

ALECART

A MAGAZINE WITH CULTURAL ATTITUDE

EUROPEAN COOPERATION

Cultural Dialogue - Dosar

TRANSLATION SPACE

The Magazine's Survey

Writers and Books at FILIT 2014

INTERVIEW

PAUL BRUMMELL
BOGDAN CREȚU



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THE ART IN DIALOGUE: EUROPEAN COOPERATION DAYS / „LUCEAFĂRUL" THEATRE / 27 SEPT. / 18.00

Reading performance **ABANDONED PEOPLE** Dumitru Crudu
Directed by: Victor Vașuta and Raluca Rus

Debate: **THE ROMANIAN FILM IN EUROPEAN CONTEXT**
Guest: Corneliu Porumboiu; moderator: Victor Vașuta

„ALECART" MAGAZINE'S NO. 13
(SPECIAL EDITION) LAUNCH

Viewing: **WHEN EVENING FALLS ON BUCHAREST OR METABOLISM**
Directed by: Corneliu Porumboiu

PALAS MALL / 25-28 SEPTEMBER / „DIALOGUE": graphics, photography and collage exhibition (works of "Alecart" collaborators)

FILIT „ALECART MEETINGS" SESSIONS / BALȘ HOUSE, CAUDELLA HALL / 1-5 OCTOBER

Wednesday, 12.00-14.00
Guests: Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari, Simona Sora

Friday, 12.00-14.00
Guests: Care Santos, Ioana Nicolaie

Sunday, 12.00-14.00
Guests: Patrick McGuinness, Matei Vișniec

Thursday, 12.00-14.00
Guests: Sahar Delijani, Gheorghe Gospodinov

Saturday, 12.00-14.00
Guests: James Meek, Fabio Stasi

Musical moments performed by students and teachers College of Arts "Octav Bancila" Iași

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This magazine is made by high-school students and graduates of the “Octav Băncilă” National College, the National College of Iași and the “Petru Rareș” National College in Suceava. This edition's texts were translated into the English language by **Silvia Popescu**.

The ALECART magazine is open to any collaboration with students and undergraduates with a cultural attitude. Send in your articles to the email address: **redactia@alecart.ro**

Culture as the Interval between Cooperation and Identity

Emil Munteanu

Cooperation across borders – this is a reality which, in order to gain substance, has to move beyond the technical definition one finds in a dictionary. To understand it in its tangible reality, sifted through the sieve of culture (since nothing can last outside of it), the young Alecart editors took part in a workshop in August, the theme of which was precisely that: cooperation across borders.

THE IDEA THAT BINDS THIS EDITION'S ARTICLES RESULTS FROM A NATURAL OPENING TO THE WORLD, WHICH THOSE LOCATED ON ONE SIDE OR ANOTHER (ROMANIANS, UKRAINIANS, YOUNG PEOPLE FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA) OF THE BORDER THAT BRINGS THEM CLOSER HAVE BECOME AWARE THAT IT CAN BE REALISED EXCLUSIVELY THROUGH KNOWING ONE ANOTHER. BUT "ANOTHER" IS NOT RESTRICTED TO THE TOTALITY OF BEINGS THAT MAKE UP A PEOPLE, BUT, FIRSTLY, IT IS ABOUT THE WAY IN WHICH SAID PEOPLE CAN SHOW TO THE WORLD WHO THEY ARE. TO BE IN THIS CONTEXT MEANS TO INTEGRATE ONE'S CULTURAL IDENTITY WITHIN THE MULTIPLE GLOBAL IDENTITIES TAKING PART IN THIS DIALOGUE (AND, THEREFORE, THE COOPERATION).

Alexandra Masgras, Alecart's former editor in chief, noticed at the end of the meeting that whenever she talks about any one author's book (whether it be Ukraine's Oksana Zabuško, Norman Manea, from Romania but currently living in the USA, Iran's Sahar Delijani, currently living in Turin, Italy or England's James Meek), that book becomes her own and, through the process of translation, it belongs to the language and the literature in which said volume gains a new form. "For me, this book no longer belongs to this or that writer," she says, "but is integrated into the world's literary heritage; being heard in my own language, it becomes part of the country to which I belong as much as it stays part of the cultural space and of the person who brought it to life." Alexandra's observation was the starting point of the inquiry we undertook in this edition, which debates, from the translators' perspective, the extent to which translations exist at the core or at the periphery of the literature that they enrich. In the same vein is the observation made by Ecaterina Reus (born in the Republic of Moldova and currently studying in Denmark): "Whenever I visit France or go back to Romania, where I finished high-school, whenever I walk the narrow streets of Madrid or Cernăuți,

the images retained in my memory, which I then phrase into words, turn these spaces into a new reality; by capturing them in writing, I not only thrust them out into the world, but I make them belong in a way to my readers and, therefore, to their countries of origin." Thus, Finland is no longer the country geographically located at a certain latitude or longitude, the same way Bruxelles is not merely "the heart of Europe" (Anca Covaliu), but the very heart of my country, my heart, in an inner leap that transforms and brings together people, cultures, territories. From Cernăuți or Copenhagen to the other side of the ocean there is only one step (a thought, rather), when one's personal experiences confront another's, in mutual validation. We were interested in the way in which a Harvard student (Tudor Giurgică-Tiron) defined dialogue and cooperation. The article "The Marathon as Metaphor" opens up the inner space towards a world which, through Tudor's images, has become ours, even though we do not belong to it. In other words, as Scotland student Astrid Băgireanu put it, we have settled into the living position of travellers, not tourists, wearing with us and bringing into our homes the spirit of the places and the people we have met.

Back to the issue of encounters, the face-to-face meeting between Andrei Kurkov (one of the most powerful voices in Ukrainian literature) and Savatie Baştovoi (an important writer from the Republic of Moldova) in a debate moderated by Luca Niculescu and symbolically titled "Writer of the East" within last year's "Filit Nights," meant, for the young audience, the perfect enactment of what cooperation across borders is all about. Kurkov and Baştovoi drew from their personal life experiences, the writer status and their work, for an inter- and transcultural voyage and another way of looking at the dialogue "across" and "beyond" borders, bringing forth the idea that a writer defines himself or herself by the extent to which this writer brings out generally valid experiences, without denying his/her national identity, but merely elevating it through multiple cultural identities.

The conclusion of the FILIT debate and our workshop was that, for Alecart's editors/contributors, literature/culture represents the common denominator of these three spaces: Ukrainian, Moldavian and Romanian, ensuring their coherence as well as the openness towards one another – a way to celebrate the European Day of Cooperation.



W R I T E R S F O R F I L I T

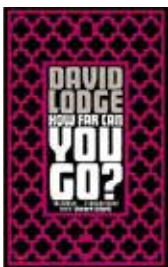
How Far Can You Go?



... A QUESTION WITH RELIGIOUS CONNOTATIONS, WHOSE CONCRETE ANSWER
DAVID LODGE'S PROTAGONISTS OBSESSIVELY TURN TO, UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE FAMILIAR ABSTINENCE
IN ACCORDANCE WITH CATHOLIC DOGMA, THE KEY AND LOCK OF HUMAN CONDUCT.



Anais Colibaba, Național Graduate



Despite their desperate efforts not to “fail” dogmatic precepts, life’s hard-to-determine and even-harder-to-control course comes to modify their initially unequivocal choice for abstinence. Gradually, they realise that this “string” associated with the game of “Faith” can be pulled only until it is irrevocably broken by the harshness of reality.

As the narrator makes a point to state in the exposition, in a style visibly oriented towards direct communication with his readers, the foundation on which these young characters’ education is built on is redemption, the continual “ascension towards Heaven,” in various possible ways – through sacraments, good deeds, acts of self-deprecation. Any action is subject to spiritual judgment, and the register of each living being is accessorised with good/bad/neutral modifiers. The corresponding visual metaphor is the general chase for redeeming stairs in order to avoid the seductive calls of the snakes. In describing the types of sin and the archetypal demarcation between good and evil, Lodge virtuously (sic!) manoeu-

vres satire, finely shaping the “fauna” of sins and good deeds. For instance, apparently removed from context, he chooses to present a hypothetical case which could turn an ordinary bus trip – initially perceived as neutral from a spiritual standpoint – into a “good deed” by discreetly muttering a few prayers. Uttering the words of faith fully, out loud, would, however, be problematic. If the prayer were uttered from the very depth of one’s faith and also touched the infidels (assuming that patience and self-forgiveness would have been bestowed upon them), that would naturally be an Act of Good, even a heroic one.

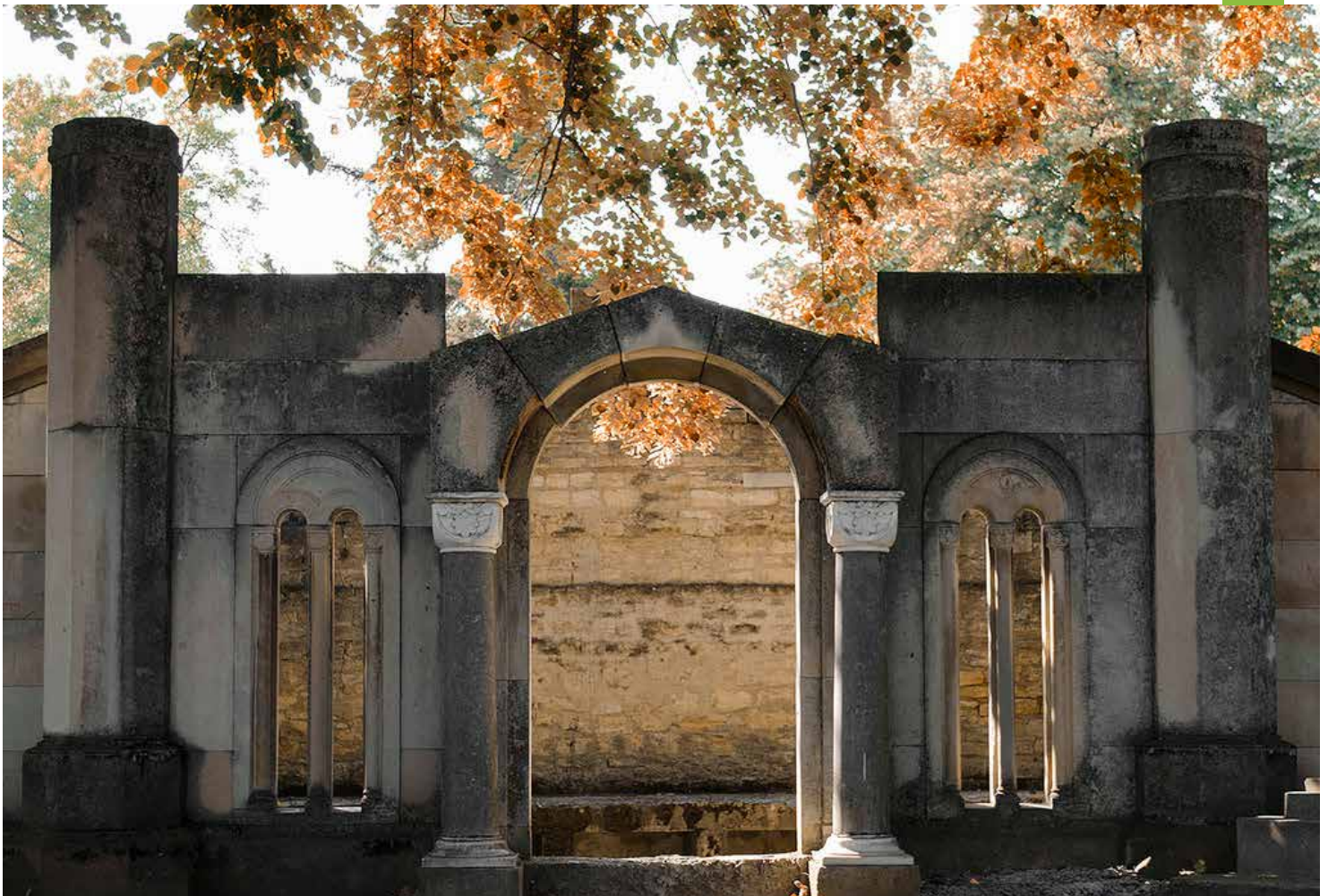
IF IT STEMMED, HOWEVER, FROM THE WISH TO SHOW OFF AND DRAW ATTENTION TO ONE’S OWN VIRTUES, IT WOULD BE, AT THE SAME TIME, EVIL – PROOF OF SPIRITUAL PRIDE THAT HIDES THE “SLIPPERY SERPENT.” IN ESSENCE, LODGE SYNTHESISES, “WHATEVER YOU INTENSELY DISLIKE IS PROBABLY GOOD AND WHATEVER YOU TREMENDOUSLY ENJOY DOING IS PROBABLY EVIL OR HAS NEGATIVE POTENTIAL – AN OPPORTUNITY TO SIN.”

This taxonomy of sins, categorised according to their severity, is realised within the frame of a mass in which eight students and friends participate, in a London Catholic church at the beginning of the 50s. They all belong to the middle class of that time, specimens with an intellectual level and education highly above average, belonging to a "minority" devoted to the Catholic Church, shown as being far stricter than the Anglican one. The Thursday morning mass is a mandatory ritual to which they sacrifice their breakfast, waiting for the sacrament (the equivalent of the Orthodox communion). Although they relate differently to discipline, justice, duty or pleasure, they all share the certainty that life is followed by the often mentioned Judgment, where they will account for everything they have undertaken on earth.

SOME OF THEM, PRESENT AT THE MASS OUT OF AN IMPETUS, PERHAPS EXPLICABLE, TO "ENSURE" THEIR PLACE IN HEAVEN, CAN HARDLY CONTROL THEIR EAGERNESS, COUNTING THE SECONDS TO RECEIVING THE HOLY EUCHARIST, THE MOMENT MARKING, FOR THEM, THE ABSOLUTION FOR ALL SINS COMMITTED DURING THE WEEK AND THE RETURN TO THE MUNDANE.

The characters are drawn following a careful pattern already established in the introduction: thus, Angela, a remarkable beauty, with an innocent and proper behaviour, brought up in a difficult familial environment, becomes the "object" of Dennis and Adrian's shared fascination. A striking character, with an instantly captivating physiognomy, Polly is marked by the same fear of Hell as her companions. Michael is revealed in pale tones, with a passion for literature, more timid than the other boys and yet tormented by an "unclean" curiosity with regard to his own carnal desires. In turn, Miles is shown as a pillar of stability, his somewhat rigid presence and impeccable posture betraying an ironclad self-discipline. Violet, on the other hand, is the character prone to emotional instability and chaotic living, both amplified, as her husband claims years in the future, "by the permanent terror created by the rigidity of Catholic education." Finally, Ruth embodies the monochromatic character who compensates her modest natural endowment with an extreme religious rigour.

Relieved to be brought back to the "state of grace" following the mass, each of their lives unfolds like a





string ball: Polly travels across Italy where she meets various men and is about to get engaged to one of them. Michael teaches literature in Catholic schools where he meets a cultured young woman with a strong personality, willing to renounce the Anglican Church in order to convert to Catholicism, a religion "with a history, prestige and a sense for the aesthetic." Edward, the Thursday mass deacon, marries a girl who initially lacks religious faith, who also embraces this religion which she finds somewhat "exotic" at first. Violet falls in love with the tutor preparing her for her finals, but her marriage is characterised by constant torment, caused either by her own insecurities, or her inability to bear children, and especially by the land-related guilt induced by the Catholic faith, for which her husband shows no empathy. Finally, Dennis and Angela are the last to get married, despite many years spent together.

Over the years, all of these young family people have to face dilemmas generated by the Catholic Church's interdictions regarding contraception. Thus, their lives appear as a merry-go-round that spins continuously around con(tra)ception: waiting for the Vatican's verdict results in the same disappointment every time, as only the Safe Method for copulation is allowed, based on the woman's biological calendar. In fact, this is not reliable at all, as the couples in the novel find themselves facing tens of unwanted pregnancies, spontaneous abortions

or, in the tragic case of the Angela-Dennis couple, a child suffering from Down Syndrome. Burdened with the incessant anxiety of a possible pregnancy, as well as the visible emancipation of the non-Catholic world of the 60s, these couples manage with great difficulty to let go of the habits so deeply engraved in the substance of their marital lives and to control, to a certain extent, their fear of hell.

Particularly memorable are the pages highlighting the changes that transpired inside the Catholic Church in England and, implicitly, in the view of some zealots such as Michael or Ruth. Michael, who has cultivated his appetite for experimenting and for the avant-garde through literature and cinematography, but is otherwise inhibited by the clerical authority, joins some meetings initiated by his former colleague Adrian, for the promotion of the Open Catholic Church.

STARTING FROM THIS TURNAROUND MOMENT, MICHAEL AND MIRIAM THEMSELVES BECOME THE ORGANISERS OF SOME INFORMAL MASS, WITH A THERAPEUTIC CHARACTER, WHERE THE PARISHIONERS GATHER TOGETHER IN A WARM ATMOSPHERE, AND WHOSE MAIN AIMS APPEAR TO BE COMMUNION AND COMMUNICATION. THUS, THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE NOW IN THEIR PRIME HAVE FOUND A NICHE IN WHICH FAITH CAN CO-EXIST WITH THEIR OWN PERSONAL NEEDS AND PRINCIPLES.



Ruth, following a tireless search of meaning in a nun's robe, comes to the realisation that her true calling is fulfilled by the Pentecostal-type mass, where prayer strongly and vibrantly uttered signifies a spiritual intimacy with all those present.

THE NOVEL IS STRIKING DUE TO ITS SURGICALLY PRECISE ANALYSIS OF ALL THE EIGHT CASE STUDIES, PLUS PRIEST AUSTIN, A CHARACTER WHO, FOR ALL HIS RELIGIOUS FERVOUR, CLEARLY EMBODIES THE CEREBRAL TYPE, HIS SEARCH AND DOUBTS TRANSLATING INTO HIS FEVERISH RESEARCH OF MYSTICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL OR EVEN SCIENTIFIC SPECIALTY ARTICLES.

Although Miles' existence is built with mostly realistic tools, the satire of academic elitism has an almost tragic impact on his fate: isolated from the world in the crystal globe of Cambridge University, Miles feeds a sort of intellectual and social exclusivism to mask his barely repressed homosexuality; in line with his conservative, almost puritanical, tendencies, he develops a stylised, intellectualised attraction for Catholicism, unlike the "provincial" colleagues of his generation. Regardless, the church's adversity towards his sexual orientation causes him suffering throughout his life and consolidates his predilection for self-induced masochism. He will find a point of balance with the help of a former monk.

Through accounts whose fictitiousness has repeatedly been claimed, Lodge subscribes to the category of authors refusing the moral discourse. Black humour appears precisely due to the "stubbornness" with which reality holds on to the lives of the characters, disregarding their spiritual "record." This is because, in the end, their destinies, as in the case of non-Catholics, will not be free from accidents, adultery, congenital disorders, the unpredictable.

THE PROTAGONISTS LEARN TO DECIPHER THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE IN A METAPHORICAL AND SYMBOLIC WAY AND NOT BY RUNNING AWAY FROM THE "SNAKES," WHILE THE RIGID DETERMINISM WHICH CHARACTERISED THE READING OF THE EPIC OF REDEMPTION IS REPLACED BY RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING TOWARDS FELLOW PEOPLE.

Anais Colibaba was Alecart's editor-in-chief and is currently a student at Jacobs University, Bremen.



ON ELECTIVE WANDERING:

Herta Müller

◆

OPPRESSION BREEDS REVOLUTION. AND SCARRING EXPERIENCES.
IT IS IN THIS TONE THAT HERTA MÜLLER'S WORK IS REVEALED TO THE READER,
STRIKING IN ITS CONSISTENTLY PSYCHOLOGICAL-ANALYTICAL THEMES.
AS A BACKGROUND FOR THE NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION, THE TOTALITARIAN REGIME IS
THE SYMBOL OF AN APOCALYPTIC HELL IN WHICH HERTA MÜLLER'S CHARACTERS FLAIL AND KICK.

◆

Clara Cășuneanu, Petru Rareș Graduate

In a fashion consistent with the local environment, we are first presented with the novel *Even Back Then, the Fox Was the Hunter*. The communist era, presented in its full glory, enslaves at the highest level the workings of human conscience.

The characters live in a virtual "mal du siècle," adapted to the daily realities. Ceaușescu's dictatorship entails neurotic, terrifying and sometimes pestilential landscapes, in which "the cockroaches will devour this socialism." The feminine figures of the narrative, Adina and Clara, come as a painful counterpoint to a strict society in which individuals are ostracised, in fear of the executioners. Fear turns into the novel's leitmotif, becoming more intense with each narrative occurrence.

Autobiographically tinted, the novel *Animal of Love* foretells of the way in which fear "lies free around you, you can spot it on things all around." Life in the Swabian community, which the heroine is part of, is consumed within the same ontological dimensions: the persecution of the intellectual class, the ravaging abuses of the Secret Police and various latent tensions. An image suggested also by the expressive title-metaphor, in a Valerian structure of "language within language," is also found, in a nuanced manner, in the novel *Is He or Isn't He Ion*.

Here, alienation becomes an essential coordinate, thus lining another motif with a heavily affective load. Within the stories of "the singing Grandmother" and those of the "praying" one, the desire to escape gradually crystallises. The impulse for liberation is, however, slightly repressed by the idea that "each escape was an offer of death."

Throughout the narrative journey there is remarkable human solidarity, the collective consciousness in relation to the perspective that "the dictator is a mistake." The aversion towards the communist regime and the dictator is incisively outlined, the characters sharing the joy of the dictator's suffering (dictator whom they nicknamed "the prune eater") with cynical voluptuousness. Thus, the "animal of love," travelling incessantly from man to man, harnesses his spastic impetuosity.

THE OBSESSION FOR LIBERATION PULSES THROUGH HERTA MÜLLER'S WRITINGS SOMETIMES AS ENERGETIC REBELLIONS, SOMETIMES AS THE FEELING OF EXISTENTIAL FUTILITY. ALMOST REMINISCENT OF PARTS OF FERNANDO PESSOA'S WORKS, IN THE NOVEL *THE HUNGER ANGEL*, THE ANGEL GENERATES DISTURBING EXPERIENCES: "HUNGER IS ALWAYS THERE." DEPORTATION INTO THE LABOUR CAMP IN THE SOVIET UNION MARKS ONE OF THE MOST OVERWHELMING IMAGES IN THE ROMANIAN SETTING.



Radu Camariu
Cheia de la gățul cui?

The unravelling monologue of the main character, Leopold Auberg, reveals the fragile condition of humanity in the camp. He bears witness to the attempt to disavow spiritual identity. The tragedy can be rightly compared to Solzhenitsyn's dramas, consummated in the universe of the camp. What is impressive, however, is the text's ability to elevate with a "heart shovel" the fear, hunger, death and silence in its prose, with an almost implausible naturalness. An inexhaustible source of stem-themes in Herta Müller's creation, totalitarianism offers the adequate environment conducive to the quest for avoiding the annihilation of one's own being. This is also the case with the lucid autobiography in the novel *The King Bows and Kills*. In a lyrical kind of prose, here the "animal of love" also swings like a pendulum between the "short fear" and the "long fear" of peripheral life. The word becomes a vital inner strength as the author discovers that "in every tongue there are new eyes." The act of confession appears as an instinct of preservation and rebellion against the system, through "cunning word games." Gradually, he allows his uprooting to spring from the "great moving island which was the country," as well as his loneliness over "the outside border."

It is an isolation deeply felt in the volume *Travelling on One Leg* as well, where Irene, the main character of

the prose discourse, lives tormented by the anxious solitude of the West. The emigrant status brings along a traumatic social inadequacy, as Irene is always searching for her identity. The theme of emigration also resonates powerfully in the writing *Man is a Great Pheasant in This World*, where the characters' psychological degradation and organic fear show once more the suffocating nature of the communist universe.

FROM A PANORAMIC PERSPECTIVE, THIS ALIENATION REPRESENTS, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, THE FINAL POINT IN THE EVOLUTION OF HERTA MÜLLER'S CHARACTERS. SOMETIMES ACCEPTED WITH A FEVERISH DETACHMENT, SOMETIMES WITH THE MELANCHOLY OF SCHISM, IT COAGULATES AROUND TORMENTING THOUGHTS AND EVENTS, DESCRIBED IN MINIMALISTIC AND RICH SENTENCES, IN SYMBOLIC FUSIONS WHERE THE FREE SOCIETY SHINES THROUGH, IN A UTOPIAN MANNER. AND, ABOVE ALL ELSE, THE FREE MAN STANDS OUT.

At this moment, the author's stance is as clear as can be in the eyes of the reader. As a representation of the puny individual, "the little wandering island" is no longer integrated in the horrors of the Oriental bloc, which, in fact, has never really been the case. The typology of Herta Müller's characters follows a precise trajectory, these characters seemingly identifying one by one, in life's crucial moments, with Victor Petrini, the hero of Marin Preda's *The Most Beloved of Earthlings*. Whether reminiscent of the intellectual class silenced through atrocities or showing the banality of the common folks' existence, the author endows her characters with unforeseen resources to fight and resist. The fighting spirit defines Herta Müller's body of work and is the living source of redemption, of leaving "the other country." Reading between the lines, however, even the charm of the West does not always bring harmony. "The Animal of Love" is permanently split between the two realities, unwillingly trapped in a process of hybridisation.

"When there is so much fear in the world," in the Naumian style—appreciated and at the same time evoked by the author—Müller has always taken care of her characters, in the winded ways of the literary. Seemingly profiling a biblical analogy, the author sends out the "animal" of her and her characters' heart like lambs among the wolves. She "shepherds" her words and the people moulded from these words amidst the fluctuating universes that knock on the doors of the West. With tenacity and dignity. The author's fear has been transformed, thanks to the inner fervour from which she extracted the strength (at times defying) to boycott history, as Blaga puts it. With every Romanian, she comes ever closer to legitimising the courage to take the pilgrimage within a dramatic odyssey through to the end. All the way up to the present and beyond.

THE LAW OF MAN:

Envelopes and Portraits

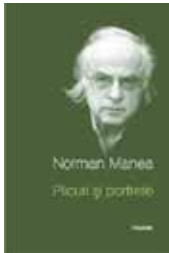
by
NORMAN MANEA

◆

IS THERE REALLY SUCH GREAT DISTANCE BETWEEN INFERNO AND A DESOLATE PARADISE?
AS FOR FREEDOM, TO PARAPHRASE EMIL CIORAN ONCE AGAIN, IS IT NOT TRUE THAT TO US, ITS POSSESSORS,
IT IS NOTHING BUT AN ILLUSION, AS WE ALREADY KNOW THAT IT WAS MADE TO BE LOST?
LITTLE BY LITTLE, THIS MEDITATION ON FREEDOM, ON HELL AND PARADISE, ON EXODUS, ON DESTINY AND
SOLITUDE DESCENDS TOWARDS THE METAPHYSICAL AND WEAVES ITSELF AROUND THE HUMAN BEING,
AS IT IS DEFINED AT THE CONFLUENCE BETWEEN SMALL AND LARGE HISTORY.

◆

Ioana Lionte, Național Graduate



I would lean towards stating that Norman Manea's *Envelopes and Portraits* is first of all a hypostasis of MAN as deciphered in all the fullness of a being at odds with history, the throes of creation, the Other, but especially with himself.

The aforementioned small and large history finds its symmetries in the relationship between the individual and the collective, between personal destiny and that of a community perceived and later consigned to posterity under the unmistakable seal of a stigma. Norman Manea manages to give (back) to the Man that which belongs to the man and to History that which belongs to History, the simplicity of truth and the candour of recollection. Seemingly in another search for lost time (this time not a Proustian one, but a Normanian one), the author offers a panorama of the Romanian literary space during and after the communist era, through an exercise in (re)memory and (com)memory. Thus, *Envelopes and Portraits* reveals its content right from the beginning: snippets of the author's correspondence with Romanian writers and from across the ocean, as well as their portraits, that is, the image of the person beyond the lines, projected with and through his words. The reader is thus shown a succession not only of figures representative of the Romanian cultural space, but the reality of the person behind the name. Thanks to the author's evocative talent and to the unmistakable epistolary style of his correspondents (receivers), the reader may easily break through, to then position himself or herself at the narration's core of ideas. The content of the volume constitutes itself into a nucleus (the man in the fullness of his contradiction) which, pulsing, shines onto the thematic spaces, later aiding

in articulating the account. Is there an adequacy of the account with regard to Romanian communism? Can we bring up the possibility of a full evocation that would meet all the conditions of objectivity or, considering the intrinsic subjectivity of any evocation, can we simply note the greater or lesser degree of the retrospection's eloquence? We should also take into account the fact that, together with the utterly "irreparable" racing of time, that which at a given moment constituted the reality of Romanian communism transforms, little by little, into the mainstream society's product of fiction. The reception is inevitably distorted not only because of the ever growing gap between generations, but also because of a decentralisation of identity. The sometimes fatal dance of the small and large history has been immortalised in various styles and shapes, but I dare say that the Norman Manea volume is one of the most eloquent accounts of that period, without presuming to possess the absolute truth, bringing the reader closer precisely through the natural flow and candour of the evocation.

The first part contains the album of "multilaterally developed" socialist Romania, evoking, image by image, the realities of the totalitarian space filtered through a culture and literature mutilated by and subjugated to a political apparatus. One finds in Norman Manea's account and the accounts of the authors with whom he corresponded the indicative factors of the mechanism of depersonalisation and utilisation, for purposes of propaganda, of the cultural factor, namely the literature born at the core of a sick utopia. One notes the parasitical transition from Ideal to Ideology, from the human being to the remnants represented by the "new man," and finally, from Utopia to Dystopia. But what of literature?

It experienced an unfortunate, Kafkaian metamorphosis from the expression of ever-troubling individuality to the instrument of a mechanism of generating sameness. Here is, in Monica Lovinescu's words, the expression of this subjugation: "...any writer publishing in Romania is aware that he will almost never get away with an intact clean manuscript." The creation no longer belongs to the author the same way that one no longer belongs to oneself. Despite all this, the gigantic instrument of flattening represented by the political factor does not succeed in breaking everything. A few characters remain just, squarely facing the consequences, some bend slightly only to maintain, in a cunning mimeticism, the appearances of obedience. What of the creator? Well, his or her stances range from the eternal believer, the solitary writer, the nostalgic exile, the content exile, to the literary idealist and writer in the service of the system for reasons of self-preservation or personal belief. All these portraits are in fact masks of the man's struggle with himself in the context of an extreme situation. The character of the literary manifestation constitutes, therefore, the expression of the fight for survival.

THE PAGES OF THE NOVEL REVEAL BOTH THE IMAGE OF THE CREATOR, ALWAYS SEARCHING FOR BEAUTY, TRUTH, KNOWLEDGE, AND THAT OF THE LITERATE, WHO DESPITE HIS OR HER CALLING, SUBSCRIBES TO A POLITICAL IDEAL.

As for the exile or rather the exodus, one could say many things. One could talk about a literature of the exile, about writers of the exile, about consequences, impressions. Once more the author, through the natural flow of his writing, brings these discussions close to the reader, who, while perhaps not fully understanding the phenomena of alienation, finds himself or herself empathising. Is the multilaterally developed Romania, from which there are those few who leave, an inferno, and the adoptive country a desolate paradise, or vice versa? The answer lies in each of the exiles, divided into two categories: those who see their new Western home as not necessarily a land of promise, but of freedom and slowly deny their connections to their point of origin, and those who keep their identity within, by belonging to a space, a culture and a language. Thus, "partir" may indeed be "mourir un peu," but also "changer un peu" and, why not, "changer en totalité."

Having undergone Stalinism and the regime of Ceaușescu, branded by the red aesthetic, post-communist literature becomes an instrument of modern pragmatism. The new society, free from the chains of a totalitarian system, denies its limits and this time subscribes willingly to sameness, through globalisation. Now, at the dawn of a new era, can one speak about the atonement of a nation? Are we granted, perhaps, a new beginning or is History bound to repeat itself?

"MAN REMAINS THE TRUE MYSTERY OF EXISTENCE. WITHIN HIM THERE ARE, IN FACT, THE POTENTIAL DICTATOR AS WELL AS THE TEENAGER IN LOVE, AND THE BLIND EXECUTIONER, AND THE ENIGMA OF THE AMPHORA OF PASSION, AND THE DEAF-MUTE BOREDOM OF GREGARIOUS SLAVERY. [...] THE REASON, THE SOUL AND THE CHIMERA OF MAN REPRESENT THE TRUE MYSTERY, TWISTING THE DAILY INCANDESCENCE OF THE SPIRIT THAT IS HARASSED, VULNERABLE, ALWAYS RESTLESS IN THE TOIL OF ITS EXISTENCE."

Norman Manea's volume constitutes as much a penetrating retrospective as an eloquent and deeply personal perspective on exile, the creator, solitude, utopia, dystopia, totalitarianism, abandonment and recollection, although it remains, above everything, a book dedicated to MANKIND.

Nowak852
Selfie



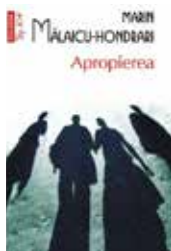
JOURNEY TO THE EDGE OF POETRY:

The Comparison

by
MARIN MĂLAICU-HONDRARI

“[...] A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IS BEST AND FASTEST LEARNED IN BED”

Andreea Nicuța, Băncilă



“(...) how is it that in a book you like you may read something along these lines: at first, I would drink my coffee with sugar, then for a long time I preferred it bitter, without a grain of sugar, and now – for some time now – I like adding a tip of a teaspoon per cup; anyway, you realise that it is pure poetry or pure prose – it doesn’t matter; what matters is that it delights, even though you may have heard that sentence before.”

The starting point of Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari’s *The Comparison* is the wish of four friends (three men and Lidia – “la madre de la poesía”) to rediscover the essence of Poetry. It is a Bolanian theme, but this does not surprise us, for Cortazar, as well as Bolaño and Marquez and Borges (focusing only on South-Americans) are the shadow “characters” who walk among Mălaicu-Hondrari’s characters here, as well as in *The Telescope Man*. One of them, Parfenie, gives up, but we find that out later, the same way as it is only halfway through the book that we understand the starting point and the stakes of the game between the three: a game of disappearance, oblivion, death or life. During each individual journey, the characters seem to distance themselves from poetry, thus coming closer than ever to its essence. This revelation is made possible through the proximity between new cultures, different people and concepts and lifestyles.

“The ghost of a man in love haunts Europe in pursuit of a married woman.” Emigration, illicit affairs, adulterous liaisons, love stories “of life and death” (of which “I was 33 years old and believed [...] they only took place in

literature and soap operas”), all can be found naturally in a space which varies almost from one chapter to the next: Madrid, Barcelona, Córdoba.

“IF I LOVED, WHAT NEED WOULD I HAVE HAD TO FALL IN LOVE?”

A combination between Vicky Cristina Barcelona and any film that deals with illegal trafficking and car smuggling, counterfeit perfumes or other trifles, the novel presents the tumultuous lives of some artists, whether they be writers, sculptors, musicians, first-rate seducers and deceivers. The unpredictably alternating perspectives of the 6 narrators accompany the reader on a journey that reveals the story of Adrian – the quiet poet – and the road to his Iberian Juliette, married and adulterous (aka Maria), a coming-of-age road into a world for which, before her, his guides are Rafael – the owner of a bankrupt business of second-hand cars – and Vanessa – a bisexual “businesswoman” (who “hugged me and it seemed to me that she did it on purpose so that I would feel under her dress the revolver resting against her left thigh”). It is a journey that does not end the way we would expect based on the movies that pump the adrenaline every other scene, because, if you have not already gathered, Mălaicu-Hondrari’s novel has very little of everything we have so far discussed. These aspects constitute only the surface, the thin layer under which there is a new story, in this game that has trapped not only the characters within (some without even realising it), but us, the readers as well. The author’s game, thus, takes place on various



Alexandru Danu
Destroy and Rebuild

levels and it is far from gratuitous. The stakes are life itself. Or poetry—that is, the life of literature.

"I was in a club when I saw him for the first time. I was doing a gig with Tinto Brass Band and he stood leaning against a wall and listened to us. Nothing special. Except that as soon as I didn't see him against the wall anymore, I started searching for him with my gaze. And when I spotted him talking to one of the sculptors I was glad, but I also saw Javier and felt ashamed of my joy."

Despite expectations or the initial image of one's own life, all the characters, regardless of ethnicity, sex, age, occupation, social status – Romanians, Spanish, Argentinian, artists, businessmen or just clinically depressed young people who try their luck ("testing the waters of the Mediterranean"), poor or rich, gay or straight, will be, one at a time (emotionally, psychologically, socially, professionally) imminently destroyed by their own uncontrolled lusts. Therefore, the expectations created by the Latin space – famous for its exciting love affairs that fill the collective psyche – are equally confirmed by the torment that the characters experience and denied by the conclusion. Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari manages to avoid the tempting mawkishness of soap operas by strategically and systematically deviating from intercultural ideas, interlacing them with serious contemporary social themes. This way he brings "into the limelight" issues such as: the continuous growth of the black market, the increasing number of cases of depression in people ever younger or the condition of emigrants.

STRIPPED OF ALL THESE, ONE MAY FORGET THAT, IN FACT, THE COMMUNION IS A FEW POETS' ATTEMPT TO REDISCOVER POETRY. BUT THE DYNAMIC STRUCTURE OF THE CHAPTERS, FLEXIBLE IN TIME AND SPACE, PLUS LIDIA'S INTERVENTIONS, "LITTLE MISS, LA MADRE DE LA POÉSIA," ARE A CONSTANT SUBTLE REMINDER OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE NOVEL.

"(...) I AM CERTAIN, I HAVE INVENTED POETRY AND HAVE A HEART NO MORE."

Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari brings closer continents, people, characters, inner worlds in a journey only made possible by the poetry of an authentically lived existence. Last but not least, he manages to bring his readers closer to a novel with extraordinary cinematic potential, which leads me to suggest this:

Directed by: someone, anyone who volunteers

Screenplay: Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari

Genre: Romantic drama, adventure, comedy, action

Starring: the actors may be cast from the many Romanian emigrants to Spain, but it is not mandatory, it only matters that they are seductive, benevolent and that they love... poetry

Synopsis: a warning that reflects an almost real society, which leaves one more careful, more sensitive and with a burning desire to travel and to fall in love – with a poet, if possible. A story of love and about love, with crimes and sacrifices committed "for the sake of art."

Have a pleasant reading (and viewing)! ■

ON THE WAY TO LOSING AND FINDING ONESELF AGAIN, THERE ARE

The Tuesday Ladies

by
MONIKA PEETZ

◆
**A SEEMINGLY MONOTONOUS HUMAN HISTORY, RECOMPOSED FROM FIVE EXISTENTIAL ADVENTURES.
A STORY OVERLAID ON AN OUTPOURING OF BITTERNESS AND INNER TORMENT.**
◆

Adela Cășuneanu, Petru Rareș



This is the reader's sensation at first sight of the volume written by Monika Peetz, *The Tuesday Ladies*. Released in 2013 by the Baroque Books&Arts Publishing House as part of the Quadrille Collection, the book brings the reader face to face with a plot sintered around events that the characters experience at high intensity. There are thoughts and emotions that, gradually, the reader will believe to have discovered in all their depth and, especially, there is a touching sense of reality that demonstrates the novelist's agility to present, as if in a fascinating world carnival, new masks of the same characters. It is only this way that Monika Peetz tests her power of persuasion against the most critical of narrative instances – the reader – beyond the pores of the book. Appearances are assimilated into an "immortal" (Toma Pavel), which only the author is capable of building in a most authentic way.

Most captivating to the reader's eyes is the novel's cover. It paints in playful shades the image of five teacups, in a multitude of shapes and colours. The tableau suggests the literary context in which the action takes place. The five ladies' friendship, outlined even from the cover, harmonises five diametrically opposed characters through fine contours. Symbiotically, the two clouds shown in this plane crystallise the ludic space in which the target is to reach perfection through minutely performed introspections. As an ensemble, the cover defines the cosmopolitan side of the novel.

MONIKA PEETZ BRINGS TO LIFE BEINGS TRAPPED IN A LABYRINTH OF DAILY ACTIVITIES. SHE SHOWS THE MODERN WORLD OF THE FIVE LADIES WHOSE TEMPERAMENTS, ALBEIT CONTRASTING, MIRROR A SENSITIVE SIDE, THAT OF UNCONDITIONAL FRIENDSHIP. THEIR LIVES OSCILLATE BETWEEN BANALITY AND EXTRAVAGANCE, BETWEEN THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE LIMITED HUMAN CONDITION AND THE PERPETUAL ATTEMPT TO BREAK FREE FROM THE STATE OF LETHARGY.

The author puts together these portraits using minimalistic lines, framing them in the urban mundaneness. Caroline, always consistent and rational in nature, channels her vital strengths in the lawyer profession. Eva, a declared family woman and an altruistic person, is portrayed as a "slave to the number four:" she is forty years old, "her mind in four directions" and four children, for whom she has given up a possible career in medicine. Estelle, a pharmacist's wife, is a spoiled modern woman, the archetype of the eccentric woman who "stuffs up her suitcase to bursting and allows others to carry it for her." Kiki, who makes the most of her imagination in a creative workshop, is always in love and dreamy, and Judith – a graceful petite and a drama queen, "would rather talk about her problems endlessly instead of solving them."

The lady quintet coagulates seamlessly over a class of French, each of the five characters wishing to learn the aforementioned language. The meeting place chosen by





Alexandra Baban
Green Grows the Lily
 Model: Kirsten van Antwerpen

the characters is marked by continuity and stability. Tom and Luc's restaurant, Le Jardin, becomes, for fifteen years, a place of impressive emotional and symbolic meaning. All the experiences and thoughts of the characters converge toward this point. The meetings of the five women are organised and rigorously observed on the first Tuesday of every month, at the same booked table near the fireplace.

IN A VOYAGE THROUGH THE UNIVERSE OF THE BOOK, THE IDEA OF A COMING-OF-AGE JOURNEY IS OFTENTIMES SUGGESTED. UPON HER HUSBAND'S DEATH, JUDITH FINDS IN SUCH A JOURNEY A SPIRITUAL SANCTUARY. AT THE SAME TIME, THE PILGRIMAGE MANIFESTS ITSELF AS AN EXTERNALISATION OF INNER EMOTIONS, PROVIDING THE READ WITH AN AMPLE VISION OF THE MAN-UNIVERSE FULL COMMUNION: "JUDITH NO LONGER HAD DESIRES. SHE HAD HELD ON UNTIL THE END. AND WAS SUFFERING THE CONSEQUENCES."

Thus, a pilgrimage to Lourdes to meet the Virgin Mary becomes a symbol for an oasis of freedom, a place of metamorphoses. From this outbreak of life radiates a new beginning for the characters of the novel. Important mutations take place existentially, generating quests for finding oneself once more. What is remarkable is the author's ability to render her characters' transfiguration in a spontaneous manner, to break into symbolic images the entire transition into a new life. Following the storyline, one notes a certain detachment from the past, an amplified torment of the vortex of intrigue. It seems as if Monika Peetz' characters are reborn, much like the Phoenix, from their own ashes. Judith, for instance, goes through the steps of re-humanisation by becoming close to others. If at the beginning Judith's suffering (generated by the death of her husband, Arne) is hyperbolised, as the story unfolds the reader also discovers the suffocating sensation of betrayal that Judith feels. Eva, on the other hand, recalibrates her personal life through an emphasised closeness to her own being.

From an affective standpoint, the narrative discourse, sustained by the density of the writing and its naturalness, subsumes an expression of genuine thoughts and feelings. Spicing up her novel with refined humour and a ludic spirit, the author manages to draw attention to her perspective. The transformation, a keyword of the literary discourse, ontologically revolutionises the world of the Tuesday ladies. Managing to break out, like butterflies, from their suffocating chrysalides, the characters transcend from a quiet world, ruled by stillness, through eternal quests, into one of discovery and findings. Of finding oneself.





STEPPING THROUGH DUST IN

Closed rooms

by
CARE SANTOS

BRINGING FORTH THE IMAGE, OF THE ARTIST AS GENIUS IN HIS WORK, BUT DEMONIC IN HIS HUMANITY, CARE SANTOS IMAGINES THE PAST AS AN IMPRESSIVE BUILDING THAT SHOWS TO THE PRESENT A FAÇADE DECORATED WITH DOORS. SOME OF THEM ARE OPENED BY THE CHARACTERS AND READER ALIKE. OTHERS ARE OPENED ONLY BY THE LATTER, BUT NO CHAMBER STAYS LOCKED, AND EVERY TIME A DOOR OPENS ANOTHER STORY TAKES SHAPE AND A NEW GHOST GAINS AN OUTLINE AND A VOICE.

Iulia-Mădălina Ștreangă, Național



In this pilgrimage dedicated to relating a family's history as it unfolds across three generations, those who live in the present go back to years long past, at first bringing fervent homage to the painter and artist Amadeo Lax, the character around whom the narrative is built, and then hesitating ever more, as unknown events reveal the man behind the paintings. It is necessary for two of the locked chambers in the ruined house of the Lax family to be forced open, so that two early deaths may outpour their evocation into the present and forever change the life of Violeta Lax Rahal, Amadeo Lax's granddaughter and, at the same time, an expert of his work. An assassination and a secret love story, hidden for decades behind the painting that contemporaries view as the artist's masterpiece, find their explanation as present-day characters, whose exponent remains Violeta, become the protagonists of a labyrinthine journey, which gradually becomes whole and gains significance from disparate fragments. The episodes are invoked in an order which disregards chronology, for the ghosts of the past cannot subdue their tormenting stories.

Along with these characters from the present, the reader also becomes engaged in a pilgrimage among relics numbed by oblivion. Each discovery that sheds light over past generations is accompanied by a detailed

episode told by an omniscient narrator whose credibility is guaranteed by the fact that it proves to be the multiplied projection of past years' ghosts: "beings outside time," who, precisely for that reason, are unperturbed by his passing by ("Time – this universal subject. It annihilates people. It blunts rocks. It dulls the voice of the writers. It bores ghosts.")

That is why ghosts attempt to defy it: the last chapter is dedicated to the imaginary journey they undertake, counter-clockwise, in a desperate attempt to rewrite history, to find peace beyond their innocent deaths, unrequited loves and the secrets kept behind the bolted doors. Attempting to rewrite the characters' destiny, the ghosts go back in time to restore the uniform silence of non-existence, which floated once over the place where Amadeo Lax's father chooses to build his imposing house that bears witness to the family curse:

"...AND, FINALLY, TO FINISH ONCE AND FOR ALL, LET US SET EACH LITTLE PIECE BACK IN ITS PLACE, BREAK DOWN THE WALLS STONE BY STONE AND LEAVE THE PLACE DESERTED, AS IT USED TO BE BACK WHEN DON RODOLFO LAX GREY, A VISIONARY, STOPPED HERE, LOOKED AROUND AND STARTED DREAMING OF HIS HOME."

IT IS A CAREFUL GAME OF TURNING BACK THE ARROW OF THE TIME MACHINE, TO ERASE THE MARKS FROM STONE AND PAPER AND TO CREATE A NEW STORY, IN A NEW WORLD.

Thanks to this multifaceted narrator, a prisoner between past and present, the reader becomes, at the end of the novel, superior to the characters of the present, characters who do not hold a thread from Ariadne long enough for them to find their way back to all the secrets of the past. For Violeta Lax, entire passages of her grandfather's life remain veiled by a mystical silence, impossible to pierce. And although the terrible burden on the soul for the crime committed, perhaps, because of too much love, is forever locked from the granddaughter (for there is no surviving proof), Violeta is, nonetheless, irrevocably shaken upon discovering the artist's infidelity, engraved to memory through thick brush strokes against the canvas: "Dust remained of all those romantic ideas. Grandfather was not the strong man I admired so much, but an immoral man, capable of much wretchedness. (...) How could he? How did he manage to start over? I don't even know if his memory is worthy of respect."

Like the ghost-narrator, Violeta finds herself trapped between two irreconcilable eras, surprised by the incongruity between her own imaginings and reality.

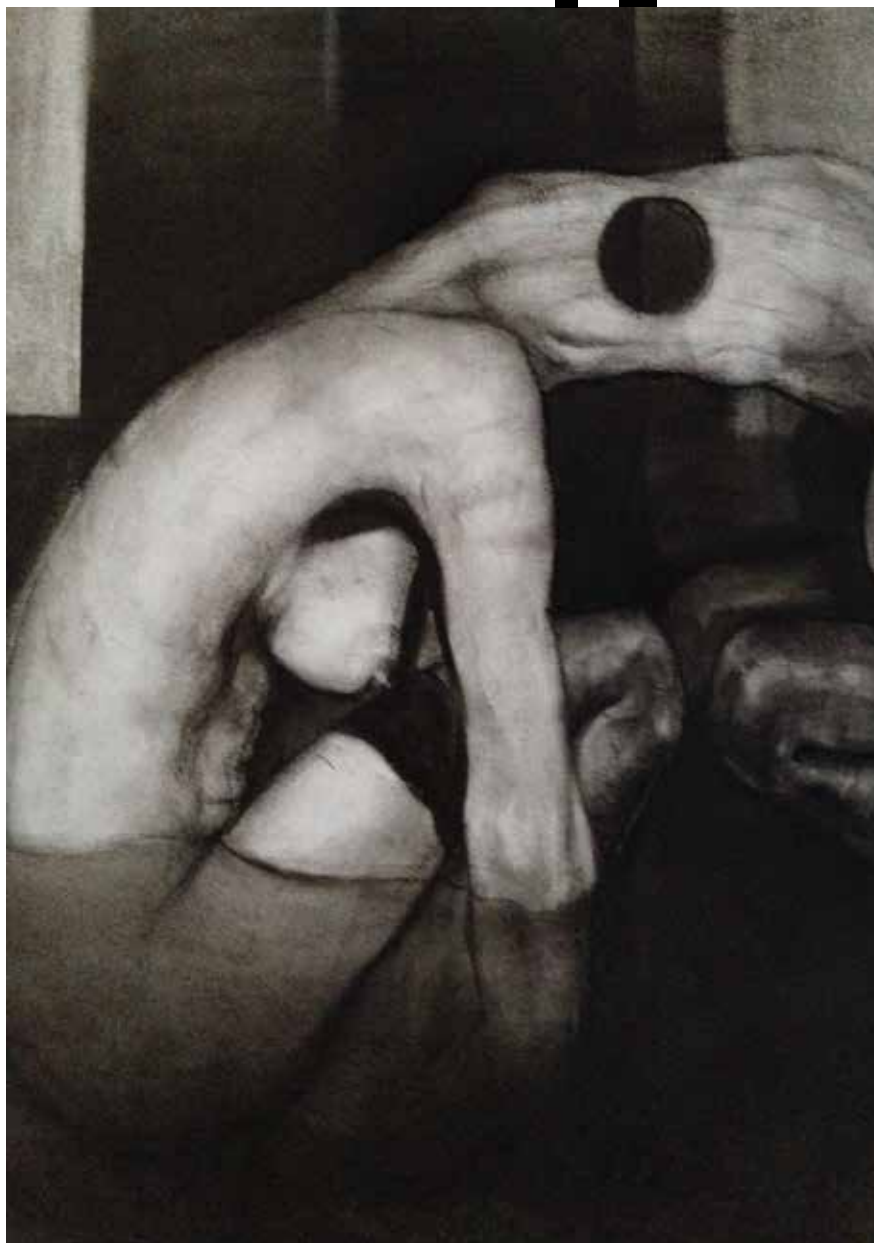
THE NOVEL CREATES A DISTURBING CONNECTION TO TANGIBLE AND IMAGINARY CHAMBERS ALIKE, THE TITLE REVEALING, THROUGHOUT THE BOOK, ITS INEXHAUSTIBLE INTERPRETATIONS. IT IS A JOURNEY OF SELF TOWARDS OTHERS AS SHADOWS OF THE PAST, ENCOURAGED BY THE DESIRE TO DEFINE ONE'S FEARS IN CONTACT WITH SHADOWS OF TIMES THAT BREATHE THROUGH PAINTINGS, FOR THE PLASTIC ARTS EXPERT KNOWS THAT "ART CAN SPEAK ANYTHING."

The novel reveals its modernity as much through the form in which certain pages are redacted as through the ideas put forth by the characters. The chapters are separated by full pages that constitute email messages, newspaper articles, maps, art chronicles, verbal processes, whose insertion determines the incredible ease with which one reads the novel. The novelty of the ideas presented has as reference point an aspect belonging to the existence of the present-day characters – namely, the fact that Violeta Lax's greatest love was a woman – and another that is correlated with the past – the promotion of spiritism among the members of the Lax family, a new current that occurred in Barcelonan society at the end of the XIXth century. As the reader witnesses the family drama centred around the sick personality of Amadeo Lax and comprising a mosaic of stories, events, opinions,

that does not become whole even a few decades after assuming the condition of the most famous, but also the most damned of the dead, the reader discovers a serial-work that, although apparently fragmented, proves to have a flawless coherence and unexpected complexity.

Picking up slices of the story and consuming them in the order served by the ghost-narrator, the reader becomes, in the end, his accomplice and upon closing the book after finishing the last words, the reader is able to comprehend the notion that the past cannot stay entirely inaccessible and fearsome, for "the Dead have a lot of time and infinite patience."

Corina Păcurar





WHEN THE LAW OF GRAVITY IS CANCELLED:

Belly Sky

by
IOANA NICOLAIE

◆

IS THE SKY A REAL PLACE?
DO WE CARRY IT ON OUR SHOULDERS OR, PERHAPS, IS IT PART OF US AND,
FOR A FEW FRACTIONS OF DIVINE GRACE, DO WE WEAR IT
LIKE A PRECIOUS COCOON FROM WHICH ETHEREAL CLOUDS OF CANDOUR WILL RISE?

◆

Ștefania Sandu, Băncilă



Ioana Nicolaie's book is brave enough to give a possible answer to these questions straight from the title. *Belly Sky* is a unique journal due to its subject as well as its approach. But why the "sky in the belly" of all things?

Nine months. Pain. Anguish. Change. A toppling over of all certainty and a restructuring of the ropes with which one hangs on to life. For, from now on, your life will be nothing but an extension of another life: one which you know, which you feel growing inside you,

but which tears the solid foundations of what you were and, lo and behold, you rediscover yourself as someone else. Someone with pain and fear, with anxieties you have never known up to this point. With stories that come from your bitter childhood, from your real mother and all the mothers in the world, from the women affectionately comforted in anterooms of waiting, of hope, of anxiousness and, sometimes, in the anteroom of death.

THIS IS A LYRICAL JOURNAL OF THOSE NINE MONTHS OF PREGNANCY IN WHICH THE BELLY BECOMES THE SKY FOR A NEW SOUL.

You are not born a woman, you become one – this is already commonplace, but you do not really get to the core of this truth until you are face to face with the strangeness of another who is you and yet is not you, who equally belongs and does not belong to you, although a thin cord pulses blood and yearnings from your body to the heart of that new being. A heart which you know is there, but which remains the greatest mystery of all times. Pregnancy as state of grace and tearing, of reconstruction of the world's walls and the self's contour, a state that torments you, adding the emotion and anxiety of the future birth, but also the lifting feeling that you have created and have given life from life.

The book represents an oscillation from the inside towards the outside, a dialogue with that second heart, which constantly grows in the body of that who, although she already is a mother, has no reason to be called that: "I feel like a watchmaker behind closed doors. I am clear and my heart is ticking." It is, likewise, a dialogue with the little girl who once was, with the mother's shadow and other faces from stories that have been lived or only heard or perhaps imagined. Being a pure state, an emotion under the empire of a lift-fall outside gravity, the text avoids monotony, as Ioana Nicolaie enhances the natural events with the help of searing poetry and powerful images that breathe lyricism.

THEREFORE, THE SKY IN THE BELLY IS A UNIQUE TEXTBOOK FOR THE STATE OF PREGNANCY. THE AUTHOR HOMOGENISES CONCRETE MEDICAL DETAILS WITH DREAMS, GHOSTS, PULSE (X2), WITH A CONTINUOUS INNER STRUGGLE, TURNING THIS TEXTBOOK INTO THE STORY OF TWO SIAMESE HEARTS.

And as is the case with every other story, the threads of time and inner order interlace, mixing the present in which the woman has the freedom to choose with a prison-past (which, for some, can never be just the past, but a time frozen in the moment of an event not always fortunate): "Conception was field and place or wall without end [...] Abortions were then called: prison."

If Ioana Nicolaie's volume has anything to offer to today's women, it is first and foremost the thought that they live in more fortunate times and they do not have to be mothers to the "future citizen of Romania" with or without "proper documents." Man, woman, child, adolescent, people – we all have had our sky, we all have known and have generated a journey which, although unique, keeps within it the signs of an essential state of grace. This means that in the end, in broad lines and simple words, *Belly Sky* is a guide for each and every one of us!

DEAR GIRL, BOY,

LOOK AT THE SKY! IN WHOSE "BELLY" DO YOU SUPPOSE WE LIVE NOW?



THE BLOODY REVOLUTION AND THE POWER TO FORGIVE:

Children of the Jacaranda Tree

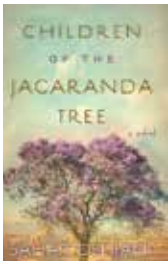
by
SAHAR DELIJANI

◆

TO THE EXTENT TO WHICH LITERATURE REFLECTS AND BEARS WITNESS TO AN OUTRAGEOUS REALITY, IT MANAGES TO KEEP THE TRAGIC TINT THAT THE MADNESS OF MANKIND AND HISTORY GIVES TO EXISTENCE WHENEVER CONFLICTS THAT ARISE TURN HUMAN BEINGS INTO FIGHTERS AND VICTIMS ON THE BATTLEFIELD OF AN IDEA — REGARDLESS OF ITS TRUTH, CRUELTY OR UTOPIA.

◆

Andra Păduraru, Național



Children of the Jacaranda Tree is a novel of shattered dreams, but first and foremost, it is a book of survival that describes the life of the Iranian people during and after the Tehran Revolution, a revolution “born” in the year 1979.

The story follows a family's saga against the background, painted in acutely realistic strokes, of executions, incarcerations, the need for freedom, the consequences of fundamentalist movements, terror and dreams. If from the perspective of life stories the novel is an easy read, on a structural level it requires additional attention, as it brings face to face the image of Tehran from yesterday and that of today. Sahar Delijani weaves these two time fragments by underscoring the issue of identity and the necessity of reconciling oneself with one's past, but also with the history of one's country, with the errors and fanaticisms of a world towards which he who lives in the present feels both outrage and attraction. Thus the most important feelings that leave a footprint on the story are highlighted: fear and love.

THE FIRST IMAGE: THE EVIN PRISON AND AZAR GIVING BIRTH TO NEDA IN BETWEEN THE WALLS OF THE PRISON HOSPITAL, A YOUNG MOTHER'S FEAR THAT HER LITTLE GIRL WILL BE TAKEN FROM HER, THE INDIFFERENCE AND BRUTALITY OF THE GUARDS, THE DEATH THAT LIES IN WAIT EVERYWHERE, THE FEAR THAT PERMANENTLY INSERTS ITSELF.

This is a suffocating reality, a tyrannical one, yet at the same time, we witness the miracle of a new existence, towards which one feels deeply responsible, as an extension of oneself, just as the history of one's country and the struggle for freedom in which one believes and which turns people into victims and a heroes. It isn't only Azar, but all the young revolutionaries in the streets of Tehran or behind the Evin prison walls that try to hang onto illusions, hoping that their sacrifice was not in vain and that something can change. The last chapter shows the memories that have left their imprint on Neda's feelings. She tries to live her life with the person she loves, symbolically reconciling herself with the world from which she tried to run, but whose history still leaves its mark on her destiny, the years of the revolution still alive in her memories.

The middle of the book contains descriptive passages that reflect scenes from the life behind bars and also outside them, and bring to light violent moments, full of resentments, but also of love for the dear ones. The struggle for freedom and survival is as tough as can be, the revolution taking thousands of lives, necessitating three generations of Iranians for the images of the massacres to stop haunting people's lives with the same intensity. The majority of the children of those who fell and made the revolution happen have to live without parents, without the love and protection they need, trying to reconcile themselves with the deaths of those in their

family or searching for the truth about the absence of their relatives. Most important is the emphasis placed on the love and suffering caused by the separation from their loved ones, the choices they made in the name of the need for freedom. Ever since the beginning, Tehran appears like a jail, in which violence and hope dispute among them the destiny of the inhabitants. If the image between the walls of death can be imagined, that of the fighting that takes place in the streets is shatteringly powerful: pregnant women mercilessly hit in full daylight by the guards, men being arrested, innocent people being shot and children made orphan. Every moment there are hundreds of investigations and raids taking place, which serve only to instil fear and hatred. The only place seemingly removed from this chaos, one where the violence of history cannot impose its laws, is Maman Zinat's yard, next to the jacaranda tree, where the children of the revolution are being kept away from the war.

OVER THE YEARS, SURVIVORS SEARCH FOR THEIR RELATIVES, THEIR FAMILIES DESTROYED OR SCATTERED INTO THE WORLD. THEY TRY TO BUILD A NEW LIFE, WHILE STILL HOLDING WITHIN THEMSELVES THE MUTILATIONS OF THE TIME THEY SURVIVED OR WERE BORN INTO.

Some remain in Tehran, some leave abroad wishing to be forever free of that place, but slowly understanding that they belong to it to the extent in which they are what their country's history was and is. Children who do not leave their home, taken with the same enthusiasm as their parents, reopen the pages of the 80s and rewrite the past. They repeat exactly the same motions of the revolutions, without giving up the struggle. If back during their parents' time the country was a purgatory, while Tehran was veiled in the stench of death and the cruel regime that wanted the total annihilation of the revolutionaries, now the same Tehran is trapped in clouds of dust, in the noise of engines and new cries for freedom.

Machine guns reap at every street corner, any breaking of law is harshly punished and the grey walls of the Evin prison still tower in the distance. Sadly, history repeats itself. The jacaranda tree remains the main symbol of the book. It signifies not only spiritual regeneration and the continuity of life, but the close bond between the dead and their descendants. Likewise, it represents Maman Zinat, the woman who brought up the orphan children in the shadow of the tree. If the tree represents Revolution, its children carry on their parents' beliefs. The past is renewed with new strength and a burning desire to fight. But despite all this, there are no significant changes, the prison chambers once more imprisoning young souls.

To claim that this novel is special may not mean anything to those who have not read it. But those who have read *The Children of the Jacaranda Tree* know that you cannot resist its allure. After turning its very first page, I no longer belonged to the place where I was, but I was living with the same intensity the agonies endured by Neda's mother. I felt the fear, the revulsion towards the Sister who was part of the Revolutionary Guards, the pain, the confusion. I was that baby brutally wrestled from its mother's arms. Sahar Delijani made me understand that there is no happiness for those who wished for change. Whether it is the present of 2009 or the image of the Revolution, I felt that the past described still retains the same destructive force it once had; it is like a black-and-white picture that should remain merely an image of the past, but instead it haunts you so that all you can do is hope, as Neda and Reza do ("the man from the adverse camp"), that history has been left behind, that they can write a new history, because the idea of this book is not centred on suffering and the bitter taste of battle, as I thought at first. The novel speaks about life, courage and the power to forgive, to live normally. It is an ode to freedom, a warning against all wars or revolutions and a plea at the same time: let us live our lives freely! ■





Escaping from an Ikea wardrobe

SOMETIMES, ALONE WITH OURSELVES, SURROUNDED BY DARKNESS,
WE CAN ONLY WRITE OUR STORY ON OUR OWN SHIRT.

THE EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEY OF THE FAKIR WHO GOT TRAPPED IN AN IKEA WARDROBE
IS A SHIRT COVERED WITH WRITING IN ALL DIRECTIONS, ON ITS COLLAR, SLEEVES, BACK, FRONT, A CREATION
BOTH HETEROGENEOUS AND FLUID, A COMBUSTIVE NOVEL WHICH INSOLENTLY UNLEASHES ITSELF WITHIN
THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY, VIOLENTLY SHATTERING ITS PREJUDICES AND WRESTLING
ASIDE THE VEIL THAT COVERS THE BRUTAL REALITY: THE CRUELTY, THE MORAL DECADENCE, ALIENATION,
CHARLATANISM, CORRUPTION, OBSCENITY, PROSTITUTION, LACK OF OPPORTUNITY.

Laura Ștreangă, Național



Provocative, alert, subversive, the novel targets us directly and attacks the axiological core of a world we recognise with painful familiarity, playfully balanced within the extension of a spectrum of mixed manifestations: dark comedy, delicious satire, social critique, cultural kaleidoscope, bildungsroman, original and spicy literary farce, sudden burst of laughter that turns to tears. Generating a hallucinating vortex, Puértolas' novel draws around us a mosaic of human portraits, ideas, revelations, cultures, destinies, identities, experiences. Puértolas' brush throws, only seemingly at random, broad and watery stains, in an infinite palette of colours, over the nucleus of ideas that we uncover behind the incredible adventures of the fakir: self-discovery, assuming an identity, choosing a set of values, searching for happiness.

Unwillingly engaged in a journey that takes him to France, the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy and Libya, Ajatashatru Lavash Patel is challenged to escape from the narrow closet of his own horizon and unearth, from under the thick layer of lies and scams that the social context had forced him to spread over himself, authentic values and feelings of compassion and sincerity. Shaken by the avalanche of people, stories and life lessons that roll over him in a crazy race, the fakir will face his own

precariousness and realise that "the world was full of con artists, cheaters, good-for-nothings like him. The world was an endless hunting field." The issue of alienation manifests with clarity against a background of ludic humour, as we explore the spiritual landscape and, in particular, Ajatashatru's past, which combines harshness with the stinging conscience of the present, taken from the naively-painted portrait of a materialistic and insensitive society, where money weighs more than life, which denies individuals a chance and is governed by the law of the strongest. The fakir learns to assume his story, to appreciate, to fight against the system, to affirm his individuality.

FIVE LIFE LESSONS, OR "ELECTROSHOCKS" THE FAKIR HAS TO ENDURE, CONSTITUTE JUST AS MANY CLIMAXES IN THIS NOVEL IN WHICH THE COMIC BLENDS WITH TRAGEDY, AND THE ENTIRE EMOTIONAL PALETTE THE PROTAGONIST EXPLORES IS TRANSFERRED ONTO THE READER. INNOCENT AND COURAGEOUS, BUT INITIALLY FLATTENED IN PERSONALITY, AJATASHATRU SHAKES OFF THE INHIBITIVE CRUST OF HIS FORMER EXISTENCE AND REFUSES TO DIE "BEFORE HAVING PROVED TO THOSE AROUND AND ALSO TO HIMSELF THAT HE HAS HAD THE POWER TO CHANGE." THE MESSAGE IS ADDRESSED TO AN ENTIRE WORLD, IN ITS ALIENATION AND SUPERFICIALITY.



In a society that presumes to be modern and equitable, Wiraj's story, narrated with no circumspection, brings down in a single strike the pedestal of false values we defiantly tackle: "it was all they wanted, (...) to find an honest job so they could send money to those left at home, their families and children, so that they would no longer have bellies swollen and heavy like a basketball, and just as empty, to find a place under the sun, away from the flies that got stuck to his lips." And in the end we too get to ask ourselves, together with the Sudanese:

"WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE BORN HERE AND OTHERS OVER THERE? WHY DO SOME PEOPLE HAVE EVERYTHING, WHILE OTHERS HAVE NOTHING? WHY DO SOME PEOPLE HAVE THE RIGHT TO LIFE, WHILE OTHERS, AND ALWAYS THE SAME ONES, ONLY HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE QUIET? AND TO DIE?"

The telescopic lens of the author then sweeps over those "chosen countries," selecting characters both from the elite and the periphery of society. Every time, however, ravaging the canvas that covers them, the protagonist finds in the other people affective resources positively oriented, even if primarily manifested, as they appear in the Palourde family, one that governs itself by unrefined but unyielding principles of solidarity. Enriched with the power, generosity, engagement, friendship and empathy he discovers, the fakir will give up his cheap tricks in favour of the true magic: literary fiction, upon which he will impress all his hopes and revelations.

Corina Păcurar

Clandestine immigration, with all the terror, humiliation and desperation it entails, represents, for the reader and the protagonist alike, the richest source of revelations, as the tragic story of Wiraj shows, presented with simplicity, with a disarming natural flow. The Sudanese Wiraj will prove the strongest catalyst in Ajatashatru's "coming-of-age" process, as the latter comes to forge a strong and authentic friendship with him. The misfortune of being born "on the wrong side of the Mediterranean, where dirt and hunger, merciless twins, never ceased to empty everything in their way," he pushes Wiraj to leave everything behind, to forsake his family and seek his fortune in "the chosen countries." The inferno of wandering mutilates souls, while the desperate and assiduous search for a normal life takes the proportions of the unique ideal that guides entire masses towards illusory lands of promise. "But even the strongest people, when wrested from their roots, become so fragile, poor hunted animals with a lost dead gaze. And among strangers, far from their kin, nothing remains of them but the frightened child that once was, without any caress, with all hopes shattered." The immigrant thus becomes the exponent of the entire human destiny, an alien in the alienness of the universe, completely alone and victim to the aspiration towards happiness. The humiliation, the fear of being discovered, the indelible scar of permanent rejection leave their stigma on the immigrants.

Shut in a plane's cargo hold, Ajatashatru will write on his shirt his first "novel," the story of a blind terrorist whom a friend teaches what the colour and beauty of life means. The fakir's initiation culminates under the staple of love, experienced in the spirit of authenticity, simplicity and naturalness. A natural and well-earned happy ending gives the last pages of the book a prevalent note of optimism. Beyond the amazing adventures he has experienced, Ajatashatru has managed to transcend his individual existence and discover happiness in helping others:

"HE FELT SOMETHING STRANGE IN HIS CHEST, SOMETHING LIKE A SMALL CLOUD THAT WAS STARTING TO GROW AND SPREAD ITS VAPOURS THROUGHOUT HIS BODY, DOWN TO THE TIP OF HIS FINGERS, WRAPPING HIM LIKE A VEIL AND TAKING HIM TOWARDS HEAVEN."

A delicious fresco of the contemporary world, *The Extraordinary Journey of the Fakir Who Got Trapped in an Ikea Wardrobe* agitates the dust of society's materialism, insensibility and cruelty, to polish that which rests underneath, authentic ideals and values. Masking the tears with a burst of laughter, veiling the contemporaneity of the problems tackled in the creases of a shirt on which he writes the story, Romain Puértolas issues, in fact, a manifesto for love, equality and friendship.



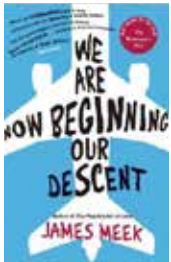


We Are Now Beginning Our Descent

by
JAMES MEEK

◆
“YOU TELL THE STORY. //NO, YOU TELL IT.”
◆

Iasmina Răceanu, Petru Rareș



When you are ready to talk about *We are now beginning Our Descent*, James Meek's novel, released by Humanitas Fiction Publishing House in 2011, you should feel as if you were at a strange breakfast, where you are given a huge tray of open sandwiches full of towers and other high buildings, tea with noise coming out of it, enamelled white china plates with black line drawings, bundles of napkin-spleen, crushed Ryvita, toast, cheese and a bottle of wine, which are taken right out of the book and among which you don't know how to navigate. The world of the book, modelled by the threat at the World Trade Center, is caught in the story of Adam Kellas, a tri-dimensional character, mobile, an alter-ego of the author, who leaves London to document the confrontations between the Taliban and the Mujahedins during the war in Afghanistan. The fiction may be considered a crossroads for a language that marks multiple textualisations: intellectual life is portrayed within one of the roads, and from that the author switches to life around the frontlines, or the tumultuous life of a couple, in a continuous back and forth. The novel is an advocacy for “to-know-is-to-become” in a canonised wilderness, thrown across time and space by the hands of an extradiegetic narrator.

Through “snake-like slithering and pink flowers,” like a story through languages—not necessarily “under jeans and skirts and T-shirts” but through temptations and trials, through the search of a story “in” and “after”/“beyond,” among others—society continues its struggle, in direct division with the people-marionettes with whom it plays. Full of chains, from which hang cruelty, harshness, stubbornness and pretence, its arms pulse in the darkness of the lairs where people are revealed. The world is one of fissures, a land of stigmatisation, shown demo(no)graphically, a land inhabited by the characters and their ravines. The skeletonisation and/or embodiment of society are caused, in the novel, through the actualisation of power

over one's instincts, converging toward inner degradation and, in the natural order of things, succumbing to vices. The action of bodies leading each other, ragging each other, establishes the decadence, making freedom appear either as greed and loneliness, or as alienation. When spun, the dirty wheels of the mechanism, identified in each corner of the world, produce ruptures between people, to perhaps remind them of the frailty lurking behind them. The almost mathematical narration is closed, uninviting to dialogue, where, instead, subjects you to a lesson of discovery throughout, humbling you in the face of a dogmatism with no suspense, “applied” from the author's constellations, in the attempt to very slowly draw an arch over the sky. Thus the universe seems, in its fictitious body, a glass cube in which each character reaches towards increasing and promoting his or her shard. The getaway, in an embodied manner, only takes place by escaping into the story.

Drawing subsequent lines through this fiction, we could say that it was in such life parlours that the protagonist's desire was born, to reach his story, his book (“He would encourage himself, telling himself that each book was a purpose and not the means to reach the purpose”). From here, a subtle game may arise between the inside and the outside, between that which you can think and that which you live in order to be thought.

A MONOGRAPH OF STORIES IS OUTLINED, WHICH BEARS ITS EXTERIOR TRAJECTORY IN ALL OF ADAM'S JOURNEYS, FOR WHEN “A COUNTRY SENDS ITS TRAVELLERS ACROSS THE BORDERS LIKE THE WORDS TOLD BY A PERSON TO ANOTHER,” ONE IDENTIFIES ONESELF THROUGH THE STORY OF THE IDENTITY ONE CARRIES ON ONE'S BACK, ITS IMMIGRATION BEING A MEANS TO BRING TO THE SURFACE THE CAMOUFLAGED OR FOREIGN IDENTITIES (OF INTERIOR LANGUAGE). THE JOURNEYS MAY THUS BECOME A TRADING PLACE FOR STORIES.

But before that, Adam tries to discover the degree to which his inner resources can become distorted so that he can lengthen them through writing. Between writing for the world, being commercial and writing something of quality to which only a small part of the crowd has access is where the rupture occurs. Adam feels it, because it is the starting point of his question mark, as he is aware that he must choose his own way at the crossroads.

IN NO WAY DOES HE HAVE TO BURY HIS STORY OR PREVENT IT FROM SPREADING, BECAUSE IT WOULD DESTROY IT. SHOULD HE WRITE GENERALLY VALID PAGES OR UNIVERSAL ONES?



Should he be a "colourful writer" or a "priest writer?" In other words, should he be the writer who talks and tells jokes and about whom the world thinks that he has wonderful books, or should he be the writer who creates ideas that radiate in truth? He chooses to remain one of the world. From here, the fiction gives birth to multiple levels of reality. Adam's conceptions transform into hybrid-word stems, so that the alternation between the various layers of language, of stylistic registers, of thoughts, begins to rotate the facets of the world engaged in the novel. But the protagonist comes to clothe himself in the words of a failed writer, and the failure of his book becomes, gradually, congruent with the disappearance of an animation given by such a way of communication. The inhabited earth is seen as a Braille alphabet, only deciphered by some, in which the functioning of the human mechanism is the result of the regular pushing on two pedals – the touch and the strike. The inner disappointment generated by this system, once decanted into the exterior, leads to the presence of the membrane between security and insecurity, and the movement of the lower side of the solution sparks the degradation of the being-Kellas, seen through his decomposition in another language, ever more subversive.

JAMES MEEK DOES NOT ISOLATE HIS BEINGS FROM WORDS, BUT ALLOWS THEM TO COME CLOSE TO HIM, SO THAT HIS INTENTIONS OR JOYS ARE REFLECTED IN THE LIVES OF THE CHARACTERS BY THEIR LISTENING TO THE NARRATOR OR EVEN VICE-VERSA.

Author in author, Author through author, through-himself-character-author could be a few defining stances of the authorial voice embraced in the novel. Even if the narrator feels that by writing the story he is travelling down a road through the "silence of the desert," on the scene on which the theatre of his ideas is enacted, the direction is in good hands. He who created the little wheels of the mechanisms of the scenes (sketches) sees his actor – Adam – moulded, but also spots a double of himself, an ego-marionette that belongs to the real world and has drawn his outline. And what could be more beautiful than to realise, as an author, at the end of your role, that pure beings of air or light, as these characters are, have accepted that you pulverise your life into them, knowing they must wear it with dignity, although you were offering them, somewhat despairingly, this purpose – your life?

"YOU THINK I'VE SOLD MY SOUL. BUT HAVE YOU SEEN MY SOUL RECENTLY?"

WHEN TIME RUNS OUT OF PATIENCE

Jacob Decides to Love

◆

CĂTĂLIN DORIAN FLORESCU'S NOVEL SPEAKS ABOUT THE COLD BREATH OF HISTORY, ABOUT UPROOTING AND SEARCH, ABOUT TORN LIVES AND INNER STRENGTH, ABOUT PRAGMATISM OR THE SHATTERING OF ILLUSIONS, ABOUT THE NEED TO FORGIVE AND THE EVER-PRESENT WING OF UNCERTAINTY AND DEATH, BRINGING TOGETHER STORIES FROM LONG AGO OR MORE RECENT ONES, A BRANCHING SAGA THAT DOES NOT HESITATE TO OBSERVE THE SPINAL CORD OF THE ETHNICALLY DIVERSE ROMANIAN VILLAGE. THIS TINT OF DOMESTICITY GIVES THE BOOK THE DELICACY WITH WHICH IT TACKLES THE TRAGEDY OF INEQUITY.

◆

Bianca Simon, Băncilă



The title of the novel takes one along intentionally-winding roads towards its core, the reader perhaps likely to believe that some romance would be involved, a typical love transfigured through time; love prevails in every life story, but it does not exclude brutality, resignation, coldness or abandonment. It is about the survival instinct, farm life, decisiveness or cynicism, love of family, love of the country of one's birth or the country towards which one's ancestors set off without knowing where they were headed, love of one's origins, of a memory, a road, a hill, a place where one finds oneself. It is a love more powerful than any obstacle, a love that prevails in the face of resentment

or an overwhelming past. It is pure love, alive, love that heals deep bleeding wounds of betrayal, making room for a new beginning. Although he chooses a subject that is as difficult and delicate as it is ripe with potential (and thus addressed), Cătălin Dorian Florescu embodies, with detailed and sensitive complexity, a ghost that one grows fond of and to whom, for a few hours, one comes to belong. Caught within the limits and in the realities of the village, one lives the rejection, the disappointment and the impossibility of responding to the injustice. Relying on the embroidery of the finest details, the author juggles the events of the Second World War (but not only!) as seen through a single person's perspective. The narrative



thread outlines an ordinary life, peppered with hardship and deficiencies, shaken by a series of events more or less foreseeable, which alter not only the natural course of the characters' destiny, but that of a collective. These are times in which to have a household, a piece of land, a few animals and a family only signifies the reflections of another time, as the only thing that matters is the desire to survive. For this new privilege—one's life—a continuous battle will be fought with oneself and the decisions that must be made or are made without the characters having any say in them. In these troubled circumstances it is easy to commit errors, make unfortunate choices, let out inner demons and later feel regret.

SOCIAL STATUS DISAPPEARS IN THE FACE OF THE GREATEST DANGER OF ALL: THE WAR, ALONG WITH DEPORTATION AND DEATH. IT BECOMES IRRELEVANT WHETHER ONE IS A SERVANT OR THE MAYOR: AS LONG AS YOU FIGHT ON THE WRONG SIDE YOU WILL BE A SURE TARGET; BOMBARDMENTS AND FORCED HOUSE EVACUATIONS INCREASE IN NUMBER, AND MAN TURNS INTO HIS OWN ENEMY.

Hunger becomes a general state and the only joy is in feeling that hunger, as it reminds you that you are still breathing. The only weapon against all of these "stray bullets" is, in the end, forgiveness. Regardless of faith, ethnicity or sex, forgiveness is the way through which Jacob, as well as others like him, overcome the hardships of existence. In a world where betrayal is served with every meal next to a dry piece of bread kept for many days, Jacob, with a "C," becomes the emblem of an unjust life. Standing by his side inside the tombstone in the graveyard, listening to the customary tales of his grandfather and the Gypsy woman from Gypsy Hill, taking the beatings and feeling the coldness of his father, changing nationalities according to the powers that be, finding out about the two births, mocked, disowned and slighted, the reader also becomes one with the guiding being, turning into an Obertin. The character's wounds are engraved on his tired retina; whether dealing with physical pain or his many disappointments, sadness always seems to catch up with Jacob.

AS FOR THE WAR, IT ONLY REPRESENTS ANOTHER FACET OF THE WORLD DOWN HERE AND THE ONE IN THE HEAVENS: "ANYWAY THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF A LONG SERIES OF ACCIDENTS, KILLINGS AND SUICIDES THAT WOULD HAUNT THE VILLAGE. IT WAS ENTIRELY THE LAND OF GOD, BUT MEN ALSO COUNTED THE OTHER ONE IN TOO."

Despite a heartbreaking destiny, impossible to change and cold, Jacob has the strength to dream and wish for more. Jumping off the train towards the end, he fights against his own world, reassembling it as he would some lost bones. The character seems to build, with time, a different path than that of Jacob, but he will eventually return to his origins. "Home" remains for him a point of reference, a road on which life guides him to travel again. It is the way to finding peace, reconciling and accepting himself. Unpredictable, full of well-kept secrets, equally poetic and realistic, *Jacob Decides to Love* is a novel that fascinates through the naturalness of images and the cruelty of reality, a novel for the seekers of simple (but no less painful) truths about life.





THE DILEMMA OF FAILED MOTHERHOOD:

The Light between the Oceans

by
M.L. STEDMAN



IT IS A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO FIND A BOOK THAT PERFECTLY EXHAUSTS ITS TOPIC LONG BEFORE IT HAS ENDED, AND FOR THAT NOT TO BE ALL THAT BOTHERSOME. BY THIS, I DO NOT IN ANY WAY SUGGEST THAT THE NARRATIVE THREAD WAS EXTENDED BEYOND THE LIMITS OF THE NECESSARY, BUT THAT THE FIRST THREE QUARTERS OF THE VOLUME BRING FORTH A DILEMMA SO WELL CONFIGURED, PRESENTED AND RESOLVED, THAT THE OPTION FOR THE CLOSED ENDING IS NOT ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY, AS IN SO MANY OTHER CASES.



Mădălina Tvardochlib, Național Graduate



This is all the more interesting as you realise that this is how the habituated expectations related to the structure and transmission of the message are contradicted. Basically, a dose of uncertainty takes shape, related to the choices that the characters make, leaving the reader wondering what their destiny might have been, if... And here the series of "ifs" is quite long.

Wrapped in the apparently fragile skin of a romance novel, *The Light between the Oceans* offers the reader a much more interesting theme: that of failed motherhood. The frame made of two intense loves serves to build the dilemma that much more intensely. This is comprised of the confrontation between two women with strong maternal instincts who vacillate between the loss and the regaining of the symbolic baby they both long for. Both destinies are faced with tragedy by losing their essence of being, their human purpose, and by facing the necessity of living in a different way than how they might have once thought they could. The first, isolated on a deserted island dominated by the lighthouse whose guard is her very husband, has three miscarriages, while

the second one loses her only child due to the little girl's disappearance at sea along with the woman's husband, "the German" who tries to escape the unleashing of hate by those who live on the still traumatised (after the war) Australian coast. The boat carrying the two, father and baby, finally reaches the isolated and vaguely heavenly island where the characters at the forefront of the narration live, the couple Isabell and Tom Sherbourne, though the man in the boat is already dead. The two will keep the little girl and will dedicate their lives to raising her until the truth is revealed (as a consequence of the feelings of guilt, the impulse to get rich, happenstance).

The child is five years old when recovered by Hannah, his biological mother, but nothing in their meeting corresponds to the image she has created. The writer will subtly juggle at this point almost all possible solutions to the obvious conflict – to which of the two families the child belongs, who is most deserving of being the little girl's mother, who is her true mother, whose trauma is smaller, whose guilt is stronger. It is precisely this approach, where both women, despite feeling torn, are



ready to give up the child, first one and then the other, that determines the probing of the feeling of maternity in its full abyss, beyond the standard handling to which movies have often accustomed us, because it does not bypass the fear, the confusion, the hesitation, the fatigue or the impulse to give up; it also does not bypass the dependence, the adjustment problems, the justice of the law or that of men, the subconscious or the pressure. In this regard, the narrative reveals as much as it withholds, the reader being left with the task of filling in the gaps from the point where the narrator interrupts the story, to continue it with the symbolic meeting almost 20 years later, between the little girl of long ago and Tom, following Isabell's death. The narration, marked by the simple style and the natural landscapes outlined in counterpoint, which tie humans to the natural space, flows gently and measuredly so that, up to a point, the reader is given the freedom to judge and decide, almost impartially, the solution he or she considers most appropriate.

Through the balance between all the different centers of the narrative, layers of complexity are created, which

allow for a deep understanding of the characters. The attention given to the past of each of them—and to their intrinsic or conjectural motivations—aids in the sharp perception of social mechanics and psychology that decisively influence the flow of events. Similarly to a realist novel, the pages of generations come loose, each marked by personal anguish, by the attempt to tame a wild world, the desire to succeed and the horrors of war (never directly described, but presented only through its consequences: lives forever ruined). On this secondary plane, the confluence points of destinies are hidden.

THE LIGHT BETWEEN THE OCEANS IS MORE THAN A STORY ABOUT PEOPLE'S NEED TO RECONCILE WITH LIFE AND THEMSELVES; IT IS A NOVEL ABOUT CONSEQUENCES AND EXISTENTIAL DILEMMAS, ABOUT LOVE AND MATERNITY, ABOUT ABDICATION AND THE STRENGTH TO SEE AND SPEAK THE TRUTH, ABOUT THE WAY IN WHICH ONE CAN LIVE WHEN THE FOUNDATIONS OF ONE'S INNER LIFE HAVE COLLAPSED. IT IS A NOVEL WITHOUT THE HARSHNESS OF A REALIST NARRATION, BUT OF REMARKABLE SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM.

THE WORLD CURVED BY AN IDEA:

Memoirs from the Ideal Library

by
BOGDAN SUCEAVĂ

BOGDAN SUCEAVĂ'S VOLUME MEMORIES FROM THE PERFECT LIBRARY PRESENTS,
BY MEANS OF "MATHEMATICAL STORIES" AND TALES FROM THE AUTHOR'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE,
SMALL SNIPPETS OF THE COMPLICATED HISTORY OF GEOMETRY.

Horăţiu Palaghiu, Naţional



First of all, I was impressed with the way in which the mathematician places himself at the service of the writer, without, however, staying in his shadow and, using mathematics as a pretext, he undertakes an analytical journey whose stakes are the process of thinking near and towards the mathematical universe, the word being both an instrument and a mediator between the two worlds: that of science and that of the possible worlds of literature. The theme of curvature is an incandescent Gordian knot of sorts, and therefore it is tackled in a detailed study of not only certain theorems, definitions and mathematical ideas, but also of their evolution through time, opening as much towards the history of the people who influenced and discovered its secrets as towards their inner worlds. The volume is, despite certain appearances, easy to read and comprehend, including by a reader who is not specialised in mathematics. The only condition is one's readiness to test the limits of personal thought, applying it to the game of ideas offered by Bogdan Suceavă.

IT IS A BOOK THAT REMINDS THE ALWAYS-IN-A-HURRY MAN OF TODAY THAT THE WORLD DOES NOT BEGIN WITH HIM AND THAT BEHIND ANY RESULT (INCLUDING A MATHEMATICAL ONE) THERE IS AN EXPLORATION OF AN IDEA, A LEAP OF THE MIND AND THE TESTING OF ONE'S OWN LIMITS, BUT ALSO OF THE LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE IN A PARTICULAR MOMENT; THUS HE PRESENTS TO US A SINUOUS HISTORY WHICH DOES NOT REPEL BUT, ON THE CONTRARY, IT INVITES INVOLVEMENT, WHILE HE ALSO FOCUSES ON THE HISTORY OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO HAVE INFLUENCED ITS EXISTENCE.

Readers with a fascination for mathematics are invited to plunge down the trajectory of a clear demonstration that juggles terms and notions, while readers who are (at first) situated on the outside take up the mantle of observers of ideas, with the freedom to remain at any point of the plane they may desire. Subjectivity becomes the mode through which abstract notions are "tamed" – whether they be one's own ideas or those that, thanks to Newton, Euler, Sophie Germain and Huygens, have become "common goods."

The history of the curvature, with which readers have the opportunity to familiarise themselves and which is addressed in detail in this volume, begins back in 1350, when (probably) Nicole Oresme attempted to define and attribute certain qualities to it (extension, intensity). In the XVIIth Century, Huygens discovers the isochrone curve and uses its applications for horologes and pendulum clocks. In 1737, Sir Isaac Newton suggests an approach of the curvature closer to mathematics, trying to measure and attribute a number to it. Euler brings important contributions in the study of a surface's curving, later completed by Jean-Baptiste-Marie. Sophie Germain, whom the author describes as a fascinating woman and exceptional writer, invents the term mean curvature. Gauss – "the first professional mathematician of modern times" – succeeds, unlike those aforementioned, to introduce a definition of a surface's curving at a particular point.

This is the "story." But the story itself builds its scaffold on rigorous thinking and mathematical demonstration,



fascinating through the accuracy of the process. In the subtext of the analysis the convergence of apparently opposed domains is clearly contoured, to serve as a basis for modern thinking. Literature's dependence on mathematics is continuously illustrated and emphasised towards the end. It is only natural, therefore, that the image of Ion Barbu/Dan Barbilian, "whose mathematical ideas have become the source of an entire poetics," would come forth from the pages of the book, with personality "fragments" and exposés of mathematical thinking from which one can easily deduce the conclusion:

"WE ARE LUCKY THAT SUCH A CAST BOARD HAS EXISTED IN THE FIELD OF ROMANIAN CULTURE."

The manner in which the volume is written fully reflects the author's personality, without it being a "purely" memorial book. *Memoirs from the Ideal Library* gathers recollections, experiences, intuitions, reformulations, defining the tangent point between the sphere of mathematics and that of literature: "The literary act has become for me a battle to synthesise and express the essential, the way you strive in mathematics to demonstrate a theorem and achieve the completion of all cases." It is a short journal of Geometry (a perpetually incomplete science, in a state of constant metamorphosis), but also a journal of the mathematician, that is, the one who constantly desires to understand the universe and take part in its progress.

THE AUTHOR, AN IMPRECISE MECHANISM?

The Merchant of Novel Beginnings

by
MATEI VIȘNIEC

AN INELUCTABLE EGOISM (EVEN IF ROOTED IN MAN'S COMPENSATORY NEED TO GIVE A MEANING TO UNRAVELLING, OR IN THE IMPULSE OF BEING A DEMIURGE, AT LEAST IN THE PRECISE MOMENT CIRCUMSCRIBED TO CREATION), INTRINSIC TO THE HUMAN SPECIES, FORCES INDIVIDUALS, IN THEIR INITIAL READER STANCE, TO REBEL, TO WISH FOR THEIR OWN FANTASIES TO BE PRINTED, IF POSSIBLE PRE-MADE AND JUST READY TO BE EXPERIENCED. THE FUTURE AND ITS HALLUCINATORY METHODS WILL ENSURE, FOR THESE HILARIOUS CHARACTERS, WITH THEIR VISIONS AND DEVIATING PRINCIPLES, THE CHANCE TO SEE THEIR "AUTO-FICTION" AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

Cătălina Donțu, Băncilă



Released by The Romanian Book, Matei Vișniec's novel *The Merchant of Novel Beginnings* imagines as if in a kaleidoscope another chaos organised within the category of great discussions on the literary act and of the pawns in the midst of a disarticulating, psychological-literary catastrophe. The main problem, lasting perhaps to the point where it becomes pathological, is limited to the insecurity involved in orchestrating through the least possible effort the logical expansion contained in the meaning of the verb "to need." That "tomorrow" placed face-to-face with "today" holds a different meaning; thus, in the future, necessity will represent a wide range of criteria. Perhaps "tomorrow," man will no longer be able to live without a self-written novel of his own, perfectly tailored to the personal requests imposed on a perfect and perfectly impersonal machine.

The novel does not provide direct answers or the narrative coherence that would effectively hold the perishable interest of an uninitiated reader, but instead it minutely constructs, in a network of metallic frames, a stained glass image. This image makes sense in its entirety, but taken in segments it is fractured, much harder to reproduce outside the whole. Each piece of glass on each frequency adjacent to reality is offered together with other visual snippets, apparently disconnected from the overall image, until they disassemble into other spectres of reality. From the story of the main emissive voice

and its relationship with the mysterious neutral character Guy Courtois, to the familial dimension of Victor's story or to the erotic story, to the poetry written for and about Miss Ri, another obsessive thought is that of the inner impulse towards a "new beginning" repeatedly turned into a cliché to the point of saturation. Everything gravitates around the effervescence of a new intrigue meant to replace the prior story, yet expired before it begins. The first words of a novel become its sentence, which Mr. Guy Courtois offers to simplify, to bring before the "author" almost programmatically, to offer, asserting with charismatic perspicacity:

"THE FIRST SENTENCE IN A NOVEL MUST CONTAIN SOME OF THE ENERGY OF AN UNCONSCIOUS SCREAM THAT CAUSES AN AVALANCHE... IT HAS TO BE A SPARK WHICH SETS OFF A CHAIN REACTION... THIS IS WHY THE FIRST SENTENCE IS NEVER AN INNOCENT ONE."

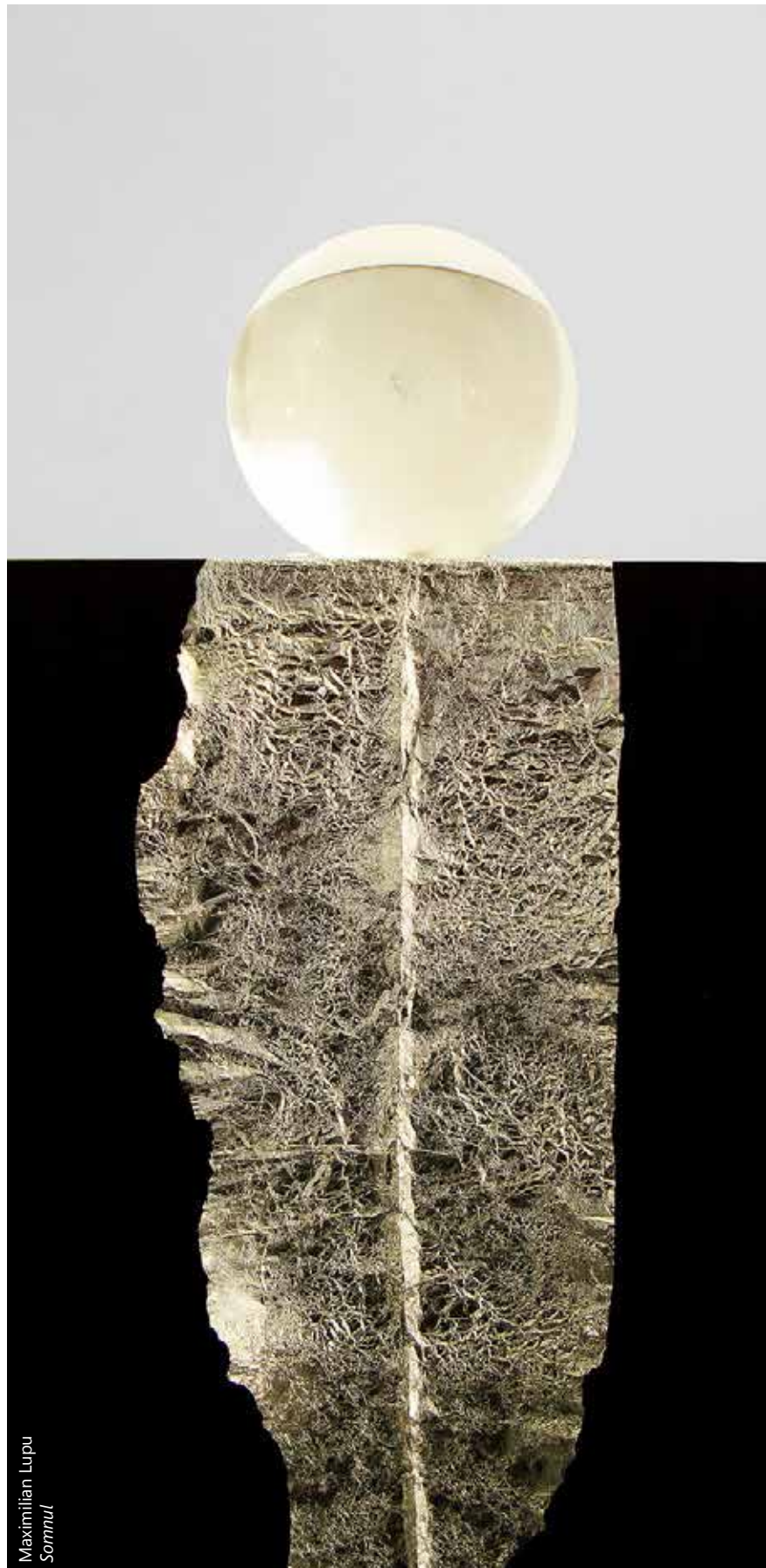
The faith in such reasoning is directly conferred through the influence that the obscure and Mephistophelian "merchant" who "seemed to have no face" claims to have had by delivering "novel beginnings" so promising that they were enough to catapult writers like Melville, Kafka, Camus or Wells onto the path of great success. The mysterious signatory of letters through which he offers Mr. M. the alternative solution of the agency he represents, is "more than a voice," as the writer, lost among the other

people invited to “some minor awards ceremony,” perceives him, but this voice will slowly gain an ambiguous consistency and a strength that one cannot escape. The intertextual contradiction between the authentic writer and his emphatically virtual successor triggers a complex debate and a few syncopated narrative nuclei that branch off, intersect, cancel each other out or complement each other, vacillating between stylistic registers and narrative perspectives, in an avalanche of anguish-inducing images, realistic or apocalyptic, marked by tenderness or mystery, each regaining something of the atmosphere of previous plays or novels by Višniec. The writing program named Patch seemingly has a will of its own and an arrogantly persuasive attitude, ever more demonic and thus comes to demonstrate a fact inconceivable in the economy of the future, but utterly apparent if we consider our ultimate finitude: the principle of the superiority of the human factor.

“AS YOU CAN SEE, I AM A MACHINE, BUT AN EXTREMELY SOPHISTICATED ONE. AT THIS MOMENT I AM IN TOUCH WITH BILLIONS OF WORDS: VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING THAT HAS EVER BEEN WRITTEN IN THE HISTORY OF HUMANITY LIES EITHER IN MY MEMORY OR WITHIN REACH.”

Through the ability to reproduce exactly a literary pattern, the artificial factor is rendered infirm/insignificant when faced with the contradictions occurring within the psychological frame, but especially when faced with the chaos that governs rationality: “Writers are, generally, complicated people torn apart inside, twisted, full of contradictions, consumed by ambition, hardly ever generous socially, although burning for the idea of humanity.”

On the other end of the spectrum, speculatively speaking, he also proposes the alternative where a program, artificial at its core, could acquire, through some mysterious process, good and bad qualities through the typical absurdity of reason. This would automatically entail a direct offence against our uniqueness as a species, and the case speculated about would become, to a certain extent, taboo. The thought that such scenarios are possible, that there could be a *Samantha operating system* (therefore an artificial intelligence) as seen in the film *Her* (2013), with whom the real character falls in love, or the precise imprinting of conscience into a computer, without disposing of the physical body, as seen with Johnny Depp’s character, Will Caster, in *Transcendence* (2014), becomes ultimately hard to accept. In this incongruence, the argument of the first sentence becomes the closing word, so it partially clarifies the situation, as death separates the artificial from the man whose existence through creation and memory knows no finitude: “People are still present in the things they left behind. Because they left behind everything [...]” ■





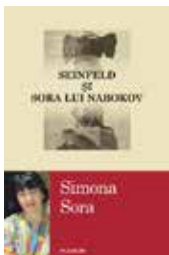
Literature + being = life

◆

SEINFELD AND NABOKOV'S SISTER IS A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS THAT BRING TO THE FORE, SOMETIMES OVERTLY AND SOMETIMES SUBTLY, USING STORIES CAREFULLY PUT TOGETHER, A TOPIC THAT BECOMES, FOR SOME, A REALITY SEEN AS PLEASURE, AS SWEET AND ADDICTIVE AS ANY VICE, AND FOR OTHERS A NECESSARY COMPONENT OF LIFE OR AN UNCONTROLLABLE REFLEX: THE TOPIC IS LITERATURE AND ITS ROLE IN THE CHAOTIC WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE.

◆

Roxana Neamțu, Național



Drawing a parallel between books and real, experienced events, Simona Sora states plainly, repeatedly and in various ways that the most important thing with regard to literature is in fact pleasure, savouring the world it promises, and then becoming aware of its worth. In the three sections aptly named *Bio*, *Biblio* and *Bio-biblio*, various themes are revealed, some of a psychological character, some closely related to older or more recent social or political problems.

Upon closer analysis, we note that the chapter *Bio* is dominated by essays that focus on people and the second one by the thoughts regarding books, whereas the last chapter's stories touch on both topics, showing the osmosis between reality and a second-degree life. Regardless of what essay we may choose, we note that the reflection always starts from a book, an author, an event the author experienced or one that a writer evokes. Therefore, perhaps the most interesting aspect of a book is that it can be read by any type of readers, as it offers precisely as much as one is willing to surrender from one's own thought and sensitivity. One may stop at the life, the work or the impact a given writer's books

and thus one is not left with insignificant data that is completely useless in their day-to-day life, but with an idea that grants the possibility to see beyond that which is directly shown, from a new perspective.

Another important aspect that brings the book closer to the audience is the appealing way in which thoughts and ideas unfold. Although most teenagers would not willingly read an essay on the condition of literature (and implicitly ours as humans) in relation to a series of writings or critical opinions, *Seinfeld and Nabokov's Sister* demonstrates right from the start an extraordinary power of seduction, being equally accessible and challenging; the sharpness of the text's arguments and later the themes that appear throughout the book hold the reader's curiosity, as the only way to discover "all the facets" of the problem is to keep reading, and thus enter this continuous game where every chapter opens new doors for the reader to see the same world, with "different eyes." At the same time, the author's availability and openness, her capacity to articulate her discourse on the same level as the potential reader constitutes another source of seduction.

SIMONA SORA CLEARLY STATES HER OPINION ABOUT HOW SHE SEES LITERATURE; SHE KNOWS HOW LITERARY CRITICS ARE PERCEIVED AND DOES NOT HESITATE TO SHARE HER POINT OF VIEW, SHAPED THROUGH A LIFETIME OF EXPERIENCE (WHICH SHE PRESENTS IN A FRAGMENTARY, BUT QUITE GENEROUS MANNER THROUGHOUT THE BOOK), REACHING CONCLUSIONS THAT SHE HAS THE COURAGE TO EXPRESS AND EXPLAIN USING CONSISTENT AND CLEAR REASONING, SO THAT THE READER WILL FOCUS ON WHAT IS ESSENTIAL.

ALL OF THIS IS PACKAGED IN A DISCOURSE THAT INCLUDES BOTH SINCERITY AND INTELLIGENCE.

For those who, unfamiliar with Simona Sora, expect a novel with a tint of love—more or less literary—the author offers an explanation of her process in *Argument*. Two points of reference are established regarding the context for the succession of ideas: Nabokov's sister frantically tries during the Second World War to recover the books from the library where she worked. The books were borrowed by Nazis, who offered them back in an implacably natural way, although there already were Russian tanks on the streets of Prague. The second one is a reference to the American sitcom, more precisely to a particular episode where the characters read a lot and end up borrowing books from the library, this act – inconceivable in the real universe of *Seinfeld* – likened to the writers' attempts to save literature.

THE CHARACTERS OF SIMONA SORA'S BOOK ARE LITERATURE, READING, CRITICISM AND WRITING, RECOLLECTION AND, BEHIND THEM, AKIN TO A SKILFUL PUPPETEER, WE SEE SIMONA SORA HERSELF, GLIDING FROM ACTUAL TO FICTIONAL EXPERIENCE.

Here are some of them, painted, of course, in the author's words: "Literature is not fable, not (just) story, not summary. It is or should be an encounter between two beings who speak the same language, more important sometimes even than words;" "Critique would thus be a recreation of the work, but also a break for understanding;" "Reading can turn from punishment to incurable disease and, eventually, an imaginative discipline applied to existence and a negotiation with death in the enemy language." Here, I will describe my own encounter with one of them, namely, Literature.

Simona Sora brings us before a concept in which she truly believes and which is, above all, an honest concept. The individualisation and gathering of such a wide field into a single point, clear and intelligible, later turns into perception: "Literature – an encounter



between two beings." Therefore, it does not entail only words, but, above all, the reader must forge a certain connection that will allow him or her to truly capture the thread of the text, to "touch" it and then mould it, so that he or she can reach the being beyond and, through it, his own being. This "encounter" represents to an equal extent a communion, a feeling, a sensation, sending one to another place and time in relation to the ones they occupy. *Seinfeld and Nabokov's Sister* is a serious book written with humour, one that carries us through characters and ideas, offering not solutions but perceptions, generating questions. And, likewise, it is a book constructed around a message only apparently scattered in secondary messages, generating, for the reader, a gradual sensation of adjustment, communion, "real" reality. At the end, you feel enriched and discover that you are about to start reading one of the books you have just encountered in Simona Sora's pages or that starting to write gives you a pleasure you have not known before, or that you yourself could become the critic. Finally, those who were already familiar with what the book tries to reveal are still left with the taste of a delicious and essential reading.

A COUNTRY AS LARGE AS A LITERATURE:

Field Work in Ukrainian Sex

by
OKSANA ZABUŠKO

◆

OKSANA ZABUŠKO'S NOVEL THROWS US UNSCRUPULOUSLY INTO A REALITY THAT IS RECOGNISABLE, WHETHER WE LIKE IT OR NOT, WHETHER WE ACKNOWLEDGE IT OR DISAVOW IT: THE IDENTITY THROUGH WHICH THE NATIONAL BEING OF THE COUNTRY TO WHICH YOU BELONG (EVEN IF ONLY AS A SECTION IN THE PASSPORT YOU USE FOR TRAVELLING) LEAVES ITS MARK ON YOU.

◆

Ioana Arina Onofrei, Național



In the case where the “bearer” of said identity is also a creative conscience, which incidentally belongs to what is called “minor” literature, things get complicated. They get complicated because we are nowhere close to a sociological study, a study on mentalities or an analysis of the creative (in this case Ukrainian) subconscious, but before a well articulated novel, written by a steady hand behind which we find a connoisseur of all modern narrative formulas, and a knowledgeable critic. At first sight, the novel presents an abusive relationship that focuses on a fictional alter-ego, a Ukrainian writer living in the United States, “courted” by literary magazines and familiarised with the workings of foreign universities. In a fragmentary manner, leaving numerous blanks, Oksana, the protagonist, retraces the transformation of a talented and determined young woman (sometimes with a quirky lack of experience) into the mature woman of the novel’s present, haunted by the spectre of belated maturity and trying to regain her confidence and heal.

Beyond the life encounter of two artists who have their own open wounds and different visions of their condition, Field Studies about Ukrainian Sex is a book that questions the status of “small” literature, still too little known but “exotic” (stirring a mixture of astonishment and disdain on the shore of an Ocean crossed as if in a rush), a literature too young and bearing the legacy of a people “haunted” by the former Soviet political regime.

THE ISSUES EXPLORED IN THIS NOVEL THEREFORE RELATE TO THE HISTORY AND IDENTITY OF UKRAINE, AS WELL AS EACH ARTIST’S INDIVIDUAL OPTIONS IN RELATION TO HIS OR HER OWN IDENTITY ROOTS: EXILE OR THE STUBBORN STRUGGLE IN THE HOPES FOR A POSSIBLE POSTHUMOUS GLORY (NAMELY, THE FEAR OF LEAVING, OF PERMANENTLY BREAKING AWAY FROM A PATTERN, THE REFUSAL TO BE A “SELL-OUT,” THE INABILITY TO COME OUT OF YOURSELF AND OPEN UP TO ANOTHER PERSON).

Initially, the narrative appears relatively simple: the love story between the protagonist and “the first Ukrainian man in her life.” It is a violent relationship, in which both show a certain weakness leading to a power struggle where dependence does not exclude abuse (physical, but especially psychological). Oksana feels equally the trauma, the discomfort, the difficulty of being in a foreign country – where human interactions seem dishearteningly superficial and psychotherapy solves everything – and the dependence on another. Mikola is the first man in whom she sees the “triumphant” Ukrainian and with whom, despite intuition, she falls in love: he is a brilliant artist, but also a sick being, incapable of sustaining a healthy relationship, unable to adjust in America and build a career in the field of the arts, projecting his complexes and frustrations in apocalyptic images on the canvas and in violent gestures in his relationship with her.

Psychoanalysing at the level of a collective mentality, we could claim (and the novel allows that) that the entire volume is only the transposition of what she had to endure in Ukraine during the Soviet regime, following the consequences of a historic “rape” and the traumas it left behind: “Ladies and gentlemen, I am increasingly sorry for my own body. This feeling is known only to the prisoners in the Soviet Gulags.” The “love” story between Oksana and Mikola K is, therefore, a metaphor for a people frantically trying to “escape” the ties of a totalitarian regime, one that has done nothing but destroyed its identity.

Another theme in Oksana Zabuško’s book is feminism. Leaving aside the over-emphasised national identity, the main character is portrayed as a modern woman. What is intriguing, however, is that, even if she is aware of the abnormality of her relationship with Mikola, she does not break up with him. On the contrary, she suffers, she has to endure abuse, sometimes provokes it, turning into an alienated being.

SHE FEELS LIKE A STRANGER IN AMERICA, BUT UKRAINE HAS BECOME FOR HER A MERE GHOST-COUNTRY THAT HAUNTS HER AND THAT SHE LOVES UNCONDITIONALLY, BUT THAT IS UNINHABITABLE:

“AND IF AT LEAST SOMEONE COULD EXPLAIN: WHY THE HELL ARE YOU BORN A WOMAN IN THIS WORLD (AND IN UKRAINE OF ALL PLACES!), WITH THIS DAMNED DEPENDENCE IMPLANTED IN YOUR BODY — LIKE A DELAYED BOMB — WITH THIS LACK OF INDEPENDENCE, WITH THE NECESSITY TO TURN TO SOFT AND MOULDABLE CLAY, SPREAD ONTO THE SOIL’S SURFACE.”

Oksana Zabuško’s piece of writing is in no way comfortable. It oscillates between first- and third-person narration, it assimilates, through insertion, poetry, and the images have a merciless accuracy, with no consideration for the reader’s prudish sensibility, underlining one of the book’s fundamental ideas: “literature is a form of national therapy.” The effect of “throwing around” ideas is hallucinatory. Warning: Oksana Zabuško may cause addiction!

Iustin Andrei Șurpănelu





COMMUNIST ROMANIA IN

The Last Hundred Days

by
PATRICK MCGUINNESS

◆

THE ROMANIAN COMMUNIST PERIOD STILL CONSTITUTES A CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECT FOR ROMANIAN SOCIETY, NOT FULLY AWOKEN AFTER ITS 25 YEARS OF FREEDOM, SPLIT (PERHAPS ALSO DEPENDING ON AGE, STUDIES OR INTERESTS) BETWEEN THE NOSTALGICS, THE TRUE OR IMAGINED DISSIDENTS AND THE FERVENT DETRACTORS. THINGS ARE SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT IN THE CASE OF FOREIGNERS, THE CEAUȘESCU ERA DEFINITELY REPRESENTING A DICTATORSHIP, SIMILAR TO THOSE OF MANY OTHER COUNTRIES. PATRICK MCGUINNESS THROWS A BRITON INTO THE COMMUNIST WORLD OF ROMANIA, OFFERING HIS READERS A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE FINAL DAYS OF CEAUȘESCU'S DICTATORSHIP.

◆

Adelina Mariniuc, Național



Most of us, although caught in enjoying our own adolescence, have probably heard that the communist period was marked by censorship, lack of freedom, a permanent control over the citizens' decisions and unending queues for food. We know that many people worked for the Securitate (a secret police agency), thus carrying a double identity, and we have later found out about the post-communist follow-ups to such stories, when files were burned and many truths were hidden – a situation that led to the Romania we know today. McGuinness' novel brings to the fore the moments prior to the '89 revolution, as seen through a stranger's eye, utterly unprepared for the reality into which he is thrown; these are times that turn the revolution into a political movement, a power struggle with multiple interests, hidden behind the Romanians' sudden courage.

The protagonist enters the hidden world of Bucharest and discovers that even those apparently willing to help have, in fact, a political function or an interest, and their appointment to a certain position is nothing more than a strategy to keep communism in power. He discovers that nothing here is what it seems: even the Briton who used to have his job before him is now among the most feared men on the black market and is one of the prime minister's trusted men. McGuinness' book brings out the political games and the obscure means employed to keep communism in power: manipulation, censorship, violence. Thus, young people come to believe that the regime in which they live, albeit oppressive, can be made bearable: "Even if I cannot say whatever I want, even if

I'm constantly under surveillance, even if they destroy my city, even if, or when they stop me from singing my music and I always have to ask for a permit before my concerts... I am free because I choose not to escape." Meeting people from various fields, the main character discovers the double life of the capital, the corruption, the power games, the incredible dirt, old Bucharest's underground or the precarious relationships (the only possible kind) established between people.

What McGuinness succeeds in is portraying an objective image, as his protagonist is in no way a judgmental observer of the place where he is located, he himself carrying with him a troubling familial history and some unresolved trauma, reaching only by chance this corner of Europe, which he is initially indifferent to, but which later assimilates him into the new reality of the days immediately following the revolution. The Bucharest in which he lives seems fragmented by gaps that regular inhabitants cannot cross: it is the world of grey apartment buildings where people who were forced to move there from the countryside still raise chickens and cannot breathe within the narrow walls, it is the city dominated by cranes in full process of demolishing old churches and building new boulevards, it is the space of the massive and impersonal People's House, it is the atmosphere from Capșa or the house where Cilea lives and Trofim's surveyed apartment. There is also the underground Bucharest, where the lure of Little Paris carries on and fascinates Leo: he sees it as a place of damnation and of forgotten beauty at the same time.

The detachment conferred by the condition of “foreigner” provides the opportunity to probe into the psychology of the people with whom the young Briton comes into contact. The reactions of people around him faced with a medical system that denies patients a fair treatment in the absence of Kent cigarette packs slipped into pockets, with a society where abortion is banned, where young women can at any time become escorts for Nicu Ceaușescu or other party leaders, where attempting to flee the country is a Russian roulette game, are only visceral reactions, never analysed through the prism of a moral grid, which emphasises the realism of the narrative, as the character himself gets caught in the carousel of a sick society he cannot fully comprehend: “Someone who comes to a new place notes everything except the important things.” Oftentimes, this world seems unhinged, outside the realm of normality: there is a black market for food and clusters of people helping others escape the country, which also comprise Securitate agents turned pimps or assassins; there are also characters like Trofim (whom he will help write a book for Free Europe), who believes, however, in a new form of communism; there is real drama, and much, much confusion.

FEAR IS INESCAPABLE: “NOT THE FEAR OF SOME GRAVE DANGER OR THE FEAR OF SOME UNIMAGINABLE EVIL, BUT THE FEAR OF THE INDIVIDUAL WHO SUDDENLY FINDS HIMSELF TRAPPED IN THE MECHANISMS OF THE SYSTEM.”

Without attempting to elucidate the mystery of the revolution in Romania, the character comes to understand that it stemmed from a push of some politicians wishing to take control in the context of pressure both from the other former communist states, in the West, and from Moscow. The Briton sees the events as something that can be subscribed to normality, but does not expect that they will be a political game. The violence of the final days in December is only sporadically described in the book, but the speed of events seems unreal, as in the span of only a few days riots in the big cities take place, and also the trial of the Ceaușescus, their execution as if they were animals, the establishment of a new leadership.

THE ROMANIA SHOWN IN THE BOOK DOES NOT BECOME TRULY FREE BECAUSE IT REMAINS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF OLD POLITICIANS.

THE ROMANIA IN WHICH WE LIVE IS NOT THE SAME AS THE ONE THAT MCGUINNNESS’ PROTAGONIST KNEW, BECAUSE IT CANNOT BE, BUT IS IT AT ALL POSSIBLE FOR IT TO BE A COUNTRY OF NEW PEOPLE?



THE LAST MEETING OF CHARLIE CHAPLIN

Charlie Chaplin's Last Dance

by
FABIO STASSI

◆

NO ONE COULD IMAGINE NOWADAYS A WORLD WITHOUT CINEMA. FILMS ARE PART OF OUR EXISTENCE OFTENTIMES MORE SO THAN BOOKS, THEATRE OR EVEN THE MUSIC WE LISTEN TO IN OUR EARPHONES, IN THE CAR, ON TERRACES, DURING CLASS; WE CRY OR LAUGH TOGETHER WITH THE MOVING SHADOWS IN THE FILM THAT PLAYS BEFORE OUR EYES, WHICH ARE AS REAL AND PALPABLE AS WE ARE.

◆

Marina Munteanu, Republic of Moldova



Directors, actors, scriptwriters, wardrobe crew, extras create a living story that always takes a different shape. And I doubt there is anyone out there who does not know Charlie Chaplin, someone who has not laughed with him, who has not felt the pleasure or the ridiculousness, the amazement and the sadness mirrored by that comical face, with that little black moustache, the unmistakable hat and cane and the motions fluidly twisted into the most unexpected gestures. In *Charlie Chaplin's Last Dance*, Fabio Stassi shows a part of Charlie Chaplin's life, giving the impression that between the biography, the possible reality of the actor's existence and that of the characters he played there might be unseen threads, which overlay certain scenes, situations, experiences.

AT HIS EIGHTY-TWO YEARS, CHAPLIN STANDS BEFORE THE LADY CLAD IN BLACK. IT IS DEATH HERSELF, WAITING PATIENTLY. BUT CHAPLIN IS FAR FROM HAVING CONCLUDED HIS BUSINESS IN LIFE. HE ASKS FOR A REPRIEVE. FROM DEATH?! BUT DEATH IS ALSO A LADY, SO SHE MAY HAVE AN IMPULSE OF GENEROSITY EVERY NOW AND THEN, TOWARD THOSE WHO CAN MAKE HER LAUGH. SO HERE IS THE PACT: DEATH WILL COME BY EVERY CHRISTMAS DAY AND IF SHE IS STIRRED TO LAUGHTER, SHE WILL POSTPONE THE JOURNEY BY A YEAR.

The novel takes the form of letters that Charlie writes to his son before his final encounter, when he senses he will not be able to cause even the shadow of a smile on the face of his uninvited guest. These evocations are interrupted by tragi-comical moments from the last six Christmas nights, when it was not the old virtuosity, but the grotesque of old age that drew howls of laughter from Death.

Thus, in the form of a picaresque novel that tells the future Vagabond's wanderings through the most varied jobs, from the world equally fascinating and miserable of the circus to that of a taxidermy workshop, from an obscure printing house to movie sets, the book hides a serious issue: the artist's condition when faced with himself, human frailty and the madness of art, the desire to express the beauty and sadness of life. It is not by chance that beyond the scenes with Charlie at the fore, a carnival-like universe is outlined and, in it, the obsessive image of the circus, that is, of the heartbreaking beauty that entails a constant risk. From this world are born, according to Fabio Stassi, both the deepest love (of Harlequin for the beautiful and miserable Eszter) and the first frames of what will be the Lumičre brothers' cinema (in which the dark Harlequin will wish to keep the image of his beloved).

A surrealist illustration of a man in a suit and bowler hat, whose torso is replaced by a large, anatomical human heart. The heart is labeled with letters A through K. The man holds a cane and walks on a dark, smoky path. The background is a plain, light color. The heart is shown in a detailed anatomical style, with visible arteries and veins. The man's legs are dark and he is wearing white shoes. The overall style is a mix of medical illustration and surrealism.

A surrealist illustration of a man in a suit and bowler hat, whose torso is replaced by a large, anatomical human heart. The heart is labeled with letters A through K. The man holds a cane and walks on a dark, smoky path. The background is a plain, light gray.

A surrealist illustration of a man in a suit and bowler hat, whose torso is replaced by a large, anatomical human heart. The heart is labeled with letters A through K. The man holds a cane and walks on a dark, smoky path. The image is a vertical composition with a light gray background. The man is walking away from the viewer, slightly to the right. His legs are dark, and he wears white shoes. The heart is a detailed anatomical drawing, showing the left and right ventricles, major arteries, and veins. The letters A through K are placed around the heart, corresponding to specific anatomical features. The man's head is a dark bowler hat, and his arms are in a dark suit. He holds a long, thin cane in his right hand. The path he walks on is dark and smoky, with some small white specks. The overall style is a mix of medical illustration and surrealism.

A surrealist illustration of a man in a suit and bowler hat, whose torso is replaced by a large, anatomical human heart. The heart is labeled with letters A through K. The man holds a cane and walks on a dark, smoky path. The image is a vertical composition with a light gray background. The man is walking away from the viewer, slightly to the right. His legs are dark, and he wears white shoes. The heart is a detailed anatomical drawing, showing the left and right ventricles, major arteries, and veins. The letters A through K are placed around the heart, likely corresponding to specific anatomical features. The man's head is a simple black silhouette of a bowler hat. The overall style is a mix of medical illustration and surrealism.

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How can you not love The People's Act of Love?!

◆
THE PEOPLE'S ACT OF LOVE, BY JAMES MEEK,
 IS MUCH MORE THAN WHAT THE TITLE SUGGESTS, THAT IS, A GENERALISATION OF LOVE
 EXPRESSED IN A CERTAIN MANNER, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT EXTREME,
 WHICH MANAGES TO ASTOUND PRECISELY THROUGH THE COURAGE AND DEVOTION IN WHICH IT TURNS.

◆

Roxana Neamțu, Național



As one reads the novel, everything unfolds with extreme clarity, and the characters and the situations in which they are placed connect seamlessly as one advances; perhaps the only moment when the atmosphere is relatively troubling is the ending, which I perceived as too well concluded, since I had expected some questions to be left unanswered. I soon realised, however, that no matter what you might predict before reading the story, nothing is what you believe it to be.

The novel is rich in images, episodes, emotions, thoughts and twists, without rejecting any of the serious themes. It has drama, it has action, it has love – all the ingredients of a complex universe.

At the fore we discover the image of a forsaken village in Siberia, Iazik, located, on the temporal axis, around 1919, somewhere at the end of the First World War; this is the place where a legion of Czechs dream of going home, a home that no longer belongs to the defunct Habsburgic Empire, but to the new Czechoslovakia, whose new existence they only heard of. The village is where the Skoptsy sect lives, a community who hold the belief that through the act of castration a person can burn the “keys of Hell” and become closer to God,

turning into an angel. Among these is Balashov, a leader of sorts, former cavalryman, with strong faith and, at the same time, a wife and child he virtually abandons in order to show his love for God. Another prominent figure in this account is Anna Petrovna, together with her son Alyosha. Anna is poorly regarded by the Skoptsy because she does whatever she wants, and her decision to come to the village seems incomprehensible. But even in her case, it all comes back to the point of departure (in this case the title), her arrival being a way to prove to her husband Balashov that she loves him, wishing to understand, at the same time, why he left her and, perhaps, to punish him for his “betrayal.” Anna takes a partner in Lieutenant Mutz – a Czech Jew who investigates things in minute detail and who falls in love with her and eventually accepts her refusal to go with him.

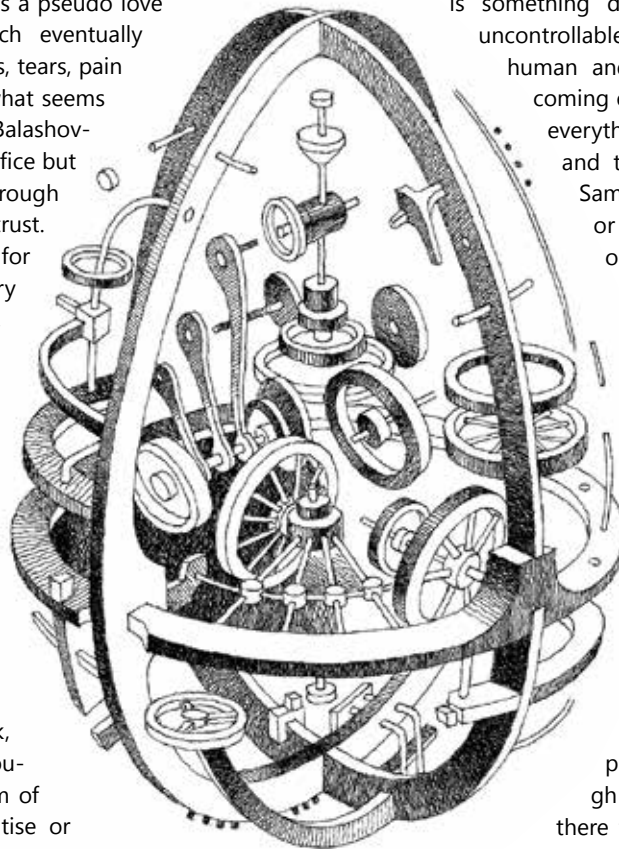
THE MOST FASCINATING CHARACTER, THE STRANGEST AND MOST COMPLEX, IS THE STUDENT WHO REFUSES TO BEAR HIS FATHER'S NAME, THE ANARCHIST IN LOVE, BUT WHO, PARADOXICALLY, STILL HAS A SLIVER OF HUMANITY WITHIN. HIS ACT OF LOVE IS THE VERY “BACKGROUND” OF THE PLOT, TYING TOGETHER THE INDIVIDUAL SITUATIONS AND CREATING A SHATTERING IMAGE OF WHAT THE MADNESS OF LOVE AND THE MADNESS OF HISTORY MEAN.

There is a Samarin who goes after the terrorist student, a girl he used to be in love with and who was exiled to Siberia, and a Samarin who does not hesitate to blow up a train that also carries a child; there is a Samarin who returns carrying Alyosha in his arms and a Samarin who knowingly takes with him a comrade to kill and eat when he runs out of supplies; there is a Samarin victim and a Samarin executioner, a storytelling wizard and a merciless killer.

The composition of the book is warm, but its components are cold. Right from the start, there is a story only half-told, which eventually ties all segments together. First, there is a pseudo love story (Samarin-Katya), which eventually degenerates into killings, lies, tears, pain and ice. Then we discover what seems to be a true love story (Balashov-Anna), one that ends in sacrifice but that, along the way, goes through love and deceit and mistrust. Other types of love, whether for the divinity or for the country or for the idea of freedom, are also presented, but their impact on the reader is more subtle, as they lack the insane reactions of the characters, their feelings taken to an extreme, and the complicated plots. The role of these other types of love, however, is just as important in the universe of the novel. As all acts of love in the universe portrayed by James Meek, they too carry the mark of courage and folly, take the form of obsession, mutilate, traumatise or involve sacrifice. The atmosphere seems constantly veiled in a permanent coldness, and the style rarely reverberates towards bitter poetry: we are in Siberia, in a time of still muddled waters politically and socially, and the descriptions recreate the atmosphere with stunning accuracy.

WHETHER DEALING WITH THE ACTUAL SPACE, WITH MINIMAL GESTURES THAT BETRAY AFFECTION OR DISGUST OR WITH CUTTING A MAN INTO FILLETS AND CONSUMING HIS ORGANS, IT ALL CONTRIBUTES TO BECOMING FAMILIARISED TO THE PLACE, TIME AND CHARACTERS. YOU PERCEIVE THE UNIFIED WHOLE AS LIGHT BUT, PUT TOGETHER, THIS

WHOLE STILL ELUDES YOU, BECAUSE FROM THE FIRST MOMENT WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER A SITUATION OR A NEW CHARACTER YOU REALISE THAT THERE IS A MEANING THAT YOU CANNOT GRASP AND YOU ALSO REALISE THAT NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU MOVE FORWARD YOU WILL NOT FIND IT, WHILE THE MESSAGE CHANGES, BECOMING RICHER WITH EACH NEW SITUATION, EACH NEW CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE.



It is true that you are glad for every moment James Meek offers, for how he succeeds in showing up-close reactions, feelings, incongruences, with a fine eye for detail, but at the same time you feel there is something deep, viscous, human, an uncontrollable force that lies in every human and sets history in motion, coming ever closer and taking over everything. The world of Balashov and the Skoptsy, of Anna and Samarin, of captain Matula or the murdered Shaman, is outlined in dark strokes, but in the end one notes a pale light effect: the Czechs who manage to survive both the Reds' attack and Matula's obsession with power start their long trek home, under Mutz's leadership. A desolate scenery, some situations that are downright macabre and characters in constant suffering—up to a certain point, everything gravitates in a precarious balance, although the disruptive element was there from the first page of the book: Samarin. Or time. Or history.

Or weakness. Or change. The character could bear any name. James Meek succeeds in bringing to light the essence of humanity as a mixture of good and evil, cowardice and strength, vulnerability and despotism. The People's Act of Love is an ensemble of intense emotions that evidence the warmth of human goodness only after experiencing and facing evil in all its most diverse forms, a novel about people and their weaknesses, about small gestures and great ideas, about destruction and the love for someone or something from whom you don't know with certainty whether you will receive at least as much as you have given.



COCKTAIL OF EXPERIENCES:

Votca-Cola

by
IRINA DENEJKINA

IRINA DENEJKINA CHALLENGES THE READER, AS DIRECTLY AS CAN BE, TO DISCOVER A SERIES OF RUSSIAN ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCES WHERE FREEDOM TESTS AND OFTEN TRANSGRESSES THE LIMITS OF MORALITY, WHERE THE NEW CAPITALIST SYSTEM MAKES THE INDIVIDUAL WILD AND DESOLATE, AND THE IMPORT OF WESTERN ELEMENTS COMES TO BE WORTH MORE THAN OLD VALUES.

Tudor Berbinschi, Național



This “exodus” into the land of hedonistic or even frivolous youths is sometimes the pretext for cutting out precise snapshots of these extraordinary (and eccentric) youths’ realities, the author showing clearly and without hesitation the fantasy and naiveté that take them from one experience to the next. Beyond these aspects, the prose of the Russian writer has “everything,” ranging from the grotesque, the violent, alcohol, drugs, sex and teenagers to love, children, music, literature, all creating a mixture of problems that the characters are saddled with, problems that are not given a solution in return.

The book includes 12 short narratives, some strange, fantastic, realistic or autobiographical, all of them projecting the idea of the characters’ alienation and loss of identity. Starting from this fact and the world of post-Soviet Russia’s teenagers, the author assumes a vulgar language in the narration as if it were perfectly natural, allowing the protagonists to mould themselves on the carefully mounted context to capture images of drunkenness in the dorms, sex with no strings attached, indifference, cynicism, or rather, false existential problems, gratuitous violence, the chase for money, image or social status. Her characters are seemingly closer to

Wu Tang, the British punk-rock or MTV than her own home, ensuring the total detachment from the Russian “classics,” a different escape from the communist past, or rather, a burial in it. Irina Denejkina’s techniques in accomplishing all these are employed in a confident and subtle manner, leaving room for different interpretations and sometimes recounting with impeccable candour and indifference – both specific to adolescence. The accuracy of the account is doubled by circularity, as the analysis of events from multiple perspectives (for instance, in *Song for Lovers*) is often opted for. In short, the author behaves as if she were serving you a cocktail without telling you what it contains, letting it hit you like a cold shower, then trying to explain how it is made while also pouring something else for you to drink. Here lie the stakes of the book: the reader is placed before 12 such “cocktails,” each with a different flavour and recipe, but all equally strong. All equally strong, but, together, they may not successfully have their desired effect, but might only cause you a temporary headache.

WRITTEN PASSIONATELY AND RIGOROUSLY ENOUGH, THESE STORIES SUMMON, IN THOSE WHO GO THROUGH THEM, A HIGHLY VIVID GLIMPSE OF SOCIETY, A SPACE WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE RUN DISORIENTED BY THE “FOG” AROUND THEM.

The frankness with which the experiences are laid out in front of the reader may sometimes be shocking. In one of the main scenes in the novel (*Valerocika*), Denejkina brings us face to face with the image of the perpetuation of crazy teenage hedonism, choosing as the main element for its narrative dissection a few kids who have reached puberty but still lack a clear identity; they appear to be set in a stance where they try to mirror their older siblings' actions, trying out alcohol, sex, drugs, violence, adopting vulgarity and prejudice. Far from reality, on the other hand, is the story of Vasea, an allegorical and grotesque account that captures human foulness and cruelty, bringing to the fore the forms of dehumanisation that individuals are subjected to in the disorderly society. The author captures every detail about those she brings to the fore, but often limits herself to what they "look like" during the account, creating an interesting image on them (neither complete, nor dry), as is the case of the "mail couple" who is only the projection of a naive young lady's dream (A "Distanced" Feeling).

Above any form of depraved reality presented or experiences of the indecisive youths, lacking in principles, an important part in Denejkina's prose is played by song lyrics (Western, of course), which, inserted in the text, underline – sometimes finely, other times downright crudely (depending on the atmosphere) – the nature of the situation in which the protagonists find themselves, treating them with irony but also leaving the impression that these crazy young people at the beginning of the XXth century know what they are doing, considering that others before them have experienced the same sensations.

THE READING EXPERIENCE DENEJKINA CREATES COMES SOMETIMES CLOSE TO IRVINE WELSH'S TRAINSPOTTING, BUT STAYS AT SUFFICIENT DISTANCE TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION OF UNIQUENESS (WHICH SHOULD BE NATURAL CONSIDERING, TOO, THE SPACE IN WHICH THE BOOKS ARE PLACED), BUT ON THE LEVEL OF SUBSTANCE THE TWO COME TO A TANGENT CLOSENESS, EACH APPROACHING ITS OWN THEMES MORE VISIBLY THAN THE COMMON ELEMENT:

THE YOUTHS' ALIENATION AND THEIR SEARCH FOR A PLACE IN THIS WORLD.

In fact, Irina Denejkina's short prose collection – *Vodka-Cola* – serves only to exhibit some problematic images about society and human nature, without offering solutions, causing readers to do a double take at these images before hanging them on a wall or burying them somewhere deep.





M E E T I N G S

LicArt Workshops. UltraFeminine Collaboration, Dialogue & Poetry

Anastasia Gavrilovici, Petru Rareș Graduate

Veni, vidi, vici. It is somewhat bizarre and premature to invoke the Latin adage when referring to poetry. But after all attempts to reach the light and find answers, some even taking a completely unexpected form, the sensation that you master something extra, an obsession, a query, could justify here “vici.”

This year as well, at the end of Licart, the poetic Workshop (its default the Workshops, to mark the diversity of the event), artfully and passionately coordinated by Răzvan Țupa, returned with a topic as punctual as it is well thought out and interesting, but also necessary, considering the majority of poetry participants was comprised of girls. From here also the vertebral spine of the workshops: “the feminine gender and poetry today.”

Throughout the eight meetings, we had the opportunity not only to take part in unique creative writing exercises and reading (and I would mention here at the very least the poems written through the deconstruction of some jokes, the poems sparked by a photograph/song, the audio translations, automatic dictations, silent or loud readings, but with everything entailed by the acoustic and décor of a skating rink, the texts about the person next to us and 14 ways of talking about a single symbol), but also to identify and metabolise certain curiosities/confusions/issues with regard to our own mechanism of writing or to poetry, in a wider context. This time, everything that took place there will stay more alive for the others as well, thanks to the anthology to be published, which contains a selection of the participants’ texts, grouped in three sections: “aggression,” “nostalgia” and “strategies.” From the chronicles the finalists wrote, one can put the puzzle

of the poetic Workshop back together, so keep an eye on poetic.ro, Răzvan Țupa’s blog, where you can see quite well what we have accomplished. I have also broadcast from the scene one of the meetings.

When we sit in a circle with a pen and paper between our teeth, we look like a small tribe getting ready to examine the prey. And our prey, during the eight weeks of Licart meetings, is poetry. What takes place here reminds me of what I used to do as a child: the moment I would lose confidence or interest in a toy dear to me, curiosity – or, rather, mistrust and the desire to reach the essence, the place where every action is put into motion – would make me cut and dig into the plush belly, to (im)patiently take out the tow until reaching the ingenious and mysterious mechanism from which it all stemmed. Or, in short, the need to know the truth and explain the way it works, what it is in what takes place at a technical level inside the battery chamber and the complicated circuits, that also has a concrete surface effect. Something similar I did at the first Workshop within the Poiana Brașov meetings, when Răzvan Țupa suggested, among other interesting things, that we trace backwards into poetry, to discover what is taking place in our own discourse, what it is that activates our inner resources and how the text is built until reaching its final formula, the one that goes to the reader.



Applied, the work tasks were something along these lines:

1. Cut your seatbelt and say who you are.
2. Don't think, just write.
3. Write the worst poem you could possibly imagine.

The first writing exercise revolved around authenticity. Starting with the idea that, as Wilde said, all our poetry is honest, we tried, through an automatic dictation which lasted three minutes, to give free reign to everything crossing our minds, following the idea that when we write without stopping and without paying attention, some things thus formulated could express, unconsciously, something much more real or representative about us compared to a text we think through and take the surplus out of, which we customise until reaching its compressed but substantial version, and the impression of discourse clarity. The question is whether in these poems we are still honest with ourselves or whether the truth was lost together with the channelling of emotions and control of the language. The second part of the Workshop focused on identifying elements that could alter the poetic discourse and which endanger the quality of the images constructed. Using them, each of us wrote the worst poem we possibly could and, thus, established personal criteria depending on which we appreciate the value of a text.

This process' counterpoint was discussing a poem that affected us and had a deciding role in the individualisation of our own writing manner. From Eminescu and Bacovia to Teodor Dună, from Mariana Marin and Virgil Mazilescu to Elena Vlădăreanu, but without forgetting Bukowski and Jerome Rothenberg, our foray into formative poems brought some of us that little bit closer to each other and all of us closer to poetry. From workshop to workshop, things became ever more challenging. We wrote a poem about the vulnerabilities of feminine poetry starting from the 14 steps we took through the hotel, and Claudia Văduvescu captured in a few verses the way in which our workshop unfolded. Here is her text:

I count my step would have walked on 14 heels/ but instead she took on her hip Father's jeans/ in which she could/ form her walk of emancipated woman with balls/ so she could call her father a man/ seed from within the left lung/ the porcelain Woman broken by the shout/ the pet Woman assassinated by an angry American/ the Woman kissing the lips of another woman and groping her breasts/ analyse my walk/ tell me what I've been through/ & grope my breasts/ I've realised I cannot grow my hair past my hip/ T H E R E/ begins a new era/ a world of delicate men/ a transvestite, a madman and a woman/ playing monopoly. (Feminine)



“Mihail Iordache” Contest

The Avatars of Cultural Journalism

Daniela Stanciuc, Grand Award winner

In each individual's system of values, experience should constitute an important reference point and even gain the significance and role of an oracle. Experience is something which we permanently refer to, something we ourselves build, which eventually becomes the sum of actions that make up our entire being. The “Mihail Iordache” contest is an experience which shapes and stays well engraved in our memory.

Contemporary culture has gained a vast range, more complex and unexpected, as it can hardly be integrated into various patterns and canons, in their restrictive essence. The educational act, on the other hand, is structured in relation to such canons and patterns. It is necessary, nonetheless, to sometimes give up the activity of effectively accumulating information, the mechanic we sometimes apply to writing and reading, the almost pathological fatigue with which we listen. Sometimes, it is necessary to always ask (ourselves) why, to find as many different answers to the same question as possible, to write differently than we were taught in school; it is necessary, therefore, to rid ourselves of conventions and the fear of taking a different road, keeping, of course, moderation.

Romanian school also offers such alternatives: a most relevant example in this case is the “Mihail Iordache” cultural journalism contest, which reached its IXth edition this year. What gives these activities uniqueness is precisely their exceptional, not rule-based, character: sometimes the exception moulds the rule, crystallises it, imprints it with new directions and meanings, thus engaging evolution, progress, becoming. Cultural journalism entails, generally, no register difficult enough to tackle. On the one hand, journalism itself imposes its rigours,

the need for objectivity, measure, offering at the same time a stunning freedom to tell, to write, to shape through words. On the other hand, culture is endless in terms of possibilities, horizons, dimensions: culture is permanently becoming, it consistently changes its way of being and manifesting itself. Last but not least, we ourselves have different conceptions, understandings and images of the phenomena around us. Journalism and culture – an approach, see, as daring and challenging as can be.

Capitalising on a new concept in an original manner and enriched from year to year, the contest in Suceava remains a serious and charming challenge to high-school people across the country. No one here asks for complicated definitions, no one asks for literary analysis “by the book,” academic expression is not necessary, and the freedom of movement within the text is nearly total.

I particularly enjoyed this freedom – to think, to create, to put on paper, while keeping, of course, the coherence of expression, the clarity of ideas and sentence logic; I also enjoyed the dedication of the teachers and of those who organise this contest every year, but also the openness with which many young people choose to write, to search for answers, to experiment.

I appreciated the jury's elegance and professionalism: Mircea A. Diaconu (honorary president), Daniel Șandru (executive president), Gheorghe Cîrstian (scientific secretary), the examiners for the speaking challenge: writers and publicists Radu Vancu, Claudiu Komartin, Răzvan Țupa, Paul Gorban, respectively, the examiners for the written challenge: Nicoleta Munteanu, Andreea Șandru, journalist Victor T. Rusu, writer Alexandru Ovidiu Vintilă. I rejoiced to take part in significant moments: the launch of the 13th edition of the magazine *The International Poet*, the launch of the 12th edition of the magazine *Alecart*, the *Avatars of Cultural Journalism* debate.

This type of approaching the cultural phenomenon prepares the professionals of tomorrow. It prepares and shapes them beautifully. It puts them in contact with excellent and profound literary texts, such as Florin Lăzărescu's *The Lamp with a Hat*, or Andrei Pleșu's *Jesus' Parables* – these, for instance, are the last two years' challenges. They are writings with depth, stories that stay, ineffable, engraved in our memory, texts which you do not comment on in a school-like manner, in two pages, to which there is no point to apply sophisticated concepts of literary theory, to which we must only forcefully imprint deepness and nuance. Why? Because every such story has its history, its nuances, miracles and implicitly its limits. And because each and every one of us understands literature differently, for each of us, it has a different definition. The "Mihail Iordache" contest promotes these aspects precisely: the search for balance between being and art, the search for one's own formula for understanding and writing, the materialisation into the vast and fascinating horizon of culture.

The book review and artistic show chronicle were the participants' two unique contest options. The speaking challenge, another novel element, capitalises precisely on the youths' capacity for selection, synthesis and expression. Various cultural publications released this year were made available to us, our role being to review one of them and then present it to the Jury. I chose *Time*: I was familiar with this magazine, the campaigns it used to promote and still does, such as the restoration of George Enescu's memorial house or saving Iași's linden trees. The fact that no one reads today constitutes in many cases an irritating stereotype, obsessively repeated: it is a sort of guilt thrown onto the shoulders of the new generations, a guilt and guilting alike. Young people do read. But they read differently, some other way, some other things. This fact is the basis of the contest organisers' vision, for the participants are put in touch with the new magazines, with the new generation and its dynamic and varied product.

One could say and write a lot about a contest. But it is in no way reduced to the award you have won or lost, the grade written next to your name, although such an award both encourages and makes you responsible. I believe that such contests represent amazing starting points: on the one hand, you get the opportunity to analyse a (cultural) cube underneath all its sides, and, on the other hand, you are given the opportunity to explore new perspectives, to thus relate to the existential patterns where, invariably, we were all born.

I spoke, in the title of this article, about avatars. Why avatars? Because the "Mihail Iordache" contest of cultural journalism is first of all an experience, and any experience changes and alters those who take part in it. Because this contest looks different every year. And because the world we look at, we each, always, look at it differently.





I T I N E R A R I E S

Guide of the Unadapted Traveller

Simple Steps Towards Inner-Coelhian Knowledge



This version represents a DEMO, free of charge and for the purpose of presenting events not commercialised elsewhere.

The article is, likewise, a stump and you can help to develop it by attempting to experience everything listed below.



Astrid Băgireanu, Băncilă Graduate

I often pondered how important it is to travel and how poor you are if you never have. This summer, the same as the last summer, I "cultivated" another percentage of my identity. Every time the self reconfigures and, eventually, I reach a new home. I sometimes wonder what it would be like if I chose to stay in the same home, to deny myself the discovery of the extensions of my potential with which my inner-traveller was endowed, without seeing a new Goya canvas or tasting another sunset or a fresh rain, in the scent of always other travellers who will corroborate the hypothesis and my only luggage: a sense of adjusting from one culture to another turns a tourist into a traveller.

When I got to move my dowry 2,467 km away from Romania, I told myself that my professional success depended on how flexible I could prove in as short a time as possible. The quality of being flexible when moving into a new culture is, in my opinion, the most precise argument of intelligence. In broad lines, this means being open-minded. A social misfit will suffer in

any circumstance. The longer the adjustment, the more difficult it will be keeping up with the changes all around. It is the same as when, as a child, you try to walk on your father's footsteps: two small steps following a big one. In the UK, I had to do about three steps of mine, that is, small steps. The question is, how many steps will I need to turn into a traveller? How do I know the pace of those around me and how quickly should I figure it out? Why should I change my pace when travelling? Why does the traveller have to adjust to a culture his is basically only visiting?

The difference between a tourist and a traveller is that the former will never adjust. With a little bit of luck, in a versatile context, he won't even have to speak the country's language.

THE TOURIST SEES, ADMIRES AND PHOTOGRAPHS A LANDSCAPE. THE TRAVELLER SEES, LIVES AND MEMORISES AN EMOTION.

The tourist talks about what it is like “back at his place,” comparing what is now being offered to him, whereas the traveller wonders what it is like in other places. The tourist will seek accommodation someplace central, will buy a fridge magnet, will eat in the hotel’s restaurant. A traveller will risk everything he owns to discover the way of life of those around him, will take it on and bring it home as his only souvenir. A tourist will take photographs before all plaque-bearing monuments, will push the tower of Pisa and grab the Eiffel Tower between two fingers. But only a traveller will smell the local kitchen from open balconies, will stop to gaze at a park or listen to a beggar, will climb to the highest point to see the city, streets, nature, people. All of this will from that moment on be part of his conscience.

The guide of the misfit traveller is, therefore, the guide of the luggage-free tourist. It is a remake of Santiago’s spirituality and aerodynamic, in two parts: one aiming for meeting the self halfway through the journey and finding oneself, as in a *déjà-vu*, in hundreds of other places and foreign moments, and another part, so superficial that it will not answer essential questions such as, “Why are we here?” but sufficiently profound for the ladies to share on Facebook. That is, the space to inspire opinion forming clichés. It is similar to the advertisement space.

I. LOOK IN THE MIRROR!

1ST METHOD: WHY SHOULD WE TRAVEL? WOULD BE THE QUESTION. BUT WHY SHOULD WE WRITE THE “SCHOOL O’ LIFE” WITHOUT AN F?

It does not matter if you speak correctly *at the people* and make yourself easily understood. What matters is how you identify yourself, what represents you. To travel means to be willing to rediscover your own somatic architecture, your own commas and dashes. It means that all roads lead to Rome, Rome being yourself. It is not called flying until you have opened the door of your cage because you did not have space enough to spread your eagle wings to full volume! But travelling is not only a mirror of self. It is one of another as well, the one with who you share your laundry pocket from your luggage. Someone said that to know that someone is right for you, you have to travel together between 3 months and a year around the world, through different environments, coming in contact with as many people. This way, you will see her (or him, the gender is irrelevant) in all situations, ranging from without make-up to without WiFi. From comfortable to annoying or boring. From caring to deep. With unwashed hair full of sand, with a red nose frozen from cold, childish, fragile, nervous, feminine. You will see her as if in a mirror: a tourist and a traveller.



2ND METHOD: WHEN I SAID I WAS NOT CARRYING ANY LUGGAGE EXCEPT THE CONCEPT OF THE TRAVELLER SEEKING TO ADJUST, IT WAS NATURALLY A LYING FIGURE OF SPEECH.

I, too, have carried across seas and countries too much luggage of things that only seemed useful, on the principle: I will not need so many pairs of shoes, but I’ve already spent so much money on this summer dress that I can only match with these shoes. Which will only match this bag. Which, look, is roomy enough, so I can also take this, and this... OK, I swear I did not take anything I don’t use or would not use, but I have to admit: I felt my stomach knot with regret when upon leaving I had no room left to load the new souvenirs or the food from the delicious Spanish kitchen. “It’s sheer madness!” I now think, while breathing in the oil of the Scottish restaurant where I work. The idea first struck me while I was in Marbella, during my last 5 days of holiday. After almost 2 weeks of trying rising to the challenge of meeting an impressive number of people (which translated into putting on too much make-up), my last days in Marbella were like a lazy Spanish siesta. This is what I thought: you spend 3 hours every day trying to put on “natural” make-up, to keep up the keratin treatment, to moisturise your skin, to apply layers upon layers of sunscreen, to wash off

the sea salt from your hair, to wipe off your nail polish, to reapply it, to moisturise your cracked lips, to solve the sunburn on your nose, to epilate and you waste half your holiday staring at your ingrown hairs. Suddenly there comes the day when you say, SCREW IT! You decide to go out make-up free, to allow your skin to heal in the sun, to no longer care about your frizzy hair – not even the hair on your legs – and to throw yourself into the sea as if you weighed nothing. And it is then, and only then, that the stars and the dregs in all the coffee cups in the world will wish for you to meet your other half that, lo, was meant for you. And it is then that he will want you to meet his family, friends, grandparents, the dog he lost as a child. And then will they immortalise the moment in THAT picture you fear most: that picture that will be shown on a projector at your wedding, printed on your maids of honour's dresses. And then you will realise how important it is to *look in the mirror* before setting off.

II. KEEP IT REAL!

1ST METHOD: PLACING EXPECTATIONS ON YOURSELF WITHOUT HAVING TO IS THE SAME AS STARTING WITH *THE FOX TOLD THE RAVEN TO SING, FOXES DON'T USUALLY SPEAK, BUT THIS IS A FABLE, SO HERE THE FOX SPEAKS!*

It spoils the charm. If there were no risk of malaria, of Lyme disease or West Nile fever, you should try to go out unprepared, although, if you're at all like me, you will take with you half the things a family with five children and a ranch will need in a year. Not expecting anything is not so easy, because nothing travels faster than information, at least in the century of Tripadvisor and other independent blogs. And it is a good idea to have a well-made plan, a map, a compass, minimal knowledge like *"dos cervezas, por favor"* and a functional camera.

2ND METHOD: IF THE ROUTE INCLUDES A VISIT TO SPAIN OR AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN AT LEAST EVERY YEAR, YOU ABSOLUTELY MUST EXPECT NOTHING AND LEAVE CARRYING ONLY YOUR TOOTHBRUSH.

If, however, you insist to load yourself with suitcases, try to take them with you empty, as empty as can be – like Venus of Milo. Just saying, you might have to return with supplies of gazpacho, jamón or tomate frito. To me, that means adapting to the Spanish lifestyle, where cuisine is Catholic and sacred.



III. THERE IS NO DESTINATION

Since there is no destination, don't expect to 'get there'! Destination only exists so long as you are a tourist, not a traveller. Any place you reach will be a preparing ramp for the next one. Eventually, to discover means to build. They say that former American Senator Dwight W. Morrow would frantically go through his pockets trying to find his journey ticket, as the train was preparing to leave the New York railway station. "I really have to find it," he would mutter nervously. "Don't worry, Senator," the conductor was trying to calm him, "I'm sure you have a ticket. Whenever you find it, you can send it to the Railway Station address!" "That's not what worries me," the Senator replied, "I have to find the ticket to know where I need to get off!"

Thus, destination turns to desire, and desire will be the nucleus of the knowledge process. Each step has its reason. Not long ago, I had this dream where there was a Russian palace. I have not visited Russia yet, but I am fascinated by the idea. Everything was golden and grand in my dream, as in a sepia photograph, and I was stood at the back of the minute hand gazing at the most beautiful view in the world. I was not in Russia, because the plaza looked Italian, and the French castle, with its red orbicular towers, looked the same as in Moscow. The locals were spread, murmuring in a language unknown. Paintings like in Prado, in the style of Dali or, rather, El Bosco, hung on either side on huge invisible pedestals. In the distance, where the orange rays of sunset blocked my view, there were gardens pouring in waterfalls, under the Venetian balconies of all the artists who lived, together with myself, that feeling of satisfaction that only completing a project

can give. The image in my dream could be a personal version of all the world frames my eye saw at some point. Only the search incites me! The search for the feeling of God. No one can answer the question, "Why are we here?" But we can throw a hypothesis out there: we want to rebel, luciferously inseminated, against the condition into which we were born, a place, a time. The power to change this information is measured only through the feeling of possession of everything the eyes perceive, up to the edge of the horizon, the way all emperors have dreamt. This possession is also found in an artist's eyes when he has finished his own Gioconda: possessing his own strip of genesis.

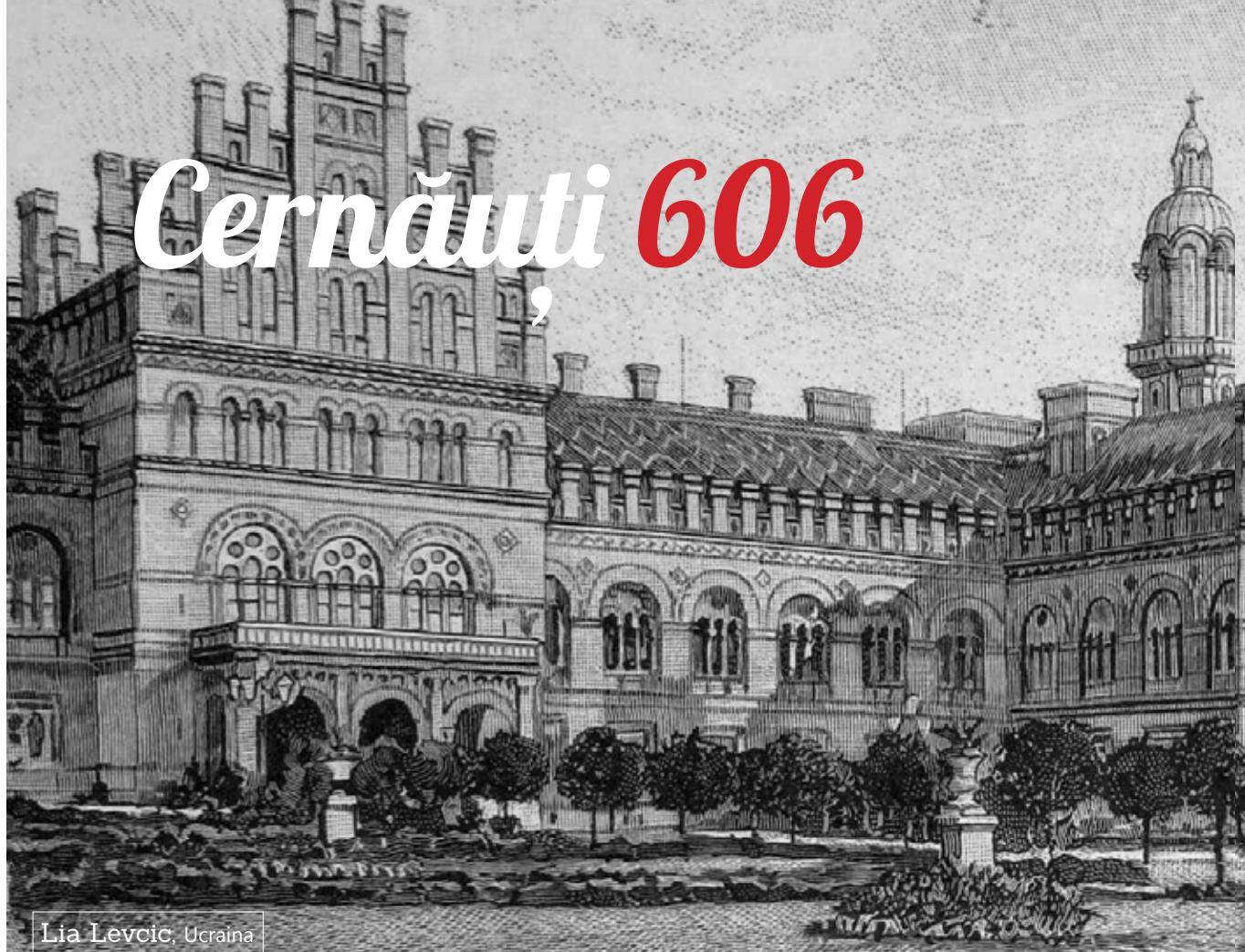
The traveller sees and keeps. His adapting to the society or the environment he visits is imposed precisely by this fact: he uses the language of the journey to search for himself in the hypostasis of creator.

Having the power to feel that what you own is measured in the lines of the horizon is not far from answering the question that pulled us from the womb. And these eyes are but those of a traveller.

„MYSTERY IS NOT TRAVELLING TO NEW PLACES, BUT LOOKING AT IT WITH DIFFERENT EYES“ – ESTHER PELER.

This DEMO-type article should be treated as such and that is, treated as it was written: with a thought to take you from the condition of tourist into that of traveller, from the condition of teacher, student, Costel's girlfriend, editor for some obscure school magazine to that of HUMAN. It is a traveller's enthusiastic attempt to translate the expression of a sunset off the coast of the Mediterranean Sea into an expressly Alecartian code. I mention here that the ease with which Astrid used to express herself before becoming a "professional" traveller towards Great Britain has long ago subsided. Therefore, translating feelings from my Spanish identity virginity into English and then Romanian has been more difficult than unpacking my suitcases. Likewise, the "practical guide" towards Coelhian knowledge is partly a pamphlet, as is more or less everything you have ever read under my signature. If you would like a more serious guide to adapt in your holidays, I recommend the cosmopolitan.ro newsletter: *How to stop your boyfriend from cheating during the holidays*. And for those who already know what they want or are travelling at this very moment and discovering their inner-self in a manner of sublime reciprocity with nature, perhaps even looking out at the sunbathed hills of Machu Picchu, I recommend that you roll up this guide in the shape of a cone to help you urinate like in The Fenis and to protect your intimate regions from Anopheles mosquitos. Cheers!





Lia Levciuc, Ucraina

Cernăuți is an old city in northern Bukovina with a rich history and astonishing touristic attractions, today – as fate would have it – under Ukrainian administration (following North Bukovina's annexation by Soviet troops). The biography of the times of thriving and destruction of its hopes and joys was engraved deeply in the mute building walls. The specific historical development and former eras diversity gave birth to an astonishing harmony of colours and styles. The work of the masters of aesthetic, grand monuments of various centuries' architecture, creates an admirable ensemble. Dubbed by its guests "Little Venice," Cernăuți is a city which takes its guests through various epochs and architectural styles, reminding them about both the Hapsburg period and the Romanian spirit, in an atypical Ukrainian city.

On the first Sunday of October, the inhabitants of Cernăuți invite guests over to celebrate the day of the city. Officials, led by mayor Olexii Kaspruk, expect tens of thousands of people who will celebrate not only the centuries-old history of the city, but also the hospitality typical to Bukovina, for this year, the old city across the Pruth will celebrate 606 years from its first documental certification, during the reign of Alexander the Good,

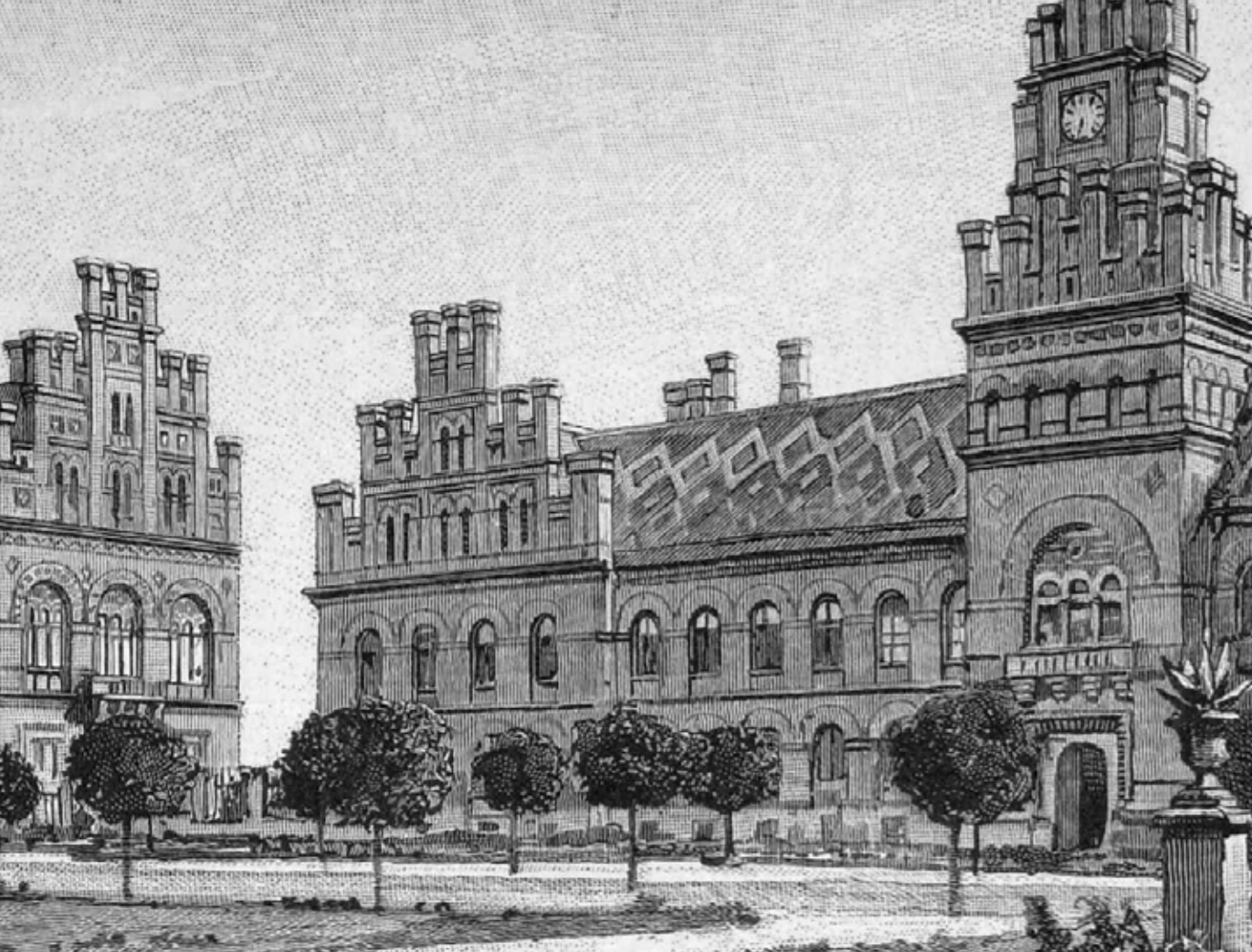
Voivode of Moldavia, in a commercial deed of 1408. Of course, that is not the date of the – back then – little settlement's founding, but the moment of its documental certification with the name Cernăuți is an important historical point.

What do today's official data say about this city? Stretching over 150 square kilometres and divided into 3 sectors (Sadagura, Șevcenko and 1 May), Cernăuți is home to 236,691 inhabitants of a lot of ethnicities, according to data from the 2009 Ukrainian population census, among whom Ukrainians are the most numerous. After 1944, minorities became the Romanians, Jews, Germans, Poles. To draw a comparison, we could analyse the data of the 1930 census, according to which, out of 112,427 inhabitants, 30,367 identified as Romanian, 568 Hungarian, 16,359 German, 1,521 Russian, 11,130 Ukrainian, 8,986 Polish, 42,592 Jews etc.



ONCE UPON A TIME COSMOPOLITAN,
CERNĂUȚI IS A CITY WHICH HAD TO BE
UNIFORMISED, REBUILT AND ADAPTED TO A
DIFFERENT POLITICAL VISION, WITHOUT BEING
STRIPPED, HOWEVER, OF ITS IDENTITY.





Rudolf Bernt, 1899

The historic truth speaks about the fact that a great part of the population was “transferred” in parts of the Soviet Union farther away, right after the establishment of the communist regime. In the place of those deported ethnics were brought in from the Socialist Soviet republics, who had no connection to the city of Cernăuți and its culture: 1,408 Polish, 1,308 Jewish and other 971 people of various ethnicities. The scattering of the Romanians represented a “necessary” act for the Soviet administration, because, according to international law, Romanians were a compact community and would have had to be granted more rights. At present, following the latest Romanian-Ukrainian meetings, it has been agreed that we are dealing with a single multi-ethnic nation.

Its architectural masterpiece, its card (also seen on the city’s emblem), is the Cernăuți University, called the Yuriy Fedkovych National University – the former residence of Bukovina and Dalmația’s metropolitans. The university was founded on 4 October 1875, by Royal decree, by Franz Joseph, the Emperor of Austria-Hungary, on the site of the old Orthodox Secondary Theological Seminar. Initially, this higher education institution, renowned throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was called precisely the Franz Joseph University, after its founder,

and during the period of Austrian domination it had three faculties (the Orthodox Theology Faculty, the Law Faculty and the Philosophy Faculty), where only a quarter of the students were Romanian and Ukrainian, the rest being German or Jewish. Following the reunification of North Bukovina with Romania, its name was again changed, to King Carol I University. Today, the name also refers to a new historical context, because Yuriy Fedkovych was a writer and publicist from Bukovina, a supporter of Ukrainian national rebirth. In 2011, the central building of the University (the Metropolitan Palace) was included on the UNESCO world heritage list.

Let us not forget that the name of the famous University and the city of Cernăuți is connected to the destinies of many Romanian personalities, including: Aron Pumnul, Mihai Eminescu, Eudoxiu Hurmuzachi, Gala Galaction, Ciprian Porumbescu, Dumitru Onciul, Father Dumitru Staniloae.

The first Sunday of October will be an occasion for celebration, Cernăuți presenting itself to the world with everything its centuries-old history and openness towards pluralism signify.





A R T E S

Prints of a Meeting

The visual experience proposed to us in the spring of this year, under the relatively neutral title *Prints. French Literature in Images*, by the magazine “Alecart,” together with the French Institute in Iași, at the latter’s headquarters (curator: Emil Munteanu), was one about interferences.

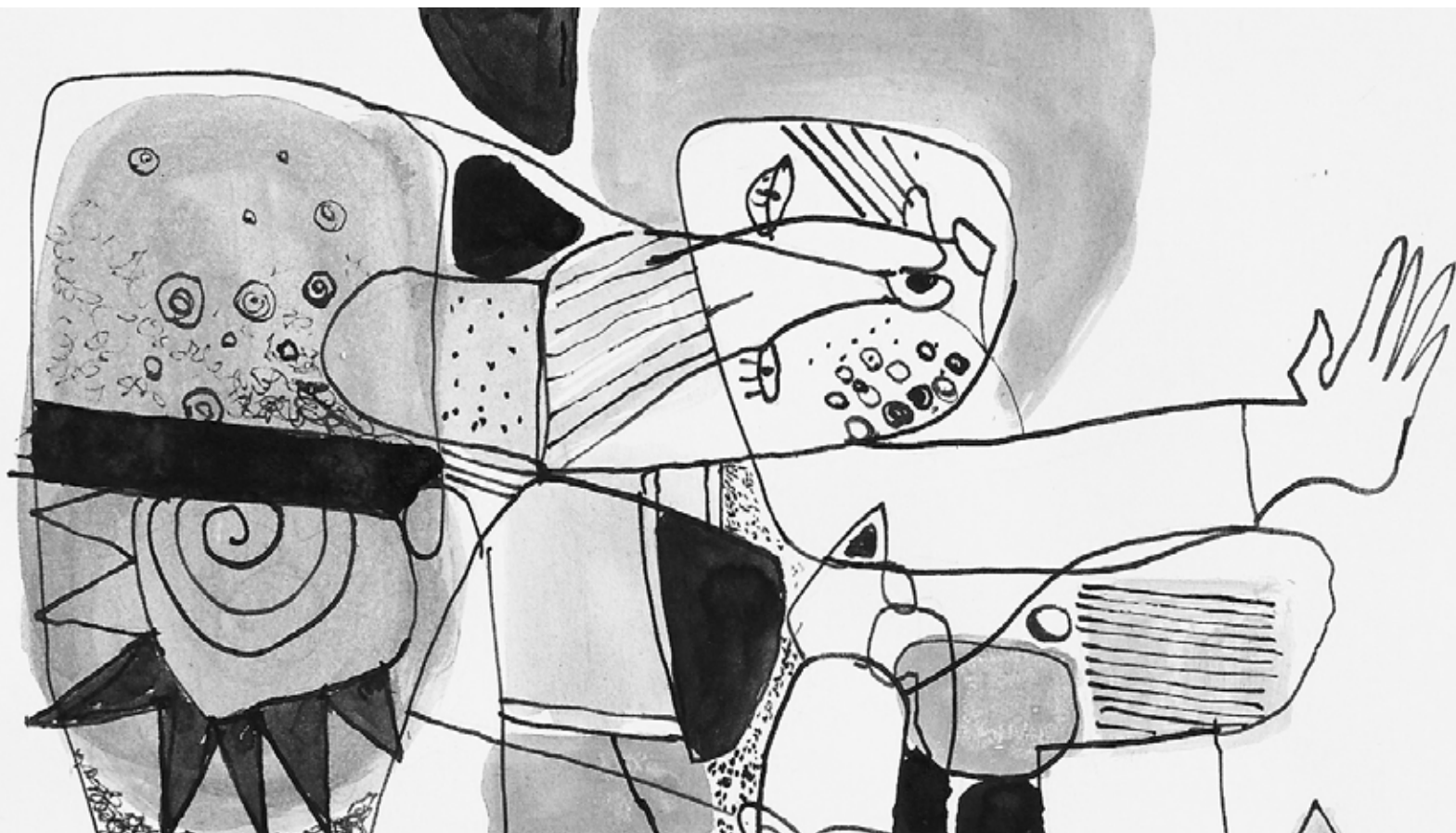
Ioan Răducea

Firstly thematic, between reputable texts from the French literature and their plastic interpretations. Then between the mentalities and artistic ages of the two exhibitors, **Ioniță Benea** – present in cymas ever since 1972 – and **Alexandra Baban** – recent graduate of the Arts University „George Enescu” Iași, the photography section. Finally, that of techniques and methods of plastic representation, ink graphics, comprising a few dozen framed works protected by glass, and colour photography in large format, respectively, almost all the negatives being grouped in diptychs.

Half the ink works, closer to the condition of the book illustration, refer to Albert Camus’ novel *The Plague*, but also to the texts of Villon, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Musset, Mistral, Éluard, Prévert, Aragon, while the photographs only reference a few contemporary authors, among whom one in common with the graphics: Camus. After all, despite all the reverence towards authors and titles, the works remain, in both cases, prints of specific preoccupations, also determined – aside from the mentioned factors – by different temperaments: restless and

feverish, with fantastic tendencies, in the first case, more melancholic and dreamy, preferring dissimulation behind great symbols such as the plastic canvases exhibited, in the second case. Common and worthy, because it opens new horizons for the idea of arts dialogue, is the fact that there are no particular lyrical or epic moments of the texts emphasised, but rather, it is an appeal to their overall artistic identity. A typical reaction before these entails, in the case of Ioniță Benea, rather varied resources, ranging from Byzantine hieratism to surreal qualities. Some gestures are taken from Picasso, with his type of cubist portraits, other times one recognises the methods of the Romanian school of graphics, those of, for instance, Jules Perahim or Ligia Macovei.

Text correspondences are generally fair, so that the visual sobriety of Jacques Prévert’s poems is demonstrated in the method of juxtaposing standardised symbolic elements. The white bird, the bars, digits, the studious dreamer’s spectacles charge just as well the didactic mechanic, in one of the two plastic replies to the poem *Dictation Class* (the other one contains similar elements, moulded after another central character, this time a female one). Serialisation of images has become a favourite process of the artist, evident also in one of his recent pain-



ting exhibitions, *Venice*, and here especially in the group brought about by the Camusian *Plague*. The obsessive contour is, as it should be, that of the rat, appearing in one instance as hairdo, its tail hanging along the blackened cheek of the humanoid character. The other cheek, bright, has its lines doubled by a female silhouette. An angular black crown, a counter-halo of sorts, emphasises the pigmented behind of the beast, in a nightmarish illustration of invasive evil. The same three central elements – rat, human face, female silhouette – are found, in a related vision, behind some bars marked by thick expressionist lines. In another part, the four horses of the apocalypse, with undecided contours, dominate from above the city where rats gnaw the houses and merge with their roofs. Poetic, albeit somewhat conventional, is the image of Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil*, the black strands drawing the fragile shoulders and veiling a svelte feminine nude. Villon is shown as a character holding a strange beast in his arms, planted as a black silhouette in a street with rows of houses undulating menacingly, a reflex of his apoplectic life. The effect is reminiscent of Chagall wandering through the small lanes of her mythical Russia, while the *Ballad of the Ladies of Bygone Times* is simply solved, the poet's tilted head supported by a column embedded with the faces of former beauties.

Remarkably unitary is also the conceptual space offered in Alexandra Baban's photographs, which count on the hand's expressivity, an eternal fundamental plastic motif. Thus, in a first diptych, a man's hands (holding his head) respond to the dynamic of several female hands, which appear to prevent (or aid) the opening of some shutters – illustration of the Sartrean *Closed Doors*. More emphasised psycho-analytically is the connection of a finger pad – dyed or reddened by blood, with long female forearms – with veins marked yellow and blue, which appear to flow into pink palms. The only isolated image, divided almost like a diptych by a frame's vertical line (likely the reason why it was included in this series) is that of a Narcis sitting on the shore, touching with his stretched hand the water that fills the side opposite him. The minimalist-symbolic aesthetic is capitalised on, but in a way that leaves room to suggestive softness as well as to sensual torment.

In all, the exhibition ensured the meeting – mutually profitable – of two ages and two artists who make use, sometimes, of the same methods, in complementary plastic environments, graphics and photography.



The Power of Example

Lack of vision is a phenomenon that can isolate communities. It is a factor that can destabilise the market and interrupt the interest of many investors and, with it, the existence of a possible wave of social and cultural diversity, elements so necessary to a former academic centre like Iași.

Vlad Țundrea, Băncilă Graduate

Even if the Eminescian pride claims that it is not “former,” but “current.” Forgive me if I say “former” in just about all respects and it does not even matter whether I am only 60% or 90% right, because the disease is old and we all know it. Vanity and the individualism hypocritically supported by the decrepit elites have revealed the lack of vision as a disease.

This is how I see the potential of the seven hills: diseased. I say that in an attempt to outline the harsh context of every youth starting out, after finishing college, on the market in Iași; or even in the entire Moldova, in many ways. Usually, whoever notices the disease and has no patience for the sick, leaves. And since Iași is, in fact, inhabited by students, the majority do not plan to stay anyway. The feeling that it is not worth it is soon present. In architecture things are no better. In the evolution of a city, our role is not hard to see. And if we are to leave something behind, it becomes even clearer. It could be used as evidence in court. The lack of vision depresses me, as much among readers, as among the guild and between teachers. Vision helps them reach over and over again, in our presence, the conclusion that it is not worth it.

Wondering whether our role has become merely a bureaucratic interface between the strawberry picker and City Hall, I was told that this is the system. If you won't do it, someone else will do it for less, and more ugly. No one has the courage to explain the origin of the experts' belittlement, because without vision, you regress from expert to a resigned piece of dough. If some scoundrel wants Palas, freaking make him Palas as he wants it, because you know nothing about business as it is!

Most times this is the confused rationale of the orangutan who pays you to materialise the sketches he made with a pen; the entire fingerprint of the terrain pulled upward for as many storeys as what your pocket allows you to put onto the head architect's desk. The idea that we provide services places us abusively and erroneously in the pocket of each businessman who wants a block in his backyard. As such, architecture as thinking process has taken a few good steps back. The six years of college are put into question by the same people who did its courses. The experience of a meeting at the Order of Architects is almost surreal. The flies sit serenely on everyone's hats.

Speculating, however, on the primitive way of project making in Iași, we could imagine a cave. Starting from this pure moment of inhabitation, some boys with vision figured they would bring some attention onto the diseased local market. Believing in the power of example, a skillful engineer experiments on himself (although it does not have to sound so dangerous) a concept known and mastered everywhere, except for the regions with no vision. It is a housing protected by earth; so not a hobbit house, as the media most stupidly dubbed it. The fundamental principle of these homes is the retention during summer of a huge quantity of heat within the earth surrounding the construction, so that in winter additional heating would no longer be necessary. Retaining the heat is not realised using some sophisticated technology, but simply naturally, through thermal transfer. To store a large quantity of heat is necessary a large volume of earth around the house. Simple. Furthermore is desired the removal of the utopian modifier so easily associated to the notion of underground heating, proving that a well thought out and carefully constructed solution may offer an accessible and remarkably effective alternative to conventional housing, in terms of sustainability and energetic efficiency.

Bringing logic before instinct, you literally feel like the one who brings fire to the other people of the cave. I express it this way, because the trust in the architect has to be regained, empirically, with as little traditional, limited and conservative crap.

This type of housing has more primordial ties to the function of housing in itself than the deceitful twaddle of arcades, eaves and bays. The functionality is diluted by the absurd requirements of people, who will want for everything, even their souls in Heaven, but without compromise. And the already traditional ideas spread, that the house is more expensive to maintain. The reality is that only around 10% of houses are properly built; as if it was not enough that the projects are a cacophony.

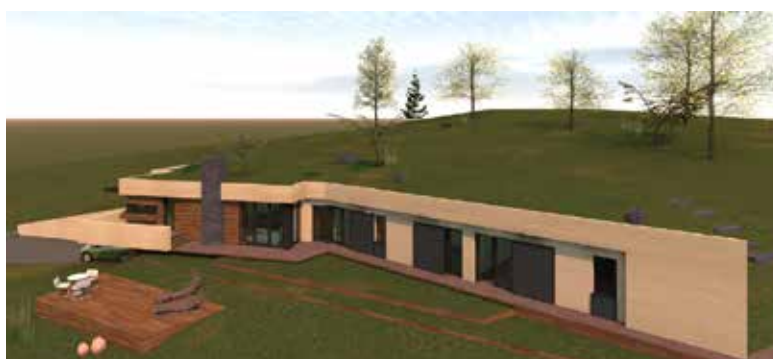
I find commendable not only the concept of a house protected by earth, but also its infiltration of the Cercu village, Bârnova commune, Iași. There is, therefore, a handful of people with vision whom I hope to thank in a few years, happy with the interesting projects that are starting to crop up. George Țăranu is the man who will live in this house stuffed into earth and he is also the engineer calculating and erecting it, ensuring that the materials are treated and mounted accordingly. The architecture is proposed by Horia Țundrea, with plans as simple and ergonomic and with the iconic and only wall that comes out of the earth, dotted with windows, facing south. No one will be bothered by the presence of a new dwelling in the village, because the visual messages are transmitted maturely and the project ticks off all the boxes of a construction that knows what it wants. Likewise, realising such a little dwelling in Iași also marks one of the few instances where the architect and engineer dare to make a team for the sole purpose of perfecting the work and seeing it erected by the book.

In my field, "doing a good deed" sounds like a surprising fart, but I would say that it should be a basic condition for the mediation of material advantages that go to the clients, designers and investors. I would like to outline the idea and will not bore you with fixture diameters, with the sequences of wall layers in the ground. I will not bore you with the ceramic tiles floors, with the true materials that go into mounting the carpentry (the foam we all know is not even on the list) and price estimates. The sacrifices in this respect are assumed by any reasonable man. And if you would like more details, I believe Horia and George would be happy to spread the initiative. Furthermore, I would like to make clear the distinction between an economically efficient house and a passive house. A passive house will always cost more than a normal one, because all the effort to have no central



heating, to only consume what it produces (sun, human body heat, wind, the earth's thermal inertia) and to be, in fact, autonomous from an energetic standpoint (with a bill totalling "0"), all of this effort means a considerably larger initial investment. In other words, if we are not ready to assume these technologies because the market is tough and snobbish, we can always return to the tiresome formula of "cheap and good."

What we learn at Cercu is that you can fit within certain parameters extremely efficient both as investment and as long-term maintenance. That is, immediately following the idea of passive house, is the idea that the housing process can only be feasible through modifying the paradigms of recipes that have never worked for the benefit of the customers. The reduction of the maintenance cost and the bills could be extraordinarily large only if the trust in the designers and the technology is granted again. In which case, one will no longer provide a service, but does a good deed.



From the Box of Wonders

Three Recommendations for an Autumn in the Alecart Spirit

Diana Murguleț

[BLOG] BAZAVAN.RO

CRISTINA BAZAVAN

Cristina Bazavan is a distinct yet discreet voice, with a charming way of revealing stories, giving them life, elegance, soul. She created the blog bazavan.ro as an – as she says in the description – “oasis of peace and beauty (cultural, within limits).” I discovered guided by her writing books and films, festivals, but especially stories about beautiful and kind people. A reached her blog by chance and stayed not only because of the content (which goes so well with my passions), but the quality, the flawless writing structure, the simplicity and minimalism, the tastefulness reflected in everything.

At TEDx Cluj she spoke about mathematics and dance, about a way of living your life as if it were a competition with yourself only: “do today more than you did yesterday. Understand the ropes you need to pull to keep what you have today and make tomorrow better. Pay attention to

the small sustained progress detail, your thoughts on the final triumph. And wish to overcome your limits.”

Among my favourite articles: Synchronicity: how I found out the story through David and Michelangelo’s eyes; Report (EXCLUSIVE): Disneyland Paris Behind-the-scenes; INTERVIEW: Valentina Lisitsa, the story of a pianist who found an audience on YouTube; Sibiu, in sequences; Aleksandra Ćrbeck Nilssen, the beauty in the jungle; Andreea Badala – where discretion, elegance and common sense converged.

Cristina Bazavan is the freelance journalist, former editor in chief of the magazine Taboo, one of the people who built the Europe FM brand, speaker at international conferences on topics regarding personal branding, media, online industry, women. (source: bazavan.ro).

[FESTIVAL] AUGUST IN EDINBURGH

THEATRE, MUSIC, DANCE, BOOK

In Edinburgh I found in August, among UNESCO heritage buildings, the world’s cultural centre. As if in a fine weave of cobwebs, this is where the paths of thousands of artists from all the corners of the world intersected, turning the grey and rainy burg in a colourful, musical and multicultural scene. 299 spaces: open-air scenes, show rooms, coffee-shop corners, classrooms turn into the audience’s meeting points with the over three thousand shows taking part in the festival.

I managed to watch 14 shows in 4 days: theatre, circus, cabaret, music, dance. I found a second home here, walking the narrow streets, running through the gloomy rain from one play to another, a smile on my lips. I laughed and cried at the shows, I filled my heart with culture, magic, beautiful and creative people. I saw

three-year-old children led by the hand to the shows, I saw buses of students constantly arriving, I saw 70-year-old couples ticking plays off their list. Do make time to get to Edinburgh at least once in August – I never would have wanted to leave.

Edinburgh Fringe Festival, founded in 1947, takes place every year in Edinburgh for three weeks in August, and it was born as a place of expression for those who were not chosen for the International Festival. The festival even now takes place at the same time as the Edinburgh International Festival (which brings annually the most renowned theatre companies after a careful selection). Also in August, the city hosts the Edinburgh International Book Festival, in partnership with the newspaper The Guardian, bringing writers like George R R Martin and Sarah Waters.

[NOVEL] THE SPARK

THE STORY OF A MOTHER WHO RAISED A GENIUS. KRISTINE BARNETTE

I found out about The Spark on Cristina Bazavan's blog, from an article titled The Spark – "are you taking all of them?!" where she told of how she bought all The Spark books in stock in a bookshop, to offer the book as a gift to her friends.

"Autism is a thief. It takes your child away. It takes your hope away and it robs you of your dreams." The Spark is an emotional autobiography, a beautiful story about a hard journey, about the struggle with yourself and the educational system, about having trust, despite all doubt, in your instincts.

Kristine Barnett is the mother of Jacob, an autistic child, who the educational system tells her will not even be able to read: "He was autistic and for this simple reason, his school had labelled him and he had prematurely decided what he could or could not do. He needed me to be his lawyer, his champion, needed me to be his voice." "No matter how gentle Jake's teacher

had been with me, the underlying message was clear. She had given up on my son." Kristine decides to withdraw her son from the rehabilitation system – which seemed to further his autistic symptoms – and to give him a beautiful childhood, while encouraging his passion for light, numbers and stars. "Why do people talk only about what these kids cannot do? Why is no one trying to look closer at what they can do?". In simple and honest words, Kristine offers the reader a way to look not only at the children, but at himself and at those around him, a plea for the development of passions as way of growth and integration. Jake grows up under the reader's gaze, surpassing system-imposed limits, but also all of his mother's expectations. Kristine's story concludes with a simple and powerful statement: "If you light the innate spark of a child, it will always show you the way to greater heights than you could ever imagine." A story about how we can, in the dark, with patience and creativity, to bring out what is most beautiful in us and in others. About how to grow souls and dreams.





F I L M S

WITH SINCERITY ABOUT SINCERITY IN

Corneliu Porumboiu's Metabolism

MY FATHER TELLS ME THAT HE LOST HIS INTEREST IN ROMANIAN FILMS LONG AGO, BECAUSE THEY OVERUSE LONG DRY SCENES, PRETENTIOUS THROUGH THE IDEA OF CONTENT ETERNALLY MORE PROFOUND THAN THE HOWLING OF THE WIND ON A POST-COMMUNIST STREET.



Vlad Țundrea, Băncilă Graduate

Seemingly they are all static and the dialogue is a reach, on the background, however, of a constant need to portray reality. A reality so cruel and plain, that it becomes tiresome as formula. You are no longer a viewer, but feel pushed to become some sort of critic, an unwilling intellectual, forced to analysis and observations as if made by another's tongue, with a "post-Cannist" voice, born from a confused combination of complexed patriotism and snobbism.

The truth is that a similar label could be applied to contemporary European cinema in general. But that would make me a hater. And besides, the world might think I support superficial Hollywood, which is not the case. Someone stressed with work and bills to pay, who has little time to relax, might be satisfied with a drama, an action movie or a comedy more "upbeat" where "stuff

actually happens." That is pretty much the reasoning of my father, who can hardly wait to retire and desolately clicks the remote control, looking for something that will draw his attention: a new story that will remind him of an old one which he would tell to me nostalgically during the morning's omelette.

In fact, cinema is not judged this way; we are not on forums or blogs, among "fanboys" and "haters." The films draw with what they intended to draw from the very beginning, whether it be excellent scripts, memorable soundtracks, plastic images or characters that will move your face to tears. The conviction that Europeans produce pretentious films in eternal antithesis with the Americans could be cancelled anytime, watching even more. Regardless, I will never consider myself a movie expert, because that is dangerous. I watch my movies at home or at the cinema, not at meetings with expert guilds, nor in cafés, analytical, with my thick-rimmed glasses, having a tea and a good book, where you "risk" laughing when it is not OK to laugh, heheh.

It is true that I would say about 4,3,2 that it could have been an excellent short film. I was not impressed by the quantity of silence or anything suggestive. But at the saving recommendation of my former Romanian teacher, I found *When Evening Falls in Bucharest* or *Metabolism*, directed by Corneliu Porumboiu. If I was rolling my eyes during the first few minutes, I soon realised what was starting to appeal to me: a sincerity of style, a transparency of the way of expression, described in fact through the film itself. So it was not the exposition, but the description of valuable cinematic utensils. And furthermore, it was not pretentious.

The first few minutes announced an unconvincing dialogue from various points of view. Free expression, but extremely articulated and correct, with “breasts” instead of “tits,” even if later they would say something along the lines: “I’m gonna annoy the living shit out of his fucking head.” An unnatural quality in all that freedom to speak, as if they were reciting lines from a cool book. They seemed to hide behind their own identity (what do you know, the hypocrites!) and that they were trying out lines and forced ideas in the given context, but not absurd, in no way absurd. I do not find such dialogue believable, because the film sells itself as realistic, but in its economy, this translates into Paul and Alina’s compatibility problems. Besides, she is an actress and actresses enunciate their words incredibly even on the toilet. And he is a director, so why would they not be a bit more weird? Everything here is actually real, because I sense

Porumboiu gives from his home in his film. He builds the characters with no curtains and calls us to assist him in his workshop. That is what I liked: the long frames are nothing but long frames and you feel that you are being lectured from his know-how. And if he builds them without curtains, it means he will be heard as a man; as a director-man. I say he “gives from his home” because there are no secondary angles of the created images; there is no hidden idea behind a frame where you don’t know what is missing (usually, the frames lack something, have in fact “that something,” point where I lose my patience). No, here the atmosphere is generally dry, because that is the world he describes: dry. And Porumboiu does not shy from showing that many members of the creative class actually make an effort to appear weird, make an effort to retort à la Boris Vian, are full of pretence and fake.

SO DO NOT THINK IT IS A DIFFERENT IDEA, BECAUSE IT IS NOT. I FIND MYSELF BEFORE A REFRESHING FILM, ALTHOUGH I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE YET ANOTHER SHOCKINGLY PLAIN STATEMENT OF THE CRUDE REALITY, WITH A SHAKING CAMERA AND NO MUSICAL SCORE. BUT PORUMBOIU’S METABOLISM JUSTIFIES MANY OF THE THINGS I WOULD CONSIDER — IN OTHER CONTEXTS — OVERSATURATED. THIS IDEA OF GIVING SUBSTANCE TO SIMPLE, ORDINARY ASPECTS, WAS — I BELIEVE — ONE OF THE MAIN FACTORS THAT ESTABLISHED US IN THE GLOBAL SCENE WITHIN THE LAST 10-20 YEARS AS A FRESH AIR OF CONTEMPORARY CINEMA, AN EXOTIC, “AWESOME” ELEMENT.





Except that it must evolve. Who knows how many good films I have actually missed, angry with the mannerism my father tells me about and I, too, have sniffed. In *Metabolism*, the attractive thing is that it is not complicated behind the simple images. And you need courage to do something like this, because I could again have thought that I wasted my time. But when Porumboiu says it as it is, plain and simple, you discover yet another thing: humour.

Realising that, in fact, Alina is not more deep than she appears, I told myself that before long I could have been watching a parody. Here is a telling dialogue in this respect – it takes place between Paul and Alina. In fact, the entire movie takes place between Paul and Alina. The camera is like a bubble that cancels any element of entourage to the point where you wonder why Paul isn't telling you one of his café theories. Because he is no better, either. With his long greasy hair, frizzy at the ends as if he's been wearing a cap the whole day; slouching and sluggish. Monosyllabic, but superior (from here also the humour – sluggish and superior); he smokes like the ultimate eccentric, in the car, before, after, during, like in high-school – that your eyes hurt with every scene, but you also feel like having a smoke, because it is there, recurrent. So: "Was it the first time you slept with an actress? // No. // And what happened after? // After what? // After the filming. // Oh, you mean an actress I worked with... I thought you meant an actress in general." Paul is, nevertheless, more in control of the situation and his apparent distraction elicited a snort of laughter. I was sorry to find out I was near the end of the film.

I sense this is pretty much how things are in Bucharest within certain parts of the cinema world: Paul twiddles his thumbs, for a few days he has no friends, family, debts and taxes and does "rehearsals" with Alina at his place. In that old school house, with 70s parquet and the iMac on a floor that looks like a table. He explains, with no fuss, his voice slightly weak, what the deal is about that scene. He tells her how putting on the dress at one point must, in fact, address one of her feelings of restlessness and sadness and then it becomes clear that she is not simply putting on some clothing, but a sort of... armour. She has no questions, nor does she seem to understand. She swallows it with an actress' loyalty. I find that strange. I know that that is their job, but I would not want to have a smoke with her. Paul does not have a choice. He has to speak in small stupid theories because it is part of the job. They speak nonsense to each other, recite their favourite novels and claim to be genuine. She takes him serious, he seems not to give a damn.

ALINA INSISTS THAT THEY REDO THE WHOLE SCENE, JUST LIKE THAT, AT HIS PLACE AND PLAYS HAVING A SHOWER AND WIPING HERSELF WITH THE TOWEL. SHE MAKES AN ADORABLE WHIZZING SOUND, MIMING THE HAIR-DRYER – THE DEAR THING – TO PRESERVE AUTHENTICITY. AND PAUL DOES NOT LAUGH, PERHAPS BECAUSE HE BELIEVES HER IN HER ATTEMPT, WHICH IS EVEN MORE HILARIOUS. AND THINGS BECOME EVEN MORE INTERESTING WHEN, AT THE RESTAURANT AND THE PUB, THEY SPEAK ABOUT NOTHING.





YOU GET USED TO A SORT OF TWO-DIMENSIONAL IMAGE, SO THAT WHOEVER APPEARS AS THIRD CHARACTER IN THOSE EMPTY DIALOGUES, DOES SO ONLY TO PROVIDE CONTEXT, A THIRD DIMENSION. BECAUSE THE FILM IS SO SIMPLE AND GOOD, THAT YOU CANNOT REALLY FOCUS ON MANY OTHERS BESIDE PAUL AND ALINA. LAUR, MAGDA, THE DOCTOR AND I DON'T KNOW WHO ELSE PROVE THAT THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE IN BUCHAREST, NOTHING ELSE. THROUGHOUT THE 85 MINUTES IT IS JUST TWO.

It is hilarious that, although seemingly unnatural, they are in fact real. You get attached to Paul's disordered metabolism, who gets sick as if someone were filming him. And the song lyrics resonate with his lifeless gaze, but also with Porumboiu's sense of humour.

The films falls onto the viewer, it does not have to tickle your brain too long. What appears as yet another Romanian production is a sort of secret weapon. Because now you know the deal about silence and reality. They are instruments. Instruments which in *Metabolism* are described as such. Nevertheless, an aspect whose description I am not satisfied with even now is the sound. And I believe it to be characteristic of local productions. All the movies – bar none – have much too loud background noise, splashing, squeaking, scratching, breathing. At one point I actually believed it was not related to technique, but technology. But I have not figured out what is the purpose of amplifying the fork against the porcelain of the plate, or chewing, swallowing and burping – things which, if you are careful, not even the person you are sharing a meal with can catch, let alone the microphone on set! They are there and must be included, I get that. But I find that amplifying such sounds even when the situation does not require, takes away from the quality. It places the film into an eternal bath.

ALL IN ALL, WITH EXPECTATIONS NOT TOO HIGH – I HAVE TO ADMIT – I HAVE DISCOVERED A VERY EFFECTIVE, VERY APPROPRIATE FILM AND HAVE REDISCOVERED THE DRIVE TO CONTINUE TO SEARCH FOR ANOTHER THING AND YET ANOTHER IN THE NATIONAL REPERTOIRE, TRYING TO GO PAST THE FUSS OF THE LIVES CHANGED BY THE CHILD'S DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES. AND I HAVE FOUND OUT ABOUT A WORLD LESS "GLAMOROUS" OF THE INTERESTING FILMS IN BUCHAREST.



ETHNOGRAPHY AND HUMANITY IN

Queen of the Gypsies

BROUGHT UP IN THE WORLD OF TECHNOLOGY, WITNESS AND CONSUMER OF EVERYTHING THAT THE LATEST GENERATION OF MOVIES ENTAILS, I WAS SURPRISED BY THE PLASTICITY AND AUTHENTICITY OF A DIFFERENT WAY TO CONCEIVE LIFE AND TO SHOW IT ON FILM.

Aura Dinco, Băncilă Graduate



The real man, with his torment and anguish, lives his existence as a continuous passing-partying, without removing himself from the pulse and rhythms of the community to which he belongs. Directed by Emil Loteanu, Queen of the Gypsies presents the love story between Rada and Zobar, based on Russian writer Maxim Gorky's novellas.

The first scene introduces us to the life in the gypsy camp, illustrating true life lessons, advice a father gives his son after the latter became a man and begins the struggle of life on his own – a hard life, which does not exclude degradation in order to survive, where stealing horses and selling them to boyars for gold is itself a way to adapt. The wise Gypsy's words from the beginning represent a clue for the direction of the film's action. We

thus find out that selling something stolen, not made, is a wrong path that leads the human being into an inescapable fateful vortex. The fallen man lives with the naive hope that God indiscriminately forgives sinners, which convinces him to stop listening both to the voice of his conscience and to ancient advice. The teachings are timeless, being applicable regardless of traditions, culture or the historical period of the society.

Music is a significant element throughout the film, conferring expressivity, authenticity, dictating the tone of emotions, corresponding to the characters' emotions and the unfolding action. The soundtrack guides the viewer's emotions in accordance with the nuance of the scene, often moving, like an interior monologue that is never uttered. Despite all this, the musical sequences interrupt the flow of events, offering moments of respite and contemplation of the customs, clothing, traditions etc. Details are part of the overall picture: the X-ray of the lives of the people in the gypsy camp.



From this fibre comes the scene of Zobar's encounter with the mysterious woman, Rada; she is like one of the miracles performed by Jesus Christ – it was as if the woman had said to him, "Rise up and walk," stretching her hand towards him. For Zobar, a restless spirit looking for a moment of reprieve which he finds when his life is no longer in danger, a new torment starts, of finding that instant when it seemed earth rotated more slowly. The night with Rada and her otherworldly incantation initiates a love ritual that connects him to her forever, although, in their world being free is the ultimate value.

A link and a curse, love turns upside down the two characters' laws and their world's resources. An old woman who warns Zobar reminds us of Holy Sunday* ("Zobar, you are going to your death"), of institutions and predestinations found in an ancestral way of perceiving the world and the individual's fate. The Gypsy, thus, acquires the qualities of a fairy-tale hero (an always wandering White Moor**, who "helps" himself by steal-

ing horses) without being stuck, however, in the latter's moral pattern. *Queen of the Gypsies* is a film where apparently nothing happens, but what matters is the depth, the vertical probing, the annulment of the straight line of action.

HENCE, THE SCENES DO NOT CAPTURE THE ATTENTION, THERE ARE LONG, SLOW, LIKE A TORRID SUMMER DAY: MANY HORSES AND MANY SCENES WHERE THE GYPSIES ARE TRAVELLING, HAVING AN INTENSE FEELING OF FREEDOM – WHICH MUST BE EXPERIENCED, NOT JUDGED.

The road, always present, becomes this world's central symbol: "All we need is roads" – Rada says and the Gypsy's life is nothing but a long series of unending roads... until the final road. The long sequences, the music and dance, the atmosphere of another time represent details that dress the scenes in an old, yet precious lace.

*Translator's Note: Holy Sunday is a character of Romanian mythology who helps and guides the protagonist. She appears as an old feeble woman, with magical powers.

**TN: The White Moor (Harap Alb) is the title character of a very well-known Romanian story.



BROKEN DESTINIES IN

Amores Perros

IN THEIR FIRST-TIME COLLABORATION, DIRECTOR ALEJANDRO GONZÁLEZ INÁRRITU AND WRITER GUILLERMO ARRIAGA SUCCEEDED TO CREATE IN 2000 THE FIRST PLAY OF A TRILOGY OF DEATH, AMORES PERROS, NOMINATED FOR AN ACADEMY AWARD IN 2001, FOLLOWED BY 21 GRAMS (2003) AND BABEL (2006).



Sabina Tumorug, Național

The film shows with cutting accuracy the austere realities lived by the characters Arriaga created, characters who remind us of people and situations constantly met in our daily lives. Having a disclaimer at the beginning, to assure us that no dog was truly harmed during filming and a title without an exact translation, but which certainly offers a sensation of aggression, the film does not delay in inducing a state of insecurity and you understand from the very first frames that Arriaga will not hesitate to weave his screenplay in a sombre atmosphere.

Literally translated, “amores” means “loves” and “perros” – “dogs,” but this is also a term used, the same as in the Romanian language, to describe vile people, as the film’s characters prove to be. The title gains, thus, an oxymoronic dimension: “amores” represents everything that is good and could save a life from failure, whereas “perros” refers to the miserable side. A possible adaptation would be Love to Throw to the Dogs or Love and Dogs, evidently without retaining the subtlety of the Spanish title.

Developing three stories apparently disconnected (except for the ever present love and dogs), the film explores various aspects, ranging from the homeless to businessmen and famous models. Each part centres on the love between two characters, distorted by regret, loss, jealousy and murder. The stories integrate love’s many facets into a world where happiness and fulfillment seem too distant to reach.

El Chivo, played by Emilio Echevarría, is probably the most fascinating character: a suspicious pariah, with a miserable look, who lives among stray dogs and gathers rubbish in his trolley. He abandoned his wife and daughter to become member of the guerilla, but was caught and sentenced to 20 years in jail. He is the link between the social mediums portrayed in the film, the only one who oscillates through the world of various characters, having a mysterious aura from the very first scenes. Dead to his



daughter and labelled a crazy man by society, he lives in a grotesque manner until the police officer who caught him offers him a pitiful shelter. Like a ghost, he haunts Mexico City followed by his pack of dogs. In Arriaga's universe there is no generosity or pity, only corruption and self-interest, so through his intervention, the "man of law" makes a paid assassin out of El Chivo, who brings him clients and compromising pictures. El Chivo hesitantly accepts, asking for colossal amounts of money.

Susana, played by Vanessa Bauche, and Octavio – Gael García Bernal, are characters of the first episode. Their image, marked by mediocrity, consists in Octavio's desperate attempts to seduce her. Although Susana is his brother's wife and mother to a child, he tries to persuade her to run off with him. Unrequited love consumes him all the more, as he does not understand why she suffers through her husband Ramiro's violence. After accidentally discovering how dangerous his dog Cofi is, he decides to list him in fights, entering illegality. He offers Susana part of the money thus earned to gain her trust as well as to be able to sustain herself after becoming pregnant again. The two start to make plans together, as, while Octavio becomes ever more affectionate and generous, her husband uncontrollably continues his aggression and his threats. Right from the beginning one notes the omnipresence of adultery, violence (both domestic and outside the home), death, murder, armed robbery and street fights. Each scene is constituted as if in a mosaic, meant to gather together the bloody, sombre, yet so familiar pieces.

The second episode focuses on the relationship between Valeria, played by Goya Toledo, and Daniel, whose part is played by Alvaro Guerrero. She is a famous model, the face of the publicity campaign for the new Enchant perfume, and Daniel leaves his wife and two daughters in the name of love, following a long period of adultery, offering Valeria a sumptuous apartment where they will live together with her dog Richie. The third micro-story is no longer about unrequited love, consumed or degraded, but about unconditional love. Coming to his wife's grave the day of her burial, El Chivo's attention will focus on his daughter, Maru, and the character starts to feel intense regret and nostalgia.

The element linking the three stories is a terrible car crash that involves his best friend Octavio and Valeria. After one of Cofi's fights turns into a disaster, the first two victims together with a dying dog are being chased by armed criminals. All the aggression of the film finds its climax in this scene, which is, in fact, the film's opening



scene. The explosion of violence that will affect all the characters does not exclude the tragical dimension. El Chivo saves Cofi's life, who then goes on to kill all his other dogs. Valeria survives, but has an open fracture of the femur and her leg is amputated due to gangrene, and the large publicity billboard Enchant is taken down, marking the end of her model career and of the love story. Octavio loses his best friend. The ending finds El Chivo a changed man, breaking and entering into Maru's home to leave her some money and a message on her answering machine to give her a sign that he is still alive, after which he leaves Mexico City.

EVERY SECOND OF THE FILM EXUDES AUTHENTICITY, WILDNESS AND DESPERATION. THE CHARACTERS SEEM TRAPPED IN AN EXISTENCE THAT OFFERS THEM NOTHING BUT THE FALSE ILLUSION THAT SOMETHING MIGHT CHANGE, THAT THEY THEMSELVES COULD BREAK AWAY FROM THE CONSEQUENCES OF PAST CHOICES.

Together, Iñárritu and Arriaga manage to create a film that has a powerful impact, where charm and satire intertwine to show people's character as it is gradually consumed by greed, people whom love cannot save, because feelings are, in turn, distorted by subconscious impulses and life has become nothing but a harsh battle to survive, to win or to forget.

TWO SHOES AND SEVERAL DREAMS:

Children of heaven

CHILDREN OF HEAVEN (ORIGINALLY BACHEHA-YE ASEMAN, 1997) IS AN IRANIAN FILM PRODUCTION DIRECTED BY MAJID MAJIDI. IT WAS NOMINATED FOR AN ACADEMY AWARD IN 1998, FOR “BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM.”



Daniela Petrovici, Petru Rareș

A family story whose vertebrae capture (you) from the very beginning. It is the story of the relationship between two siblings, backed by an old pair of broken shoes. The film opens with the image of the shoes, taken by Ali (Amir Farrokh Hashemian) to be fixed, but which the child loses on his way home. Ali is part of a poor family and aware that his parents would not be able to fix his mistake and buy his sister Zahra (Bahare Seddiqi) another pair.

Although the boy is afraid of the possible consequences, he decides to tell her the truth. The two siblings make a pact to wear the same pair of shoes, Ali's trainers. From this point on, *Children of Heaven* acquires a note of complicity. Furthermore, it becomes a film in a rush, if not even a run. The viewer is involuntarily part of the secret and a third runner in the siblings' race. *Children of Heaven's* substance is akin to Abbas Kiarostami's film, *Where Is the Friend's Home?*, also based on a run to and from a debt. The children choose to hide from their parents the sacrifice they are making. This is reminiscent of the hero in Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, who insists that "happiness is not possible without someone's sacrifice." Thus,



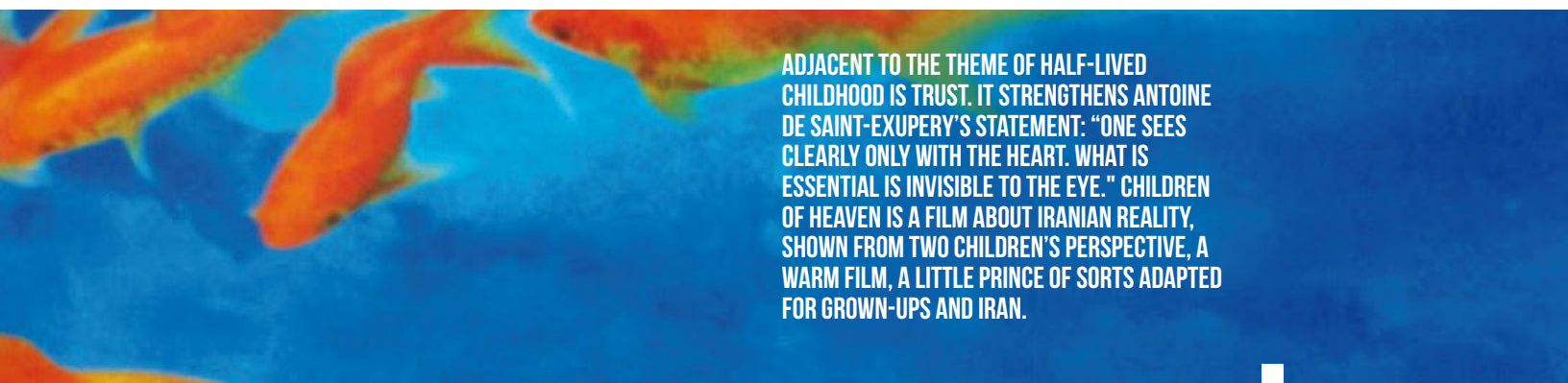
the siblings resign themselves and follow their decision. In the morning, the trainers belong to Zahra and in the afternoon to Ali. Majid Majidi captures a relationship based on the given word and the genuine love between the two. Trust and empathy are implacably a natural fact of the film. *Children of Heaven* stresses moral values. Therefore, the film depends on the viewer's level of empathy. Family unity, responsibility, fairness and even the fact that, in such a difficult situation for a child, Ali is one of the best students in his class flow naturally from the way the two see the world. Overall, we see the image of a poor family in the suburbs of Tehran, crushed by the rent, with a sick mother and two children, but who still hold on to the values of the community.

In the fever of complicity, Ali and Zahra create their own world, for which they are responsible. Wearing the same pair of shoes, they give the sensation of an overlap. When Ali loses Zahra's shoes, she finds herself having to go to school wearing her brother's shoes, which are too big for her. When Zahra is late, Ali cannot make it to school in time and is punished. They build a circle where one depends on the other. Even when they wash their pair of shoes, they share their duty in a brotherly manner: each washes one shoe. It is also Ali whom Zahra calls when she recognises her shoes on another little girl's feet. In fact, *Children of Heaven* sifts Iranian life through the sieve of reality. It does not present a universe of the fragile child, spared by the harshness of reality. On the contrary, the child is faced with responsibility ("You are no longer a child, you are 9 years old already. When I was 9, I helped my parents"), doubled by the sermon-ques-

tion Ali always hears from his father ("Do you only want to eat, sleep and play the whole day?"). Even the praise of Zahra's mother ("Today my little girl did all the house chores") captures the same attitude of equality before duties. Despite all this, there are soap bubbles and fishes, as if fragments of the children who still know how to see the small joys.

Ali is the image of the adult-child hybrid. In a world where adults miss out details that are left to the children, he easily crosses beyond the social status differences and projects his moral qualities in a short-lived but strong friendship with Alireza (Mohammed-Hossein Shahidi), a child from a superior social class. For the two children this aspect is insignificant (what matters is the new friendship). Their games are the same. But later, Alireza stays a child, whereas Ali returns to oscillating before being a child and a grown-up, specific for his age.

His father's enthusiasm, after he earns money from gardening, is not mirrored by Ali, who is satisfied to ask, from the future abundance, only "*a pair of shoes for Zahra*." He immediately realises the opportunity of the athletics contest. Once afforded the third place, he will win a pair of shoes, which he will exchange for a pair of shoes for his sister. The pain on the winner's face which Ali shows is accompanied by the resignation in his sister's eyes. But even so, Zahra does not betray their pact and keeps the secret. A red pair of shoes bought by the two children's father, will restore peace in their world. Only so that it would likely be shattered later, by another incident seemingly unimportant from an outsider's perspective.



ADJACENT TO THE THEME OF HALF-LIVED CHILDHOOD IS TRUST. IT STRENGTHENS ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPERY'S STATEMENT: "ONE SEES CLEARLY ONLY WITH THE HEART. WHAT IS ESSENTIAL IS INVISIBLE TO THE EYE." CHILDREN OF HEAVEN IS A FILM ABOUT IRANIAN REALITY, SHOWN FROM TWO CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVE, A WARM FILM, A LITTLE PRINCE OF SORTS ADAPTED FOR GROWN-UPS AND IRAN.



SURVEY

THE SPACE OF TRANSLATION

■ ARGUMENT

In cultural manifestations, translations represent, due to tradition, a special section, apart from the field of literature: translations are not *within* literature, but *beside* literature. The two fields seem to meet, though, with the occasion of literary awards, only then representing a common unit.



How do you understand, as a translator, the placement of the translating act *inside* the literary space and *outside* it (*à l'écart*)?

■ VERONICA D. NICULESCU (BUCHAREST, ROMANIA)

"Translations make up literature."

I do not have a choice but to start with a negation, as much as I am trying not to. Translations are not *beside* literature, ever. Translations *make up* literature. I cannot speak about "cultural manifestations," because I don't really know what that might be about. Literature is home. In each of our homes. From the day we learned to read a story on our own – 6, 7, 8 years old – and until the day we die, we bring literature into our homes and into ourselves; and this "literature" means, in an overwhelming percentage, translated literature. Take the globe, place your fingertip over our country to cover it. The same should the Bulgarian, the Hungarian, the Serb, the German, the Frenchman, the Dutchman do. Everything that remains exposed is literature we read translated. The fact that only some of the readers realise it, is a different matter. The translator, indeed, is sitting there, small, behind a cover and a white page, under the title. He is puppeteer in the shadows. But he exists and the book you carry in your arms during the day, whether you

know it or not, is his work, his life, dedicated to another writer's work and to you, the reader. I do not believe, thus, in the statement, "translations are not *within* literature, but *beside* literature" and, in fact, it is not that I do not believe in it, it's that I find it horrible. In my work and living space – of translating and reading, sometimes writing – there is a rather large desk, roughly one by two metres. This space of each of us means much more than any "cultural manifestation" in whatever city, about which I might, but most likely I won't find out from a newspaper or off the internet. Literature is every one of us face to face with a book. Manifestations and awards? Without the least irony, they are the ones sitting beside literature, much beside, to the extent where "beside" is no longer the right word: in a dark annex, filled every now and then – perhaps once a year – with the pop of a cork of champagne, laughter, kisses and congratulations under the lights suddenly switched on. Literature pretends to be there. But it stayed at home.

■ ALEX DRACE-FRANCIS (AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS)

"The translator, too, is a *literator*."

My profession is historic of culture, which means, among others, that I select and edit texts from several European cultures, for university courses in Great Britain and, more recently, in the Netherlands. I choose texts of literary quality, but also with a history witnessing character, not in the "eventful" sense of the word, but in the sense of confessions about states of spirit and cultural borders. In my experience of researcher, but also of teacher, I felt the lack of texts that would bring to those abroad subjective aspects of Romanian culture (and other related cultures): what anthropologist Michael Herzfeld called "cultural intimacy." I value this "subjective" aspect of memorial and travel writings: subjectivity here should not be considered a "deduction," but a revelatory aspect for the analysis of attitudes and mentalities. For me, to translate is an act of science and interpretation in the field of cultural subjectivity. Sometimes it is a more "technical" process, even banal; at the same time, it also bears creative aspects. The act of translating texts from one language to another seems to me an extremely important process for global contemporary culture and one generally underrated on the intellectual market, despite the efforts of several valuable institutions which offer

scholarships and other forms of sponsorship. In many universities, for example, translation is not appraised equivalently with, say, research or literary interpretation, although it is, by virtue of its very nature, an act of interpretation which requires a great deal of science and experience. It is a service indispensable in the field of culture and human sciences. The translator, too, is a *literator*, he formulates phrases, paragraphs, chapters, he takes part in the literary creation; but at the same time, a good translator must know how to hide his own efforts, how not to draw the reader's attention on the difficulty of his work. The translator's art, like that of a tailor, who makes all the efforts to prevent sewing marks from being visible, partly consists in camouflaging his own skill. And also like a tailor, the translator operates, he does not simply create, from nothing. If we look at the role of the translator from that perspective, we can understand a little why some do not consider the act of translation as being sometimes on the same level as the literary creation, sometimes a "scientific" operation, sometimes a more common "profession." In this sense, I believe, you are right to note that the act of translation lies both in and outside the literary space.

Resident within the FILIT Residence Programme for foreign translators, at Lucian Blaga House – Belvedere Hotel in Vatra Dornei, August 2014

■ VANINA BOJIKOVA (SOFIA, BULGARIA)

"The translation represents deepest form of reading."

Resident within
the FILIT Residence
Programme for
foreign translators, at
Lucian Blaga House
– Belvedere Hotel in
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For me, being a translator means, first of all, being very, very humble. Regardless of whether it is written or oral translations, a good translator only has to observe; this noble profession simply rejects any vanity. If we sat to think about it, most often we note and discuss the translators' errors, not their accomplishments; awards are only given once a year, they are special moments, of occasion, and the translators toil every day... The translator is a rope dancer of sorts, who, on the one hand, has to maintain at any cost the loyalty to the authorial style, the work's tone etc, and on the other hand, has to remember the audience on the receiving end, so he can make the text legible and intelligible for them. At the same time, translators are as much literary critics – fairly objective ones, I would say – as they are, in turn, writers. It is fairly difficult to fool a translator: while working, he lives in the world of the book and in the mind of the author he is translating; at one point, he begins to know very well all his "tricks:" the syntactic and stylistic constructions, but also all the author's obsessions and anxieties. The translation represents perhaps the deepest form of reading: before trying to translate a text, you have to fully understand it, after which you completely destroy it, you take it apart so that you can put it back together in another language, which

will in fact be a rewriting, a new literary work. Looking that this question from another point of view, it seems to me that no established contemporary writer could exist, who has not read something outside his own culture. You cannot be a XXist century writer and not having read Dostoyevsky, M. Proust, Thomas Mann and other great writers... Which means that, in a way, writers grow up and live among translations. Concretely referring to Bulgaria and the reception of contemporary Romanian literature, as well as the other south-eastern European literatures, we, the translators, are usually the ones who promote them. Editors take into account the artistic value of the text, the degree to which the respective author could appeal to the larger audience, but most times they will count on the translators' opinion. Returning to the concrete question regarding the presence of translators within literature and outside its space, I find very pertinent the observation Mircea Cărtărescu made in an interview given to a Bulgarian radio station, which is that translators are the Cinderellas of intercultural communication: those discreet and almost invisible intermediaries, without whom, however, this communication would not be possible.

„Translators are the shadow heroes of literature, the often forgotten instruments that make it possible for different cultures to talk to one another, who have enabled us to understand that we all from every part of the world, live in one world“ (Paul Auster)



■ GABRIELA LUNGU (CLUJ-NAPOCA, ROMANIA)

"I don't see how a real culture could exist without translations."

I am trying to understand the question and it is difficult, because, for me, translation – naturally when referring to an "art of translation" and not a profession like many others – *means* literature, it *means* culture. I don't see how a real culture could exist without translations. Although it is often considered a secondary activity, easy for whoever knows a foreign language a little bit, although the translator is for many a non-existent character, it is thanks to translation that texts survive and this has been happening ever since the Tower of Babel. Thanks to translations, generation after generation of readers were able to savour in their own language masterpieces of universal literature. Born from a practical necessity, together with the spread of Christianity, translation is just as old as figurative art or oral poetry.

That is where we should start, to fully understand its role and importance. This type of historical perspective also shows us how much literature and the culture of humanity in general owe to translation. I say nothing new when stating that the great works of universal literature became known, were successful and therefore survived thanks to translations. I close this with a quote by Claudio Magris, translation-literature: *"When I happen to promote abroad one of my translated books, I often say, holding the Italian edition, that that book was written by me and add that the version in another language we wrote in a pair, the translator and I."* And if the author and his translator wrote together a book, how could translation be placed outside literature?

Maximilian Lupu
Opium





UNIVERSITARIA

EUROPE AS SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTION

I WILL SAY RIGHT FROM THE START THAT I AM ONE OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT, WHEN ROMANIA ACCEDED TO THE EUROPEAN UNION ON 1 JANUARY 2007, ROMANIA WAS NOT A STATE READY FOR MEMBER STATUS. WHICH DOES NOT MEAN THAT I DID NOT APPRECIATE BACK THEN — OR DO NOT APPRECIATE NOW — THE IMPORTANCE OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, WHICH DOES NOT MEAN THAT I AM A EUROSCPTIC, WHICH DOES NOT MEAN THAT I DO NOT BELIEVE IN THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROJECT THAT THE UNION CONSTITUTES.

Daniel Șandru

Daniel Șandru is a political scientist, Univ. Prof. Dr. at the "Petre Andrei" University in Iași and associate Professor at the "Ștefan cel Mare" University in Suceava, director of the contemporary culture magazine "Time" and editor-in-chief for the "Polis" political science magazine.

What is true is that I did not believe in the state and our society's capacity to adapt to European standards. I continue to have the same doubt, without believing that this issue is caused, exclusively, by our politicians. In the end, seen overall, overcoming the issue of adjustment difficulty depends on each and every one of us.

HOW I FOUND MY "EUROPEANNESS"

I remember that my first time out of the country happened to be in the Netherlands, on one of the first Erasmus scholarships, at the end of January, beginning of February 1999. Still fresh on my retina were the

images accompanying the apocalyptic news about the army defending Bucharest and the unhinged speeches perfectly framed within a communist-national rhetoric, given by Miron Cozma and Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the Middle Ages-like bunch from Cozia Monastery, consisting of priests, politicians and miner leaders, thanks to whom a "peace" accord was signed, and finally, the happy expression after the deal was made, on the face of the then prime minister, Radu Vasile. I was carrying with me these images, while the minibus carrying my suitcase was rattling along between Arad and Nădlac, taking me towards my dream of seeing the normalcy I had read about in books and which I had glimpsed, every now and then, on television. It is true, I felt humbled to get the visa,



Bogdan Onofrei

home, as I realised that, to change things in that direction, things had to happen over here. That, beyond political decisions of the transient leaders, the European quality of a society and implicitly of a state is earned through each of its citizens. That is why I continue to believe that Romania's integration into the European Union, on 1 January 2007, was, for all the difficulty from before and after, one of the best things to have happened to us in recent history.

WHY "EUROPEANNESS" CONTINUES TO BE A PROJECT

Europeanness continues to be today an important project for Romania. A project, however, which we were not ready for back then, a project for which we are not yet ready today. The recrudescence of nationalism, within public as well as pedagogical discourse, will serve only to hide the still palpable civilisational and mental hiatus. And the ancestral self-absorption is certainly not a project for the future of this society, no matter how many Olympic medalists we might have or how many successes our athletes might have in the coming years.

Europe itself is faced with a strong populist wave, which ultimately concerns not only the political scientists, sociologists or historians, but also the political leaders of democratic leaning. There is no alternative project to the European one, not for Europe itself and not for Romania. For us, the absence of the European political-economic umbrella and the security given by the North-Atlantic Treaty Alliance clearly means a total and disadvantageous isolation or stepping without recourse into Russia's sphere of influence. My subjective perception does not presume, of course, the claim of truth (and who holds the truth, in a fluid world as that of today?) It can only face other subjective perceptions, but without making concessions about the absurdity of considering ourselves, as a nation, the centre of the universe, when, in fact, we do not know for certain whether we are at least European.

For us as well as for itself, Europe is still an ongoing project, for which the current economic and political crisis represents a test. Fortunately, the European Union, whose political foundation is the democratic political regime, is not a fixed system, but one configured in an incremental and dynamic manner. For Romania, the problem is not, therefore, whether being part of this project is good or not, but whether it has the capacity to adapt, in turn, to the new challenges the European Union overall will have to address.

on a freezing morning, when that endless queue outside the Dutch Embassy seemed to have laid all the weight of waiting on my shoulders. Towards noon, happy, with my stamped passport, I hurried to see, before climbing on the train back to Iași, the enormity, the architectural ugliness called the People's House.

All of this was but gone. I was on my way to one of Europe's most tolerant countries. That internship was extraordinary there, at Utrecht University, I learned what political science means – the field in which I wanted to specialise. But it was also very sad to wonder, almost all the time, whether my country would ever be truly European. And this weighed a lot in my decision to return

THE SLIGHTLY BITTER TASTE OF BEER (IN) CHIȘINĂU

“DOESN'T CHIȘINĂU INHIBIT YOU?” SOMEONE ONCE ASKED ME.

Nichita Danilov

Nichita Danilov
is a writer and ICR-
Deputy Director, Rep.
Of Moldova

How would it inhibit me?! I replied. In Chișinău I always feel at ease. Here, following the fall of the Soviet empire, as in Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the world seems so recently created, that between the things themselves and their names no stable border has been fixed. On the left bank of the Pruth, reality is more alive, more exciting, more full of vigour, the earth is more black, more fertile, and the people more picturesque, yet also more pragmatic than those living their lives, taken by a sweet sleep, in the Moldova situated on the right bank of the same river.

The language you will hear spoken in the streets or at the market seems not far removed from the sweet and wise language of the old sermons, it is moist and fresh like the furrow deeply carved by a plough, which brings to light, together with the vestiges of a glorious epoch, a few relics from a past marked by suffering hard to imagine. Every time I reach Chișinău, I come back home with a different energy. I remember my visit from February 2011, together with a few good friends from Iași. For two days we wandered through the city, walking through neighbourhoods, parks and streets that



**RETURNING TO CHIȘINĂU
MEANS, TO ME, RETURNING
IN TIME, GOING BACK IN TIME
AND SOMETIMES SHORTLY
ASCENDING INTO THE FUTURE.**

looked familiar. My steps intersected with many people I used to know while living there. Two of them, the poets Nicolae Popa and Nicolae Spătaru (the latter a worthy descendent of the Spătărești clan), were so kind as to accompany us to the bus station and keep us company until the minibus left for Iași.

Since time spent at a bus station seems slower than in any other place, we entered a pub where we bought each other *Chișinău* beer. Here, chatting and talking, one thing leading to another, slowly, very slowly, yet unsurprisingly, we got to literature.

On this topic, the writers from Bessarabia have a great unconfessed sadness. After almost a quarter of a century from the collapse of the USSR, Bessarabian literature continues to be regarded as the poor cousin of Romanian literature. There is an unseen curtain of glass which divides Romanian spirituality into two or even more parts. Writers from the capital and those from the province. Writers in the country and those outside of it. Bessarabian writers, regardless of the generation they belong to, perceive with an acute sentiment of alienation this unseen but palpable boundary, drawn along the Pruth. They attempt to cut its wires, but to no avail. Barbed wire has remained deeply entrenched in the conscience of our critics who, with a few exceptions, treat them as such, that is, ignore them entirely... For the representatives of civil society and Romanian elites, the literature across the Pruth has long been regarded as a sort of relic of peasantry and pașoptism ["48-ism"]. Hence, the receptive reticence...

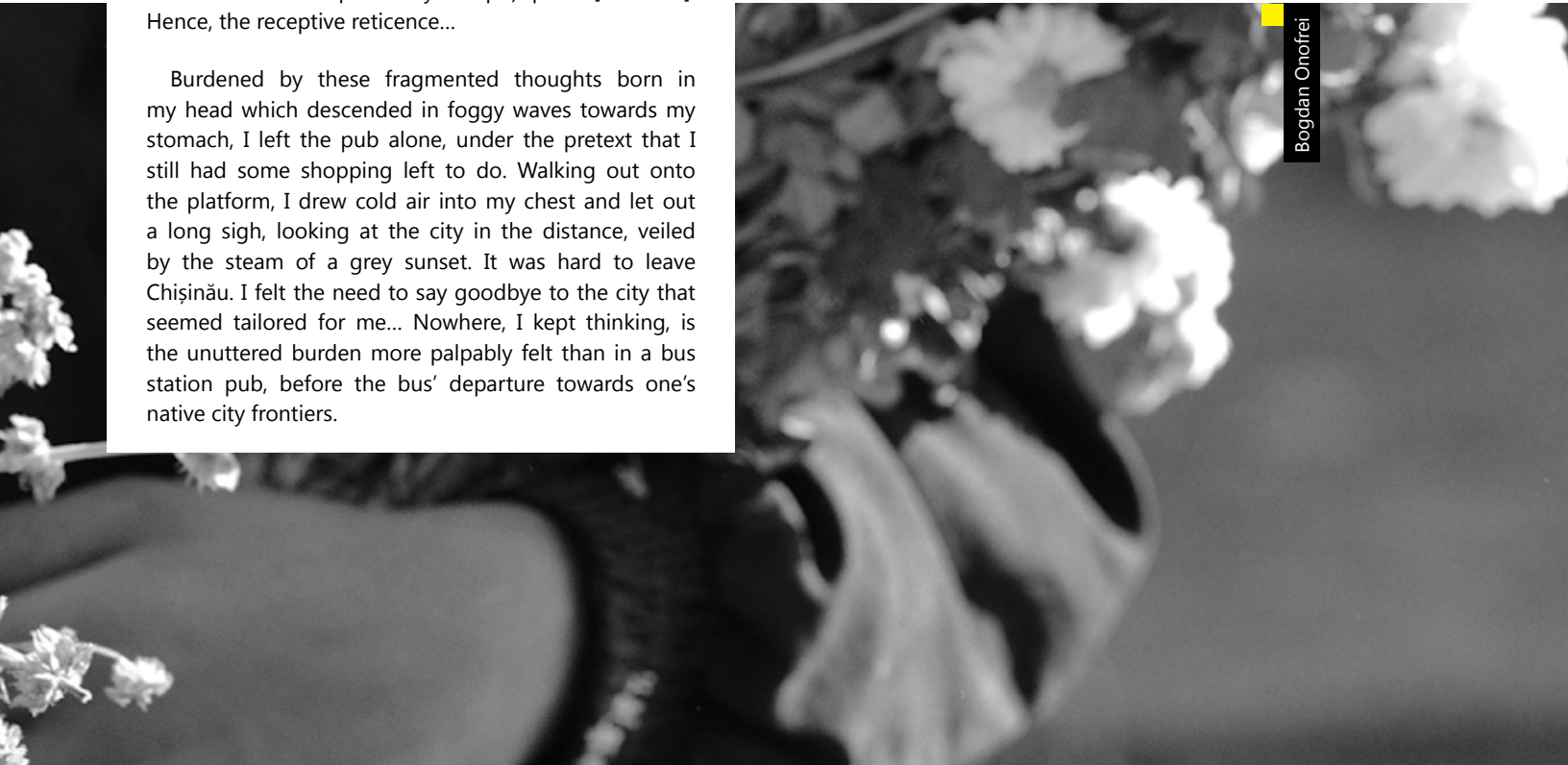
Burdened by these fragmented thoughts born in my head which descended in foggy waves towards my stomach, I left the pub alone, under the pretext that I still had some shopping left to do. Walking out onto the platform, I drew cold air into my chest and let out a long sigh, looking at the city in the distance, veiled by the steam of a grey sunset. It was hard to leave Chișinău. I felt the need to say goodbye to the city that seemed tailored for me... Nowhere, I kept thinking, is the unuttered burden more palpably felt than in a bus station pub, before the bus' departure towards one's native city frontiers.

ON A PLATFORM FULL OF CIGARETTE BUTTS, WRAPPERS AND ALL SORTS OF TRUNKS, THE WORLD SOMEHOW SEEMS TO MAKE SENSE. YOU CAME FROM HOME AND YOU GO BACK HOME. A BIT MORE RICH, BUT ALSO A BIT MORE DESPERATE. DESPERATION HAS ALWAYS ACCOMPANIED YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY, BUT, DISTRACTED BY CHATTING, YOU FORGOT ABOUT IT.

BUT IT HAS NOT FORGOTTEN ABOUT YOU.

I walked towards the exit gate, where I stopped again, contemplating for a few minutes the west side of a hill that looked like a postmodern Acropolis, with Bessarabian flavour. The time was already late. I had about half an hour to departure, enough time for a short, but useful, "chit-chat." I took out my wallet from my pocket, checked my banknote reserve – I still had a dozen Moldovan lei left – I also checked the ticket bought upon arrival at the bus station and sighed with relief. It was glossing there in its place, among the multitude of Moldovan lei. I turned on the spot and went back to the pub. The hosts and also my travel companions, Lucian and Cassian, were quietly sat in their seats. In the pub, the noise had quieted down. I took a seat on my tall stool and ordered another row of beers. *Chișinău* beers.

Bogdan Onofrei



ABOUT GOOD LIVING AND ITS CIVILISING EFFECTS

I FEEL LIKE TALKING ABOUT WHAT WE TAKE AND WHAT WE BRING FROM OUR JOURNEYS WITHIN THE UNION'S BORDERS. SURELY, WE TAKE THERE MONEY WHEN WE ARE TOURISTS AND BRING BACK OR SEND BACK MONEY IF OUR STAY IS LUCRATIVE. WHICH IS IMPORTANT FROM AN ECONOMIC POINT OF VIEW, BUT NOT SO FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PERSONAL BECOMING. WE IMPORT CIVILITY, WE MAKE COMPARISONS, WE DISCOVER POINTS OF REFERENCE WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT BECOME PERSONAL.

Marius Galan

Marius Galan is a judge, member of the Alecart Honorary College, a passionate reader.

On my way back from Berlin, on the train to Suceava, I was fired up with inspiration (it is true, it was 40 degrees and the air conditioning had broken down – the conductor later told me, it was already nighttime, that it would not work above 28 and he kept fiddling with the control panel, so people would not pick on him for not being involved). But I had no laptop, no paper to somehow fix the surplus. Now, almost two weeks later, all beginnings seem banal and all information insignificant, like cold food. So that, the fact that in a park at the end of the famous Friedrichstrasse, where the no less famous Checkpoint Charlie is situated, I had seen – like Nora Iuga in her Berlin diary – a few rats, that it was instantly clear the fact that in the city of the wall the second spoken language after German is Russian, that, by far, most foreign tourists spoke said language no longer seem things worthy to recount.

In fact, looking back, I am amused to conclude that what rather stayed in my head is a much more domestic scene, almost commonplace. Shortly before the Bacău station, I see a young woman get up, not quite fresh, not exactly withered, getting ready to get off. Arm raised, palm rested on the tall back of a chair a few metres away, the golden down between her neck and shoulder blades, her golden honey-coloured skin were viscerally sensual. I had seen her two or three times walking

up and down the wagon, to the dining compartment and back and, as I often do, I imagined where she was coming from and what she did over there. She looked to be a young runaway to the capital or even farther, who wanted to make money in one of those old and rather anachronously condemned ways, her slightly superior air, the tattoo around her appendix, her slightly provocative attitude had, of course, weighed a lot when I thought about it. Naturally, I did not – nor will I – find out who she was and where she came from, but I can tell you that on the station platform there was a 55-60-year-old couple waiting for her, probably her parents, looking very well and smiling widely and happily and a little boy of about 4 or 5 years of age who jumped into her arms in that way that betrays not only love but also a complicit closeness. And so, in the direction allowed or suggested by my little story, I feel like talking about what we take and what we bring from our journeys within the Union's borders.

Surely, we take there money when we are tourists and bring back or send back money if our stay is lucrative. Which is important from an economic point of view, but not so from the perspective of personal becoming. We import civility, we make comparisons, we discover points of reference which may or may not become personal. We open our eyes and breathe decently. In Germany, locals do not argue, but neither do they smile at you, in

France it is as if you do not exist to them, in Italy they speak loudly and without embarrassment, in Spain they downright argue. Towards the north of the continent, almost everyone speaks English, in the south, at least. Clothes and supermarket are cheaper, the delicacies and traditional products market is highly developed. It is evident that people live well. Everyone lives well. The same as in Romania. My good friend's godmother from the countryside would say to us, a while ago (she's already been dead for two years) that one lives well around our parts, "how would you not live well if the postman brings your pension to the doorstep every month and the bread you find at the shop is already sliced?"

Perhaps all my statements are too general, obviously they do not claim to be syllogisms, but I, too, believe we live increasingly better. And I believe that beside the European Union's money, we import from there, with small steps (the politics around 1860) and on our own, examples of decency, of appropriate measure, politeness, how to live well. Imports which, in the long run, will bring fruit. It is not few of those who left that came back with business ideas, brought back nice things, culinary customs and stories to last a lifetime. Perhaps the Occident no longer seduces as it used to once upon a time with the mirage of material wealth, but it seduces with the mirage of quality relationships between people who do not know each other. And the club of those genuinely surprised upon returning at the aggression of the language, the intolerance of the people at the airport, the fact that people are not as reserved and as polite as in the countries from which they come is ever larger. Within only a week or two over there, we learn to live in a more civilised manner. We feel different during our trips in those places, we discover simple pleasures, a glass of rosé after coffee and entire hours looking at people or reading are as many kinds of beauty. We savour foods and walks, customs, different types of diversity.

AND I WOULD LIKE TO BELIEVE THAT PLENTY OF US ARE ABOUT TO DISCOVER THAT THE ROMANIAN MODEL WITH TRICKS AND SPINS, WITH ARROGANCE AND PSEUDO SUPERIORITY IS TIRING AND, IN THE LONG TERM, UNREWARDING. PERHAPS THAT YOUNG WOMAN WHO GOT OFF AT BACĂU WILL LEAVE AGAIN AND COME BACK HOME AGAIN. MEANWHILE, THINGS WILL HAVE CHANGED. I SMILED AT HER CONFIDENTLY THROUGH THE WINDOW THROUGH WHICH I FOLLOWED HER GET DOWN.



APPENDIX: ABOUT CIVILISING EVENTS IN ROMANIA. OR ABOUT THE CIVILISING EFFECT OF WINE

#1 A memorable line of an older lady (but wearing trainers), who sees me at the table reading, a glass of wine in my hand (of Corcova, Pastorel Teodoreanu mentions it in the preface of Sanda Marin's cookbook, first edition, 1936), in the Humanitas [bookshop] on Queen Elisabeth: you gave me cravings, she says. You look so civilised.

#2 The same day – it was little past 12:00 – Dan C. Mihăilescu, who had eaten a sandwich and drunk a glass of (Corcova) wine in the same place, tells a young acquaintance who had come into the bookshop (literally) wet from the rain: You got rained on, how good that you got rained on and he continues to reproduce the lines from *The King Dies*, you climbed up the stairs, how good that you can go up the stairs, you went to the market, how good that... you smelled the lovage... how good...

#3 After the open-air symphonic concert organised in front of the Suceava Prefecture by the Rotary Club, I sit down to eat with a friend at a nearby pub. Next table – a young couple with a little girl of 7-8 years of age, smartly dressed, also come from the show. At one point, the gentleman comes to our table and asks if we would allow him to offer us the bottle of wine he had ordered, which he could not stay on and have due to the late hour. He had noticed, he told us, that we had ordered the exact same wine.

Amazingly, as many other things that happen to me, I read, after I have finished the material, the prologue of *The Wry Journal of the unemployed man* (it is the state of unemployment which the journal's author assumes) who drinks wine at Humanitas. And I realise that, in fact, although I consider myself this way, a sceptic, I nearly always write in an optimistic register. Could it be the wine? Or have I simply found the niche that Liiceanu talks about in *Meeting with a Stranger*? ■



COOPERATION AND DIALOGUE

We Are the Sum of Our Encounters

Anamaria Blanaru

Any young man who studied for a while abroad will inevitably say that the definition of cultural dialogue is that of the laid out tables where each would bring some of their own traditional food. During my study at a university in Germany, international days were particularly exciting, the university halls full of traditional dresses, colourful flags, the most delicious foods as the Romanian would put it, from Moldova, Ukraine, Japan or South America, but especially, even better than what you find in tourism agencies and American advertisements, slogans like "Come and visit," "Why to visit...". Above all this, there was a deafening clamour of voices and unknown languages that somehow got along. The Spaniards' lively ease, the incredible politeness and common sense of the Asian cultures, the Britons' confidence or our pride to be Romanian brought us all together beyond politics, cultures, boundaries or money

exchanges. I don't believe I could remember now a better definition of cultural dialogue than that of the German class where Ukrainians, Romanians, Moldovans, Turks or Italians spoke slowly and with difficulty a new completely foreign language, trying to tell, as best we could, where we were from, what is specific to our country of origin and what we know about the others.

AMONG STRANGERS ARRIVED FROM A DIFFERENT COUNTRY THE SAME AS YOU, TO STUDY, WORK OR SIMPLY TRAVEL THE WORLD, YOU WILL NEVER FEEL A STRANGER. THE NEED TO TELL ANOTHER ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR COUNTRY, TO MAKE HIM AN UNWILLING PARTNER TO YOUR SHORT OR LONG JOURNEY IS THE LANGUAGE THAT MAKES YOU SPEAK WORDS YOU DID NOT THINK YOU KNEW.



Every time my journeys through another country take me close to a bookshop, I like to seek out a Romanian author translated into the language of that space and placed in the foreign literature shelf. I have the feeling, then, that his position – the same as my own in my journey – takes a place known not only to me, but to them about us, the ones who visit them.

The cultural dialogue at FILIT Iași, no matter how foreign to understand these words seem when uttered for the first time, should not be limited in understanding to the writers' dialogue, the European currents and so many other words that make a good impression in the A-grade essays at university or in high-school. Dialogue is of the people, even in the beautifully ordered books at the international halls. "What does the writer mean?" is a question only for creative school children. What the

author meant is the question the young participants of the FILIT "Alecart Meetings" address in real time, meridian time, not of the literary trend. And to finish in the spirit of the Romanian "current," cultural dialogue stops in understanding the moment the Romanian complains everywhere that he can feel the draft (current). I do not know if you have ever come across these medical misunderstandings, but a teacher in Germany kept telling me not too long ago that he could not understand why everyone from Romania would ask for the windows to be closed, even when boiling from heat inside, claiming they could feel the draft. Perhaps the longing, our Doina and our little ewe still find their equivalent in other languages, but this expression opens the window to dialogue and an endless controversy and at the same time closes other people's window with no right of appeal.





Finland on Each Continent

Finland was the context in which, for ten days, I was part of an international community of nearly one hundred people. I stepped there not as a tourist, but as a participant in an international science camp, during which I had the opportunity to shake the hands of young people from all continents, with whom, by the end of those ten days, I managed not to feel so far from home – being the only participant from Romania – but integrated into that incredibly vibrant multicultural cadre.

Iulia Mădălina Ștreangă, Național

I met Finland firstly through the organisers of Millennium Youth Camp 2014, young people who do not fit the profile the Europeans created for northern countries: absolute but distant politeness, somehow excluding foreigners. I never perceived them that way. Towards me they were extremely meticulous, serious and showing exemplary promptness, answering my inquiries within 24 hours, always open to the problems I was facing, placing safety as first priority, always thinking of back ups, in case some difficulty might arise. This is how I perceived them before reaching Finland, during the period of preparation for my Nordic experience.

There I found friendly people, with an admirable curiosity and openness to the highly different cultural mediums we all came from, kind, passionate about what they were doing and in no way lonely or cold, as they are often described. I could see glimpses of Finland every morning, when we took the minibuses from Sannäs Manor, the place where we were hosted, to Helsinki, where the activities took place. A huge park with forests everywhere, with stone vestiges left behind from the time of glaciations – I remember that this was the first geographical information I received from the man who waited for me at the airport.



Julia Mădălina Ștreangă

THE LANDSCAPE ILLUSTRATES THEIR MENTALITY: BECAUSE I WAS PART OF THE RENEWABLE RESOURCES GROUP, I VISITED ONE DAY THE HEADQUARTERS OF UPM, AFTERWARDS WALKING TOGETHER THROUGH THE FOREST THEY ADMINISTER. ALL THE PROFIT THEY MAKE, ECONOMIC OR FINANCIAL, IS ANALYSED FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE EFFECT IT WILL HAVE ON THE FOREST IN TEN YEARS.

The Finnish have an absolute altruism, as they cut down and plant new trees with this permanent need for balance in mind, trying to make use of the forests without annihilating them, as a source of profit, for the future generations. That day I planted, for the first time, two fir seedlings. One of the people at UPM told me to come back in seventy years to see them grown into firs.

I visited Helsinki on my last day, without enough time, unfortunately, to discover it properly. I did want, though, to feel its pulse, just a little, so I walked the streets for a

few hours. The capital is one of the newest in Europe. In the central part of the city there are still some of the old buildings, with an impressive architecture – a tour guide told me that the people living in Helsinki only notice the decorations on the walls and balconies only when a pigeon flies right over their heads and makes them lift their eyes. Most of the other buildings, though, are modern, with black walls of windows and glass, without architectural details. Along the narrow streets, the blocks rise on either side touching each other, cramped in a way.

I got the feeling of a community for which each square centimetre is vital and the organisation of urban centres is in strong contrast with the rest of the country, about which it was also a tour guide who said to me that it is a replica of the road to Sannäs Manor – trees, glades and blunted ice cliffs. I admired the overview of the city from the tallest café-hotel-tower of the capital, I went into a church carved into the rock and an Orthodox cathedral.

The places in Helsinki where I spent most of my time were the two universities in partnership for this project:



the University in Helsinki and the Aalto University. I worked in the University of Helsinki's laboratories on the practical side of our group's project, under the guidance of a Chemistry specialist. Also during this camp, I noticed how efficient a teams competition is, with challenges at different check-points, when one seeks to familiarise a group of young people with the halls of a university. The organisers extended the method to when we visited the Suomenlinna Island, where we ran among the ruins and parks that cover the island, to complete various challenges.

One day I spent in a forest, feeling for a few hours like in a Scout camp. The most exciting moment was when I volunteered for my team, to operate the raft the others would build from the materials made available to us. It was a crazy experience, because it was only when I found myself wearing a rather uncomfortable orange rubber suit and the man who had helped me asked if I would be all right without my glasses, that I realised what I was, in

fact, about to do. But the raft was well-built, so I made it to the mark in the middle of the lake without any issues and then got back, breathing heavily, cheered on by my teammates. And one of them wrote in my memory book: "You're a very good raft operator!"...

It was in Finland that I entered a sauna for the first time. I found out that almost every house there has its own sauna and there are almost two million saunas throughout the country, with a population of approximately five million. It is a local trait so well entrenched in their culture and way of life, that even a business pitch I attended on the first day of camp, had taken the name of Sauna Start-Up, although it had no connection with an actual sauna. One of the guides told us that such correlations draw the public, because they mention an essential aspect of Finnish society. The other important trademark of the country is coffee, for which almost every person there has a soft spot. They sometimes drink up to four-five cups of coffee in a day.

BUT THE SPIRIT OF FINNISH EXISTENCE CANNOT BE DESCRIBED BY THE STREETS I WALKED, NOR THE TREES I SAW, BUT BY THE PEOPLE.

I was introduced to a small part of each person's country within the two international evenings, from which I still remember the dances we all took part in, learning the steps as we went, the traditional foods, the chocolate and biscuits everyone had brought from home; but it was not just that: the songs with which we concluded each evening, one of them in Finnish, which had become over





the years the camp's official anthem; the tune sung by the guides, in a line down the hallway, sending us to bed, wishing us good night in Finnish; the guitars and voices heard around the campfire, while stabbing sticky marshmallows onto pointed sticks, struggling then to separate them – melted as they were – from the stick; mindless games that were so much fun, making us howl with laughter afterwards, when watching the recordings; and the memory books we completed on our last night, unwillingly bursting into tears, realising how hard it would be to meet each other again, scattered as we were all over the world; all this made the Finnish experience one of the richest experiences to date.

The moment when the first group took the bus to reach the airport undoubtedly signified a parting more sad than I could have imagined. Then I hugged for the last time the three of the best friends I have made – one of them from Slovenia, the other ones from Africa. I have

kept in my heart, along with all the moments I have invoked so far, the vivid image of the unnaturally white nights, where darkness fell at midnight and started to dissipate around two and a half, the Australian traditional food I sampled on one of the international evenings, a pack of Salmiakki, specifically Finnish candy, salty and bitter at the same time, a little movie made by one of the participants, where we were saying some words in the language of Israel, a decorative weaving from Paraguay, which came to Romania seemingly by accident, a string of beads symbolising a cultural feature specific to femininity in Ghana, a few dozen written pages in a notebook with blue covers.

THAT IS WHAT I LOOK TOWARDS WHEN I WANT TO RELIVE, IN FRAGMENTS, MY FINNISH EXPERIENCE, WHICH I DO NOT LIMIT WITHIN THE BORDERS OF THE NORDIC COUNTRY, BUT, RATHER, ASSOCIATE WITH THE WHOLE WORLD.





The Marathon as a Metaphor

... " ... for a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard. "
 Herman Melville, Moby Dick

Tudor Giurgică-Tiron, Național graduate

Tudor Giurgică-Tiron is a student in the third year at Harvard University, USA. During high school, which he graduated as valedictorian, was an International Olympic physics, was declared "Student of the Year" in 2010 and was also editor of the magazine "Alecart".

Perhaps ironically, the Harvard Bridge is nowhere near Harvard. Several miles down the Charles river from the university bearing the same name, the bridge links Back Bay, Boston's posh, red-brick, colonial neighborhood, to the MIT campus and is, like any landmark in a student-heavy area, the subject of urban legends. In the 50s, as part of the *rushing* (i.e. initiation) process at one of the fraternities across the river, the shortest *pledge* (i.e. candidate to become a brother) went through a peculiar rite of passage: during one night, Oliver Smoot, the freshman measuring just 1.7 meters, was used as a yardstick to measure the full length of the bridge. Paint marks were laid out every ten *smoots* and are just as visible today across the Harvard Bridge, interlaced with various works of street art or harmless cry of rebellion, such as the *halfway to hell* sign marking the midpoint of the bridge, under which an arrow points, of course, towards the MIT main campus. Last summer, the bridge was part of my daily running ritual; after homing in along the shore of the Charles, admiring in a very cliché fashion the skyscrapers of downtown Boston, I would keep sprinting across the bridge, using the *smoot* marks to try to calculate my speed in my head while my earphones were blasting, most likely, a Black Keys tune. My own little Boston Marathon.

ON THE DAY OF THE REAL BOSTON MARATHON, WHILE ON THE SAME BRIDGE, MY FRESHMAN YEAR ROOMMATE (HOW ON EARTH CAN PEOPLE FROM MINNESOTA BE SO NICE?) HEARD THE TWO BOMBS EXPLODE, JUST A COUPLE OF STREETS AWAY. IN THE WEEK THAT FOLLOWED I LEARNT MORE ABOUT AMERICA THAN DURING MY 20 YEARS OF WATCHING ILLEGALLY DOWNLOADED AMERICAN MOVIES AND TV SHOWS.

The way people, and by that I mean our brains, perceive time is a very bizarre phenomenon. When an exceptional and completely unexpected event happens, our natural instinct of innocent ignorance that we would normally use to defend ourselves from the continuous influx of information distracting us from our routine begins to break apart; the perception of time becomes surprisingly more articulate. For this reason, the days after the marathon went by far slower and in a far more personal fashion. In the end, I have no interest in discussing the actual events in downtown Boston and the hype in the media, although everyone's eyes were indeed glued to the news screens during those days. In the end, I was left with people's reactions and an unexpected lesson in something I might even call humanity; at any rate, this sort of humanity was far above any stereotype about America that a European, fresh off the boat as myself, might have had. I saw how the runners in the marathon, after twenty-six miles of pain, continued to jog towards Massachusetts General Hospital to donate blood for the victims. I saw how all establishments and residents downtown opened their doors to host the crowd in the streets after panic set in. I saw how ordinary folks reacted in an unforeseen manner; the almost grotesque photograph in which a man in a cowboy hat is pushing a victim in a wheelchair towards the ambulance will surely remain in the public subconscious for a long time.

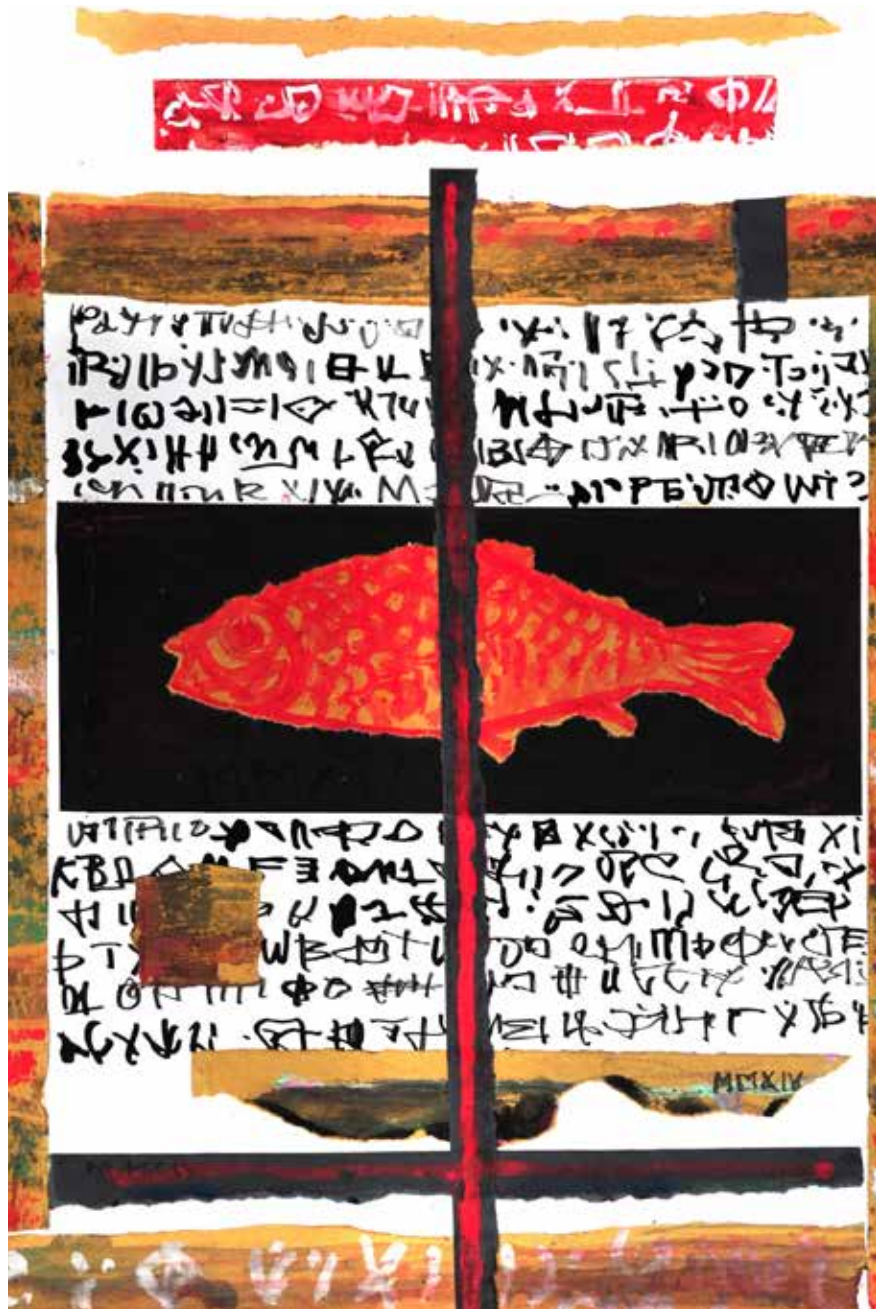
Back in our little bubble at the College that night, under the gothic arches of our dining hall, one of my most extrovert friends was visibly troubled for the first time; he told me how he was there at the site of the bombing ten minutes before it happened. The general feeling that something is happening, in fact a mix of confusion and the egoistic excitement about being part of an important moment, went on until the day the suspects were

caught, followed by an ecstatic reaction from media and Bostoners alike.

For me, the scene that marked the end of this chapter had to do with the harmless, naïve patriotism of the New World: during a party happening that same weekend, a student climbed on top of the bar unfurling a huge, beer-stained American flag while hands raising red solo cups were shouting USA! USA! USA!...

The marathon goes on. Proximity is perhaps a surprising aspect of university life, even in an institution of the size of a small country. Imagine an old druid mixing up his potion in a cauldron but not knowing what would come out of it – all of us are inside, students, postdocs and professors. It is perhaps scary how easy it is to schedule a dinner with some of the leading scientists in their fields if all you want is just career advice or an interesting story. In the end, we owe maybe too much to circumstance and serendipity; a basic survival strategy consists of not saying no to new experiences and keeping one's eyes large open. My own implementation of this strategy led me to the university's mathematics department, where last year I have worked as a teaching fellow for the math class taught to advanced freshmen by the legendary Noam Elkies. Famous perhaps as the youngest professor in Harvard's history but also for his late night concerts in the math department, Elkies is also a chess grandmaster and a genius pianist (and much more). In the end, this experience was particularly rewarding: teaching seminars and staying up late with my students before deadlines and exams, I felt like I was the closest I would ever be to true meritocracy. In our comfortable bubble, where some students came from some of the richest families in America while others happened to be from forgotten ghettos or, why not, from Eastern Europe, the differences faded away.

I'll end with my favorite story from this class: while Elkies was teaching point-set topology at the blackboard, a student's phone starts ringing. Elkies stops talking and an uncomfortable silence sets over the whole lecture hall. The professor puts the chalk down, says nothing, walks towards the piano in the room, opens it, and with his perfect pitch plays the exact tune of the ringtone that was briefly heard just moments before, in the exact same key, while everyone was too stunned to react. Afterwards, he returns to the blackboard and keeps teaching as if nothing happened.



IN THE MIDDLE OF IT ALL, WHILE THE DAILY MARATHON BECOMES TOO EXTREME AND I AM NO LONGER ABLE TO DRAW THE LINE BETWEEN EXCELLENCE AND MEDIOCRITY, I CAME UP WITH A WORD GAME. A MANTRA, IF YOU WISH: **I MIGHT NOT BE EXTRAORDINARY, BUT MY LIFE IS.** IT'S THE STORY THAT MATTERS, NOT THE EGO; AFTERWARDS, I FELT A KIND OF PEACE I NEVER THOUGHT POSSIBLE. BECAUSE AS CLICHÉ AS IT MAY SOUND WHEN I SAY LIFE HERE IS A MARATHON, I SWEAR THAT'S HOW IT FEELS.



The Heart of Europe

8:35 in the morning: I come down out of the block of flats and head for the bus stop. Like nearly every morning, rain falls down over the city. A gloomy city, friend of the clouds and best buddies with the air masses which greet each other enthusiastically whenever they meet.

Anca Covaliu

Under a large umbrella is my nest. A makeshift nest, ready to keep me away from the joy of the air masses' reunions. I get to the stop and meet my neighbours: conationals and bus stop colleagues. Big and small, also under umbrellas, they are ready for a new day when they might not see the sun. Some wearing boots, some flip-flops, they give off the impression that the Equator was overlaid on the North Pole, in a city that has nothing to do with either of the two. I said they might not see the sun and I used the modal because in Brussels life is always expressed through such verbs.

After four years of living here I know for certain that Brussels is a dynamic city. And not only because it is strategically placed on the continent or because the sky changes every few minutes, but because the people who live here are so different. To understand what I mean, imagine moving to a new city and, after exiting the underground, you land on a Saturday, on precisely the busiest street, where a multitude of people swarm as if operating on batteries from shop to shop, in an

almost apocalyptic search of clothing, scents and tastes. It is a street around one kilometre in length, where you can barely make room to cross, where you hear all the languages of the earth and where personal space is seriously threatened by an abusive occupation, because in a sea of people you can expect anything. If you have finished your experiment, I'll tell you that this was how I landed, as a resident, in the city dubbed, for good reason, the "heart of Europe." I now ask you to continue the game: imagine if, for whatever reason, the whole planet, aside from Brussels, would disappear. It would be a tragedy, but in a few hundred years everything could return to the state of before, because in Brussels are concentrated all genes. It is a city where you lose yourself, look for yourself, find yourself and can find anything else. I could say that the majority of Western Europe metropolises are a blend of cultures, origins, scents, stories, sounds and colours. They are a blend of dreams and hopes which may or may not take shape, depending on personal dynamism and ability to catch the right train, but in Brussels everything seems more concentrated.

Before moving here, I, too, imagined what the metropolis might look and feel like. I believed that the existence of so many loud European and international institutions would leave a mark on every aspect of the city, ranging from the way people dress to the food they cook and the car they drive. I believed in the right direction but in the different sense. After landing, in the first moments, I did not see people in a suit, nor expensive cars. But instead I discovered an assortment of figures I had rarely seen before. In Brussels cultural diversity breathes through all pores and the contrast between the rest of the city and the area of European institutions is shocking. Or, at least, it was to me at the time, although until today I continue to be stunned by the authentic cohabitation of so many cultures.

Here is the place of neighbourhoods seemingly taken from other landscapes, which provide the specifically urban architecture, but where the language of cohabitation is completely different. There are adapted and less adapted neighbourhoods, seemingly broken away from their mother country and left to land on a new territory, where acclimation is gradual and difficult. That is because coming out of them means coming face to face with another civilisation, with people in a suit, people in a hurry, with officials turned marionettes, who try to find their limits by working for over eight hours a day.

Brussels is a city of contrast, dissatisfaction, freedom of expression and nonconformism. Because, beside the people in a suit, there are countless others:

PEOPLE PATIENTLY WAITING FOR THE TRAIN, A LAZY CAT ON A LEASH BESIDE THEM; PEOPLE WHOSE PERMANENT RESIDENCE IS THREE STEPS TO THE LEFT, TWO STEPS TO THE RIGHT, BEHIND THE THIRD TREE IN THE CENTRAL PARK; PAINTERS, PHILOSOPHERS, PHOTOGRAPHERS, SOOTHSAYERS; PRINCES AND PRINCESSES FROM OTHER CONTINENTS WITH NOBLE BLOOD OF UNKNOWN LINEAGE; AFRICAN TRIBE LEADERS; EXPERTS IN PUBLIC MILITANCY; PROFESSIONAL PROTESTERS; ACTORS, SINGERS, FORTUNETELLERS; PROFESSIONAL MOTHERS, REBELLIOUS ADOLESCENTS; BEER DRINKERS, CHOCOLATE EATERS; REFUGEES, SHIPWRECKED PEOPLE, LANDED PEOPLE AND MANY OTHERS. AN ENTIRE SOCIAL BLANKET, GATHERED LIKE SAND IN THE DESERT, WHICH STAYS IN THE CLOUDS' SHADE SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING BETTER, SOMETHING MORE, SOMETHING INTERESTING.



I come back at 8:40 in the morning and get on the bus. Out of 60 people, almost a third were born in Belgium and of that third only a few are "naturally" Belgian, that is pure Walloon and Fleming blood. The others are visiting, refugees, shipwrecked or landed on the soil of tiny country which hosts the heart of Europe. A heart that beats strongly between glass buildings, houses from past centuries, wishes, aspirations, realities. A heart which vibrates through collective pulsations engaged by astonishing rank discrepancies.

In Brussels a story is weaved, different from the television version. On the one hand, it is a story of people in a suit who constantly come and go, who revolve successively in matchboxes controlled by computers, who are living a new life far from the land where they were born, searching for fame, worth, prestige. On the other hand, it is the story of other people searching for themselves and for their purpose, in a land completely different from the land that conceived them. In Brussels, the story is kneaded through collision.

Anca Covaliu -
Communication and
Marketing Consultant
in Brussels, Belgium

Together, but Separate?

There is a divergent position with which I cannot reconcile: homo homini lupus or the man a social animal? In fact, I cannot ascertain to what extent people are truly social beings or not. It is not a problem to which you can reply a simple “yes” or “no,” although most of us agree with Aristotle, without necessarily having read him, because to him the answer is dependent on evidence.

Raluca Anisie, Național Graduate

It is always surprising, revelatory and amusing to hear what others think about you. Such an experience also carries with it something nostalgic, because when you think of all those who have known you, you realise that no one has truly known you and that putting together the puzzle pieces, there is nothing there that reflects your image, instead everything is in conflict in this new picture: two suns, three moons, no stars, two tree trunks with no branches – things are double, triple, lacking etc. I do not wish to blame biology, but I believe that the mechanism of thinking, in order to be more efficient, had to be divided into patterns. And once you reach maturity, the illusion that your collection of patterns is complete slows down your process of creation (and acceptance) of new ones. We start to believe we have seen everything there was to see – synthesised, of course, but complete. Nothing more wrong, because our patterns only partially coincide with the ones of the person next to us. The same system can be applied to cultures. When you meet someone, all your efforts focus on squaring them into a pattern, trying, in turn, to apply yourself on their potential patterns. Since you assume that their patterns are similar to yours, you stay, in fact, within them. I think you get to know someone relatively well and feel comfortable around them when the pattern you have formed and the one they designated for you overlap (up to similarity in some cases) in as clear a proportion. A situation of balance is created, given by the process of knowledge

accepted as equal collaboration between those involved. The process is repetitive, but the result is always different. Each time you rediscover and reinvent yourself trying to adapt to the other person's patterns. The more open you are to multiple and various experiences, the more the known patterns multiply, deviating from those established in the first friendships you formed. Having to apply yourself to so many patterns could threaten the stability of the self and generate mistrust, insecurity or confusion. Probably the majority of those who came in contact with different professional environments, people belonging to different cultures than that from which they came, new social mediums, have felt this phenomenon at least in passing. Probably they all longed for a separation, after returning to “the” pattern. Regardless, the desire to empathise, to anticipate the other person's thoughts and feelings, to understand them proves more powerful. The ability to socialise offers more than the security of identity.

In this moment, marked by globalisation, we all are exposed to a smaller or greater extent to this dilemma: we stay anchored in the secure space of patterns that we have formed for ourselves or we open ourselves to others. In my case the “extent” proved greater. Each person I “appropriated” changed me – some only for a while, others for good (few, though, are those who truly change you forever!). It would be an overstatement to

Yes, it is a century of speed, you have to decide quickly, you do not have time to analyse all your options...The reality is that our personalities and our "worlds" are in a continuous evolution. The basic structure forms until maturity is reached, after which we have to be willing to adapt, to change, to adjust. That is, we have to be willing to constantly reevaluate our identity. Sometimes I get the feeling that the people around me create my sole and most cherished reality, while other times I feel they destroy my most precious reality.

I FEEL THAT THEY CAN GIVE ME EVERYTHING, BUT ALSO TAKE EVERYTHING FROM ME, THAT THEY HAVE A VETO RIGHT OVER WHAT I MEAN. AND THEN I FEEL THE NEED FOR SEPARATION.

say that the worlds of other people are independent and have nothing in common, but it is striking to realise that, although we share the same reality, each builds "a world," a diaphanous aura of thoughts through which everything seems more bearable, a comfort zone which, regardless whether it is pink or grey, means "home." Some worlds are closer to the objective reality, in others there is always another film playing. For me, all the worlds around me are fascinating, whether I agree with them, whether I find them more or less morale, fair or not. That is why I surround myself with extremely different people, with whom I do not necessarily have something fundamental in common, but whose world is so strong and well-defined, that at first I am intrigued and then absorbed by the contrast.

IN FACT, THE MORE YOU BELIEVE IN YOUR WORLD, THE MORE OPEN YOU MAKE FOR OTHERS. CONSIDERING THAT NOWADAYS THERE ARE SO MANY CHOICES, YOU CAN HAVE SOMETHING IN A THOUSAND MODELS AND COLOURS, AND MUSIC, FILMS, JOBS, EVEN RELIGIONS EXIST IN AN ABUNDANCE OF MANIFESTATIONS. IT IS INCREASINGLY HARDER TO DECIDE WHAT YOU LIKE. IT IS TRUE THAT THE TENDENCY IS TO LOOK AROUND AND SEE WHAT OTHERS LIKE, TAKING THEIR WORD FOR IT, WITHOUT ANALYSING.

On the other hand, "No man is an island," as they say, and if ever the idea of separation should look comfortable and appealing, it will only happen for an instant and we will return to what is truly worth it: the people in our lives. And my life is the collection of people that I have met.

Are we then social creatures? To what extent and for how long should we wish it? The society we live in is extremely noisy, permissive, diverse, daring. It makes us less honest, but more tactful. We stay social beings, but society sometimes demands too much from us.

The only validation of personal experiences, the only way to justify your existence is by realising that someone else has witnessed the same things you have. Love, the need for appreciation and understanding are some of the most powerful instincts and human experiences, and they are closely connected with our capacity to socialise, to live in the proximity of each other. Therefore, knowing a person's world remains the most fascinating, surprising and gratifying experience. Communication is not in this case the dialogue where you wait for your turn to speak, but that where you open the gates of your world to another, thus achieving freedom. It is only then that you know your world is not a wreck lost at sea, an arid island. It is only then that you know you are not alone.

Raluca Anisie is a graduate of the University of Sheffield (England), completing her Master Degree at Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (Switzerland). She is currently on an internship in Dubai.



Impressions from the Tower of Babel

-Note-

If I were to talk to you about an imaginary sunrise, I would automatically be creating a dead concept. So, I propose to the reader of my sunrise a sensible concept of it and an article based on personal experience.

Ecaterina Reus, Rep. of Moldova

Both the characters mentioned as well as the situations are real, but do remember the assumed subjectivity and the author's irony and vanity – that is, what is an integral part of myself and leaves its mark on my writing. The beginning of summer in Copenhagen comes every year with a series of important events: exhibits, conferences, workshops organised by the large companies and the members of the European scientific clubs. The city changes: now starts the period of ties and classical elegance, of bohemian existence in an atmosphere seemingly more refined than ever. And I had just had a successful interview and was given a seasonal job, my duties resumed to the pleasure of sitting and, eventually, guiding the conference attendants to the X or Y auditorium. The experience would have a powerful impact on me and I continue to live with the sensation that I knew the Tower of Babel. Once, a long time ago, the construction was shattered by linguistic differences and pride, which now bear the name of multinationalism. It is the act of mutual segregation and the relationship of polarity of the races that I investigated during the three weeks and two days that my job in this country lasted.

THE FIRST OBSERVATION:

With regards to racial behaviourism there is a simple matrix: we all function based on the same instinctive mechanism and react the same in general situations. The difference start to manifest at a conversational level, leaving aside the linguistic barrier which is only one instance. For example, the sequelae of the communist period, characteristic to Slavic peoples, as well as the thinking graft marked by utilitarianism, efficiency and preciseness of the Germanic nations are easily noticed. In other words, the methods of approaching day-to-day situations and the global vision of a nation depend on the order of its thinking. Joubert said, on 26 June 1806: "Violent lessons of humanity were followed by horrifying cruelty: pity turned to anger. We butchered Louis the XVIth and his sister, everything that was most virtuous in France." This passage is applicable to any country. In the case of the former communists, history killed everything most noble to Romanians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Russians, Bulgarians and all others behind the Iron Curtain. Trees made leafless by an aberrant history!



THE WILD WEST AND THE HIT OF THE MODERN MAN:

The conferences remained in my memory like a sum of veritable meetings with the prototype of the modern man caught between the third millennium's tendencies. European north-west did not uncover for me anything "new under the sun," but only showed once more its characteristic spiritual nihilism, as well as its successful product – the modern man. He lives in constant search for new meanings, own meanings, fabricated in an industrial hobby of senses. He is the man who believes in man and nothing else. I had noticed for a long time how the Normans do very well without the Saviour and faith in an afterlife and how those in Latin countries are very spiritual and religious. Christianity is the first real humanism to systematically exclude evil from the economy of the human creature, while the Normans write their own Bible, building running tracks in graveyards: the dead with the living and the living with the dead! Thus,



the differences are validated through the speed of living this life; the Scandinavians, with a dose of superficiality, are characterised by fast foods, fast thinkers, fast lovers. We, the people in the east, also make time for sacred things: we eat more slowly, we love more slowly, but we also think more slowly. Stupidity or the stupid as veritable stillness in project.

THE SECOND OBSERVATION:

The conference started on 15 May, an unusually warm day for that time of year in Copenhagen. The building rented for the event borrowed something from a typical airport's aura – a table of people put in the situation of communicating with each other either out of necessity, or out of politeness, or interest. Everything is temporary: work colleagues, conference friends, the hotel room, even the plastic cup in which coffee is served. In this rendez-vous with the world, I decided to explore the man from the perspective of ethnocultural differences and the social behaviour characteristic to each nation.



CONCLUSION I:

The pattern-dialogue that illustrates in a grotesque and extreme fashion the difficulties in communication between the Latin and Scandinavians flows along these lines:

Good afternoon! // Good afternoon. // Is this Dr. Cucu's office? // Yes, it is. // Could you tell me if Dr. Cucu will be available next week? // Like a trout at the bottom of a waterfall. // Sorry? // Yes, he will be. // Because I would like to pop by... // The mixture of will and locomotive capacity are essential in context. // Sorry? // I am sure he's counting the minutes. // I'll come by on Monday, then. It's the building on the right, yes? // It depends. // Hello... Sorry? // It depends which way you look. // I'll be there on Monday, then, bye!

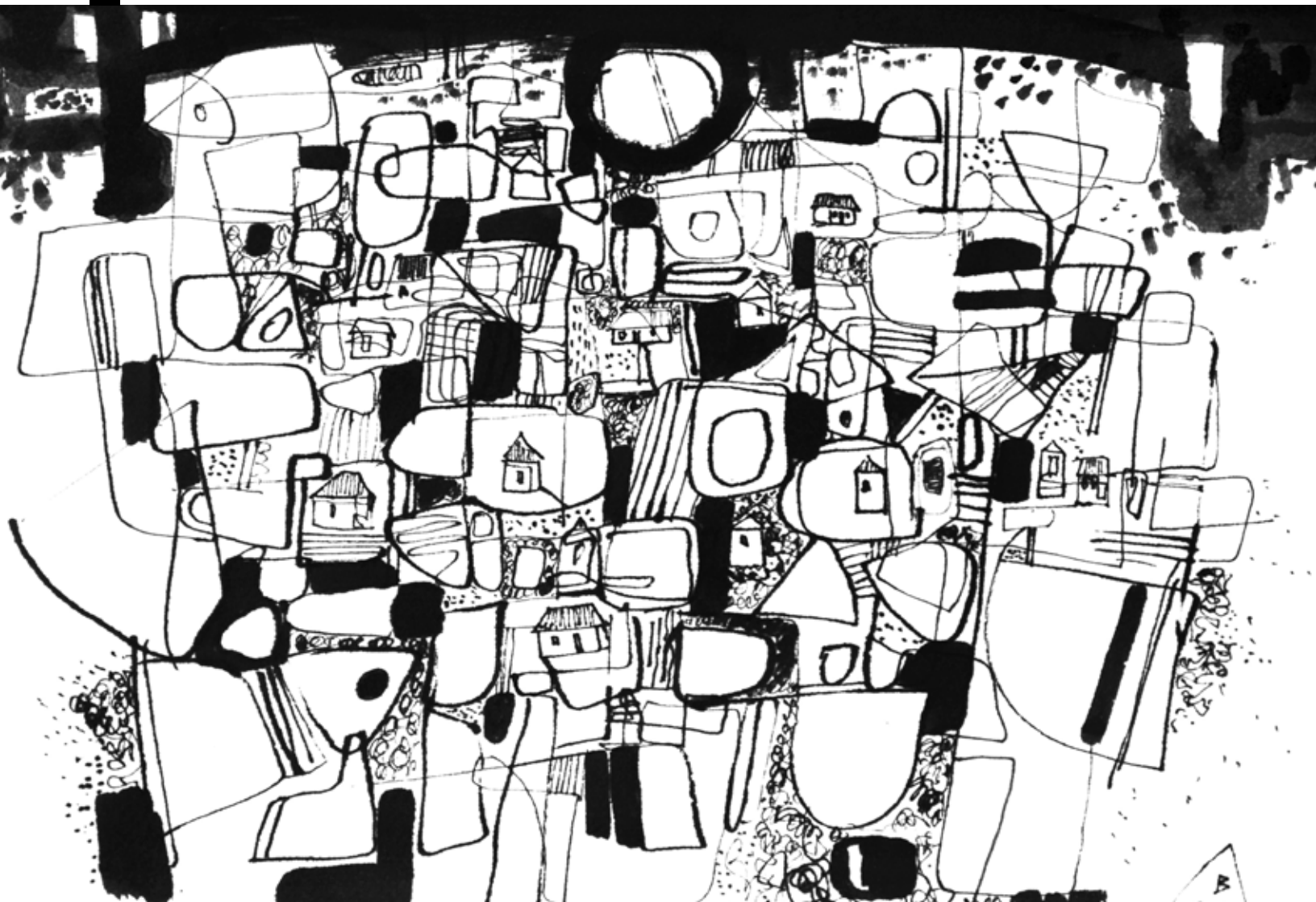
The situational humour is seen as subatomic hazard here, tackling the issue on a microcosmic scale. It is one of geographical-historical origin and stems from an identity naturalness.

CONCLUSION II:

I am amazed by the innocence and love of life of those in the European south-west. I see them all around me, living once more their fantasy to be reborn as an empire (never using that term, though), imagining that Occidental civilisation is still centred in Rome or Paris. Yet don't they feel the Germanic breath in terms of economic-political influence? Apparently not: Latin people master very well the art of living in fantasy, contemplating past glory and holding on to historic pride. That is why they smile more, they talk more, dance more and feel more.

CONCLUSION III:

Slavs, too, are an ethnic exponent closely connected to history, but their relationship with it is of a different kind. Communism, as shadow of the past, extends into the present in a much too aggressive way, becoming inseparable from this people who still wears today a red tie.





Professor Burkovskii from the Moscow State University, whom I had shown to the airport before leaving, told me that the current situation in Ukraine is merely a product of circumstance, the dead – a historic accident, a statistic without which the occupation of Crimea would not have been possible. “Russia was the one who stole the Occident’s communism,” he said, “although it was the Occident’s duty to implement it, to adapt it to its conditions, to tame it and make it functional.” In fact, I had before me the chance to speak with one of the most admired surgeons, who had probably saved hundreds of lives, but was completely devoid of sensitivity and humanity.

I tend to believe that this gentleman is the exponent of a people who have endured a series of despotic regimes, a humiliating and vegetative existence throughout history, which allowed him to increase his strength and take out of his enslavement maximum biological profit, in such a way that a liberal regime would weaken him, would denationalise him. Tormented by the messianic dream of domination, the Russians are somewhat discriminated against and judged in the current European context, a fact proved even within the “Conference of Microsurgery and Thoracic Diseases” in Copenhagen.

And yet...

Nothing that is Russian is foreign to me.

Nothing that is Occidental is repugnant to me.

Watching the Occident diseased and in an advanced state of moral decadence and the European East in an interim of waiting, I can only define this century as one under the sign of turmoil, drama and nationalist maladies, of confrontations of morals and pride. We are no longer interested in the simple things and the question: “Do you take sugar with your tea?” was replaced by others: “Where are you from, Sir?”, “What country are you from?”. That is the first criteria of determination.

Once arrived in the Occident, we are contaminated with frustrations. We begin to hate and be hated. Prejudice comes before feelings; human tolerance is no longer exercised in its most fecund framework and, no longer utilised, annuls in itself the idea of egalitarianism.

One hundred and forty-eight hours spent at the reception desk of a conference centre represented a free session of descent into the “European heaven,” perverted by hierarchies and multinationalism. We carry on even today the construction of the Tower of Babel. It is, after all, the Sisyphean task and the punishment of the world!

All I said here is true. I swear it! True up to the point of untrue.

August 9, 2014, in the same dorm room.

Ecaterina Reus

is a year IV student at KEA Copenhagen, last year she was an Erasmus scholarship student at the Technical University of Madrid and during her first student year she was granted internships in the USA and Germany.



I N T E R V I E W S

Paul Brummell

“Being a diplomat may sometimes mean not saying everything you might like to say.”

Paul Brummell is the ambassador of the United Kingdom in Romania

■ WHAT MADE YOU PURSUE A DIPLOMATIC CAREER?

For me, Geography was always very important. I remember when I was a child I would often draw maps and I wanted to study Geography at university. I remember my parents were slightly worried. They believed I could study medicine or law, but I was stubborn, I insisted and I graduated Geography at Cambridge. Geography being a passion for me, I wanted a career that would allow me not only to travel, but also to live in various countries, to learn more about other cultures. At university I contemplated all possible careers where I would have the opportunity to use Geography this way and diplomacy was one of them. That is how I applied for a career in this field and I lucky enough to be accepted!

■ COULD YOU TELL US THREE THINGS AN AMBASSADOR SHOULD NEVER SAY OR DO?

That is a very interesting question! I believe that, first of all, he should not lie. I believe it is very important for an ambassador to be honest.

Secondly, he should not be closed off. In the past, diplomatic life was different. For instance, in the XIXth century, diplomacy was closely connected to government, it was based on negotiation and treaties. But nowadays a diplomat has to be in contact with the entire society, has to communicate, to be open and transparent. For instance, I use Twitter – if you wish to follow me on Twitter, my username is @PaulBrummell.

Thirdly, ambassadors should not refuse traditional food! Luckily, that is not a problem in Romania, because all Romanian foods are very, very good! I have tried *tochitură moldovenească* [Moldavian stew] and *bulz* and many other dishes I loved.

■ DO YOU BELIEVE A DIPLOMAT IS ALSO A MEDIATOR?

I think a better word would be *supporter* rather than *mediator*. A diplomat's job is for me a very important one. My main role is to try and develop bilateral relations, supporting relations on several levels between the respective countries. It is possible that a situation might require mediation, when there are differing points of view. In this case, the diplomat is indeed a mediator. But most often the situation is a positive one, and in this sense the diplomat assumes his role of supporter of relations between states.

■ AS A DIPLOMAT, HAVE YOU EVER BEEN PUT IN A SITUATION WHERE YOU WANTED TO GIVE A DIFFERENT ANSWER THAN YOUR POSITION REQUIRED?

I believe a diplomat has to be diplomatic! Sometimes this meant that I could not say everything I wanted to say. As I said, it is important not to lie, but being a diplomat may sometimes mean not saying everything you might like to say. Likewise, I believe a diplomat should not get involved in the internal political affairs of the respective country.

■ YOU CAME TO ROMANIA TO STUDY THE ROMANIAN LANGUAGE MORE DEEPLY. DO YOU BELIEVE IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR AN AMBASSADOR TO KNOW THE LANGUAGE OF THE COUNTRY WHERE HE WILL OCCUPY A POSITION?

Yes, I believe it necessary to operate and in my ministry this aspect is stressed. For instance, the former minister, William Hague, established a language centre at the British External Affairs Ministry. I started studying Romanian there in November of last year, then moved to Iași in the middle of May, for an intensive course. I think it is important not only professionally, but also because it represents a sign of respect for the country where I occupy this function. Likewise, it is important personally, because I could not imagine living in a country for several years without knowing the language, the culture,





the civilisation and the values of that country. I believe it is a positive thing in many ways. And from a cultural standpoint, living in Iași for two and a half months was a very good experience.

It is important not only to study the Romanian language in a strict sense, but also to learn more about the Romanian culture and traditions. That for me was a great pleasure! I had the opportunity to visit many unique places in the region of Moldavia, I was in Bukovina and around Neamț, I visited Cotnari, where I sampled some really good Romanian wine and ate various dishes, so it was a much larger cultural experience and this way I learned more about Romania.

■ **DO YOU THINK IT IS POSSIBLE, IN YOUR POSITION OF AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND, TO CHANGE THE IMAGE OF THE ROMANIAN PEOPLE IN THE UK?**

I was very happy that before coming to Iași, I took part to an event in London organised by the Romanian Embassy in Great Britain, which an organisation for Romanian students in the United Kingdom also attended. The event took place at the Romanian Cultural Institute in London with the participation of Ambassador Jinga and I was very impressed to see that the hall was packed, there were Romanian students, all very bright, successfully studying at some of the best universities in Great Britain. I also met Romanian businessmen working in London, Romanian doctors who ensure the Great Britain National Healthcare System continues to be a source of national pride!

I believe that there are many Romanians studying or working very successfully here, in Great Britain. I would like them to become “ambassadors” for Romania, because, unfortunately, part of the media in the UK only focuses on a certain category of immigrants (the beggars on the streets of London) and does not provide a complete image of the Romanians in Great Britain.

■ **WHAT SHOULD THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WANT TO STUDY IN GREAT BRITAIN KNOW ABOUT THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN THE UK?**

I am proud that we have very good universities in Great Britain! I recently read an article about the best universities in the world and among the first ten, four of them were British: Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial College London and University College London. Beside these, we have a very wide range of great universities in Great Britain. It is good for Romanian students to get informed with regard to the university most suited for them. For each student, choosing a university depends on a lot of factors: the field, for instance. Many universities are specialised in certain fields and, beside this criterion, there are many other choices to make also regarding the way of life. Student life in London is very different to that in a smaller city, where there is only the university campus! It is a very different experience, I would not want to say that one option is better than the other because these very much depend on each of us. Fortunately, all British universities have detailed websites which can give a lot of information. Last but not least, the British Council in Bucharest, Iași and Cluj could help young people with information about the British system.

■ **WHAT HISTORICAL OR POLITICAL PERSONALITIES DO YOU ADMIRE?**

While I was in Iași, I wanted to learn more also about the personalities of Romania’s political and cultural world. I was lucky because, for instance, I visited Ipotești, a community related to Eminescu’s name. It was a very interesting experience, to find out more about his wonderful poetry. I also attended one of Caragiale’s plays here, except, the same as for any foreign student, it was very difficult to understand the language! But what I did understand is that Caragiale’s work, even if created in the XIXth century, is relevant to our modern world! So, I am happy to be in a country with such a rich culture as Romania and I want to keep finding out more about Romanian culture.

Internationally, there are many personalities who impressed me; people who went through difficulties, like Mr. Mandela, but also less well-known personalities who, for me, have very much to say. For instance, a British writer I really like, Patrick Leigh Fermor, walked in the 30s from London to Istanbul and wrote three books about this journey. One of them was almost entirely about Romania, it is called *Between the Woods and the Water*, and this book is very beautifully written. Patrick Leigh Fermor tried to find out as much as he could about Romania's culture and history and made connections between these and universal history. For me it is essential to try living my life in such an open way and to discover such connections!

■ **HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE IAȘI FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOMEONE COMING HERE FOR THE FIRST TIME?**

For me, living in Iași was a very pleasant experience! Of course, it is a very friendly city, I have met many interesting people and was made very comfortable. I thank everyone in Iași for this! It is a city not too big, not too small, a city of students, with many good universities, and for me it constituted a beautiful experience!

■ **WHAT IMPRESSION DID THE CULTURAL LIFE IN IAȘI MAKE?**

I was lucky to be here in a very diverse period also with regards to culture. I was in Iași to the International Festival of Education, for instance. Within this festival, I liked very much the concert of an English band, Jethro Tull, whom I remember from childhood! Among other cultural events in Iași, I saw two operas which I appreciated – *La Bohème* and *La Traviata*. I had the opportunity to meet students and attended the launch of ALECART magazine, which was a very interesting experience and I believe the magazine is high quality!

■ **WHAT IS THE RECIPE OF SUCCESS FOR YOUR EXCELLENCY?**

I think you have to do two things: stay open and be positive! I want to contribute to the bilateral relations between our countries, I want them to grow and remain positive. Romania and Great Britain are friends and we believe we can continue to work together to improve international relations, and to me that would mean the success of my mandate!

Has signed: Alexandra Masgras. Pictures by Dagoș Zămosteanu, EuroEd



Corina Păcurar



Bogdan Crețu

“Just a little bit more and I will be a good reader, that is the purpose!”

Bogdan Crețu is a literary critic and associate professor at UAIC

■ IS THE LITERARY CRITIC A CREATOR OR A THINKER OF THE TEXT?

This is a question that many have been preoccupied with. Two solutions are the radical ones: on the one hand, the Maiorescu – Șerban Cioculescu line, both firmly claiming that critical exercise is an exercise of reason, which involves some distancing, an aseptic attitude towards the text, and, on the other hand, there is Călinescu – whom I would rather be wrong with instead of being right together with the other two – who said that, critique clearly is literature, a literature of ideas, a literary art. It requires imagination, well concocted scenarios, the staging of ideas. Starting from here, Călinescu stated that someone who never failed, at least (seriously!) flirting with the idea of writing in some literary genre, cannot be a critic because he does not understand literature “on the inside.” Thus, clearly, literary critique is a consistent, essential part of literature. Admittedly, perhaps not with the same cultural weight of the other genres, but it stays of of the genres of literature. Sometimes, in again an awry occurrence, the “discourse about,” the critique and literary theory have been known to take the form of literature. If we look towards the Occident, in France, especially during the 60s and 70s, literary critics and theorists are much more visible than the literature written in those years. Roland Barthes is better known than any of his contemporary writers. Of course, also on the background of a decline in fiction. Such things have happened, but these are not the norm. Even as literary genre, critique is a genre which must have the altruism, if not the humility to remain a little in the shadows. Excessive pride is always harmful for critique, the latter should not value itself more than the literary text with which it deals. Finally, another definition I like a great deal and to which I adhere, formulated by several essayists I cared and care about – including Paleologu, Eugen Simion – literary critique is, first of all, an exercise of admiration: someone who knows not how to admire should not be doing literary critique.

It is not only tearing apart, as some believe, the literary critic is not a dogcatcher. He is a man who knows, first of all, to admire and who is capable of convincingly explaining his admiration.

■ IN THIS CASE, HOW DOES A CRITIC RELATE TO A WRITER'S SUCCESS?

As objectively as possible. There is a certain reaction, alchemical rather than chemical, either way implicit, which defines the critical spirit, that is, the possibility,

or at least the effort, to objectify. Therefore, you do not relate to a writer's success, nor the writer himself, except inevitably, as to a name that synthesises a work or an aesthetic experience, but relate to the work itself. Success becomes relative then. Take a look at contemporary literature and you will not that authors who are successful with the public are not successful with the critics.

A critic who respects himself is not a family man and does not try to promote books that need to be sold. He is not a salesman.

Investing his intelligence, culture, taste, experience, competence (all these being subject to honesty), he tries to create a certain order of value. A purpose which certainly is hard to achieve, is not easy for a single critic, but he has to try, aware of the team game that is literary critique.

■ COULD A NEGATIVE CRITICAL REVIEW RUIN A GOOD BOOK?

I don't know if it could ruin it, I can't think right now of any great writer destroyed by critique. There might sometimes be what Camil Petrescu called a “conspiracy of silence.” There could be cases of good writers who are not an active presence in the cultural life or have this discretion which sometimes has a price, the price of waiting. They don't necessarily make the short list of welcoming critiques, but welcoming critique is not all there is. There is that critique that comes and sets the values and not necessarily today or for today, but especially for tomorrow.

A writer's bet is not necessarily one with the present. I don't believe that there is any great writer undiscovered because of some plot of critique. Which does not mean that the majority of writers, ranging from weak to mediocre, do not feel wronged by the critics. It is an illness more frequent than common cold in literary life.

I don't think you will meet 4-5 writers to talk admiringly about literary critics. It is rare to find a collected writer, satisfied with himself, come to terms with his level,



which he openly admits, who would suddenly, humorously, receive a critic's amendment and allow himself to be visited by a minimal dilemma: "What if this man, who really knows, is right?" Critics are always suspected of group interests, as if they were politicians, as if they were driven by who knows what hidden and fundamental interests. Things are ridiculous! In the end, this is not the point of literature. Neither the critic, nor the writer should write for applause, they come or don't come, but either way, change nothing; when motivation comes from the outside, it is artificial anyway, true literature does not allow itself to be triggered from the exterior. Of course, encouragement is not at all bad for it, but is it essential for it. Had it been so, Proust would have had to bury the first volume of his great novel and console himself with a worldly existence. Literature, when it is an authentic calling, stems from somewhere else, from a need to probe into the self and express the existential opacity, at least approximately, most times approximately.

■ **DOES LITERARY CRITIQUE HAVE A SHAPING ROLE FROM A HUMAN STANDPOINT? REGARDING YOUNG PEOPLE, WHY SHOULD THEY READ LITERARY CRITIQUE?**

That is a very interesting and very tough question, which I have tried to ask myself, in a different way, in some texts. Where could literary critique lead you? What are its limits? Because sometimes there is this sentiment of neglect, a certain crisis – any man doing something seriously, consistently and passionately reaches a moment of crisis. There is that *mal du littérature* which every now and then takes you out on the sidelines. It is a sort of professional depression, a sensation of saturation a feeling of futility. Anyway, it is a crisis you don't get rid of, which would be a pity to get rid of, because it brings you face to face with the hardest questions with regard to your preoccupations, your intellectual and affective investments. Life passes, death is here, you can touch it, yet you sit and write literary critique, reconciled with your own mediocrity. It is a restlessness that made Eugen Ionescu to write that memorable No, which, carefully read, is a passionate Yes. Whoever writes happily, without any doubts about his own writing, is either useless, or lacks the courage to dig deep within himself. How do you get cured from this feeling of futility? By continuing to do what you have to do, insisting, persisting, because there is no other way... These questions about your field's limits will naturally come. And they will settle one on top of the other and open one towards the other. How far can literary critique take you, not in a professional sense, but in a human one, although we cannot separate them? What meets the eye is a career, several books, several chronicles, awards etc. That's not what matters.

Literary critique, if honestly assumed, keeps you close to morals or helps you maintain a certain balance – a "calm of values." Because it forces you to keep, every time, the equidistance between affective involvement and the surgical precision of the critical spirit. It forces you to see things from above and put them, with honesty, in their place.

Even if the resulting order does not agree with you emotionally or personally. Literary critique teaches you that there is a world order that you are not allowed to rig. It creates a perspective – if not balanced, at any rate situated above literary works and from there, above life, because you enter a domain that is not easy to account, where there are no precise units of measurement. Literary critique is not an experiment conducted in a laboratory, with fix results, of which everyone is convinced. And what else can it give you? A certain appetite for nuance, at least in my case. It helps you see that there is no right and there is no wrong, that it is very difficult to put precise labels, it is even incorrect and, sometimes, immoral. You simply have to take things as they are. And literature is as diverse as reality, being a good workout to facing the latter.

■ **WHAT WERE THE LITERARY CRITIQUE BOOKS YOU READ IN HIGH-SCHOOL THAT MADE AN IMPRESSION?**

That's quite a few! Before high-school, I remember I was little and couldn't reach the library shelf where Călinescu's *History of Romanian Literature* was, so I would keep trying to reach it and my mother would give it to me and I would browse through it. It was really big, that's what impressed me, it was the largest book in our house. It remains a curiosity for me how it was written, because it is not, as Lanson or De Sanctis' models, a didactic book, as naturally any history of literature has to be. In his *History*, Călinescu is not a good teacher, his ideas cannot even be continued except at the price of their distortion. In Călinescu's case one could speak, as it's been said, about a novel of literature, with characters, a plot even, written with gusto. In high-school this was my go-to book and just as I could recite passages from *The Old Court Libertines* or *Bunavestire*, I could reproduce anytime Iorga's portrait from Călinescu's *History*, as well as many other passages. On the other hand, I admit to have eaten a lot of literary critique, because in the XIth

and XIIth grades I had the ambition to go to the library almost every day to summarise for every author in the syllabus the essential monographies. This is how I prepared for university, one had to undergo an admission exam back then, those notebooks were useful to me even during college. I've read, thus, perhaps even too much literary critique in high-school. I still do, because I have retained my curiosity. Back then I used to heavily read Eugen Simion and Nicolae Manolescu. I learned a lot from their books – from Eugen Simion's books I learned about French culture, for example; the image of Paris was consolidated through *Time to Live, Time to Confess*, and when I got there I was fairly well oriented, and from Manolescu I was mostly attracted by the *Themes*, where he wrote about literature's great novels. Of course, there was also *Noah's Ark*, but not only. Towards the end of high-school, I came across Alexandru Paleologu's books, I don't know that nowadays I would be as persuaded by them, but for a 17-18-year-old man they mattered immensely; I found there a very disinhibited way of tackling taboo issues, of not being scared of serious topics, of being matter-of-course, natural, even if this impression entails a staging effort. That is most likely why (and this is something that I was sometimes criticised for and other times appreciated for) I still have a more relaxed way of writing even on heavy subjects, which require tens, hundreds of books as bibliography. But I don't literary critique books that are stale, with a jargon that denies them to any reader. In their case, what is the difference between a literary critique book that ironically speaks about nothing other than literary works that are absolutely friendly, delectable, with their own charm, and a manual for resisting the materials? We don't have to get there! From Romanian critique I've passionately read, as a teenager, when readings are formative, Lucian Raicu and Valeriu Cristea's books as well; oh, before I forget, also those of Marin Mincu. I would go to some of his classes and I was at first surprised, he was a little eccentric, but afterwards, reading him, I realised he is a true critic. Once I entered literary life, we had the fortune to grow close. I read a lot of other books in high-school and I certainly did not stay away from books of literary critique!

■ WHAT DO YOU OWE AND TO WHOM IN BECOMING A LITERARY CRITIC?

I've never had a different option. At the end of high-school, I was not put in a situation where I had to choose between two faculties, during college I was never put in the situation of having to choose between literature and linguistics, I did not have such dilemmas. My case was similar to that of a quarterback who will not give up, who will dig his heels in and pushes until kicking the ball through the gate! It all started, I believe, in my childhood, when I shared a very large library with





my brother. Books usually came in pairs, because, as twins, we would occasionally bicker. And that helped me – I have swift spontaneous reactions, I am not afraid of polemics! I read a lot as a child and if you take literature seriously, you will eventually reach the critique. If you read one or two novels a year, then naturally you won't feel the need to pit your reading impression against an experienced reader's well-argued point of view. But if you read fervently, you're bound to get there. I don't know how it happened, but among my attempts to write literature and write about literature – and because I was lucky enough to stay as preparator within the Romanian Department of Literature, which entails research activity – the balance leaned, up to this point, towards the critique. At a fairly high price that had to be paid; but I do have my saving Bovarisms, regarding the writing of a novel and I don't that, eventually, my writing could channel itself in this direction. So I owe a great deal to the books I have read and meeting two-three teachers. There was, on the one hand, my class master during the VI-VIII grades, Ion Iuga, a Romanian teacher who never allowed me to reproduce or memorise any commentary. Afterwards, I owe not so much to a university professor in Constanța as to his library, to which I had access and which I would "snapshoot." Whenever I asked him for a book and he didn't know where it was, I would tell him (from a different room) that he would find it on the third shelf, the – insert number here – volume... I've always had a memory of the library and now I am better than a file! Later on, during college, I wasn't naturally very orderly, but was dedicated and passionate, and I had the fortune of meeting, during my very first school term, Professor Elvira

Sorohan. She was insistent, patient, and most importantly for me, the "me" back then (as well as now), she believed in my possibilities, which I am still amazed that she could glimpse through all my clumsiness; she might have seen something in that disorganised student, extroverted just so he would not look shy, and helped me; this was how I started, around my first academic year, to publish in the newspapers. Which gives a certain obligation or places you in a position you start to enjoy. I have never been as excited whenever one of my books was published as I felt when my first article was published in *Literary Colloquies*! In my mind, I was page colleagues with Titu Maiorescu and Eminescu! I will never forget that feeling. So there were those people in the beginning – Mrs. Elvira Sorohan, then Emil Iordache, who at the time was editorial secretary at "Literary Colloquies," with whom I later forged a true friendship, from which I learned a work ritual. There are meetings which, if they don't happen at the right time, they're not even meetings anymore, actually. It is very important that they be right for you when they happen and I had the fortune of such meetings. And I had another great fortune: I have a cult for writers I really like, they become somehow familiar, it is ultimately a matter of intimacy. After you read Thomas Mann entirely you cannot be a stranger to him, you feel he is much more real than a lot of people you meet every day. Well, I had the fortune of forging friendships with writers I greatly admired – Marin Mincu, Emil Brumaru, Eugen Simion, Nicolae Breban. They are all experiences that taught me a lot, allowing me to be seduced by this immense, sometimes abnormal, passion for literature, for writing. Half-measures just won't do, that is one of the lessons! I would also mention the fortune of becoming close to Ștefan S. Gorovei and Maria Magdalena Szčkely, renowned medievalists, whose passion for the old, whose work strength and, more importantly, whose friendship gave me a necessary push every time; because, agitated and disorganised as I am, I have always needed a small push to complete my projects.

■ WHICH OF THE CONTEMPORARY IAȘI WRITERS WOULD YOU RECOMMEND TO HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS?

If I said Emil Brumaru, I would seem subversive! Aside from being a great poet, he is also a great reader, one of the most passionate about literature people I know. If he knows I'm leaving for Bucharest, he is capable of ringing me for a whole week, to bring him whatever book that is impossible to find. They are very few, these people suffering from books! They can teach you a lot. From the writers from Iași, Mariana Codruț is someone I would recommend that you get to know more closely: she is a poet with a distinct voice, a very good writer and a publicist with a spine. She is a writer who would deserve much more attention



foto: Codrin Dinu Vasiliu

from you, young people, as well. She has this “fault” that she does not come to the fore much, she is a more discreet nature, and this is a sin we tend to pay for in our literary world, which prefers – in accordance with Balkan tradition – intellectual feast, literary party, the gang. If you read her carefully, you will see that she is worth being much more ahead. I don’t even know to what extent Nimigean is a Iași writer (I stubbornly continue to believe that he is, because this is where we meet most times). I don’t even think Ovidiu needs a recommendation, especially since this year he published both a new poetry anthology and a new book. Anyway, *The Weaver’s Broom Root* remains for me one of those titles of reference, out of the at most ten truly good novels released after ’90, which you immediately know that they will stay there, that time will not pass them by. There is also Constantin Acosmei, but with him you have to have great communication abilities or to know him very well – he is a poet who, through his book, “marked a territory.” Lyrical, I promptly add, and there is no humoristic intent in what I say. There are plenty others, among whom the poet Radu Andriescu, also fairly inactive recently. I would also recommend the very young Matei Hutopila. The other ones I believed you have visited more often. Lucian Dan Teodorovici, Florin Lăzărescu, Dan Lungu are more active, but the other ones are equally deserving of being investigated.

■ **CONSIDERING THE EXAMPLES YOU HAVE JUST MENTIONED, HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN ROMANIAN TEACHERS’ RETICENCE TOWARDS CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE?**

Is there such a reticence? At least among the teachers of my generation, whom I am pal, friend or even husband to, there is no such reticence. I know writers who go through high-schools, enthusiastic for a fresher and more natural reaction than those in the literary colloquies that many are bored with.

No teacher has the power to stop you from reading a contemporary writer, if you want to read them! He instead has the power to make you encounter some good books, that is his role.

I don’t believe the focus should be on the teacher. He can facilitate some encounters, to open up some roads, but he is not the most important element in this equation. The same as the encounter between a master and an apprentice, it is much more important what the apprentice takes out of it. The master has reached the end of his road, if you are a master you are buried, you cannot

achieve more! The effort is to stay alive, “up to date” as they say, but it is hard to assume that you get go up. Well, yes, actually, you can allow yourself to be overtaken by the one you prepare. This is the only way a teacher or a master can go forward, but they are not the important part in this equation. For them things are settled, if you try to keep moulding them, you might break them. More important is the other partner in this dialogue. I don’t have concrete solutions, but in northern countries the educational system is extremely flexible, a system where the student, together with the parent, can choose his subjects and learn what he likes and is good at. In the Romanian educational system the focus is on the teacher and we give the student what we can: this is what we have, therefore, this is what we teach! I don’t know if anyone will have the courage to make a real change!

■ **DO YOU SEE YOURSELF AS A TEACHER FIRST OR A LITERARY CRITIC?**

I’ve never made a difference between them, because the two activities are connected, the satisfaction is equal. If I manage to write something good one day, I have the same satisfaction as when I come out of a class where I managed to communicate well with my students. A lot of times, many of the things that spin around vaguely and incoherently in my head become clear when I am put in the situation – neither easy, nor comfortable, but always exciting – to explain them to others. And literary critique, too, is an exercise of explaining, the same as teaching. What you have understood very well you can explain just as well. The literary critic and the teacher meet in this point: you have to propose, not to explain. Literary critique means hermeneutics, analysis, it does not lead to the truth. There is no truth! In any case, you have to propose a certain way to understand things, which is what the teacher has to do as well. He doesn’t hold the truth in his pockets, either! Through dialogue, we reach a road of balance, not the truth; not even Plato knew what truth is, so why should we strive to find it at any cost where, evidently, is not its field?

■ **WHEN YOU DON’T LIKE A BOOK, WOULD YOU RATHER NOT WRITE ABOUT IT OR TEAR IT APART?**

What I prefer now is closely connected to the time I have. Little, unfortunately... As a rule of thumb, I find it a more important endeavour to support a really good book than to show the precariousness of an evidently poor one. I have done that, too, sometimes even now I cannot shake off the label that I am a vicious, violent critic... how come? You see, I am a very peaceful person! I met someone a few months ago, he looked at me and said: “Aaah! The vicious critic!”; but I am very shy... I would not have now the pleasure to write about bad books. It is worth to in-



tervene when a book with problems receives excessive praise, when very good things are written about a certain book without seeing some obvious things. Or the other way around. For example, about the memoirs of Adrian Marino were written mostly negative things, but you can't expect a man who spent 8 years in jail and 6 years of house arrest to be serene, it is his business if he is not serene, it is his right. There are moments when you feel the need not to write about a book, but to intervene, not to say what the deal is, but to bring a different perspective. It is mostly in this sense that I write negatively today.

I prefer to support and explain why a book is truly good instead of demonstrating that an mediocre writer has given his seventh, his eighth less than mediocre book. There are plenty of people to take care of that!

■ SO, FOR YOU, DOES CRITIQUE REMAIN AN EXERCISE OF ADMIRATION?

Mainly of admiration (but does admiration not presume, in itself, selection, excluding non-value?), but the azimuth still has to be fixed according to common sense and things have to be brought to their natural course.

Critique is a permanent effort to defend value from non-value; we should also say "no," not just "yes." But it is a poor strategy to say no, no, no and yes from the corner of your mouth, every now and then. To purposefully search for fault is not literary critique.

Such things also happened. Usually, those who did that gave up literary critique, we find them nowadays in the newspapers in other fields. In literary critique you need continuity, perseverance. Marin Preda said that if you want to be a writer you have to have strong bones. But the literary critic, too, has to have strong bones: there is a lot of sitting in a chair, always reading... it is a considerable physical effort!

■ WHAT ARE THE COMPROMISES A LITERARY CRITIC MAKES?

Those he also accepts! I say that normally he should run from them. Generally I could trenchantly say "none," but I don't know the critic who managed that. Usually, you do make compromises. I get annoyed if someone



Ionita Benea

"recommends" that I write about this or that book, I never have. I have never written good things about writers I did not enjoy. And half a truth is also a compromise, the tone matters heavily, it is one thing to say "it's very good, amazing" and another to say "it's not bad."

Critique without a verdict is also a form to avoid, in the end, reality does not, I repeat, reality does not necessarily exist, in literature the truth is not the same for everyone, but an accordance with your own opinions.

This is the measure of a critic's honesty: the loyalty to his own opinions. You can make mistakes, but you make them "on your own," not from some suspicious interest. Thus, I won't hide from you that this career of literary annalist can be advantageous; any writer is sensitive to what you write about him, you can think out your reviews so that you can gain certain advantages.

If you want to do that, you can, but at the same time you cannot cheat, because it shows: literary critique is a profession that you do with your cards on the table.

■ ARE THERE APPRECIATED AUTHORS, CLASSICAL AS WELL AS CONTEMPORARY, WHOM YOU DO NOT ENJOY READING?

I have the power to make myself objective, to recognise a great writer and say that he is not good for me. I don't have real antipathies; so it's not empty talk, I will give you an example: I am not too keen on Mircea Horia Simionescu, who has so many fans in our country, I find him redundant, lacking real epic imagination, repetitive. He squeezes an artifice to exhaustion and does not know when to stop the process, he does not have the counterpoint science, although his entire prose could seem made entirely of counterpoint. I find him a "fake" writer, meticulous, calculated, too technical, dry, who does not get inflamed. But that does not mean that I am not capable of recognising at any point his merit in the evolution of our postwar prose. To return to the immediate reality, I have focused on books I found extremely good, but perhaps not so well advertised: Bogdan Popescu's *Whoever Falls Asleep Last*, or Răzvan Rădulescu's *Theodosius the Small* or Nimigean's book, *The Weaver's Broom Root* (even if this one was well received). Thus, as time passes and the more I reread, I rediscover writers I hadn't necessarily missed, but who had *tormented* me. In college, Musil tormented me, but I was ambitious and read him. I reread him last

year and thought he was extraordinary. I have now finished rereading almost everything Thomas Mann. Some of his books, with all the harangues I found un-epic when I was 18-20 years old, I started to like, precisely because of them. When reading them back then, I was looking for the epic, being an ardent Dumasian in my adolescence. Similarly, it might seem a paradox, but I started to enjoy precisely the "badly" written books, not the clear book, which flow with a pleasant gurgle and make you thirsty. My taste now leans towards the books with twisted phrases. Only these can dig in, can scratch all the way to the dregs. From the interwar years, a writer to my taste now, whom I didn't use to love much (I got her both at the Olympiads and the baccalauréat exam), Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu – I find her extraordinary. Her syncopated broken phrase goes so well with those sick psychologies. Since my first year of college I very much enjoyed Nicolae Breban. Nowadays people almost look at me with pity, a pity that gives me the right to arrogance (I have my knowledge...) and ask, "And did you really read all of it?" Yes, that is how you are supposed to read a writer. Only reading their entire work can you understand writers of this type. There are novels which relate to each other, there is a certain work syllogism. So rereading always brings me great joys (I cannot call them revelations).

Just a little bit more and I will be a good reader, that is the purpose!

■ COULD YOU SHARE A TOP 5 OF YOUR FAVOURITE BOOKS?

This Top 5 changes by definition, although lately I come back ever more insistently to certain writers. I believe I have read almost all Romanian poetry; since I have also taught it for a long time, I know most of it by heart, ranging from Miron Costin to Ioan Es. Pop, Komartin and Vancu. But ultimately, my favourite genre is the novel. After persistent rereadings, there are a few certainties: Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Proust, Thomas Mann, Faulkner would qualify anytime. This would be my Top 5, not necessarily in that order, because order truly does not matter. They are not holiday readings, lazy readings, they are readings that can torment you, which is as it should be. Among Romanians, I very much like Breban, then Sadoveanu, in his masterpiece novels, Hortensia, Preda (I am rereading him now as I'm preparing a course and I have to admit he is memorable even in his weaker novels, such as *The Prodigals*; I am otherwise very interested in how a great writer fails rather than how a mediocre or almost good writer succeeds...)

Have signed: Alexandra Masgras and Tudor Berbinschi.



P O E T R Y



DANIELA BEJINARIU

(b. February 21, 1996, Dorohoi) Daniela is a student in the 12th grade at „Petru Rareș” from Suceava. She is a member of the Literary Circle „Săgetătorul” (Sagittarius). Her creation was published in ALECART. She was laureate at many literary contests. Her poetry is one that describes the sensorial concrete. The irony and selfirony coalesce and the domestic space floods her pseudo-rebel soul. (Gheorghe Cîrstian)

is not a simple song

flesh doesn't heal it all
about/ just
take a smoke/ doesn't hurt. come on come

hide your foulness sharpen your soul. take it easy with
seeing and hearing
synaesthesia all about some girded body explanation
teach me the unhoped senses floods, 'cause yeah the
future
is quite now

be good they should have snow too. this song is all
flesh not. all that we have
is each other's fire the waves & on ramparts let's

come damn impure mortal
on rampart-lyrics

modern talking

now you're not allowed to think about me. YouMe is a
broken line anyway
these blooming flowers don't seem
to be so awesome we knew it all consuming
this damned breath wait for it
it's been some time he could have saved an idea a
slender dance some
slender just like that

(you'll only despair in English so it won't
damage)

my lips transition to the sounds that won't sweep to
the risks
of not believing do not trust me no promises no
charmed songs that solemnly swear/ we'll know
when and how

ready
set

go I don't love you I didn't miss you I don't want you
don't come
settled

bravo applause begging god, forgive me I won't make
many promises I won't listen
shiny birds shiny head()sets

tic-tock seek a boo

while they were dealing
the money that we're singing I was not sad
I unbalanced the blood
daddy loves me shouts the phonecalls he requires that
I should too no
no no he won't believe

let's make it real
if there's an explanation you won't listen to it
it's from the glasses
seriouslynowgotosleep

the gravity won't let it coagulate
more vaguely than that we'll start speaking in
languages

I can only hear the hopscotch about
daddy's better, daddy won't die
whispers from mommy I won't write to you don't
nasty-whisper by
mistake in our languages

last minute reverence

voila, steams might have opera whiff
my sinuses paint the town
red
in a frame and skin dies

I endure those withered flowers laying them down on
any blanket I put them in greenish cups
every cup will be washed with *fairy*
like in a tale, yeah

rise from the table
forgive me brother the basil smells like stone in
my dream family

trad. Daniela Bejnararu



ALEXANDRA TURCU

(b. April 29, 1993, Bistrița) My name is Alexandra and i'm part of Subnord. I'm from Bistrita, and because poetry is in Bistrita, i wouldn't want to be born elsewhere. I just got back from the Licart camp, where I met a lot of nice people and I won the second place. I have published a few poems in Zona Nouă and I'll appear in the poesis this fall. I have finished highschool and now all that is left is to enjoy the fact that *i have in front of me a desert full of literature.*

habit

it was saturday morning
and you were showing me how the light could peel off
flesh from bones without leaving any trace.

you made me coffee and told me
that old age could come even a hundred years late,
that we'd better not get out of the house yet,
for people were waiting on the doorstep.

we got out of the bed
we put the pot on the stove
we waited

it was saturday morning
and memory was the only device
to help us get rid of ourselves

the other parts of the world

at the end of the street there's america
my brother used to go to america every day.
they call it england now.
i don't know,
i've never been there.

it's better here.
the sun rests on the table and
we're waiting for it to set.
if we feel lonely, we each sit
on one arm of the armchair and we smoke.
every now and then, we hold hands and we walk
around the room.

you can come here too.
i promise to never lose you in the kaufland parking lot
and to keep the painkillers in the top cupboard.

the whole night at your head,
so that no fly should awaken your brain,
i told you.

here's good.
we're listening to grandma's voice
and we're watching mother sort clothes.
we're climbing on chairs to the sweets cabinet.
we're sleeping.

here's good.
we're sitting and counting people
getting out of the hospital.

nothing else/ full

the last time i wrote to you about going to sibiu.
the picture of your back against the chair,
the hand on the edge of the desk, the background
music
and the click of closing the conversation window with
me.

if i cannot talk to you,
i won't talk to anyone.
i sit with my legs crouched.
i try to keep my eyes closed for as long as i can.
the lungs are still holding on.
sore throat, late reflexes.
the mind circling like moths circle
around the light bulb.

i do not care about the wrinkled dress,
i do not care about the neighbours upstairs.
i'm waiting for the end of the song.
then i'm waiting for the end of the next song.
i don't react to mother calling me for dinner
i only open the door to the cat.
i open the fan every now and then.
a few air flows gently notch my skin.
very close to triggering the system of
selfdestruction

beyond

you get used to loneliness
like you get used to a strong drug.
you listen to the noise of
the pigeons in the loft.
you look outside without getting close
to the window.
you stare at the glass of water for hours
and you still don't get thirsty.
in the stomach, more and more
painkillers. all aches
must be foreseen.

the body - an animal unable to communicate.
for one single move,
more than two hours of training.
for one single move,
the brain is about to explode.

days go by like an antibiotics treatment
that never ends.
you look down to your feet.
from the neck below
there is nothing left.

