography, sexuality and individuality in the economy of their appearance.

Firstly, let us take into consideration the dystopian outer geography. In all cases, the primary space is the city, an artificial environment par excellence. The city is carefully controlled and surveyed by the authorities of the state. Natural spaces are usually considered uncanny, uncontrollable and therefore dangerous by those in power whose supreme goal is to create forced social stability. Because of their marginalization and their uncanny quality, these spaces become hotspots of dissidence, vantage points from which a potential resistance to the dominant dystopian discourses could theoretically be channelled, from where the suppressed individual will may re-emerge. But let us see where these hotspots are placed in the two novels that I chose for analysis.

In George Orwell's *1984* Winston Smith imagines "the place where there is no darkness" and dreams about a place in nature where he can escape the Party. The one who facilitates all this is his imagined girl with dark hair:

"The girl with dark hair was coming across the field. With its grace and carelessness it seemed to annihilate a whole culture, a whole system of thought, as though Big Brother and the Party and the Thought Police could all be swept into nothingness by a single splendid movement of the arm"¹

However, as the story progresses we see that this inner vision of a location without telescreens and high surveillance will materialize with the coming of Julia and their coupling at Julia's meeting place near a forest outside London. Here Winston begins to understand that "the simple undifferentiated desire was the force that would tear the Party to shreds"².

In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the repressed natural space is more clearly delineated firstly in the form of the Savage Reservation and secondly as the Islands, of which we do not know much except that the dissenters from the World State are sent there as punishment for their crimes. As in the case of *1984* these are the repressed hotspots free from the influence of the World State. The citizens of *Brave New World* are conditioned to hate nature because nature does not fulfil the consumerist agenda imposed by the state.

¹ Orwell, George, *1984*, p. 760.

² *Ibidem*, p. 822.

”Why go to the trouble of making it psychologically impossible for Deltas to like flowers?

Primroses and landscapes, he pointed out, have one great defect: they are gratuitous. A love of nature keeps no factories busy. It was decided to abolish the love of nature, but not the tendency to consume transport. For of course it was essential that they should keep on going to the country, even though they hated it. The problem was to find an economically sounder reason for consuming transport than a mere affection for primroses and landscapes. [...] We condition them to love all country sports. So that the consume manufactured articles as well as transport”³

Therefore, when Bernard Marx asks Lenina to go alone for a walk in the Savage Reservation or the Lake District (the Lake District being a location not chosen coincidentally by Huxley if we remember the nature cult that poets like William Wordsworth or Samuel Taylor Coleridge instituted around it), he basically achieves a transcendence of the conditioning imposed by the state and disturbs the influence of monstrous geography committing a symbolic sin against the consumerist ideology of the state.

In the case of Orwell’s *1984*, Winston Smith and Julia are very much aware that they will get caught sooner or later, that this period of natural bliss will not last forever. However, by allowing themselves individual freedom they have severed themselves from state regimentation. As Orwell himself puts it:

”Their embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory. It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act.”⁴

Similar political acts are Bernard Marx’s refusal of soma and of abiding the laws of state conditioning, his fascination with time spent alone in nature or Helmholtz’s desire to be alone and write poetry.

Indeed, taking into consideration the level of repression inside the two fictional universes, their act is revolutionary. But what is really the reason behind these acts of state defiance and how does this cancel the effects of monstrous geography? How is this spontaneous outburst in individuality and dissidence linked with sexuality? What is the role of memory in the re-emergence of individual consciousness and what is the connection between this awakening and geographical locations in the novels?

I believe that the answer to these questions is to be found this time not only in the state marginalization of certain environments but in the state suppression of human nature, a nature that is not state bound, but bound by an uncanny nostalgia for a different way of being, for something the characters can only intuitively perceive, an alternative human nature to the one approved by the Party. As regards the issue of the importance of individual memory, in *1984* Winston Smith realises over the course of the novel that the Party alternatively manipulates historical happenings in order to

³ Huxley, Aldous, *Brave New World*, London, UK, Penguin Books 1976 [1932], p. 29.

⁴ Orwell, George, *1984*, p. 818.

rewrite history itself. For "he who controls the present controls the past. He who controls the past, controls the future"⁵. Or "All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly how often it was necessary."⁶ With such a recurring theme throughout the novel, collective memory becomes untrustworthy and Winston Smith begins to rely more and more on individual memory until he begins to perceive himself as a minority of one, an individual. Spaces considered relics from the past, like the old room or the church tower, besides serving as temporary safe havens for him and Julia outside the Party's reach also seem to serve the purpose of triggering questions of historic accuracy for the main character. I believe this type of geographical location serves somehow to cancel the blurring effect of monstrous geography and destabilize its function by challenging the character to confront the past and the veridicity of state approved history. These old spaces, where the telescreens have not been installed, where some kind of intimacy and freedom from the monstrous geography of the new state can be maintained, seem to serve to delimitate between individual memory and state-imposed history.

"the room had awakened in him a kind of nostalgia, a sort of ancestral memory. It seemed to him that he knew exactly what it felt like to sit utterly alone, with nobody watching you, no voice pursuing you, no sound except the singing of the kettle and the friendly ticking of the clock" Julia says „in this room I'm going to be a woman not a Party comrade" or „So long as they were actually there, they both felt no harm could come to them. Getting there was difficult and dangerous but the place itself was sanctuary"⁷

In Huxley's *Brave New World* the state began its ascension with what the world controller Mustapha Mond called "campaigns against the past" consisting of closing museums and blowing up historical monuments that may trigger reactions such as those we observed in *1984*. We see how in this fictional universe the dominating discourse is more careful with uncanny geographical locations. However natural geographical environments like the sea still seem to exercise a powerful influence over Bernard Marx, disrupting temporarily the influence of state conditioning and monstrous geography. On their way back across the Channel Bernard chooses to hover his helicopter for a little while over the sea.

"I want to look at the sea in peace. [...] It makes me feel as though [...] as though I were more me, if you see what I mean. More on my own, not so completely a part of something else. Not just a cell in the social body. [...] what would it be like if I were free – not enslaved by my conditioning? [...] Wouldn't you like to be happy in some other way? In your own way, not in everybody else's way. I thought we'd be more...more together here with nothing but the sea and the moon. More together than in that crowd, or even in my rooms."⁸

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 763.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 766.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 799.

⁸ Huxley, Aldous, *Brave New World*, London, UK, Penguin Books 1976 [1932], p. 78.

Even the Director of the Hatchery seems to fall into a short fit of nostalgia recalling his own experience in the Savage Reservation before handing Bernard Marx the permit. The Savage Reservation, consisting of five hundred and sixty thousand square kilometers, divided into four distinct Sub-Reservations each surrounded by a high tension wire fence, seems to be a geographical conglomerate that consists of all the repressed natural world. All the World State's taboos seem to be concentrated here. As the Warden explains to the inhabitants:

“still preserve their repulsive habits and customs...marriage, if you know what that is [...] families... no conditioning... monstrous superstitions... Christianity and totemism and ancestor worship ... extinct languages, such as Zuni and Spanish and Athapascan... pumas... porcupines... infectious diseases... priests... venomous lizards...”⁹

Also John the Savage learns during his visit in the geography room that “*a savage reservation is a place which, owing to unfavorable climatic or geological conditions, or poverty of natural resources, has not been worth the expense of civilizing*”.¹⁰

Both the Party in *1984* and the One State in *Brave New World* are well aware that in order to create social stability human nature itself must be altered and replaced with another image fit to conform to the norms imposed by the state. Paul Tillich in *The Dynamics of Faith* wrote that when a people makes the state its ultimate concern “*it (the state) demands that all other concerns, economic well being, health and life, family, aesthetic and cognitive truth, justice and humanity, be sacrificed. Everything is centred in the only god, the nation*”¹¹ However true this may be, such a state has a very high chance of backfiring for several reasons, and for the developing of my argument I call attention to Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*.

Firstly, as a disclaimer, I must state that even though some criticize Freud today arguing that his theory is outdated, that since the strict sexual mores of his time have changed, his thoughts on collective psychology are no longer as relevant as they were in his lifetime I have come to believe that Orwell's *1984* is precisely the sort of world where the Freudian model would work accordingly, a world of intensely suppressed desire that favored outbursts in different forms. We are aware of Orwell's interest in human psychology and that, although a socialist himself, his main dissension with orthodox Marxism expressed in his work *The Road to Wigan Pier* was that “*possessing a system which appears to explain everything, they never bother to discover what is going on inside other people's heads.*”¹² Therefore one of Orwell's main goals in *1984* would be to represent the psyche in a context of severe psychological repression. While Victorianism was no dystopia, the much discussed sexual repression

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 130.

¹¹ Tillich, Paul, *Dynamics of Faith*, New York, USA, 1958, p. 1-2.

¹² Orwell, George *The Road To Wigan Pier*, Chapter XII. http://www.georgeorwell.org/The_Road_to_Wigan_Pier/11.html

of the time would be similar to the sexual repression characters are subjected to in *1984*, and therefore Freud's model would function accordingly.

But let us return to the issue under investigation. Freud states that "It does not seem as though any influence could induce a man to change, his nature into a termite's. No doubt he will always defend his claim to individual liberty against the will of the group"¹³. Furthermore, in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* he argues that

„Sexual impulsions are unfavourable to the formation of groups. The more important sexual love became for the ego, and the more it developed the characteristics of being in love, the more urgently it required to be limited to two people... Two people coming together for the purpose of sexual satisfaction, in so far as they seek solitude, are making a demonstration against the herd instinct, the group feeling. Even in a person who has in other respects become absorbed in a group, the directly sexual impulsions preserve a little of his individual activity. If they become too strong, they disintegrate every group formation"¹⁴

This is precisely the case we have in the novel *1984* with Winston and Julia. Disobedience to the state is nothing more than a natural consequence of the state's own repressive measures. It is human nature striking back, cancelling the brainwashing influence of monstrous geography. In the non-fictional "real" world this was the fate of fascism and authoritarian communism. The Party in *1984* has learned to limit sexuality with the help of such organizations as the Anti-Sex League and channel the repressed energy through events like "The Two Minute Hate" or the glorification of the beloved leader, Big Brother. O'Brien even boasts that the Party shall abolish orgasm that by this course of action there will be no loyalty except for the Party. Julia gives a most pertinent analysis.

"It was not merely that the sex instinct created a world of its own which was outside the Party's control and which therefore had to be destroyed if possible. What was more important was that sexual privation induced hysteria, which was desirable because it could be transformed into war- fever and leader-worship. The way she put it was: 'When you make love you're using up energy; and afterwards you feel happy and don't give a damn for anything. They can't bear you to feel like that. They want you to be bursting with energy all the time. If you're happy inside yourself, why should you get excited about Big Brother and the Three- Year Plans and the Two Minutes Hate and all the rest of their bloody rot?' That was very true, he thought. There was a direct intimate connexion between chastity and political orthodoxy. For how could the fear, the hatred, and the lunatic credulity which the Party needed in its members be kept at the right pitch, except by bottling down some powerful instinct and using it as a driving force? The sex impulse was dangerous to the Party."¹⁵

¹³ Freud, Sigmund *Civilization and its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, XXI, London, 1961 p. 115.

¹⁴ Freud, Sigmund *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. <http://www.bartleby.com/290/12.html>

¹⁵ Orwell, George, *1984*, p. 822.

We can see thus how, in *1984*, the emergence of repressed sexual impulses helps in the formation of individual consciousness and, even more, is perceived as a form of dissidence, an outlet for the repressed human impulses destabilizing the geometricity of monstrous dystopian geography.

In Huxley's *Brave New World* on the contrary, sexuality is indulged, not limited like in *1984*. Here, the World State seems to be well aware that the repression of sexual impulses may cause unforeseen consequences to its well-being. Huxley himself, in his foreword to the 1946 edition to the novel notes that "*As political freedom diminishes, sexual freedom tends compensatingly to increase. And the dictator will do well to encourage that freedom. In conjunction with the freedom to daydream under the influence of dope and movies and the radio, it will help to reconcile his subjects to the servitude which is their fate*". In this particular fictional universe it is individual consciousness that plays a great part in the fracturing of monstrous geography, for all of them: Bernard Marx, Helmholtz, John the Savage are first and foremost individually self-conscious characters that cannot find a place in either the strict caste system of the World State or the reservation in Malpais. As Huxley notes about Bernard and Helmholtz: "*What the two men shared was the knowledge that they were individuals.*"¹⁶

"Did you ever feel", he asked, „as though „as though you had something inside you that was only waiting for you to give it a chance to come out? Some sort of extra power that you aren't using – you know, like all the water that goes down the falls instead of through the turbines?"¹⁷

Otherwise said, they are conscious of a human nature outside the regimentation of society and precisely when they choose to manifest it, they threaten to fissure the tight repressive ideological frame. As in *1984*, the World State reacts, maybe not as violently but manages to exile Bernard and Helmholtz to the islands populated by former dissidents.

Going back to *1984*, Orwell's final take on the issue was that, through torture and brainwashing, the Party could in the end break even this human nature and instil in the citizen a love for the state and its leader, Big Brother. Thus Orwell makes a parallel between his novel and what he saw happening in Russia.

During the course of this study I have attempted to show that, despite the very careful regimentation of society in the hope of creating forced social stability, despite violent repressive measures taken to condition, control and survey the environment and its inhabitants, we can still observe outbursts of repressed human nature and individuality that challenge the dominating discourse articulated with the help of a monstrous geography.

¹⁶ Huxley, Aldous, *Brave New World*, p. 62.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 63.

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À LA RECHERCHE DE L'HUMANITÉ PERDUE – *FAHRENHEIT 451*

ALINA SILVANA FELEA*

ABSTRACT. *Searching for lost humanity – Fahrenheit 451.* Most of the utopian projects are made round the central ideal of collective and individual happiness. On the other hand, modern capitalist societies are in the pursuit of the same ideal of happiness, as if this were the true and ultimate meaning of human existence. Ray Bradbury's novel is a dystopia which, by stressing certain tendencies and features of modern society to an extent that renders them grotesque, highlights the possible dangers of focusing the entire activity of a society around this pole of happiness. The wish for a better life is not to be criticized, but the lack of discrimination concerning the idea of happiness is. Pursuing happiness at any cost, especially through technological means, may lead to disastrous consequences. This is why Bradbury's novel, like other dystopias, may be considered a symbolical alarm call concerning mistakes that humanity can make in the pursuit of a better life.

Keywords: Utopia, dystopia, novel, criticism, imagination, humanity, book, ideal, happiness, perfection.

REZUMAT. *În căutarea umanității pierdute – Fahrenheit 451.* Cele mai multe proiecte utopice se construiesc în jurul idealului central al fericirii colective și individuale. Pe de altă parte, societățile capitaliste moderne urmăresc și ele obsesiv același ideal al fericirii, ca și cum acesta ar fi sensul ultim și adevărat al existenței umane. Romanul lui Ray Bradbury este o antiutopie care, accentuând până la grotesc anumite tendințe și trăsături ale societății moderne, scoate în evidență și posibilele pericole ale centrării întregii activități a unei societăți în jurul acestui pol al fericirii. De criticat nu este dorința de mai bine, ci lipsa de discernământ în ceea ce privește ideea de fericire. Urmărirea acesteia cu orice preț, în special prin mijloace tehnologice, poate duce la consecințe dezastruoase. Iată de ce romanul lui Bradbury, ca și alte antiutopii, poate fi considerat un semnal de alarmă simbolic cu privire la greșeli pe care umanitatea le face în dorința de a-și îmbunătăți existența.

Cuvinte cheie: Utopie, antiutopie, roman, critică, imaginație, umanitate, carte, ideal, fericire, perfecțiune.

On est toujours à la recherche de quelque chose en plaçant consciemment ou inconsciemment la vie sous les directives d'un sens à atteindre, à découvrir, un sens qui parfois reste un idéal et rien de plus. La possibilité en soi est une

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incroyable source d'énergie et de motivation et la seule promesse d'une vie meilleure a été maintes fois ce qui a propulsé le genre humain vers des horizons qui paraissaient inatteignables. Ce qui est pensé, rêvé, imaginé peut modifier l'aspect et la configuration du réel. L'une des modalités que l'imagination a choisie pour concrétiser en un projet ces attentes de progrès a été l'utopie.

L'existence, certes, n'est ni prévisible ni contrôlable et elle est vraiment très loin d'être parfaite. Alors les contes utopiques sont devenus des débouchés de cette frustration. Les auteurs des utopies ont rêvé des cités organisées, où le mot d'ordre est la perfection, où le gouvernement, soumis à une rationalité lucide, scientifique, est le *nec plus ultra* des gouvernements. Les gens y trouvent tout ce qu'ils peuvent désirer, puisque la perfection est la station terminus des espérances. Et les utopies, on le sait, ne sont pas présentes seulement dans l'espace livresque. Leurs manifestations pratiques représentent la mise en œuvre de projets idéaux. Mais la question qui se pose si l'on se trouve face à face avec l'expression vivante ou livresque de la «perfection» est comment s'expliquent les contestations, les critiques, les contre-utopies ou les antiutopies ?! L'idéal inatteignable est souvent vu comme un échec personnel ou collectif, l'idéal devenu réalité n'est-il pas alors le signe sans conteste de la réussite ? Il paraîtrait qu'on ne sache pas toujours ce qui est idéal pour nous les hommes et quel est en vérité le visage de la perfection. On a cru, depuis des siècles, que le progrès technologique, le confort et l'accès aux commodités de tout genre sont le secret de la vie rêvée tant par les individus que par les peuples. On observe maintenant que l'on est toujours loin de la perfection... Les sociétés industrielles modernes ont appliqué des principes et ont matérialisé des visions propres à l'univers utopique et l'humanité continue d'être menacée par des dangers, mais cette fois-ci c'est justement le progrès technologique qui menace. Les antiutopies peuvent être vues comme un signal d'alarme: l'idéal construit ou reflété par les utopies n'est pas l'expression de ce qui est absolument nécessaire pour les hommes. Ou peut-être ne connaissons-nous pas toutes les conséquences de la mise en pratique de ces idéaux... Les unes peuvent être catastrophiques, les autres sans l'efficacité désirée ou purement et simplement imprévisibles quant à leur évolution. L'utopie présuppose la fermeture dans un monde limité qui est la condition *sine qua non* pour que puisse s'exercer le contrôle, mais ce type de structure représente une réelle menace à l'encontre de la spontanéité et de la liberté tant dans la pensée que dans l'activité imaginaire. C'est la constatation que des livres comme celui de Ray Bradbury font pour indiquer un parcours parsemé de périls que l'humanité adopte avec naïveté et aveuglement quand il s'agit de son bien-être. La précaution et pourquoi pas la suspicion concernant l'avenir sont anesthésiées par la promesse d'une vie sans soucis, stable et confortable. On ne calcule pourtant pas les coûts et le prix à payer...

«Les gardiens de l'ignorance»

Une grande ville américaine imaginée dans l'avenir, un avenir incertain, est le cadre du livre *Fahrenheit 451* de Ray Bradbury. Publié en 1953, le roman a des accents de vie qu'on reconnaît à présent sans que l'avenir préconisé par

l'auteur soit tout à fait notre présent. Pourtant la réflexion à laquelle invite cette histoire n'est pas datée, l'inquiétude et le trouble suggérés à ses lecteurs peuvent concerner notre société de consommation courant après le plaisir et le bien-être personnel comme buts suprêmes de l'existence. Nous pouvons parler, en nous référant à ce roman, d'une antiutopie ou d'une utopie à rebours puisque le réel est radicalisé, touchant des limites ou des extrêmes qui menacent un peuple ou même des sociétés organisées sur ce modèle. Cependant le groupe humain dans son ensemble ne saisit pas le danger, il ne saisit pas la décadence et l'altération de sa sensibilité, de l'affectivité, de tout ce qui représente l'essence de notre humanité. Une société sans livres, une société qui a fait de ses pompiers les gardiens de l'ignorance, de l'abrutissement puisque leur rôle n'est pas d'éteindre les feux, mais au contraire ils sont en charge d'allumer des feux pour détruire le trésor intellectuel des siècles passés, gardé justement par et dans les livres. Les gens ne se rappellent plus que le rôle initial des pompiers était de sauver du feu les personnes comme les objets. Bien sûr, il est bizarre de considérer les livres comme l'ennemi publique numéro 1 et organiser des croisades contre ces objets peut paraître une barbarie inutile. Cependant si nous tenons compte du fait que la principale mission du livre est de donner à penser, d'inviter ses lecteurs à se poser des questions, à chercher la vérité, à polémiquer, son importance alors s'accroît. Pourquoi ne pas reconnaître que notre société matérialiste qui juge tout en termes de profit, rentabilité et efficacité, voit de plus en plus la culture comme un luxe ou comme un attribut facultatif de notre civilisation ? Il y a une part importante de la société moderne qui ignore le rôle des livres, heureusement il ne s'agit pas là de notre société dans son intégralité. Ce qui est inquiétant c'est que l'attitude envers la culture et envers ses porte-paroles, les livres, change, que la culture se révèle de manière croissante fort peu attirante pour la majorité des gens. Sera-t-il vraiment possible de voir un jour, comme dans le roman de Bradbury, un danger dans les feuilles de papier d'un livre ? Espérons que non.

L'auteur a imaginé ce monde monstrueux en partant d'une frustration. Il observait une pratique à succès, qui se rejouit du succès même aujourd'hui, à quelques décennies de la publication du roman. La mutilation des livres ! Ils sont résumés, abrégés, tronqués, concentrés pour « faciliter » la lecture, en raison du manque du temps, l'efficacité et la vitesse minant un territoire pour lequel l'abréviation équivaut à la destruction. Ceux qui font appel à ce genre d'activités ne comprennent pas les proportions de l'abus. Bradbury en offre alors une image radicalisée et sa principale conséquence: l'humanité abrutie et incapable de se voir dans un miroir non déformant. Parce qu'elle a la sensation que tout va bien, que l'information circule de façon libre en étant à la portée de tous. En réalité, la quantité d'information vide de contenu, la fausse information crée l'illusion de satiété alors même que la société meurt d'inanition, en totale ignorance de son état. Mais quelle est la raison pour laquelle un gouvernement, un Etat désirerait maintenir la population dans cette condition d'abrutissement intellectuel ? Une explication possible serait que l'égalitarisme artificiel et l'uniformisation transforment

le groupe humain en une masse de manoeuvre, facilement manipulable et rien de plus. Les livres incitent à penser, ils cultivent les équivoques, les contradictions, ils sont les ferments des changements et du progrès spirituel, intellectuel, indirectement matériel. Une autorité totalitaire n'a pas besoin d'êtres qui ont des opinions, d'êtres qui ne sont pas d'accord avec ses décisions, par conséquent elle n'a pas besoin de culture ni de livres. La solution s'avère alors diabolique et très simple: annuler l'initiative personnelle ou collective par la sensation du contentement. L'initiative en est paralysée par la sensation qu'on a tout ce qu'on peut désirer. À quoi bon alors se révolter?

Le bonheur et l'apparence

L'une des similitudes les plus visibles de l'utopie et de la mentalité contemporaine des sociétés occidentales est l'importance accrue accordée au bonheur. Jean-Jacques Wunenburger parle d'un culte collectif du bonheur favorisé par l'avènement d'une technologie de plus en plus sophistiquée (*L'Utopie ou la crise de l'imaginaire*, p. 245). À la différence de la société traditionnelle archaïque ou préindustrielle, la société moderne s'est fixée comme but social ultime le bonheur (p. 253). L'impératif de la réussite s'est affirmé comme la conséquence naturelle de cette recherche du bonheur et du plaisir. Le vrai sens de la vie serait la réussite personnelle, l'aisance matérielle et le confort. La société du roman de Bradbury a l'impression d'être heureuse. Toute une industrie de succédanés entretient le mensonge. Il s'agit principalement de l'industrie de l'image, la télévision. Les «murs-parlants» représentent la métaphore de la conquête de l'imagination humaine par l'image artificielle qui manipule et asservit les esprits des spectateurs. La femme de Montag, le pompier qui est le personnage principal, les amies de cette femme, tous les dépendants de la télé sont les victimes des images envahissantes, des images qui occupent non seulement tout le champ visuel, mais tout l'espace intime des familles. En fait, les personnages de télévision sont « la famille » de Mildred. Un programme sophistiqué lui crée l'impression qu'elle est une participante active de scénarios auxquels elle ne comprend rien. Puisque Mildred est incapable de résumer l'action, de parler de quoi il s'agit. Ses amies aussi rient et parlent sans rien dire, mais elles sont fermement convaincues qu'elles pratiquent une forme de sociabilité tout naturelle. Elles sont ensemble, mais de fait dans une solitude parfaite, aliénante. La télévision devient la réalité, la seule vérité de ces existences vides. Les distractions, la musique-bruit, les scénarios sans contenu, le rire-riktus, le soi-disant plaisir, le faux bonheur, représentent les voiles de l'irréalité qui accaparent l'horizon de la vie et transforment les gens en témoins passifs d'un spectacle grotesque. Le plus passionnant est le spectacle de la violence et de la mort. La poursuite de Montag par le chien mécanique, le crime d'un innocent satisfont la soif de cruauté du public. Parce que ceux qui contrôlent cet instrument perfide qui est la télévision savent que la violence est une composante importante de la nature humaine et qu'elle fonctionne comme une sorte de soupape. C'est pour

cette raison aussi que les parcs de loisirs ont des jeux vedettes: le casseur de vitres ou le démolisseur de voitures... En se référant à l'*Utopie* de Thomas More, Hélène Vedrine écrivait : « Toute la philosophie qui gouverne l'île d'Utopia est fondée sur une seule idée : la violence réelle ou symbolique s'exerce toujours au nom du Bien ». (p. 57) Une idée parfaitement valable dans l'Etat totalitaire de *Fahrenheit 451* aussi, Etat qui encourage la violence, l'autorise autant qu'elle n'est pas dirigée contre lui. Une violence au nom du Bien...

Sous la surface...

Mais il y a aussi le revers de l'image artificielle qui a tué le naturel pour mettre à la place des scénarios stéréotypés et monotones, qui a confisqué l'imagination spontanée et a déserté les esprits. C'est le personnage séraphique de la jeune Clarisse qui disparaît aussi mystérieusement qu'elle apparaît mais qui a le temps de rendre évident ce que Montag ne réalisait pas. Elle lui apprend la saveur des choses simples: une conversation authentique, la beauté des choses que personne n'observait plus, la lune, la rosée, le pissenlit...

Ce que tout le monde désire est d'expérimenter la plénitude de l'existence, sa vivacité et ce sont les sens qui fournissent le plus le ressenti d'être vivant. La télévision connaît très bien cette vérité et elle offre un simulacre de vie par ses images artificielles. La vue est accablée par des séquences, pleines de couleurs, se déroulant à grande vitesse, qui ne laisse pas au spectateur le temps d'assimiler ce qu'il voit. L'ouïe aussi est accaparée, bombardée, harcelée par les bruits d'une «musique» aliénante. En fait, ces images et ces sons à grande intensité, créant une fausse sensation de vivacité, ont détruit le naturel à la faveur du mécanique, de l'artificiel. C'est pour cette raison que dans le roman de Bradbury la contrepartie de cet expansionisme en est manifestée par un autre sens qui devient l'expression de l'authenticité: l'odorat. L'odeur d'abricot et de fraise, l'odeur des feuilles sèches et même l'odeur des livres...

Mais pour saisir le vrai visage de l'existence et les proportions du désastre, on doit y consentir et ce n'est pas aussi simple qu'il n'y paraît, puisque les gens vivent dans un cadre faux, un écran obture leur vue et dissimule les drames psychiques intérieurs. Si on refuse cet écran, on est déboussolé, on ne sait plus ce qu'est la réalité. D'ailleurs, c'est plus simple lorsque l'on vous dit quoi penser, quelle est la vérité et ce que l'on doit faire pour vivre sa vie. Vous ne devez faire aucun effort intellectuel ni d'aucune autre nature. C'est pour cette raison que Mildred refuse de sortir de cet état d'abrutissement, elle ne saurait pas ce qu'elle doit faire. Pourtant, sous l'apparence d'une femme heureuse – et à grande échelle, la population de la ville vit le même drame – se trouve un être désespéré, perdu, qui essaie se suicider et après ce moment refuse d'accepter qu'elle a été capable d'un geste si dramatique. L'une de ses amies pleure hystériquement en entendant la poésie lue par Montag et elle ne sait pas pourquoi, elle ne peut pas s'expliquer cette réaction profondément émotionnelle. Sous la surface d'une vie glamour se trouve

une vie affective corrodée, mutilée; si on regarde au fond des âmes on ne voit que le noir, le malheur, l'incapacité de communiquer, de poser et de se poser des questions, de trouver des réponses: la déshumanisation. Les maisons aux fenêtres fermées hermétiquement semblent des tombeaux sinistres et les gens des morts-vivants qui simulent d'être actifs et pleins de vie. Ils parlent mais ils ne disent rien, ils ne comprennent pas le sens des choses, ils ne se connaissent plus entre eux, ils savent seulement consommer et détruire et non plus construire, ils ont perdu leur mémoire. L'auteur du roman trouve dans cette perte de la mémoire l'une des conséquences les plus graves du refus de la culture et du livre, le signe certain de la déshumanisation.

Mais l'espérance existe encore, le vieux Faber, par exemple. Ou le groupe d'intellectuels dissidents que Montag trouve à l'extérieur de la ville, autour d'un feu, le feu symbolique et purificateur qui sauve et illumine cette fois-ci. Ils lui révèlent le fait qu'ils sont les gens-bibliothèque, les gens qui ont sauvé les grands livres en les mémorisant. Leur personnalité ne compte plus, disent-ils, l'important est le trésor intellectuel qu'ils gardent en mémorisant pour ceux qui un jour vont se rendre compte que l'humanité a besoin de leur savoir. Une fin de roman quand même prometteuse en dépit des dégâts et des destructions d'une guerre ignorée par la masse à la faveur des spectacles de télévision. Le sens de la conservation même ne fonctionne pas pour ces gens de la ville qui ne sont plus capables de percevoir le danger et qui le minimalisent parce qu'ils ne vivent que dans une réalité alternative. L'image pathétique du groupe d'intellectuels qui part pour sauver ce qui peut encore l'être suggère la capacité humaine à renaître de ses cendres comme Phénix évoqué pour contrebalancer le mal que la Salamandre a fait.

À quoi bon l'antiutopie ?

En dehors de l'intérêt purement artistique de cette fiction, le roman veut bien sûr donner à penser, d'autant plus que l'on peut voir dans ce monde imaginé qui pousse à l'extrême des défauts de notre monde, une anticipation sur l'avenir, une sorte d'exercice spéculatif qui devance ce qui va se produire. C'est évident, toute l'histoire millénaire le prouve, que l'humanité ne peut effectivement pas sortir « du cycle infernal » de la destruction et de la reconstruction. Mais les gens doivent se réveiller, comme Montag le fait, pas à pas, et ils doivent se rendre compte tout seuls qu'ils ne vont pas bien, que la société est malade en croyant qu'elle est saine, qu'elle ne connaît plus la vérité, que son affectivité s'est atrophiée. Se rendre compte qu'il y a un problème voire des problèmes est le premier pas, absolument nécessaire, pour la guérison. La perfidie et la perversion de cet état décadent consiste à se cacher au-delà l'apparence du confort et du bien être. Les utopies et les rêves utopiques ont fait de l'idée de perfection une obsession, en espérant l'installer sur la terre et dans la vie des hommes. Et ce n'est pas très clair si l'objectif en soi, c'est à dire d'être heureux, ou les modalités pour atteindre cet objectif posent des problèmes ou tous les deux à la fois. Le roman de Bradbury nous fait prendre conscience, malgré tout, de ce faux bonheur qui nous

rend malheureux. Peut-être la bonne vie ne réside-t-elle pas forcément dans le bonheur ou peut être notre idée du bonheur n'est pas celle qui est la plus correcte ou celle qui peut conduire à la certitude qu'en vivant dans cet état notre vie n'est pas ou n'a pas été inutile.

Le roman de Bradbury attire l'attention aussi, même si pour nous, les gens du troisième millénaire, ce n'est pas une idée neuve, sur les pièges de la télévision qui finit par aplatir et appauvrir notre imagination. R. Barthes considérait que le vide dans la culture de masse n'est pas l'absence, le rien, mais la répétition, le stéréotype, une définition toujours actuelle pour nous qui sommes confrontés aux mêmes cadres, formules et structures bien emballées en images artificielles et servies jour après jour, 24 heures sur 24. Une vie pour laquelle, comme Faber, le personnage du roman le dit, la quantité est tout et la qualité n'a plus de sens. Une vie dans laquelle le temps pour penser nous fait défaut et une vie qui nous interdit d'intervenir, d'avoir l'initiative. L'humanité peut se perdre en courant après le bien matériel, mais tout n'est pas perdu si on en perçoit tout le danger. Mais est-il vraiment possible que la reconstruction ne puisse être mise en pratique qu'après la destruction ?

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METAPHORICAL DYSTOPIAS AND THE END OF THE WORLD(S) IN AUSTER'S *COUNTRY OF LAST THINGS* AND JOSÉ SARAMAGO'S *BLINDNESS*

ANDREI SIMUȚ*

ABSTRACT. *Metaphorical Dystopias and the End of the World(s) in Auster's Country of Last Things and José Saramago's Blindness.* The present paper aims to analyse how the apocalyptic imagination and dystopian visions and motifs are intertwined in two recent fictions, Paul Auster's *Country of Last Things* and José Saramago's *Blindness*, both constructed on an pre-apocalyptic scenario and a few essential dystopian motifs.

Keywords: metaphorical dystopia, apocalyptic imagination, impossibility fiction, end of the world.

REZUMAT. *Distopii metaforice și sfârșituri de lume în În țara ultimelor lucruri de Paul Auster și în Orbirea de José Saramago.* Articolul își propune să analizeze modul cum imaginația apocaliptică se întâlnește cu viziunea distopică și cum acestea se potențează reciproc în două romane contemporane, *În țara ultimelor lucruri* de Paul Auster și *Eseu despre orbire* de José Saramago.

Cuvinte cheie: distopii metaforice, imaginar apocaliptic, ficțiunea imposibilului, sfârșit de lume.

Introduction

Both Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* and José Saramago's *Blindness* represent an intriguing mixture of an apocalyptic scenario superimposed on a dystopian world. Both authors employ heavily the strategies and the deadlocks of the impossibility fiction, as it was defined by Peter Stockwell: "a working name for those virtual regions where fantasy, science fiction, utopia, mythology, extrapolative, speculative and alternative worlds overlap"¹. Curiously enough, Auster's novel does not appear either in Stockwell's collection of studies or in Keith Booker's *Dystopian Literature*, and this is because of the novel's mixed nature: *In the Country of Last Things* is an apocalyptic novel imbued with dystopian

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¹ Derek Littlewood, Peter Stockwell (eds), *Impossibility fiction. Alternativity-Extrapolation-Speculation*, Amsterdam – Atlanta, Rodopi, 1996, p. 6.

elements. Auster manages to produce a unique synthesis between these two akin modes of imagination, the dystopian and the apocalyptic. Both Auster's novel and Saramago's fiction are perfect examples of transgressing both apocalyptic scenarios and dystopian patterns: the dystopian order is ensued in both cases as a result of an indeterminate apocalyptic crisis; both novels built their plots on a central metaphor, extended and materialised; both novels rely on moralistic, pedagogical assumptions; both fictional worlds have a concentric organisation of space around a dystopian *centrum mundi*, which is also the embodiment of the apocalyptic force (the City/ the Country of Last Things, the mental institution - *Blindness*). Saramago's novel also poses some difficulties in terms of dystopian/apocalyptic fiction: the end of the present civilisation creates the very the zero historical point when a dystopian space is ensued.

As regards the apocalyptic patterns, *In the Country of Last Things* transgresses the paradigm of the hermeneutic apocalyptic and *Blindness* goes beyond the usual scenario of a viral apocalypse through metaphorisation. The hermeneutic apocalyptic can be described as a post-war version of the romantic hermeneutic apocalyptic, Douglas Robinson's term², relying on the etymological sense of the apocalyptic as revelation (of a hidden meaning), with famous representatives from Borges, Thomas Pynchon, to Umberto Eco and many others. *In the Country of Last Things* (1987) is also one of the best examples in the vast series of novels representing the dissolution of language, of meaning and of the world as system of signs (as Bertrand Gervais has shown³).

The Pre-Apocalyptic Crisis Meets the Dystopian Nightmare

Paul Auster's novel is also the perfect example of a transgression of both the dystopian apocalyptic and the nuclear apocalyptic scenario: his fictional world circumscribes an isolated space, far from the known world, a nameless City which functions as a centre from where the forces of chaos and destruction are disseminated towards the entire world. It is an *ou-topos* suspended outside the profane, chronological time, in this respect being very close to a dystopian space. Another formal and stylistic aspect of Auster's fiction that orientates our expectations as readers towards the dystopian narratives is the fact that the narrator (first-person narrative) coincides with the witness (the stranger who arrives in the dystopian world) and the protagonist. Anna Blume is the witness who describes the decadence of a civilization and its regression towards a total barbarian state, the end of all forms of authority (also present in the nuclear apocalypse). "The country of last things" is bound to a pre-apocalyptic time of an imminent end of the world,

² Douglas Robinson, *Literature and Apocalyptic*, in: John J. Collins; Bernard McGinn, Stephen J. Stein (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (vol. 3 *Apocalypticism in the Modern Period and the Contemporary Age*), New York, Continuum, 2000, p. 361.

³ Bertrand Gervais, *L'Imaginaire de la fin. Temps, Mots et Signes, Logiques de l'imaginaire- tome III*, Montréal, Le Quartanier, 2009, p.84.

when the extinction of the human race seems to be approaching as no children are born anymore (this resembles the bio-apocalypses, but also apocalyptic films such as *Children of Men*). Despite all these resemblances, Auster's novel distances itself from all these types of apocalyptic scenarios.

The apocalyptic dimension takes the shape of a disseminated force of disintegration, a submersion into the void and the spreading of chaos (the gradual disappearance of all forms of order, social, temporal and spatial). The apocalyptic dimension is thus read through its negative forms, the synonym for the progressive disappearance of meaning itself (in sharp contrast with the hermeneutic apocalyptic of Pynchon's and Eco's novels, for instance). Anna Blume's first impression upon her arrival in "the country of last things" is that she bears witness to the literal vanishing of all things, of their names and of their inner representation and memory. As Bertrand Gervais has shown, Auster's novel is a representation of the end through the domestic and ultimate consequences that the apocalyptic state of things has generated, as opposed to the global effects on the world⁴. This could also explain the first person narrative of Anna Blume's confession and its intimate atmosphere. Her letters form a diary which is written under the pressure of the imminent end (the world's disintegration) and even the spectre of the end of language itself, which draws the novel near the apocalyptic dystopias of Orwell (*1984*), Bradbury (*Fahrenheit 451*), or Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Oryx and Crake* (2001).

Anna Blume's long and desperate letter of becomes a last and symbolic attempt to maintain the language and the meaning, a long letter that becomes a diary of survival, a perfect intrinsic motivation for the form, style and narrative techniques that Auster has adopted. In this way he surpasses the main difficulty in literary discourse, that of representing the end of the world as it actually happens, a struggle to reveal what cannot be expressed. The protagonist's name could remind us of Anne Frank, the famous example of writing a diary on the brink of the end.

The writing metaphor is apparently introduced through an insignificant detail (as in other dystopias, for instance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where Winston discovers a hidden space in his room where he cannot be observed): Isabel, Anna's friend, loses her voice, so they were forced to continue their dialogue on paper, in written form. The act of writing becomes thus a metaphor for salvation, the protagonist's endeavour to keep memory, identity and meaning, since the names and words are disappearing, together with their real denoted objects, and the world is regressing towards a pre-technological state, a New Dark Ages very similar to the one described in nuclear apocalypses such as *Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter M. Miller or *Davy* by Edgar Pangborn. This gradual disappearance of the technological objects is disclosed in a conversation between Anna and a local inhabitant who also insists on the fact that there is no escape from the City, which is an enclosed dystopian space increasing the feeling of total captivity. The end of

⁴ Bertrand Gervais, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

the world becomes the metaphorical equivalent of an irreversible sinking into oblivion, into a blank space, and also the governing principle of the dystopian world. In this sense, "the country of last things" is placed in a post-historical moment when the end of the human history has occurred, along with its cultural memory, both generating a liberating feeling and a traumatic experience for the protagonist, who experiences the anxiety of losing her world. This feature is common with other post-human narratives, whether bio-apocalypses or nuclear apocalypses, all relying on the assumption that "the end has already happened". This general feeling will gradually intensify during the 1990s, when it is theorised by Francis Fukuyama (the end of a singular human history)⁵, Jean Baudrillard and James Berger ("apocalypse is our history"⁶) among many others.

As in other post-human narrations, the protagonist undertakes the task of reconstructing the lost, vanished world through his personal memory, through its details and here the diary plays a crucial role in dystopian apocalyptic fiction from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Gravity's Rainbow* to *Handmaid's Tale*, or bio-apocalypses from *Oryx and Crake* to *Possibility of an Island*. The process of recollection starts only after the world of yesteryear has already been shattered, when memory becomes the only condition for survival and thus Anna Blume imposes herself a conscious program of grounding the world through her memory, as if the world has already vanished.

The originating cause of annihilation continues to remain unknown throughout the entire novel, in spite of Anna's attempts to reveal its true starting point. As in other fictions about the end of humanity, the startling and essential question that triggers Anna's quest and the novel's plot is "how it all started". The answer to this question was also the main reason why Anna travelled to the "country of last things" in order to find William, a lost correspondent who disappeared mysteriously in the same crepuscular space. In spite of all the warning signs and of her awareness that the anonymous City represents the embodiment of a disintegration principle and of the end of the world itself, Anna starts in pursuit of William and in her quest of the enclosed dystopian world, the City-prison isolated from the outer world by ontological barriers. Their dissymmetry regarding the permission to enter versus the impossible escape to the outer world suggest the general, irreversible submersion of the world into the void, which is represented by the City itself. Its space borrows from utopian geography its concentric display. Another common feature with anti-utopias regards the protagonist's initiation in the mysteries and the laws of the new space she has entered. The testimony of her confrontation with the dystopian space results in the text of her testimony, made by Auster to coincide with the text of the novel itself and with the description of the City as in classical utopias. Another feature that situates Auster's text close to the utopian tradition is the indirect reference to the real city of New York.

⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Free Print, 2006.

⁶ James Berger, *Twentieth Century Apocalypse: Forecasts and Aftermaths*, "Twentieth Century Literature", Vol. 46, Winter, 2000, "Literature and Apocalypse", No. 4.

A secondary motivation for the spreading of chaos and dissolution is the negativity and bad feelings in people's minds, and this possible explanation is solipsistic in nature but also suggests that the nameless City is also a metaphorical dystopia. The inhabitants of this dystopian world are divided into sects according to their beliefs regarding the end of the world, divided between those who believe that the world will be redeemed and those who think that the world is doomed and punished for the sins of humanity.

When the apocalyptic imagination is intertwined with the domestic micro-universe of Anna, the initial tension of the imminent End dwindles and the apocalyptic scenario is moralistically tamed, in a similar fashion as in novels such as *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy or *Blindness*, which could remind us of the moralistic dimension of a classical (anti)-utopian text.

The second part of the novel is dominated by such backlashes which superimpose on a dystopian, impossible space a familiar one (sometimes a domestic space, like Anna's dream of having a child), where we gradually recognize buildings and institutions from the real world, which have miraculously survived, such as the National Library, left untouched in the middle of the disaster. Her passage is in fact a last minute escape from annihilation towards new oases of the "real", which eventually also collapse.

Far from describing a post-apocalyptic future, Auster's fictional world is captive in the pre-apocalyptic crisis and its irreversible temporality. The apocalyptic expectations arise from this stagnation, with a subliminal belief in the end's redeeming powers, similar to other dystopian-apocalyptic fictions like Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where the end is postponed indefinitely, although everyone seems to feel its presence. Although Anna Blume witnesses a collapse of civilisation, she is far from witnessing the Apocalypse or the End itself, which becomes a compensatory fiction, an imaginary product. The end can only be imagined but remains mysterious and out of reach. The end itself dissolves, diminishes and becomes the end of a notebook, in a bourgeois vein frequently employed by the fictions written during the next decade. The possible ends are perfectly staged in their continuous augmentation, from the end of political authority, end of organised society, end of rules and laws, end of civilisation, to end of the real, but the real End remains to be expected.

In the Country of Last Things is a novel entirely constructed on a metaphorical structure, an extended metaphor which overshadows the narrative development of the plot. As a consequence, *In the Country of Last Things* can be considered, along with *Blindness*, a metaphorical dystopia: the former builds upon the metaphor of dissolution (blank space, disappearance of all things, chaos, the void) and the latter on blindness as a viral disease. Bertrand Gervais integrates Auster's novel in the typology of domestic apocalypses, Auster being an artful crafter of domestic worlds colliding with a crisis of some sort, and this also goes for Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (a domestic intimate universe of a family, confronted with the post-nuclear chaos).

In *Blindness* (1995), José Saramago describes a similar submission of the world to the chaos before the End, which does not occur but initiates a nightmarish "state of exception". This state of exception appears because of an Event that disrupts the ordinary, familiar order of things, a signal for entering a different time, accelerated, irreversible, pre-apocalyptic. The Event occurs as an everyday experience, restricted to a personal drama: a driver goes blind in the middle of the traffic, an Event surprisingly singular, in sharp contrast with the global Events of previous apocalyptic scenarios (hermeneutic, comic or nuclear apocalypses). Like Auster, Saramago uses both *extrapolation* ("metonymical extensions of the ends of reality", as Peter Stockwell defines it) and *speculation*, which is based on a visual metaphor and on imagination which reformulates the present world (its essential and unsettling phenomena). Both these literary strategies are metaphorical in nature and are frequently used in apocalyptic, dystopian fiction (which also assimilates science fiction, but the apocalyptic–SF distinction is inoperative). In Auster's "Country of Last Things" the disappearance of all things is initially the feature of an enclosed, limited space, but it gradually becomes the apocalyptic threat for the entire world or a metaphor for the end of all things.

The same goes for Saramago's fictional world: all the inhabitants of the world will eventually go blind, as in viral apocalypses, very popular both in fiction and in film during the 1990s: contagion is here used clearly as a metaphor, while the material environment remains untouched by an outer force of destruction. The crisis is experienced by man and focused entirely on the human factor as in bio-apocalypses, where almost in every example it is accompanied by the myth of the "last Man", the last surviving individual of the human race. "The Last Man" assumes both the role of the protagonist and that of the narrator. Saramago offers his own version of this pattern: the narration is rendered in an objective style and omniscient point of view and the last man is a woman, the Doctor's Wife who has not been infected with the strange virus. The causes of this viral infection are also obliterated, no scientific explanation is given or suggested, transgressing the precise scientific explanations, thus suggesting a metaphorical dimension as in Auster's novel.

The ultimate cause of the mysterious disease is of course of a different nature, moral and religious, the current state of humanity, its culpable existence and past, its cruelty and lack of generosity and feelings. The apocalyptic, viral Event creates an enclosed space, at first the City where it first occurs and then the Sanatorium where all those infected are imprisoned, where all the social and human representatives are gathered (a mirror to the humanity as a whole). We have at least two concentric circles of the fictional representation: one is the City/Centre/Country, where chaos reigns and civilisation gradually collapses, and the other is the Prison, the dystopian space of the Sanatorium, surrounded by the army, a symbol for control, surveillance and eventually total isolation. Through extrapolation (the contagion eventually affects the entire world), the Sanatorium becomes the Prison and also the Infernal *Centrum mundi*, the result of an

apocalyptic collapse of civilisation and of chronological time. The apocalyptic hypothesis is somehow akin to the speculative ideas of the nuclear and biological pattern of apocalyptic fictions, when man is no longer the master of his world, technology and civilisation, and his downfall creates a regression into barbarism with surprising and intriguing possible consequences, a matter of fictional speculation for both Auster and Saramago.

The process of contagion with the unknown “white” virus follows a providential pattern, selecting the “elect” from the “doomed”. The first would experience a moral initiation through blindness, ignored by the others (the Thief has not learned anything from his new experience and will be killed along with the other “doomed” members of the Sanatorium, faithful to their fanatic Leader). The path followed by contagion starts and ends with the group of the “elect”, led by the Doctor’s Wife, deliberately left without names, a hierarchical trajectory according to the moral/religious standards that divide antagonistically the characters of the novel and the inhabitants of the Sanatorium into the “good” and the “bad” (those who cannot be saved and will continue to pursue Evil ends). The isolation of the protagonists in the Sanatorium appears to be a giant and diabolical Experiment meant to test the righteousness of the characters, their survival abilities, and becomes a narrative pretext for describing the state of exception that produces all the transgressions and transformations: the hospital becomes a prison and then a dystopian space, reversing the old habits and the social class system previously established in the normal, lost world.

The Sanatorium is the representation of our present civilisation and its inner demons, where the whole diabolical past of the 20th century is unleashed. This dystopian space is the synthesis between those who could offer a new beginning for the exhausted human history and those who could re-cast the actual state of things into total chaos and barbarian state, materializing the pure evil. Outside the prison walls are located the common, ordinary people. The detachment from the outer world and its civilisation of image and comfort is signalled by two symbolical mutations, the loss of vision and the loss of chronological time, the latter being lost when the Doctor’s Wife forgets to turn the clock (the sign that we enter into a different nature of time, the dystopian order of time). The incapacity of the authorities to manage the crisis, to find the cure for the impossible disease (again a metaphor) and for the widespread panic, culminates with the prisoners being aware that they are abandoned and totally isolated both from the outer world and from its past and present (the dystopian order of space). All traces of civilization and comfort are lost one by one (physical decay, the difficulty of finding toilets, having to bury the dead, etc.) and, in spite of the doctor’s attempts to organize a new order, irremediable chaos ensues.

Amid the general blindness, the author masterfully places a character who has not gone blind (the Doctor’s Wife), one of the brilliant narrative ideas of the novel. The first major narrative function of this character is to bear witness of the entire process of fast decay of the human being, which brings the collapse of old social relations (the

consumption society) and retrieves older type relationships based on lost values (generosity, brotherhood, sacrifice etc). This character expresses the author's sharp criticism towards the media society, governed by the cult of image and decadent voyeurism. The Doctor's Wife considers an obscenity the ability to see the other without being seen, refusing to accept the intrusion into the intimate lives of the others, a rejection of a typical dystopian feature (unlimited surveillance) and a rejection of the possible dystopian world. She suddenly finds herself in possession of the capacity to survey and profoundly understand the frailties and shortcomings of the human nature. She also illustrates the perspective and the position of the last surviving member of the lost humanity and civilization, forced to assist to the whole process of degeneration, when humans are turned into "blind animals".

Saramago seems to imply that, after the collapse of authority (and its means of control) and the dissolution of social conventions under the pressure of an apocalyptic crisis, there are only two possible versions of the human behaviour, either the selfish, violent, heartless urge for survival at all costs, a regression towards bestiality, or the Christian version of sacrifice for the sake of the others, of love and compassion. A similar question troubled the writers of nuclear apocalyptic scenarios and other visions of the collapse of the social system, namely if there is a way for humanity to adopt other than the regression towards pure bestiality and violence. The representative society gathered and imprisoned because of the quarantine measures is sharply divided between those who experience the spiritual dimension of the blindness (a return to Christianity), led by the Doctor's Wife, and those who are led by a blind Dictator who imposes a reign of terror on the asylum. Saramago suggests that our present civilization is surprisingly volatile, and, if it were to vanish, it would quickly reveal its subliminal cruelty and barbarity, hidden in the very world we live in.

Conclusions

In an age dominated by the omnipotence of the gaze, a blindness epidemics would represent the clear path towards overall confusion, but also to a possible rediscovery of spiritual values, and towards the utopia of a renewed humanity. The analogy with Auster's version of the apocalyptic scenario is evident in this emphasis on the moral, religious and spiritual dimension that could be adopted by humanity after a catastrophe. The end of the novel, when the epidemic vanishes miraculously, can be interpreted in close relationship with the "pedagogy of catastrophe", a syntagm discussed by Peter Sloterdijk as the actual, peculiar necessity to learn through catastrophe and also the pedagogical energies that are to be found in such an Event⁷. The novel's end leads us to the assumption that humanity has needed to pass through a catastrophic event (an epidemic) in order to regain its spiritual values, to purify its evil impulses and after this lesson is learned, normality returns.

⁷ Peter Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoism. Contribuții la o critică a cineticii politice*, Translated by Alexandru Suter, Cluj-Napoca, Idea Design & Print, 2004, p. 44.

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COUNTRIES OF LAST THINGS. LOCATION AND DISLOCATION IN MODERN DYSTOPIAS

OLGA ȘTEFAN*

ABSTRACT. *Countries of Last Things. Location and Dislocation in Modern Dystopias.* The present paper aims to discuss dystopia as narrative of personal dislocation. When the space one assumes as “home” is emptied of those very attributes that built its significance as such, it is, instead, invested with the potential of becoming a “bad place”, thus, a dystopian one. I follow two early approaches to modern dystopia, and Paul Auster’s 1987 atypical novel, *In the Country of Last Things*, which I intend to read in terms of creating a dystopian space and describing the devastating potentialities seeded in the urban environments of the present world.

Keywords: Paul Auster, New York, urbanism, dystopia, devastation, nostalgia, subjectivity.

REZUMAT. *Țări ale ultimelor lucruri. Localizare și dislocare în dystopiile moderne.* Lucrarea de față discută dystopiile în calitatea lor de narațiuni ale dislocării personale. Când spațiul asumat ca acasă este golit de ceea ce îi oferea semnificație ca atare, fiind, în schimb, investit cu potențialitatea de a deveni un loc rău, el capătă atributele unei dystopii. Urmăresc două abordări timpurii ale genului dystopiei moderne și romanul *În țara ultimelor lucruri*, de Paul Auster, pe care îl descriu drept o dystopie atipică.

Cuvinte cheie: Paul Auster, New York, urbanism, antiutopie, pustiire, nostalgie, subiectivitate.

When you live in the city, you learn to take nothing for granted. Close your eyes for a moment, turn around to look at something else, and the thing that was before you is suddenly gone. Nothing lasts, you see, not even the thoughts inside you. And you mustn't waste your time looking for them. Once a thing is gone, that is the end of it. (Paul Auster, *In the Country of Last Things*)

When the space one assumes as “home” is emptied of those very attributes that built its significance as such, it is, instead, invested with the potential of becoming a “bad place”, thus, a dystopian one. Moreover, it is not only bad or maladjusted to the subject’s expectations of comfort and security, it also becomes

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the depository of unsettling phantasms that threaten to become parts of reality. Both destructive and horrifying, the images of a defamiliarized place give birth to speculative questions concerning the dystopian path such a present might, eventually, follow. Consequently, they trigger a nostalgic perspective on the author's present, transformed, in the context of his narrative, into a remote and desired past. The literary text that served me as argument for these considerations is Paul Auster's 1987 atypical dystopia, *In the Country of Last Things*, which I intend to read in terms of creating dystopian space and describing the devastating potentialities seeded in the urban environments of the present world.

Dystopian cities often refill the shape of familiar cities, requiring the reinterpretation of a whole urban imaginary, with its magnificent and terrifying values and nuances. The author's option for well known symbolic places he rebuilds in the frames of decay, decadence and destruction may be read as the very specific intention of writing a text with a cautionary character. In other words, dystopias place problematic aspects of the present in an absurd future, which has them already transformed into major issues. The purpose of their message is to suggest that, without any intervention, the dystopian world is inevitable. That is why, when it comes to building spatial new worlds, the authors of such fictions often choose to map an alternative history of already significant urban places of the world. In order to discuss dystopias from the point of view of their setting, one must permanently consider the fundamental ambivalence underneath their apparent architectonic seamlessness. Dystopian cities are governed by a type of order whose dysfunctionality is seeded in the very expansion of such anthems of formal perfection. The modern city is, indeed, responsible for inspiring most dystopian worlds from the point of view of their outer appearance. In his essay on "noir urbanism", Gyan Prakash¹ considers that "as the world becomes increasingly urban, dire predictions of an impending crisis have reached a feverish pitch". There are "alarming statistics" that insist on "the huge and unsustainable gap between the rates of urbanization and economic growth", while "the unprecedented agglomeration of the poor produces the specter of an unremittingly (...) planet of slums"². Under these circumstances, "monstrous megacities do not promise the pleasures of urbanity but the misery and strife of the Hobbesian jungle"³.

Since the 20th century's imaginary is to be held responsible for spatializing time, one may also comment on a transfer of phobias from their temporal register to a spatial approach. Thus, ruin and decay become part of the urban day to day development. Having dystopic images as prominent figures in literary, cinematic and sociological representations of the modern city, we are confronted with negative portrayals of the urban environment. It "often appears as dark, insurgent

¹ Prakash, Gyan, *Noir Urbanisms: Dystopic Images of the Modern City*, p. 1.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*.

(or forced into total obedience), dysfunctional (or forced into machine-like functioning), engulfed in ecological and social crises, seduced by capitalist consumption, paralyzed by crime, wars, class, gender, and racial conflicts, and subjected to excessive technological and technocratic control". Such representations are, according to Prakash, characterized by the mode of interpretation they invite their audience to. They are nothing more but "critical readings of specific historical conditions to diagnose crisis and catastrophe"⁴. In this respect, an attempt to see in the modern city the utopian impulse of progress is automatically followed by its counterpart: a dystopian approach. Considering the fact that "the dystopic imagination places us directly in a terrifying world to alert us of the danger that the future holds if we do not recognize its symptoms in the present", we recognize the modern city as "an instantiation of a dystopic form of society", and this shall challenge a number of opinions expressed on the topic of urban living.

Modernism both glorified and demonized the quality of urban spaces. As Prakash further puts it, "the rhythm of daily urban life might suggest a symphony, but it also spelled the boredom of routinization", while "the awesome promise of technology and planned futures was also terrifying". Urban dystopia was a natural result of such contrasting attitudes, since "its dark visions of mass society forged by capitalism and technology" contained a subtle "critique of the betrayal of its utopian promise" in the sense that "the dystopic form functioned as a critical discourse that embraced urban modernity rather than reject it".

In "Amnesia, Nostalgia and the Politics of Place Memory", Margaret Farrar examines two different types of creating space memory: one refers to urban sprawls, the other takes into account historical preservation, while also analyzing the relationship established between the two and memory. Farrar talks about such urban sprawls in the context of their becoming amnesia places, since all the possibilities of the geographical spaces they occupy are somehow neutralised. This happens because all historical data imprinted in the sites where such urban forms are being constructed are somehow invalidated by the attempt to create an anonymous, unidentifiable place. Lacking any memory or inheritance, these places, thus, facilitate one's comfortable drowning into an amorphous anonymity, passive towards memorable events. On the other hand, what Farrar tries to underline is the intervention of historical preservation as an element of balance, serving the obvious purpose of filling the significance gaps such identity-related space devaluations generate. The problem of this so-called superficial solution lies in the fact that, by focusing on rather peculiar, selective or purely imaginary forms of the past, it operates a symbolic cut-up whose fundament covers merely commercial aims. The effects of such isolated history islands reflect an alienating approach to their very subject and a reversed potentiality. Thus, in spite of their apparent dichotomy,

⁴ Prakash, Gyan, *op. cit.*

these two practices usually work against a proper understanding of the relationship established between identity, memory and means of creating space. Margaret Farrar purposely refuses to choose one of the two attitudes promoted through urban sprawls and historical preservation. Instead, she expresses a preference for Walter Benjamin's coined term of *porosity*, attempting to explore its semantic values in the context of urban developments that characterize 20th century America. The premise framing Margaret Farrar's approach is that "how we choose to build history into or eradicate history from our cities and towns shapes our understandings of identity, community, and responsibility. In short, how we attend to the past through the medium of the built environment has political implications for our future"⁵. Basing her studies on material furnished by relatively recent geographies of American urban spaces solely, Farrar observes the fact that "sprawl is an anathema: a twenty-first-century topography of distinctly unmemorable landscapes characterized by endless, homogeneous stretches of drive-by scenery, drive-through eateries, and stunningly forgettable architecture"⁶. The most prominent consequence carried by such a dominant type of space conceivment would be, according to Margaret Farrar, the way in which "many of the popular, academic, and practitioner responses to sprawl come uncomfortably close to what one might call landscapes of nostalgia". Since, during the last five decades, urban sprawls have simply proliferated in an unforeseen manner, the reclamation of past spaces for preservation and beautification has proceeded apace". Thus, projected "in direct contrast to placeless places", such designated historic sites "attempt to shore up memory, putting it at the front and center of public consciousness"⁷.

An important number of studies concerning recent geographies have focused on the subject of the post World War II massive building boom and many of their authors have specifically reacted to the increasing speed of emergence of such placeless places, describing the psychological effects their impersonality might have had upon their inhabitants. The first to use the term "placelessness" when referring to this type of urban spaces is Edward Relph. He describes the relationship new American landscapes imply, suggesting that "placelessness is not only a psychological condition but also a political phenomenon" whose effects "are not only individual or collective alienation but also may be the diminishment of political engagement and efficacy"⁸ because "landscapes – shared spaces, recognizable boundaries, identifiable landmarks, common sites of remembrance – help to establish relationships between people"⁹.

⁵ Farrar, Margaret, *Amnesia, Nostalgia, and the Politics of Place-Memory*, Western Political Science Association. San Diego, CA, 2008.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

In these contexts of space-creation, nostalgia comes as a key concept in investing places with a type of inherited meaning. But, discussing dystopian cities, one must pay attention to their basically amnesic structure. These urban settings reflect the terror of living in a lobotomized society. Placelessness is a central quality in dystopian spaces. It is the ultimate proof that memory and meaningful relationships have been canceled in order to favor uniformity and the dissolution of all individual features.

As a matter of fact, when we describe a world – be it real or fictive dominated by negative principles as dystopian, we assume that the discourse which leads to its description actually intends to promote a type of comparison between a previous better world (that became, in the official position of society, forbidden, thus, unaccessible) and the world as it is now: deteriorated, corrupted, undesirable. The result in positing such an antinomy is a tendency to invest the previous world with the significance, possibilities and never fulfilled promises of a lost paradise. In *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide*, M. Keith Booker saw this type of literature as a form of skeptical dialogue with most of the utopian dispositions the modern world focused on developing. He thus claimed that "dystopian literature is specifically that literature which situates itself in direct opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential negative consequences of arrant utopianism"¹⁰.

The voice beneath these fictional developments is that of a misfit, one who dares question the logic within their world devoid of meaning. The narrative is often constructed in by paying attention to the verisimilitude of details. As mentioned before, while utopias have the tendency to tell the story of a yet impossible future, dystopias are anchored in the present. In spite of the differences in framing their fictional material and trauma exploring, they all share the goal of preventing humanity from turning into a nightmare. In this respect, one of the side effects considered from this point of view depends on the way the dystopian and utopian contrast is moved on the scale of historical and personal time experience. One can easily remark that "the better place" is not to be found in a progress oriented future, but back in time, through "the lens of nostalgia". "This is the past that somebody in the future is longing to go back to" is the paradox that frames the logic of dystopian patterns.

Spatial reference points are the first ones to be challenged within the framework of a "memory and identity loss" type of narrative. Even though most classical dystopias do not insist on how the badlands of their stories have actually seen themselves geographically turned into monstrous shadows of what they once were (we are only suggested that some apocalyptic destruction had occurred, since, in such postapocalyptic debates, "the end does not come as a predictable

¹⁰ Booker, M. Keith, *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide*, Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1994.

consequence of historical forces or personal actions but as rupture, shock, and unexpected intervention – a traumatic event that can only be explained after the fact”¹¹), Paul Auster writes an atypical story of an expanding inferno that undermines science fiction patterns and meets the curious approach of an epistolary form.

According to Mark Hillegas, the most revealing indexes to the anxieties of the modern world were works like Zamyatin’s *We*, Huxley’s *Brave New World* and Orwell’s *1984*. What these books have in common is the fact that they all describe nightmare states giving birth to nightmarish environments, mapping a new acceptation of the concept of inferno. The dystopian hell is one which isolates man from nature while exposing him to spatial factors that diminish his deepest values of intimacy. Furthermore, technology enslaves human beings and deforms their vision upon their politics of selfhood, subjectivity and placement awareness. Under these circumstances, the narrative space employed in tracing the highways to the modern hell is a prominent element when it comes to analyzing the patterns of modern dystopias.

In this respect, my paper tries to trace a few guidelines on understanding the preponderance of certain motifs that emerge when creating spatial perspectives within the modern dystopian worlds, serving as further examples to literary texts that approach pessimistic accounts of a totalitarian future. When I refer to creating space in modern dystopia, I think of diegetic elements that give coherence to our spatial experience within such fictions. According to Hilary Dannenberg’s perspective on spatial plotting, ”the bodily experience of negotiating and perceiving space underlies sensemaking operations” since ”the negotiation of space is one of the first orientational steps in any human being’s existence. This knowledge is claimed to be crucial in terms of metaphorically mapping any other experiences”.

The dystopian experience is clearly thought as one the reader would experience as traumatizing. According to Tom Moylan (*Scraps of the Untainted Sky*), these narratives operate a type of inversion that focuses on the terrors rather than the hopes of history. Moylan further speaks about dystopian maps of social hells that invite their readers to strange, nightmarish worlds whose structures generate a fictionally shaped critique against the modern utopias of progress. These spatial negotiations are discussed in terms of an iconic construction of an alternative world.

The dystopian experience also claims a type of negotiating location and dislocation. Were we to find those very spatial patterns that will further function in the context of modern dystopias, we should certainly re-evaluate two texts that are said to invent this type of imaginary: E.M. Foster’s *The Machine Stops* and Zamyatin’s *We*. I shall briefly compare the actual fictional places where the plots unfold takes place into and analyze the details they based their verisimilitude on.

¹¹ Auster, Paul, *In the Country of Last Things*, Faber and Faber, New York, 2005.

The Machine Stops, E.M. Foster's 1909 story, is the first work of fiction to portray what Tom Moylan describes as "a totalizing administration that mechanizes every dimension of daily life". Along with its developing a critical account of the new social spacetime of the 20th century, Foster's story also offers a number of patterns that will further be used in order to create a sense of dystopian space whose main features will be claustrophobia and devaluation of intimacy.

The story opens in a beehive-like room buried deep below ground, supporting the life of a sole, technology dependent woman named Vashti, engaged in a Machine-mediated conversation with her son, Kuno. The society they belong to strongly promotes a programmatic agoraphobia, and the people living under the Machine's jurisdiction are entrapped in hexagonally shaped cells that provide them with means of occupying their time in such a manner that their bodies never have to move. Everyone in the world was physically isolated in standardized rooms linked by permanent, constant, consequent communication with one another. Thus, in Foster's words, "few travelled in these days for, thanks to the advance of science, the earth was exactly alike all over". The outer world's atmosphere is poisonous and visiting the surface of the Earth is possible only with the Machine's permission. Still, this activity is believed to be contrary to the spirit of the age, useless and disadvantageous. Vashti fears the terrors of direct experience. However, she goes on an unpleasant trip to her son's private room (that will be described as identical to her own, fully equipped in terms of providing the necessary conditions for living a life outside any human interaction). Travelling to the other side of the world is, indeed, a traumatizing direct experience, since it exposes one to the habits of a time when airships were built and "the desire to look direct at things still lingered in the world". Hence, the discomfortable number of skylights and windows. They reactivate the wounded memory of places which once stood in the open air. However, the language used by these people has lost the habit of naming natural phenomena. A notable example is the scene of the airship passing over the Himalayas. The passengers and the flight attendant admit to the fact that they have forgotten the name of the white stuff in the cracks and are shocked by the usage of traditional names for the ruins of cities long ago.

This fear of the open air is a contrastive element when comparing E.M. Foster's story with another approach to the early modern dystopian space, namely Yevgheni Zamyatin's spatial descriptions in *We*. The setting here is described in a rather solar, aseptic regime. While the greatest fear in the world of the Machine concerned the sunlight (Science could prolong the night but only for a little, and those high hopes of neutralizing the earth's diurnal revolution had passed, together with hopes that were possibly higher. To "keep pace with the sun," or even to outstrip it, had been the aim of the earlier civilization in the story), in Zamyatin's 1921 novel it is the virtues of full light that are mainly praised, while the space here is public, privileging complete exposure. While in *The Machine Stops*, beauty was

seen as a barbarian concept, here it is to be found in the unfree movement of the Integral, in the glass-walled city and in the perfect order emerging from this space deprived of intimacy. The narrator, D-503, cannot imagine a city that is not surrounded by a Green Wall, or a life that is not regulated by the figures of the Table. Yet, once he discovers the ancient house (as a chronotope) he will understand what Gaston Bachelard described in *The Poetics of Space* as the intimate values of inside space, capable of challenging an entire world view.

The glass-walled apartments contrast with the hivebee cells from the point of view of their structure solely. At a deeper, diegetic level, they have been designed in order to speak about different approaches to the same symptom that characterizes the illness of dystopian worlds: alienation, enstrangement, identity loss.

What the uncharted, wild surface of the earth is for the society built around the machine is, in the case of Zamyatin's novel, the green wall with its ancient building's opaque mass (in the narrator's terms).

E.M. Foster's Kuno, portrayed as a misfit whose discursive presence gives birth to a prototype, formulates an impactful sentence, one that, in my opinion, encompasses the principle of spatially constructing an evil-endorsed world:

"You know that we have lost the sense of space. We say space is annihilated, but we have annihilated not space, but the sense thereof". Kuno, thus, believes that this loss was an identity one and by means of recovering it, he would, eventually, recover a whole psychological configuration the technologized society had been deprived of. In his exploratory context, the first one to be recaptured is the meaning of the dichotomy between near and far. This notional discovery further allows Kuno to understand the geography of his underground city and to find alternative eloping paths.

D 503, on the other hand, is introduced another way of perceiving spatial perspective when entering the closed, opaque intimacy shell of the ancient house. The inhabited place transcends geometry, wrote Gaston Bachelard, and the massively conceived spatial maze which is the ancient house paradoxically confirms this statement. Even though abandoned, museum-like, the house surfaces a deeper imaginary which the rigid architecture of the city had turned into an amnesia black hole.

Spatial reference points are the first to be challenged within the framework of a "memory and identity loss" type of narrative. Even though most classical dystopias do not insist on how the badlands of their stories have actually seen themselves geographically turned into monstrous shadows of what they once were (we are only suggested that some apocalyptic destruction had occurred, since in such postapocalyptic debates "the end does not come as a predictable consequence of historical forces or personal actions but as rupture, shock, and unexpected intervention – a traumatic event that can only be explained after the fact"¹²), in 1987 Paul Auster writes an atypical story of an expanding inferno that

¹² Auster, Paul, *In the Country of Last Things*, Faber & Faber, New York, 2005 [1987], p.1.

undermines science fiction patterns. When describing a world that finds in itself the process of direct and undeniable destruction, Paul Auster creates, through his narrator's female voice (Anna Blume), a discourse in which memory is banned as a means of self-preservation: "These are the last things...When you live in the city, you learn to take nothing for granted. Close your eyes for a moment, turn around to look at something else, and the thing that was before you is suddenly gone. Nothing lasts, you see, not even the thoughts inside you"¹³. What Auster's main character finds mostly shocking is the fact that, in a space where everything seems to be falling apart, so many things go on resisting. Part of their survival is due to ways of preserving the good memories of a dead better world, without actually dwelling on them. Nostalgia is an ethical value that invests the ruins with the promise of new shelters.

Paul Auster's novel carries a double message, and that is what qualifies it as an unusual dystopian text. On the one hand, it is placed in a future that makes the reader of the present nostalgic for what still exists and defines him as part of a certain place he considers stable and unchallengeable. As a dystopia, *In the Country of Last Things* seems interested in the psychological impact the description of such a world would have rather than in depicting the exact social and political wrong choices that have conducted to such a desperate situation. On the other hand, it is conceived as an authentication document, a letter from the inferno written against all hope it would ever reach its destination, with the therapeutical purpose of saving its writer's humanity by means of constructing a linear narrative solely, which is in itself a way of maintaining a vivid relationship with the realm of memory. Anne Blum writes to her homeward lover in order to describe the New York haunted by hunger, fear and destruction she found herself captive in. The atmosphere of the incipit is tense and desolate: "These are the last things, she wrote. One by one they disappear and never come back. I can tell you of the ones I have seen, I can tell you of the ones that are no more, but I doubt there will be time. It is all happening too fast now, and I cannot keep up"¹⁴. What we further discover is a personal experience of an infernal urban setting, very much like Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* from the point of view of subjective perspective, delivered through documents of self-identification (letters in this case, a recorded tape in Atwood's novel). Paul Auster reinvents the catastrophic drama of forgetting as a collapse of meaning. As Edward Casey claimed in his study on remembering and forgetting, "the fact is that we have forgotten what memory is and can mean; and we make matters worse by repressing the fact of our own oblivion". He further quotes Yates' "we moderns have no memories at all", underlining the fact that "where once Mnemosyne was a venerated Goddess, we have turned over responsibility for remembering to the cult of the computers,

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

which serve as our modern mnemonic idols"¹⁵. These machines, however, "cannot remember; what they can do is to record, store and retrieve information - which is only part of what human beings do when they enter into a memorious state"¹⁶.

In addition, such residual collections of what coherent memories once were cannot but increase the feeling of alienation that involves that type of happiness Nietzsche considered possible only outside the possibility of holding any recollection of one's past. Forgetfulness is never perceived as such in Auster's city. Survival is a matter of giving up on memory, thus Anne Blum's documenting effort is both reckless and unnecessary, since everyone in the city is already condemned to death. Memory is, thus, seen as part of death, rather than belonging to life: "So many of us have become like children again. It's not that we make an effort, you understand, or that anyone is really conscious of it. But when hope disappears, when you find that you have given up hoping even for the possibility of hope, you tend to fill the empty spaces with dreams, little childlike thoughts and stories to keep yourself going"¹⁷. Language is seen as a substitute for lacking life sustaining elements, since "even the most hardened people (...) talk about the desires that have been welling up inside them"¹⁸, conversing on food and the sensorial world before their experience of resistance, keeping a clear account of how all of their phantasms "belong to a language of ghosts" that is nothing but a step forward towards "The Castle of No Return".

Death and dying are major themes in Paul Auster's novel and, perhaps, it is they that inhabit the whole concept of space creation in this atypical text. Death is a place of paradoxical freedom. Thus, not only is it mentioned or illustrated, but it is brutally described in terms of refugees destined to a postapocalyptic, general hopelessness. On the one hand, people lie themselves to death. The stories they share are preludes to an oversimplified rite of passage. "The ghost people", Anne Blum claims, "always die in their sleep".

"For a month or two they walk around with a strange smile on their face, and a weird glow of otherness hovers around them, as if they have already begun to disappear. The signs are unmistakable, even the forwarning hints: the slight flush to the cheeks, the eyes suddenly a bit bigger than usual, the stuporous shuffle, the foul smell from the lower body. It is probably a happy death, however"¹⁹. Other deaths are described as "more dramatic". "There are the Runners, (...) a sect of people who run through the streets as fast as they can, flailing their arms wildly about them, punching the air, screaming at the top of their lungs". The suicidal method they use is exhaustion, with the purpose of dying as fast as possible. "The

¹⁵ Casey, Edward S., *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, Indiana University Press, 2000, p. 201.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ Auster, Paul, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p.11.

Runners say that no one would have the courage to do this on his own. By running together, each member of the group is swept along by the others, encouraged by the screams, whipped to a frenzy of self-pushing endurance". The irony of their condition is the preconditioned training in order to become a good enough runner to push the ultimate limit, so that "by the time a member is ready to make his death run, he has simultaneously reached a point of ultimate strength and ultimate weakness"²⁰, so that he is able to "theoretically run forever, and at the same time his body has used up all its resources. This combination produces the desired result. (...) Runners advertise that their method is over ninety percent failure-proof – which means that almost no one ever has to make a second death run".

As a conclusion, writing about space in dystopias is both challenging and unusual since such literary texts are often read in terms of the ideology they support or criticize. Rarely have the scholars noticed how redimensioning space is a crucial matter in understanding these projected and, ultimately, organized nightmares. As Gyan Prakash notices, "in our effort to reclaim utopia and dystopia as analytic categories of historical inquiry, we place space and time in the background and think instead of these phenomena as markers for conditions of possibility"²¹. Still, diegetic categories are to be taken into account, for the perspective they grant to further readings is both enriching and relevant.

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²⁰ *Ibidem*, p.12.

²¹ Gordin, Michael D., Tilley, Helen, Prakash, Gyan, *Utopia / Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 4.

WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS DREAMING TO THE END OF DEATH

LAURENȚIU MALOMFĂLEAN*

ABSTRACT. *William S. Burroughs dreaming to the end of death.* In this paper, I will propose a very descriptive analysis of *The Land of the Dead*, as it appears in *My Education. A book of dreams* by William S. Burroughs. Being a mythical modernist aspect which this volume shares with a similar book signed by Jack Kerouac, another beatnik author who published a dream diary, the recurrent mentioned oneiric space presents some features I will try to discuss, regarding an urbanistic dystopian topography.

Keywords: William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, beat generation, dream, dystopia.

REZUMAT. *William S. Burroughs visând capătul morții.* În acest articol, voi propune o foarte descriptivă analiză a Tărâmului Morților, așa cum apare el în *Educația mea. O carte de vise* de William S. Burroughs. Fiind un aspect mitic-modernist pe care volumul vine să-l împartă cu o carte similară semnată Jack Kerouac, un alt beatnic autor al unui jurnal de vise, recurentul spațiu oniric menționat prezintă niște caracteristici pe care voi încerca să le discut, în ce privește o topografie urbană distopică.

Cuvinte cheie: William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, generația beat, vis, antiutopie.

We were in 1987 when *The western lands* appeared, a novel by William S. Burroughs with a synonymous title for the western shore of the Nile, where, as the younger Eden, on the East of which shall be persecuted the biblical man, was found the *Land of the Dead*. Hypertextualizing *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, this volume carries a major theme in the post-mortem condition, foreseen also in dreams. Only after eight years, the author will publish his real dreams as well, in what will prove to be his last book. And one of its striking elements concerns precisely the dead, who are always dreamed in a specific dystopian place that I am going to comment. In some points of my account I will make references and parallels to an earlier beatnik – and more modernist, for that matter – dream diary, that of Jack Kerouac.

Of course, as suggested by its name, the major characteristic of this land is to be an eschatological space: its inhabitants are the dead, the spirits or the bodies

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of the deceased. The American writer encounters in his nocturnal voyages a large amount of dead people, from his mother to his lovers:

“The Land of the Dead can be identified by certain signs: The people are all dead and known to me, Mother, Dad, Mort, Brion Gysin, Ian Sommerville, Antony Balch, Michael Portman (Mikey), Kells Elvins.”¹

We could ask ourselves why does the author entitle this most personal place *The Land of the Dead*² and not *The Land of the Dead Mother and Men*, or even *The Land of Death*? One answer could be the following: by respecting the oneiric logic, for which all the characters from a dream are merely segments from the dreamer's personality, Jungian archetypes of the collective unconscious or simply personal convictions about the dreamed. In fact, when we dream about a dead person we used to know, talk or care about, we dream about a part of ourselves which is no longer there. So, the reason for choosing that name and no other is this: if in our dreams we see – or interact with – dead individuals, it is about dead segments from our psyche, places left vacant after the disappearing of those persons. The Land of the Dead is a necrotic area from the dreaming brain of William S. Burroughs. A mortified oneiric tissue. We all must know that if someone whom we love dies, a certain side of us dies too. The beloved ones – or the hated – survive in our memory and can revisit us in our dreams.

Because the dead have become extra spatial entities, Burroughs dreams them both like phantoms and like bodies, even though the French term “revenant” would be more accurate³. In fact, for Jack Kerouac already, almost all of the dreamed ones share the phantom condition; the most often met adjective in his book of dreams is, by far, this omnipresent “spectral”, that we can find almost every few pages. Here are some examples from Burroughs:

“these phantoms keep coming in, look like people but are just as fraudulent and if you shove them they disappear.”⁴

“The old family ghost is in the front room.”⁵

By contrast, if the phantoms happen to disappear, that is not possible with a body, not even – by chance – in the dream world:

“Three people behind zinc counter about three feet long and two patrons in tiny booths with coffee. The people behind the counter look dead, a gray-green color, like «The Absinthe Drunkers».”⁶

Moreover, a spirit, a non-fleshy entity could not be described in terms of

¹ William S. Burroughs, *My Education. A Book of Dreams*, Penguin Books, New York, 1995, p. 11.

² Rather in the singular.

³ “Zombie” has an exaggerated horror constitution, which the figures of Burroughs do not own.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

lengthiness. Not to mention the “gray green color” which is the obvious color of a dead body. We could say that when the dreamer sees phantoms he is in a modernist position, for which the belief in a sort of afterlife was – even contested – still a valid assumption; but when he observes only dead bodies, he states a skeptic hypermodernist⁷ goal: the presentification of life, the *hic et nunc* of it.

Spatially, the oneiric entrance into the realm of death is referred to quite late in the book:

“The Gates of Anubis lead to the Land of the Dead.”⁸

This Egyptian reference could be enhanced by the more specific one related to dreaming which is depicted by the well known gates of horn and ivory from the Greek mythology. But here “the gates of Anubis” lead onto the Land of the Dead, not outwards, as with Homer. It is the dreamer who enters there, not the winged dreams which leave the Tartar and head towards the head of the dreamer's bed. For Burroughs, the dream can no longer be a supernatural being, but an almost hellish psychological place. Again, by contrast, for the modernist Kerouac, this *topos* was rather paradisiacal; once when he forgets his dream, the writer notes a pathetic invocation:

“OPEN THE GATES OF HEAVEN”⁹

Another time, Kerouac makes a slightly comic balance:

“I'm on the road to heaven (this marks the first year of dreams, started in Easonburg on the 14th of August 1952, and now it is the 14th of August 1953, in New York).”¹⁰

Temporally, the first oneiric voyage to The Land of the Dead is noted by William S. Burroughs even later in his book:

“Many years ago my first contact with the Land of the Dead: It is in the backyard of 4664 Pershing Avenue. Darkness and patches of oil and smell of oil. In the house now, and I am bending over Mother from in front, eating her back, like a dinosaur. Now Mother comes screaming into the room: «I had a terrible dream that you were eating my back.» I have a long neck that reaches up and over her head. My face in the dream is wooden with horror. It is like a segment of film underexposed. Not enough light. The light is running out. Dinosaurs rise from the tar pits on La Brea Avenue. Oil and coal gas.”¹¹

We could consider this type of dream as a combination of a dream within a dream (which we shall call a hyperdream, as being more typical to hypermodernism) and a shared / common dream (by far, more specific to the modernist age, with its

⁷ I have chosen the term introduced by Gilles Lipovetsky, for a period we got too used to call postmodernity.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 157.

⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Book of dreams*, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1971, p. 74.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

¹¹ William S. Burroughs, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

taste for a mythical sphere of collectiveness). In other words, a very unusual mixture that engenders a form of oneiric lucidity: because the dead mother appears doubled in the dream of his son, as dreamed by and dreaming his very nightmare, the big dream of the male dreamer is very possible to have become conscious.

Furthermore, perhaps The *Land* of the Dead should be called better The *City* of Death:

“The set is usually some section, three or four blocks of Paris, Tangier, London, New York, St. Louis. And what is outside this dreary claustrophobic area? What lies beyond the Expanding Universe? Answer: Nothing. But??? No but. That is all you-I-they ... can see or experience with their senses, their telescopes, their calculations.”¹²

Like in the movie *Dark City*, there is (only) nothing outside the last walls of this composite town. In fact, for all dystopias, because they are already beyond the real space, there cannot be anything beyond their boundaries. Than, maybe, as for Plato, the *Dead Poets’ Society*...

For Jack Kerouac, the set was placed in or simply was:

“Cincinnati, Philarkadelphia, Frohio, underground stations – the City of Rain, bad jobs, Beelzebub and The Hashish Town I was in all of them...”¹³

“that ghostly station from The City of Rain... [...] everything snorts and everything is haunted by dead... lost lost lost in the endless eternity of our destruction...”¹⁴

“THAT SAVAGE NEW YORK AND SOMEHOW LIKE CHICAGO or “the city of rain” Pittsburgh from the first page of The Book of Dreams...”¹⁵

Thus, after assuring us that the so-called infernal city of rain is in fact only Pittsburgh, the dreamer acts as a merely contemporary textualistic author who sends the reader to another page of the volume, as if the dream would have already a paper consistency. But Jack Kerouac has only flashes of hypermodernity – he is quite entirely modern when, for example, he transforms his native town into a sort of Eternal City of Dreams:

“IN A STRANGE LIVING ROOM, probably in Mexico City, but very suspiciously similar to a living room from a dream about mother and father in Lowell or in The City of Dreams...”¹⁶

Returning to William S. Burroughs, we must add another two features for his oneiric Land of the Dead. The first one would be the lack of distinction between the private and public space. As for, again, all dystopias – or utopias for that matter – such a separation is absurd and nonfunctional. But here are the examples taken from *My Education*:

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 11.

¹³ Jack Kerouac, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 189.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

“The usual mixture of rooms and squares and streets that is the mark of the Land of the Dead. Streets lead into kitchens and bedrooms, so no area is completely private or completely public.”¹⁷

“Note [who? we may ask; my note – L.M.] that there is no line between streets and private house – all doors seem to be open. This line is a convention of Planet Earth and does not apply in these areas.”¹⁸

Once more, being a non-terrestrial zone, even though we may not call it an extra-terrestrial one, precisely because it denominates a pure psychological *topos*, the Land of the Dead is a place where the most drastic hyperindividualism occurs. Everything is public, but everyone is the same old Burroughs, whose inner parts are sharing the same building:

“The hotel is surrounded by corridors rather than streets. Smooth red tile floors with turnstiles and shops and restaurants, all closed in, like one vast structure. This is, of course, usual in the Land of the Dead.”¹⁹

So there is no reason for stupefaction if the dreamer cannot find his own room. With no line between privacy and the public area, the answer is but simple: his room is everywhere and nowhere.

Another typical issue is the breakfast problem. The morning meal, the first one the dreamer will have had after waking from the dream, would be refused to him precisely because having it could cause the end of dreaming, or maybe the realization of this act – that is a lucid dream?

“There is always difficulty in obtaining breakfast or any food for that matter.”²⁰

“Usually the looking-for-breakfast dream is in the L.O.D., as I soon discern by looking around at the personnel. They are all dead.”²¹

Of course, we could ask the question: Where does he realize “they are all dead”? In the *real reality*, or in the oneiric one? During or after the dream? Is this a lucidity arousal or a *post factum* perspective on the *events*? Because we can only have access to the written account of the nocturnal voyage, it is impossible to decide.

I shall finish my very close reading of The Land of the Dead with examples of a somehow had food in the end:

“The dreams refer not only to breakfast but to difficulty in obtaining any sort of food, except for strange outlandish sweet dishes that are eaten more with the eyes than with the mouth.”²²

“I acquire some liquid nourishment in a silver trough. It is creamy and custardy and it tastes delicious ... I absorb some by a sort of osmosis.”²³

¹⁷ William S. Burroughs, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 62.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

If we take in consideration the psychoanalytic analogy between eyes and testicles, this “liquid nourishment [...] creamy and custardy” would represent sperm. In the same dream, Burroughs reports:

“The proprietor brings out a bar like a gold ingot, about eight inches long and brown on the outside. He cuts off one side and inside is a creamy filling ... looks like crème brûlée, clearly delicious and I am eating it with my *eyes*. It's known as *Eye Candy* ... breathing it in through my eyes.”

He even gives us this infantile explication:

“As a child of three I thought that one saw with one's mouth. My brother then told me to close my eyes and open my mouth and I got the idea that I couldn't see with my mouth ... but people do *feast* their eyes.”

What could be said in addition to this, besides the fact that the dream of Burroughs acts like a terrible gamer when it comes to wordplay?

As a conclusion, the Land of the Dead from the – book of – dreams published by William S. Burroughs may be seen as a reminiscence of a mythical modernist age, with enough hypermodern taste and traits – like the non-distinct pattern between public/outer and private/inner zone. Afterlife has become a psych(olog)ic(al) issue, a mnemonic-oneiric dystopia. Even if this dreamed realm of death is not always perceived as a nightmare, we could go further and propose a new concept: oneirodystopia.

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VIKTOR PELEVIN'S DYSTOPIAN *HELMET OF HORROR*. THE DISINTEGRATING NARRATIVE IDENTITY OF THE LITERARY CHARACTER

ELENA BUTUȘINĂ*

ABSTRACT. *Viktor Pelevin's Dystopian Helmet of Horror. The disintegrating narrative identity of the literary character.* Considering Viktor Pelevin's novel *The Helmet of Horror* in the light of Russian literary experimentalism, this article presents and analyzes a series of elements that could configure the weak identity of his literary characters. Highly influenced by the architecture of online communication, Pelevin's narrative questions the possibilities of dialogue and self-awareness in a dehumanized technological space.

Keywords: Viktor Pelevin, *The Helmet of Horror*, dystopia, narrative identity, inter-subjectivity.

REZUMAT. *Distopia Coiful Ororii de Viktor Pelevin. Identitatea narativă a personajului literar în dezintegrare.* Analizând romanul lui Viktor Pelevin, *Coiful ororii*, în lumina experimentalismului literar rus, acest articol prezintă și analizează o serie de elemente care pot configura identitatea labilă a personajelor literare ale scriitorului. Puternic influențat de arhitectura rețelelor de comunicare *online*, romanul lui Pelevin problematizează posibilitatea dialogului și a conștiinței de sine într-un spațiu tehnologic dezumanizat.

Cuvinte-cheie: Viktor Pelevin, *Coiful ororii*, distopie, identitate narativă, intersubiectivitate.

Motto:

*If you wear Batman's mask and
look in the mirror, you see Batman.
But the mask shall never see itself.¹*

Quite often observed in narratives that are representative for the contemporary sensibility, the idea that mental mechanisms are profoundly computational is stylized in Viktor Pelevin's novel *The Helmet of Horror*, first published in 2005. The novel's highly technical structure, confessing a quasi-humane

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¹ Viktor Pelevin, *El yelmo del horror. El mito de Teseo y el laberinto*, Salamandra Publishing House, Barcelona, 2006, translated by Ricard Altés & Natàlia Boronat, p.178.

mind attempting at an explanation of reality, is undermined by a hidden mysticism, present through the signals that an omnipotent, diffuse and unknown authority rarely sends. Pelevin's novel, deprived of a clearly delineated, human-like narrator, challenges the assertions concerning the concept of free will and implies both the mythological and the poetical within its innovative formulae. The lack of an identifiable author goes as far as to touch the real identity of the writer, implicitly debating the status of the literary hero today. In Pelevin's case, one might ask whom the hero is now and if this label should be offered to the literary character or not, given the fact that the narrative frame inside which the characters act is a highly technical, stylized and quasi-dehumanized one, reduced to a necessary minimum in order to make the communication possible.

Therefore, the novel tackled in this study, situated far from any traditional definition of the genre, could also be regarded as an exacerbation of an autistic identity, reduced to its computational features, acting as a structure that tries to cover technically all the possibilities of settling life experiences. As a result, an internet-governed logic seems to function even at the level of page presentation, whereas the structuring units of the text have titles consisting of emoticons already consecrated by online communication. Consequently, the readers enter the literary sequence being offered, instead of a title, a diffuse state of mind, suggested after a reductionist convention that brings together all the characters. They are "alone together"² in this labyrinth.

Tradition and innovation in contemporary Russian prose

The Russian prose of the last decades – from whose most prominent exponents we shall deal with Vladimir Sorokin, Sasha Sokolov, Viktor Pelevin – modifies many formal aspects of prose, following the avant-garde tradition. Nevertheless, it influences implicitly the content, bringing forth worlds where fundamental distinctions such as those of gender identity, past-present-future, and life-death cease to exist. Emphasizing the linguistic experience as the ultimate reality – a persistent hyper-stylistic tendency including sanctifying tendencies –, Russian literature includes transgressive and marginal personalities such as those created by Pelevin. His characters act in the centre of a diffuse world, a radiation of their own labile subjectivity, looking for a point of stability. The spirituality they face is fragmentary, manifesting itself suddenly, a direct effect of the paradigm they move in. Stylistically, losing the poetic level of the phrases (in its ancient sense of craftsmanship capable of reuniting contraries) is surely the sign of a violent break in the centre of human individuality.

Impressionistic, surrealist, modernist or postmodern, sometimes simply regarded as the only available alternative, the novels belonging to Sokolov, Sorokin or Pelevin contain multiple layers of significance, strong inter-textuality and meta-fictional dimensions. The resulting fiction is therefore both lyrical and

² *Ibidem*, p. 2.

self-aware – both a linguistic and an aesthetic interplay – and it could also be related to a possible redefinition of the contemporary lyric. Sokolov, for instance, calls himself a *Proet*, and his work – *proetry*. His writing does not explicitly deal with any social, political or moral issue, being never totally about the exterior world or the inner one.³ The Russian novelist has a unique manner of contradicting inside a paragraph what he had just claimed inside the previous one, endlessly multiplying the fictional layers. Sorokin, instead, describes his method as a series of small binary bombs – partly surrealist, partly based on real physiology, a mixture of scientific naturalism and psychological realism, both at the level of content and at the level of language. This model is actually based on a strong interdependence of the elements composing it. All these different languages need each other because, left alone, they cannot express the dystopian reality they are part of. In this case, the poetics emphasizes the sign's potential, the lack of credibility and the lability of the author's voice, the interpretability of the world.⁴ The world Sorokin obliges his reader to get into is a typically detective one, but the function of the detective novel today is not generated only by its popular and commercially profitable features, but also by internal factors caused by the distinct competing interpretations, hermeneutically attractive while reading.⁵ Underlining the role of the simulacrum in a culture influenced by mass media's visuality, these contemporary novels comprise the scenery of a neo-reality modeled by and due to its own medium,⁶ as anticipated by Baudrillard's thinking, through imitations inside which the signifier can replace the signified. Similarly, in Pelevin's case, visual technologies and image supra-saturation lead towards what Anna Ljunggren calls a reduplicated world, a dialectics between the thing represented and its representation, a hypertrophy of the sign and, thus, of its signifying power: *The emptying of the sign in contemporary culture has been addressed by a number of studies, but these interpretations of the "void" do not connect it with the superabundance and sophisticated integration and expansion of the sign in contemporary life.*⁷

From another perspective, the aesthetic shock is a poetic mechanism that Russian transgressive writers continuously use. The poetics of monstrosity that they cultivate favors a predilection for radical deviations (one that is sometimes pathologic and terminologically medicalized) from the established cultural norms. Perfectly aware of the tradition that they pastiche, sometimes programmatically, the deviant poetics of Russian literature is not an adolescent challenge, but an approach to the collective trauma of the soviet society. Either a symbolic interpretation of daily life (Venedikt Erofeev's case), the parody of soviet language (Sasha Sokolov's case) or the revelation

³ Ludmilla L. Litus, *Sasa Sokolov's Skila dlja durakov: Aesopian Language and Intertextual play*, in *The Slavic and East European Journal*, vol.41, no.1/1997, p. 115.

⁴ Anna Ljunggren, *Closing the Circle: On the poetics of contemporary russian prose*, in *Russian Literature* LXV/2009, p. 453.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 453-4.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 458.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 463.

of the core of signifying processes, all these literary constructions have the same function – that of freeing human perception from automatism, as this had previously been defined by the formalist theory. Euphemism becomes a metaphor for life inside the Soviet Union where normality is impossible.⁸ Sublimations and transfers as compensatory processes, as well as distorted images of the father and of the authoritarian image, the death of idols and mentors are elements that displace the narrative from its own matrix in favor of a perceptual heterogeneity.

Nevertheless, the structure is so richly significant that, at a closer look, it allows for the observation of the poetical disguise of mechanisms that are central in the perception of the surrounding world, just as within autistic perception. Rhetoric figures such as personification, metaphor, anaphora and assonance pave the way for an appropriation of the external world, through a selection operated by virtue of certain rules. This is close to the way autistics classify the surrounding elements and perceive various elements according to certain selection frames so that, afterwards, the uncanny part reveals its poetic virtues – the ability of world-making. For instance, the student in Sokolov's *School for Fools* does not believe in calendar time and builds up a totally different mechanism for recording the passage of time. For him, the ordered numbers of the calendar do not mean a thing, whereas memory is regarded as being double-sided and fragmentary.

In this literary context, Viktor Pelevin focuses on the relation between individual and community and on the media mechanisms that govern it. The central hero of Pelevin's 1999 novel *Generation P*, available in a Romanian version published by *Curtea Veche*, is a young man that begins to decipher occult images hidden behind advertising slogans. On the contrary, in the case of the highly experimental novel *The Helmet of Horror*, the origin of these images is not decipherable anymore. Introducing his book to potential readers, Pelevin writes about the discrepancy that can show up at the confrontation between traditional and contemporary thinking, blames the stereotype according to which explanations and histories coming from the past are false, and claims the necessary revelation of this fatal mistake made by the contemporary subject.⁹ What Pelevin is actually telling us all today is that we live next to instantaneous myths similar to soap bubbles. Anything can acquire a mythical dimension for us today, even though only for very brief moments (the example Pelevin offers is that of the short time span of a program like *Myth Busters* on Discovery channel).¹⁰ But this manner of thinking is not based on belief, like in traditional cultures, but on the absence of belief. Today, even the progress stands for a myth trying to explain the social and the natural in our lives. If our mind is like that of a computer, myths are like shell programs – a complex series of rules that we follow when perceiving the world, mental matrices

⁸ Ulrich Schmid, *Flowers of Evil: the Poetics of Monstrosity in Contemporary Russian Literature* (Erofeev, Mamleev, Sokolov, Sorokin), in *Russian Literature* XLVIII/2000, p. 218.

⁹ Viktor Pelevin, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p.10.

that we project into complex happenings in order to make them significant. Regarding the codes involved, the perspectives are so diverse that they lead to the situation in which questions concerning the signified lose their consistency: *Why does the Minotaur have a bull head? What and how is he thinking now? Is his mind a function of his body or is his body an image of his mind? Is Theseus inside the labyrinth? Or is the labyrinth inside Theseus? Both possibilities? Or none of them?*¹¹

Live characters and mortifying spaces – Pelevin's dreamlike narrative dystopia

The characters in *The Helmet of Horror* find themselves inside a labyrinth that presents many similarities to a hotel – a temporary location (a *no-place*, following Marc Augé's terminology) – that they rebuild as a result of their observations concerning the surrounding space and that they communicate to each other through the chat all of them are connected to. The main coordinates the narrative begins to develop (if one is allowed to use the word narrative in its traditional sense) define a space that appears to be a puzzle-labyrinth composed of personal impressions (extremely concrete, almost mathematical descriptions, affected inevitably by the subjective perspectives – in fact, a possible objective reality, weakly defined by a series of subjective glances), the clothing they allude to and that presents many similarities to an ancient garment (with possible ritual/sacrificial dimensions today, due to its ceremonial value in contemporary imaginary), plus the names of the characters, with a clear mythological resonance (when names do not originate in Greek mythology, as in Ariadna's case, one finds names composed of an upside-down, maybe ridiculed mythology, but a mythology that is latent and possibly resurrectional). In addition, one finds names that have to do with modern imaginary and with a consecrated fictional realm, sometimes results of the work of famous authors, already parts of a collective imaginary: Nutscracker, Romeo, Monstradamus, Isolda. It is remarkable noticing how the reversals stem first of all at a graphic level – a proof of how shape and content transform each other. Through a virtual interface, the characters recompose the apparently unexplainable happenings that brought them together and that come back in the dialogues between them like flashbacks from the previous night's dream. The fusion between the real and the unreal is mediated virtually. In addition, it is obvious while analyzing that the figures populating their dreams come from a collective unconscious marked by the cinematographic legacy.¹² These visions of an ancient, powerful, monumental, individual-annihilating architecture, with strong mythological resonance, mingling with contemporary animation representations, is not a totally new element, as it already has a strong past in the world of video games. The recurring element in all of the characters' visions is connected to the aesthetics of ruins. Yet, the

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p.12.

¹² *Ibidem*, p.26: *Bronze statues I saw in the antique square where I was during my dream (...), through their style seems as ancient as the city, but through what they represented they gave the feeling they had just got out of Japanese cartoons...* (author's translation).

buildings surrounding them and belonging to an overwhelming architecture (whose origin remains unexplained) neither can hide, through their restoration, the traces of a catastrophe, nor the sensation Ariadna often talks about, that all these buildings, permanently observed from outside, are *empty and dead*.¹³ The characters' dreams intermingle with real adventures they go through outside the room they are trapped in, without knowing who locked them in. Unconfessed apocalyptic visions that they only allude to, appear in all the narratives meant to situate the storytellers in a space and time that could comfort them. Inside one of their dreams, a priest appears, preaching the importance of spiritual labyrinths:¹⁴ the world shall become an accumulation of enigmas among which we will wander as in fog, and the only solution might be the religious one.¹⁵ Another one claims that the space of his dream is similar to that of an editing process in a television studio. Recalling this dream, one of the characters (called Nuts-cracker) realizes a series of connections with entertainment shows where characters with mythological potential for the large audience¹⁶ are invited. Thus, in the TV show he speaks about, without even knowing whether or not it belongs to the realm of dream or that of reality,¹⁷ Nuts-cracker tells us of the appearance of a history professor who – being filmed with a bull skull caught in a net behind him, an emblematic representation for the show – sees the labyrinth as a symbol for the brain.¹⁸ The sectioned brain and the classic labyrinth have a similar aspect and the Minotaur is the animal part of the mind, whereas Theseus is the human part. The televised epiphanies emerging during dream states offer the characters possible paths for interpreting their own status. The mixture of antiquity and actuality becomes obvious concerning the very instruments that are used in their dreams – some of them with an archetypal potential, others – simply with a practice purpose (axes, computers, helmets, colonnades, HD screens, even the screen savers from their computers represents a labyrinth¹⁹).

The hidden authorship

In a more or less serious tone, one of the characters asks for a psychiatrist's help, though there is nowhere such a man could come out from and, later on, the same character calls the anguish all of them experience *a corporate frustration*. Upon waking up from each dream, it is highly necessary that the unanswered question induced is typed and appears on the screen each of them has in his/her room. Otherwise, the question is forgotten and it unconsciously affects the

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 121.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 163.

¹⁷ This is due to the fact that there is no clear reference to something that could have happened once, outside the world the characters find themselves in; their world is reduced to the space they are in, the realities suggested by dream and labyrinth, and the readers do not know if there could exist another dimension of their lives or not.

¹⁸ The image resembles that of the diamond skull realized by the artist Jeff Koons.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

characters. There are recurrent allusions to the divine instance, no matter the shape these ones take. The story begins, resembling the well-known Borgesian labyrinth, the exact moment Ariadna launches the chat.²⁰ Thus, after many conflicts between the ones entering this strange dialogue, some of them even ask themselves if Ariadna could possibly be a common invention of theirs.²¹ But the climactic sequence takes place when the characters realize there is somebody else controlling their messages, given the fact that no writing mistakes ever show up on the screen and, when this fact is mentioned in the online chat, mistakes ostentatiously begin to appear. This proves there is an organizing instance, giving the coherence and retrieving it upon wish, but this instance could also be a product of a collective phantasm. Regarding the problem of time, messages are not sent from one to another, as in a normal chat, but show up on the screen in real time, letter by letter, and one can notice the hesitations and the implicit intentions emerging while writing the message. Meanwhile, when the character wants to interrupt the phrase, the punctuation ellipses show up automatically, as if reading the writer's own mind.²² Due to the idea that one of them could actually be the Minotaur himself, paranoid reactions interfere between all of them. Asterisc's mind, controlling them all from a hidden locus, shows up unexpectedly in some of the most unpredictable places of the labyrinth taking the shape of a series of luminescent images and successive flashes. Being the hidden Big Brother that led them all, Asterisc could also be an inter-subjectively generated scheme, created by those participating in the chat, and this reality is immaterially supported by the screens showing the successive hesitations, bits of thoughts of the ones present and partially explaining the book's title.²³

The final considerations hint at the fact that the mythological helmet, heroic and mystifying, is the one generating the paranoid vision of the world. It is not a simple interface, but one that creates through reciprocity, simultaneously, forming and sustaining itself through the contribution of the person it subjugates in this truncated mechanism of communication. The presence of this helmet, equivalent to a lens on the world, reminds us of the fencer's defense helmet. It is an eyehole, a self-defense mechanism, but also a net through which things that enter in the category of the real are sieved, distinguished, simplified or essentialized. In addition, the messages that the heroes are shown seem to be recorded rather than instantly expressed, and any attack against them can lead to their destruction or partial erasure, to the collapse of the whole message or to its dissipation into

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 13: *Construiré un laberinto en el que podré perderme con quien me quiera encontrar: quién lo ha dicho y a que se refiere? / I shall build a labyrinth inside which I could lose myself with whomever wanted to meet me: who said that and about whom?* (author's translation).

²¹ *Idem*, p.45: *Porque, desde un punto de vista fenomenológico, ella existe en forma de unos mensajes surgidos de quien sabe donde, firmados por una tal „Ariadna”. / Because, from a phenomenologic point of view, she exists in the shape of some messages emerged from who knows where, signed by a so-called „Ariadna”* (author's translation).

²² *Ibidem*, p. 46.

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 68-9.

thousands of unrecognizable fragments. The fractal logic does not seem to function anymore in this case, and the messages become autonomous, integral entities, each with its own force. All these sudden messages are signed by Asterisc and are under the explicit authority of the helmet of horror.

The characters participate only as incapable spectators of ongoing processes that they are shown probably demonstratively and instructively, in a reciprocal search for sensations with some concreteness. Their discussions lead to discursive dead ends concerning free will, its real existence and the illusion of any possible interactivity.²⁴ What the characters see therefore depends on the direction of their eyes, proving how conditioned or how autonomous we are. The fear the characters try when they approach the reality behind the closed door, where the Minotaur could be, is permanent. When speaking about what might lie behind the closed door, all of them are convinced there's a labyrinth and often use the term *catacombs*, their vision thus approaching the ancient apocalyptic visions, but also an inherent sense of fatality. The narrator's position is extremely skilful. Practically, he does not appear in any of these stories, letting loose the unfolding dialogue. When even the characters' names get to be changed by an unknown online entity, the fact that there is somebody mingling their considerations, when they are very close to unlocking the enigma, becomes obvious. The reversal of this situation consists of somebody's existence being felt particularly in the moments when his existence is subjected to doubt. Similarly, their identities are under the malevolent whims of this unseen, but felt instance. Their identities are transformable through almost imperceptible changes of letters, the ultimate underlining idea being that of the mind as a function of the content.²⁵ The identity of the characters resides in the acknowledgement of the symbiosis and reciprocal conditioning between the empty interiority and the identity resulted after accepting the view through the

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 85: (...) se permite al sujeto entrar en una zona estrecha en la que cualquier elección no variará la esencia de la cuestión. Precisamente el problema mas importante radica en que, para librarlo de la libertad de elección, hay que hacerle tomar la decisión necesaria con severidad, y hacerle mantener la certeza de que la elección es libre. Científicamente se llama orientación coercitiva. P.87: Como todo lo que se ve en el casco està procesado por un programa especial, esto se puede configurar de tal modo que el casco siempre elija precisamente la opción por la que antes nos hemos decidido nosotros. (...) Ahí esta el quid de la cuestión. Cuando el casco y el Casquez confluyen en un todo, por decirlo así, se puede modificar no sólo el libro, sino también al lector. Por eso decimos que las tecnologías de corrección pueden ser externas o internas. Aunque, por supuesto, no hay una frontera nitida entre ellas./ (...) the subject is permitted the entrance in the narrow zone where any choice shall not alter the essence of the question. The most important problems consist precisely of the fact that, in order to free him of the freedom of choice, one has to severely make him take the necessary decision, and to make him maintain the certainty that the decision is free. Scientifically, it is called cohercitive orientation. P.87: As anything that is seen in the helmet is processed by means of a special programme, this can be configured so that the helmet always chose precisely the option that we had previously decided. (...) This is the quid of the question. When the helmet and the one wearing it merge into a sum, so to say, not only the book can be modified, but also the reader. That is why we decide that correcting technologies can be external or internal. Even if, of course, there is no clear limit between the two. (author's translation)

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 180-1.

eyehole of the helmet.²⁶ Therefore, freedom consists of observing the perceptual conditionings, the limits of the subjectivity and the flashing succession of present moments that compose our lives. In addition, the acceptance of the mechanisms symbiotically generated in order to function as interfaces between individuals or between individuals and the external world represents the first step in the liberating process and the immersion into the abyssal individuality. Distinctly, Pelevin's characters reconstruct the chaotic trajectory of the six characters in search of an author envisaged by Luigi Pirandello.

The apparently incoherent elements that populate Pelevin's experimental novel create a dystopian dimension visibly influenced by the architecture and the emotional impact of online social networks, both at the level of content and at the level of stylistics. His characters, far from any possible personalization, are composites of mythological derisory and inverted reminiscences, looking for a possibility of organizing a vital explanation of their existence. The dehumanized space they inhabit is a metaphor for an author/narrator/organizing principle that stays hidden and demands intricate detective attitudes. The striking conclusion of the characters' search for an identity is that the process they inevitably experience is self-generated and that their very quasi-narrative perspective, although fragmentary and weak, is the ultimate element that can legitimize them.

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²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 204: *Ariadna: No hay que temer a Asterio. Si lo temes significa que llevas puesto el yelmo del horror y que el es el señor de tu mundo. Y si te quitas el yelmo, Asterio desaparece y no queda nada de que reírse. Llevar el yelmo y quitárselo es un gran error. Con él, no hay que hacer nada. Aunque sólo sea porque en realidad no existe.../Ariadna: One doesn't have to fear Asterisco. If one fears him, this means one wears the helmet of horror and that one's world is ruled by him. And if one takes the helmet off, Asterio disappears and there is nothing else to laugh about. Wearing the helmet and taking it off is a big mistake. With it on, one doesn't have to do anything. Even if this is because it doesn't actually exist... (author's translation)*

LA RÉVOLUTION CHEZ ION VINEA – ENTRE UTOPIE SOCIALE ET PROJET ARTISTIQUE

SANDA CORDOȘ*

ABSTRACT. *Ion Vinea and the Concept of Revolution. Between Social Utopia and Artistic Project.* The study aims to identify the ways in which the topic of revolution appears in the work of Ion Vinea (1895-1964), an important Romanian writer of the twentieth century, as well as a director of several publications that catalyzed the literary and socio-political ideas in Romania. Like other left-wing intellectuals and the majority of avant-garde writers, Vinea deals constantly with and advocates the *social revolution* (which must be based on a “creative thought” and a humanistic project), whose successful stance he finds in USSR (considered to be a “great pacific and anti-revisionist power”). Gradually, the writer discovers that this incarnation of the revolution is not a righteous world of proletarians but a space for political machinations, and therefore he denounces its utopian character (including the fact that there is a “despotic regime” in USSR). A second aspect of the revolution that concerned Ion Vinea is the artistic one, for which he finds models and allies in Western literary circles. However, unlike Tristan Tzara, his old friend, Vinea envisages a revolution that excludes the scandal and exhibition, being defined as a spiritual revolution and also a means of identity construction, which guarantees the Europeanization of the Romanian literature.

Keywords: revolution; bolshevism; anarchism; avant-garde; Europeanization.

REZUMAT. *Revoluția la Ion Vinea între utopie socială și proiect artistic.* Studiul își propune să identifice accepțiunile în care apare tema revoluției în reflecția lui Ion Vinea (1895-1964), important scriitor al secolului XX, director al unor publicații care au catalizat ideile literare și social-politice din România. La fel ca alți intelectuali de stânga și asemenea majorității scriitorilor din cercurile de avangardă, Vinea se ocupă în mod constant și pledează pentru *revoluția socială* (care trebuie să aibă la bază un ”gând creator” și un proiect umanist), a cărei ipostază reușită o găsește în URSS (considerată ”o mare putere pacifică și antirevizionistă”). Treptat, scriitorul descoperă că revoluția întrupată nu este, însă, o lume dreaptă a proletarilor, ci un spațiu de manevră al politicienilor și denunță caracterul utopic al acesteia (inclusiv faptul că în URSS există ”un regim despotice”). A doua ipostază a revoluției care îl preocupă pe Ion Vinea este cea artistică, pentru care își găsește modele și aliați în cercurile literare occidentale. Spre deosebire, însă, de Tristan Tzara, vechiul său prieten, o asemenea revoluție exclude scandalul și exhibiția, fiind definită ca o *revoluție sufletească* și, totodată, ca o modalitate de construcție identitară, ce garantează europeanizarea literaturii române.

Cuvinte cheie: revoluție, bolșevism, anarhism, avangardă, europeanizare.

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Dans une interview du début des années 60 (publiée intégralement seulement après la mort de son auteur), Ion Vinea évoque une rencontre parisienne du passé: « Je me rappelle que [...] en 1927 ou en 1928, j'ai assisté à une «réunion» de l'état major surréaliste. J'étais dans une maison ingénieusement bâtie sur une «bosse» de Montmartre, par le grand architecte précurseur Loss : la maison de mon ami d'enfance, le poète Tristan Tzara. Y prenaient part des communistes, des gens de la gauche : André Breton, le chef du mouvement surréaliste, Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon (qui était en train d'écrire «Le paysan de Paris»), Ribemont-Dessaignes, Philippe Soupault et d'autres. Le sujet de la discussion : le mécontentement du groupe surréaliste envers la direction du journal «Humanité», qui n'acceptait pas de mettre ses colonnes au service ou à la disposition de la production surréaliste et de la reconnaître en tant que littérature et art «prolétarien». La discussion a duré environ six heures et les coryphées du surréalisme se sont séparés sans avoir abouti à aucun résultat. Et, si l'on y réfléchit bien, c'était normal que ce soit ainsi. Et c'est bien qu'il en ait été ainsi »¹.

À l'époque de ce dialogue, les participants avaient déjà acquis de l'expérience, ils avaient une histoire en ce qui concerne le potentiel subversif de l'art et sa relation avec la politique. Tous auraient pu souscrire à la phrase d'André Breton (qui apparaîtra en fait un peu plus tard, en 1929, acquérant une grande notoriété): « En matière de révolte, aucun de nous ne doit avoir besoin d'ancêtres »². Si la révolte relève de l'héritage personnel et qu'elle doit être vécue spontanément, de façon créatrice, à son compte, en revanche, la révolution doit être faite avec les autres, d'après des règles et des stratégies qui ne sont pas de facture littéraire, mais qui impliquent, à divers degrés, la soumission. Pendant la période évoquée par Vinea, les surréalistes traversent une période de clarifications décisives, concernant l'engagement révolutionnaire de leur art ainsi que l'attitude envers le Parti Communiste (dont la plupart d'entre eux ont fait partie, pendant des périodes variables) et envers la révolution concrète de l'U.R.S.S. Si presque tous les surréalistes et les écrivains avant-gardistes de l'époque s'accordent sur le devoir de servir la Révolution (*Le surréalisme au service de la révolution* est le célèbre titre emblématique d'une publication du début des années 30), la signification de la révolution ainsi que les moyens de la réaliser sont conçus de façon tellement différente qu'ils occasionnent d'incessants débats, disputes ou ruptures³ (telles que les disputes devenues célèbres entre Breton et Aragon ou entre Breton et Tzara).

¹ Ilie Purcaru, *Un interviu restant cu Ion Vinea. Fiecare epocă spune: „Poetul are cuvântul”* (Une interview restante avec Ion Vinea. Chaque époque dit: « Le poète a la parole »), dans *Ramuri*, année VIII, no. 11, 15 novembre 1971, p. 9.

² André Breton, *Manifestes du Surréalisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1989, p. 76.

³ Voir l'ouvrage de référence de Maurice Nadeau, *Histoire du Surréalisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1964. Une analyse substantielle des idées surréalistes sur la révolution peut être lue dans Laurent Jenny, *Je suis la Révolution. Histoire d'une métaphore (1830-1975)*, Paris, Belin, 2008, le chapitre *Révolutionnaire en quête de la Révolution*, qui s'achève par la conclusion: « La notion de « révolution », l'espace d'une décennie, s'est mise au service du surréalisme » (p. 108).

Nous ne savons pas si Ion Vinea a juste assisté ou s'il a également participé à cette discussion tumultueuse. En tant qu'intellectuel constamment immergé dans l'évolution des idées surréalistes et avant-gardistes en général, il aurait certainement eu le droit de le faire. La revue *Contimporanul* en constitue la preuve : elle accueille une rubrique régulière, très riche, consacrée à la revue de la presse avant-gardiste occidentale, elle signale promptement la parution des ouvrages des écrivains appartenant à ces milieux et, plus d'une fois, elle reprend partiellement ou intégralement des articles des mêmes auteurs⁴. En 1932, l'hebdomadaire *Facla* (placé sous la direction de Vinea) publie un ample fragment du *Front rouge*, le poème de Louis Aragon⁵, qui a valu à son auteur sa mise en accusation pour instigation à la rébellion et qui a provoqué en France un grand débat sur l'engagement et la responsabilité des écrivains. De plus, [le long du temps], Ion Vinea fait à maintes reprises des références et consacre quelques textes au groupe surréaliste, tels que *Le rayon invisible. Suprarealismul lui Breton* (Le surréalisme d'André Breton) ou *André Breton*⁶.

De plus, l'obsession constante de Vinea pour les thèmes de la révolution et de la relation écrivain – politique lui permettrait de participer au dialogue des avant-gardistes parisiens. A l'instar des artistes occidentaux, la révolution est inscrite dans ses gènes d'intellectuel, nourri par le sentiment d'une exaspération généralisée, sans précédent (ou peut-être seulement exprimée par le biais d'une multitude de voix, plus fortes et plus expressives qu'autrefois). Pour les générations encore jeunes, la révolution apparaît comme une représentation salvatrice, ne serait-ce qu'en guise de tremblement, qui réassemble les plaques tectoniques d'un monde à la dérive. Tout comme ses confrères (roumains et européens), l'écrivain emploie le terme et vit le fantasme de la révolution dans toute son ambiguïté, potentiel explosif et promesse d'un changement radical. En empruntant les termes

⁴ Au sujet de l'ouverture de *Contimporanul* vers l'avant-garde européenne, voir Ion Pop, *Avangarda în literatura română* (L'Avant-garde dans la littérature roumaine), Bucarest, Minerva, 1990, p. 90, ainsi que Paul Cernat, *Avangarda românească și complexul periferiei* (L'Avant-garde roumaine et le complexe de la périphérie), Bucarest, Cartea Românească, 2007, pp. 131-148.

⁵ Louis Aragon, *Frontul roșu* (Le Front Rouge). Fragment, dans *Facla*, année XI, no. 447, 21 mars.

⁶ Ion Vinea, *Le Rayon invisible. Suprarealismul lui Breton* (*Le Rayon invisible. Le surréalisme de Breton*), dans *Cuvântul liber*, série II, année II, no. 3, 17 janvier 1925, et Ion Vinea, *André Breton*, dans *Adevărul*, année 39, no. 13107, 9 septembre 1926, repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, VI, *Publicistica* (Œuvres, VI, Les articles), édition critique, notes et variantes d'Elena Zaharia-Filipaș, Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, Institutul de Istorie și Teorie literară „G. Călinescu” « G. Călinescu », Bucarest, 2005. Les deux articles témoignent de la grande admiration que l'écrivain roumain a, à cette date, pour le fondateur du surréalisme. Par exemple, dans le deuxième article, nous pouvons lire : « Le surréalisme de Breton apporte la révolution fondamentale, réalise les prophéties d'une apocalypse littéraire. Puisque nous employons la terminologie politique et journalistique de l'époque, précisons : jusqu'à présent, en littérature, aucun mouvement innovateur n'a touché aux privilèges séculaires de la sacro-sainte oligarchie intellectuelle : *La Logique*, *La Raison*, *L'Intelligence*. André Breton a donné à ces statues obsédantes et exagérées le coup de pioche libérateur. Au bout de quatre mille ans de littérature asservie aux exigences du grand et du petit public, apparaît en fin, la véritable liberté. Ce mot représente bien sûr tout ce qui nous enchante nous aussi » (p. 332, souligné dans le texte).

analytiques de Pierre Bourdieu (qui exprime d'ailleurs une idée très répandue parmi les commentateurs), la révolution représente la participation à l'utopie « d'une réconciliation de l'avant-gardisme politique et de l'avant-gardisme en matière d'art et d'art de vivre, dans une sorte de somme de toutes les révolutions, sociale, sexuelle, artistique », qui renaît continuellement et « se heurte sans cesse à l'évidence de la difficulté pratique de surmonter [...] l'écart structural, malgré l'homologie, entre les positions »avancées» dans le champ politique et dans le champ artistique et, du même coup, le décalage, voire la contradiction, entre le raffinement esthétique et le progressisme politique »⁷.

Il y a quelques éléments dans la biographie intellectuelle de Vinea qui forgent une conception particulière sur la révolution. À côté de la réflexion artistique, il construit une ample et constante démarche analytique de facture politique, engendrée par son activité de journaliste, en tant que directeur de quelques publications sociopolitiques. Vinea est (le seul dans le paysage roumain) l'écrivain d'avant-garde avec la plus longue activité dans le journalisme quotidien. Cela l'oblige à être constamment informé au sujet de la révolution, dans toute la complexité, dans ses différentes manifestations, à observer attentivement des phénomènes qui ne sont pas en relation directe avec l'art, à rationaliser son opinion dont il fait part, en général, à un lecteur peu familiarisé avec les problèmes de celle-ci. Le journalisme culturel et sociopolitique fonctionne effectivement selon le principe des vases communicants, se conditionnant et s'alimentant réciproquement.

Pour Ion Vinea, le fantasme de la révolution est entretenu moins par l'idéologie et davantage par son sensibilité aiguë devant l'iniquité sociale, « la souffrance profonde des foules qui la produisent »⁸, par l'attention véritable prêtée à « ces foules compactes et silencieuses de paysans, d'ouvriers et d'intellectuels, qui se donnent et s'épuisent dans leur création de chaque jour » ; ce sont elles qui assurent « toute la vitalité de la Roumanie »⁹. Quoiqu'il renvoie plusieurs fois à la doctrine marxiste, en soulignant son caractère valable (« Le marxisme est critiquable, comme toute théorie d'ailleurs. Mais pas sur ses « points essentiels ». Les points essentiels échappent à la critique parce qu'ils sont confirmés par la réalité, avec une précision qui engendre la panique dans notre mentalité et notre sentimentalisme bourgeois »¹⁰), nous doutons que Vinea ait été un lecteur assidu de

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Nouvelle édition revue et corrigée, Paris, Seuil, 1998, p. 414.

⁸ Ion Vinea, *Două revolte și înțeleșul lor* (Deux révoltes et leur signification), dans *Facla*, année XII, no. 604, 2 février 1933.

⁹ Ion Vinea, *Armindeniul*, dans *Facla*, année XI, no. 453, 2 mai 1932, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere, IX, Publicistica* (1932-1934) (Oeuvres, IX, Les articles, 1932-1934), édition critique, notes et commentaires d'Elena Zaharia-Filipaș et Magdalena Răduță, Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, București, 2012, p. 56.

¹⁰ Ion Vinea, *D. Iorga, Marx și capitalismul* (M. Iorga, Marx et le capitalisme), dans *Facla*, année X, no. 419, 10 août 1931, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere, VIII, Publicistica* (Oeuvres, VIII, Les articles), édition critique, notes et commentaires d'Elena Zaharia-Filipaș, Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, București, 2008, p. 356.

Marx¹¹. D'ailleurs le journaliste, intéressé par les idées, n'hésite pas à ironiser plusieurs fois sur les interprètes dogmatiques de l'idéologie (« les clercs intolérants d'une nouvelle religion »¹²) pour souligner, en revanche, l'importance coagulante de celle-ci dans la pratique sociale. En réalité, à rebours par rapport aux lectures officielles des partis d'extraction socialiste, Vinea apprécie l'humanisme et le potentiel libérateur de la théorie marxiste. Dans un article publié en 1923, marquant la commémoration de 40 ans de la mort de Marx, le directeur de *Contimporanul* exprime son attachement à la doctrine marxiste réduite à la « loi fondamentale » : « Ce ne sont pas la théorie de la plus-value, l'aspect des conditions subjectives et objectives, la concordance rigoureuse entre ce qui a été réalisé et ce qui a été écrit dans le bréviaire travaillé par les savants crétinisés et les semi-doctes ahuris ayant assumé la direction des foules, qu'il faut proclamer ; mais, nu, ailé et vif comme un ange, pleinement et clairement révélé à tous, le mot de peine et fraternité : unissez-vous ! ». C'est l'enseignement simple sur lequel se fonde la révolution russe, selon Vinea, et qui prouve que « la loi prophétique de Marx s'est accomplie. Aujourd'hui, dans le tumulte stérile de la bourgeoisie. Demain, dans sa chute, par elle-même »¹³.

D'ailleurs, avec le temps, Vinea consacre beaucoup d'articles à la révolution russe. À l'automne 1919, au moment de l'équilibre instable qui suit la prise de Petrograd, le jeune journaliste se montre confiant dans « l'étincelle impérissable de la révolte », faisant une prophétie pathétique de la résistance de la conscience révolutionnaire dans le temps : « Impuissantes brilleront les baïonnettes dans le pays où le soleil rouge a brillé jusqu'au fond des âmes ; l'or bouchera en vain les bouches instigatrices, après que le mot eut été entendu et compris par chaque ouvrier en partie ; l'ordre et la menace retentiront en vain, les chaînes cliquetteront inutilement, puisqu'on ne peut plus enlever au prolétariat la conscience de son pouvoir ; et on ne peut pas l'écarter de l'outil d'asservissement qui s'est transformé avec le temps en arme de son liberté »¹⁴. Même s'il renonce progressivement à la tonalité émotionnelle de l'adhésion, Ion Vinea garde, pendant presque deux décennies, son intérêt

¹¹ Il est intéressant de signaler que dans un excellent poème de 1938, *Adam. Încercare de autobiografie* (Adam. Essai d'autobiographie) apparaît le vers : « je peux réciter par coeur *Capitalul / (Le Capital)* » (*Facla*, année XXVIII, no. 2175, 20 juin 1938). Ce vers est exclu de la version publiée dans *Ora fântânilor* (L'heure des fontaines) (București, Editura pentru literatură, 1964). Les textes peuvent être consultés dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, I, *Poezii* (Oeuvres, I, Poésies), édition critique et préface d'Elena Zaharia-Filipaș, București, Minerva, 1984, pp. 114-117 et pp. 486-489.

¹² Ion Vinea, *Socialism* (Socialisme), dans *Chemarea*, année III, no. 265, 15 janvier 1920, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, V, *Publicistica* (1920-1924) (Oeuvres V, Les articles 1920-1924), édition critique, notes et variantes d'Elena Zaharia-Filipaș, Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, Institutul de Istorie și Teorie literară „G. Călinescu”, București, 2003, p. 10.

¹³ Ion Vinea, *Comemorarea Mesiei Roșii* (La commémoration du Messie Rouge), dans *Contimporanul*, année II, no. 34, 10 mars 1923, texte repris dans *Ibidem*, pp. 365-366.

¹⁴ Ion Vinea, *Boje Tzara Hrani*, dans *Chemarea*, année II, no. 191, 24 octobre 1919, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, IV, *Publicistica* (Oeuvres, IV, Les articles), édition critique, notes et commentaires d'Elena Zaharia-Filipaș, Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, Institutul de Istorie și Teorie literară „G. Călinescu”, București, 2001, p. 274.

participatif et son soutien pour tout ce qui se passe au-delà du Dniestr (en roumain Nistru), se proposant, plus d'une fois, de dissocier ce qu'il considérait à l'époque comme propagande diffamatoire contre la révolution bolchevique « tout le réseau de fausses nouvelles jeté, ces dernières années, sur la République Soviétique »¹⁵. En 1923, le journaliste jalonne la fête des travailleurs (l'éditorial sur ce thème représente un point fixe dans le calendrier de son activité de publiciste dans l'entre-deux-guerres) en rappelant que : « Les soviétiques ont résisté et leur ombre rouge recouvre un quart du monde. L'ombre s'étend insensiblement, comme une tache de sang sur la neige », ce qui ne peut représenter que « le signe de la mort de l'ancien monde ». La prophétie de l'imminente victoire de la révolution inclut aussi à présent les coûts dramatiques de celle-ci : « Ce sera pire, certes, mais seulement ... pendant quelques dizaines d'années ! Mais la révolution, quoiqu'on essaie, quoiqu'on dise, quoiqu'on voie à la surface, a triomphé »¹⁶.

La confiance dans le caractère inévitable de la révolution, dans « le signe zodiacal [de] Lénine »¹⁷, et plus tard dans « le parcours rouge des temps » n'exclut pas chez Vinea la réflexion sur la dimension déchaînée, incontrôlable et possiblement dévastatrice de celle-ci, tel que le prouve un article de 1925, écrit pour marquer l'anniversaire de « 8 ans de la Révolution d'Octobre ». L'image emblématique pour ce monde en plein changement déstabilisant, qui pourrait entraîner l'Europe entière, est identifiée par l'auteur dans le poème *Les douze* d'Alexandre Blok, « qui résume, en un serrement des dents et un serrement du cœur, toute la révolution russe »¹⁸.

Quelques années plus tard, marquant *Optsprezece ani de la Revoluția Rusă* (Dix-huit ans de la Révolution Russe), pendant un moment qui aurait pu passer pour stable, le directeur de *Facla* fait, sur un ton polémique, un bilan plus que positif des réalisations de la patrie de la révolution : « L'Union Soviétique a réussi à se créer une industrie, qui, en tant que force de production, est actuellement la deuxième sur le plan mondial. La Russie révolutionnaire a organisé également une agriculture moderne. Elle a combattu de façon victorieuse l'analphabétisme. Elle a créé l'un des plus modernes appareils d'hygiène sociale. Elle a intensifié son industrie pétrolière. Elle a construit des routes et des chemins de fer nouveaux. [...] En fin, la Russie révolutionnaire est incomparablement plus évoluée, plus cohérente, plus systématisée, que la Russie tsariste, de triste mémoire ». Sur le plan externe, l'Union Soviétique, qui « a sauvé notre unité nationale » et « a délivré du

¹⁵ Ion Vinea, *Apropiată descindere la Viitorul* (Prochaine descente chez Viitorul), dans *Facla*, année VII, no. 93, 14 août 1925, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, VI, *Publicistica* (Oeuvres, VI, Les articles), éd. cit., p. 89.

¹⁶ Ion Vinea, *Sărbătoarea revoluției* (La fête de la révolution), dans *Contimporanul*, année II, no. 43, 23 juin 1923, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, V (Oeuvres, V), p. 374.

¹⁷ Ion Vinea, 1919, dans *Chemarea*, année III, no. 266, 17 janvier 1920, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, IV, *Publicistica* (Oeuvres, IV, Les articles), éd. cit., p. 11.

¹⁸ Ion Vinea, *Cei doisprezece* (Les douze), dans *Facla*, année VIII, no. 166, 9 novembre 1925, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, VI, *Publicistica* (Oeuvres, VI, Les articles), éd. cit., p. 152.

joug tsariste la Pologne, l'Estonie, la Livonie, la Lituanie, la Finlande et la Bessarabie, laquelle a pu ainsi se joindre au pays », ne peut pas être considérée autrement qu'« une grande puissance pacifique et antirévisionniste »¹⁹.

En outre, dans ses articles consacrés à l'analyse de la politique externe, faisant confiance à l'internationalisme et au pacifisme de l'Union, Vinea sanctionne, plus d'une fois, « les erreurs diplomatiques et politiques de notre classe dirigeante », et plaide constamment pour « une reprise des relations diplomatiques avec l'U.R.S.S. »²⁰. Accusant le fait que « dans la question de la Bessarabie, étroitement liée au problème de nos rapports avec les Soviets, on n'a pas fait une politique nationale, mais une politique de classe, des banquiers de l'Occident »²¹, voire le fait que, ignorant la tendance des diplomaties occidentales (qui avaient commencé à reprendre les relations avec l'U.R.S.S.), « le point de vue le plus bigot du capitalisme mondial » a été transplanté dans « un faubourg de Bucarest »²², le journaliste considère que le véritable adversaire de la Roumanie est le tsarisme (conservé par certains groupes révisionnistes occidentaux). Au contraire, « la révolution russe a permis de créer Le Conseil du Pays et la milice nationale de Bessarabie. Elle lui a apporté la liberté et lui a permis de se joindre à la Roumanie. Un pouvoir humain n'aurait jamais pu arracher cette province des griffes de l'aristocratie et de la ploutocratie russes »²³. Lorsque le traité est en fin signé, le ministre des affaires étrangères, N. Titulescu, est très apprécié, comme étant « le commandant sans égal des batailles de chancelleries » (quoiqu'il eût été auparavant la cible du verbe acide du journaliste). Ion Vinea considère le moment comme historique, et la garantie de la sécurité nationale comme incontestable : « La réconciliation actuelle avec l'U.R.S.S. dissipa nos angoisses de Dniepr, la crainte que le poignard qui frappe dans le dos pourrait se lever sur la Roumanie »²⁴.

Jusqu'à la fin des années 30, même s'il reconnaît parfois « l'habileté diabolique de la diplomatie soviétique »²⁵ ou le caractère imprévisible de ce grand

¹⁹ Ion Vinea, *Opsprezece ani de la Revoluția Rusă* (Dix-huit ans de la Révolution Russe), dans *Facla*, année XV, no. 1435, 8 novembre 1935, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, V, *Publicistica* (Oeuvres, V, Les articles), édition revue par Mircea Vaida et Gheorghe Sprințeroiu, étude introductive par Mircea Vaida, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia, 1978, pp. 347-348.

²⁰ Ion Vinea, *România și Sovietele* (La Roumanie et les Soviets), dans *Facla*, année X, no. 394, 9 février 1931, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, VIII (Oeuvres, VIII), éd. cit., pp. 286-287.

²¹ Ion Vinea, *Basarabia, România și Sovietele* (La Bessarabie, la Roumanie et les Soviets), dans *Facla*, année XI, no. 463, 16 août 1932, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, IX (Oeuvres, IX), p. 110.

²² Ion Vinea, *Cum se face politică externă: Pactul cu Sovietele. D. Argentoianu la Paris* (Comment fait-on de la politique externe: le Pacte avec les Soviets. D. Argentoianu à Paris), dans *Facla*, année XI, no. 437, 10 janvier 1932, texte repris dans *Ibidem*, p. 10.

²³ Ion Vinea, *Între țarism și soviete sau „marea noastră grijă”* (Entre tsarisme et soviets ou „notre grand souci”), dans *Facla*, année XI, no. 523, 26 octobre 1932, texte repris dans *Ibidem*, pp. 164-165.

²⁴ Ion Vinea, *1918-1934*, dans *Facla*, année XIII, no. 1005, 11 juin 1934, texte repris dans *Ibidem*, p. 443. Voir, au même endroit et sur le même thème, l'article *România, Rusia și lumea* (La Roumanie, la Russie et le monde), pp. 300-303.

²⁵ Ion Vinea, *Basarabia, România și Sovietele* (La Bessarabie, la Roumanie et les Soviets), loc. cit.

empire (« Un empire capable d'étourdir l'Europe d'une main, et de mettre le feu à la Chine et de rincer les escadres de l'Angleterre ainsi que les peuple de l'Inde dans les mers jaunes, de l'autre main »²⁶), Vinea continue à considérer que l'U.R.S.S. incarne une révolution juste et que la seule menace qu'elle représente vise « l'ordre social »²⁷, respectivement l'ordre bourgeois, contre les excès duquel le journaliste exprime constamment son mécontentement et son mépris. En assumant le risque que *Facla* soit accusé de « bolchevisme » (alors qu'en réalité « il ne s'agit que de la sincérité dans le mode de penser et surtout de la liberté de mouvement »²⁸), le directeur publie constamment dans les pages du journal des articles pro et contre la nouvelle patrie, peu connue, de l'Est ; il faut mentionner que les premiers ont plus de poids que les seconds. Y paraissent des articles sur la réussite du plan quinquennal²⁹, sur les bonnes conditions de vie, ainsi que des articles portant sur des sujets politiques, tels que les procès politiques et la liberté d'expression, qui soulèvent des points d'interrogation dans la presse occidentale. A l'exception d'une présentation neutre concernant *Deportări de masă, în Rusia siberiană* (Les déportements en masse, dans la Russie sibérienne)³⁰, la publication dirigée par Vinea fait confiance à la justesse des procès politiques.

En ce qui concerne la présence de la culture soviétique dans les publications dirigées par Ion Vinea, la situation est plus complexe. Affirmé dès les premières années de son activité de journaliste (c'est-à-dire avant que la Révolution russe n'éclate), son intérêt précoce pour Maxime Gorki, en tant qu'écrivain d'une humanité marginalisée³¹, s'étend à présent à d'autres créateurs communistes ou à l'idéologie qui soutient la création politiquement engagée. Ainsi,

²⁶ Ion Vinea, *România, Rusia și lumea* (La Roumanie, la Russie et le monde), dans *Facla*, année XII, no. 780, 8 juillet 1933, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, IX (Oeuvres, IX), p. 301.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 302.

²⁸ Ion Vinea, *Remedii utile* (Des remèdes utiles), dans *Facla*, année XI, no. 463, 11 juillet 1932, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, IX (Oeuvres, IX), p. 87.

²⁹ Par exemple: *Al doilea plan quinquenal. Din discursul președintelui comisarilor poporului M. Molotoff* (Le deuxième plan quinquennal. Extrait du discours du président des commissaires du peuple M. Molotoff), sans auteur, dans *Facla*, année XI, no. 444, 29 février 1932; m [sic!], dans *Cum se fac mașini, cum se fac oameni în U.R.S.S.* (Comment construit-on des machines, comment construit-on des gens dans l'U.R.S.S.), dans *Facla*, année XV, no. 1262, 12 avril 1935. Dans le second article, nous pouvons lire: « Tandis que la dictature hitlérienne persécute le livre et fait l'éloge la force, les Soviets, laissant aussi au sport la place qui lui convient, se préoccupe avant tout du progrès intellectuel du travailleur ». La thèse est accompagnée par une présentation idyllique de la vie des travailleurs dans une usine près de Moscou.

³⁰ *Deportări de masă, în Rusia siberiană* (Déportations en masse, dans la Russie sibérienne), dans *Facla*, année XIII, no. 890, 14 janvier 1934.

³¹ Ion Vinea, *Alexei Maximovici Peșkov*, dans *Facla*, année V, no. 93, 11 janvier 1914, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, IV (Oeuvres, IV), éd. cit. Dans ce texte assez long, qui esquisse à la fois la biographie et les axes de l'univers artistique, le très jeune journaliste note: « En général, l'œuvre de Gorki ne trahit pas une préoccupation particulière. Son principe – s'il en avait un – serait de nier tout principe, de rejeter toute théorie. Car ceux qui parlent à travers lui ce sont les déclassés abrités par les plafonds noircis, inspirés par les flots de vodka, des âmes caressées par l'alcool, la fumée, le pétrole, le sang et la moisissure » (p. 46, souligné dans le texte).

Facla accueille des textes d’A. Lunaciarski, d’Ilya Ehrenbourg, de Vladimir Pozner et présente le déroulement du premier congrès des écrivains soviétiques³². La revue *Contimporanul*, à son tour, n’évite pas la culture russe et soviétique. Nous mentionnons, entre autres, qu’en 1923, on y publie, en recourant paraît-il à une ruse destinée à tromper l’œil vigilant de la censure (active encore à cette date-là), un poème de V. Maïakovski, *La Famine sur la Volga*, dont la paternité est exposée seulement dans le prochain numéro³³. Pour compléter le tableau, il faut rappeler que nous pouvons lire dans les deux publications des articles qui informent de la censure exercée sur la culture et sur la presse, tels que la note *Maxim Gorki împotriva literaturii proletare* (Maxime Gorki contre la littérature prolétarienne)³⁴ ou l’article plus ample qui évoque « tout un Etat Majeur de contrôleurs, qui suivent toutes les publications parues dans la Russie soviétique, ainsi que les journaux, en veillant à l’uniformité éducative, culturelle et politique en même temps »³⁵. Il devient évident que, pour Vinea, le modèle de la révolution dans l’art est différent du modèle soviétique.

Mais, avant d’analyser cet aspect, il faut retenir que la réflexion de l’écrivain sur la révolution sociopolitique recouvre aussi d’autres zones, à part l’expérience bolchevique (qui est effectivement écrasante et inéluctable par sa présence même). Au-delà du fait que Vinea est prêt à accorder de la confiance à tout germe révolutionnaire, étant donné que « la vie même obéit aux dirigeants du travail, elle suspend sa respiration et se retire, et creuse le vide où que le poing et

³² A. Lunaciarski, *Sfârșitul culturii occidentale* (La fin de la culture occidentale), sans traducteur, dans *Facla*, année XI, no. 439, 25 janvier 1932. L’article de l’idéologue soviétique se fonde sur l’antithèse entre la culture de l’Occident, en déclin (qui promeut le fascisme et le racisme ou bien présente « le message du désespoir ») et « le chemin qui mène au salut: le chemin de la Révolution ». Ilya Ehrenbourg, *Fragment din Front unic* (Fragment du Front unique), dans *Facla*, année XI, no. 445, 7 mars 1932; Vladimir Pozner, *Repertoriul prozatorilor ruși* (Le répertoire des prosateurs russes), dans *Facla*, année XI, no. 451, 18 avril 1932; Vladimir Pozner, *O vizită la Maxim Gorki* (Une visite chez Maxime Gorki), dans *Facla*, année XI, no. 458, 6 juin 1932 etc.; *În jurul congresului scriitorilor sovietici* (Autour du congrès des écrivains soviétiques), dans *Facla*, année XV, no. 1178, 4 janvier 1935.

³³ *Foametea pe Volga* (La famine sur la Volga), texte non signé, dans *Contimporanul*, année II, no. 30, 10 février 1923, paru sur la dernière page, avec des caractères de petite taille. Dans le prochain numéro de la revue (no. 31, 17 février 1923), toujours sur la dernière page, on précise: « Le poème *Foametea pe Volga*, publié dans notre dernier numéro appartient au poète bolchevique Maïakovski et nous l’avons traduit à partir de l’une des revues révolutionnaires russes qui paraissent à Berlin ».

³⁴ *Maxim Gorki împotriva literaturii proletare* (Maxime Gorki contre la littérature prolétarienne), article non signée, dans *Facla*, année XI, no. 460, 20 juin 1932: « Maxime Gorki proteste dans *Izvestia* de Moscou contre la tendance de plus en plus prononcée en U.R.S.S. de baisser le niveau culturel et intellectuel de la littérature pour la rendre accessible au prolétariat ».

³⁵ *Un fizionomist în Rusia sovietică. Cine sunt colaboratorii cei mai importanți ai lui Stalin? Controlul presei în U.R.S.S.* (Un physionomiste dans la Russie soviétique. Qui sont les collaborateurs les plus importants de Staline? Le contrôle de la presse dans l’U.R.S.S.), dans *Facla*, année XII, no. 862, 8 décembre 1932, article repris par l’agence de presse CP, Paris. Sur l’attitude « révolutionnaire sympathisante » dans les pages de *Contimporanul* voir Paul Cernat, *op. cit.*, p. 232 et pages suivantes.

l'hurlerment vain de la réaction se lèvent »³⁶, le journaliste montre son admiration pour la révolution française de 1789. Le 14 juillet (« avec ses détails à la fois sublimes et horribles ») représente pour lui « le sens unique de la traversée du temps par les peuples », c'est-à-dire « un symbole éternel des revendications populaires, toujours d'actualité, et de la victoire populaire qui demande ses trophées pillés », d'autant plus admirable par sa leçon sur la liberté conquise et légiférée dans la Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme, que la tendance contraire serait plutôt propre à l'être humain : « Le penchant humain pour la servilité est aussi fort que la tendance irrésistible des plantes à s'ensauvager. Il y a tellement de tristesse dans le constat que l'homme tend vers la chaîne et le collier, alors que l'arbre tend vers la liberté, que la raison hésite un moment et ne sait pas quel élément choisir, lequel admirer et lequel mépriser »³⁷.

En ce qui concerne l'espace roumain, quoique Vinea soit un défenseur des communistes et qu'il plaide même pour l'entrée dans la légalité du parti communiste, il ne croit pas à la mise en œuvre d'un tel projet social dans l'espace autochtone : « Le communisme et le roumanisme sont deux notions opposées. Notre paysan est individualiste et parcellaire. Nous allons corriger le parcellarisme par des coopératives de production, mais nous ne deviendrons pas communistes. C'est une question de tempérament qui défie le matérialisme historique. [...] La peur du communisme c'est de l'hypocrisie ou de l'absurdité »³⁸.

En échange, ce qui devrait provoquer la peur authentique de la société roumaine c'est le nationalisme de l'extrême droite, dont l'anarchisme – précise Vinea – est erronément confondu avec la dimension révolutionnaire : « Si nous confondons le scandale avec la révolution, la casse d'une vitrine avec l'anéantissement d'une institution et avec des privilèges affaiblis, et l'hurlerment « à bas les juifs » avec un slogan plein de significations créatrices, dans ce cas-là, le groupe de M. Codreanu représentera certainement l'avant-garde de la révolution roumaine. Il faut cependant savoir que la Garde de fer n'avait aucune doctrine et, en plus, ne pouvait pas espérer en avoir une ». Ce que dénonce le directeur de *Facla* c'est l'hypocrisie, le manque de culture, la tentative de conquérir le peuple avec « des mises en scènes de théâtre mystico-villageois », c'est-à-dire « tout ce que la démagogie du vote universel a inventé de plus charlatanesque ». En conclusion, Vinea se demande :

³⁶ Ion Vinea, *Revoluția în Franța* (La révolution en France), dans *Chemarea*, année III, no. 361, 15 mai 1920, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, V (Oeuvres, V), p. 82. Le texte porte sur les mouvements populaires et syndicaux de l'époque en France, sur la base desquels le journaliste peut conclure que « la deuxième grande révolution française a éclaté ». Voir, dans le même volume, le texte *Comunismul la lucru* (Le communisme au travail), pp. 61-62, où l'on salue « la révolte communiste de Ruhr » (dans *Chemarea*, année III, no. 341, 18 avril 1920).

³⁷ Ion Vinea, *14 iulie. Căderea Bastiliei* (14 juillet. La prise de la Bastille), dans *Facla*, année XXVIII, no. 2176, 11 juillet 1938, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, V, *Publicistica* (Oeuvres, V, Les articles), édition revue par Mircea Vaida et Gheorghe Sprințeroiu, pp. 381-389.

³⁸ Ion Vinea, *Teama de U.R.S.S.* (La peur de l'U.R.S.S.), dans *Facla*, année XIII, no. 1126, 31 octobre 1934, texte repris dans *Ibidem*, p. 473.

« quel est le lien entre tout cela et une révolution ? Au nom de quelle pensée créatrice on appelait les villages et les villes, les laboureurs et les ouvriers, autour du *Hakenkreuz* de la Garde? »³⁹ (souligné dans le texte).

Le fait que les gardes dirigées par A. C. Cuza sont loin de toute *pensée créatrice* et qu'elles transforment la guerre des idées en violence physique, Vinea le ressentira à vif, très brutalement, quelques mois plus tard, le 5 octobre 1934, lorsque – tel que le précise un article publié le lendemain sur la première page – « une horde d'une quarantaine de vagabonds appartenant à la jeunesse sympathisante d'A. C. Cuza, armés de revolvers, bâtons et casse-tête, a fait irruption dans la rédaction de notre journal, dévastant complètement les meubles, l'installation électrique et téléphonique, cassant les portes, les fenêtres et détruisant la collection et les archives. [...] Frappé dans le dos avec le bâton et les casse-tête, M. Ion Vinea a été gravement blessé au niveau de la tête, ce qui lui a causé une hémorragie abondante »⁴⁰.

D'ailleurs le scandale se retrouve aussi dans l'équation de la révolution artistique, envers laquelle, malgré l'admiration pour la célébrité de Tristan Tzara et du dadaïsme initié par celui-ci et répandu rapidement dans toute l'Europe, Ion Vinea a un certain temps une attitude versatile, qui n'est pas dépourvue de réserves ou de scepticisme. Au printemps de 1920, lorsque Tzara, qui s'était déplacé de Zürich à Paris, finit par être accusé d'espionnage dans les milieux artistiques de là-bas, Vinea écrit un texte de solidarité. Sans manquer d'humour subtile, il y montre que « les adeptes de ce libertarisme esthétique se sont regroupés afin de le faire connaître dans des revues, des manifestes et des veillées, par des farces, des mystifications, des pieds de nez, des pirouettes, des bouffonneries et des bravades risqués, jetés au visage du bon sens publique ». Par conséquent, loin du caractère subversif de l'espionnage, « Dada avait cependant un but et il l'a atteint : le scandale et un renom intercontinental à tout prix »⁴¹. Dans une lettre envoyée un an plus tard à Tzara, Vinea annonce à son ami la célébrité dont jouit le mouvement en Roumanie, mais il avoue aussi son manque d'adhésion structural au militantisme dadaïste : « Vos manifestes ont un succès fou, surtout celui de l'idiotie pure très compris. C'est la plus amusante manière de gaspiller sa vie, et il n'y a que la

³⁹ Ion Vinea, *Aventura* (L'aventure), dans *Facla*, année XII, no. 868, 15 décembre 1933, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, IX (Oeuvres, IX), éd. cit., pp. 366-367. Ion Vinea se prononce contre le manque d'éducation des étudiants gardistes dans un autre endroit aussi : « Mieux vaut lire et comprendre un volume par mois que cent briques par semaines [...]. Au moment où le capitaine Zelea Codreanu réaliserait le miracle de faire sortir ses gardes du chantier et de les faire entrer dans des bibliothèques, au moins quelques mois par an, celui-ci sera bien mérité par la nation qu'il aime tant » (*Studentul, cartea și cărămida / L'étudiant, le livre et la brique*, dans *Facla*, année XII, no. 826, 27 octobre 1933, repris dans *Ibidem*, p. 335).

⁴⁰ *Agresiunea bandiților cuziști la „Facla”* (L'agression des bandits sympathisants d'A. C. Cuza chez „Facla”), éditorial signé „Facla”, dans *Facla*, année XIV, no. 1105, 6 octobre 1934. Ce numéro de la publication, tout comme les prochains numéros, consignent les échos réprobateurs de la presse de l'époque.

⁴¹ Ion Vinea, „Dada”..., dans *Adevărul*, année XXXIII, no. 11052, 15 avril 1920, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, V, *Publicistica* (1920-1924) (Œuvres, V, Les articles), édition d'Elena Zaharia-Filipaș, p. 58.

timidité qui m'empêche de devenir un dadaïste militant. Je te confierai mon âme déjà dadaïsante »⁴² (en français en original).

A part la timidité, une lucidité sceptique doit avoir déterminé Vinea à publier, peu de temps après l'envoi de la carte postale à son ami, un article qui annonce, dès le titre, une *Atitudine sfârșită* (Attitude finie). D'un côté, l'écrivain de Bucarest exprime ses réserves sur la théorie particulière de « l'idiotie pure » exprimée dans les manifestes dadaïstes, qui risque de dégénérer elle-même « en un système étroit », et, de l'autre côté, dans un sens plus large, celui-ci identifie « la fin d'une attitude : de révolutionnaire dans l'art, la littérature et la science », étant donné que « l'humanité, constamment grattée avec de nouvelles recettes, des paradoxes, [...], des sentences qui anéantissent tout ce que la littérature a bâti en tant que réputation, n'accueille pas l'arrivée des néoromantiques et des nouveaux Galilée avec des hurlements et des éclats de rire. L'élément audacieux et bizarre est reçu avec un calme relatif »⁴³.

Par rapport à ce scepticisme, il peut paraître surprenant le fait qu'un an plus tard, mais aussi pendant toute la décennie suivante, nous retrouvons Vinea, surtout en tant que directeur de *Contimporanul*, comme promoteur de la révolution esthétique dans l'espace culturel roumain. Au-delà des circonstances artistiques proprement dites (nous pensons d'abord au retour au pays de Marcel Iancu, ancien compagnon de Tzara à Zürich), l'explication principale du retour et de la radicalisation de l'attitude est à chercher précisément dans l'exaspération politique et sociale. L'article programmatique de la nouvelle revue le consigne d'ailleurs : « Les mœurs politiques n'ont jamais été plus asiatiques, leur geste plus voleur, le dos qui le supporte plus humble, qu'à présent quand le crime devient un moyen courant de gouverner et la lamentation représente le seul délit de résistance ». La plus grande faute n'appartient pas cependant au monde politique, mais au public « renversé sur la paille de son insouciance traditionnelle, ici, avec sa Romania Mare tirée au cœur de la civilisation européenne, ressemblant à une boue avec des cadavres, des coquilles d'œufs et des écorces de pastèques au milieu d'une cour asphaltée ». Par conséquent, la nouvelle revue se propose de « créer [...] une nouvelle mentalité », de « réveiller ce public »⁴⁴. *Revoluția sufletească* (la révolution de l'âme) devient ainsi l'enjeu du renouvellement artistique. Elle est subtilement rattachée au projet de changement social et politique et écartée de la simple fronde ou, avec les mots de Vinea, de l'exhibition. La distinction est

⁴² Ion Vinea, carte postale envoyée à Tristan Tzara le 1 août 1921, en français en original, conservée dans les fonds de la Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet, à Paris, publiée dans le corpus épistolaire *Ion Vinea – Tristan Tzara*. Correspondance de Paris envoyée par Henri Béhar, dans *Manuscriptum*, année XII, no. 2 (43), 1981, p. 164.

⁴³ Ion Vinea, *Atitudine sfârșită* (Attitude finie), dans *Adevărul*, année XXXIV, no. 11450, 3 août 1921, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, V, *Publicistica* (Oeuvres, V, Les articles), édition d'Elena Zaharia-Filipaș, p. 214.

⁴⁴ Ion Vinea, [*Contimporanul*], dans *Contimporanul ...*, année I, no. 1, 13 juin 1922, texte repris dans *Ibidem*, pp. 294-295.

persistante et elle se retrouve aussi, en termes antithétiques, dans *Vorbe goale* (Paroles vides), le petit manifeste publié en 1925 dans *Punct* : « C'est une révolution de lexique. C'est une conception de coiffeur-garçon autodidacte. À quand la révolution de la sensibilité – la vraie? »⁴⁵ (souligné dans le texte, en français en original). En échange, dans le fameux manifeste de 1924, *Manifest activist cãtre tinerime*⁴⁶ (Manifeste activiste à l'usage de la jeunesse), qui ouvre l'époque avant-gardiste proprement dite de *Contimporanul*, il faudrait souligner que dans le tableau de l'Art qui « s'est prostitué » (dans l'énumération des définitions négatives qu'il faut dépasser pour réaliser le renouvellement, de la poésie à l'architecture) on inclut aussi la politique, « l'occupation des porteurs de cercueil et des trafiquants ». L'art nouveau projeté dans le manifeste sera ainsi antipolitique, mais pas dans le sens de fronde, de bouffonnerie et de bravade (ironisées dans les textes antérieurs), mais dans un sens utopique au fond et intangible par les moyens de l'art, de *construction* civique et nationale de la Roumanie même : « La Roumanie se construit aujourd'hui. En dépit des partis déconcertés, nous pénétrons dans la grande phase activiste industrielle. Nos villes, routes, ponts, usines, qui seront construits, l'esprit, le rythme et le style qui en découleront ne seront pas falsifiés par le byzantinisme, le ludovicisme, accablés par les anachronismes ».

Mais ce projet identitaire est antinationaliste. D'ailleurs, dans la réplique finale du célèbre texte (« Tuons nos morts ! ») nous sommes tentés de lire non pas un écho des manifestes occidentaux, mais une réplique donnée à un épisode d'antisémitisme local que, peu de temps avant, Vinea avait promptement sanctionné, avec beaucoup de sarcasme. A Iași, écrit le journaliste, les étudiants antisémites de la faculté de médecine ont demandé : « Que le gouvernement prenne des mesures pour que les étudiants juifs obtiennent des cadavres ayant eu la même religion que la leur. [...] Nous voulons donc, souligne l'orateur, »avoir nos morts. Chacun avec ses morts, c'est ça le principe». Et la foule : «vive nos morts!»⁴⁷. Plusieurs fois Vinea prend ses distances avec les morts qui engendrent la brutalité et le grotesque ainsi qu'avec toute la phraséologie patriotarde. À la même époque, le directeur de *Contimporanul* écrit que, puisque les véritables valeurs nationales ne sont pas encore cristallisées (« Le tricolore est trop frais »), « notre patriotisme ne signifie pas encore *conserver*, mais *construire*. Nous ressemblons, dans cette situation, aux américains et nous avons l'air des émigrants sur nos terres aurifères, pourtant ancestrales. Ne sommes-nous pas arrivés en ville récemment, par tranches

⁴⁵ Ion Vinea, *Vorbe goale* (Paroles vides), dans *Punct*, année II, no. 14, 20 février 1925, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, VI (Oeuvres, VI), éd. cit., p. 12.

⁴⁶ Ion Vinea, *Manifest activist cãtre tinerime* (Manifeste activiste à l'usage de la jeunesse), dans *Contimporanul*, année III, no. 46, mai 1924, texte repris dans Ion Vinea, *Opere*, V, *Publicistica* (Oeuvres, V, Les articles) (1920-1924), édition d'Elena Zaharia-Filipaș, pp. 417-418.

⁴⁷ Ion Vinea, *Scrisori din Iași. Cu huliganii* (Lettres de Iași. Avec les hooligans), dans *Contimporanul*, année I, no. 22, 16 décembre 1922, texte repris dans *Ibidem*, p. 342.

et en séries ? Et le travail de construction que nous transmettons à peine aux autres pour le conserver, à ceux qui connaîtront alors le patriotisme supérieur de Renan, débarrassé de xénophobie et de hooliganisme, n'est-il pas dans la pleine pensée ?» (souligné dans le texte)⁴⁸. D'ailleurs, la grande chance engendrée par la révolution dans l'art est justement celle d'une véritable internationalisation, de façon à ce que l'on puisse parler d'une « internationale des publications d'avant-garde du monde entier, créant au-dessus des frontières une atmosphère d'émulation et d'incitation réciproques, d'échange de directives et d'inspirations, qui mènera à la découverte finale du très recherché style de l'époque et de la planète unifiée. Une internationale intellectuelle est née, insensiblement, sans congrès, sans programme, sans fonds de propagande ; et de l'angoisse des mêmes besoins, sous l'empire de la même demande, elle a implanté en avant, clairement, son idéal »⁴⁹. En d'autres mots, la révolution artistique a représenté pour Vinea une modalité sûre de s'europaniser, d'entrer dans un circuit réel des valeurs et de transgresser ainsi le nationalisme primitif. Ce qui est significatif, c'est que lorsqu'il se décide à promouvoir la révolution dans l'art, l'écrivain n'opte pas, malgré la grande amitié qui le lie à Tristan Tzara, pour le dadaïsme (c'est-à-dire pour la fronde et le scandale), mais pour le constructivisme, c'est-à-dire pour une forme d'édification dans l'espace européen. Ainsi, tandis que la révolution sociale se fait à l'Est, la révolution artistique ne peut se faire que le visage tourné vers l'Ouest.

Vers la fin des années 30, Ion Vinea transforme en quelque sorte le projet de la révolution dans l'art en un fantasme de celle-ci, la déplaçant du temps futur de la construction, pour laquelle des énergies et des idéaux se mettaient en mouvement, au temps passé de sa jeunesse, d'avec laquelle il commençait, au fond, à se séparer. L'énergie du changement laissait la place au sentiment de la vanité et à l'état de mélancolie. Or, les mélancoliques ne produisent pas de révolutions, même si (en l'occurrence) ils y croient. En échange, le thème de la révolution sociale se retrouve encore dans ses textes, soit par des renvois, tel que nous l'avons montré, à la victoire (prometteuse pour tout un monde), de la révolution de l'U.R.S.S., soit comme une alternative à la guerre. La confiance dans la justesse de la révolution soviétique a certainement reçu le coup décisif par le pacte Ribbentrop-Molotov et surtout par la perte de la Bessarabie, en juin 1940. La déception de Vinea a sans doute été grande lorsqu'il constate que ses opinions sur le pacifisme de l'U.R.S.S. et sur sa garantie de stabilité pour la Bessarabie sont démenties, seulement quelques ans après (intervalle très court de point de vue historique).

Le désenchantement est également probablement passé par ses lectures. Par exemple, même si l'on ne peut pas préciser le moment exact, il est certain que Vinea a lu l'autobiographie de Trotski (« le grand journaliste et mémorialiste »),

⁴⁸ Ion Vinea, *Patriotism. Ernst Renan: « Pages françaises »*, dans *Luptătorul*, année II, no. 311, 7 juillet 1921, texte repris dans *Ibidem*, p. 210.

⁴⁹ Ion Vinea, *Promisiuni* (Des promesses), dans *Contimporanul*, année III, no. 50-51, 30 novembre-30 décembre 1922, texte repris dans *Ibidem*, p. 433.

Ma vie, à laquelle il consacre un article⁵⁰. Dans ce livre calme, raisonnable, serein à sa façon, l'écrivain roumain a certainement lu la remarque à propos de Staline, faite immédiatement après la mort de Lénine : « Staline, dis-je, est la plus éminente médiocrité de notre parti »⁵¹. A cela s'ajoute dans les années suivantes les nouvelles reçues du front de l'Est, sur la vie quotidienne de type concentrationnaire, sur laquelle Vinea écrit à plusieurs reprises dans *Evenimentul zilei*, la nouvelle publication qu'il dirige pendant la guerre. En réalité, l'écrivain roumain découvre que la révolution n'incarne pas le monde des prolétaires, tel qu'il l'avait cru pendant plusieurs décennies, mais un grand espace de manœuvre pour les politiciens. Par conséquent, l'U.R.S.S. n'est qu'« un régime despotique » qui « s'intègre dans la même unique Histoire de toutes les Russies depuis toujours... Qu'elles soient tsaristes, démocratiques, soviétiques, ces Russies ont été constamment jalonnées, en long et en large, de gibets, de poteaux d'exécution, de barreaux en fer, de cadenas et de chaînes »⁵².

Evidemment, en 1941, quand il écrit ces lignes, Ion Vinea avait abandonné l'utopie de la révolution sociale et il gardait ce thème seulement pour les exercices analytiques de la démythisation. Une figure autochtone de celle-ci (imposée politiquement et importée) sera proclamée en Roumanie aussi, quelques années après, accomplissant, par l'une des ironies du destin (auxquelles Vinea croyait), l'une des prophéties avec lesquelles l'écrivain avait joué dans sa jeunesse : « Ce sera pire, certes, mai seulement ... pendant quelques dizaines d'années! ». Ce seront les dernières décennies de sa vie, que Vinea vivra en marge et dans le souterrain d'une révolution douteuse, qui n'avait presque rien en commun avec le fantasme nourri pendant sa jeunesse, à l'époque où il voyageait souvent à Paris et il rencontrait, dans la maison de son ami Tristan Tzara, les surréalistes français, qui voulaient apporter leur contribution aux lignes directrices du Parti Communiste. Pendant les dernières décennies de sa vie, Vinea apprendra (s'il en avait jamais douté) que le parti de la classe des travailleurs ne reçoit jamais, mais il donnait les directives de toute révolution, qu'elle soit politique ou esthétique. Dès l'instant où ses textes ne pouvaient plus être publiés dans la République Populaire Roumaine, il pouvait juste affirmer, de façon équivoque, dans une interview publiée après sa mort : « c'est bien qu'il en ait été ainsi ». C'est-à-dire qu'ait donc existé une époque où la révolution a pu conserver, parmi les écrivains, son caractère utopique, c'est-à-dire, l'ambiguïté, l'exubérance, l'internationalisme et la promesse intacte d'une future liberté.

⁵⁰ Ion Vinea, *Râsul lui Lenin* (Le rire de Lénine), dans *Evenimentul zilei*, année V, no. 1691, 29 janvier 1944.

⁵¹ Léon Trotsky, *Ma vie. Essai autobiographique*, traduit sur le manuscrit par Maurice Parijanine, Paris, Rieder, tome III, p. 245.

⁵² Ion Vinea, *Minciunile despotismului* (Les mensonges du despotisme), dans *Evenimentul zilei*, année III, no. 913, vendredi 21 novembre 1941, p.1. Nous avons largement reconstitué les articles de Vinea qui démythise l'U.R.S.S. et la révolution soviétique ainsi que les conséquences biographiques néfastes de celle-ci, dans l'étude *Ion Vinea în timpul totalitarismelor (II)* (Ion Vinea pendant les totalitarismes), dans *Transilvania*, no. 3, 2012.

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L'IDÉE DE GÉNÉRATION CHEZ LE CRITIQUE ROUMAIN MIRCEA VULCĂNESCU

GHEORGHE PERIAN*

ABSTRACT. *Mircea Vulcănescu Concept of Generations of Writers.* In the Romanian literary criticism, the issue of generations became the subject of theoretical reflection later than in Western Europe. Much later than in Germany, where the first studies on the subject date back to the late nineteenth century, and much later than in France, where attention to the phenomenon of generations began to grow, resulting in books following the First World War. In our country such concerns became more obvious in the early 30's of the last century, when the Romanian Society of Philosophy organized a series of conferences on "The problem of generations", conferences held in the auditorium of the 'Carol I' University Foundation and presented by some of the leading thinkers of the time. The first big "generation" moment in the evolution of the Romanian literary theory represented the critic Mircea Vulcănescu. He published a series of articles about the phenomenon of generations, culminating with the *Generation* study, published in the journal "Criterion" in 1934. The author based his study on Dimitrie Gusti's monograph concept, whose work fellow he was, and defined the concept of generation from a multiple perspective, seeking to highlight all its meanings, from the biological one to the sociological, historical, psychological, cultural and economic.

Keywords: Romanian literature, Mircea Vulcănescu, generations of writers.

REZUMAT. *Ideea de generație la criticul român Mircea Vulcănescu.* Studiul se referă la cel dintâi din cele trei momente "generaționiste" care au fost înregistrate în istoria teoriei literare din România, acela al anilor 1930. Reprezentativ pentru acest prim moment este articolul *Generație* publicat de Mircea Vulcănescu în 1934 în revista „Criterion”. Autorul pornea de la concepția monografică a lui Dimitrie Gusti, al cărui colaborator a fost, și definea noțiunea de „generație” dintr-o perspectivă multiplă, căutând să-i evidențieze toate sensurile: biologic, sociologic, istoric, psihologic, cultural și economic. În explicațiile sale, Vulcănescu a acordat o importanță deosebită influenței pe care o exercită evenimentul istoric și situația socială asupra oamenilor dintr-o epocă. Pe de altă parte, el a înțeles foarte bine că nici separat și nici împreună acești doi factori nu pot duce la constituirea unei generații dacă lipsește suportul biologic al vârstei, cel care condiționează și modulează orice influență catalizatoare primită din istorie sau din societate. Generația este, întâi de toate, o categorie de vârstă, unită printr-un sentiment de solidaritate și printr-un set de interese comune. Studiul a devenit imediat un reper în reflecția indigenă asupra problemei și a creat emulație în rândul criticilor literari români.

Cuvinte cheie: Literatura română, Mircea Vulcănescu, generații literare.

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Dans la critique littéraire roumaine le problème des générations est devenu un sujet de réflexion théorique plus tardivement que dans les pays de l'Europe occidentale. Beaucoup plus tard qu'en Allemagne, où les premières études sur ce thème remontent à la fin du XIX^e siècle, mais plus tard aussi qu'en France, où il y a eu un regain d'intérêt pour le phénomène des générations après la première guerre mondiale. Chez nous, les préoccupations de ce genre deviennent plus manifestes au début des années 30 du siècle dernier, quand la Société roumaine de philosophie a organisé un cycle de conférences sur « Le problème des générations », conférences tenues dans l'amphithéâtre de la Fondation universitaire Carol I-er et présentées par quelques penseurs importants de l'époque.

Si l'on tient compte de la chronologie, nous pouvons affirmer qu'il y a eu dans la critique littéraire roumaine trois moments « générationnistes », d'importance et de qualité inégales, mais qui ont apporté des clarifications et ont essayé d'offrir des solutions raisonnables aux questions difficiles de ce domaine. Loin d'être une préoccupation constante des critiques littéraires roumains, l'étude des générations littéraires a connu des périodes propices, quand le sujet intéressait tout le monde et (qu'on écrivait beaucoup), mais aussi des périodes défavorables, d'oubli ou de refus. L'idée a stimulé la réflexion théorique des critiques chaque fois que dans la littérature roumaine a eu lieu un changement de générations et chaque fois que ce changement a eu pour effet des polémiques et des conflits d'intérêts. Chez nous, les études sur ce thème n'ont pas été uniquement le résultat de recherches de bibliothèque ou de réflexions de cabinet, mais elles ont eu comme point de départ l'observation directe de la vie littéraire avec toutes les confrontations intergénérationnelles qui l'agitaient périodiquement.

Dans l'évolution de la théorie littéraire roumaine, le premier grand moment « générationniste » a été celui des années 1930, quand Mircea Vulcănescu a publié une série d'articles sur le phénomène des générations, dont le plus important, *Génération*, est paru en 1934 dans la revue *Criterion*. L'auteur partait de la conception monographique de Dimitrie Gusti, dont il a été le collaborateur, et définissait la notion de génération d'après plusieurs points de vue, en distinguant tous ses sens: biologique (considéré primordial), sociologique, historique, psychologique, culturel et économique.

Le premier sens et le plus durable de la notion de génération est celui biologique, relevé par l'étymologie latine du mot. Selon l'étymon, par génération, on comprend la multitude des descendants issus d'un même géniteur, descendants dont les dates de naissance constituent un niveau temporel distinct et distancé de l'âge des parents. C'est un éloignement uniquement chronologique, parce que, autrement, la continuité entre la génération des parents et celle des fils est toujours assurée par l'hérédité. Au sens biologique, les théoriciens de la littérature ont gardé uniquement l'idée du décalage temporel grâce auquel les deux catégories d'âge en viennent à s'éloigner l'une de l'autre, et ont éliminé le principe de l'hérédité en tant que facteur de continuité. Au contraire, pour ceux qui étudient les caractères hérités

et les problèmes de la généalogie, il n'y a pas de ruptures graves dans la succession des âges. La lecture à l'horizontale d'un arbre généalogique suffit pour comprendre ce qu'est une génération.

Sous l'aspect sociologique, on peut observer que, dans une communauté, les adultes et les jeunes forment non seulement des catégories éloignées par l'âge, mais aussi des catégories sociales engagées différemment et ayant une importance inégale dans la vie quotidienne. Ceux qui sont actifs et intégrés pleinement dans la société, occupant les positions les plus hautes et les positions de direction, sont les adultes liés entre eux par leur passé et des intérêts communs. Les jeunes (sont en attente et) se préparent pour devenir, à leur tour, actifs. Quand l'attente se prolonge d'une manière exagérée, leur impatience augmente progressivement et un état de nervosité sociale, qui peut atteindre des niveaux explosifs, apparaît dans leur cercle d'existence. Les hiérarchies dans la société se fondent en fonction de l'âge aussi, parce qu'il conditionne souvent la performance, tant sur le plan quantitatif que qualitatif. Il est vrai que dans la société moderne, caractérisée par la complexité, l'âge perd de son importance par rapport à d'autres règles qui décident de la distribution des positions sociales, sans tenir compte du facteur biologique. Il s'agit du marxisme, qui fige la société moins dans des catégories de génération que dans des classes sociales antagoniques.

Mircea Vulcănescu a soutenu que le sens sociologique est essentiel pour définir la génération, terme autour duquel s'organisent tous les autres sens. La prééminence accordée au sens sociologique s'explique par l'affiliation de l'auteur aux idées de l'école monographique de Dimitrie Gusti, mais aussi par la nécessité de résoudre d'urgence les problèmes d'ordre social de la jeune génération de son temps. Quoiqu'il ait maintes fois rejeté le marxisme, Mircea Vulcănescu utilise ses termes chaque fois qu'il écrit sur «a prolétarisation de la jeunesse intellectuelle», sur «le chômage» ou sur l'incapacité de la société roumaine à intégrer la nouvelle génération dans le système institutionnel déjà bloqué, source de mécontentement, de haine et de ressentiment. Le fait de retenir le sens sociologique comme critère ordonnateur et le fait de reléguer les autres sens au niveau de subsidiarité, est probablement le résultat de l'expérience sociale désagréable que la génération *Criterion* a dû supporter après la fin des études, au début des années 1930.

La génération est une unité qui mesure l'intervalle de temps nécessaire pour le passage d'une catégorie d'âge de la période active à celle de retrait de l'activité sociale. Selon les études démographiques, la régénération du substrat biologique de la société se passe tous les trente ans. Il faut préciser que c'est une limite flexible et que la durée de prééminence d'une génération est plus longue ou plus restreinte en fonction du climat social. Le changement de générations peut produire un changement de paradigme aussi, mais pas toujours et pas de manière obligatoire, parce qu'il y a des générations qui, bien qu'elles aient pris les positions de ceux qui ont cessé toute activité, continuent à se manifester dans les anciennes structures. Ce sont les générations d'héritiers, les générations respectueuses, pas

assez fortes pour édifier leurs propres normes, leur propre univers thématique. Le passage de ces trente années crée chaque fois le cadre nécessaire pour l'apparition d'une nouvelle génération, mais c'est uniquement de temps en temps, quand les astres sont favorables, que se produisent des changements de mentalité.

Pour illustrer la périodicité susmentionnée, observée par les historiens grecs déjà dans l'Antiquité, Mircea Vulcănescu a dressé un tableau des générations qui se sont succédé dans la littérature roumaine à partir du XIX^e siècle. On sait aujourd'hui que, par son tableau, il a été l'un de ceux qui ont fondé ce « genre » dans l'histoire littéraire roumaine. Sa démarche a été suivie d'autres essais similaires, surtout à l'époque des années 1980, quand on assiste à une recrudescence des débats sur la génération. Les générations roumaines commencent par la prétendue « génération des précurseurs ». Elle a annoncé son existence en 1821, en même temps que la Révolution de Tudor Vladimirescu, et elle s'est fait remarquer par une attitude anti-grecque et autochtoniste. Ses représentants ont été Gheorghe Lazăr en Munténie et les « carvunari » en Moldavie. Après eux, en 1848 s'est constituée la génération romantique, celle qui a créé la Roumanie moderne, avec Ion Brătianu, M. Kogălniceanu, C.A. Rosetti et Avram Iancu en tête. Composée de petits boïards avec des études en France, cette génération a mené une vie tumultueuse, engagée dans des révolutions et des guerres mais réussissant à la fin à transformer la Roumanie en un État européen. En 1880 c'était le tour de la génération junimiste de s'affirmer. Conservatrice et réactionnaire, elle groupait les représentants de l'aristocratie (P.P. Carp, Iacob Negruzzi), de la paysannerie et de la bourgeoisie (Titu Maiorescu, Ion Creangă, Mihai Eminescu), la plupart ayant une culture allemande. Leur revue a été *Convorbiri literare* (« Conversations littéraires ») tandis que leur idée maîtresse était celle des « formes sans fond ». La quatrième génération, issue après la révolte de 1907, s'est trouvée sous l'influence du « narodnicisme » russe et a créé une littérature d'inspiration rurale. Son idéal politique a été l'unification de tous les Roumains en un seul pays. Elle a initié des courants idéologiques tels le « semănătorism » (courant nationaliste animé par Nicolae Iorga et A.C. Cuza) et le « poporanism » (courant socialiste ayant au premier plan C-tin Stere). Le premier courant était pour l'unification de la Transylvanie avec la Roumanie et le deuxième pour l'annexion de la Bessarabie à l'État roumain. Les revues dans lesquelles ils se sont manifestés étaient *Semănătorul* et *Viața Românească*. Les débuts de la génération suivante, la génération de la Grande Unification (ou la génération de la revue *Gîndirea*) remontent à l'année 1914. Ses représentants (Nae Ionescu, Octavian Goga, Lucian Blaga, Nichifor Crainic, Pamfil Șeicaru, Cezar Petrescu, Emanoil Bucuța, Tudor Vianu, Victor Ion Popa, Ion Marin Sadoveanu, Mihail Ralea, Camil Petrescu) se préoccupaient autant du roumanisme que de l'universalité. L'opinion de la génération a été résumée par Nae Ionescu en quatre mots: réalisme, orthodoxie, monarchie et autochtonisme. La statistique des générations, peu convaincante jusqu'ici, devient encore plus embrouillée lorsque Mircea Vulcănescu commence à

parler de la sixième génération, la sienne, qui ne voulait pas respecter la périodicité de trente ans. Le problème était qu'il ne pouvait pas associer cette génération à un événement historique, comme il l'avait fait pour les premières. De plus, il n'avait aucun nom pour elle. Tout ce qu'il affirme en cette question montre le fait qu'il s'agit, en réalité, d'une semi-génération issue à l'ombre de la génération antérieure, de l'autorité de laquelle il voulait s'échapper, mais sans y parvenir complètement.

Le tableau panoramique dressé par Mircea Vulcănescu est fragile pour deux raisons. Premièrement, en délimitant les générations en fonction de quelques repères chronologiques importants (la Révolution de Tudor Vladimirescu, la Révolution bourgeoise de 1848, la Proclamation du Royaume en 1881, la Révolte de 1907, la Grande Unification de 1918), l'auteur semble avoir oublié que la littérature a sa propre périodicité interne, qui ne coïncide que rarement avec celle de l'histoire événementielle, socio-politique. S'il avait utilisé pour périodiser, tout comme on fait aujourd'hui, des critères strictement littéraires, il n'aurait eu aucune difficulté à comprendre que la génération romantique a ses origines en 1840, lorsque Mihail Kogălniceanu a fait paraître la revue *Dacia literară*, que la génération junimiste n'a pas attendu la Proclamation du Royaume pour faire son entrée dans la littérature, mais qu'elle a signalé son existence dès l'année 1867, par les *Conversations littéraires* et quand Titu Maiorescu a publié sa grande étude intitulée *Une recherche critique sur la poésie roumaine à partir de 1867*, et que le poporanisme remonte à 1893, depuis la fondation de la revue *L'Événement littéraire*, où la doctrine du courant a été exprimée d'une manière décisive. Dépourvu d'expérience préalable dans la délimitation correcte des générations de la littérature roumaine, Mircea Vulcănescu devient tendancieux. Dans la génération de Junimea il n'a pas trouvé de place ni pour Caragiale (probablement parce que l'écrivain était allogène et très critique), ni pour Slavici (à ce temps-là, celui-ci ne passait pas encore pour un grand prosateur et, outre cela, il avait collaboré avec l'occupant allemand pendant la guerre). Il se fait coupable d'autres omissions graves quand il décrit la génération qui suit, qu'il réduit au « poporanism » et au « semănătorism », malgré la présence active des écrivains décadents et symbolistes, avec Alexandru Macedonski en tête. Attaché au nationalisme et à l'orthodoxie de la revue *Gândirea* (La Pensée), il a presque totalement ignoré le groupe littéraire de la revue *Sburătorul* et s'est borné à mentionner – en fin de liste – le nom de Camil Petrescu. Où sont Ion Barbu, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Anton Holban? L'élimination de E. Lovinescu du tableau de la génération de l'entre-deux-guerres est encore plus stupéfiante et condamnable si l'on pense que, à cette époque, le critique avait déjà publié deux de ses livres importants, il est vrai, d'orientation démocratique et libérale: *L'Histoire de la civilisation roumaine moderne* (1924-1925) et *L'Histoire de la littérature roumaine contemporaine* (1926-1929). Composé des positions de la droite intellectuelle, erroné et tendancieux, comme j'ai déjà affirmé, le tableau des générations de Mircea Vulcănescu peut être lu aujourd'hui uniquement comme un document d'époque.

Située dans la même catégorie que la mode, le courant, le siècle, l'époque, l'ère et l'éon, la génération devient un élément d'une chaîne conceptuelle plus longue, subordonnée à l'idée de temporalité, mais pas très cohérente en soi. Les sept notions énumérées plus haut forment une échelle et se distinguent l'une de l'autre par l'intervalle de temps qu'elles mesurent, de plus en plus étendu, jusqu'à l'indétermination. Dans nos calculs du temps, nous utilisons fréquemment les quatre premières notions (la mode, la génération, le courant, le siècle) et très rarement (ou guère) les autres. Peu importe pour nous, en tant qu'individus, en quel éon on vit ou en quelle époque, mais c'est important de savoir de quelle génération on fait partie, et dans quel courant on s'inscrit ou quelle mode on suit. Dans leur énorme ouverture, accessible à peine à nos esprits pragmatiques, les notions d'époque, d'ère ou d'éon ont en elles quelque chose de surhumain, ont une dimension spéculative et presque mystique. C'est pourquoi elles ont tant plu aux écrivains romantiques. Il nous est facile de compter les années d'un siècle ou d'une génération, mais on ne peut pas dire avec la même précision quels intervalles de temps mesurent les trois notions romantiques. Combien dure une ère? Une époque? Et un éon? Les durées courtes, parmi lesquelles la génération, apparaissent toujours plus clairement que les durées longues, dont la description globale est compliquée et difficile à prouver.

Parmi ces sept notions, seulement quelques-unes sont des termes strictement d'ordre temporel (le siècle, surtout), les autres ayant des connotations qui renvoient à un champ sémantique plus large. Le courant littéraire, par exemple, pourvu d'un sens temporel faible, se rapporte à des manifestations à durée variable, plus longue dans le passé et de plus en plus courte à mesure qu'on s'approche du présent. Il peut être la création des deux générations successives, l'une novatrice et l'autre faite d'épigones, intéressée uniquement à continuer l'oeuvre de la première et, à certains égards, à la répéter. Le « junimisme » a été édifié, dans ses grandes lignes, par la génération de Maiorescu et il a été maintenu en l'état pour longtemps, jusqu'au début du vingtième siècle, par la génération des disciples, consacrée au maître et aux règles imposées par celui-ci. L'épigonisme résulte de la peur de l'avenir et du désir (ou de résignation) d'être semblable aux précurseurs et, dans la mesure du possible, à leur hauteur.

Suprahistorique et plaçant ensemble des écrivains d'époques différentes, la notion de « typologie » n'a pas de place dans la chaîne conceptuelle de la génération. Les typologies sont des faits de répétition, et non pas de succession, comme les générations. Quoiqu'il ait proposé deux séries typologiques, celle des écrivains fougueux (Heliade, Hasdeu, Iorga) et celle des écrivains raisonnables (Kogălniceanu, Maiorescu, Rădulescu-Motru), Mircea Vulcănescu n'a pas poussé jusqu'au bout la distinction d'ordre théorique entre la typologie et la génération. Mais il a instauré une distinction là où, plus tard, les critiques littéraires ont voulu opérer un lien. Aujourd'hui peu de gens croient encore à la dissociation nette entre la typologie et le courant littéraire, surtout après qu'Eugenio d'Ors et Gustav René

Hocke ont découplé le baroque et, respectivement, le maniérisme de leur sens strictement temporel et les ont considérés comme des styles artistiques observables sur plusieurs siècles, y compris au vingtième. Comme je le disais, les typologies se définissent par leur sens suprahistorique, mais aussi par le fait qu'elles sont toujours des constructions de la critique littéraire. Le critique a la possibilité d'identifier une typologie, à l'aide de son information et de son pouvoir de corrélation, et d'observer son évolution dans le temps. Mais les générations existent d'une manière objective, en dehors de sa volonté et indépendamment de sa raison. La mission du critique est seulement de constater leur apparition et d'étudier leur évolution par l'analyse.

On sait qu'au début des années 1930 la réflexion de Mircea Vulcănescu et de ses confrères a été monopolisée dans une grande mesure par les thèmes de la vie sociale, en se référant explicitement aux difficultés d'intégration dans le système des jeunes intellectuels du temps. C'est pourquoi, dans la définition de la génération, l'auteur a donné la primauté au sens sociologique, en lui subordonnant, au moins au niveau d'intention et au niveau déclaratif, tous les autres sens. Malgré tout cela, nous avons vu que dans la périodisation, lorsqu'il veut délimiter les générations qui se sont succédé dans la littérature roumaine, il délaisse le plan sociologique et invoque les grands événements de l'histoire politique. C'est une contradiction qui montre que le premier, mais non pas le plus important, rôle attribué par Mircea Vulcănescu à l'événement historique, consiste à construire les bornes entre lesquelles se manifeste une génération littéraire. J'ai déjà écrit sur les inconvénients de ce procédé. Plus loin, suivant la conception déterministe d'Hippolyte Taine, l'événement historique est considéré comme un facteur qui produit, par sa grande force d'influence, des modifications d'ordre structural dans la manière de penser et d'agir de ceux qui l'ont vécu. Une guerre, une révolution et encore d'autres circonstances moins explosives deviennent les lieux communs dans lesquels les membres d'une génération se rencontrent et qu'ils invoquent fréquemment comme un signe de reconnaissance, comme une parole. Certains de ces événements peuvent être considérés comme des actions de génération (la Révolution de 1848, par exemple), les autres ont leurs causes en dehors de la génération qui doit seulement les supporter. Dans son étude, Mircea Vulcănescu a voulu montrer que les jeunes de son âge disposent de tout ce qu'il faut pour être une génération et qu'ils remplissent, point par point, toutes les conditions que l'exemple théorique de la notion a mises en évidence. Poussé par la conviction qu'une structure générationnelle ne peut pas apparaître en l'absence d'un événement historique qui la modèle, il a invoqué la guerre de 1916, en passant trop facilement sur le fait que ni lui et ni ses confrères n'étaient (pas négation à supprimer) complètement sortis, à cette heure-là, de l'enfance et que, par suite, ils disposaient d'une capacité de compréhension trop réduite pour être profondément marqués de ce qui se passait. Selon eux, la guerre a ouvert la voie à un processus de liquidation des valeurs héritées du XIX^e siècle (la raison, la liberté, la

démocratie), un processus qui ne pouvait plus être arrêté et qu'ils étaient obligés de mener jusqu'au bout. Cette hâte de se séparer, parfois en claquant la porte, du siècle précédent, a été une limite majeure de la génération Criterion.

Toujours dans l'esprit de Taine, l'événement historique est compris comme une cause primaire dont les effets se voient surtout au niveau de la psychologie, dans la structure d'âme de ceux qui font partie d'une génération. La réverbération interne produite par l'événement a une amplitude inégale, étant conditionnée en grande mesure par l'âge. L'influence formatrice s'exerce sur les jeunes à la mentalité encore peu formée, et qui sont désireux d'assimiler de l'expérience et de construire leur personnalité. L'ancienne génération, figée dans ses convictions et ayant une curiosité réduite vis-à-vis du nouveau, opte pour une position de retrait ou de rejet de l'événement et n'accepte pas son influence. La psychologie des âges se distingue et apparaissent les conditions nécessaires pour qu'éclate un conflit intergénérationnel, conditions dont la plus importante est la résistance, de la part des jeunes, au désir de s'affirmer, résistance manifestée par les vieux confortés dans les institutions de l'État (académies, collèges, instituts, universités). Dans les époques de calme, quand il n'y a pas d'événements historiques majeurs, les solidarités sur des critères d'âge sont plus rares et plus faibles et laissent lieu à des associations sur la base d'affinités esthétiques ou idéologiques.

D'une manière surprenante, quand il se réfère aux générations culturelles, Mircea Vulcănescu abandonne le point de vue déterministe et adopte une conception de type platonicien, axée sur la question du logos. Il affirme que les positions spirituelles (l'idéalisme, le réalisme, le théisme, le matérialisme, le nationalisme, le communisme) sont éternelles et extratemporelles, des idées actualisées sélectivement dans l'histoire par chaque génération. Toutes les générations soumises à la précarité ont un caractère temporel, transitoire, mais les idées qu'elles embrassent et soutiennent sont sous le signe de la pérennité. C'est un fait qu'à l'intérieur d'une génération on distingue plusieurs positions spirituelles, parfois difficiles à concilier, mais toujours hiérarchisées. L'une d'elles a un caractère de dominant. Elle peut être identifiée avec des moyens statistiques, grâce à quelques indices d'une relative précision, tels les tirages et les éditions d'un livre, le succès d'un genre ou d'un style, le degré d'influence d'une oeuvre littéraire. Ce serait une erreur que de forcer la réduction à l'unité des positions spirituelles sur lesquelles se fixe une génération. Mieux vaut reconnaître la diversité de ces positions, relever les mérites de la plus répandue et définir la génération à partir de celle-ci. En 1934, lorsqu'il a publié cette étude, Mircea Vulcănescu voulait encore tenir sa génération loin de l'action politique, en la guidant vers une dominante spirituelle, dans la sphère de la culture et de la philosophie. Mais les évolutions ont été différentes, catastrophiques.

L'étude finit par l'observation que le marxisme, dont le principe explicatif est la réduction au facteur économique, a une contribution sans importance pour la clarification de la notion. L'auteur met la doctrine marxiste dans la catégorie des

soi-disant sociologies unilatérales auxquelles il reproche d'avoir expliqué la génération d'une manière exclusiviste, par l'influence d'un facteur unique (milieu, race, base économique etc.). Pour les marxistes, une génération se définit par la manière de participer à l'activité économique et par le degré d'intégration dans «la hiérarchie sociale existante». Les générations sont assimilées aux classes sociales et le conflit entre les générations est transposé en lutte de classe. Bref, le marxisme dissout le problème des générations en déterminisme économique et en idéologie politique.

Une première conclusion est que, dans toutes ses explications, Mircea Vulcănescu a donné une importance particulière à l'influence que l'événement historique et la situation sociale exercent sur les gens d'une époque. D'autre part, il a très bien compris que ni séparés et ni ensemble ces deux facteurs ne peuvent aboutir à la constitution d'une génération en l'absence du support biologique de l'âge, celui qui conditionne et module toute influence venue de l'histoire ou de la société. La génération est, avant tout, une catégorie d'âge, unie par un sentiment de solidarité et par des intérêts communs. Les différences d'ordre social, psychologique et culturel qui apparaissent entre deux générations voisines succèdent aux différences d'âge dont elles dépendent. Quoique le sens biologique de la notion soit le plus ancien et le plus durable, Mircea Vulcănescu signale deux cas où il paraît qu'il perd de son importance, concurrencé par les sens nouveaux. Dans les sociétés évoluées, comme sont celles européennes du vingtième siècle, où interviennent des critères de différenciation sociale sans corrélation directe et nécessaire avec l'âge. De même, l'âge a peu d'importance dans les époques de calme historique, quand les jeunes n'éprouvent pas le besoin de se renfermer dans le bastion de leur génération mais s'associent selon d'autres critères que celui biologique.

La deuxième conclusion est qu'un thème très sensible, tel celui du conflit entre les générations, n'a pas constitué de sujet de réflexion chez Mircea Vulcănescu. Il a été exprimé parfois, mais en termes vagues et d'une manière fugitive. En discutant du sens psychologique de la notion de génération, il a laissé échapper une phrase sur les dissensions entre les jeunes et les vieux, sans y insister. Je crois que son silence sur cette question a été un silence diplomatique. Car autrement, en affirmant partout que les différences entre les générations commencent à partir de l'âge et qu'elles deviennent plus profondes au niveau de l'expérience historique et sociale, Mircea Vulcănescu a toujours sous-entendu la possibilité du conflit intergénérationnel.

Devenue tout de suite un repère dans la réflexion indigène sur le problème, l'étude a créé une émulation et nous pouvons dire que toutes les contributions suivantes, jusqu'aux années 1950, quoiqu'elles aient évité la polémique directe et explicite, ont été écrites en guise de réponse et ont essayé d'assouplir la théorie un peu abrupte de Mircea Vulcănescu, formulée en 1934.

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THE REDEEMED LAND OF NARNIA AND ITS INTERNAL DYSTOPIAS

MARIUS CONKAN*

ABSTRACT. *The Redeemed Land of Narnia and Its Internal Dystopias.* This study aims to analyse the dystopian structures identified in C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, starting from the hypothesis that these structures are either metaphors of reason censoring the imagination, or, on the contrary, expressions of the evil and dark magic, through which certain characters try to control the miraculous world. Taking into consideration the fact that fantasy literature problematizes the relationship between the individual and the infinite and, to be precise, it transposes in concrete terms the archetypal conflicts and charters in finite, alternative spaces of mythical dimensions (for instance, the Paradise, the Inferno), the dystopian scenarios fulfil an essential role in the evolution of the characters that enter, travel, negotiate their place and redesign their identity inside the fantastic realm.

Keywords: C. S Lewis, *Narnia*, fantasy, dystopia.

REZUMAT. *Ținutul mântuit al Narniei și distopiile sale interne.* Acest studiu își propune să analizeze structurile distopice identificate în *Cronicile din Narnia*, de C. S. Lewis, pornind de la ipoteza că aceste structuri sunt fie metafore ale rațiunii care cenzurează imaginația, fie, dimpotrivă, expresii ale magiei rele și întunecate, prin care unele personaje încearcă să controleze lumea miraculoasă. Având în vedere că literatura *fantasy* problematizează relația dintre individual și infinit, mai exact transpune în termeni concreți conflicte arhetipale și catografiază în spații finite, alternative, dimensiuni mitice (spre exemplu Paradisul, Infernul), scenariile distopice îndeplinesc un rol esențial pentru evoluția personajelor care intră, călătoresc, își negociază locul și își reformulează identitatea în cadrul lumii fantastice.

Cuvinte cheie: C. S Lewis, *Narnia*, *fantasy*, antiutopie.

In *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Farah Mendlesohn investigates fantasy literature from the perspective of the strategies through which the reader is integrated in the fantastic world, since "the fantastic is an area of literature that is heavily dependent of the dialectic between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder"¹. With these rhetorical strategies in mind, Mendlesohn distinguishes four

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¹ Mendlesohn, Farah, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 2008, p. XIII.

categories of fantasy fictions, "determined by the means by which the fantastic enters the narrated world"²: the portal-quest fantasy, the immersive fantasy, the intrusion fantasy and the liminal fantasy. Out of these four categories, the portal-quest fantasy, which I shall refer to in this study, presupposes the interference of two topoi, one mundane and the other fantastic, the character entering the secondary world through a place of passage that separates the two *levels of reality*:

«In quest fantasy the protagonist goes from a mundane life – in which the fantastic, if she is aware of it, is very distant and unknown (or at least unavailable to the protagonist) – into direct contact with the fantastic, through which she transitions, to the point of negotiation with the world via the personal manipulation of the fantastic realm.»³

Transition and negotiation are essential in this type of fantasy fiction, since the character that enters in a magical realm is forced to negotiate her own identity in contact with supernatural beings and forces of evil that endanger the integrity of the fantastic world. Thus, we can talk about a double negotiation: on the one hand, the negotiation of the fantastic world, the author being determined "to describe and explain what is seen by the point of view character as she negotiates the world"⁴. On the other hand, we have the negotiation of the character's identity, who, leaving the mundane reality in which the fantastic is not accessible or known, will be transformed existentially according to principles that are different than the realist ones (magical, mythical etc.). In this scenario of negotiation, the forces of evil have the role of delaying the end of the character's formative journey and of endangering the balance of the fantastic world, forming a basic structure of the dialectics between paradise and dystopia, as it is formulated in the terms of fantasy literature.

In his book, *Fantasy. The Liberation of Imagination*, Richard Mathews defines fantasy literature as: "the literary genre of modern fantasy is characterized by a narrative frame that unites timeless mythic patterns with contemporary individual experiences. Its stories at their hearts are about the relationship between the individual and the infinite."⁵ The element of novelty of this definition is the interpretation of fantasy literature from the perspective of the relationship between the individual and the infinite. If the individual is represented by each character and reader who enter the fantastic realm (of the portal-quest type), the infinite signifies either transcendence⁶, or the mythical dimension, archetypal, which, through word and narration, is transposed into a finite space:

«In each model of antiquity we find expression of the human imagination dealing with powers of infinity. These models are the roots and archetypes of fantasy. We

² *Ibidem*, p. xiv.

³ *Ibidem*, p. xx.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. xx.

⁵ Mathews, Richard, *Fantasy. The Liberation of Imagination*, New York, Routledge, 2011, p. 1.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

sense a purpose in these early works to cast the infinite in finite terms, to translate overwhelming and eternal forces into down-to-earth language and physical presences, to use the imagination and the containment, or expression, of words to control and comprehend the overwhelming forces.»⁷

Without discussing in concrete terms the relationship between the individual and the infinite in what regards the fantastic, Eric S. Rabkin, in turn, analyses the mutations suffered by the myth from Antiquity and up to modern fantasy literature. The contemporary fantastic worlds could be "constructed as alternatives to the older fantastic worlds"⁸, and through these as alternatives to the real world. The myth is the red line connecting these types of fiction from a double perspective: on the one hand, modern fantastic worlds recreate the meaning of the mythical classic imaginary and, on the other hand, the myth and fantastic stories fulfil the same function of putting man's fears into stories and offering explanations for certain tense aspects of reality. Thus, the relationship between the individual and the infinite in fantasy fiction of the portal-quest type can be understood in the sense of the interaction of the character and the reader (so, of the individual) with archetypal (infinite) forces, interaction that can generate mythical conflicts with a purifying purpose since it transforms problems of the real world into metaphors. The metaphor of the reader's initiation is held by the symbolic level of the text, the fantasy narration being "dependent on the simultaneous belief in the text's literal truth and the understanding of a nonliteral, numinous dimension."⁹ In this respect, negotiation of the character and the fantastic world's identity, as strategy for completing the formative journey, is specific both to the literal conflict (between the character and the supernatural forces of evil), as well as to the symbolic conflict (between the character/reader and his own fears).

Fantasy literature of the 19th century was born as a counter-reaction to realism, being an alternative literary form to fictions of an "ordinary life": "the emergence of realism as the mainstream focus for the literary imagination created a clear dialectical pole against which the fantasy genre could counterthrust as a specialized mode of fiction."¹⁰ So, the imagination, as matrix of fantasy literature, is a counterpoint of reason modelling the realistic imaginary. I shall not insist on this process of extenuating the excess reason through the fantastic (due, mostly, to scientific revolutions), but I shall investigate, in the following, the dystopian constructions that appear in fantasy fictions and that, in my opinion, have their roots precisely in the conflict between the fantastical/magical and the rational. If "the gothic tale of terror, the first significant generic rebellion against the realistic novel, developed a clear identity of its own, playing fear and dark terror against the

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

⁸ Rabkin, Eric S., *Fantastic Worlds: Myths, Tales, and Stories*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 6-7.

⁹ Mathews, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 2-3.

light of reason"¹¹, the dystopian structures in fantasy literature are expressions of reason that fight to destroy the imagination in all its substrata (mythic, magic, symbolic). As we shall see in the analysis of C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, the dystopian constructions represent either metaphors of oppressive political systems, illustrating scenarios and topoi in which an evil character, master of a disenchanting land, is trying through subversive (thus rational) strategies to destroy a paradisiac realm, or forms of evil magic used by supernatural creatures that are in conflict with characters that protect their paradisiac realm using good magic. So, dystopian structures in fantasy literature are both expressions of ill reasoning, of the evil brain fighting to subdue imagination, as well as of black magic trying to control and destroy good magic.

Although "utopian fiction may be distinguished from fantasy by the fact that it usually sticks closer to the realistic «rules»"¹², the use of concepts pertaining to utopia and dystopia is effective in interpreting fantasy literature, with the remark that these concepts must be understood from within the fantastic world and not in relation to an external reality governed by realist laws. This is why, in fantasy fiction, utopia and dystopia contain, although not necessarily, abundant fantastic elements (witches, mythical supernatural creatures etc.), that differentiate them from the classical utopias and dystopias since "the ideal society must be seen in relationship to the realistic present, and most utopias imply there is a way to change our present, real society into a more ideal society by means other than magic"¹³. In fantasy literature, one can find dystopian structures when certain forces of evil try to invade/conquer a paradisiac, ideal, magical, utopian land (for instance, while Narnia is a fantastic utopia, Calormen or Charn are dystopian worlds that orbit around Narnia and that can contaminate the utopia by the intervention of forces of evil).

The relationship between the individual and the infinite, which is the basis of fantasy fictions, refers to the manner in which fantastic utopias and dystopias (as recreations of the meaning of mythical places) allow the initiation of a character that leaves the mundane (finite) reality, being involved in the archetypal (and infinitely replicable) conflict between the forces of good and those of evil. Furthermore, the essential conflicts of fantasy literature are rewritings of the classical Titanomachy, of the battles between the good gods and the bad ones, and the characters of the present world are made protagonists of this mythical battle that can be reinitiated for eternity. Thus, the individual is involved in an infinite/transcendent conflict, and the fears of modern man (as were those of the ancient man) and the tensions of the real world are imagined at a cosmic level.

Six out of the seven volumes of *The Chronicles of Narnia* (except for the book *The Horse and His Boy*) are portal-quest type fantasy fictions. Polly, Digory, Eustace, Jill and the four Pevensie brothers (Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy) enter,

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 5.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

through different places of passage (the wardrobe, the railway station, the painting etc.), into the magical land created by the lion Aslan. The reader explores Narnia through the eyes of these characters who come from a world where the fantastic is inaccessible, so that their experience will overlap with the reader's formative experience. Since the invisible world, from beyond the places of passage, must be made visible and created from its foundations, "the language of the portal-quest fantasy is often elaborate, but it is the elaboration of the anthropologist or the Pre-Raphaelite painter, intensely descriptive and exploratory rather than assumptive"¹⁴. Through the detailed description of the fantastic world's components (without the author destroying the mystery), the character and the reader succeed in negotiating their place and identity inside the other realm. The initial amazement to magic is substituted by the need to integrate one's self in the secondary world. While the negotiation of identity is set into motion, the primordial conflict between the inhabitants of Narnia, as an ideal space, and the forces of evil eager to transform Aslan's realm into a dystopia, is revealed to the character.

So, the option of the character entering the secondary world is oriented from the beginning towards the forces of good, and his function will be to protect the fantastic utopia. That is why, "in fantasy, details of settings and atmosphere are especially important because they have several functions, including spiritual significance"¹⁵. These functions are reflected especially through the manner in which the character that enters the secondary world is related to the utopian and dystopian structures of the fantasy fiction. This relationship first and foremost aims at a moral dimension inherent to every formative move, oriented towards that which is unanimously recognised as good (in the case of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, it is the Christian set of values).

As I have stated on another occasion, C. S. Lewis creates through *The Chronicles of Narnia* a fantasy scripture, alternative to the canonical Scriptures (the Old and New Testament). On the one hand, the seven books create a cosmos that contains its own genesis and apocalypse and on the other hand, through the lion Aslan as a Christic and Dionysiac character and through intertextual Biblical scenarios, Narnia is purified and saved from the intervention of evil¹⁶. In this study I shall not analyse in great detail the Christian, Greek and Celtic myths whose meanings were recreated by Lewis, but I shall insist on the dystopian elements which contaminate Narnia and interpose in the process of purification initiated by Aslan with the calling of the characters from the real world. "The highest function of fairy stories is eucatastrophe, or good catastrophe"¹⁷, that implies, in the case of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a continuous dialectics between death and resurrection, between the destruction of paradise and its recreation. The eucatastrophe is always

¹⁴ Mendlesohn, *op. cit.*, p. xix.

¹⁵ Sammons, Martha C., *War of the Fantasy Worlds*, Santa Barbara, Praeger, 2010, p. 120.

¹⁶ Conkan, Marius, "Imaginarul simbolic al Narniei", in *Steaua*, no. 9/2011, p. 26.

¹⁷ Sammons, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

generated by dystopian forces claiming the sacrifice of Aslan and the inhabitants of Narnia, since "this ideal land has, for the sake of adventure and dramatic conflict, to have evil in it, and it is presented as an unredeemed country waiting for Aslan's death and resurrection"¹⁸.

In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, one can identify three categories of dystopian constructions, according to the importance that the fantastic and magical have in their formation. The first category can include dystopias characterised by the use of black magic, inhabited by evil supernatural beings that destroy or intend to destroy Narnia. The second category refers to political dystopias, deprived of the magical and the fantastic and ruled over by tyrannical kings who install in Narnia an oppressive regime, using reason as an instrument of censorship of the magical. In the third category, one can incorporate the dystopias situated beyond the borders of Narnia that do not disturb its balance directly and that are either zones in which excess pragmatism works or mythical lands, populated by monstrous beings with which the rescuing characters of Narnia get in contact in their formative journey.

Before investigating the manner in which these dystopian structures contaminate Aslan's realm, triggering the eucatastrophe and the inner quest of the characters, I shall make several observations regarding the nature of the evil and magic in Lewis' fantasy novels. Evil can only cause an infection of the paradisiac world, in its attempt to dominate and take part in the tyrannical reformation of the ideal creation¹⁹. In the meantime, "evil in fantasy teaches us that we have an eternal element; it teaches us about ourselves and allows us to «experience» evil without actually having it affect us spiritually"²⁰. Then again, a dissociation between the good magic and the bad one must be made. While the first one is incantational and "harmonizes with the Bible through imitation"²¹, the second is invocational, since it calls evil spirits to control other people²². Thus, while good magic is an instrument of re-enchanting the characters and a 'treatment' to reinstall the destroyed paradise, the other one is a means of obtaining power, of manipulating the other and ruining every form of spirituality.

In the first of the three aforementioned types of dystopian construction, evil magic is the main form of subduing Narnia's inhabitants and obliterating Aslan's realm. In *The Magician's Nephew*, Jadis, the witch that turned Charn in an apocalyptic zone, is the one trying to ruin the "real" world, from which Polly and Digory come, as well as Narnia, created by Aslan's Orphic song. The birth of Narnia is a recreation of meaning of the biblical Genesis and Jadis, daughter of the demonical Lilith, first wife of Adam, is the one who, using the invocational magic,

¹⁸ Blount, Margaret, "Fallen and Redeemed: Animals in the Novels of C. S. Lewis", in C. S. Lewis, ed. Harold Bloom, New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 2006, p. 17.

¹⁹ Sammons, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 62.

wishes to control the newly created paradise. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the same Jadis, now the White Witch, had transformed Narnia into a frozen land, where any form of good magic is forbidden and the fantastic creatures made by Aslan (satyrs, wolves, foxes, centaurs, nymphs etc.) had been turned to stone. Outlawing Christmas is a mechanism of censoring magical thought and installing, in Narnia, a thought exclusively based on rationality. The White Witch, seconded by the wolf Maugrim, captain of the secret police, is a portrait of the dictator, the tyrant that changes the world into a dystopia, destroying every form of magic, myth and spirituality. Her schemes are based especially on manipulation and blackmail (see the manner in which she lures Edmond with Turkish delight to bring his brother and sisters to Narnia), strategies mostly adopted in a corrupt and excessively pragmatic society.

The second category of dystopian structures encompasses Calormen (from *The Horse and His Boy*), King Miraz's Narnia (from *Prince Caspian*) and the apocalyptic Narnia (from *The Last Battle*). The land of Calormen, populated by pragmatic, mercenary beings, is an ironical-reply to the world of the *Arabian Nights*²³, to the customs, language and atmosphere specific to the Arabs, to be precise, since it does not contain supernatural beings (Ifrit, jinn etc.) that are recurrent in Scheherazade's tales. The book *The Horse and His Boy* narrates the formative journey from Calormen to Narnia and Archen that Shasta makes through the desert (accompanied by Aravis and the talking horses, Bree and Hwin) to reclaim his former identity. With this briefly presented scenario, Lewis broadly recreates the meaning of the biblical Exodus²⁴, since Shasta symbolises Moses and Calormen can be viewed as a fallen Egypt, hybridised with the world of *Arabian Nights*. In *Prince Caspian*, the imaginary is built through the mixture of magical and fantastic elements with aspects of a socio-political nature²⁵. The role of the White Witch is played in this story by the Telmarine king, Miraz, Caspian's uncle, who killed his brother (King Caspian IX), usurping the throne which was on a hereditary line rightfully his nephew's, the future King Caspian X. With the intervention of the tyrant Mitraz, Narnia was demystified, the return of Aslan and of the Kings and Queens of Old being necessary to re-establish the paradisiac order and the magical living in the Telmarine-invaded land. The Telmarines transformed Narnia in a form of dystopia that differs from the one created by the White Witch by the fact that it is denied any magical reminiscence, being a strictly political dystopia, autistic to myth. In *Prince Caspian* the frame conflict is "between nostalgia and progress, [...] between what might be called preservationism (represented by the Old Narnians) and exploitation (King Miraz and his

²³ Adey, Lionel, "Children's Storyteller", in C. S. Lewis, ed. Harold Bloom, New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 2006, p. 169.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 173.

²⁵ Manlove, C. N., "The 'Narnia' Books", in C. S. Lewis, ed. Harold Bloom, New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 2006, p. 100.

followers)"²⁶. That is why Caspian embarks on a formative journey, not just to be made the rightful king of Narnia, but especially to regain his identity of an authentic Narnian. In other words, Caspian eventually succeeds in purifying himself from every substance of the Telmarine evil and achieves the status of "Son of Adam" and true heir of the mythical kings of Narnia. In the book *The Last Battle* we find out that, after dying in a train crash, Eustace and Jill enter a dystopian Narnia in which Aslan had not been seen for centuries. Shift, the monkey, takes control over Narnia, disguising Puzzle, the donkey, in a lion's hide to manipulate the talking animals and make them think Aslan had returned to punish them. In the dystopian scenario, Shift symbolises the image of the Antichrist²⁷, since he tries and even manages in a large measure to diminish the Narnian animals' faith in Aslan. Shift and the Calormenes hybridise Tash, the god of the Calormenes, envisaged as an evil creature, and Aslan in Tashlan, a false deity. That is why Tash himself descends to Narnia to punish the unfaithful Calormenes. At the end of the novel we discover that Aslan and Tash are two opposing divinities, with the difference that submission to Tash is, in fact, a form of belief in the lion. Thus, Lewis constructs Aslan as a singular divinity, understood as the Christian God.

Narnia's genesis (in *The Magician's Nephew*) and the apocalypse of Aslan's realm in the last book are built by Lewis symmetrically to suggest the alternative cosmos structure of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Furthermore, like the Christian Scriptures, the alternative scripture created by Lewis begins with a genesis and ends with an apocalypse. Celestial Narnia (a symbolic Kingdom of Heaven) constitutes an inner world, in comparison with which the terrestrial Narnia, visited by the characters of the "real" world, is merely a copy. In *The Last Battle* C. S. Lewis has a Platonic vision of the alternative worlds²⁸, introducing novel elements in comparison to the other books of *The Chronicles*. After dying in the train crash, the characters enter an eschatological Narnia, so that the travels from the terrestrial Narnia can be viewed as a form of initiation before the final integration in the celestial realm.

One can situate The Lone Islands, The House of Harfang and Underland in the third category of dystopias. In the fifth book of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* we discover that, after Lucy, Edmund and Eustace are taken on board of Caspian's ship, the first stop they make is on the Lone Islands, a dominion of Narnia created after the model of the anti-utopian islands of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Gumpas, the governor of these islands is a bureaucratic being, living among documents and neglecting the precarious conditions of his subjects. The gesture of the lords Bern and Drinian, to turn over the governor's document-filled desk, is equivalent with re-establishing the ancestral order in the

²⁶ Dickerson, Matthew; O'Hara, David, *Narnia and the Fields of Arbol*, Kentucky, The University Press of Kentucky, 2009, p. 52.

²⁷ Sammons, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

²⁸ Sammons, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

Lone Islands. The book *The Silver Chair* embodies two Greek myths: the descent into the Inferno and the abduction of Kore-Persephone by Hades. The House of Harfang, a land of giants, can be considered a reaction to the anti-utopian realms of *Gulliver's Travels*, but could also be a mythological reference to Ulysses and the land of the Cyclops (feeding on human flesh). Beneath this realm lies Underland, ruled by the witch who abducted prince Rilian, holding him prisoner in her underground castle. With Underland, Lewis makes reference to the Greek Inferno, with the difference that Hades is substituted by the evil witch. In fact, Kore-Persephone's myth is recreated 'in reverse', since prince Rilian plays the part of the daughter of Demeter and Zeus.

These dystopian scenarios are overshadowed by the Christic image of the lion Aslan, whose mythical profile is hybridised with Dionysian elements, thus *The Chronicles of Narnia* create a mixture of Christian and Greek archetypes. Aslan is the initiator of the characters that enter his miraculous realm, and for whom he creates an alternative identity, being eventually integrated in Narnia as an eschatological paradise. He does so either by intervening to re-establish the magical dimension in a world sickened by a cancer called reason and governed by tyrannical beings, or by fighting, with the aid of good magic, against supernatural forces yearning to control Narnia by means of evil magic. Through the numerous conflicts narrating at a cosmic scale the eternal fears of man, formulated in terms of eucatastrophes (the death and resurrection of Aslan, the destruction of terrestrial Narnia and the creation of the celestial one), through faith in imagination's power to reinvest, with a purifying purpose, the archetypal matter, C. S. Lewis redefines in *The Chronicles of Narnia* the relationship between the individual and the infinite. He does so and more: he adds an essential component – the insight that, in a world where the fantastic is unknown, one can always discover a place of passage, even in the shape of a wardrobe, through which one can enter into an alternative universe, imbued with the entire human spirituality.

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TALES OF DYSTOPIA FROM THE WEIRD WILD WEB: WEB 2.0 AND THE PARTICIPATORY DELUGE CULTURE

RUXANDRA BULARCA*

ABSTRACT. *Tales of Dystopia from the Weird Wild Web: Web 2.0 and the participatory deluge culture.* In the recent years, the Web 2.0 umbrella-concept has started producing all sorts of ripples in the cultural landscape, some of which turned towards a dystopian color scheme. This paper is looking to emphasize upon the fact that seeing the web 2.0 as an end and not a means to something else can create its own implosion turning it into a massive cultural dystopia. Given the fact that content is there to be absorbed, reflected upon, shared and judged by human actors renders the content deluge issue even more complex. The need for content curation requires an urgency directly proportional with the motivation of establishing value and quality regarding types of web 2.0 content. What this study initializes an enquiry into the dystopian potential of “the machine” called Web 2.0 and is proposing/proposes a new figure of an interactive critic 2.0 who has as a task the establishing of excellence and quality in the heavy flow of data that invades the Web. This study therefore raises some questions about the role of the interactive critic as the solution for the seemingly diminishing role of traditional criticism as the incubator of gatekeepers of culture in the age of web 2.0.

Keywords: Web 2.0, participation, establishing excellence and quality, criticism, interactive paradigm, criticism 2.0.

REZUMAT. *Narațiuni distopice despre strania și neîmplânzită rețea – Web 2.0 și diluviul culturii participative.* În ultimii ani, conceptul-umbrelă Web 2.0 a început să tulbure peisajul cultural într-o manieră distopică. Această lucrare caută să sublinieze faptul că a privi această rețea 2.0 ca scop și nu ca mijloc pentru a ține un anumit scop poate crea propria sa implozie transformând respectiva rețea într-o distopie culturală majoră. Datorită faptului că toate corpurile informaționale fac obiectul unei absorbții culturale, ale unei reflecții, împărtășiri și judecăți performate de actanții umani, problema diluviului informațional devine din ce în ce mai complexă. Nevoia curatorie legată de conținut devine presantă direct proporțional cu motivația de a stabili valori și grade de calitate în ceea ce privește tipurile de conținut Web 2.0. Studul de față dorește să ancheteze potențialul distopic al acestei mașini intitulate Web 2.0 și propune o nouă figură, cea a criticului interactiv 2.0. Această entitate are sarcina de a stabili excelența și calitatea în acest nestăpânit flux de date care invadează zilnic rețeaua. Lucrarea va ridica astfel întrebări cu privire la rolul acestui critic interactiv ca soluție pentru aparenta diminuare a rostului criticii tradiționale ca incubator cultural în era Web 2.0.

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Cuvinte cheie: Web 2.0, participare, stabilirea excelenței și a calității, critică, paradigma interactivă, critica 2.0.

„The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.[...]
Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”¹

T.S Eliot, Opening Stanza of *Choruses from the Rock*

In June 2008 Chris Anderson posted an article on *Wired Magazine* website called *The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete*². According to this article the modern era of “petabyte” information and ‘cloud’ computing on the web is bypassing the “hypothesize, model, test” procedure of science. It bases its argument for abandoning the scientific method hence formal modeling, because scientific theorizing simply cannot cope with the deluge of data.

"Out with every theory of human behavior, from linguistics to sociology. Forget taxonomy, ontology, and psychology. Who knows why people do what they do? The point is they do it, and we can track and measure it with unprecedented fidelity [...] the numbers speak for themselves."[...] Google's founding philosophy is that we don't know why this page is better than that one: If the statistics of incoming links say it is, that's good enough. No semantic or causal analysis is required.[...]Correlation supersedes causation, and science can advance even without coherent models, unified theories, or really any mechanistic explanation at all. There's no reason to cling to our old ways. It's time to ask: What can science learn from Google?"

Although this article speaks of the data plethora, the end of theory as we know it and the intoxicating amount of information it raises a question that can be extended to information content as well, more precisely the deluge of user generated content spread massively across the Web 2.0 via participatory practices.

Data can be comfortably molded into graphs as colorful and playful statistics. But what happens when you transgress the formal boundary, when data providers are individuals and not machines and you look at participatory content as a way of creating communities and intelligent ‘hives’?

¹ <http://www.westminster.edu/staff/brennie/wisdoms/eliot1.htm> (last access: 20.09.2012)

² http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/magazine/16-07/pb_theory (last access: 20.09.2012)

You get a charming and balmy feeling of being connected to the world. But this feeling also has its downside. As a human ‘operator’ that has to navigate, triage and eventually make use of the consumed content you find yourself tickling a dark side of the Internet and you realize that the sunny fields in which you are serenely clicking around are in fact filled with monstrous and infinitely looping caves and informational quick sands that result in sudden rushes of network anxiety and a general dystopian somaesthesia.

Given the fact that content is there to be absorbed, reflected upon, shared and judged by human actors renders the content deluge issue even more complicated. The need for content curation gains more urgency with the motivation of establishing value and quality regarding types of web 2.0 content.

What this study is set to enquire is the dystopian potential of “the machine” called Web 2.0 and suggests a new figure of an interactive critic who has as a task the establishing of excellence and quality in the heavy flow of data that invades the Web. This study is therefore proposing the interactive critic as the flesh live solution for the seemingly diminishing role of traditional criticism as the incubator of gatekeepers of culture in the age of web 2.0.

Web 2.0 and participatory practices

In the recent years, the Web 2.0 umbrella–concept has started producing all sorts of ripples in the cultural landscape, some of which turned towards a dystopian color scheme. Coined by Tim O’Reilly³ in 2003, the Web 2.0 continues to present itself as an attempt to denominate a natural direction in the course of the evolution of the Internet. The large palette of software and technologies that had the “social” particle added somewhere in the name, with their steady production and their rapid spread, caused the occurrence of a new type of user profile heavily interested in generating, sharing and distributing symbolic content. These entities alone were considered sufficient for spreading the general belief that the web and the network as a whole entered a new phase paradigm-wise.

The individual's ability to submit content to the internet so that it may be reached by a wide audience have enabled websites like Wikipedia, Flickr or Facebook, as well as blogs to encourage the submission of a flood of content. They increase steadily as long as a user can post content through the benevolence of his Internet browser. These websites also serve to create online communities for the production of content. These communities, as well as their web services, have been largely labeled as part of Web 2.0.

The relationship between Web 2.0 tools and participatory culture is more than just material and as the mindsets and skillsets of participatory practitioners

³ Tim O’Reilly about the Web 2.0: <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html> (last access 20. 09.2012)

have been increasingly employed, people are increasingly likely to exploit new tools and technology in 2.0 ways.

To explain further the emergent dystopian implications of this setting it might be useful to first refer to the difference between the structure of the mass-media utopia and the interactive media as a Web 2.0 dystopia.

The mass-media built a producer-consumer (of content) utopia where the producer made the content and the consumer was supposed to behave, take and consume, more or less whole heartedly, the product that was put in front of him – with the alternative choice of refusing that particular product altogether. The gatekeepers of culture had the role of triaging and connecting audiences with quality works and to help create target audiences for these works by building the necessary theoretical instruments for grasping the meaning of those particular works as was the case throughout the 20th century with most of the avant-garde movements.

This mass-media utopia was eventually exposed as being quite far from a *promised land* – a consumer society that encouraged social and political apathy – by the writings of the so-called Frankfurt School, mainly Horkheimer and Adorno (1944)⁴ and their critique of mass culture. They argued that the industry was selling a package of ideas and beliefs so that people no longer had to think since "the product prescribes every reaction by signals" through a profusion of sameness via sets of interchangeable details.

Even in the case of the first Web 1.0 sites and content display forms that emerged in the 90' the situation did not suffer much altering; they took the shape and constraints of a 'showcase' or a 'bulletin board' to support their economic and business oriented usage. Despite this fact, in the recent years this already consolidated trend – social media - began to develop new features, shyly latent in the previous phase (that had to make do with bandwidth restrictions and single user strategies).

The network thus became a 'conversation' or a virtual agora that began feeding the need for individual expression and affirmation and adding value regarding forms of participation, collaboration and information sharing. The user status changed from being solely a consumer to being the producer of content as well, a bidirectional dynamic unprecedented in consequence, building up to collective and hive 'intelligence'.

Digital media have blurred relations between the once clearly demarcated realms of producers and consumers. As these digital technologies have become networked and entered a state of high connectivity and process that is roughly a decade old, we have seen the fast emergence of new social media types that have enabled new forms of collaboration, and they provide what Pierre Lévy describes as a 'collective intelligence'⁵. Henry Jenkins calls this a paradigm shift from static

⁴ <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1944/culture-industry.htm> (last access: 20.09.2012).

models to process oriented dynamics and the process takes the name of convergence⁶.

Bruns coins the term produsage as a community collaboration process where participants can get access in order to share “content, contributions, and tasks throughout the networked community”⁷. He describes the empowerment of users as different from the typical “top-down mediated spaces of the traditional mediaspheres”⁸. Produsage occurs when the users are the producers and vice versa, creating a bottom-up structure. The contribution of each participant is based on a principle of inclusivity; each member contributes valuable information for another user to use, add to or edit. In a community of cultural consumers, collaboration through produsage can provide access to content for everyone, the main point being that every participant has a form of authority over it.

Vincent Miller in his work, *Understanding Digital Culture*, argues that the lines between producer and consumers are blurred. By referring to Bruns' idea of "prosumer," Miller is pointing out that "with the advent of convergent new media and the plethora of choice in sources for information, as well as the increased capacity for individuals to produce content themselves, this shift away from producer hegemony to audience or consumer power would seem to have accelerated, thus eroding the producer-consumer distinction"⁹.

A "Prosumer" is the result of a strategy increasingly employed to encourage feedback between producers and consumers (prosumers), "which allows for more consumer influence over the production of goods."

The Web 2.0 common user continues to develop under the same set of participative conditions, shaping new practices for innovative usage of the network far beyond the initial commercial use moving away from a solipsistic monologue and entering an age of unlimited conversation. Arguments for this approach fed the feverish minds of neo-Marxist movements and militants for freedom of expression in the past years. However, I will not discuss the socio-political implications of such empowerment measures as the focus of this study is addressing the consequences these types of development are implying for the Web in the Web 2.0 paradigm and the dystopian view of this pattern.

These past years digital humanities scholars (Jenkins, 2008) are persistently drawing attention to the interactive side of media rendering the mass-media utopia obsolete.

⁶ “[...] a shift in the ways we think about our relations to media, that we are making that shift through our relations with popular culture”, “the skills we acquire through play may have implications for how we learn, work, participate in the political process and connect with other people around the world” (Jenkins, 2008, pp. 22, 23).

⁷ Bruns, 2008, p.14.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ Miller, 2011, p.87.

Dystopian features of the participatory deluge or the politics of amateurism

So what exactly looks like the dystopian potential of this so-called Web 2.0? The shifts from centrality to dispersion, from unidirectional mass media to multifaceted collective intelligence and data visualization of feeds lead to a sort of cyberpunk hubris where Web 2.0 “mass collaboration”¹⁰ generates an overwhelming quantity of information.

The common dystopian features on the Web 2.0 revolve around the fact that cyberspace will dissolve all known categories, will render obsolete secular models and will fundamentally change everything known to man, and this unknown seems to engulf itself in stormy clouds of fear in this non-hierarchical social design. In this regard, the Web 2.0 world is set to create a “digital enclosure”¹¹ (Andrejevic, 2007) promoting a sort of spiritual release.

If we choose to view the Web through a religious filter, when we yield it our personal need for transcendence we begin to lack an objective view regarding it. The purpose of technology is in fact to connect people. If the Web is the primary actor in this equation we reduce its dynamics to a simple collection of inanimate software with no higher purpose. The Web 2.0 represents – participation, virtual communities and amateurism – concepts that in themselves are good and unarguably enlightening.

The critics of Web 2.0 emphasize these dystopian features, both articulated in great depth. The first is Jason Lanier, whose article entitled *Digital Maoism*, published in the scientific magazine *Edge: The Third Culture* in July 2006 showed skepticism against the epistemic validity of a collaborative project like Wikipedia. Lanier served it as an example to bring to light a background issue: the appropriateness of “laissez-faire” of the “unskilled masses”, in the words of Lanier, and the alleged risks this could entail.

Recently, Andrew Keen, in his book *The Cult of the Amateur* (2007), takes this issue up in similar terms, pointing out the harmful effects of Web 2.0 as a predictable cultural devaluation and as a result of the incorporation of the average citizen (here, as an amateur user) in the field of production of information and content. Both positions share a common criticism based on the set that could be synthesized in a few lines as follows.

The *non-equivalency* clause between amateur and expert states that the individual in the web 2.0 is now available to perform tasks previously entrusted to

¹⁰ Tapscott & Williams, 2007.

¹¹ „The somewhat dystopian theme is that people will not only pay to participate in the spectacle of their own manipulation, but that, thanks in part to the promise of participation, they will ratify policies that benefit powerful elites and vested interests at their own expense, as if their (inter)active support might somehow make these vested interests their own”. (iSpy: Surveillance and Power in the Interactive Era, p. 243)

specialized bodies of proven competence. Although optimistic in ethical terms, they appear harmful, "flattening" the cultural. Making an issue of cultural production of "amateurism" is to bring it to a loss of quality and value that result in loss of the possibility of tracking innovation. The knowledge versus opinion argument shows that epistemologically there is no equality between qualified voices and *the unskilled*. The dividing line between opinion and knowledge goal becomes so dangerously blurred and leads to vagueness, inaccuracy or directly to falsehood.

The dynamics of creative work argument states that the Web 2.0 is changing the economics of culture – and it's doing it in a way that may well restrict rather than expand our choices.

Averting dystopia or the role of the interactive critic in curating prosumers

Mark Poster's¹² comparison of trust on the Internet to that of guilds in the early days of the printing press makes for an interesting position. Before the press, replication was not standardized. An audience's trust lay in the guild and not in the author; the audience did not know this author face-to-face, but they certainly knew the guild members and guild master. Trust soon shifted to authors with the expectation of precise printing that mediated connection to an author. A similar mistrust of the author as the one that precedes the precision of the printing press exists today on the Internet, Poster argues, in which trust is invested in the collective and not the individual. This idea makes fair sense when we see the strong reputation some of the underground or indie-oriented type websites have garnered, such as Metacritic, Rottentomatoes or collective blogs whose reputation is not built on or around an individual writer, and thus the site earns a collective reputation in the same way that printed periodicals do.

The purpose of the so-called traditional criticism was the avoidance of micro-canons and solipsist cultural enclaves with disregard for the idea promoted by the Web 2.0 that consuming is criticizing. In the Web 2.0 online presence is made known through reaction *id est* participating in the informational flux, a mandatory and basic condition for existence.

Participation seems to have negative effects on cultural innovation because judgment becomes preference and personal micro-canon. Hence we gain a potential loss of an avant-garde because innovation gets trapped in the noise. A criticism 2.0 (and an interactive one) might help refocus, bring to order cultural innovation beyond the formal scope of participation. We can get excited about how people connect and participate but let us figure out what to do with it and how to put it to good use.

The review mentality is not equivalent to the criticism mentality but criticism in the age of Web 2.0 is no longer an elitist one. The allegations according to

¹² Mark Poster: http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/3.11/poster.if_pr.html (last access 20.09.2012).

which criticism is being lost to the review under the ethos of participation, and that the consumption mentality of reviews encourages the treatment of art and entertainment as merely means to the ends of pleasure, thereby eliminating the appreciation and contemplation of experimental and avant-garde works function in a traditional setting where the loss of criticism might mean a loss of innovation and of avant-garde movements.

Hence, what could be the role of the critic in web 2.0? How can one establish quality criteria in the noise of information fed to your laptop or mobile screen?

During the present time Twitter journalism, for instance, is the raw and unmediated preferred source of news in spite of the refined articles of New York Times. The critic held an intermediary position in mass-media but in the interactive media his voice is lost in the crowd.

In this data deluge there is a greater need for criticism and filtering than before (mass-media). After all, "criticism" is everywhere, from the stream of comments underneath YouTube videos or newspapers articles, to the multitude of blogs, to customer reviews on every commercial retailer's website. One way to sort out some of the confusion is to distinguish between recommendation, endorsement and criticism.

Many critics of participatory culture argue that there is no accountability online which paradoxically made the user to be more aware of all their sources of information.

Web 2.0 technologies have made cultural criticism a dialog instead of a broadcast, and with the proper education, we should all be able to work together and navigate this new landscape. This study is proposing the idea of an interactive critic, a type of critic 2.0 that is the new gatekeeper in a privileged position that conveys the regular user/consumer a new faculty.

Cultural criticism ceased to yield to an oligarchical structure and shifted into an opinionated abundance of so-called reviewers. "Everyone's a critic" is a saying that has gone quite literal in the New Media landscape. This paper argues further that criticism is required more than ever to be on its toes but the curation and criticism should shift from content to prosumers.

The figure of the critic reemerges once again as an essential pillar of the participatory culture. I believe that participatory culture does not make the critic obsolete, but instead makes him or her occupy a new role in society. The traditional role of the critic is to guide individuals in navigating the popular culture landscape, to help the public make an informed decision regarding cultural products and investing one's time in them. Now that the public has taken on this role itself, where does this leave the critic? The solution might lie in the curation of the opinionated voices, working together and sharing information. The critic gives in-depth information, while the so-called amateur gives a wide variety of opinions and novel ideas.

The “expert” submerges deep into the subject with their wealth of knowledge and “expertise”, while the amateurs provide a variety of opinions and valid side-viewpoints. I think that one does not exclude the other and both can form a more informed public dialog. Both can inform the public, in-depth and widespread, on the status of the cultural landscape. Everyone is an expert on something, and no one is an expert on everything. By pooling as an ultimate solution this type of orthogonal expertise, we can devise a collective judgment and taste. Both positions, expert critic and amateur, are beneficial to our cultural development, and are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The “cult” of the amateur does not make the expert obsolete. Each role holds a specific purpose. Each provides a different experience to the user. By reading both, the user gets a better overview of opinions and the topic.

The issue that is really brought to the forefront in the age of the new critic is the importance of media education. In the digital landscape, where accountability is hard to enforce, users need to learn to do their own research and to figure out whom to trust. We should not trust an “expert”, whether they are a blogger or a New York Times’ acclaimed voice.

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A PHOTO CAMERA, A RADIO AND A HIGH-TECH MECHANISM USED TO ERASE MEMORIES, OR HOW TO DECEIVE REALITY IN ROBIN WILLIAMS' MOVIES

SIMONA ARDELEAN*

ABSTRACT. *A photo camera, a radio and a high-tech mechanism used to erase memories, or How to deceive reality in Robin Williams' movies.* We build reality whilst transforming it through the means of memory. This is common knowledge. What happens though when we intervene upon memory in a brutal way? When we try to change the past by projecting in it those things we would have liked to happen; when the world in which we live becomes one chance to overcome, through imagination, the closure of a world based on suicide and despair? We chose for this study three movies that we find to be most relevant for the given topic: *Jakob the Liar* (1999), directed by Peter Kassovitz, the story of a Polish Jew during the Second World War, who manages to save his community with the help of a non-existent radio, *One Hour Photo* (2002), directed by Mark Romanek, a movie in which a character named Sy Parrish is fantasizing about being the favourite "Uncle Sy" in a family he is obsessed with and *The Final Cut* (2004), directed by Omar Naim.

Keywords: film, Robin Williams, transformed reality, One Hour Photo, Jakob the Liar, The Final Cut, reflection, ideal.

REZUMAT. *Un aparat de fotografiat, un radio și un instrument de tehnologie înaltă folosit pentru a șterge memoria, sau Cum să înșeli realitatea în filmele lui Robin Williams.* Construim realitatea pe măsură ce o transformăm prin intermediul memoriei. E un lucru care se știe. Totuși, ce se întâmplă când intervenim asupra memoriei într-un mod brutal? Atunci când încercăm să schimbăm trecutul proiectând în el lucruri care ne-ar fi plăcut să se întâmple, ce se întâmplă când lumea în care trăim devine o șansă uriașă de a învinge, prin imaginație, o altă lume caracterizată de suicid și disperare? Am ales pentru acest studiu trei filme pe care le considerăm relevante pentru tema dată. Filmele sunt: *Jakob Mincinosul* (1999), regizat de Peter Kassovitz, povestea unui evreu polonez cel de-al Doilea Război Mondial care a reușit să-și salveze comunitatea cu ajutorul unui radio ficțional, *O fotografie la minut* (2002), regizat de Mark Romanek, un film în care personajul cu numele Sy Parrish visează că a deveni unchiul favorit al unie familii de care este obsedat și *Ultimul Montak* (2004), regizat de Omar Naim.

Cuvinte cheie: film, Robin Williams, realitate transformată, One Hour Photo, Jakob the Liar, The Final Cut, reflecție, ideal.

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It is more than apparent that besides having Robin Williams as the lead actor, the following movies *Jakob the Liar* (1999- directed by Peter Kassovitz), *One Hour Photo* (2002- directed by Mark Romanek) and *The Final Cut* (2004- directed by Omar Naim) share also the attempt to measure the degree to which mental images can function as valid description of a plain surrounding world. In one form or another, all three of them deal with a form of perceptual decision which is supposed to save an alienated existence. While the first movie, *Jakob the Liar* uses a non-existent radio to re-create an overwhelming reality, the other two use a photo camera and a sort of futuristic memory shredding mechanism, hence visual means of projecting it.

Kassovitz's movie opens with the image of a man facing a wall, but not in Magritte's style. He gazes up at a tree whose branches can be seen behind it, but which is inaccessible due to some closure reasons which we find out in the following moments of the movie when solitude overlies the narrator's voice while describing the past. The memories are fenced and all hope seems to be lost but Jakob will invent it and save the doomed community.

It is a providential newspaper carried by the wind that triggers the action of the movie and a melancholic man starts chasing it in order to find out some news about the world whose embrace is denied to him. The space he inhabits is zoomed in while he tries to grasp the floating newspaper and it reveals itself to us as a grey, amorphous mass of demolished buildings. Moreover, it seems devoid of any flickering individuality and reduced to a zero rhythm of life.

The chase makes the man forget about time and he is caught outside after the curfew and thus taken to a German head-officer. This, however, proves to be a fortunate event because, while waiting for the commandant, he gets to hear some news on the radio. The news is vital for the inhabitants of the ghetto who are living in a deep state of despair. Furthermore, he gets another secret to add to the one concerning the radio when, on his way home, he meets a little girl, Lina, who asks for his help. Not being allowed to hide anyone, Jakob is at first afraid to do that, but finally this kind-hearted character takes the risk.

Returned to the ghetto, the pancake shopkeeper confides to a friend about the information on the radio. Rumors begin. Everyone is convinced that Jakob owns a radio and not that he accidentally listened to one. Whereas he is partially guilty of that because he chooses to use and thus reveal the information in order to save an imprisoned fellow from suicide, once started, the rumor snowballs into something that cannot be stopped. Everyone starts vying for his company hoping that he will reveal more. Although he tries to deny everything he soon finds himself forced to make up stories for the others. Their craving for hope is desperate and he projects a reality that is supposed to comfort them. Stories abandon logic and the emotional roller coaster cannot hear anything else than the obsessive question about what is to be invented for the following day. The tone is ironic and there are quite a few good comic lines that will leave the audience in splits.

Underneath the ironic tone and comic lines runs a deeper, serious current. A whole universe starts to exist in the mind of the men behind the ghetto walls. There are jazz concerts and shotguns, Russian music, concerned Americans from Chicago and encoded messages transmitted through the final result of a soccer game.

Furthermore, speaking about what is gained and lost, there are a couple of touching scenes: a professor living in the same ghetto destroys his real radio that he, so far, kept hidden. The professor keeps repeating the lines he has learned for his King Lear's performance: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport." Fear defeats him, but not the others. It is a matter of destiny but not acceptance without a fight.

The imaginary radio becomes real and proves to be more than enough to re-vitalize the human mind. Its "existence" radiates optimism and creates a sort of artificial soap bubble. The Spanish name of the movie *Ilusiones de un mentiroso* or the Brazilian one, *Um Sinal de Esperança* seem to us more appropriate. The world Jakob builds is a world of tangled illusions where the lies are converted to temporary truths. They are also soothing and projective, bringing closer an expected ending. More importantly they speak about how relative everything is: "Here's a book about Africa. You read this, you'll forget you're hungry." plus "Technically, they're retreating. But strategically, they're advancing." or even the funny hint on his personality: "Jakob Heym: My name is Jakob Heym./ Miss Esther: The Jakob Heym? I imagined you much taller. / Jakob Heym: So did I."

The second significant scene that caught our eye is the one at the end where there are a multitude of suitcases abandoned in the street. They are perfect symbols for no hopes but also for unexpected paths. The viewers are let to believe that Russians indeed saved the prisoners but the information comes from the narrative voice of an incurable optimist and a "liar", Jakob, who is already dead. The layers of uncertainty are doubled, but we should not be surprised. We live in a world of illusions and relativity. There is a measurable smaller distance between tick and tock rather than the one between tock and tick, the sea seems to burst with colours at sunrise and we are ready to believe that there is a man in the moon or that we can lose weight through a miraculous diet says Jacques Ninio in *The Science of Illusions* (Jacques Ninio, 2001: p.5). The author also differentiates between the physical illusory perception and the mental one. The movies that we intend to discuss deal strictly with mental reconfigurations. Yet the demarcation proceeds with the biased states such as hunger, emotion or expectation which, in turn, are responsible for the perceptual decision. Then, it goes on with choices brought on by ambiguity of display and thus by misinterpretation (J.O. Robinson, 1998: p.16).

If *Jakob the Liar* is oriented towards past and history the second movie we have chosen to analyze is a story of modern times. *One Hour Photo* (2002) directed by Mark Romanek tells the story of blank spaces and lack of emotions:

Like painting and graphics, photography creates an illusionary image of a flat plane. However, what is specific about photography's pictorial language is that

there is a special relationship with reality [...] the specific relationship is known as the photographic paradox, that is, in the same (photographic) image a large similarity with reality and at the same time an illusionary alienation of that reality is present. If factors as time and movement are absent, the alienation is increased. (Henk Slager, 1997: p.126)

In fact, the movie opens with a line about the adequacy, and photos as mirrors of to real life: "Family photos depict smiling faces [...] People take photos of their happy moments in their life. One looking through our photos would conclude that we have led a joyous, leisurely existence free of tragedy. No one ever takes a photo of something they want to forget." Hence photos are seen as a self-deceiving mechanism. People would rather save their family albums before anything else when it comes to a house on fire. In that way a sort of projected eternity is at hand, ready to be grasped and held tightly. A family album transforms itself into a cluster of imaginary bubbles filled with happiness. *I was happy long time ago, so long ago that I can't remember why and how come, but the fact that I am smiling to the photographer is evidence enough* is what a photo seems to say. If for Jakob it was hope that made the world go round, for regular people the same is to be attained through an abstract concept of happiness

The main character of the movie, Seymour Parrish (*See more?*), is obsessed with the Yorkin family. They seem to be, to the outer world, unbelievably happy. Working as an employee of a one-hour photo lab, Sy is a very lonely man. Loneliness is one of the reasons why he gets emotionally attached to this suburban family and often fantasizes of being the uncle of the family. He gets to know their life by heart each time the family drops off photos that are to be printed. But when the manager discovers that he makes an extra set of prints for himself everything changes.

Now there are some details in the movie that are impossible to ignore. We talked about spaces and how they are perceived. Mrs. Yorkin, Nina, transforms her living space into a much too perfect magazine cover display. She does that because investing in architectural design and accessories proves to be a temporary solution for her neglected emotional needs. Sy's home is also the result of his maniacal need for cleanness. Everything is spotless and white in a minimal yet allusive call for attention. In both houses time is suspended but in a different manner. On one hand, there is the laughter of the child and the photos to supply the desired marital happiness and on the other hand there is the broken windshield of a car one of the characters drives symbolically used to show how the world actually functions. People perceive the world through translucent media, not seeing the cracked detail but the global illusion of clear, if far-lying space in front of them.

Photos only speak about a reassuring thought that events they captured were there, existed without a doubt and were important enough for the others so as to be taken a photo of them. For that reason, Sy goes unwanted and unexpected into the family's home and enjoys watching their TV, sitting on their sofa and wearing their clothes. It is the small things that matter and the vision of the kid,

Jake, seems to be closer than anything else to a secure space of which Sy has always dreamed. Jake himself takes photos of toys, furniture and all sorts of unimpressive things we feel familiar with. They are in total contrast with what Sy, in the final scene confesses about his traumatized childhood: it was full of indecent pictures that an abusive father was asking for.

There are a few witty hints on how to understand the movie: Yoshi Araki, Sy's helper from the lab bears, in fact, that name of a famous Japanese photographer and so does Danny Lyon the cop who is a notorious American photographer. The actor who plays the police officer was a police officer in real life and Sy, trying to escape from the prosecutors enters by mistake in a conference room where the discussed topic is optics. It is all about framing in both senses the reality.

Whereas Sy lives in a continuous emotionally devoid present, the main character from in *The Final Cut* (2004), directed by Omar Naim, Alan Hackman, played by the same Robin Williams, lives in an utopian future where memories fully belong to people to such an extent that they, if willing, can permanently erase them.

The one that is able to materialize all this is a person called "the cutter" and his role is to re-build the emotional lives of his clients. Only the moral, beautiful and safe memories are kept. No matter what a person did in his/her life the way people will remember him/her after death is the way in which the loving and paying family wants to. Guilt, altogether with remorse is erased and we find ourselves trapped in a perfectly Dostoevskian world where everything is allowed. "The cutter" acts as a sort of censor but also as a guardian of secrets having total access to some of the most private thoughts which can be at times, overwhelming. During the movie "the cutter" is defined through analogies: he performs a rite like a priest does, but dealing with corpses he can also be compared to a medical examiner or a taxidermist. Sitting at a desk he sees simultaneously a great number of recordings that offer the same dispersed information like a jigsaw. He stores the information he gets in special folders tagged by age, diet, career, preferences almost in the same way the modern neuromarketing acts.

Not everybody agrees to what he does. There are people protesting out in the streets crying that it is not fair to make saints out of murderers and that it is a crime to deprive people of certain painful things that happened to them. Not everything is perfect but the sorrow, the struggle is part of our existence as well and defines us as individuals. Once understood, the mistakes we have made transform themselves into lessons and points of reference for future paths we choose to follow. Even if erased from the memory the deeds remain and people find themselves entrapped in an illusory world, living an artificial life, governed by a constant lie that insists on them being "happy". Still, to be completely honest this movie is just a *mise en abyme* of a permanent tendency of humans to exorcise a guilt complex. The Jewish tradition, for example, has the following funeral ceremony: money is put on the eyes of the dead person and salt and bread are given to a person who, by eating them will take on himself own the sins of the deceased.

The cutter does more or less the same thing, by means of visual Photoshop intervention upon memories.

The technology that makes the control of minds possible is based on a chip called Zoe, a chip that sometimes shows its own flaws. It is only then that Allan Hackman sees the poetry of the human mind. The chip records fragments of dreams and hopes, surreal veils of floating fish and swings in the breeze. One of his friends tells him: "You've seen so much life and somehow you've missed the point of it" and what she says proves to be the tragic essence of his life.

He is constantly haunted by one childhood memory, a terrible accident that he considers himself guilty of. Hence his life is tormented and the only solution he can think of is to go back to the roots of his nightmare and explore his one edited life. The result proves to be unexpected. The blood that he remembered was only spilt paint, his friend lives and the memories were deceiving, incomplete glimpses of emotionally charged past times.

The movie ends with the image of a new cutter, editing Allan's life.

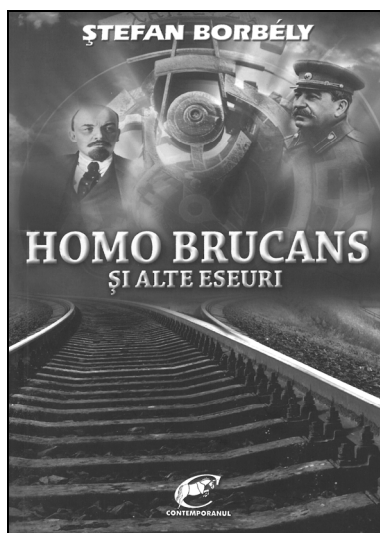
Robin Williams is not a comedy actor even if recent roles classified him as such. He carefully chooses his roles and most of them deal with illusions, memories and surreal worlds. It is nevertheless true that some of his choices are playful and speak about children and their pure and adventurous way of living their lives, but the great majority shows his interest for the human mind and what it can project. The directors are different in the movies we have chosen to present here and each one, in his way, is a genius. We were mostly interested in exploring three versions of faking reality. One dictated by the need to find hope where fear and despair ruled, another one that aimed to cover an emotionally blank space and the third one which spoke about healing as well as imposed perfection. The means used to do that are common: devices of all kinds (a radio, a photo-camera, a cutting studio and a microchip), instruments that intervene in our perception of the world and shape it according to our own needs or to the needs of society.

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BOOK REVIEWS

**Ștefan Borbély, *Homo Brucans și alte eseuri*,
Editura Contemporanul, București, 2011**



Homo Brucans și alte eseuri (*Homo Brucans and Other Essays*) is a thirteen essay collection reflecting Ștefan Borbély's interests in recent history, religion, the history of mentalities, literary studies and hermeneutics. Focusing on less known aspects of the historical and literary imaginary, Ștefan Borbély attempts to underline the importance of details and nuances in reading crucial debates of the Western thought. Despite the eclectism that characterizes the choice of themes in the present volume, they all share the author's propensity for a passionate approach in matters of delicate issues concerning both autochthonous and world matters. On the one hand, Ștefan Borbély pays attention to challenging aspects of Romanian mentalities. He, thus, discusses the Romanian journalism before the 1989 Revolution (1968, *The Year of the Restless Sun* and *Its Media Reflections* in

Romania), methodologies of identity generating discourses in the context of the World Wide Web expansion (*The Diffuse Romanian Identity on the Internet*), the discontinuities and challenges of literary directions throughout the 90s and at the beginning of the new millennium (*The Generational Dynamics of Recent Romanian Literature*, *Romanian Literature Post-Ceaușescu*, *Literature, In Between Mythology and Politics*), as well as representative figures of Romanian Culture (*Marin Mincu*, *Images of Death in Nicolae Balotă's Blue Notebook*, *The Marino Case 2010*, *The Sad Posthumous Life of a Lonely Man*). On the other hand, the book contains essays that analyze major themes of the contemporary world (*The Postapocaliptical Man*, *The Intrauterine Space in Psychohistory*, *The Ash - a mythopoetics essay concerning a prominent symbol of death and extinction*), as well as studies on challenging figures of the Western panopticon, from *The Old Testament's Devil* to "the violent" Lenin.

The volume owes its curious title to the paradigm Silviu Brucan imposes in the post-1989 media imaginary. *Homo Brucans* is, in Ștefan Borbély's acception, "the omniscient cynic, (...) the omnipresent, aggressive commentator", allowing the public space to become an area of reckless indoctrinated discourse. Ștefan Borbély manifests a firm attitude against such acts of dilettantism and defines the pertinent, erudite critique of his essays as an alternative to the ever-spreading clichés of irresponsible discourse generators.

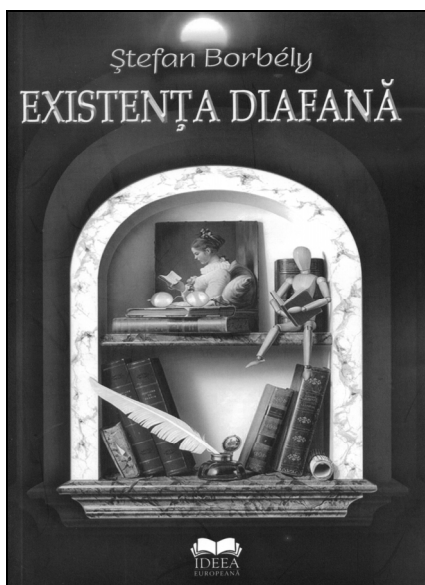
Consequently, the author proves himself a lucid interpreter of political realities, seeing beyond their immediate effects. The

patterns that guide history's development are described in a passionate manner, allowing the uninitiated readers to empathize with these uneasy, less debated, yet fascinating matters. Also, by permanently questioning so-called classified aspects of the contemporary mainstream thought, the author reinvests history, be it political or literary, with the premises of a vivid, challenging subject.

As a conclusion, Ștefan Borbély's book is invested with the premises of a must-read guide capable of altering a much petrified and inflexible manner of thinking day to day global realities.

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**Ștefan Borbély, *Existența diafană*,
Editura Ideea Europeană, București, 2011**



Ștefan Borbély's books are one of the rarest examples of a fruitful and successful combination of two very divergent matters of the critical studies. One regards comparative literature and its complex themes, and Ștefan Borbély has already offered valuable inquiries in its essential concepts, from Antiquity to the post-war period, from the

myth of the Anti-Hero to the Counterculture. The other is represented by the contemporary Romanian literature, its actual ever changing phenomena and its debates, usually a different field of the critical studies, held in opposition to the academic field, manifested in the reviews. Those two different dimensions are equally very well reflected in Ștefan Borbély's cultural preoccupations, and he proves that they do not oppose one another at all, but can cooperate fruitfully for the benefit of both comparative studies and critical reviews of recent books.

His articles from his latest book *Existența diafană* stand as a proof for the fact that the comparative-based formation can be a valuable and rare quality necessary for the precise and critical examination of the cultural present. The methods he employs are those of the comparative academic scholar, seeking the general features and phenomena beyond the "sound and the fury" of contemporary debates and idiosyncrasies. Although he has published so far several books about the literature of the 2000s such as *Cercul de grație*, *O carte pe săptămână* and though he has been writing book reviews since 1974, Ștefan Borbély sets himself apart from any other book reviewer/critic,

not only because of his unique style, but also because his aim is far more complex than a simple book review. Through the chaos of Romanian book apparitions, his choices are never random, but according to a very clear articulated outlook and according to the implicit assumption that a certain book or author stands for a particular trend in contemporary literature. His book reviews always start with an extended paragraph regarding the context in which the book in question appeared, and this is followed by a concise description of the general trend that the book renders manifest. The implicit premise for the fact that the books are never randomly picked up is that the choices made by a critic define his vision. His perspective can only be defined through the analyses of the book in question.

A few crucial features of the Romanian literature written in the post-revolutionary period are formulated in the foreword, but they also appear very clearly throughout the entire book. The first is the new rise of ideologies in post-revolutionary Romania, visible in the whole literary field, imbued with idiosyncrasies and preoccupied with cultural strategies of promoting certain authors according to a few critics' subjective preferences. This is also a closed system, where hierarchies cannot be questioned and, if they are, the result is not their re-evaluation, but always conformism and obedience. Although Borbély chooses to write mainly about well-known and almost classic authors, he always chooses those considered to be neglected by the current state of critical attention and by the readers, either because their books were issued at less-known publishing houses, or because they did not receive too many reviews elsewhere, in the mainstream press. The examples range from internationally acclaimed scholars, such as Adrian Marino, Marin Mincu, Matei Călinescu or Mircea Cărtărescu, through the mid-Generation of the Eighties movement, to recently debuted authors like Anamaria Selu or Adrian Dohotaru. For each of these writers,

Ștefan Borbély manages to offer a memorable portrait, consisting both of biographical traits and of the main features of their work. We can also detect certain common traits for all these writers: nonconformist behaviour versus the cultural environment, their marginal position in contrast to the same cultural system, and their propensity towards questioning the establishment, its hierarchies.

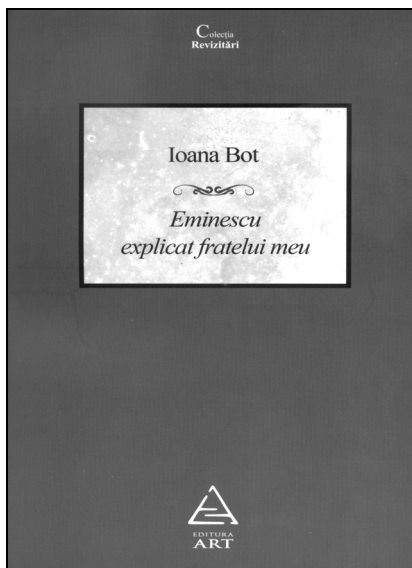
The second major feature of Romanian contemporary literature is the general feeling of exhaustion, of belatedness, of an end approaching, as if we witnessed a return of all traumas, communism, the 1989 Revolution, and the miserable present, when resignation and political lethargy prevail. Ștefan Borbély shows that, at the present moment, Romanian literature experiences not the possibility of a new, fresh start, but the end of a line, the exhaustion of possibilities and this has also been noticed by other European thinkers regarding the end of illusions for all the Eastern European countries after the Communist downfall (Slavoj Žižek).

As a result, the third essential feature of our literature is the struggle with the traumatic past (the Communist era), a vengeful angriness of present debates that point to a widening gap between the senior writers of the Sixties and Seventies (its surviving members) and the newly emerging generation of young critics, who seem to be speaking a different language.

Although *Existența diafană* seems, at a first glance, to consist of book reviews, Ștefan Borbély adapts them to the new original form of an essay, replete with interesting ideas, analogies, discoveries, new concepts, interpretations and memorable stylistic formulas. His articles reveal an accurate, unique and homogeneous perspective on contemporary Romanian culture.

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**Ioana Bot, *Eminescu explicat fratelui meu*, „Colecția „Revizitări””,
Grupul Editorial Art, București, 2012**



Conceived as a “late response” and, also, as a “very personal” one, to all those “blind and narcissistic” interpretations of Eminescu’s work, this time, Ioana Bot enchants her readers with a far more familiar understanding than she used to and also with a very professional approach. The introduction is a contextual essay, explaining its intention as an open letter to a “hypocrite brother”, seen in a Baudelairean way as a twin image mirrored in the writing process and its becoming as a tremendous construct of another identity. This ingenious critical approach- between mirrors- is also a two-fold approach: in one way, the fear of being discovered and, in another way, the exciting need for this, inviting the reader to trace the “word traps”, guided by the accomplished experience of a well known expert in Eminescu’s works interpretations. Along with this “semblable” brother-companion, she is prepared, thus, to explore the insight of these great texts, in search of discovering herself, but also himself, the unknown *brother-reader*.

Following a rhetorical close reading of a few of Eminescu’s wise poems, the first chapter, *Discursul îndrăgostit*, exposes the lazy reflections of the canonical readings which had followed the paths traced for more than a century as some “die hard clichés”, postulated by the first interpreters of the poet’s work. Stating that “the quiet waters of Eminescu’s works are deeper and swindler” than we may think, Ioana Bot’s demonstration changes the old categories of “the last great European Romantic” or “the poet of absolute love” by posing instead a new interpretation of the poetic work as an allegorical expression of a new paradigm belonging to a post-Romantic era and, rather, to the paradigm of the major European modernism. In order to skilfully illustrate these features of the modern sensitivity (as being more insidious, more courageous and more innovative) some of the works (*Oda, Gemenii, Locul aripelor, Călin (file din poveste), Călin Nebunul*) are called here to stand for a demonstration mostly focused on the discourse’s figurative construction.

The second chapter, *Privirile iubirii*, questions the possibility of bringing some new interpretations by reading again Eminescu’s erotic poetry. Although Eminescu’s youthful poetry entertains the readers with its various references, (from Platonic visions of unity and wholeness of a perfect harmony between the Ego and the world, to oriental philosophy), we cannot speak about a thematically or stylistically coherent lyrical space. Thus, the poem *Gemenii* stands here as an ironic example for the erotic failure of one’s narcissistic view as a counterpart of the true, poetic, visionary view. As an embryo example for Eminescu’s early erotic works, the poem states the importance of the Ego’s experience confronted with his total failure in the real objectification of it.

The next chapter, *Misterele simetriei*, analyses the relation between Eminescu's works and its second great model: the folkloric pattern. Here, also, Ioana Bot's demonstration takes an antithetical position to the old critical interpretations by showing that the poet does not follow entirely the folk patterns and, by keeping only the main structures of these fairy tales, he innovates them and makes them look different in his work's laboratory. Also, in a close relationship with the demonstration sketched in the previous chapter, the critical interpretation chooses here four poems: *Făt-Frumos din lacrimă*, *La mijloc de codru des*, *Ondina* and *Melancolie* to underline a platonical, binary structure with two symmetrical parts mirroring each other and the irreconcilable antithesis within the estranged ego as an example for the poet's experiment of early modern thoughts.

As we have already seen in the previous chapters, Eminescu explained to the brother-reader requires, last but not least, the examination of the poet's art manifesto facing the "language crisis" as stated in his earlier poems. Secondly, the book invites us in its fourth chapter (*Între zgomot și operă*) to lay out our attention on the work's genesis in order to understand how the poem reached its final form and what those alterations imply for an interpretation of the work's meaning. Tracing the work's genesis is not a simple task. Following the pathway from the "avantext" to the text and the continuous crystallisations of the poetic forms, Ioana Bot states that the dissolution of this "dying germs" fulfils the perfect poetical architecture as *vis formativa*. Consequently, this leads the literary historians to an imperative need for electronic editions which should follow the European standards in text genetics, as well as to the necessity for a dynamic view of the digital work with the texts' corpus.

The fifth chapter, *Epigonii: o aporie*, sketches the cultural environment in which Eminescu flourished as young poet, justifying his first intellectual influences by pro-

viding a brief discussion on identity issues. Thus, the poem becomes a poetical manifesto built on a romantic antithetical structure and exposes the complicated relationship with his contemporary literary canon. Ioana Bot's subtle analysis of *Epigonii* reveals the "anxieties of influence" (Harold Bloom's term) as a different poetical goal, completely different both from his contemporary literary environment and from the earlier poets. The three stages of creativity, the sacred visionary prophecy, the Orphism and the imaginative power of dreams are called to stand for a new poetical vision meant to overcome the cultural and historical crisis by antithetically counterpoising the two canons: the historical and the personal one, as two different ways of "faithful" and "unfaithful" writing and as a turning point from a romantic to a modern poetic era. Further, the professor's critical interpretation skilfully postulates the necessity of a rhetorical reading instead of an "idle", thematic-oriented one as developed in the chapter to come.

Next, the book gives particular attention to the poetics's torn body, to the transformations within texts and lyrical discourse. In the chapter *Sfășieri retorice*, this approach requires the close reading of several poems *Oda*, *Odin și poetul*, *Scrisoarea III*, *Gemenii* to conclude that we face here the first modern poetics of silence, the unrest of an initiated poet who rejects society and social demand in order to conceive real poetry born out of the subject's incredible sorrow. A social estranged poetical subject crosses over cycles of civilizations, through mythical dreams and through the contemporary *theatrum mundi*, in order to surpass a language crisis and in search for a new rhetorical body to thoroughly express the poem as an *imago mundi*. By following the chaotic order of the universe, the martyrdom of the poetical body turns the view into vision.

The seventh chapter, *Tema patriotică în poezia eminesciană față cu stereotipiile*

criticii, conceived almost as the first part of a concluding section and guided by an almost different discursive voice, reveals the ultimate danger of a distorted reading. The construction of the identity figure of a National Poet is, according to a messianic pattern (A Romantic and revolutionary one), a fact that does not fit into the inner ideological and esthetical features of Eminescu's work. Moreover, Romania is seen in his poems as the last truth of the poetic being. Thus, the country has feminine features, being the other half of a split ego, the ontological space, both morbid and protective.

The next chapter, *Un produs românesc refuzat la export: Mihai Eminescu, poet național*, investigates how the cultural myth of Mihai Eminescu as National Poet was carefully built and carried on by its posterity for more than a hundred years. After his death, he transgresses the limits of a great writer becoming

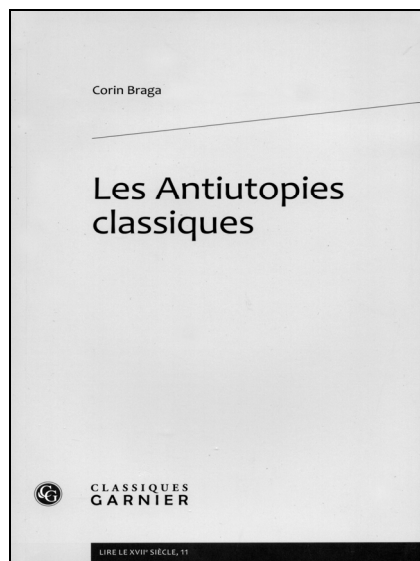
both cult-image and identity construct, being almost a "country brand". Therefore, one must see Eminescu as a phenomenon that reached beyond the area of literary studies. Here, the author minutely challenges and examines the issue of the export strategies as *paratextes* about the Romanian writer shown to the readers abroad. In order to have an accurate overview of Mihail Eminescu's reception abroad, Ioana Bot investigates all the references in the Encyclopaedias of Universal Culture but also on Google, YouTube or Facebook.

The last chapter, *Un poet pentru secolul XXI*, concludes that with all his novelties, with all the virtues fulfilled by his work, Eminescu is to be seen as tradition but also as a canonical writer for the forerunners to follow.

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**Corin Braga, *Les Antiutopies classiques*,
Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2012**

Corin Braga is one of the few contemporary Romanian comparatists who has succeeded to emerge internationally as a distinguished scholar, completing and publishing a tetralogy about a vast and less explored corpus of texts (classic utopian and antiutopian literature), at two impressive publishing houses (L'Harmattan, Classiques Garnier). His latest accomplishment, *Les Antiutopies classiques* is the fourth volume of an entire series, completing a monumental project about the archetypal scenario of the Quest ("la quête initiatique manquée"), ranging from the Earthly Paradise in Medieval Times (*Le paradis interdit au Moyen Âge. La quête manquée de L'Éden Oriental*, 2004), to the magic Celtic islands (*Le paradis interdit au Moyen Âge 2. La quête manquée de l'Avalon occidentale*, 2006) and finally focusing on the replacement



of the Garden of Eden with Earthly Paradise and Utopian Cities built by man, which takes place in the Renaissance (*Du paradis perdu à l'antiutopie aux XVII-XVIII^e siècles*, 2010).

The present volume systematically continues the previous one, both focusing on the shift of paradigm which occurred during the Sixteenth and Eighteenth centuries, the internal and external causes that facilitated the transformation of utopia into its counterpart and the general spread of the anti-utopian visions. The purpose of both volumes is to offer a systemic overview on the criticism that eventually ruined the classical utopia from XVI century. In the previous volume, Corin Braga had focused mainly on the religious factor (mainly Catholicism) and its censorship on humanism and utopian visions, but also on the correlations between utopias and medieval *mirabilia*, between Christianity and utopia. The main aim of his study was to prove that theological critique and censorship triggered the rise of anti-utopias during the Seventeenth Century. *Les Antiutopies classiques* structures its chapters according to the other critical blows received by the utopian imagination from two important philosophical trends, Rationalism and Empiricism, both leading to the emergence of the anti-utopias. The book is carefully constructed on the symmetry between the first part (*La critique rationaliste de la pensée utopique*) and the second part (*La critique empirique de la pensée utopique*): the first part starts with a thorough analysis of the philosophical foundations of the Rationalist attack on the utopian journeys, and, in the second part, the empirical attack on imagination; in both parts the approach of utopia as a literary genre and form is present (*Le narrateur en position dystopique* and *Le pacte de vraisemblance*), offering very useful tools in analysing both the classical texts and their modern counterparts; each part has its archetypal examination of utopias and anti-utopias (*Îles de fous et autres dystopies classiques*, *Les topies souterraines*, *Les topies astrales*).

This fourth volume also lays a different emphasis on the classical anti-utopias, mostly neglected by the contemporary body of criticism that tends to centre on the modern dystopias of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries. One of the main theses of the whole book, its subliminal and explicit assumption, is that anti-utopias are not the result of modern mentality, but the consequence of a long and ancient tradition, both formal and archetypal, that goes back to the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, a literary tradition that produced a rich amount of literary works. One of the major qualities of Corin Braga's book is that he succeeds to circumscribe a very representative body of texts and to demonstrate that it represents a clearly circumscribed sub-genre of utopian literature, rarely investigated as such in the whole vast critical bibliography on the subject of anti-utopias.

The other argument that corroded the utopian imagination and facilitated the rise of anti-utopias in the Nineteenth century was the disenchantment of the modern world (with the other philosophical topics, the Death of God, the end of transcendence, and the metaphysical void). This represents the other turning point where the scope of the *Les Antiutopies classiques* ends, along with the breaking point between classical anti-utopias and modern ones, which takes place during the first half of the Nineteenth Century. The perfectly chosen paradigmatic example is Jules Verne. His works are analysed by Corin Braga in order to illustrate not only the conclusions of the whole book, but also a few crucial shifts in the Western utopian imagination: the replacement of Medieval *mirabilia* with the Positivist technological explanations, the concatenation of two major traditions, the one that transforms the Terrestrial Paradise into utopia and the other which metamorphoses the Lost Paradise into anti-utopia.

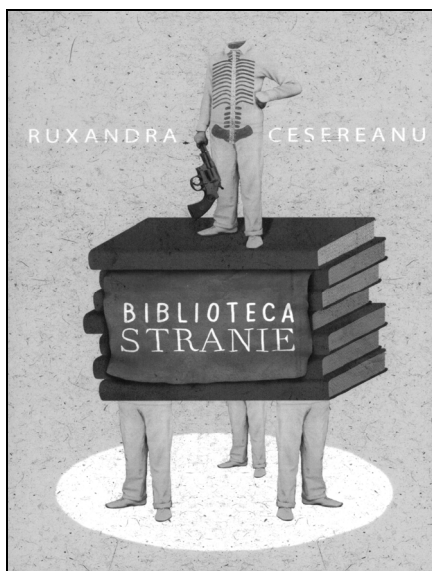
The passage from utopia to anti-utopia is examined in all its implications and from all possible perspectives, philosophical, arche-

typal, thematic, through cultural changes of paradigm, through stylistic and formal analyses of (anti)-utopian narration and narrator, through its contemporary reader's response and reception theory, as a slowed and minutely described process. *Les Antiutopies classiques* surpasses the older debates and distinctions between utopia as literary genre and utopia as an immutable imaginary and philosophi-

cal construct into a comprehensive synthesis able to offer the proper methods, concepts and information about the entire history of the (sub)-genre, valuable not only for the classical anti-utopias, but also for Twentieth Century anti-utopias.

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**Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Biblioteca stranie*,
București, Curtea Veche, 2010**



Previously conceived as blog posts (on www.mesmeeacuttita.wordpress.com), these texts give us a strange feeling, as if we were eavesdropping on a writer's secret diary. Offering far more than a web article could possibly require, but without the pretences and stiffness of an old-fashioned critical style, the book gives us an example of a very trendy and clever reconsideration on the history of reading. The author herself admits that her

intention was not to write an academic critical interpretation of these novels, but a collection of essays, as suggested on the front page of the book.

We may say that Ruxandra Cesereanu uses a baroque reason for choosing the novels to form the uncanny, mysterious library. In the "Foreword", the author herself insists to explain her reading options and the selection criteria, in a playful and clear manner. This library, as any other enigmatic place, has a special key and some rules to follow which one should know before rambling too far through its imaginary chambers. Both lady of the palace and *châtelaine*, Ruxandra Cesereanu begins by explaining to us her reading options. Thus, we find out the reasons why she did not choose the honourable and famous classical books, but strange, uncanny, exotic works. Therefore, she considers these books as being merely *mysterious* and affirms that, in spite of the classical books that are setting up life elements or a good moral, psychological mood, the mysterious books come to shock and bewilder the reader.

The chapter's titles are subtle and symbolically-oriented in order to illustrate the subjective close reading. Thus, the mysterious quest in twelve chapters invites both author

and readers to cross the bridge of the ordinary for a strange journey to the underworld. Each page goes deeper down the rabbit hole by opening new spaces to the reader's eyes in a spectacular and flamboyant style. Passing from one textual chamber to another, one meets gradually the phantasms of the childhood imaginary followed by compensatory worlds, the world of dreams and insomnia, the travellers' worlds, a scary and delicious location for metamorphoses to take place, delirious worlds of wildness, the worlds of passionate readers, a puzzle-like world, the world where reigns the mighty two slice-tongue death, the baroque world of *The Book of The Thousand and one Nights* with its soteriology of meaning, the world of hard and soft violence and, finally, the last world, which is meant to classify all that remains. Thus, the *mysterious library* builds itself step by step, slowly, as the reader's eyes go deeper into the text, in a bawdy, magical, and, of course, interactive way.

Consisting of a different model of reading and interpretation, Ruxandra Cesereanu's book brings a new look upon the field of literary analysis, sometimes closer to fiction than to a critical approach. Yet one could say this recipe might seem unusual in the contemporary Romanian literary field, but speaking about the newest methods in Western essay writing at least one example comes to mind: Michel Schneider's 2003 book about the great writers' last days, *Morts imaginaires* (translated into Romanian in 2010), where the French author successfully combines fiction and text analysis in order to reconsider some biographical pages from literary history in a different and ingenuous way. In *Biblioteca stranie*, Ruxandra Cesereanu uses the same binary conjunction, aiming to describe this strange collection of novels, altogether with those plots and paragraphs that bashful interpretations would usually conceal as taboos. Thus, the mysterious reading diary is conceived in order to analyse more than fifty novelists from well-known

and already canonical writers (Umberto Eco, Patrick Süskind, Mario Vargas Llosa, Milan Kundera, Salman Rushdie, José Saramago, Michael Ondaatje, Ian McEwan, Philip Roth, Kazuo Ishiguro, Julian Barnes etc) to other less-known writers (Daniel Kelmann, Sam Savage, Dai Sijie, Andrew Sean Greer, Yann Martel etc). All these novels, as the author argues, were books which scandalised and disturbed the audience by being too strange, too bizarre, too peculiar or too extravagant for the common taste, but in time they have completely gained the public's attention *per se*. Soon, the shock faded away and, surpassing all the taboos, the readers have come to understand that some books can irritate without being irritating, can do violence without being violent, as much as they can bring a new look upon our world. Indeed, the goal of Ruxandra Cesereanu's library is this aesthetic turning point, inviting us to overcome all the reading prejudices and to rethink, to re-discover the reading process through a profound inquiry into the novels' structures.

Hence not only the bizarreness of the subject matters in choosing these novels, but also the accuracy of the style. Ruxandra Cesereanu explains once again her selection criteria to the readers, affirming that, if a novel belongs to the category of the uncanny, but does not possess any aesthetical competences, it has to be excellently written in order to be selected.

This mysterious library is described using gastronomic metaphors, as the author has already accustomed us, especially in one of her earlier books, *Gourmet*, – also an essayistic close reading of four favourites writers (Céline, Bulgakov, Cortázar, Rushdie). By presenting herself as a "taster" of the analysed novels, she offers an interpretation "ready to consume", the reading is "delicious", the style is often "tasty", Ondaatje's book is "constantly flavourful", Tavare's novel is "fresh and very well written" and the exam-

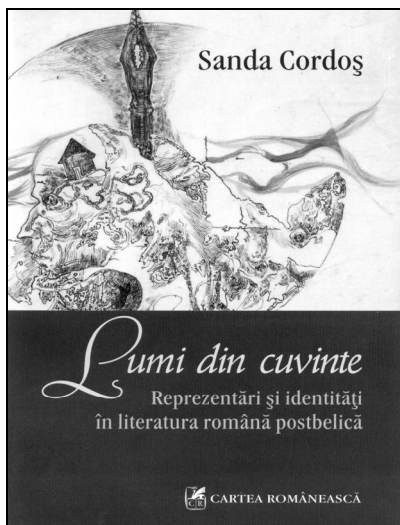
ples may endlessly continue. So, we must kindly admit that this gastronomic imaginary is just a pale stylistic hint meant to lead to the main aim of the book, to the representation of what we may not call a new aesthetics of ugliness, but rather – as the author herself explains in the Foreword – a unique canon built upon the Italian word *stranio* (and its synonyms: strange, unusual, curios, bizarre, uncommon...), ready to be justified by using some of the very important books on the theory of the fantastic.

With her well-known writing abilities, Ruxandra Cesereanu's "mysterious library" charms the readers - by periodically advising them to drink an ambrosial liqueur of this so-called *stranio* reading cannon- as an already incredibly skilled novel writer and, also, as an ingenious text analyst. The readers were driven to the pathway of this fantastic place, ruled by the great dynamic ability of the

texts as imposed by the web environment they were initially meant for. Therefore, conceived as *work in progress*, these essays continuously transformed themselves, being permanently reshaped by the dialogue with the blog readers. At first a blog project and then a book, *Biblioteca stranie* leads us to the same aesthetical conclusion: Ruxandra Cesereanu builds this imaginary place not guided by the chaotic, accidentally-determined criteria of the *uncanny*, but choosing some very important novels canonized as such. As an unfamiliar book about uncommon novels, *Biblioteca stranie* introduces us to the mysterious imaginary of such unaccustomed works as a secret invitation to rethink our old reading and interpretation habits.

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**Sanda Cordoș, *Lumi din cuvinte*,
Cartea Românească, București, 2012**



Lumi din cuvinte by Sanda Cordoș describes backgrounds, comprises statements and explains literary phenomena that have animated the Romanian social, political and cultural landscape for more than 50 years. The book evolves around mechanisms and outcomes of the Romanian totalitarian regime, and its aftermath, with a credible focus on literature and its survival strategies, centripetal force and transformations. Literature is, for the author, a powerful subversive universe, a molding force that can serve political and propagandistic purposes, but literature will remain the ultimate instance that will shape, forge and influence societies, especially in times of crisis.

The book is a collection of essays, united through outlooks on different frameworks.

The first three essays (“Ideologia realismului socialist în România”; “Modernitatea Hortensiei Papadat-Bengescu în anii 50 sau Un tăcut semn de întrebare”; “1956: calendarul oficial”) configure case studies and political aspects that arise through the instauration of the communist regime. The author takes on the difficult task of explaining the literary scene, after 1947, and renders, for the reader, typologies and categories of the socialist realism in Romania. The gradual control over creation, even imagination and literary forms will ultimately force well-known authors such as Tudor Arghezi, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, George Călinescu, Ion Negoitescu etc. to either accept the rule of regulation from the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist guidelines) or live a scourged and painfully blamed life, where creation remains hidden because of the ultimate punishment: no publication right. Those who choose to stand for the freedom of creation do it at public assemblies, like the National Congress of Romanian Writers, but encrypt their messages and ultimately debate on poetics with no possibility for a real dialogue: the state apparatus finds human interfaces through active literary critics and supporters. The outcomes of such manifestations have a surprising impact on the literary reception. Readers and writers will form a complete circle of trust, known as the clandestine readings.

The next two essays deal with the phenomena of clandestine readings and the beginning of the Ceaușescu regime. The author notes the privacy of the act of reading, a counterbalance for the forbidden lists of books, imposed by the totalitarian regime, endless book titles that could liberate thought and dangerously undermine the main thought-creator, the state. Sanda Cordoș poses accurate questions such as why, how and what books were read, registering testimonies from authors such as Ana Blandiana, Nicolae Manolescu and others who gained access (aware of the dangers) to library sections hidden in rooms where

world history, literature, culture and philosophy stop being inexistent and open, through the deepest act of recognition, the future cultural formation of an entire generation. The prices for such acts, for a possible future, are high: lynch law, imprisonment and forced labor. The author ends her essay by exposing possible functions of the clandestine reading and underlines: “În lectură, cititorul își descoperă sau își construiește viața interioară și gândirea individuală pe care regimul, prin politica sa uniformizantă, le neagă” (p. 94). The act of reading becomes a means of surviving, through escaping what the totalitarian state will always deny and destroy: the Self. The essay called “Dreptul la nefericire” – The Right to Unhappiness, portrays the rise of Ceaușescu’s pursuit of self-made happiness: literature, culture, their hedonistic functions prevail. No way of denying it, no room to be unhappy, no way to write about life, as we all know it.

Sanda Cordoș explores in her next essays constitutive constellations for a Romanian imaginary. In “Reprezentări ale Italiei în literatura română postbelică” the author unveils representations of Italy in Romanian literature. It seems that Italy is a place for travel and escape (prior to the rise of the Iron Curtain), Italian language a source of language renewal and, last, but not least, some Romanian authors will use Italy to create, project, recreate and expose, through literature, not only a source of inspiration but a place of transit and escape.

Migration, identity representations and the Otherness are the main themes discussed by Sanda Cordoș in „Imaginar românesc la scriitori germani din România”, „Cine suntem? Romanul identitar” and „Noii nomazi. Tema migrației în literatura postcomunistă”. Instead of a chronological approach, the author explores a realm of broken unity, dismantled truths and endless search for an identity, a collective one. German authors of Romanian origin write, live and will ultimately leave Romania. Their creations are a double reflection on the Self:

for the Others they remain the permanent guest, for the Self they remain the Other, by definition. A Romanian imaginary is poignant, omnipresent and productive. The totalitarian state of mind leaves deep traces in the works of Herta Müller, Richard Wagner or Eginald Schlattner but they will not engulf the common ground of human experience. The Romanian imaginary for these authors unravels itself in the most intense way possible: the nomadic experience.

„Cine suntem? Romanul identitar” is an essay that provides a classification of literature in the post-communist period. Sanda Cordoș explains backgrounds and analyzes the main difficulties authors had, after the fall of the Ceaușescu regime. The quest for a Romanian identity has its backlashes, as the past is still the present, and debutant authors, who try to detach themselves from an elusive past, will begin, after 2000, a process of restoring a literary imaginary based on transformations and tabu-breaking features: migration, an impossible future, family crisis, desperation, madness etc. In a closing argument, the essay „Noii nomazi. Tema migrației în literatura postcomunistă” begins with a nostalgic look upon the West, prior to the disfiguring historical turning point of 1945. The main interest of the author is actually migration at the dawn of the 20th century. The no-place-of-belonging is translated into literature through a constant desire to be anywhere else but here (no matter what „here” stands for”), a spectacular fascination for the U.S, as the promised land, and the European *Fata Morgana*: the dream of relocation fails. Nomadic experience is actually a nomadic condition, as this is the point of no return. The authors who revisit their homelands, such as Norman Manea, or Matei Călinescu, meet their past Self. The drive to leave Romania in novels such as *Dumnezeu binecuvintează America*, by Petre Barbu or *Blazare* depict the whimsical-nomad escaping a place of failure and nowhere, through the imaginary. „Lume de nicăieri, loc predilect

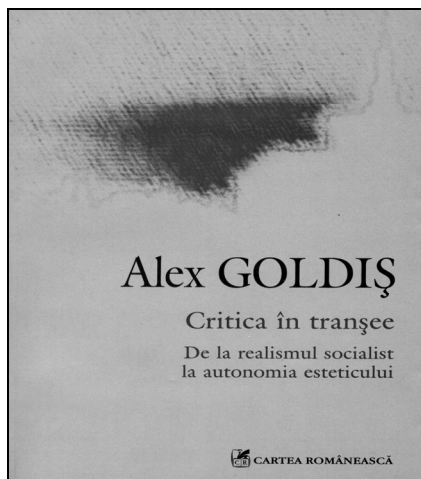
al celor înfrânți, literatura le oferă adăpost” (p. 159).

The last three essays of „Lumi în cuvinte” complete the missing pieces of a puzzle. Sanda Cordoș takes on an attempt to explore literary production in our time from a thematical point of view and testing, as a true explorer, theoretical frameworks. „Postmodernismul lui Mircea Cărtărescu între teorie și practică. Cu aplicații pe orbitor” is a vivid, contemporary and genuine approach to Cărtărescu’s literary development and shows the matter in which the creative force, torments and the classical repositioning can open new possibilities of understanding literature. Upon discussing Norman Manea, Gabriela Adameșteanu and Gheorghe Crăciun, the author of „Lumi în cuvinte” identifies in „Doamna Bovary în literatura socialistă” and „De la August Prostul la huligan” thematical rifts and experimentation projects. The authors play on the meaning of creation, use universal themes to explore alienating human experiences: social ascent, failure and migration.

„Lumi în cuvinte” is a successful attempt to show how literature and its representation forms become subversive and break own, imposed rules (the Romanian Communist Party had more than a share of controlling strategies) and enter a freedom trance (after 1989), in which there are no closing circles or identities formed. The book is an evident testimony of possible worlds, in which the power of creation can stand for truth, salvation and endless searches for life’s complex meanings. Readers will find a credible source of understanding Romanian literature in current times, through the lenses of a traumatic past and the desirable future.

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**Alex Goldiș, *Critica în tranșee. De la realismul socialist la autonomia esteticului*,
Bucarest, Cartea Românească, 2011**



It might not be obvious to someone who is unfamiliar with recent Romanian literary historiography, but Alex Goldiș's book, *Critica în tranșee. De la realismul socialist la autonomia esteticului* [Criticism in the trenches. From socialist realism to aesthetic autonomy] happens to be one of the few comprehensive analyses of the Romanian literary criticism under communism. Goldiș, who is himself a promising literary critic, does not mention in the book this scarcity of relevant bibliography on the topic, as he previously did in some of his reviews; nevertheless, the footnotes of his text, originally defended as a doctoral dissertation at the Babeș-Bolyai University, are somehow eloquent: one can find quoted in them, besides Ana Selejan's useful anthology of materials published under communism, only a couple of recent studies devoted to the matter. The aim of Goldiș's book, in this context, nothing short of ambitious, is to provide an exegesis of the vocabulary used by literary critics from 1948 to 1971, in order to emphasize, as the title suggests, the shift in paradigm from a literature understood exclusively in the rigid framework of the socialist realism to the re-emergence of the aesthetic criteria in the

judgment of the literary work. While on the surface this process might take the shape of a gradual departure from the intrusive interference of the communist nomenklatura with the literary institutions of the era, Goldiș carefully points out how, in fact, most of the critical takes on socialist realism in the first two decades of the Communist regime had either been tacitly approved by the authorities or carefully disguised in order to fit the socialist realist dogma. Even if the young critic does not fully agree with the harsh verdict pronounced by another Romanian critic, Eugen Negrici, in a chapter of his recent book *Iluziile literaturii române* [The delusions of the Romanian literature] in the case of the literary criticism of the sixties, his text is still a work of demystification. Goldiș's method, which focuses less on the individual works of the literary critics of the era and more on the fervent debates around concepts such as "realism", "modernism" or "aesthetic specificity", has the advantage of revealing a threefold relationship between the critics that were taking one side or the other in the disputes and the communist power. The metaphor in the title, referring to the ongoing and predictable "war in the trenches", is appropriately chosen; the history of the Romanian literary criticism under communism written by Goldiș does not mention any explicit condemnation of socialist realism in the name of some other, radically different aesthetic theory; instead, it shows how, under the constraints of the communist power, the critics progressively embedded in the socialist realist dogma a number of different criteria which allowed them to redeem certain authors forbidden by communist censorship while rejecting, at the same time, contemporary literary works that rigidly applied the socialist realist formula.

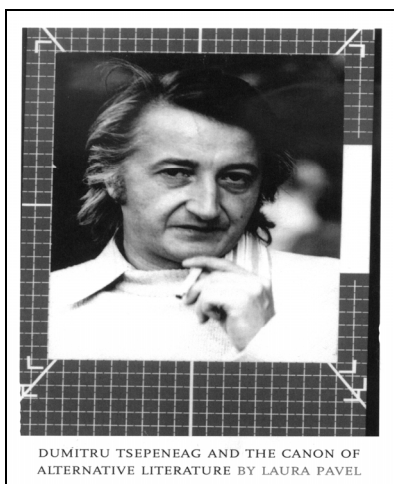
Since, as Alex Goldiș mentions in the foreword of the book, his research was initially intended as an analysis of the main theoretical positions of the literary criticism under com-

munism, *Critica în tranșee* retains a certain symmetry in its structure. A first chapter, dedicated to the initial stages of socialist realism in Romania, deals with the imposed influence of the official Stalinist theories; a fourth chapter tries to explain what a new generation of Romanian critics had incorporated from the theories of the new French criticism of the sixties and why. In between, Goldiș's book follows the mutations suffered by the concept of "realism" under the influence of new Marxist theoretical elaborations, such as Roger Garaudy's discussion of a "boundless realism"; *Critica în tranșee* equally tries to sketch in a third chapter a typology of the main critical approaches to the literary text in the sixties, based on the affinities with or the discreditation of the critical model of the Romanian literary historian George Călinescu. While this approach might seem at first glance essentially concerned only with the influence of Russian or Western concepts upon the development of the Romanian literary criticism, it successfully demonstrates how most of the larger theoretical frameworks were only partially assimilated and used only so far as they were not seen as dangerous for the hardly-gained and ephemeral autonomy of the literary critic. This selective synchroniza-

tion with the Western literary theories does not only explain the specific vocabulary adopted by the most influential Romanian critics of the sixties, but it also justifies a hierarchy of the critical genres prevalent among the authors of the era. As Goldiș suggests in a final chapter of his book, the eventual prevalence of the "aesthetic autonomy" and an overall distrust for the scientific (understood as dogmatic) character of the literary monographies of the previous decade resulted in an almost unanimous praise of the essay. In an analysis of the most representative works of the genre, Alex Goldiș highlights a common assumption behind the different approaches used by their authors: far from being reducible to style or linguistic structures, the writer is first of all the source of a very personal view on the world and the generator of his own "universe". *Critica în tranșee* ends up by providing a poetics of the Romanian criticism of the sixties, understood not only via its theoretical acquisitions, but also through its reactions to what is still being perceived as the ideological and conceptual limitations of the previous decade.

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Laura Pavel, *Dumitru Tsepeneag and the Canon of Alternative Literature*, translated by Alistair Ian Blyth, Dalkey Archive Press, 2007



Who is D. Tsepeneag? The double of Țepeneag, the printed form of an exotic signature, the alter-ego of Ed Pasternague, the name used to sign the novel *Pigeon Vole* or, to sum up, the Other, the continuous shift between two cultural identities of a Romanian born writer. And also, of course, it is the subject of a study carried out by Laura Pavel. Now, why choosing such an intricate personality? Simply because, as the author says, it is fascinating to understand who is the person standing behind the oneiric hybrid text that mix altogether painting and writing as if they were recomposing and re-creating the spiral drawn by Saul Steinberg.

Tsepeneag's characters are often anonymous, unreal or anti-psychological. Laura Pavel observes that the affinity for this non-human subjectivity has, in fact, a motivation. It might be an unconscious need for synchronicity with the European Literature in an era dominated by censorship and restriction, an era in which the communists were trying to neutralize the power of art and literature upon free thinking and stop an underground phenomenon such as *resistance through culture*. But Tsepeneag's preference could be explained by the authentic vibration, by the empathy he had towards the polemical vision of the humans caught in late modernism. For example, in his novel, *Pigeon Vole*, the main character is torn apart between the drama of the decaying writer and the effectiveness of the impersonal computer. Laura Pavel calls the latter a non-anthropomorphic double, a virtual demiurge. But the double can be, as well, she says, zoomorphic as in the image of the woman constantly walking a dog. Nevertheless, what should be remembered about this particular preference of Tsepeneag is the attitude of the writer towards this dissipation of the subjectivity: his bizarre creatures are not seen as ironic creations but as melancholic and somehow tender means of escaping the world.

Oneirism is not a transposition of a dream flux into a text, but a construction of a world in which *as if it were* dominates, not matter if this *as if it were* supposes the presence of the above-mentioned creatures and alter-egos or apparitions as the one of the drifted away angels. Speaking of which, Tsepeneag's angles are worth being discussed since they are no longer mediators between God and humans, but real dandies with dyed hair, ironic smile, a walking cane and a top hat. This conversion of the archetypal is emblematic for an alienated universe.

Why is Oneirism something that comes forward as shocking and not easy-to-digest? Why is it different from the Romantic dream? Well, the author considers that it is all about the

perspective. While Romanticism places the emphasis on the verb *to look at*, Oneirism chooses to stay faithful to *the look within*. The Romantic Oneiric branch however distances itself from *what is seen* by embracing the illusion, the mimesis, and triggers the *as if it were*. Also, according to Laura Pavel, it brings the fascination of clandestine contemplation, the theatrical voyeurism characteristic – after all – to Tsepeneag. Nowadays, Oneirism knows new directions of interpretation of what is lucid control of literary creation: Ruxandra Cesereanu prefers, the author says, the states of the innate trance and the instinctual delirium, while Corin Braga, for example, inclines towards hallucinatory Oneirism.

Oneirism itself has always had inner dissensions. What we mean by that is that there was a sort of gap between the main figures standing for this artistic movement. On one hand, there was Leonid Dimov, who, according to Laura Pavel, was not as much a lyrical poet, as an epic one due to his preference for description and enumeration, for the narration of visions and imperatives (but these nuances are debatable, and even Tsepeneag wondered if the distinction of genres could be still kept as rigid as before), and on the other hand there was Tsepeneag, an active politically involved writer, a human ticking bomb that could, ultimately destroy by over-implication, the whole Oneiric movement. However, the latter seemed to have understood the danger and kept himself out of some delicate boundaries, even though he tried explaining his implication (attracting attention meant becoming strong and influential as an opposition factor, being active meant responding to censorship through defense and subversion). It is not only the two of them who went through tough times as a part of the counter-culture. There were also Mircea Ivănescu or Mircea Horia Simionescu.

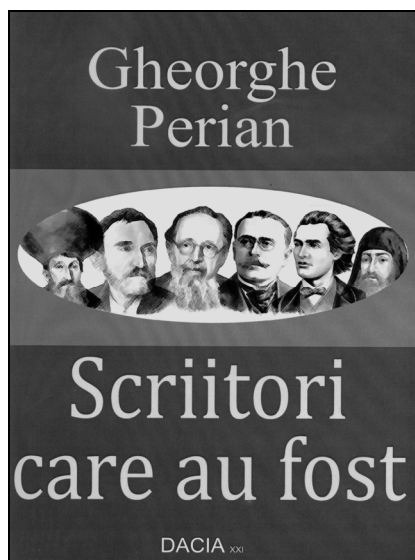
Tsepeneag should though be acknowledged for his merits as a parodist, as an author of a well written trilogy based on Romanian cultural identity, and for being a dynamic

fictional novelist. He should be given credit for his belief that dream was no longer a means of moralization, or revelation, or dialogue with God, but an aesthetically criterion, a term of comparison between worlds. The connection between reader and writer in his vision resorts to the correspondence between an actor or dancer and the viewer of the performing art, thus offering, considers Laura Pavel, *a group complicity, one that was primarily aesthetic* (p. 41).

Basically, her study reopens from this perspective the urgency to discuss the need for alternative literature, and reaffirms the fascination of the dream that is not a sort of escapism, but a means of invading reality.

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**Gheorghe Perian, *Scriitori care au fost*,
Ed. Dacia XXI, Cluj-Napoca, 2011**



Gheorghe Perian's book reopens a series of discussions upon the known history of the Romanian literature. Following the chronological timeline he brings forward some unpublished aspects of a literature descending from Dosoftei. The author believes that injustice has been made in the case of this writer and scholar, Dosoftei, when his oeuvre

has been categorized as nothing more than a lyrical, folk influenced translation of the Psalms. On the contrary, argues Perian, the work of Dosoftei starts with a prose version of the original Slavonic version of the text taken into consideration. His ambition was to render as clear as possible the message of the Psalms and alongside with that he got the chance to practice a poetic terminology, adorned with cryptic images and hieratic figures. This first milestone chosen by Perian is emblematic for the whole book, because it shows a tendency to take up debatable themes as a philologist would be expected to do. And he does so in the four chapters of the book.

The second author chosen is Conachi, who, given his *double personality*, fits perfectly into an era torn apart by two massive influences: the Western one delivered by French scholars, and the political Eastern one. While Ovid Densusianu described, in a study from 1921, Conachi as a frivolous and whimsical poet and a meticulous and traditional prose writer, Paul Cornea circumscribes his dualism strictly to the poetic area where he notices the influence of two

main cultural and artistic movements: the Neo-Classical one and the Pre-Romantic one. When it comes to Perian, he rather sees the diversity of the genres Conachi is interested in (the meditation, allegory, longing poetry or versified letter), concluding that this could be the specific trait of this person: he is not dual, but eager to experience all layers of poetry and courageous enough to try it.

The chapter about Eminescu dwells upon his interest in the fixed form poetry, which requires mathematical skill and virtuosity. In his manuscripts one can find numerous versions of the same poem, which proves that Eminescu was a perfectionist. Whereas Eminescu represents the expression of pure intellect, the poetry of Șt.O. Iosif is, according to the author of this study, marked by an intentional infantilism: his lyrical space is populated by fairies and butterflies, and the patriarchal world receives dream-like features. Equally fragile is the space described by Topârceanu. The nature resembles to jewelry and the dominant artistic images are the ones referring to tactile senses: velvet and silk are folding together. However, Topârceanu is best known for his rhapsodies and his parodies. The latter are meant as forms of ridicule directed towards an obsolete literature.

Alexandru Obedenaru is a very little known poet, but Gheorghe Perian chooses to bring him to light for his innovative spirit, for the same aesthetical turmoil that he saw in the previously mentioned authors. He was a decadent poet who felt total adversity towards *Junimea* and its literary cannon imposing values.

Having the same decadent roots, G. Bacovia's poetry ripens in Symbolist imagery. The strange, the hallucination and the obsessions are present in his volume, *Cu voi*, which Perian considers to be a *turning point book*. Although it only has 32 poems, they are extremely interesting from a philological point of view. Many of them will be rewritten, following Eminescu's work pattern. As a matter

of fact, his poems *Ego* and *Cu voi sunt* have obvious Eminescean influences when it comes to the lexical and prosodic level.

Another category of published poems is the one with social implications in which there are scattered words like *strike*, *famine*, *bourgeois*... It will be a long time until he will approach very personal subjects, but starting with 1936, his lyric becomes subjective and borrows a confessional tone.

Dimitrie Anghel is defined by critics as the poet of flowers, but Perian manages to find, once again, unknown aspects. He is interested rather in a new lyrical genre, *the still life*, which the poet tries to accommodate into poetry. It consists of interior descriptions, presenting mainly objects and museum-like backgrounds. The auditory perception dominates the verses. His prose is worth to be read also. In *Fluturul morții*, a passionate entomologist dreams about a rare butterfly and he will actually be close to it – in the end – when the butterfly appears briefly *to cover with his wings the dying man's eyes* (p.176). Those kinds of images determine Perian to bring forth an idea according to which one can identify in Anghel's writing future reflections of Postmodernism.

When it comes to Minulescu's creation, if we are to mention the last poet Perian discusses in his book, the macabre has nothing of the shivering quality of a thriller, but exhales amusement. His stylistic is based on oral interpretation and thus, it makes the author believe that Minulescu's poetry is rather theatrical than rhetorical.

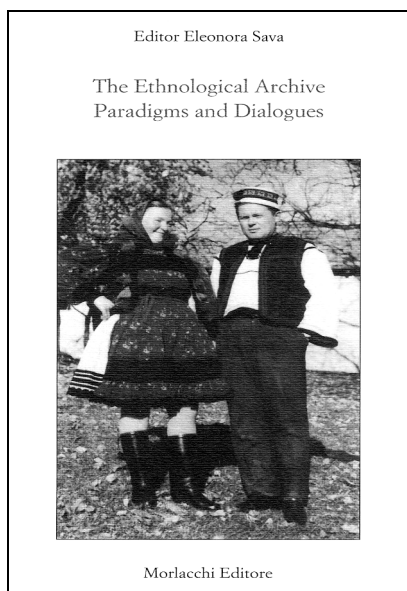
In addition to the poets mentioned above, Perian also turns to Agârbiceanu's prose, more precisely to the novel *Arhanghelii*, published in 1913 (its topic consists in revealing the drama of losing one's roots and the peril of believing in superficial values) and also to Caragiale's comedies. For the characters of the latter the author suggests, as defining, the concept of *snobbism*. Vanity and snobbism are alike and that is why in the case of

Cațavencu, for example, the author says that his speeches, before transmitting a message, have the purpose of underlying the political identity of the speaker (p.71). We find these considerations (that Cațavencu is a perfectionist who sees the world in terms of becoming and progress, that Farfuridi sees it like a mechanism, and that Tipătescu is, ultimately, not able to cope with reality) to be very unsettling when it comes to the critical dogma we used to be accustomed to.

As a matter of fact here lies the strength of Perian's book. He brings arguments and examples for each new idea and his style is easy to read and dynamic, always leading the reader to an out-of-the box thinking, no matter if they are specialists or occasional readers.

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The Ethnological Archive. Paradigms and Dialogues,
Edited by Eleonora Sava, Morlacchi Editore, Perugia, 2011



This volume is the result of a research under the Romanian National Research Council, with its main target to review and re-evaluate, according to current scientific perspectives, the Ethno Folkloric documents collected in the Archive of the Folklore Society

from the Faculty of Letters of the Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj. The research, coordinated by Lecturer PhD Eleonora Sava, developed during the last years, in several stages.

The Ethnological Archive. Paradigms and Dialogues, edited by Eleonora Sava, and published in English at Morlacchi Editore, Perugia, Italy, is structured in six chapters and comprises 200 pages. The book focuses on different aspects related to the deep meanings, relevance and functions of the Archives in Romania nowadays. Therefore, necessary interrogations on the general place and role of the archives, the process of archiving and in depth reevaluation of these archives in current times are formulated. Subsequently, a theoretical frame is constructed by interpretations, comments, analyses of answers to these interrogations.

A diachronic perspective on *The Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society: Ethnological Practices in Communist Romania* is articulated in the first chapter, dedicated to a history of this archive, also approaching in a quantitative and qualitative frame the collected materials.

The chapter written by Eleonora Sava reconstructs in a chronological way, the paths and trajectories assumed by the Archive contributors, students and professors of the Faculty of Letters, members of the Students' Scientific Folklore Society. Thus, a few periods are approached, following the scientific goals, issues and methodological demands of each of them.

They are obviously different from one period to another (1958/1994, 1994/onwards). A refined analysis of the ways in which the research practices developed from a stage of folklore studies (1958-1973) to an ethnological one (1973-1992) and then to an anthropological approach, relevant for the post 1992 period, is also present in this chapter.

These are discussed in a general frame, related to the ideological constraints (totalitarian pressure), to different types of national projects and nationalisms, to scientific demands, to West European trends in social sciences, and also to Central European research traditions. The author's analytical tools are very complex, considering all research levels, meanwhile encountering the continuities and discontinuities of socio-cultural research in Romania, generated by peculiar historical and political accumulations and pressures.

The chapters dedicated to *Ethnographic Documents and Field Textualization*, authored by Eleonora Sava and Maria Candale and also Maria Candale's *Ethnological Questionnaires and National Identity Construction* debate the triangular relation between the archived data, their collectors and the researchers in charge with archiving them, considering the fact that "the archived data are not sheer transparent records but constructions of reality" (p. 121). Texts, contexts and fieldwork are seen reflexively, as main elements in the research process. Methodological challenges are assessed, according to specific fieldwork solutions that have a certain influence on the archiving process.

Liviu Pop's study *On the Digital Version of the Folklore Society Archive* illustrates how digital technologies can be used in eth-

nology, in all subfields approaching cultural heritage. The author presents the developments of new technologies and their applications in cultural archives.

The necessary historical clarifications, theoretical and methodological aspects and current perspectives on practical solutions adopted in archives are exposed reflexively and critically in the above mentioned chapters.

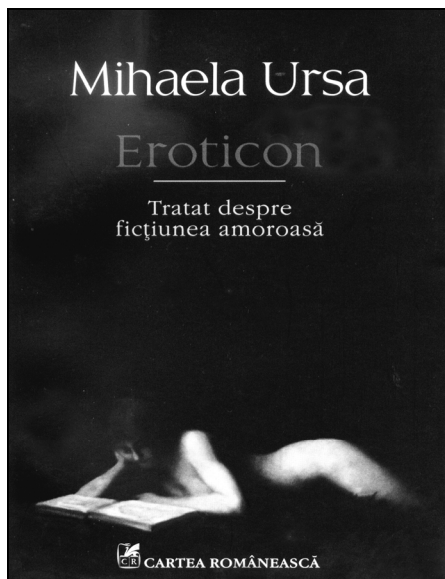
The other two chapters, Eleonora Sava's *An Analysis of a Corpus of Archived Documents* and *On the Relation between Folk Dance and Witty Couplets*, authored by Silvestru Petac, are proposing applied perspectives, while demonstrating how archive materials, field notes especially, can be used in contemporary ethnological studies. They are suggesting also the necessity of recuperating contextual elements, through returning to the already explored fields, in previous fieldwork campaigns.

The chapter authored by Eleonora Sava is an ethnological approach that makes use of field notes from the Oaş region, selecting and interpreting mythological narratives on ghosts. Silvestru Petac focus on witty couplets (*strigături*) as archived texts, collected in the same region, between 1974-1978. He is re-analyzing them in new, current contexts, conducting fieldwork in the area, between 2008-2011. The folk dance witty couplets are studied on multiple levels (music, rhythm, choreography, text).

The Ethnological Archive. Paradigms and Dialogues is a complex volume, addressing theoretical and methodological interrogations, and formulating well documented and original responses related to ethnological/cultural archives and processes of archiving, while illustrating them in research practice.

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**Mihaela Ursa, *Eroticon*,
București, Cartea Românească, 2012**



I admire Mihaela Ursa's great courage of writing a book like *Eroticon. Treaty about amorous fiction* (Cartea Românească, 2012). Publishing such a book in the Romanian cultural space is a bold gesture, which is implicitly setting an elite landmark in the history of the genre. As the author confesses in the volumes' pages, the book tries to deal with *the theoretical and scientific demon*, as well as with *the soul of a live woman*.

The discourse present in *Eroticon* sets a delicate intermediation among the books it discusses and the possible reader, where the voice of the author recommends, interprets, puts the books on the shelf (with an always surprising choice and new organizational criteria). The object of the research is representing the love literature or, in the author's words, the amorous fiction, which captivates, getting a maximum *identifying potential* read not superficial but in depth as a cinematographic image.

Literature is not treated narratorially anymore, as a verbal speech, as the traditional approaches accustomed us, but as a visual image. So, in the thesis proposed by the author, the erotic fiction applies more to the sight than to the lecture, the act of life meeting proposed in the book's pages being one very intimate, tangible, the reader lets himself abandoned to the succeeding images *until the book wakes up to life* and the character's *rising from the book's pages* takes place and you can feel its *breath*. Such a manner of approaching the love stories, as well as their treatment as *useful fictions* (in the way interpreted by Hans Vaihinger in *The Philosophy of As If*) transforms the strong concepts of man and woman into projections of a cultural order, into discursive fantasies.

The book is divided into two parts: *eroticons* and *erotologies*. The eroticon is defined by the author as *the visual image set helping the text to motivate an amorous fiction*, an image that is *guessing its reader*, fully culturally engaged, a window scene, a self picture, a frame for the content of the erotic scene. So, Don Quixote with his imaginary Dulcinea, Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Iseult, Justine, Lilith, Adam and Eve are only some of the characters seen through the eroticon's filter, analyzed in relation to each other and with the background (the frame, the picture) where they appear, analyzed with the whole arsenal of a specialist in the history of ideas. The erotology, as an alternative philosophy of love, is understood by the author as a *pseudo-explanation, a pseudo-theory, or even an ideology of eros, an identification code of real love or the nature of love*. Thus, Erotology is made of those theories or interpretations of the amorous fictions which pretend to express the nature of love, or it can be better described by

invoking those *conceptual snapshots where love is fictionally treated as it would express the truth*. Those *truths* of love are formulated in such a way as to show that love is a matter of androgyny, or a fatal attraction, or a creating power, or a disease, or a sexual metaphysics. In an ample and attentive study of Plato's Banquet, the author identifies two erotologies: (the theory of the androgyne and the one of platonic love) studying also their echoes through the cultural history in amorous fictions. The recourse to the magnetic theory (Julius Evola, *Metaphysics of sex*) and to the idea that erotism would be approving life even in death (Georges Bataille, *Erotism*) allow for a renewed discussion of some amorous fictions from the perspective of those erotologies, action as subtle and refined for the author as it is exciting for the reader.

The author does not hesitate to observe the way the actions converge in the real life, the fact *that we do not stop letting ourselves be taught how to love, by the most unreliable teachers: the literary characters*.

So, this book launches in the Romanian culture an alternative model, different, in its approach, from the way in which amorous fictions can be interpreted by obeying a theoretical matrix. It is a book that deserves to stir our minds, to make us rethink the rapport between literary theory and the voluptuous identifying discourses found in books about women.

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