Acta Universitatis Sapientiae

Philologica

Volume 5, Number 1, 2013

STUDIES ON LITERATURE

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania
Scientia Publishing House

Proceedings of the conference on

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND ALTERITY IN TIME

Sapientia University
Institute of Humanities, Miercurea-Ciuc
19-20 April 2013

Contents

Andreea PETRE
Feminity – An Image of Alterity in *The Girl from the Forest* by Ioan Slavici . . . 7

Imre József BALÁZS
Surrealist Senses: Marcel Jean's Representations of Budapest 17

Vilma MIHÁLY
Europe's Fe/Male Identity 33

Caius DOBRESCU
Identity, Otherness, Crime: Detective Fiction and Interethnic Hazards 43

Anca ANDRIESCU GARCIA
Inventing the Enemy. When Propaganda Becomes History 59

Laura SASU
Appeal to the Witness. The Role of Romanian Post-Communist Witness Literature in Outlining National (Self-)Images 67

Jørgen BRUHN
Post-Medium Literature? Two Examples of Contemporary Scandinavian "Literature" 79

Judit PIELDNER
Representations of Female Alterity in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Cinema 95

Book Review

Árpád KÉMENES
Judit Pieldner and Zsuzsa Tapodi, eds. *A tér értelmezései, az értelmezés terei. [Interpretations of Space, Spaces of Interpretation.]* 113

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **5**, 1 (2013) 7–16

Feminity – An Image of Alterity in *The Girl from the Forest* by Ioan Slavici

Andreea PETRE
Transilvania University of Braşov
Department of Literature and Cultural Studies
anda_petre@yahoo.com

Abstract. The short-story *The Girl from the Forest* by Ioan Slavici emphasises, from a modern perspective, the encounter with the Other, represented here by the feminine character, Simina. *The Girl from the Forest* can be read as a drama of excessive beauty, taking into account the fact that, in Romanian literature, the beauty of the positive feminine character was a datum, harmonised with a matching character, until Slavici; with Simina from *The Girl from the Forest*, feminine beauty becomes, first of all, a source of self-confidence, it confers self-awareness and helps the woman to overcome the traditional condition of a passive individual.

A complex character, Simina transfigures her maternal vocation in an attempt to save the man she loves. This is the moment when the relationship with the Other (Man, Master, Father) reaches the point of conflict. Simina is a figure of otherness because, although all the characters belong to the same environment, the rural country, the economic and social status differences are obvious, and, in the encounters with the Other, the feminine character refuses to behave submissively; she is an active protagonist, who takes full responsibility for her desire to valorise her subjectivity.

Keywords: Feminity, the Father figure, The Other, Modernism

Slavici's heroines, as all his characters, seem detached from the achievements of the prose of those times, from romantic clichés. The woman of the 1848s prose and of the prose that followed was a determined reality, be it linear or contradictory, but strictly confined within the author's—narrator's theory. This was what Vasile Popovici, in his study *The World of the Literary Character*, called "a monologist character," incapable of getting in touch with the inner self and of manifesting genuine "dialogic reactions: bewilderment, doubt, fear, joy, loathing, love as a gradual and complex feeling" (1997, 54).[1] With Slavici, the moment the feeling creeps, like a mystery, in the heroine's life, the Other makes

1 The quotations from specialist literature as well as the literary fragments quoted in the article are translated by Anamaria Plescan.

his entrance as well, as a distinct conscience to be faced, problematically, by the heroine. The realism of this prose brings a new, complex character on the stage of our literature—the *dialogic character*—as Popovici called it in the same study, a character who takes notice of both his/her own interiority as well as of the Other's. Slavici should not be analysed only from an ethical perspective, as he is interested, as a writer, in "human nature," a mix of the ethic, social and historic. "The works of Slavici are not mere copies of reality, accurate and meetly, but visions," Magdalena Popescu remarks (1977, 81). As a mental projection of the feminine universe, the writer does not make use of the irony we find in Caragiale's *Sketches*. A certain dynamics can be noticed in the construction of the feminine character. From *Folk Stories* to *Mara*, feminity is portrayed in the making. The woman, at Slavici, has the vocation of genesis; she is in search of purpose and meaning. Even more, she is aware of her need to search for a core, which is, after all, in direct connection with the rural, ceremonial world, but also with the decisive moments of feminine existence: marriage and maternity.

The woman, in the Romanian prose of the nineteenth century, had been, up to then, identified with the confined space of the house, an angel of the interiors. At Slavici, the woman is looking for the house in which to settle. His heroines are young lasses, fit for marriage, like Sanda from *Scormon*, Ileana from *At the Cross in the Village*, Marta from *The Village's Voice*, Simina from *The Girl from the Forest* and Persida, Mara's daughter; all of them are looking for a "nest." Sevasta from *A Wasted Life* and Ana from *The Lucky Mill* are the exceptions; although young, the two women do not perceive love as a new beginning.

The process of making a family is one of the favourite themes of Slavici's prose. It is the moment when the woman shows her adaptability, her extraordinary ability to mould after reality, her full vitality, and all these happen when the feminine character finds herself thrown in the arena. What happens to Slavici's heroines is not left unseen, chatted or judged. The more the feeling shakes the feminine inner self, the more life makes claims on her, the more visible intimacy becomes. Popovici identified a third person narrative apart from "Me" and "You"; the two involved, subjective consciences are watched, in the world as a scene, by "Him/Her," "the Stranger, a detached and objective spectator" (Popovici 1997, 75), the one who embodies the moral rule. The presence of this spectator is tightly connected to the emergence of love, a devastating energy, which leaves the characters uncovered. In the nineteenth century, placed under the sign of Prometheus, "the archetype hero of progress and effort" (Marcuse 1966, 154), the family becomes more important, as it illustrates what Michel Foucault named the "deployment of sexuality". The village is a closed community, ruled by unwritten laws which direct the individuals' behaviour. In this world, there is a "deployment of alliance" (Foucault 1990), a system of marriage, a system for establishing and developing kinship, to ensure the transmission of possessions

and names. This "deployment," where the partners have a well-defined social status, is instituted on the laws which govern relationships, and it is organised around economy and the circulation of goods. Superimposed on the "deployment of alliance," the "deployment of sexuality" is concerned with the complex control of sensations, laying the spotlight on issues of body and flesh. We are able to best observe the interconnection between the two "deployments" in the works of Slavici, especially because here irony has no place in the separation of the heroine from the romantic model. The writer is a master of the complex technique of rendering the passage of feminity from one existential status to the other.

The Girl from the Forest, published in 1884 in the "Tribuna" Magazine from Sibiu, is ascertained and analysed for its true value with delay by literary criticism. Seen as a "drama of election" (Popescu 1977, 90), *The Girl from the Forest*, labelled as a tragic story, together with *The Lucky Mill* and *A Wasted Life*, develop a theme which is also common for Slavici's idyllic short-stories—*At the Cross in the Village, Scormon* and *The Village's* V*oice*: love and starting a family.

Similarities and differences between this story and the others can, of course, be found. The idyllic element is present in the description of the reaping scene, an archaic work, done according to ancestral rituals, which causes the foresters to migrate to the plains. This time, the scene of the action is much more ample by comparison with the idyllic novels, where everything is confined within the village.

The son of "wealthy" Busuioc, Iorgovan, goes through the villages to gather people for the harvest, although an epidemic of cholera was spreading across the country and the authorities forbade the celebrations. Iorgovan had dreamt of these celebrations all through the winter. Celebration time is the period when "most of the love scenes take place and the vehemence of the gestures is much more visible," Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu states in *Love's Labors* (2006, 47). The young lad thinks about Simina, the girl he would have liked to kiss the previous year, but didn't dare, for fear that she might have found out that he wanted "even more." Simina's image is reflected in Iorgovan's mind as a blurred, hazy image: "It was not only Simina Iorgovan was thinking about, rather a certain kind of Simina, who comes and goes and what is left behind is a vague feel-good impression of presence" (Slavici, 1977, 105).

The face of the forest girl gives him a sour taste "as the sour taste of freshly-made wine, still thick". This comparison contains, in fact, the hero's destiny, which is the reflection of what Baudrillard called the "becoming-feminine of the masculine" (2008, 31); the constant absence of clarity, as induced by fresh thick wine, marks Iorgovan's attitude. At the same time, Simina is a beautiful girl, fully aware of her beauty:

> Beautiful, that's what Simina was, and she knew it. Even when she was a little girl, she felt the looks of everyone on her, and when she became a lass,

> others were telling her every day she was beautiful, and she could see it herself in the lads' eyes. And beautiful girls have plenty to choose from. (Slavici, 1979, 105)

The Girl from the Forest can be seen as a drama of excessive beauty. Simina—and, from this point of view, she prefigures Persida, the heroine of the novel *Mara*—is "wondrously beautiful". Up to this point, the beauty of positive feminine characters was consistent with a matching character, while in the case of demonic feminity, it was an instrument of manipulation and perdition.

For Slavici, beauty confers self-confidence and deepens self-awareness, without being a weapon against men. Simina is able to choose because she is good, hard-working and very beautiful. And she would choose, if not for the traditional condition of the woman, that of passivity and waiting: "A girl has to be passive, to wait, to watch and recognise the signals sent by a potential suitor" (Vintilă-Ghițulescu 2006, 14). So, Simina can do nothing but wait: "Nevertheless, lasses cannot follow their minds, as lads, but they sit, and think, and wait and cry" (Slavici 1979, 115–116).

The girl is desired by other men, but although "it isn't her who chose Iorgovan," there is something in the scarce words he addressed her in the three months they saw each other during the field works the previous year. This something, a hidden grief, draws Simina to Iorgovan.

There is a vocation of maternity at Slavici's feminine character, present in Simina, but most distinctive in Persida, two of the most complex feminine characters in Slavici's writings. Sensible to male suffering, Slavici's women want to save the man and courageously assume his weakness. This is the force which "pushes" them towards the "unfit" man. The girl's love undergoes a reversed process to that of "crystallization," the famous love theory of Stendhal.

Arriving at the girl's house after an intended two-day detour, Iorgovan asks her to go to the harvest. But Simina wouldn't like to. Neacşu, her father, is not feeling too well, and the girl has her own reasons to avoid Iorgovan. The two heroes have a decisive discussion:

> 'I meant to ask you, she said, and I don't know why I didn't: what do you want with me?'
> He shrugged.
> 'Nothing. I just know that I have a fancy for you like my life's over.'
> 'Dry love. Me fancied, and it's still me who's left dry.'
> 'True—the lad answered—I know you're right.'
> 'Then leave me be!'
> 'Why don't you leave me be?!' (Slavici 1979, 117)

"What I call 'crystallization' is the operation of the mind that draws from all that presents itself the discovery that the loved object has some new perfections," Stendhal says in *On Love* (1968, 78). Simina does not discover "new perfections" in the beloved man. He shows his indecision from the beginning. And the girl is aware of that. Throughout the whole story, Iorgovan shows his incomplete personality. He desires the girl: as soon as he sees her, he feels like "putting his hands around her and hugging her," but he doesn't look "straight" at her. After he brings her in his father's courtyard, he regrets his gesture, not only because she is the Stranger, the Marginal who reaches the "centre"—the rich and well-kept household of Busuioc—but because he is afraid that someone could figure out that he loves her but does not want to marry her: "He wouldn't have liked them to think that, God forbid, he was thinking of taking Simina as his spouse, but he loved her; and even less would he have liked someone to get that he fancied her but he didn't want to take her" (Slavici 1979, 124).

Iorgovan is a "projection," an aspiration to overcome his parents' social status, wealthy peasants, but peasants still, Magdalena Popescu demonstrates. As his parents' aspiration, he fails. But the young man knows the same failure for himself. Unable to rise to the other's expectations, Iorgovan permanently relates himself to the "projection" and not to reality.

Şofron is a powerful, fully developed individual: "Şofron, a man in his thirties, served in the imperial army and was, a few years now, a paid servant, but he knew what duty and the master's command was" (Slavici 1979, 110). The servants, who have left their homes, keep the place of the boyar's court, where they eat and sleep, with their families, as this place is their refuge in tough times and their joy for holidays, Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu affirms in the previously mentioned book (2006, 51).

Şofron falls for Simina as well: "When Şofron saw Simina, he only looked at her by chance, then tentatively, then he was struck dumb and, finally, he felt like the life still left in him was wasted, and his whole soul was clenched in one thought: to hide her away, known only to himself" (Slavici 1979, 118).

"To love someone is to isolate him from the world, to wipe out every trace of him," Jean Baudrillard meditated in *Fatal Strategies* (1996, 115). This is what Şofron wants, who, similarly to Simina, is aware that Iorgovan is incapable of taking the decision. Unlike the rich man's son, Şofron is his own master; he is at peace with himself. He works as a servant in Busuioc's household, but he is well-off, at least he has enough to start his own family. The "misfortune" which hits him hard is not his love for the forest girl, but his rivalry with Iorgovan.

Vasile Popovici demonstrates the theatrical character of this short story, which places the spotlight on the three characters: Simina, Iorgovan and Şofron, who find themselves "thrown in the arena"—the vast fields where the reaping takes place, the barn, the stable, the house (Popovici 1997, 38). Their meeting uncovers,

on turns, the deep structure of the characters. One of the fundamental scenes is the one of the kiss between Şofron and Simina. Simina's motherly instinct, impulsive, triggers Şofron's uncontrolled reaction. Let us follow the scene:

> Women are weak-hearted by nature, and seeing the stair curbing under Şofron, Simina felt the whole weight of the sack and the fright drove her near.
> 'Come down, or I'll be sick', she told Şofron. You'd better go help them. Şofron stopped for a moment, embarrassed, then he got down and dropped the sack. He was glad that, early in the morning, Simina saw him and told him to do something; he had to talk back to her. But it's hard to put the thought to proper action. He took her both hands and looked puzzled at her face.
> 'Do you know I feel like kissing you?!' he then said to her. (Slavici 1979,129)

Şofron's decision to kiss the girl from the forest is the equivalent of choosing the beloved one, but it is also a pattern of male behaviour, which shows fighting spirit, courage and boldness. Şofron kisses her not only because he loves her, but also because he knows they are watched, he knows that Iorgovan might also watch and, by his gesture, he intends to provoke him, but nothing happens. The consequences of the gesture are different for each of the protagonists: Iorgovan watches, but he is content to see the girl's reluctance, who allowed the closeness without wanting it. Simina painfully grasps Iorgovan's ambiguous attitude. She knows that if a girl is chosen, she should have protection: "You should make others afraid to kiss me" (Slavici 1979, 129). In his turn, Şofron considers Iorgovan a mollycoddle, as he accepts such jokes when he loves the woman.

All the key scenes have witnesses. The kiss scene generates a discussion between Simina and her father, Neacşu. We notice the weak figure of the Father, the instance/institution that enjoins the children's lives, as it appears in *The Girl from the Forest*. Neacşu and Busuioc see themselves transformed into witnesses to their children's drama, but they do not meddle decisively. Busuioc is the victim of his own aspirations to be more than a peasant, which he projects on Iorgovan. Neacşu knows that Şofron wants his daughter, that Iorgovan is weak-kneed, while with Şofron, one can do anything.

They all talk about the social differences between the two young people, differences which, theoretically, annul the marriage. On the one hand, Busuioc sees the girl from the forest in his courtyard and realises that Iorgovan did not make all that way to bring her to the harvest—of all the foresters—for nothing. Worried, he seeks the help of the priest, Father Furtună ('storm'), to pick Iorgovan's brains, to clarify what he intends with the girl. If he were a widower, Busuioc would have taken the girl for himself, because she is "smart, well-built and mighty fair", but she would shame him as hiss daughter-in-law. On the other hand, Neacşu counsels his daughter:

> Do not make yourself, my girl, a cuckoo's egg in a crow's nest, 'cause you're not built for it. You slept here last night, on a bed of straws, and you slept well, but they slept in beds with down pillows and will not forget that you have slept in their barn. (Slavici 1979, 135)

In the end, Busuioc would go with Iorgovan's choice, as he is his son, and Neacşu believes in destiny, which can make one's luck. From this perspective, Magdalena Popescu underlined the story's "purity." Unlike the other writings of Slavici, here the social constraints are less visible in reality; they do not come to surface "for fear of causing harm" (Popescu 1977, 191). More precisely, the social constraints are manifested on the mental level. Simina would be a servant for Iorgovan, because he is "good-hearted," while, for him, she should be "daughter-in-law to my parents, and one of them to my relatives, and it should be hell" (Popescu 1977, 192). This is the fundamental gap between the two protagonists, magisterially rendered by Slavici, who places the "heroic/erotic triangle" in "the arena": Simina, Iorgovan and Şofron. At Simina's initiative, the first two have a meeting by night. The weakening power of the father can be noticed again. Neacşu knows what his daughter is up to. He would stop her, but he knows how strong-willed his daughter is.

Şofron interferes between Simina and Iorgovan. Their retorts, followed by the explanations Neacşu asks from Iorgovan, underline the modern structure of the feminine character:

> 'What do you want with that girl?' Şofron asked quetly, very quietly.
> 'What do you want?' Iorgovan asked.
> 'I want to marry her!' Şofron answered.
> 'I don't want that!' Iorgovan said, frankly.
> 'Then, leave her be!'
> 'She doesn't leave me!'
> Şofron took a step back. That was that: what was left for him to do?
> 'You lie, he shouted, liar, liar!'
> Simina, panicked, took a step forward and placed herself between them.
> 'He doesn't lie, Şofron, she said, raising her hand. He speaks the truth, as God is my witness.' (Slavici 1979, 145)

The process of seduction, as it was pictured in the prose up to then, is cracking. The declaration of love, associated with the woman's praise, was followed by the marriage vows. Here, this promise is excluded from the start. More than that, instead of backing out, Simina courageously announces her initiative.

What supports her is the need for recognition, for affirming her "subjectivity." A flexible psychological structure, Simina converts her love into a maternal

dimension, the only thing that confers the woman a heroic dimension, equivalent to masculine heroism. The episode that takes place at the pub can be interpreted from this perspective. In a traditional universe, ruled by firm and eternal laws, the girl takes the full responsibility of her gesture. As Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu writes: "The pub is a place of perdition, where no good girl would enter" (2006, 84). The girl from the forest risks her reputation, but she is so determined that her conduct uproots Iorgovan even more and utterly baffles Şofron. She does not leave with her father, but stays to bring back the equilibrium in Busuioc's "troubled" house.

Neacşu's death has multiple implications. The guilt felt for Iorgovan's inner mess stays behind. The rendering of the critical moment the heroine is facing shows the writer's modern intuition of the woman's power to adjust, to metamorphose: "The madness and the pain she left behind!—and still, feeling steady, Simina started to cry…." (Slavici 1979, 165).

From that moment on, Simina becomes a "third woman," ready to "appropriate her self-hood" (Lipovetsky 2000, 34). Magdalena Popescu sees in the death of the father the manifestation of a constraint which obliges the young woman to come back to her people, to be a forest woman by taking on the duties of her kind (1977, 193).

When Busuioc finally decides to ask her as daughter-in-law, his gesture comes as an effort to tolerate the other, as an attempt to control otherness. The woman, as a marginal being, an intruder, has brought too much disorder in Busuioc's family, and now that the girl is alone, the rich man feels obliged to give in, to give up his vanity of not taking a forest girl as a daughter-in-law: "If Neacşu were still alive, Busuioc wouldn't have yielded in front of his son" (Slavici 1979, 166).

But accepting Simina comes too late. Busuioc is incapable of understanding that he cannot just tolerate the forester. When the girl demands to be asked from her relatives, the old man considers it a woman's whim: "But Busuioc could not gasp that a girl left all alone could linger in thoughts when he asked her for his son. A woman's whim!" (Slavici 1979, 168).

In fact, the woman, who comes from the periphery to the centre, refuses to be marginal.Virgil Vintilescu in *Ioan Slavici – Critical Evaluations*, saw in Simina "a person like everyone, but crushed, in the end, between her inner world (the genuine and passionate love for Iorgovan) and the outer world, represented by Busuioc, the proud and hard man, who only gives in at the twelfth hour, after his son is marked by moral decomposition" (1977, 157). The affirmation must be nuanced: Simina is between two worlds, but it is not her who will be crushed. Built as a hard structure, Simina detaches herself from the "outer world" (Busuioc), and, in her inner structure, her passionate love for Iorgovan is, as we have said before, converted into maternal care and responsibility.

"Man lives for an idea that becomes obsessive and he is ready to die for it," but that drives him to solitude, while the woman connects the idea of existence

indestructibly, "although fatal loneliness might mark her—she is never typically as solitary as the man; she is always at home, while the man has his 'home' outside himself," Georg Simmel remarked in *The Philosophical Culture. Adventure, Genders and the Modern Crisis* (1998, 63).

Iorgovan's "idea" is his belonging to a constraint which is long ago weakened. The obsession of incapacity of assuming his love throws him out of the centre. Besides, Simina is looking for her destiny, "at home" as an anchoring point, although she is deprived of the most important enjoining instance of her life: the father. After Neacşu's death, Simina enrols herself into penance, transferring the maternal dimension she discovered with Iorgovan towards Martin, a widower with four children. This is how Şofron finds her, who joins her patiently; this is how they find out that Iorgovan is dying. Simina runs to Iorgovan, but she only pours her soul to Şofron, who slowly and steadily takes over Neacşu's duties: "I have a weak spot for Iorgovan, Şofron! What can I do if I have, as for my child" (Slavici 1979, 200).

Iorgovan's death is a failure of the maternal energy of the woman who tried to sustain the weak and inconstant structure of the beloved man. At the same time, Iorgovan's death flattens Simina's way to Şofron, her other destiny.

Translated by Anamaria Plescan

Works cited

Baudrillard, Jean. 1996. *Strategiile fatale.* [*Fatal Strategies.*] Trans. Felicia Sicoie. Iaşi: Polirom.

—. 2008. *Cuvinte de acces.* [*Passwords.*] Trans. Bogdan Ghiu. Bucureşti: ART.

Foucault, Michel. 1990 [1978]. *A History of Sexuality.* Volume 1: An Introduction. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books.

Lipovetsky, Gilles. 2000. *A treia femeie.* [*The Third Woman.*] Trans. Radu Sergiu Ruba and Manuela Vrabie. Bucureşti: UNIVERS.

Marcuse, Herbert. 1996. *Eros şi civilizație.* [*Eros and Civilization.*] Trans. Cătălina and Louis Ulrich. Bucureşti: TREI.

Popescu, Magdalena. 1977. *Slavici.* Bucureşti: Cartea Românească.

Popovici, Vasile. 1997. *Lumea personajului.* [*The World of the Literary Character.*] Cluj-Napoca: Echinocțiu.

Simmel, George. 1998. *Cultura filosofică. Despre aventură, sexe şi criza modernului.* [*The Philosophical Culture. Adventure, Genders and the Modern Crisis.*] Trans. Nicolae Stoian and Magdalena Popescu-Marin. Bucureşti: Humanitas.

Slavici, Ioan. 1979. *Proză. Poveşti. Nuvele. Mara* [*Prose. Tales. Stories. Mara*]. Bucureşti: Cartea Românească.

Stendhal. 1968. *Despre dragoste*. [*On Love.*] Trans. Gellu Naum. Bucureşti: EPLU.
Vintilă-Ghițulescu, Constanța. 2006. *Focul amorului – despre dragoste şi sexualitate în societatea românească (1750–1830).* [*Love's Labors – On Love and Sexuality in the Romanian Society (1750–1830).*] Bucureşti: Humanitas.
Vintilescu, Virgil. 1977. *Ioan Slavici – Evaluări critice*. [*Ioan Slavici – Critical Evaluation*.] Timişoara: Excelsior Art.

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **5**, 1 (2013) 17–31

Surrealist Senses: Marcel Jean's Representations of Budapest

Imre József BALÁZS
Babeş–Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca
Department of Hungarian Literary Studies
balazsimrejozsef@gmail.com

Abstract. The paper analyses the spatial representations and the self-representations of the surrealist author Marcel Jean in his late autobiography entitled *Au galop dans le vent*, where he reflects upon his life and upon the seven years that he spent in Budapest with his wife between 1939 and 1945, and also in his book *Mnésiques*, published in 1942 in Budapest. In this latter book the presence of the surrealist mythology of transformation can be interpreted as a representation of the dislocated self, *Au galop dans le vent* showing the historical and biographical contexts of these experiences.

Keywords: Marcel Jean, Árpád Mezei, European School, surrealism, war

Marcel Jean and surrealism

In September 1938 Marcel Jean, member of the Paris surrealist group, painter and poet present in the most important publications and exhibitions of the surrealists of those times, moves to Budapest with his wife, getting a job as a designer at a Hungarian textile company. Although they plan to stay no more than one or two years, their stay in Budapest will last for seven years—they are unable to return to France or to rejoin their surrealist friends in the United States during the war.

Marcel Jean was active as an artist in Budapest, several of his drawings of this period being now part of the Peggy Guggenheim collection in Venice.[1] His textile designs created for the Francia-Magyar Pamutipar Rt. were deposited in the Museum of Applied Arts, in Budapest (Horváth 1992). He also published a book there in 1942 (*Mnésiques*, poetic essay with reproductions of 3 drawings of his own), and wrote another volume about Lautréamont's *Maldoror* during

1 The reproduction of 36 works by Marcel Jean and his biography can be accessed on the website of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection: *http://www.guggenheim-venice.it/inglese/collections/artisti/biografia.php?id_art=196*

the war years, his co-author being Árpád Mezei, essayist and future founder of the European School in Budapest (Jean and Mezei 1947). After his return to Paris, his cooperation with Mezei resulted later on in three more books: *Genèse de la pensée moderne* (Jean and Mezei 1950), *Histoire de la peinture surréaliste* (Jean and Mezei 1959) and a commented edition of the works by Isidore Ducasse / Lautréamont (Ducasse 1971). During his late years he also wrote an autobiography, *Au galop dans le vent* (Jean 1991), of great interest for our analysis. About half of this book of 224 pages is a description of the Budapest years and the experience of the war, mixing elements of travel literature, of autobiographies, and having as a background the interaction and solidarity of people developed during the war.

This article analyses the descriptions of the city and the inner experience connected to this in two of Marcel Jean's books: *Mnésiques* and *Au galop dans le vent*. My purpose is also to analyse in a broader context the representations of Hungary and of Budapest in the autobiographical accounts.

Marcel Jean's accounts of his seven years spent in Hungary

Marcel Jean joined the surrealist group in 1933, and after this he participated in surrealist meetings, exhibitions and publications as a painter, poet, essayist and even actor. He earned his living as a textile designer, working for different factories in France and also in the United States. Being involved in the strikes of the designers and textile workers in Paris in 1936, and having become secretary of their craft union, in 1938 he was offered a job in Hungary, in the textile industry. As Jean recalls in his autobiography, those who offered him this job also hoped that after his departure from Paris, there would be less trouble in the unionist movement—at least from the employers' point of view (Jean 1991, 72–73). The offer seemed generous, and in September 1938 Jean left Paris with his newly wedded wife, Lily, planning to stay in Budapest for one year or two.

In Budapest, they lived in the Rózsadomb quarter, one of the most fashionable places in town, and they soon also began learning the Hungarian language. In July 1939 they spent their holidays in France, meeting André Breton, Yves Tanguy and Roberto Matta there. They soon returned to Hungary, Jean's contract being prolonged for another year. They did not presume that the war would prevent them from returning to France during the next years. In fact, Jean's Hungarian experience includes a period of seven years between September 1938 and May 1945, and also another visit to Budapest after the war. We can reconstruct his attitude towards this experience through his books and his correspondence.

First of all, I will try to identify Jean's strategies for integration into the Hungarian cultural space and society. Jean felt that the presence of a French

couple in Budapest was quite rare at that time (80, single numbers refer to Jean 1991 further on), so their strategies for integration had to be worked out individually. They met several people who spoke French and who helped them grasp the basic elements of life in Hungary, but as Jean points out, most of them turned out to be Jews. Among the other middle-class people they met, only German could be considered as a widely spoken language (a language that the Jean family was not familiar with and did not really succeed in learning in spite of some language lessons), and in the Alföld where they also travelled, they met people who did not speak any other language besides Hungarian. Therefore, the majority of their contact persons were Jews, and this aspect became more and more important during the war years, although Jean describes himself as not particularly sensitive about this issue at the moment of arriving in Hungary. His comments on this aspect of origin are the following:

> In France, we had never cared or even got any glimpse of the Jewish question, but in Hungary it had to be taken into account. [...] As most of the other inhabitants of the kingdom of Hungary, the Jews were patriots; they were talkative and humorous, among them many nonbelievers. They were very active in the country, they were everywhere: in liberal professions, in publishing, journalism and other intellectual circles, in the show business, industry, large and small businesses—so they permeated the population, reaching even the family of Horthy, the Head of State, whose wife had a Jewish great-grandmother ... [80, my translations – I. J. B.][2]

As we can see, Jean himself thinks of the national issue on a voluntary basis, seeing the nation as a community largely based upon the choice and the will to belong there. This is a view that will be contested more and more radically by the Hungarian realities during the next few years.

French was not the only language of communication though: both Lily and Marcel Jean attempted to learn Hungarian employing a private teacher, and Jean remembers Lily counting the steps descending from a hill in Hungarian (79–80). In his letters addressed to Árpád Mezei after his return to France, we can find occasionally Hungarian words or phrases, mostly in humorous contexts: "We hope you arrived safe and sound in your home country. [...] Zádor's writing is totally undecipherable for us—it seems that Hungarians try to revert to the

2 "En France, nous ne nous étions jamais souciés ni même aperçus de la question juive; en Hongrie elle se posait pourtant. [...] Comme la plupart des autres sujets du royaume de Hongrie, les Juifs étaient patriotes, loquaces et pleins d'humour; parmi eux, beaucoup d'incroyants. Cheville ouvrière des activités du pays, on les trouvait partout: professions libérales, édition, journalisme et cercles intellectuels, spectacles, industrie, grands et petits commerces, avaient imbriqués dans la population; jusqu'au régent Horthy, le chef de l'État, dont l'épouse avait une grande-mère juive..."

Chinese ideogrammatic expression in writing. [phrase in Hungarian]. [...] Mabille was impressed when I read him your conference"[3] (Jean to Mezei, 30 May 1948). We also know that Jean lectured in Hungarian after the war in the series of conferences organized by the European School in Budapest, on the topic of French surrealism (169).

Besides Hungarian language and friends who spoke French, one possible contact for Jean with the Hungarian world could have been art. However, he felt that his surrealist interests were not shared in the country: "I perceived no significant echo of Western movements, neither any activity of a real group of avant-garde. [...] The most 'advanced' painters stuck to German expressionism or Dutch abstractionism. Surrealism? Vaguely perceived, almost ignored, while in the Czech Republic, Serbia, Romania, it created its 'schools'"[4] (80–81). He arrives to the same conclusion after meeting one of the few people whose interests roughly coincide with his: Árpád Mezei. They get into contact after the publication of *Mnésiques*, authentic surrealist blend of dream narratives, essays, poetry and drawings, a book inspired by a walk in the neighbourhood of the Schmidt castle in Óbuda, today the building of the Kiscelli Múzeum. Having read the book at one of their friends, Tamás Lossonczy the painter, Mezei gets fascinated with it, and they begin their discussions that will lead later on to several co-authored books and articles. Their first project, however, a sort of history of surrealism written for a Hungarian audience, initiated by Jean, has to be abandoned because of lack of resources. In Budapest they cannot find enough material to document this history in a professional manner:

> We agreed to write an outline of the history of surrealism, to be published in Hungarian. We lacked documentation, however. In a bookshop, I came across a copy of *Nadja*, signed by Breton for the writer Marcel Sauvage—how this copy turned out to be there? (Breton could not tell me when, later in Paris, I told him about my discovery.) A bibliophile opened his library to me, it was a huge room lined with books from floor to ceiling where, in the domain of surrealism, I discovered the brochure *Violette Nozières*, which I had co-authored in 1935. Gyúla [sic] Illyés, writer and poet, very open and a real authority within the circles that we could call advanced, had known members of the Paris surrealist group. [...] He lent me some numbers of Surrealism in the Service of Revolution. But I could

3 "Nous espèrons que tu es arrivé sain et sauf dans ton pays natal. […] A Zádor írása nekunk teljesen olvashatatlan – Úgy látszik, a magyarok az írásukban akarják visszatérni az ideogrammatic (kínai) íráshoz. […] Mabille 'sekre esett' quand je lui ai lu ta conférence, mise au point."

4 "je ne perçus aucun echo significatif des mouvements occidentaux, aucune activité d'un véritable groupe d'avant-garde. […] Les peintres les plus 'avancés' en étaient restés à l'expressionisme allemande ou à l'abstractionnisme néerlandais. Le surréalisme? Très vaguement perçu, presque ignoré, alors qu'en Tchéquie, Serbie, Roumanie, il faisait école."

> not get hold of Surrealist Revolution or Minotaur anywhere. The project of a history of surrealism was abandoned.[5] (83–84)

The lack of this type of material will not prevent them though from writing together an interpretation of *Maldoror*, where the kind of bibliography they use is more general, linked to psychology and philosophy.

In 1947, after his return to France, and after having seen some recent works by Hungarian painters, he will still think that Mezei's way of thinking is closest to what Jean considers to be surrealist: "There are no Hungarian surrealists—you're the only one of that curious species, until further notice"[6] (Jean to Mezei, 11 April 1947). All these experiences suggest that for Marcel Jean art was not a very strong connecting tool to the Hungarian intellectuals, although he recounts meeting besides Mezei and Lossonczy poets like Gyula Illyés (84), Miklós Radnóti and István Vas (91), and also artists like Endre Rozsda and Lajos Barta (92). These contacts made Jean experiment later on with the promotion of Hungarian artists in France after the war, and also suggest the translation of some major French texts connected to surrealism—I shall return to this issue further on in my essay.

Impressions of Hungary: differences that matter

> Our first impression of the Hungarian capital was olfactive—today all cities have the stale smell of pollution, but once each had its special aroma, Paris smelled of gasoline, London of coal, New York spreading the sweet smell of tar. Enclosed by huge campaigns, Budapest smelled like a farm, more exactly like horses.[7] (79)

5 "On en vint à ébaucher le projet d'une histoire, ou d'un précis du surréalisme, à publier en hongrois. Nous manquions de documentation. Chez un bouquiniste, je tombai sur un exemplaire de *Nadja* dédicacé par Breton à l'écrivain Marcel Sauvage—comment cet exemplaire était-il arrivé là? (Breton ne sut me le dire lorsque, plus tard à Paris, je lui parlai de ma découverte.) Un bibliophile m'ouvrit sa bibliothèque, immense salle tapissée de livres du parquet au plafond où, en fait de surréalisme, il ne découvrit que la brochure *Violette Nozières* à laquelle j'avais collaboré en 1935. Gyúla [sic] Illyés, écrivain et poète, très ouvert et faisant autorité dans les cercles qui pouvaient se dire avancés, avait connu à Paris des membres du groupe surréaliste. […] Il me prêta quelques numéros dépareillés du Surréalisme au service de la révolution. Nulle part, je ne pus mettre la main sur La Révolution surréaliste ou Minotaure. On abandonna le projet d'une histoire du surréalisme."

6 "Il n'y a pas des surréalistes hongrois—tu es le seul de cette curieux espèce, jusqu'à plus ample informé."

7 "Notre première impression de la capitale hongroise fut olfactive—aujourd'hui toutes les villes ont l'odeur fade de la pollution; autrefois chacune avait son arôme spécial, Paris sentait l'essence, Londres le charbon, New York répandait les effluves sucrés du goudron. Enserrée par d'immenses campagnes, Budapest sentait la ferme, plus exactement le cheval."

As we can see, Jean tries to recall his first impressions of Hungary through sensual effects. The scent associated with Budapest is a somewhat “rural” one; while the other cities Jean mentions are related to emblems of modern life, it is the horse that becomes Hungary’s emblem in this paragraph, a creature denoting a more traditional culture, but also more mythical contexts. In this sense, Hungary seems to be a right place to experience the exotic.

The other memory recalling the first day of their stay in Budapest is a visual one: “Our second surprise was visual: shops displaying signs in a language completely incomprehensible for us”[8] (79). Surrealists were great admirers of commercials and of different inscriptions displayed on the streets. They were looking for hidden meanings and connections between these signs, inscriptions and their own lives. For Jean, this strange and unintelligible nature of the inscriptions meant possibly also the fact that the hidden relationships between texts, images and everyday events seemed here impossible to discover at the time. This could be a reason why the strangeness, the alien character of the Hungarian language is represented in the text through a visual code, and not through an auditive experience for example.

At least two observations should be made regarding the representation of Jean’s stay in Hungary: 1. the country is largely presented through its inhabitants—through people Jean gets in contact with; 2. while their first year in Budapest, the pre-war period is summed up in two and a half pages, the rest of this part (between pages 81–158) deals with the war years when they were trapped in Hungary, unable to leave the country. It is clear that this meant for Jean experiencing his limits, and also experiencing his talents to deal with extreme situations. Interesting enough, these are also the years when he creates his famous surrealist objects “arbre à tiroirs” [the tree of drawers] and “armoire surréaliste” [surrealist cabinet], considered by André Breton later on to be his masterpieces (82). The result of these two characteristics is that the focus of the narrative is quite rarely directed towards the inner side of the personality: Jean appears several times as a simple observer of the vivid life of the others—a sort of anthropologist who tries not to interfere decisively with the actions of others (although we know that he did interfere with the lives of others, even saving some lives during the war, more or less directly). In this sense, the text resembles a theatrical act where there are several characters, each of them spending only a few moments on stage. Because of the war, it is also a world turned upside down, with its tragic, comic and grotesque stories—Jewish boys entering Szálasi’s youth organization for camouflage; Jean himself using his drawing skills to create his own baptism certificate to prove his non-Jewish origin; convinced communists taken away by the Russian army after the takeover of Budapest, while well-

8 “notre seconde surprise fut visuelle: les boutiques affichaient des enseignes dans une langue toute à fait incomprehensible.”

known "nyilas" activists carrying on with their lives in peace among the ruins of Budapest. The analogy of a theatrical performance is, therefore, valid also in this sense—of people playing roles of others, wearing masks, negotiating their parts within the play.

After more than a decade, Jean will develop his experiences connected to Hungarian people into a sort of Volksgeist—a humourous one, as one of his basic experience with Hungarians is telling jokes: "My long experience with the friendly people who over the centuries has become established on the site of the great Danubian plain helped me identify two of their main features, or at least of many of them. 1. They invented sealing wax. 2. They believe in Santa Claus"[9] (Jean to Mezei, 1 July 1957). In fact, this is already a description of Hungarians' relationships with Western Europe—a caricature of their high hopes concerning their careers but also their expecting some kind of undefined help from Western people.

While in *Au galop dans le vent* Jean insists very much on the outside events, on episodes connected to other people, the reverse of this attitude is shown in *Mnésiques*, where the inner experience of dreams and of visual associations has a much stronger presence. However, as I tried to prove in a former detailed analysis of *Mnésiques*, the basic characteristic of the representations of Hungarian landscapes is that inner and outside experiences are interchangeable in both directions within the text. We can recognize the ancient technique of mirroring inner feelings with nature and landscapes, but we see in Jean's book also the way desire can change a landscape or the way objects enter the dreams of the artist and become strong inner realities there. In this sense, the connection works both ways (Balázs 2013, 163).

In *Au galop dans le vent*, the description of landscapes is less frequent, but there are two or three representations that seem quite important. One of them coincides with the more intensive description from the chapter *Morphée* from *Mnésiques*—description of the Schmidt castle:

> In fact, [Schütz] Mihály and I spoke the same language, combining a certain disdain for conventions, a taste for the unusual and for the miracles encountered among the incidents of everyday life. One day he took us beyond the northern districts of the city, past an old cemetery, to a steep ramp along which there were shaky railings supporting some baroque cherubs made of rather deteriorated cement. This path led to a park with full size replicas of famous works of sculpture like Venus of Milo, Michelangelo's Moses, the Uffizi Porcellino, nymphs and antique vases

9 "Ma déjà longue expérience avec la sympathique population qui au cours des siècles s'est acclimatée sur le site de la grande plaine danubienne m'a permis de dégager deux traits principaux des dites indigènes, ou du moins de beaucoup d'entre eux. 1. Ils ont inventé la cire à cacheter; 2. Ils croirent au Père Noël."

> perched on mounds or sheltered by a fold of land, simulacra of simulacra, sometimes badly damaged. Alleys led to a masonry of the eighteenth century, shuttered, surrounded by other statues and broken sculptures. All this in abandonment. We could see no one.
> An atmosphere of timeless disorder permeated the collection of fake relics. This crazy house was, said Mihály, the Schmidt castle, once the property of a curious antique collector. One morning in a room of the castle the body of his mysteriously murdered mistress was found.
> This tour, along with memories and dreams that visited me at the time, made me write a book, *Mnesics*, published in 1942 by Editions Hungaria in Budapest, in French language.[10] (82–83)

In Árpád Mezei's view, this description of ruins is in a way a premonitory one, coinciding with what Jean will see in Budapest after the bombings: "The castle and its surroundings appear in the dream as a desert of ruins, of fantastic dimensions. […] Some years later, after the siege, looking out of the window of the writer's home in Buda, the sight was quite similar" (Mezei 1993a, 224–225, my translation, I. J. B.).

Other depictions include the sight of the bombing—where the sensational element is even caricatured. At the restaurant situated on János-hegy, where they go for a small excursion, the waiter greets them like this: "You came for the bombings, right?"[11] (104). It seems that for some inhabitants of Budapest, the bombing of the city by the American air force became a habitual "show"—something they had to get accustomed to, but also a sort of thrilling entertainment. Indeed, the "show" is described by Jean in terms of a theatrical performance ("the radio recited ritual litanies"; "like a theater curtain"; "on stage"

10 "En fait, [Schütz] Mihály et moi parlions la même langue, mêlant un certain dédain des conventions au goût de l'insolite et du merveilleux rencontrés parmi les incidents de la vie courante. Il nous conduisit un jour au-delà des quartiers nord de la ville, passé un vieux cimetière, jusqu'à une rampe abrupte bordée de balustrades chancelantes supportant quelques angelots de style baroque, moulages en ciment assez détériorés. Ce chemin menait vers un parc dénudé ou s'érigeaient les répliques grandeur nature d'oeuvres célèbres de la sculpture: Vénus de Milo, Moïse de Michel-Ange, le sanglier romain du musée des Offices, des nymphes et des vases antiques, perchés sur des monticules ou abrités par un pli de terrain, simulacres de simulacres parfois très abîmés. Des allées conduisaient à une batisse du XVIIIe siècle, volets clos, entourée d'autres statues et de débris de sculptures. Tout cela à l'abandon. On ne voyait personne.
Une atmosphère de désordre intemporel imprégnait la collection de faux vestiges. Cette demeure folle, c'était, nous dit Mihály, le château Schmidt, jadis domaine d'un antiquaire fantasque. Un matin, on avait trouvé, dans une salle du château, le corps de sa maitresse, mystérieusement assassinée.
De cette excursion et des souvenirs et rêves qui me visitèrent à cette époque, j'écrivis un récit, *Mnésiques*, publié en 1942 aux éditions Hungária à Budapest, en français."

11 "Vous venez pour les bombardements?"

etc., 105).[12] The metaphors stressing natural analogies might be interpreted as reflections of the ambiguous attitude of the viewer—watching the procession of forces that are beyond the control of everyday people resembles the effect of the sublime that can only be admired but cannot be interacted with. Jean describes the bombing using terms like "insects," "geysers," "clouds," "dragonflies" (105). These kinds of landscapes (just like the sight of the Schmidt castle surrounded by ruins) represent anxieties, uneasy feelings, the only way of overcoming these being (in 1942 at least, in *Mnésiques*, before the bombings and before the siege of Budapest) the core of surrealist mythology: love. In *Mnésiques*, the landscape with mountains is represented at a certain moment as a female profile, and the sight of the ruins of the Schmidt castle becomes the place of a revelation, and not a mere visual image any more (Balázs 2013, 159).

During his stay in Hungary, Marcel Jean travels also in Transylvania on at least two occasions, and makes a business trip also to Bucharest. It is interesting to notice that in the representations of Transylvania he uses the same pattern as in the depiction of the bombing—animal and natural analogies. But this time the animals are mythological beasts or quite strange creatures like the Transylvanian variant of water buffaloes that is not a familiar sight for a Frenchman:

> The horizons of the Székely country, which I have contemplated for the first time, evoked to me nostalgic memories of a previous life that I had spent in the large plains at the foot of the high Carpathians, and, without ever having seen them, I seemed to recognize their bluish profiles. [...] The mountain was like a witch's cauldron and it would not have seemed surprising to find in a clearing these ladies celebrating a Sabbath. [...] The water buffaloes, black and ugly as dragons from fables, pulled chariots, ancestors of covered wagons that transported the emigrants of the last century from Central Europe and from elsewhere across the savannas of the American West.[13] (86–87)

This could suggest that Jean considered Transylvania as a more archaic land, connected to primordial existence—this representation being quite frequent also among Hungarian people of the period. The American analogy also stresses the

12 "la radio récitait les litanies rituelles;" "comme un rideau de théâtre;" "sur la scène"

13 "Les horizons du pays Székely, pour moi qui les contemplais pour la première fois, évoquaient comme le souvenir nostalgique d'une existence antérieure que j'aurais passée dans ces grandes plaines douces étendues au pied des hautes Carpates dont, sans les avoir jamais vues, il me semblait reconnaître les profils bleutés. […] La montagne était comme un chaudron de sorcières et il n'eût pas paru surprenant de rencontrer dans une clairière ces dames en train de célébrer quelque sabbat. […] Des buffles, noirs et hideux comme les dragons des fables, tiraient des chars bâchés, ancêtres des covered waggons qui transportèrent au siècle passé les émigrants d'Europe centrale et d'ailleurs à travers les savanes de l'Ouest américain."

'wild' character of the Transylvanian land that seems to offer itself for explorers. Besides the reference to the American frontier experience, another element that suggests this idea is the reference to wild berries that Jean and his friends could collect in seemingly unmeasurable quantities (87). We should notice also the reference to the profile of the mountains and the salted lakes—the mythology of Jean's series of drawings called *Profile de la Memoire*, being present also in *Mnésiques*, can be linked to the image of the mountains that seemed strangely well-known for the painter.

Another trip to Szilágysomlyó and its surroundings with Árpád Mezei and his wife is an opportunity for Jean also to discover the multiethnic aspects of Transylvania. The discovery of diversity is mirrored through architectural and gastronomical experiences:

> The population was half Hungarian, half Romanian—among Romanians the custom was building blue houses and they were cooking using oil, while living side by side, the Hungarians, oh economic determinism, had whitewashed houses and they cooked using fat—and the two communities had different costumes.[14] (87)

The trip to Bucharest, carried out also in 1941, is recalled much later in the book, on the occasion of their return to France in 1945 via Bucharest and Istanbul. Jean's impressions about Bucharest are those of familiarity—good quality French being spoken there, and the atmosphere of the textile industries, of the great boulevards resembling boulevard Haussmann, the fashionable cars, cafés and the "Latin" vivacity of the inhabitants make him feel comfortable there among friends with surrealist connections—like the family members of Victor Brauner whom they meet in Bucharest (147). During their transit to Istanbul they cannot revive the same atmosphere—in the post-war situation Bucharest seems to them quite affected by the war, too. But the way the Bucharest memories are inserted into the narrative (a flashback to 1941 within a narrative concerning events from 1945) suggests that the Romanian capital is for Jean a mirror of Paris, a visual substitute for his home—the 1941 memories serving as anticipation of their return to Paris.

---

14 "La population, mi-hongroise, mi-roumaine, badigeonnait chez les Roumains les maisons en bleu et faisaient la cuisine à l'huile tandis que, vivant du même sol et côte à côte, les Hongrois, ô déterminisme économique, avaient des maisons blanchies à la chaux et cuisinaient à la graisse, et les deux communautés portaient des costumes différents."

Cultural transfers between France and Hungary

One of the closest friends of Jean among the members of the surrealist group was Yves Tanguy, with whom he also exchanged several letters. When Jean's wife met Tanguy's family in Paris in 1939, they must have exchanged some kind of small gifts. Tanguy's message written after this occasion shows that Jean tried to identify the elements of Hungarian identity also through specific meals and drinks, and distributed these among his friends: "Your dear Tokaji vanished quickly."[15] Tanguy also drew a sketch about the bottle of Tokaji, in his very specific style (Tanguy 1993 [29 April 1939], 17).

After the outbreak of the war, Tanguy moved to the United States with his future wife Kay Sage, and tried to help his friends, among them Marcel Jean, to escape Europe. One of his letters shows that these attempts were blocked by several bureaucratic and financial impediments:

> We tried many things and spoke with many people about you so far, alas to no avail. Because according to the new laws the person who gives an affidavit must formally commit to ensure a certain amount of money per month to the beneficiary, and also has to fully commit himself to bear the expenses in case of a disease. There are 15 things like that each of them as bad as this. We found an old lady who initially had promised this thing, but when she read all this she just deflated.[16] (Tanguy 1993 [30 April 1941], 25)

After his return to Paris, Jean was quite active in transferring Hungarian culture to France, but also in the opposite way, transferring valuable pieces of information for Árpád Mezei and his fellow founders of the European School in Budapest. Jean was a contact person for the young artists Béla Bán and Endre Bálint who finally managed to exhibit their works at the 1947 international surrealist exhibition. In Paris he tried to promote major artists like Tivadar Csontváry or Lajos Vajda, showing their works to André Breton and others—Breton seeming quite interested in Csontváry, but uncontent with the quality of the reproductions that Jean showed them. The quality of the reproductions also delayed the publication of Jean's and Mezei's article about Csontváry very much, which finally appeared in les Cahiers d'Art (Jean and Mezei 1949).

---

15 "Ton cher petit Tokay a disparu allègrement."

16 "Nous avons essayé beaucoup de choses et gens pour toi jusqu'ici hélas sans résultat. Car d'après les nouvelles lois la personne qui donne un affidavit doit s'engager formellement à garantir une certaine somme d'argent par mois au bénéficiaire, s'engager également à l'avoir entièrement lui et sa famille à sa charge en cas de maladie. Il y a comme ça 15 choses aussi terribles les unes que les autres. Nous avions trouvé une vieille dame qui avait promis, mais quand elle a lu ça elle s'est tout simplement dégonflée."

In the opposite direction, he followed closely the activity of the European School, making suggestions for translations (from Jarry, Breton and others), also lecturing on his return to Budapest about the recent evolutions of surrealist painting and becoming honorary member of the European School. He suggested to Mezei several contacts among the surrealists with whom the European School could cooperate, and largely contributed to the visibility of Mezei's works within the French cultural field. However, the political context made it more and more difficult to keep in touch with his friend and co-author, and after the publication of *Genèse de la pensée moderne* in 1950, their contacts became more sporadic. *Histoire de la peinture surréaliste*, begun following the same pattern of cooperation between Jean and Mezei as the previous books, was quite difficult to finish with no real possibility of cooperation in the context of the Hungarian Stalinist regime where contacts with France were watched with suspicion by the authorities. Jean felt that the amount of work carried out documenting the later stages of surrealism and of the international diffusion of surrealist art made the book his own in a greater proportion than the previous ones—this is why this volume has as its author Marcel Jean on its cover and in the bibliographies, "avec la collaboration de Arpad Mezei." Although Mezei accepted this formula in a letter written to Jean in 1959, after the publication of *Au galop dans le vent* he tried to highlight some aspects of Jean's narrative that seemed to him a retroactive distortion of the nature of their cooperation (Mezei 1993b).

In his study about Hungarian surrealism, Marc Martin is right to observe that the presence of Hungarian painting is quite scarce in *Histoire de la peinture surréaliste*, and considers that Jean could have written much more about Hungarian surrealism in this book precisely because of his detailed knowledge about the situation of Hungarian art and about the European School: "Back in Paris, he did not contribute to the spreading of Hungarian avant-garde in France (e.g. *The History of Surrealist Painting*, published by Seuil in 1959, although written in collaboration with Árpád Mezei [...] does not contain any articles or comments on the Hungarian painting)"[17] (Martin 1995, 66). Possible reasons for this omission include the ambivalent relationship of Hungarian painters to surrealism. From the letters of Béla Bán and Endre Bálint addressed to Imre Pán and Árpád Mezei we know about the project of some young Hungarian artists to create a group that would be programmatically surrealist. However, this project was soon abandoned precisely by the painters who took part at the 1947 international surrealist exhibition (Bán 1990 [1947], 131). Therefore, although Hungarian painting had strong connections to surrealist art during the 1940s,

17 "De retour à Paris, il ne contribua pas davantage à la diffusion française de l'avant-gardisme hongrois (par exemple son *Histoire de la peinture surréaliste*, parue au Seuil en 1959, et pourtant pensée et rédigée en collaboration avec Àrpàd Mezei, […] ne comporte aucun article ou commentaire sur la peinture hongroise)."

no actual surrealist group was constituted there, and this is a notable difference between the Hungarian, the Romanian and the Czech art scenes. In the latter two countries, as Jean also noticed in his book of memories, surrealism flourished within a dynamic group activity. In this sense, Jean's *Histoire* (if it were published a decade later) most probably would have included only painters like Simon Hantai, Endre Rozsda, Judit Reigl, who actually lived in Paris after the Second World War, and were valued by André Breton during the late stages of surrealism.

Another reason for the omission of Hungarian painters may have been the fact that Jean saw Hungarian culture as centered more on literature.

> "It does not surprise me that the Hungarians of Paris have sent nothing surrealist to your show. There are no Hungarian surrealists–you're the only one of that curious species, until further notice."[18] (Jean to Mezei, 11 April 1947); "I think that historically the Hungarians are at their best in poetry and philosophy rather than in the arts, but I think this means no prejudice to the possible painters, but I do not know enough about them to give a precise opinion about them. As for Rozsda and Barta, they seemed at the time sufficiently distant from surrealism, but this does not mean that they cannot naturally grow in this direction."[19] (Jean to Mezei, 12 May 1947).

Conclusions

Marcel Jean comes closest to Hungarian culture in his 1942 book *Mnésiques*, where he sees inner and outside phenomena as interchangeable, as communicating. As I have shown in another essay, *Mnésiques* is a book where we can see the presence of the surrealist mythologies of transformation and of the hybrid—the latter one being also an emblem of a dynamic, unstable identity. *Au galop dans le vent* offers a background for these experiences, looking back on past events from a historical perspective, where the outside events become more important. Jean offers an image of his Hungarian experience through presenting meetings with people, through some visual elements—and generally through sensual aspects. The image of Budapest under siege prevails in the narrative, marking a decisive period of Jean's identity—and showing elements of the characteristic urban

18 "Je ne m'étonne pas que les Hongrois du Paris n'aient rien envoyé de surréaliste pour ton exposition. Il n'y a pas des surréalistes hongrois—tu es le seul de cette curieux espèce, jusqu'à plus ample informé."

19 "Je crois d'ailleurs que historiquement les Hongrois se révèlent plutôt dans la poésie et la philosophie que dans les arts plastiques, ceci naturellement ne préjuge en sien de peintres possibles, mais je ne connais pas suffisamment eux dont tu me parles pour donner un avis là-dessus. Quant à Rozsda et Barta, ils me semblaient à l'époque, assez éloignés du surréalisme, cela ne veut pas dire naturellement qu'ils ne puissent se développer dans cette direction?"

mythology of the surrealist prose written by Breton or Aragon (Bancquart 2004, Ottinger 2002). This urban mythology, however, of *Au galop dans le vent* is only a distant echo of *Nadja* or *Le paysan de Paris*, and even of the one of Jean's own *Mnésiques*, and it needs further investigation.

Works cited

Balázs Imre József. 2013. Francia álombeszéd Budapestről: Marcel Jean Mnésiques című könyve. [Dreamspeech about Budapest: Mnésiques by Marcel Jean.] In *Kortárs magyar kisebbségi irodalmak.* [*Contemporary Hungarian Minority Literatures.*], ed. Imre József Balázs, 152–164. Kolozsvár: Egyetemi Műhely Kiadó.

Bancquart, Marie-Claire. 2004. *Paris des Surréalistes.* [*The Paris of Surrealists.*] Paris: Éd. de la Différence.

Bán Béla Pán Imréhez. [Letter from Bán Béla to Pán Imre.] 1990 [1947]. In Péter György and Gábor Pataki, *Az Európai Iskola és az Elvont Művészek csoportja.* [*The European School and the Group of Abstract Artists.*] Budapest: Corvina.

Ducasse, Isidore comte de Lautréamont. 1971. *Oeuvres complètes commentées par Marcel Jean et Arpad Mezei.* [*Complete Works Commented by MJ and AM.*] Paris: Eric Losfeld.

Horváth Hilda. 1992. Marcel Jean textiltervei a Francia-Magyar Pamutipar Rt számára. [The Textile Designs of MJ for the Francia-Magyar Pamutipar Rt.] In *Ars decorativa 12*, ed. Gyula Rózsa, 141–150. Budapest: Iparművészeti Múzeum.

Jean, Marcel avec la collaboration d' Arpad Mezei. 1959. *Histoire de la peinture surréaliste.* [*The History of Surrealist Painting.*] Paris: Seuil.

Jean, Marcel et Arpad Mezei. 1947. *Maldoror*. Paris: Éd. du Pavois.

—. 1949. Csontvary. *Cahiers d'Art* (June): 89–98.

—. 1950. *Genèse de la pensée moderne.* [*The Genesis of Modern Thought.*] Paris: Éd. Corrêa.

Jean, Marcel to Árpád Mezei. *Correspondence*. Budapest: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Kézirattár, Fonds Árpád Mezei.

Jean, Marcel. 1942. *Mnésiques: Essai avec trois dessins de l'auteur.* [*Mnesics : Essay with Three Drawings by the Author.*] Budapest: Editions Hungária.

—. 1991. *Au galop dans le vent.* [*Galloping through the Wind.*] Paris: Ed. Jean-Pierre de Monza.

Martin, Marc. 1995. L'infortune du surréalisme en Hongrie. [The Misfortune of Surrealism in Hungary.] *Mélusine* vol. XV: 45–74.

Mezei Árpád. 1993a. A francia szürrealista költészet. [French Surrealist Poetry.] In Árpád Mezei, *Mikrokozmoszok és értékelések.* [*Microcosms and Evaluations.*], 217–226. Pécs: Jelenkor.

—. 1993b. Marcel Jean: Au galop dans le vent. In Árpád Mezei, *Mikrokozmoszok és értékelések.* [*Microcosms and Evaluations.*], 300–304. Pécs: Jelenkor.
Ottinger, Didier. 2002. *Surréalisme et mythologie moderne. Les voies du labyrinthe d'Ariane à Fantômas.* [*Surrealism and Modernist Mythology : The Ways of the Labyrinth from Ariadne to Fantômas.*] Paris: Gallimard.
Tanguy, Yves. 1993. *Lettres de loin: à Marcel Jean.* [*Letters from Far Away : to MJ.*] Paris: Le Dilettante.

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **5**, 1 (2013) 33–41

Europe's Fe/Male Identity

Vilma MIHÁLY
Sapientia University, Miercurea Ciuc
Department of Humanities
vilma_gote@yahoo.com

Abstract. The following study discusses Europe's identity focussing upon questions such as how Europa's destiny—the next of kin from Greek mythology—has influenced that of the continent, the relationship between Europe and its nations or Europe's role in the world. According to French anthropologist Annick de Souzenelle, there is a lunar, that is female and a solar, that is a male side to both Europa and Europe but whereas the mythical figure failed to find and integrate the opposite within herself, Europe does still have the opportunity to discover its solar aspects and reach unity within itself and the world as a whole. Apart from the theory the present paper also tries to give examples from different fields of study such as politics, philosophy and literature, which shall underline Europe's fe/male identity and role, e. g. Winston Churchill's *Iron Curtain Speech*, Jose Ortega y Gasset's *Meditation on Europe*, Sándor Márai's *Europe's Abduction* or Czeszlaw Milosz's *Native Realm.*

Keywords: Europe, identity, female, male, myth

Today, when many European countries are facing financial, political and social problems, with the fate of the European Union being insecure, we have to turn to Europe's identity once again and try to find, that is restate its common cultural roots, so that it can fulfil its goals on a wider, universal level.

There exists certainly more than one point of view to discuss the issue from, such as the outer perspective, Europe as seen from an outsider, or the inner one, as seen from an insider. A possible inner point of view would be to focus upon our continent's male and female characteristics and their relationship to each other. The way these two features interact influences Europe's identity as a whole, as well as Europe's inner and outer image.

In order to analyse Europe's male and female sides, I suggest an interdisciplinary approach, based, on the one hand, upon the thoughts of French Christian anthropologist Annick de Souzenelle, on the other hand, upon chosen literary works, written shortly after World War II, dealing with European identity.

In her book entitled *The Inner Oedipus. The Presence of the Logos in the Greek Myth,* Annick de Souzenelle (1999) dedicates a whole chapter to Europe's identity and destiny, taking as a starting point the myth of Zeus's kidnapping Europa. Within the female pantheon of Greek mythology, Europa, daughter of Agenor, king of Tyre and sister of Cadmos, appears as a charming young lady capable of seducing anyone. Yet, it is not anyone, but Zeus himself, the Father of Gods and men, who falls in love with the girl. When Zeus notices her, Europa is asleep and has a strange dream. She sees two continents, each of them in shape of a woman is trying to possess her. Asia pretends to have a right upon her, because she gave birth to her. The other continent, still unnamed, claims that Zeus would give Europa to her when she became an adolescent. Europa awakens and is deeply shocked by her dream, she wants to get rid of this strange impression and invites her friends to join her on the beach, to collect flowers and bathe in the sea. Zeus transforms himself into a white bull and comes down to play with the girls. When Europa caresses him and gets on his back, he jumps into the sea and swims away to Crete with her. Once on the island of Crete, Zeus changes into a vulture and rapes Europa. As a result of their union, Europa will give birth to three sons: Minos, Radamante and Sarpedon. Zeus also gives her a javelin which never misses its target, a dog which always catches its prey and a giant made out of bronze, vulnerable only on one spot, which is left to guard the island. Yet, Zeus does not stay with Europa too long, so the young woman marries Asterios, King of Crete, who adopts her three sons, naming them his successors (Graves 2001, 201–203).

We know the story of the three brothers, but we do not learn what has happened to Europa. Has she lived with King Minos and Queen Pasiphae on Crete? Her brothers have not succeeded in their quest of finding her. Only Cadmos has partially gone through the right path, and it is Oedipus of the fourth generation who finally completes the route. We can thus conclude that at the time of Cadmos, Europa faces a banalised end. According to Souzenelle, this is due to the fact that the reunion of brother and sister, two halves of the the same whole, does not take place (1999, 127–135).

Europa's myth with her dream of the two continents together with the etymology of Europe's name, that is "the one who flows/expands far toward the West," lead Souzenelle to the conclusion that Europa's mythical figure can be regarded as a personification of our continent (Souzenelle 1999, 139, translated by me, V. M.).

Europa's/Europe's destiny follows the traditional mythical founding process: the God of the Heavens separates the male and female poles from each other, dissolving the confusion that surrounds their primordial unity, in order to allow their reunification on a more conscious level. The male half is more active and combative, whereas the female part is supportive and full of life potential that helps the action to complete. Europa/Europe has been geographically, politically and religiously torn away from the Orient for centuries; she should try to heal this

rupture without recreating a confusing situation, but by finding her true identity. As every female being, Europa/Europe bears a male seed of divine origin within herself, which constitutes the essence of her life potential and will play a major role in activating this quality (Souzenelle 1999, 140–141).

The mythical Europa, sunk into her exile on Crete, seems to be unconscious of the essence. The fact that Zeus transforms himself into a bull to possess her underlines Europa's lunar features; she is not allowed to take part in Zeus's victories. The Father of Gods and men commits the abduction, yet through the rape he turns into the devil, embodiment of the fake solar aspect. Thus, two of Europa's sons, Minos and Radamante will be closely connected with the underworld and death, it is only Sarpedon who will contribute to saving Helena in the Trojan war (Souzenelle 1999, 141–142). After her lunar maternities the development of Europa dissolves in the Cretan waters; she dies without assuming her solar side, that is the divine word she unconsciously bears within herself.

Today's Europe seems to be in a deep crisis on all levels mainly because the sense behind things has been lost, there are no reference points. Our search for Europe's identity is still unconscious, since it is directed outward. National particularities are getting stronger and often confront each other, different ethnic groups ask for cultural and religious independence, they want freedom of language and custom usage, rather than to recall their forgotten traditions. If under these circumstances we want to construct a conscious Europe, we have to be aware of the masks our leaders are wearing, for they think they are following Ariadne's thread, yet they forget that Ariadne remained just as infantile as Europa, her grandmother. Her thread does not lead us out of the labyrinth but leaves us entangled in it (Souzenelle 1999, 144).

The question is how to get out of the labyrinth and how to build a solar Europe? Europe will not make sense if she does not succeed in bringing the mythic woman from within herself into the solar phase. Perhaps Europa/Europe should make use of the three gifts Zeus offered her: the javelin must reach its task, Logos, the unique language; the dog must lead her toward the light; the bronze giant must open the gates and let the light flow in (Souzenelle 1999, 145). We should try to use these items and set our tasks accordingly, not only follow the modern Daedalus and Icarus in their vain and foolish pursuit. We keep moving on the horizontal level and seem to have forgotten all about the vertical one. We have mistaken progress for an upward movement, thinking that it is capable of solving all contradictions. As a consequence of this diverted perspective what should be the source of great achievements has turned into demonic, destructive energies. The solution would be to return to our ontological laws. We have normalised our labyrinthine existence continuously ignoring and transgressing these basic rules. Our world is experiencing a period of development when the lunar Europe denounces the infantile and rejects morals without finding the ontological laws,

which leads to her becoming infantile again (Souzenelle 1999, 146). Among the ontological laws we can find the importance of the moment: When we regard the moment as belonging to historical time, it becomes repetitive and banal, when we live the moment aware of its eternal character, it reveals its creative power to us. Each and every human being is the eternal 'I am' in development. Every thing is real only if it is in relationship with its founding word. Thus, the principle behind each and every being, as well as its finality lies in its ultimate unity (Souzenelle 1999, 147).

If we want a solar and working Europe, its construction must obey the law of people's profound and clear unity. Anthropology meets quantum physics at this stage, since the latter also states that at a certain level we all belong to one unique entity. To forget this fact is the source of real confusion and leads to serious dangers (Souzenelle 1999, 148). It is essential for Europe to listen to the voice of our sacred books, or if she is not willing to, then to the quantum physicists of our days. These voices proclaim the existence of an ultimate reality that lies behind all phenomena and all forms eluding all sorts of description (Souzenelle 1999, 165).

At least since the end of World War II a rupture has existed within Europe itself, a break between the West/(fake) male side and the East/(fake) female part that not even the European Union has managed to reconcile. The meaning and the consequences of virtually cutting Europe in two entered the political and philosophical discourse right after the historic event took place. On the 5th of March 1946 Winston Churchill presented his *Sinews of Peace*, also known as the *Iron Curtain Speech*, at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. When speaking about our continent, Churchill acknowledged that it had become a ruin and its achievements had vanished (1946, 2). He drew a clear map of the new borders and limitations, referring to Europe's position in the world:

> From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an *iron curtain* has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in some cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow. (Churchill 1946, 6)

Presenting facts Churchill tried to argue objectively for a reunification of the old continent:

> Whatever conclusions may be drawn from these facts—and facts they are—this is certainly not the Liberated Europe we fought to build up. Nor is it

> one which contains the essentials of permanent peace. The safety of the world, ladies and gentlemen, requires a new unity in Europe, from which no nation should be permanently outcast. (1946, 6–7)

According to Churchill, World Wars I and II could not be prevented, but our future depended on us, our fortunes were still in our hands. In his speech he encouraged a continuous dialogue between the two sides, namely Western and Eastern Europe with Soviet Russia (1946, 8). Many things that he proclaimed and argued for in his *Iron Curtain Speech* were kept and carried through by those who followed him in politics. Although we have witnessed wars, there has not been and hopefully will not be another war to engulf the whole world. The plea for peace has been constant throughout the decades.

If we wanted to 'translate' Churchill's discourse into Souzenelle's symbolic language, we should consider the aim of the politician's speech, that is to achieve everlasting peace worldwide as belonging to the female characteristics. In this view, the years following World War II have continuously strengthened Europe's female features. Yet, the means by which peace has been preserved have been represented by, at times fake male manifestations. One of the first measures Churchill suggested was to establish an international armed force within the United Nations Organization that would fight off every attempt to cause further disturbances (1946, 3). This has undoubtedly happened and even today we can see how sometimes local conflicts are handled with help of outer armed forces. The question remains whether war can truly be prevented by another war, by an armed intervention, by misusing active male power.

Politics often seems to fail precisely because although it sets the right goals, it uses the wrong tools. There is always 'the other' who turns out to be the enemy and has to be fought off. Armed forces (re)act right away, yet even if they win, they fail in the long run because the action-reaction chain has been set into motion, and peace under the strict surveillance of the army is a fragile one, in my opinion. A possible solution would be to consider other means of achieving harmony with 'the other.' In 1949, three years after Churchill's speech, the Spanish philosopher, José Ortega y Gasset, standing on the west side of the Berlin Wall, spoke about the necessity of uniting Europe by invoking the human intellect as an active force to help change the current situation (2007, 9). In Ortega y Gasset's view, pure intellectuality had the role of pointing at and defining the historic changes that occurred throughout the times. If great thinkers, intellectuals did not come out and speak about current happenings, the root of the problems would remain hidden from the eyes of the masses. For lack of highlighting interpretation the suffering of people would increase (2007, 10).

Another major issue Europe was confronted with in the years following World War II was that its other main pillars, civilisation and language had become

problematic. Words had lost their essence, they had become perverted with a double meaning. 'Democracy' had seized to exist as a valid concept after Yalta (Ortega y Gasset 2007, 10). Thus, politicians who were using these words and concepts, being blind to the truth could not be regarded as authentic. Europe as its peoples had known it did no longer exist. There were only its ruins left. In his speech Ortega y Gasset pleaded for the emergence of a new Europe with a strengthened European identity (2007, 13–14). Catastrophes got a meaning only if they served as a step to a rebirth. The only way for people to survive the changing times was to develop a positive attitude towards their situation, not to remain trapped in a petrified past, but to be able to step out of and look at the happenings from the outside. Quoting Herakleitos, our slogan should be: "Mobilis in mobile" (qtd. Ortega y Gasset 2007, 16). This type of mobility is closer to the true male active features than armed reaction, because it reaches to the essence of human beings and does not only involve outer, surface problems.

Literature, in its general pursuit to reveal truth, has always been a realm that tried to show people the true nature of all phenomena, helping us pull down the mask of a fake, perverted reality. Long before the Central European discourse had become a trend, somewhere at the beginning of the 1950s, two writers, Sándor Márai and Czeslaw Milosz, both from Central-Eastern Europe, reflected on this schism and tried to offer solutions to the problem.

Márai's work bears the title *Europa's Abduction* and was written between 1946 and 1947. It renders the author's impressions and experience while travelling to Western Europe, more precisely to Switzerland, Italy and France right after World War II. We have a first person narrative, rarely changing to a dialogue when the author turns to himself, so basically we have to deal with a diary. The journey gives the author the opportunity to take a close look at the political, social and mental changes that the war caused in Eastern and Western Europe, to compare these and view the two sides in each other's reflection. He concludes that although the overall situation seems to be better in the West, as far as human thoughts and quality literature are concerned, the West has not managed to keep its standards, moral and literary values have more accurately been preserved in the East. World literature as we had in the Renaissance or in the nineteenth century does no longer exist. It is as if "the word had got stuck in the throat of world literature," as Márai puts it (2008, 91):

> Does the intellectual/spiritual Europe still exist?... Or are there only countries, state borders, monetary and political systems and ailing nationalism left? I cannot answer this. Is there anything on which Europe agrees as it used to at the time of Erasmus—when Reformation ravaged national societies—but was still one through its humanist education? What does Europe agree on today?[1]

1 The fragments by Sándor Márai and Czeslaw Milosz quoted in the article are my translations, V. M.

Under these circumstances the only home for the author is language itself: "There is only one home, that is language itself. Everything else is either need or concept" (Márai 2008, 99). He primarily refers to his mother tongue, the Hungarian language, which serves as a refuge. For the whole of Europe he predicts that Art and Intellect/Spirit will speak up with an immense power and will take on a position above all other phenomena. Yet, this process takes time, first the finances have to be cleared, so that people would have a warm room and what to eat, only then can they think great thoughts (Márai 2008, 41).

The title of the book cannot be regarded as a coincidence either; the author makes reference to the mythical source twice. First only briefly: when he visits Palazzo Venezia, Mussolini's office, there is a bronze statue of Europa's Abduction dating from the sixteenth century. He thinks it might be a coincidence or a mocking gesture, since the exhibition has been organized by Americans (Márai 2008, 54).

The second time he mentions Europa's kidnapping is towards the end of the book, as part of the conclusion. "Ratto d'Europa? Has she really been kidnapped? By whom and what has been kidnapped?" the author asks (Márai 2008, 110). The houses, towns, though damaged, are still there. People are there and do their business in a hurry. Books are being published and there are plays on at the theatre. It is the sense of vocation that has been abducted, namely that Europe, the people on this continent have some sort of a mission to fulfill, a certain role to play in the world, which they have inherited from their European destiny. One can no longer feel this consciousness in Europe. No one believes in Europe's mission the way Columbus, Michelangelo, Goethe, Planck or Einstein used to do. "Not only does the generation not have a common inspiration any longer, but neither does the whole continent" (Márai 2008, 110). The intellect, the spirit have been crippled and Europe cannot exist unless they are reconstructed (Márai 2008, 125).

The text is organised around this metaphor, we can find Europa's abduction in the title, that is at the beginning, then in the middle and at the end, with a gradual increase in the amount of narration referring to it. Furthermore, at the end of the book the author draws his conclusions only after rereading what he wrote, a clear proof of the fact that this particular literary work underwent a thorough, conscious creating process. This in its turn underlines the important role literature plays in presenting reality, showing us the true face of history and in offering solutions. On the one hand, the author deconstructs the idea of a unified Europe, on the other hand, he shows us that it can be reconstructed through and in language.

If we were to use Souzenelle's terms, we could say that the two World Wars were manifestations of Europe's solar aspect, which having been misunderstood, was used in a wrong way. Next to quantum physics and sacred texts, as mentioned by Souzenelle, literature could step up as a means of expressing the true solar and lunar aspects of Europe in our case. The word could be the javelin Europa

received from Zeus, the Logos. Intellectual and spiritual power would be the light, whereas literature itself would be the gate to be opened in order to allow light to flow in.

Czeslaw Milosz's work entitled *Native Realm*, was written in the 1950s and published in 1958. In many respects Milosz's book can be compared with that of Márai. We have a first person narrative here as well, sort of an intellectual autobiography with many excerpts about journeys made to Western European countries such as Switzerland, France or Italy after World War II. The autobiographic mode helps create a personality's continuity beginning with the narrator's childhood in Lithuania to his emigration to France, although meanwhile cities and countries have disappeared from our maps.

In spite of what he witnesses in the early 1950s, namely the efforts to deprive Central Europe, not to talk about Eastern Europe, of its cultural identity, he goes on proclaiming this region's European status.

> Why did they cut Europe in two, and why did they throw us into this 'outer darkness' […]?[...] I was foreign to them, as if I had not grown up in a baroque city, as if I had not learnt Latin in school just like they had. Rome had been my religion's capital, the Jesuit order had educated several remarkable people, and my university had been established as a follow-up of the Jesuit academy. Yet this is not all. I was proud of my origin, why should I have pretended to be someone who was down-and-out. (Milosz 2011, 6)

Parallel to showing the central and eastern parts of our continent to the estranged public, the narrator takes an inner journey towards his own identity, by trying to find his homeland's place within Europe and within the world (Milosz 2011, 9–12). Like in Márai's work, the role of the mother tongue plays an essential part: "I didn't want them to like me, on the contrary, I wanted to declare that I was from the East and a foreigner. And this meant above all that I would cling to the Polish language" (Milosz 2011, 5–6).

It might seem a paradox to us that while both authors deplore Europe's dismembered state and talk about its common root and origin, they insist on their foreignness and on the use of their mother tongue, as opposed to emigrants who have chosen to take up another language, for example. Native language is closest to the essence which in its turn is universal. Besides, it is often useful to speak about foreignness in order to make others notice the similarities next to the differences.

The aim of Milosz's book is to bring Europe closer to Europeans, as the narrator puts it in the introduction. The target audience are not the Poles, but Western Europeans who seem to have forgotten all about the *other* Europe, their other half.

Milosz's view is very similar to that of Souzenelle's: although he believes identity to be enigmatic, he is convinced that behind appearance and masks,

there is an inner essence which does not get lost and which we can meet through introspection.

The solution offered to us by Souzenelle is to become aware of and use Europe's lunar and solar aspects more consciously. Through their works Márai and Milosz prove to us that literature cannot only be aesthetically pleasing, but can also make a difference in the world by reaching for the essence behind both male/solar and female/lunar aspects.

Works cited

Churchill, Winston. 1946. *The Sinews of Peace*. Quoted in Mark A. Kishlansky. 1995. ed., *Sources of World History.* New York: HarperCollins, 298–302.

Graves, Robert. 2001. *Görög mítoszok.* [*The Greek Myths.*] Vol. 1. Trans. László Szíjgyártó. Szeged: Szukits.

Márai Sándor. 2008. *Európa elrablása. Útirajzok. Röpirat a nemzetnevelés ügyében.* [*Europe's Abduction. Travelogues. Manifest for National Education.*] Debrecen: Helikon.

Milosz, Czeslaw. 2011. *Családias Európa.* [*Native Realm.*] Trans. Endre Bojtár, Jolán Cservenits, Zsuzsa Mihályi, Lajos Pálfalvi, Viktória Szathmáry-Kellermann. Pozsony: Kalligram.

Ortega y Gasset, José. 2007. *Elmélkedések Európáról.* [*Meditation on Europe.*] Trans. Dezső Csejtei and Anikó Juhász. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

Souzenelle, Annick de. 1999. *Oedip interior. Prezența Logosului în mitul grec.* [*The Inner Oedipus. The Presence of the Logos in the Greek Myth.*] Trans. Margareta Gyurcsik. Timişoara: Amacord.

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **5**, 1 (2013) 43–58

Identity, Otherness, Crime: Detective Fiction and Interethnic Hazards

Caius DOBRESCU
University of Bucharest
Department of Literary Studies
caius.dobrescu@gmail.com

Abstract. The topic of Otherness has been investigated from the point of view of popular culture and popular fiction studies, especially on the basis of the multiracial social environments of the United States. The challenges of addressing real or potential conflicts in areas characterised by an ethnic puzzle are to some extent similar, but at the same time differ substantively from the political, legal, and fictional world of "race." This paper investigates these differences in the ways of overcoming ethnic stereotyping on the basis of examples taken from post-World War II crime fiction of Southern Europe, and Middle East.

In communist and post-communist Eastern Central Europe there are not many instances of mediational crime fiction. This paper will point to the few, although notable exceptions, while hypothesizing on the factors that could favor in the foreseeable future the emergence and expansion of such artistic experiments in the multiethnic and multicultural province of Transylvania.

Keywords: crime fiction, ethnicity, race, conflict, body, post-communism, Transylvania

Complex as it may seem for contemporary social and cultural historians, the genre of crime fiction (including both literary and cinematic narratives—Nicol, McNulty & Pulham 2011) was, for a long time, exclusively limited to the status of popular entertainment (Forshaw 2007). And, in spite of the commitment of cultural studies experts to expose the network of discriminative prescriptions and procedures which allegedly were always silently at work in the mental depths of popular culture (Cohen 2000, Spencer 2006, Rushing 2007, Evans 2009), this type of fiction still remains, in the eyes of numerous members of the public, an unsophisticated way of getting a "good," even if not necessarily "clean" fun. But besides these "learned" and "lay" attitudes, we should also account for a gradual change of the cultural status of crime fiction since World War II, which was due not to undercurrents of the popular psyche, but to the ethical choices and cultural policies of individual authors and other actors of the literary system.

The main goal of the present undertaking is to estimate the potential of crime fiction to deliver not only usable representations of ethnic "otherness" (that is to say, usable within the ethical framework of a liberal democracy), but also of providing effective symbolic means of mitigating the imaginative stakes always present in ethnic conflicts. This might sound very common to the ears of researchers familiar with the agenda of popular culture studies, and especially of US-focused popular fiction surveys (Bertens & D'haen 2001). It is a fact that the study of crime fiction is massively dominated by US authors and Americanists. Because of that the theme of the emergence and (real or potential) clash of symbolic collective identities, as illustrated in popular culture genres such as crime fiction is identified with US sensitivities and political priorities, among these, the preeminence of "race" and race conflict.

This cast of mind is, of course, consistent with the historical experience of a self-defined multiracial society, a society in which, quite predictably, the very understanding of multiculturalism tends to be predicated on the "primary" or "basic" experience of racial diversity. I propose that the salience of the study of racial labeling, stereotyping, and antagonisms is both supportive and inhibiting for the research of the articulation of *ethnicity* in post-WWII crime fiction. And it is so especially if we consider those cultural areas which, like the Middle East, East-Central or Southern Europe, neither see themselves as multiracial, nor could be described as such from any consensual theoretical perspective.

Consequently, the second sequence of my paper will analyze the play between similarities and dissimilarities as far as race and ethnic studies are concerned, on the basis of works generated from within historical situations of mutual violence, hate, and distrust. Analyzing "ethnicity" in the context of crime fiction will, therefore, focus on the measure and manner in which a subtle literary transfiguration of the *loci communi* of popular imagination is connected with the painful uncertainties, intricacies, and moral blind spots of different regional histories.

The last part of the present paper will concentrate on the relevant developments in communist and especially post-communist Eastern Europe, with some tentative remarks on the possibilities of using crime fiction as an instrument of cultural policy within the Transylvanian multiethnic and multicultural context.

Crime, Conflict, and Inter-Racial Catharsis

The evolution of detective and crime fiction towards the status of a respectable if not prestigious literary form is closely connected to the transformation of this genre into both a rhetorical instrument and a rhetorical battlefield concerning some of the most pungent polemics of post-WWII United States. The process of cultural upgrading of crime writing was directly influenced by the involvement/

intricacy of this type of popular fiction in the 1960s confrontations around the political enfranchising of the African-Americans.

This crucial matter deserves a more extended elaboration, but before approaching it, we should remember that the status of crime fiction had already begun to change before the era of the civil rights movement, with the gradual recognition by the high culture establishment of the significance of authors such as James M. Cain, Dashiell Hammet and Raymond Chandler (Scaggs 2005, Forshaw 2007). Ironically or not, the eye of literary and cultural critics was not caught primarily by the refined puzzles and plots placed in sophisticated British social milieus, such as those invented by the authors congregated in the high-brow Detection Club founded in 1930. It is true that some of these writers enjoyed great popularity, culminating with the fact that the most famous of them, Agatha Christie, has been turned into a global popular culture icon. It is also true that occasionally this socially and morally sanitized type of crime fiction could also produce ethically complex narratives such as G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown novels. But the main interest of the aesthetically-minded readers was rather channeled towards the *roman noir*, the "hardboiled" creations that, on the one hand, were exploring violent and insecure fringe social milieus, and, on the other, were exposing the subterranean streams and complicity/cupidity networks supposed to connect the social heights with the social underground, but also, within the individual psyche, the superego with the unconscious (Cohen 2000).

In other words, crime fiction was brought into the light of cultural significance not by its logical refinements, but by its alleged capacity to resound with the "darkest" layers of human behavior, therefore moving within a general flow of aesthetic naturalism and cultural pessimism with upbeat *fin-de-siècle* Nietzschean origins. To wrap the argument up, we should conclude that, before its manifest shift of cultural status in the militant and utopian 1960s, the form of detective and crime fiction was already permeated by a "decadent" sensitivity typified by a disquieting osmosis between social and bodily (or psychic) decay.

This indirect manner of thematizing corporeality in its essential fragility and "morbidity" (the infliction of actual death-producing violence upon the fictional victims being at the centre of a complex network of bodily allusions and suggestions concurring in the general impression of a "somatized" or "visceralized" universe) paved the way for the thematization of race in the US crime fiction since the 1960s. Aesthetically, the naturalistic expressionism derived from the *fin-de-siècle décadence* represented a kind of formative mould, an *Urgrund* of the *roman noir*. In point of the social imaginary, the fictional structures of crime fiction could be construed as connecting: a) the disquieting representation of the fluid, transgressive nature of the "body" (peaking on the recurrence of a morally shocking motive such as the *Blutschande*, the "blood sin," which is to say "incest"—Braun 1989) with b) the ideological concept of

"race" issued from a centuries-long philosophical debate in the English-speaking world and acquiring a new political momentum in the US, in the aftermath of WWII (Spencer 2006).

To this contiguity, suggesting the mysterious ways of an ongoing process of thematic osmosis, bears witness the contemporaneity of two novels both turned eventually into cult motion pictures. The first one is Robert Bloch's 1959 *Psycho* (brought to a world prominence by the 1960 filmic adaptation of Alfred Hitchcock, a work of art seen as a cornerstone in the history of post-WWII cinema), notoriously presenting an extreme case of schizophrenia with incestuous undertones. The second novel having a huge cultural impact was the 1965 *In the Heat of the Night* authored by John Ball (and turned into a film in 1967 by Norman Jewison—a production which collected no less than five Academy Awards), which presents the dramatic confrontation between the blatant racial prejudice of a South Carolina small town community shuttered by a brutal murder with sexual content, and the dignified and intellectually sophisticated Virgil Tibbs, an African American Philadelphia homicide investigator. The later character, masterfully embodied by Sidney Poitier, became a symbol of the civil rights movement and an icon of global popular culture (Browne 1986, 95–104).

This new political identity nurtured itself on the symbolic ambivalences of the investigative procedures traditionally represented by crime fiction. The very nature and apparatus of investigation have to do with unraveling secrets, and the thrill and quality of the process mirrors the complexity, depth and embeddedness of the secrets to be exposed. If this holds true, then we might presume that the 1960s search for artistic vehicles to carry an emancipatory message to a mass audience (an attempt actually echoing, consciously or not, experiments made by the Soviet Avant-Garde with the propaganda potential of different popular genres—Stites 1989), intersected an inner tendency of creating ever more powerful "revelatory" literary effects. As a consequence of this interaction the scope of the represented investigation procedures constantly widened from the identification of definite evil "entities," from individual perpetrators and clearly-categorized misdeeds and moral scourges, to the unveiling of pernicious networks of interests, of conspiracies of silence, of the dark, brutal, and "polymorphously perverse" underground of an apparently free and opulent society. We should not forget that this brand of militant crime fiction developed in the cultural vicinity of the radical utopianism of the 1960s, which was thriving on conspiratorial fantasies (Pipes 1997, Evans 2009). The aesthetical acumen of the politically empowered crime fiction lie in the subtlety of revealing discriminatory habits of the heart so deeply engrained that they have become the second nature of a society otherwise priding itself on its egalitarian traditions.

The political avatar of crime fiction was also characterized by the ostentatious enhancement of the dramatic element that had always been present in the structure

of the genre. Actually, a murder case, until solved, brackets the very possibility of civilized society, puts it in question, lends it to prangs of chronic doubt. The very structure of a crime narrative has the potential of calling into question the social statuses and identities of the agents involved in it, therefore generating a clash of "naked" passions and interests closely reminding of the state of crisis posited by Mikhail Bakhtin as essential to the social function of fiction (Bakhtin made these allegations consequently to the application of his theory of narrative "carnivalization" on Dostoyevsky's major novels—Bakhtin 1984).

The articulation of an aesthetics of graduality *cum* ambiguity with an aesthetics of explosion, unveiling the "true," even if impure motivations behind the actions of the involved parties inserted crime fiction quite "naturally" in the grand narrative of the Civil Rights Movement ignited in the 1960s. The main impact of this thus-reconstructed genre can be documented on the lines of climactically-cathartically representing (and eventually attempting to exorcise the "demons" of) racial conflicts in the social and mental context of the Southern US (Hawkins 1995, Reddy 2003). Powered by the same social momentum, crime fiction had also served to promote feminism into the mainstream popular culture (Munt 1994, Erickson Johnsen 2006).

But it is time now to narrow the scope of our investigation and to estimate the degree and the effects of the impact of this revitalized, ideologized and aesthetically and intellectually empowered popular genre on inherently multicultural areas marked by ethnic, rather than racial conflicts.

Crime and Chiasm: Ethnicity as Ethical Imbroglio

In the militant US 1960s interracial confrontation was seen as a psychodrama and as an archetypal conflict, since race was supposed to be absolute evidence, rooted in a "fundamental" somatic reality. In Europe, as opposed to America or the colonial world, the symbolic encapsulation of a racial difference had been arbitrary connected with a deliriously somatized representation of the otherness of the Jew and of "Jewishness." Unlike the history of racial representations projected by Americans of European descent on African Americans, in continental, and especially in Central and Eastern Europe, the power (and eventual empowerment) of hostile racial representations did not come from any somatic "evidence," but, on the contrary, from the paranoid anxiety of not being able to tell the allegedly hostile Other from one's own racial "kin." The Jews were construed as threatening especially because, in point of social "face" and cultural affiliation, "they" were almost undistinguishable from "us" (Schoeps & Simon 1995).

Actually the process of somatization of ethnic cultural differences began in Central and Eastern Europe at a much earlier date. It was closely connected

with the German-based birth of the ethnic nation, built around intense *Blut und Boden* representations which have been associated by cultural critics with psychoanalytical leanings on the imagery of a pantheistic eroticism of sorts (Mosse 1985, Parker et al. 1992, Sieg 2002, Doan & Garitty 2010). The "voice of blood" was intensified by the ambiguously seductive approach of intense representations of carnal passion. Even the *Blutschande* (understood as incestuous passion) already evoked in the present context could count, within this imaginary pattern, as a powerful, almost ecstatic metaphor of "brotherly love" so deep that it eluded any ethical code, any moral taboo (Braun 1989). Within this frame, the hostile Other insinuating itself within the autoerotic body of the nation could be construed (under the inescapable influence of the modern physiological imagination) as an "infectious disease" (Schoeps & Simon 1995).

Placed against this imaginary configuration, the narrative patterns of "crime" (i.e. murder) could only have acquired paranoid symbolisms of exorcism and self-purification. This connection was already exposed and analyzed by Siegfried Kracauer, through the study of the ambiguous interaction of the emotional violence-prone expressionist cinema with the process of concocting the anxieties and psychic depression of the German post-WWI society into an ideology of vengeful and racist nativism (Kracauer 1959).

Therefore, it took a very long and complicated evolution, marked by the genocidal tragedies of WWII, to displace the symbolism of crime-as-racial-scapegoating and to instrumentalize it into an analytic narrative structure. This is to say a structure which does not function as a mantra meant to build up tension to the threshold of an overflow of negative emotions directed against a demonized fictional perpetrator bearing a "blood stigma" (that is to say, a narrative totally coextensive with the rhetorical mechanisms of what was scientifically defined as "hate speech"—Kirk Whillock & Slayden 1995, Cesereanu 2003). On the contrary, the narrative structure of a crime investigation would rather accommodate different forms of narrative *ralenti*, i.e. various stylistic devices meant to "delay" the action and allowing for the development of (and thereby thematizing) reflexive doubt. In this new era of conjunction between crime fiction and the ethnic imagination, the emotional elements of the narrative are not directed against, but made to support the process (or the figuring of the process) of analytic thought.

The construction of ethnicity in post-WWII continental crime fiction gradually went the way of epitomizing the reflexive moments of an "investigation," but not without a previous mid-station that unconsciously implied the reversed replication of the Nazi crime fiction recipe. That is to say, the uncritical rerun of narrative schemes in which the perpetrator was not actually revealed *within* the fictional framework, but *through* the instrument of fiction, in an ideological context in which "racial" guilt was attributed *a priori*. In the aftermath of WWII continental Western European crime fiction incorporated a Manichean epic

representation of Evil that mixed radically polemic images of the Nazi "other," and traditional hostile stereotypes of the "Germans" and "German-ness" (Rollyson, Abbott & Davies 2008).

West Germany itself had no problems of joining the firm condemnation of the Nazi past, but its position was evidently much more uncomfortable as far as the Germanophobic ethnic stereotyping was concerned. This specific position generated some of the first European significant attempts of articulating "criminal" investigative narrative structures with a discriminative construction of the ethnic: the novels of Hans Hellmut Kirst, *Fabrik der Offiziere* (*Officer Factory*, 1960—adapted for the screen in the same year by the German director Franz Wisbar, and a second time in 1989, as a mini-series written, produced and directed by Wolf Vollmar) and *Die Nacht der Generale* (*The Night of the Generals*, 1962—adapted for the screen, quite symbolically, as a 1967 British-French production under the direction of Anatole Litvak, a Jewish-American of Ukrainian descent). Both novels had to do with the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the "struggle to come to terms with the past," by presenting the moral corruption of the Nazi system through the vast complicity in covering brutal murders perpetrated by SS and Wehrmacht officials, at the same time with the stubbornness of investigators inspired if not by a moral abhorrence of the Nazi ideology, at least by a general sense of justice (Lieutenant Karl Krafft, respectively the Major Grau). In a narrative twist quite unspecific for murder mysteries, both Krafft and Grau are assassinated in order to keep the veil of silence over perpetrators held in high Nazi esteem.

Kirst's novels point to the most important cultural effect that the structure of crime fiction could create on ethnic processes of self-definition and self-identification. The crime narrative structure is not oriented towards articulating symbolic elements into a substantive, charismatic representation of a collective identity, but it rather follows the lines of cleavage within the allegedly innate moral solidarity of the ethnic nation. Dramatic tension does not build in a self-revelatory cohesive experience, but comes from the vibration of ethical self-doubt. The murdering of the murder investigators turns them into the symbolic forerunners (or involuntary, "accidental" founding fathers) of a community created not through "natural" empathy but around a strong commitment to transcendental ethical imperatives.

More than that, in the second and most famous of the above-mentioned Kirst novels, *The Night of the Generals*, the represented investigation knits together two epochs (the perpetrator is tracked first in the 1940s, in German-occupied Warsaw and Paris, then in the 1960s France), but also two sleuths representing two nations with a hate-loaded common history: the German major Grau and, taking up his inquiry two decades after his physical disappearance, the French police inspector Morand. This time-loop with empathetic bi-national overtones points to an essential transformation of the dramatic function of crime fiction:

while associated with the activism of the US 1960s, it was styled as a kind of battle of the giants, but in continental post-WWII Europe, its function was rather to dissolve the ideologically mummified ties of undisputed ethnic nationalist solidarity, to arouse one's critical skepticism towards the moral cohesiveness and justifications of the goals of one's own ethnic camp, and, finally, to substantiate the precept that deadly dangers are necessarily not "before the gates," and that the Other encapsulated as the enemy could prove to be, at the end of the day, more humane than one's own traditionally proclaimed "blood brothers."

A later phase of the ethnically concerned crime fiction has to do with another geographical area, Southern Europe, and with the historical moment when the post-WWII economic wonder, somehow delayed in this part of the continent, began to bear social and cultural fruits. The *détente* following the sharp ideological polarisation of the 1960s created forms of crime fiction in which ethnicity and drama, even if co-present in the narrative frame, are not necessarily co-extensive. Ethnicity is presented neither as a blessing, nor as a curse, but rather as a pervasive atmosphere, having to do not with great narratives of heroic sacrifice, but rather with the "small" family and community histories and benign cultural features of everyday life, such as, for instance, gastronomy.

The proper embodiment of these cultural and literary evolutions is to be found in the series of novels of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán treating the abrupt changes underwent by the province of Catalonia in the post-Franco era form the perspective of private investigator Pepe Carvalho, a sophisticated libertine and gourmet. Written in Spanish, even if placed for the most part in Barcelona, but, imbued with innumerable cultural and multicultural local intricacies, Montalbán's poetic and ironic novels are miles away from any display of Catalan irredentism. Following in his steps—in the most overt manner, since his investigator is named, after his Spanish peer and forerunner, *commissario* Montalbano—the Italian author Andrea Camilleri uses subtle detectivistic imbroglios in order to present an image of Sicily and "Sicilianness" quite remote from the one traditionally derived form the neo-realist social dramas. The Montalbano novels are styling Southern Italian ethnicity as a refined form of *savoir vivre*.

A most interesting example is Petros Markaris, the creator of commissioner Kostas Haritos, the leading character of a detective series picturing the networks that bind together the political, social, cultural and crime scenes of contemporary Athens. Ethnicity is present in the Kostas Haritos books as a motive and as a general atmosphere (thereby suggesting the specificity of the Greek cultural mix within the European concert) very much in the spirit of the other two above-mentioned Mediterranean crime authors, Montalbán and Camilleri. But Greece's organic ties to the unsettled Balkans and the Middle East seem to make the references to contemporary or historical regional traumas definitely unavoidable. The investigative structure sets, on occasions, the representation of ethnicity in

connection to the impact on the Greek society of the waves of refugees or illegal economic migrants coming from ex-Communist Balkan countries (Markaris 2007).

At other times, the present is haunted by the specters of an only apparently remote history, having to do, for the most, with the heavy legacy of the Greek-Turkish relationships. In *Long, Long Ago* (2008; the German translation accessible to me was titled *Die Kinderfrau / The Nanny*, 2009), an old woman, who during her Istanbul youth babysitted the offspring of wealthy Greek families, returns from Greece, where she came as a refugee after the 1955 anti-Greek riots, to Istanbul, in order to dispense to people who had influenced her life, Greeks and Turks alike, rewards and punishments, both in the form of home-baked pita breads. The difference being that those destined to the wrongdoers prove to be impregnated with a poison causing a degrading and painful death. On holiday in Istanbul, Haritos is consigned by his superior in Athens to collaborate with the local police forces in order to handle a situation that might cause diplomatic tensions. The detective tracking reveals a complicated past in which the ethical boundaries do not overlap with the ethnic ones, a past dominated by numerous ethno-ethical chiasms (the "close" Other, and the distant, if not averse "kin"). The story also opens a window, through Haritos' relationship to his young, Western-educated Istanbul co-investigator, to the paradoxes and the fragile balances of present-day Turkey, a social diversity that appears as difficult to manage, understand and contain as Greece's own.

An interesting instance for the transforming of the crime fiction genre in an intellectual instrument for the problematization of ethno-national identity/otherness is to be found in the hotbed of the Near East. For this area, we have first of all to consider the novels of the Israeli author Batya Gur featuring the Jerusalem police detective Michael Ohayon. Deeply entrenched in a conflict perceived as a battle for survival, the Israeli society is, nevertheless, depicted, with complete transparence and honesty, in all its complexities, doubts, and, last but not least, inner culture wars. For instance, in *Murder in Jerusalem* (2006), the last novel of the Ohayon series (which actually was interrupted by Batya Gur's untimely death), the investigative structure and the symbolisms of "crime" are used in order to reveal the violent mutual hate opposing the liberals who occasionally tend to side with the Palestinian cause, at least as far as the human rights abuses of the Israeli army are concerned, and the religious fundamentalists, with their radical suspicion against the secular state and society. Besides, the search for the factual truth to which the leading character and his team are totally committed reveals a universe of ethical nuances, choices and blind spots which implicitly pleads for a nation construed not around a substantive ethnicity, but as a community of interrogation and doubt.

If we are to consider the situation from the Palestinian perspective, the partial equivalent of Batya Gur's undertaking could be considered the Matt Beynon Rees's *Palestine Quartet*, which features the exploits of the amateur detective

Omar Yussef, a professor of history and a former OLP militant who has grown totally disappointed with the Palestinian authority technically governing the Gaza strip, but incapable of putting an end to the anarchic violence of the fanaticized, corrupt, and abusive paramilitary. In spite of their complexity and subtle mélange of irony and intense drama, I call Beynon Rees's works a *partial* equivalent of the scrutiny of Israeli society styled as crime fiction by Batya Gur because Beynon Rees is not a Palestinian or Arab, but a Welsh author, writing in English for a predominantly English-speaking audience.

If we were to find among genuine Arab authors an example of using crime fiction for raising complex problems of identity building, the choice would almost inescapably go to Yasmina Khadra. This being the feminine pen name of Mohammed Moulessehoul, a former Algerian army officer who currently resides in France. In his novel *Morituri* (1997, adapted for the screen in 2007 as a French-Algerian production under the direction of Okacha Touita), Khadra reflects, through his leading character Superintendent Brahim Llob, on the Algerian paradox of juxtaposing an extremely bloody civil war between the secular government and the Islamic fundamentalists with an all-pervasive ideological ambiguity and with a very nuanced spectre of everyday moral choices.

Crime Fiction and the Post-Communist Nation: a Match in the Making?

In communist Eastern Europe, though crime fiction had a larger scale, spectrum, and network of supporters than it is acknowledged by the Western world, the development of the genre has been significantly distorted by ideological restraints. To which it should be added that the nature of social life under a closely controlled economy did not leave many options for elaborate criminal plots (Segel 2008, 137–142). In the first phase of its development, Eastern European crime fiction was drilled by essentialist representations of the "enemies of the socialist state" lumping together the surviving imagery of the war propaganda (the Nazis and Fascists, under different guises, were pictured as a direct threat to society long after the end of WWII—a habit to some extent connected with the ease of labeling as such any form of inner dissent or opposition to the human rights abuses of the communist regimes), the standard Cold War representation of the great anti-socialist conspiracy of the capitalist world (a fantasy which directly engendered a large variety of fictional spies passionately interested in the technological breakthroughs of the allegedly most progressive form of society), and the traditional Soviet-backed gallery of stereotyped "enemies from within" (i.e. the free rider, the parasite, the greedy black-marketeer, etc.).

In time, crime fiction gradually moved towards more complex motivations and characters. Given its popular and commercial genealogy, it also acquired the status of a tacit cultural mediator between the austere mainstream socialist culture and a burgeoning literary free market revolving around the genuine psychological or intellectual thrill. That is to say that crime fiction thrived as far as it could present itself as an innocent hobby very similar in nature with other consecrated socialist forms of leisure such as solving crosswords puzzles or chess problems.

As far as the ethnic stakes are concerned, they might have been marginally present in the forms of minor motives, but, in the communist times, crime fiction as such seems to have provided neither a significant ideological vehicle for nationalist propaganda, nor an especially effective instrument of literary subversion. With the possible exception of somewhat dissent authors like the East-German Wolfgang Hilbig (Segel 2008, 141–2) or the Czech Josef Škvorecký. The latter's famous Lieutenant Boruvka series contains elements of social satire, though most notably in its fourth and final part published after Škvorecký's expatriation to Canada ([1980] 1991).

If we are to consider the matter sociologically, we should say that the premises for the process that makes the object of the present study, the transmogrifying of crime fiction into a tribune for publically problematizing ethnic and inter-ethnic representations, seem to have been ideally reunited only after the fall of the communist system. The tensions and conflicts generated partially by the new living conditions, partially by the revival of pre-communist ideological conflicts, were partial to an unexpected comeback of crude ethnic positive and negative stereotyping, as much as to a revival of pre-communist nationalist and even antisemitic ideologies (Tismăneanu 1998, Shafir 1999).

In spite of these "favoring" conditions (to which we could add a certain pre-communist Central European tradition of *noir*), and in spite of a manifest interest of the public in the crime genre, examples of creative uses of this literary structure in order to promote a critical attitude towards ethnic stereotyping and a debate around substantive identities are for the time being rather scarce. One could account for a momentary conversion to detective fiction of an established ex-dissenting author like the Czech Pavel Kohout, in his *Hvězdná hodina vrahů/ The Widow Killer* ([1995] 1998), which takes a detective investigation as the pretext for exploring the moral and psychological tensions roaming between Czechs, Germans, and Jews, in the very last days of the Nazi occupation of Prague. Or the recent attempt of the Hungarian author Vilmos Kondor of entering the English speaking crime fiction scene with his 2008 *Budapest Noir* (translated into English 2012), set in 1936 and revolving around the intricacies (e.g. the possible connection to the original emergence of radical ideologies that tend to re-emerge in the post-communist era) of the killing of a young Jewish woman.

But the most accomplished and internationally acclaimed crime fiction project aspiring simultaneously to literary sophistication and to a complex and critical view of the region's convoluted ethnic identities and histories, is the Eberhard Mock series of Polish author Marek Krajewski. Set in the interbellum German city of Breslau, which is going to become, after WWII, the Polish city of Wrocław, Krajewski's novels follow his leading character, a detective with the Breslau police, through the imbroglios of plots which bring together classical elements of the hardboiled detective story (more often than not exaggerated in an ironical and *livresque* manner) with the most sensitive topics of the German-Polish mutually guilt-ridden history (e.g. Krajewski [2006] 2008). To his credit, Krajewski is in no way attempting to tell his stories from the "official" Polish point of view: following the tribulations of his German detective, who is essentially a lonely rider and a cynic of the Sam Spade breed, he does not refrain from addressing the most uncomfortable aspects of the Polish pressures for the German depopulation of Breslau after the war, or of the Polish implication in the repression of the local Jewish population.

Transylvanian Perspectives?

The conclusion of this survey is meant to keep us within the atmosphere of present day Eastern Europe, and especially that of an area so very complex from the point of view of embedded ethnicities, ambiguous heritages, silent resentments, as the province of Transylvania. To the best of my knowledge, there were no attempts to tackle the ethnic complexities and (blatant lack of) interethnic communication of this area with the instruments of as powerful a popular genre as crime fiction, the possible exception being *Katalin Varga*, a film narrative conceived by British director Peter Strickland released in 2009.

The eponymous character of this film is a woman from the rural Szeklerland (in the South-Eastern part of Transylvania) who was brutally raped by a Roma man, with the help of a second perpetrator, and who, as a consequence of this, bore a son. Realising the truth after many years, her lawful husband banishes her. Katalin Varga decides to overcome her condition of social outcast by seeking revenge over the two fatidic culprits. In a cinematic language that, as it was largely noticed, reminds of the slowness and ritualism of Béla Tarr, Peter Strickland follows a pattern of conflict quite similar not to the reflexivity and nuance with which the substantive ethnic representations are tested in the crime fiction examples cited above, but rather to the cathartic intensity of the racial conflicts featured in the 1960s US crime fiction.

Apart from his artistic endeavors, we could say that with *Katalin Varga* Strickland is not much closer to understanding the social and cultural complexities

of the Transylvanian ethnic landscape than was his forerunner Bram Stoker. But it is possible to hypothesize that his rather dim perception of the real tensions nested within the local multiculturalism is also a consequence of the traditional strategy of the Transylvanian ethnic communities to avoid each other as much as possible, to act, at least at an imaginary level, as if the other did not actually exist.

The tragedy of Katalin Varga is emotionally intense and convincing: the woman kills the man who had passively assisted to her ordeal, only to discover later on that the one who had actually raped her, and the actual father of her son was not the horrid brute she had always projected in her imagination. The revelation of her identity and story triggers the suicide of the rapist's wife, while Katalin is, in the end, caught and brutally suppressed by the relatives of the man whose life she had previously taken. But no matter how effective aesthetically or emotionally, the mixture of archaic sacrificial ritualism and moral paradoxes created by the British director is in no way touching on the real conundrums of the Hungarian-Romanian relationships in Transylvania.

Strickland's movie could be construed as an incentive for a real effort of converting the structures of crime fiction into credible tools of exploring the *long durée* of the interactions bewteen the two communities and between their more often than not conflicting imageries. We might also ask the question whether, given the fact that both literary and cinematic crime fiction have proved to a reasonable extent their capacity of producing public debate and of affecting mentalities, the emergence of such forms of ethical-aesthetical mitigation could not be promoted by means of a definite cultural policy. If, for instance, different types of public institutions, local, regional, national or European, in different possible combinations and with the essential support of non-governmental civic and cultural organizations and of private cultural entrepreneurs, could sponsor long-term editorial projects with an agenda of interethnic communication through the innovative use of consecrated popular literary genres, such as crime fiction.

But, of course, this should be the subject of a distinct social and academic argument.

Works cited

Allen, Tim and John Eade (eds.). 1999. *Divide Europeans: Understanding Ethnicities in Conflict*. The Hague: Kluwer Law International.

Bakhtin, M. M. 1984. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Bertens, Hans and Theo D'haen (eds.). 2001. *Contemporary American Crime Fiction*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Bloch, Robert. 1959. *Psycho*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Braham, Persephone. 2004. *Crimes against the State, Crimes against Persons: Detective Fiction in Cuba and Mexico*. Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press.

Braun, Christina von. 1989. *Die schamlose Schönheit des Vergangenen: zum Verhältnis von Geschlecht und Geschichte*. Frankfurt: Verlag Neue Kritik.

Browne, Ray B. 1986. *Heroes and Humanities: Detective Fiction and Culture*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.

Ball, John. 1965. *In the Heat of the Night*. New York: Harper & Row.

Cesereanu, Ruxandra. 2003. *Imaginarul violent al românilor*. [*The Romanians' Imagery of Violence*.] Bucharest: Humanitas.

Cohen, Michael. 2000. *Murder Most Fair: The Appeal of Mystery Fiction*. Cranbury N.J. – London: Associated University Press.

Doan, Laura and Jane Garitty (eds.). 2010. *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dunn, Seamus and T. G. Fraser (eds.). 1996. *Europe and Ethnicity: the First World War and Contemporary Conflict*. New York: Routledge.

Erickson Johnsen, Rosemary. 2006. *Contemporary Feminist Historical Crime Fiction*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Evans, Mary. 2009. *The Imagination of Evil: Detective Fiction and the Modern World*. London – New York: Continuum.

Fischer-Hornung, Dorothea and Monika Mueller (eds.). 2003. *Sleuthing Ethnicity: the Detective in Multiethnic Crime Fiction*. Cranbury N. J. – London: Associated University Press.

Forshaw, Barry. 2007. *The Rough Guide to Crime Fiction*. London: Rough Guides – Penguin Books.

Gur, Batya. 2006. *Murder in Jerusalem: A Michael Ohayon Mystery*. Translated into English by Evan Fallenberg. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Hawkins, Darnell F. (ed.). 1995. *Ethnicity, Race, and Crime: Perspectives across Time and Place*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Kawana, Sari. 2008. *Murder Most Modern: Detective Fiction and Japanese Culture*. Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press.

Khadra, Yasmina. 2003 *Morituri*. Translated into English by David Herman. New Milford: Toby Press.

Kirk Whillock, Rita and David Slayden (eds.). 1995. *Hate Speech*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Kirst, Hans Hellmut. 1960. *Fabrik der Offiziere*. [Officer Factory.] Munich: Desch Verlag.

—. 1962. *Die Nacht der Generale*. [The Night of the Generals] Munich: Desch Verlag.

Kohout, Pavel. [1995] 1998. *The Widow Killer*. Translated into English by Neil Bermel. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Kondor Vilmos. [2008] 2012. *Budapest Noir: A Novel*. Trans. Paul Olchváry. New York – London: HarperCollins.

Kracauer, Siegfried. 1959. *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. New York: Noonday Press.

Krajenbrink, Marieke and Kate M. Quinn (eds.). 2009. *Investigating Identities: Questions of Identity in Contemporary International Crime Fiction*. Amsterdam – New York: Textext: Studies in Comparative Literature, no. 56.

Krajewski, Marek. [2006] 2008. *Death in Breslau*. Translated into English by Danusia Stok. London: MacLehose Press.

Markaris, Petros. [2008] 2009. *Die Kinderfrau*. [The Nanny.] Translated into German by Michaela Prinzinger. Zürich: Diogenes.

—. 2007. *Balkan Blues*. Translated into German by Michaela Prinzinger. Zürich: Diogenes.

Mosse, George L. 1985. *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*. New York : H. Fertig.

Munt, Sally R. 1994. *Murder by the Book?: Feminism and the Crime Novel*. New York: Routledge.

Nicol, Bran, Eugene McNulty and Patricia Pulham (eds.). 2011. *Crime Culture*: *Figuring Criminality in Fiction and Film*. London – New York: Continuum.

Parker, Andrew, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer and Patricia Yaeger (eds.). 1992. *Nationalisms & Sexualities*. New York: Routledge.

Pipes, Daniel. 1997. *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From*. New York: Free Press.

Priestman, Martin (ed.). 2003. *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*. Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press.

Reddy, Maureen T. 2003. *Traces, Codes, and Clues: Reading Race in Crime Fiction*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Rollyson, Carl, Anthony Abbott and L. P. Davies (eds.). 2008. *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction*. Revised edition. Volume 1. Pasadena, California Hackensack, New Jersey: Salem Press.

Rushing, Robert A. 2007. *Resisting Arrest: Detective Fiction and Popular Culture*. New York: Other Press.

Scaggs, John. 2005. *Crime Fiction*. London – New York: Routledge.

Schneider, Stephen Jay (ed.). 2004. *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press.

Schoeps, Julius H. and Herman Simon (eds.). 1995. *Dreyfus und die Folgen*. Berlin: Edition Hentrich.

Segel, Harold B. 2008. *The Columbia Literary History of Eastern Europe: Since 1945*. New York: Columbia Univeristy Press.

Shafir, Michael. 1999. The Mind of Romania's Radical Right. In *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet, 213–232. University Park: Penn State University Press.

Sieg, Katrin. 2002. *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Škvorecký, Josef. [1980] 1991. *The Return of Lieutenant Boruvka: A Reactionary Tale of Crime and Detection*. Translated and adapted by Paul Wilson. New York: Norton.

Spencer, Stephen. 2006. *Race and Ethnicity: Culture, Identity and Representation*. New York: Routledge.

Stites, Richard. 1989. *Revolutionary Dreams. Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*. New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tismăneanu, Vladimir. 1998. *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **5**, 1 (2013) 59–66

Inventing the Enemy. When Propaganda Becomes History

Anca ANDRIESCU GARCIA
Valdosta State University, Georgia, USA
English Language Institute
garciaanca@yahoo.com

Abstract. Umberto Eco's latest novel, *The Prague Cemetery*, has a complicated metatextual plot in which, as the writer himself stated, he attempts to create the most repugnant of all literary characters, in other words, some sort of "perfect loather" who detests everyone, including himself. I will discuss the various stereotypes of otherness, the way these stereotypical images interact, and how the author weaves the prejudices related to almost every European nationality, but mostly to the Jews, into the image of the "supreme enemy," an image divested of any ornament and so presumptuous that it becomes almost dense. Moreover, in relation to the image I mentioned above, I analyse the mechanisms language uses as a vehicle of deception especially when it describes what is familiar in propagandist texts. I also focus on the different fictional filters applied to real historical events (and texts) in order to entice the reader into trying to decipher a complex and factitious labyrinth in which the barrier between truth and fiction no longer matters, it is purely accidental, and has only one purpose—to generate conspiracies.

Keywords: Enemy, Propaganda, Jews, Metatext

"Having an enemy is important not only to define our identity but also to provide us with an obstacle against which to measure our system of values and, in seeking to overcome it, to demonstrate our own worth. So when there is no enemy, we have to invent one" (2012, 46), Umberto Eco wrote in the essay that gives the title of one of his latest books, *Inventing the Enemy.* Indeed, this seems to be the key metaphor at the beginning of his novel *The Prague Cemetery*, where the main character, Simone Simonini, admits he loves nobody and, in fact, hates everyone: for him the Germans, who "produce twice the feces of a Frenchman" represent "the lowest level of humanity" (2010, 102) imaginable, the French are "vicious" and "kill out of boredom" (134), while an Italian is from his point of view nothing but an "untrustworthy, lying, contemptible traitor […], consistent only in changing sides with the wind" (161). Later on this description will fit him perfectly as he is a forger who works for whomever pays him the most, and who

throughout the novel commits numerous murders, but never feels guilty. He also hates the priests, among which "the worst of all, without doubt, are the Jesuits," yet that does not stop him to walk around disguised as one whenever it suits him, their "blood brothers, the Masons" (181), and the women, in spite of what little he knows of them. And if this revelation of his animosities was not enough to convey a full image of his personality, the character makes it even clearer by declaring emphatically at the end of his exposé, paraphrasing the well-known Cartesian belief, "Odio ergo sum. I hate therefore I am" (222).

His first choice in the hierarchy of the most hated ethnicities would be, however, the Jew who, as his grandfather told him, belongs to a nation of "the most godless people," who "work only for the conquest of this world," and who, apart from his monstrous being with "eyes that spy on you, so false as to turn you pale, those unctuous smiles, those hyena lips over bared teeth, those heavy, polluted brutish looks, those restless creases between nose and lips, wrinkled by hatred" etc., embodies the flaws of many other ethnicities combined being "as vain as a Spaniard, ignorant as a Croat, greedy as a Levantine, ungrateful as a Maltese, insolent as a Gypsy, dirty as an Englishman, unctuous as a Kalmyk, imperious as a Prussian and as slanderous as anyone from Asti…" (90–94). The list of negative stereotypes in the text is almost infinite; it creates a textual labyrinth in which the writer inserts elements of popular hatred and historical prejudices together with Gothic, Mannerist, Balzacian, scientific etc. collages, all meant to build the image of a grotesque, utterly despicable character placed in the middle of a metatextual harangue which puzzles the most sophisticated reader and which is obviously meant to provoke an intense reaction of shock and repulsion.

As a character, Simonini will gain an even more ambiguous consistency at the end of the novel when the writer reveals that he is "the only fictitious character" in the story, everyone else, including his grandfather, Captain Simonini, a "mysterious writer of a letter to Abbé Barruel" (Eco 2010, 5541), the well-known conspiracy theorist in the nineteenth century, is a real, historical figure. And most of the book reviewers seem to be completely content with this statement. Yet the name Simonini, which according to Eco is derivative from the name of a suppressed Catholic saint, Saint Simon of Trent, allegedly killed by the Jews, can be found in Eco's essays, previous to the release of the novel.[1] Moreover, in the novel he has an obviously dual, schizoid personality: he writes a journal both as Simonini and as the Abbé Dalla Piccola and, at some point in the text, assumes the title of Captain in memory of his grandfather. The journal as a literary technique, as well as the double are not new conventions, especially in the Gothic literature

1 In the collection of articles entitled *Turning Back the Clock*, published in 2006, Eco mentions the Abbé Barruel, who believed the French Revolution was a result of the plot put together by the Templars and the Masons, but whose views were amended by a certain Captain Simonini, "who pointed out to him that those who pulled the strings were the perfidious Jews" (Eco 2008, 314).

with which the novel has clear affinities, but the fact that the alter ego of the protagonist addresses himself as "Captain Simonini" makes the fine line between him as a character and the grandfather as a historical person according to Eco even harder to define. Moreover, in an interview with a Norwegian television station when speaking about his novel, Eco points out that Simonini is meant to be repugnant in order not to be taken seriously, and that he is absolutely true, although invented. In other words, Eco's character is impossible to be read in a textual vacuum, as a regular narrative being because of an unconventional dialectical game between his reality and his textual nature.

The journal itself, the pretext for the novel, represents another clue to this dialectic. Simonini hates the Jews but writes at the suggestion of the Jewish doctor Sigmund Froïde, an obvious reference to Freud, whom he met at the restaurant Chez Magny. The character suffers from amnesia and tries to recover his memory through writing and not through confession, being too afraid, for obvious reasons, to talk about his past with the psychoanalyst. Apart from Simonini and his alter ego who both use the first person narration, the novel also includes a Narrator—some believe that this voice belongs to Eco himself—whose role seems to be to put order into the journal. Freud's presence in the novel and these narrative instances could possibly be related, in my opinion, to the Freudian well-known model of the mind structured on three levels: unconscious, ego, and superego, with every one of these narrators corresponding to a stratum. That explanation does not answer the question why the writer would go to such great lengths, would create such a florid and complicated textual scheme for such a disruptive, malicious, and, ultimately, nonsensical character. After all, regardless of the mosaic of intertextual allusions, mainly stereotypical, and the effort to recreate the image of the late 1800s, Simonini is not exactly an innovative figure and thus not very easy to digest (even the culinary references do not make up for this!). I think, however, that the answer lies not necessarily in his disruptive nature, but rather in the way this nature and the entire plot of the novel position themselves toward reality and in how their fictitiousness transforms into real throughout the novel.

Alain Badiou in the book entitled *The Century* asserts that when reconstructing history the real question for philosophers is not what took place in a certain period of time—his book speaks about the twentieth century—but rather what people in that period believed in. He calls this a search for the "uninherited thoughts" (Badiou 2012, 3) of the time. Only if we admit, for instance, that what the Nazis did was a form of thought, and avoid categorising it religiously as evil can we distinguish the truth about it. The best method to investigate the last century is to extract from among the century's productions the ones that singularise it among the other centuries, the "documents or traces indicative of how the century thought itself" (Badiou 2012, 3). In this way, in relationship

with history, "we might manage to replace the passing of judgments with the resolution of some problems" (Badiou 2012, 6).

Thus, from Badiou's point of view, the evaluation of the twentieth century must be done bearing in mind what he later on defines as its "passion for the real," a construct "devoid of morality" because "morality is a residue of the old world" (63). And, Badiou continues, there are two paths generated by this "passion of the real" of the twentieth century—the one of "terroristic nihilism," one which is ultimately "hostile to every action as well as every thought," and "one that attempts to hold onto the passion without falling for the paroxysmal charms of terror," which attempts not to destroy the reality, but to purify it to the point where it can detect the "minuscule difference, the vanishing point that constitutes it." Both paths are obsessed with the question of the new—hence the image of the new man with two opposite meanings: for the fascists the new man is "in part the restitution of the man of old, of the man who had been eradicated, had disappeared, had been corrupted," and in this process of purification the goal is to return to a vanished origin; while for the marxisant communism the new man is a new creation, who "emerges from the deconstruction of historical antagonisms" (Badiou 2012, 65). The twentieth century oscillates between these two extreme images—one of mythical origins, one antagonistic to everything before it, and presumably completely new.

In Eco's novel, the protagonist's type of reasoning, *because of* or *in spite of* the multiple racial and ethnic stereotypes, is situated beyond the limit of morality, beyond good and evil, beyond the possibility of any judgment. His "Odio ergo sum" is a mere thought, not a passionate statement. He is not charming, he is definitely not a hero, but he is not necessarily an anti-hero either because after the first few pages the reader somehow grows accustomed to his vitriolic personality which is so outrageous that it becomes benign. The focus shifts now towards the plot of the novel which ultimately concerns a famous fiction published for the first time in 1903, although obviously written earlier, known as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. In spite of the fact that the *Protocols* were not originals, they indubitably influenced the past century because they became a central part of Hitler's propaganda, they were his "warrant for genocide" as the historian Norman Cohn suggested, and thus I would call them, in Badiou's terms, some of the most important "forms of thoughts."

As Eco noticed in *Turning Back the Clock. Hot Wars and Media Populism*, the polemic which led to the writing of the *Protocols* started after Abbé Barruel wrote his *Mémoires pour servir à l'istoire du jacobinisme,* in 1797. The entire nineteenth century is thus shaped by the debate concerning Jews as the enemies, especially in France. Hence when the *Protocols* were published the public opinion was already prepared to believe in them in spite of their style resembling feuilletons. They speak of a secret meeting of Jewish leaders conspiring to take over the

world. It is, clearly, a text put together precisely to create a story of conspiracy, but, as Eco notices, "the extraordinary thing about the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* isn't the story of their production but that of their reception. […] Amazingly, this fake is born again and again from the ashes every time someone comes up with the cast-iron proof of its falseness" (Eco 2008, 317–318).

> Moreover, the reasoning [of those who resist the evidence of their falseness] is impeccable: 'since the *Protocols* say what I say in my story, they confirm my words.' Or: 'the *Protocols* confirm the story I have drawn from them, and hence they are authentic.' In other words, it is not the *Protocols* that engendered anti-Semitism; it is the profound need to identify an enemy that prompts people to believe in them. (Eco 2008, 319)

And it is not a first, as René Girard once stated: in many of the medieval documents speaking about the Jew as the scapegoat, the source of evil, and the violence of the persecutions that follow such beliefs, "the probable and improbable interact in such a way that each explains and justifies the presence of the other" (1986, 10). This "profound need to identify an enemy" and the will to decipher the way public hatred focuses on a particular one is what makes Eco's literature become an exploration of how the history of ideas in the twentieth century was shaped.

Seen as the core of the novel, the story of the *Protocols* casts a different light on the character. He is, after all, another part of the almost impermeable labyrinth of hoaxes and intertextual relationships that surrounds this fiction which is in its turn fictionalized in the novel. Simonini might be the result of a textual collage, but his function is very specific—his actions and picaresque adventures are meant not only to explain the writing of the *Protocols*, but also to bring together, in a plausible narrative scheme, all the real, historical players that are known to have taken part, willingly or unwillingly, in the creation of the document.

Simonini's grandfather is just the starting point of his journey—the character will be an observer, even a tangential one, of all the major events of the time: the Communist Manifesto, the Franco-Prussian War, the Dreyfus affair, and Drumont's book are among the most notable ones. Napoleon III, Dumas, Marx, Garibaldi, and Dostoyevsky are just a few names mentioned in the text. Simonini is a forger of legal documents and a seller of consecrated hosts, but in reality he works for the French and the Russian secret services. In chapter 11 Lagrange, the head of the French secret service, shows him a copy of Maurice Joly's book, *Dialogue aux enfers entre Machiavel et Montesquieu*, which is historically proven to have served as one of the main sources of the *Protocols*. He infiltrates the prison to speak with the author who represents the epitome of resignation: "you cannot change the world through ideas" (Eco 2010, 2240), Joly says at some

point, but the rest of the novel will prove him wrong. Simonini also dismantles the mechanisms of conspiracy when he puts together a plot against Napoleon III only to report it. Eco's wit follows every single recipe of small level paranoid machinations in order to, it seems, prepare the reader for the real story in the following chapter. The novel is in this point serious and humorous in the same time, the rhetoric surrounding the plot is built on the classical pattern of any conspiracy which, according to P. Knight quoted by Adrian S. Wisnicki, takes itself seriously, while also "casts satiric suspicion on everything, even its own pronouncements" (Wisnicki 2008, 271).

This satiric tone is maintained in Chapter 12, the most important in the novel, when Simonini has the revelation that

> there was an anti-Jewish market not just among all the descendants of Abbé Barruel (and there were quite a few of them), but also among revolutionaries, republicans and socialists. The Jews were the enemy of the altar, but also of the ordinary people whose blood they sucked. And they were also the enemy of the throne, depending on who governed (Eco 2010, 2461).

Thus Simonini decides "to work on the Jews" and he gets the chance to do so right away when Lagrange asks him to meet his Russian counterpart represented by colonel Dimitri, who plans to gather information in order to direct the Russian peasants' discontent against the Jews instead of the government. The passages that follow are a masterful analysis of what makes manipulation and propaganda easy to believe and thus extremely dangerous. As "revelations have to be out of the ordinary, shocking and fantastical" because "only then do they become credible and arouse indignation," the "convincing framework" which Simonini will choose is completely fictional, namely "the Masonic gathering on Thunder Mountain, [...] Joseph Balsamo's plan and the Jesuits' night in the Prague cemetery" (2540-2545). Eco's character is very aware that conspiracy is primarily a combination of truth and fantasy and knows perfectly well how important the setting of it is: he chooses the cemetery as the background where the Jewish rabbis meet because it instills fear. Unlike in Pynchon's and DeLillo's novels where, as Adrian S. Wisnicki observes, what generates the paranoia associated with the conspiracy are not the machinations of a genuine one, but rather the fear of the protagonists that a conspiracy of huge proportions could be possible, in Eco's novel the mechanisms generating the fear are totally exposed, deciphered, and thus almost made friendly. The forged document must sound familiar—namely containing elements of the popular rhetoric of hatred towards the foreigner—and innovative at the same time. Simonini's choices are Dumas, Sue, Joly, and Toussenel. Later on he will add Goedsche's novel *Biarritz* to complete the list of the main sources of his document (and, of course, of the real *Protocols*, as

well). Centered on the well-known fear of the "Jewish plan for the conquest of the world" (Eco 2010, 2545), the text addresses all parts of the society: monarchies, government, clergy, socialists, anarchists, and revolutionaries alike, and it "had to appear in the form of an oral testimony by a witness to that terrible night [of the meeting]—a witness forced on pain of death to remain anonymous" (2560). After this point of the novel Simonini's fictional dimension does not matter anymore—the forgery exists and it will claim its place among the "thoughts" that shaped the world throughout the twentieth century. What is even more extraordinary is the fact that he begins to believe in it himself, just because it was his own creation. He paradoxically becomes a historic villain and a victim of history.

The novel makes the reader aware that "the people who become our enemies often are not those who directly threaten us [...], but those whom someone has an interest in portraying as a true threat when they aren't" (Eco 2012, 110). Later in history the Nazi propaganda used the *Protocols* and anti-Semitism as a narrative model that explained real events. Hitler denounced the Jews as a foreign element responsible for all the German problems; then he and his leading propagandists "brought [the *Protocols*] up to date and fleshed it out with the names and faces of recognizable prominent figures" (Herf 2006, 173). Eco's novel warns its reader about the human temptation to believe in fabricated stories and about the use of language as a vehicle of deception, especially when it describes what is familiar. It manages to deconstruct the two great antagonists in the writing of history—fiction and reality—but its purifying operation, as stripped of any ornament as it is in the end, is not meant to return to an originating point, a vanished origin as Badiou called it, but rather to explain an outcome.

And even more—*The Prague Cemetery* is not just a canonical metatextual novel in which literature returns to itself and investigates its own resources. It goes beyond that—it represents the proof that fiction and reality can function together and that any fiction, once recorded, is able to create its own reality. Its plot seems to be meant to place literature at the confluence of anthropology, iconography, history, and philosophy, all of which are spiced with humor and irony. Its function transgresses the regular use of literature which, as Gabriele Schwab once described it, "unsettles the status quo of habitual cultural codes" and "generates emergent forms of subjectivity, culture and life in processes of dialogical exchange with its readers" (226), but actually explores reality as if it were fictional and conveys the real with a place in fiction. It places itself beyond any type of judgment (and in this aspect those who accused Umberto Eco of anti-Semitism cannot be further from reality) illustrating how the history of humanity can be explored taking a journey back, from the "form of thoughts" that shape it towards reality and not the other way around.

Works cited

Badiou, Alain. 2012. *The Century*. Malden: Polity Press.

Eco, Umberto. 2008. *Turning Back the Clock. Hot Wars and Media Populism.* Orlando: Harcourt Inc.

—. 2012. *Inventing the Enemy.* (Kindle edition.) Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

—. 2010. *The Prague Cemetery.* (Kindle edition.) Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Girard, René. 1986. *The Scapegoat.* (Kindle edition.) Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Herf, Jeffrey. 2006. *The Jewish Enemy. Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust.* (Kindle edition.) Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Schwab, Gabriele. (year not mentioned). *Imaginary Ethnographies. Literature, Culture, and Subjectivity.* (Kindle edition.) New York: Columbia University Press.

Wisnicki, Adrian S. 2008. *Conspiracy, Revolution, and Terrorism from Victorian Fiction to the Modern Novel.* (Kindle edition.) New York and London: Routledge.

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **5**, 1 (2013) 67–78

Appeal to the Witness. The Role of Romanian Post-Communist Witness Literature in Outlining National (Self-)Images

Laura SASU
Transilvania University of Braşov
Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics
laurasasu@yahoo.com

Abstract. The purpose of this paper is to identify and investigate the role of Romanian post-communist witness literature for contemporary historiography in outlining national and social (self-)images. This type of literature, written mostly by former political detainees, is perceived by literary criticism as a specific borderline segment partly relevant as historical documents and partly as literary texts. Applying the conceptual pattern coined by Giorgio Agamben, in his analysis based upon the national socialist concentration camp, to post-communist depositional literature reveals two focal directions of imagological relevance: on the one hand, the points of similarity and difference of totalitarian practices in creating stereotypes, cultivating the sense of absolute antagonist otherness and promoting distorted ethnic, social and national images and, on the other hand, the particular contributions and limitations posed by the post-totalitarian depositional discourse in (re)-creating national and social (self-)images.

Keywords: totalitarianism, distorted (self-)images, depositional literature, the witness

1. Introduction

Both national-socialist totalitarianism and later communist totalitarianism, although founded on divergent doctrines, relied on cultivating the sense of absolute antagonist otherness, materialised in stereotypical images and absolute discrimination: while Nazism brought race discrimination to its extreme, Communism followed the very same path in promoting extreme class segregation. The distorted racial, ethnic, and social images hereby created were then used as the foundation principles for the systematic extermination or annihilation of the segregated group. Harboured apparently by distinct ideologies, these two totalitarian extremes are, however,

similar in two basic points: both were advocating a certain type of supremacy[1]—race supremacy and class supremacy, respectively; both aimed at creating a new superior man, and for this purpose they coined iconic images, the image of the Arian superhuman of Nazism and the image of the New Man of Communism. In the name of this supremacy, both considered themselves entitled to eliminate the remnant minorities. The extermination plans were carried out in an organised manner in both cases, systematically eliminating the undesired other in concentration camps or in political prisons. Most victims perished leaving little evidence or just mere images behind. One is the image of the Muslim,[2] the emaciated creature of the concentration camp, and the other image is that of the Re-educated[3]—the crippled, mutilated, and disfigured political detainee of the communist prison. Despite the very low survival rates[4] in both cases, there are testimonies brought by the very bearers of those names. The Muslim of Auschwitz and the Re-educate of Piteşti meet in the realm of witness literature to utter the word for that image, to tell and to explain, to share the experience of a path leading up to the limit of almost everything. This testimony, of the limits of human existence and resistance reflects in its turn, another image, that of the unbelievable human potential. Although most testimonies were silenced definitively before being told, the merely exceptional survivors of both totalitarian extermination experiments have been able to provide accounts of the circumstances and specificity of each of them.

2. Testimony, history, literature

More than twenty years since the so-called implosion of the communist totalitarianism in Romania, contemporary historiography has the rather difficult task of performing a cautious selection of the sources usable in (re)writing the recent national history that has been subjected to substantial misrepresentation, programmatically orchestrated by the totalitarian regime until the revolution in 1989 (Boia 2012). Both national images and self-images have been directly related to literature and history, which, in turn, are mediated by historiography, the latter bearing the responsibility of wisely using the available literary-historical

1 Constructed by providing and cultivating distorted images, and creating stereotypes as to serve their purpose.

2 Muslim—term used in the concentration camp jargon to describe the prisoners that were in worst condition, emaciated, ill, voided of any will power, closest to death; used along with other parallel terms: in Dachau Kretiner [cretin], in Stuthof Kruppel [cripple], in Mauthausen Schwimmer [swimmer], in Neuengamme Kamele [camel], in Buchenwald müde Scheichs [tired sheik], in Ravensbruck Muselweiber [Muslim woman] or Schmuckstücke [jewel] (Sofsky 1993, 464).

3 Term used to refer to communist political detainees that were subjected to torture, mutilation, and disfigurement in the re-education process.

4 Various figures have been advanced so far, but are irrelevant to the objective of the underlying article, which does not intend to let itself entangled in the polemics of competitive victimhood.

documentary resources. Among several other types of historical sources, not available in the context of totalitarian communist rule, yet highly relevant for attaining such an objective, there is this specific segment of written literature (Cesereanu 2005), currently referred to under a series of different denominations, such as witness literature, depositional literature, testimonial literature, literature of the Romanian Gulag, detention literature, prison memoirs, basically encompassing the totality of referential productions, written by opponents to the communist regime, a vast majority of them former political detainees (Cistelecan 2007).

3. The New Man

Communism has apparently learned from the radical lesson of national socialism, and has adapted its practices, placing a new landmark on the map of totalitarian cruelty, by the experiment of annihilating the human being while still alive[5]—known under the name of re-education (Ierunca 1993). Whereas the surviving witness of the Nazi concentration camp is an unintended and unforeseen exception to the gruesome plan of extermination, communism planned to maintain the re-educated alive,[6] to bear witness both to his own complete annihilation and to that of his peers, in the apotheosis of the creation of the New—communist—Man (Andreica 2007).

The destruction plan went this time in the direction of systematic and complete mental, physical and spiritual demolition of the individual, but keeping the victim alive was important, so as to document to what extent an individual can be bereft of his own humanity and substituted by a matrix consisting exactly of its opposite. In this respect, the testimony of re-education is the account of the human being, compelled to acquire a new countenance, a (self-)image that he or she will never be able to face. It is the testimony of the human being who had to wear Gorgon's face, and completely relinquish his own. And live with it, in addition to that.

This re-education experiment of communism is, therefore, the focal and starting point of the present paper, which aims at investigating the role of testimony in this particular instance of European totalitarianism of the past century, regarding its capacity to render an accurate account of the goals and practices used in creating that New Man.

The image of the communist ideal, paralleled to the current (self-)images of the post-communist individual is able to reveal to what extent the New Man has been created, and in what way some of his features are still traceable in the (self-)image of the contemporary post-communist individual.

5 That is the point of coincidence between the two experiments, attaining complete demolition of the human being while still alive, as presented by the symbolic figures of the Muslim of the concentration camp, on the one hand, and the re-educated of the communist prison, on the other.

6 Making the re-education subject's escape from torture by suicide practically impossible.

4. Re-education

Re-education was an experiment implemented in several Romanian prisons in the late 1940s, involving political detainees, mostly students, included in a category referred to by the stereotypical expression "enemies of the people," a label applied to all opponents of the communist party (Bacu 1989). They were arrested, usually for the fault of having been members of different other political groups prior to the instauration of the communist regime. Many of them were killed in the terrible tortures of the inquiry procedures. The rest were sentenced to long years of imprisonment and hard labour in mock trials, where no proof of their crimes was needed, where everything was a mere formality, in a court of law that was submissive to any political command (Rădulescu 1998).

The experiment itself aimed at creating a new individual, turning a political opponent into a fervent supporter by brainwashing the victims in gruesome torture. There is nothing new in that. The novelty, however, consists in the principles devised for this re-education: the victims were tortured to relinquish, in a first stage, all their personal beliefs, relationships, to denunciate and declare loath for their families, friends and mentors; then they were compelled by another set of torture techniques to make formal statements bringing terrible offences to themselves—admitting guilt to any crime or sin possible—, imprecations and offences to family, friends, mentors, to every personal belief, to God—basically to everything that was relevant and defining to them as human beings (Wurmbrand 1994). In short, they were compelled by torture, mutilation and disfiguration of the physical body to accept and perform themselves a much more horrifying type of torture: the mutilation of their souls, of their identity, and herewith to perform themselves the disfiguration of their conscience and of their spirit. Once the victim was considered re-educated, he was supposed to prove the truthfulness of his re-education by inflicting the same tortures, the very same mutilations of body and spirit upon their prison companions, upon their friends (Petrişor 1994). In case of resistance, they had to go through the initial re-education stages again. If he was not truly applying the torture procedures indicated, by faking or trying to spare the other the suffering, again he as well as his protégé had to go through the initial stages once again. There was not much choice in this situation. The closest relationships were dissolute in this manner, trust in others, but above all, the trust in oneself became empty words that did not allow meaning. Loathing everyone, starting from the communist torturers, the friends turned into one's torturers, and most painful of all, loathing oneself for becoming a torturer of best friends—that is the path towards the loss of one's humanity.

It is this perverse sense of making the victim turn into the torturer,[7] under the threat of relentless torment, and the absolute impossibility to escape by suicide,[8] that made the experiment to be seen as one of the most barbaric ones in recent European history.[9] Cultivating a sense of otherness towards the unknown stranger has been done before. Cultivating a sense of antagonist otherness towards the closest peer is not as common, but has also been done before. Cultivating a sense of antagonist otherness towards one's own self has been so far the subject of pathology. So far meaning up to the point when re-education made it possible for a human being to survive its own complete annihilation.

Just like the extermination within the concentration camp has become the symbol of Nazism, re-education becomes not only an experiment orchestrated in a number of Romanian prisons, but first and foremost, an emblematic image of communism. The historical relevance is therefore obvious, being another reason why the underlying analysis focuses on the testimony of re-education.

This experiment is simultaneously of imagological relevance, to the extent that it reveals, beyond its concrete and extreme practices, the very core of objectives and practices held by communist totalitarianism regarding the image and the identity of the individual it aimed to create. It provides an image of the intended New Man, which can be compared to the current image of the post-totalitarian individual, in an attempt to see what features of the latter have been actually seeded by the communist rule in over 50 years. It also provides a clear image of the way communism cultivated general mutual distrust, fear, and the sense of isolation that enabled it to preserve power for such a long amount of time.

5. The new man after the New Man: (Self-)images of the post-communist individual

The inconsistent evolution of post-totalitarian societies can be mainly attributed to a chronic perpetuation of the principles that generated the concept of New Man, as well as its various manifestations in less acute, attenuated, current forms that are, however, sufficient to compromise the possibility of a natural development of the individual and of the post-totalitarian society as a whole. The Individual, once again abandoned in the confusion of the obliteration of a

---

7 Becoming a torturer by torture not by free will, and becoming torturer of friends not of enemies, herewith making him the very author of his most painful torture, that of his conscience.

8 While this ultimate way of escaping torment was still possible in the Nazi concentration camp: "Of course I could commit suicide, throwing myself over the barbed wire fence, I could do that anytime" (Sofsky 1993, 477).

9 So described by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, one of the most important literary witnesses of the Soviet Gulag.

system of values (be it even an artificial and obtuse one), is repositioned in an environment lacking any landmarks, since both the old ones and the new ones have disappeared—the former systematically demolished by communism, and the latter obliterated by the final failure of the system.

The context disappears yet the reflexes persist—contrary to the Pavlovian predictions—and it is an undeniable fact that the individual of post-totalitarian society often sees himself placed in front of a mirror, reflecting the typological profile of the Re-educated New Man, subsuming all its inherent attributes: an original sin of cooperation or just the omission of denunciation—hereby indictable, especially before his own conscience, as accomplice and partner in crime to the totalitarian atrocities—; judged implicitly and explicitly, sentenced without the right to appeal by a new authority, that is equally culprit—and, hence, depleted of legitimacy; isolated within the narrow space of stigmatisation, blamed and feared by those from the outside the system; compelled to cohabitate with individuals similar to himself, yet enrolled in a new hierarchy that has little logic, is completely unjust and absolutely non-transparent; suspicious to the boundary of pathology; encouraged to acts of interior and exterior falsification; socially construed to alignment to the new rules of the game; adapted and engaged without his will in a competition with the single rationale of subsistence; the New Man exists; and just that. He cannot understand anything, he can do almost nothing and, above everything else, he cannot aspire towards anything. Looking forwards and behind, to his left and to his right: he is paralysed, trapped between options. He is voided, just like the old New Man, but he believes in nothing and he does not even want to. He builds nothing, is engaged in nothing but in the rationale of his own subsistence; he cannot and does not attempt to move on.

This new New Man of post-totalitarian society is trapped in his—not in the least enviable—status: simultaneously (denunciated and (self-)denunciated) as author and co-author of his own predicament (often referred to under the well-known phrase “we deserve our fate”), yet also subjected to the quandary of the context hereby created (articulated in the cliché expression “the heavy heritage of communism”)—the new man exists. And stands still.

Is this not the very portrait of the old New Man, the re-educated of totalitarianism, now drawn by the impressionist pencil on the recent page of geopolitics, that still bears the contours of the former picture, deeply imprinted by the sharp pressure of the totalitarian engraving tool? And if so, what next?

Two decades after the dissolution of the old regime, after undergoing a whole spate of re-configurations, attempts, experiments, re-considerations and more or less spectacular changes of route—some completely predictable, while some completely unexpected—it seems that the New Man has been created after all, and he persists. It seems that the predicament is not solved yet. Furthermore, contrary to all expectations placing their bets on an immediate and implicit realignment

to the last coherent landmark, and a serene continuity of those coordinates, the solution is not even vaguely traceable at the line of the horizon.

The profile above, comprising all those current constituents of the post-communist individual that can be traced back to the profile of the re-education victim, sums up a set of (self-)images common both to the internal and the external perception of the contemporary Romanian individual. Tracing back these features, their relation to some of the present difficulties society faces, may be useful for the awareness of their origin and possibly leads to finding ways to overcome them, by following the example set by the survivors of the literal and extreme re-education of the communist system.

What is left is a new man, disfigured and disoriented, simultaneously victimised object, yet also culprit subject for the past experiences, but especially for the recent ones, although apparently paralysed and enslaved by condemnable passivity, without very apparent manifestations, who is, however, looking for a solution. Maybe 'is looking' is too much to say. Maybe a more precise quantification should be expressed in other terms: This new man of contemporary post-communist society does not look for, but he awaits, maybe not to find, but to be shown, the solution. The first step in identifying any potential solution is to reconfigure the position of knowledge and comprehension, which become crucial for becoming aware of all aspects that contributed to the current context.

6. Witness literature

What better way is there, in attempting an identity reconfiguration, than initiating more involved research of the source and the course of this entanglement, profoundly affecting those who have experienced it, but also affecting younger generations by rebound totalitarianism. Hence, if transcending this profound fracture of identity becomes possible, by means of knowledge and awareness, then it is most certain that witness literature should be placed at the core of such endeavours.

However, looking back—once again—to the other instance of European totalitarianism of the twentieth century, the national-socialist regime, one can anticipate, by means of analogy, that an exact outline of the communist practices and their short and long term impact upon the individual will not be easily attainable due to the fact that totalitarianism, in all its forms, has proven extremely efficient in concealing its secrets—the "arcana imperii" (Agamben 2006b, 11)—erasing the traces and leaving almost no witnesses behind. "Truly successful misdeeds leave no witnesses. It was only just possible to substantiate adequately the Nazi policy of annihilation. The black book of communism has large gaps" (Engdahl 2001, 5). The particular limitations posed by the post-totalitarian depositional discourse are due to a fourfold contextual predicament of this type of testimony.

The first—and most generic—predicament of testimony relies in the philosophical background[10] undermining the concept of subjectivity itself by the destitution of the subject of its authority to interpret and confess "the historic experience of contemporary man" (Vattimo 1996, 70) as well as the historic experience in itself, totalitarianism, able to literally eliminate testimony—or most of it—by the programmatic and literal extermination of the witnesses. A second impediment is the programmatic erasure of all potential proof or documentation of the events by disposing of and replacing any person or material that can be used against the perpetrating totalitarian power. It is the "horror over the systematic erasure of memory in totalitarian societies" (Engdahl 2001, 6) that grants testimony the key position in the context of contemporary literary discourse. The third difficulty is rendered by the fact that the type of experience poses limitations of itself: the experiences "characterized by the most profound torment" (Engdahl 2001, 11) typical for the circumstances of the concentration camp, or the communist political prison are rather difficult and sometimes impossible to recall. Memory plays a central role in this respect, but in extreme situations oblivion becomes an instinctual reflex of the human set in survival mode.

This leads to the last obstacle in the way of testimony about totalitarianism, namely the fact that in both instances a vast majority of the potential witnesses are not left alive and can, therefore, not testify. The survivor of the totalitarian experiment has to testify both for himself and for the majority of his peers who have passed and are thus reduced to silence. The incapacity of the survivor to account for the experience of another, who has undergone the complete experience up to the end, is denominated in current criticism as the "lacuna of testimony" (Agamben 2006a, 7). There are, indeed, only a few surviving witnesses of the concentration camp and of the communist prison, when compared to the huge number of potential witnesses who have perished in these experiments. However, it is this very impairment that only places more emphasis upon those few witnesses that survived, upon those testimonies that can be shared. The experience of the totalitarian experiment has led, indeed, most of its victims to the end. To the end of their lives and simultaneously to the end of their humanity.

7. The Complete Witness

The complete experience of this path, up to its end is made by a vast majority, whereas the surviving witness acknowledges his exceptional status in having survived. A surviving witness is Primo Levi, who in his attempt of bringing his testimony of the concentration camp is faced with his incapacity of testifying for

10 Initiated by Nietzsche in his critique to the notion of consciousness as supreme instance of personality, and continued by Heidegger in questioning authenticity as a whole.

the experience of the majority, since he himself did not make it, not "to the very end" (Wiesel 1975, 314). To account for this incapacity of revealing the fate of another,[11] Levi appeals to an image as a symbol for the complete witness—the one who experienced the end in the camp but is, hence, in impossibility of bringing his own testimony—the image of the Muslim. Muslim was one of the terms used by camp jargon to describe those emaciated figures that were lingering on the boundary between life and death, "living corpses" (Agamben 2006a, 29), who will never be able to speak in the language of testimony:

> An anonymous and continuously renewed but always the same mass of non-people, who march and labor in silence, in whom the divine spark has gone out, too empty of everything they had to actually suffer. One finds it difficult to call their death a death, they do not fear it, being too exhausted to be aware of anything. They stick to my memory in their faceless presence, and if I were to sum up all the evil of our time in an image, I would choose this image so familiar to me. (Levi 2004, 145)

Complete testimony is, hence, forever trapped in impossibility since the complete witness can never return to testify. While the complete witness—both in the sense coined by Primo Levi as well as in Giorgio Agamben's subsequent analysis—is exclusively the Muslim, the last page of Agamben's study brings forth an exceptional case, that is yet powerful enough to imply the reconfiguration of all operating concepts of the analysis: the existence of the testifying Muslim. There is indeed an existing corpus of direct testimonies brought by survivors both of the camp, but also survivors of the Muslim condition, coined as the point of loss of humanity, the point of non-humanity. The Muslim condition—up to this point, seen as the attribute but also the impossibility of complete testimony—is overcome by the surviving Muslim, hereby annulling part of the lacuna of testimony, namely the impossibility of complete testimony. A section of a monographic study of the Muslim provides, under the heading "I Was a Muslim" (Ryn and Klodzinski 1987, 128), testimonies of former Muslims, who not only survived but were able to recover from the non-human condition, and to return to humanity; they can bring the testimony of that limit: the loss of humanity. "Regarding their being prepared to die, however, there was nothing like an act of will, but rather a destruction of will. They let it come, because all of their strengths were mutilated and annihilated" (Kogon 1995, 400). The first person, past tense account of Muslims, "the non-humans" (Levi 2004, 146), brings complete testimony in the realm of possibility, and presents therein the

11 In a common statement made by many survivors of both totalitarian experiments: "I have said this before and I will not cease to say it: prison was not easy, but I suffered less than others, who would have far scarier things to testify" (Orlea 1991, 5).

experience undergone up to its very limit, up to the end of humanity. It is this aspect that becomes of major relevance to the discourse of literary testimony since it allows a glimpse into the limit of human experience.

Applying this conceptual pattern, of the structure and contents of testimony, to the other instance of totalitarian experimentation, reveals new meanings of the re-education testimony. The account of witnesses having experienced re-education is no longer a mere representation of torture and mutilation inflicted by the communist regime upon its political opponents. It is the complete exhibition of the human torment undergone by those who were pushed to their limits: in this case they were pushed to counter-humanity, in being forced to become the exact opposite of what they had been before. And there is, similar to the complete testimony of non-humanity[12] of the Nazi concentration camp, also another instance of complete testimony of counter-humanity brought by the survivors of the communist re-education, where all victims were torturers and vice-versa, of others and of their own selves. An intricate design, one must admit. Intricate is the design still, since many of the principles are recognisable in the contemporary individual, as shown above. That only leads to the conclusion that re-education has been exported from the communist political prison to the outside world of the larger prison of the whole country applying the same principles with the softer gloves of later policies of the totalitarian party. The testimony of the more extreme experience has been useful in outlining the general image of the background as well as the details of the experiment.

8. Conclusion

Put into simpler words, the specificity of totalitarian experiments is that they bring the testimony of an experience of limit situations, where humanity is pushed to its extremes. The testimony on totalitarianism circumscribes a multitude of sequences in the line of de-humanisation of man, subjected to totalitarian power, a man who survives and brings, as witness, the testimony of the entire course of de-humanisation and even of its limit. Therefore, witness literature allows the unmediated encounter with humanity itself, in its most extreme but defining conditions: the perpetual denial and acknowledgement of its own destructibility, and everything that fits in between, ultimately resulting in an image of the unbelievable recovery resources of human potential.

12 The concept was initially coined by Primo Levi, and further investigated, among others, by the Italian critic and philosopher Giorgio Agamben referring to the testimony of undergoing the complete experience of the concentration camp, up to its limit set at the very boundary between life and death, between human and non-human.

Works cited

Andreica, Gheorghe. 2007. *Reeducările comuniste. Volumul I: Eugen Țurcanu, ruşinea speciei umane.* [*Communist Re-education. Volume I: Eugen Țurcanu, the Shame of the Human Species.*] Constanța: Editura Ex Ponto.

Agamben, Giorgio. 2006a. *Ce rămâne din Auschwitz. Arhiva şi martorul.* [*Remnants of Auschwitz. The Archive and the Witness.*] Trans. Alexandru Cistelecan. Cluj: Ed. Idea Design & Print.

—. 2006b. *Homo Sacer. Puterea suverană şi viața nudă.* [*Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life.*] Trans. Alexandru Cistelecan. Cluj: Ed. Idea Design & Print.

Bacu, Dumitru. 1989. *Piteşti. Centru de reeducare studențească.* [*Piteşti. Student Re-education Center.*] Hamilton: Editura Cuvântul Românesc.

Boia, Lucian. 2012. *Capcanele istoriei. Elita intelectuală Românească între 1930 şi 1950.* [*The Traps of History. The Romanian Intellectual Elite between 1930 and 1950.*] Bucureşti: Ed. Humanitas.

Cesereanu, Ruxandra. 2005. *Gulagul în conştiința românească. Memorialistica şi literatura închisorilor şi lagărelor comuniste.* [*The Gulag in the Romanian Conscience. Memoir Literature and the Literature of Communist Prisons and Camps.*] Bucureşti: Ed. Polirom.

Cistelecan, Alexandru. 2007. *Aide-Mémoir. Aspecte ale memorialisticii româneşti.* [*Aide- Mémoir. Aspects of Romanian Memoir Literature.*] Braşov: Ed. Aula.

Engdahl, Horace. 2001. Philomela's Tongue. Introductory Remarks on Witness Literature. In *Witness Literature: Proceedings of the Nobel Centennial Symposium*, ed. Horace Engdahl, 1–14. Stockholm: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte.

Ierunca,Virgil. 1993. *Subiect şi predicat.* [*Subject and Predicate.*] Bucureşti: Ed. Humanitas.

Kogon, Eugen. 1995. *Der SS-Staat. Das System der deutschen Konzentrationslager.* [*The SS-State. The System of the German Concentration Camp.*] München: Heyne.

Levi, Primo. 2004. *Mai este oare acesta un om?* [*Is This a Man?*] Trans. Doina Condrea Derer. Iaşi: Polirom.

Orlea, Oana. 1991. *Ia-ți boarfele şi mişcă!* [*Get Your Things and Move!*] Interview by Mariana Marin. Bucureşti: Cartea Românească.

Petrişor, Marcel. 1994. *Memorii II: Secretul Fortului 13. Reeducări si execuții.* [*The Secret of Fort 11. Re-educations and Executions.*] Iaşi: Editura Timpul.

Rădulescu, Mihai. 1998. *Istoria literaturii române de detenție – memorialistica reeducărilor* [*The History of Romanian Detention Literature – Memoirs of Re-educations.*] vol. I, Bucureşti: Ramida.

Ryn Zdzislaw and Klodzinski Stanslav. 1987. *An der Grenze zwischen Leben und Tod. Eine Studie über die Erscheinung des Muselmanns im Konzentrationslager.*

[*At the Borderline between Life and Death. A Study of the Emergence of the Muslim in the Concentration Camp*]. Auschwitz-Hefte, vol 1, Weinheim & Basel: Beltz.

Sofsky, Wolfgang. 1993. *Die Ordnung des Terrors*. [*The Order of Terror*.] Frankfurt a.M: Fischer Taschenbuch.

Vattimo, Gianni. 1996. *Aventurile diferenței.* [*The Adventure of Difference.*] Trans. Ştefania Mincu. Constanța: Pontica.

Wiesel, Ellie. 1975. For Some Measure of Humility. *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Responsibility* no. 5: 314.

Wurmbrand, Richard. 1994. *Cu Dumnezeu în subterană.* [*With God in the Underworld.*] Bucureşti: Editura Casa Şcoalelor.

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **5**, 1 (2013) 79–94

Post-Medium Literature? Two Examples of Contemporary Scandinavian "Literature"

Jørgen BRUHN
Linnæus University, Växjö
Department of Film and Literature
jorgen.bruhn@lnu.se

Abstract. This article discusses two contemporary Scandinavian literary texts: Ursula Andkjær Olsen's Danish book of poetry called *Havet er en scene* [*The Sea Is a Stage*], and Abo Rasul's (pseudonym for Matias Faldbakken) Norwegian novel *Unfun*. I intend to show that these texts exemplify two very different but nevertheless comparable positions in contemporary Scandinavian literature. Despite the differences, they resemble each other in that they actively mix medial constellations to offer social critique, and the aim of this article is thus to investigate the specific relation between medial mixture and social critique.

Keywords: Intermediality, post-medium, Rosalind Krauss, Abo Rasul/Matias Faldbakken, Ursula Andkjær Olsen

Introduction

The role of literature in Western societies has changed in recent decades. Intermediality scholar Werner Wolf is probably right when he states that television (which broadcasts reality shows, feature films and news) has been the "unchallenged leading medium" for some time.[1] Wolf also notes that television is in the process of being overtaken by the form and content of the World Wide Web, as it becomes the new leading medium. Compared to the 1970s or 1980s, literature has lost its position as the self-evident, central cultural reference. Literature has not disappeared, but it is included in cultural circuits and ideological debates, mixed with other media in complicated overlaps and cooperative efforts. For example, literary form and content have moved from the book to "quality TV,"

1 For a discussion from an intermedial point of view of the idea of literature as a "Leitmedium," a leading medium in the paragone of the arts and media, see Wolf 2010.

with TV series such as *The Wire, The Sopranos* or *Mad Men* seen as the obvious heirs to the large-scale realistic novel. As noted by a *New York Times* commentator, “if Charles Dickens were alive today, he would watch *The Wire*, unless, that is, he was already writing for it” (Kulish 2006).

The thesis that lies at the heart of this article is the fundamental “mixed” condition of all texts and all media.[2] In another context I refer to this condition as “heteromediality” (Bruhn 2010), meaning that every text is mixed in different ways, due to the fact that the specific combination of media is determined according to ideological contexts and historical institutions as well as the aesthetic or existential aims of the individuals involved. However, there is no natural or pre-given correlation between the mixed character of texts and progressive aesthetic or ideological potentials: I do not claim that mixing media is aesthetically satisfying or socially progressive *per se*.

Ursula Andkjær Olsen’s Danish book of poetry called *Havet er en scene* [*The Sea Is a Stage*] and Abo Rasul/Matias Faldbakken’s Norwegian novel *Unfun,* both published in 2008, exemplify two different “literary” positions in contemporary Scandinavian culture. Nevertheless, they resemble each other in that they actively mix medial constellations to provide political critique, and the aim of the article is thus to investigate the specific relationship between medial mixture and social critique in these texts.

Three perspectives on contemporary medial mixture: Spielmann, Schröter, Krauss

In *New and Novelty in Contemporary Media Cultures* (2010), German media theorist Yvonne Spielmann describes the invasion of mixed media culture (primarily transmitted by digital technology) into our everyday lives. The mixing and remediating of conventional, distinct media forms characterise contemporary media and technology, but according to Spielmann, new intermedial products threaten to stress, stupefy and alienate individuals. Spielmann presents contemporary artists who create “pockets of resistance” around, beside, or beyond what she sees as the attempt of global communication networks to monopolise human existence. In contrast to the all-dominant commercial mixes, these artists create intermedial constellations that question and disturb the commercially produced intermediality of corporate capitalism. Indeed, Spielmann frames their intermedial activity as subversive interventions into today’s media landscapes,

2 W. J. T. Mitchell has formulated influential catchphrases for this, first stating that “all media are mixed media” (Mitchell 1994, 4). A few years later, Mitchell modified his statement, saying that “[a]ll media are, from the standpoint of sensory modality, ‘mixed media’” (Mitchell 2005).

and consequently she describes these creative practices as "media behaviour against the grain" (Spielmann 2010, 13).

In a related, recent article, German media theorist and film scholar Jens Schröter develops and discusses the well-known dichotomy of medium specificity (represented by Greenberg) and the Gesamtkunstwerk tradition (represented by Higgins); the differences between these positions constitute what he considers to be the "politics of intermediality" in twentieth-century thought. According to Clement Greenberg, the mix of media should be avoided, and as late as 1981 he states: "What's ominous is that the decline of taste now, for the first time, threatens to overtake art *itself*. I see 'intermedia' and the permissiveness that goes with it as symptom of this. [...] Good art can come from anywhere, but it hasn't yet come from intermedia or anything like it" (Greenberg quoted in Schröter 2010, 110). For Greenberg, then, the mixing of media limits art's ability to go against the grain of commercialism and kitsch, and in Schröter's assessment, "this position views intermediality as a capitulation of art to capitalist spectacle culture" (Schröter 2010, 112). However, as both Schröter and Spielmann demonstrate, the mixing of the arts (Greenberg's "intermedia") may also be interpreted as a liberating practice that *opposes* commercialism and alienation.

One might object that Higgins and Greenberg are not discussing the same phenomenon: art critic Greenberg is interested in (and even worried about) the future of the arts, whereas Higgins himself is an artist and editor who creates performance art and publishes work in the avant-garde tradition. Nevertheless, Schröter's examination clarifies that medial mixedness is both a central aspect of modern and postmodern art and critical thinking. Furthermore, and equally important, he demonstrates the ideological implications of the mixing of media.

Art critic Rosalind Krauss offers a complimentary framework to Spielmann's and Schröter's positions that helps understanding aspects of contemporary literary production. Greenberg's interpretation of medium specificity, of which Krauss for many years was an active proponent, ends up as an abstract and generalised idea of the category of the work of art. Krauss sketches a development from minimalism to concept art and then to performance art, claiming that painting and sculpture existed as productive media up until a certain point. After the death of the old "exhausted" or "obsolete" media in the seventies, the "post-medium condition" reigns. Under this condition, new important artworks are being created, but they do not follow what she rather provocatively refers to as the "medium-specific" notion of "obsolete" media nor the kitschy trends of mixing media uncritically. Krauss contends in a series of essays that "these artists do not work with the traditional mediums of painting and sculpture, which they view as exhausted, but are instead forced to do something as counterintuitive as inventing a new medium" (Krauss 2006, 58).

The two texts discussed below exemplify this dialectical relationship to the medium of literature. The authors have faced the task of creating a book of poems and a novel while being well aware, I believe, that the medium (literature) to which they used to refer has become if not "obsolete" then at least conventionalized and to a high degree commercialized.

Staging Literary Intermediality (The Sea Is a Stage, 2008)

Havet er en scene [*The Sea Is a Stage*] is an extraordinarily rich and complex book even when measured against Danish poet Ursula Andkjær Olsen's own standards.[3] It is divided into sections with titles such as "Auditions to a life without conflicts," "Auditions to the life without costs," "Excerpts from the Sleeping and the Awake" (Part One and Part Two), and "Father of All and King. Of All." The last section, "Appendix to The Sleeping and the Awake," combines earlier textual fragments in the book into new poems. One long poem in turquoise print runs from the front to the back cover and on every page in between. A frontispiece and vignettes by Danish artist Ib Monrad Hansen add another significant layer to the book, as do the figural poems created by the author herself.

The different sections employ a variety of literary styles and forms. The relatively traditional modernist language of the section running at the bottom of the pages contrasts with the banal, everyday language of the section of "auditions." The figural poems of the handwritten parts oppose the systematic, possibly OULIPO-inspired form of the appendix. The stylistic complexity is mirrored in the unusually large number of enunciative positions, or voices, in the book. In the auditions, three voices (mock allegorical figures called Fox [Ræv], Song [Sang] and Wise [Klog]) discuss both banal and serious matters in a Beckett-like absurd dialogue. Another section, "Father of All and King. Of All" stages a discussion of the concept of war (with the right-hand pages consisting of quotes taken from American soldiers' blogs from Iraq and Afghanistan). The book thus creates an intricate web of media mixtures. Drawing upon a useful distinction made by intermediality scholars Irina Rajewsky (2002) and Jörg Helbig (2008, 32), we might say that it stages a number of *intramedial* (literature quoting or mixing the literary form or content of other literary texts) and *intermedial* (literature quoting or mixing with non-literary forms and content) relations.[4]

3 Since her debut in 2000, Andkjær Olsen, who was born in 1970, has authored a rich oeuvre of critically acclaimed books of poetry, essays and opera librettos.

4 Irina Rajewsky proposed the term "Intramedialität" for one-medium references in *Intermedialität*, 2002. For a general discussion of intra- and intermedial relations as the entire field of studies of

The structure, visual design, and "content" of the book disavow any conventional idea of poetry as subjective voice.[5] The book transgresses the conventional borders of contemporary print literature by using intramedial and iconicity devices such as handwritten segments, coloured letters and the arrangement of various and discrete verbal tracks placed on different parts of the page. All these aspects may remind the reader of a long tradition of literature including non-verbal, iconic aspects of language going back to figure poems of antiquity as well as modern precursors like the symbolist poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé. Furthermore, the book transgresses the borders between subjects that conventionally are or are not suitable for poetry, such as in the section where Andkjær Olsen combines fragments of American soldiers' blogs to create lyrical texts.

Besides investigating the visual iconic aspects inherent in verbal language and the possibilities of mixing different social discourses, Andkjær Olsen's work stresses the mediated nature of any discourse. *The Sea Is a Stage* juxtaposes so many different forms of written text that it becomes impossible, and also futile, to decide which discursive level is dominant in the book or to ascertain where the omniscient viewpoint might be.

The "audition section" may exemplify the complexity of Andkjær Olsen's work: Three reviewers, presumably from some kind of TV show, supervise the audition. In a setting reminiscent of the absurdity of Beckett or Ionesco—or Kafka's text "Before the Law"—they participate in an absurd dialogue while guarding an entrance never to be entered:

> So, do you think anybody will pass?
> Asks Song?
> No no no no no. Nobody ever came through. Not in my time; it is a totally grotesque show.
> Says Fox. Is there any coffee? (Andkjær Olsen 2008, 8)[6]

The characters in this section are gatekeepers of some kind of docu-soap or X-Factor show and the language is mostly banal and torrid, unpoetical in any conventional sense. At the same time, the dialogues include passages of philosophical depth and aspects of social critique and historical references. The titles of the game show ("Audition for a life without costs," and "Audition for

intermediality, see Bruhn 2010.

5 In his reading of Ursula Andkjær Olsen, Peter Stein Larsen also underlines this indirect critique of the idea of the classical modernist enunciative center. See Stein Larsen 2009.

6 "Men tror I så der er nogen der slipper igennem?
Spørger Sang?
Nej nej nej nej nej. Der er aldrig nogen der er sluppet igennem. Ikke i min tid; det er et helt grotesk program.
Siger Ræv. Er der noget kaffe?"

a life without conflicts") suggest a surrounding society transformed into one gigantic reality show. Here, as elsewhere in the book, Andkjær Olsen, when depicting society as a mere popularised image devoid of political meaning (for the protagonists) perhaps refers to Guy Debord's radical social critique in his book *The Society of the Spectacle* from the sixties. Andkjær Olsen's representation of the non-reality of popular television shows (in contradistinction to the brutal reality of war) may also be seen as a parallel to the critical understanding of popular culture and alienation put forward, for example, by Adorno.

Social critique—even if its theoretical provenience is hard to establish—is an important dimension in *The Sea Is a Stage*: The text creates a kaleidoscopic version of a number of internally co-referring discourses characterised by the debasing of a conventional poetical discourse through the prominent use of everyday language. This kaleidoscope of stupidity and banality portrays and criticises Danish society and politics in the years of the right-wing administrations of Anders Fogh Rasmussen (2001–2009) and Lars Løkke Rasmussen (2009–2011) that decisively changed Denmark: from a position as an integrated part of the Scandinavian ideology of the welfare state, Denmark embraced a neo-liberal and conservative political position, where it was considered necessary to wage military and cultural wars against threats to "our" civilisation. The clash between escapist game shows and real-time war experiences by living soldiers (and the incorporating of these non-aesthetic aspects in a literary context in the first place) signals that the boundaries between life and art are transgressed in a typical avant-garde fashion.

But, is the "transgressive" avant-garde position still a viable aesthetic and political option? Matias Faldbakken, whose entire production questions the possibility of political transgression, denies this possibility. And, how effective are such devices? From a reader's perspective, the complex, multi-voiced and mixed-media character of the many sections of Andkjær Olsen's book make it difficult to engage psychologically or existentially with the work and to grasp its overall themes. This resistance to direct communication is, however, part of the intended design of the book. Ursula Andkjær Olsen seems well aware of the historicity of her own formal and thematic choices and when applying the "transgressive" avant-garde position she seems to consider it a viable contemporary strategy, politically and aesthetically.

Rosalind Krauss suspects mixed media to be just another expression of numbing capitalist kitsch culture, but I would argue that the intricate and almost overwhelmingly rich form of Andkjær Olsen's book utilises *and* mirrors the typical layout of much contemporary media and infotainment. The form of her book is not only reminiscent of musical scores (Andkjær Olsen is a musicologist by education): the formal structuring of the book may also be compared to the multiple information tracks running side by side and on top of each other on a

standard television news channel where the visual interface combines weather forecasts, news headlines, stock exchange levels and conventional interviews on the screen, inviting or rather forcing the viewer to engage in complicated semiotic multi-tasking. Or *The Sea Is a Stage* may be seen to resemble contemporary computer games. A *World of Warcraft* gamer, for example, needs to navigate simultaneously between textual messages from co-players and adversaries with constantly changing the advanced settings of the game. Likewise, the soundtracks as well as the many visual styles signify different dimensions of the game to which the gamer must relate. Andkjær Olsen's meta-fictional construction, which juxtaposes acute political questions with absurd game show logic, insists on the productive and even world-saving role of literature in the constant contrast between the "ugly," satiric commentary in her book with epiphanic, and perhaps also desperate, glimpses of exquisite poetic and visual beauty.

Beauty is an effect of the elaborate visual design of her book, and of parts of her text. In a 2005 interview, although she first discusses her attempt to create some kind of relative representation of the complexity and open-endedness of the world, she eventually stresses her search for beauty:

> [P]oetry [i]s a possibility of acknowledging the world's—not to mention my own—lack of perfection—even when I accept this non-coherence [of the world and myself], meaning that all this can be used in order to create something beautiful. I can, of course, hear the connotations of marginality [uvæsentlighed] attached to this term; beauty is mere surface and does not change the world, and so on, but I believe in it. (Fangel 2005, my translation)[7]

"Not drama, not development, not an end." (Unfun)

Attempts to match the complexity and beauty of the world through aesthetically pleasing devices are thus part of the delicate design as well as in the poetic style of certain passages in *The Sea Is a Stage*. Such attempts are deliberately refuted as an aesthetic possibility in the work of the Norwegian artist Matias Faldbakken. Born in 1973, Faldbakken has published three novels, *The Cocka Hola Company* (2001), *Macht und Rebel* (2002), and *Unfun* (2008), under the pseudonym Abo Rasul. These novels may be compared to the fiction of Michel Houellebecq: Faldbakken's and Houellebecq's works are calculated provocations and clearly foreshadow and encourage future critique in their texts. A major difference, however, is that Faldbakken's work relates to the contemporary art scene (the

7 See *http://www.litteratursiden.dk/artikler/jeg-har-slugt-mange-svaner-og-faa-soem-interview-med-ursula-andkjaer-olsen-og-adda-djoerup* (Accessed 16 April 2012)

novels written under pseudonym are considered adjuncts to his art projects) and is informed by contemporary critical theory, philosophy and art theory, while Houellebecq sees contemporary Western culture in the light of classical philosophical paradigms such as the extreme pessimism (and grim humour) of Arthur Schopenhauer.[8]

Unfun describes a dysfunctional family composed of a hyper-violent father, Slaktus (punning "slaughter" and "slaughterhouse" in Norwegian), his wife Lucy (allegedly from the African "Ik-tribe," characterised by a total inability both to feel or to care about anything) and their two nightmarish twins who have inherited their mother's pathological lack of sensitivity and empathy. Like all protagonists in Faldbakken's fiction, the entire family seems to promote and epitomise that which is not supposed to exist in the Scandinavian welfare state. This is most notably the case with the twins, whom Lucy saves from the corrupting influence of society by not registering them after their birth. They are kept away from all official registers in a kind of Rousseauean primitivism dream and have escaped the socialisation normally provided by attending school and kindergarten. However, they do not become less corrupt and perverted: on the contrary, they spend their time gaming, drinking, smoking, and printing their own money, so the novel seems to argue that the lack of socialisation produces happy but utterly unempathic and cruel subjects.

I read Faldbakken's *Unfun* as a project with a double focus. On the one hand, the novel stages a political statement, ironic and non-conventional as it may be. On the other, *Unfun* enters a contemporary *paragone* discussion (a debate concerning which art ought to be the dominant, see Schnitzler 2007) where literary discourse competes with other media. At first sight, Faldbakken's novels may look like avant-garde or post-avant-garde transgressions of the conventional borders of literary form and style. But as it will become clear below, Faldbakken does not follow any preordained schemes of literary development. Instead, he—at least inside the fiction—suggests a non-literary genre as the solution to the problems of literature. His three novels form a veritable catalogue of forms that lie at the edge of the written narrative. The conventional discourse of fiction (dialogue, set description, plot-driven narrative) is constantly inflated with both intermedial and intramedial relations: political speeches, advertising slogans and logos co-exist with fragments of plots for future computer games, descriptions of horror movies and representations of pornographic movies.

Such an intramedial blend of genres and voices (often considered fundamental to the novel form itself) as well as the references to non-literary media, might

---

8 Until now, the work of Rasul has mostly been met with journalistic criticism and public debate in and outside Norway, and there has been little academic work on Abo Rasul or Matias Faldbakken. To my knowledge, the best analysis of Rasul's literary and philosophical strategy is Skare Malvik 2010. My own reading owes several insights to this article.

be interpreted as the only justifiable representation of the complexity of contemporary society. A reading, relying on, for instance, M. M. Bakhtin's ideas of heteroglossia and "novelness" in *Discourse in the Novel* (1981), would focus on the positive, surplus character of numerous perspectives and dimensions that together create a richer version of a given represented reality. But the diversity and multiplicity of discourses in Faldbakken's work would seem to signify the opposite of such an optimistic vision of diversifying plenitude.

On the contrary, the intra- and intermedial diversity in Faldbakken's novels signals a media implosion. Meaning is sucked out of the forms and media used in his work, which results in a general and highly disturbing negativity. Instead of seeing Faldbakken's literary construction as creating a surplus of meaning in a more or less conventional realistic depiction, it is probably more to the point to see it as deeply influenced by Menippean satire. Northrop Frye, in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) considered this genre to be central to the Western imagination from antiquity until our own epoch. The Menippean satire is a philosophical and narrative genre, coloured by both sophism and cynicism (in the philosophical sense of both terms). It mixes points of view in order to create a non-edifying, satiric and materialistic representation of society while debating fundamental questions of truth, justice and human nature.[9]

Consequently, the aesthetics and literary style of Faldbakken owe more to Menippean satire (and conceptual avant-garde art) than to classical standards of "good" writing: rhythm, aural patterns, and cognitively enriching figural language are hard to find. Metaphors, for instance, are used seldom, and when they are, they have a deliberate debasing function in the text, as exemplified in the characterisation of Paris as "a passion filled with foie gras" (Rasul 2008, 58, my translation). Instead, a gruesome, funny, sexually and politically transgressive voice and choice of subjects are the novel's main attractions.

The characters of Faldbakken's novels do not want to participate in the Scandinavian welfare state in *Unfun*, but several of them have ambitions to make some mark—preferably of a destructive, subversive kind—on society. Faldbakken's protagonists mimic while at the same time also destroying the strategies of what Richard Florida famously named the "creative class" (Florida 2005): artists, people working in advertising, academics, and political sub-groups. In *Unfun*, the mock-artistic project is aimed at destroying the very idea of narration, in particular film-making, as a symbol of an edifying or even devotional artistic form, and consequently Lucy denounces the generally accepted idea that film is the replacement of the novel's dominating grand narrative in contemporary culture.

9 Christian Dahl discusses Faldbakken/Rasul's novels as examples of Menippean satire in "Scandinavian Misanthropy and Transgression: The Poetics of Matias Faldbakken," unpublished manuscript. See Relihan 1993 and Vignes 1985 for discussions of the history and form of the Menippean satire.

This is part of Faldbakken's staging of a postmodern paragone. This competition is not between conventional forms such as music, sculpture and painting (or between literature and painting as was the case in the Renaissance). Instead, heavy metal or punk music, and in particular contemporary semi-underground audio-visual media, such as porn and extremely violent movies, rule the cultural universe of the protagonists and compete for their attention. For the protagonists, reading (or writing) literature, such as novels, is an anachronism in a cultural universe where other media have taken over.

Slaktus—the violent husband of the dysfunctional family—first attempts to adapt Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* into a slasher movie. Instead of a white man travelling into the obscure and dangerous interior of the African continent in order to regularise the colonial trade, as described in Conrad's novel, Slaktus conceptualises an African mass murderer in Paris who uses a road worker's stone cutter to kill his victims. Interpreted from a typical left-wing position, this slasher movie could be understood, his wife Lucy ironises, as "some statement" about "cultural alienation, clash of civilizations or colonial backlash" (Rasul 2008, 72, my translation). Needless to say, the project receives no funding and Faldbakken turns the screw one turn more as the protagonists argue that even pornographic or slasher movies (both characterised by rudimentary narrative plots) are too conventional. Cinema is still too dependent on what Lucy, in an acidly satiric description of the common understanding of narration and storytelling, refers to as the old-fashioned idea of "life as narration," a "recognizable common space that we may kinda identify with and that will glue us together" (Rasul 2008, 74, my translation).

In order to avoid cinematic and literary narrativity, Slaktus's computer game creates "a world existing between the eye and the hand;" that is, without "verbalisation" or reflection. He is, therefore, not interested in a conventional first-person shooter game and instead sketches a first-person *slasher* game, a "splatter medium" (Rasul 2008, 74). Narration as pattern, as a meaningful sign of humanity, is actively avoided in the new medium, and Lucy hesitatingly acknowledges that Slaktus is on to something. The "non-form" and extreme open-endedness of the "splatter medium" stand in contrast to cinema and literature: "In fiction it is only the openings [anslag] that are interesting. They are where the ideas are; that is where the potential is. Openings on top of openings on top of openings, potential on top of potential, a flat sequence of openings. Not drama, not development, not an end" (Rasul 2008, 124, my translation). The efficient escapism of gaming lies in its infinite number of openings without endings. Being a non-humanistic, non-edifying, non-structured form that finally facilitates a worthy substitute of real life with its numerous restrictions, the game does not illuminate or enlighten life.

The slasher film's working title "*Mbo – Avenging Congo*" is changed to the game-title *Deathbox* and the young computer nerds at the *Rapefruit* office create

a graphic design that painstakingly recreates an exact representation of Paris.[10] A Nigerian male actor is the model for the animation scenes, and the non-fictitious actor Dan Castellaneta, the voice of Homer Simpson in *The Simpsons,* is brought in to provide the voicing. Faldbakken creates a balance here, as well as elsewhere, between racist jokes and political satire. The brand names, plot of the game and the description of the process of creating the game are both a dystopic representation of contemporary quasi-artistic production and a freewheeling parody. The inclusion of Dan Castellaneta as a non-fictive element (but with fictive features!) disturbs the safe borders between fiction and reality in the text.

Faldbakken's use of literature and the novel to conduct the deadly attack by popular culture might, in fact, be turned critically upon his own project. *Unfun* is, after all, a kind of novel that follows several of the conventions of novelistic discourse: more or less trustworthy figures, a recognisable setting, a plot driven by identifiable needs (even though the devices of Menippean satire cause it to deviate from conventional novels). Faldbakken's novel provides a double answer to this imagined objection. First, the novel shows that it may be very effective to wage war on the territory of the opponents, to destroy the cultural and artistic *street cred* of the novel from inside the novel itself. Secondly, the real and radical break with the conventional, edifying novelistic form (first and foremost with narrativity) lies in the formal structure.

The main part of *Unfun* resembles Faldbakken's two earlier novels. As we have seen, sexually and politically subversive content is combined with an obvious disdain for good taste and literary style. At the same time, a relatively conventional narrative plot forms the structure of the text. *Unfun* is basically a grotesque parody of a crime plot that creates a (nevertheless) gratifying mixture of humour, suspense, and satire. But in its final chapter, called "Final Girl" in reference to the conventional female protagonist in slasher and horror films (see Clover 1992), new plot logic takes over.[11]

The chapter begins with Lucy being brutally raped by her ex-husband Slaktus. Instead of accepting this as she has done previously, she kills him. Following this murder we are, in a transitional scene, introduced to the virtual reality of Slaktus's computer game. The English script (one of many genres in the book) describes the introductory sequence to the game, ending like this: "We are Mbo now, stone cutter in hand. […] We are free to act" (Rasul 2008, 241, English in the original). With no clear passage from this virtual reality to the world outside fiction, Lucy takes over as final girl, only in *Unfun* the final girl has already killed

10 "*Deathbox*" probably puns Microsofts gaming station Xbox, while "Rapefruit" debases and puns Yoko Ono's avant-garde classic artist's book *Grapefruit* from 1964. The highly detailed, digital version of Paris is destroyed because of a computer programming mistake later on, initiating one of Slaktus's violent assaults.

11 This has been foreshadowed in a discussion of the "final girl" and of splatterpunk in the first chapter, p. 38–39.

the violent threat and is herself turning into a killer of partly innocent people.

In this last part of *Unfun*, Faldbakken creates an *unheimlich* feeling in the reader: One is not sure which reality s/he is in. We recognise Lucy the narrator, but she also acts strangely abrupt, as if she—like a game-player—is both inside and outside the game. The text points at this when hinting that "the body to one side, the eyes towards the other" (Rasul 2008, 241, my translation). It seems as if a split personality takes the place of the narrator:

> What happens now seems to happen after language has shut itself down. I will tell you what is happening without talking, I guess there are only pictures left. Lucy2 has left, Lucy1 disappears too, I feel I am only eye, I am a lens, a kind of gaze, a gaze that moves about, a kind of consciousness with eyes in front. (Rasul 2008, 232, my translation)

Here, the novel is violently overtaken, invaded by another medium: a new game logic takes over, and the rest of the book mimics a game.

The idea of the novel as a "pure" literary form has never been particularly strong, and as I have already mentioned, the history of the novel repeatedly rejects the borders of the genre. However, Faldbakken uses the novel's form as a vehicle for a societal and anarchistic criticism of bourgeois values and as a means to negate the novelistic form itself. What is even more surprising, and what may be seen as a new constellation in the unending renewal of the form of the novel, is the attempt to let the relatively non-narrative medium of gaming take over. This results in a deeply disturbing feeling when Lucy kills a handful of people, including her own two sons, as dispassionately as if she were inside a virtual reality.[12] And perhaps even more disturbing is the fact that we find no soothing normality "outside" fiction in Faldbakken's version: Being outside the violent and nihilistic fiction means entering the "reality" of Slaktus, a world that is as violent and nihilistic as the computer game he wishes to create.

There seems to be no way out of the fictive universe of *Unfun*. Thus, Faldbakken has cleverly staged a paragone between the novel and computer games, which triumphs as the violent winner. Faldbakken seems to close all utopian or hopeful exits for his media paragone with this victory. The question, however, is whether the victory of gaming over novelness has a certain promise to it. Not a promise of beauty as in the case of Andkjær Olsen's work, but a promise of emptiness and non-narrativity. *Unfun* may open up an exhilarating field of "[o]penings on top of openings on top of openings, potential on top of potential, a flat sequence

12 Bret Easton Ellis tested a similar strategy in *American Psycho* (1991), but Ellis's moralistic criticism of consumer society was supported by narrative signs that imply that the narrator/protagonist was psychotic and that the entire novel was *perhaps* nothing but a very lively pornographic phantasy of the male protagonist.

of openings," in which freedom *from* meaning and conclusion offers new and potentially fertile political possibilities.

A politics of contemporary "literature"?

These two literary works are spectacular intermedial and intramedial mixtures, though in different ways that may be worth specifying. In *The Sea Is a Stage*, the intra- and intermedial mixture is characterised by a "synchronic" co-existence in the text. Andkjær Olsen mixes handwriting, colours and different iconic aspects of language, which results in an unusual visual design. In comparison, Faldbakken's text resembles an "ordinary" novel with no outer signs that reveal its mixed media nature: the novel transforms Conrad's novel into a fictitious game, and is itself partly transformed by the form of gaming.

Ursula Andkjær Olsen mixes discourses, literary genres and the iconic representation of language in order to satirise and criticise aspects of a society of spectacle and the discourses of contemporary Danish politics. The contrast between the audition for a banal TV-show and the very real position of contemporary (Danish) politics toward wars waged outside Denmark and the threatening global ecological disaster creates a sophisticated literary form that transcends conventional literary representation. It may be argued, however, that her complex and multi-level discourse may create the kind of apathy and confusion that she is so eager to prevent.

Matias Faldbakken's novelistic Menippean satires blend aspects of pornographic movies, advertising slogans, and other media with more traditional literary and verbal material. In *Unfun* it is first of all the gaming in novelistic discourse that marks a real, and unheimlich, effect of mixing media. This "gamification" takes place inside the story (where Conrad's novel is adapted to gaming), but as we have seen, it is also a crucial aspect of the narrative frame (the style of gaming overtaking the form of the novel itself). Both these aspects of the game-influence attempt to avoid any conventional sense of plot and narrativity. This use of gaming as a Trojan horse inside the novel is part of Faldbakken's general attack on literature as a conventional medium and expresses Faldbakken's sketch of an anarchist aesthetic approach to reality.

Following the distinctions made by Jens Schröter, these texts clearly lean toward *Gesamtkunstwerk* rather than trying to achieve medium-specific purity and they express no concerns whatsoever regarding the problems of mixing of media. On the contrary, they show that by mixing literary genres, or the conventional medium of literature with cinema and gaming, it is possible to gain a critical representation, and thus deeper understanding, of reality. Both texts challenge the genres and media they apparently enter, and like so

many strategic avant-garde efforts, they question the utility and the political productivity of conventional and culturally accepted forms. By representing and understanding contemporary reality in these particular ways, these texts also offer ways of intervening in contemporary Scandinavian politics and culture. Fusing Spielmann's and Schröter's considerations of intermediality we might argue that by combining (the already mixed) media in the tradition of hybrid art forms and *Gesamtkunstwerk*, it becomes possible to create works of art that intervene in contemporary politics: mixed media may introduce small grains of sand (cf. Spielmann) into the machinery of contemporary Scandinavian self-understanding.

The question is, of course, whether these texts fall under Krauss's criticism of the "international fashion of installation and intermedia work, in which art finds itself complicit with a globalization of the image in the service of capital" (Krauss 1999, 56). She claims that only a tiny portion of contemporary art, and I suggest we include literature in these considerations, grasps the challenge posed by the fact that the ideal of art—as being media specific—has been exhausted. Since she considers the new intermedia ideal to be kitsch, Krauss leaves only limited space for contemporary artistic creation, which must navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of "obsolete" media and intermedia kitsch. Although it is problematic to translate Krauss's argument from visual art to literature, she does remind us that the mixing of media for the sake of mixing is, in art as in film and literature, not a liberating or enlightening activity per se. And perhaps the most valuable aspect of Krauss's analysis of contemporary art and culture is that she reminds us that the mixing of media is no longer the exception to the rule. Rather, mixing media is the general condition of producing significant, but also consumable, messages in politics, advertising—and art.

Nevertheless, I believe that the two works discussed here do produce a critical effect: they invigorate the media with which they engage. Reaching beyond the conventional form and content of the media of the novel and the book of poems, these aesthetic works seem to take up the challenge of the new (and weakened) position of literature in contemporary Western societies. For these two authors, the co-existence of social critique and beauty (Andkjær Olsen) and the possibility of non-edifying negativity (Faldbakken) are attainable in a mixed-media version of literature.

Works cited

Andkjær Olsen, Ursula. 2008. *Havet er en scene.* [The sea is a stage] København: Gyldendal.

Bakhtin, M. M. 1981. *The Dialogical Imagination.* Austin: Texas UP.

—. 1984. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Minnesota: Minnesota UP.

Bruhn, Jørgen. 2010. Heteromediality. In *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. Lars Elleström, 225–236. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Clover, Carol J. 1992. *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Dahl, Christian. Unpublished ms: "Scandinavian Misanthropy and Transgression: The Poetics of Matias Faldbakken."

Debord, Guy. 1970 [1967]. *The Society of the Spectacle.* Trans. Fredy Perlman and Jon Supak. New York: Black and Red.

Easton Ellis, Bret. 1991. *American Psycho*. New York: Vintage Books.

Elleström, Lars. 2010. The Modalities of Media. A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations. In *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. Lars Elleström, 11–49. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

—. 2011. *Visuell ikonicitet i lyrik: en intermedial och semiotisk undersökning med speciellt fokus på svenskspråkig lyrik från sent 1900-tal*. Hedemora: Gidlunds förlag.

Fangel, Gitte. 2005. "Jeg har slugt for mange svaner og for få søm – interview med Ursula Andkjær Olsen og Adda Djørup." *http://www.litteratursiden.dk/artikler/jeg-har-slugt-mange-svaner-og-faa-soem-interview-med-ursula-andkjaer-olsen-og-adda-djoerup* (Accessed 16 April 2012.)

Florida, Richard. 2005. *The Flight of the Creative Class. The New Global Competition for Talent.* New York: HarperCollins.

Frye, Northrop. 1957. *Anatomy of Criticism.* Princeton: Princeton UP.

Helbig, J. 2008. Intermedialität – eine spezifische Form des Medienkontakts oder globaler Oberbegriff? In *Media Encounters and Media Theories*, ed. Jürgen E. Müller, 79–87. Münster: Nodus.

Koebner, Thomas, ed. 1989. *Laokoon und kein Ende: Der Wettstreit der Künste, Litteratur und andere Künste*. München: Edition Text und Kritik.

Krauss, Rosalind. 1999. *A Voyage on the North Sea. Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*. London: Thames & Hudson.

—. 2006. Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition. *October* vol. 116: 55–62.

Kulish, Nicholas. 2006. "Television you can't put down." *The New York Times*, September 10. *http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/10/opinion/10sun3.html?_r=1* (Accessed September 1, 2012.)

Malvik, Anders Skare. 2010. Naivismus, Nihilismus, Negation – zur Ästhetik in Abo Rasuls *Unfun*. In *Figuren des Dazwischen. Naivität in Kunst, Pop- und Populärkultur*, eds. Stefan Krankenhagen und Hans-Otto Hügel, 109–133. Wilhelm Fink Verlag.

Mitchell W. J. T. 1994. *Picture Theory: Essays on Visual and Verbal Representation.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

—. 2005. There Are No Visual Media. *Journal of Visual Culture* vol. 4 no. 2: 257–266.

Pethő Ágnes. 2010. Intermediality in Film. A Historiography of Methodologies. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* vol. 2: 39–72.

—. 2011. *Cinema and Intermediality. The Passion for the In-between*. Newcastle on Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Rajewsky, Irina. 2002. *Intermedialität.* [Intermediality] Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag.

Rasul, Abo. 2001. *The Cocka Hola Company. Skandinavisk misantropi.* Oslo: Cappelen.

—. 2002. *Macht und Rebel. Skandinavisk misantropi 2*. Oslo: Cappelen.

—. 2008. *Unfun. Skandinavisk misantropi 3.* Oslo: Cappelen.

Relihan, Joel. 1993. *Ancient Menippean Satire*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.

Schnitzler, Andreas. 2007. *Der Wettstreit der Künste*. Berlin: Reimer Verlag.

Spielmann, Yvonne. 1997. *Intermedialität. Das System Peter Greenaway.* [Intermediality. The Peter Greenaway system] München: W. Fink.

—. 2010. New and Novelty in Contemporary Media Cultures. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* vol. 3: 7–18.

—. 2010. *Hybridkultur.* Berlin: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch.

Schröter, Jens. 2010. The Politics of Intermediality – New and Novelty in Contemporary Media Cultures. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies,* vol. 2: 107–124.

Stein Larsen, Peter. 2009. *Drømme og dialoger. To poetiske traditioner omkring 2000.* Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag.

Vignes, Jean. 1985. Culture et histoire dans la Satyre Menippee. In *Etudes sur la Satyre Mennippée*, eds. Frank Lestringant and Daniel Menager, 151–199. Geneva: Droz.

Voigts-Virchow, Eckart. 1991. Metadaptation: Adaptation and Intermediality – Cock and Bull. *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance,* vol. 2, no. 2: 137–152.

Wolf, Werner. 2010. Intermedialität und mediale Dominanz typologisch, funktionsgeschichtlich und akademisch-institutionell betrachtet. In *Der Neue Wettstreit der Künste. Legitimation und Dominanz im Zeichen der Intermedialität*, eds. Uta Degner and Norbert Christian Wolf, 241–260. Bielefeld: Transcript.

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **5**, 1 (2013) 95–110

Representations of Female Alterity in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Cinema[1]

Judit PIELDNER
Sapientia University, Miercurea Ciuc
Department of Humanities
juditpieldner@yahoo.com

Abstract. The present study carries out a comparative/contrastive analysis of two ways of contemporary Hungarian and Romanian film discourse, namely magic realism and micro-realism, and will focus on the representation of the woman in the contemporary films entitled *Witch Circle* (Dezső Zsigmond, 2009), exploring a subversive female mythologem of a confined traditional community, that of the Csángó people, *Bibliothèque Pascal* (Szabolcs Hajdú, 2010), which creates a private mythology, materialised in form of surrealist images, of the female self interpreting herself out of her conditions, and *Beyond the Hills* (Cristian Mungiu, 2012), drawing its topic from a real event —reality generating fiction—that inspired Tatiana Niculescu Bran's *Deadly Confession* (*Spovedanie la Tanacu*), *Judges' Book* (*Cartea Judecătorilor*), as well as Zsolt Láng's *The Monastery of Protection* (*Az oltalom kolostora*). Beyond dealing with related female patterns, the films under discussion are engaged in mediating collective and private mental representations, as well as in creating film narratives with the convergent feature of juxtaposing the real and the mythical. The films approach the topic from distinct possibilities of cinematic representation and offer, in my view, a complementary and intercultural image of the woman trapped between the East and the West, between social and religious institutions and victimised by the stereotypical view of society.

Keywords: magic realism, micro-realism, real vs. mythical, stereotypes, female identity and alterity

Introduction

Ever since the change of the political regime in Hungary and Romania, several literary and cinematic attempts have emerged to depict the socio-cultural realities of Eastern Europe, to cope with the past traumas experienced by both

1 The study was created within the framework of the three-year group research programme *Imagology Researches*, supported by the Institute of Research Programmes of Sapientia University.

nations, to revive collective and cultural memory, to grab the Eastern European specificity that makes the region the "other" of (Western) Europe. In the past two decades that have passed since the fall of the iron curtain it has turned out that what used to be conceived—or rather ideologically imposed—as a homogeneous space in political, cultural and ethnic terms, got transformed into a polymorph, heterogeneous, multidimensional one in several respects, a multilayered, palimpsest-zone which its inhabitants both identify with and get estranged from, a zone where global supermodernity is in perpetual conflict with local, cultural and religious traditions; the reader/spectator is confronted with the experience of incompatibilities in several artistic representations.

Several Hungarian and Romanian films set themselves the task of processing the—collective and individual—trauma experienced in the communist regime,[2] revaluing the Romanian revolution, unveiling mechanisms of mediation,[3] as well as analysing the relationship between private memory and cultural memory, the quest for the past as a self-quest.[4]

Besides the attention focused on the past, several cinematic representations of women have been created, focusing on issues such as women and trauma, women between the East and the West, women trapped by social institutions/taboos, the female body as a carrier of the spirit of the place and power relations, some of them reinforcing stereotypes, others nuancing the image and pointing at affinities that are at the core of the Eastern European (female) existence.

These films display various discursive trends, from the magic realist tendency in Hungarian films to the "New Wave" in Romanian cinema, as well as various stylistic and rhetorical specificities, from minimalism, micro-realism, naturalism to excessive stylization, (self-)reflexivity, exploration of intermedial/interart relations.

The hypothesis of the present paper is that the issue of women in film is always also an issue pertaining to representation; female alterity implying thus, in most cases, some kind of medial alterity, specificity. This is why I examine the question of female alterity in connection with particular cinematic modes of representation, namely magic realism in contemporary Hungarian cinema and micro-realism in contemporary Romanian cinema.

---

2 e.g., *The Way I Spent the End of the World* (*Cum mi-am petrecut sfârşitul lumii*, Cătălin Mitulescu, 2006); *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (*4 luni, 3 săptămâni, şi 2 zile*, Cristian Mungiu, 2007); *Tales from the Golden Age* (*Amintiri din epoca de aur*, Hanno Höfer, Răzvan Mărculescu, Cristian Mungiu, Constantin Popescu, Ioana Uricaru, 2009)

3 e.g., *12:8 East of Bucharest* (*A fost sau n-a fost?*, Corneliu Porumboiu, 2006)

4 e.g., *Moscow Square* (*Moszkva tér*, Ferenc Török, 2001); *White Palms* (*Fehér tenyér*, Szabolcs Hajdú, 2006); *Taxidermia* (György Pálfi, 2006); *Delta* (Kornél Mundruczó, 2008). As for the topic of the past in contemporary Hungarian cinema, see Strausz (2011), and regarding the same topic in contemporary Romanian cinema, see Részeg (2011).

Tendencies of magic realism in contemporary Hungarian Cinema

The first set of questions is related to what principles of storytelling the contemporary Hungarian films that can be labelled as "magic realist" assume and to what extent they contribute to the cinematic representation of the Central and Eastern European condition/paradigm, or rather, what kind of representational discourse they establish within the framework of the generic-discursive diversity of today's Hungarian film productions. Further on, my attention is turned towards the way the so-called "magic realist" narrative-representational discourse and the topic of female alterity, traumatised female identity are interlocked in particular films. Whereas Miklós Mészöly's prose turn after the publication of his novel entitled *Film* (1976) was still received in terms of the "South-American paradigm" in the literary criticism of the time, ever since Tamás Bényei's *Apocriphal Documents* was published in 1997, the term "magic realism" has been applied to contemporary Hungarian literary works as well, critics regarding the versions of this way of narrative discourse as a Central and Eastern European "specificity," influenced/inspired by the South-American way of "seasoning." In today's Hungarian short story and novel writing practice there is a strong tendency of displaying a narratorial voice striving to enthrall the reader by turning natural elements into supernatural ones and vice versa, being characterised by a "double crowdedness" at the level of plot as well as rhetoric, by blending history and self-reflection, characterised by an excessive use of decorative and hyperbolical figures (cf. Bényei 1997). By definition, magic realism combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed. It is not always unambiguous what the necessary and sufficient conditions for a literary work to be considered as "magic realist" are; however, works of mythical character, whether drawing from the historical-cultural tradition or from contemporary social realities, whether the fantastic element is imposed on or abstracted from the "real," by authors such as László Darvasi, János Háy, Zsolt Láng, Éva Berniczky, András Cserna Szabó as well as Ádám Bodor and his followers, György Dragomán and Gábor Vida, enter the category under discussion. Tamás Bényei goes beyond reading the conceptually obscure term merely as an oxymoron as well as beyond automatically attaching the phenomenon to a particular geographical-cultural region and defines magic realism as an international phenomenon constituting an integrative part of postmodern discourse (Bényei 1997). The "magic" component of the phrase refers, on the one hand, to the visual aspects, to the rhetorical and narrative specificities of the literary discourse; on the other hand, it also implies an ontological layer of meaning, referring to a particular way of reading—by virtually transgressing the boundaries of—reality/existence.

In parallel with the above-mentioned endeavours in contemporary Hungarian literature, in today's Hungarian cinema there is a tendency of representing the social, cultural, ethnic diversity and incompatibilities that characterise Central and Eastern European existence, a tendency of visually recreating a Balkan Macondo, the stereotypes of Balkan existence with all its ambivalences and absurdities, constituting the preconditions for the carnivalesque type of rendering (as it manifests in Emir Kusturica's oeuvre). Among the established discourses of contemporary Hungarian film, which I am going to briefly survey without the intention of being exhaustive, a number of films that attempt to transgress the boundaries of given realities and to make *realms beyond* discernible are regarded as experiments, inventions, even as "cuckoo's eggs," though a contemporary "Budapest Film School" speaking the language of magic realism is taking shape, is getting crystallised. Thus, among the generic diversity represented by popular genres such as the crime-thriller combination,[5] the comedy,[6] the films of coming-of-age, of generation disposition;[7] by art film genres such as film drama most powerfully represented by Béla Tarr's films, adaptation;[8] by various experimental endeavours such as the non-narrative experiment,[9] the remake, the opera film or the quasi-documentary, "magic realism" may appear as a genre-shaping dominant aiming at the (re-)territorialization of the imaginary[10] or as a quality enriching the visual vocabulary of one of the above-mentioned genres.[11]

"Magic realism" may also be related to the inherently magic quality of filmic representation, acquiring media-conscious overtones, as in Ildikó Enyedi's films, especially in *Simon, the Magician* (*Simon mágus*, 1999). (The term "magic realism" was already used by Miklós Erdély, who suggested the term in order to define the way films by Bódy, Jeles, Tarr and Gothár transgressed the established modes of rendering.) It is to be mentioned that in contemporary Hungarian film criticism the inherent terminological obscurity of "magic realism" is preserved, as it is referred to as a generic, stylistic, even as an unspecified feature. All in all, we can detect an openness of contemporary film towards the mythical, the legendary, the miraculous, towards alternative entrances and exits of storytelling, as being qualities that lead to the shaping of a multilayered Central

5 e.g., *The Detective* (*A nyomozó*, Attila Gigor, 2008) or *Hukkle* (György Pálfi, 2002)

6 e.g., *Only Sex and Nothing Else* (*Csak szex és más semmi*, Krisztina Goda, 2005), *Some Kind of America* (*Valami Amerika*, Gábor Herendi, 2002), *Glass Tyger* (*Üvegtigris*, Iván Kapitány and Péter Rudolf, 2001)

7 e.g., *Dad Would Have a Fit* (*Apám beájulna*, Tamás Sas, 2003), *Moscow Square* (*Moszkva tér*, Ferenc Török, 2001)

8 e.g., *Damnation* (*Kárhozat*, Béla Tarr, 1988); *Satan's Tango* (*Sátántangó*, Béla Tarr, 1994); *Werckmeister Harmonies* (*Werckmeister harmóniák*, Béla Tarr, 2000); *Fateless* (*Sorstalanság*, Lajos Koltai, 2005)

9 e.g., *Milky Way* (*Tejút*, Benedek Fliegauf, 2007)

10 e.g., *Bibliothèque Pascal* (Szabolcs Hajdú, 2010)

11 e.g., *Vespa* (Diána Groó, 2010)

and Eastern European mythological space, to the reanimation of the realm of the visual and simultaneously bring round a new familiarity—or rather intriguing unfamiliarity—as concerns spectatorship.

Micro-realism as trademark of contemporary Romanian cinema

Contemporary Romanian cinema employs another way of approaching the Eastern European condition. Doru Pop speaks about the common grammar of Romanian "new-new-wave" cinema, in which a dominant trope is "the preference for verism, the closeness of cinema to realism" (2010, 32). As the author argues,

> As was the case of the Italian neo-realism, this new realism of the Romanian young cinema comes against the fictional-propaganda style of the "old" Romanian cinema, founded in a certain symbolic stage, where signification is generated by hidden meaning and collateral or subtle references. This is a direct cinema, in the very sense of addressing direct and abrupt issues, some of them ignored for decades. (32)

The elaboration of the specific minimalist-realist mode of representation which is a dominant characteristic of contemporary Romanian filmmaking, is linked to Cristi Puiu's name, to his first film entitled *Stuff and Dough* (*Marfa şi banii*, 2001). The term micro-realism covers more or less what we mean by Czech realism, having its representatives both in literature (Bohumil Hrabal) and in cinema (Miloš Forman), and is used to refer to representations of marginal, provincial spaces, absurd-grotesque twists and turns, tragicomic patterns, petty figures, anti-heroes, "lives of no great importance."

Although not all directors admit their categorisation into any kind of film school (see Fulger 2006), there seems to be a consensus in the critical discourse to speak about contemporary Romanian movies in terms of "new wave" or "new-new wave," and to characterise their mode of representation in terms of realism, micro-realism, verism, documentary style, direct cinema.

The image of the woman: beyond the gender code

Ever since Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) the word "woman" covers less a biological than a socially-culturally shaped entity; woman defined as "the Other" has revolutionised twentieth-century concepts of gender identity

and gender roles. And ever since the emergence of post-structuralist feminist discourses, gender is a construct dependent on discursive practices.

> In this sense, then, "sex" not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce-demarcate, circulate, differentiate the bodies it controls. Thus, "sex" is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. (Butler 1993, 1)

The relationship between gender representation and film discourse is a favoured topic of film theory; maybe the most often cited essay in this respect is Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, which states that the pleasure of the traditional narrative film is based on the scopophilic instinct, that is, "the pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object," the cinematic representation of woman induces voyeuristic-fetishistic mechanisms, and, on a psychoanalitic background, identifies mainstream cinema as the perpetuator of a patriarchal order in which the image of woman is "(passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man" (Mulvey 1975).

The voyeuristic-fetishistic mechanism of the classical Hollywood film narrative has been overwritten by several cinematic discourses, trends and tendencies, distancing the image of the woman from being the object of the male gaze, providing sharp criticism of visual exposedness and oppression, offering a sensitive, reflective view of the complexity of female identity and alterity, of the female image as a complex implying both ethic and aesthetic considerations.

The image of woman indispensably reveals the onlooker's gaze, the perspective from which it is as it is shown. Representing women is by itself reflexive, as Hajnal Király states, "as long as it implicitly alludes to the (voyeuristic, fetishistic) gaze, and as such, it is suitable for metaphorically representing all kinds of rendered visuality" (Király 2010, 31, translated by me, J. P.).

Lately special attention has been devoted to various representations of women, to various topics related to female identity in contemporary Hungarian and Romanian cinematic endeavours. In contemporary cinematic representations woman appears as a vulnerable surface bearing the imprints of power relations. The female body comes to the fore as the product of mentalities/ideologies, as a specific carrier of profound spirituality, and last but not least, as a powerful medium transporting social criticism and urging a critical view of the overused term "reality."

With no claim of being exhaustive, I will make reference to a few recent studies which deal with the topic of representation of women in contemporary cinema. Júlia Éva Havas points out that in auteur cinema (used synonymously with art

film) the representation of woman in film goes beyond the gender code, as the exposedness of woman implies the existential exposedness of the human being: "the ultimate exposedness to the other is not the exposedness of Woman to Man; instead of the gender code we must search for ontological solutions" (2011, 30, translated by me, J. P.).

László Strausz (2011) discusses Ágnes Kocsis's *Adrienn Pál* (*Pál Adrienn*, 2010) in the context of the topic of memory with young Hungarian directors; the film relates the overweight nurse's search for her past friend, Adrienn Pál, displaying the story of a self-quest rather than a mere nostalgia for a former friendship.

Recent researches on cinematic representations of the woman also include comparative analyses of Hungarian and Romanian films, such as Lilla László's (2012) comparative study of Ágnes Kocsis's *Fresh Air* (*Friss levegő*, 2006) and Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (*4 luni, 3 săptămâni şi 2 zile*, 2007), which examines cinematic space representation in connection with women protagonists, with women's lives and their bodies.

In her study entitled *Surrogate Nature, Culture, Women—Inner Colonies. Postcolonial Readings of Contemporary Hungarian Films*, by making use of the terms and arguments of post-colonialism, Mónika Dánél points out the underlying colonial schemes, mostly present in the representation of women, of Hungarian films set in Transylvania/Romania.[12]

Reality transfigured: *Witch Circle* vs. *Bibliothèque Pascal*

In what follows, I am going to contrast two films that touch upon related questions, both being preoccupied with the female condition and the possibility of "escape" through the visual rendering of a compound of collective consciousness and a private female imaginary realm respectively. I wish to point out essential differences in the strategies these films follow in order to create a sort of "magic realism" on the screen.

Before doing so, the inherent magic quality of the motion picture needs to be mentioned at the outset, as a consequence of which "magic realism," reality transfigured in/through film rhetoric, is of ontological significance as concerns the film medium. Similarly, the spectatorship of the film implies the magic of perception, a displaced and reordered functioning of the senses, defying "real" spatio-temporal experiences. But the contrast I intend to make goes beyond this generalising meaning and outlines the distinct effects the selected procedures exercise upon the viewer.

12 Among others, *Delta* (Kornél Mundruczó, 2008); *Katalin Varga* (*Varga Katalin balladája*, Peter Strickland, 2009); *Witch Circle* (*Boszorkánykör*, Dezső Zsigmond, 2009); *Bibliothèque Pascal* (Szabolcs Hajdú, 2010).

I start from thematic contrasts within larger-scale parallels: in accordance with Dezső Zsigmond's interest in documenting confined, isolated, rural communities in which beliefs and superstitions are preserved, *Witch Circle* is aimed at representing the anthropological world of the Csángó people, more specifically, the beliefs related to the wild girls, whereas Szabolcs Hajdú's *Bibliothèque Pascal* is grounded upon urban social reality, and follows the destiny of a female individual.

The "rural" and the "urban" paradigms attain special overtones: though the beliefs centred around the wild girls allow the functioning of these female creatures escaped from the ties of society as a community, Mona Saparu's story (*Bibliothèque Pascal*) evolves into a prostitute story taking place in a brothel that strictly isolates women, hindering cooperation. Generically, *Witch Circle* implies a level-crossing detective thread (the investigation intersecting the irrational), while *Bibliothèque Pascal* relates a picaresque story, a story of maturisation nested into a frame.

As for the targeted spectator group of the former film is concerned, we get across anomalies: the "documentation" of myth, the "adaptation" of collective mental representations seem to be aimed at popularising the folklore element, and for this, authenticity has to be attained. However, casting authentic characters deriving from the respective area and having them say the text of the script reaches the very opposite effect of inauthenticity, artificiality. A number of authentic characters render verbally their experiences related to the supernatural creatures, trying to translate the events beyond perception into being palpable (they are either witnesses or partakers of the events). Still, they cannot capture the wild girls in their narrative traps as these creatures escape verbalisation, just as any other attempt of suppression.

The wild girls embody the male fear of the unharnessable, unsatisfiable woman, the projection of a collective female dream and male nightmare. The characters (acted by actors bringing along their heterogeneous origins, intended to form a homogeneous group) can be divided into the initiated (the wild girls themselves), those who believe in them, therefore respect them (the villagers), and the townspeople, the detectives (the one who does not believe in them is avenged, whereas the one who is open to get to know them, gets initiated himself).

Along with the conventions of the detective story, the conflict evolves from an initial situation lacking knowledge, towards the gradual unveiling of the mystery of the wild girls: the mythical is gradually revealed and juxtaposed to reality. In terms of the relationship between the word (the verbally expressed knowledge of the villagers) and the image (the visual into which the motion picture translates the verbal), the film seems not to have any special means to retain a dose of magic and in this way, along with the advancement of the investigation, the film loses its special taste of "magic realism," to the extent the wild girls become real, to the same extent the magic fades out. *Witch Circle* creates the magical in/through language, remaining the viewer's debtor in terms of aesthetic moments. It carries out the gesture of exoticising, assuming a colonial/voyeuristic gaze.

The reflexive thematisation of feminity seems to be consciously assumed by Szabolcs Hajdú's directorial concept. However, this seems to be left unexplored by Dezső Zsigmond's unreflected camera. Since the medial images of women differ in the two films: whereas *Witch Circle* follows the pattern of the "woman within the image," that is, the woman subjected to the image, throwing the free and active woman into the captivity of an authoritative film narration instead of the captivity of peasant society, Mona Saparu, though being thrown into most humiliating conditions, drifting along passively according to the whims of fate, is active in an implied narratorial position: she interprets herself out of her conditions, thus she is in a way, through the activation of her imagination, the creator of her own image.

The ultimate reality of her being a sexual commodity turns into the realm of magic, and the viewer is free to interpret the escape-scene as a liberating gesture: removing the fetish-image from its usual place and "interpreting it out" of her conditions. However, this protective code system, working against the logic of passivity and exposure, seems not to go through the censorship of a male authority: the agent who urges Mona to tell her story, is not willing to accept the story infused with magic turns, and requires a translation of it into more simple terms. But Mona's magic seems to slip through the male authority: the fantasy gets saved beyond the records.

The IKEA-shop scene provides an open ending: on the one hand, it can be interpreted as the way reality restricts the possibility of creating and living in a dream world, on the other hand, it sustains the playful character of storytelling fantasy, even if only as a simulacrum (see the image of the sun on the computer screen). The resounding tones of *Holy Night* at the end of the film simultaneously introduce pathos, irony and social criticism into Mona's story, together with a post-romantic nostalgia of escapism, while the film leaves it unsolved whether the escape from reality is just a tale or reality itself.

As a conclusion regarding magic realism in the two discussed films, whereas *Witch Circle* merges magic into realism, *Bibliothèque Pascal* does the opposite, through its aesthetic moments it raises realism to the level of magic.

Reality transgressing itself: *Beyond the Hills*

In what follows, the cinematic representation of the woman victimised by the stereotypes created by social institutions will be discussed as it appears in Cristian Mungiu's *Beyond the Hills* (*După dealuri*, 2012).[13]

The film is two steps from the events that took place in 2005 and aroused a great media scandal. It is the adaptation of two non-fiction novels by Tatiana Niculescu Bran: *Deadly Confession* (*Spovedanie la Tanacu*, 2006), and *Judges'*

13 The film premiered at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival.

Book (*Cartea judecătorilor*, 2007). Although deeply embedded in social realities, the film specifically creates fiction out of non-fiction by changing the names of the protagonists and by creating a fictitious place as the scene of action.

Both the book and the film offer a strong social reading of a series of events that did happen, though they bear a striking resemblance to fiction. And here we can detect a *metalepsis*: reality itself is fully suitable to be turned into novel and film, and the mediating act of the discussed artistic products turns the attention back to social realities. The question arises: what kind of reality do we live in, which is in itself ready-made fiction, which allows such cases to take place? What ideologies lie behind the real story rendered by the works of art, what does this story tell about institutions, religion, and about people themselves?

In the universe presented by the film it is the institution of religion, alongside with the health institution, that victimise the protagonist, marking a weird moral territory in which no one is to be blamed, everyone has their own truth. There is a cosy family atmosphere at the convent, a caressing spirit that surrounds Alina (Irina in *Deadly Confession*)—still, the unfolding of the events lead towards a practice of exorcism resulting in the girl's death, and it is very difficult to unambiguously point at the victimiser.

The world of the convent is a place ripped from time and space, a kind of *non-place* in Marc Augé's sense of the term.[14] The title of the film also suggests that it is situated elsewhere, *beyond* the hills, but it can be added that it is also situated in another temporal dimension. Its relationship to the present, profane world is full of ruptures and contradictions, what is more, these ruptures and contradictions exist also within the confines of the convent.

Alina's pathological case creates a situation in the convent in the mirror of which these incompatibilities suddenly come to light. It is the girl's case that makes a connection between the institutions of religion and health, and something strange happens, as if the institutions exchanged their roles: no diagnosis is established in the hospital, as the doctors and nurses see the "soul" and not the body, while in the convent the priest and the nuns want to heal Alina by all means, even by resorting to the medieval practice of exorcism.

Another metalepsis that can be identified is how the institutional discourses repress and cover the visible signs of a bodily illness. When priest Daniel carries out the procedure of exorcism, he is satisfied to conclude that it has been successful, not even noticing that the patient is no longer alive. It is as if everybody lived in their own world, without these confined worlds ever reaching one another. There is no good or bad as there is no universally applicable code of interpretation—this element is strongly present in Zsolt Láng's short story entitled *The Monastery of*

14 "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place." (Augé 1995, 77–78)

Protection (*Az oltalom kolostora*) too, in the case of which the reader perceives the mediating presence of language and narration more powerfully than in Tatiana Niculesu Bran's *Deadly Confession*, which tries to mediate the story "as it was," objectively, without any moral comment, still, allowing a certain degree of irony in the almost naïve assimilation of everyone's dose of truth.

While no one can be individually blamed, there is an accumulation of individual irresponsibilities which lead to the death of the protagonist. The girl is the victim of the whole social apparatus. Her illness can be traced back to the fact that no social status emerges for her with the background that she has, the institutions of society hurry up to stigmatise a case like hers.

Two opportunities turn up in her life: going to the West and earning money, or going to the East, beyond the hills, into the convent, which, in its spirituality, does not refrain from taking her money away. In this way, an East-West opposition is created (similarly to Szabolcs Hajdú's *Bibliothèque Pascal*), a material as well as a spiritual alternative. However, neither is a real option, as nothing is what it seems to be or what it should be.

Her schizophrenia turns out to be the projection of the schizophrenia of society itself; in the absence of a real, supporting environment she loses the integrity of her personality, she loses her sanity. There is no place for her in society; she is a deviant element, especially with the sexually burdened past that she disposes of. Her self-esteem is marked by social stigmas, the film presents her story as the clash between her sexual libertinism and the primeval patriarchal order that she meets in the convent. She does not fit into the framework provided by institutions and mentalities; she is victimised by social taboos and stereotypes. It is this fiction-reality amalgam that seems to demonstrate something about the heterotopic moral space which we live in, displaying incompatibilities and unsolvable paradoxes.

Conclusion

The examined films provide the possibility for us to examine issues related to imagology, such as the image of the East about the West (in *Bibliothèque Pascal* the Eastern European female body as an export commodity for the West; in *Beyond the Hills* the West as the alternative of the "oriental" monastery) or the social "reception" of otherness. They offer a complementary and intercultural image of the woman trapped between the East and the West, between social and religious institutions, and victimised by the stereotypical view of society. The brothel in *Bibliothèque Pascal* and the monastery in *Beyond the Hills* are two alternatives of *non-places*, in Marc Augé's sense of the term, the former representing a spatial version (the Eastern female body as a commodity transported to the West), the latter a temporal one (the female body victimised by medieval mentality).

We have identified two distinct tendencies in Hungarian and Romanian cinema, drawing on distinct, apparently opposing tropes, namely excessive form/use of fiction and a low-key, minimalist one; still, they share an important feature, namely creating an imagery that, rendered through female alterity, defies the conventions and stereotypes created by classical (Hollywood) cinema and provide a disquieting field of critical reflection upon the always deferring, ultimately impalpable, unfathomable "reality." As one character in Zsolt Láng's short story sums up: "In vein do they keep researching, they will never find out what happened in fact. As it is reality that is left out from every story" (2008, 282, translated by me, J. P.).

Works cited

Augé, Marc. 1995. *Non-Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Trans. John Howe. London–New York: Verso.

Bényei Tamás. 1997. *Apokrif iratok*. [*Apocriphal Documents*.] Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó.

Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge.

Dánél Mónika. 2012. Surrogate Nature, Culture, Women—Inner Colonies. Postcolonial Readings of Contemporary Hungarian Films. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* vol. 5: 107–128. *http://www.acta.sapientia.ro/acta-film/C5/film5-7.pdf*

De Beauvoir, Simone. 1949. *The Second Sex*. *http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2nd-sex/introduction.htm*

Fulger, Mihai. 2006. *„Noul val" în cinematografia românească*. [*The "New Wave" in Romanian Cinema*.] Bucureşti: ART.

Havas Júlia Éva. 2011. Test-tanok. Kortárs magyar szerzői filmek nőképe. [Body-Tenets. The Image of Woman in Contemporary Hungarian Auteur Films.] *Metropolis* vol. XV. no. 3: 30–41.

Király Hajnal. 2011. *Könyv és film között. A hűségelven innen és túl*. [*Between Book and Film: Alternative Approaches to the Fidelity-Theory of Adaptations*.] Cluj-Napoca: Koinónia.

Láng Zsolt. Az oltalom kolostora. In *Hosszúfény. Határon túli magyar írók antológiája* [*Hosszúfény. Anthology of Hungarian Writers beyond the Border*], ed. Vince Fekete, 258–284. Budapest: Magvető.

László Lilla. 2012. A nő terei egy kortárs magyar és román filmben. [Spaces of the Woman in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Cinema.] In *A tér értelmezései, az értelmezés terei* [*Interpretations of Space, Spaces of Interpretation*], eds. Judit Pieldner and Zsuzsa Tapodi, 296–307. Cluj-Napoca–Miercurea Ciuc: Societatea Muzeului Ardelean–Editura Status.

Mulvey, Laura. 1975. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen* 16. no. 3.: 6–18. *http://imlportfolio.usc.edu/ctcs505/mulveyVisualPleasureNarrativeCinema.pdf*

Niculescu Bran, Tatiana. 2012. *Spovedanie la Tanacu*. Roman. [*Deadly Confession. A Novel*.] Polirom. First edition: 2006, Humanitas.

—. 2013. *Cartea Judecătorilor*. [*Judges' Book*.] Iaşi: Polirom. First edition: 2007, Humanitas.

Pop, Doru. 2010. The Grammar of the New Romanian Cinema. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* vol. 3: 19–40. *http://www.acta.sapientia.ro/acta-film/C3/film3-2.pdf*

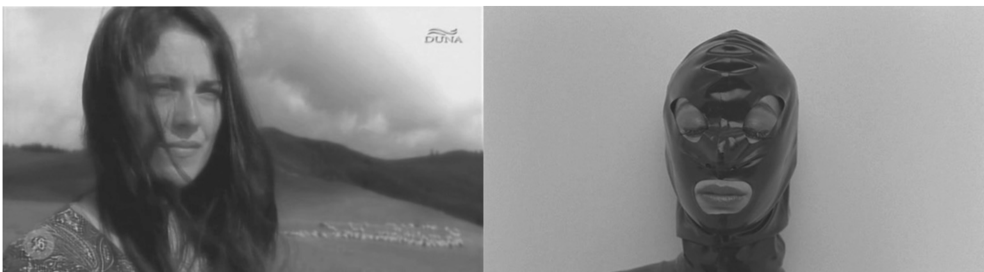
Részeg Imola. 2011. Múlt, történelem és emlékezés a kortárs román filmben. [Past, History and Memory in Contemporary Romanian Cinema.] In *Kapcsolatok, képek. Imagológiai tanulmányok*. [*Connections, Images. Imagology Studies*.], eds. Levente Pap and Zsuzsa Tapodi, 207–223. Miercurea Ciuc: Status.

Strausz László. 2011. Vissza a múltba. Az emlékezés tematikája fiatal magyar rendezőknél. [Back into the Past. The Topic of Memory with Young Hungarian Directors.] *Metropolis* vol. XV no. 3: 20–28.

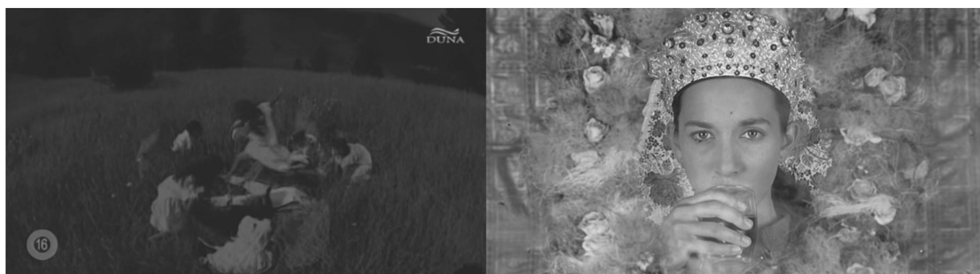
Figures

Figs. 1–8. *Witch Circle* (Dezső Zsigmond, 2009) vs. *Bibliothèque Pascal* (Szabolcs Hajdú, 2010)
The medial/narrative image of the woman:

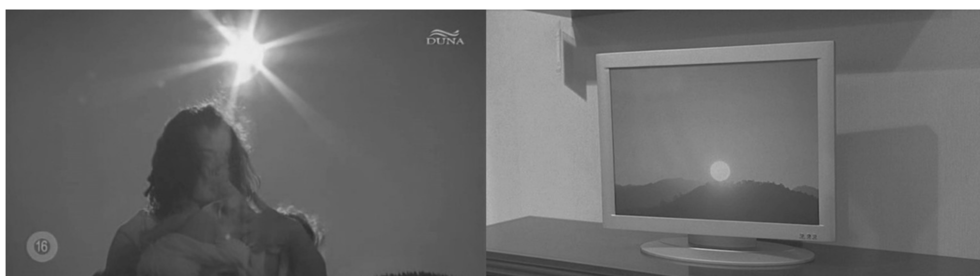
Outside social constraints vs. female identity as visual-sexual commodity:



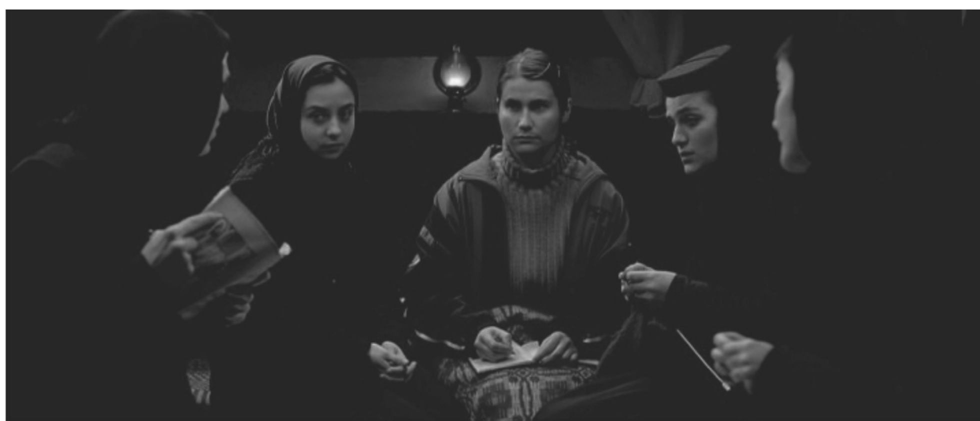
Realms of the imaginary:

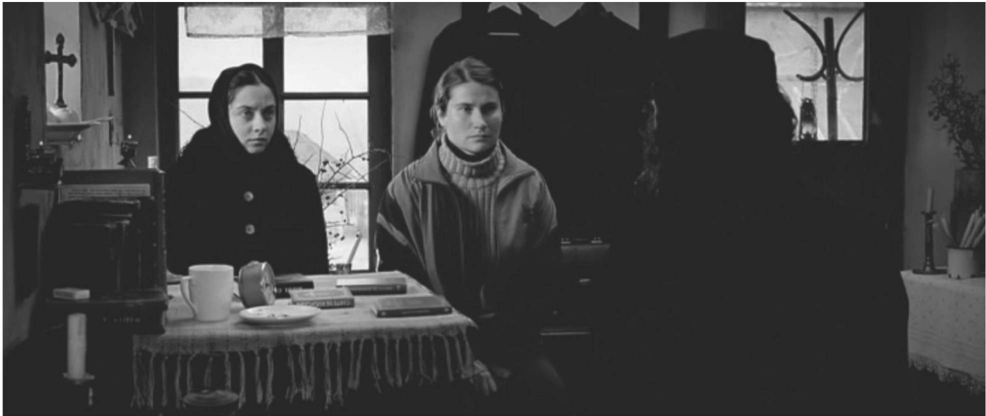


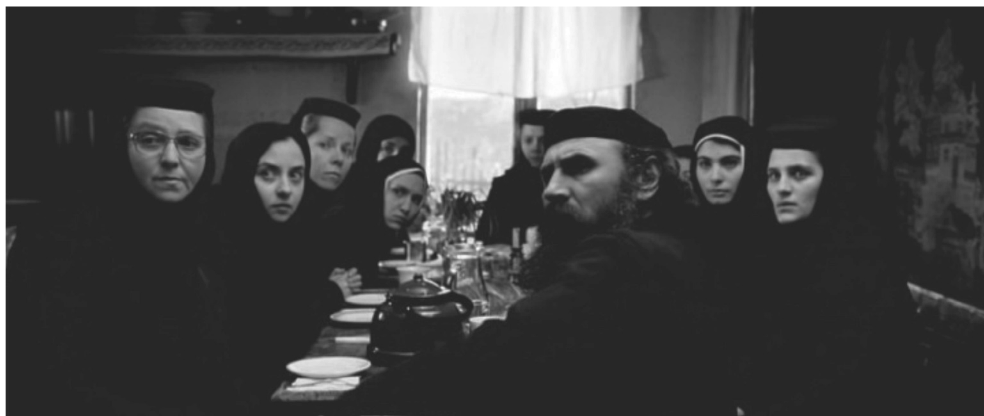
The glorification of the myth vs. the magic as simulacrum/reality supplement:

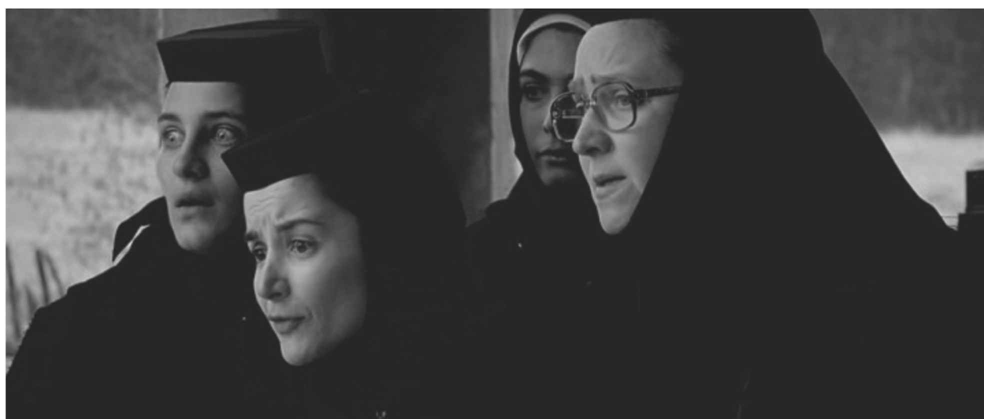


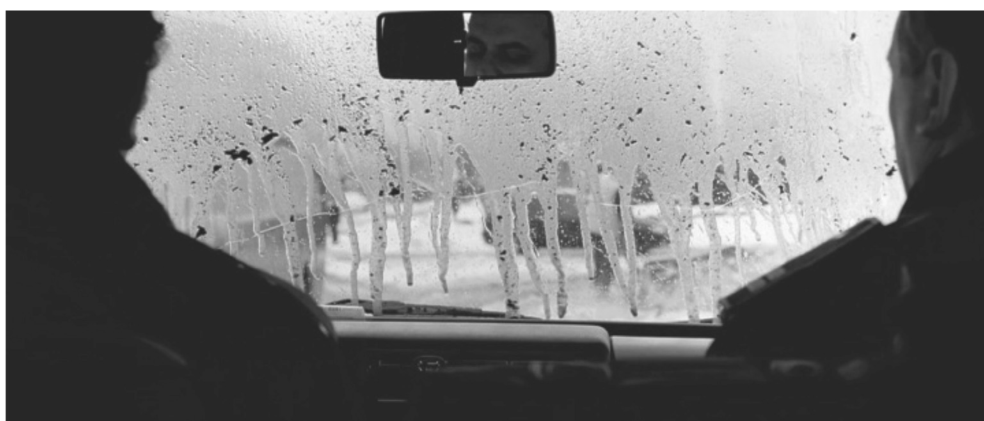
Figs. 9–15. ***Beyond the Hills*** **(Cristian Mungiu, 2012)**











Book Review

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **5**, 1 (2013) 113–115

Judit Pieldner and Zsuzsa Tapodi, eds. *A tér értelmezései, az értelmezés terei.* [*Interpretations of Space, Spaces of Interpretation.*]

Miercurea Ciuc: Status; Cluj-Napoca: Transylvanian Museum Society, 2012. 431 pp.

Review by Árpád KÉMENES
Sapientia University, Miercurea Ciuc
Department of Humanities
kemenesa@yahoo.com

A tér értelmezései, az értelmezés terei [*Interpretations of Space, Spaces of Interpretation*] is a record of two important events in the life of the Humanities Department of Sapientia University. The main part of the volume comprises the essays presented in Hungarian language at the conference on *Discourses of Space* organised by the Institute of Humanities at the Miercurea Ciuc campus of the University on 30-31 March 2012. Besides, a number of writings are dedicated to the celebration of Professor Béla Bíró's 65th birthday, an anniversary commemorated at the opening of the conference.

Executive Editor of the *Philologica* series and author of a great number of books, Professor Bíró's oeuvre is vast and diversified, spanning from journalism to research into theory of literature, narratology, drama-theory, aesthetics and politology. Journalists and figures of academic life have equally contributed essays, expressing their respect for Béla Bíró's decades-long, value-creating activity. László Szále, columnist at *Magyar Hírlap* and *Élet és Irodalom*, expresses his appreciations on Professor Bíró's book *Eszmélet és körkörösség* [*Consciousness and Circularity*], raising a number of questions that emerged while he was reading the volume. Judit Horgas, editor at *Liget* and *Szitakötő*, shares her thoughts on another volume by Professzor Bíró entitled *A* Tragédia *paradoxona* [*The Paradox of the* Tragedy], a book on Bíró's original interpretation of *The Tragedy of Man* by Imre Madách. Apart from reviewing achievements of Béla Bíró's scientific activity, devotees have also contributed essays written on topics overlapping with the Professor's fields of research. Szabolcs Szonda, editor at *Új Magyar Szó*, reflects on the neo-avantgarde or postmodern orientation characteristic of

the poets belonging to the third *'Forrás'* generation of Hungarian literature from Romania. György Tverdota from Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, expounds on the relationship between two Hungarian poets: Dezső Kosztolányi and Attila József, questioning—in Béla Bíró's fashion—some of the findings of previous research. Levente Pap, from Sapientia University, sheds light on some common elements found in King Saint Stephen's *Admonitions* and *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his Son Theodosie*, while József Tillmann (from the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest) writes about the role of the sea in literature, philosophy, and arts in general.

In the part of the volume comprising the proceedings of the conference, the editors grouped the essays according to the topic investigated. The presentation of these writings within the limits of the present book review is neither exhaustive, nor representative, our aim being only to whet readers' appetite for a closer look into the topics raised in the volume.

In the chapter entitled 'Space, Time, Value, Language', the authors analyse problems such as foreign language acquisition, bilingualism (especially the influence of Serbian on the Hungarian language in Vojvodina), language using practices and varieties of phatic language in the Hungarian spoken in Szeklerland.

Half of the essays selected in the chapter on 'Interethnic Spaces' deal with problems of time and space as they appear in the Hungarian literature of Vojvodina. The literary and journalistic activity of the outstanding Vojvodinian poet and writer, Ottó Tolnai is in the focus of Anikó Novák's and Csilla Utasi's writings. Anikó Novák investigates the way real and imaginary museums—regarded as entropic spaces—appear in Tolnai's fiction, while Csilla Utasi expounds on the writer's interview-novel based on a series of interviews for the Hungarian Radio.

In the chapter entitled 'Theatrical and Cinematic Spaces', Zsófia Szerda's essay presents the play *The Rose from Chişinău* in the way it is put on stage at the "Kosztolányi Dezső" Theatre, Szabadka, under the direction of András Urbán. Boróka Prohászka Rád analyses different modalities in which works of contemporary drama that employ techniques such as the extended monologue or the on-stage interview are capable of creating the dramatic suspense necessary for sustaining attention and interest. Judit Pieldner's essay on space constructions in adaptations of *Hamlet* starts with the analysis of space constructing specificities characteristic of the Elizabethan theatre, then the author goes on to investigate the cinematic space in adaptations of *Hamlet* throughout film history.

'Spaces in literary discourse' is the topic of the essays selected in the last part of the volume, where most of the writings analyse pieces of Hungarian literature. For example, Andrea Balogh investigates the relativity of space and the logic of ironical space-construction in Benő Karácsony's novels, Krisztina Kovács examines the way urban spaces (i.e. artefacts of the city) appear in Sándor Hunyady's works, while László Patócs studies the interaction of emotional spaces

and the question of multiple embeddedness into space in Zoltán Egressy's novel entitled *Szaggatott vonal* [*Broken Line*].

The specific points of view from which the various topics analysed in this volume are approached offer the readers guidelines for the interpretation and reinterpretation of the complex notion of *space*.

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae

The scientific journal of Sapientia University publishes original papers and surveys in several areas of sciences written in English.
Information about each series can be found at
http://www.acta.sapientia.ro.

Editor-in-Chief
László DÁVID

Main Editorial Board

Zoltán A. BIRÓ
Zoltán KÁSA
András KELEMEN
Ágnes PETHŐ
Emőd VERESS

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae Philologica

Executive Editor
Béla BÍRÓ (Sapientia University, Romania)
birobela@sapientia.siculorum.ro

Editorial Board
Zoltán ABÁDI-NAGY (University of Debrecen, Hungary)
Neil BALDWIN (Montclair State University, USA)
Attila IMRE (Sapientia University, Romania)
Daniela IONESCU (Bucharest University, Romania)
Géza KÁLLAY (Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary)
Péter PASTOR (Montclair State University, USA)
Zsuzsa TAPODI (Sapientia University, Romania)

Assistant Editors
Judit PIELDNER (Sapientia University, Romania)
Boróka PROHÁSZKA-RÁD (Sapientia University, Romania)

Sapientia University

Scientia Publishing House

ISSN 2067-5151
http://www.acta.sapientia.ro

Information for authors

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica publishes original, previously unpublished articles in the wide field of philological studies, and it is published in 2 volumes a year.

All papers are to be submitted in English, in A4 Word format, to be peer reviewed. Submissions are to be made to the following e-mail address:
philologica@sapientia.siculorum.ro.

Authors are also requested to submit the following information: academic affiliation, contact e-mail address. Articles should be between 6000 and 8000 words long. Detailed information regarding the general style and referencing format can be found at the address: http://www.acta.sapientia.ro/acta-philo/philologica-main.htm

Submitted papers should not be considered for publication by other journals. The author is responsible for obtaining, if needed, the permission for publication of peer authors or other institutional authorities. The Editorial Board disclaims any responsibility.

Each author is entitled to one issue containing his/her paper free of charge.
No reprints are available.

Contact address and subscription:
Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica
RO 400112 Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Str. Matei Corvin nr. 4.
E-mail: philologica@sapientia.siculorum.ro

Printed by Gloria Printing House
Director: Péter Nagy