

Vacations and the Production of Aesthetic Forms: Ligia Tudurachi, *Sociabilité de loisir. Écrire en congé*

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Is there any frame of a specific literary *loisir* when talking about Romanian writers? This seems to be the question standing at the origin of Ligia Tudurachi's book, *Sociabilité de loisir. Écrire en congé* (Sofia, Coopération Universitaire Romanistika & Transpontica, 2023), which encompasses five studies that focus on the ways in which some Romanian writers spent their vacations at the seaside, in the mountains, in the sanatorium or among ruins immersed in history.

Working as a researcher at “Sextil Pușcariu” Institute (Romanian Academy, Cluj-Napoca Branch), Ligia Tudurachi examines the correlation between the discursive pattern and the imaginary frame, starting from the tourist experience itself. Specifically, with the help of a combination of methods, the author wishes to investigate how this correlation evolved from a preexisting pattern (as revealed by the romantic poetry of ruins) to the outbreak of a national fantasy within the reality of physical or even political constraints.

A significant imported literary form is the one that urged the Romanian poet to go to ancient ruins, in the XIX-the century. As a result of this journey, the writer built his poetics on the vestiges of a nocturnal, solitary, spectral and spectacular formula. A programatic longing for ruins encouraged a specific poetry (with discursive differences triggered by day/ by night) and led to a travel memorial which, compared to meditation, belonged to a peculiar visibility regime.

From ruins as negotiated construction of heterotopia, the research spins to the challenging issue of filiation. In the second chapter, Ligia Tudurachi analyses the case of V. A. Urechia (1834-1901) and his

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two sons, Nestor and Alceu, who chose an exclusive form to mirror the writer's relationship with reality, derived from the atmosphere of their vacations spent in the Bucegi mountains. Even if the strolls (arranged by the father) had a stated educational goal, they turned into opportunities to collect folklore – apart from collecting plant species for a botanical atlas in a space where the picturesque landscape had hidden a core of intimacy. In terms of method, the author relies on the “genealogical form” explained by Didi-Huberman as an “anachronistic form” and refers to his opinion about the origin (that is converging within the dialectic of novelty and repetition), in order to investigate a comprehensive background, inspired not only by the so-called Văcărești poets, but also by Titu Maiorescu (a Romanian literary critic and politician, whose activity was crucial for the development of Romanian culture).

The third study included in the book provides a concise overview of living the scenography of a national identity. More accurately, it tracks the presence of targeted aesthetic devices in Balchik and Mangalia – which, during the interwar period, functioned as resorts on the Black Sea. The analysis reveals that, for the Romanian interwar writers and for the visual artists as well, these spots at the seaside were competing. A certain stage of the investigation is dedicated to exploring how experiences in Balchik are not just aesthetically and plastically transcribed, but theatrically treated and connected to the Romanian identity. Ligia Tudurachi's research makes the transition from highlighting the disguise and masks involved in some texts written by Emanuil Bucuța, Anton Holban, Oscar Walter Cisek, Vasile Voiculescu to identifying the aestheticized ethnic character in paintings signed by Iosif Iser, Lucian Grigorescu, Victor Brauer, Cecilia Cuțescu-Stork et al.

On the other hand, the experiences occasioned by vacations in Mangalia produce significant mutations regarding presence and absence. Due to the overlapping layers of civilisation comprised by this (ancient) place, the visitors are overwhelmed with intense emotions, in the range of melancholy and depression, as we can see in some texts written by Gala Galaction and Mihail Sadoveanu or in the paintings signed Nicolae Tonitza, Marius Bunescu, Francisc Șirato, Ion Țuculescu. As a consequence, the artists (who were tourists in Mangalia in the interwar era) ended up reflecting an absence in the landscape, instead of mirroring the presence.

Another literary form that was explored in vacation was the miniature – whose controversial etymology is not avoided by the Ligia Tudurachi. In this case, the literary discourse is completed by the pictorial asset. In the study suggestively titled “Corps en souffrance,

corps en vacances” (“Bodies in pain, bodies on vacation”), the researcher focuses on M. Blechers’s literary work and Lucia Dem. Bălăcescu’s paintings, both artists sharing the same experience in Tekirghiol, a sanatorium at the seaside. But why miniature? The author starts from the assumption that the sanatorium used to house about 300 children, only exceptionally accommodating adults. The childlike way of enduring their own suffering was learnt by Blecher and Bălăcescu from those children and echoed in the distinctive forms of miniature art. Directing her attention not only to Paul Klee’s raw dolls, but also to Giorgio Agamben’s and Walter Benjamin’s beliefs, Ligia Tudurachi proves that the miniature acts as (I would call) a shock absorber and finally helps the artist replace the body in pain with a body on vacation.

The last section of the volume is dedicated to Petru Creția, a remarkable Romanian philosopher and professor, and explores the shifting views on the skies and the clouds. In *Norii (The Clouds)*, published in 1979, even if it was written in the 1950’s, when the totalitarian regime was in full swing), Petru Creția’s gaze is re-aimed upwards, instead of being guided to an urban or bucolic landscape (in which the contemplator was placed). Through a comprehensive comparative approach (rooted in Jackie Pigeaud’s volume published in 2010), the researcher outlines the widespread prevalence of the coloured skies/ clouds in *The Aeneid* and *Georgics* of Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro), in *De rerum natura* (Lucretius), *The Clouds* (Aristophanes), in the *Divine Comedy* (Dante), in *The Meteors* (Descartes) and in literary works written by Goethe and Baudelaire.

In contrast, Creția cannot directly perceive coloured skies, as if totalitarian life would make the eye incompatible with the perception of colour. The coloured skies are imagined as an effect of the incantation, calling for a landscape that is not real. Therefore, a totalitarian meteorology can be depicted in *Norii (The Clouds)*. By means of aphorism (linked to closure, to loss of variability, and even to a place of isolation) and incantation (engaging a landscape that is actually denied), Creția describes his own time.

Aimed at both specialized and general audiences, *Sociabilité de loisir (The Sociability of Leisure)* is rich in examples and also grounded in a reliable theoretical framework. It successfully pleads for an inclusive approach to literature (broadly, to arts), while meditating on the aesthetic of coming into presence/ absence, which was wired to the phantasmagoric feature of the national project.