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Texts & Contexts Reloaded
T.C.R.

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INTRO

From Literary Criticism to Creative Writing: A Personal Perspective

Roger Craik¹

The title of this effort, delivered as a keynote lecture and deliberately unrevised so as to retain the spoken and perhaps idiosyncratic, voice behind it, is “From Literary Criticism to Creative Writing: A Personal Perspective,” with the now apparently obligatory colon. Actually it’s a little more complicated than this—a better title would have been, albeit more cumbersome, “from creative writing to literary criticism, and back to creative writing, with some literary criticism still, but in diminishing amounts,” but such a title would cause the departmental printer, poor thing, no small discomfort. And although this is supposed to be, and is, a personal perspective, I want to stock the paper with instances, quotations and examples, rather than with details of my own life. It’s these subjects, literary criticism and creative writing, that are my focus, and how they complement each other, if they do, and how they react against each other, again if they do, or even have nothing at all to do with each other, if this happens to be the case. The first half will concern itself with studying, reading, and literary criticism, and will be more or less chronological—the second half will have hardly any chronology in it at all, and will concern itself with attempts (I stress “attempts”) to write poetry, and aspects of those attempts.

When I was a schoolboy in the north of Scotland, from the ages of twelve to fourteen, there was a compulsory class, and it was called English, and it was a glory and a delight. One part of it was called “interpretation,” which involved our having hurled at us all manner of unseen material in fragments (Francis Bacon (the philosopher, not the artist), Somerset Maugham, Thackeray, Dickens, W. H. Hudson, Marco Polo, and even W. H. Davies’s

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account of how to beg for food, the gloriously-titled “Autobiography of a Super Tramp,” from which a pop group of the 1970s would later take its name. Although all this was called “interpretation,” it wasn’t interpretation in the sense we know it today: just twenty factual questions so that we could prove ourselves capable of understanding, on a good day. The second part was creative writing—I remember writing stories borrowing heavily from D. H. Lawrence’s “The Rocking-Horse Winner,” and poems of my own invention and subject. The English teacher (meaning the teacher of English in the Aberdeen school) even made a small book of them.

When we reached fifteen, all that changed. Out went interpretation, never to return, and out went creative writing, never to return either. Also, incidentally (or perhaps not incidentally) out went art, so that was the end of making things. And the new course, which was called English, involved writing about other people’s books. It was never explained why, which struck my fifteen-year-old self as, somehow, a betrayal as well as a loss. French remained French and Latin remained Latin, but English was changed forever, and changed into joylessness. The staple was *King Lear*, *Julius Caesar*, *Lord of the Flies*, and some faux Scottish stuff (a great irony was that Aberdeen was the city of that most extraordinary of Scottish writers, Burns Singer, although it was not until I was working in America that I heard his name). After school came English at university, less joyless. The answers required of us were large and sweeping—Love in John Donne, the characteristics of Metaphysical Poetry, Fate in Hardy. There was no creative writing. I never heard the word “manuscript.” I don’t think it ever occurred seriously to me that the words that we were reading on the page had been written, or perhaps typed, by cigarette-smoking men and women. I began to feel—not in any sense that I was right, just that I began to feel—that what I valued in literature was not covered by the lectures, or by the books of criticism that we read (and, healthily, we read little of those). It was a loneliness.

Does anyone tell a graduating class that one it has graduated, there are no more essays to write, on prescribed books, and that you can graze on literature’s hillside like a good sheep? “Never judge a book by its cover,” one is told, but I did, munching my way indiscriminately through Livy, Alain-Fournier, Gide, Kerouac, Thomas Wolfe, Cicero, Blaise Cendrars, Lermontov and

Pliny the Elder. It was then, for what it's worth, that I began to realize what came to matter most: individuality, detail, eccentricity. Let me give you some examples, without telling you the books ("books," not "texts") they come from.

- 1) "The usual English, who are so hopeless abroad."
- 2) "The clock began to strike. 'It's an old clock,' I said, idiotically."
- 3) "'Is that you, Frank? 'Why are you calling me at work, Helen?' 'Do I have to have a reason to phone you, Frank?' asked Helen, tenderly."
- 4) "Philosophically the jar gave no advice."
- 5) "'Finally, Charles,' said Cordelia, 'the fathers took poor Sebastian in at a small monastery by a river. There had to be a river.'"
- 6) "Thomas Edison. Or maybe it was B. F. Goodrich. One of them was deaf."
- 7) "She is all states, and all princes I. / Nothing else is."

Well, the first is D. H. Lawrence in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, as I'm sure, (forgive me), you don't remember. Second is from *The Great Gatsby*. The indeterminate Jewish Lower East Side in the 1950s is the scene of the third, from Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant*. That's Ray Bradbury in the fourth, in "The Jar." Evelyn Waugh is fifth: *Brideshead Revisited*. The sixth: *Death of a Salesman*. The seventh is John Donne. Now, I could say much about why these resonate with me, but I withhold comment, other than to say that in the words "there had to be a river" there is a whole world, a whole lifetime of the girl who knew her older brother, who held to his simple, childhood loves to the end: the words draw the reader back to the years before the novel began. (For the other direction, do have a look at a painting by van Gogh of a fourteen-year-old boy; the title eludes me. There, in the face that van Gogh gives us, one sees the whole life, the sensual sneer, the cruelty, the knowing that one is attractive: the selfishness perhaps.)

Where does all this take us? My first suggestion is that, for all of us for whom literature is important, there are similar resonances, ones that work personally, that are hard to explain why one loves them. "Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy," writes Tennyson in lines that whose magic no analysis can explain, as paradoxically my mother explained to me when I was a

schoolboy, not to mention his line about grasshoppers—“dry high-elbowed grigs that leap in summer grass.” One can imagine Tennyson sitting down, some summer’s afternoon, and watching them. Can’t you?

I now rather anxiously feel I have to say something about literary criticism. Criticism isn’t literature: it is an adjunct to literature and never its subject. “it’s always better, wrote C. S. Lewis, “to read Chaucer again than the latest criticism of him,” while none other than Shakespeare contends, in *Troilus and Cressida*, “’tis mere idolatry / To make the service greater than the god.” My third suggestion, twin suggestions in fact, is firstly that most literary criticism is incomprehensible to the unacademic reader (and frequently to the academic one too), and, every bit as seriously, the following question: if literature is in itself so magical, why does so much criticism read with such grinding teeth-pulling effort. What became of the old hierarchy: first comes the work; then, a long way further back, the reader; and then, even further back, oneself? What of zest, the kind of criticism that takes it upon itself as duty to tell you why the work is worth reading, makes you want to read it, *and tells you what it feels like to read it*. Consider the critic Brian Cox, who observed: “when I read Homer, I am Argus-eyed: I see with a thousand eyes, and am never more myself than when I do.” Consider Graham Greene, perhaps more a belle-lettrist than a critic, writing of H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*, “we remember how we loved him when we were young.” Of course we nowadays, most of us, remember no such thing, but there is no mistaking the closeness, the affection; and it’s possible that some of us will take up Rider Haggard ourselves, in consequence. And even greater a critic is Ruskin, for instance when he tells you how a competent artist paints a tree (i.e. competently) and then not only tells us how an inspired artist does so, but how an inspired artist drives at his subject, with Ruskin’s *own* prose driving at *his* subject—you can almost sense the fountain pen racing across the page, and the right words found intuitively.

That was the hardest part of the lecture to write, and it is meant as statement more than complaint, although it is meant as complaint, a sad complaint, too. After all, as Beatrix Potter says in *The Tale of Johnny Town Mouse*, “one person likes one thing; and another person likes another thing.” After all, one has to have a very strange (and damaged) personality indeed to have one’s

pleasure in a book tainted by some wrong-headed nonsense about it: one remembers A. A. Milne observing coolly that Dorothy Parker's criticisms of the last Pooh book "leave the book very much where it was." But what I myself found, increasingly, when I was writing for academic tenure and promotion, was that I couldn't imagine a reader for my stuff. Who reads criticism for pleasure? Is this the right question, or do people do so only so as to clear the ground for their own essays, which who knows who reads? One tries to imagine the Dean here, Teodor Mateoc, saying to me, "I know that Holland are playing Brazil in the semi-finals of the World Cup, and I could be with you in the Hanul Cu Naroc, feeding my face with mici and swilling Ursus by the tankard, but I'd prefer to stay indoors and read Stephen Greenblatt."

I didn't move to trying to write poetry in reaction to these views about criticism. I just found myself doing it, first of all, in adult life, in New Haven, Connecticut. A line would form in my mind from nowhere, I suppose, and then another would come, perhaps, and I would find myself ever more absorbed, early morning after early morning.

There's no way to make coherent and seamless the ways an individual finds helps in poetry writing, so much of what remains are separate and discrete points.

Isn't it, people will ask, daunting to try to write poetry of your own when so much, and so varied, wonderful poetry has been written before you, by those who are better than you will ever be? And the answer to that is yes it is, if you choose to think that way. When Philip Larkin's introduction to the revised *The North Ship* appeared, Larkin said "a line of Auden is worth all of this put together"—and one knows what he means. How many times does one hear someone say "I used to write poetry but it was no good, and so I threw it all away"? One understands this too. But looked at another way, suppose you are an eighteenth century writer, Thomas Gray, for instance, or Wordsworth, or Shelley, and you have before you: Shakespeare and Milton! If all of us were to be daunted by those whom the chess player Garik Kasparov calls "my great predecessors," how would any poetry be written at all? This is logic, and of small help to the unconfident would-be writer. Far more useful is what the American poet William Stafford says: "it doesn't have to be good. What matters is that you wrote it."

To more practical matters. Those of you who have been artist's models, as I have, will notice how artists point their

pencils at you, then they move brushes and pencils over the page, not touching it. This is limbering up. I limber up by taking a stick of soft graphite and scrawling, pushing over the page with this, flatwise not pointwise. As I am right-handed, I doodle and scrawl and carve left-handed; the left hand takes you to the child you are not, to childhood. I then, with the left hand again, carve and swerve away with coloured crayons. I can't tell you how this helps, only that it does.

So this has as poem moving. For movement, to get an idea of the next line, I recite into a pocket recorder what I have written so far, and then play myself to myself ad nauseam, on my front doorstep, or hanging out of my window into Piata 1 Decembrie, in the hope that the next line comes into mind organically, because of sound. (This is a better method than reading aloud from the page, for that method has one rooted to one's workplace.) And now I am led to two complex points, or maybe three. If you value rhythm, as I do, don't let rhythm interfere with truth. Let every word count. Let me briefly return to literature: in some vital baseball game in the States, the home team was three runs down in the final innings, with the bases loaded, and one ball of the match remaining. Only a home run would do: a virtual impossibility. I quote: "The pitcher pitched, the batter swung, and the ball went soaring high and far and deep, everyone's eyes upon it, further and higher than anyone had ever seen; then dancing broke out, everyone happy, even children, their happiness callused by pure contagion. Now that's not just bad, it's *really bad*, and I invented it in my office while my office mate, Florin Cioban, was explaining something to an disgruntled student. What John Updike wrote was "and there it was." One should, furthermore, be suspicious of what one think of as one's own best lines, lest they prove dishonest. Years ago, I drove the poet Robert Bly back to Cleveland Airport at some frightful hour in the morning, and idiotically (he must have been dreading it) showed him some of my efforts, in the greying light. "That's beautiful, really beautiful," he said, of the first one. When he looked at the second, he asked "what does this line mean, Roger?" I began to bluster and shuffle, but he said "this is a bad and dishonest line, and you know it is." That should have hurt but oddly it didn't, it being true. Another Robert, Robert Nye, once wrote to me, candidly, "the trouble with you is that you try for a big effect in every line. Don't. You're screwing yourself up too tight.

Put ordinary lines in. If you don't, you'll end up like double-you-be-why," (meaning William Butler Yeats (whom all spellchecks, irrelevantly, correct to "William Butter Yeast").

Let me briefly mention a drawback to writing a poem. Let's say one piles up numbered drafts. You've started off by writing about a pig, let's say, something to do with the kissable prehensile twitching of its snout (let's also say), and a small discoloration in the snout, about one o'clock in relation to the left nostril of your pig. You revise. You revise. "Revise," of course, comes from the Latin "revidere," to see again, or look back. And, by implication, to improve. But often it doesn't improve. You smooth. You polish. There is less pigness in the poem: you have become a cutter of pigness. What you might end up with might be, in Beaudelaire's scandalous-sounding term, "mere literature."

On the subject of working a piece toward an end, I've found it helpful to number the drafts, and write on the top one with all the others underneath: this probably sounds logical and even sensible, but one could perfectly well have the previous versions in a pile on one's left, and the current one right here in front of you. My reason for piling is intuitive, mystical, and superstitious, and even borderline insane, and one is allowed to be all four, I hope. The sense, meaning the intuition, is that the manuscripts breathe into each other: this is the same idea that is practiced by the British painter Frank Auerbach, who scrapes off the oil from the same canvas—never a new one—so that the ghosts of previous efforts are there on that one canvas. This makes sense to me. But if it were too lofty a flight of fancy, let me return to those manuscripts in their order, with the final version, finished (if anything ever is) on the top. It is well possible that in this pile, in an earlier version, is something better than in the final one. If so, this is fine. It is no waste of time. One has learned. A month ago, I was trying to write a piece about an alcoholic in a cemetery telling me that years ago there was a stream that ran down the cemetery; and I was imagining that there still is one, "beneath the earth, unseen and cold." I so wanted to use the line, before this: "I remember being told," so as to rhyme with "cold," and end the piece with a firmness—but it wouldn't work, it wouldn't work. "Words that tear and strain to rhyme," writes Paul Simon. Something of that rejected line somehow stayed in the piece.

If time permitted, and I thought your patience permitted, I would mention publication, and my being interviewed

by the Cleveland Psychoanalytic Institute, and on how, when a piece is on the move, words and phrases from entirely unconnected books come to your aid (such is receptivity). But I would like to draw towards a conclusion with two unconnected points. The first is public readings, and is a point on which no one has ever wholly agreed with me. It's this. First I would like to quote Aldous Huxley:

When an evil orator attempts to persuade us, by rhetoric, of an evil course, we are very properly shocked. When, however, a virtuous orator uses the same means to persuade us of a good cause, we are not. . . The orator, the man of rhetoric, is, *ipso facto*, a liar." Or, as Marius Mihet of the Romanian Department told me, *en passant*, "it's the words that matter." A poetry reading is a performance. It is acting. It can be vanity. What matters, again, are the words, the skill. I am not at all convinced that poetry readings bring out craft in writing. Is it possible to make a bad poem sound good, by reading it like Richard Burton or Dylan Thomas? Probably. Is it *theme* that makes a poem good? No, not necessarily. Remember that Philip Larkin says "a good poem about failure is a success." He didn't add, but we can fill in, the second part, the corollary: "a bad poem about success is a failure.

Penultimately, some words about a very unusual kind of literary criticism: it is the literary criticism you apply to your own writing. It is a very pure matter. It has no footnotes. It is immediate, and, one hopes, honest. I set my stuff aside. I come back and grade it as if it were by someone else---the scale runs from zero to fifty, the failing grade, which as the Leicester University English Department guide calls "varying degrees of awfulness." Then come the passing grades: D--, D-, D, D+, D++, all the way to B--, which is as far as I allow myself. One's comments can be things like "good idea but poor lines, there's something better out there, somewhere," and so on.

To attempt, oneself, to write, is to become, I believe, a different kind of reader of literature, a different critic. I'd like to suggest that it will help you get into print more often, if that's what matters to you, in articles. But I don't think I do believe this. It somehow makes one a amore empathetic reader: it brings the mind to a different state. Not until I had started to attempt to write did I consider afresh the doubtless familiar lines:

Father McKenzie,
Writing the words of a sermon that no one will hear,
No one comes near. Look at him working.

“Eleanor Rigby,” by a well-known British group. 1967? By then the Beatles were in London, but the lines are steeped not just in Liverpool but in the Roman Catholic Irish Liverpool of Paul McCartney’s boyhood. Do you notice the false note? McKenzie: the name is Scottish. It should be an Irish name, and what is that name? McCarthy. But then the line would read “Father McCarthy. . .” it’s too jingly. I really believe that McCarthy was the first choice behind the man, and I sense, or think I sense, Lennon and McCartney discussing it. They are trapped by language. “Father McCartney” plainly wouldn’t have worked either.

In the end, when it comes to writing poetry (which is the main focus of this wandering paper), no amount of maxims, ideas, the rhythms of received literature running consciously or subconsciously, convey what it’s like to do, to create, and the deep enjoyment and fulfilment ensuing. One thinks things; one is led to think things one never would have thought otherwise. But if one had to choose a maxim to help, the second, and lesser, is Stafford’s “it doesn’t have to be good. What matters is that you made it.” For the first maxim, the one that I believe should motivate literary criticism too but so often doesn’t, one has to go back to the sixteenth century, to Sir Philip Sidney’s “Astrophel and Stella”: “Look in thy heart and write.”

STUDENTS' POETRY CONTEST: FIRST WORLD WAR CENTENARY. WINNING POEMS

Most people think of World War I as a tragedy, because it didn't need to happen, and because it didn't really accomplish much except for creating social and economic conditions that made World War II possible. Though not the most disastrous war, World War I was incredibly destructive: over fifteen million people were killed and about twenty million wounded. *The Great War*, as it was called in the beginning, did not end all wars, though many believed at the time that it would. Yet, while it did not achieve much, it was certainly the war to change all wars.

Before World War I, war was perceived as necessary and often glorious. The stalemate of trench warfare on the Western Front put an end to the idealization of combat. We know much about the soldiers who fought in it, because they described their experience of senseless violence and destruction in their letters. There was nothing heroic and glamorous in decaying in the trenches or being butchered by machine guns. The general outlook on war has been changed forever: cynicism and irony taking the place of excitement and ennoblement.

One hundred years after the beginning of World War I, we may say that not only are we still inclined to view warfare with cynicism and irony, but we can't even imagine that it can be discussed otherwise. This is all too obvious from the viewpoint on the war taken in the poems that were entered into the *Students' Poetry Contest: First World War Centenary* organized by the English Department of the Faculty of Letters, the University of Oradea in 2014.

It was a valiant effort on the part of the contestants. Not only did they write on a topic that they had no experience of, but they also wrote about it in a language that was not their mother tongue. Yet their viewpoint, though reflective only of what they have been taught in school and of their private readings on World War I, is not without interest. For they belong to the age group that

one hundred years ago was most affected by the war. In 1914 it were mainly young men in their early twenties that naively let themselves be convinced to take part in the Great War that killed or maimed most of them. Young people in 2014 could not be as easily duped. The following three prize winning poems bring this fact into stark relief. They also demonstrate the young poets' excellent command of the English language and their love for and understanding of poetry.

Éva Székely
Contest organizer

A bombed cadaver¹

by Alexandra Martin²

A bombed cadaver
Lying frostbit in a trench -
Boom! The First World War

¹ Winner of the 1st Prize

² Undergraduate student, Faculty of Letters, University of Oradea

Letter from a mother³

by Camelia Luncan⁴

Don't let them steal your peace
Wars are for the hungry pockets
For the craving pulpits
Keep your eyes away
From the ground
From the captain's
High concerts

His music becomes your
Unwilling dream

Wake up from
Oniric pressures

Your bullets,
My dear son
And soldier,
Are not made
For shooting.
Your bullets
are conceived
for love.

³ Winner of the 2nd Prize

⁴ MA student, Faculty of Letters, University of Oradea

ww1 & transylvania⁵

by Tamás Mihók⁶

just let's remember it —
ww1 proved that it's not about vampires
would anyone put up with so much blood?
here, holding somebody's hand meant
a saved tree
as it's the case with a pact that can be easily a word
or clinking the țuică⁷ glasses
ww1 proved
that it's not about vampires anymore
that herdsmen can be good shepherds as well
and that carpenters are the best
sculptors of destiny
for what have we died so many?
for what square meter has the mist swallowed us?
this year my verse no no
this life my heart hiccups for you
my dearest
here is an honest wish
that
a Swiss banker would have made 1 franc
per life.

⁵ Winner of the 3rd Prize.

⁶ MA student, Faculty of Letters, University of Oradea.

⁷ A generic term for an alcoholic beverage distilled from fruit.

GENDER, RACE and ETHNICITY
Literary-isms

GENDER, RASSE und ethnische
ANGEHÖRIGKEIT
Literaturwissenschaftliche Studien

RACE, GENRE, ETHNICITÉ
Études littéraires



GENDER ISSUES AND STEREOTYPES IN NEO-VICTORIAN FICTION: “THE CRIMSON PETAL AND THE WHITE” BY MICHEL FABER

Diana Cordea¹

Abstract: *The purpose of this article is to highlight issues connected to feminism and female emancipation, as represented in contemporary Neo-Victorian fiction. By emerging into the complex plot of Michel Faber’s 2002 novel The Crimson Petal and the White, we intend to try to re-live and get a better understanding of the tumultuous nineteenth century in Britain, an epoch of massive social changes and intense debate over what was then called the Woman Question. The great gap and differences between the central feminine figures in the novel, Agnes and Sugar, express, in our opinion, the outstanding progress of women’s status throughout the Victorian era, from uncultivated, submissive housewives, to new, strong-headed and educated individuals who fight for their rights and liberties with sometimes more logic and perseverance than their male counterparts. Last but not least, the character of Sugar is a living myth breaker who proves that women are neither angels, nor monsters, but human souls which struggle to live in a society which desperately needs to learn to forgive, to accept, and to adapt.*

Key words: *Neo-Victorianism, angel in the house, fallen monster, feminism, sexuality.*

Introduction

The 65 years of Queen Victoria’s reign were not only a period of an ever-expanding British Empire which ruled over the world by virtue of its unprecedented and unequalled scientific and technological progress, but also an era of significant changes in the manner in which people regarded themselves and their existence in general.

The Industrial Revolution and its immediate consequences greatly altered the lives of individuals, families and entire communities. People now bought and came to use products imported from the Empire’s overseas territories or manufactured in the local mills, they expanded their horizons by travelling to new destinations by way of trains and steamships, while education

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slowly became more accessible to the masses, who could now read books and journals printed at a much more rapid pace. Furthermore, while adapting to these great social changes, the Victorian mentality was also massively shaken by science itself and the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, which seriously threatened people's faith in God and the church.

Nonetheless, the rigid Victorian set of principles, morality and ethics remained as stiff as ever, with clear indications which carefully regulated people's lives, their status and their roles upon the social stage. Queen Victoria, an impeccable model of virtue and marital stability, was the epitome of this entire system, through the example she herself tried to give, along with her husband, Prince Albert, the Royal Family and the English Court.

1. The Woman Question in mid-Victorian mentality

This "shift in people's mentality and existence however soon brought into light, among other similarly pressing issues, the *Woman Question*, a matter which upset Queen Victoria, who considered men and women to be utterly different. Her position on the matter was shared by John Ruskin, who published *Sesame and Lilies*, an approach on the philosophy of separate spheres which claimed that women were best equipped for the private or domestic realm, while men were naturally suited to the active, aggressive and intellectual domains of public life" (Cordea 2013: 117).

Ruskin was supported in his views by the doctors and so-called scientists of his time, who considered that, "since men only concerned themselves with fertilization, they could also spend energies in other arenas, allowing as Spencer says 'the male capacity for abstract reason... along with an attachment to the idea of abstract justice...[which] was a sign of highly-evolved life.' On the other hand, woman's heavy role in pregnancy, menstruation (considered a time of illness, debilitation, and temporary insanity), and child-rearing left very little energy left for other pursuits. As a result, women's position in society came from biological evolution -- she had to stay at home in order to conserve her energy, while the man could and needed to go out and hunt or forage" (Lee 1997: 79).

The women who failed to adhere to this otherwise unanimously accepted social philosophy were considered depraved, fallen and thus unwelcome in moral and educated communities.

“At the opposite pole of the argument, John Stuart Mill published *The Subjection of Women*, a well-argued approach to gender philosophy in clear contrast to that of Ruskin, which voiced the thoughts and aspirations of many women who had already started the battle for their emancipation” (Cordea 2013: 116). He argued that “the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other” (Mill 1869: 82). Mill went beyond the social convictions of his time and was an active advocate of women’s emancipation, to their right to education, public activity and personal opinions.

2. The “angel in the house” versus “the fallen monster”

Ruskin’s and the Queen’s views on the status of women constituted the generally accepted and practiced principles almost throughout the entire Victorian era. For the greatest part of the nineteenth century, respectable women in Britain were considered to be angels in the house, living embodiments of values such as purity, morality, devotion and self-sacrifice.

A Victorian woman’s main purpose in life and actual career was getting married and then being an accomplished wife and household manager. “While the middle-class husband usually spent long hours professing as a doctor, clerk or banker, the wife had her own perfectly defined occupation at home. Household management and motherhood were regarded with sanctity by the Victorians and were treated with the utmost seriousness and devotion. Thus, the Victorian mistress would get up as early as her husband and would start her work with punctuality, because responsibilities abounded and many people relied upon her decisions, choices and activities” (Cordea 2011: 99): she had to make sure that she was always fresh, pleasant and beautiful, she had to organize and coordinate her staff, tend to her home and keep it in optimal conditions (without bothering the husband with domestic issues) and involve in philanthropic activities meant to help those in need, from a material, as well as emotional and spiritual perspective.

Middle-class Victorian wives were never permitted to think about or desire to have sexual intercourse with her

spouse; they had to be chaste, modest and discreet and were only allowed to submit to their male counterparts' pleasures or with the purpose of procreation. Motherhood was another essential task of a Victorian wife; she had to offer love and comfort to her sometimes five or six children, but she rarely questioned her husband's decisions regarding the children's education. One should highlight the fact that girls received limited education, thus becoming unsuitable for admission in universities and only capable to perform jobs which earned a low income. Last but not least, the Victorian wife was expected to contribute devotedly in displaying the signs of her family's status and to publicly represent and support her husband through a particular control of her social behaviour and by hosting or attending public events such as dinner parties, tea parties or house calls.

Simultaneously, in other less fortunate corners of the cities, lower-class women also struggled to make a living, but in strikingly different circumstances: they were expected to work in the mills and contribute to the family's meager income, and then return to their homes, where, after 12 hours of hard labour, they had to raise six or seven children, tend to the house and subject to the moods of frequently drunken husbands.

“According to renowned historian Judith Walkowitz, a nineteenth century city would commonly have 1 prostitute per 36 inhabitants, or 1 per 12 adult males, which would yield 55,000 prostitutes” (Bell 2014: online) and the reason for this numerous population is thus understandable; prostitution helped women earn considerably larger sums of money and offered them the chance to enjoy economic and personal independence. According to Fraser Joyce, “the working prostitute did not fit her gender role as a mother or ‘angel of the house’, instead choosing to work in public. Fielding noted that prostitutes were ‘getting bolder’, appearing more often in public; female independence posed a threat to patriarchal society, and displayed a stark warning against crime and unregulated sexuality” (Joyce 2008: online). At the same time and somewhat inevitably, prostitutes also came to be regarded as not only “fallen” or “depraved”, but also as “monsters”, due to the great pollution that they brought to the cities by spreading a significant range of diseases. “An anonymous doctor calculated the yearly spread of venereal disease: a total of 1,652,500 people infected per year from just

500 initially infected women; with each of the 500 infecting 3,304 men” (Joyce 2008: online).

3. Michel Faber’s “The Crimson Petal and the White”

Michel Faber is a Dutch-born Australian writer now residing in Scotland. He is best known for his rich body of fictional work which includes novels and short stories such as *Some Rain Must Fall* (1998), *Under the Skin* (2000), *The Fire Gospel* (2008) or *Walking after Midnight* (2009).

His most renowned and highly appreciated novel *The Crimson Petal and the White* was published in 2002, with a title inspired by the poem *Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal* written by Alfred Lord Tennyson in 1847. The story is set in mid-Victorian England and centers around the insipid businessman William Rackham and the two antonymous women in his otherwise mundane existence: his wife, Agnes Rackham, and his paid whore, Sugar.

The novel can be placed within the contemporary literary trend of Neo-Victorian fiction (the post-modernist re-evaluation of the Victorian era) and approaches multiple complex themes which are typical to Victorian-related literature such as poverty and destitution in the Victorian slums, social ascension, gender segregation, questioned religious faith, insanity, sexuality, the role of books and writing. Nonetheless, perhaps the most significant of them all, the theme of feminism stands at the very core of the novel and it is revealed to the contemporary reader from a double perspective: the typical angelic Victorian housewife, dramatically portrayed by Agnes Rackham (a narrow-minded, mentally disturbed and isolated young wife, with no knowledge whatsoever of sexual matters, whose main purpose in life is the London Season) and the fallen monster, Miss Sugar (a nineteen-year old prostitute who does everything in her power to overcome her destitute condition and who pours all her anguish, disgust and cynicism in the pages of her apparently autobiographical erotic murder novel).

The Crimson Petal and the White reflects its concern with the issues of feminism and female emancipation by the great gap it creates between the two female protagonists, who express, in a very careful and complex manner, the progress of women’s status throughout the nineteenth century, from uncultivated, submissive housewives, to new, strong-headed and educated individuals who

fight for their rights and liberties with sometimes ferocious determination, perseverance and logic.

4. Agnes Rackham: a misunderstood Victorian doll

Agnes Rackham is, at first glance, the embodiment of Victorian femininity. She comes from a rather wealthy family and she possesses the appearance of the perfect Victorian woman: "she graces a thousand paintings, ten thousand old postcards, a hundred thousand tins of soap. She is a paragon of porcelain femininity, five foot two with eyes of blue, her blonde hair smooth and fine, her mouth like a tiny pink vulva, pristine" (Faber, 2002). As reconstructed through her husband's memories of the past, she is a shy young woman who promises to be the illustrious devoted wife, the perfectly active housewife and eventually the ideal tender and loving mother.

However, once the reader crosses the threshold of the Rackham house and looks beyond the stereotypes of Victorian society and mentality, a totally different Agnes is revealed to the world. The fine young woman whom William marries is actually a motherless daughter raised by a cold and distant father, who rushes the business of marrying her to the first male pretender: "For all that Lord Unwin seemed to care, his new son-in-law could dispose of Agnes's clothes, her jewellery, her books, her servants. Short of saying so, he was washing his hands of her – no doubt because he already knew (crafty old sot!) what poison was eating away at his step-daughter's sanity" (Faber 2002: 56).

Agnes is totally unaware of her own body and sexuality, let alone her impending future role of partner in the matrimonial bed. A fanatic Catholic believer, she looks upon her menstruation as a divine punishment for her earthy sins and she never even glances at her body parts below her waistline. "Her focus is on preserving her beauty, social occasions and Catholic religion. She had received education typical for ladies of her status – embroidery, dancing, music, French and German. In other words, she is an emblematic representative, a female stereotype of the leisure class" (Braid 2009: online), a product of the mentality of an age which totally restricted women to the private spheres of their households and who barely had any common interests with their male counterparts.

The pivotal moment in Agnes's isolated and peaceful existence takes place when she marries William Rackham, the

promising heir of a thriving cosmetics industry. To her husband's consternation, Agnes is completely unaware of her bodily duties, so she perceives their wedding night as a terrifying and deeply traumatizing experience which leaves her perpetually deranged and tormented by demons which represent nothing but her husband's violence and obsessions, as well as his complete lack of patience and understanding regarding his young wife's condition.

Moreover, the horrors of the matrimonial bed also lead to Agnes becoming pregnant. However, as we come to understand, "she knows nothing about pregnancy; when her servant Clara mentions that the baby's late, Agnes notes in her diary: 'Whose baby can this be?' Her growing belly, in her belief, is the result of a demon force feeding her. When she finally gives birth, she describes a fantasy where, in the Convent of the Health, a nurse removes the demon from her body" (Braid 2009: online). The violent and shocking experience her labour inevitably determine the frail Mrs. Rackham to completely erase these events, as well as their end result, her daughter, from her mind or her everyday life. Young Sophie is kept far from her mother's sight, in a different part of the house, where she is raised by the strict nurse Cleave.

The events of Agnes's first years of marriage thus leave great scars upon her behaviour and personality. She is forever confined in her bedroom, with the curtains pulled close, dressed in night gowns and completely dependent on her servant, Clara, who keeps her company or goes into town to purchase her necessities (while also stealing money for herself). It is due to all these factors that Agnes is first introduced to the reader "gingerly descending a spiral of stairs, breathing shallowly, frowning, biting her lip. As she reluctantly entrusts her weight to each carpeted step, she clutches the banister with one white-knuckled hand, while the other hand is laid on her breastbone, just under the mandarin colour of the morning gown" (Faber 2002: 179).

Her daily activities include reading beauty magazines or journals advising women on what is modern and valuable in the fields of art and literature, writing her diary, sewing dresses and preparing for the following London Season, the focal point of her personal and social existence. She fantasizes about her careless childhood days and worries that she may be punished by the Divine Authority for apparent sins such as supervising the workmen who refurbished her house on a Sunday: "Is is a sign? Is God cross with her for giving those workmen, those paperers,

instructions? She only spoke; she didn't lift a finger herself!" (Faber 2002: 367).

Moreover, Agnes Rackham also has to endure the weekly harassment of Doctor Curlew's home visits. Contrary to all expectations, the doctor's treatment is not even close to what one might imagine it to be, namely a friendly and professional visit meant to bring mental and bodily healing to an ailing patient. Doctor Curlew reveals himself to the reader as being a cynical, obsessed monster which further enhances Mrs. Rackham's traumas by regularly sexually harassing her. She tries all the alternatives she can think of to avoid the medic's consultations or to warn her husband of his horrific acts, but, as she sees no result or escape out of this trap, she resigns herself to finding solace in the soothing projections of her mind: "she's on her way to the Convent of Health: a train compartment has been specially prepared for her, to look as much like her own room as possible; she lies in a berth by the window, and all the walls there is proper wallpaper, and framed portraits of her mother and father" (Faber 2002: 732).

In short, from the perspective of Agnes Rackham, Faber's novel actually reconstructs the minds of the Victorians, from the general idea of their purity and virtue, to their wildest sexual cravings and tastes. "examines how the discourse of sexuality shaped in the academy has transformed the Victorians in the popular mind from repressed puritans into sexy beasts, albeit of rather particular sexual tastes" (Sussman 2005: 73). Agnes is the failed result of a rigid and puritan Victorian upbringing and mentality which completely exclude the realities of life or the basic human needs. She is a woman almost completely blind to the world around her and whose entire existence revolves around petty conversation, gossip, social gatherings and fashion. Last but not least, her inability to perform common tasks such as household management, motherhood or sexual intercourse with her spouse further proves the inefficacy of an outdated system of values which can ultimately lead to mental disorders, hindered communication, introversion and a general misbalance of one's entire subsistence.

5. Sugar: a prostitute with a mind of her own

Sugar's character and experiences are apparently meant to completely antagonize Agnes. While the latter received a restricted

and sheltered upbringing, the former is presented to the reader in quite a different environment; the part of town where Sugar lives and works is a dirty and dangerous slum “where people go to sleep not at a specific hour but when the gin takes effect, or when exhaustion will permit no further violence (...), a street reached only faintly, too faintly, by the bells of church and the trumpets of state” (Faber 2002: 323).

Sugar is a nineteen year-old whore working at a brothel hidden behind dark, putrid alleyways, whose entire existence labels her as a typical fallen Victorian woman. “How long has she been a prostitute (asks the narrator)? Six years. You do the arithmetic, and the answer is a disturbing one, especially when you consider that the girls of this time commonly don’t pubesce until fifteen or sixteen. Yes, but then Sugar was always precocious – and remarkable” (Faber 2002: 547). This last word – “remarkable” – is intentionally used by the author from the very beginning of the novel to anticipate Sugar’s features, inclinations and purpose as a character: outstandingness, difference, change, revolution. She “is determined to be different. The Fates can look down any time they please, and find her always set apart from the common herd, ready for the wand of change to christen her head” (Faber 2002: 119).

Her general appearance is itself striking. While her body presents her to be tall, slim and rather boyish, her golden-orange hair goes in sharp contrast to her pale complexion. Her eyes are large and green, and what particularly draws one’s attention are Sugar’s excessively dry lips, which sometimes look like small pieces of lace. We then come to deduce that an acute skin condition left her body striped with patches of pink and dry white skin, as if having been brutally lashed with a whip. Moreover, Sugar also has a very husky voice, the result of a blade held too near too her throat many years before.

Regardless of her unattractive skin, Sugar is a well-known prostitute among the male society. She is famous for doing any kind of service that a client might demand, always with a smile on her face. This is exactly what draws William Rackham to her, and what he discovers on their first meeting goes beyond anyone’s expectations: Sugar is a well-read young woman, with excellent knowledge of the works of literary classics, as well as contemporary writers. She has specific opinions about their novels and recites countless passages of poetry. For instance, when she stumbles upon a journal which condemns a woman’s capacity to

think without affecting her ability to conceive, Sugar writes her adamant and honest thoughts on the very page of the publication: “We’ll see about that, you poxy old fool! There’s a new century coming soon, and you and your kind will be DEAD!” (Faber 2002: 464). The narrator himself voices an utterance which actually reveals and encompasses the general Victorian position regarding the status of women: “A pity, really, that Sugar’s brain was not born into a man’s head, and instead squirms, constricted and crammed, in the dainty skull of a girl. What a contribution she might have made to the British Empire!” (Faber 2002: 468). It is thus perfectly obvious that the narrator blames and disagrees with the mentality of the time, by regretting the fact that bright and cultivated women were forced to show herself in a proper society as completely devoid of any personal opinions and intellectual preoccupations, and by honestly wishing that they had had equal opportunities to those of men to build a successful career for herself. However, the independence provided by Sugar’s occupation offers her a significant extent of freedom of personal expression.

However, Sugar never rests a moment and is always seen engaged in cultural activities such as reading – even her fellow prostitutes refer to her as “the one who reads all the books” (Faber 2002: 202) – or writing. For Sugar, the activity of writing her Hate Book entitled “The Fall and Rise of Sugar” is one of cleansing herself of her own dreadful thoughts and enjoying an indirect and imaginative revenge against all of those who have taken away her innocence. “Faber is something of an unreconstructed feminist, and the novel that Sugar labours over while her punters slept off their drink goes beyond autobiography, telling of the luring exploits of a prostitute who carves up men, an inverted Jack the Ripper dreamt up years before he padded the city’s streets” (Anderson 2002: online).

Moreover, she also gets involved in William Rackham’s perfume business, by offering him sound advice and intelligent and efficient consultancy, an activity which makes her lover’s cosmetics enterprise quite thriving, but which, according to the mentality of the era, bluntly violates any regulation concerning women’s preoccupations. She thus steps outside the comfort of domestic concerns and becomes quite a revolutionary figure. No doubt many male scientists and doctors of her time would have seriously doubted her actual ability to think outside the private

sphere, let alone express intellectual opinions from her perspective of a socially stigmatized prostitute.

Sugar also uses her cleverness and knowledge of the world to devise a complex and detailed strategy to go beyond her condition of a paid whore working under her mother's patronage (because, yes, Mrs. Castaway, the owner of the brothel, is her own blood, the person who led Sugar's first client into her room when she was thirteen), a body perpetually subjected to male domination and the inhabitant of a destitute area of London immersed in mud, misery, disease and poverty. She wishes to leave all of these sad and tormenting realities behind – "She cannot bear going backwards when she's made up her mind to go forwards; she's crossed this street now, and there's no crossing back" (Faber 2002: 681) – and build a new life for herself by trying to ascend the social ladder. Her endeavour proves successful sooner than expected, when William Rackham offers to buy and have Sugar all to himself; while he is satisfied to know that he is the only man to take advantage of her, Sugar has made a great step forward towards the achievement of her goals. Then, it isn't long before William also proceeds to moving her into a comfortable house of her own, in a decent part of the town, where they can spend time together away from the horrid slums and in complete discretion. He goes one step further when he invites Sugar to move into his own house, as a governess for own his daughter. All of William's decisions are carefully forged ideas which Sugar discreetly plants into his mind and which represent nothing but fruitful leaps forward along the path of her self-improvement.

Moving into the Rackham house is, however, another significant turning point in Sugar's existence. Not only does her lover become somewhat colder towards her, but she also finds herself surprisingly preoccupied by and caring for her new pupil. She again proves her disagreement with the mentality of her age, by being not only a governess for Sugar, but also a loving mother, who offers unrestrained love and attention. She rejects the disciplinarian and rigid Victorian education, by taking on a new and friendly approach which makes the little girl enjoy her studies. Moreover, Sugar does not limit Sophie's education to embroidery and dancing, but goes on to teach her sciences such as history or geography. Sugar's determination to expand the horizons of the young Miss Rackham is further exemplified at the end of the novel, when William decides to remove Sugar from her position of

governess; she refuses to be parted from the child she came to regard as her own, so she devises a plan to leave London and the Rackham house by taking the little girl with her: Sugar thus indirectly offers the little girl the chance to pursue an unlikely possible career for women, that of being an explorer, which had previously attracted the young pupil's attention.

Moreover, as the action of the novel progresses, the reader slowly comes to understand Sugar and empathize with her dreams and ambitions. She redeems her sins of harlotry not only by her sincere love for Sophie Rackham, but also by accepting to be the image of the Guardian Angel that Agnes sees in her. By living inside the house, Sugar soon comes to fathom the true source of Agnes's mental illness: she is not only the victim of cold parenting and of a rigid and abstract education, but also of the two dominating male figures in her life, her husband, who forces upon her body during a period of serious illness, and her doctor, who regularly molests her. The newly-appointed governess feels authentic compassion towards Agnes and it does not take long before she resolves to help the harassed wife escape from her confinement: Sugar plots and assists in freeing Agnes from the Rackham house and guiding her to a convent far away from London, and then keeping their secret sealed when William is misled to believe that she has died.

By the end of the lengthy novel and after numerous experiences and events, Sugar succeeds in her greatest achievement yet, one which goes beyond any other kind and thoughtful gestures that she chooses to perform along the way: she proves to the reader and to the people around her that an educated woman with a strong will can make her own decisions regarding her life, that she is the only person entitled to choose for herself and that her mind and her passions are never to be determined or questioned or banned by the outside world. Moreover, she also demonstrates that the Victorian stereotypical society is completely blind to the human soul; she is neither an angel, nor a monster, but a woman in search of herself, thrown to live and struggle in a society which is not yet ready for people like her and which still needs to learn to forgive, to accept and to adapt.

Conclusion

To sum up, Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* and its female protagonists are the vivid illustrations of a social

contrast which characterized Queen Victoria's entire reign. While Agnes Rackham is the representative of limited women, perpetually reminded that they are their husbands' inferiors, Sugar turns Faber's novel into an eloquent work of fiction whose main purpose is that of supporting, yet again, after more than a century since the period it reinterprets so successfully, the obvious equality between the male and female sexes and the regret that women were for so long silenced, subjected and oppressed by a patriarchal society completely blind to the human soul and the basic human needs. "Described by some critics as postmodern while others echoed the assertion (made in an early review) that it was 'the novel that Dickens might have written had he been allowed to speak freely'" (online, 2014), Faber's novel brings to the reader a complex feminist character who, no doubt, would have been an active suffragette and an ardent advocate of female emancipation alongside Emmeline Pankhurst², had she lived but two decades later in Britain.

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**LANGUAGE AND METAMORPHOSIS
IN A. S. BYATT'S *POSSESSION***

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Abstract: *The study aims to examine the concept of metamorphosis in Byatt's Possession both on structural and on metafigurative level. The parallel mythical, Victorian and postmodern story lines, the recurrent archetypes all make us recognize that the stories and the characters are only figurations, metamorphic variations of a solid structure. On the basis of Solodow's and Joseph Hillis Miller's definition I investigate the concept of metamorphosis as a mode of representation, a way of perception and interpretation. Also, starting out from Paul de Man's theory, I regard language as a carrier of prosopopoeic nature, giving face and voice to the perceived world, but also disfiguring it.*

Key words: *metamorphosis, prosopopoeia, language, myth*

A. S. Byatt's novel is full of metamorphoses on both thematic and structural levels. At first sight, the narrative line can be seen to reenact a simple romance form, a plot driven by the obstacles that two lovers have to overcome. However, the structure of the novel turns out to be more complicated when we come to realize that it stages two parallel intertwined storylines (a contemporary and a Victorian one), which, through Byatt's mirroring-technique (Covert 128), reflect upon one another. In this way, reading Byatt's *Possession*, one can easily notice the conspicuous interrelating system upon which its structure is built. Its recurrent archetypes and its parallel storylines reflecting upon one another give the reader the sense that somehow they share a common pattern, as if they were only figurations of a general design. Accordingly, its mythical, Victorian and contemporary characters and plots can be interpreted as the metamorphosed manifestations of one another.

Also, the structure of the Romance constantly metamorphoses into other kinds of discursive forms, exploring the possibilities of how to narrate the past. Accordingly, the novel

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abounds in poems, fairy tales², mythical stories, biographical extracts, literary criticisms, letters and diaries. Apart from the permanently metamorphosing narrative lines, the genre of the Romance also seems to transform itself into other possible genre forms: the Romance of the contemporary line is driven by a quest narrative in which two would-be lovers do their research work together to find the “holy grail”, that is knowledge. Their studying and researching the Victorian poets’ oeuvres and lives can also be read as a detective story, or as a campus novel—since they work as university scholars. Similarly, since large sections of the novel present us the correspondence from the Victorian Romance-line, it can also function as an epistolary novel or as a forged manuscript novel (Burgass 27). Likewise, the characters – especially of the contemporary line – are frequently aware of their own metamorphosed status and act like fairy tale figures who cannot avoid their plots (Bényei, *Imperfections* 2).³

Besides, the novel is full of literary allusions, which link the narratives to other literary ages, reinforcing the archetypal connotation of (literary) repetition in the text.⁴ In this way, Ash as a ventriloquist can be seen as Robert Browning’s metamorphosed figure, who also wrote dramatic monologues and eloped with his lover, while Christabel’s figure seems to echo Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti as a spinster poet, who, living in seclusion, later elopes with a married man (Burgass 52). Through these multiple layers. Byatt creates a unique textual universe, the title of which also reveals its multiple interpretational possibilities. Thus, the concept of possession itself metamorphoses, carrying different layers of meaning. It mainly alludes to the fundamental paradox: to try to possess something (the past), an object, or somebody (the loved one) is in turn to be possessed by it (or by our fantasy vision of it).

² However, these inserted genres do not weaken the plot of the Romance, but rather reinforce it. In the “Garden of Proserpina” Heracles’s stealing the golden apple alludes to Roland’s purloining Ash’s letter. “Melusine” and “Gode’s Story” reinforce La Motte and Christabel’s powerful female attributes; and the rescue plot in the “Glass Coffin” mirrors Roland and Maud’s relationship.

³ In the “Glass Coffin” fairy tale the characters also accept that they are only metamorphosed variations of an archetypal structure, and they act according to the rules upon which fairy tales are built.

⁴ The text mentions Faust’s “Gothie”, Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress” and George Herbert’s “The Agonie”. These all can be read as reflecting upon the contemporary and Victorian couples’ situation.

Furthermore, the characters' names also become sites of metamorphic potential. Beatrice Nest's figure can be read as the metamorphosed version of a mother hen sitting on Ellen's journal, like on eggs, but never hatching them, thus, never achieving professional success (Burgass 41). Blackadder is the black adder, who guards the golden apple or the tree of life and protects Ash's poetic works as a literary scholar. Cropper's name means the maw of a bird that also connotes his accumulating, greedy raping of Ash's heritage (Burgass 36). Additionally, the theme of ventriloquism as a metamorphosis into dead voices is similarly apparent throughout the whole novel. Randolph Henry Ash, the "great ventriloquist", "lends his voice to past voices" (Byatt 104) and writes dramatic monologues. Christabel as a poet also metamorphoses into Melusina's mythical character in her dramatic monologue "Melusina". The novel also abounds in thematic allusions to the phenomena of metamorphosis and circularity to such a degree that they permeate not only the structure of the novel but also the events in it. One of the main Victorian characters', Randolph Henry Ash's poetic and scientific work is deeply concerned with it, and the novel also problematizes other kinds of transformation, from the occult seances, and transmigration, to Darwinism, and the origin of tales and religions from the perspective of circulation. That is why the concept of metamorphosis seems to be a good starting point for an analysis of Byatt's novel.

In my interpretation I shall start out from the definitions of metamorphosis provided by Joseph B. Solodow and J. Hillis Miller, exploring its workings on different levels of the text and extending its meaning considerably: apart from its presence as a thematic motif, I consider it also a self-reflexive metafigurative trope that refers to representation in general. According to Solodow, metamorphosis is "a change of form by which content becomes represented in form," "a process by which the characteristics of a person, essential or identical, are given" (Solodow 174). Metamorphosis, however, does not reflect human experience in its complexity, but rather represents only one and the most characteristic aspect of it. The narcissus flower is not the image of Narcissus's total personality, it only stands for its most significant feature, that is, self-love. Hence, by encapsulating a single abstract notion, only one feature of a person, metamorphosis becomes a "simplification", an inevitably figurative (synecdochic) "clarification" (Solodow 189) of experience, and in

this way it takes up a mediatory role. Similarly to art and literature, it offers only a representation, an image, a limited tool for making sense of an experience. As its visible “monuments” (Solodow 214) crystallize, distinguish and give order to the perceived world, it also functions like language that gives sense to and constructs reality. To such a degree, gods, artists and language-users all accord in their act of creation as they all turn Chaos into Cosmos and make their own worlds by metamorphosing external phenomena.

Regarding the story of Pygmalion, J. Hillis Miller observes that “. . . in the cruel justice of the gods we see the performative power that figures of speech may have” (Miller, “Pygmalion”¹). He claims that language has a performative, creative power, too and on that account metamorphosis can be seen as “the literalization of a metaphor”(Miller, “Pygmalion”¹), or of a synecdoche. Just as in metamorphosis a particular person is transformed into a natural phenomenon that will become a monument representing his/her story, so do metaphors “carry over” and “transfer” meaning from one conceptual domain to another. Similarly to the performative power of the gods, which transforms mythical characters into natural forms through metamorphosis, the linguistic power of metaphors also metamorphoses concepts, entities (tenors) into seemingly distant and unfamiliar vehicles. Thus, J. Hillis Miller equates the performative power of the gods with linguistic power and considers it a basic process of perceiving and interpreting the world around us. Starting out from this basic definition, I shall look at the way Byatt’s novel dramatizes the deictic, unrepresentational nature of our semiotic systems (Chase 90-1)⁵, including language and literature, generated by metamorphosis. I shall argue that Byatt’s novel conceives of language as essentially of prosopopoeic (pygmalionic) in the de Manian sense of the term. Paul de Man’s notion of prosopopoeia – “conferring a mask or a face to a faceless entity”, giving a voice, that is, the power of speech to the absent, the voiceless, the deceased (de Man *Rhetoric* 75) – can also be found in J. Hillis Miller’s “Pygmalion’s Prosopopoeia”, where, analyzing Pygmalion’s myth, he likens the reanimation of a

⁵ Cynthia Chase writes about Paul de Man’s notion of deixis as a basic feature of our representational semiotic systems, like languages. As these deictic systems present particular phenomena in universal utterances they can function only as unrepresentative demonstrations.

stone sculpture to the figure of prosopopoeia. Language, too, can be seen as an essentially inadequate, prosopopoeic semiotic system, the speakers of which – similarly to Pygmalion – give a face to the perceived world, but at the same time also deface it. Thus, analogously with myths, language is seen as the repository of metamorphosed forms, which, by giving face (voice) and figure to the natural world, also defaces and disfigures it.

As a result, metamorphosis, as an allegorical manifestation of art, literature, language and metaphor, reflects upon the interpretative and creative nature of perception by turning the individual into the monumental but never representing it in its complexity. Instead, it presents us the personal in universal forms, creating a semiotic system of its own. Solodow refers to this system as a world of abstract notions, a kind of reality created by the interpretative process of perception rewriting its nature from Plato's and Ovid's perspectives. While Plato names it "the world of ideas" and defines it as the repository of real meanings, Ovid identifies abstract notions in the metamorphosed nature-forms of "the world of appearances." Therefore, while Plato connects the abstract with the real, and the physical with the unreal, Ovid implies that physical, real forms can incorporate abstract notions through metamorphosis (Solodow 223). Hence, "the world of ideas" and art – mythology, literature, language and metaphor – all serve us as standing stones that are always "there" (Byatt 1), as the opening lines of *Possession* suggests (Byatt 463)⁶, each providing us with a norm by which we can recognize the things about us. This recurrent claim about the "thereness" of these things establishes a hierarchy between the archetypal forms and their metamorphic, variable manifestations – a hierarchy, which is explored and interpreted in the novel.

Ash refers to the recurrent nature of this norm as a distant, uncontrollable driving force, which possesses, and thereby somehow devalues or invalidates our own experiences: "a present experience is only a Repetition of what has already, perhaps frequently – been lived through before – is Evidence of some circularity of inhuman time – of Another Adjacent World where things eternally are with no change or decay" (166). Thus, he

⁶ These things are there. The Garden and the tree/The serpent at its root, the fruit of gold/The woman in the shadow of the boughs/The running water and the grassy space./They are and were there. At the old world's rim,/In the Hesperidean grove, the fruit/Glowed golden on eternal boughs/

places these external, timeless forms in a Platonic world of ideas, reiterating this view in his poem “Swammerdam” as well: “I saw a new world in this world of ours / A world of miracle, a world of truth” (207). Besides, Ash applies his concept of constant repetition and circularity in his scientific work as well, the experiments of which often provide him with poetic material. In “Swammerdam”, Ash analyses the universal principles of nature in all living forms:

The optic lens is like a slicing sword.
It multiplies the world, or it divides –
We see the many in the one . . .
.
The more the Many were revealed to me
The more I pressed my hunt to find the One –
Prima Materia, Nature's shifting shape
Still constant in her metamorphoses.(Byatt 207)

Later he also admits that his paramount field of interest both as a poet and as a scientist is “the persistent shape-shifting life of things long-dead but not vanished” (256). By studying “the life-continuing functions of the digestive functions of all forms” (250), by experimenting with reproductive systems and vivisection, Ash’s poetic and scientific work is also saturated with the idea of metamorphosis, thus with the “continuity and interdependence of all life” (249). In a reciprocal or circular fashion, these scientific categories become metaphors of the vaguely Platonic and mythical things that are “there”, the eternal circularity of which he imagines in the metaphor of the sea:

We know no more about the constitution of water than we do about that of blood. What is most easily discerned . . . is that it is simultaneously an end and a beginning . . . a product of the innumerable residues of death, who would yield them to life? . . . These moults which could be called a daily and partial death, fill the world of the seas with gelatinous richness from which newborn life profits momentarily. . . the still animated particles, the still living liquids . . . have no time to die . . . do not fall back into an inorganic state but rapidly enter new organisms. (250)

Water, which itself formless without a container, can be seen as a medium, through which circularity, handing down and possession

can be effectuated. Similarly, Ash alludes to our fallen dust-particles as life-continuing forces, which, by getting into a dead state, do not cease to exist but cohere and generate new life: “Dust falls from us daily as we walk, dust of us, lives a little in the air and is Trodden – we sweep away – Parts of Ourselves – and shall all these – jots and omicra – cohere?” (Byatt 389). Blood and bone are also referred to as a carrier of life, which connect the past and the present entities: “Here . . . one has a sense of nearness of those remotest men whose blood and bones made our blood and bones and live still in them” (Byatt 263). Analogously, the poet extends the relevance of the image to the concept of literature as well in which every written world becomes resuscitated by those who write it down again and by those who read and fill it with some meaning: “Those fallen leaves which keep their green/The noble letters of the dead” (Byatt 103).

Even he himself metamorphoses into past voices as a ventriloquist:

I myself, with the aid of the imagination, have worked a little in that line, have ventriloquised, have lent my voice to, and mixt my life with, those past voices and lives whose resuscitation in our own lives as warnings, as examples, as the life of the past persisting in us, is the business of every thinking man and woman (Byatt 104).

What Ash says here echoes J. Hillis Miller’s notion of *prosopopoeia*: he gives voices to voiceless entities and, by conferring to them the power of speech, he resuscitates the deceased in a *pygmalionic* way. As a ventriloquist, he “lends his voice to” (Byatt 104), metamorphoses into long-vanished entities, and through the linguistic and performative act of *prosopopoeia* he reenlivens past stories, making them present “warnings” and “examples” (Byatt 104). This analogy between *Pygmalion*’s mythical story and the trope echoes J. Hillis Miller’s notion of *prosopopoeia*. Miller— following Paul de Man’s theories — through the story of *Pygmalion* interprets *prosopopoeia* as a reversed metamorphosis. While the Ovidian metamorphosis means getting into a deadened, mute and permanent state, in the case of *prosopopoeia* it is the inanimate work of art that becomes alive and gains a voice of her own. In this sense, narratives (including Byatt’s resuscitated story-lines) can all function as extended

prosopopoeias in which the dead are given voices to speak through contemporary characters. Byatt and Ash the ventriloquist also take upon Pygmalion's artistic role when they give voice and reanimate past and seemingly dead stories. However, instead of falling into Pygmalion's sin, that of "taking a figure of speech literally" (Miller, "Pygmalion" 11), they are aware of the fact that they can resurrect the past only by accepting metamorphosis as an act of creative perception and figuration. Therefore, in a postmodern self-reflexive way they resuscitate past stories and characters only to demonstrate that they are mere figures of speech, mere projections of a core structure which represent some common essence. Their literary production works as a performative gesture which suggests that each perception implies interpretation, thus mediation and metamorphosis. Accordingly, Ash does not create his own stories, but retells the stories of the dead, or rather, he becomes a medium through which the dead gain their voice.

Analogously, the world of the novel constantly oscillates between the referential and the allegorical (metafigurative): characters, actions and places are at the same time what they "are" and metamorphosed figures, textual allegories, repetitions. Metamorphosis can be seen as the key to the permanent duplicity inasmuch as what it stages (allegorizes) is precisely the moment of transformation between the referential and the allegorical, a moment that is endlessly repeated and restaged in Byatt's novel. Similarly to Ash, Byatt also creates a world, in which every story is a myth, every narcissus is Narcissus and his self-love, and somehow "everything connects and connects" (Byatt 253), sharing a core structure of abstract notions. To this extent, she approaches the notion of art, literature and language through the idea of metamorphosis: her storylines and characters become the obvious reflections, the obvious metamorphosed forms of one another, the individual representations of the same pattern.

In this context I shall examine two aspects of how the novel explores the relationship between subjectivity and language, a theme, which also permeates Randolph Hanry Ash's poetic work: "His poetry began and ended with incarnated truths, unrepeated unique lives" (Byatt 109). This quotation demonstrates how the novel approaches subjectivity. On the one hand, it can be seen as the hybrid carrier of an abstract idea, an "incarnated truth" (Byatt 109). This presents what we could call the Modernist way of reading Byatt's characters and storylines as paler variations of a

mythical tale. On the other hand, the second part of the quote reflects upon the postmodern notion of subjectivity as an unrepeatable, unique idea. According to this latter interpretation, the characters of the Romance can also be seen as repetitions, metamorphosed forms, but rather than repeating a stable structure – as in the Modernist reading –, they mirror one another with no hierarchy between them. In this way, the ambiguous concept of subjectivity as presented in the novel leads us back to the questions: how the present subject is connected to the past (and vice versa); and to what extent the particular features of the subject can be integrated into universal forms.

There is a recurrent motif in the novel that dramatizes the complex reciprocal relationship between the past (with its stories and voices) and the present. The images of water and a pool, which appear several times in the text, can be read as the metaphors of their problematic relationship. Roland and Maud as contemporary characters, Ash and Christabel as Victorian figures all peer at their reflections in a pool, and Byatt provides an account of their experience in a riddling, metaphorical way. Christabel's poem about a frozen pool containing dead fish, which wait for the resuscitating power of the sun, is relived by Maud in the late twentieth century story when she visits the place, and, searching for fish in the frozen pool, can see only her own face, as well as "imperfections and reflections" (Byatt 142).

The quiet was absolute. It was beginning to snow again. Maud bowed her head with the self-consciousness of such a gesture, and thought of Christabel, standing here, looking at this frozen surface, darkly glowing under blown traces of snow.

And in the pool two fishes play
Argent and gules they shine away
Against the green against the grey
They flash upon a summer's day

And in the depth of wintry night
They slumber open-eyed and bright
Silver and red, a shadowed light
Ice-veiled and steadily upright.

A paradox of chilly fire
Of life in death, of quenched desire

That has no force, e'en to respire
Suspended until frost retire –

Were there fish? Maud crouched on the rim of the pool, her briefcase standing in snow beside her, and scraped with an elegant gloved hand at the snow on the ice. The ice was ridged and bubbly and impure. Whatever was beneath it could not be seen. She moved her hand in little circles, polishing, and saw, ghostly and pale in the metal-dark surface a woman's face, her own, barred like the moon under mackerel clouds, wavering up at her. . . .

'Are there fish?'

'All you can see is imperfections and reflections' (Byatt 141-2).

What both the poem and Maud's experience suggest is the ability of the fish to reflect and being reflected in us. Analogously, every work of art, piece of literature, every metaphor in the pool of art, literature and language functions as our metamorphosed reflection, which, being a representation, is always an imperfection. These fish are "there" (Byatt 1). Just as Byatt already suggests in the opening lines of the novel, modernist stable structures, or postmodern repetitions, metamorphosed forms are "there" – like the fish in the pool – and wait for us to reenlive them by recognizing our present in their past:

A paradox of chilly fire
Of life in death, of quenched desire
That has no force, e'en to respire
Suspended until the frost retire. (Byatt 142)

Therefore, the fish in the frozen pool are "life in death", the metaphors of metamorphosed forms waiting to be reanimated, turned into prosopopoeias by Pygmalion. Ash has a similar experience when going out for a ride he notices a creature in a pool "as still as though it was made of marble": "My horse and I stopped and stared. And the creature, stone-still always, stared back, with comfortable confidence, and a look, somehow, of command... I stared, it stared. It seemed to me a solid Poem" (Byatt 183). He even gives utterance of the implied. Instead of naming it an animal he alludes to it as a "creature", a "Poem", a product of artistic creation and he suggests that "such moments" of self-recognition in the metaphor "are poetry" (Byatt 182). On having a closer look

at Ash's account of his poetic experience it becomes conspicuous that his self-recognition in the "creature", that is a "Solid Poem", reenacts Pygmalion's prosopopoeic act. The "stone-still creature" in the pool is "made of marble", which echoes Pagan's artistic product, a stone sculpture. In this way, Ash, as a poet resuscitates Pygmalion's artistic figure, when, through the linguistic power of prosopopoeia, he notices his own reflection in the pool. Thus, at the same time, the "Solid Poem" might also refer to the situation of the creature and the poet-spectator: the poem is both the thing in the water (metamorphosed object) and the event of the encounter (the inception of the prosopopoeic activity of poetry). In this way, Ash joins Christabel and Maud, who are both able to recognize these moments of poetry, these experiences of self-recognition, which Narcissus failed to do, when, looking into the pool, he did not notice his own reflection in it.

James Joyce refers to these exceptional moments as epiphanies, as "sudden spiritual manifestations" (Joyce 51), in which a sudden realization or comprehension of a larger essence or meaning takes place. Often a seemingly insignificant phenomenon or experience illuminates a deeper frame of reference, to such a degree that it not only reinforces its own "organized composite structure" (Joyce 52), but it also affirms its partial status in a larger framework. Similarly, Christabel's poem, Ash's "moment of poetry" (Byatt 182) and Maud's pool-scene all can be read as "sudden spiritual manifestations", as "poetic moments of self-possession" (Miller, *Poets* 152), in which the characters come to realize their metamorphosed status in the vast flow of literature. From a modernist perspective we can read Christabel's, Maud's and Ash's "moments of poetry" (Byatt 182) as their recognition that their lives are only tales fallen into a myth, and, though individual, they are ceaselessly being turned into the general due to the non-representational nature of metamorphosis, thus of metaphor, language, myth and literature. Still, on the other hand, they also know that by recognizing their own fallenness into myth they are also reinterpreting and rewriting the myth, thus also changing it to some extent. This approach reflects the postmodern reading of the text, which would rather emphasize the diversity of their storylines generated through metamorphosis.

Based on "Wordsworth's essay on the origins of language as poetic language" (de Man, "Autobiography" 51) Paul de Man also analyses how we "see entities as interchangeable parts

of a whole”, when in our “first/Poetic spirit of life” (de Man, “Autobiography” 52) we start to perceive and comprehend the world through language. In this sense, Paul de Man investigates language as poetic language echoing Giambattista Vico’s theory of the originally metamorphic notion of languages, which supports the idea of the common origin of myth and metaphor. The novel also problematizes Vico’s notion of myth and poetic language as the entire plot of complex repetitions, as it were, springs from Vico’s *Scienza Nuova*, which is found by Roland at the beginning of the narrative. Thus, when Paul de Man reads Wordsworth’s poem he explores the “first/Poetic spirit of life” (de Man, “Autobiography” 52) as the origin of our perceiving and understanding the world through our poetic, metaphoric language. Seeing entities as parts of a whole, that is “making resemblance between terms that erases their differences and integrate them into wholes” (Chase 85) is identified by him with the notion of a totalizing metaphor, a “metaphorical synecdoche” (de Man, “Autobiography” 52). This means that when perceiving the natural world we tend to set up our own seemingly total systems of figures based on the logic of metaphor, the literalization of which is metamorphosis. Accordingly, perception will depend on the figurative, poetic nature of language, that is the totalizing power of metaphors: “The unlimited capacity of representation or figuration in fact is . . . a total dependency; this is the significance of the figure of ‘face’ ” (de Man, “Autobiography” 52).

Furthermore, this metamorphic or metaphorical moment of perception very much supports the idea that, through being given a face, reflection will always necessarily be an “imperfection” (Byatt 142). His point is that prosopopoeia implicitly rewards the face, a metaphor that is endowed to inanimate, dead intities. If this is the case, however, the giver of the face is also exposed to this: his/her face is also revealed as something given, attributed by a figure of subjectivity. That is why, for Paul de Man, face-giving is also inevitably a defacement. Therefore, he considers the figurative aspect of language not as an enabling but rather as an imprisoning phenomenon and uses the term “face” to refer to both the attributor and the attributed. As a result, he argues that due to the figurative, poetic nature of our language it is only our own faces that we can see in the natural world. Byatt’s characters also feel this kind of imprisonment: Maud and Ash even formulate how their experiences put them into

a confined, imprisoned state. While Maud thinks of her reflection as “barred like the moon under mackerel clouds” (Byatt 142), Ash writes about the commanding look of “the creature” (Byatt 183). In this sense, they both seem to hint at the metaphysical distance, which separates them from what they see in the water, or, if these episodes are read as repetitions of the Narcissus myth, the essential alienation, which is at the heart of the self (Lacan also talks about the barred subject). We are governed by our metaphors, which “eat up our world” (Byatt 253)⁷ and we can only be figurative, faceless characters recreating mythology.

However, Byatt’s *Possession* can be read as a positive reassurance of our thinking in metaphors. Although language is “essentially inadequate” (Byatt 473) and we can never possess the “essence” (our past, our surrounding world) wholly, we should find meaning exactly in the unrepresentative poetic nature of its metaphors. In turn, just like metamorphosis, metaphor can also be seen as the projection of our subjective and always deficient perception of the world. Like mythical metamorphosed forms, linguistic figures will also function as limited tools of representation, which, by presenting the particular in universal forms, create the unrepresentative deictic systems of their own. In this way, both myth and language will become poetic due to their common feature of repositing metaphors, that is, metamorphosed forms. In this way, by extending its thematic analysis, I examined how metamorphosis can be read as a self-reflexive metafigurative trope in the novel alluding to the unrepresentational, deictic nature of our representational systems in general. In argument with Solodow, who alludes to metamorphosis as “simplification”, “clarification” (Solodow 189), therefore a necessarily deictic representation, I argue that the novel presents our language of metaphors as also a deictic, metamorphosing system of arbitrary signs. To this extent language will become prosopopoeic in as much as its metaphores can give figures to external phenomena only by disfiguring them. Correspondingly, Byatt’s resuscitated storylines and recurrent character-types can be read only as figurative versions, metamorphosed forms of a core, mythical

⁷ At one point Roland also mentions his paranoid feelings about the imprisoning power of our linguistic structures: “Do you ever have the sense that our metaphors eat up our world? . . . everything connects and connects . . . It’s really powerlessness . . . We are so knowing. . . . Everything relates to *us* and so we’re imprisoned in ourselves – we can’t see *things*. . . .”

structure, which deprived of their true, individual faces (voices) wait for Pygmalion to give them voice and reenliven them.

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The Priest of the Normal and His Victims In Peter Shaffer's *Equus*

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Abstract: *My study on Peter Shaffer's Equus raises issues I believe to be central in the play, namely the debate regarding such concepts as: reality, normality, madness, civilization, truth, right and wrong. Shaffer merely needed a background to uncover the relativity of these concepts and of the modern reality itself. Reality has no substance, is an illusion, this is what Martin Dysart, the main character of the play, discovers. Therefore he chooses to make the journey back - with the help of Alan Strang, another key character in the play - from modern society to the purity of perception, leaving behind all conventions.*

Key words: *reality, normality, victim, diegesis, "limit-modernist"*

Peter Shaffer, like most playwrights of his generation, focuses his creative energy on the rebellion against social conformity, which is perceived to be the archenemy of creativity and individuality. Society is perceived, by these writers, as a sterile space filled with lies, falsity and immorality. So the battleground with modern society and its evils is transferred onto fiction. This is the reason their heroes are often teenagers in conflict with the older generations, as in Peter Shaffer's *Five Finger Exercise*, Shaffer's first big success, in 1958, where Clive is in permanent conflict with his father and the pseudo-values he stands for; or in *Billy the Liar* by Willis Hall and Keith Waterhouse, in which Billy, the main character, creates for himself worlds of imagination, rejecting altogether the world of adults. In John Osborne's plays (*Epitaph for George Dillon*, *Look Back in Anger*, *Inadmissible Evidence*, etc.) we find the same outline: the conflict between the main characters and the mediocrity of social life, which finally overpowers and defeats them.

The drama developing in most of these plays and also their common feature is the feeling of entrapment between two worlds: the modern civilization and the world of imagination that

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the characters attempt to build for themselves; while they cannot escape the first, they often cannot make the latter solid enough to support their own weight.

Peter Shaffer's *Equus* was first presented by The National Theatre in London in 1973. The Director of the play was John Dexter, who seems to have had a lasting professional relationship with Peter Shaffer, by also directing other plays written by the author, such as *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Black Comedy*. The action of the play was inspired by an actual crime that the author had heard about from a friend, involving a disturbed young man who blinded several horses. In *A Note on the Play* the author mentions, however, that: "Every person and incident in *Equus* is of my own invention, save the crime itself" (Shaffer 201).

In *Equus*, Peter Shaffer raises the same thematic concerns, represented under the form of several conflicts: the one between the material world and the world of imagination, accentuating the incompatibilities between them, both ontological and structural; between modern and ancient civilization; between sanity and insanity; between real and fake values; between light and darkness, etc.

All these contradictory ideas are embodied in two symbolic characters, representing two different fictional realms: Alan Strang, the teenage "madman", who is the ambassador of a carefully constructed world, "the place of Ha Ha", but with a real geography (the stables and the field) and a real God, *Equus*; and Martin Dysart, the psychiatrist, the Priest of the Normal. Judging by his profession and role within the text, he seems to be the character responsible for restoring normality. But during the process of curing Alan, Dysart reaches the problematic core of the play: the unsubstantial concepts of reality and normality, which seem more and more inconsistent to him, as Alan's reality becomes more and more concrete.

1. Is normality a wise objective?

Alan Strang arrives in Dysart's psychiatric care at Hesther Salomon's intervention, after blinding six horses with a metal spike. Hesther, a friend of Martin's, is one of the magistrates who tried Alan's case. She considers Alan to be a highly disturbed young man in desperate need of Dysart's expertise. At the beginning, there is no communication between doctor and patient;

Alan's only response to Dysart's questions consists of television jingles, as a way of pointing out the absurdity of the modern world the psychiatrist represents. The patient begins to open up to Martin only as Martin opens up to him.

The psychiatrist reaches him by using means typical for a detective story, recreating step by step Alan's background: he grew up in an environment of conflicting ideas, his mother being a fanatical Christian and his father an atheist; both his parents undermined each other's authority, confusing their child; he constructed his own reality as his parents did not provide him with a solid perception of the world. Then, other important episodes like the replacement of a picture representing the crucifixion of Jesus with the picture of a horse, his mother's stories (inspired by both Christian and pagan thought), the prohibitions imposed by his father, his job in an electronics store, where he met Jill, who got him his job at the stables, all crystallize more and more the geography of his reality.

Dysart attempts to determine how all these factors could have driven Alan into blinding the horses. While trying to understand the boy's inner motivations, the psychiatrist also undergoes a process of transformation. This is a very short presentation of what happens in the play. But the author's focus is not on what happens, but on the concepts of reality, truth, normality, right and wrong, etc. The author brought them on stage in order to uncover their relativity and also of the modern reality itself. Reality has no substance, it is an illusion. People set up conventions in order to feel something concrete and then they fool themselves that these conventions make up the substance of reality. But what people actually do is deceive themselves and step further and further into a fictitious universe of their own making. By trying to bring Alan Strang into the "normal" world Dysart makes a life-turning discovery. What he realizes is that if you take away the web of conventions, what you are left with is nothing. So this prompts him to find out some answers for himself:

Why? Moments snap together like magnets, forging a chain of shackles. Why? I can trace them. I can even, with time, pull them apart again. But why, at the start, they were ever magnetized at all - just those particular moments of experience and no others - I don't know. And nor does anyone else. Yet if I don't know - if I can never know that - then what am I doing here? I don't mean clinically doing or

socially doing- I mean *fundamentally!* These questions, these Whys are fundamental- yet they have no place in a consulting room. So then, do I? .. This is the feeling more and more with me - No Place. Displacement ... (Shaffer 268)

So, instead of watching Alan's expected journey to normality, the spectator/reader discovers that Alan is not the only character in motion, but Dysart is too. He aims to return to the purity of perception, leaving behind all that is artificial and all the common places of thought by stripping off all social conventionalities. What makes Alan the perfect character to help Dysart is the fact that he lacks the code of normality, which makes him unable to grasp the modern world:

He can hardly read. He knows no physics or engineering to make the world real for him. No paintings to show him how others have enjoyed it. No music except television jingles. No history except tales from a desperate mother. No friends. Not one kid to give him a joke, or make him know himself more moderately. He's a modern citizen for whom society doesn't exist. (Shaffer 273)

However, this lack of understanding goes both ways, as the modern world is also unable to decipher the logic of Alan's actions.

2. Who is the victim and who is the victimizer?

At the beginning of the play, when Alan is placed under the psychiatric care of Martin Dysart, after blinding the horses, he is presented as a violent, deeply disturbed young man, whose actions seem to be both cruel and illogical. But right after Alan is presented as a victimizer, Martin has a dream that shifts the entire perspective:

That night I had a very explicit dream. In it I am a chief priest in Homeric Greece. I'm wearing a wide gold mask (...) I'm officiating at some immensely important ritual sacrifice (...) The sacrifice is a herd of children (...) On either side of me stand two assistant priests, and absolutely tireless. As each child steps forward, they grab it from behind and throw it over the stone (...) And with each victim, it's getting worse. My face is going green behind the mask. Of course I redouble my efforts to look professional - cutting and snipping for all I'm worth: mainly because I know that if ever those two

assistants so much as glimpse my distress - and the implied doubt that this repetitive and smelly work is doing any social good at all - I will be the next across the stone. And then, of course - the damn mask begins to slip ... (Shaffer 216-217).

After confessing his dream to the audience, he tells Hesther that it was Alan's face he saw on every victim across the stone. So, from the position of the victimizer, Alan is placed on the one of the victim, and Dysart himself appears as the executioner who sacrifices Alan on the altar of the Normal:

The Normal is the good smile in a child's eyes - all right. It is also the dead stare in a million adults. It both sustains and kills - like a God. It is the ordinary made beautiful; it is also the Average made lethal. The Normal is the indispensable, murderous God of Health and I am his Priest. My tools are very delicate. My compassion is honest. I have honestly assisted children in this room. I have talked away terrors and relieved many agonies. But also - beyond question - I have cut from them parts of individuality repugnant to this God, in both his aspects. Parts sacred to rarer and more wonderful Gods. And at what length ... Sacrifices to Zeus took at the most, surely, sixty seconds each. Sacrifices to the Normal can take as long as sixty months." (Shaffer 257)

The Normal seems to be the most demanding God of all, swallowing every part of people's individuality and modern society is his hunting ground. Dysart feels like a pawn in this evil game and after having had this revelation he starts thinking that the price to pay is too high. This is the moment his social mask begins to slip and he realizes that he wants to exit this world.

Alan's journey is backwards. Alan's world is set until he starts dating Jill, but from there on everything changes for him. They go to watch an erotic movie and then they return to the stables to make love. That is the moment when the two realities overlap: Alan's sacred reality ruled by God Equus (i.e. "horse" in Latin) and the modern civilization with its temptress, Jill. He desires Jill, but he cannot perceive her, as Equus keeps getting in the way:

ALAN [to DYSART]: I couldn't ... see her.

DYSART: What do you mean?

ALAN [to DYSART]: Only Him. Every time I kissed her- He was in the way.

ALAN: (...) When I shut my eyes, I saw Him at once. The streaks on his belly ... [with more desperation] I couldn't feel her flesh at all! I wanted the foam off his neck. His sweaty hide. Not flesh. Hide! Horse-hide!... Then I couldn't even kiss her." (Shaffer 294-295).

The two realities clash together, his erotic imagery goes into contradiction with the imagery of the world he had built for himself and he feels like he is about to defile his Temple. That is why he cannot perform erotically. He feels trapped between two worlds: his own, with mechanisms borrowed from the ancient societies, and the one of civilization that has just become enticing to him because of its ambassador, Jill.

In this text Jill's role resembles the one of the harlot in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, who draws Enkidu into the civilized world. Also in the *Bible*, Eve is responsible for the descent from Eden into the world of pain and suffering. In these texts the woman has a double symbolism: she is both an initiator and a vitiator.

Although in this text Jill failed to extract him from his world, what she managed to do, however, was create tension, which will ultimately make him turn against his own beliefs. Alan becomes angry, sends Jill away, and as anger triggers violence, he channels it towards the horses. Rene Girard underlines the sacred character of the victim and its innocence. So Alan's behavior is justified if we apply the logic of ancient ritualistic sacrifices. But in this case, Alan's act is ambivalent: rage channeled towards the innocent and also the intention of freeing himself from the world he had created, by turning against its God. This act resembles in symbolism the crucifixion of Jesus - parallels between Equus and Jesus are drawn within the text. Alan's actions however seem meaningless and plain mad in the outlines of modern society.

Girard provides an explanation: the modern society fails to perceive the ritualistic background because it lacks the idea of Divinity. (Girard 15) So if this is taken out of the equation, then the ritualistic sacrifice is perceived as madness, because it makes no sense. This explains why the modern society perceives Alan to be mad and labels him as such. Dysart is able to put things in perspective as he gains access to the mechanisms and logic of ancient societies. However, the final push to "normality" is given to Alan by Dysart:

I'll heal the rash on his body. I'll erase the welts cut into his mind by flying manes. When that's done, I'll set him on a nice mini-scooter and send him pattering off into the Normal world where animals are treated properly: Made extinct, or put into servitude, or tethered all their lives in dim light, just to feed it! I'll give him the good Normal world where we're tethered beside them - blinking our nights away in a non-stop drench of cathode-ray over our shriveling heads! I'll take away his field of Ha Ha, and give him Normal places for his ecstasy- multi-lane highways driven through the guts of cities, extinguishing Place altogether, even the idea of Place! He'll trot on his metal pony tamely through the concrete evening - and one thing I promise you: he will never touch hide again! With any luck his private parts will come to feel as plastic to him as the products of the factory to which he will almost certainly be sent. Who knows? He might even come to find sex funny. Bit of grunt funny. Trampled and furtive and entirely in control. Hopefully he'll feel nothing at his fork but Approved Flesh. I doubt, however, with much passion!... Passion, you see, can be destroyed by a doctor. It cannot be created. (Shaffer 299-300).

From Dysart's sarcastic discourse at the end of the play we understand that his act of bringing Alan to *normality* is nothing but a reenactment of his dream, a symbolic sacrifice which he has to perform in order to enter his patient's world, just like Alan had to sacrifice the horses in order to exit.

3. A "limit-modernist" text?

In regard to the construction of the play, one can easily notice a shift from *mimesis* to *diegesis*. The play begins with Dysart addressing the audience and there are several more instances when he confesses directly to the audience, acknowledging the spectators' presence and offering them a position of both observers and participants: "The thing is, I'm desperate ... ". The frame of the play is narrative:

"I'm sorry. I'm not making much sense. Let me start properly; in order. It began one Monday last month, with Hesther's visit" (Shaffer 210).

Dysart plays the part of a subjective narrator who stages his own limited perspective and account of the events, doubled by his own thoughts and concerns. Narration in drama is a largely

widespread technique, yet undertheorized, as Brian Richardson points out.

According to Richardson's categories, *Equus*, as well as *Amadeus*, is a *memory play*. These are, according to the author, "partially enacted homodiegetic narratives in which the narrator is also a participant in the events he or she recounts and enacts" (Richardson 682). This is why we have unlimited access to Martin Dysart's thoughts, doubts, insecurities (as he expresses them directly to the audience), but we cannot reach the other characters at that same depth because they seem to be nothing more than instruments used by Dysart in order to reenact the events. That is why the other characters come forward, play their parts, and then they resume their place on a bench and expect their turn again, like actors in Martin's play.

By unveiling Alan's reality little by little through Dysart's reconstructing efforts, the author places the content of the play into a modernist matrix. We easily recognize the *epistemological dominant*, as described by Brian McHale (McHale 9). But, although Dysart's attempts to enter Alan's world and understand it are typically epistemological in nature, they prompt Dysart into creating his own reality, based on Alan's. This way the *epistemological dominant* makes way for the *ontological one*, marked at the end of the play by Dysart's questions, which indicate the shift (McHale 10): "What way is this? What dark is this? ... "(Shaffer 301)

The main character's need to create himself another world is provided by the incapability of the modern world to give an answer to the cognitive questions stated by him at the beginning of the play. The shift towards the *ontological dominant* appears necessary in this context. The modernist matrix seems insufficient and the need for postmodernist solutions is therefore created. Alan's projected world reminds Dysart of his own, which resurfaces through repetitive dreams and warns the psychiatrist about the implications of his job. Of course, the Ancient Greece Dysart refers to is, like Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, part history, part invention. But for the character it becomes more and more real, as he invests in it. Reaching the end of the play, I find deeply significant the fact that we do not hear the voice of the marginal, the madman, trying to legitimize his reality. We hear instead the voice of the psychiatrist, who not only understands the reality of the madman, but seeks shelter in it and thus legitimizes it. It's like

a reverse *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, from the perspective of the psychiatrist. Here, the voice of the marginal is encapsulated in the psychiatrist's discourse. The implications are far reaching because, surprisingly, the ontological perspective is legitimized by using means that are typical for the epistemological perspective. This is what Brian McHale would call a massive, maybe even fatal, hemorrhage of modernist poetics.

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Feminist and Feminine Issues in the Theatre of Pam Gems and Marsha Norman

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Abstract: *As major representatives of feminist drama, Pam Gems and Marsha Norman raise the issue of woman's condition in patriarchal society with unconventional theatrical strategies. Focusing on women's experiences from a feminist perspective, they highlight the mental patterns and social practices that lead to gender differences and social injustice. The main objective of the article is to illustrate the originality of their interpretation of woman in a theatre that challenges the audience's deeply ingrained convictions.*

Key Words: *Feminism, drama, gender, difference, patriarchal*

1. Feminist Drama, a Revolution in 20th Century Theatre

Related to the broader feminist movement of the twentieth century, feminist theatre is primarily concerned with the criticism of the dominant culture because it establishes gender differences and a hierarchical distinction between men and women. Echoing Brecht's view that theatre may serve as a medium for social and political reformation, the feminist dramatists' intention is to encourage the audience not only to think about the events performed on the stage, but also to provoke a change in women's status. In spite of its polemical and subversive role, feminist theatre avoids simplifications and ideological stereotypes, for it reflects on women's condition by introducing "areas of experience that the stage traditionally ignored" and by "developing styles designed as a radical contrast to the standard dramatic forms." (Innes, 2002: 49). In other words, feminist playwrights aim at a theatrical revolution in content and dramatic structure, exploring themes such as gender oppression, sexuality and sexual difference, race or cultural inferiority by means of unconventional staging strategies.

Commenting on Michelene Wandor's theory of feminist drama, Christopher Innes shows that the "category of woman-

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writer” represents “a species of creativity” whose major purpose is to challenge “the dominant image” of the male-writer and common ideologies “in which the male concern is the norm”. (Innes, 2002:449) Strictly speaking, feminist drama has embarked upon reinterpreting women’s experience from new perspectives which differ from the conventional male representations of the female mind and feminine feelings, reconstituting woman both as a subject and object of knowledge.

To highlight the contribution of feminist drama to the development of the twentieth century theatre, we have selected the work of two major women playwrights, Pam Gems and Marsha Norman. The former depicts female figures transformed in cultural symbols by society (*Queen Christina*-1977, *Piaf*-1978, *Camille*-1984) challenging the audience’s expectations. The latter focuses on ordinary women dramatizing instances of self-searching in *Getting Out* (1977), where a paroled woman reviews her life to understand her present condition, and of relentless self-examination in *Night Mother* (1983), where a daughter explains to her mother why she has decided to commit suicide.

In their drama, both Pam Gems and Marsha Norman demonstrate that gender is a cultural product generated by patriarchal society which imposes gender-roles on men and women, requiring them to be different and behave differently, and accept the established order. It is an oppressive and discriminating ideology according to which “A woman only becomes a wife, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human dictaphone in certain relations.” (Rubin, 1978:18) From the roles assigned to women by the social system, the two playwrights choose prostitutes as their main characters in *Camille* and *Getting Out*. Their heroines embody unprivileged women submitted to men’s domination, or, as Teresa de Lauretis states, “the- other-from man (nature and Mother, site of sexuality and masculine desire, sign and object of men’s social exchange”. (Lauretis, 1984: 5)

2. Reinterpreting a Classic Story

In *Camille* (1984), Gems debunks the romantic universe and tragic sentimentalism characteristic of the works of Dumas and Verdi, revealing the naked reality behind the mask of conventions. Faithful to her aesthetic creed according to which feminist theatre should be “subversive” by revealing gender inequalities, she rejects the innocence of the characters in *The Ladies of the Camellias* or

La Traviata depicting the hopeless and dark world of prostitutes like Marguerite, Prudence, Sophie, Bela and Clemence, exploited by men who act as agents of power over their bodies and lives. As a product of a male-oriented society, the prostitute assumes a role which is generally accepted through a long, painful and degrading process including “rape and economic coercion” as well as “the more subtle and lasting effects of ideology, representation and identification” (Lauretis, 1984: 134).

In Gems’ play, Marguerite’s way of living is rooted in the traumas experienced in her childhood and adolescence, as she was frequently molested by the men in her family and made pregnant by the Marquis who employed her as a housemaid. Like all the other women in the play, she is coerced into obedience to men and dependency on them for financial survival. But it is in the depraved world in which she lives that she finds herself capable of passionate love. Ironically, she becomes infatuated with Armand, the Marquis’s son who, in his turn, is a debauched homosexual. It is obvious that Gems departs from Dumas’ story shifting the emphasis from romanticism to a moral context in order to provoke the audience to question social conventions and beliefs.

In spite of the fact that Marguerite endures social injustice and sexual oppression, she is able to confront the dominant male system and find her own voice by loving Armand. They consummate their love in the countryside, an idyllic place where Armand envisages life as togetherness in a new future, freed from the constraints of the present: “...our aim. To live – to support our children – to read – to think – and be as clear as we can.” But, as Innes notices, the protagonists will show conflicting visions of love (2002: 50). While Armand considers that their love is a matter of personal choice beyond other considerations (“It’s simple. We choose to live...You are here, and I am here, and it is decided between us”), Marguerite, as a feminist voice, believes that their happiness depends on the strategies she may use to get power and independence in a world that reduces her to a simple object of men’s desire (“it’s in your interest and in mine to guard my freedom. God knows it costs me enough”).

Contradicting the prevailing ideology that leads women to view themselves as passive objects handled by men for economic purposes, Marguerite takes the first step to constructing her individuality as an active subject, redefining her identity within the established order. Living in a system of power from which women

are excluded, she is aware that acting according to her personal needs and aspirations as a human being may require compromise, effort and subtlety. Moreover, the feminist context of the play justifies the strong feeling of sisterhood that bind together the prostitutes compelled to accept marginalization, suffering and alienation in society. As Lynda Hart points out, Marguerite's personality is defined not only by her love for Armand but also by her relations with her female friends: "Throughout the play, the women who have survived and succeeded by trading their bodies...depend on one another for support, love and advice" (Hart, 1989: 110).

Gems' critique of a society in which gender, economic and class differences constitute the norm reaches its climax when showing how different forces conspire against the pair of lovers. Thus, Armand is threatened by his father with bankruptcy and disinheritance, and also with putting Marguerite in prison, whereas, the Russian Prince, who is Armand's former male lover, tries to commit suicide in order to prevent Armand from leaving him. On the other hand, the Marquis kidnaps Jean Paul, his illegitimate child, from Marguerite and forces her into choosing between himself and Armand by exploiting her feelings of motherhood. In this manner, gender-roles and the authority of the powerful individual are restored, leaving her no alternative: if she accepts to break up with Armand and becomes the obedient woman she used to be, her boy will be adopted and raised by the Marquis. As can be seen, the lovers are forced into submission through "financial and emotional blackmail" (Innes, 2002: 455) which puts a dramatic end to their aspiration for equality between the sexes and hope for a better life. Armand's bitter final questions ("Were we so threatening? One man? One woman?) suggest his feeling of powerlessness in the confrontation with oppressive forces that do not tolerate the self-determination and autonomy of the weak. Ironically, in a feminist context it is a marginalized homosexual male who is able to identify with the female role.

It is also important to mention that Pam Gems changes the classic storyline and the characters' delineation in order to reinterpret cultural stereotypes through a feminine and feminist angle of vision. If Dumas' protagonist represents a childless courtesan whose existence centres on her deep feelings for Armand, Gems' more complex character epitomizes the feminine values that society expects her to prove. Consequently, her love for

little Jean Paul will prevail over her passion for Armand. Equally important, Marguerite's death scene loses the melodramatic feature characteristic of the French author's novel, where the heroine dies from tuberculosis, leaving spectators the liberty to judge the moment in the light of the gender and social issues brought to their attention throughout the play. Even its problematic ending invites them, in a Brechtian manner, to ponder over Marguerite's sad story and draw their own conclusions from the issues presented on the stage.

Armand. I have no life.

Prudence. Poor Armand. You thought to rescue Marguerite Gautier and you lost her. (*He does not reply.*)

Perhaps, after all, she preferred her freedom. (*He looks up.*)

Has it never occurred to you that some of us might prefer the life – given the alternatives?

Armand. No. No. (*He rises.*) You killed her.

3. Searching for Self-identity

If Gems exposes “the gender bias in received images of well-known women, reinterpreting history from a female perspective”, (Innes, 2002: 453), Marsha Norman chooses a low status woman to tackle feminist problems on the stage. In *Getting Out*, the protagonist of the play is Arlene Holsclaw who, after being released from prison where she served eight years for murder, starts her new life in a cheap flat in Louisville, Kentucky, struggling hard to free herself from her former life of crime. Arlene's attempts to reconstruct her identity in the present are permanently disrupted by flashbacks to her rebellious youth, or of her prison days (when her name was Arlie). The protagonist's different personalities, Arlene and Arlie, are played by distinct performers, sometimes simultaneously, showing a constant pendulation between her two selves in the effort to restore the unity of her broken soul. As Blumenfeld rightly argues (1998: 95), Marsha Norman's play is feminist because, among other numerous reasons, it shows “identity as the point of departure of the process of self-consciousness, a process by which one begins to know how she as a subject is specifically and materially en-gendered in the social conditions and possibilities of existence.” At the same time, the interplay between Arlie and Arlene, which enacts episodes from the protagonist's previous life, enables the audience to understand the external pressures that led her into the wrong way of living.

The division of the stage is highly suggestive for the heroine's feelings and state of mind. Thus, the central area, represented by the dingy one-room flat, is designed for performing events that occur in the present, while a catwalk of stairs and the prison cells surrounding the flat serve as playing areas for her memories. The enclosure of the flat (which is a visual metaphor for entrapment) and the dramatization of the prison environment stand for the heroine's imprisoned condition in both hypostases, as Arlene and as Arlie. The motif of the window bars mentioned in the stage directions also reinforces the feeling of confinement that haunts the heroine:

Arlene:...[*Points to a spot near the window.*] I could put a cloth on it and sit an look out the...[*She pulls the curtains the curtains apart, sees the bars on the window.*] What's these bars doin here?

Bennie: [*Stops moving the trunk.*] I think they're to keep out burglars, you know. [*Sits on the trunk.*]

Arlene: Yeah, I know.

Outside the prison, Arlene tries hard to adjust herself to the requirements of society and to be different from her former self, Arlie, as much as possible. But, despite her best endeavours, she learns a new humiliating lesson, being rejected as an undesirable outsider because of the social role that patriarchal society imposed on her (for instance, she cannot be employed as a beautician, the job that she was trained for in prison, and has to work as a dishwasher, one of the low-paid, menial jobs traditionally destined for ex-convicts). In this way she discovers that the world she lives in is another kind of prison whose discriminating rules and multiple constraints condemn her to a powerless position.

Arlene's history of oppression and subordination is similar to the one of Camille, the heroine of *Pam Gems*. As with Camille, her moral decline began in childhood when she was sexually abused by her father, neglected by a selfish and heartless mother, or declared hopeless by the head teacher of the school that she attended. As an adolescent, dominated by anger and unaware of her true nature and identity, she engaged in menial crimes and became a prostitute, letting her self be exploited by Carl, her pimp and lover.

Like *Gems*, Norman brings the feminine value of motherhood to the fore in order to reinforce the inequalities and

social injustice that women suffer in a male dominated society. As a mother deprived of her newborn baby by the prison doctors, Arlie represents a deeply hurt and frustrated woman who fights for her natural rights, no matter the consequences (for example, the episode presenting Arlie's escape from prison, followed by the murder of the cabdriver who assaulted her). As shown in the dialogue with her insensitive mother, Arlene's bond with her child transcends time, leaving room for the hope that one day she will regain Joey, the son who never knew her:

Arlene: But I'm his mother.

Mother: [*Interrupting*] See, now you don't have to be worryin. No kids, no worryin.

Arlene: He just had his birthday, you know.

For Arlie, life in prison meant a continual struggle for survival and resistance to sexual advances from both prison guards and female inmates. Moreover, she underwent a taming process that turned her from a rebel into a submissive woman. If in *Camille*, "all elements of society collaborate against" Marguerite and Armand (Innes, 2002: 455), in Arlie's case it is the institutions (family, school, prison and church) together with their representatives that bear the responsibility for her depersonalization. As Blumenfeld puts it "from priest to guards, the men in *Getting Out* reduce Arlene to a sexual identity that corresponds to their own desires, a situation that seriously confuses Arlene's sense of self and, with it, her ability to act in her own interest." (Blumenfeld, 1998: 105)

In contrast with Arlie, her former personality, Arlene has the will and power to build her sense of autonomy and self-esteem, being now able to make her own choices and control her life. Consequently, she rejects Bennie, the prison guard who is sexually interested in her, Carl, her ex-pimp whose financial exploitation drove her to crime, and her selfish mother, always unresponsive to her sufferings. Furthermore, she discovers the meaning of friendship and trust in people due to her neighbour Ruby, also a former convict, who offers her advice, support and encouragement whenever she feels alone and powerless: "well, you can wash dishes to pay the rent on your slum, or you can spread your legs for any shit that's got ten dollars." Fully aware of the fact that she has to cope with poverty and social constraints, Arlene decides to choose Ruby's way of living. Thus, by coming to terms

with her past and by unifying her split personality, she manages to define her identity and accept herself as she is.

4. Conclusions

As leading representatives of feminist drama, Pam Gems and Marsha Norman dramatize stories of used and abused women who oppose economic, social and sexual discrimination in a male-dominated society. The dramatic condition of Camille and Arlene reflects “that the inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced by cultural construction of gender differences.” (Morris, 1993: 1) Both playwrights challenge the typical roles assigned to women by patriarchal tradition presenting self-determined characters capable of reconstructing themselves as autonomous individuals within the very norms and standards that constitute their source of entrapment. At the same time, the protagonists’ feelings of despair, alienation, loneliness and emptiness include the dramatists’ feminist concerns in a wider concept of theatre that mirrors human condition in modern society.

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Feminine Identity Discourses In Christa Wolf's and Elfriede Jelinek's Novels

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Abstract: *My paper follows the way in which the feminine identity is constructed and deconstructed in Christa Wolf's and Elfriede Jelinek's novels. In the context of postmodern literature, the feminine and the masculine become principles inside a system of power in which identity is built not on moral grounds, like in the traditional culture, but on ideological grounds. The undermining of the centralizing discursive power pertaining to the patriarchal model, and the deconstruction of authority either in the social ideology (Jelinek), or in the historical one (Wolf) are closely followed in my paper in order to answer the following question: do these books challenge only in a subversive manner a culture dominated by masculinity or are they also attempts of building a new humanism?*

Key words: *identity, postmodernism, system of power, authority, humanism*

Postmodernism is oriented towards the relegation of any suspicious or conventional authority and of centred thought. The alternative discourses which are promoted by postmodernist fiction undermine the traditional and standardized ties referring to such concepts as: God, father, state, man, all symbols of centralized power. Without annihilating them, postmodernism imposes a pluralizing rhetoric, as Linda Hutcheon² shows, in which the manifold, the heterogeneous, the different, the marginal, the collateral affirm their rights to speech. To be marginal both inside and out means to have a different perspective, a weak one, as it lacks the centring force. It is not a new form of centring that this new orientation is searching for, but the affirmation of plurality and, through this, the disappearance of centrality in cultural thought.

The change in perspective implies, however, the reconfiguration of reality itself. There is not a single reality, but a plurality of possible realities, depending on the assumed

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² Linda Hutcheon, *Poetica postmodernismului*, Editura Univers, București, 2002.

perspective, just like history is nothing but a narration which legitimizes the events from the perspective of the dominant discourse or of a contextual viewpoint. Christa Wolf's book, *Cassandra*, retells in a different way, under the form of a parabolic novel, the history of Troy from Cassandra's perspective (the sibyl), framing an alternative narration to the „official” one, present in Homer's epic. The epic is seen by the Christa Wolf as an assumed discourse by a society dominated by a patriarchal, phallogocentric mentality. This idea is enunciated by the main feminine character, who is also the narrator.

Cassandra becomes thus the voice of the marginal, being not only the repressed individual feminine voice, but she manages to capture all the possible voices of marginality. Her narration is done both in an oral and virtual form as well as in a written form, writing being a means of self expression and difference, but also a way of undermining the patriarchal discourse of oppression. But there is also another perspective. The act of textualization, the written word, belongs to the dominating, masculine discourse, i.e to the Homeric text, written by a man, fixating the historical reality from the masculine perspective. However, the Homeric text is also the narration of the winner. The virtual narration Cassandra frames, which is not written but intended for oral transmission, is also a form of imposing knowledge by means of narrativity, a weaker alternative discourse, situated as well under the sign of fiction, just like the Homeric text. But the masculine discourse of the winner is not complete without the feminine one, written from the perspective of the defeated Trojans.

This truth of Troy, known only by women, is the one Cassandra wishes to preserve in her last moments of life. Although she knows she is bound to die by Clitemnestra's hand, she is thinking about salvation only in order to give an alternative record to the official epic of the Trojan War, this frail epic belonging to the repressed perspective.

The methodizing, integrating voice of the Homeric poem is replaced, therefore, by the hesitating, erratic voice of the feminine character, Cassandra, whose confession is guided by the sinuous principles of search and knowledge: the way towards self and towards truth of the feminine character. Around her are built a series of destinies and identities, each having their own truth, parallel with the collective voice, which avoids the truth and

therefore clashes. An entire universe collapses under the weight of representation, as Troy becomes the world itself. The history of Troy represents the history of a collapsed humanity, under the burden of its own mistaken representations.

The writer asks herself in the essay preceding the novel: „To what extent is there a «feminine» literature? To the extent that for historical, biological reasons, women live in a different reality than men. They perceive reality differently as compared to men and they express it differently. To the extent that women are not among those dominating, but among those who are dominated, belonging for centuries to the category of objects, most often second class objects belonging to men (...) to the extent that they stop making the useless effort to integrate in the delirium of dominating systems.”³

The novel, *Cassandra*, would qualify as a *historiographic metafiction*, as Linda Hutcheon defines them in her book, *A Poetics of Postmodernism 4*, narratives which revisit history from an ironical and critical perspective, questioning the credibility of the legitimizing narratives belonging to any established system in history. As credibility is concerned, history itself achieves in postmodernism a fictional character because, just like historiography, literature redeems history in an imaginative form, making out of it an intellectual construct, a „system of signification”.

In *Cassandra*, we witness a *refocalization* of historiography from the perspective of the ones who were excluded from the „official” version of the Homeric text: the voice of the individual woman, or collective women, present in the discourse of a symbolical subjectivity, the one of Cassandra, in the terms of the untold stories of women.

Christa Wolf’s historiographic metafiction offers a pluralist vision which refuses the narrative of a privileged group, feeding itself not on the historic reality, but on the textual construct of the Homeric narrative. It becomes a second degree narrative, due to the narrative repositioning and to the shift of perspective. A paraphrase which deconstructs a previous discourse and in which intertextuality places under doubt its truth as it imposes in parallel a textual alternative of thought and knowledge.

³ Christa Wolf, *Premisele unei povestiri*, in *Casandra*, Editura Univers, București, 1990, pg. 156.

⁴ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Routledge, New York, 1988.

In the present case, as it associates with satire, the intertext takes more precise ideological dimensions. From this perspective, as the novel does not attack only a system of reference, but also the textual discourse which legitimizes this system of reference, we can speak rather about „interdiscourse”, a concept which is found, by Linda Hutcheon more suitable for this type of postmodern narratives.

The reaffirmation of femininity as subject rather than object, as it appears in the Homeric narrative is yet another polemic ambition of the novel and its author builds here forms of multiple subjectivity, as Cassandra’s voice collects all the other feminine voices around her. The subject is ideologically marked by the gender category, but it is also a form of problematizing subjectivity, interrogative to a large extent, which affirms with the same violence it denies. Between “no” and “yes” Cassandra’s identity emerges, imposing by means of her own narrative a series of values and a humanist and feminist discourse: liberty of thought and action, self-determination, rationalization.

Cassandra is the favourite daughter of king Priam and Queen Hecuba, whose marriage had been extremely fruitful. Cassandra’s destiny is placed from the beginning under the sign of a fracture, which fact will determine her wavering structure: she is trapped between the voice of blood and her own voice, which is placed under the sign of tragic guilt, coming in the form of the gift of prophecy.

From the perspective of the women, the war has nothing glorious; the political and strategic decisions taken under the name of victory become unacceptable compromises, which are against humanism and life. The war ultimately degenerates in a general prostitution in which almost all who don’t see it, lose their dignity and those who do, become victims themselves.

Cassandra’s drama appears here as a drama of separation, of differentiation because by means of self-knowledge the heroine becomes aware of human nature in general and also of the saddest truth: the repeatability of human history. But for conquering these supreme truths the character must follow the difficult and dramatic road of separation: separation of the city, of her dear father, of people in order to become a marginal. The loss of affiliation, the loss of *us*, which the character keeps repeating in her confession, represents the painful gain of her own identity, which is the cursed gift of Apollo. Becoming the priestess of the

truth, not of Apollo, whom she rejects, Cassandra realizes, finally, that her identity has been acquired through the sacrifice of not belonging to anyone but herself and to the force which had possessed her.

Cassandra vacillates from the beginning to the end between a centrality which had lost its substance and a marginality which is ignored. To be ignored means to stop existing and this non-existence is one of the sources of tragedy. As any tragic character, however, she forces the limits and continues to affirm her existence, even being aware, at a certain point, that her battle is lost, just like Troy's is. There are no winners in *this* war. The fight is not only between Troy and the Greeks, but also between two ideological discourses, out of which the feminine one cannot but undermine the other, but not defeat it. The patriarchal society and its representatives are elaborating a discourse of power and dominance. The discourse of power, although preoccupied with permanent self legitimization, cannot be however legitimized from the exterior. From the exterior it can be only regarded with criticism and irony, but it cannot be centred. The centre of power is in fact in its own legitimizing discourse. What is constant, however, in the majority of the writings on power is their delirious character, based on a certain fictionalization of reality. Out of two different discourses emerge two different realities, or rather different representations of reality. At a certain point Cassandra vacillates also in order to avoid both extremes and firm opinions, knowing that the latter can become dangerous.

What is, thus, the tragic guilt of the character? One of these culpabilities may be the ambition of possessing the gift of prediction without foreseeing its consequences. Another form of culpability may be the refusal to accept the copulation with Apollo after receiving the gift, tricking him. He will punish her for that. The refusal to obey a masculine deity already announces her war against the dominating, patriarchal attitude, anticipating also the separation of the father who symbolizes the masculine deity. Cassandra decides, by accepting this gift, not to truly belong to anyone, neither to the god, nor her family and city. She refuses any form of possession, always affirming her autonomy. She will not give herself neither to the people, nor to the man she loves, nor to the gods.

Ultimately Cassandra, as she appears in the novel, attempts to affirm herself and to impose herself mostly as a voice

of consciousness, as a mirror in which all community could see itself. However, her voice will not be accepted and men will treat her as an object, as they treat the other women.

To the end Cassandra situates herself not on the central position of *in*, but on the equidistant position of *between*. She cannot deny Troy, which also belongs to her and to the other women, but she cannot deny her own self either. Troy is deconstructed and becomes, for her, an internalized fiction. Cassandra parts from her father and from all masculine deities, who are the models of all human men (Apollo punishes her for her refusal of letting herself be possessed and so do all men in the novel) and she comes to represent and to provide a narrative body to all marginal forces, which generate a different type of power, by promoting life, rather than destruction.

The feminine identity discourse is built in Elfride Jelinek's novels by means of a social contextualization in which the novelist attacks the dominant patriarchal mentality under which the feminine characters are looking for their self-definition.

Elfride Jelinek writes and thinks with an unbearable lucidity, rethinking in actual terms a series of myths, discourses and social stereotypes which are connected with femininity. In the centre of her thematic concerns she places the eternal struggle and the roles men and women take on and have been taking on throughout history. Generally the author follows especially the way in which females become individuals, because, despite the so-called feminine emancipation, nothing leads to a real feminine emancipation. The feminine condition as an eternal victim is brutally affirmed by the author. And from this condition there is no real exit, just aberrant escapes which lead nowhere.

Clearly the writer lets no illusion survive. She kills them all systematically: the myth of happiness achieved through love, the institution of marriage, the real affirmation of femininity. The author leaves nothing to hope for and the perspectives she shows prove nothing but repetitive traps, as no change is possible as long as the roles distributed by society to the two sexes will continue to exist. That is why she will define the relations between men and women in the terms of the duality: victim-executioner. The eternal role of the victim will be distributed by society only to the woman, and the winner will take everything. The condition of the victim, however, will not be described by Jelinek in pathetic terms. Her writing leaves no place neither for feminine lamentations, nor for

poeticism, although a poetry of sarcasm does not lack her writing. The author does not forgive women, who are seen in their absolute reality (defined by self-destructing instincts) and in their ontological vulnerability (the form of enslaving given by feelings).

She denounces this vulnerability as issuing both from mentalities or social roles, as well as from the inside, from the image women form about themselves. From this perspective, of the already written roles, which women assume or refuse, the action of the novel, *The Pianist* (1983), emerges⁵.

In the first part of the novel *The Pianist* the premises for Erika's ulterior evolution are set in the most psycho analysable way possible. Let us not forget that Erika is nothing but the result of the role her mother had passed on to her. The two women, mother and daughter sleep in the same bed, a matrimonial one, which had remained empty after the death of her father. The child sleeps in the place of her dead father, as a substitute of a liquidated masculinity, which has left the stage. Unconsciously, pushed by her mother, Erika will evolve towards the assumption of an absent masculinity, by accepting masculine roles in this matriarchal micro universe. She is not allowed to get married, to have love relationships and in order to complete the castrating operation, Erika is not allowed to wear feminine dresses, just neuter clothes from the perspective of sexual distinction. Even her escapes resemble the innocent sexual adventures men have, in places frequented by men only. She assists in a voyeuristic manner, to erotic scenes in the park, goes to cheap pornographic movies in the dangerous suburbs of the city; she goes in the peep-show cabins frequented by men, holding no inhibitions, cancelling her feminine body, which she ultimately cannot feel at all. As a response to the quietness of her body, she often mutilates herself with a razor she is constantly carrying with her, self denial but also a desire to feel, which is violently expressed.

In the intimacy of this little matriarchal cell the roles have been cast in a deviant manner because the matriarchy becomes a monstrous aberration as long as somebody must sacrifice or annul her sexual reality in order to fill the role of the opposite sex. The ghost of masculinity is present everywhere, the feminine self-sufficiency understood in this manner is also annulled as a counterproductive illusion.

⁵ Elfriede Jelinek, *Pianista*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2012, traducere de Nora Iuga.

In the second part of the novel around this matriarchal domestic reality appears a man: he is the hunter, Walter Klemmer, who tenaciously fixates his target, Erika. The young man, ten years younger than his professor, is one of her students at the Vienna Conservatory, where she works. He is attracted to her not because he perceives her as beautiful, in fact her body is perceived with too much criticism for a lover, the young man noticing all the implacable signs of her physical decay. Behind the lover's discourse, the ambition of a hunter becomes more and more visible. The writer places between the two the eternal story of the power ratio confronted in the game of seduction.

The culture of desire and seduction belongs exclusively to the man. The woman is in this scenario, prescribed by mentality, just an object and silence. That is why, the letter she writes to him, as a written text, symbolizes the right to speak the woman proclaims. However, this way she becomes guilty of violating taboo borders between sexes and she becomes an anomaly. The woman's attempt at a discourse of desire in the context of seduction equates with a castration of the man, and he will respond through violence. The object has started to speak! The emancipation of Erika's femininity will become in this moment impossible; individualization will be forbidden for her.

Clearly, the young man is fascinated by the superiority of the woman, given by her status of professor. He cannot defeat her in the space of music, being too superficial and mediocre. So the superiority of the woman can be annulled only in one way, by pushing the relationship in the space of seduction. Only by possessing her sexually the man could overturn the ratio. Here, the writer describes yet another stereotype which functions at the level of mentalities, being therefore inscribed in the behavioural code of the man, persuaded that a sexual capitulation of the woman equates the regaining of the missing superiority. The objective of seduction is, for the man, not the attainment of the woman's affection, but the attainment of a pray, which is meant to confirm his virility. The woman is not the purpose, but the instrument of his masculine legitimization, just as, at the end of seduction, for women, there is another fiction embedded in their genetic code: affection and dedication.

In the traditional culture of seduction, the seduced woman must repay the man for his efforts. The repay must be done only in one way: she must become the sexual instrument of the

man's satisfaction. Everything deviating from this scenario with precise roles will be considered by the man as castration, as an attack to his virility. In the episode which takes place in the bathroom, in the sexual game between the two, the man is violated, as he is not allowed to finalize. However, the moment the woman had refused her destined role in the eternal game of seduction, she had become a man, the rival who must be liquidated, in order for the man to be able to reaffirm his masculinity. After a long line of symbolical castrations, emerged from the woman's desire to individualise herself, but applied in the space of sexuality, in the mind of the man becomes to burst the desire of revenge. So in the place of the declared love, hate begins to arise.

The young man revenges by means of physical violence: the need of individual affirmation in Erika had been interpreted by him as an act of violence, a desecration of all taboos and a transgression of the precise boundaries by forcing limitations. This is why he will respond through violence, bursting in the women's house and beating, then violating Erika. The glorious regaining of masculinity can be done only by sacrificing the woman. The balance can be restored only by violence and sacrifice, both of which need a scapegoat. Erika becomes the scapegoat, as he could not kill the substitute, the exotic bird in the park, act meant to relieve his inner tensions caused by Erika. Without being able to annul a substitute, he took his vengeance directly to the one who stirred his violent nature. Beaten, transformed in an absolute victim, on the ground, Erika still defies her executioner; drawing his attention that physical violence is the only possible form of superiority he possesses.

Erika's sacrifice on the altar of masculinity is another manner of annihilating the woman who tried to exceed her imposed functions. In the end she returns, even more insignificant, to the nothing from which she had emerged. She is left only with the amniotic, pseudo-safe space of her matriarchal home.

The writer attacks in fact the narratives based on stereotypes of phallocentrism and of the seduction culture, which belong to the patriarchal mentalities that cannot be demolished yet. Their core is made visible by means of a cruel and ruthless deconstruction.

The injury Erika causes herself at the end of the novel is a symbolic gesture of transferring guilt. Erika punishes herself knowing that she is her own victim first, and then the victim of the

man, because she is her most powerful enemy. The woman's condition is the serene abandonment in their own annihilation or nothing. All that exceeds this role is sanctioned. In this scene, unseen by Walter, she does not exist anymore, as she stopped existing as an object of manly desire, the only method of feminine legitimization. The young women around him take her place, she had become replaceable at any time, just like any object, a piece is a series, not one of a kind. The uniqueness of woman is given by the desire of man beyond this she does not exist. And this dominant discourse present in mentalities cannot be easily deconstructed.

The complex profile of the main character is composed from a multitude of roles, beyond which the generic woman claims her rights. And the transfer of roles through the breach of sexual boundaries does not appear in the fictional universe constructed by the author as a real solution, but only as a way of escape that can be accomplished only in aberrant ways, through anomaly. Castrated herself by her mother, Erika will castrate but she will not be understood, but violently aggressed. Attempting to escape the crushing mother figure, she will encounter another form of slavery, a terror imposed by the cult of obedience, orchestrated by man.

The transfer of roles which the writer meditates upon in this novel is not a real solution, as it is confronted with the refusal of a deep-rooted mentality, which defends itself through violence. That is why, while beating her, Walter accuses her of wanting to rewrite Creation. She is guilty of sexual heresy. The woman must remain captive in a network of mentalities which seek their legitimization by appealing to the sacred texts.

The novel is blocking all possible exists; the prose of the writer leaves no illusion. There is, however, a single resilient thesis, the one all discourses of the writer are based upon: the preordained destiny of women, their damnation to the condition of the victim, beyond which the writer does not seem to want to look.

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L'expérience de la «surconscience linguistique» chez Julien Green et Emil Cioran

Eva-Ildiko Palyi Delce¹

Abstract: *Settling in France, Julien Green and Emil Cioran adopted French as literary expression language. The subject of this paper is to see how Julien Green and Emil Cioran, as bilingual writers, succeeded to distance themselves from the language, which will determine them taste the linguistic supra-conscience.*

Keywords: *linguistic supra-conscience, writing, auto-reflexivity*

Julien Green et Emil Cioran sont deux écrivains d'origine étrangère qui ont adopté le français comme langue d'expression littéraire, faisant partie de la grande famille des écrivains bilingues. Il est à noter dès le départ que le bilinguisme n'a pas le même sens pour les deux auteurs et afin d'en cerner les différences, il faut envisager ce phénomène à deux niveaux: celui du locuteur et celui du scripteur. Vivant en France, Julien Green et Emil Cioran sont avant tout membres de la communauté d'accueil, évoluant à travers les interactions avec les personnes qui les entourent. À la croisée de deux langues, ils prennent conscience des relations qui s'établissent entre leur langue maternelle et la langue étrangère à travers son réseau social. Envisageant les deux écrivains comme locuteurs bilingues nous a amenés à constater une différence essentielle.

Né en France, Julien Green a acquis le français, la langue de son pays d'adoption et l'anglais, sa langue maternelle, en même temps, faisant l'expérience de ce que Wallace Lambert appelle bilinguisme simultané. Le cas d'Emil Cioran est particulier car il a appris le français beaucoup plus tard, à l'âge adulte, vivant une expérience de bilinguisme consécutif.

En tant qu'auteurs bilingues ayant adopté le français comme langue d'écriture, tant l'écrivain américain que l'écrivain roumain ont pris en considération l'horizon d'attente du lecteur visé, outre les motivations personnelles qui leur ont fait changer de

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langue de plume. Ecrire dans la langue du public immédiat leur a permis de bénéficier tout de suite du rayonnement de leur œuvre. Les séjours de Julien Green aux États-Unis l'obligent de pratiquer un va-et-vient entre l'anglais et le français alors qu'Emil Cioran, n'écrit plus qu'en français car il ne vit plus qu'en France. Intéressés par le questionnement du langage, les deux écrivains s'interrogent sur ce que leur position dans l'espace de l'entre-deux leur (r)apporte. L'écriture leur offre le cadre idéal pour mieux comprendre leur expérience du bilinguisme. Ils se montrent préoccupés par le rapport entre la/ les langue (s) d'écriture et l'acte de création lui-même. Ils font l'expérience de ce que Lise Gauvin, l'une des théoriciennes de premier ordre de la littérature bilingue francophone, appelle « la surconscience linguistique »² qui est avant tout une *conscience de la langue*. L'écrivain est amené à réfléchir sur la langue, à examiner le fonctionnement de celle-ci dans l'acte créateur, à interroger la nature même du langage de sorte que le geste d'écrire devient un acte de langage, car le choix de telle ou telle langue d'écriture est révélateur d'un « procès » littéraire plus important que les procédés mis en jeu.

1. Surconscience linguistique et acte de création

Poser un regard attentif sur la langue s'avère un thème de prédilection pour les deux écrivains concernés par cette étude. Emil Cioran a hérité cette préoccupation de son professeur Monsieur Lecombe qui réfléchissant sur les mots, corrigeant tout le monde, lui a appris « la conscience de l'acte d'écrire »³. Le passage du roumain au français lui dévoile un autre rapport aux mots qui sont autonomes, ils ne jaillissent plus spontanément ce qui entraîne la perte d'authenticité. Écrire n'est donc plus un acte instinctif, mais plutôt construit, élaboré. Pierre-Yves Boissau notait à ce propos:

Écrire en français, c'est se soumettre à un regard – en surplomb – sur la langue perçue comme français: le souci du bien écrire, que souligne Cioran, on ne trouve pas dans les autres langues.⁴

² Gauvin, L., 1997 *L'écrivain francophone à la croisée des langues*, Entretiens, Paris, Éditions Karthala, p. 6.

³ Cioran, E., 1997, *Entretiens*, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, p. 75.

⁴ Boissau, P.-Y., 2007, « Cioran ou l'art du déplacement » in *Écrivains multilingues et écritures métisses. L'hospitalité des langues*, Axel Gasquet et

L'écrivain roumain part à la (re)conquête de la langue, ayant comme tâche de trouver *sa* langue dans la langue commune.

Il convient de noter que chez les écrivains à deux langues de plume, l'acte de création devient très souvent synonyme d'inconfort, de doute ou même de conflit. Lorsqu'ils écrivent en français, ces auteurs se penchent sur les langues ; il y a chez eux une certaine manie d'entendre, de voir, d'analyser la langue française, leur nouvelle langue de création. Nous pouvons donc affirmer que l'une des spécificités de l'écriture de l'entre-deux est justement cette autoréflexivité ce qui justifie le penchant de cette catégorie d'écrivains vers l'autoscopie linguistique. Nombreux sont les témoignages sur ce sujet dans l'œuvre de Julien Green de même que dans celle d'Emil Cioran.

2. Surconscience linguistique et autoréflexivité

Étudier la surconscience linguistique nous conduit à constater que tant l'écrivain roumain que l'écrivain américain parviennent, par le biais de l'écriture, à prendre leurs distances par rapport à la langue. Cela leur permet de l'examiner de l'extérieur et de la penser car « le langage n'est pas seulement le moyen de désigner les objets ou de décrire des émotions, c'est en lui-même un processus de pensée »⁵. La langue étrangère offre donc à l'écrivain la possibilité de mieux s'observer en train d'écrire. En effet, lorsqu'ils écrivent, les écrivains bilingues sont à la fois à leur propre écoute, mais aussi à l'écoute de la langue, ils ont la conscience de la langue comme lieu de réflexion privilégié. En examinant l'écriture en langue maternelle et celle en langue seconde, ils aboutissent à la conclusion suivante: si la langue maternelle, celle qui « ne s'apprend pas, mais qu'on sait presque en naissant », est la langue intérieure, profondément mêlée à ce que nous sommes (*OC*, IV, 1239), la langue d'adoption peut être une langue extérieure pour ceux qui, comme Emil Cioran, l'ont appris à un âge adulte ou bien intérieure pour ceux qui comme Julien Écrire en français signifie établir un autre rapport avec les

Modesta Suarez (eds), Actes du colloque international de Clermont-Ferrand, Centre de Recherches sur les Littératures Modernes et Contemporaines, Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, p. 307.

⁵ Green, J., 1990, *Œuvres complètes*, tome VI, Paris, Gallimard, « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », p. 1339. Sauf indication contraire, les citations de Julien Green renverront à cette édition pour laquelle nous utiliserons *OC*, suivi du tome et de la pagination.

mots devenus un matériau totalement chosifié, s'en rapprocher comme d'un objet dont on peut connaître l'extérieur mais on a du mal à en saisir l'essence. Parfois il y a des mots qui se refusent ce qui fait l'écrivain s'interroger sur sa vocation. Voilà ce qu'Emil Cioran a dit à ce propos:

Je ne suis pas un écrivain, je ne trouve pas les mots qui conviennent à ce que je ressens, à ce que j'endure. Le « talent », c'est la capacité de combler l'intervalle qui sépare l'épreuve et le langage. Pour moi cet intervalle est là, béant, impossible à remplir ou à escamoter.⁶

À la différence de l'écrivain roumain qui réfléchit plutôt sur les langues que sur la manière d'écrire, ce qui est d'ailleurs compréhensible ayant en vue le fait que, abandonnant le roumain, il adopte le français et n'écrit plus qu'en cette langue, Julien Green porte son attention sur ce dernier aspect. Cela l'amène à s'apercevoir de la différence de l'écriture en deux-langues. Il convient de rappeler l'expérience racontée par l'écrivain lorsqu'il a entamé la rédaction de son récit autobiographique « Quand nous habitons tous ensemble », commencé en français et finalement rédigé en anglais pour deux raisons: d'une part à cause du public visé qui était américain et d'autre part à cause de son bilinguisme de circonstance. Le résultat de cette aventure linguistique sera surprenant:

Ayant écrit à peu près une vingtaine de pages, je pris mon courage à deux mains et je relus ce que j'avais fait: [...] Or j'avais pensé trouver, sinon une espèce de traduction inconsciente du français, du moins un équivalent assez proche, et ce que j'avais sous les yeux semblait presque d'une autre main que la mienne. [...] Le sujet était bien le même. Le choix des détails était tout autre. Je ne disais pas les mêmes choses dans les deux langues [...]. (OC, III, 1436)

Cela est dû évidemment aux différences entre les deux langues puisque « le choix des mots [...] varie extrêmement d'une langue à l'autre » (OC, III, 1437), car les idées que nous exprimons nous sont suggérées par les mots sans que nous en soyons conscients .

⁶ Cioran, E., 1997, *Cahiers*, Paris, Gallimard, p. 70. Nous utiliserons CH pour les citations renvoyant à cette édition suivi de la pagination.

Quant à l'expérience de la surconscience linguistique vécue par Emil Cioran, il faut également noter que, bien qu'au début de sa carrière en tant qu'écrivain roumain d'expression française il n'ait pas vraiment approuvé cette approche réflexive de la langue, la considérant plutôt comme encombrante car, dans son opinion, « [u]n écrivain doit vivre dans la langue et par la langue et non *méditer* sur elle (CH, 574). Force est de constater que l'écrivain roumain change d'avis au fur et mesure de son parcours créateur. Aussi confesse-t-il dans ses *Cahiers*: « Si j'avais été français, je crois que je n'aurais prêté aucune attention à l'écriture. Mais c'est le drame du métèque, de songer sans cesse qu'il manie une langue qui n'est pas la sienne. » (CH, 662).

Il n'est pas dépourvu d'intérêt de rappeler la raison pour laquelle Emil Cioran a complètement abandonné sa langue première: montrer aux Français qu'au niveau de l'écrit, lui, le métèque, peut écrire aussi correctement qu'eux.

Écrire correctement en français est pour l'écrivain roumain également une sorte de compensation à sa prononciation très influencée par son accent valaque: « une fois à Paris, je n'ai jamais pu me débarrasser de mon accent valaque. Si donc je ne peux articuler comme les autochtones, du moins vais-je tenter d'écrire comme eux⁷ ».

Julien Green à son tour se heurte au problème de l'accent, lorsqu'il doit parler anglais, sa langue maternelle⁸. Il suffit de citer à ce propos les extraits suivants:

Ma mère me prenait à part, dans cette chambre qui regardait le néant de la cour, et elle me faisait me tenir près d'elle. Je reconnais entre ses mains le livre à couverture marron qui ne me faisait pas peur, parce que c'était elle qui le tenait, et elle me faisait lire une page d'anglais. La porte était fermée. Il ne fallait pas que mes sœurs entendent et se moquent de mon accent français dont je ne me défaisais pas facilement. (OC, V, 729)

Il est presque impossible combien ils étaient différents du type d'humanité auquel j'étais habitué. Sûr, j'avais été élevé dans une famille américaine et avais rencontré certains amis de mes parents, mais je n'avais jamais vu de près un étudiant américain, et surtout autant. Etant à l'âge d'une absurde timidité, que j'augmentais peut-être inconsciemment exprès,

⁷ Cioran, E., 1995, *Œuvres*, Paris, Gallimard, p. 1630. Nous utiliserons *Œ* pour les citations renvoyant à cette édition suivi de la pagination.

⁸ La langue maternelle comprise dans le sens de langue de la mère.

je demeurai muet quand mes nouveaux camarades se mirent à me poser des questions. Mon accent français me gênait affreusement et, craignant de me trahir en rougissant, je devins immédiatement cramoisi. Résultat, avec gentillesse on me laissa tranquille.⁹

Cela pourrait d'ailleurs être considéré un exemple à ce que Julia Kristeva avait évoqué dans *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*:

Ne pas parler sa langue maternelle. Habiter des sonorités, des logiques coupées de la mémoire nocturne du corps, du sommeil aigre-doux de l'enfance. Porter en soi comme un caveau secret, ou comme un enfant handicapé – chéri et inutile –, ce langage d'autrefois qui se fane sans jamais vous quitter. Vous vous perfectionnez dans un autre instrument, comme on s'exprime avec l'algèbre ou le violon. Vous pouvez devenir virtuose avec ce nouvel artifice qui vous procure d'ailleurs un nouveau corps, tout aussi artificiel, sublimé – certains disent sublime. Vous avez le sentiment que la nouvelle langue est votre résurrection [...].¹⁰

Écrire dans la langue d'adoption est un grand défi pour l'écrivain roumain. Pour y aboutir, il devait impérieusement renoncer au roumain. Son expérience du bilinguisme littéraire est marquée par une dichotomie fondamentale. D'une part, il étudie le français, en passant par le vocabulaire et la grammaire afin de gagner le pari qu'il s'est fait avec soi-même. D'autre part, dans la vie quotidienne, il fait appel au français comme instrument de communication de la communauté linguistique où il vit. Comme toute personne qui change de région ou de pays, Emil Cioran apporte avec lui un bagage linguistique et l'accent qui en fait partie. Pourtant, tout ce bagage le met mal à l'aise. Au lieu de considérer son accent comme source d'hybridité linguistique, l'écrivain roumain en est frustré: « C'est un défaut d'élocution, mes balbutiements, ma façon saccadée de parler, mon *art* de bredouiller, et surtout l'obsession cuisante de mon accent, qui m'ont poussé, par réaction, à soigner mon style en français, et à me rendre quelque peu digne d'une langue que je massacre, par la parole, tous les jours. »¹¹.

⁹ Green, J., 2007, *Souvenirs des jours heureux*, Paris, Flammarion, p. 164.

¹⁰ Kristeva, J., 1987, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, Paris, Gallimard, p. 27.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

Il convient donc de dire que, écrire correctement en français, devient pour l'écrivain roumain un moyen de se faire pardonner ce « massacre verbal » qu'il impose à sa langue d'adoption.

Au départ, après son arrivée en France, Emil Cioran continue à écrire en roumain, à faire des traductions, à approfondir ses connaissances de roumain. Selon les linguistes, l'étude de la langue maternelle est importante pour une meilleure acquisition de la langue étrangère. Nous pouvons donc affirmer que devenant un bon connaisseur du roumain lui a servi à enrichir rapidement ses acquis en français, le conduisant vers une écriture dépourvue de toute erreur, ce qui l'a rendu en quelque sorte vainqueur sur la langue de Pascal à laquelle il avait déclaré la guerre, selon ses propres aveux: « Avec la langue française j'ai engagé un combat qui est loin d'être terminé. Avec un tel ennemi ! »¹²

« Remonter aux sources de la langue » lui est donc indispensable. Il faut également dire qu'il est arrivé à un accomplissement total dans cet idiome qui s'est laissé découvrir jusqu'aux moindres détails. Il était grand temps qu'il se tourne à présent vers la langue de son pays d'accueil. Vivant en France, ne souhaitant plus retourner dans son pays, il se lance dans l'exploration de cette nouvelle langue, ayant pour objectif de la maîtriser elle aussi le mieux possible, dépassant même les autochtones. Nous avons déjà évoqué le célèbre passage de son séjour dans un village près de Dieppe lorsque l'écrivain roumain, traduisant Mallarmé, a une révélation fulgurante de l'inanité d'écrire en roumain suite auquel il prend la décision d'en finir avec l'écriture dans cette langue. À quoi pourrait lui servir de continuer à écrire dans sa langue maternelle, cette langue ignorée par l'Occident et parlée par un nombre réduit de personnes ? L'écriture en français lui permet d'avoir un public immédiat et par conséquent de jouir de l'effet de son œuvre. Écrire en français devient pour lui impératif. Mais, pour ce faire, il doit avant tout aboutir à maîtriser la langue du pays d'accueil. Devenue dorénavant sa priorité, s'exprimer en français s'avère, néanmoins, une chose plus compliquée qu'il ne s'y est pas attendu. Cioran ne perd pas l'occasion d'en parler, de rendre témoignage de ce combat qu'il entreprend avec la langue française. Il écrit à un compatriote:

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 436.

Ce serait entreprendre le récit d'un cauchemar que de vous raconter par le menu l'histoire de mes relations avec cet idiome d'emprunt, avec tous ces mots pensés et repensés, affinés, subtils jusqu'à l'inexistence, courbés sous les exactions de la nuance, inexpressifs pour avoir tout exprimé, effrayants de précision, chargés de fatigue et de pudeur, discrets jusque dans la vulgarité. Comment voulez-vous que s'en accommode un Scythe, qu'il en saisisse la signification et les manie avec scrupule et probité ?¹³

« Des mots pensés et repensés », voilà ce qui résume l'effort et le malaise que l'écriture en langue étrangère suppose pour Emil Cioran. L'abandon de la langue natale et son remplacement par une autre donnent lieu à des modifications dans la structure intime de la pensée, ce qui génère des conséquences importantes. Au-delà de chaque mot, il y a ce que l'ensemble de la langue, en tant que système oblige ou non à dire et par là à taire. Il existe des situations qui réclament l'utilisation de la langue d'origine. Le locuteur ressent le besoin de dire quelque chose qu'il ne parvient pourtant pas à traduire. Avec la perte volontaire de la langue maternelle et le choix du silence, l'écrivain roumain ressent pourtant qu'il perd aussi son authenticité: « j'ai cessé d'une certaine manière d'être moi-même, d'être authentique ». ¹⁴

Une lecture attentive de l'œuvre cioranienne nous livre l'image d'un écrivain divisé. D'une part, il accepte l'innovation dans la langue, d'autre part, il se surveille constamment quand il écrit. Pour Doina Constantinescu, cette permanente autoscopie linguistique équivaut à une « conscience exacerbée » de la langue:

L'écriture en langue étrangère le fait tenir en éveil le contrôle de la langue, car la condition *même de l'étranger, pour un écrivain comme Cioran, développe une conscience exacerbée du langage* et le besoin perpétuel de remanier son style. ¹⁵

¹³ Cioran, E.M., Noica, C., 1991, *L'ami lointain, Paris-Bucarest*, Paris, Éditions Criterion, p.7.

¹⁴ Liiceanu, G., 1995, *Itinéraires d'une vie: E. M. Cioran suivi de Les continents de l'insomnie. Entretien avec E.M. Cioran*, Paris, Éditions Michalon, p. 116.

¹⁵ Constantinescu, D., «L'imaginaire linguistique et culturel de Cioran» in www.revistatransilvania.ro/arhiva/2007/pdf/numarul1/art13.pdf, p. 48[consulté le 14 avril 2013].

Emil Cioran rejoint, ainsi, d'autres écrivains d'origine étrangère qui, ayant adopté le français comme langue d'expression littéraire, ont signalé une différence essentielle entre « écrire français » et « écrire *en* français ». Il est donc pas naturel que les écrivains français, les indigènes, s'abandonnent au gré de leur plume et écrivent avec une aisance qui n'est pas à la portée de main des écrivains bilingues qui eux, les métèques, écrivent *en* français. Si pour les premiers le français leur est familier, étant leur langue maternelle, pour les derniers elle restera toujours une langue étrangère, maîtrisée à différents niveaux. Il convient de noter qu'en fonction de l'âge d'acquisition, l'écrivain à deux langues de plume peut sentir la langue seconde plus proche ou plus éloignée. Les exemples de Julien Green et d'Emil Cioran le confirment. Acquis dès l'âge le plus tendre, la langue française est pour l'écrivain américain une habitude de l'esprit, donc intérieure, alors que pour l'écrivain roumain elle est hors de lui, elle lui est extérieure. Se trouver à la surface des mots lui impose un style forcé. C'est ce qui explique le rapport douloureux de l'écrivain roumain avec la langue de son pays d'accueil qu'il compare à plusieurs reprises à une « une camisole de force » dont il a du mal à se libérer. Les réflexions sur cet état de choses reviennent sans cesse dans l'écriture cioranienne:

Mon combat avec la langue française est un des plus durs qui se puissent imaginer. Victoire et défaite y alternent, mais je ne cède pas. (CH, 490)

Aux prises avec la langue française: une agonie dans le sens véritable du mot, un combat où j'ai eu toujours le dessous. (CH, 44)

Julien Green se confronte à son tour à la difficulté de trouver le mot approprié pour dire tout ce qu'il a envie. L'extrait suivant est révélateur à ce propos:

Ce matin, à Passy, l'idée m'est venue tout à coup de tout ce qu'il y a d'inexprimable dans ce que nous essayons de dire, la plume a la main. C'est à ce point que, pour moi, écrire n'est pas autre chose que faire allusion à ce qu'on ne peut pas exprimer- parce qu'il n'y a pas de mots. On a beau s'efforcer, quelque chose échappe toujours. Le langage humain ne dépasse pas certaines limites. (OC, IV, 305)

Écrire dans une langue étrangère s'avère pour Emil Cioran une expérience à la fois « terrible »¹⁶, mais aussi enrichissante voire bénéfique, car elle lui permet de délester son passé. S'exprimer en toute liberté sur des sujets dont il n'aurait pas pu parler dans sa langue maternelle constitue également une motivation importante dans l'adoption du français comme langue d'écriture chez Julien Green. Le changement de langue est donc pour tous les deux comme une nouvelle naissance qui leur apporte du renouveau. Pourtant, nous ne pouvons pas parler, chez l'écrivain roumain d'un véritable enracinement dans le français, ce qui est au fait vrai pour l'écrivain américain. Le français fait partie de sa nature. C'est la raison pour laquelle il avoue être deux au lieu d'être double. Extérieur à lui, le français impose à Emil Cioran un style « nerveux », « trop travaillé », dépourvu de « naturel ». La conclusion à laquelle il aboutit est qu'un étranger qui décide d'écrire dans une langue étrangère, comme il l'a fait lui-même, d'ailleurs, « ne peut être vraiment naturel, puisqu'il écrit dans une langue d'emprunt, *étrangère* à sa nature » (*CH*, 677). Cela justifie également l'affirmation de l'écrivain qui considère que, adopter une autre langue de plume est synonyme avec écrire une lettre d'amour avec un dictionnaire (*CE*, 1661).

L'expérience de la surconscience linguistique a amené Julien Green et Emil Cioran à prendre conscience de ce que leur position au seuil de deux-langues leur a rapporté. L'écriture devient pour eux un lieu d'appropriation et de réappropriation, le lieu de rencontre entre le pays quitté de bon gré ou perdu et celui qui les a adoptés.

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GENDER, RACE and ETHNICITY
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KATE ATKINSON'S GENDERED SPACES

Magda Danciu¹

Abstract: *The paper investigates the ways in which spaces absorb one's identity within the process of relating gender to landscapes, either urban or rural. By examining the link between gender, space, and identity in Kate Atkinson's popular writings, the author focuses on aspects of the characters' everydayness and their interactions with spaces (and people) that contribute to the shaping of their individual and communal identities.*

Key words: *gender, space, identity*

Where Are You?

Defining identities can be an answer to the above written question as well, since space in general, and place in particular can be read as an intricate text of a signifying system of a nation, community, or an individual, that is, as a construction displaying a specific culture. According to most theorists, space can be understood and experienced cognitively on one hand, and on the other hand, it can be perceived as being melded with sensual, practical, unreflexive knowledge (see Edensor 54). Edensor analyses the relationship between a nation, respectively one's national identity and the national space, a link so strong that it can be reconstituted in Diaspora in the process of confronting with otherness (see Edensor 39), emphasizing the fact that the specific, that is, the acknowledged national landscapes are synecdoches through which nations and individuals are recognized globally, mostly when they are charged with affective and symbolic meanings. Some spaces of national importance connote historical events, thus testifying for significant past cultures becoming "memoryscapes to commemorate significant episodes in a retrospectively reconstructed national history" (Edensor 45). Other spaces turn into symbolic spaces within the dynamics of the everyday and of the popular, such as sports stadia, parks and promenades, show grounds and religious sites, bohemian quarters (e.g. pubs and restaurants), and centres for popular activities of the community,

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all of them being organized to generate a “sense of being in place within the nation” (Edensor 51). The author visualizes some of the mundane signifiers that convey the familiarity of the space by listing commercial notices, service provision (e.g. phone boxes), roadscape, domestic architecture, styles of fencing and garden ornamentation, home décor (e.g. kitchen arrangement), foregrounding the relevance of the distribution of these elements within the larger picture of rendering one’s complex identity (see Edensor 51) within the thick intertextuality of landscapes and environments that consolidate one’s life in the world. Features of our domestic environments, so commonly regarded as part of familiar mediascapes as they are employed in television dramas and movies, stand for common denominators to consolidate the relationship between people/s who identify themselves as beneficiaries of the spatial complex network and realize that they themselves can alter the space by domesticating it or narrativising it.

There are various ways in which people apprehend and understand familiar spaces and their physical or spiritual relation to them, such as in case of the spatial concept of *home* which covers a wide range of significances – a house, a land, a village, a city, a district, a country or, why not, the world, transmitting the sentimental associations of one scale to others, linking spatial levels together, from the small-scale domestic to the large-scale space (see Edensor 57). The geographical terms are juxtaposed to terms of sensual meanings (a place of comfort, convenience, efficiency, leisure, ease, pleasure, domesticity, intimacy), turning home into the perfect site of a “wealth of unreflexive, habitual practices”(Edensor 58), and encouraging the experience of home-making as one through which we make ourselves comfortable with the world we live in. Home is the micro-environment which facilitates a display and performance of objects and activities meant to foreground the link to the national constructions of one’s self, as home points to where and how we are located among objects, artefacts, rituals, practices that „configure who we are in our particularity’ and stand for a “form of identity sustenance and cultural resistance” (Edensor 62).

Reflecting on everydayness

When investigating gendered everyday practices one should assume that they emerge from a gendered personality which is, according to Lipsitz Bem, “a static collection of masculine and

feminine traits that has already been shaped by enculturation”, a “finished product rather than a psychological process”, evolving both as a product and process of construing those precise masculine and feminine traits against a reality that itself constructs the same traits (see Lipsitz Bem 152).

Gendered personalities defining gendered bodies become sites of contestation over meanings in any subcultural spaces such as everyday practices, respectively eating habits as any gendered space creates opportunities to explore and negotiate identities (see Muggleton, Weinzierl 258). Joanne Hollows demonstrates that consumption has shifted to the more routine, unspectacular modes that can create and sustain a gendered, respectively, classed and raced experience of everyday life, that acquire new meanings of femininity/masculinity contextually and historically based, operating as a site of differences. (see Hollows, Moseley 97).

Theorists assume that cultural constructions of gender are communicated to individuals through a wide range of structures and practices that make up our everyday world (see Wood, Reich, 2006: 179) as it is communication that produces, reflects and reproduces genders so that communication, culture and gender “continuously recreate one another”(Wood, Reich 185), foregrounding current standards in everyday life.

As temporal patterns “define individual character and identity”(Coverley 125), we witness instances when the paradox of our age emerges, among other things, from the fact that while our national cover tends towards universality and globalization, small homelands, regions, towns and communities appear to support our identity *alternative* as Daniel Bougneaux puts it (139). Our memories, our everyday practices tie us to places, linking our identities to those invisible identities of the visible which epitomizes a possible definition of a place, composed by a series of “displacements and effects among the fragmented strata that form it”, playing on “these moving layers”(De Certeau 108)

Gendering spaces in fiction

The history of Western culture emphasizes three beliefs about both men and women according to which they have fundamentally different psychological and sexual natures, “men are inherently the dominant and superior” sex, and “both male-female difference and male dominance are natural” (Lipsitz Bem 1) so that organizing

social life around this distinction becomes a general rule since any individual constructs a personal identity by "making a commitment to some aspect of the self"(Lipsitz Bem 137).

In Kate Atkinson's book *Emotionally Weird* (2000), the highly emotional encounter between Euphemia Stuart Murray, or Effie, and Nora takes place on strongly masculine island, off the west coast of Scotland, turned into Nora's island and "the holiday home"(Atkinson 2000: 25) of their ancestors. The geography of the place suggests historic Scotland's isolation and peculiarity, its stubbornness in adopting European modernism, its conservative tendency both in social and in cultural values, and the place itself foregrounds a tendency that most often leads to redundant images, often suffused with nostalgia, thus rendering a typical landscape of Scotland, of the always-seen poor and neglected province. Effie's options for comparing the place to the city of Dundee emerges from her wish to reenact her college life, foregrounding the picture of the city from the depth of her memories:

"a place far, far away in the magical north country", "land of outlandish street names – Strawberrybank, Peep o' Day Lane, Shepherd's Loan, Magdalen Yard Green, Small's Wynd, Brown Constable Street, Bonnybank Road", "the city of the three J's (n.a. jam, jute, journalism), the home of the Broons, the schoolyard of the Bash Street Kids and William Wallace, the kailyard of Scottish journalism, Juteopolis", "built on the solidified magma and lava of an extinct volcano", "Bonny Dundee" with its "crumbling, muddy sandstone tenements, impenetrable accent, appalling diet and its big, big estuary sky" (Kate Atkinson, 2000: 26)

An island's metamorphosis is granted by the islanders' changing nature, on the one hand, and on the other hand, its constant re/configuration depends on the people's transit and progress towards further stages in permanent motion, consequently, the land/locus is submitted to a re/shaping force wielded by both humans and non-humans. Similarly, individuals who choose, due to various causes, an exilian status on island, when accepting this immersion in the time-space-ness of this confined territory, gradually develop an *A-effect* (*alienation effect*), as Chris Baldwick explains it (5), characterized by a critical self/evaluation of the present condition, resulting in a shift from being a victim to becoming a hero in spree of triumph and success (see Doinas 7).

The island that unfolds the above mentioned profile and essence is part of a country of legends and myths, of a traditional inhabiting this ambiguous landscape; it is a peat and heather island off the west coast of Scotland chosen to become the background against which Effie sets on her journey of self-discovery, like a Wandering Scot, struggling to define her identity through this imaginary quest.

At the end of her journey out of night, Euphemia Stuart-Murray realizes that she inhabits a world reconstructed from psychological landscapes of her fake mother's childhood and family; what she is left is a void past, an uncertain present, an unpromising future, an allegory to the "historyless suspension of modern Scotland" (Craig 159), a place with a past, they say, but a place without a history, an ironical denunciation of the "eventless, domestic environment of Scotland and the lost world of historical significance"(Craig 122). This world is reflected in miniature by this individual experience, by this specific personal identity seen as "the poetry of history, the primary tool for the reconstruction of the self" (Blend 63) in the temporary but exemplary isolation of the Caledonian Isle.

Domesticating the island and its environment and eventually turning it into an affective, symbolic space for the interaction with nature and construction of her identity, Effie's attempt is an example of how gender can interfere in organizing and transforming both the private and the public spaces, using the new representations developed by recent theorists to show that "urban landscapes and the meanings they express change through the practices of successive generations"(Bondi 10) and that "many of the activities and interactions characteristic of daily life take place in spaces that are not unambiguously either public or private."(Bondi 8). Thus, the Hunters in Atkinson's other novel, investigated in this paper, *When Will There Be Good News?* (2008), are seen to equally share a residential area, "Dr and Mr Hunter lived on the really nice side of Edinburgh, with a view of Blackford Hill, quite a distance in every way from the third-floor shoebox in Gorgie "(Atkinson 2008: 44) and a property of their own, epitomizing the history of the place and of the people formerly inhabiting it:

The Hunters' house was Victorian and although it had every modern comfort it still had its original fireplaces and doors

and cornices, which Dr Hunter said was a miracle. The front door had coloured glass panels, starbursts of red, snowflakes of blue and rosettes of yellow that cast prisms of colour when the sun shone through, There was even a full set of servants' bells and back staircase that had allowed the servants to scurry around unseen. 'Those were the days,' Mr Hunter said and laughed because he said if he had been alive when the house was built he would have been making fires and blacking boots. (Atkinson 2008:55).

The description of the house slowly becomes the picture of a home, insisting of the image of the kitchen of this home, which can be both perceived as gendered spaces, as they are usually feminized due to the nature of the practices that produce and provide their specific values. Arranging, ordering, protecting, cleaning, clearing these spaces generate a potential for self-expression, a configuration of the particularity of who we are. Home exists beyond the physicality of the space, that is, it exists in words, jokes, opinions, gestures, actions, the way one wears their clothes, it exists as part of a life lived in movement (Edensor 64). Any of its components embodies the owner's identity features in terms of culture, lifestyle, everyday practices:

The kitchen was Reggie's favourite room. You could have fitted the whole of Reggie's Gorgie flat into it and still had room for swinging a few elephants if you were so inclined. Surprisingly, Mr Hunter liked cooking and was always making a mess in the kitchen. 'My creative side,' he said. 'Women cook food because people need to eat,' Dr Hunter said. 'Men cook to show off.' (Atkinson 2008: 56).

One could infer that the kitchen and the tasks carried out there are usually ascribed to women's cultural territories and duties, representing both a cognitive and an affectively charged site of experiences and facilitating the shaping and consolidation of a sense of the place, identification and belonging, in this specific case. Yet in the above excerpt, they seem to have now become gender-free thus demonstrating that the private and the public can operate at an irrelevant, ambiguous level in terms of gender division of the space when referring to everyday practices when the importance lies in the characters' communal identities, in our case, that of being (or not being) Scottish. Scottish affiliation, belonging,

and spirit are contrasted to the typically English background, London, so artificially glamorous at Christmas time:

Westminster Bridge, at dawn. (...) It was freezing cold. The city was almost deserted in a way that you never saw it normally. This wasn't how he [Jackson Brodie] had expected to spend Christmas day. On his own, on his uppers [poor], in the Great Wen [London]. They had planned to book something last minute to somewhere hot and relatively unChristmassy. 'I don't like Christmas too much.' Tessa [his new wife] said to him. (Atkinson 2008: 475)

Scottish drabness comes to contrast the typically American franchised space of the Starbucks cafes as well, thriving in formerly quiet corners of Caledonian remoteness,

She [Detective Chief Inspector Louise Monroe] had driven back into town to meet the girl [Reggie]. They left the dog on the back seat of Louise's care while they went and had a coffee in a Starbucks on George Street. Louise hated Starbucks. Drinking the Yankee dollar. 'Someone has to make money for the evil capitalists,' she said to the girl buying her a latte and a chocolate muffin. (Atkinson 2008:264)

Conclusions

The representations of city and island, of the home and its components, the structuring of the public and private in the two novels we investigated provide an instance on reflection on how the gendered construction of identities, individual or communal can get materialized through small practices in a way that brings into discussion issues of contestation and transformation, of subversion of traditionally acknowledged gender roles in social interactions. We could think of gender in its dynamics of reconfiguration and amplification, permanently attempting to resist stereotyping: "Gendering as a social process facilitates an understanding of gender identities as a set of fluid and active processes, which sustain gender relations." (Green 117).

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Negotiating Tradition and Innovation, Originality and Creolization– Food Creolization In The Romanian Menu

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Abstract. *This paper attempts to demonstrate that the Romanian culture is influenced by a process known as ‘creolization’, not only in literature, arts or everyday practices, but also in aspects related to food. A common example of creolized food in Romania that has a significant part in the menu is pizza, due to its ingredients, tips, forms and mixtures that are borrowed and combined in accordance with the tastes and possibilities of the region.*

Key words: *originality, fusion, innovation, creolization, food.*

Introduction

Nowadays we are actually part of a culture that is starving for originality and authenticity. People are asked to bring newer and newer things and ideas, showing and sharing their own and inner personality and feelings. A common matter among people is the eagerness or the need to be *original*. But can we speak about originality when everything was mentioned or used before? Can someone be blamed for adopting ideas, gestures or style from others and using for his or her own purpose? Is there any originality in the age of the internet or just imitation and plagiarism? With the help of the social websites, everything can be read, seen or borrowed for personal use, so there are no secrets that cannot be revealed with a single click. Furthermore, “postmodern literary theory reminds us that nothing is wholly original – that we depend on remixing and reusing the past, adding to or remaking old plots, insights and ideas” (Eisner, Vicinus, 2008 : 1).

In my opinion, due to this lack of originality, need for assertion and innovation, there appeared the process known as *creolization*, that combines everything on purpose to obtain something similar or different, suitable for each person or country,

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but by means of their own materials, their own rules or possibilities. It is fairly true that we have access to information which is a great advantage for this new generation, especially because we are up-to-date, we can exchange ideas and equivocations, we can observe the situation from another cultures, we find out very easily what is happening all over the world even if we are from Romania and communicate with persons from Russia, China or America. Issues like the place where we live and the way we live; what, where and how we eat; from where we buy food; how we dress and how we care about our appearance; from where we buy clothes and make-up products, but also the educational system in which we are involved, are all aspects of everyday life that influence us and our way of thinking. We all know that these issues are not new, hidden or typical for a culture or a person, but they existed for centuries and arise from different parts of the world, they only developed or changed according to financial possibilities of a culture.

I strongly believe that what we are and what we have today is a result of creolization because we do not have something that is one hundred percent ours, we only have a type of mixture of what we are and have and an influence, be it American, Asian, African or European.

1. Of Creolization

As I mentioned before, the search for originality and innovation is a common aspect nowadays in a world in which tradition or a certain part of tradition become a *creolized cliché* and are adopted by others as being their own, even if the result is not the same as the original one. This preoccupation for cultural homogenization has developed also due to the process of globalization, which facilitates the exchange of information and opinions among people all over the world.

The pattern of creolization was used for the first time when dealing with “the mixing of cultures and languages in parts of the early colonial world” (Lionnet, Shih, 2011:2), depicting “a straightforward empirical reality in which cultural and ideological entanglements abound” (Lionnet, Shih, 2011:2). It is said that the “earlier processes of creolization emerged from violent encounters that were colonial and imperial” (Lionnet, Shih, 2011:24) and in the present it is compared with some negative consequences of globalization, being linked due to their unforeseeable. What is

more, notions as “*fusion, syncretism or transculturalism* are also descriptors of the cross-cultural conditions historically emerged from the polities and societies established by Atlantic slavery across the Americas” (Lionnet, Sheh, 2011:37). Because of its expansion, there were framed various relationships, types of contact and migration models “in and among diverse ethnic and linguistic communities” (Lionnet, Shih, 2011:2).

As a concept, creolization is simultaneously descriptive and analytical: it emerges from the experiential but provides a theoretical framework that does justice to the lived realities of subaltern subjects, while explaining their experiences in terms of an epistemology that remains connected to those realities. Creolization indexes flexibility, welcomes the test of reality, and it is a mode of theorizing that is integral to the living practices of being and knowing (Lionnet, Shih, 2011:2).

Creolization can be understood as a *never-ending* process, that can happen everywhere and in every possible field or aspect from a culture, affecting and including the population cohabitating the same territory forcing them to fuse their own traditional values with new adopted ones.

...this global trend is impossible to miss, from curry and chips, that were recently voted the favorite dish in Britain, to Thai Saunas, Zen Catholicism and Judaism, Nigerian Kung Fu or ‘Bollywood’ films, made in Bombay-Mumbai and mixing Italian traditions of song and dance with the conventions of Hollywood...(Burke, 2009:2-3).

In order to understand the meaning of the term *creolization*, we have to know that it is a synonym for hybridity, fusion, métissage, syncretism or mixture and it is said to be linked to colonialism, namely with “the uprooting and displacement of large numbers of people in colonial plantation economies” (Stewart, 2007: 155). There are cases in which the term *creolization* was related to the term *creole*, but they are separated and mean different things as the literary critic Édouard Glissant and others suggested.

...creoleness refers to a state; creolization refers to a process. Creoleness is a state and a condition in which the constituent elements may become hardened and reified, erecting

multilingualism or multiethnicity into a dogma or model, while creolization is an open-ended process that can be everywhere (see Chanda in Lionnet, Shih, 2011:24).

What is more, the term *creole* was offered to those persons who have worked “during slavery in the Caribbean basin and in the Indian Ocean, being uprooted persons belonging to a New World, contrasting the old, deep and rooted, ascribing for the first time a Spaniard born in the New World” (see Stewart, 2007:155). Nowadays the term means different things to different locations, but its main relevance is linked to something being impure.

In the island La Réunion everybody born there are called *creole*; in Trinidad the term designates all Trinidadians, except those of Asian origin; in Suriname, a creole is a person of African origin, while in French Guyana a creole is someone who has adopted an European way of life (see Stewart, 2007: 155).

Furthermore, various ideologists who have discussed about hybridity were related as being “of double or mixed cultural identity” (Burke, 2009:3), being born in one part of the world and living in another, adopting two or more ideologies at the same time.

Homi Bhabha (1949-) for instance, is an Indian who has taught in England and now lives in the USA; Stuart Hill (1932-) was born in Jamaica of mixed parentage, has lived most of his life in England; Paul Gilroy (1956-), also of mixed parentage, was born in London and has worked in the USA; Edward Said (1935-2003), a Palestinian who grew up in Egypt and taught in the USA (see Burke, 2009:3).

When referring to creolization and the way this process interferes in the life of a person or in the culture of a nation, we have to stress also the need for acceptance of sharing the same ideas in a single space. Latin America is an example of cultural creolization and hybridity, being composed of all kinds of ethnic groups and social classes. Notably in this case is Uruguay, whose population consists in “Spanish and Italian descent” (Burke, 2009:4), while Brazil has “Africans, Japanese and immigrants from Europe as well as the indigenous population” (Burke, 2009:5). These groups have learnt

to live together, to accept each other and to share in a way common ideas, sustaining the same values and requiring for equal rights, mainly because they occupy the same geographical space. As Lionnet (2011) stated about creolization that “it simply affirms the implications of diverse colonial relationality as part of the continual process of modern entity formation, including modern democracy” (Lionnet, Shih, 2011:42).

Romania, in my opinion, can be considered an example of creolized or hybrid culture due to the roots of our language or of our ancestors, but our country can be taken also as a *bolster boat* which accepts, shares and adopts various foreign influences. In either case, we have proofs that with the help of the cutting-edge technology and the go-as-you-please accessibility, we are free to experience different things in different places. It is not a hidden or secret thing that we are free and able to take an idea from the Americans and combine it with a Japanese décor in accordance with an Italian or French taste, using made-in-China objects settled on exotic scenery near the sea in Romania. As far as I am concerned, *creolization* means both evolution and innovation. It is challenging to discover the origins of some systems and to observe what it is now, how it was possible to achieve a new level and what is here questionable, if it is more or less effective.

2. Creolized food: Pizza in Romania

To demonstrate and illustrate this process of food creolization in Romania, I have chosen to present the ways or the reasons why some people consider the Romanian menu a hybrid one, especially when it comes to pizza. Regarding food, I think that it is important to know what we eat, where different sorts of food do come from and how it is possible to eat nowadays a kind of food that was typical for a certain period of time or for a culture. Because of the accessibility of hyper-consumerism, we can obtain everything we want, be it local or foreign, from our supermarkets or from other countries through an online order. Nowadays, we have plenty of shops that sell only one type of food or ingredients in accordance to a specific country or culture. As for instance we have in our country Chinese, Italian or American shops or restaurants, which tend to sell or offer only their local food, delicatessen and ingredients, but, of course, it is not one hundred percent possible, because sometimes due to the need for gaining profit, they combine and offer also other products which people buy and consume.

What is interesting to me is the fact that there are cases in which a Romanian opens a Chinese-specific restaurant or an Italian-specific restaurant and offers foreign food combined with Romanian specific food and this thing occurs not only because of the migration of that person in our country, but also because of the fact that having a different and outlandish restaurant is *in fashion* and this *Otherness* has become a trend for many Romanians. We can speak here about “a form of creolization characterized by a mixture of ingredients, methods, and dishes” (Danciu, Radu, 2014:169).

Pizza has become a ‘worldwide trend’ because in every restaurant, both in our country and outside Romania, pizza occupies a significant part in the menu. We can state that pizza holds together all these *pizza-eating* countries. What is more, there are numerous types of pizza in every country. Little do we know about the fact that they are differently obtained. We believe that pizza is a creolized food because in its composition we find ingredients, tips, forms and mixtures that are not original, but *borrowed* from differently parts of the world and mixed with traditional and local elements in accordance with tastes and possibilities of the regions. Furthermore, we assume that pizza has become an *international dish* because we find pizza also in French or vegetarian restaurants` menus, forming a specific category of food, beside spaghetti, salads or entrees.

As far as we know, the origin of pizza seems to be Italian and began with the *lazzaroni* of Naples. The poor of the city wanted a cheap dish that could be eaten anytime. The particular innovation of the Italians was to add fresh tomatoes to flat bread and this creation was so famous, that tourists such as Alexander Dumas deliberately went into the slums of the city to taste their specialty, as Helstosky (2008) mentions it.

In 1835, the French author, Alexander Dumas, travelled to Naples, in Italy, where he observed the customs and life of the Neapolitan poor. In his book, *Le Corricolo* from 1843, he described the infamous *lazzaroni* of the city and declared that the *lazzaroni* subsisted on two foods: watermelon in the summer and pizza in the winter (Helstosky, 2008: 7).

What is more, “pizza was more than an example of a regional culinary curiosity, it was *the gastronomic thermometer of the*

market and therefore of Neapolitan society” (Helstosky, 2008: 8). In fact, “pizza reflected as much about the society that ate the pizza as it did about the pizza itself” (Helstosky, 2008: 8).

Pizza as most people know it, first appeared in 1889 with baker Raffaele Esposito of Naples and was inwrought with tomato, cheese, and other toppings and seasonings.

In honor of a visit by Queen Margherita of Savoy, he prepared a patriotic pizza in the colors of the Italian flag: green basil, white mozzarella cheese made from water buffalo milk, and red tomatoes. He named it Pizza Margherita, a variety of pie still served today. In fact, the descendants of Esposito and his wife Maria Brandi still operate Brandi Pizzeria in Naples (Hulin, 2007:22).

Undoubtedly, pizza is known everywhere and you do not have to be an expert in order to prepare a pizza, only to have all the required ingredients. We can eat pizza in restaurants, fast foods or at home. Today, throughout Italy, pizza is eaten at lunch, dinner, or as a snack, eating a slice folded over into a kind of sandwich.

As the popularity of pizza spread from Naples to the rest of the world, it changed in terms of shape and flavor. As it moved into different societies, pizza came to mean different things to different people, taking on more significance than a simple snack. Pizza was a way to survive, but it later became part of the city`s mythic history; for the rest of Italy, pizza became an adopted favorite meal, representing a part of Italian cuisine to be celebrated, commemorated and protected; for Italian emigrants, pizza became a way to connect back to one`s homeland as well as a way to earn a living and for non-Italians, pizza was both an ethnic food and a blank canvas, open to all forms of culinary experimentation (Helstosky, 2008: 9).

In Romania, it is assumed that pizza appeared for the first time at the seaside restaurants, in order to attract more and more tourists. In that time, it was a custom to eat toast with oil, garlic, onion, bacon or tomatoes, but this was only a simple form of what it is now called *pizza*. In the present, we have all kinds of restaurants, Italian or not, but with pizza in the menu. According to an article published by <http://www.isic-romania.ro/pizza-hut/>, in our country, the first official pizza restaurant appeared in 1994 and

was opened in Bucharest on Dorobantilor Street, under an American franchise: *Pizza Hut*. *Pizza Hut* still exists in Bucharest, Timisoara, Ploiesti, Iasi, Cluj, Constanța, Sibiu and Bacau. In the same year, another pizza restaurant was opened in Brănești by a Romanian, but with the help of an Italian pizzaiolo. The next pizza restaurant was called *Jerry`s Pizza*, another American franchise, which was opened in 1996 by the American John Alfred Dauteuil, the one who invented pizza with stuffed cabbage (see <http://www.foodandbar.ro/qmi-am-controlat-strict-afacerea/>). Soon after, various pizzerias were opened all over the country.

Obviously, the most important ingredients for a pizza are the dough, the tomato sauce and mozzarella. These ingredients used for pizza are mixed and combined with others. It is said that the Romanian ingredients differ from the classic Italian ones, even if Romanians import most of them. To improve my knowledge about pizza and the required ingredients, I have discussed with different managers of pizzerias, who have explained to me their secrets for a perfect pizza. For the batter, Romanian pizzerias use in general patent flour, sediment, water and cooking oil. On the other hand, for the composition, it is used tomato sauce from the local producers, mozzarella, imported and bought from supermarkets, ham, bacon, salami, baloney, prosciutto crudo from the local producers, anchovy, imported in tins, sea fruits, tuna, sweet corn and mushrooms from local producers, imported olives and pineapples, local bean, pumpkins, eggplants, tomatoes, peppers, onion or lemon. Peperoncini, gorgonzola and parmesan are also imported. Hence, there are various types of pizza nowadays, especially in terms of crust, which can be thick or thin, topped with sauce, cheese and various ingredients.

For the most part, ancient and medieval pizzas relied on local ingredients, yet the pizza we know today is a global concoction: wheat came from the Middle East, olive oil and oregano came from Mediterranean, basil came from India and the water buffalo, which is used to make mozzarella cheese, came from Asia (Helstosky, 2008:19).

Conclusion

I strongly believe that each country comes into prominence with something. Italians come with pizza and maybe this is the cause why they refuse to eat pizza outside Italy. For them, pizza is

something local, a part from their history and they want to keep it in this way, even if nowadays pizza is globalised and sometimes taken as *moulding clay* on which each culture puts its impress. On the whole, in Romania, pizza has become a trend, more and more people order pizza at home when having guests or special events. As I stated before, pizza is in fact a creolized food, adopted and improved in accordance to our taste and possibilities. What is more, even if the crust or the ingredients are not original or do not taste the same in every restaurant because of their diversity, people simply adore to eat pizza, being a certain choice for breakfast, lunch or dinner for many of us. As a matter of fact, creolization is closely related to ethnicity, race and gender because all of these issues are part of our identity and define ourselves as nation and culture, but they make us feel different and original too.

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Perceptions of Gender Roles in the Romanian Society – a case study

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Abstract: *The present paper tackles the issue of gender roles and gender stereotypes and their perception in the Romanian society, taking as a starting point the Gender Barometer, a research carried out in Romania, in August 2000 by the Open Society Foundation.*

Key words: *gender roles, gender schemata, double burden*

1. Gender roles

Gender is a pervasive feature of our everyday life. Even though in recent years the demarcation between the masculine and the feminine has become more or less blurred – unisex fashion, men with long hair, wearing jewellery, etc. – gender continues to be one of the most visible human traits and we are still defined to a great extent by gender. To give just one simple example: almost every official form that we have to fill in throughout our life requires that we mention whether we are male or female. In everything we do we communicate the idea of gender. “Our biological sex is determined at birth by factors beyond our control, yet being born male or female is probably the most important feature of our lives.” (Romaine 1999:1)

Gender roles are a theoretical construct, a set of norms referring to the behavior and attitudes that society associates with each sex, including the rights and responsibilities that men and women have within a certain society. The problem with these gender roles is that they aren't merely descriptive, but rather prescriptive i.e. they don't simply tell us how men and women are, but how they should be. These norms *dictate* how a man or a woman should think, speak, react, dress etc., putting a lot of pressure on the individual to conform to these norms.

This gendered behaviour or gender schemas are taught and perpetuated by various socializing agents: parents, school,

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colleagues, friends, books, the media etc. From the moment we are born into this world, we are faced with gender stereotypes and gender roles. It is well known that parents treat female and male children differently, probably a result of them being subjected to the same gendered expectations as children and as a matter of fact for their whole life. From the moment they are born, babies receive a 'gendered' welcome to this world: pink nurseries for baby girls, filled with dolls and tea sets or blue nurseries for baby boys, full of cars and constructions games, all providing behavioural patterns for the man/woman-to-be. As a result, at the age of 2 or three, children are perfectly capable of selecting toys considered 'suitable' for each gender. From early childhood boys and girls are socialized in different ways, being shown and taught what is considered appropriate behavior for their gender. Traditionally, boys are taught how to build and fix things, to take part in competitive games. Girls play house, performing on a small scale the grown ups' world, where mommy cooks and cleans and daddy goes to work. The following dialogue between Ann and her mother proves my point, i.e. that gender roles are learnt from an early age.

Mamma: Go and buy a toy, Ann.

Ann: I can buy a gun.

Mamma: A gun is not fit for you, Ann.

Ann: Why is a gun not fit for me?

Mamma: A gun is only fit for a boy.

Ann: May I buy a top?

Mamma: No, but you may buy a mop. (Arnold, 1996: 19 cited in Coates 1997 : 22)

And the so-called gender-role lesson does not stop here: among the gender role patterns learnt at an early age, we should mention:

- Boys are strong, girls are graceful.
- Boys are handsome, girls are beautiful.
- Boys are doctors, girls are nurses.
- Boys are football players, girls are cheerleaders.
- Boys are pilots, girls are stewardesses.
- Boys are presidents, girls are first ladies.
- Boys fix things, girls need things fixed.
- Boys can eat, girls can cook.
- Boys build houses, girls keep houses. (Darrow 1970)

Gender becomes an important variable quite early in our lives; we start developing these gender schemata from early childhood and by the time we are grown-ups, they are so well rooted that we end up perceiving the people around us in accordance with gender stereotypes.

2. Romania and gender roles – a case study

Every society is to a certain extent patriarchal; each society encourages differences between men and women, in the way they are educated, treated, taught etc. From a communist patriarchal society, Romania seems to have abolished only the communist part, as Romania continues to be to a large extent a patriarchal, sexist and conservatory society, perpetuating Anna's myth of self-sacrifice, a society where women are perceived mainly as wives and mothers and are denied access to more powerful positions in the business world. In the Romanian society there is an implicit ideology, supported by church and tradition, which postulates men's superiority over women – a superiority that is by no means biological, but social, given by one's social position – and by social position I mean higher income, more favourable hierarchical positions, access to political power etc.

In order to analyse the perception of gender roles in the Romanian society, I took as a starting point The Gender Barometer ² - a research carried out in Romania in August 2000 which analysed the gender dimension and gender relations in the Romania. The research offers the image of a patriarchal society, where 63% of the people questioned believe that it is women's duty to undertake housework, where 83% believe that the man is the head of the family etc. Nevertheless, when the results were broken down by age groups, it was clear that younger generations had a somewhat different perception of gender roles: e.g. only 58% of the people aged 18-29 believed that only women should undertake the housework, compared to 61% of people aged 30-59 and 71% of people aged 60 and +.

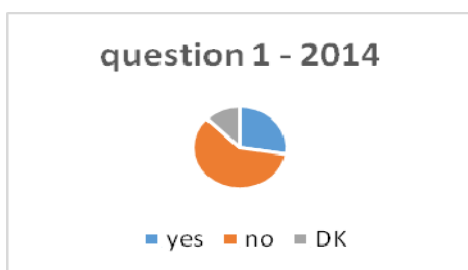
Therefore, I have decided to follow up this lead and, by reiterating some of the questions from the Gender Barometer, see if in the past 14 years, the perception of gender roles and gender stereotypes within the younger generation has changed in any way. I focused on the younger generations, since in the above

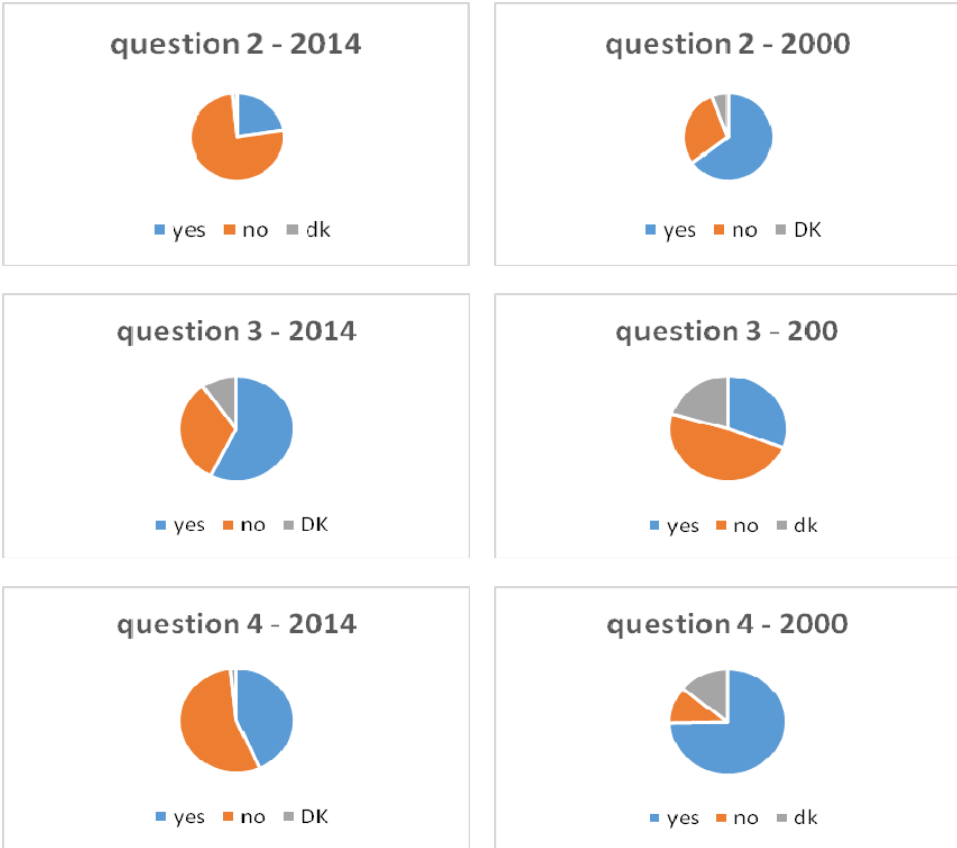
² Retrieved from <http://datedeschise.soros.ro/?q=barometrul-de-gen-2000> on the 14.05. 2014.

mentioned research they were the ones challenging the old patriarchal ideologies regarding men and women and their role in society. So the sample volume comprises 40 persons aged 19-35, with higher education, survey timetable 20th April – 14th of May 2014, data-gathering methods: questionnaire, methods for summarizing: graphs. The questions were the following:

1. Is it women's duty more than men's to undertake the housework? (yes/no/I don't know)
2. Is it men's duty more than women's to be the main breadwinners in the household? (yes/no/I don't know)
3. Are men as able as women in raising children? (yes/no/I don't know)
4. Is man the head of the family?
5. Who does the shopping in your family? (the man/the woman/both)
6. Who performs the following tasks in your household? (the man/the woman/both)
 1. Wash family car
 2. Repairs around the house
 3. Washes clothes
 4. Iron clothes
 5. Washes dishes
 6. Cooks
 7. Looks after the child
 8. Does the homework with the child
 9. Goes with the child to the doctor
 10. Takes the child from school

And here are the findings: the column on the left reflects the findings of the Gender Barometer research, August 2000, while the right column reflects the findings of my research April 2014





The question related to who does the shopping in your family brought forward surprising findings: shopping used to be regarded as a 'female task' par excellence. In the year 2000, 52% of the shopping was done by women only, compared to the 82.5 % in 2014 done by both men and women.

As for the household tasks included in question 6, the findings also indicated a significant change. The answers of the 2000 research mirrored a society in which there was a clear-cut distinction between the household roles of each gender: men were in charge with washing the car 81%, with the repairs around the house 77%, whereas women were in charge with the washing 88%, the ironing 88%, the cooking 86%, taking care of the children 69% etc. The 2014 research reflects a society in which the key-word seems to be shared household tasks: both men and women wash the family car 70%, wash clothes 55%, cook 37.5%, take care of the children 87.5% etc.

A clear improvement is obvious in the younger generation's perception of gender roles; tasks that were regarded 'feminine' par excellence are now undertaken by both men and women thus diminishing the so-called 'double burden' – a term used to refer to workload of – more often than not – women who work in the public sphere to earn money, but also are responsible for the domestic, unpaid labor.

In a society in which only men had a paid job to provide for the family, it seemed somewhat normal for the household chores to be done almost exclusively by women. But times have changed, women work too and earn money, and due to traditional gender roles that have been accepted by society over time and reinforced through different channels, they are faced with the double burden of guilt, worrying that work makes them neglect their children on the one hand, and that motherhood makes them neglect their job, on the other hand. Times are changing, people's perceptions of gender roles are changing too, but such things do not happen overnight and until they do it is again women who have to find a way to deal with this double burden – either of work or of guilt, trying to do their best in both the public and domestic sphere.

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Revisiting the Argentine Tango: From the “Paris of South America” to the Interwar Bucharest

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Abstract: *The following paper traces back the origins of the Argentine Tango to the barrios of Buenos Aires discussing the alterations that have transformed it into a selling product, enlarging upon the essential differences between the traditional tango and the “domestic” versions of it. The controversial myth of “Zaraza” is linked to the rise and fall of “the last troubadour”, Cristian Vasile, and paralleled by the glory and decay of the aristocratic, opulent interwar Bucharest, buried under the ruins of the Second World War bombings.*

Key words: *tango, Zaraza, import, Cristian Vasile, interbellum*

Esa ráfaga, el tango, esa diablura,/ los atreados años desafía; hecho de polvo y tiempo, el hombre dura/ menos que la liviana melodía, que solo es tiempo. El tango crea un turbio/ pasado irreal que de algún modo es cierto, un recuerdo imposible de haber muerto/ peleando, en una esquina del suburbio.
Jorge Luis Borges, *El Tango* (1958)

Nowadays, when the word *tango* is mentioned, the first image that comes into one’s mind is that of a couple of dancers, locked in a tight embrace, drawing long, gliding steps with their feet across the dance floor. For the ones displaying a keen sensibility towards any form of art, tango - as a cultural phenomenon, should reveal both of its sides: the commercial aspect as well as the traditional one.

As a tourist in Buenos Aires, the enthralling “*ciudad porteña de mi unico querer*”², known to the world as the *Paris of South America*, one cannot miss a delightful candle light dinner at the most famous houses of tango, “El Señor Tango” and “El Viejo Almacén”, while enjoying the intertwined, professional dance couples carrying out their outstanding performances, accompanied by the live music played by small orchestras.

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² *Mi Buenos Aires Querido*, famous Tango composed by Carlos Gardel, with lyrics by Alfredo Le Pera.

At “Señor Tango” the spectators are bedazzled by the glamorous performance, an elaborate show that reenacts the birth of the Argentine Tango: *Gauchos* on horseback parade on the multilevel revolving stage, dancers recreate the decadent climate of the bordellos from the outskirts of Buenos Aires; Fernando Soler, the lead singer and owner of the place, melts the hearts of the audience with his deep, gravelly, baritone voice, dramatically intoning Carlos Gardel’s most famous tangos. The grand finale of the show brings back to the stage all the prior entertainers; stripes of the black-and-blue Argentinian flag fall upon them from the ceiling, along with a cloud of glimmering confetti, while the orchestra triumphantly plays Evita’s *Don’t Cry for Me Argentina*, receiving a rapturous standing ovation from the audience.

At “El Viejo Almacén” the audience is reminded that they have reached “the most traditional corner of tango, where the soul of Buenos Aires is to be found”³. In an intimate setting, with small, round, wooden tables, resembling a *bodegón* rather than a luxurious restaurant, in dim lighting, the dancers perform to the chords of the *orchestra típica*. The authenticity of the tango is still questionable, as the couples almost never use close embrace, focusing more on inextricable pirouettes, lifts and dips, much to the delight of the audience, but losing that magical feeling of the connection instead.

Thus, one cannot help but wonder: has tango become a selling product in an epoch based on consumerism beliefs? What does the authentic tango really mean, and how far have we, the Europeans, drifted from its original symbolism?

Tracing back its evolution, tango, the “ceremonious and enigmatic ritual of the man from Buenos Aires” (Véliz 7), is known to have originated amongst working-class slums, in bawdyhouses, at the end of the nineteenth century, as Borges himself stated in one of his many interviews: “The tango in Buenos Aires, as most people have written about it, was evolved in the brothel houses about 1880. And the people didn’t accept it because they knew whom it came from. When people heard that they were dancing it in Paris, then they took it seriously.” (Burgin 199)

³ At the beginning of the show, the host utters the following phrase: “Bienvenidos a la esquina más tradicional del tango, donde se encuentra el alma de Buenos Aires”.

It is known that there was no tango in the beginning, only the fast and strong beats of the playful *milonga*. Its lyrics talked about the passionate throbbing of life, about fights, hoodlums, malefactors and stabbings in the life of the Argentinian *arrabales* (outskirts), as one of Arturo Perez Reverte's characters stated: "There are tangos for suffering and tangos for killing... The original ones were rather of the latter category." (Reverte 67)

Milonga was mainly practiced between men, challenging each other and engaging in a contest to measure and surpass the opponent's dancing skills, while waiting for the women to appear. As time passed, the *milonga* acquired romantic connotations. Men began their "hunt" for a lady partner, aspiring to conquer women with their dance steps. It is always the man who invites the woman, never the other way, using a *cabeceo* or an "eye game", a subtle nod of the head, a non-verbal invitation to the dance. When the woman accepts his invitation, the man walks over to the lady knowing that she is at his disposal for at least three or four dances, that is, one *tanda*: "The rituals that take place here are: courtship - represented by staring , nodding; then comes the union or communion, the embrace, then the separation, the music stops, the magic ends, he keeps her in his arms for an instant more and then takes her back to her table, but stops about three feet before her table to fulfill the last ritual of not invading her space. A love story in one tango. Birth, life and death."⁴

In tango dancing, what may seem as an act of subduing the woman is in fact a way of transforming her into an accomplice of the man to whom she will surrender on the dance floor: "Tango can only be danced by a trained couple, capable of adapting to a dance in which the movement suddenly stops, slowing down the rhythm of the man; an imitation of a fight in which the woman, clenched to the man, intents a continuous escape but stops every time, proudly and provocatively defeated." (Reverte 39)

In one of his interviews, while emphasizing on the essential differences between *milonga* and *tango*, Jorge Luis Borges remembered turning down one of the requests to write the lyrics for a tango:

I believe the tango began to decline with Gardel and the sentimental tangos of the type of *La cumparsita*. The earlier

⁴ This statement can be found at <http://www.totango.net/cabeceo.html>

ones were far better, those we call the tangos of the old guard (...) All these tangos have the spirit of bravery as the *milonga*, which was a much older form. The tango dates from the 1880's, and had its origins in bawdyhouses. The *milonga* was already there. (Burgin 54)

Tango music is regarded by the Argentinian writer as an altered variation of the old *milonga*, being totally unrepresentative for the people of Buenos Aires: "I have written a book of *milonga* lyrics. The *milonga* is of the people; the tango never was. You know the instruments used in the tango were the piano, the flute and the violin. If the tango were of the people, the instrument would have been the guitar, as it is in the *milonga*." (Burgin 224) Thus, Borges explains that instruments like the piano, the flute or the violin, clearly belonging to a higher economic level, could not be found in the tenement houses of the suburbs where the *milonga* could be heard.

The writer's statement is yet another proof of the mixed cultural influences that have changed the original *milonga* into the tango that is still being danced in Europe nowadays. Due to its seashore setting, Buenos Aires became an inlet for the majority of the European immigrants since the 19-th century: Spaniards, Italians, French and Jewish immigrants escaping persecution. The Italian influence became most visible, as tango lyrics were saturated with words from the Lunfardo dialect or "street-smart slang". First known as "*El dialecto de los ladrones*" ("The dialect of thieves")⁵, the Lunfardo was originally a prison slang that spread among the social strata, slowly being considered as a permanent addition to the colloquial language of the *porteños*.

The *bandoneón*, an instrument related to the *concertina*, inevitably linked to the tangos that can be heard today, was introduced from Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century. Shortly after, tango dancers and musicians from *orquestas típicas* began travelling to other parts of the world, and the capitals of Europe welcomed them openheartedly. The famous "Morocho del Abasto"⁶, Carlos Gardel, distilled the *bordello*

⁵ Lunfardo: Gotán Slang", <http://www.argentinaindependent.com/life-style/society-life-style/lunfardo-gotan-slang>.

⁶ The Brunet Boy from Abasto", also known as "El Zorzal" (The Song Thrush), "El Mago" (The Magician) and "El Mudo" (The Mute).

couplets into the sentimental tango and the traditional *milonga* music has gradually devolved into the romanced *tango-canción*.

From this moment on, the concept of tango turned into a commercial product. In spite of the word's etymology, the Latin *tango* meaning "touch", the dancers' frame - the *abrazo* (the closed embrace), that hypnotic connection between the dancers, opened to avoid too much body contact, and the British eventually classified it as *ballroom tango*. Musicians slowed down the original tempo, lyricizing it and reducing it to a melancholic lament about sorrow and the misfortunes of love: "*Quejas de Bandoneon*"⁷ Eventually, tango was condemned to reflect „the tribulations of the man of Buenos Aires: unstable, concerned, uncertain, melancholic, nostalgic, pessimistic and depressive. Furthermore, disregarding the social type of restrictions, this man feels the urge to unburden himself of his woes" (Irimia) or *desahogarse*, as the Argentinians say.

It is then, in the late 1920', that the tango, after being contaminated with all influences, travelled halfway around the world and became popular in the Romanian "Little Paris", declining in popularity, after less than a decade, in favor of the *jazz*. The long disputed legend of "Zaraza", whose story never seems to transcend the covers of a "pink novel", arose somewhere in this climate, in the tumultuous, effervescent turmoil of the interwar Bucharest.

Myth or reality, the mysterious female character's existence is most certainly connected to the lifework of the famous Cristian Vasile, the most beloved diseur of the interbellum. Conceived in the manner of a docufiction, Andrei Ruse's novel, "Zaraza", intends to restore the rise and fall of "the last troubadour", paralleled by the glory and decay of the "Little Paris", buried under the ruins of the Second World War bombings.

As a spotlight addict, much in love with the stage and the audience and always uneager to settle down, the bohemian vocalist's existence burst like a succession of solar explosions. After having lost his father in the battle of Mărășești, he fled with his remaining family to Huși, to escape the horrors of the First World War. He fell in love with tango music as a child, when the gramophones from the Jewish neighborhoods told stories about love and the promise of a beautiful life. Memorizing their lyrics, at

⁷ Famous tango composed by Roberto Firpo in 1920.

the end of those infernal war days, he would put the other children to sleep by singing them to alleviate hunger and poverty.

Following the end of the First World War, the Romanian capital became impregnated with the sweetness of all pleasures: modern cars and chariots riding side by side, palaces built after French models, cafeterias and cafes, pubs, beerhouses, saloons, restaurants and summer terraces, sweet perfumes and colored, provocative fashion items in display windows. A true feast of life seemed to be celebrated in this “garden city”, where patches of lush vegetation matched the exploding enthusiasm of people.

Cristian Vasile adopted an already distilled, domestic version of the original tango music. Once introduced to the Parisian ballrooms, tango fused with the French romance melodies, immersing into their lyricism and dissenting from its obscure, decadent origins.

The charming diseur-writer-composer trio, Cristian Vasile, Ion Pribeagu and Ionel Fernic, had to face the great competition of the time: Jean Moscopol, Zavaidoc and Titi Botez, all of them renown and praised songsters in the expensive lounges and restaurants of Bucharest.

Cristian Vasile’s success came as a breakthrough after he adapted the world famous “Zaraza”. In his original version, the song was an Uruguayan awarded tango, composed by Benjamin Tagle Lara, previously recorded by famous vocalists as Jose Razzano and Ignacio Corsini. As recounted by the author himself at his book launch, in Spanish language *zaraza* stands for a printed textile used to cover the back of the animals, and the word became a kind of sobriquet given to the oxen, commonly used as a goading, and verbalized to encourage the animal to carry his master home. By creating a set of new lyrics, Ion Pribeagu transformed Zaraza into the name of the fatally ravishing woman. Even though Manole Stroici recorded this song exactly the same year, with completely different lyrics signed by Nicolae Kirițescu, Cristian Vasile’s version could never be equaled.

In his novel, Andrei Ruse offers the readers a fictional, possible projection of the mysterious Zaraza: Miss Coincidence (Domnișoara Coincidentă), a dark skinned cocotte that irreversibly marked the diseur’s destiny by becoming his unnamed muse and the main reason for his dropping out from the conservatory. Miss Coincidence’s presence becomes a landmark in his existence;

meeting her first as a humble student, then seven years later, as a wealthy and widely appreciated discur, he transforms her into a marker of progress, just enough for him to realize that she is accidentally responsible for his success.

In spite of him confessing his beliefs in love at first sight, her refusal is cruel and explicit: “I believe in any kind of love, as long as there are furs, jewels and wallets forgotten on the nightstand.” (Ruse 22) After having followed her chariot to the famous “Răcaru’s” pub, the twenty year old student, with shattered dreams and empty pockets, climbed on the stage for the first time, attempting to impress Miss Coincidence with Ionel Fernic’s “Wandering Heart” (“Inimă pribeagă”), conquering the audience’s hearts but not his beloved one’s.

After seven years of experiencing the sweet delirium of success, hazard brings them face to face again. Cristian Vasile makes the noblest gesture a man can do: having bought her favors for a night, he refuses to touch her on the account of his unconditional love that means “giving everything to the other, without expecting anything back” (Ruse 168)

During an interview, the author pointed out the fact that his novel focuses “on the main character and his relationship to death, because that’s going to define his every move and his rather savory attempt of becoming immortal”(Andrei). Failing as an individual, pressured by a dramatic political regime change from monarchy to communism, condemned and obliterated by many generations, Cristian Vasile wanted to erase himself from the pages of history. He died in indigence, choosing to be interred in a grave without a cross or a name, convinced that the world had forgotten him. Even if the stories about him and his life faded along with the aristocratic opulence of the interwar Bucharest, the myth of “Zaraza” represents a melodic pledge for the continuous rediscovery golden epoch of tango and its promoters.

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Comment Bouddha a découvert la Révolution russe

Aurora Băgiag¹

Résumé: *Le roman Le Retour de Bouddha (1923) de l'écrivain russe Vsévolod Ivanov orchestre un entrecroisement de vecteurs spirituels opposés : d'une part, la régression du lama mongol Dava-Dordji, oscillant entre les mystérieux appels de l'Orient, qui le déterminent à reconduire une statue de Bouddha dans son pays, et les appels de l'Europe, qui le font évader vers la civilisation moderne et l'utopie bolchévique ; de l'autre part, la progression du professeur russe Safonov, qui franchit les obstacles de la science pour retrouver la sérénité. Cet interchangement de rôles est censé rétablir l'équilibre bouddhique dans un univers révolutionnaire, où le présent historique dévore la représentation divine, tout en se laissant réinterpréter à la lumière des enseignements divins.*

Mots-clé: *Bouddha, occident, orient, retour, révolution russe*

Introduction

Au début des années 1920, l'écrivain russe Vsévolod Ivanov raconte dans son roman *Le Retour de Bouddha*² l'histoire d'un vieux professeur de Petersbourg qui redécouvre le présent aux côtés d'un lama mongol. Escortant une statue en bronze de Bouddha vers sa Mongolie originaire, le long voyage hivernal possède tous les éléments d'un parcours initiatique : chercher le sens de l'existence dans le tourbillon d'ethnies, races, croyances et

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² Écrit en 1922 et publié dans l'almanach *Nos jours* en 1923, le roman *Возвращение Будды/ Le Retour de Bouddha* connaît plusieurs éditions, comprenant des modifications substantielles. Pour une bibliographie complète des éditions du roman parues en russe du vivant de Vsévolod Ivanov consulter l'annexe de l'article de Dany Savelli, « Une lecture du *Retour du Bouddha* de Vsévolod Ivanov ou le fantastique à la jonction du bouddhisme et de la Révolution », p. 318. L'édition sur laquelle s'appuie notre étude, la dernière parue du vivant de son auteur, date de 1958. Elle est également à la base de la traduction française, réalisée en 1973 par Rémy Perraud et publiée par L'Age d'Homme, avec une préface de Jacques Catteau. Toutes nos références seront empruntées à cette traduction et seront indiquées entre parenthèse dans le texte, en utilisant l'abréviation du titre *Retour*.

doctrines politiques, qui se confrontent sur la scène d'une Russie postrévolutionnaire, tourmentée par la guerre civile.

Dans un premier temps nous nous interrogerons sur les avatars de Bouddha présents dans le roman ainsi que sur la propension de ceux-ci à orchestrer le retour du dieu. Nous explorerons ensuite l'interchangement de rôles qui s'opère entre les deux compagnons de route de la statue en bronze, l'Européen et l'Asiatique, l'un remplaçant l'autre auprès de Bouddha. Enfin nous analyserons, sous un angle à la fois politique et spirituel, la quête bouddhique du sens dans l'univers russe postrévolutionnaire.

1. Les avatars de Bouddha sont de retour ?

Le récit du *Retour de Bouddha* fait partie de l'œuvre engagée de Vsévolod Ivanov, de la « littérature soviétique sibérienne », tout comme ses autres romans et nouvelles : *Partisans* (1921), *Le Train blindé* (1922). Baptisé par le groupe littéraire des Frères Sérapion dont il fait partie « Frère Aléoute », en référence aux populations qui vivent dans l'archipel s'étendant entre l'Alaska et le Kamtchatka, Ivanov est le révolutionnaire qui a traversé la Sibérie, « l'homme aux cent métiers », qui est devenu finalement écrivain. Le « mammouth sibérien », comme il est surnommé, est l'artisan d'une fusion originale entre la Russie révolutionnaire et l'Orient : « poing tendu du partisan et regard énigmatique du Bouddha confondus » (Catteau 7)

Ivanov, dans les veines duquel coule du sang russe, polonais et mongol, est fasciné par les représentations sculptées de « l'Eveillé » et va jusqu'à s'identifier avec les hommes de pierre de son peuple. Vladimir Pozner, qui raconte l'une de leurs rencontres à Paris, le décrit méditant face aux dieux mystérieux du musée Guimet :

Nous étions entourés de statues de Bouddha qui se succédaient comme les arbres d'une forêt. Je finis par trouver notre ami, plongé dans la contemplation des divinités pétrifiées, comme elles immobile, pareil à elles au point de ne pouvoir en être distingué. (Catteau 10)

Un fragment autobiographique, extrait de l'introduction aux *Nouvelles Partisanes*, rédigée par l'auteur même, relie l'inspiration du *Retour de Bouddha* et la découverte à Petrograd d'un temple bouddhique, dominé par une immense statue de Bouddha, devant

laquelle trois Mongols attendent patiemment, aussi immobiles que leur mystérieux dieu :

Un jour de 1921, alors que j'étais dans les faubourgs de Petrograd, je tombai inopinément sur un temple bouddhique dont j'avais ignoré jusque-là l'existence... J'entrai. Les murs étaient blancs, d'une blancheur que seuls nuançaient quelques ornements vermeils, et au beau milieu de cette blancheur, rayonnait une grande statue dorée de Bouddha. Trois Mongols en capote et en toque de mouton étaient assis devant elle, immobiles... Je m'assis près de la porte sur un tabouret. Je restai une heure, deux heures, peut-être trois... Je restais assis et attendais, je ne sais pourquoi, que « mes » Mongols se lèvent. Puis, lorsque mes yeux se mirent à papilloter et ma bouche à se dessécher, cette attente me parut ridicule et naïve. Je m'en allai. (Catteau 10-11)

Cette attente qui s'est gravée dans la mémoire de l'écrivain est associée au souvenir d'une rencontre, lors d'un congrès de Batoum, avec un ethnographe mongol. Celui-ci avait raconté à Ivanov l'histoire de plusieurs lamas qui voulaient obtenir l'autorisation de renvoyer dans leur pays une statue de Bouddha. Ils avaient promis en échange de lui permettre de transcrire les légendes qu'ils racontaient. Une interrogation plane pourtant sur cette expédition : « Ne serait-il pas advenu à cette statue ce qui est arrivé au *Coran* d'Omar? » (Catteau 10-11) A savoir que ce *Coran*, écrit par le successeur spirituel de Mahomet même, qui était conservé dans la Bibliothèque publique de Petrograd, avait été revendiqué par les musulmans d'Asie Centrale. Expédié à Samarkand par le train, le *Coran* est déchiré par les *basmatchs* qui s'en emparent et se le partagent.

Le Retour de Bouddha propose en effet une fable analogue. Un jour de novembre 1918, dans le Petersbourg d'après la révolution d'Octobre 1917, bouleversé par le gouvernement récemment instauré des Rouges et tourmenté par le froid et la faim, le soldat mongol Dava-Dordji rend une visite inopinée au professeur Safonov. Interrompant son précieux rituel journalier autour du feu et d'un repas frugal, le Mongol annonce au professeur qu'il devra accompagner une statue de Bouddha jusqu'en Mongolie. Le voyage hivernal, qui dure plusieurs mois, réunit dans un wagon de train misérable une assemblée bizarre, comprenant le professeur Safonov, Dava-Dordji, une escorte de

douze soldats mongols, une femme et, occasionnellement des représentants des commissariats soviétiques, tous gravitant autour d'une immense caisse en bois qui contient Bouddha. Se laissant entraîner dans cette aventure étrange, où s'opèrent de mystérieuses conversions, qui font que les Mongols désertent un à un, abandonnant le dieu, le professeur Safonov demeure seul à reconduire la statue jusqu'au terme de son voyage. Descendu dans la steppe pour achever sa route avec une caravane de chameaux, Safonov fini par se faire tuer par les Kirghizes qui prennent possession de la statue en bronze et la démembrant, en recherchant l'or.

Compris dans son sens premier, le retour de Bouddha, c'est-à-dire, la restitution au peuple mongol d'un bien faisant partie de son patrimoine culturel, échoue. Initiée par le Commissariat du peuple aux Nationalités³, qui souhaite rétrocéder une statue prise par un général tsariste à un monastère lamaïque mongol de la province de Tüshetü-Khan, l'expédition n'atteindra pas son but, faisant ainsi du Bouddha en bronze doré le protagoniste d'un impossible retour. Si, pour les bolchevicks, celui-ci ne dépasse pas le statut de « fétiche religieux » (*Retour* 30), pour ses propres adeptes il ne représente non plus qu'un instrument religieux profitable, voire une simple carcasse que l'on défonce à la recherche des richesses qui pourraient s'y cacher.

Cependant la traversée de la steppe vers le pays des « hommes au regard endormi » (*Retour* 29) a au centre un objet symbolique, associant la représentation et le représenté⁴. Le terme générique employé comme synonyme de statue, *bourkhan*, qui désigne par essence toute représentation divine, recouvre en mongol et en russe plusieurs sens apparentés : « intelligence pure », « raison suprême », « raison personnifiée », « être doué de raison, intelligent, plein de sagesse ; philosophe », « représentation de Bouddha »⁵. D'ailleurs, l'origine de la statue plonge dans une légende invraisemblable, qui évoque la consubstantialité homme,

³ Organe responsable des problèmes liés aux populations allogènes de R.S.F.S.R (*Retour...*, note 21, p. 118-119).

⁴ Dany Savelli considère que la traduction française de « возвращение Будды », le retour *de* Bouddha, exclut d'emblée la référence à une statue, privilégiant le signifiant divin. Le critique propose comme titre « Le retour *du* Bouddha » afin de maintenir la complexité des rapports « entre la statue et son modèle, entre la divinité et son icône » (p. 305).

⁵ Vsévolod Ivanov, *Le Retour de Bouddha*, *op. cit.*, note 13, p. 117-118.

représentation divine et dieu: en l'Année du Lièvre Rouge, un Lama Blanc qui avait passé sa vie dans la contemplation construit un sanctuaire et se fait murer vivant dans un rocher. Au bout de sept années de prières l'ermite meurt et ses disciples retrouvent à la place de ses os « une statue en bronze doré : un *bourkhan* de Siddharta Gautama, surnommé Bouddha... » (*Retour 17*).

A ce retour dans le bronze de la représentation divine font pendant les multiples réveils sur terre du dieu, les réincarnations de l'esprit de Bouddha dans des lamas. Tout d'abord Dava-Dordji, l'initiateur de cet extraordinaire voyage en train, est un lama, un *gheghen*, porteur des légendes et des croyances de son peuple. Il prétend vouloir escorter la statue de Bouddha dans sa province natale pour y ouvrir un musée ethnographique, mais au fur et à mesure que le convoi avance, il se laisse conquérir par des espoirs plus pragmatiques : lorsqu'il fera son apparition aux côtés de Bouddha, ceux qui se sont emparés de ses troupeaux et de ses terres les lui restitueront. Finalement Dava-Dordji abandonne l'idée de récupérer ses biens par la médiation du dieu, renonçant à une aventure dont il ne trouve plus le sens et se dirigeant vers une autre, qui promet plus de consistance. Tout comme les autres soldats, qui renoncent l'un après l'autre au voyage, charmés par l'utopie de l'étoile à cinq branches et nourris par la conviction « qu'étant des bolcheviks et portant l'étoile rouge, on peut récupérer beaucoup de troupeaux et de yourtes » (*Retour 60*). Le retour de Bouddha dans le corps du *gheghen* ou de ses compatriotes se révèle ainsi problématique.

Si le lama mongol abandonne le statut de réceptacle de l'esprit de l'Eveillé, le professeur russe ne fait pas apparemment lui non plus la preuve d'une plus grande disponibilité. Malgré son travail d'académicien et d'« auteur de travaux très estimés », il ne se laisse pas séduire par les « légendes stupides » d'un « imbécile de Mongol ». S'il accepte de partir, c'est d'abord pour troquer sa condition d'homme seul, affamé et transi contre la promesse d'une ration double, d'un chandail tricoté et même d'un utopique troupeau dans les steppes de l'Asie. Il faut tout de même souligner que cet Européen fasciné par l'Orient, se présente d'abord comme un être absent de soi, privé d'identité. Lors de la visite du Mongol, croyant avoir affaire à une perquisition, le professeur annonce à son hôte inopiné que chez lui il n'y a « que des livres », complétant ensuite de façon surprenante : « Chez moi, c'est le vide complet » (*Retour 15*). Ce n'est pas alors étonnant si à la veille de son départ

de Pétrograd, se préparant pour la mission scientifique en Mongolie, après avoir ficelé et cacheté ses vieux manuscrits, le professeur jette dans le poêle tout le reste, devenu maculature. Geste propitiatoire canonique depuis Don Quichotte pour tout départ à l'aventure, certes, mais aussi tentative d'échanger le vide glacé de son appartement de Petrograd, où l'unique histoire contemporaine est celle d'une cuisson de pommes de terre, contre un voyage inédit et aux allures fantastiques à travers la steppe. Bouddha, serait-il de retour pour combler ce vide ? Aurait-il choisi comme dernière réincarnation vivante le sexagénaire Safonov, dont le prénom et patronyme, Vitali Vitalievich signifient « qui est vivifiant » ? Ou bien le professeur ne se laisserait tirer de son vide initial que pour être ramené au vide⁶ ?

2. Appels d'Occident, rappels d'Orient

Le professeur Safonov est en effet le sujet d'une mystérieuse hybridation nature-culture, qui se fonde sur l'oscillation entre ses deux dieux métalliques : son poêle, son dieu en fonte, qui lui prodigue quarante minutes précieuses de *chaleur* par jour, et le *bourkhan* en bronze doré, le dieu aux lotus, qui l'éconduira à travers la steppe vers les eaux « *tièdes* » de l'esprit. Notons que le poêle occupe le centre d'un rituel journalier qui valide Safonov en tant que savant et orientaliste : « Quand j'ai un peu de chaleur, je ne parle à personne, j'ôte mon pardessus, ma toque, je lis et j'écris. » (*Retour 15*) C'est précisément cet intervalle de délectation qu'envahit le Mongol, avec ses légendes bouddhiques. Et, chose surprenante, ses histoires invraisemblables ne signifient au professeur agacé par l'interruption qu'« encore une journée de *chaleur* perdue » (*Retour 18*). Non seulement il ne se soucie guère de ce que le soldat pourrait lui raconter, mais il est prêt à lui céder sa propre « sagesse » en échange de la nourriture : « Contre toute ma sagesse, ne me donnerez-vous pas un sac de pommes de terre ? » (*Retour 15*). Parce que la faim et le froid, qui devancent la solitude même, rythment le récit d'Ivanov. L'incipit du roman, placé sous les augures du « seul et même Bouddha [qui] apparaît sous d'innombrables formes, et dans chacune de ces innombrables formes, il reste le seul et même Bouddha » (*Retour 13*), mis en

⁶ Dans l'analyse que Dany Savelli consacre à ce roman, le vide est présenté comme inhérent à une conception pervertie du bouddhisme. Si la statue éventrée de Bouddha, qui ne contient rien, représente « une coque vide », voire « le vide » même, le bouddhisme devient « culte du néant » (p. 309).

exergue, focalise paradoxalement sur la voracité de la Russie affamée par une guerre qui menace de dévorer la divinité même :

On approche la marmite le plus près possible du tuyau. Il faut placer le bois loin de la paroi du poêle, ainsi la flamme, en s'élançant vers le haut, chauffe la plaque du poêle plus vite que quand on dispose le bois à la manière habituelle, et alors les pommes de terre cuisent en seize minutes et demie exactement. Il faut aussitôt les manger, avec la peau, et, dans ce qui reste de l'eau de cuisson encore bouillante, se laver le visage, les mains et enfin rincer la vaisselle. (*Retour* 13)

La phrase qui ouvre le roman transforme ainsi le poêle de Safonov en protagoniste emblématique pour un monde en régression, où la culture est devenue un combustible qui assure la survie biologique de l'espèce humaine. Avant son départ vers la Mongolie, nous l'avons vu, le professeur ramasse de vieux manuscrits, des « cahiers de brouillons », des « livres inutiles » ou des livres « qu'il n'a pas lus » (*Retour* 34) et, pour épargner le bois de chauffage, les jette dans son poêle. L'image du feu engloutissant les bibliothèques obsède le professeur, qui, irrité par l'interminable voyage en train, s'inquiète du sort de ses livres échappés initialement à l'incinération :

En ce moment, sans doute, un quelconque locataire doit faire marcher son poêle avec ma bibliothèque, et viendra un temps où on chauffera avec des manuscrits et « L'Évangile d'Ostromir » les bâtiments qui sont à l'angle de la Perspective Nevski et de la Sadovaïa. (*RB*, 62)

Echo iconoclaste, futuriste et révolutionnaire que ce geste de transformer le manuscrit russe daté le plus ancien, *L'Évangile d'Ostromir* (1056-1057), en combustible pour la bibliothèque publique de Petersbourg. Puisque c'est ce bâtiment qui se situe à l'intersection du boulevard circulaire de Sadovaïa et la grande avenue rectiligne appelée la Perspective Nevski. De plus, le poêle, *bourjouïka*, qui désigne argotiquement un poêle bas, de petit calibre, en principe en fonte, signifie en russe littéralement *bourgeoisie*. Et sa *bourjouïka* dévoratrice de culture accompagne dans son voyage Vitali Vitalievitch, qui se fait occasionnellement appeler du nom de *bourgeois* et qui « se réjouit de voir son poêle partir avec lui » (*Retour* 37-38). Dans le camion qui transporte ses

affaires à la gare et ensuite dans le wagon qui l’emmène en Mongolie, le poêle du professeur voisine avec la caisse en planches qui abrite la massive statue de Bouddha : « La *chaleur* pour le corps, et la *chaleur* pour l’âme » (*Retour* 38), comme le remarque le commissaire Anissimov.

La substitution d’une chaleur à l’autre s’opère effectivement à plusieurs reprises. Pendant que l’esprit du Bienheureux plane au-dessus de son nouveau disciple, la statue est l’objet de plusieurs sacrilèges. D’abord sa caisse en bois, que le Mongol fend à coups de hache, nourrit le poêle de Safonov pendant une semaine. La chaleur du corps et celle de l’âme se rencontrent sous les yeux bridés de la statue qui émerge de sa boîte et « sourit de son éternel sourire céleste vers l’éternelle chaleur du feu » (*Retour* 64). Ensuite, le fil d’or qui décore son habit et ses ongles est arraché par Safonov qui phantasma de l’échanger contre la nourriture. Enfin, le Mongol initie à son tour un pillage similaire et la dorure que les *moujiks* russes écorchent du corps en bronze est troquée contre de petits pains gelés, des pommes de terre et du bois de chauffage. De plus, lors de sa convalescence du typhus, au bout de plusieurs semaines de jeûne, le lama est envahi par une « rage de vivre » dévoratrice. L’image de sa cuiller, « complètement rongée sur le pourtour » (*Retour* 90), portant sur le métal les « traces rondes » (*Retour* 90) de ses dents, résonne étrangement avec le rouge cuivré, taché de jaune, du visage raclé de Bouddha. Les deux gestes, dont le dernier précède la maladie et l’autre annonce la guérison, ont rapport à la nourriture physique qui se substitue progressivement à celle sacrée.

Pourtant au cours de cette l’hybridation nature-culture, une inversion de rôles spirituels semble se produire. Le récit du voyage bouddhique s’ouvre sur le conciliabule de Dava-Dordji et du professeur Safonov dans son appartement de Petersbourg et s’achève par un dialogue similaire des mêmes protagonistes, à Semipalatinsk, dans le wagon de train déserté par les autres compagnons de route. Le sujet de leurs entretiens demeure inchangé, mais si dans le chapitre initial, c’est le professeur affamé qui se dit prêt à échanger sa sagesse contre des vivres, dans l’avant-dernier chapitre, c’est le lama qui troque sa sainteté contre un appétit brutal.

La double métamorphose qui transfigure le Russe et le Mongol s’appuie sur une forte dialectique Occident-Orient. Ainsi, le professeur se représente le village mongol auquel la statue est

destinée de la façon suivante : un endroit sauvage « sale et puant » où « même l'eau sent la charogne, les chameaux sont couverts d'énormes punaises, les bergers tuent les poux avec leurs dents » (*Retour* 21-22). Les peuples se présentent sous des traits stéréotypés, qui allient préjugés dévalorisants et schématisation ethnique : le Géorgien est un « homme au sang chaud » (*Retour* 28) vu l'abondance des vignes dans le pays; les Tartars sont « d'une impassibilité révoltante » (*Retour* 39) ; le Kirghize « a un visage à gros nez, presque russe, et de bonnes dents solides » (*Retour* 110). Quant aux Mongols avec lesquels Safonov partage le wagon et qu'il observe avec intérêt, ils passent leur temps à boire du thé et à discuter exclusivement « de bétail, de remèdes et de religion » (*Retour* 43). La perspective du professeur d'histoire sur ces hommes au regard « distrait, endormi, mais comme séculaire » (*Retour* 29) se présente initialement comme celle d'un impérialiste sédentaire qui tolère ses nouveaux concitoyens nomades : tandis que les autres sont des « errants » qui « s'enorgueillissent de la nostalgie du pays natal », Safonov, lui, « n'est pas un errant, il a un chez soi où il est le maître » (*Retour* 29). L'« image négative de l'Asiate » l'« homme de la duplicité et de la concupiscence », telle qu'elle se construit à travers les figures des Mongols, Tartars et Kirghizes, est d'ailleurs fortement ancrée dans l'imaginaire russe (Savelli, 304).

Inversement, le regard que Dava-Dordji pose sur la Russie est tout aussi empreint d'une volonté de s'en détacher. Le Mongol « parl[e] des Russes avec mépris » (*Retour* 47), distinguant « culture russe » et « histoires de [sa] steppe » (*Retour* 47). L'ironie ne manque pas à ce *gheghen*, qui a promis cinq cent têtes de bêtes en échange du Bouddha et qui remarque : « Un musée de nos jours revient cher aux barbares incultes » (*Retour* 47). S'appropriant sarcastiquement le regard que les étrangers posent sur son peuple, il reproduit également le discours européen sur l'Orient :

Encore que nous nous trouvions dans des conditions exécrables, nous avons décidé malgré cela, comme des Européens cultivés que nous sommes... ou plutôt ce que je viens de dire ne concerne que le professeur... nous avons décidé de consacrer tout notre temps libre à une série de recherches scientifiques dans le domaine de la mongolistique. Bien que je ne sois qu'un modeste représentant... (*Retour* 57)

Cependant cette opposition séculaire entre deux représentants de cultures et civilisations différentes aboutit à un interchangement fondamental de rôles entre le Russe et le Mongol. Ainsi Dava-Dorji abandonne ses prières et se joint au sacrilège des *moujiks*, en leur ordonnant de gratter la couche d'or qui recouvre Bouddha. La maladie qui s'ensuit le projette dans un délire qui le rapproche et l'éloigne successivement de Bouddha : « je suis déjà mort... je suis de nouveau l'esprit de Bouddha » (*Retour 77*). Sa convalescence est ponctuée par les remarques de Safonov, qui révèle l'oscillation du lama entre les appels de l'Europe, avec ses mirages techniques, et l'appel mystérieux de l'Orient, qui l'avait déterminé à accompagner la statue bouddhique dans son pays :

Vous, qui vous êtes enivré des détonations d'obus de soixante tonnes, des tanks détruisant les villes [...] enivré que vous étiez par les maisons de trente étages et la radio, vous vous précipitez vers les appels de l'Europe. Mais l'esprit des siècles s'est mis à parler devant vous, lorsque l'Europe a déposé son masque et qu'elle a lâché ses loups, provisoirement sur la seule Russie. Vous vous êtes souvenu que vous étiez Bouddha réincarné, un *gheghen*, et que vous avez porté son âme à travers les ténèbres et le feu, soumis vous-même aux supplices – vous purifiant... (*Retour 85-86*).

Au fur et à mesure que le professeur pénètre dans les profondeurs de la mission spirituelle de Dava Dorji, dernière incarnation de Bouddha, celui-ci nie son statut privilégié et s'accroche désespérément à la vie organique. La civilisation ténébreuse de l'Europe avec son idéologie dont l'emblème est l'étoile rouge participe plus que jamais à son désistement. Dans la Russie transformée en un univers de paperasse bizarre et contradictoire, où « les gens lisent des proclamations, des affiches, des tracts, des brochures et des communiqués du front imprimés sur du mauvais papier gris » (*Retour 52*), le Mongol tend à se transformer lui-même en un être de papier : sa démarche devient hésitante à cause de ses jambes comme « en papier » (*Retour 89*), tandis que ses yeux prennent eux aussi la couleur du papier. Le lama finit par abandonner voyage, statue dorée et esprit incarné, pour s'orienter vers la vie dont Vitali Vitalievitch continue à s'écarter :

Dava Dorji clame sa nouvelle réincarnation : il n'est plus Bouddha à partir d'aujourd'hui, ni *gheghen* ; il n'est plus

malade, il est mort, il a abandonné l'esprit de celui qui est là, à côté, tout couvert de taches d'or ; a-t-on jamais vu quelqu'un tomber malade de cette façon ? (*Retour* 91-92)

En revanche, le parcours du professeur Safonov aboutit à une dynamique inverse : le voyage en train conduit le héros à franchir les obstacles de la science et de la civilisation moderne pour retrouver la sérénité. Pour cet Européen spécialiste en questions d'histoire orientale⁷, comme il se gratifie lui-même, escorter la statue de Bouddha en Mongolie représenterait un retour aux sources spirituelles de l'humanité, tout comme la redécouverte de l'Orient serait une source de rajeunissement pour la culture européenne : « Grâce à ce voyage, vous retrouverez votre jeunesse, vous pourrez encore longtemps vous adonner à votre travail intellectuel, ce travail grandiose, unique, dont l'humanité peut à juste titre s'enorgueillir » (*Retour* 41), lui assure Dava-Dordji. Pendant que le train parcourt les immensités recouvertes de neige, Safonov se laisse plonger dans une sorte de transe. Il abandonne ses papiers et renonce à noter des conversations, des pensées, des rencontres au profit de l'immobilité : « les jambes enveloppées dans une couverture, il reste assis des jours entiers devant le poêle » (*Retour* 44). Une véritable conversion s'opère lorsqu'il confectionne une croix en bois qu'il jette ensuite dans le poêle. Une religion du pathos vient d'être remplacée par une religion de la sérénité : « On dirait que ce sont les moustaches d'un autre, dans le *sourire* d'un autre, qui lui chatouille ses joues à lui » (*Retour* 51). C'est que, durant la traversée de la steppe, il s'est opéré une sorte de transfert de l'esprit de Bouddha, qui est passé du corps malade du lama dans celui du professeur : « Un professeur russe se révélerait plus bouddhiste qu'une réincarnation vivante du Bouddha ? » (*Retour* 62) Seul avec le dieu auquel il s'identifie progressivement, le professeur salue effectivement le franchissement d'une seconde étape, décisive, de son initiation : « l'entrée dans la grande sagesse, la transformation

⁷ Dans les éditions antérieures du *Retour de Bouddha*, Safonov apparaît comme professeur de littérature et ensuite comme professeur de droit. Ce n'est que dans la dernière édition qu'il devient spécialiste de l'Orient. Un spécialiste très controversé d'ailleurs, prenant en compte « ses titres universitaires passablement douteux » et ses connaissances très approximatives sur l'Orient : il ne parle pas le mongol et se représente l'Orient d'après un schéma orientalisant (Savelli, 316).

en Bouddha » (*Retour* 94). Une identification scellée par la mort conjugée de Safonov et de la représentation en bronze du dieu aux lotus, dans les étendues désertiques de Sémipalatinsk. Nature et culture, homme et représentation divine fusionnent définitivement à la fin du roman, dans la scène du meurtre de Safonov et du morcellement simultané du corps de Bouddha : les doigts dorés du dieu et la dent en or du professeur, qui avaient suscité la convoitise des Kirghizes, se rejoignent au milieu du désert, dans une coulée épaisse et visqueuse de sable.

Le Retour de Bouddha orchestre ainsi un entrecroisement de vecteurs spirituels opposés : d'une part, la régression du Mongol Dava-Dordji, dernière réincarnation de Bouddha, oscillant entre « le mystérieux appel de l'Orient », « la voix du sang » qui le détermine à reconduire la statue de l'« idole sacrée de [sa] race » dans son pays, et « les appels de l'Europe » (*Retour* 85), qui le font évader vers la civilisation moderne ; de l'autre, la progression spirituelle du Russe Safonov, qui franchit les obstacles de la science pour retrouver la spiritualité. Car, finalement, la « civilisation » et la « science », tout en donnant au savant l'illusion d'être l'« un des maîtres de la Terre », ne représentent qu'un « bonnet [...] brillant, inutile, idiot », alors que le voyage en compagnie de la statue de Bouddha, se révèle comme une conquête de la « sérénité », voire une descente « dans les eaux tièdes et odorantes de l'esprit » (*Retour* 86). Après tout, « les liens qui unissent les bolcheviks et les Orientaux », « le clan des révolutionnaires » et « le clan des Asiatiques » sont tellement étroits que les deux groupes parviennent à incarner des traits censés individualiser leurs opposants (Savelli 313).

3. Bouddha, le révolutionnaire

La conquête de la sérénité passe par une série d'interrogations que Safonov énonce le long du voyage. Le professeur s'interroge d'abord sur les raisons de son voyage : « Et pourquoi, au juste, avait-il accepté de partir ? Eveil tardif d'une passion des voyages, l'ennui, l'envie de manger ou bien le désir de faire du bien aux Mongols ? » (*Retour* 62-63). Le sens de sa « mission » revient comme un leitmotiv : « pourquoi moi, professeur d'histoire, dois-je escorter la statue de Bouddha en Mongolie ? Y a-t-il un sens à cela ? » (*Retour* 36). Son fantasme d'une mission héroïque « infiniment forte et importante pour l'humanité » (*Retour* 37) est profondément ancré dans le contexte historique contemporain.

Ainsi, dans le chaos politique et militaire de Russie, Safonov cherche l'élément qui pourrait contrebalancer l'obscurité, les ténèbres, la tempête meurtrière, tantôt du côté de la Révolution, tantôt du côté de Bouddha.

Le rapport de forces, très complexe à cause de l'imbrication des pôles politique et spirituel, sur laquelle se construit le roman, nous invite à formuler deux questions complémentaires : La Révolution, protagoniste par excellence de la prose d'Ivanov, arrivera-t-elle à dévorer Bouddha ? Ou c'est grâce à cet événement déstructurant *sui generis* que le révolutionnaire pourrait atteindre le Nirvana ? Des arguments soutiennent l'une et l'autre hypothèse. Ainsi, le pouvoir soviétique qui vise l'anéantissement des modes de vie patriarcal ou tribal rejette ouvertement la religion, subsumée aux superstitions. Si les Rouges décident de renvoyer la statue, figurant dans le discours communiste en tant qu'« objet de vénération pour les moines et les masses incultes abêties par les lamas » (*Retour 30*), cela fait partie d'un projet politique. Le respect déclaré de la « personnalité religieuses » des différentes nationalités sert à consolider l'unité de la République socialiste fédérative soviétique de Russie. Cependant, la Révolution et le climat de famine et insécurité qu'elle institue créent aussi les prémisses d'une solitude et d'un repli sur soi, propices à la méditation. Elle inculque également « la honte de la richesse », ce même sentiment duquel « est sorti Bouddha » (*Retour 33*).

De plus, Ivanov réussit à introduire dans une même scène, les figures tutélaires de la Révolution et du bouddhisme. A la veille du départ pour la Mongolie, une assemblée a lieu à Petrograd dans l'ancien palais Stroganof. Un discours est tenu par Tsviladze, adjoint du commissaire du peuple aux Nationalités : celui-ci tourne le dos à la fenêtre de laquelle émerge la statue imposante de Bouddha. Comme le remarque Dany Savelli, la scène est construite sur le dispositif « d'un grand prêtre prêchant devant une idole », proposant ainsi le « portrait d'un Staline avec Bouddha » (311-312).

Bouddha et doctrine communiste voyagent en parallèle à travers la RSFSR : au moment où la statue arrive à Omsk, « Le Manifeste Communiste » est en train de se faire traduire en kirghize. En fin, Bouddha, figure tutélaire de la culture orientale, que l'on soupçonne d'encourager les insurrections, pourrait même cacher dans son ventre des proclamations des socialistes, ennemis

des bolchéviks. Après tout, le dieu est renvoyé en Sibérie, lieu d'exil de prédilection des révolutionnaires.

Le chaos politique ouvre le chemin à toutes les possibilités. La Révolution et la guerre civile sont évoquées avec une simplicité recherchée, qui isole les faits les plus représentatifs pour l'absurde de la situation. La Tchéka, police politique spéciale constituée au lendemain de la Révolution, le Commissariat du peuple à l'Instruction, le Commissariat du peuple aux Nationalités, la Garde Rouge ainsi que l'Armée Rouge, le détachement paysan des Verts qui mènent leur combat contre les Blancs, embrouillent les destins de la jeune Union Soviétique. Car l'objet de leurs affrontements frise l'absurdité et remet en cause le bien fondé de la cause même :

Si la vie de l'Armée ne tient pas debout, ce pourquoi elle combat est également invraisemblable, et quand elle aura conquis ce quelque chose d'invraisemblable, elle nous obligera à vivre le diable sait dans quoi et où, dans je ne sais quelle légende. (*Retour 36*)

Le récit baigne alors dans une atmosphère fantasque : tout est invraisemblable, imprévisible, changeant. Les représentants de différents commissariats hésitent entre des ordres contradictoires, les gares sont bourrées de trains, dont certains, envoyés sur des voies de garage, stationnent des jours entiers. Des gens rôdent autour du wagon de Bouddha à la recherche de la nourriture et des commissaires y font irruption, apparaissant et disparaissant de façon aussi inattendue qu'étrange.

Une sorte d'illusion cosmique va s'amplifiant, introduite par les légendes d'un Mongol mythomane, prolongée par le climat de méfiance qui s'instaure entre celui-ci et Safonov et amplifiée par l'absurde d'une expédition atemporelle et a-spatiale. Car le voyage perd progressivement toute dimension géographique – « N'est-ce pas indifférent d'aller en Sibérie, au Turkestan ou en Mongolie ? *On n'arrivera nulle part.* » (*Retour 62*) – et chronologique déterminée – « Le chemin de fer s'est perdu dans la toundra, on peut rouler maintenant *pendant mille ans* » (*Retour 92*). C'est un univers en désordre, qui se prête mal au récit : « comment raconter ces journées ? » (*Retour 54*) se demande le narrateur.

Le présent historique, qui apparaît comme un cycle continu de révolutions et réactions engendrant désordre et

souffrance, se dissout ainsi dans l'illusion. Les gens vivent dans les ténèbres, en plein *Samsara*. Nous pouvons alors nous demander dans quelle mesure le périple de la statue de Bouddha est redevable à la légende de Siddhartha Gautama. Le roman d'Ivanov retravaille effectivement une série de références intertextuelles. Tout comme le prince isolé dans son palais doré, à l'écart de tout ce qui pourrait évoquer la misère, la maladie, la souffrance ou la mort, la statue en bronze doré de Bouddha voyage dans sa double cage – deux boîtes imbriquées sur le modèle des poupées russes, dont la première, une immense caisse en bois de pin, est contenue par la seconde, le wagon de train – et sous la surveillance croisée du lama mongol et du professeur russe. A l'instar de Siddhartha qui quitte l'enceinte royale pour connaître la réalité de l'existence, la fragilité des hommes et le monde de l'illusion, le *bourkhan* qui émerge progressivement de sa boîte ainsi que Safonov, qui abandonne le confort de sa bibliothèque, seront confrontés à la souffrance universelle, sous toutes ses facettes. Le voyage initiatique est ponctué par la découverte de la maladie (l'épisode de typhus du lama) et de la mort (les histoires de cadavres entassés dans les granges). Pendant cette marche vers l'avant, où le chaos de la guerre civile se conjugue à l'infini de la steppe, au froid et à la faim, les deux compagnons de route de la statue passent eux aussi involontairement par les épreuves mortificatoires, auxquelles s'était soumis Siddhartha: méditer sans manger, sans boire et le corps exposé aux intempéries. Un aphorisme du prince légendaire « Le bois humide ne peut pas faire un bon feu », qui synthétise le besoin d'avoir un corps sain, afin de conserver un esprit sain, revient rythmer comme un leitmotiv le roman d'Ivanov « le bois humide brûlait mal ». Serait-il, ce voyage sur les rails, la voie médiane, à mi-chemin entre l'automortification et la satisfaction des désirs ? En tout cas, nous pouvons affirmer que l'interrogation et la quête du sens qui pourrait sauver l'humanité de sa souffrance, qui obsède Safonov, rejoint la recherche archétypale bouddhique du chemin de la vérité.

Le traitement métaphorique de deux éléments corporels vient appuyer définitivement l'identification de la représentation de l'Eveillé et des deux protagonistes humains du roman d'Ivanov. Le premier est le visage de Bouddha, généralement représenté avec des rondeurs sans aucune aspérité où pourrait s'inscrire les rides du temps. La statue en bronze doré ne fait pas exception. Lorsque les Russes commencent à racler la dorure, celle-ci se révèle être

plus épaisse « sur son visage et ses joues rondes » (*Retour 75*). Une fois enlevée la couche sacrée, « une face méchante d'un rouge cuivré » (*Retour 75*) émerge. Une transformation analogue subit le visage du lama, après l'épisode typhoïde et son désistement du statut de *gheghen* : celui qui déclare ne plus être Bouddha affiche un « visage *pelé* » aux « paupières bouffies, très inégalement comme des poids écarlates » (*Retour 91*). En revanche, la face du Safonov, qui se prépare à recevoir l'enseignement bouddhique, subit une transfiguration qui récupère les éléments sacralisants. Lorsqu'il brûle ses livres, de la cendre de papier s'en échappe, plane à travers la pièce et recouvre les joues du professeur, qui s'en débarrasse « d'un geste *ensommeillé* », geste définitif de rupture d'avec son statut d'« académicien et auteur de travaux très estimés » (*Retour 15*) et d'ouverture vers le retour légendaire au pays des « hommes au regard *endormi* » (*Retour 28*). Or ce regard « *ensommeillé* », définitoire pour les Mongols dans le roman d'Ivanov, qui se retrouve aussi chez la statue aux yeux « profondément *enfonceés à l'intérieur* » (*Retour 75*), est typique pour Bouddha, représenté souvent les yeux *mi-clos* ou *tournés vers l'intérieur*. L'arrivée à Semipalatinsk, point terminus du voyage en train, est placée sous le signe de cet ensommeillement qui gagne les gens et le désert :

La ville de sable est fantomatique : c'est bien ainsi que se la représentait le professeur Safonov. Le sable jaune file en flots mous, étonnamment chauds [...]. Dans les coulées de sable, les gens prennent un air *ensommeillé* [...]. Il doit en être ainsi : au seuil d'une culture différente, toujours errent, *ivres de sommeil*, des hommes différents, étrangers à cette culture. Ils sont *ensommeillés*, stagnants, et ils assimilent les pensées aussi difficilement que la pierre absorbe l'eau. Ils sont *ensommeillés* et tendus fixement vers l'avant, vers le désert. (*Retour 104*)

Le Tatar qui conduit Safonov marche lentement, comme s'il avait « les pieds visés au sol » (*Retour 101*) et « *s'assouplit* » au milieu de la conversation. Le professeur même « oublie instantanément, comme en *rêve*, les visages entrevus » (*Retour 104*) et se conduit comme un « homme [...] complètement *ivre* » (*Retour 108*). Dans cette ville de sable « semblable à un *songe* » (*Retour 108*), un frisson *joyeux* lui parcourt le corps et la vie lui apparaît enfin « simple et *sereine* » (*Retour 108*). Safonov réitère ainsi le sourire

de Bouddha, qui monte de l'intérieur, image de plénitude sans pathos, au-delà des illusions et des tragédies de l'histoire. Laisant derrière soi le poêle devenu inutile ainsi que le tumulte de la Révolution, assimilable elle aussi au « feu », dévoratrice et sans jamais être rassasiée, le professeur semble plonger dans une béatitude infinie, un état de conscience proche du *nirvana*. N'oublions pas que *nir-vana* signifie littéralement « feu sans combustible », qui n'a plus rien à consumer. Le calme avec lequel il regarde le meurtre des conducteurs de sa caravane de chameaux et qui préside à sa propre mort renvoie à la volontaire extinction du soi de Siddhartha.

Le deuxième élément corporel qui participe à l'ancrage du roman d'Ivanov dans la légende du Bouddha historique est le doigt. Rappelons-nous que dans l'histoire de Siddhartha, il apparaît le personnage d'Angulimala, le coupeur de doigts. Celui-ci figure l'homme fondamentalement bon, mais piégé par les circonstances et transformé en assassin par sa propre soif de connaissance. Parti à la recherche de mille doigts humains, en échange desquels son maître lui avait promis la transmission d'un savoir exceptionnel, Angulimala rencontre Bouddha. Comme la guirlande de doigts qu'il porte autour de son cou compte déjà neuf cent quatre-vingt-dix-neuf pièces, il menace de le transformer en sa dernière victime. Un dialogue s'engage alors entre Angulimala, qui a l'impression que Bouddha s'éloigne en courant de lui et essaie de l'arrêter, et Bouddha, qui oppose son immobilité dans le cycle infernal des renaissances à la course lamentable de son interlocuteur dans le *samsara*. L'intervention de Bouddha est suivie par une prise de conscience et par la transformation du coupeur de doigts en moine. Cette dialectique mouvement - immobilité est exploitée à plusieurs niveaux par le roman d'Ivanov, surtout pour mettre en opposition le rapport occidental et oriental à la sagesse :

Le professeur Safonov est un Européen. Il sait que pour ne pas penser, il faut occuper le corps et la raison par le *mouvement*. En remuant sans arrêt, sans réfléchir au sens du mouvement, L'Europe en est arrivée aux ténèbres. L'Orient, lui, est *immobile*, et ce n'est pas un hasard si son symbole est le Bouddha pareil au lotus. (*Retour* 95)

Mais, pour revenir à la récurrence du doigt dans le roman, sa symbolique se construit graduellement et converge vers

l'événement final, la mort de Safonov. Ainsi, le geste avec lequel les Mongols concluent le marché – ils se serrent discrètement les doigts, à l'intérieur des manches, l'un laissant pendre sa manche et l'autre y fourrant sa main – se retrouve légèrement modifié chez le commandant de la gare de Sémipalatinsk qui a l'habitude de « fourre[r] ses manches l'une dans l'autre » et de les « désassemble[r] [...] comme on décroche des wagons » (*Retour* 100). Le mouvement des doigts devient alors une métaphore pour le voyage en train, pour l'assemblage d'ethnies et de populations, pour l'imbrication de la révolution et de la religion.

Les doigts de Bouddha réassemblent le sacré et le profane. Dans un premier temps, ils refusent de se transformer en nourriture terrestre, car les paysans qui raclent la statue de la tête aux pieds n'arrivent pas à enlever l'or de ses doigts. Parallèlement, le fil en or détaché de la statue ne peut lui non plus être vendu, car les Russes se contentent de l'envelopper autour du doigt et de le regarder avec appréhension. C'est en revanche la bague du professeur Safonov, dont le doigt nu est fixé par le regard fébrile du Mongol, qui sera échangée contre des vivres pour apaiser l'appétit brutal du convalescent. Peu après, le rétablissement du lama commence symboliquement par la reprise de l'usage de ses doigts : « soulever un doigt, le laisser tomber » (*Retour* 81). Sa rage de vivre se donne ensuite à voir par les mains qu'il laisse traîner dans la nourriture, « comme s'il voulait imbiber ses dix doigts de graisse » (*Retour* 90).

Si la statue de Bouddha résiste devant Dava-Dordji, ce premier « coupeur de doigts », sans lui apporter pour autant paix et sérénité, une fois arrivée à Sémipalatinsk, en Russie asiatique, le *bourkhan* renonce à son intégrité corporelle aux côtés du professeur qui, lui, a atteint le calme expiatoire. Le Tatar, qui fera de Safonov sa victime, l'arrête précisément avec son doigt : le professeur qui marche le long d'une palissade sent ses vêtements s'accrocher à un clou, qui se révèle être « un doigt humain » au bout duquel « il y a un homme » (*Retour* 101). C'est autour de ce même doigt qu'il enveloppe le fil d'or, le reconnaissant enfin comme « le plus cher et le plus ancien » :

Il sent qu'ici c'est un autre monde et que son fil sera compris. C'est exact : le Tatar ne fait qu'effleurer le fil, il le suspend à l'ongle de son petit doigt. Le professeur regarde avec amour cet ongle long et effilé comme une écaille de bois. (*Retour* 105)

Le Tatar qui exerce une sorte de fascination stupéfiante sur Safonov lui promet de lui faire traverser le désert avec ses chameaux. Etape ultime du voyage du professeur et du *bourkhan*, la mort du premier étant accompagnée par le démembrement du second. Ce sont précisément les doigts dorés de Bouddha qui sont tranchés et emportés par les Kirghizes, qui convoitent aussi la dent en or de son compagnon étendu sur le sable. La consubstantialité des deux entités, évoquée par le biais du métal précieux, se trouve ainsi définitivement renforcée dans l'épisode de l'assassinat : la tentative du Kirghize d'enlever au professeur sa dent en or rejoint un épisode similaire d'une légende bouddhiste, selon laquelle, juste avant sa crémation, un disciple de Bouddha lui dérobe une dent (Savelli 310). La mort de Safonov, interprétée tantôt comme un « achèvement spirituel », tantôt comme une « défaite »⁸, est d'abord révélatrice de l'imbrication des deux pôles, politique et spirituel, qui se nourrissent les uns des autres.

Conclusion

En tant qu'initiateur de la littérature soviétique sibérienne, Vsévolod Ivanov parvient à faire fusionner dans son roman poésie de la steppe, méditation bouddhique et chronique de la guerre civile. Les trois possibles avatars de Siddhartha Gautama, le *bourkhan* en bronze, le lama mongol et le professeur russe, semblent orchestrer un impossible retour de la divinité dans la Russie postrévolutionnaire. Pourtant l'interchangement de rôles spirituels auprès de la statue de l'Eveillé agit tel la somme de deux vecteurs opposés, qui tout en voyageant en parallèle dans la même direction se révèlent être de sens contraire, s'annulant ainsi réciproquement et rétablissant l'équilibre bouddhique dans l'univers révolutionnaire. La jeune RSFSR a beau gratter, démembrer, dévorer Bouddha, elle permet surtout à un Européen, soit-il orientaliste, de perpétuer une quête millénaire du sens et de la vérité, tout en l'ancrant dans l'histoire politique contemporaine. S'achevant sur l'image de la statue amputée de ses doigts dorés et de l'homme qui conserve sa dent en or, les deux immobiles entre les coulées de sable et le ciel pétrifié, *Le Retour de Bouddha* relance le cycle éternel de renaissances par l'interrogation finale « vers où, à présent, Bouddha doit-il poursuivre sa route ? ».

⁸ Voir la présentation de plusieurs hypothèses interprétatives sur la mort de Safonov et la représentation du bouddhisme (Savelli 306-307).

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Imaginaire des lieux, imaginaire des mots. «Russie», «Norvège», «Andalousie» ou la magie des toponymes étrangers

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Résumé : *La rêverie sur le signifiant pur, représenté le plus souvent par un simple nom propre, revêt chez Philippe Jaccottet, l'un des plus célèbres poètes francophones contemporains, des connotations pour le moins diverses. Pourtant, un enjeu central semble se dégager constamment de ce magma métaphorique, impliquant le développement métonymique d'un réseau d'associations serrées et motivées sémantiquement, afin de dépasser le non-sens postmoderne du langage par un retour à son arkhè génésique.*

Mots-clés : *nom propre, imaginaire, topographie*

Au commencement était le Verbe. Ce qui, pour Philippe Jaccottet, l'un des plus célèbres poètes francophones contemporains n'est pas la même chose que la parole, même si leur rapprochement est de l'ordre de l'évidence. La source de l'écriture reste une autre écriture, et la primauté d'un des deux gestes cognitifs élémentaires – la lecture et l'écriture – demeure incertaine. La lecture des signes est un prétexte (*pré-texte*) à leur inscription sur la page. La graine dans les ruines évoquée par Jaccottet dans la prose éponyme de son recueil *Cristal et fumée*² ne révèle pas seulement la prédilection jaccottéenne pour la dynamique des contraires (précarité *vs.* devenir, volatilisation *vs.* promesse) mais aussi la main qui écrit, la « paume tiède » de l'écrivain qui, en se courbant pour protéger le Verbe originaire, transforme les sensations en paroles :

Nous, aujourd'hui, nous aurions pu rester là des heures sans bouger, ni rien faire, ni dire un mot, contre ces ruines, en

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² Philippe Jaccottet, *Cristal et fumée*, [Saint-Clément-de-Rivière], Fata Morgana, 1993. Les références à cette prose se rapporteront à cette édition. Elles seront indiquées par le sigle CF, suivi de la page, et placées entre parenthèses dans le corps du texte.

plein soleil, comme des graines dans la paume tiède de Déméter [...].

Nous ne pourrions éprouver tant de déférence devant leurs débris s'ils n'avaient pas été doués d'un sens profond, s'ils n'avaient pas accompli un travail essentiel d'écoute et de filtrage des messages les plus lointains, de transformation de ces ondes en parole humaine. (CF 39, 41-42)

La réflexion sur le langage, fût-elle arrêt sur le mot, développement sous forme de variations d'un même thème, reprise d'une image dans un kaléidoscope de formes et de valeurs, travail sur le déjà-dit ou rêverie sur le non-pas-encore-dit, est une pratique courante chez Philippe Jaccottet, productrice de différence verbale. Mais outre leur fonction de différenciation, redevable au jeu des contextes, les signes imposent au poète leur réalité immédiate. Ils l'y font arrêter et peser leur matérialité ou leur immatérialité « auréolée de silence » (Mathieu 376). Attirant le regard par le procédé de l'hypotypose, le signe se détache aussitôt du corps du texte et reste en suspens, jusqu'à ce qu'une subjectivité le verbalise et le réintègre dans le circuit des mots. Mais le mot isolé laisse pourtant la trace de son passage dans le texte. Certaines marques typographiques (comme l'impression en italiques) ou de ponctuation (les guillemets) rappellent le fond blanc d'où le mot avait jailli « comme un événement » et où il « s'inscrit comme une figure » (Mathieu 378). La vocation du mot-événement est de conduire à un discours nouveau, inachevé et inachevable, à un cheminement langagier où les directions se déploient en éventail. Le détachement du mot a une double fonction, définie par Jean-Claude Mathieu comme « médiane » et « médiatrice » (Mathieu 379).

1. Pour une histoire de l'écriture : variations sur le mot « Russie »³

La reprise, à des intervalles plus ou moins réguliers, du mot « Russie » dans une prose qui lui est consacrée produit un rythme qui dégage le texte d'un prosaïsme trop pesant. Fixé comme point

³ Le titre reprend partiellement le titre d'une prose de Philippe Jaccottet, parue pour la première fois dans le quarantième numéro de la revue lausannoise *Écriture*. Les références à cette prose se rapporteront à cette édition. Elles seront indiquées par le sigle MR, suivi de la page, et placées entre parenthèses dans le corps du texte.

de départ à l'errance discursive, le mot évoque tour à tour le cadre imaginaire des récits de Jules Verne, mêlant le référentiel au fabuleux, l'Est géographique lié à l'Orient de l'âme, les mentions livresques de ce territoire situé au carrefour de l'Europe et de l'Asie. La répétition du mot « Russie » sert de matrice à la fabrication textuelle, elle conduit toujours plus loin le jeu de la surimpression et de l'accumulation des images : « À ce mot de 'Russie' ne sont liées d'abord dans mon esprit que quelques images, tirées de la lecture, enfant, du *Michel Strogoff* de Jules Verne dans la grande édition Hetzel à couverture rouge et or. » (MR 11)

Enfant, Jaccottet associe à la « Russie »⁴ des images. Projeté dans un dehors textuel difficile à localiser sur une quelconque carte géographique (« À ce mot de 'Russie' ne sont liées d'abord dans mon esprit que quelques images »), le nom propre – dont le caractère étranger est accusé par l'usage des guillemets – est peu à peu accepté dans son étrangeté même et intégré dans la conscience du sujet grâce au travail de l'imaginaire. Des éléments du lexique russe font développer à l'enfant une réflexion d'ordre linguistique :

Non, ce qui, de ce livre, est resté toute ma vie dans mon esprit lié à la Russie, ce ne sont guère que quelques mots et quelques images ; des noms de lieux dont la sonorité rude, brutale même : Oms, Tomsk, Irkoutsk, suffisaient à les rendre étrangers et à faire voyager très loin celui qui les entendait, avant même qu'il sût rien d'eux ; des noms de choses, aussi, plus spécifiques : télègue, tarentass, knout ; [...] le knout qui s'est alors sans doute gravé en moi comme un des emblèmes de la Russie impériale ; avec ce mot de « czar » dont se sert Jules Verne, tellement plus parlant que « tsar », mieux fait, dans l'éclair de son z, pour évoquer un souverain tout-puissant et lointain [...]. (MR 11-12)

Saurait-on déceler dans ce fragment l'aveu d'une nostalgie pour le cratylogisme mythologique des signes ? Quelque « lecteur »⁵ qu'il soit, le poète ne peut s'empêcher de rêver le mot dans son

⁴ Nous recourons à l'usage des guillemets pour renvoyer à l'entité linguistique et non pas au référent géographique correspondant à ce mot.

⁵ Dans son acception étymologique, le lecteur est celui qui lie. Attentif aux analogies, l'écrivain lie des images diverses dans une constellation textuelle cohérente ; de même, dans la syntaxe les mots sont liés les uns aux autres.

apparence nue, entouré de cette zone de silence qui lui est inhérente. Le pouvoir imageant du mot étranger, du mot de l'Autre, s'appauvrit par son adaptation à la réalité familière. La substitution du z par s (proximité inconsciente de la théorie barthienne⁶) élimine l'irréductible du mot allogène. En même temps, l'adhésion presque extatique à l'opacité de l'Autre s'accompagne du sentiment d'angoisse devant le *Ganz Andere* : « Il avait donc suffi de quelques signes pour créer un lointain à la fois inquiétant et fabuleux » (*MR* 12). La « Russie » de Jaccottet est un artefact, une création verbale fantastique qui semble bondir dans le réel ; au lieu de faire référence à un pays, le mot crée le pays. Ce qui importe ici ce n'est pas l'occupation d'un espace, somme toute, inhabitable, mais le passage qui se fraye entre le réel et un au-delà. Les liens que le mot tisse entre le réel, le livresque et le spirituel confirment sa valeur médiatrice, mais *heureusement* médiatrice.

Le mot « Russie » est un conglomérat d'images, mais son tissu n'est pas pour autant incohérent. Toutes les images qui déterminent le nom de lieu sont issues d'un même foyer irradiant et disposées selon un ordre qui donne à voir une figure⁷. Horizontalement, le procédé de la surimpression superpose de nouvelles traces à celles déjà existantes dans l'espace du mot, et dans ce cas le signe peut être décrypté comme un palimpseste. Verticalement, le procédé du souvenir fait traverser plusieurs âges du même mot. L'écho propagé par la mémoire crée des rapports dynamiques entre les différents états historiques d'une notion : dans ce cas-là, le signe devient la trace mnésique d'un amont du langage. La voix médiane, pas trop élevée, et médiatrice, dirigée vers un au-delà échappant à la verbalisation, devient à la fin célébration de la « parole pure » :

Toutes les choses qui sont dites, et dites, c'est essentiel, presque en sourdine, avec une parfaite simplicité, dans ces pages : la traversée de la rivière, le gonflement printanier de ses eaux, les feux allumés pour la fête dans la nuit et la brume [...], les fragments de cantilènes que cite avec ferveur le jeune

⁶ Nous pensons, certes, à la lecture célèbre consacrée par Roland Barthes à la nouvelle de Balzac, *Sarrasine*. Cf. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, Paris, Seuil, coll. « Tel Quel », 1970.

⁷ Un peu comme le motif de la figure dans le tapis dans le roman de Henry James.

moins à la gloire de toute parole pure, tout cela fait comme autant de thèmes, de motifs [...] noués en une sorte de polyphonie très souple et tout intérieure qui porterait à la clef l'affirmation de la Résurrection. (MR 15)

La magie de la parole opère une conversion comme la Résurrection reflète l'affirmation absolue de la vie contre la mort. Mais cette magie n'intervient que dans les conditions où l'absence, premier signe positif, selon Greimas⁸ est liée à la présence, où la parole côtoie le silence et où le développement syntaxique ne dé-finit pas le texte, mais le laisse suspendu, prêt à rebondir dans un a-venir incertain : « Ces légendes elles-mêmes contribuent à l'effet magique, peut-être parce que faites le plus souvent de phrases tronquées, en suspens, à la fois liées à l'histoire et laissant un espace libre devant elles, un possible, un a-venir. » (MR 12)

La structure polyphonique du discours se greffe sur un seul mot, « Russie », foyer de forces à la fois centrifuges et centripètes. À l'image des beaux-arts, théorisant le point de fuite comme point de convergence des lignes, « Russie », dans le texte de Philippe Jaccottet, est un *mot de fuite*, cellule génératrice et régénératrice de l'écriture.

Marque de l'humain, le langage est signe du sujet qui le profère. Il raconte, même sans le poser explicitement, son histoire. Pour le sujet de la modernité dont les parangons sont chez Jaccottet le personnage égaré de Musil et le « visage effacé » de Hofmannsthal, la langue n'est pas uniquement un signe de son exil sur la Terre, mais cet exil même. Elle dit son propre exil. En parlant, le sujet s'exprime : chaque mot fait sortir de lui, une fois de plus, ce qui se dérobe à l'expression, le point aveugle de son identité, l'oubli qui, selon saint Augustin, a conduit à la Chute du premier homme. L'épisode de Babel n'est arrivé que pour révéler l'impureté qui était déjà dans l'homme dès le moment du péché originel : il atteste, comme s'il y était encore besoin d'une preuve matérielle, la perte de l'unité ontologique inaugurale. La condition humaine est une condition de la division multipliée à l'infini. Il y a pourtant une solution à cette contamination générale de la maladie historicisante ou à cette dégradation perpétuelle. Jaccottet la voit dans la recherche, à l'intérieur de cette langue malade, de la mémoire qui la restitue à elle-même et la relie à son origine. Pour

⁸ Greimas s'exprime dans les termes suivants : « l'absence [fait] surgir la présence : non s1 est déjà le premier terme positif » (Greimas 314).

un sujet orphelin, sans père ni patrie, la langue maternelle devient une langue étrangère. Mais l'inverse pourrait s'avérer être tout aussi vrai. Deux sont les modalités de cette récupération mémorielle : soit l'accumulation du sens, par le réinvestissement sémantique de la parole vide, soit, par contre, la décantation progressive du langage pour parvenir à sa fin positive, au silence d'où il naît et auquel il doit retourner. Les deux solutions répondent aux défis lancés par un contexte de crise. Apparemment opposées, elles se rejoignent dans leur finalité commune.

2. La topographie hybride de la page

Nous l'avons vu : le mot a un corps à lui, fantastique, ondoyant et miroitant. La rêverie jaccottéenne sur le mot nous fait découvrir le déplacement du mot à l'intérieur de lui-même, son tangage, son mouvement à travers des couches de sens et d'histoire. Le cas du nom propre est d'autant plus révélateur vu l'immobilité apparente de ce type nominal, sa lourdeur et son opacité sémantique associées, en règle générale, à un usage purement conventionnel. Le nom propre expose de la manière la plus brillante l'arbitraire du signe provoqué par la Chute originelle, sa séparation d'avec les choses. Quelque monolithique qu'il puisse paraître, il est l'indice le plus visible de la séparation, de la désunion, de la fracture malheureuse. Aussi soupçonnons-nous que le choix de Jaccottet d'associer des proses de voyages (réels ou imaginaires) à des rêveries sur des noms propres comme « Russie », « Athènes », « Beauregard » ou « Andalousie » dépasse la simple curiosité touristique. Le récit de voyage permet de penser, d'une façon beaucoup plus libre que la poésie embarrassée par des questionnements vite qualifiés d'« arts poétiques », le problème du sens, la crise du langage, la difficulté de la représentation. L'aventure du sujet se paye bien d'une aventure discursive : texte et vie se répondent intimement, dans une imbrication où le discours se fait vie et la vie devient discours. Or le mot, instrument élémentaire du discours, a son rôle dans ce processus d'interchangeabilité.

Il y a une rêverie jaccottéenne sur le mot, bien étonnante de la part d'un poète classé parmi les « poètes de l'Être » et non parmi les « poètes de la Lettre »⁹. Les mots

⁹ Dans un essai consacré à la poésie contemporaine, Jean-Claude Pinson sépare les poètes de notre modernité en poètes de l'Être et poètes de la Lettre. Jaccottet

semblent posséder une entité bien distincte, un corps à eux, un corps de signes mémoriels dont l'effleurement induit presque automatiquement un tourbillon de sensations, de souvenirs et de désirs. Dans une prose reprise dans le recueil *À travers un verger*¹⁰, les contrées de la Norvège ne tentent pas l'auteur au point d'y risquer un voyage ; par contre, le mot « Norvège », surtout dans un contexte littéraire précis, « fait irruption » et atteint non seulement la conscience du sujet, mais aussi sa peau :

ce n'était pas la réalité de tel pays situé au nord dont j'avais la nostalgie, mais celle que l'irruption du mot Norvège suscite déjà dans les *Solitudes* de Góngora, quelque chose de froid, de pur et de lointain comme une autre source, un pôle intérieur qu'il ne s'agit pas vraiment d'atteindre, qu'il faut seulement approcher, entrevoir [...]. (« Les Cormorans », *ATV* 53)

Le contraste entre deux pôles géographiques et littéraires, entre la vision méditerranéenne, solaire de Góngora et le froid des pays nordiques attire et fascine Jaccottet : seul ou engagé dans des relations le plus souvent oxymoroniques, le nom propre a la capacité de dépayser au sens propre le lecteur, de le projeter non dans un sens, mais dans un halo sémantique où la perte de soi devient d'autant plus délicate que le labyrinthe reste toujours codifié et limité par des lois (référentielles).

Il y a un corps du mot chez Jaccottet, mais il y a aussi un corps de la lettre. Tout d'abord, il y a, certes, un jeu entre les différents styles de caractères qui peuvent intervenir à l'intérieur

est intégré parmi les premiers (Pinson 45). Selon Pinson, on assiste, depuis les années 80 du XX^e siècle, à un retour du lyrique qui reprend confiance dans la possibilité d'un Sens vers lequel la poésie pourrait faire accéder. Dans cette catégorie, Pinson met les néo-lyriques contemporains aussi bien que des poètes lyriques plus anciens comme Supervielle, Bonnefoy ou Jaccottet. Ces néo-lyriques, rompant avec les ludismes langagiers des « textualistes » dans lesquels ils ne voient que des artifices arbitraires et un retour narcissiste de la poésie sur elle-même, proclament la résurrection du sujet (mort, comme on le sait, après s'être heurté contre les vitres de l'azur mallarméen) et le retour du référent éliminé lors des pratiques poétiques des épigones du même Mallarmé. De plus, ils exigent la possibilité d'un retour à la tradition ancienne de la poésie lyrique, c'est-à-dire « chantante ».

¹⁰ Philippe Jaccottet, *À travers un verger* suivi de *Les cormorans* et de *Beauregard*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Blanche », 1997. Toutes les références ultérieures à cet ouvrage se rapporteront désormais à cette édition, désignée ATV.

du même recueil. Un exemple éloquent dans ce sens est *Cahier de verdure*, recueil assez récent de Jaccottet (il paraît en 1990 aux éditions Gallimard) et bien novateur pour un poète généralement peu soucieux de recherches formelles. Il convient toutefois de garder à l'esprit que Jaccottet n'est pas aussi étranger à ce type de recherches qu'il voudrait (faire) paraître : il avoue volontiers son penchant pour les éditions de luxe, au point de mettre au second plan la question des coûts financiers.

Cahier de verdure est l'un des premiers recueils jaccottéens à mêler prose et vers. Mais là ce n'est pas l'essentiel, du moins en ce qui concerne la question qui nous arrête dans ce chapitre-ci. Ce qui nous y intéresse, c'est l'alternance, du point de vue typographique, entre police romaine et police italique, celle-ci n'étant pas réservée, comme on aurait pu le croire, aux fragments en vers. Interposés entre des textes en caractères normaux, les textes en italiques révèlent un statut plutôt poétique. Il s'y agit quand même de proses. Leur fonction médiatrice, « médiatisant » entre des textes plus référentiels, répond à leur statut générique hybride, ce qui signifie que Jaccottet emploie même les jeux formels dans sa quête d'un « autre langage » qui traduirait « l'autre parole ».

Il y a, ensuite, le jeu entre des manières différentes, souvent inédites, d'arranger les fragments textuels sur la feuille de papier. La page possède, ainsi, son corps à elle sur laquelle vient se greffer un tracé de lignes qui peut tourner parfois au labyrinthe. Jaccottet tire de ce procédé de nombreux effets sémantiques, allant tous vers une ambiguïisation volontaire du sens. Le cas le plus intéressant est celui de *Pensées sous les nuages*¹¹, un autre recueil mélangeant proses et vers¹² (il semble que la forme hybride se

¹¹ Philippe Jaccottet, *Pensées sous les nuages* (poèmes), Paris, Gallimard, 2002. Toutes les références ultérieures à cet ouvrage se rapporteront désormais à cette édition, désignée PSN.

¹² C'est le premier recueil à réaliser ce type de mélange à l'intérieur d'un volume, entre deux formes génériques distinctes. À penser plus loin, nous pouvons dire, toutefois, que Jaccottet rêve très tôt de l'hybridation des genres et des effets qui en découlent, à partir même de son premier recueil publié, *Trois poèmes aux démons*, où il s'agit, de plus, de trois proses (poétiques) : « En 1945 avait paru aux éditions des Portes de France mon premier livre, *Trois poèmes aux démons* (rien que ça !), des 'proses poétiques' qui étaient ce que les jeunes éditeurs de Porrentruy avaient jugé bon de garder d'un ensemble qui comportait également des vers. » Philippe Jaccottet, *Requiem* (1946) suivi de *Remarques* (1990), [Saint-Clément-de-Rivière], Fata Morgana, p. 35.

prête le plus volontiers à des codages typographiques supplémentaires). Assez proche, du point de vue de la chronologie de sa publication, de *Cahier de verdure, Pensées sous les nuages* paraît pour la première fois chez Gallimard en 1983 et connaîtra plusieurs éditions.

Composé de sept séquences, le recueil abonde en jeux typographiques (très sérieux, pourtant) dont certains semblent chercher à tout prix une ambiguïté de lecture peu caractéristique des poèmes jaccottéens. Par exemple, le poème de la page 27 de l'édition de 1983 est inscrit en bas de page ; mis entre parenthèses, il semble continuer sur la page suivante, le premier (?) poème de la page 28 étant situé juste en haut de la page. La même remarque est possible pour les deux blocs textuels des pages 33-34 : ici la parenthèse ouverte sur la page 33 est fermée à la fin du poème figurant sur la page suivante, ce qui constitue un possible indice en faveur de la considération des deux blocs poétiques comme représentant les deux unités d'un même poème. L'arrangement discursif ne nous aide pourtant pas dans ce deuxième cas : l'unité secondaire du poème n'est pas placée en haut de la page comme c'est le cas des autres poèmes « découpés » du recueil, mais bien vers son milieu. Le troisième exemple et le dernier que nous retenons, c'est celui du poème (ou des poèmes) de la page 36 de l'édition citée, poème appartenant à un autre cycle consacré par Jaccottet à une rêverie associative autour d'une entité linguistique, représentée cette fois-ci par le mot « joie » :

Ce matin, il y avait un miroir rond dans la brume,
un disque argenté près de virer à l'or,
il eût suffi d'yeux plus ardents pour y voir
le visage de celle qui en efface avec un tendre soin
les marques de la nuit...

Et dans le jour encore gris
courent ici et là comme la crête d'un feu pâle
les branchages neufs des tilleuls... (« Le mot joie », *PSN* 36)

Selon la manière dont le lecteur choisit de les lire, les deux blocs provoquent des effets de lecture différents. Le sémantisme très proche favorise leur lecture comme les deux parties d'un seul poème : il s'agit du même moment de la journée (l'aube) et de l'hésitation visuelle provoquée par le moment de transition. Cette même hésitation est « thématifiée » visuellement par les points de

suspension disposés symétriquement à la fin des deux unités. Enfin, si la conjonction « Et » du bloc d'en bas peut être interprété comme une marque de liaison entre les deux « strophes », il convient de se rappeler qu'on rencontre plus d'une fois, chez Jaccottet, des cas où une conjonction de coordination ou un adverbe itératif peut inaugurer l'écriture.

3. « S/Z » ou le corps de la lettre

Si le mot et la page ont leur corps à eux, il y a aussi un troisième élément, tenant à la fois du régime formel et du régime représentatif, auquel Jaccottet prête un corps. Il s'agit de la lettre, de sa forme non seulement sur la page mais aussi et surtout sur la carte de la mémoire. Avec l'exemple de la rêverie sur un petit caractère entrant dans la composition du mot « Andalousie », nous clorons cette étude plutôt formaliste qu'herméneutique au sens strict, mais dont les possibilités de lecture nous ont ouvert bien des voies dans la compréhension de l'imaginaire toponymique jaccottéen.

Les mots « Andalou » et « Andalousie » constituent les noyaux thématiques d'une autre prose de voyage, intitulée « Les mots 'Andalou', 'Andalousie'... » et incluse par Jaccottet dans le même recueil où il a inséré deux autres relations de voyage : « Cristal et fumée », prose consacrée à l'architecture du monde grec ancien et « Entrevu en Égypte », le récit d'une incursion dans le monde égyptien que l'auteur a faite en 1992, selon toutes les apparences, par l'intermédiaire d'une agence de voyage.

Le recours typographique non plus aux guillemets, comme dans le cas du mot « Russie », mais aux points de suspension présents déjà dans le titre projette le toponyme étranger dans une sorte de blanc scriptural dont la fonction serait de répondre, en écho, à la mémoire intime évoquée par le nom et de la prolonger indéfiniment dans un hors-parole sensualiste et dans l'inachevable : « Les mots 'Andalou', 'Andalousie', ce qu'ils ont de langoureux, comme des regards d'yeux noirs dans un visage olivâtre ; ce qu'ils ont d'à la fois sonore et tendre, de sonore, clair et voluptueux comme le mot velours [...]. » (CF 9)

S, z, k... Ce qui fascine Jaccottet dans tous ces mots étrangers, c'est la matérialité de la lettre, pareille dans ses courbes et dans ses sinuosités aux courbures du corps oriental. La forme du signifiant fonctionne à la manière des voiles soyeux de la femme orientale, protégeant son intimité contre tout regard indiscret,

offrant néanmoins sa pureté à l'initié, à celui qui trouve la clé du sérail. Le mot expose ainsi un interdit. Il défend son sens dans l'opacité de sa forme. Il promet un au-delà, tout en le gardant farouchement. Sa forme est son gardien : d'autant plus délicate que le voile est plus compact, plus serré contre le corps, dévoilant les formes d'un contenu inaccessible. On ne peut que fantasmer à son sujet. C'est là le rôle de l'écriture. Sans le voile, sans l'ombre, il n'y aurait pas de langage.

Entouré de cercles synonymiques de sens et d'« hyperliens » métonymiques d'expériences contiguës, le mot devient son propre miroir : mais il ne se donne plus à voir lui-même, en pure perte. La rêverie opère à la fois comme une clôture et comme une ouverture : la relance de sens est ainsi infinie. Il faut reconnaître dans le geste typique de Jaccottet de s'arrêter sur un mot le pouvoir considérable d'une projection, sur le mot transformé en écran de l'inconscient, de ses propres fantasmes et désirs. Mais il s'agit toujours de désirs contrôlés, motivés en général par des rapprochements sémantiques ou phoniques. Les désirs qui ne font que réactiver les fantasmes collectifs, Jaccottet les rejette. Il faudrait accéder à la profonde singularité de chaque mot comme si, par ce geste, on parvenait, en fait, à découvrir tout ce qu'il y a d'universel en lui. Par un effet de cyclicité, à la langue on parvient à travers *ma* langue.

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BOOK REVIEWS

BUCHBESPREHUNGEN

REVUE DU LIVRE



Dissipation, Death and Ethics in Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*
Markus Zusak, *Hoțul de cărți*
RAO Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011 (*The Book Thief*, 2005)

Anemona Alb¹

Markus Zusak's novel *The Book Thief*, published in 2005 (and translated into Romanian in 2011) received enthusiastic criticism at the time of its publication and has since enjoyed even greater success as it was turned into a movie in 2013. It is a book about the disinvestment of ethical responsibility that humanity experiences in times of war (World War Two here). It is about the ultimate alienation, Death (apart from the alienation of mankind *vis-à-vis* its own humanity, to instantiate a pun – within the paradigm of Nazi-ism, but of all totalitarian regimes more broadly speaking; the book under scrutiny here is not agitprop, however); but death with a difference, for His acts are by no means final in the novel, He allows space for overlap with Life. Hence a dissipation of sorts emerges: that of Death into Life and the other way round. Ontological boundaries transgressed.

It is by no means an arbitrary, value-free choice on the author's part to have the plot of his book triggered by the female protagonist (Liesel) finding a book left behind by somebody. The somebody in question is a grave-digger, more specifically an apprentice. It is, in other words, a *post festum* instance; it is the silence after all the attendees at a funeral have left (here silence also in the sense that the girl cannot read, it is only later that she will be taught the alphabet); the dissipated space of non-intentionality in the now deserted cemetery, a space of desolation despite it being replete with humans, i.e. the deceased, the lack of teleology thereof. It is within this space that the little girl, our protagonist, finds, quite paradoxically, a new pathway into life (after finding the book left behind by the young grave-digger) precisely on the day of her brother's funeral. An end and an improbable beginning. Note also that the rightful owner of the book, a handbook on the craft of grave-digging is very young, an inexperienced apprentice – which is to say the craft of handling the dead is esoteric in more ways than one. But more saliently, according to Zusak Death itself is not an autonomous entity as contrasted to Life, it is indeed dissipated, the boundaries thereof straddling both vitalist and morbid categories. Here Jean Baudrillard's theory of the symbolic order comes in handy (Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 1998, Sage Publications). According to Baudrillard Life and Death are not distinct categories, but on the contrary, they are co-terminous. As he puts it,

”The irreversibility of biological death, its objective and punctual character, is a modern fact of science. It is specific to our culture. Every other culture says that death begins before death, that life goes on after life, and that it is impossible to distinguish life from death. Against the representation which sees in one the *term* of the other, we must try to see the radical *indeterminacy*

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of life and death, and the impossibility of their autonomy in the symbolic order.” (Baudrillard 1998: 158)

It is this very impossibility of their autonomy that Zusak taps into when he has the omnipresence of Death become versatile, in the sense that it is not merely ubiquity- as- impending- reality (especially in times of war), it is also prolonged into Life, into Life on the edge. As such, these prolongations resignify Life in terms of urgency, of the proliferation of essential gestures (see Liesel’s repeated refusal to give her friend a kiss – a girlish coquetry, this refusal – and subsequently, all too belatedly, offering to kiss him in his last minutes on this earth, as he agonizes after being mortally wounded in a Luftwaffe bombing of the city, urging him not to die, in a *Look, I will even kiss you if you promise not to die* stance). It is apparent that Death has intervened in the economy of life, has determined the nubile girl to transgress the boundaries of her modesty, of her prudishness and offer a kiss to the dying boy. And Life has similarly tried to intervene into the realm of Death, *via* the naive gesture of the little girl that was meant to bring the agonizing boy back to life. A bizarre symbiotic co-dependence, indeed some strange bedfellows, Life and Death, an existential juxtaposition, a palimpsest of desperate situations.

Baudrillard coins the syntagm *death is a nuance of life* – and the other way round, he argues. In his own words, “Death is not a due payment (*échéance*), it is a nuance of life; or, life is a nuance of death. But our modern idea of death is controlled by a very different system of representations: that of the machine and the function. A machine either works or it does not. Thus the biological machine is either dead or alive.” (Baudrillard 1998: 159). This very mechanistic view of life is what informs the whole novel under scrutiny here. It is the functionality of totalitarian regimes (here, Nazi-ism) that the author seeks to expose. Efficiency, radical action *via* the instantiation of death – this is what Nazi-ism is apparently all about. The way the Jews are hunted down and sent to concentration camps – see the case of Max in the novel, who is the exception, in fact, as he is eventually saved – in other words this ideological witch hunt plays out the versatility of Death. Not only is Death versatile here, it is also invested with the role of narrator, of all-controlling narrator. Should I say omniscient narrator? All-controlling for sure. Even though the subtext is that Death is but an *aide-de-camp* to mankind, the real perpetrator. It is as if humanity had been disinvested of any responsibility as regards the war and its aftermath, as if ethics were the prerequisite of Death exclusively. Quite strangely, death becomes an almost pleasant presence, as is visible in His own self-portrayal:

Here’s a little truth: you will die. I’m trying, in all honesty, to be merry about this topic, although the majority of men are embarrassed to believe in me, despite my protestations. Please, pretty please, trust me! I can definitely be merry, I can! I can be polite. I can be considerate. Agreeable. Affable. And these are just the ones starting with an a. Just do not ask me to be nice. Nice has nothing to do with me. (Zusak 2011: 11, translation mine, Anemona Alb)

It is, however, an a-moral space that this newly-invested narrator, Death, by no means a recluse, but a socializing, jazzy presence inhabits in spite of His jollity,

politeness and eerie glee. The lack of ethics thereof is the stepping stone in the story. Death narrates His activity, his prolific activity in times of war in a disconcertingly neutral vein, as in the following excerpt describing a plane crash, a few minutes into the event, right there at the scene:

A few minutes later, the smoke dissipated. There was nothing left to be handed out. It was a boy that arrived first at the scene, out of breath and carrying something that resembled a tool kit. Extremely troubled, he got near the cockpit and took a look at the pilot, checking whether he is alive, which he was at the time. The book thief arrived roughly thirty seconds later. Years had passed, but I recognized her. She was short of breath. Out of the tool kit came a teddy bear. He reached into the cockpit through the broken window and he lay the teddy bear on the pilot's chest. The smiling teddy lay there crammed on the damaged, bloodshed chest. A few minutes later, I did my job. It was about time. (Zusak 2011: 18-19; translation mine, Anemona Alb)

This neutrality thus instantiated pervades the text. It constitutes, without doubt, one of the most effective ways of disinvestment. That of humanity in its transactions with evil.

Roger Craik. A Book on Solitude and Instant *Down Stranger Roads*

New York Publishing House, BlazeVOX Buffalo, 2014

Ioana Cistelecan¹

Once again, the English by birth academic now performing in U.S.A. at Kent University Ohio - Roger Craik - is offering a surprising collection of poems, a book about the self's excruciating solitude within the world, a book about the world's both splendour and ingratitude, its substantial shallowness, a book about people, instant and brief most rewarding surprises and human vanity, its appearance and above all its rarely uttered nucleus. As Steven Reese opinionated, "What sets Roger Craik's body of work apart from that of so many contemporaries is the quality of its *savoring*, the sense that human experience in all its complexity is richly rewarding when we attend to it with a keen eye and an open heart." A certain uniqueness of his poetical articulated discourse has been also identified by George B. Bilgere who stated that "No one sounds like Roger Craik. His voice, a beguilingly cosmopolitan mix of British purebred and American mutt, is the well-stamped passport he shows at border crossing from Ashtabula to Auschwitz, from Kent State to Krakow, from Amsterdam to the far-flung outposts of the human heart."

The author seems to suggest that everything goes in modern poetry, everything is allowed, there is no border, no limit, no prohibition regime. The world is functioning intriguingly while the lines are building up as paradoxical oppositions: the proximity poem is largely vocalized always targeting the individual; he/ she is apparently thrown in the middle of the world, constantly doing their best to fit in, to belong, to make sense and to define their selves. - "Despite the snow banked high to ice,/ the parking lot was jammed with cars"; "(...) The airplane slowly turns,/ banks into its leisurly decline/ toward another city's lights,/ its suburbs twinkling. It will not be long/ until he'll stand rehearsing someone else's lines/ written long ago when he was someone else./ These days he never writes." *The self* is a spectator, a reflector, a mere guest of his own world; he is constructing the poem of proximity along with the poem of himself, but mostly the poem of his loneliness. Even the couple is eventually imprinted by a series of probabilities, never of viable possibilities; in spite of the momentary surprise, the other half of the couple never proves to be anything but a projected reality, denying thus the concreteness and the fulfillment of it. The couple stagnates in its artefact and virtual pose, doomed to an improbable future, never attached to an immediate present. ("and caught/ (...)/ the sound that suddenly meant you"; "until you came/ and pressed the bell/ and made me happy// then.// Alone, of course,/ again and again// I press my bell"; "And there I'd be,/ in one great sweep all fingers fumbling off your wedding ring/ and smoothing with my plans"; "Not two are close together./ Each one is drapped out on its own, draining/ into a flat white shoelace"; "you would listen,/ tousled with your fantasies,/ making the willow a fiend but a

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friend// in private, not a friend to talk about”) Powerful images do bear strong impact to the reader: the black with its shadows, variables, occurrences and innuendoes is definitely leading us to the idea of ending, of final statement; all these cities, museums, paintings and songs, beyond inter-, para- and meta-textuality they are obviously displaying, they are also a proof not only for the authorial traveller self’s remarkable memory storing capacity, but mainly for the inner process of exaggerating in and out for de-frustrating sake exclusively: “Every six years or so/ you come back here, put up at the same hotel/ in the Anna van den Vondelkpark”; “ (...) She hums/ a line or two from Paul McCartney’s song/ “Another Day” and sees, twelve hours away// beyond the customs wall a pacing man”; “Your eight short lines announce a different truth./ Immortalized by what you never were,/ a puzzlement to those whose Yeats descants”; “Instantly afraid, I hear/ my own voice downstairs/ announcing my name to no one in the dark”; “Fear, ferocity, astonishment in one/ maddish eye of yours from Audubon/ beneath a few spiked feathers for a crest”; “On the day that all the world had died,/ standing on my front door step/ with coffee in the dark blue mug I’d bought”. Photos of strangers surprised or rather paralysed within the proximity of the poetic self’s both exterior and interior journey make up the world seen as a circus, a mixture of shadows, precarious destinies and mostly unbearable solitude; with a proper attention for details, blowing out of proportions, the imageries are revealed for poetic and ego reasons. Some common denominators, some hyper-marketed places are constantly identifiable in Roger Craik’s lyrics – the recurrent battle targeting the author and the reader, be it the genuine one or the critical acknowledged voice, text interpretation which is never completely satisfactory, never totally trustworthy – these are all articulated or insinuated in a game of ironical bitter counterpoints within the poem, thus linking once again the perverted outside with the lonely inside of the authorial self: “Near silence. Solitude. The gradual/ ebb and leakage into truth.”; “<This next one’s a prose poem>, he intones,/ and I think what were all the others then. (...) // There’s a bar just down the street.// There is indeed a bar just down the street/ and I could be there, there expansively to contemplate/ the art that is a pint of Guinness/ (...) Instead, I reason with myself, that I am here for poetry, to get a sense”; “And all the tumblers, acrobats,/ all the gauzy zoomers of the air/ dull themselves to baubles, gauds,/ drawing not one scrape of syllable/ from you”.

International, cosmopolitan vibrant images, projections and virtualizations – they all balance in a tango between slow motion and stillness rhythms of heart, of self; one familiar face in this dance of and for life, the grandfather reappears in this volume too, acting as a pillar for the poetic self, doubling his singularity. The present volume ultimately represents a trip along instants building up existence, completing gaps, ego-es, progressively articulating the poems of the moment, the poems of proximity, the ones that would last.

Alain Berenboom (né en 1947) est un écrivain francophone de Belgique qui se remarque par une activité culturelle très riche et diverse. Auteur de romans, de nouvelles et de pièces de théâtre, il est aussi chroniqueur du journal *Le soir* et administrateur de la Cinémathèque royale de Belgique. Il est également avocat au barreau de Bruxelles depuis 1969, spécialiste notamment des droits d'auteur et des médias ainsi que professeur de droit à l'Université libre de Bruxelles. L'ancien secrétaire général de la Ligue belge des droits de l'homme est très préoccupé de la marche du monde et de la réalité de son pays dont il est un très fin observateur.

Monsieur Optimiste est son onzième roman qui lui a apporté le prix Rossel, le prix littéraire le plus prestigieux de Belgique, l'équivalent du Goncourt français. C'est un livre singulier, une chronique de famille rappelant le genre mémorialiste où Alain Berenboom se lance à la quête de ses origines. Si les autres romans de l'auteur sont plutôt des polars dans la bonne tradition belge, celui-ci est un livre autobiographique où il essaie de configurer le portrait de son père tel qu'il ressort des archives familiales et de ses souvenirs.

Alain Berenboom se remarque aussi par son identité composite, étant né dans une famille juive provenant de deux pays de l'Europe de l'Est : le père Chaïm d'origine polonaise et la mère, Rebecca, lituanienne de Vilnius. Les deux parents ont échappé à l'Holocauste par leur choix d'étudier et de vivre à Bruxelles où ils se sont rencontrés pendant la Seconde Guerre. L'écrivain y est né aussi et y a grandi sans savoir grand-chose sur ses origines car ses parents lui ont toujours caché leur passé dans leur ambition d'éduquer leur enfant pour l'avenir et d'en faire un vrai citoyen Belge. Pharmacien comme métier, très passionné de son travail, son père a toujours donné l'impression d'avoir mené une vie lisse, sans histoires. C'est ce qui explique le désintérêt de son fils-écrivain de la décrire plus tôt. Tout cela, jusqu'au moment où, des années après la mort de ses parents, il se met à fouiller dans les lettres familiales que sa mère lui a léguées et qu'elle a gardées, de son vivant, comme un trésor caché. C'est alors que l'écrivain découvre ses ancêtres et leur monde, ses parents braves qui ont enduré les vicissitudes de l'Histoire ayant la chance de se sauver et de survivre. A mesure qu'il avance dans la lecture des documents, le petit pharmacien se transforme dans un héros qui mène une vie pleine d'aventures, traverse des épreuves, court des dangers et réussit toujours à s'en sortir avec du courage et de l'espoir.

Divisé en plusieurs petits chapitres (54) dont certains pourraient se lire comme de petites histoires indépendantes, ce livre n'est pas très facile à classer. A-t-on affaire à une simple transcription des documents, dans un certain ordre, pour retracer la chronique d'une famille ou est-ce bien un roman de fiction ? Pour éclaircir cet aspect, l'écrivain s'adresse au lecteur dès le début

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du roman dans le chapitre : *Petite précision : les événements et les personnages de ce livre sont...* tout en dévoilant les circonstances où il a démarré son entreprise de reconstitution de même que son dilemme pour en choisir la meilleure forme. Les documents épars auraient pu être rangés chronologiquement mais il y avait pas mal de lacunes. Une fiction qui raconte les aventures de ses parents aurait pu donner, selon lui, « le grand roman européen. Mais mes parents auraient été rapidement emportés par le flot de l'Histoire, perdus dans la fiction. Au diable l'histoire du XX-e siècle ! » (p. 16). D'autres hypothèses sont avancées dans un mélange de sobriété et d'humour, deux tonalités qui vont de pair tout le long du récit : « j'ai choisi d'être le greffier scrupuleux de leur vie, rien de plus, laissant béants les trous de leur biographie sans les combler de supputations dont je serais le maître... Sous peine d'inventer, Lecteur, vous êtes donc averti : pour l'essentiel, j'en ai peur, vous resterez sur votre faim, autant que moi. Mais si les personnages de ce livre vous paraissent de vaporeux fantômes, ils sont le reflet d'êtres vivants dont les âmes continuent d'errer, parce que j'ai refusé de les enterrer... » (p. 16)

En effet, ce sont ses parents et leur monde, des lieux et des événements vécus dans une époque très agitée de l'Histoire, depuis les années 20 jusqu'aux années 60. La figure centrale est celle de son père, né dans la petite ville polonaise de Makow et arrivé en Belgique en 1928 sous le nom de Chaïm Berenbaum mais devenu Hubert pour ses clients. Quant au nom de famille, l'écrivain s'amuse à rappeler toutes ses variantes depuis Bernbaum que portait son grand-père paternel jusqu'à Birnbaum ou Barenboïm pour identifier des cousins établis aux Etats-Unis. Pour l'écrivain, il reçoit une résonance française, voire Berenboom. Il lance une conclusion toujours amusante à cette transformation lorsqu'il dit que sa famille a une identité « à géométrie variable » (p. 49). Et encore un nom, Monsieur Optimisme ! C'est le surnom de son père Chaïm qui signifie « vie » en hébreu. Il colle très bien à la personnalité de ce Juif traqué par les nazis qui surmonte tous les périls, qui perd une partie de ses proches mais qui n'abandonne pas la vie grâce à sa confiance et à son espoir dans un meilleur avenir. Son fils-écrivain refait le puzzle de son identité à l'aide des archives familiales et d'autres documents. Que contiennent ces archives ? Il s'agit surtout des lettres de ses grands-parents paternels, écrites en polonais et en yiddish, des lettres des sœurs de son père, des bribes de journal de l'une d'elles et une trentaine de lettres de sa mère. L'écrivain a consulté aussi les archives de la commune de Schaerbeek et de la police des étrangers où il a découvert des données sur ses tantes et le fait que son père ait été poursuivi par un certain agent au nom prédestiné, Monsieur Porcin. Les lettres de ses grands-parents sont en polonais et en yiddish, des langues que l'écrivain ne connaît pas. Pour les traduire il a fait appel à deux étudiantes polonaises et à des professeurs de yiddish américains qui se sont cassé la tête pour mener à terme leur entreprise.

Au fil des pages, le lecteur découvre des épisodes qui peuvent configurer l'identité de Monsieur Optimisme. Sa lettre de demande de naturalisation en Belgique (p. 157-158) comprend toute sa biographie dont on retient quelques séquences : la naissance en Pologne, la déportation des parents dont la mère réussit à se sauver, les études et le service militaire en Pologne, la vie d'étudiant à Liège, le mariage avec Rebecca, après un coup de foudre, le voyage de noces raté et plein d'aventures, l'implication dans la Résistance belge,

l'amitié avec Tomas, l'espion allemand, la convocation allemande à Malines (l'endroit de départ des Juifs vers Auschwitz), à laquelle il ne répond pas, l'aide de son policier de quartier pour se sauver. De son identité juïve, il a gardé l'amour du peuple élu et de la Bible, désirant à reconstruire l'Etat moderne d'Israël, tout animé par l'idéal sioniste.

Monsieur Optimisme se plaît à insister à maintes reprises sur sa nouvelle facette identitaire tout en exprimant ses opinions sur son pays d'accueil. Loin de la chaleur originelle mais étouffante de son *shtetl* polonais, il préfère la Belgique, « son Amérique à lui, un pays cosmopolite où les Juifs seront toujours à l'abri, une oasis sur la *carte* de l'Europe ». (p. 136). Ces paroles nous rappellent celles d'un autre écrivain belge francophone, Pierre Mertens, qui peuvent s'entendre sous la voix du héros de son roman *Terre d'asile*. La Belgique est une « banquise démocratique », une véritable terre d'accueil pour beaucoup d'étrangers de toute origine, c'est « le musée de l'Occident » où toutes les valeurs s'y trouvent résumées et planquées, étiquetées comme derrière les vitrines. » (*Terre d'asile*, p. 114). D'ailleurs, dès l'arrivée en Belgique, Chaïm ainsi que sa femme ont rompu avec leur identité primaire et leur passé, dans le désir de commencer une nouvelle vie et dans leur hâte de s'intégrer dans la société belge moderne et laïque. Aussi l'écrivain parle-t-il de leur « bruxellisation. » rapide. (p. 87) Monsieur Optimisme déclare à haute voix son amour pour la Belgique dont il se sent totalement attaché, se nommant « Belge de cœur et d'esprit » (p. 158). C'est pourquoi, dans son rôle de père, il se propose d'élever son fils loin de ses origines juïves et de faire de lui un vrai Belge, amoureux de son pays plus que les Belges de souche.

Chaïm se remarque aussi dans sa profession de pharmacien, faisant la preuve d'un homme passionné de son métier qui croit à l'effet miraculeux de ses potions, destinées aussi bien aux êtres humains qu'aux pigeons. Le pharmacien magicien était aussi à même d'offrir une thérapie aux femmes malheureuses qui trouvaient en lui le confident idéal.

Les lettres-document font apparaître les figures des proches de Chaïm : ses parents, Aba et Frania de même que ses sœurs, Esther et Sara auxquelles l'écrivain dédie des chapitres séparés. Il réussit à relever les traits particuliers de chacun, faisant par ci, par là des commentaires amusantes, concernant un possible héritage de leur côté. La figure qui le fascine est celle de sa grand-mère qui a réussi à se sauver des Allemands s'enfuyant par les égouts de Bruxelles. C'est une femme rebelle, ouverte, haïssant la religion, très active, malheureuse dans son mariage mais une bonne mère juïve qui tient le ménage et se préoccupe du sort de ses enfants. L'écrivain la compare à Lilith, cette sorcière de la mystique juïve qui voulait à tout prix se montrer l'égal des hommes. Au contraire, Aba, le grand-père est un bigot qui se distingue par un esprit très étroit et par son autorité exagérée envers ses enfants. L'écrivain ne perd pas l'occasion de faire des remarques ironiques et drôles à l'adresse de ses origines : « mon père est donc le fruit de l'union entre un Juif pieux traditionnel respectueux de la Bible et une Lilith, le démon femelle de la Kabbale. Et l'on voudrait me faire croire qu'il n'était qu'un brave pharmacien inoffensif ? » (p. 96)

L'écrivain ne néglige pas son héritage maternel représenté par sa mère Rebecca, son oncle Harry et sa tante Nunia qui donne d'ailleurs le nom d'un chapitre. Sa mère a été élevée dans un milieu plurilingue qui a changé en

fonction du statut de sa ville natale. Depuis la langue russe, en passant par le polonais jusqu'au français, voilà un itinéraire linguistique qui a dû influencer l'amour des mots et des nuances de son fils-écrivain. Elle réussit à fuir le ghetto de Vilnius où la majorité des Juifs ont été exterminés. Passionnée de gastronomie et éprise d'ordre et de ses affaires, elle dévoile ses traits dans les chapitres intitulés : *L'affaire de la valise de Boulogne*, *Voyage avec ma mère*, *Le livre de cuisine*, *Cappucino*. Sa sœur Nunia éveille l'intérêt par son histoire impressionnante : les épreuves dans les ghettos de Vilnius et de Riga, la santé précaire, la libération par les Russes, l'amour dans le camp et l'émigration au Canada.

En dehors des figures rappelées et d'autres qui ressortent des pages, *Monsieur Optimiste* comprend des descriptions de son village natal polonais, Makow, le mode de vie des Juifs, la vie en famille, la synagogue, la pauvreté et les soucis quotidiens. Une place à part revient aux souvenirs de l'écrivain-enfant reliés à la ville de Bruxelles. Il s'avère être un très fin observateur tout en évoquant des images, des héros de l'endroit et des mentalités d'autrefois : les cloches sonnantes qui annoncent le passage de certains vendeurs, la pharmacie de son père, « Pharmacie des Boulevards, la vie du quartier, les magasins, le grand nombre de cafés (« Bruxelles, ville des cafés » p. 181), les salles de cinéma, les trams à porte ouverte, le défilé de Walkoviak, le gagnant du Tour de France de l'époque et la figure dominante du premier magistrat de Bruxelles, M. Van de Meulebrock qui a résisté contre les Allemands. Sont annoncés les projets de modernisation de la ville, concernant surtout l'architecture et les futurs quartiers éclectiques, comme l'écrivain se plaît à nommer.

Au bout de la lecture, on est fasciné par les gens, les lieux et les histoires de vie cachées pendant des années. Dans le travail d'écriture de ce livre, l'auteur a eu l'impression de manipuler une poupée russe, chaque document cachant un autre mais, comme il le dit, « au bout du compte, il reste un noyau d'atome impossible à briser » (p. 232) *Monsieur Optimiste* s'avère être un roman nostalgique par lequel Alain Berenboom dévoile la richesse inattendue de ses origines, tout en rendant un vrai hommage à son père.

**Teresa Gomez Reus & Terry Gifford, eds.: *Women in Transit through Literary Liminal Spaces*
Macmillan, Palgrave, 2013**

Teodor Mateoc¹

Five years ago, Teresa Gomez Reus edited (together with Aranzazu Usandizaga) a collection of essays gathered together under the title *Inside Out: Women Negotiating, Subverting, Appropriating Public and Private Spaces* (Rodopi Press, 2008).

Last year, the senior lecturer in English and American literature at the University of Alicante, Spain and researcher in feminist literary criticism and writings of women (and about women) in Victorian and early 20th century literature revisits the old topic and returns to her old hobby-horse, this time together with the critic, poet and scholar Terry Gifford. The result of their joint endeavour is a splendid collection of eleven essays entitled *Women in Transit through Literary Liminal Spaces*. Needless to say, this shows intention, consistency, impeccable academic professionalism and a commendable effort of documentation and research.

In a way, the present volume is a sequel to the previous one, but, equally, a new or revised approach to the topic: if the first collection looked at the ways in which the old dichotomy between male-peopled public spaces and female-inhabited private spaces was reconsidered in the field of literary studies, the present one refines the research and focuses more effectively on borderlands, liminal and transient spaces, considered from the double, temporal and spatial perspective.

The authors draw insightfully on a variety of sources, from the sanctioned cultural and literary studies, to the related fields of anthropology, philosophy, history or social theory, while the structure of the book is indebted to Arnold van Gennep's seminal study, *The Rites of Passage*. Consequently, the essays are grouped in three sections that recall the three-stage journey known, in its cultural and literary guise, as "rites of passage": *separation*, or breaking away, literally and mentally, from a place or condition, *transition*, which is future-oriented and implies the crossing of a threshold into a new space or mental stage, a phase which may be laden with promise and hope, but equally with anxiety or fear of failure. Finally, the stage of *reconciliation*, or re-integration which may be successful but also problematic, partial or questionable.

The four articles/chapters that make up Part I, *New Women, Old Pattern* look, from different perspectives, at the possible side-effects that the increasing presence of women in the public arena produces. The first two are literary "cases": Charles Dickens (*Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*), George Meredith (*The Egoist*) and Wilkie Collins (*No Name*). By showing the three novelists as definitely marked by the spirit of their time and place, Shannon Russell equally believes that the important effect of their female

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protagonists' increasing agency in the public sphere is the fact "that egocentric positions are first critiqued, then reformed, and, finally, reasserted". The private and the public come together in the osmotic place which is the court room, seen by Janet Stobbs Wright as both real, in the case of a famous murder trial of 1857 and in its fictional rendering, i.e., Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady*. "In what would have been a transformative experience for a woman in Victorian England", the trial and the *trial* is illustrative for a classical rite of passage, "involving separation from everyday life, a liminal space of testing and negotiation followed by re-assimilation". To speak about women's relation to modernity and technological progress, Anna Despotopoulou sees them in "literal" places of transit: the train (compartment) and the railway station. Such places are inherently ambiguous: public and private, comfortable and intimidating, connoting speed and immobility, social interaction and privacy etc. The presence of women in "this complex space of urban life" shows both identification with and fear of "the new drifting identity experienced through mobility". Finally, Valerie Felhbaum looks at the fall of "the Bastille of Journalism" and at the intrusion of the feminine presence upon the exclusively male territory which was journalism in the 19th century. By literally moving from home, "the site of both production and consumption of their work", to the newspaper office, women were defying conventions and "gender-stereotyping", in an effort to forge "a space for themselves in the pages of journals and in the world at large".

Part II, *The Call of the Wild*, foregrounds the iconic image of the pioneer woman as a trespasser into theretofore exclusively male grounds: explorations of exotic lands, mountaineering and war. Thus, Daniela Karo, while commenting on the ethnographic travel narrative of Isabela Bird to Japan, intends to deconstruct "gendered subjectivity over space and time". The author under discussion is a woman in transition, shedding "the conventions of masculine Oriental discourses" and attempting to build "an embryonic professional identity" by "participating in the public, male sphere of the then emerging scientific discourse of ethnography". For a very long time, Terry Gifford states, mountain climbing had always been a male business, while women remained quasi " 'invisible' " except for from our necessarily limited awareness of the early achievements of women mountaineers". Things have not changed much in our days, he concludes: "More upward travel by women in transit through the highest liminal spaces clearly remains to be done and reported by them if the momentum of the early women pioneers is to be continued". The presence of women in the WW I occasions Teresa Gomez Reus interesting considerations on the condition of the female "in transit". Exposure to lethal danger, in "the most masculine of all spaces" drew the attention of the press and rewarded the war heroines "with a much coveted public visibility".

The last section of the present collection, Part III, *Redrawing the Boundaries* highlights efforts of re-assimilation in new surroundings and their partial success as actors in various public/private spaces: cafes, hotels, home, gardens. Emma Short examines four of Elizabeth's Bowen novels by focusing on that private space we call 'home', especially relevant in her case of mixed ancestry, and on the complex relation between the self and the space it occupies. "The liminal spaces of transit in her novels", we read, "have an undeniable effect on the physicality of her characters, constructing their corporeal subjectivity

through their temporary and impermanent natures”. The domestic space of home is further contrasted with the front line, by Rebecca D’Monte in her article about women dramatists of WW II. Not only the contrast between domesticity and engagement is present in their plays, but also a blurring of the line between the two and a questioning of family values and unity by the realities of the post-war era: Such sets of contraries as “home/away, private/public and masculine/feminine were no longer polarized, but functioned instead to produce new synergies between gender, place and space, all of which were ‘in transit’ “.The boundary between space/place, public/private, or that between ‘home’ and its possible surrogates, a hotel, a café, restaurant or public garden is sometimes difficult to draw or, maybe, should not be drawn absolutely. It can be transcended in such a way that the two coexist and signify upon each other. This is the argument in Frances Piper article on ‘spatial parody’ and the ‘theatricalization of self’. Moreover, such oppositions as mentioned above are “always in flux, never stable”. And, since it is the female figure that is always associated with the private sphere, it is she only who “has the potential to effect ‘transitoriness’ “. The concluding article of the volume discusses various representations of the garden as a gendered space, specifically a post-war country house garden, as it appears in the writings of the prolific but obscure Clara Coltman Vyvyan. Niamh Downing, concludes that such a garden “remains always and already in transit, inviting the mobile botanical gaze. Its existence “depends on the separation, liminal transformation and re-assimilation of people, botanical specimens and gendered experience across continents and centuries”

Dense, diverse and challenging, *Women in Transit* is an important contribution to cultural, feminist and gender studies. Revisiting literary texts from the Anglo-American tradition, but also travel narratives, newspaper articles or other various written testimonies, the authors take the reader along a journey of initiation into the arduous and ongoing exploration of literally and literary liminal spaces.

Adriana Babeți, *Amazoanele. O poveste (The Amazons. A Story)*

Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2013

Marius Miheț¹

A Fundamental Research

Whenever we are referring to the Romanian literary folklore, we are constantly noticing that *the amazons* have been subject to plenty of representations, but they have never enjoyed a specific imaginary. They are entities stuck in a sort of archaic stage if we are to relate to the anthropological perspective, in the sense that these particular mythical fairies or the so-called Beauties have always been processed rather as equivalents for mermaids – a kind of terrestrial mermaids, erotically subjugating men and not only men; their influence was definitely not a beneficial one. However, the Romanian culture has never ever truly experienced a strategic emancipation of a certain femininity type and it has never ever acknowledged feminism and its statements, at least not before the beginning of the XX-th century. Adriana Babeți is actually offering in her book a research focusing and stepping beyond any geographic boundary, a research which practically re-interprets and completely organizes an apparently long demystified myth or a totally in-existent one during many epochs.

The history drawn by that the academic from Timisoara is essentially crossing all cultural and social areas, from philosophy to the history of ideas, anthropology, ethnology, literature, sociology and so on; the researcher seems to leave behind nothing at all, not even postmodern cinema or arts.

Adriana Babeți's study proves solidity and hard work. Even more, it may already be considered a canonized book as far as the amazons' myth issue is concerned. After 30 years of documentation, enlisting an impressive bibliography, displaying an exquisite and quite intimidating erudition, Adriana Babeți is ultimately enriching the more or less given and taken for granted denominations of the manly-woman archetype in such a large extent that the reader is under the impression there is nothing else to be said on this particular matter. The amazons' history, in Adriana Babeți's perspective, covers three distinct stages: the first one, let's call it archaic, defining the amazons as warriors, thus being characterized by their skills, their courage, their ability of dominating the forces specific to male, the forces that are basically so estranged from any kind of femininity idea; secondly, we are dealing with the amazon figure fighting for authority, not only for the idea of equality and its strength and heroism, as it has been the case up until then. It is rather a form of the amazons' political utterance identifiable at the erotic level too; finally, the third argument focuses itself on the soldier-woman figure, an archetype long extended beyond the issue of primordial, an archetype presuming a superior will imposed exclusively through strategic force. It is quite interesting for the reader to notice the emphasis on sexuality across history, sexuality being accepted as a psychological mechanism as far as the amazons are concerned. In Adriana

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Babeti's opinion, it is a form of utterance rooted in the Greeks' interdictions, since they believed that equilibrium is actually to be found everywhere; thus, the amazons' ebullient sexuality understood as an expression of their emancipation has been taken rather as an excess and therefore rejected. Consequently, there is no accident in the symbolic titles that Adriana Babeti is choosing for her book's chapters: Heartening, Attack, Incursion, Counter-attack, Encirclement, Assault, Parade and Withdrawal. It is as if this particular history would be impossible to understand outside an overwhelming and complete battle which is to be harmonized with the civilization outbreak. The author seems pretty persuasive in such a text structuring.

Along with all the convincing arguments and analysis, the reader may also discover a history of both the femininity and feminism, overlapped in very spicy details. While the Roman and Greek amazons, as they are seen in literature, would decide to repress any form of maternal utterance for the sake of stating the conflict with the male, the Renaissance amazons would totally and openly decline it in any possible shape; instead, they would replace it with an active participation to action, thus creating a real unity, a kind of unity never to be seen before. In the author's opinion, the modern perspective is quite successful in this respect especially due to Orlando and Albertine. Virginia Woolf's character would be equivalent to literature itself, a literature turned into life. In all cases the modern amazon represents a quintessence of shapes and sensations, a so-called amazon-saga, in the researcher's words.

In all its matters, the book is actually offering a multitude of interdisciplinary perspectives and the reader, be it genuine or trained enough, is definitely a winner.

Daniela Francesca Viridis, *Serialised Gender. A Linguistic Analysis of Femininities in Contemporary TV Series and Media*
Genoa: ECIG, Lagado studi, 2012

Dana Sala¹

Reinventing Romance in Postfeminist Media

Fascination with romance is a permanence of literature throughout different ages. It is not necessarily gender-biased, since Don Quixote, fan of Amadís de Gaula, was a sampler of this kind of literature himself.

However, what happens to romance and its courtship rituals in a more circumscribed context, that of postfeminist backlash? Daniela Francesca Viridis gives surprising evidences in her research book, *Serialised Gender. A Linguistic Analysis of Femininities in Contemporary TV Series and Media*. On one hand, we have a postfeminist consumer culture. Romance is one of its products. Romance as a cultural product has raised certain expectations. It is a very required genre. After the proven viability of romance patterns throughout different centuries, witnessing idyllic stories of an updated environment, with the ingredients of our social ethos must be very satisfying, catharsis-laden. So romances have upgraded themselves and now their ingredients are very appealing, because we recognise in them our work environment, our ideologies, our thoughts and our echoes of emancipations.

In her book on *Serialised Gender....*, Viridis analyses samples of the language spoken by the characters of socially-relevant TV series and Media. The characters whom she portrays in different scenes are taken from the following famous love stories or famous households stories: *When Harry Met Sally....*, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, The Pilot Show of the *Sex and the City*, Bree Van de Kamp in *Desperate Housewives*, Marge Simpson in *The Simpsons*, Susan Mayer in *Desperate Housewives*, Kimber Henry in *Nip/Tuck*, Mary Brady in *Sex and the City*, Julie Meyer in *Desperate Housewives*, along with Postfeminist Role Models in the final episode of *The Sex and the City*, relevant also because of its time lapse.

These postfeminist products express the empowerment of women, as a result of former waves of feminism. However, as Daniela Viridis notices by taking a closer look at the evidences, women as characters in these romances display an inner contradiction with regards to their emancipation. They do treasure the former acquisitions of feminist ideology. They find a source of gratification at the thought of their work-life balance. However, their approach on romance is not only traditionalist, but actually these iconic characters or *dramatis personae* seem ready to trade the values of emancipation for the thrill of romance. Actually, it is not the need for romance to be challenged, as much as the belief that courtship rituals are safer in the traditional distribution of gender roles.

Of course, the same characters are oversensitive to any display of abusive male dominance patterns. With one exception, that of Kimber Henry in

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Nip/Tuck. In the selected example (that of being shown what a perfect 10 means), she is the victim of manipulation as a result of her readiness to see the likelihood of romance in a toxic behaviour. Apart from this, we cannot imagine Sally (Harry's partner), Bridget Jones, Carrie Bradshaw, Samantha Jones, Miranda Hobbes or Susan Mayer (Julie's mother) giving up their freedom as independent educated women. The surprising factor is that, even if these characters fall into the category of postfeminist backlash, they would not contradict the core values of feminism.

Viridis's book shows that there is no "winner takes it all" kind of conflicting values between these two sides, feminism and romance. There is only a matter of priority, but an essential one.

Suppose some aspects of feminist ideologies clash some acknowledgements of women's secret desire to put romance first, what will come first, indeed? The commitment to ideology or the aspiration to having romance? Actually, it depends on the character. The book has the wisdom to capture open debates instead of forcing interpretations.

Viridis' book is a pleasant reading because of its complexity and clarity. Once the author circumscribes very well her object of research and her methodology, she makes no concession whatsoever for including more, but she develops interfaces with many other disciplines. Therefore not only Austin and Searle, not only Leech and Grice, but also Page, Faludi, Tooley and s.o.; the bibliography is truly impeccable. Every study accumulates depth and humour, easiness and irony, because of the flexibility with which the author navigates through so many theories. Her methodology can be described like the act of placing a mirror at the crossroads in which she sees the unexpected.

Viridis masters very well the art of constructing and deconstructing. We can see how the model of pre-marriage romance (Bridget, Carrie) is balanced with a more down-to-earth view of households, as in the *Simpsons* and *Desperate Housewives*. Viridis finds scenes in mirror, with secret passages and parallelisms between them, which provide the analyses with unexpected insights. For discourse analyses, Viridis uses the scheme invented by others in a very creative way, she always finds new potentialities in these schemes.

The topic of postfeminism and romance is about the frail construction of an identity which attempts to be "perfect", as a character like Bree Van de Kamp in *Desperate Housewives* is going to prove.

Thus Bree embodies the perfect sophisticated mother and wife, at the same time with a growing estrangement from her family. On the other hand, Bridget is in the funny situation of making preparations through daydreaming for the "perfect" mini-break with Daniel, for which she pack the most evanescent outfits and cannot take the fact that the fantasied situation did not bring to her the signs of a more palpable romance. With Mark Darcy, the same situation is reverted. Bridget fantasizes about impressing Mark and her friends with the sophisticated menu and the qualities of a good wife according to the rules of a patriarchal society. She fails at everything, she makes her dear guests eat a strange blue soup, everything spells disaster, but romance does not elude Bridget this time. "Mark Darcy and Tom even making lengthy argument for less color prejudice in the world of food", as Fielding says through her heroine's diary.

As Viridis rightly observes, "Bridget explicitly associates being or appearing to be a perfect homemaker, that is to say, a female figure who

preserves the status quo, with impressing Mark and with winning his respect and heart” (Viridis:61).

Postfeminist backlash has given some amplitude to this phenomenon. However, Viridis’s deconstruction is very careful and many a time undermined by a double wink complicity. The book *Serialised Gender. A Linguistic Analysis of Femininities in Contemporary TV Series and Media*, written by the Italian author, Daniela Viridis, academic at the University of Cagliari, is a very flexible, subtle, well-documented research, grounded on lucidity, humour and common sense. In the unifying mirror held by the author’s methodology, the background is taken by the reflection of post-’90s feminist frame and the foreground is taken by the “reinvention of the code of romance” in nowadays TV series and films of large impact.

The “old fashioned romance” will prodigally be preferred and will still be perceived as of a central value to feminine life. “Feminist free will, self-determination and empowerment” are great assets, but sometimes the heroines presented under scrutiny in this book are willing to traditionalize some aspects of their independent existence, with the secret aspiration that in return they will benefit from Mr. Right’s outpouring affection.

Even women who say they reject tradition, might not choose to displace the importance of relationships from central to marginal.

Women’s aspiration to be caught in romance and the profile of femininity as shaped by the 20th century theories feminism, captured with the right means and with the right evidences, may reveal some surprises. The characters (*dramatis personae*) that say or prove that they are committed to the values of feminist theories may still prioritize the matters of the soul over the moulded portrait as feminists. These characters are watched by an audience that grows exponentially, or are discovered through the act of reading certain genres. More people will have access to an easy identification with such personas.

Daniela Viridis delineates very well the field of the undertaken research. At the same time, she knows that objectivity through a tense approach would push away the credibility of the results. Therefore, she lets humour permeate the interpretation and she takes genuine common sense as tools to ensure her relaxed attitude on the research and on the estimated results. A perusal of the changing patterns in courtship rituals as portrayed by post-1990’s movies, emphasizing the alarming trends should be taken seriously. But at the same time, the writer of *Serialised Gender*...knows that humour may hold together construction and deconstruction, old patterns and new patterns, it glues them better than any misconceived representation.

Viridis’ methodology is mainly linguistic analysis. Viridis’ employment of the theories of speech, from Austin and Searle to the most recent theoreticians is of an astonishing fluidity. All characters are fictitious. Since the book *Serialised Gender*... does not interview people or does not record other types of TV shows than the fictionalized TV series, a one-dimensional approach would spoil the result. Viridis’ analyses are never one-dimensional. They employ a complex combination of features: narratology, diegesis, gesture analyses, paradigms for verbal communication, pragmatics, theories of evolution from feminism to postfeminism, backlash theories. On the other hand, the unity of the analysed texts is given by the fact that they all belong to the category of script, even Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* could be included here if we take

into account the laconicism of the diarist. The authors of the characters, namely the creators of the romance scripts analysed in this book, will exploit comically, stylistically, and narratologically this reversal between emancipated roles of feminism and the desire to intersect romance while taming feminism and adopting a more traditional outlook on existence.

As Virdis remarks: “While the femininities and sexualities enacted in these cultural narratives may appear to be unsparingly and humorously critical of conventionally female linguistic and cultural stereotypes, and could therefore be regarded as radical feminist embodiments, despite all their ironic and hyperbolic approach they are in fact not only romantic and mainstream, but also ideologically biased, preserving a normative white middle class status quo, and restoring a challenged / contested patriarchal value system. A close linguistic and critical scrutiny thus lays bare the textual and discursive strategies by which feminism has switched to postfeminism romance and in doing so has yielded to postfeminist backlash”. (*Serialised Gender*, backcover).

A Useful Aid for the Teacher of Canadian Studies: Scott W. See: *The History of Canada (Second Edition)* Grey House Publishing, New York, 2011

Eva Szekely¹

Teaching Canadian Studies entails the teaching of some Canadian history. The finding of a compelling, reader friendly book that delineates the historical events that shaped Canada into the country we know today, therefore, is imperative for both the teacher who teaches Canadian Studies (and who is not a historian) and his/her students. For quite a while my classes have been plagued by the lack of such a history book from my shelf. Of course, I had a few 'short histories of Canada' or 'introductions to Canada' by various authors but none of them managed to present the panoramic view of Canada's past that I needed. This, of course until I found Scott W. See's book: *The History of Canada (Second Edition)*, a sweeping overview written not by a Canadian but by an American historian.

Scott W. See is a professor of history at the University of Maine. He teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on a variety of Canadian, American and Canadian American topics and wrote quite a number of books and studies on topics such as Irish immigrants in Canada, nativism, free trade between the U.S. and Canada etc.

In *The History of Canada* See manages to capture the essence of 'Canadieness': the Canadians' preoccupation with self-identity, the historical reasons behind Canadians' patriotism: social programs that leave no citizen behind; the Canadian role on the world stage as a middle power; Canada's contributions to science, medicine, the arts.

The book is very well structured. It opens with a series of full colour maps and national and provincial flags and emblems, as well as the lyrics of Canada's national anthem followed by photos of prime ministers and governor generals.

The main body of text is structured into eleven chapters. The first chapter is a general introduction to Canada, emphasizing basic aspects of its geography, economical life and political system. The rest of the chapters are arranged chronologically, taking the reader through about 12,000 years of history starting from the first wave of migration and ending with today's film and sport industries that cross international borders. Each chapter is amply subtitled and supported by photographs and maps, placed thoughtfully throughout the text, helping the reader visualize the changes that Canada went through as they happened. Chapter 2 encompasses a succinct description of life before the coming of the Europeans: the migration of the native peoples to Canada and their lifestyle and a more lengthy description of the encounter and clash of the two cultures in the 16th century: native and European. Chapter 3 is devoted to the history of the rise and fall of New France and that of the British conquest and of life in British North America until the second half of the 18th

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century. Chapter 4 is entirely devoted to life in British North America in the second half of the 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries. It discusses the relationship of British Canada with Quebec, the arrival of the Loyalists as a result of the American War of Independence, the War of 1812 and its consequences. Chapter 5 is the account of the years that lead to Confederation, the debates that surrounded it and its immediate aftermath, which included the rebellions of the natives who resented western expansion and the loss of their territories. Chapter 6 relates political life, issues of immigration, Canada's relationship with the British Empire and the United States at the turn of the century as well as Canada's experience of World War 1, Women's struggle for the right to vote, the Temperance movement etc. Chapter 7 is a discussion of the Great Depression and of Canada's role in World War 2. Chapter 8 is devoted to the period of the Cold War in Canada, Canada's establishment as middle power in international politics and the "Quiet Revolution" in Quebec. Chapter 9 is an account of the competing nationalisms between Quebec and English Canada, Quebec's 1980 Referendum and the completion of the Constitution Act in 1982. Chapter 10 is devoted to late 20th century Canada (1984-2000): women's issues, native claims, new immigrants etc. Chapter 11 is a discussion of political life contemporary Canada, Canada's foreign policy in the post-Cold War era, territorial control and environmentalism.

The eleventh chapter is followed by a series of short biographies of notable people in the history of Canada, people who, according to Scott W. See helped define this vast country. The list of 41 comprises politicians, journalists, explorers, religious figures, writers, activists and artists. Most of them are males of English or of French descent. The impact of native activists, artists and politicians as well as those of women are overlooked.

The *Timeline* puts the history of Canada in order. It includes hundreds of significant events, from the migration of the Aboriginal people to North America, which occurred in the period 18,000-10,000 BC right up to the Vancouver Winter Olympics in 2010.

The *Primary Documents* section is actually my favourite section of *The History of Canada*. It includes carefully selected articles, legislation, letters and excerpts. Designed to support chapter themes, each document is referenced in the main text. There are 38 diverse documents identified by a separate Table of Contents. These documents really help to bring Canadians close to the reader, such as the excerpt entitled *Joe Canadian Rant*, one of the most successful advertisement moments of all Canadian history and a brilliant and succinct, though stereotypical, characterization of Canadians as not-Americans:

Hey. I'm not a lumberjack or a fur trader. And I don't live in an igloo, or eat blubber, or own a dogsled.

And I don't know Jimmy, Sally, or Suzy from Canada, although I'm certain they're really, really nice. I

have a Prime Minister, not a President. I speak English and French, not American. And I pronounce it "about," not "about." I can proudly sew my country's flag on my backpack. I believe in peacekeeping, not policing; diversity, not assimilation. And that the beaver is a truly proud and noble animal. A toque is a hat, a chesterfield is a couch, and it is pronounced "zed" not "zee."

Canada is the second largest land mass, the first nation of hockey, and the best part of North America! My name is Joe, and I am Canadian! Thank you. (See: 290)

The History of Canada includes a Bibliographic Essay that lists books that would be helpful in further research on Canada. These resources are categorised by topics relevant to Canada's history, such as international relations, Canadian women, Provinces and Regions, Native People and workers in Canada. The essay ends with a list of recommended web sites on Canadian history.

Ending with a detailed Index, *The History of Canada* is a compellingly written narrative that weaves the country's immense geography, political struggles, and regional and ethnic diversity into the complex reality of Canada.

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Next Issue's Topic:
ABSENCE *versus* PRESENS
**Applied on Literary and Cultural
Items**

Thematik der nächsten Ausgabe:
ABWESENHEIT *versus*
ANWESENHEIT
**Studien im Bereich der Literatur- und
Kulturwissenschaft**

Thématique du prochain numéro:
ABSENCE *versus* PRÉSENCE
**Application sur des sujets littéraires
et culturels**



Confluente, Annals of the University of Oradea, Modern Literature Fascicule is an academic, double blind peer-reviewed journal that appears once a year.

The executive editors and the advisory board shall decide on any change about the frequency of the journal.

TCR specializes in bridging the world of academic literary criticism and theories with the aliveness of everyday literary phenomenon as reflected in the cultural media and book-production.

The topics covered by our journal in its 2 generous sections – **Literary - Isms & Cultural - Isms** are as they follow:

British and Commonwealth Literature
American and Canadian Literature
German Speaking Literature
French Literature
Emmigrants' Literature
Cultural and Gender Studies
Literature and Media

Foundation:

As a research journal, the beginnings can be traced back to the academic year 1966- 1967, when, under the name *Lucrari stiintifice*, the section of academic research emerged at the University of Oradea. In 1991 the research journal changed its name and template, focusing on topics of immediate relevance and on thorough going studies, on cultural studies, research articles on Romanian literature, comparative literature. In 2006 emerged *Confluente*, a Modern Literature Fascicule including academic literary studies in English, French, German and Italian. In 2012 the Ministry of Education and Research (Romania) ranked our journal category C.

Submission:

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Our journal advocates the double blind peer-review system. The quality of the research article is the single argument taken into account when operating the selection of articles.

The administration of the peer-review process is the attribution of the journal's editors that are selected from the members of the advisory board. The sender of the manuscript does not know the names of the reviewers of his/her particular case, only the complete list of reviewers.

The complete list of reviewers will be included in every other issue. The editor-in-chief may supplement the initial list of reviewers, if necessary.

Konfluezen, Jahrbuch der Universität Oradea, Band für Neuere Literaturen und Fremdsprachen, ist eine wissenschaftlich begutachtete Fachzeitschrift, die ein Mal im Jahr erscheint.

Der Redaktionsbeirat ist befugt, über die Erscheinungsfrequenz der Zeitschrift zu entscheiden.

TCR setzt sich zum Ziel, die Welt der akademischen Literatur- und Kulturforschung mit dem dynamischen Alltag des literarischen Phänomens, so wie dieses von den Kulturmedien und von der Buchproduktion widerspiegelt wird, in Einklang zu bringen.

Die in den zwei umfangreichen Sektionen dieser Zeitschrift behandelten Thematiken umfassen:

Die Dynamik des literarischen Phänomens
Die Interdisziplinarität von Literatur- und
Kulturwissenschaft
Identitäts- und Alteritätsstudien, Anthropologie- und
Kulturtheorien anhand der Literatur
Literarische Identitätsmodelle
Zeit und die Literaturtheorie
Mythos in der postmodernen Literatur
Komparatistische Literaturstudien

Geschichte:

Als wissenschaftliche Fachzeitschrift wurde das Jahrbuch der Universität Oradea, im Universitätsjahrgang 1966-1967 zum ersten Mal unter dem Titel *Lucrări științifice* herausgegeben. 1991 änderten sich Titel und Format der Zeitschrift, während der Inhalt sich auf Forschungsthemen mit Aktualitätsbezug aus dem Bereich der rumänischen Literatur und der Komparatistik fokussierte. Im Jahr 2006 entstand *Confluente*, ein Band für Neuere Literaturen in den Fremdsprachen Englisch, Französisch, Deutsch und Italienisch. 2012 wurde die Zeitschrift von CNC SIS und dem Bildungs- und Forschungsministerium Rumäniens als Publikation in der Kategorie C anerkannt.

Hinweise zur Einreichung des Manuskripts:

Auskunft über die Einreichung des Manuskripts entnehmen Sie unserer Internetseite:

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Begutachtungsverfahren:

Unsere Redaktion setzt ein doppel-blindes Begutachtungsverfahren ein, im Verlauf dessen die Beiträge anonym den jeweiligen Begutachtern zukommen. Allein die Qualität der Studien spielt eine Rolle für die Auswahl der zu veröffentlichenden Artikel.

Die Verwaltung des Begutachtungsverfahrens ist die Aufgabe des Redaktionsbeirates, denen die Aufgabe zukommt, die ansprechenden Begutachter aus der Liste des akademischen Beirates der Zeitschrift zu wählen und anzusprechen. Die Autoren der eingereichten Beiträge kennen den Namen jener Begutachter nicht, die über ihre Studie referieren.

Die vollständige Liste der Begutachter erscheint in jeder Nummer. Der Chefredakteur hat die Befugnis, diese Liste zu ergänzen.

Confluences, les Annales de l'Université d'Oradea, Fascicule Littérature moderne, est une revue académique évaluée qui paraît une fois par an. Les directeurs exécutifs et le comité scientifique vont décider tout changement concernant la fréquence de la revue.

TCR a le but de réunir le monde de la critique littéraire académique et des théories avec le phénomène vivant de la littérature d'aujourd'hui tel qu'il est reflété dans les médias culturels et dans la production du livre.

Les sujets contenus par notre revue dans ses deux sections généreuses – **Littérarismes** et **Culturalismes** sont les suivants:

Les dynamiques de la littérature, tendances
L'interconnexion de la littérature et de la culture
Identité, altérité, anthropologie et littérature, études culturelles
L'identité et son expression en littérature
Temps et théorie littéraire
Myths et auteurs postmodernes
Littérature comparée et études comparées

Fondation:

Comme revue de recherche, son commencement remonte loin, dans l'année académique 1966/1967, lorsque sous le nom de *Travaux scientifiques*, la section de la recherche académique a démarré à l'Université d'Oradea. En 1991, la revue a changé son nom et sa forme se fixant sur des sujets d'intérêt immédiat et sur des études approfondies, sur la culture, sur la littérature roumaine, sur la littérature comparée. En 2006 a paru *Confluences*, un Fascicule de littérature moderne incluant des recherches académiques littéraires en anglais, en français, en allemand et en italien. L'année 2012 la revue a été classifiée niveau C per le Ministère de l'Education et de la Recherche de Roumanie

Soumission

Les détails pour la soumission des articles, les instructions pour les contributeurs et pour la préparation du manuscrit sont publiés en ligne:

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Evaluation

Notre revue soutient un système d'évaluation ouverte, considérant que les noms des auteurs des articles ne doivent pas être envoyés comme anonymes aux évaluateurs, parce que cela pourrait avoir un petit impact sur la qualité de l'article soumis. La qualité de l'article de recherche est le seul argument dont on tient compte lorsqu'on fait la sélection des articles.

L'administration du processus d'évaluation est la tâche des éditeurs évaluateurs. L'expéditeur du manuscrit ne connaît pas les noms des évaluateurs de son cas particulier mais seulement la liste complète des évaluateurs.

La liste complète des évaluateurs sera incluse dans un numéro sur deux. L'éditeur général peut augmenter la liste initiale des évaluateurs, si nécessaire.