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ROMANIAN WRITERS

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WRITERS**

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Gabriela Adameșteanu

Born 1942. Writer and translator.

Editor-in-chief of the *Bucureștiul cultural* supplement of 22 magazine.

Published volumes: *The Even way of Every Day* (1975), *Give Yourself a Holiday* (1979), *Wasted Morning* (1983) (French translation, Éditions Gallimard, 2005), *Summer-Spring* (1989), *The Obsession of Politics* (1995), *The Two Romanias* (2000), *The Encounter* (2004)

Romanian Writers' Union Prize for Debut, Romanian Academy Prize (1975), Romanian Writers' Union Prize for Novel (1983), Hellman Hammet Prize, awarded by Human Rights Watch (2002), Ateneu literary review and Ziarul de Iași Prize for the novel *The Encounter* (2004)



The starched bonnet of Madame Ana moves over the tea table, then into the middle of the room, next to the tall-legged tables. On each of them she places a five-armed candelabra and, after hesitating

“Wasted Morning ... is one of the best novels to have been published in recent years: rich, even dense, profound, ‘true’ in the most minute of details, modern in its construction, and written with finesse. (...) The novel is kaleidoscopic, allowing not only the alternation of sweeping shots with close-ups, but also the serious with the derisory, the pathetic with the ironic. The world is deconstructed and reconstructed from these shards, revolving sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly, according to need...”
(Nicolae Manolescu)

briefly (it is still light outside), she lights the stearin candles.

The welcome scent of the tea.

With a provocative frou-frou, with light steps, Sophie passes from one to another, gracefully proffering a steaming teacup.

“Stefan! Please!”

She takes the tongs from his fervent hand, irritated at the clumsiness with which he is trying to pick up a sugar cube. And, with the same movement that admits no reply, she gestures towards the obligatory slice of cake. The look she gives him from beneath her long lashes says sufficient about her authoritarian and possessive care.

Oh, our stable, mediocre familial sentiments, of which it would seem you are not worthy, as long as you cannot prevent yourself from seeing the one close to you! From seeing him and, on seeing him, from falling into the sin of judging him!

But how bitter the tea is this evening!

Or is it only his mouth that is bitter?

Not losing sight of his wife’s outline, twisting his face childishly, the Professor swallows the last morsel of cake. There she is, fulfilling her duties as hostess, without displaying her sorrow in any way. And, of course, nor will she reproach him later in any way for having raised his voice at her; at the most a migraine or one of those feminine ailments that lay her low in bed. She will languish for hours, with her poor brow swathed in muslin soaked in aromatic vinegar, with a hot water bottle at her cold feet, with her cheek white and her lips colourless. It is then that he will regret most of all that he has offended her, and surrounded by company at that! He too will remain alone in his unfriendly office, working listlessly on his planned dialect atlas, unable to prevent his thoughts from always returning to her.

A sad consolation that only he makes her suffer, that she seems unaffected by the lack of attention on the part of the young Ialomițeanu: if the absurd suppositions about the two that sometimes assail the Professor were true, what a blow it would be for her when the young man courted her sister!

As for him, see how indifferently he takes the steaming cup from Sophia's hand! Does a hand descend caressingly over the body, gliding further, yet further? What an absurd presupposition!

"... I was forced to attend the funeral," continues Titus Ialomițeanu, "and I beg you to imagine what a spectacle! Hundreds and hundreds of coffins! Coffin next to coffin... Each of us, I am convinced, seemingly sensed a miniature rehearsal of what is to come. No one, I am convinced, not one of those present had any doubt that he was witnessing, so to speak, the overture to the war... Apart from that, dreadful people, officials, speeches, heat. And thus it was, Professor, that that thought occurred to me, which, without any doubt, also occurred to many honourable Romanians in those moments. Might, I thought, it really be true that, as has been said, a criminal hand was behind the explosion at the Munitions Factory?"

And Mr Ialomițeanu bows, in that exaggerated way of his, before Madam Ana, who offers him a bowl of glacés, his favourite dessert.

"Someone who might make an attack against our smattering of military preparedness?" laughs the Professor. "As long as the stocks of ordnance have increased unsatisfactorily, and the orders have not been delivered, and so on and so forth, why should the enemy put up a stubborn fight? I won't even ask you, dear chap, which enemy you were thinking of, given the circumstances in which we have not decided whether we shall side with

the Germans or the French! If we are speaking of a criminal hand and of a dangerous enemy, would it not more appropriate for us to think about ourselves? ..."

A drop of friendly spite dissolved in the Professor's cordiality. Perhaps he is trying to atone for the unseemly things he thought about the guest half an hour ago, imagining that he was, no more or less, Sophie's lover?

"But nonetheless," resumed the guest, unaware of the magistrate's complicated analyses. "Nonetheless, it seems that not even the Police are intent on discovering the truth... Do you really exclude the idea of an attack?"

"Perhaps those who killed King Carol might also have planned the explosions?" hastened Margot. "I recall that evening very well! Mr Ialomițeanu was visiting, and Sophie answered the telephone and, because of the shock, on finding out about the death of King Carol, she brought Yvonne into the world prematurely! Godmother Fănica clapped her hands and said: 'This is not a clean death! This is a suspicious death!' And godfather Alecu also said that he had wagered they would poison him in the end, because he had made a secret treaty with the Germans..."

"Nonsense... Tu prêtes comme d'habitude l'oreille à toutes les bêtises..." frowned Sophie at her sister, seating herself on the other side of Mr Ialomițeanu on the couch.

"Come now, missy, don't you start on all the sponge-fingers, because a lady should eat nicely in company! Don't you look at me like that, because it was me who brought up your mother too..."

The hoarse whisper of Madam Ana scolding little Yvonne caused amusement in those present. Only Sophie Mironescu expressed her concern that, in

such harsh times, when the foreigners were getting ready to leave, it would be harder to find someone reasonable to look after the child.

“That it will be impossible to find another Fräulein or mademoiselle is nothing, esteemed lady! But the servants too will disappear! And procurement

look at a lady and, besides, it would have been difficult even had I ventured, parce qu'elle portait grand deuil. She had such a thick veil, so that I do believe that those who praised her beauty could not have seen her better than I... Of course, she seemed affected by the loss, and something like

“Wasted Morning is a truly modern novel, but one in which techniques are so well mastered, held so well in check, so justified, so demanded by the structure of the novel and the demands of the characters, that they become invisible.

In spite of the perspective that changes with each of the characters, to whom complete freedom of speech is given, without authorial censorship, this kaleidoscope finally coalesces in a perspective that is so unitary that Wasted Morning might be read in a single breath, as a traditional novel, and only afterwards does one realise by what narrative strategies has such fluency been obtained...”

(Monica Lovinescu)

of supplies will become a great problem, as it has already come to be for the poor, who not only wait in queues, but who find meat only twice a week... And so it will not be long before it will be the same here as it is in Germany, where even well-off people stand in the queue... Yes, yes, esteemed and distinguished lady, we can expect even harsher days.”

The voice of the young prophet is gay and a gleam of satisfaction has lit up in his eyes. Nevertheless, a worried silence has been woven in the penumbra of the salon, at this disquieting hour of the day entre chien et loup. The most overcast face is that of Professor Mironescu, who is worriedly dabbing his balding temples: his burning eyelids give the impression that his fever has suddenly and dangerously relapsed. He will go to rest in the bedroom and to change his clothes for the spree.

“Did you see the young widow of Colonel Albu at the funeral, about whom they have spoken so much?” insisted Titus Ialomițeanu.

“In such circumstances one does not venture to

that impresses the company, except that wherever you turned your head, you were just as impressed... So many families struck, each standing by a separate coffin! And those coffins, imagine, esteemed Mrs Mironescu, imagine, closed and sealed! Because what did they contain? If I am permitted to say, a chunk of man, a shoulder, a leg, and

so on and so forth... I shall not descend into gross details, but one could not stay there except with a handkerchief to one's nose. Someone well informed told me that starting this evening, passenger trains will no longer circulate towards Sinaia, and as for medics, I have heard that those in the provinces have been required to do sanitary service exercises...”

“I hope that it is as you heard, dear chap... I hope that they will have learned something from the other war, when filth and disorganisation claimed so many victims, and little did it avail us that not a single shot was fired... With my own eyes I saw how our wretched soldiers were overjoyed on receiving Bulgarian uniforms, not knowing that they were preparing to clothe themselves in veritable shirts of Nessus... I heard one young medic, recently returned from Heidelberg, perorating on the need to put captured equipment through the sterilising oven, but his speech provoked nothing but sarcasm: where was there a sterilising oven? The sarcasm was not lacking in foundation, but it

had the usual lack of respect that our people display when combating a different opinion. And the youthfulness of the medic did not permit them to yield, so that, bored, even those who would have agreed with him grimaced, come, sir, open your eyes, wake up and see that you are in the Balkans, not in Heidelberg, they flung at the poor young man, who was, indeed, to be one of the first victims of the cholera that came from the uniforms captured from the Bulgarians...”

Professor Mironescu nodded his head with a weary smile. What belated youthful illusions had voluntarily taken him to war at the age of forty? What torture to put up with those gnawing boots, the exhausting marches in the blazing heat and the rusty water, the dust that continually crunched between his teeth when he ate, the stench of the privy upon which he sat in the officers’ mess and, moreover, the continual presence of the others?

“Come, missy, leave the table alone, it is not a toy...”

“Yvonne! You know where you should be at this hour! Strangers upset and weary her and, the more tired she is the more difficult she becomes...” explained Sophie.

A brief intermezzo: Mr Mironescu asks Yvonne quickly to go to bed, Mr Mironescu compliments Madam Ana on her cake, Miss Margot consults with Mr Ialomițeanu in a whisper, and the latter, laughing heartily, urges her to tell her perplexities aloud.

“Perhaps that is why King Carol did not want there to be a war then? Perhaps he knew that the country was not ready and that is why he did not want to sign the mobilisation order? Come now, that is what you yourself told me, Mr Ialomițeanu! That they were shouting at him from the street to

order mobilisation and the King would have none of it... And in the end he allowed it to go the way the people wished: he summoned them all and signed! He was weeping but he signed! And finally he said: Armes Land! But he submitted, for it to go the way the people wished...”

“The People, yes! The people, the street, who know so well what they want! But apropos, do you still remember how much an agent cost the last time? Twenty lei... An agent provocateur for war, or what would be the correct way of naming him?” laughed Mr Ialomițeanu.

“How can you say such a thing, when you with your own eyes saw how the streets were full of demonstrators?”

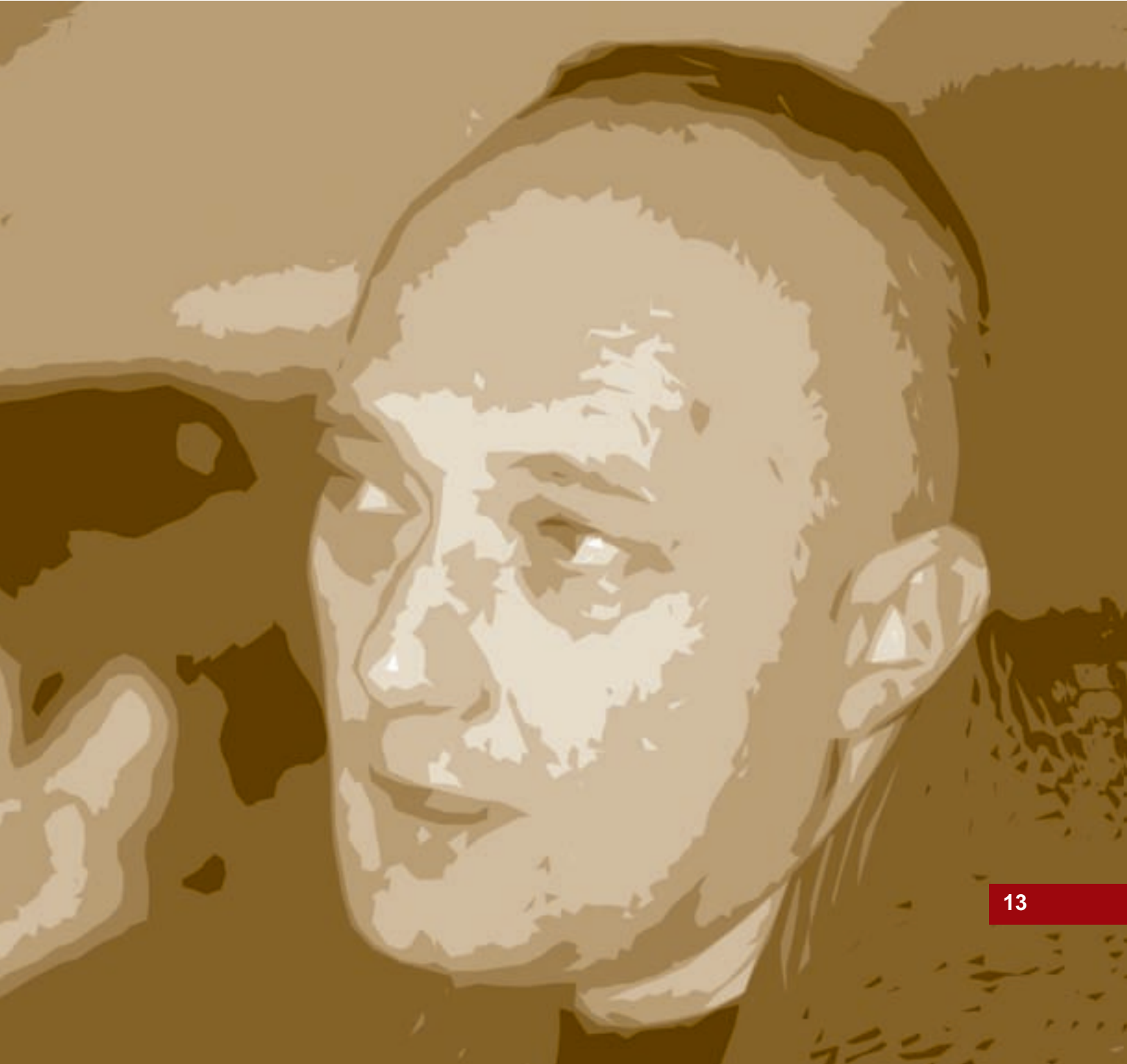
An indignation greater than the incident warranted caused Mrs Mironescu’s voice to tremble. As Mr Ialomițeanu was content to laugh, the hostess rose, irritated, nibbled a wafer biscuit from the tea table, and then went to sit in the armchair in the opposite corner of the salon.

“Perhaps we too will have learned something this time! Because popular hygiene is our Achilles’ heel...” the Professor continued with stubborn mildness. “And not one of all the positive measures that might be taken to improve the nation’s health, not one, my dears, stands in our power, unfortunately! We, well-intentioned, generous, idealist, we do not and will never have more than words at our disposal! Thus it often happens that one finds oneself powerless and alone, with loneliness knowing very well that it brings after it the selfish desire to spare oneself, and fear...”

*Excerpt from the novel **Wasted Morning***

Daniel Bănulescu

Born 1960. He has published three volumes of poetry: *I shall Love you until the End of the Bed*, 1993, *The Ballad of Daniel Bănulescu*, 1997, *The Federal Republic of Daniel Bănulescu. The Northern State and the Southern State*, 2000, *Daniel, of the Prayer*, 2002; and the novels: *I Kiss your Arse, Beloved Leader!*, 1994 and *The Seven Kings of the City of Bucharest*, 1997. A member of the Romanian Writers' Union, he has been awarded the Romanian Academy Prize for Literature. Together with Ernest Wichner, he was awarded the City of Munster European Poetry Prize in 2005. A collection of his poetry has been published in German translation: *Schrumpeln wirst du wirst eine exatistische Frucht sein* (Pro Procura, Vienna, 2002 and 2005), and also the novel *Ich Küsser dir den Hintern, Geliebter Führer!*



AMANDA: Let me recapitulate for you all...
(A moment of silence and concentration on what is about to be said): So, seven years after abandoning all his palaces and riches, as well as his two wives... As he was sitting plunged in meditation, at the root of a tree...
KIRILL: *(with VOICE NUMBER 2, extremely obligingly)*: What sort of tree?
AMANDA: A fig tree.
MARCEL: *(benevolently)*: Aha!
LUPU *(neutrally)*: As soon as you start teaching fig trees history, you come up against the most stubborn creatures in the world!
AMANDA: *(invulnerable to interruptions; he continues to exposit his teaching with the same calm and with the same near perfect harmony)*: As he was sitting, deep in thought, at the root of a tree. One night. Unexpectedly. All of a sudden... The truth powerfully shone within his mind!
THE PRINCE: He was a king. So, he wasn't wearing specs and a beret... He was a crowned head. So, he wouldn't have permitted himself to pick

pockets... How then could the truth not have shone within his mind, and with so much power?!
GEORGE *(he pulls the handkerchief out of his mouth, solely to repeat mockingly what Amanda has previously stated)*: That is to say, he stopped hiccuping. His eyes were popping out from the concentration. And he asked himself: What the blazes am I doing here?
IGNATIUS *(at the table, he is seated closest to the apparatus made up of four embedded clocks, of which only that of the Buddhist speaker is measuring time. Due to the frequent interruptions of the patients, Ignatius makes a gesture as though to stop the clock. Concomitantly, he addresses Amanda)*: Shall I interrupt the time for your preaching, reverend Amanda?
PICA: If he didn't look after his guts properly, it was pointless him pretending to have been brought up in palaces! ...
AMANDA: The truth then shone powerfully within his mind. He discovered that the whole of existence is suffering... That release from suffering

comes about only through suppression of the desire to live... From the moment of this discovery, he was no longer Prince Siddhartha, the one who had fled from his palaces, but rather he became, as those around him also named him: the Enlightened or Buddha. The Buddha revealed to his disciples the four holy truths: the existence of suffering, the cause of suffering, the removal of suffering... and the way that leads to the removal of suffering.

CAIUS (*he has desperately been seeking to understand something from the learning expounded by Amanda. He has not succeeded and even now he understands absolutely nothing. When he hears "the four holy truths" being enumerated, Caius strives to memorise them, counting them on the fingers of his left hand. But he cannot follow Amanda, gets mixed up, and is left ridiculous and revolted, with his fingers spread out in the air*): This is a way for just one hand... You see how you're resorting to trickery?!

Didn't you yourself say that there were, errr... some sixteen or seventeen ways?

AMANDA: No. I never pronounced such a thing. I merely stated that the fourth truth, the holy way. The way that leads to the removal of suffering. Separates, in its turn, into eight paths. The eight paths are: right belief, right decision, right speaking, right deeds, right means of existence, right effort, right thinking and right meditation.

PICA: Those girls, if they drove away the prince... Maybe they used to feed even his guts with right injection, holy tablet, noble electric shock. Thirty-seven – fifty one ways... Poor Marcel is right.

MARCEL: Me, as for being poor, I wouldn't be that poor. I have a child. Maybe you don't have...

That brick you gnaw, do you think that it's a child?

PICA: The brick is a little boy. I have a little piece of slate too. Two. A little boy and a little girl.

"The play has an unconventional and provocative air. In a world in which the clash of civilisations is frequently spoken of, and globalisation as an antidote, contemporary madness in its entirety is summarised in Daniel Bănulescu's play. We find ourselves in an asylum, which it is no longer even necessary to say represents this world, although on the other hand it could be any world since the beginning of creation. The twelve dangerous madmen suffer from the strangest illnesses, which the author describes with a wealth of detail, a sign that before or during the time he wrote the play he did serious research, reading specialist texts. These poor creatures, in spite of their infirmities, are very aggressive and have an absolutely unpredictable deviant behaviour. Most of the play represents a kind of wager between the writer and himself, to make the incredible behaviour of those his fantasy has created as credible as possible. (...) He achieves characters of universal breadth, to be found anywhere, if the respective place allows malformations. The play might be localised (...) in Pitești, in the Siberian Gulag, in a Nazi, Maoist or Khmer Rouge extermination camp, and, why not, even in one of the CIA's secret prisons. This is the principal merit of the play."

(Dan Stanca)

MARCEL: You've ended up a cannibal. There is no greater villainy to which bad friendships can impel you! The cannibals you've ganged up with – precisely because they're cannibals – are going to be hanged along whatever path they take! (*To Amanda, with sympathy.*) Isn't that right, baldy?

IGNATIUS: (*to the same Amanda*): You have one minute remaining for your sermon, your honour. I have stopped the clock.

WALDO (*to Ignatius, dryly*): I told you not to stop it and you've stopped it. You did a bad thing when you stopped it, given that I asked you not to stop it, your holiness...

(Striving to conceal his fury, he resorts to a smile).

Why should we drag it out?

VIRGIL: It is a sin to play with the clock.

WALDO *(turning back to Amanda, in order to hurry*

the truth that would halt rebirth...

He who has been enlightened that all is illusion and who has single-handedly broken the shackles of his reincarnations, who has elevated himself to the state of bodhi and penetrated into nirvana. Nirvana means extinguishing. Emancipation from pain. Nothingness. Annihilation...

GEORGE *(the handkerchief)*: So I'm more dangerous if I say not "go to blazes" but "go to nirvana".

MARCEL *(to Pica in particular)*: And whatever path you take with the cannibals, you end up either hanged or annihilated...

WALDO *(calm, tactful, he is sitting upright in bed, like the majority of the patients, with his back resting against a pillow. He is going by his own stopwatch, which he has long since*

extracted from inside the mattress, and he makes it understood that this is the primary instrument for measuring the preaching times of the four religious teachers. The apparatus consisting of the four clocks, as in a chess match, enthroned on the table, would have no other purpose than that of not deviating however little from the time measured by his, Waldo's, stopwatch): Fifteen seconds. Thirteen... Eight... Five. Three. Two. Stop!

(To Amanda): And the second time for preaching, that of your reverend self, has come to a close. *(Addressing them all)*: The Orthodox did more ranting than he did preaching. The Buddhist has initiated us. But in my eyes, I still don't feel as though the little lights that ought to have been kindled in the eyes of any believer or adept have lit up. *(He turns and talks familiarly with the Orthodox priest, an old man with a huge white beard and*

"What ought to be remarked, among other things, is the good 'clinical' knowledge of the illnesses, the authenticity of each patient's language of madness, the capacity of the author to individualise his characters without cheating by using theoretical tricks, his aptitude to 'rein in' all this polyphonic delirium, to make it communicate aberrant, insanely contorted logic, against the outline of a diabolical conflict of anti-metaphysical horror. The black humour born of the clash of psychotic repartee or the 'pleas' of the believers of the four major religions pigments the text. An aberrant society, a damned infra-universe comes to birth in this infernal malabolge, in this theatre of a topsy-turvy world governed by madness. (...) A theatrical synthesis between poetry and novel, Who Won the World War of Religions? is Daniel Bănulescu's most memorable creation to date."

(Paul Cernat)

him into continuing and to make him finish his sermon): So, all is suffering. Four holy ways. The fourth way has eight paths... Please jump straight to the part with nirvana, the bit with the smoke, and let's conclude.

AMANDA *(undisturbed, without irony)*: Do you wish to listen to nirvana for one minute or for two minutes?

WALDO: You are a very diplomatic chap. You choose.

AMANDA: The whole of reality is an illusion. Try to clutch between your fingers any of life's promises and you will find only smoke... People die, people are reincarnated, people endlessly suffer once more. In order to interrupt the entire chain of reincarnations and of suffering, the first three things that must be abandoned are: the thirst for life, attachment to the world, and ignorance of

a venerable appearance):
Isn't that so, Bowel of Hell?

(During this time, Amanda, in silence, has risen from the place where he expositated his teaching and sat down at the table where the other three high religious servants are lined up. In this wise, the order in which the four religious leaders are seated on the bench is as follows: Paranasius, Amanda – both of them having completed their times for preaching – Ignatius – who is about to speak – and Zaid).

PARANASIUS *(being the one aimed at by Waldo's question, answers him, with a resounding voice well-trained in oratory):* May the worms devour you, father! They have not been kindled for you.

WALDO *(politely, as though he were responding to a greeting):* May the heavens strike you down, father! I would have scratched myself had I felt... *(Sweetly, as though the question had nothing to do with the main thread of the discussions):* What is it that you are taught in the holy Psalter, for you to recommend those who swear by things holy?

PARANASIUS *(it is plain that he is straining his memory and that he is quoting from the Homilies):* "For the blasphemer, the canon that is laid down is for him to drag his tongue along the ground many times. Let him be taught wisdom with beatings... And if need be, break his teeth, rend his mouth. Sanctify thy hand with such a blow..."

WALDO: A terrifying canon!

Well then, you shouldn't swear...

PARANASIUS *(humanly disconcerted that precisely he is being instructed to avoid such a blasphemous act):* Me, swear?!

WALDO: We know that, as a rule, you speak only like an innocent birdy...

GEORGE *(takes out his handkerchief, giving what*

has been said an obscene signification):
Yes. Like a birdy.

Excerpt from the play **Who Won the World War of Religions?**

M. Blecher

Born 1909 - died 1938. Poet and prose-writer. In 1928, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis of the spine (Pott's disease). He was interned in various sanatoria in France, Switzerland and Romania, but treatment proved ineffective. He had leanings towards Surrealism, without joining any particular grouping, and towards existentialist philosophy. He corresponded with, among others, Geo Bogza, Mihail Sebastian, André Breton, André Gide, Martin Heidegger and Ilarie Voronca. He sporadically collaborated with Parisian magazines *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* and *Les Feuilles inutiles*.

Texts: *Occurrences in the Immediate Unreality*, *Cicatrised Hearts*, *The Illumined Burrow*, *Transparent Body*.



When I gaze for a long time at a fixed point on the wall, what sometimes happens to me is that I no longer know who I am or where I am. I feel my lack of identity from far off, as though I had, for an instant, become a complete stranger. This abstract personage and my real person vie with equal strength to convince me.

In the following instant my identity is regained, like

“In his three novels, Blecher is essentially preoccupied with the configuration of a tragic destiny, in his strictly existential side, captured between the fall into teratology and the appeal to abyssal compensatory fiction.”
(Radu G. Țeposu)

in those stereoscopic views where the two images sometimes separate by accident and only when the projectionist readjusts them, superimposing them, do they all at once provide the illusion of depth. Then it appears to me that my room is of a freshness it did not previously possess. It returns to its prior consistency and the objects in it fall back into place, just as in a glass of water a lump of crumbled soil will settle in strata of different, well defined and variously coloured elements. The elements of my room stratify in their own outlines and in the colouring of the old memory I have of them.

The sensation of distance and loneliness in the moments when my quotidian person has dissolved into inconsistency differs from any other sensation. When it lasts longer, it becomes a fear, a terror of

not being able to recover myself ever again. Far off, an uncertain outline persists in me, encompassed by a great luminosity, the same as objects sometimes appear in the mist.

The terrible question “who exactly am I” then lives in me like an entirely new body, having grown in me with skin and organs that are wholly unknown to me. The answer to it is demanded by a more pro-

found and more essential lucidity than that of the brain. All that is capable of stirring in my body stirs, struggles and rebels more powerfully and more elementarily than in everyday life. All implores a solution. Oftentimes, I

recover the room as I know it, as though I were closing and opening my eyes; each time, the room is clearer – just as a landscape appears in a telescope, more and more well-structured, to the extent that, adjusting the focus, we pierce all the veils of intermediary distances.

In the end, I recognise myself and recover my room. It is a sensation of slight intoxication. The room is extraordinarily condensed in its matter, and I am implacably returned to the surface of things: the deeper the wave of uncertainty the higher its crest; never and under no other circumstances does it seem more evident to me than in those moments, that each object must occupy the place it occupies and that I must be who I am.

My struggle in uncertainty then no longer has any

name; it is the mere regret that I have not found anything in its depths. What surprises me is merely the fact that a complete lack of significance could have been so profoundly bound to my intrinsic matter. When I have recovered myself and seek to express the sensation to myself, it appears wholly impersonal to me: a mere exaggeration of my identity, having grown like a cancer from its own substance. A jellyfish arm that extended immeasurably and sought exasperated among the waves before finally retracting beneath the gelatinous sucker. In a few instants of disquietude, I have thus traversed all the certainties and uncertainties of my existence, only to return definitively and painfully to my solitude. It is then a solitude that is purer and more pathetic than previously. The sensation of the world being far off is clearer and more intrinsic: a limpid and delicate melancholy, like a dream we recall in the middle of the night. It alone still reminds me of something of the mystery and rather sad charm of my childhood “crises”. Except that in this sudden disappearance of identity, I rediscover my falls into the cursed spaces of formerly and only in the moments of immediate lucidity that follow upon the return to the surface does the world appear to me in that unusual atmosphere of inutility and obsolescence, which formed around me when my hallucinatory trances ended by overcoming me. It was always the same places on the street, in the house, or in the garden that would provoke my “crises”. Whenever I used to enter their space, the same faintness and dizziness would overwhelm me. Veritable invisible traps, laid here and there in the town, in no way distinct from the air that encompassed them – they would ferociously wait for me to fall prey to the special atmosphere they contained. If I took so much as a single step and entered such a “cursed”

space, the crisis would inevitably come. One of those spaces was in the town park, in a small glade at the end of a lane, where no one ever walked. The wild rose bushes and dwarf willows that surrounded it opened on one side onto the desolate vista of a deserted field. There was no place in the world

“What makes Max Blecher akin to Kafka, Bruno Schulz or Robert Wasler is above all the faculty of inhabiting misfortune, of accepting it as a condition of ongoing life. Before the disease manifests itself, he observes a systematic aggression against him on the part of the universe. Things emerge from their neutrality and besiege him, seeking to fascinate or terrorise him.” (Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu)

sadder or more abandoned. Dense silence settled on the dusty leaves, in the stagnant heat of summer. Now and then, the echoes of the garrison bugles could be heard. Those protracted, futile calls were aching sad... Far off, the sun-scorched air quivered vaporously like the transparent steam that floats over a boiling liquid. The place was wild and isolated; its loneliness seemed endless. There, I felt the heat of the day was more tiring and the air harder to breathe. The dusty bushes were scorched yellow by the sun, in an atmosphere of consummate solitude. A bizarre sensation of inutility floated in that glade which existed “somewhere in the world”, somewhere upon which I myself had happened pointlessly, one ordinary summer afternoon which itself had no meaning. An afternoon that strayed chaotically in the heat of the sun, among bushes anchored in space “somewhere in the world”. Then I felt more profoundly and more painfully that I had nothing to do in this world, nothing except to roam through parks – through dusty glades baking in the sun, deserted and wild. It was a roaming which in the end tore at my heart.

*Excerpt from the novel **Occurrences in the Immediate Unreality***

Mircea Cărtărescu

Born 1956. He graduated from Bucharest University's Faculty of Romanian Language and Literature in 1980. He is currently a lecturer in the Faculty of Letters at Bucharest University. Poet, prose-writer, essayist, literary critic and journalist.

Published works: *Headlamps, Shop Windows, Photographs, poems*, Cartea Românească, 1980; *Love Poems*, Cartea Românească, 1982; *Everything, Poems*, Cartea Românească, 1984; *The Dream* (in later editions, *Nostalgia*), short stories, Cartea Românească, 1989; *Humanitas*, 1993 (translated into French, German, Italian, Swedish, Norwegian, Spanish, Hungarian, English and Slovenian); *The Levant*, epic poem, Cartea Românească, 1990; *Humanitas*, 1998; *The Chimeric Dream*, critical study, Litera, 1991; *Travesti*, novel, *Humanitas*, 1994 (translated into French, Dutch, Norwegian, Spanish and Hungarian, and due to be published in Polish); *Love, poem*, *Humanitas*, 1994; *Dazzler vol. 1*, novel, *Humanitas*, 1996 (translated into French, Swedish, Hungarian and Bulgarian, and due to be published in German and Italian); *Double CD*, poems, *Humanitas*, 1998; *Romanian Post-modernism, critical study*, *Humanitas*, 1999; *Diary*, *Humanitas*, 2001; *Dazzler vol. 2*, novel, *Humanitas*, 2002 (translated into French, Swedish and Bulgarian); *The Encyclopaedia of Dragons, book for children*, *Humanitas*, 2002; *Forever Young, Swathed in Pixels*, journalism, *Humanitas*, 2003; *The Harsh Scent of Fiction*, audiobook, *Humanitas*, 2003. *Pluriverse, 2 vols.*, poems, *Humanitas*, 2003; *Fifty Sonnets*, poems, *Brumar*, 2003; *Why We Love Women*, short stories and audiobook, *Humanitas*, 2004 (translated into Spanish and Bulgarian, due to be published in Polish and Portuguese), *Diary vol. 2*, *Humanitas*, 2005, *O Baron!*, *Humanitas*, 2005. Collections of poems by Mircea Cărtărescu have been published in Ireland, the United States, Italy and Germany.

His books have received awards from the Romanian Academy, the Romanian Writers' Union, the Moldovan Writers' Union, ASPRO, the Bucharest Association of Writers, the Association of Romanian Publishers, and the Cuvîntul, Ateneu, Flacăra, Tomis and Ziarul de Iași reviews. In France, he has been nominated for the Médicis, Le meilleur livre étranger, and Prix Union Latine. His novel *Nostalgia* won the Giuseppe Acerbi Prize at Castle Goffredo, Italy, in 2005.



My illumination was now to be scraped away, and over it, with even and crabbed characters, there was to be written an imperative text as heavy as theatre curtain. And today, when I am at the halfway point of my life's arc, when I have read all the books, including those tattooed on the moon and on my skin, those written with needlepoint in the corner of my eyes, when I have seen and heard plenty, when I have systematically deranged all my senses, when I have loved and hated, when I have erected monuments of unperishing bronze, when I have grown long in the ear waiting for the wee little God, without understanding for a long while that I am nothing but a sarcoptic mite tunnelling my channels into his skin of old light, when the angels throng my brain like spirochaetes, when all the sweetness of the world has delighted me and when April and May

and June have passed – today, when beneath my ring the skin desquamates in thousands of Bible-leaf layers, today, this vivacious and absurd today, I attempt to put my thoughts in disorder and to read the runes of the block across the way, with its windows and balconies full of wet laundry, which has rent my life in twain just as the nautilus walls up each compartment in which it is no longer able to fit and moves into a larger one, along the nacreous spiral that resumes its life. However, this text is not human and I can no longer decipher it. What has remained beyond, my birth, childhood and adolescence sometimes loom through the porosity of the huge wall, in long and enigmatic tatters, deformed into anamorphoses and foreshortenings, pulverised by the countless media of diffraction, whereby they reach as far as the small chamber to which I

sometimes return. Nacre upon nacre upon nacre, bluish upon bluish upon bluish, each age and each house in which I have dwelled (if it was not all a hallucination of nothingness) is a filter deforming the previous one, blending itself with them, making them narrower and more heterogeneous bands. For you do not describe the

past by writing about old things, but the misty air between you and it. The way in which my present brain envelops my brains beneath ever smaller skulls, of bone and cartilage and skin. The tension between my present mind and that of a moment ago, and that of ten years ago. Their interaction, their blending one with the imagery and emotion of the other. How much necrophilia there is in remembrance! How much fascination for ruin and putrefaction! How much coroner rummaging among liquefied organs! Thinking about myself at different ages, as so many consumed previous lives, it is as though I spoke about a long, uninterrupted chain of corpses, a tunnel of bodies dying one within the other. A moment ago, the one who, reflected by the dark lacquer of the coffee cup, had written here the words “dying one within the other”

collapsed off the stool, his skin cracked, the bones of his face became visible, his eyes leaked out oozing black blood. In a moment, the one who will write “the one who will write” will also collapse down upon the other’s dust. How could you penetrate this ossuary? And why would you do so? And what gauze mask, what surgical gloves would protect you from the infection emanated

by memory?

Years ago, what used to happen to me, when I read poetry or listened to music, was that I felt ecstasy, the sudden and concentrated congestion of the brain, the sudden gathering there of a volatile and vesicatory liquid, the sudden opening there of a flap, not toward the exterior, but

“After making his debut as a poet, Mircea Cărtărescu now seems definitively captivated by prose. A dense and profound, realist and oneiric, descriptive and hallucinatory prose, oozing subjectivity like water from a sponge, populated by fascinating characters and objects, attracted to the promiscuous psychoanalytic underground and illumined by splendid baroque rainbows. A novel of the search for lost time, a meta-novel of reading and writing the past, Dazzler is an archaeology and an anatomy of being without any term of comparison in Romanian literature, except, perhaps, the metaphysical sensuality of Max Blecher. (...) The author has a unique and unrepeatable recipe for the novel, in which the most meticulous realism is blended with the strangest fantasy, description with visionariness, narrative with poetry, the natural with the absurd, the autobiographical with the purest invention, the oneiric with the erotic. The characters (and we along with them) pass through mysterious doors from one reality to another, penetrate through tree-hollows into palaces worthy of the 1001 Nights, gaze at infinitesimal and marvellous worlds through magnifying glasses, descend and ascend the ladder of time. In all of Romanian literature there has not been written a book so full of imagination (in terms of things as well as words), so free and so captivating, so unclassifiable. Ultimately, it is a literary genre that can be read as reminiscences of childhood and as a visionary prose in the tradition of Novalis, a genre in which bizarre and enormous butterflies traverse the dreams of a great poet, for whom the universe can be contained in the pattern of a carpet and that carpet can become the cosmos itself.”

(Nicolae Manolescu)

toward something surrounded by brain, something deep and unbearable, oozing beatitude. I had access, I gained access there, into the forbidden room, through poetry or music (or a single thought, or an image coming into my mind, or – long ago, coming home alone from school, trampling in the spring puddles by the tram line – a gleam from a shop window, the perfume of a

woman). I would penetrate into the epithalamus, I would get clogged in the tonsils, I would huddle in the abstract extension of the golden ring at the centre of the mind. The revelation was like a silent cry of joy, which had nothing in common with orgasm except epileptic brutality, but which expressed relief, love, submission, surrender, adoration. There were punctures, fractures

“Cărtărescu’s imagination functions incited by astronomical immensities, the great universal analogies, esoteric doctrines and scientific-fantastic theories, the myths of humanity and the hidden workings of the unconscious.”

(Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu)

toward the cistern of living light in the deepest depths of our being, points of fracture piercing the inner limit of thought, making it resemble a starry sky, for we all have a starry firmament in our skull and the moral awareness above. Oftentimes, however, this ejaculation towards the interior did not reach consummation, but stopped in the antechamber, and the antechambers of the antechambers, whence it extracted palpitating images, extinguished in a moment and leaving behind regret and nostalgia, which would then pursue me all day long. The machinery for fabricating the illumination, the poems used to make me vicious, I would use them like drugs and it was impossible for me to live without them. I had begun, after a time, also to write poems, where, among so many graceful, enchanted and aggressive verses, I would sometimes find myself inserting, needlessly, an unintelligible passage, which had seemingly been dictated to me by someone and which, when I reread it, would horrify me like a fulfilled prophecy. I used to speak there about my mother, about God and about childhood, as though, during the course of a conversation over a beer, I had suddenly started to

speak in tongues, with the reedy voice of a child, a castrato or an angel. My mother used to appear in my poems, striding down Stephen the Great Road, taller than the blocks of flats, overturning trucks and trams, crushing the iron kiosks with huge soles, sweeping away the passers-by with her cheap moleskin skirt. She would stop in front of the triple window of my room, crouch down and peer inside. The entire window would be filled by her great blue eye, by her knitted brow, which would fill me with terror. Then she would stand up and head westwards, knocking postal aeroplanes and artificial satellites from the bloody sky with her wiry and phosphorescent hair... What was with this mythification of my mother? Nothing had ever drawn me to her, had ever aroused any interest in me for her. She was the woman who washed my clothes, who fried my potatoes, who sent me off to university even when I would have liked to play truant. She was my mother, a neutral being who looked neutral, who lived her modest, chore-laden life in our house, in which I had always been a stranger. What did this affective deficiency in our house conceal? My father always on the road, and when he came home, his face congested, reeking of sweat, and continually squeezing his thick-stranded hair like horses’ tails in a net stocking, with vacant eyes, with the smoky sole hanging between his shoulder blades. Mother serving him his meal and both of them watching the television, choosing their “favourites” among the folk singers or the variety actors and chattering endlessly on the subject. I eating hurriedly and withdrawing to my room overlooking the main road (the other two faced the back, towards the melancholy redbrick build-

ing of the Dîmbovitza Mill) so as to watch the polyhedric bustle of Bucharest from the window or to write rambling poems in notebooks with checked paper, or to huddle under the quilt, pulling it over my head as though I could no longer bear the humiliation and shame of being an adolescent... In our family, we were like three insects, each preoccupied with our own chemical trail, rarely brushing antennae and going on our way. "How's it going at school?" "Fine." "Dynamo are going to get a drubbing, right in your own trough." "Leave it out, I'm not at all ashamed of my other team, Poli, either." And then back into my shell, to write more verses coming from nowhere:
mother, it was you who gave me the power of
dream.

i would stand for entire nights eye to eye with you
and hand in hand with you I would believe that I
began to understand.

and your heart would again beat for us both
and between our skulls as translucent as the skins
of cucumbers

a fantastic umbilical cord would loom
and hypnosis and levitation and telepathy and love
would be merely motley flowers in our arms.
together

we would eternally play cards with just two suits:
life, death

while the clouds would spark in the overbrimming
of day, far off.

*Excerpt from the novel **Dazzler***

Petru Cimpoeșu

Born 1952. He completed lycée courses in 1971 and graduated from the Ploiești Gas and Petroleum Institute in 1976. Until 1990, he worked as an engineer in the petroleum industry and as a lycée school-teacher. Since the fall of the communist regime, he has practised a number of professions in the cultural and mass media fields (journalist, editor, theatre director).

He made his publishing debut with the volume of short prose *Provincial Reminiscences*, Junimea, 1983, followed by the novel *Naturally*, Cartea Românească, 1985. Since 1990, he has published the novels *Unwilling Hero*, 1994 and *The Tale of the Great Brigand*, 2000, both of which were awarded the Prize of the Jassy Writers' Association. The novel *Simeon the Lifite*, published in 2001 by Compania, was awarded the Prize of Cuvîntul magazine and the Romanian Writers' Union Prize.



Lord, Lord
Seek in the heavens and see
And search this vine
That Thou hast planted,
And make it perfect...

*The first (i.e. third) day
Of playing Little Red Riding Hood*

Every evening and every morning, the Mother of God, the Holy Virgin, falls before the Heavenly Throne, makes obeisance in all humility and says:

Lord, I who, while on earth and being made from earth, in ages long past received a sign through the Archangels Michael and Gabriel and then, receiving from them the Annunciation, in wondrous wise conceived Jesus, Thy son, to redeem the ancient sin and for Him to ascend into Thy kingdom, and Jesus, the Son of Man, living among men, established for them, as the Christ, the New

Covenant, whence commenced a new numbering of the years and a new age of the world, and He strengthened that Covenant with His own precious blood, sacrificing Himself on the Cross, when he was crucified in the time of Pontius Pilate, I pray Thee now, Good and Merciful One, Treasurer of all good things and Giver of life, in Thy boundless goodness and in Thy limitless compassion, seek out and have mercy upon Thy servant:
PELAGHIA

and forgive her for the sins, witting and unwitting, in deed, in word and in thought, which she may have committed this day and in all the days of her life, and in particular that terrible sin, that deadly sin, let its name not be uttered, to which she has been devoting herself for many years, unable to rid herself of it, for her anxious soul has battered on the soul of that man whose name I shall pass over in silence, they have both fallen into the voluptuousness of that bodily sin from which they can no longer release themselves and they have

intertwined together in that sin like two intertwining lindens, trees that you can only separate by severing them at the root... Do not sever them yet, Good Lord, find in Thy boundless compassion a path to redemption for them too and in the host of Thy numberless mercies save them, for, although caught into the snares of sin, yet do they seek Thee in humility. Listen, Lord, be mindful, Lover of men! Have mercy, be compassionate and redeem their vile souls, confound the machinations of the deadly foe, deliver them from the world's shame and guide them patiently along the path of righteousness, for they have no other God and no other hope than in Thee, heavenly God, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, Creator of all things visible and invisible, in heaven and on earth. Amen.”

The Mother of God knows very well what she is talking about. For, prior to falling before the Heavenly Throne, she herself had listened mindfully to the humble and ashamed prayer of Mrs Pelaghia, from the second floor, and the words of the Holy Virgin merely repeat what she had heard from that unworthy servant of hers a short while before.

Every evening and every morning, Mrs Pelaghia falls before the icon of the Holy Virgin, the Mother of God, fervently praying that she beg the forgiveness of her Son and Our God for that terrible sin, for that mortal sin, according to the Holy Scriptures and the old canons of the Church Fathers, for that sin of which she cannot rid herself, for her agitated soul has battened onto the soul of him with whom she sins. With breaking

*“At once tender and unbridled in its parody, without anything holy, but always tingling with the ironic breeze of divine mystery, the novel **Simeon the Liftite** by Petru Cimpoeșu brings to post-1989 Romanian prose an almost incredible freshness of tone and vision. (...) The source of comedy, the intersection between the plane of frenetically lived mythologies of consumption and the plane of a hazy mystical aspiration, is nevertheless not a mechanical, ultimately tiring procedure. (...) There is a permanent ambiguity in this novel, whose world never takes on the aspect of caricature, but is rather viewed with understanding and even, quite often, warmth. The lack of aggression comes from an aesthetic attitude. The serenity of tone here has its origin in the pure pleasure of constructing a story. (...) **Simeon the Liftite** is (also) a book to delight the reader. And if it gives food for thought, then so much the better!”*

(Mircea Iorgulescu)

heart she prays and with vanquished soul, making countless genuflections and countless, devout obeisances, confessing her guilt and begging whispered forgiveness, spiritual peace, help to do good deeds, and health for her husband Costică and her parents, Mrs Alice and Mr Vasile. It is superfluous to say that all these prayers are not in vain. They straightaway return to caress her soul like a blessing, for when, at last, she rises, from numbed knees, she feels better, more tranquil, more at peace with herself, as though she had wept.

Then, if it is evening, she goes to bed and lies under her cold and unwelcoming quilt, which is to say in the same bedroom where she has said her whispered prayers with the door locked, separate from her lawful husband, who has remained in the living room and will watch some football match or current-affairs talk show on the television until he falls asleep on the sofa, vanquished by the toil of the day. And if it is morning, Mrs Pelaghia drinks her cup of coffee and smokes a cigarette, the only one of that day, and hurries to work. But as soon as she arrives on the landing, where the light of

day never penetrates, because the architect did not think of putting a window there, and the light bulb that ought to illumine it is always dead or sooner missing, she pauses for a few moments in front of the hole left in the wall by the erstwhile light-switch, ripped from its place by the forces of darkness, and, with a seemingly careless gesture, she casts there a small, insignificant pellet of paper, about the size of a plum stone. The gesture, however careless it might be intended to look, is not without a certain amount of risk, for the two electrical wires of the erstwhile light switch, which continue to be live and whose ends are not isolated, as stipulated by health and safety regulations, might at any time produce an electric shock in whoever might, whether recklessly or accidentally, cause them to cross.

But there are also risks greater than electrocution, at least in the case of Mrs Pelaghia. Whoever might be curious enough to follow what happens afterwards would see that, a quarter of an hour later, the lift stops on the second floor. From the lift emerges a middle-aged man, whose name we shall pass over in silence. He traverses the landing with even steps, nevertheless taking care not to make any sound to attract the attention of the neighbours. When he reaches the erstwhile light switch, he takes a biro from his pocket and skilfully employs it to extract from the hole of the erstwhile light switch that small, insignificant pellet of paper the size of a plum stone...

Whoever might curiously persist in following what the middle-aged man does next would see him descending the two remaining floors by the stairs. Once he has reached the ground floor, he takes the pellet of paper from his pocket, unrav-

els it and reads what is written there. In short: it is in fact a note whereby Mrs Pelaghia informs the middle-aged man at what time and where exactly they will meet that afternoon, after she finishes work. The place is not indicated by any precise landmark, but codified in the form of a beautiful metaphor. For example: “by the melancholy willow tree” in fact means on the banks of the Bistritza River, a short way uphill from the amusement park island, where there is indeed a willow tree melancholy by its nature. The formula “peanut cake” indicates the Zodiac Buffet, the premises resulting from the privatisation of a former state cafeteria. The favourite place of rendezvous nevertheless remains the so-called “dancing in the rain”, situated in the little park by the railway line. What does “dancing in the rain” mean? We shall find out at the appropriate moment.

Today, however, they shall meet earlier, in a wholly unforeseen place, for Mrs Pelaghia has to go to a funeral, and thus the place initially chosen for the rendezvous, known under the codename “peanut cake”, has had to be changed at the last moment. Why at the last moment? Instead of a long and rather complicated explanation, let us rather tell the truth: Mrs Pelaghia had forgotten that she had to go to the funeral of the husband of one of her workmates. She only remembered that morning, as she was getting ready to leave, and she gave a start, frightened at what might have happened had she not remembered in time. While Mr Costică was shaving in the bathroom, she hurriedly wrote the note in order to change the co-ordinates of the rendezvous established the previous day. Instead of the usual codified formulas, she found herself forced to use an explicit

and quite ordinary language. If someone else, and not the gentleman whose name we shall pass over in silence, had read the note, Mrs Pelaghia's public image and the honour of her family would have been gravely affected, and Mrs Alice along with Mr Vasile would have suffered cruelly.

Fortunately, no one paid any attention to the pellet of paper that had, who knows how, got into the hole in the wall left by an erstwhile light switch. With the exception, of course, of a middle-aged man, whose name we shall pass over in silence. Let us retain that, on the morning of Monday, 5 October, he did not descend in the lift from the fifth floor, where he lives, but by the stairs, because the lift was out of order. Why it was out of order is a complex problem, to which we shall return. For the time being, let us try to decipher the contents of the note: "We have to talk. Your wife has sent an anonymous letter to my parents, my dad phoned and told me. Mum doesn't know I know. We'll meet at 11, in the entrance of the paying polyclinic, because after that I'm going to a funeral. Can you come too?"

In fact there is nothing to decipher. At eleven o'clock they will meet in the entrance of the polyclinic, as if by accident, they will talk for a little, and then they will leave in different directions, Mrs Pelaghia heading for the home of her workmate whose husband is deceased, and the middle-aged man waiting on the route to the cemetery for the funeral cortege, which he will join unobserved by anyone, except, of course, Mrs Pelaghia. They will then have at least two hours together at their disposal.

In the case of Mr Thoma, from the third floor: his conceptions had evolved greatly since the day he started listening to the BBC's Romanian-language

broadcasts. Nor had things been very rosy up until then. His frank and forthright way of being had brought him plenty of troubles. And that is without taking into account his slightly exaggerated inclination to trust in the sincerity of others, from which had gradually resulted, consequent to countless disappointments, a great mistrust in anyone and anything. For years on end, he had gawped like an idiot at the television (the expression might seem too harsh, but it should be known that it belongs to Mr Thoma himself and that, in general terms, it characterises his way of thinking) in the conviction that everything he saw there was the naked truth. Now, when he looks back on those times, Mr Thoma shakes his head and smiles sceptically. Almost touched. It cannot be said that he no longer watches television at all, on the contrary, but now there is nothing that can fool him. His critical spirit functions ruthlessly. The famous talk shows, which provoke in others verbal attitudes that are on no few occasions vehement, leave him cold. When some minister or parliamentarian or other makes a shattering revelation, speaking about the extent of corruption, or about the cigarette-smuggling mafia, Mr Thoma snorts through his nose with bitter irony. In the first place, he does not smoke. Or to put it better, in the second place. Because in the first place all these so-called news-items and so-called sensational revelations were well known to him long before, from the BBC.

*Excerpt from the novel **Simeon the Liftite. Novel with Angels and Moldavians***

Lena Constante

Born 1909 - died 2005. Artist and folklorist. Solo exhibitions of tapestry in Bucharest (1934, 1935, 1946, 1970, 1971) and Ankara (1947). In 1945, she worked as a set designer at the Țândărică Theatre in Bucharest, together with Elena Pătrășcanu, thereby entering the circle of subsequently imprisoned and murdered communist minister of justice Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, which was to lead to her own arrest and a twelve-year prison sentence. She was released in 1968. She was a member of the Artists' Union. In prison, she 'composed' a play in verse, preserving it in memory, a play which would not be performed until four decades later, by Romanian Youth Radio in 1992: *Smiles in the Flowers*. Later, she illustrated and published books for children. One of them is reminiscent of Tudor Arghezi's *Toys Book: her Story with a Father, a Mother, and Three Little Girls*. She became well known in the West after 1989, with two books: *Silent Escape* and *Impossible Escape*, which describe her experiences in communist prisons. Written in French, *L'Évasion silencieuse* was published in Paris in 1990. *Silent Escape* was published in her own translation in Bucharest in 1992. Both books were enthusiastically received by the critics. They were translated in the United States and in Great Britain. The French translation of the book was awarded the Prix Européen in 1992, the Prize of the French-Language Writers' Association.



I have been sentenced to twelve years in prison. The trial lasted six days. The investigation five years. So, up until today, I have executed five years of my prison sentence. Alone. In a five-metre-square cell. 1827 days. Alone for 43848 hours. In a cell in which each hour inexorably has

formed a sneaking hope that I would be free after the trial. Little by little, I had begun to believe it. The shock of those seven months of detention shatters my brain. I no longer feel anything. For two or three days, four even, I lie on the straw mattress. Unconscious. Every day, at lunchtime and in the evening, they bring me a bowl of blackish liquid and a thin slice of bread. I cannot swallow them. I can't even look at them. My eyes are closed. Under my eyelids, nothing but darkness. I can no longer feel my arms. I can no longer feel my legs. I am dissolving...

“Like Margarete Buber-Neumann, a survivor of the Stalinist and Nazi camps, Lena Constante made bearing witness and memory crucial values for her own survival. She has described in detail the abominable humiliations she suffered during her time of solitary confinement, but also the moments of human solidarity she experienced in the hell of the prison camps.”
(Vladimir Tismăneanu)

60 minutes, each minute 60 seconds. One, two, three, four, five seconds, six, seven, eight, nine, ten seconds, a thousand seconds, a hundred thousand seconds. I have lived alone in this cell 157852800 seconds of solitude and fear. It is not a thing to be spoken, but to be screamed! It condemns me to live for another 220838400 seconds. To go on living for that many seconds or to die from that many seconds. In the final months of the investigation, I had

They take me out of the cell in the morning, towards four o'clock. It is, I am certain, 15 April 1954. They order me to sign a piece of paper. I sign it. I do not know what I am signing. A blank page hides the text from me. They shove me outside. I am still wearing prison glasses. With opaque black lenses. I feel the air. It is cold. They keep shoving me... I climb two steps... They bundle me into a van. I leave behind me five years of detention. During

these five years I have changed prisons four times. In each of these prisons, I have changed cell many times. (...)

The second subject. The deed is real.

On that day, at the midday meal, the tub is full of a thin gruel, in which dried peas are floating. Unfortunately, the peas are worm-ridden. Each pea has its worm. So, no one ate that day, neither at lunchtime nor in the evening. I had thought of drawing women chasing a wormy pea around the cell.

The commandant would, of course, have granted me an even greater 'recompense'. Not two, but four days of solitary confinement.

Trying to relive my life at that time, I realise that I used to make a great effort of will to prevent myself from thinking. From thinking about myself. About the human condition. About causes and finalities. About God and the devil. All these were taboo. 'Peril'. I preferred to be stupid. Even like that I was unhappy. When some philosophers are well dressed, well fed, with their stoves lit, they scrawl bitter phrases about the futility of everything. That's their business. If they publish them, finding publishers, and if they also sell them, finding buyers, then so much the better for them. If one of their readers commits suicide, ultimately, it's his business. And in me too the thought of suicide lay hidden, but at the same time, there was also the thought that gave me the strength to go on living. If the thought had one day transformed itself into deed, it would not have been metaphysical theo-

ries that pushed me to do it, but the sufferings I felt deep down in my unconscious and vulnerable flesh. When those sufferings would have exceeded the limits of my will, of my desire to live. When the body would have become stronger than the spirit.

*Excerpt from the volume **Silent Escape. 3000 days in the prisons of Romania***

"Unlike N. Steinhardt (Diary of Happiness) or R. Wurmbrandt (With God in the Underground) and many other prisoners, Lena Constante did not have the sustaining force of Christian faith, and her only ally – in the unequal battle with an entire, invincible system – was her own reason, her own dynamic, free, creative thought. It is precisely in this mental creativity that the solitary prisoner finds her salvation. Whereas she rarely received paper and drawing materials, she discovered that she could create using words, without any material support. Thus, without paper or pencil, only in her mind (thereby maintaining the flexibility of her memory) the prisoner manages to compose in prison eight plays in verse. (...) 'I am not a writer,' Lena Constante warns, and the proposition is true as long as she lacks works of fiction and any official affiliation to the guild; she became a writer, however, before writing on paper and before having an audience, she became a writer in prison, when she discovered and experienced writing as existential salvation, as necessary escape, without which survival (including physical survival) would no longer have been possible. Silent Escape consecrates a vocation, exercised and proven in the most terrible trials, aligning Lena Constante definitively with Romanian writers."
(Sanda Cordoş)

Gheorghe Crăciun

Born 1950 - died 2007. Graduate of the Philology Faculty of Bucharest University (1973). Doctor in Philology, Bucharest University (2000). He made his debut with poems published in *Luceafărul* magazine, in 1970.

Published volumes:

Original Documents / Legalised Copies, 1982, *Composition with Uneven Parallels*, 1988; 2nd edition 1999, *The Bodiless Beauty*, 1993, *Russian Doll*, 2004, *The Body Knows More: Faux Journal on Russian Doll*, 2006, *With Open Guard*, 1997, *In Search of the Reference*, 1998, *Literary Experiment in Post-war Romanian Letters* (in collaboration), 1998, *Reduction to Scale*, 1999, *The Iceberg of Modern Poetry*, 2002, *Two in a Book, without taking any account of its author*. Excerpts with Radu Petrescu and Mircea Nedelciu, 2003, *Introduction to Literary Theory*, 1997, 2nd edition, 2003, *Fluid Mechanics*, 2003.

He edited and wrote forewords to the following anthologies: *The Continual Context. The Eighties Generation in Theoretical Texts*, 1994; 2nd edition, 1999 and *The Eighties Generation in Short Prose* (in collaboration), 1998, *Experiment in Romanian Post-War Literature* (in collaboration, 1998), *Images & Texts / Images et textes* (in collaboration, 2000), *Composition aux parallèles inégales* (Éditions Maurice Nadeau, Paris, 2001, translated into French by Odile Serre).

The novel *Composition aux parallèles inégales* was awarded the Pierre François-Caillé Prize of the French Society of Translators for Best Translation of 2001 and nominated for the Prize of the Latin Union.

Literary prizes, including: Romanian Writers' Union Prize for Debut, 1983; *Viața Românească* magazine's Prize for Prose, 1984; the Cluj-Napoca Book National Book Salon Prize for Book of the Year, 1994; the Prize of the Writers' Union of the Republic of Moldova, 1995, 2003; the ASPRO Prize for the Year's Best Book of Criticism 1997, 2002; the *Familia* magazine Octav Șuluțiu Prize, 1988; *Cuvîntul* magazine's Prize for Critical Exegesis (2002) and for Prose (2004), the Romanian Writers' Union Prize for Novel (2004).



Up until the year 1800, poets felt to a much lesser degree the need to explain their own work. It was not Racine or La Fontaine who wrote poetic treatises, but Boileau, a kind of official critic of the day, preoccupied above all else with laying down norms for art and with preserving the unity of the literary language. Nowadays, we speak of many different kinds of poetry, about many different types of poetic language. Traditional poetry allowed at the most a discussion of its different

“The texts are analysed not hastily but thoroughly, and the formulation seems to arrive later, after mature and lengthy reflection. This perfectly balanced critical text has weight, it is impressive, and it gives food for thought even when it does not immediately convince.”

(Sorin Alexandrescu)

species, all of them subordinate to the same type of versified language.

If it is difficult to identify a transitive and another reflexive variant in lyric poetry until romanticism, this is also due to the fact that the two modalities were neither historically nor aesthetically opposed at the time. They do not constitute themselves in different, conflicting languages. It is only possible to speak of a conscious opposition between languages once the tendencies of poetry to obscure its expression and autonomise its substance have been established, thereby placing the reader in difficulty.

Transitive poetry is precisely the result of the will

to maintain the lyric text within the field of immediate reception, as close as possible to the reader. But we should not exaggerate the directness and simplicity of such poetry. From the experience of the rupture of linguistic codes occurring in the late 19th Century, it was also transitive poets in the line of Whitman who profited and, in their fight for transparency, who were obliged to discover their own, equally complicated means of construction.

Although uninterested in the values of suggestion, of ambiguity and of semantic obscurity, the poetry of the transitive message is not, nevertheless, a poetry that wholly conforms to the codes of common language. A number of its techniques, including collage, montage, ellipse, lexical discontinuity, asyntaxis, the procedure of blanks and of chaotic enumeration, are to a large extent deviations from these codes.

However, what is interesting is the fact that the poetic means under discussion are based upon habits and reflexes acquired by modern man in his confrontation with the new technologies of everyday life. Transitive poetry is addressed to a reader who lives in the immediate and is obliged to take account of the configuration of this context. It attempts to incorporate into its substance the rapidity, the disjunction of planes, the simul-

taneity, the aleatory, the artificiality and the multiplicity of existence, the orality and syntactic vitality of everyday communication. This poetry borrows techniques from photography, cinematography, painting, the domain of mass communications, and advertising. It knows how to make intelligent use of certain well-trodden paths of perception and comprehension, making the leap from linear verse to projective verse, from the monolithic block of text to composition within the field of the page. It thereby contravenes certain visual habitudes of the reader, but it valorises the mental modes proper to the textual contingency of the modern world.

It is perhaps the moment to observe that the battle between “inside” and “outside” which Montale problematises in his poem *Poetry is*, in fact, a battle to mould a certain type of reader, tailored according to the problematic measure of the post-romantic socio-cultural space. The reader therefore has to choose between, on the one hand, an esoteric, elitist, hermetic aesthetic, disgusted by “universal reportage”, purified from the vulgarity of the world and isolated within a space of perennial significations, and, on the other, an up-to-date, impure, spontaneous, processual aesthetic, cultivating momentary aims and meanings, the colloquial and the corporeality of speech, action, punctual truth, indeterminacy, the immanence of states and of reactions. But however “pragmatic” it might wish to be, nor is transitive poetry a facile poetry, which neglects the problem of the structural complexity of any aesthetic construct. Of course, this poetry is more accessible, but such accessibility is not equivalent to technical simplicity.

On the other hand, the familiarisation of the reader with the specific forms of this poetry is not something that is self-evident. The closeness of poetry to prose, to the anecdotal, to journalistic techniques and to everyday language is a phenomenon that the reader continues to view with great reserve. The overly great directness of transitive

“Reading Crăciun’s book has meant for me ‘a celebration of the intellect’, to repeat Valéry’s formulation, a celebration of the intellect and of the spirit in the widest possible sense, because, in its content are implied not only intellectual but also artistic and creative virtues and competences. I do not hesitate to assert that The Iceberg of Modern Poetry represents one of the most solid and innovative books written in Romanian in recent decades. It defines and restores a type of poetry at the national and international level; it reopens, after so many other illustrious attempts, the trial of modern poetry. A book which is ordained, in my opinion, to a European destiny.”
(Mircea Martin)

poetry upsets the reader, rocks his prejudices, snatches away his right to idealism and the ideal. His stupor in the face of an enunciatory poetic discourse might be just as great as in the case of hermetic poetry.

Ultimately, the entire problem is that of “translatability”. The most convenient model of poetry for the common reader – a model institutionalised by school education – is that of literary poetry, of the indirect discourse that allows an immediate operation of translation through a given rhetorical grid. However, both transitive poetry and reflexive poetry are types of discourse fundamentally based upon the literalness of meaning, which do not intend to say more than what they say.

*Excerpt from the volume **The Iceberg of Modern Poetry***

Filip Florian

Born 1968. In the period 1990-1992, he was a special reporter for *Cuvîntul* magazine, and between 1992 and 1995 Deutsche Welle correspondent in Bucharest. He has published short prose in *România Literară*, *Lucefărul*, *Euphorion* and *Cuvîntul* magazines. The novel *Little Fingers* was awarded the România Literară and Anonimul Foundation Prize for Debut in 2004. He has also published *The Băiuț Alley Boys* (2006).



I had found the six monographs in a nook of the public library, at the end of a week's search. My good fortune arrived together with an ulcer attack, because it was only the signs of pain on my ashen

“Little Fingers is a novel that clearly falls into the same category of magic realism as Marquez and Llosa, with its care for form and great attention to narrative detail. The arborescent sentences, the baroque imagery, the mad wisdom and obsession with the number five are reminiscent of Bohumil Hrabal, while the non-linear construction and multiple perspectives upon the same event recall Milorad Pavič. However, Filip Florian does not attempt to mask his models, but intentionally brings them into view: this is the riverbed through which the tale must flow.”

(Cătălin Sturza)

face which, after a number of failed attempts, finally awakened some kind of solidarity in the bitter sadness of the lady who administered the institution. With an expression of complicity, Mrs Mia (as she introduced herself to me) had extracted the key chain that dangled between her huge breasts. Belaboured by her obesity, she had unlocked the door to a small room, subject like all the others to the influence of the climate without seasons in such spaces – musty air, a mixture of dust, macerated paper, and cockroach poison. It was a narrow box room intended for brooms, mops and gas canisters, but which had not fulfilled its purpose. What I had before me, behind a curtain of spider webs and mouse droppings, represented an old bequest from the town hall (the living memory of the locality, the fat lady whispered

to me). It comprised orders of the day from the guard regiment; plans of monuments; visitors' books from the sanatorium, casino and hotels; posters for charity balls; bequeathal documents, registration certificates and the last wills of prominent persons; the programmes of coastal automobile races; scout and guard hymnals; council decisions regarding the naming of main streets; and designs for buildings never constructed, such as the theatre, the skating rink, and the hermitage at St Veronica's grotto. Amid the plans, registers and files, it took me an entire morning and half a tube of antacid in order to extract, from heaps of yellowing documents, the manuscripts of which I expected so much. By the end of this operation, my checked shirt had turned a uniform grey, my mouth and nostrils had clogged up with a mealy, brackish dust, and the notions of soap and a hot bath seemed more tempting than ever. In my naivety, I had imagined that I would study the hundreds of pages in peace and quiet, with toast and marjoram tea to hand, tunes by the Mills brothers softly flowing in the background, and a hot water bottle on my tummy, while I stretched out on the soft, restful bed in the room I rented from auntie Pauline. However, as I rummaged for hours on end through the heaps of registers, what little goodwill the librarian may once have had soon vanished, and pickled bitterness

once more laved her features. She fixed me with her beady eyes, set deeply between puffy eyelids, and breathing with difficulty, panting almost asthmatically, she claimed that the rare items from the special fund could be consulted only in the reading room.

I had chosen the best-lit spot, next to a south-facing window and, whenever I managed to get away from the archaeological site, I would pore over those forgotten texts. In usually unpleasant company, made up of Mrs Mia's friends and pensioners filling in lottery coupons, I hoped to discover some old event or at least some clue regarding the bones among the ruins. I was dealing with scripts that were not at all similar, from the meticulous, excessively calligraphic handwriting of the former abbot to the rebellious, barely legible hand of the veterinarian. Topic and orthography also differed, likewise narrative style, but overall there was a nagging common substratum, a kind of concealed understanding on the part of the chroniclers to treat the same events polemically. The stationmaster, for example, ascribed the cancellation of a visit by Franz Joseph at the beginning of the century to a plot by Hungarian railway workers. The teacher saw in the sudden change of imperial schedule a lesson to King Carol I. Dr Gavrilesco explained the incident by the incompatibility of the date of the journey with that of the foxhunting season. And the lawyer Stratulat presupposed that the decision of the Viennese court was down to amorous motives, impossible to include in an official communiqué. Under this heading, in spite of their placement at such distant rungs of the ecclesiastical ladder, Macarius and Ioannikos nonetheless

coincided in their convictions, interpreting the gesture of the last Hapsburg as a Roman-Catholic infamy flung in the face of Orthodoxy. As for the facts that interested me, facts upon which depended continuation of research at the Roman fort, it was clear that if I did not find information in one of the texts then it would be missing in all the others. But between the dark-brown wrappers that protected the jurist's version there was nothing capable of explaining the presence of dozens of skeletons within the perimeter of the fort. I had reached the end of that account one Wednesday. (I remember it precisely, because people were coming back from the stadium after a cup match.) It was getting on towards six o'clock, closing time, and, since I had neglected my rusks and cottage cheese at lunchtime, my stomach was giving me hell. The throbbing of my ulcer and my disappoint-

*"Written and then polished over a number of years, the novel **Little Fingers** is a retro tale, with a flavour of Mitteleuropa, in which nostalgia blends with fine, subtle humour. The writing (the discreet humour of the author's asides, the ironic sentimentality, the attention to detail, the objects of the domestic setting, the non-heroic nature of the characters and action), the narrative intelligence, the well-honed artistic style, the highly complex issues tackled, and, beyond all these, the settled assurance of the text make Filip Florian an author who, from his very first book, has become a certainty in contemporary Romanian literature. It is undoubtedly the most solid debut to have been published in the Romanian market in the last few years."*

(Tudorel Urian)

ment once more mollified the librarian, who felt the need, in the empty room, to sit down beside me and rattle on about the fugue of mankind's books. The sun had been dwarfed and was just about to vanish behind a wooded peak, when I felt her clammy fingers between my legs.

*Excerpt from the novel **Little Fingers***

Ioan Groșan

Born 1954. Graduate of the Faculty of Philology (Romanian-Spanish section) of Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj (1978). Teacher (1978-1989), then editor of *Contrapunct* and *Academia Cașavencu*. Currently, he is a commentator for the *Ziua* newspaper. Books: *The Cinematography Caravan*, short stories; *Cartea românească*, 1985; Writers' Union Prize for Debut; reprinted in 1999 by All and in 2005 by Corint, *Night Train*, short stories; *Cartea românească*, 1989, *The Planet of Mediocrities*, Cassandra; republished in 2001 by Aula, *The Ludic School*, theatre; *Ghepardul*, 1991, *A Hundred Years of Solitude at the Gates of the Orient*, novel; Romanian Cultural Foundation Press, 1992; *Romanian Writers' Union Prize for Prose*; reprinted in 2001 by Editura Aula, *Brothel Journal*, Seara, 1995, *Cotroceni Diary*, *Scrisul românesc*, 1996, *Vaslui County in NATO*, Aula, 2002. His novels and short stories have been translated into French, German, Hungarian, Polish, Russian and Vietnamese.



At dawn, when the embers were choked with ash and a cold air began to slip in from the sea, I arose, careful not to wake you, and headed toward the north of the island. I arrived quite quickly: the sun had barely risen and I could already discern the sea, greener and seemingly more tranquil on this side.

"In Ioan Groșan, the tale advances slowly, with a wealth of details that the lucid and attentive gaze of the author captures and conveys to the reader with acid commentary. In their banality, the characters have a complexity and strangeness that captivates the interest, while the action, however much it might occur in the ordinary world, remains unpredictable."

(Horia Gîrbea)

The books here lay jumbled; the shelves were overturned and overgrown with moss. It was in a way the only area where I had not lingered during our searches, driven out by the damp and by the duckweed that supremely threatened to envelop all. I hastily read for about an hour, always rummaging in the midst of a heap of mouldering epistolary novels, but I found nothing. And perhaps I would have returned to your side, had I not suddenly felt terribly defeated and alone. "Who am I", came into my mind, "who am I?" On a mildew-encrusted cover, a ladybird was clambering hesitantly, trying to take flight. "It cannot be," I told myself. "I must somehow remember, it is not possible to have been here all the time, I have forgotten, I have definitely forgotten... Let's see... I woke up one morning on the beach and I began to read... but before that? Before that can there not have been anything, can nothing have happened to me? Can I not have

experienced childhood, adolescence, grandparents, some friend or other, something... anything? Do I not know anything any more? Well then, but how the devil... who in God's name am I?" I suddenly shouted, but all that could be heard was the air emerging terrified from my mouth. I rushed to the heap of books and tried to scrape it up, hurling tattered, reeking pages, sand and mud to either side. "Come on, think," I said to myself, so as not to weep, "come on, think... Did no one hate you? Did you love no one?

Was nothing yours? A story... something stupid with a girl on a bicycle... or the teacher... what was she like? Tall? Melancholy? What were her eyes like? Remember, there must have been a teacher... or a street, your street, with that beautiful house in which lived Madame Bova... no, of course not, not that Madame... maybe Madame Bovarinsky, the Polish dairywoman who lived on the corner... what corner? The corner with Fialkovsky? You're raving, mon cher... Lord, maybe I was ill once, maybe I suffered and I was fearful of death or maybe I wanted a toy and they didn't give me it, maybe I stole cherries and I trod on Aunt Madeleine's hemp, remember," I kept saying, "remember, maybe you were a prince or a knight, or a traitor, or an accountant, or a peasant, or an interbellic intellectual, maybe you starved or you made a fortune and you frittered it away with anyone at all, remember, and you existed, and you lived, and you left a trace

somewhere, in some village perhaps, on the bank of some river you sat down and there you did weep because you could not run away with the troupe of that circus performer who swallowed swords and fiddles, Vasile they used to call him, Vasile Porojan wasn't it, remember, you must have been deceived, abandoned, you aren't handsome, you lied, you were a scoundrel, remember that you were a scoundrel, that you toyed with her, she was superb, blonde, brunette, chestnut-haired, what was she like, you thought you could dominate her and you ended up loving her perhaps, you suffered like a dog, dog that you are, you don't know who you are any more, who you are, you are nothing any more." I kept digging in that silo, I was kneeling, my arms were dirty as far as the elbows, when suddenly I felt that my palms were touching a hard, dry surface. At first, I did not realise. It seemed like some kind of plank, of floorboard, but then, carefully feeling the spot and cleaning around it, I observed that in fact it was the dried leather of a book cover. Quite intrigued, I continued to remove the dirt from above, trying to grasp a corner of the book, to see how thick it was, to pull it out. But the book proved quite large, it might have been a Grande Encyclopédie, I had already cleared about a square metre and I still could not feel the edges. Not even then did I realise. I ran back to the baroque promontory where you were sitting and reading, I caught you by the hand and, as you gazed at me bewildered, probably thinking that I wanted to play a game, I took you to see the pit I had dug, at the bottom of which lay the warped, ripe-cherry-red cover in question. I fell to scraping around it once more, and I gestured for you to help me, you came up to me and after a period of silent, tenacious labour, in the middle of the expanding pit we

both managed to clear away the sand, the friable wood of the shelves and the damp paper from a surface area of a few square metres, without, however, reaching the edges of the cover. We paused and looked at one another amused: a gigantic book? What book could it be? And it was only then, as you gazed at me smiling and a bead of sweat appeared in the corner of your left eye, that

"A typical case of post-modernism, in which naivety has been replaced by an ironic consciousness of the library from which the text is nourished, Groșan's prose is, an indisputable proof of essential engagement, in all its variety: one of the writer's eyes watches the convulsions of being, its eternal dramas, while the other gazes behind literature, scrutinising its past."
(Radu G. Țeposu)

a suspicion struck me. I rushed out of the pit, ran a few paces away, and began to dig. No more than two palms deep, I once more felt the same rough leather. I froze to the spot. "Impossible," I told myself. Next to a lone thistle, I knelt down once more, although now I knew. I gestured for you to come closer, I waited for you and then, with an easy movement, a single movement, I pulled up the thistle, whose roots, forced to slide horizontally over the surface of the cover, trembled for a moment in the air. In their place in the sand, a wound had opened, revealing the blood-red leather of the book. Your eyes opened wide, you bent down and slowly placed your hand there. Although there was no way you could hear me, nevertheless I whispered: "Now you understand? Yes?" Then, thinking that nowhere would I find those words written, I said: "My dear, we reside on a book. That's it." A lock of hair had fallen over your ear. You were beautiful like that. For a moment, something dirty came into my mind, and I smiled to myself.

*Excerpt from the volume **The Cinematography Caravan***

Florina Ilis

Born 1968. Made her debut in 2000, with a collection of haikus: *Haikus and Calligrammes*. Her novel *The Children's Crusade*, *Cartea Românească*, 2005 was awarded the Romanian Writers' Union Prize for Prose, the România literară and Anonimul Foundation Prize for Book of the Year 2005, the Cuvântul magazine Prize for Prose, and the Radio Romania Cultural Prize for Prose. The Hebrew translation of the novel was published in autumn 2006. In addition to *The Children's Crusade*, she has also published *Five Coloured Clouds on the Eastern Sky* (2006) and *The Descent from the Cross* (2006).



Attention on platform three! Please stand clear of the edge of platform three! The special train is now arriving from Oradea! Attention on platform three! Please stand clear of the edge of platform three! The special holiday train is now arriving from Oradea! The train will be coupling up with carriages from Baia-Mare and Satu-Mare! Attention on platform three! Please stand clear of the edge of platform three!

In the torrid summer air, the Bucharest express, announced over the loudspeaker a few minutes before the special train, was slowing forming on platform two, Pavel followed it with his gaze for a while, and then absently turned towards the bustle produced in the station by the arrival of the two trains, To an immobile observer, the Brownian motion of the travellers would have seemed chaotic and apparently meaningless, as purposeless as the mad whirl of particles during the first minutes of the universe might have seemed to the same eye, when the primordial objectives of matter or, according to religious conceptions, the intentions of divine creation did not yet express

the existence of any rational or, according to the case, divine plan, but, to the extent that that gaze, detaching itself from the standard distances of human eyesight, manages to adapt itself to examination of isolated states within the larger whole, separating from reality portions whose perception can be regulated, like a camera lens, depending on the cognitive horizon of the human senses, the picture of reality acquires, within the immediate order of the system of spatial and temporal co-ordinates in which the careful observer is situated, meaning and consistency, offering itself with elementary simplicity to the senses and awareness, The yellow flag, fluttering from a door of a carriage of the train standing at platform two, signals the entry of the Bucharest express into the station, the train on which Pavel will return to the capital, he had arrived at the same station, alighting on the same platform, two days previously, on Sunday to be precise, and Dan Pantea, his former university colleague, had been waiting for him, Railway stations depress him, he has never liked them! Wherever you direct your

gaze, you see youngsters with mountainous rucksacks on their backs, heading for all the usual holiday destinations, but Pavel will not allow himself to be overwhelmed by the nostalgia with which the juvenile atmosphere of the station entices him, as he strives to concentrate on the professional problems he came to Cluj in order to elucidate, he had been summoned by Dan Pantea, a good friend and editor of the city's largest daily, with whom he has been collaborating for a good few years in uncovering the western branch of the cross-border child trafficking network, Dan had placed at his disposal all he had most recently discovered, fresh confessions from parents who had sold their children over the border, revealing photographs, data from informants and, above all, fresh information that would have allowed the discovery of the identity of the one who, within the network, was known as the Colonel, but unfortunately, believing that they had reached one of the bosses of the trade, the two journalists and friends then realised that the individual in question was nothing but a link, a person at the bottom of a pyramid whose pinnacle vanished somewhere in the mists of huge non-taxable and, implicitly, intangible profits, and since he had come to Cluj anyway, besides the fact that he had been happy to meet up with Dan, he had formed in his mind a fresh subject for his newspaper editorial, and decided to write it up on the train, on his laptop, and, with this thought welling from the depths of his professional conscience, Pavel's fingers lightly stroked the digits encrusted in the yellowish metal of the coded lock that secured the bag resting beside him on the bench, a bag in which he carried all his documents and the laptop

with which he gauged the objective measure of reality,

A woman's hand, with fingernails varnished pink, a translucent pink, strokes in tacit melancholy the huge suitcase, made of a rigid material, samsonite, which sits at her feet, in anticipation of the Bucharest express, It was the first time she had used the suitcase, she had only just bought it a few days ago, with an almost erotic thrill she

“A complex novel, with numerous epic threads, which ultimately intertwine to produce an extraordinary pattern in the carpet of this story woven by an exceptional author.”

(Ștefan Agopian)

touched its elegant handle, thinking dreamily of a more civilised world where such objects are a sign of normality rather than pointless luxury, a world to which she was to fly via british airways on Sunday, a world which contained the fascinating New York of books and magazines and which was included in the America of every promise, a new world! A world in which the present insatiably absorbed every trace of the past, she had seen the still youthful man with his bag on the bench, he was, undoubtedly, also waiting for the Bucharest express, she felt like exchanging a few words with him, just for the sake of it, to disperse the spider's web of sadness that threatened to spin itself within her soul at the thought of her definitive departure from the city where she had spent her entire life, she would have liked to share with someone the circumstances that were taking her to New York to start a new life, she smiles quietly, into the air, at the man who doesn't return her gaze, at the yellow flag waving in the doorway of the train, at the clock on the platform and at the presumably blue sky, only pre-

sumably, because her sunglasses render it in the almost black tint of the lenses that conceal her eyes, in the meantime, the express had come to a stop with a metallic grinding noise at the platform announced, platform number two, and from the

“The performance of Florina Ilis in The Children’s Crusade depends primarily upon her juggling of differing registers. In the purest psychological realism, fantasy, religiosity, and magical order, she establishes her own laws, necessarily conquering both story and the reader. (...) Florina Ilis is not only an excellent storyteller, and her novel – with its extraordinary cinematographic potential – is not only the utopian chronicle of lost innocence regained. She is one of the few young writers for whom writing is, once more, what it should be, a profound and astonishing vocation.”

(Simona Sora)

station loudspeaker could still be heard the impersonal voice of the announcer on duty, Attention on platform three! Please stand clear of the edge of platform three! The special train is now arriving from Oradea! Attention on platform three! Attention on platform three! Please stand clear of the edge of platform three! The special train is now arriving from Oradea!

On the same platform, between lines two and three, Octavian impatiently listens for the umpteenth time to the same precious parental indications, Clean your teeth every night and in the morning when you get up, be careful where you keep your money, don’t spend it all on the first day and, above all, but Octavian didn’t hear what his mother wanted to say above all, as his thoughts were elsewhere, he was thinking of Bogdan, he hadn’t seen Bogdan yet, his friend and desk-mate, “Why isn’t Bogdan here?” he asked his mother, “He ought to have come by now! Look, there’s Diana and her parents!” The whole of the sixth grade had arranged to meet at the exit from the underpass, he couldn’t stand Diana, she was top of the class and she put on airs, as

prim as could be! But how great it would be at summer camp! Octavian cheered up, “Here comes Miss too!” among the passengers climbing the steps out of the underpass he caught sight of her red hair, they had the coolest class tutor in the whole school! “I kiss your hand!” Diana’s father kissed the hand of Octavian’s mother in mid-air, verbally only, “Bogdan is here!” Octavian leapt up joyfully to greet his friend and desk-mate, and just then a boy of his height, one of those boys who go begging on the streets and in the buses, almost

knocked him over, “Watch it, you!” the boy who had bumped into him shouted nastily and, as a bonus, threw in a revolting swearword, “Eat my...!” something of the violence whereby such an important element of the male anatomy was transferred to the culinary domain startled Octavian, “How could I eat something like that!?” the vagabond could not have been older than him, which is to say no more than twelve years old, “What train could this be?” Calman wondered, irritated after bumping into that well-fed snot-nosed brat, dusting himself off, as though contact with the other boy had tainted his skin with an unpleasant sticky sensation, then he took another drag on the cigarette butt he had picked off the ground, he recognised it by the smell, over time he had honed his senses of smell and taste for cigarettes, “it’s a Marlboro!” he had the gift of being able to recognise any cigarette brand from the first puff he drew into his lungs, “it’s a Marlboro!” a well dressed type had discarded it just as he was boarding the train and hadn’t had the chance to smoke the whole cigarette, that’s what Calman liked about railway stations, because he always

had the opportunity to come across good cigarettes that had only just been lit, “It’s a Marlboro!” he had never learned to read, naturally, but he didn’t need to know how to read when there wasn’t a brand of cigarette in the whole world that he hadn’t held between his lips at one time or another and that he wouldn’t recognise a second time if he took a drag and, on the platform between lines two and three, Calman didn’t know which way to head, but what he did know was that he had to get back to Bucharest! “Attention on platform three! The special train to Mangalia is now arriving from Oradea,

*Excerpt from the novel **The Children’s Crusade***

Mircea Ivănescu

Born 1931. He sat his baccalureate at the Spiru Haret Lycée in Bucharest (1949), and graduated from the French section of the Philology Faculty in 1954. He made his debut with poems published in *Steaua*, Cluj, in 1958. His first collection, entitled *verses*, was published in 1968. Other volumes: *poems*, 1970, *poesies*, 1970, *other verses*, 1972, *other poems*, 1973, *poems*, 1973, *other poesies*, 1976, *new poesies*, 1982, *new poems*, 1983, *more new poems*, 1986, *old verses*, *new verses*, 1988, *poems old, new*, 1989, *the limits of power or the bribing of witnesses*, in collaboration with Iustin Panța, 1994, *the same verses*, 2002.

In 1982, he was awarded the Writers' Union Prize for Poetry and the Romanian Academy's Mihai Eminescu Prize for Poetry. In 1993, the Writers' Union awarded him the Prize for Opera Omnia, and in 1995, the Prize for Translation (for his translation of Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*). In 1999, he was awarded the Botoșani Mihai Eminescu National Poetry Prize.

Translations:

William Faulkner: *The Sound and the Fury* (1971); *Absalom! Absalom!* (1974); *Sartoris* (1981); *Go Down Moses* (1991); *Requiem for a Nun* (1995); *Sanctuary* (1996); *The Rievers* (1998); F.Scott Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby* (1967); *Tender is the Night* (1976); James Joyce: *Ulysses* (1984) Frantz Kafka: *Diary and Letters* (1984); *Works*, vols. 1-2, *Short Prose* (1996); vol. 3, *Diary* and vol. 4, *Letters* (1998); vol. 5, *Letters* (1999); Robert Musil: *The Man without Qualities*, I-II (1995); Rainer Maria Rilke: *Tales about the Good God* (1993); Herman Broch: *The Sleepwalkers* (2000).



but memories too are true

and I too once walked around with a memory
in my hands, carefully clutching it, not to drop it.
(once it had slipped away from me –
 and had tumbled headlong
to the ground. I wiped it nicely, on the sleeve
 of my coat,
I was not afraid. my memories are balls –
they never break. but if I drop them,
out of my hands, they can roll a very long
 way off –
and I am too idle to chase after them or even
to stretch to the edge of myself, to extend
 my arm
longer and longer to the ground, to chase after
 the memory.
it's better just to get another one. this one too
 might be false.)
and so once I walked around with a memory
in my arms (and I was thinking, with an evil
smirk, that in a famous book, someone,
 I don't recall who,
used to walk around hell with his own head,

lighting his way). and isn't it just the same thing?

words, words, words...

words should be chosen with care
words leave traces – you remember
them later – just as footprints are left behind
 in the snow,
words should be chosen (but sometimes
 it is so easy
to know how to fit words one next to the other
so as to mean something – something that no
 longer
fits on top of what you truly feel
is what you feel in yourself.
anyone can make words one after another –
anyone can speak – that's not the main thing –
what perhaps should be chosen
are precisely the words that don't say too much.)
and afterwards, each of those words
like traces in the snow...

moppete' and the hypostases

moppete is writing a poem about a moppete
sitting at a table in a bar, earnestly writing
a poem about a moppete (moppete has
a complicated tome on the table
with wondrous stuff about the middle ages)
and ink
stains on his fingers, from all the notes
he's making.
the moppete in the poem he himself is writing
is making his own conjectures about him and
thinks he is independent – but owls –
symbols of reason – are lying in wait on
his own brow,
because they know he is merely a creation
that depends on any petty aberration
of the moppete, when he wants to knit his brows
for no reason, and forget him. moppete
has been toppled.
which of them? him – the other one? the
other one?

his presentation mid-off

he is mid-off, like a tiger, a tiger burning
brightly in the forests of the night – thus he
now traverses
his moppete thoughts, and irritated pools
of expectation open beneath the moon gently
mirroring themselves in them – and the salutation
yet resounds – happy hunting – as in the
jungle books.
thus mid-off he stalks the moppete,

and incessantly
envelops his solitude with one or another rune
of serenity, like those inscribed on the ruined
wooden wall
of the temple buried in the grass.
upon the moppete
thus there now quivers in the moon the
script with his hidden

meaning, he mid-off who, at leisure,
wished to tell a truth there, thus the
moppetian night
burns with small flames. and he mid-off passes –
a kingly feline.

“Refined, cultivated, ironic (without asperity), subtextual, the poetry of Mircea Ivănescu is the work of one of the most original contemporary Romanian poets.”
(Nicolae Manolescu)

the first allusion to dracula

about stupid people with pricked-up ears – I read
in a notebook, an entry in the middle of a
blank page –
and it was exactly my own mood – I was striving
to understand something there, from
that notebook, from other
trifles, there, in the drawer of a desk.
perhaps that's how it begins – stupid people
with pricked-up
ears, who slowly spin, and from whose
curiosity large sparks are struck, which drop
onto the pages, and burn up their meaning.

“Mircea Ivănescu seems to have approached more than anyone else an ideal lyricism of privacy. An erudite poet, nourished on Henry James and Virginia Wolf, his tools are melancholy, irony and a discreet imagination.

His poetry rejects the exterior world so categorically that even this absence itself becomes significant. On the other hand, he inscribes himself within the play between the emotions of anguish and humiliation with the hidden pleasures of self-sufficiency and of unrequited love. (...)

He deserves to be read not only in order to seek out his unique and subjective lyricism, but also for the surprising capacity to generate from self-sufficiency a kind of gentle altruism, combined with the values and with the forms of an alternative world.”

(Virgil Nemoianu)

– on the other hand,
another kind of people, who have let
their ears down,
don't even look at what is written in front
of them,
they don't hang around, like particles
of dust, at the windows, in the moonlight –
and thence
they don't coalesce into a woman made of mist,
enter the room
and bend over the being in bed (as is written
in dracula).

the time of snows

the time of snows – one way of saying
that you see a face again, which you haven't seen
for a long time,
and you move towards it through snow –
inscribing tracks
in a time in which you were not. and it's
a long time.

plunged into matte winter, buried in silence,
this being. and the return to it
is like a viking burial, struggling to push out
that ship, which through snow has a
different power

of refraction in greenish waters – and which then
towers in flame, quickly engulfed, with a rune
of smoke – as now, when you walk toward
her face, with a strange

dead light. hence, you turn back
and the non-truths settle, each a trace
of the gestures that were written – and her
face is old.

“Today, from the perspective of current poetry, Mircea Ivănescu appears to be one of the most theoretically advanced and influential Romanian poets since the war.”
(Mircea Cărtărescu)

the beech wood to music by dante

towards the end of our way of life
we met again in a luminous wood,
for the way to that yearned-for blue springtime
I had lost – and there was a low
light, which was raining sunlight
through the leaves, on the path where
 I slowly passed
my steps crackling amid the branches where
new silence straightaway sprouted, a stroll
through a wood of light gloaming into silver,
walking as though in a dream in which
 you imperceptibly awake,
and no longer knowing where you are heading,
 merely skirting
with the path around overgrown thickets,
advancing, as though you saw your
lifelines in your palm, and knowing
that you can close your palm –
and then you would be
clenched in the fist of eternity – and
and it will no longer be possible to wave
 your hands, yearning for
that bluish springtime.

*Excerpts from the volume **verses poems poesies**
others the same old new*

¹ *moppete* – anagram of *poem* and *poet*. – *Translator’s note.*

Nicolae Manolescu

Born 1939. Critic and literary historian, President of the Romanian Writers' Union. Graduate of the Philology Faculty of Bucharest University (1962). Doctorate in Letters, Bucharest University (on the work of Titu Maiorescu, 1974). University career at the Philology Faculty of Bucharest University, where he was appointed titular professor in 1990. For thirty years, he has written literary reviews for *România literară*, whose director and editorialist he became in 1990.

Corresponding Member of the Romanian Academy (1997). In 2005, he was elected President of the Romanian Writers' Union. Since 2006, he has been Romanian Ambassador to UNESCO.

Published volumes: *Romanian Literature Today, 1944-1964*, 1965, *Unfaithful Readings*, 1966, *The Metamorphoses of Poetry*, 1968, *Romanian Poetry from G. Bacovia to Emil Botta*, 1968, *Maiorescu's Contradiction*, 1970; 2nd edition, Humanitas, 2000, *Themes*, 7 vols., 1971-1988, *Introduction to the Work of Nicolae Odobescu*, 1976, *Sadoveanu, or the Utopia of the Book*, 1976, *Noah's Ark: Essay on the Romanian Novel*, 3 vols., 1980-1983), *The Critical History of Romanian Literature*, vol. 1, 1990, *The Right to Normality: Political Discourse and Reality*, 1991, *Books have Souls*, 1995, *Post-war Romanian Literature: Manolescu's List*, 2002, *Reading and Writing*, 2003.



It was not the French novelists who invented the combination of political intrigue and love, but it was certainly their recipe that was one of the most original. However, we owe them something else, namely a blend of introspection and sentimental publicity, of minute analysis of personal feelings and public scandal. Even before France there had existed epochs of debauchery (for example, the youth of Louis XIV or the Regency), but at that time the heart had not truly discovered those others of its reasons which reasoning ignores (although the phrase belongs to a classic) and the private diary was not yet in fashion. The case of Benjamin Constant is highly characteristic of the conception of life brought by romanticism. A public personage for the entire duration of his existence, author of political pamphlets and apologetic memoirs, of declarations and retractions, a politician famous under the Empire and the Restoration, he is also one of the first Europeans to keep a private diary, after J. J. Rousseau, but before Amiel, reckoned

by some to be the founder of the species. (I cannot say what connexion there is between Switzerland and the habit of recording one's personal life in an orderly fashion, but I think I know what connexion there is between Protestantism and the private diary.) A chapter in the life of Constant such as that of his passion for Juliette Récamier is worth observing closely from this point of view, especially as its most palpable and stirring fruit are the 179 love letters written by the author of *Adolphe* to the beautiful woman between 1814 and 1815 (with a few exceptions), which is to say at a turning point in the history of France and Europe.

I recently read them in Romanian, in the splendid translation of Ileana Littera, in an edition that Angela Ion has striven and succeeded in making more exciting than a good historical novel. A number of conclusions can be drawn from the letters. Firstly, one of especial interest for the correspondence between lovers: the passionate love of Constant is not shared by Madame

Récamier, and so the letters are a kind of desperate monologue (her rather infrequent replies have been lost), whose (indeed exceptional) literary quality had absolutely no effect upon Juliette, who remained insensible to the intellectual and artistic brilliance of the hapless suitor. It is rather unexpected for Constant himself, who was used to breaking the hearts to which he felt attracted, be they those of extraordinary women such as Madame de Staël, be they those of the illustrious men upon whom his political fate depended, for example Napoleon or Louis XVIII. This prince of rhetoricians, who had the daring to defend, under the Restoration, the constitution that he himself had drawn up at the solicitation of the barely deposed Emperor, and not only escaped any consequences but even came off with honours, something which probably only his consummate style made possible, this highly persuasive author of political brochures met with, in the person of Juliette, an unassailable fortress. He was forced to recognise in

two sentences at the end of their epistolary liaison the entire failure and memorably formulated it: "One word from you returns peace to my soul and restores my judgement. Why then must you snatch this word from me forever?" In over one hundred and fifty letters he has fought to snatch a word of understanding from Juliette and has not succeeded.

Much ink has been used up in interpreting the nature and the life of the woman who aroused

countless passions in some of the most celebrated men of the time, without reciprocating any of them (excepting Chateaubriand) and personally I have nothing to add or subtract from that voluminous dossier. I would prefer to believe (if I am to give an opinion) that Juliette was

"Scrupulous notes in the margins of the fundamental themes of French literature, or else theoretical speculation that utilises the respective impulse as the departure point towards its own arguments, these open a symbolic atlas of the strategic positions occupied in the world of culture that has consecrated the idea of belles lettres. The anecdotal meets scientific experiment, etymological and linguistic research function in parallel with literary analysis and sociological considerations, and the panorama offered detaches itself from the constraints of critical mechanism and tends towards the opening-up of cultural studies. (...) A product of the hours of active relaxation spent by a spirit always on the alert to the intelligent and sensible signals emitted by the cultural space, this book tells at the same time the story of a great love. Declared or merely suggested, patient and durable, it envelops the profile of an outstanding writer in the unmistakable aromas of French perfumes. Succumbing to temptation, Nicolae Manolescu allows himself to be born through the unique landscape of a unique territory, which he outlines, deconstructs, and rearranges with the trained eye and sure hand of a draughtsman of the word. An indirect and kaleidoscopic eulogy to the homeland of belles lettres, the French themes are also readings in culture and civilisation – magical France, ineffable France, intensely sought-after and superfluous France, like the Woman in a Dream.

(Cristina Chevereşan)

absolutely normal as a woman (the contrary has been sustained) and of a demureness that nevertheless forbade her the great frivolities of the majority of her contemporaries. As far as Constant is concerned, she did not love him and that was all. There is nothing strange in that. Other women had loved him, for example Charlotte, whom he even married and from whom he lived separately until much later. His reputation in such matters was not very good. He

was eternally in love, and in his soul one passion quickly replaced another, equalling it in intensity and surrendering to the next, just as stormy. Some of these passions were even concomitant. He loved to play cards, at which he lost more than a fortune. He did not always comport himself irreproachably with his lovers. When Madame de Staël demanded of him the return of a debt, he threatened her with publication of her love letters from the terrible beginning of their agitated liaison. He would fight duels at the drop of a hat, for any reason whatever, political or sentimental. As a politician, he was a kind of jack-in-the-box: he went from the Bourbons to Napoleon and then from the royalists to the liberals with a greater ease than anyone else in his age, men of whom it would be difficult to say that they were terribly loyal, and he always fell on his feet. (I do not necessarily insist on being malicious about him, although I find his character unsympathetic, but I cannot fail to recall that, at the end of his life, multiple fractures brought him into the situation of walking on crutches or being carried in a litter, which might mean that he was surer on his feet figuratively rather than literally). Moreover, Juliette was also put on her guard by the way in which his passion made its first appearance. They had known each other and had been corresponding for seven years when, one evening, she summoned him in order to beg him to intervene on behalf of Murat. It was 31 August 1814. It is not known what passed between them. Constant's passion for Juliette erupted absolutely unexpectedly. He would subsequently relate that there existed in his soul a neuralgic spot, which,

once touched, placed everything in motion. This is a metaphor. It seems that Juliette provoked the cataclysm by making advances to him. It is likely that, wishing to save the Neapolitan throne for her friend Murat, threatened by Napoleon's first abdication, she exaggerated her attentions to Constant. Two or three times, the latter repeats in his letters observations of the type "you wanted me" or "you insisted at all costs on making me lose my head", something which casts a pale light (but still a light!) on the circumstances in which Constant fell into the net of the enigmatic woman. Juliette quickly retreats, however. She even helps Madame de Staël, who paints her former lover in colours intended to cause a woman thoroughly in love with him to give him up. Against the backdrop of the political crisis in France, of the One hundred Days and of the final defeat of the Emperor at Waterloo, there take place the spiritual debates of the hapless Constant, rejected by Juliette and made prey to a sentiment that has as much to do with love as it does with illness.

In this respect, the letters do not tell all. The *Intimate Diaries* from the same period must be perused. What is absolutely astonishing is, as we stated at the beginning, the way in which, for the romantics in general and Benjamin Constant in particular, there is a blend of erotic adventure, passion and madness with self-observing lucidity and calculation. Of these men one might simultaneously believe that they do not know themselves at all and that they know themselves perfectly, that they are possessed by the demons of the senses and that they describe their senses

as no one else had ever managed to before. It has been claimed that, in contrast to the classic, which is “healthy”, the romantic is “sick”. Reading Constant, it is not so much his “sickness” that makes me wonder (although I must admit that his letters and diary contain all the proofs needed for us to diagnose him), but rather the sufferer’s capacity to speak about his sickness. It is certain that the classics often felt the same way too, but their epoch has left us no document from which it might result that they were capable of drawing up their own medical record. The romantics are not, it might be said, only the first sick men of Europe, but also the first psychologists of sickness, the first psychoanalysts, in the wider sense, which is to say doctors of the human passions.

*Excerpt from the volume **French Themes***

Ion Mureșan

Born 1955. Graduate of the Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj. He made his debut in 1981, with the collection *The Book of Winter*, published by Cartea Românească. Two years later, his collection *The Unintelligible Poem* was published. He was included in *Anthology of Young Poets* (1982), *Anthology of Romanian Poetry from its Origins to the Present* (1998), and in *Anthology of '80s-Generation Poetry* (2002). In 2002, his collection *Le mouvement sans cœur de l'image* was published by in France by Éditions Belin. He is one of the poets included in the anthology *12 Écrivains roumains*, published by Éditions L'Inventaire on the occasion of Belles Étrangères programme organised by the Centre National du Livre in 2005.



Poem

Alas, the poor, poor alcoholics,
to whom no one has a good word to say!
But especially, especially in the morning, when
they go reeling along the walls
and sometimes they fall to their knees and they're
like letters
traced by a clumsy schoolboy.

Only God, in His great goodness, puts a pub in
their path,
because for Him it's easy, as easy as for a child
to shove a box of matches with its finger. And
just as they reach the end of the street, round the
corner,
where there was nothing before, like a rabbit
a pub jumps out in front of them and stops them
dead.
Then a guileless gleam glints in their eye
and they perspire dreadfully for so much joy.

And by afternoon the town is like Tyrian purple.
By afternoon autumn comes three times, spring
comes three times,
the birds migrate three times to and from warm
climes.
And they talk and talk, about life. About life,

just so, in general, and even the young alcoholics
express themselves with warm responsibility
and if they stammer and if they stumble
it's not because they are expressing terribly
profound ideas,
but because inspired by youth
they manage to say genuinely touching things.

But God, in His great Goodness, does not
stop there.
Straightaway He makes a hole in the wall of
Heaven with His finger
and invites the alcoholics to take a look.
(Oh, where has so much happiness even befallen
a hapless man!)
And even if because of the shakes they don't
manage to see more than a patch of grass,
it's still something beyond measure.
Until one of them gets up and ruins everything.
And he says:
"Soon, soon evening will come,
then we shall rest and we shall find much
reconciliation!"
Then one after the other they get up from
the tables,
wipe their wet lips with a handkerchief,
and are very, very ashamed.

Poem

What a won-der-ful place for crying and smoking
you have here!

I said to the barman, for oftentimes, at the table
by the window,
late at night, I have sighed,
thinking that you are far, far away, my love,
and that I shall never see you again.

And he, “a face oiled like an iron padlock”,
puffed and breathed into a glass to steam it up:
“Sir, we would be honoured for you to cry here
with us,
we would be honoured for you to smoke! And so
that we can cry together,
in your honour I’m giving myself two slaps!
In your honour I’m giving myself yet another!
Anyhow, in Romanian culture there is a lot of
crying,
for, by your leave, we are a tearful nation!”
And he gently lowered his old cherubic head
among the glasses –
a moon among snowy hills.

And the pub was packed: three or four blokes to
a table,
hunched like badgers over their ashtrays.
(Faces contorted with pain
and silent as in a dream.)

Then it was midnight, then midnight passed
and the hunches of their backs began to tremble,
to rise and fall,
as though each had a turkey under his coat
with its claws dug into his ribs. And the barman
walked among the tables singing:

“But how can I forget you, how can I forget you,
how can I forget you
when your kiss is so sweet!”

Then the turkeys stuck out their necks from
under collars, like snakes,
red tasselled banners by every ear, hideous
banners, beaked banners,
and the laments went from table to table like
beggars:

“Glug-glug-glug, Maria, why did you leave me?

“Glug-glug-glug, Maria, why did you deceive me?

“Glug-glug-glug, Maria, it was for you I rotted
in gaol!

“Glug-glug-glug, Maria, what am I to do with
five children?”

And each table
was like a house
with three or four smoking chimneys,
and we were drinking with our elbows on
the roof.

And beneath the ceiling, creaking,
the fan was winding our lungs into a grey clew.

Tears and ash in the ashtrays, black water.

And as thus I sat with my face to the wall
I began to laugh.

And I pointed my finger upwards and said:
“They’ve stopped work! They’ve stopped all
the work!”

And going out into the street I looked at the sky:
and the sky was like a building site hurriedly
abandoned at the onset of winter.

Glass

It is an enchanted night.
The moon quivers in my glass, yellow and rotund.
I stick my finger in my glass.
Then I stick my arm up to the elbow in my glass.
Then I stick my arm up to the shoulder
in my glass.
The vodka is as cold as ice.
At the bottom of the glass there is a large
stone slab.
There are also dead leaves and black roots.
There is also a ruptured rubber boot.
At the bottom of the glass there is also a
rusty stove.
I stick my head in the glass.
The vodka is as cold as ice.
I open my eyes in the glass.
In the glass I can see even without my spectacles.
I say: "All is dream and harmony."
The stone slab is white with red veins.
Now I see the monster.
Now I hear it purring softly, like a cat.
I see its blue legs.
I see its terrible tail poking from beneath
the stone slab.
By the stone slab flows a limpid spring.
It purls crystalline over the pebbles.
Around it the grass is eternally green.
In the grass grow delicate flowers.
In the spring swim children as small as dolls.
They swim with amazingly swift movements.
They swim clothed in gaily-coloured dresses
and shirts and short trousers.
They are the little angels of the glass.
The little angels of the glass do not bite and
do no harm to anybody.

I feel like puking for pity, I feel like puking
for sadness.
I feel like puking when I think how I could
swallow a little angel of the glass.
I feel like weeping at the thought that he would,
all of a sudden, be very alone.
Let me weep at the thought that he would weep
all night sobbing inside me.
Let me weep at the thought that he might sing
nursery-school songs in me.
He might sing, with a reedy voice, "Spring's
a-coming, spring's a-coming!"
With nails dug into the back of the monster
I descend to the bottom of the glass.
There is a stone slab with red veins down there.
Now I'm stretching out on the stone slab
with red veins.
Far off, in the glass, a dog is barking.
It is autumn.
It is the day of the eclipse.
The rotund yellow moon quivers in the glass.
Through a shard of candle-smoked glass,
I see a black fly cross a light bulb.
With nails dug into the back of the monster
I drag its head from beneath the slab.
Its terrible back snakes like a train through
the mountains.
With my nails I drag the monster's locomotive
from beneath the slab.
The little angels of the glass hold hands and
daintily dance in a circle.
The little angels of the glass are singing and
dancing around us.
"All is dream and harmony".
The monster has one mother's eye and
one father's eye.

In the glass I can see well even without my spectacles.

I read in the mother's eye:

"Child, when are you going to learn some sense?"

I read in the father's eye:

"Child, when are you going to learn some sense?"

The glass tightens like an iron band around my forehead.

It hurts.

My head bangs against the walls:

one, two, one, two.

The little angel of the glass weeps sobbing from the pain.

The little angel of the glass sings in me with a reedy voice: "Spring's a-coming, spring's a-coming!"

"All is dream and harmony".

"Ion Mureşan is one of the most remarkable poets in Romania today, both through the exigency that guides his work and through the originality of his language. While it is possible to consider him as the inheritor of the Romanian "oneiric group", which marked the 1960s by its research into an inner rule within the verbal flux of the image, Ion Mureşan stands out through the at once enigmatic and transparent character of his poems. His vision of the world is cruel, almost ghostly, haunted by universal or specifically Transylvanian legends, while at the same time an aspiration to purity always traverses it, as though, in a dream, a bolt of lightning came unexpectedly to dissipate the disquieting fog."

*(from the introduction to **Le mouvement sans cœur de l'image** published by Éditions Belin, France, 2001)*

Lullaby

My hands froze in my sleep,
because in sleep it's very cold.
They woke me up and cut them off.

Sleep, mammy's chicky, sleep!

My feet froze in my sleep,
Because in sleep it's very cold.
They woke me up and cut them off.

Sleep, mammy's chicky, sleep!

My heart froze in my sleep,
because in sleep it's very cold.
They woke me up and cut it out.

Sleep, mammy's chicky, sleep!

Now I am dead.
I shall never sleep again.

Sleep, mammy's chicky, sleep!

*Excerpts from the volume **The Book of Winter***

Constantin Noica

Born 1909 - died 1987. Studied at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, Bucharest (1928-1931), graduating with a thesis on *The Problem of the Thing-in-itself in Kant*. After post-graduate studies in France (1938-1939), he returned to Bucharest, where he was awarded a Doctorate in Philosophy for his thesis *Sketch for the History of How anything New is Possible*, published in 1940. Philosophy consultant at the Romanian-German Institute in Berlin (1941-1944). Concomitantly, together with C. Floru and M. Vulcănescu, he published four of Nae Ionescu's university courses and the Sources of Philosophy annual (1942-1943). He was held under house arrest in Cîmpulung-Muscel (1949-1958) and then imprisoned, as a political detainee (1958-1964). He worked as a researcher for the Logic Centre of the Romanian Academy (1965-1975). He spent his final twelve years in Păltiniș, and is buried in the nearby hermitage.

Original works, listed in the order of their first edition:

Mathesis, or Simple Joys, 1934; *Open Concepts in the History of Philosophy in Descartes, Leibniz and Kant*, 1936; *De caelo. Essay concerning Knowledge and the Individual*, 1937; *Sketch for the History of How anything New is Possible*, 1940; *Two Introductions and a Transition toward Idealism* (with a translation of the first of Kant's introductions to the Critique of Judgement), 1943; *Philosophical Diary*, 1944; *Pages on the Romanian Soul*, 1944; *G. W. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit narrated by Constantin Noica*, 1962; *Twenty-seven Stages of the Real*, 1969; *Plato: Lysis* (with an essay on the Greek understanding of the love of people and things), 1969; *Romanian Philosophical Utterance*, 1970; *Creation and Beauty in Romanian Utterance*, 1973; *Eminescu, or Thoughts on the Complete Man of Romanian Culture*, 1975; *The Separation from Goethe*, 1976; *The Romanian Sentiment of Being*, 1978; *The Romanian Spirit at the Balance of the Age. Six Maladies of the Contemporary Spirit*, 1978; *Tales about Man* (after a book by Hegel: Phenomenology of the Spirit), 1980; *The Becoming within Being, vol. 1: Essay on Traditional Philosophy; vol. 2: Treatise of Ontology*, 1981; *Three Introductions to the Becoming within Being*, 1984; *Letters on the Logic of Hermes*, 1986; *De dignitate Europae* (in German) (1988); *Pray for Brother Alexander*, 1990; *Diary of Ideas*, 1990.



In contrast to the common maladies, which are indefinite in number, since they are caused by divers agents and various external factors, the maladies of a higher nature, those of the spirit, can only be six, as they reflect the six possible situations of the precariousness of Being.

The first situation is that of an individual reality and its determinations not possessing anything of a general order. Things manifest themselves in all kinds of ways but in reality they are not. *Catholitis*, in humans.¹

The second is that of determinations, caught up in something general, not possessing any individual reality. Manifestations can organise themselves in all kinds of ways but in reality they are not. *Todetitis*.²

The third ontological situation is that of something general, which has acquired an

individual embodiment, not having any appropriate determinations. Things “happened” in principle, but now in reality they no longer are. *Horetitis*.³

The fourth is the opposite of the previous, that of not possessing (or in humans of rejecting) certain determinations for something individual which has been elevated to the General. There can be an entry into order, but things, lacking determinate manifestations, in reality are not. *Ahoretia*.

The fifth is that of not possessing, or, in humans, of ignoring, an individual reality for a General that has specified itself through varied determinations. Manifestations possess a definite responsibility, but they possess it without being concentrated within a reality, therefore in reality they are not. *Atodetia*.

The sixth precariousness of Being is that of

concentrating (deliberately, in humans) determinations within an individual reality, determinations which in themselves lack the certainty of the General. Things fixate themselves, but in something which, lacking the basis of the General, in reality is not. *Acatolia*.

Thanks probably to these six maladies it has been said that man is a “sick being” in the universe, not thanks to the ordinary maladies which, including neurosis, can also affect other living things. They have never been given the above names, nor perhaps have they always been elucidated with reference to man’s deficiencies in terms of Being, and in any case, as a whole, they are what can justify the claim that man is a sick being in the universe, since they are constitutive of him.

But if the usual sense of sickness is preserved, then how inappropriate this claim about man will sound! Because it is not just man who is sick in his being, but everything else proves to be so, even resting (in contrast to man) under the negative of ontological sickness.

Something strange happened at the heart of culture: it seemed destined to bring to light the perfection of things (their laws and the order to which they belong, and in man the laws and the order to which he ought to

belong); but by revealing their laws, culture brought precisely their imperfection to light. The gods proved to be sick. After they had

It is he who speaks from the time of his youth about ‘the excuse of not being a genius’. It is he who glorifies Eminescu with an intensity equal to that with which he detests Caragiale. It is he who speaks about his prison years in terms that recall a key exchange in Calumny (‘What is it like in prison, John?’ ‘God be thanked, it is good.’). And it is he who leaves for young people ‘barely out of the egg’ a saying to whose truth few have yet measured: ‘When you arrive in the wide world you will see that your inner limits are more painful than your outer limits’. All these fragmentary episodes, and many others (I have deliberately left to one side all that is my own personal memory) contain something enigmatic. I have the feeling that they say something important and enigmatic about Noica’s ethos, that among all these episodes and in the ethos in question there is a characteristic of union or mysterious interweaving, which continues to excite assiduous research.”
(Sorin Vieru)

made a world worse than one would have expected of them, some of them withdrew, becoming “otiose gods”. They were natures that were too general, without image or essence. Other gods on the contrary, interfered too much in human affairs, like the Greek gods, becoming natures that were too individual, almost unilateral and mutilated by their specialisation.

Others still, remaining general natures, nevertheless had an image and essence, but no longer had any clear regimen of life and did not know how to provide themselves with determinations, or else gave themselves an

“The image of Constantin Noica – firstly the well-off and elegant young man, eager to earn an independent living by his own labour, by intellectual hack-work such as translating detective novels; the man of society desirous of isolation; the man who takes on wagers that are impossible to win, as he himself was later to realise, including the perilous political wager. Noica remains the man of provocatively and paradoxically formulated ideas, from ‘the school I dream of, a school where nothing is learnt’ to the ‘closure that opens’. It is he who recalls with a feeling of guilt, and despairs at the thought of Mihai Rădulescu’s tragedy. He who evokes many years later a saying of Gioran: ‘glory between four walls surpasses all the glory of empire’. And he who fashions the motto ‘vita sine cultura quasi imago mortis est’. It is he who, examining himself, diagnoses himself as suffering from the spiritual malady of ahoretia (indeterminateness), and elsewhere lucidly notes: ‘I preferred but did not love myself’.
(Sorin Vieru)

excessive number of determinations, like the Indian gods.

The gods are sick.

The heavens too are sick. The ancients believed in the incorruptibility of the stars and the firmament (as they also believed in divine incorruptibility).

But Galileo’s telescope came along to show the imperfections of the moon, which his contemporary Cremonini did not wish to see; and today it seems that galactic maladies can be identified easily enough.

There is a hidden worm in the cosmos.

Light too is sick. Goethe still believed in its

perfection, protesting against Newton, who saw it as a mixture of seven colours and thus impure.

But not only is it impure; it is also measurable with its feeble cosmic velocity of just 300,000 kilometres per second. Impure in itself and feeble, light is also internally fractured, as it is both a particle and a wave. How many maladies in a simple ray of light! But Time too, that homogenous and uniform absolute time, with its implacable measure, has proved to be less majestic, as it is simply a local time, or one identical with space,

while space itself has become, in the cosmic order of the coexistence of things, a mere spatial field, a kind of regional reality, as though in a universe in which there were countless parts but no whole.

Might we not also say that Life, with its approximation and uncertainties, is sick, as it has seemed to today’s biologists? For them, life appears to be the result of chance transformed into necessity: on earth at least, it is a kind of incidental, continually turgescient tumefaction of matter, which in man is growing and swelling perhaps to the point where the abscess will burst. In any case, the Logos

is sick, manifesting itself brokenly in the natural languages. Even if you do not admit that this is as a result of divine punishment for man's assault with the Tower of Babel, it is nevertheless a form of anomaly for the Logos to be divided, when it should bear within itself, as its name suggests, the unity of reason.

*Excerpt from the volume **The Romanian Spirit at the Balance of the Age. Six Maladies of the Contemporary Spirit***

¹ *Catholitis, acatholia* – from the Greek *katholou* “on the whole, in general”; employed by Aristotle as a term for the universal. – *Translator's note.*

² *Todetitis, atodetia* – from the Greek *tode ti* “this somewhat”, “hoc aliquid”, “dies etwas”; for Aristotle, the concrete particular, in opposition to the universal or general (*katholou*). – *Translator's note.*

³ *Horetitis, ahoretia* – from the Greek *horos* “boundary”; in Aristotle, the term is used in the sense of “definition, species”. – *Translator's note.*

Răzvan Petrescu

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Theatre: *The Farce*, 1994; UNITER Prize for Best Play of the Year, *Spring at the Buffet*, 1995; Grand Prize at the 1st Edition of the Camil Petrescu National Dramaturgic Competition; Romanian Writers' Union Prize for Theatre.



The judge blinked his eyes at the broken glass, then cautiously placed the hammer on a corner of the desk.

"I still think a bell would have been better," he sighed.

"Never mind, don't get worked up about it. I just wanted to make you understand that our life had come to be a hell. I was the number one suspect, but the truth is that everybody suspected everybody else. The only one who seemed happy about the way things were turning out was my brother. He had found a new pastime. Don't get me wrong, he didn't give so much as the dirt under his fingernails for the truth..."

"In fact, how do you explain this phenomenon? I refer to the disappearance of the animals."

Seeing that I was silent, the judge sprawled in his chair, picking between his teeth with a matchstick. "I don't know. All I know is that I wasn't to blame..."

"Obviously. That's the only thing that interests you, you poor idiot."

"Mr President, please control your language..."

"Very well. Clerk, strike out the word idiot. Replace it with something else, you think of something..."

The clerk of court looked behind him, quickly leafing through the voluminous sheaf of pages filled with his miniscule handwriting, found the word, struck it out, and then went on with his business.

"I couldn't stand it any more. And so one fine day I took my brother to one side, so that we could clear things up. Let's go into the field, I told him, we'll go into the garden and stay there as long as you like, for a day, a month, a thousand years if need be, until you convince yourself that I have no share whatsoever in what's happening. He burst out laughing, he tried to get out of it for a while, but in the end he agreed. We left right then. It was a splendid day. We walked quickly, impatient to arrive and have done with the whole affair once and for all. My brother came behind me, almost running. He was wiping the sweat from his brow and hobbling comically with that shorter leg of his. We arrived at around lunchtime. It had become very hot. We saw that everything was in its place, just as we had left it the day before, his two lambs and my loaves of bread. We sat down and unwrapped the bundle of food. The bees were buzzing in the air, it was such a clear day, so..."

"The bees were buzzing!"

"...aromatic that you almost couldn't smell the

rubbish piled up in the garden. We lay down to rest under a rotting apple tree, but it sheltered us well enough from the sun. We both fell asleep quite quickly. I can't remember what I dreamed. In any case, I woke up towards evening, shaken by my brother. 'Well, now what you got to say?' he yelled. I looked around groggily, and, indeed, the lambs had vanished. On the other hand, the loaves of bread were untouched. A few ants were clambering over their golden crust. I gazed at the sky. Heavy, threatening clouds had gathered above us and the heat had become unbearable. I felt like my brain was a sponge. 'You took advantage while I was asleep and now you're acting the innocent. Come on, out with it, where have you hidden them, you bastard?' Shortly after that question it started to rain, with large warm drops. I got up and set out homewards without a word. We could never agree. Not even now can we agree.' The clerk placed his nib in the inkwell, smacked his lips delightedly and held out the papers to the president, for signature. I stood on tiptoes trying to make something out from the written statement, and I observed that a large part of my account had been crossed out with red pencil. In effect, only some seven lines remained. After the president signed, the clerk withdrew towards the exit, walking backwards. Before he disappeared through the door, he blew me a kiss. I cursed him through my teeth. 'Why are you cursing him? There's no point, he's only a humble functionary,' said the judge. I remained silent. A great weariness had overwhelmed me. I asked permission to be seated. 'Please, be seated... Look here, you have kept me here an entire day just to tell me, wait a moment,

exactly ninety words," murmured the president, leafing through the file.

Dusk had fallen. Through the windows of the chancellery something was crawling, some kind of great nocturnal snail, leaving behind it a huge trail

"An overflowing and precise talent, of the purest Romanian extraction. The youngest master in the tradition of our writers endowed with an ear for the speech (whether public or inner) of our fellow countrymen and with a delirious imagination for capturing the everyday. Surgery on the collective imagination. If you read his work, you will laugh out loud, but also at yourself, and, consequently, at the irrepressible laughter. The first book of genuine artistic realism whose subjects are situated after December 1989."
(Bogdan Ghiu)

of darkness. The president pulled the small lamp with the yellow shade towards the file on the desk. I flew into a rage.

"But what has that man being writing for all these hours? Because he was writing all the time..."

"What a child you are! Of course he was writing, but he crossed out everything that wasn't important with a red pencil. My dear chap, why don't you tell the truth, concisely and without so many digressions? You have stuffed my head with so many details that I don't know who I am any more..."

"You are Mr President."

"There, you see that even you don't know? I'm the prosecutor!"

However, a few seconds later, he asked uneasily:

"Or am I the judge? ..."

We looked at each other for a long time. Without making each other out very well.

"In the end, it doesn't matter very much who you are," I said. "What matters is for you to be objective." "My dear fellow, it is plain that you have not the slightest notion of the law. In the first place, in order to be objective, one must be impartial. It's elementary. Thus, impartial to good or to evil.

Recompense or punishment, guilty, not guilty...”

“Don’t distinctions have any importance for you?”

“I’m of the old school. I believe that nothing exists between the beginning and the end. So, no, they don’t.”

“What then?”

“Then it means you are guilty. Otherwise, it is clear, you’re even marked. You have a mark, there, on your brow...”

“Well, but it isn’t true! I don’t have the slightest guilt. I have a wife, a child... Look at this photograph of the three of us! That’s my wife!”

“Listen, do you have any witnesses? You don’t. Do you have a lawyer? You don’t. Why don’t you have a lawyer?”

“Because no one wanted to...”

“You see? What’s the point of us discussing any further... Better for you to be dignified.”

I felt my stomach tightening. I hiccupped. If I had had to vomit I don’t know what I would have done. I would have died of shame.

“Please, Mr Judge, Mr President, Mr Prosecutor... I swear on the Bible that I am not guilty.”

“There’s no need. We don’t have any Bibles here,” said the judge gloomily.

“Then I swear on my father’s life. On my child’s life, on the clerk’s life, on whosever life you like! I am an honest man, a model citizen, I... It’s a pity you don’t want to look at this picture. You should hear me out to the end!”

“You know, this is a bit boring. Alright, out with it, if you really insist. But I warn you that it’s pointless. And hurry up. We don’t have any more time.” I looked instinctively around me. Maybe I still had time to make a run for it.

“Try it! I’m not your keeper,” spoke the judge. His left cheek, the one illumined by the lamp,

seemed creased, as though he were laughing silently. It had grown very cold in the room. I walked up to the blackboard, I wiped off the judge’s sheep with a sponge, and I began to draw, so as to illustrate my testimony as well as possible.

“The rain had soaked us to the skin. We were heading back home, advancing with difficulty through the mud. The storm had broken, whirling a kind of soot through the air. It was lightning continuously. (I draw a zigzag.) Water streaming down his face, his clothes flapping, my brother was yelling like a madman. He looked as though he had completely lost his mind. (I rapidly draw the outline of a winged man.) But I was too depressed to pay any more attention to him. I kept thinking about what had happened. After a while, I espied the plough, which I had left in the field the day before. I went up to it. ‘Where are you going?’ my brother screamed, with his eyes popping out. (I draw a cross.) I shoved him violently and he fell into the mud. ‘Only you are to blame,’ he cried, his whole body shaking... He stopped straight away, interrupted by a fit of coughing. ‘We are condemned forever because of you! You stole... father’s curse! You stole, you stole, you stole,’ he kept shouting, beating the mire with his fists. I bent over the plough. Strange, it had rusted. Next to it lay the tools with which I had tried to repair it. There I was bareheaded in the rain, overwhelmed, kneeling in a puddle. I don’t know how long I remained like that.”

I remained with the chalk in midair, because it was precisely at that moment that the cleaning woman made her appearance. Although very old, thin and dressed in a dirty overall, it seemed to me that she bore an extraordinary resemblance to the girl whose photograph was pasted on the back of the

globe. She set about sweeping the papers scattered over the floor, she cleared away the ones on my lectern, wiped with her rag the man-sized crucifix I had not noticed until then, and then went out with short steps, leaving a cloud of dust behind her. I waited for a little, sneezed, and then resumed my testimony.

“At a given moment, I heard steps, a light shuffling behind me. And, unexpectedly, behind me, there burst out that wild, strident laugh of my brother. I turned around at the last moment and hit him with the hammer right in the forehead. (I draw an outline stretched out on the ground and point to it with my finger.) He collapsed like a sack, without a groan. In his right hand he was clutching a toy star, made of tin.”

I turned my gaze to the window, rediscovering in the darkness outside the scene that had taken place so long ago. Then I put the chalk back in its place and returned to the bench. I closed my eyes. “The accused shall rise!”

I rose with difficulty, my hands and feet numb with cold.

“You have been found guilty of premeditated murder. The sentence shall be executed...”

The rest of the words were lost in an unintelligible murmur. The president had withdrawn from the cone of light spread by the lamp on the desk and I could no longer see him at all.

“Hic et nunc,” a barely perceptible voice could be heard.

“Mr president, where are you?”

I groped with my arms stretched in front of me, heading towards the faint light of the lamp. At a given moment it seemed to me that I heard a snigger, somewhere on my right. I stumbled and, try-

ing to catch hold of the corner of the desk, my fingers involuntarily grasped the hammer of the president. Suddenly, his face loomed right in front of me.

“Now do you recognise me?” he asked.

“It can’t be!” I cried, stepping backwards. The judge had swiftly withdrawn into the darkness. A few moments later, I sensed a movement behind me. It was as though someone was getting ready to jump on my back. I turned around and struck out blindly with the hammer, a few times. A muffled noise was heard, then another, louder noise, like that of a chair falling over. And then nothing. The lamp too had fallen, shattering on the floor

“The gravity of the content is beyond doubt. However, what is impressive is that such serious matters, made to weigh down and crush, can be seen fitting into an athletic, lively literature, which is not lacking in humour or fantasy. In the writing of this talented prose-writer, the ‘bitter’ ideal is happily counterbalanced by the ‘sweet post-modernist game’. (...) Everywhere there is a play of alternating perspectives, of voices, of inventive hidden narrators. (...) In Răzvan Petrescu’s book, the neurotic state is combined with irony, piquant language and an almost poetic sense of imagery. In effect, the dark zone is combined with a zone of fantastically iridescent lights.”
(Claudiu Constantinescu)

that seemed to me covered in raindrops. I bent over Abel. He lay stretched out on his back, his brow bloodied. Devil take it, I thought, there is no end to it forever and ever!

*Excerpt from the volume **Small Changes in Attitude***

Andrei Pleșu

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1. The Nature Goddess.

A Number of European Allegories

Before becoming visually interesting, nature had, since early Antiquity, been extremely stimulating at an allegorical level. Before becoming “landscape”, it was, therefore, a personage, and always a feminine personage.

The concept of “nature” (*physis*)¹ - as employed since the Presocratics - rested, it is true, at the beginning, above any personification. In Par-

Significantly, the offspring attributed to her are Thanatos (Death), Hypnos (Sleep), Lêthê (Forgetting) and Gêras (Old Age), thus entities of the same order as those reckoned by Hesiod to be “the daughters of the goddess Night” (Theogeny, 211-28).⁴

The affinities between the goddess Nature and the world’s nocturnal zone will have a long echo in the entire history of European culture, from the Presocratics to Novalis. Symbolically, night, like emptiness, designates the lack of any attributes, chaos, the unqualified substance of beginnings. Nature is, in this context, defined as “*materia prima*”, as latency, as unseen foundation, compared to which “landscape” is merely an accidental “phenomenon”.

The presence of Aphrodite - Nature’s other symbolic “kinswoman” - will also be consolidated in the ambience of ancient culture, until it becomes, with Epicurus and, especially, the Latin Epicurean Lucretius, explicit. Lucretius repeats almost to the letter the Parmenidean image: to the nature that steers all (*panta kubernai*) corresponds

“Andrei Pleșu does not even in this situation abandon his method – that of saying the most serious things in jest, winking, introducing the salutary ludic.”
(Mihai Zamfir)

menides there also appears, however, besides the concept itself – otherwise reabsorbed in the more comprehensive “being” – an image: that of a goddess “who steers all” (*panta kubernai*) and who as the “principle of mixture” (*mixios archei*) presides over the domain of “coupling and births” (Diels-Kranz, fr. 12, 3-6). In close relation to Eros (fr. 13),² Parmenides’ goddess is recognised by Plutarch as being none other than Aphrodite.³

Natura gubernans. And the identification with Venus is proclaimed in the celebrated lines: *Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divomque voluptas alma Venus...* etc.

The equation of Venus and Nature is also sumptuously developed in texts which, although they have come down to us in late transcriptions, refer to an older tradition, one spiritually opposed to Epicurean thought: a tradition that is sooner bound to the Orphic universe. In a rich suite of magical invocations, collected by K. Preisendanz,⁵ we meet not only the theme “mother nature” (*Physis pammêtôr*) but also her equivalence with Aphrodite. The hymns to which we refer were intoned during the preparation of a love “elixir”, whose magical potency depended on the goodwill of the “star Aphrodite”.⁶

In terms of the above-mentioned analogy between nature and night, what is spectacular is the tendency of some Orphic texts to superimpose the figure of Aphrodite upon that of the Moon:

*All-nascent and love-conceiving Aphrodite,
Torch-bearer, luminous, shining Selena...*
(Preisendanz, IV, 2556)

In a long “prayer to Selena”, cited by Kerényi, the identification between Physis, Aphrodite and Selena becomes the dominant theme.⁷ The goddess, the beginning and end of all that exists, the all-determining force (*Damnô*) that determines even Determination itself (*Damnodameia*), holds a golden sceptre and, like a genuine “jewel of the night” (*nyktos agalma*), she is “beautiful by birth” (*kalligeneia*). With this, we perhaps find ourselves faced with one of the first European documents

to attest the “beauty” of nature. And her “lunar” quality will continue to assert itself, in one form or another, in other texts. In the *Hyperotomachia Polyphili*, for example, it is suggested by the

“Andrei Pleșu has the talent of putting complicated things plainly and humorously, things about which it is usual to write in a learned and boring style.”
(Cristian Teodorescu)

embodiment of nature as a “nymph”. The mistress of the nymphs is, as is known, Diana, who is at the same time goddess of the Moon. On the other hand, the allegory of the nymph also brings into play a complex symbolism of the aquatic world, to which we shall return presently. The nymph is a vegetal-humid being. And somnolence (*die Nymphe darf nicht munter sein / Und wo sie steht, da schläft sie ein* – as Goethe says, in *Faust*, II, 1276). Within the same order of associations, Wolfgang Kemp cites an inscription found on an engraving by Marten de Vos (late 16th Century), according to which:

*Auspicio Lunae, Naturae munera crescunt
Robur et hinc Infans concipit omne suum.*⁸

Pythagorean texts (see for example the hymns collected by Mesomedes⁹ often turn the “universal Mother” (*kosmou mêtêr*) into a personage complementary, like the Moon, to the diurnal deity of the Sun. In this context, she appears to be comparable not only to Aphrodite but also to the goddess Rhea-Cybele.

Independent of Mesomedes and two centuries later (400 A.D.), the Roman poet Claudian likewise illustrates the relation between the Goddess Nature and the Sun God (cf. *De consulatu Stichionis*, 2, 424-431), resorting to a mythic image

not lacking in orientalising (Mythraic) elements.¹⁰

The Nature Goddess appears as a guardian of the threshold beyond which lies the “cave of vast Aiôn” (*immensi spelunca Aevi*),¹¹ the original place

“A vast character, with multiple resources, endowed with a velvet arrogance and amiably outclassing all the rest, effortlessly achieving high performance and brilliance in everything he happens to do, modulating within any human register (devastating in derision and adorable in banter), apt to take the form of any setting (from parties with fiddlers to meetings with aged ladies and queens), viscerally incapable of tolerating an affront, passionate and unwilling to recognise a mistake, endowed with a good faith that sometimes verges on stupidity, becoming relativist and indulgent when confronted with trenchant judgements, but grave and pathetically serving the truth when principles are injured, distant and engaged, drawn to monastic rigours and voluptuously melting in the vanities of the world...”
(Gabriel Liiceanu)

of Time and the World. Around the cave lies coiled Ourobouros, the snake that bites its own tail, symbolising the eternal recurrence of the great cosmic cycles. The Nature who guards the threshold is “old but beautiful”. To her limbs are bound winged souls:

*Vestibuli custos vultu longaeva decoro
ante fores Natura sedet, cunctisque volantes
dependent membris animae...*

Inside the cave of Aion can be found the goddess Nyx (Night)¹² and two sisters (Idê and Adrasteia), both of whom are often worshipped as mere aspects of Rhea/Cybele. The “Adrasteia” aspect would accentuate not so much the maternal dimension of the goddess, as much as her function as judge of souls, as “customs officer” for those who emerge from the “primordial cave” in order to return to life or, inversely, who return,

on dying, to the stage of trans-mundane latency. Adrasteia is therefore a goddess of Destiny. To be born is to come under her law, from which only death releases you. Kerényi also notes the identity established in the Stoic milieu between Adrasteia on the one hand and Anankê (necessity), Pepromenê (predestination), Heimarmenê (the fated), and Pronoia (providence) on the other.¹³

The “Adrasteia” aspect of nature is not, however, as widespread in the European area as the allegory of “Mother Nature”. She reappears at the height of the Middle Ages in Alain de Lille’s epic poem *De planctu Naturae*.¹⁴

According to Wolfgang Kemp, the source used by the mediaeval writer is the “well known vision of Isis” by Alpuleius (*Metamorphoses*, II, 47).¹⁵

It describes a “young woman” whose raiment mirrors all Creation. On her head, she wears a revolving crown, symbolising the zodiacal heavens. Her robe too is a symbol, of the element Air; likewise, her cloak and tunic are, respectively, symbols of Water and Earth.

Excerpt from the volume Picturesque and Melancholy: An Analysis of the Sentiment of Nature in European Culture

¹ *Fundamental for the understanding of this concept is the article Physis by H. Leisegang, in Pauly-Wissowa Realencyclopädie, XX, 1, p. 1129. Also to be consulted are Aristotle, Metaphysics, book 5, and Physics, book 2. Inter alia, also instructive is the chapter Nature in C. S. Lewis, Studies in Words, Cambridge UP, 1959, pp. 24-74,*

² As in Empedocles, for whom Physis is the same thing as Philotês or Philia. Elsewhere, it is also called Gêthosyne (“Joy”) or Harmonia. Together with Neikos (“Adversity”), it forms the couple of “primordial forces” which set the four elements in motion (Diels-Kranz, fr. 35, 3-7).

³ Cf. Karl Kerényi, *Die Göttin Natur*, in *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, vol. 14 (1946), p. 58. To Kerényi’s erudite essay we owe a large part of the information used in this chapter. Likewise, we have made use of Wolfgang Kemp’s dissertation *Natura: Ikonographische Studien zur Geschichte und Verbreitung einer Allegorie* (Tübingen, 1973). Wherever we have been able to refer to direct sources, we have mentioned them in brackets in the body of the text.

⁴ Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I, II, 28, *apud Kerényi*, *op. cit.*, p. 57, note 1.

⁵ K. Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, I, Leipzig, 1928.

⁶ K. Kerényi, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 68-9.

⁸ Cf. W. Kemp, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁹ K. Horna, *Die Hymnen des Mesomedes*, Sitz.-Ber. Wien, *Philhist.*, 207, I, 1928, quoted by Kerényi, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

¹⁰ Cf. K. Kerényi, *op. cit.*, p. 74 ff.

¹¹ Let us note that *Aiôn*, the god of unending time, is sometimes, starting before Claudian and even Mesomedes, equated with the sun god, as on some coins of the 3rd-century Roman emperors. Cf. Franz Cumont, *L'éternité des empereurs romains*, in *Revue d'hist. et de litt. Relig.*, I, 445.

¹² It was perhaps to such an image that Aristotle was referring when, in *Metaphysics* 1071b26, he launches a polemic against the “theologians who believe that everything was born of night”.

¹³ Kerényi, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹⁴ Cf. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 210 Sp. 432 A; cf. also Ernst Robert Curtius, *Literatura europeană și Evul Mediu latin*, trans. Adolf Armruster, Bucharest, 1970, pp. 141-6.

¹⁵ Cf. W. Kemp, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

“Andrei Pleșu is one of the greatest stylists of the Romanian language, even if he writes essays and not fiction.”
(Dan C. Mihăilescu)

Ioan Es. Pop

Born 1958. Graduate of the Philology Faculty of the University of Baia Mare, Romanian and English Department, 1983. Journalist, editor-in-chief of *Ziarul de Duminică* and senior editor of science, technology and travel magazine *Descoperă*.

Published volumes: *leud with no Exit*, Editura Cartea Românească, 1994; *Porcec* (Pigcheck), Editura Cartea Românească, *Poets of the City of Bucharest* series, 1994; *Pantelimon 113 bis*, Editura Cartea Românească, 1999; *The Bridge*, Editura Cartea Românească, “Hyperion” series, 2000; *The Anthracite Prayer*, bilingual collection, in Romanian and English, Editura Dacia; *Pedestrian Party*, Editura Paralela 45, 2003; *Enhanced Grade 2 Convenience* (together with Lucian Vasilescu), Editura Publicațiilor pentru Străinătate, 2004; *The Livid Worlds*, Romanian Cultural Institute Press, 2004

Prizes: Prize for Debut awarded by the Romanian Writers’ Union and the Writers’ Union of the Republic of Moldova, for the volume *leud without Exit*, The Writers’ Union Prize, Prize of the City of Bucharest, and the Romanian Academy Prize for the volume *Pantelimon 113 bis*, The Prize of the Association of Romanian Professional Writers and The Romanian Writers’ Union Prize for the volume *Pedestrian Party*.



***I heard that someone from vărai, right where
I'm from, from vărai,***

had discovered the gene for death.
not for immortality, but for death.
the one which, when you start to tremble,
paralyses the fear at once
and shields you from the horror of life beyond,
when you are about to depart.

I quickly hurried off to vărai
to meet him and to resolve
my fear of death, but
it was a monday and he had gone to
the market at șomcuta, and so

I paid someone with a car
to take me to șomcuta.
I was dying of fear that I would die.

well you see he wasn't at the market
in șomcuta, but they told me
that he'd gone to baia mare, where

the potatoes sell better,
and so I set off to baia mare.
the fear had grown on me as big as a house.
and off you go to baia mare and find him
and in the end someone said
that he'd gone to the pub to get drunk

and you trawl all the pubs and on the third day,
when they brought him home, he had
his guts out
and the ambulance wouldn't start.

“Ioan Es. Pop’s leud is a kind of no man’s world, like Eliot’s Wasteland: “it was hot it is cold he said it was hot it was dark / if I had picked with my nail in its flesh I could have gone in / he said don’t pick the flesh with your nails it’s not a shirt it’s / your flesh you can’t go out.” This struggle within the carapace of one’s own being, in the prison of the body, produces an inner vertigo at the end of which can be glimpsed illumination, the exit from the phenomenal, from ephemeral corporeality. The grotesque visions are a symbol of purification.”
(Radu G. Țeposu)

12 October 1976

for four generations, at the back of our house
there has been flowing
a brook of dark blood.
for years and years, my father has been covering
it with straw and leaves
so the neighbours won’t find out. and his father
covered it with straw and leaves
and perhaps it will be my turn to cover it soon,
for it is not well that the neighbours find out what
flows there

in spring we make as though we plough and sow,
so as to seem in step with everyone else,
in autumn we make as though we too reap the
fruits,
so as to look like the others, so that they won’t
notice,
but in fact all we do is to wait, to
lie in wait for the one who comes next, one of us
is sure to come next.

we spend the day congratulating the one who
will escape, although
whoever escapes escapes only until some
future time.
all the while, along the brook there flows a
streak of

dark blood, we’ve been covering it up for
years with
straw and leaves,
it is not well that the neighbours find out what
flows there,
we too have to look as though we are in step
with everyone else.

the banquet

ever thus has it been in our house:
three beds through which all in turn
have had to pass. and each, for generations,
has followed this course and this in time
became a law
and it was upon this our house was founded.

we are the latest born. to the newborn
it was foreordained to bide in the luminous
corner of the room.
we are too fresh in this world to understand
that in this house there are also others. our world
is merely the illumined bed beneath the window.
many years pass before we realise that our
parents
bide here too, but in another bed, further away
whither it is much harder for the light to reach.

“I lead without Exit associates (...) also the perspective upon language, in a few of the tensest poems. The existential impasses are also a ‘dead end of language’, and the suite of texts in the second part of the cycle that gives its title to the volume circumscribes it in terms of the same extreme difficulty of ‘exiting’ from nocturnal, visceral, telluric elementariness, toward an individualised expression of the ‘I’. (...) It is to be recognised that such poems cannot be written by just anyone and that there are not very many poets capable of transmitting with such force the tragic implication of being within the creative act. (...) We quite simply find ourselves before a poet, about whom it would not be amiss sooner to say that he is a great poet.”
(Ion Pop)

they make less noise, they move more
slowly than us.
but many years pass before we understand this.

one day we discover that beyond them,
in the darkest
corner of the room, there is a third bed
and when we find out we cease to laugh—
we used to believe that there, in the shadow,
the whole world ended

and now we find that someone is breathing there
and no one
pays him any heed;
I am merely told: the old man of the house
is there, the father of all.

so there is a father there, so that corner exists,
I tell myself.

then we grow accustomed and forget and only
at night

do we hear the one in the corner
wheezing unpleasantly –

it was the devil put him in the same room as us.

I still dwell in the bed by the window but I no
longer laugh

at the one wheezing in the opposite corner:
in my self I think that he is deliberately not
revealed to us.
and when one day he is taken outside, he is taken
from the room
shadow and all and for us he remains a great
unknown.
I am given leave merely to touch the new plank of
the coffin.

on the other hand, my father, from the second
bed, passes
shadow and all to the bed of the departed,
I pass to his bed, young flesh occupies my
previous bed,

but all takes place slowly and from one
bed to another we pass after a long wait, to gain
the next bed is the result of a terrible battle,
of long and hidden grappling.

those in the first bed already covet the second,
it is visible in their eyes, I myself feel
goaded at night by a terrible covetousness to take
the place
of the one in the third bed, who is now wheezing

ever more unpleasantly in his darkened corner.
and one day, the third bed is again
disburdened and
the one there is taken outside and soundly thrust
into the fourth bed
on top of which a lid is placed, for him not to
come back somehow, because
his bed has been taken and the others have even
stormed the second bed
and in the first bed can be heard new guests who
as yet cannot hear
how someone begins to wheeze in the bed at the
bottom and that one is even I...

and at that moment the day seemed to swell.

hans the bird

at night a bird came through the window
and I was sure it was hans.
it was balding like him and dead drunk.
here, he said, take fifty lei, go over the road,
they've
got a smashing brandy. nevermore, I replied.

he says: since I left you all, he says, I've got
a job as a nightwatchman at the cemetery. I've
got a first-rate flashing siren. I sleep during
the day. I work
with the police. I've got money to bury you.
I'm Minerva's
owl. I don't open my eyes until the onset
of evening.

now I've risen through the ranks. I've got
great big

insignia on my liver. that's since when I was living
here with you. oh! and the wounds still ache.
crack something open and let's celebrate.

hansy, I told him, nevermore.

*Excerpts from the volume **leud with no Exit***

N. Steinhardt

Born 1912 - died 1989. He studied Law and Letters, taking his Degree in 1934 and his Doctorate in 1936, with a thesis on constitutional Law: *Classic Principles and New Trends in Constitutional Law: A Critique of Leon Duguit*. In 1934, under the pseudonym Atisthius, he published a collection of parodies, entitled *In the Genre...of the Young* (Cultura Poporului), in 1935 *Essai sur une conception catholique du Judaïsme* (together with Emanuel Neuman; Cultura Românească), and in 1937 *Illusions et realites juives* (also in collaboration with Emanuel Neuman; Librairie Libschutz, Paris). During the same period, he frequented the “Sburătorul” literary cénacle and, in 1934 and 1935, published various articles in *Revista Burgheză*. Up until the outbreak of the war, he continued his studies in Paris and in England. After 1947, he was also removed from the bar, and forced into all kinds of lowly, often unqualified work. His texts were, of course, banned. In 1959, the group of friends to which he belonged began to be arrested, the first being Constantin Noica. Steinhardt, refusing to be a witness for the prosecution, was in his turn arrested, tried as part of the “Noica-Pillat batch”, and sentenced to twelve years hard labour. He begins to lead an authentic Christian life, and after the death of his father in 1967, he begins to seek a monastery. In 1973, Constantin Noica informs him that he has found “the perfect place” for him: Rohia Monastery. For seven years, he makes pilgrimages to Rohia, and on 16 August 1980 he becomes a monk. He is entrusted with the care of the monastery library. He re-enters literary life publishing translations, essays, and reviews in *Secolul XX*, *Viața românească*, *Steaua*, *Familia*, *Vatra*, *Orizont*, *Echinox*, *Opinia studentească* etc. He also published the following volumes: *Between life and books*, 1976, *Literary Uncertainties*, Dacia, 1980, *Geo Bogza, a Poet of Effects, Exaltation, the Grandiose, Solemnity, Exuberance and the Pathetic*, Albatros, 1982, *First Person Criticism*, Dacia, 1983, *Ports of Call in Time and Space, or Hither and Beyond Texts*, Cartea Românească, 1987, *Through Others Toward the Self*, Eminescu, 1988, and the *Foreword to Svetlana Paleologu-Matta's Eminescu and the Ontological Abyss*, Aarhus, Denmark, 1988.

The following volumes were published posthumously: *Diary of Happiness*, Dacia, edited with an afterword by Virgil Ciomoș, 1991; *The Polyphonic Monologue*, Dacia, 1991; *By Giving Thou Shalt Receive. Words of Faith*, Episcopia Ortodoxă Română a Maramureșului și Satmarului, 1992; *The Monk from Rohia Answers 365 Awkward Questions put by Zaharia Sîngeorzan*, Literatorul, 1992; *The Peril of Confession – Conversations with Ioan Pinteă*, Dacia, 1993; *The Journey of a Prodigal Son*, Adonai, 1995; *The Book of Communion*, Apostrof, 1995; *The Path to Hesychasm*, Dacia, 1999; *The God in Whom you say you do not Believe*, Humanitas, 2000; *The Temptation of Reading*, Dacia, 2000; *Classic Principles and New Trends in Constitutional Law: A Critique of the Work of Leon Duguit*, Solstițiu, 2000; 1st edition, 1936; *I myself and a Few Others (Essays Old and New)*, Dacia, 2001; *Between Worlds, conversations with Nicolae Baciuț*, Dacia, 2001; 1st edition, 1994, Tipomur.



February 1962

And your joy no man taketh from you.

John, 16, 22

Let me stand upright! So as not to lose my soul.

Paul Claudel

The cells in the Reduit, at Jilava, are particularly gloomy and have the reputation of having an even harsher regime than “in the sections”. I arrive at 34, coming from the “secret”, where I was held for as long as I was on hunger strike in a cell unheated since the fort was built – together with the useless belt around the Capital – by engineer Brialmont. The cold, more terrible than hunger and thirst (but worst of all is the lack of sleep), has penetrated me deeply.

I must look very wretched, because the famous warrant officer Ungureanu, who takes charge of me at the gate to the Reduit, smiles at me (just as, for example, a connoisseur of choice dishes would be placated in front of a hunk of unmistakably well-tenderised game) and entrusts me to the head of the room, recommending that he give me my own bed and look after me. I am placed in the bed by the door, as one who is suspect, and watched mindfully by the head of the room, a Bassarabian with a Russian name, a giant of a man, sullen, with a harsh gaze; I soon learn that he is dangerous, it is said that he is a defrocked priest.

Cell 34 is a kind of dark and long tunnel, with numerous and powerful elements of nightmare. It is a vault, it is a drain, it is a subterranean gut, cold and profoundly hostile, it is a barren mine, it is the crater of an extinct volcano, it is quite a successful image of a colourless hell.

In this almost unreal sinister place I was to know the happiest days of my entire life. How absolutely happy I was able to be in room 34! (Neither in Brashov, with my mother, during childhood, nor on the endless streets of mysterious London; neither among the proud hills of Muscel, nor in the blue picture-postcard decor of Lucerne; no, nowhere else.)

In the room there are also a large number of young people, subject to special treatment by the guards and in particular by the head of the room. (The hatred of the old men against the new generation; which goes as far as alliance with the most ruthless of the guards in order to forge a common front against the unmasked and the insolent. A form of generational solidarity of age, very similar to the class solidarity thanks to which some peasants, workers and petty clerks hate their titled, boyar or bourgeois fellow prisoners much more fiercely than the representatives of the administration.) From the very first day, I ascertain that in the whole cell there is a terrible thirst for

poetry. Learning poems by heart is one of the most pleasant and most ceaseless pastimes of prison life. Blessed are they that know poems. Whoever knows many poems off by heart is a made man in detention, his are the hours that pass imperceptibly and in dignity, his is the lobby of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel and his is the Flore Café. His are the ices and lemonade served on the tables of the Florian Brasserie in Piazza San Marco. The Abbé Faria knew what he was doing when he prepared for the Isle of Monte-Cristo by learning all the books off by heart. And Nikolai Semenovitch Leskov could not even have suspected how truly he spoke when he advised: “Read and try to extract some use from it. You will be blessed with a good pastime in the grave.” As prison too is a grave, the advice comes excellently true: whoever likes to learn poetry will never grow bored in prison – and will never be alone.

From this point of view I do very well. I know off by heart [Mihai Eminescu’s] *Morning Star* and *Letters*, a large portion of Coşbuc and Topîrceanu (the latter is particularly sought after), thousands (I think) lines of [Radu] Gyr and [Nichifor] Crainic (from the very start ingested, along with Morse Code, from the Iron Guard veterans); I have also picked up a host of Verlaine, Lamartine and Baudelaire; Arvers’ sonnet, of course (*Ma vie à son secret, mon âme son mystère*), Samain – *Au jardin de l’Infante* – which, whenever I recite it or teach it, bears my thoughts off to Ojardindilifant in [Ionel Teodoreanu’s novel] *At Medeleni* and to paradisiacal afternoons in Pitar-Moşu Street [in Bucharest].

I straightaway find a circle of young men who want to learn *The Morning Star* and who have been waiting on tenterhooks for someone who knows it to turn up. In the room there is also a young Lutheran pastor from Brashov, with the look of a Gösta Berling; German is his native tongue and he himself is a poet. A passionate admirer of Rilke,

“The author is Nicolae Steinhardt, a Jewish intellectual of the same generation as Eugène Ionesco, Emil Cioran and Mircea Eliade, but without having had the latter’s luck to be in the West at the moment the communist dictatorship was installed in Romania. As a lawyer who had become well known as a journalist and literary critic of Liberal outlook, Nicolae Steinhardt did not “go down well” with the new regime: he was arrested in 1959, at a time when the post-Stalinist regime was re-Stalinising, and sentenced to thirteen years hard labour. It should be pointed out that the entire batch of intellectuals to which Steinhardt belonged was arrested on the pretext of discussions in the margins of texts from the West and accused of “high treason” and “machinating against the socialist order”. N. Steinhardt could have escaped prison if he had accepted to be a witness for the prosecution in a typically communist trial, as was proposed to him from the very start. (...) Let us not forget that these pages are part of an (introspective) diary of his prison years. Its title? **Diary of happiness**. However, here it is not a case of mere beatitude, as it might seem. This happiness is, of course, a revelation of faith, but it is also a revelation of freedom, of inner freedom.
(Mircea Martin)

whose work he has translated; he also knows countless poems by the great poet, which he recites superbly, with vibrant feeling and extraordinary interpretation; he has iron patience and a goodwill refractory to tiredness. In him, everything oscillates between demigod and saint. If he told us that

*Mein Vater Parsifal trägt eine Krone
Sein Rittersohn bin ich, Lohengrin genannt*

or if he confessed to us that he himself is Siegfried fallen from his Rheinfahrt into the middle of the Reduit, anyone at all would believe him.

Excerpt from the volume **Diary of Happiness**

Stelian Tănase

Born in 1952. He studied philosophy at the University of Bucharest and defended a doctoral thesis in Political Sociology. He currently teaches political sciences at the University of Bucharest. He published his first novel, *The Luxury of Melancholy*, in 1982. From 1983 until 1989, the communist regime prohibited the publication of any of his texts. He was a Fellow Scholar at the Wilson Centre in 1994 and a visiting professor at UCLA in 1997, having been awarded a Fulbright scholarship. He has been co-president of the Romanian Journalists' Association since 1990 and vice president of the Romanian Political Science Association since 1994. He has been invited to lecture on political topics in Italy, Norway, Hungary, Austria, and the U.S.A.

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In 1927, the Russian ambassador to Paris is Cristian Racovski. In the summer of that year, Moscow finds itself confronted with a vehement campaign against Racovski led by the French press. After much hesitation, the Russian foreign Minister, Chicherin, makes a declaration in which he thanks the ambassador for his services, but bows to the pressure. He announces Racovski's recall. On 15 October, Racovski leaves the embassy in a luggage-laden automobile, surprised that there is not a single policeman to be seen. He was accompanied by Panait Istrati. The paths of the two had crossed as early as 1905, in socialist and trade union circles. They met again in Paris, once Racovski was installed at Rue de Grenelle. They had many shared memories and acquaintances. Istrati frequented the embassy and was, for example, on familiar terms with Racovski's adoptive daughter, who recalls him thus: "Panait Istrati often used to visit us for dinner and would sit for hours on end chatting in Cristian's office."¹

He was "a nervous man, as scrawny as could be, who used to say very interesting, cutting things,

things often embarrassing to Cristian, who was nevertheless fond of him and valued him a great deal."²

Racovski invited Istrati to come to Russia as early as 1926, but preparations were drawn-out. For propaganda reasons, Moscow was preoccupied with inviting intellectuals. Istrati was ideal for this purpose, in view of his notoriety, as well as his sympathies for Bolshevism. However, no one could have imagined that his visit would coincide with the decline of Racovski's career. It remains unclear whether Stalin recalled his ambassador because he was preparing to exile Trotsky and his acolytes, or whether it was because of pressure from the French press. However, the tension was there. Racovski and Istrati were abreast of the fact that something was being prepared. Istrati asks him in the car: "Are you really being exiled by France or are you being destroyed by your countrymen?"³ Racovski prefers to change the subject. When Racovski was appointed ambassador to London in 1923, Lenin was already ill and no longer ruled Russia, which had fallen into the

clutches of Stalin. Racovski is removed from his post of head of the Ukrainian government, which conferred on him too great a power, and sent to London as ambassador. It was, in fact, a luxurious exile. Racovski protests, but submits. In 1927, things became worse for him. Lenin had died three years previously. In the Kremlin, the struggle for succession was at its height. The party to which Racovski belonged loses. His closest friend, Lev Trotsky, Stalin's number one enemy, is on the point of being removed. At the same time, preparations were under way in Moscow for the tenth anniversary of Bolshevik accession to power.

This is the context of Istrati's arrival in Moscow. Three weeks later, on 14 November 1927, Trotsky and Zinoviev are excluded from the Party. Racovski, Kamenev, Shmilga and Yevdokimov, the leaders of the opposition within the Party, are excluded from the Central Committee of the CPSU. On 19 November, Adolf Ioffe, an advocate of Trotsky, is buried in Moscow. His suicide letter creates nervousness in political circles. At the funeral ceremony, we witness Trotsky's last public appearance in Russia. Racovski also attends the funeral. In December 1927, Racovski is heckled as he gives a speech at the Party Congress. In January 1928, the leaders of the opposition are banished from Moscow and Leningrad, and sent into exile. Trotsky is forcibly transported to Alma-Ata, while Racovski is sent to Astrakhan, in the Volga Delta. Since Racovski's name is closely linked to that of Trotsky, his career is practically over. The period Istrati spends in the USSR is full of events of this kind. The climate is that of a frenzied struggle for power. Stalin assails those who had opposed him in the operation to succeed Lenin. In January 1929, Trotsky is expelled to Turkey. The date almost

coincides with that of Istrati's departure from Russia. On 15 February, Istrati arrives in Paris, after having spent sixteen months in the USSR.

Thus, early in the morning of 15 October 1927, the two leave Paris. The previous evening, in a Paris restaurant, Racovski and Istrati meet Boris Souvarine, a former Bolshevik, expelled from the Komintern. In 1929, Souvarine, together with Istrati and Victor Serge, will write one of the books in the trilogy *Vers l'autre flamme*. In the mid-1930s, he will publish one of the best biographies of Stalin. He narrates the evening of departure thus: "That evening, Racovski was pensive, taciturn, from time to time he seemed absent, although he was usually such a sparkling causeur. [...] Istrati was talkative, euphoric, even exultant at the thought of the pilgrimage to the "Mecca of communism" which he was about to make and of which he had dreamed for so long. So, Istrati kept heaping enthusiastic praise on the revolution and the radiant future that lay before it. He was not a member of the Communist Party, but he shared the popular convictions regarding the 'great light from the east', as they used to say back then, due to his powerful hostility to 'bourgeois' society. [...] He did not know anything about Marxism but was not at all worried on that account; his feelings substituted for doctrine, instinct caused him to take the side of the poor, the exploited, the victims. And of rebels of every kind. [...] His ideology placed him rather in the rank of a kind of humanitarian anarchism lacking in theoretical reasoning. Of the Soviet regime he knew nothing, excepting its hostility to the capitalist world [...] Overcome by the joy of imminent departure, he did not sense the incompatibility of his behaviour with that of his travelling companion. He had no

idea of the political tragedy into which Racovski had entered [...] The ambassador, a disciplined cadre above all else, complied to a strict rule that forbade him to speak of secret family problems in front of a stranger to the Party, even if that stranger was a declared communist [such as Istrati – author’s note].”⁴

The journey to the USSR takes the two by automobile to Berlin, whence they board the train to Riga, and thence to Moscow. Once he arrives in Moscow, Istrati enthusiastically declares to *Pravda* that he is a Bolshevik, that he has left the West for good, that Russia is the only place where there is the freedom to create. He would like to be buried here, but he further desires that his body be taken to Romania once a Bolshevik regime is installed in Bucharest. Are there echoes here of conversations with Racovski, who dreamed of being a red dictator in Bucharest? In spite of his conventional declarations, Istrati observes the way in which Racovski is received: “We arrive in Moscow one beautiful morning (20 October). At the station, there is nothing to attest the slightest attention on the part of the government for a great ambassador, even one fallen into disgrace... None of those luxurious limousines that drive the bureaucratic rabble around... Nothing. And the hand of the former president of the Council of Commissars of the Ukrainian People, which signed so many documents in Geneva, London and Paris, was shaken by no one. Racovski’s athletically built and highly intelligent attendant Lithuanian went to look for a taxi, while the photo-reporters fixed their lenses on us. Cristian dodged them. I say to him: ‘Why do you dodge them so maliciously? They are doing it to earn a living.’ ‘In that case, they don’t know what they are doing. I am sparing

them from gaffes and worn-out clichés.” Racovski knew what awaited him. The cold, even hostile, reception given to Racovski did not prevent Istrati from manifesting his enthusiasm for Russia and Bolshevism, even in the presence of his companion. In *Confessional for the Defeated*, Istrati was to recollect: “Before leaving, I asked Racovski: ‘What is going on in Soviet Russia?’ And he gave me this diplomatic reply: ‘If you look at the surface, you won’t be satisfied. However, if you know how to look, you will love our Revolution’.”⁵

Paid by the Soviet press, Istrati had already written two eulogising articles about Racovski, which he had brought in his pocket. Neither of them was to be published. Why? Between the date they had been ordered and the date of his arrival in Moscow, the fate of the former head of the Bolshevik Government of Ukraine, of the former ambassador to London and Paris, had been decided.

Istrati’s relations with Bolshevism are not, however, as simple as they appear at first sight. Was Istrati won over by Bolshevism? Can we take his declarations at face value? Can we regard his enthusiastic words of autumn 1927 as a conventional response to the hospitality of his hosts? The Kremlin propagandists had great need of famous writers to give their regime credibility. The scenario was relatively simple. Major personalities from the West were invited and then given supervised tours of Russia. Big ceremonies are organised for them, receptions with flowers, celebrations; they are shown that they are popular. Back home, almost none of those invited enjoy such glory. Moreover, they were paid royally. Their works were printed in millions of copies, and the royalties they received were to match. They were requested to contribute to magazines, they were

interviewed. All contra cost. Soviet propaganda was unstinting, especially when the person invited was someone well known. Returning to the West, after the adoring crowds, financial rewards and grandiose ceremonies, they carried out their task by “remote control”, won over by the manner in which they had been received. They wrote eulogising pages about the Soviet regime. Not necessarily because they had been corrupted, although this was also true, but because the manipulation had had its effect. They had seen not so much Russia as staged spectacles in which they more or less believed. Istrati was also the pawn of such a practice of the propaganda apparatus and the GRU.

He was not naïve, but rather volatile in his options. He became easily enthused, lost his convictions just as easily, started over again. Istrati’s itinerary in Russia is telling in this respect. We might say that he comes to Russia ready to see what lies hidden behind the veil of Bolshevik propaganda. Panait Istrati’s political experience was more than sufficient for him to understand the truth. He had been a militant socialist in his youth; he had worked for trade unions. He had organised strikes and demonstrations; he had been an editor at *Workingman’s Romania*. He personally knew all the Romanian socialist and trade union leaders of the day. He was well acquainted with the conditions of the workingman, whose cause he upheld whenever he had the opportunity. He goes to the USSR believing that he will find a dictatorship of the proletariat “at work”. Instead, he encounters a venal bureaucracy and a working class exploited by brutal masters. Hence his disappointment, which, however, occurs later, towards the end of

the journey, after his illusions have been shattered one by one. He sees the reason for the regime’s failure in Russia’s new rulers. The “bureaucratisation of the Soviet regime” was the thesis of the Trotskyite opposition, with whom Istrati had close contacts. It is to be recalled that in 1913 he

“In Stelian Tanase’s book, the members of the communist underground movement emerge in a cruel, fascinating family portrait, which can be interpreted with any possible number of nuances. The book seeks the roots of disaster at the very dawn of the twentieth century. The author tries to sketch patterns of behaviour: those of the illegal communist activist who would, later, achieve power, of the illegal activist who loses the battle and would come to be regarded as an even more inconvenient element than the “class enemy”. Communism is presented during the period when it was seeking martyrs and its leaders were fighting for supremacy. It is an incredible swarm of characters, who abruptly fall completely silent after the final victory of Dej in the communist hierarchy.”
(Costi Rogozanu)

had met Lev Trotsky in Bucharest, in a hotel room near the Romanian Athenaeum. Racovski is his closest link to Opposition circles. On 6 August 1928, Racovski writes and sends his adherents an article/manifesto entitled “The Professional Perils of Power”.

*Excerpt from the volume **Aunt Varvara’s Clients***

¹ Elena Codreanu Rocaovski, *De-a lungul si de-a latul secolului (1908-1999) [The Length and Breadth of the Century]*. Univers Enciclopedic, 2002, p. 53.

² *Idem*, p. 77.

³ Panait Istrati, *Spovedanie pentru invinsi [Confessional for the Defeated]*, Editura Dacia, 1990, p. 39.

⁴ Boris Souvarine, *Souvenirs*, Editions Gérard Lébovici, 1985, pp. 56-58.

⁵ Panait Istrati, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

Ion Vartic

Born 1944. Essayist and literary critic. Professor of Comparative Literature in the Faculty of Letters at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj. Founder of the Theatre Faculty of the same university. Secretary of State in the Ministry of Culture, 1990-1992. Since 2000, he has been Director General of the National Theatre in Cluj.

Monographs and collections of essays on comparative literature, with psychoanalytic and philosophic perspectives: *Interior Spectacle*, 1977, Writers' Union Prize; *Radu Stanca: Poetry and Theatre*, 1978; *The Model and the Mirror*, 1982, G. Călinescu Prize for Criticism; *Ibsen and the "Invisible Theatre"*, 1995, Prize of the Romanian Section of the International Association of Theatre Critics; *Cioran, Nad've and Sentimental*, 2000, Writers' Union Essay Prize; 2nd revised and expanded edition, 2002; 3rd revised and expanded edition, 2006; *The Caragiale Clan*, 2002; *Bulgakov and Koroviev's Secret*, 2004, Writers' Union Essay Prize).

Co-author of *The Dictionary of Romanian Writers*, vols. 1 to 4 (1995-2002), and of *Adolfo Casares – Àlbum* (1991), published by the Spanish Ministry of Culture on the occasion of the Cervantes Prize being awarded to the great Argentine writer.



On 30 January 1969, leafing through a book about the youth of Kafka – most probably that by Klaus Wagenbach – Cioran notes in his Cahiers that the images of Prague and the mores of Central Europe evoke for him the Sibiu of his adolescence, and then goes on to elaborate: “I lived at the other end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire”. This is precisely why, in this entry in his private notebook, he deliberately writes not “Sibiu” but “Hermannstadt”, giving the impression, above all for his own benefit, that he conducts himself like a typical Austro-Hungarian. In any case, with the same intention, he often uses in conversation not only Romanian toponyms but also those consecrated in the erstwhile bicephalous monarchy. He repeatedly accredits himself as a subject of the Kaiser Franz Josef: “As I was born before the war of '14, I was an Austro-Hungarian”, originally from Transylvania, where “we all lived, in fact, in a Kaiser-princely world, which, even to this day, is unforgettable... I have even heard communists speaking emotionally about the Emperor Franz Josef.” With divers variations, be it in *History and Utopia*, in his notebooks, or in conversations, Cioran constantly reformulates and nuances his Mittel-European stratum: “As I grow older, the more I realise that, not only by my origins but also by my temperament, I belong to Central Europe.

Thirty years' residence in Paris will not erase the fact that I was born on the periphery of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.” There is no point in providing other quotations, since they all prove the same thing: Cioran imagines himself – of course, in the first place for his own benefit! – as a citizen, albeit marginal, of the old empire. And, in a way, with a certain real justification. For ultimately he lived in the empire as a child, and his memories of that age are persistent and essential, just as, now generally speaking, the manners and exigencies of a certain type of culture and civilisation were preserved in Transylvania long after the break-up of the empire. At the same time, from one Transylvanian generation to the next, there has been passed down an ideally and anecdotally transformed image of the nation-civilising empire, of inaccessible “Viana”, of Maria Theresia and the “darling emperor”, as well as of the Archduke Franz-Ferdinand as saviour and the United States of Greater Austria, of “monarchical Switzerland” and the “decentralised unitary state”. Joseph Roth is right: the essence of the Hapsburg Empire and of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was not the centre but rather its periphery, for it was the latter that preserved the empire's aura and lent it substance, even if it was through a fidelity that was not recompensed, but rather always despised and

scorned. Thus it was that the Hapsburg myth was consolidated, as Claudio Magris long ago observed, a myth which today functions as a “sentimental escape into a vanished world”, but which is ultimately nourished by “a centuries-old Hapsburg tradition of deforming the reality” of history properly speaking.¹ Cioran himself creates his own Hapsburg myth, on the one hand from the elements inherited from this tradition of transfiguring a concrete reality long buried in time, and on the other hand from elements drawn from the memories and fantasies of his childhood at the edge of the empire. The second category, that of liminal personal experiences, is compressed in three infantile sequences with a typically Central-European character. In the first – as a mirror of his perfect childhood – he can be seen, alongside the peasants of Rășinari, as a precocious hoops player in the “At Vidrighin’s” tavern on Priests’ Lane. The second sequence includes the revelation of the existence of authority, concretised, not fortuitously, in a foreigner: the frightening gendarme with a cockerel feather in his cap, from whom the child, as soon as he catches sight of him, runs away. Lastly, of capital importance for the child is contact with Sibiu, which shapes him, offering him – through its atmosphere of a town at the border of Mitteleuropa and its mix of peoples and languages – a decisive experience of confluence and marginality. Infused by such juvenile memories, this margin of empire enters, alongside Rășinari, into Cioran’s system of compensatory fictions, transforming itself into a territory just as imaginary and as symbolic as the whole of Kakania

(defined by Musil as a country that extracts from itself an empty space, offered up to the free fantasy of its subtle inhabitants). Similarly, Livius Ciocârlie observes, not without self-irony, that a specific inter-culturality, impregnated almost imperceptibly into the everyday life of co-existence, has sedimented in the people of Transylvania and the Banat a kind of “imperial subconscious”, which in its turn has become the source of a Kakanian imagery,² a creator of evanescent spaces, paradoxically figured by the combination of a number of diffuse real elements. This can be

*“Let us not hesitate to use superlatives: at the present time, Ion Vartic is the most subtle literary analyst (more precisely, analyst of psycho-textual mechanisms) that we have. Vartic is fascinated by all that implies textual mystery, pathologic luxuriance, psychological snare, and experimentation between meraviglia and shocking revelation. He hatches an idea, an outline, for years at a time, works with three sets of lenses, and suffers from an abyssal voluptuousness of psychoanalytical rummaging in the creative ‘I’. (...) Vartic has for some ten years plunged into the maniacal whirlpool of fevers and contraries named Cioran, which, mind you, fits him like a glove. I have not had the feeling of a hermeneutics so sympathetic and dazzlingly detective-like since Negoitescu’s and Edgar Papu’s work on Eminescu, since Lucian Raicu’s book on Gogol, or Ovidiu Cotruș’s studies on Mateiu Caragiale. He is as much a master of dismantling hidden mechanisms as he passionately reveals himself in associations, in filiations and the establishment of relations.
(Dan C. Mihăilescu)*

seen very well in Cioran, who recognises that “in the depths of my ‘being’ there lies an absurd Austro-Hungarian nostalgia, an eminently non-Walachian zone.”

*Excerpt from the volume **Cioran, Nad’ve and Sentimental***

¹Claudio Magris, *Il mito absburgico nella letteratura austriaca moderna*, Turin, Einaudi, 1976, p. 25.

²Livius Ciocârlie, *Clopotul scufundat*, Bucharest, Editura Cartea Românească, 1988, pp. 181-2.

ABOUT THE ROMANIAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE

The goal of the Romanian Cultural Institute, a public institution of national interest founded in 2003, is to enhance the visibility of Romanian cultural values world wide. Year by year, the Romanian Cultural Institute has expanded its activities, placing particular emphasis on the encouragement of young talent and the promotion of Romanian cultural values internationally. The primary means for achieving this goal are dissemination of information and consolidation of Romanian cultural identity.

At the same time, the Romanian Cultural Institute represents a channel of communication between the public abroad and Romanian cultural artefacts. International promotion of Romanian culture is primarily achieved via the fifteen institutes abroad, in Berlin, Budapest, Istanbul, Lisbon, London, Madrid, New York, Paris, Prague, Rome, Stockholm, Tel Aviv, Venice, Vienna, and Warsaw.

Their mission is to create high-impact events, calibrate supply according to specific types of foreign audience, and preserve the balance between a sense of national identity and international openness.

The Romanian Cultural Institute maintains close relations with Romanians not only in neighbouring countries but also with the Romanian diaspora, in an effort to conserve and enhance cultural identity in the countries where they live. Likewise, the Romanian Cultural Institute addresses the cultural environment within

Romania, with programmes of financing for cultural operators; scholarships and grants, such as the CANTEMIR Programme, the Constantin Brâncuși and George Enescu scholarships (to the la Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris), and scholarships for young Romanians studying abroad; the residency programme for Romanian artists at the Romanian Cultural Institute in London (Attic Arts); and the training programme at the Romanian Cultural Institute in Warsaw for students wishing to specialise in cultural management. Since 2007, the Romanian Cultural Institute has been a co-organiser of the European Film Festival, in partnership with the European Commission Delegation to Romania. In reaching out to the public abroad, the Romanian Cultural Institute also offers courses on Romanian language, culture and civilisation (Baia Mare); scholarships for budding translators, professional translators, and cultural journalists abroad; research and documentation scholarships; and TPS (a programme offering funding to foreign publishers for translations of Romanian authors).

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THE BOOK CENTER

The Book Center was established in 2007 as part of the Romanian Cultural Institute in Bucharest, the main institution for the promotion of Romanian culture worldwide. The Book Center runs a series of programmes whose aim is to stimulate translations from Romanian literature, as well as publications dedicated to Romanian culture and civilisation. This aim is achieved through financial support for translations and publications, grants for foreign translators from Romanian, and organisation of a Romanian presence at international book fairs.

AIMS

The Book Center is a structure to facilitate contact between publishers abroad and books by Romanian authors or books about Romanian culture. The main aim of the Book Centre is to promote Romanian culture and literature abroad.

The Book Center sets out to:

- Provide publishers abroad with as complete an image of Romanian literature as possible
- Provide information about the Romanian book market and about Romanian publishers
- Centralise information about Romanian literature published abroad
- Provide information about foreign translators from Romanian

PROGRAMMES RUN BY THE BOOK CENTER

- Financial support for translations from Romanian literature (via the *Translation and Publication Support Programme*)
- Financial support for the publication of illustrated albums, books, and magazines dedicated to Romanian culture and civilisation (via the *Publishing Romania* programme)
- The award of *grants* to foreign translators from Romanian
- Co-ordination and organisation of Romanian participation at international book fairs
- Organisation of meetings with publishers in various linguistic regions

TPS – TRANSLATION AND PUBLICATION SUPPORT PROGRAMME/THE PROGRAMME TO FUND FOREIGN PUBLISHERS FOR TRANSLATIONS OF ROMANIAN AUTHORS

The TPS (Translation and Publication Support) Programme was launched with the aim of facilitating the circulation of Romanian literature in the international publishing market. The programme enables foreign publishers interested in issuing works of Romanian literature to apply for funding to cover the costs of translation and, in some cases, printing. TPS supports the international publication and dissemination of representative works of Romanian culture in the fields of literature and the humanities.

Application forms and further information regarding TPS rules are available at www.icr.ro

PUBLISHING ROMANIA

Publishing Romania is one of the financing programmes of the Romanian Cultural Institute that follows our general strategy of promoting Romanian culture abroad through editorial projects.

In accordance with the goals of the programme, project selection is structured in two sections, each with its own specific objectives and selection criteria.

Section 1 is intended to increase foreign publishers' interest in outstanding Romanian values and hence to contribute to the dissemination of these values abroad. Financial support can be granted to incorporated publishing houses outside Romania for the publication of illustrated albums and/or books dedicated to Romanian culture.

Section 2 sets out to raise the interest of foreign-language publications in Romanian values and, at the same time, to encourage the publication or development of academic journals dedicated to Romanian Studies. Financial support can be granted to foreign cultural and arts magazines publishing thematic issues, cultural supplements dedicated to Romanian culture or to the development of academic journals that shall publish articles, interviews or research relating to Romanian literature, culture, society and history.

Further information and application forms at www.icr.ro.

PROGRAMMES OF THE ROMANIAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE

COURSES IN ROMANIAN LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND CIVILISATION

The Romanian Cultural Institute offers you the opportunity to learn Romanian directly from those who speak it as part of their everyday life, in the setting of one of the most picturesque traditional communities of northern Romania: Maramureş.

The programme comprises intensive Romanian language courses for beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. The courses in Romanian culture and civilisation focus on subjects drawn from history, literature, ethnography and folklore, cultural mindsets, aspects of contemporary social life, cinematography, and the plastic arts.

The course offers creative workshops – folk song and dancing, decorative crafts, painting on glass, pottery – which aim to give students hands-on experience of traditional Romanian arts. In addition, the programme includes cultural tours, with visits to the Merry Cemetery at Săpânţa, the Museum of the Maramureş Village at Sighetu Marmaţiei, the Memorial to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance at Sighet, the Memorial House dedicated to Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel, and some of the wooden churches and monasteries in Maramureş county, listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarships for budding translators

This programme sets out to cultivate a new generation of translators from Romanian into other languages. Annually, the Romanian Cultural Institute offers twenty three-month scholarships. The programme runs in partnership with the Brâncoveanu Palaces Cultural Centre at Mogoşoaia and the University of Bucharest MA in Translation Studies.

Scholarships for professional translators

Through this programme, the Romanian Cultural Institute sets out to support direct contact between translators of Romanian and the Romanian cultural milieu. Ten scholarships are available for periods of between one and three months.

Scholarships for cultural journalists abroad

This programme sets out to promote Romanian culture in the foreign press, and aims to facilitate contacts between foreign journalists and Romanian cultural figures. Scholarships are awarded both to Romanian researchers living abroad and to foreign researchers. The programme is aimed at writers, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and doctoral students in the humanities intending to undertake periods of documentation in Romania for the purposes of completing far-reaching research projects.

THE CANTEMIR PROGRAMME 2007

The CANTEMIR programme was inaugurated in 2006. It is a Romanian Cultural Institute initiative that provides non-reimbursable funding for cultural projects at an international level.

For 2007, the objectives of the CANTEMIR Programme are to increase the visibility and accessibility of Romanian culture in international cultural markets, and to encourage co-operation between Romanian and foreign artists. Consequently, support will be provided to Romanian cultural operators wishing to take part in major international festivals, initiating projects to promote Romanian culture abroad, or participating in cultural projects aimed at the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

In concordance with the goals of the programme, project selection will be structured in three sections, each with specific conditions for eligibility.

SECTION I – FESTIVAL/Culture by Request sets out to support Romanian participation at major festivals abroad, with the aim of enhancing the visibility of Romanian culture, increasing access of specialist audiences to high-quality contemporary Romanian art, and integrating it into international circuits.

SECTION II – PROMOTION/Culture to Go is aimed at projects that intensively promote the existing Romanian arts (e.g. books, the visual arts, photography, theatre, acting), through the creation of promotional materials such as CDs, DVDs, brochures, leaflets, web sites, and catalogues, and the organisation of series of events, such as book launches, vernissages, concerts, theatrical performances etc.

SECTION III – CO-OPERATION/Culture to Share promotes intercultural dialogue between Romanian and foreign artists. It supports working exchange visits between artists and the creation of cultural artefacts within cultural contexts other than the Romanian, as well as the integration of Romanian cultural operators within an international circuit of resources.

In 2007, for each of the above three sections, the fields for eligible projects are as follows: literature, visual arts, architecture and design, theatre, music, dance, film, heritage, and photography. Projects may also be interdisciplinary.

For further information on the above programmes, as well as other programmes initiated and run by the Romanian Cultural Institute in Bucharest and the fifteen institutes abroad, please visit our web site at www.icr.ro

