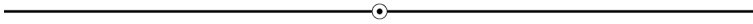


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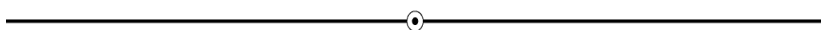
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THEORY, HISTORY AND LITERARY CRITICISM

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Violence and Betrayal: Translation as a Window into Understanding Colonialism in R. F. Kuang's *Babel, or the Necessity of Violence*

Cătălina-Diana Teliban*

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Abstract:

In this article I explore the ways in which the concept of *translation* is utilized throughout R. F. Kuang's novel *Babel, or the Necessity of Violence*, a work of speculative fiction which explores the colonial relations between Britain and China in the 19th century, in order to facilitate the understanding of colonialism and its penchant for destruction. Specifically, I use the methodology of critical race theory and critical race narratology in order to prove that the novel belongs to the category of ethnic counterstorytelling, and then move on to demonstrate how the concept of translation is employed as a literary device that permits historical recentering through fantasy, while also, on a metaphorical level, mirroring the perspectives on colonialism, intracultural trust and community belonging that the characters hold. In these ways, I argue that translation becomes a window into exploring the themes proposed by the novel, both internally, through the main character, and extrinsically, through the world built on its foundations as a magical system, while also exploring the consequences that these traumatic positions have on the main character's psyche.

Keywords: counterstorytelling, critical race narratology, Asian American literature, recent literature, colonialism

An act of translation is “always an act of betrayal”, proclaims Rebecca F. Kuang's 2022 novel *Babel, or the Necessity of Violence*, a work of speculative fiction which reimagines the era of Britain's semi-colonialism in China by means of a fantastical setting that is guided, at its core, by the work of translation. The story unfolds through the third person narration, with the perspective oriented around the main character, Robin Swift, whose inner turmoil becomes the center focus of the narrative as he comes to understand the devastating effects that Britain, with the help of his very own work of translation at Oxford, is unleashing upon Canton, his home country from where he has been taken as a very young child. Translation is used in multiple ways throughout the novel, both as the core element of the magical system that Kuang has

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built, where translation is turned into the very means for the attempted colonial rule and for the revolution against it, but also as a philosophical theme on which the characters often reflect as the events unfold. A second layer of complexity is added to the story through the main character's unique position, in that he is an orphan forced into displacement and migration by his adopter, who perceives him to be in a highly privileged position and actively denies his trauma and perpetuates the abuse by engaging in manipulative behaviors rooted in racism. These experiences all have substantial consequences on the formation of his identity and sense of self as he navigates the events that unfold, and become important layers in the deconstruction of colonialism and its penchant for destruction.

Within this context, I argue that the concept of translation becomes a literary device used as a means to explore the processes of colonialism, both internally, through the main character, and extrinsically, in the world created by the author. Firstly, because translation represents the core of the fantasy element of the novel, it becomes the very catalyst that allows for the setting to exist and for the ethnic characters to be situated at the center of the action. Thus, I argue that the concept of translation utilized as a literary device permits the story to unfold through the framework of historical recentering and the use of an alternative timeline, in order to reimagine and dissect history, thus subscribing the novel to the tradition of counterstorytelling. Secondly, I argue that the reflections on the concept of translation that appear throughout the novel serve to mirror the main character's process of articulating his relationship with his homeland from his position of an orphan forcefully displaced from his birth country, thus turning the concept of translation into a metaphor for understanding Britain's attempted colonial rule in China and its devastating effects on both individuals and the national collective. Concretely, the philosophical perspectives about the act of translation help to unveil the complicated liminal position that the main character is situated within, and facilitate the understanding of his immense amounts of guilt and trauma that arise therein, while the magical system that functions through the work of translation gives way for that position to exist in itself, in order for it to be explored conceptually and philosophically. As such, the concept of translation becomes a window into understanding the processes related to colonialism that stand at the heart of the novel both extrinsically, as well as internally through the main character, and engaging with this aspect of the novel facilitates a much more thorough understanding of its themes.

To explore my argument, I utilize the methodology of critical race theory as seen in Delgado and Stefancic (2023), as well as the sub-branch of critical race narratology as seen in von Mossner et. al (2022),

frameworks which I employ in order to explain and understand the construction of the story and its particularities as a piece of ethnic literature. I am also in conversation with recent works from the area of refugee studies, as well as works on migration, colonialism, and orphanhood, in order to properly encompass the complexity of the situation portrayed. In these ways, I aim to not only show how translation functions as a literary device for conveying and exploring these themes, but also to investigate the traumatic aspects of the themes presented in the novel in regards to the effects of colonialism and forcefully taking part in it.

Translation as the Core of Historical Recentering

Through utilizing the fantasy lens for reimagining the relations between imperialist Britain and China in the years prior to what is known to history as the First Opium War, I argue that Kuang's novel subscribes to what has been termed as counterstorytelling in the field of critical race theory. Counterstorytelling has been described as a tool used by ethnic authors in order to "challenge, displace, or mock these pernicious narratives and beliefs" that have become the stereotypical norm for viewing non-white people, and which actively lead to marginalization and a fundamental misunderstanding of their histories and experiences (Delgado and Stefancic, 2023: 51). Formed around the belief that "attacking embedded preconceptions that marginalize others or conceal their humanity is a legitimate function of all fiction" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2023: 51), counterstorytelling focuses the narrative on ethnic people and their lived experiences, in order to bridge the gap of understanding that exists between ethnic minorities and the white majority, and through that, rectify the misunderstanding of the histories of ethnic people. Common features of such narratives include "reimagining narrative time, space, and history in ways that challenge or run counter to established literary and cultural conventions", often achieved by means of "alternative temporalities and spatial renegotiations" (von Mossner, 2022: 2). These tools are used in order to deconstruct the complex histories of people of differing ethnic origins through the act of historical recentering, by allowing the central consciousness of the story to be that of the ethnic minorities, often by creating fictional geographies and timelines that could not have existed during real history (von Mossner, 2022: 3). In these ways, literary works can dissect history and comment on it, by affording a special focus to the experiences of ethnic minorities.

In Kuang's novel, these traits arise by function of the fantasy element of the text, which becomes central for the exploration of the complex colonial relations between Britain and China in the 19th century.

The relations between these two countries during this particular point in history have been called by historians “semi-colonialism”, a term which stresses “the mutual constitutiveness, reciprocity and interdependence between British colonialists and Chinese society” (Yang, 2019: 7), defining a very unique and particular iteration of colonialism. The fantasy element of the novel allows the author to reposition the characters and afford more liberties to the ethnic characters, by placing them at the forefront of the action in order to explore these particularities and provide a social commentary on them and their devastating effects. As I have previously mentioned, the magical system of the novel relies entirely on translation; this is achieved through what is called “silver-work”, a form of magic which uses silver bars inscribed with translation pairs which capture the meaning of what is lost in translation, in order to create a magical effect. These silver bars are created by scholars at the Oxford Translation Institute, Babel, and they are used in order to power every aspect of Britain, from its economy (through facilitating agriculture and industrial production and work) to its military prowess, making the country essentially indestructible, albeit dependent on its access to silver. Babel seeks to recruit native speakers of languages less spoken in Britain, particularly languages from Asia, as match pairs between other languages, such as English and Latin or English and French are becoming less powerful because of the languages being too closely interconnected with English through neologisms, history and language formation. As such, Babel scholars seek to recruit people of various ethnic descents, in order to use their native languages for the gains of the British empire, which they do mainly by bringing orphans from colonized countries to the Babel institute, where they construct an image of privilege and purpose in order to entrap them into working for the benefit of Britain.

Within this context, translation represents not only the core of the magical system of the novel, but also the backbone of Britain’s entire existence and the very object of colonization around which the novel revolves, as silver bars are only used for empowering Britain more and more, and never for the benefit of the countries whose languages they profit off of and who have more need of aid. In these ways, translation allows for the circumstances to be created, and becomes the foundation for the exploration of history and historical recentering, as the device around which the alternative timeline is created, thus permitting the story to unfold and opening up the dialogue on the particularities of Britain’s semi-colonialism in China, which are then evidenced and commented on through the work that foreign scholars, such as Robin, the main character, do for Britain. In these ways, the novel is a clear example of counterstorytelling, as it aims to deconstruct history and provide a

commentary on it, while also imagining an alternative timeline where the events could have been prevented.

Self-Translation, Liminality, and Assimilation

Orphaned as a very young child after having to witness his mother slowly die of cholera, the main character is conveniently “rescued” by a Babel scholar, Professor Lovell, who uses a silver bar to heal him of the disease and then takes him along without any explanation. Troy et. al. argue that literary orphans are mobilized in order to “explore a time of change, social upheaval, and crises in national identity” (2014: 2), which is seen in the novel in various ways: firstly, through the fact that Robin becoming an orphan is the catalyst which sets in motion a chain of events that will end with an important revolution against colonization, but also through the importance that other orphans carry in the resistance and the revolution, since, as I have mentioned, orphans of colonized countries represent the main way through which Babel scholars attain their objectives. As Troy et. al. argue, “contemporary writers who are interested in expanding the canon to incorporate cultural difference use the orphan figure to explore alternatives to US hegemony” (2014: 3), reflected in Kuang’s novel through the ways in which orphans aid in the quest of exploring the processes of colonialism, and ultimately rebelling against the imperialist hegemony of Britain.

After evaluating his skills in languages, Professor Lovell proposes a dubious “adoption”, which entails the child’s relocation to the professor’s English estate, where he will live comfortably so long as he “appl[ies himself] diligently to [his] studies” (Kuang, 2022: 20). The proposition is a veiled and manipulative threat, as the professor does not hesitate to use the child’s precarious position as an orphan in order to force him to agree, and his position as a ward and not an adopted child is made clear not only through the professor’s detached and cold attitude, but also by being forced to sign a document accepting the terms of the professor’s guardianship as if accepting a business proposal, despite being merely a very young child in a traumatizing situation. Upon accepting, the professor informs him that he must choose an English name and surname, which is how he takes the name Robin Swift, inspired by English books he has read during his childhood, and forever casting aside his Cantonese name (which is pointedly never revealed to the reader), thus marking the first official “translation” that Robin is forced to make for Britain, by discarding his native name for “one that will do in London” (Kuang, 2022: 21), in an attempt at being accepted through “a name by which Englishmen could take him seriously” (Kuang, 2022: 21).

The requirement of discarding his surname baffles Robin, who, even as a young child, recognizes the implications of the act: “The boy blinked at him. ‘Pick... a surname?’ Family names were not things to be dropped and replaced at whim, he thought. They marked lineage; they marked belonging” (Kuang, 2022: 21). The professor retorts that he has no reason to hold onto his surname, as he has no titles that would make his surname valuable, thus marking the beginning of a very long string of racist manipulations that Professor Lovell utilizes in order to subdue Robin by making him ashamed of his origins and building a connection based on fear and blind idealization between Robin and Britain. Assmann and Schwarz explain that views on immigration have for a long time presupposed the idea of forgetting, based on which immigrants were expected “to leave their past behind in order to be ‘reborn’ in a different national context and to start over again by adapting to the culture of their new place of residence” (2013: 51). Changing one’s name is cited among the “rituals of forgetting” by Assmann and Schwarz, who explain that this expected practice represented a “promise of equality for all citizens”, but that this equality could only be founded on “the abolition of all distinctions, privileges and claims based on origin and status in favour of the sole principle of personal achievement based on individual qualification and performance in the future” (2013: 52). Professor Lovell adheres to the views presented by Assmann and Schwarz, and, accordingly, Robin is forced to leave behind any trace of his past for the quest to adapt to the English culture, motivated by the professor through the offhanded remark that “the English reinvent their names all the time” (Kuang, 2022: 21), and therefore implying that the customs which Robin holds valuable are viewed as unimportant and easily discardable from the perspective of the professor, already suggesting Britain to be the “superior culture” in his eyes, to whose rules Robin should live by.

Associating the surname with the idea of belonging, Robin manifests the desire to take the professor’s name, as he is now becoming his caretaker, but the professor quickly and harshly shuts down the proposal by telling Robin “they’ll think I’m your father” (Kuang, 2022: 21). Later in the novel, the professor is revealed to be, in actuality, Robin’s biological father, and the orchestrator of all the events, having fathered Robin in order to be raised by his mother in Canton while living with an Englishwoman appointed by him, who was to ensure that Robin learns both English and Cantonese, in order to be later taken to Babel and turned into a translation scholar, thus building Robin’s life from the very beginning as a cog in the colonialist machine, a scheme which he had previously tried once before with another child, Griffin, Robin’s half-brother, who was a “failed experiment” as he was not given enough time to achieve fluency in Cantonese. Lovell’s actions serve to portray the

extent of the dehumanization that colonization produces, as it makes clear the fact that Professor Lovell only sees Robin as a product he can use to bring profit to his own nation, showing no care at all to the traumatic circumstances that Robin is subjected to, despite being directly at fault for them. He also forces Robin to engage in various acts of self-translation, on the promise that these will help him assimilate in the new country. On a smaller scale, in Robin's life, Lovell's action and his rejection of Robin prove that orphans, despite being characterized by lacking family, "are nevertheless fundamentally constituted by their relation to family" (Troy et. al., 2014: 1), and that everything that takes place in Robin's life is attributed to this status and place that he holds. Because of this, not knowing how to navigate the situation better, Robin continuously attempts to emulate Lovell, continuing the series of translations that he has to make of himself, by studying and mimicking Lovell's reactions, saying what he thinks the professor wants to hear, or staying silent when he thinks that is what he wants, thus attempting to mold his reaction to better fit the expectations Lovell has, believing all the while that becoming a reflection of him will not only ensure the professor's love, but also his acceptance in the new world he has been brought in.

Slowly, as the events take place and he becomes more and more enmeshed into this world, Robin realizes that the promise of acceptance will never be fulfilled, and that he is perpetually on the verge of rejection, even at the slightest mistake. The first such hint comes when Robin, engrossed in a book, foolishly forgets about his lessons, to which Lovell reacts by abusing him: "He seemed simply, with every hard and deliberate blow, to be attempting to inflict maximum pain with the minimum risk of permanent injury" (Kuang, 2022: 48). This prompts Robin to become completely engrossed in his studies, "to the point of exhaustion" (Kuang, 2022: 51), in order to ensure that the abuse would not happen again, striving to control the situation, despite having little power in it.

Although the term refugee would not be introduced until much later than the events of the novel take place, Professor Lovell's behavior towards Robin, as well as his overall experience in England, are closely akin to behaviors experienced by refugees when they migrate to new countries of asylum, and who are continuously expected to show gratitude for being there. Motivated by the racist lens, Lovell sees himself, and by extension Britain, as Robin's saviors, to whom he owes everything and must therefore show perpetual unquestioned gratitude, neglecting to take into account that he himself is responsible for Robin's life circumstances, and that Britain, through its imperialistic and colonizing nature, is itself responsible for the state of the countries it depletes. This situation draws obvious parallels to refugee experiences, particularly in cases where they are forcefully displaced from their native countries because of situations that are the fault of the countries they

ultimately have to relocate to. Nayeri highlights that the ongoing expectation of being grateful “threatens and makes one afraid for the future” (Nayeri qtd. in Espiritu et al., 2022: 97), which is in line with Lovell’s purpose, that of instilling dread into Robin in order to control him, while also forcing him to discard all loyalty to his roots. Against this backdrop, Robin’s resignation comes as no surprise:

Months ago Robin would have spat at anyone for speaking so cruelly about his family. But here, alone in the middle of the ocean with no relatives and nothing to his name, he could not summon the ire. He had no fire left in him. He was only scared, and so very tired (Kuang, 2022: 26).

In specialized literature, it has been described that the assimilation model entails that people of different ethnic origins who find themselves in a position of becoming migrants “were encouraged to disregard racial differences as a way to ‘fit in’ with ‘white culture’” (Falvey, 2008: 276), which is seen from the very beginning in Lovell’s treatment of Robin and his continuous attempts to remove all ethnic traits from him, save for his native language of which he can make use for Britain’s gains. Through these racist manipulations, coupled with the constant expectation of working to the point of exhaustion and continuously exhibiting gratitude for the privilege of doing this work, Lovell attempts to make Robin not only disregard racial differences, but also develop hatred towards his origins, in order to switch his perceptions on his home country and ensure that he would not betray the cause that he is preparing him for: “Laziness and deceit are common traits among your kind. This is why China remains an indolent and backwards country while her neighbors hurtle towards progress. You are by nature foolish, weak-minded, and disinclined to hard work” (Kuang, 2022: 49). With no other alternative and desperate to maintain his safety, Robin resorts to doing exactly what Lovell wants, which is to translate himself into the version that Lovell wants and that ensures his protection. This metaphorical translation of the self for the promise of assimilation is only achieved by repressing his true feelings about the situation, already showing how Lovell’s manipulations seep into his judgement: “He had no right to be resentful. (...) Robin did not yet fully understand the rules of this world he was about to enter, but he understood the necessity of gratitude. Of deference. One did not spite one’s saviors” (Kuang, 2022: 27).

Once arrived at Babel, Robin’s attempts at assimilation are highly contrasted by another student, Ramy, of Indian origins, whose choices in navigating the English world are strikingly different from Robin’s, thus introducing a fresh new perspective in Robin’s life:

That marked the difference between them. Ever since his arrival in London, Robin had tried to keep his head down and assimilate, to play down his otherness. He thought the more unremarkable he seemed, the less attention he would draw. But Ramy, who had no choice but to stand out, had decided he might as well dazzle. He was bold to the extreme (Kuang, 2022: 62).

The new perspectives on race and ethnicity that Ramy introduces to Robin's life are the first necessary building blocks in constructing Robin's perception on racism, colonialism and the oppressive nature that Britain encapsulates. Solely being around Ramy, whose otherness is markedly more striking than his own, opens Robin's eyes to the multitude of racist encounters that both of them have been going through, including Robin's experiences at Lovell's house and his probable status of fatherhood: "Robin found his frankness alarming. He'd got so used to ignoring the issue that it was odd to hear it described in such blunt terms" (Kuang, 2022: 63). Thus, Ramy becomes the first personification of the opposite pulling forces that Robin will eventually find himself stuck between: nativity and resistance, as marked by Ramy, and assimilation and betrayal, as marked by Lovell and the whole of the Babel Institute. This liminal existence between two opposite forces is only hardened once Robin meets his half-brother, Griffin, Lovell's previous "failed experiment" and active participant in the resistance against Britain's imperialistic attempts and its colonization of other countries, who introduces Robin to the Hermes Society, the resistance group itself, whom Robin attempts to help, by being an insider. Confronted with Griffin's views, strongly connected to Ramy's, Robin's world starts to unravel as he slowly realizes his real place in Britain's machinations: "And he wondered at the contradiction: that he despised them, that he knew they could be up to no good, and that still he wanted to be respected by them enough to be included in their ranks" (Kuang, 2022: 124). Gómez uses the term "intracultural trust" in order to describe relationships that form in people from ethnic communities, a term that "conceptualizes the need for attachment with other in-group members because of the toll of societal inequality" (2018: 3), which, she argues, entails a stronger sense of loyalty that extends to the entire community of which one takes part of. Robin's relationship with Ramy and with Griffin, as well as the community of resistance formed at Hermes Society become exemplary of this form of trust, as they solidify Robin's need to take action against the inequalities and abuses that he is starting to understand are happening, and represents a defining bond that guides the actions that he will eventually take.

Translation as a Metaphor for Colonialism

Once Robin is exposed to the realities of racism and exploitation, these events begin a long process of him trying to live both as resistance

and as a Babel Scholar without picking either one side, which Robin slowly realizes is impossible, as he becomes consumed by guilt:

The only way he could justify his happiness here, to keep dancing on the edges of two worlds, was to continue awaiting Griffin's correspondence at night – a hidden, silent rebellion whose main purpose was to assuage his guilt over the fact that all this gold and glitter had to come at a cost (Kuang, 2022: 137).

Robin's reaction is a clear and direct result of the years spent living under Lovell's manipulations and the hanging threat of gratitude for the promise of protection: "Babel represented more than material comforts. Babel was the reason he belonged in England, why he was not begging on the streets of Canton. Babel was the only place where his talents mattered. Babel was security" (Kuang, 2022: 142). For Robin, going against Babel is akin to committing suicide, because he cannot imagine himself secure in any other position that the one he has been "gifted" by Lovell, as a result of having internalized his discourse from a very young age. Thus, even as he realizes he is being used and that his work is actively hurting others whose backgrounds he could easily identify with, cognitive dissonances such as those above help him justify continuing to not pick a side. This is made easier by the remoteness of what Griffin is describing, as he cannot easily grasp the magnitude of the situation: "And Robin, despite everything, hoped the day Griffin prophesied would never come, that he could live hanging in this balance forever. (...) Robin's life was split into two, and Griffin existed in the shadow world, hidden from sight" (Kuang, 2022: 173-183).

Within this context, while Robin is actively trying to turn a blind eye and repress his feelings about the situation he is in, translation represents the most important metaphor in the novel, through which these feelings continuously seep out, and which therefore facilitates the understanding of what Robin is indirectly expressing. Engaging with the views on translation means directly engaging with Robin's internal conflict, and the way he sees himself in this world, as well as with the way in which the world sees him. The most poignant example of this takes place when Robin attends the first lecture on translation at Babel, where the professor presents the dominant theories on translation: foreignization and domestication, the former one adhering to maintaining the text as filled with its original epistemologies as possible, and the latter adhering to bringing the text as close as possible to its target audience. The professor concludes that "the dominant strain in England now is (...) to make translations sound so natural to the English reader that they do not read as translations at all" (Kuang, 2022: 157), which is symbolic of the self-centering that Britain engages in all throughout the larger political context of the novel, prioritizing its desires over the needs

of the other countries it depletes of resources in its imperialistic quest of domination and power through colonization. It seeks novelty through foreign languages in order to create gains for itself, yet when it comes to understanding the larger sources of those languages, it offers little accommodation space, preferring a domesticized approach that brings the source as close to itself, the target, as possible. The most striking portion of the scene is that which most encapsulates this attitude:

‘Translation means doing violence upon the original, means warping and distorting it for foreign, unintended eyes. So then where does that leave us? How can we conclude, except by acknowledging that an act of translation is then necessarily always an act of betrayal?’ (...) And as Robin’s eyes met Professor Playfair’s, he felt a deep, vinegary squirm of guilt in his gut (Kuang, 2022: 157).

Robin’s guilt is triggered by the professor’s lecture because he attributes more meaning to his words than simply that of theory and philosophy, showing that the way in which Robin relates to the concept of translation itself is steeped in the political struggle and the obvious call to rebellion that he is trying to hide from. The scene shows that for Robin continuing to partake in the translation work at Babel represents a clear betrayal of his roots and his ethnic bonds. Shen draws attention to the fact that “although betrayal often results in the violent severing of social or emotional bonds, it sometimes involves complex negotiations with the conflicting demands of multiple loyalties and points to a nuanced definition of self-identity” (2012: 117-8). This is relevant in Robin’s case because it shows the complexity of his sense of identity, and proves that although he has been raised for years as Robin Swift and prepared by Lovell to behave as one of the Englishmen, Robin has not forgotten his roots, despite Lovell’s attempts at generating his hatred for them. Thus, in this case, what Robin perceives as betrayal represents “a reminder of the subject’s dependence on and responsibility toward the Other for its self-formation” (Shen, 2012: 119).

The guilt that derives from translation and the necessity to make the choice to betray one’s roots are brought into focus from the very first time when Robin departs from Canton and embarks towards England. On the ship that he and Lovell board, they encounter another Cantonese man who is seeking to board the ship, but who is unfairly and abusively rejected by the crew, despite having a paid contract for boarding the ship. Lovell pushes Robin to intervene and sort out the situation, him being the only one who speaks both the Cantonese dialect and English. Robin immediately appears to be an ally in the eyes of the laborer: “the labourer seemed relieved – he seemed to recognize immediately in Robin’s face an ally, the only other Chinese person in sight” (Kuang, 2022: 23), which already establishes the importance of the link to one’s roots. The

crewman immediately urges Robin to lie and tell the laborer that he cannot board the ship despite having a contract, offering a string of racist arguments (“‘Last ship I sailed that carried a Chinaman got filthy with lice. I’m not taking risks on people who can’t wash. Could even understand the word bath if I yelled it at him, this one. Hello? Boy? Do you understand what I’m saying?’” (Kuang, 2022: 23)), all while the laborer hinges his hope on Robin’s translation, in another clear act of intracultural trust and expected loyalty. Lovell symbolically sits at Robin’s side throughout the entire scene, a threatening presence that already instills fear in Robin, who realizes that should he not make the “correct” choice, he himself might be left behind in Canton, alone and afraid. Within this context, Robin does what the Englishmen silently urge him to do, which is to tell the laborer he cannot board the ship, an act that he engages in in order to protect himself, even at the cost of immense amounts of guilt. This scene establishes early on for the reader that which Robin only discovers much later in the novel, and which he does not directly articulate in words, that the translations he does in the name of the Englishmen represent a direct betrayal of his native country, and of himself.

The suddenness of forced displacement is a contributing factor to Robin’s choice, as “the initial stages of flight may be fraught with fear and uncertainty, the focus being on staying alive and safe” (Goveas and Coomarasamy, 2018: 101). However, “once people reach the place of supposed safety, they become conscious of what they have left behind. They experience the losses; loss of family, community, culture and country” (Goveas and Coomarasamy, 2018: 101). Similarly, Robin only begins to realize these feelings once he arrives at a point of safety, out of Lovell’s estate and at Babel, where he finally is allowed to interact with people of a similar background to his. After this point, everything is put through the lens of the continuous betrayals that they are all forced to do in order to survive, be those betrayals of the self or betrayals of their roots, but all achieved through the means of translation: “Robin wondered then how much of Anthony’s life had been spent carefully translating himself to white people, how much of his genial, affable polish was an artful construction to fit a particular idea of a Black man in white England” (Kuang, 2022: 393), without directly realizing that he himself has been engaging in the same acts of self-translation that he identifies in Anthony, ever since stepping foot in Lovell’s estate.

The final and most important moment that solidifies the truth in Robin happens when he and his schoolmates are taken as translators on a trip to Canton, marking the very first time that Robin returns to his home country after years of living in England. In line with his emotional journey thus far, the only emotion Robin can summon upon returning

home is “a confused, vaguely guilty dread” (Kuang, 2022: 251), as well as the confrontation to what Lovell has been telling him all along, that “nothing awaited him there; no friends, no family, just a city he only half remembered” (Kuang, 2022: 251). Being the first time that Robin engages directly with the politics of Britain in China, and having to translate them for the Chinese officials, he is left with no doubt that all he has been told all along has been true. He attempts to confront Lovell about it, but the result is another string of racist manipulations and reproaches, which represent the final tipping point for Robin who realizes that

he had not requested these privileges of Oxford, had not chosen to be spirited out of Canton at all, (...) the generosities of the university should not demand his constant, unswerving loyalty to the Crown and its colonial projects, and, if it did, then that was a peculiar form of bondage he had never agreed to (Kuang, 2022: 258).

Arrived back at Oxford, Robin, as well as other members of the resistance, reveal to the Babel scholars the truth of their work of translation, and launch an important strike, which puts England essentially out of functioning order, proving how much everything was dependent on silver work. Laborers join their strike, and it evolves into an entire revolution, and Robin realizes that the only way to end it all is to destroy the Babel tower and all its research, in order to cut off England’s power and its capability to be a threat to other countries. Robin’s final act also represents his final work of translation: he uses the match-pair for the word “translate”, which causes a chain explosive reaction which demolishes the Babel tower with him inside it, as a final act of sacrifice. Gómez proposes that intracultural trust and racial loyalty represent “the conscious process of self-sacrificing for the greater good of the minority group” (2018: 3), a concept which aptly fits Robin’s sole solution for the betrayal that he feels he has been committing, wherein he sacrifices himself for the greater good of all countries that live under colonial rule, in order to reframe the translation act from one of betrayal, to one of violent loyalty.

Conclusion

In these ways, translation sits at the heart of the exploration of colonialism, constructing the world of the novel around it. It also supplements information when that information is attempted to be hidden, a fact made clearest once Robin starts to understand the position he has been put in and, assaulted by guilt, he begins to repress his real thoughts and feelings, and the perspectives on translation come as an aiding tool which brings these hidden perspectives to light. Thus, engaging with the philosophical concept of translation facilitates a more

thorough engagement with the themes of the novel, and a more thorough understanding of the characters and their psychology, and becomes a literary device utilized all throughout the novel in order to present the social commentary on colonialism.

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The Body in Ruins: Echoes of the First World War in Modern and Avant-Garde Aesthetics

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Abstract:

This article explores how the tragic experience of the First World War profoundly transformed artistic representations of the human body in modern and avant-garde aesthetics, particularly within Romanian literature and European visual arts. The war's devastating impact gave rise to a crisis of corporeality, reflected in disfigured, fragmented, and vulnerable depictions of the body. Such visual representations were conveyed through radical images of the body in the (radical) modern and avant-garde aesthetics. The vulnerability of the human body was linked to the catastrophic consequences of the war experience.

Romanian avant-garde writers such as Tristan Tzara, Ilarie Voronca or Ion Vinea, alongside European artists like Otto Dix or George Grosz, responded with radical imagery that challenged traditional forms and expressed the psychological trauma of a disenchanted age.

Through a close reading of Alexandru Daia's war diary *Eroi la 16 ani*, the article illustrates the visceral experience of war and the bodily suffering it entailed, linking it directly to avant-garde motifs of chaos, decay, and existential crisis. The article argues that war led to a shift in both literature and art, where the body became a central symbol of fractures of modernity, bridging the realms of personal trauma and collective aesthetic revolt.

The horrors of the war, coupled with the radical artistic responses from avant-garde writers, underscore the fragility of the human body and its enduring vulnerability, marking a significant shift in the understanding of corporeality in modern artistic expressions.

Keywords: Romanian avant-garde, modernity, First World War, vulnerability, corporeality

The tragic war, the generator of a human body crisis

The tragic experience of the First World War radically influenced the representations of the human body in modern and avant-garde art across Europe, including Romania. Thus, this period saw the emergence of a recurring theme: the crisis of vulnerable corporeality. The 20th

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century was intensely preoccupied with the human body, to the extent that visual artists explored and sought to depict various radical images of the body, while in literature, writers echoed the modern atmosphere of the period in their texts. More precisely, the tragic aftermath of the first global conflagration led to real crises of humanity, which resonated within the artistic and literary fields of the period that concerns us in this article.

Deconstructed, disfigured, and traumatized human figures, eviscerated, fragmented, and decomposed bodies – all of these became a new source of artistic and poetic material in 20th-century literature. Accordingly, in Romanian avant-garde writing, we observe the resonance of radical imagery in poems belonging to Tristan Tzara, Ilarie Voronca, Geo Bogza, Gherasim Luca, and Virgil Teodorescu.

Among the many consequences of the First World War was the physical experience of mass mortality, “a bodily experience [...] that translated into mass death” (Corbin, Courtine, Vigarello, 2009: 490) [trad. mea]¹, which led to the intensification of a crisis that manifested most acutely on an aesthetic level. One of the foremost theorists of Romanian avant-garde literature, Ion Pop, highlights in *Avangardismul poetic românesc*, that this era was marked by “the grave events of war, with their disastrous and chaotic consequences [...] which would trigger a latent revolt, pushing it to its most extreme limits” (Pop, 1969: 153) [trad. mea]². This revolt, in turn, gave rise to a pervasive existential anxiety expressed in both interwar visual art and the literary output of Romanian avant-garde writers.

The crisis of corporeality emerges as a direct consequence of the traumatic experiences of early 20th-century warfare, which shattered conventional frameworks and gave rise to unfamiliar, unsettling imagery: “Every experience of war is, above all, an experience of the body. In war, bodies both enact and endure violence” (Corbin, Courtine, Vigarello, 2009: 329) [trad. mea]³. Thus, the horrors of the First World War left profound echoes in the artistic imagination, manifesting in multiple ways as a crisis of the body, through depictions that are „dismembered, disarticulated, mutilated, with faces disfigured and massacred” (*Ibidem*: 490) [trad. mea]⁴.

Avant-garde and war. The violent subversion of tradition

We observe a violent rupture from traditional poetical texts and from the system of conventions that preceded modernism, conventions

¹ Romanian: „Experiența corporală [...] care s-a tradus printr-o mortalitate în masă”.

² Romanian: „Evenimente grave ale războiului, cu consecințele sale dezastruoase și haotice [...] care vor declanșa o revoltă latentă, dezvoltând-o până la limitele extreme”.

³ Romanian: „Orice experiență de război este înainte de toate o experiență a corpului. În război, corpurile exercită violență și tot ele o îndură”.

⁴ Romanian: „Dezmembrate, dezarticulate, mutilate, chipuri desfigurate și masacrate”.

with which we may have been familiar, as readers. In the introductory study to the anthology *Avangarda literară românească*, Marin Mincu asserts that the poetics of the Romanian avant-garde brought about “a profound transformation in the way literature is conceived and structured” (Mincu, 1983: 5) [trad. mea]⁵. The attention now shifts toward corporeality, captured through states of conflict and contradiction, through “crises, dramas, and personal experiences” (Marino, 2000: 168) [trad. mea]⁶, elements that appear prominently in the poetic texts of Romanian avant-gardists, especially in the works of Tristan Tzara and Ilarie Voronca.

Ilarie Voronca encapsulates some of these ideas in his 1925 programmatic text *Surrealism și integralism*: “Especially since the war, Europe has undergone continuous turmoil” (Mincu, 1983: 566) [trad. mea]⁷. We can infer that the Romanian writer refers to the deeply negative impact the global conflagration had on the European continent, including political, economic, and social consequences, marked by “the countless sufferings caused by the bloody tragedy of twentieth-century violence” (Corbin, Courtine, Vigarello, 2009: 9) [trad. mea]⁸. In both visual arts and literature, we witness major transformations, with striking imagery, dominated by representations of the vulnerable human body. Consequently, the lyrical discourse of the avant-garde movements presents a full spectacle of the modern human form, through “scandalous or exhibitionist images” (Pană, 1969: 17) [trad. mea]⁹, frequently represented in poetic texts.

Another key reference for our analysis is Sașa Pană’s anthology, in which he notes that “just as the vanguard of an army prepares the path for action, the literary avant-garde paves the way for the emergence of new artistic structures, subverting the old ones” (*Ibidem*: 6) [trad. mea]¹⁰. Thus, the poetic material assimilated by avant-garde writers is unpredictable and unconventional, and their representations of the body are imbued with radical visions that enact revolt, rejection, and a break from traditional foundations. These dynamics were also fueled by the dramatic consequences of the First World War, as suggested by Ion Pop in the preface to *Șapte manifeste DADA cu câteva desene de Francis*

⁵ Romanian: „Schimbare profundă în modul de a concepe și de a structura obiectul literaturii”.

⁶ Romanian: „Crize, drame și experiențe personale”.

⁷ Romanian: „De la război mai ales, Europa a trecut prin frământări continue”.

⁸ Romanian: „Nenumăratele suferințe pricinuite de tragedia sângeroasă a violențelor secolului XX”.

⁹ Romanian: „Imagini scandaloase sau exhibiționiste”.

¹⁰ Romanian: „Tot așa cum avangarda unei armate pregătește intrarea în acțiune, avangarda literară ar pregăti instaurarea unor noi structuri artistice, subminându-le pe cele vechi”.

Picabia. Lampisterii. Omul aproximativ. Pop further states that the avant-garde emerges during “a historical moment of profound spiritual crisis, exacerbated by the tragedy of the First World War” (Tzara, 1996: VII) [trad. mea]¹¹. This tragic context, as highlighted by Ion Pop, generates dense visual representations of the body as an “anatomical prison” (*Ibidem*: XV) [trad. mea]¹², vulnerable and therefore in crisis.

In *Notă despre arta neagră*, from *Lampisterii*, Tristan Tzara captures the avant-garde impulse with the imperative: “Let us deform. Let us boil” (*Ibidem*: 62) [trad. mea]¹³, emphasizing the need to expose the perishable, vulnerable nature of the human body.

To better understand the phenomenon of the avant-garde in Romania, we have also considered the perspectives of other critics, including Adrian Marino, Alexandru Mușina, and Gabriela Duda. Each of them proposes a set of features that define and distinguish the Romanian avant-garde movements. In *Biografia ideii de literatură*, Adrian Marino claims that the “antiliterature is the direct expression of the negative spirit in literature” (Marino, 2000: 190) [trad. mea]¹⁴, while Alexandru Mușina, in *Paradigme moderne*, proposes the concept of “poetry of negativity” (Mușina, 2004: 102) [trad. mea]¹⁵, suggesting that avant-garde poetry can be read through this lens. Both Ion Pop, in *Avangardismul poetic românesc*, and Gabriela Duda, in *Literatura românească de avangardă*, analyze the concept of “crisis of literature” (Duda, 1997: 11) [trad. mea]¹⁶. These concepts, *poetry of negativity*, *antiliterature* and *crisis of literature* can be perceived as complementary. As such, the *crisis of literature* can be closely linked to the poetic texts of avant-garde writers, as they reveal rich representations of a body in crisis, in “ruins”, a concept that ultimately manifests as a tension within the realm of imagery.

Recalling the war experience: *Eroi la 16 ani* by Alexandru Daia

To better understand the tragic experience of the First World War, we will analyze several illustrative fragments from the war diary of professor and publicist Alexandru Daia, *Eroi la 16 ani. Însemnările unui fost cercetaș: Jurnal de război (1916–1918)*. Although the text stands apart from the avant-garde movements, it serves as a resource for grasping the direct, unfiltered experience of war. Through its depiction of

¹¹ Romanian: „Moment istoric de profundă criză spirituală, agravată de tragismul Primului Război Mondial”.

¹² Romanian: „Închisoare anatomică”.

¹³ Romanian: „Să deformăm. Să fierbem”.

¹⁴ Romanian: „Antiliteratura este manifestarea directă a spiritului negativ în literatură”.

¹⁵ Romanian: „Poezie a negativității”.

¹⁶ Romanian: „Criză a literaturii”.

conflicting emotional states, existential anxiety, the drama of human and material loss, and the harrowing reality of war, marked by illnesses, violence, aggression, corpses, exhaustion, despair, and death, this diary offers insight into the trauma of that historical moment.

Our premise is that the war, along with its contradictions, gave rise to a series of striking and unconventional representations of the human body in European modern and avant-garde aesthetics. These were shaped by the trauma of countless wounded, mutilated, and disfigured bodies. The contradictions inherent to war contributed to the emergence of a profound crisis of corporeality, evident both in modern art and in avant-garde literary discourse, underscoring the idea of human ephemerality and perishability.

Through Alexandru Daia's war experience, one can observe how it can leave a profound psychological imprint on individuals. The notes in this diary correspond to the period during which Romania became actively involved in the First World War (1916–1918), after maintaining a position of neutrality in the initial years of the conflict (1914–1916).

The first dramatic images of the war appear in Alexandru Daia's diary note from August 1916:

The evacuation of the city gave rise to harrowing scenes. Alarmed by the onset of bombardment, the residents, groping through the darkness, carried with them small bundles of whatever they had managed to gather in their hurried departure, amidst shells and explosions. Tripping over burning beams and crumbled walls strewn across their path, they struggled to reach the train station. The elderly and the sick were carried in arms, or transported in wheelbarrows or baby carriages (Daia, 1981: 49–50) [trad. mea]¹⁷.

The sense of chaos intensifies in the diary's pages: "Now the state of war is felt ever closer to our very skin" (*Ibidem*: 51) [trad. mea]¹⁸. These fragments capture how the experience of war inflicts deep psychological trauma. The entire text is filled with haunting images of the wounded, of those lost in the chaos of the battle, and of those languishing in overcrowded hospitals, ravaged by injuries and disease.

In this context, Romanian avant-garde literature was also deeply marked by the catastrophic consequences of the war, its tragic aftermath resonating in the subtext of their literary discourse. Just as Alexandru Daia writes in his text, "This was how I first came to know the horrors of

¹⁷ Romanian: „Părăsirea oraşului a dat loc la scene dramatice. Alarmaţi de începerea bombardamentului, locuitorii, orbecăind prin întuneric, duceau cu ei câte o legăturică cu ce fuseseră în stare să adune în graba plecării, printre obuze şi explozii. Împiedicându-se de grinzi aprinse şi de ziduri căzute în drum, ajunseseră cu greu la gară. Bătrânii şi bolnavii au fost duşi pe braţe sau căraţi în câte o roabă sau în câte un cărucior de copil”.

¹⁸ Romanian: „Acum starea de război se face simţită tot mai aproape de pielea noastră”.

war” (*Ibidem*: 59) [trad. mea]¹⁹, we may assert that modern and avant-garde artists and writers were undoubtedly and profoundly impacted by such an experience.

Images of the wounded and of overcrowded hospitals are also dominant in Alexandru Daia’s text:

Women display great heroism: in the canteens, in the hospitals, where the number of wounded brought in from all fronts keeps growing, and where, from dawn until late at night, they strive to ease the pain of those in need (*Ibidem*: 57) [trad. mea]²⁰.

The wounded body, marked by suffering, is a recurring motif in avant-garde poetic imagery as well, emerging as a central figure of the vulnerable human.

Another fragment that revolves around the image of the wounded and the overflowing hospitals is:

I never imagined that stepping into the hospital would expose me to such a harrowing spectacle. You would have thought of yourself on the front lines, after a devastating battle. All the hallways had become impassable, crammed with stretchers loaded with the injured. When and from where had they all been brought so quickly? I don’t know. But there was not a single spot left to step. Pallid faces contorted by pain, bloodied heads, broken arms and legs, gaping wounds like great torn-open mouths, flesh ripped apart, intestines spilling from abdomens like strips of cloth. A vision of hell (*Ibidem*: 60) [trad. mea]²¹.

This excerpt is saturated with striking visual imagery, evoking a visceral, an anatomic spectacle of the vulnerable body: *the wounded – pallid faces – pain – bloodied heads – broken limbs – open wounds – torn flesh – intestines – abdomen*. Moreover, the accumulation of evocative adjectives paints a picture of a body in crisis and contributes to the infernal representation of war: *harrowing – devastating – pallid – contorted – bloodied – broken – torn – shredded*. Thus, this fragment

¹⁹ Romanian: „Așa am cunoscut prima oară ororile războiului”.

²⁰ Romanian: „Femeile dau dovadă de eroism: la cantine, în spitale, unde numărul răniților aduși de pe toate fronturile este tot mai mare și unde de dimineață, din zori, până noaptea târziu, se străduiesc să aline durerile celor lipsiți”.

²¹ Romanian: „Nu mi-am închipuit că intrând în spital voi avea un spectacol înfrorător. Te credeai pe front, după o luptă nimicitoare. Toate culoarele deveniseră impracticabile, fiind înțesate de târgi pline cu răniți. Când și de unde fuseseră aduși acești răniți atât de repede? Nu știu. Dar nu mai puteai pune piciorul pe niciun loc. Figuri livide sau crispate de durere, capete sângerânde, mâini și picioare rupte, răni deschise care arătau ca niște guri mari sfârtcate, carne sfâșiată, intestine atârând afară din abdomen ca niște zdrențe. O imagine de infern”.

exemplifies the “brutal deformations” (De Micheli, 1968: 131) [trad. mea]²² inflicted by the tragic realities of the First World War.

The body marked by suffering is depicted in Alexandru Daia’s text through a fragment mentioning an almost endless number of those who were wounded: “More wounded were brought in. The line of those waiting to enter the hospital courtyard seemed endless” (Daia, 1981: 60) [trad. mea]²³.

Furthermore, another relevant excerpt suggests the fragility and vulnerability of the human body:

I will never forget the shocking impression, through its tragedy, that a little girl of 9 or 10 years old made on me – fainting, or perhaps dead – brought with other wounded on a platform truck, a truck with horses. The little girl had a leg broken below the knee; a leg that was held together only by a single black cotton sock she wore. Like logs thrown haphazardly into a pile, that’s how these wounded had been brought in, hastily gathered from the places where bombs had fallen on a crowd of peaceful, unsuspecting civilians, unaware of the danger that awaited them (*Ibidem*) [trad. mea]²⁴.

Thus, the unforgiving reality of war is conveyed through its cruelty, which has an inevitable and major impact on humanity, as a witness to all the grim events and unimaginable, horrifying scenes. This excerpt emphasizes the concept of “the body” as an “object that can decompose” (Jeudy, 1998: 17) [trad. mea]²⁵, being perishable, fragile, vulnerable.

In the subsequent sections of Alexandru Daia’s book, several fragments evoke the image of a spectacle of human suffering, offering the reader numerous details of the wounds found on the vulnerable bodies of soldiers:

A multitude of soldiers, bearing horrific wounds caused by dum-dum bullets – used frequently by some of the enemies, despite being prohibited by international conventions – crowded the hospital. In the early days, the surgeons struggled to cope with the overwhelming number of wounded who required urgent surgical

²² Romanian: „Deformările brutale”.

²³ Romanian: „Aduceau alți răniți. Șirul celor care își așteptau rândul să intre în curtea spitalului nu se mai sfârșea”.

²⁴ Romanian: „N-am să uit impresia zguduitoare, prin tragismul ei, pe care mi-a făcut-o o fetiță de 9–10 anișori, leșinată, sau poate moartă, adusă cu alți răniți, pe un camion platformă, un camion cu cai. Fetița avea piciorul rupt mai jos de genunchi, picior care nu se mai ținea decât într-un fir de ciorap negru de bumbac, cu care era încălțată. Ca niște bușteni aruncați claie peste grămadă, așa fuseseră aduși acei răniți, adunați în grabă de pe locurile unde căzuseră bombele în plină mulțime, populație pașnică, neștiutoare de primejdia care o păștea”.

²⁵ Romanian: „Obiect ce se poate descompune”.

intervention. Many of those brought in from the front lines already had extensive and advanced gangrene (Daia, 1981: 71) [trad. mea]²⁶.

This paragraph conveys not only the high number of wounded in October 1916, but also a medical system strained to the point of near collapse under the weight of this tragic toll. The description also includes references to necrosis of body parts, through phrases such as extensive and advanced gangrene, indicating that “the disease becomes repugnant ‘when it destroys the organism through decomposition’” (Rosenkranz, 1984: 272) [trad. mea]²⁷. We may thus identify the way the wound takes on a pathological character:

The gangrene in the wounded arm was too advanced for any operation to have a chance of success. Any attempt was deemed futile, especially since it would have wasted the precious time of those who could instead operate and save other lives, with significantly greater chances of success. Soldiers with lighter wounds, and without gangrene, were expected and required to be operated on first, since they could be saved and quickly recovered (Daia, 1981: 71) [trad. mea]²⁸.

The tragic nature of this reality is heightened by the fact that some severely wounded soldiers had to face their impending death with resignation, as the following excerpt suggests: “Dr. Bruteanu, moved by the pleading face of the young soldier who realized he had been abandoned – and indeed he had, abandoned and condemned to certain death, which would follow shortly” (*Ibidem*) [trad. mea]²⁹. Moreover, a note dated October 16, 1916, underscores the tragic toll of war upon the fragile human body, caught in a prolonged state of agony in the hospital: “We go from hospital to hospital. In Bucharest, nearly all 15,000 beds are occupied” (*Ibidem*: 81) [trad. mea]³⁰.

²⁶ Romanian: O mulțime de soldați, cu răni îngrozitoare, datorate gloanțelor dum-dum, pe care unii dintre dușmani le folosesc adeseori, deși convențiile internaționale le opresc, împănără spitalul. Cu greu, în primele zile, chirurgii au putut face față mulțimii de răniți care trebuiau operați cu precădere. Mulți dintre răniți, aduși din primele linii de luptă, veneau cu mari cangrene foarte avansate”.

²⁷ Romanian: „Boala devine scârboasă «când distruge organismul prin descompunere»”.

²⁸ Romanian: „O cangrenă a brațului rănit era prea avansată ca să se mai încerce o operație cu șanse de reușită. Orice încercare se socotea inutilă, mai ales că ar fi răpit degeaba timpul prețios al celor care operau și salvau, cu șanse sporite, alte vieți. Soldații cu răni mai ușoare, și fără cangrene, trebuiau și se cerea să fie operați mai întâi, pentru că puteau fi salvați și repede recuperați”.

²⁹ Romanian: „Doctorul Bruteanu, mișcat de figura rugătoare a tânărului soldat, care se vedea părăsit – și chiar așa era, părăsit și condamnat la moarte sigură, moarte care ar fi urmat în scurt timp”.

³⁰ Romanian: „Mergem din spital în spital. În București, cele 15 000 paturi sunt aproape toate ocupate”.

The experience of the First World War is also documented through the lens of illness, as Alexandru Daia notes in an entry dated December 14, 1916, referencing a scabies outbreak: “Scabies! Scabies? We cry out. How can this be?” (*Ibidem*: 122) [trad. mea]³¹. Moreover, we observe how illness accentuates “weakness [...], the passivity of endurance and suffering” (Rosenkranz, 1984: 177) [trad. mea]³², a notion suggested by the human sense of helplessness in the face of disease: “We feel humiliated, though we bear no guilt” (Daia, 1981: 122) [trad. mea]³³.

Alongside this idea, the text also presents details of the direct association between corporeality and the pathological, rendered in a tone of exasperated frustration: “It is plain beyond doubt that these lice have a particular predilection for our flesh and blood” (*Ibidem*: 123) [trad. mea]³⁴.

Beyond scabies, another agonizing facet of the war experience is captured in the outbreak of epidemic typhus, which Daia documents in a fragment from the spring of 1917. Despite being a time when physicians were “caught off guard” by this unfamiliar disease, whose symptoms were initially undefined, Daia recounts the way “in the first few days, they did not know what diagnosis to give. It was something new. The virus was unknown, as were the manifestations of the illness and the means of combating it” (*Ibidem*: 171) [trad. mea]³⁵.

The tragic impact of this disease, as portrayed by Daia, is conveyed through detailed descriptions of an epidemic that ravaged large swathes of the population, spreading “with lightning speed, even to the most hidden places” (*Ibidem*) [trad. mea]³⁶. The devastating consequences of this plague illustrate the precarious condition of the human body, “subject to a constant threat of dissolution and death, as only the state of illness can induce in the traumatized individual” (Glăvan, 2014: 161) [trad. mea]³⁷.

The reference to Alexandru Daia’s diary is especially relevant here, as it offers an authentic and highly detailed depiction of the war experience, and of the psychological trauma inflicted by such a conflict. Referring to epidemic typhus as a “terrible, deadly disease, brought on by war. A disease of misery, of poor hygiene, and of weakened,

³¹ Romanian: „Râie! Râie? strigăm noi. Cum se poate?”.

³² Romanian: „Slăbiciunea [...], pasivitatea îndurării și suferinței”.

³³ Romanian: „Ne simțim umiliți, fără să fim vinovați cu ceva”.

³⁴ Romanian: „Se vede, fără puțință de tăgadă, că păduchii aceștia au mare predilecție pentru carnea și sângele nostru”.

³⁵ Romanian: „N-au știut în primele zile ce diagnostic să pună. Era ceva nou. Nu se cunoștea nici virusul, nici manifestările bolii și nici mijloacele de combatere”.

³⁶ Romanian: „Cu iuțea fulgerului până în cele mai ascunse locuri”.

³⁷ Romanian: „Aflată sub semnul unei continue amenințări a disoluției și morții, așa cum numai starea maladivă îi poate induce celui traumatizat”.

distressed bodies, just like ours now, in the midst of war” (Daia, 1981: 172) [trad. mea]³⁸, we find yet another argument supporting the central hypothesis of this analysis: namely, that the context of the First World War, with its tragic consequences, generates a radicalized vision of the human being, and implicitly, of the human body.

The avant-garde writers, influenced (whether directly or indirectly) by the experience of the First World War, draw upon the consequences of this calamitous period to shape a new poetic material. In doing so, they construct an entire spectacle of vulnerable, pathological, and even cadaveric corporeality. We establish these connections between Alexandru Daia’s diary and avant-garde texts because war embodies chaos, anarchy, and contradiction, key terms frequently associated with the avant-garde movements, which were, in many ways, catalyzed by the war itself.

One of the defining elements of war, as previously mentioned, is chaos. This is illustrated in Daia’s account of a catastrophe on January 5, 1917, when a train derailed due to “brakes that no longer worked and an overloaded weight” (*Ibidem*: 140) [trad. mea]³⁹. Alexandru Daia captures the scene of the wounded and mutilated victims:

There were apocalyptic scenes. My uncle [...] spoke to me of the victims who screamed, howled, or merely groaned in terror among the wreckage of the train. Some were injured, others trapped between splintered remains and unable to move. All of them pleaded with their rescuers to free them from the heap of wood and iron in which they were caught, like a trap from which there was no escape, and from the flames that had engulfed the remnants of the train (*Ibidem*) [trad. mea]⁴⁰.

This entire spectacle of the vulnerable body, subjected to external forces, also captures the despair of those involved, reinforcing the idea that their corporeality is marked by the “precariousness of being” (Tzara, 1996: XV) [trad. mea]⁴¹. Daia recounts:

An officer, with his leg trapped between twisted metal from which he could not escape, begged for it to be cut off with an axe below the knee, in order to escape

³⁸ Romanian: „Boală îngrozitoare, mortală, adusă de război. Boală a mizeriei, a lipsei de igienă și a organismelor slăbite și necăjite, așa cum erau și ale noastre acum în plin război”.

³⁹ Romanian: „Frânelor care nu mai funcționau și a tonajului depășit”.

⁴⁰ Romanian: „Au fost scene de apocalips. Unchiul meu [...] îmi vorbi de victimele care strigau, urlau sau numai gemeau fioros, printre sfărâăturile trenului. Unii erau răniți, alții fiind prinși printre sfărâături nu se puteau mișca. Toți implorau pe cei veniți în ajutor să-i scoată din mormanul de scânduri și fierărie în care erau prinși ca într-o capcană din care nu puteau scăpa, ca și din flăcările care cuprinseseră rămășițele trenului”.

⁴¹ Romanian: „Precaritatea ființei”.

the grip of the iron and the fire that had begun to burn the back of his uniform. Many burned alive like human torches, and no one ever learned who they had been [...]. The toll of the catastrophe was around 2,500 dead and wounded (Daia, 1981: 141) [trad. mea]⁴².

Through these infernal images, Alexandru Daia captures what Rosenkranz terms the “pathos of annihilation” (Rosenkranz, 1984: 254) [trad. mea]⁴³ of the vulnerable body. With the disintegration of corporeality comes the erasure of identity, a notion underscored by the inability to identify many of the victims after the disaster.

As we can observe, there is a multitude of excerpts focusing on the vast number of human losses incurred. Chaos and catastrophe are, inevitably, among the most devastating effects of war, giving rise to profound psychological trauma through the depiction of shocking, unflinching images of injured, destroyed, and decomposing bodies. One such effect is also outlined in an entry dated August 19, 1917:

Corporal Mușat, the one-armed soldier who, together with his grenadiers from the 51st/52nd Infantry Regiment, had wreaked havoc upon enemy lines, was struck down by a shell fragment. Second Lieutenant Georgescu I., from another infantry regiment, severely wounded in the arm, continued to lead his soldiers in the attack until he was felled by two enemy bullets that struck him in the chest (Daia, 1981: 207) [trad. mea]⁴⁴.

This part of the text thus underscores the trauma and consequences brought about by the brutal confrontations of war, effects that are intensified by human infirmity and the emergence of bodily disfigurements. These disfigurements lead to the segmentation and fragmentation of the formerly unified corporeal self.

Chaos is depicted through various fragments of the war diary, a suggestive example being an entry dated September 30, 1917. Here, we witness a buildup of details reflecting the agitation and turmoil provoked by the chaotic nature of war:

Ambulances reached the front lines, and everyone was gathering and transporting the wounded, whose numbers kept growing. Not infrequently, this rescue took

⁴² Romanian: „Un ofițer, cu piciorul prins între fiare îndoite, de unde nu puteau scăpa, ceru să i se taie piciorul cu un topor mai jos de genunchi, pentru a scăpa din strânsoarea fiarelor și a focului care începuse să-i ardă hainele în spate. Mulți au ars ca niște torțe vii și nici nu s-a mai știut cine vor fi fost [...]. Cam 2 500 de morți și de răniți a fost bilanțul catastrofei”.

⁴³ Romanian: „Patosul nimicirii”.

⁴⁴ Romanian: „Caporalul Mușat, cel fără o mână, care împreună cu grenadierii săi din regimentul 51/52 infanterie făcuse ravagii în rândurile dușmane, a căzut lovit de o schije de obuz. Sublocotenentul Georgescu I. din alt regiment de infanterie, rănit grav la braț, a continuat să-și conducă ostașii la atac, până ce a fost răpus de două gloanțe vrăjmașe, care l-au lovit în piept”.

place under enemy fire, amid the explosions of shells of all calibers and aerial bombardments (*Ibidem*: 221) [trad. mea]⁴⁵.

As in other excerpts that were cited from the diary, the visual representation of the wounded is amplified by the increasing number of casualties. In this context, medicine became more necessary than ever, as shown by the recurring depictions of hospitals and the active involvement of doctors, through surgeries and treatments. Thus, twentieth-century medicine required development, innovation, and an improvement of treatment conditions so that war victims could have a chance at recovery. In this regard, the evolution of surgical practices is illustrated in the following fragment:

I meet two great heroes of aviation: Captain Peneș (Ion) and Captain Dimitriu Adrian (nicknamed the Falcon). Both were wounded in aerial battles during the great clashes at Cașin. Retrieved from the wreckage of the planes in which they had crashed, war surgery managed – a true miracle – to reset their bones, stitch their wounds, and patch them up; in short, to restore life to them, which still faintly lingered in their bodies when they were lifted and taken to the hospital (*Ibidem*: 244) [trad. mea]⁴⁶.

This excerpt highlights the surgical procedures performed to heal the wounded. Moreover, it conveys the idea of a shattered, fragmented body restored through medical treatment, as suggested by the actions mentioned toward the end of the fragment. We thus identify the following sequence of operations performed on the human body: setting bones back in place, stitching wounds, patching, all leading to restoring life. For medicine during the First World War, these were already significant steps toward developing methods for healing and rehabilitating those wounded in the battles. Accordingly, a cumulative process leading to the restoration of life and physical recovery is highlighted, even if psychological trauma would continue to persist.

In the final part of this analysis, we focus on two excerpts that underscore the trauma caused by such a devastating conflict. One of them appears in an entry dated July 16, 1918:

⁴⁵ Romanian: „Ambulanțele ajungeau până în primele linii de luptă și cu toții culegeau și transportau răniții, în număr tot mai mare. Nu de puține ori, adunarea răniților s-a făcut sub focul inamicului, în exploziile obuzelor de toate calibrele și sub bombardamentele aviației”.

⁴⁶ Romanian: „Fac cunoștință cu doi mari eroi ai aviației: căpitanul Peneș (Ion) și căpitanul Dimitriu Adrian (supranumit Șoimul). Amândoi au fost răniți în luptele aeriene, în timpul marilor bătălii de la Cașin. Adunați dintre sfărâmurile avioanelor cu care au căzut, chirurgia de război a reușit – adevărată minune – să le pună oasele la loc, să le coasă rănilor, să-i carpească; într-un cuvânt, să le redea viața, care încă mai palpită în trupurile lor, atunci când au fost ridicați și duși la spital”.

In the no man's land between our former positions and those of the Germans, the vast plain – where fierce hand-to-hand combat once raged, and where the earth greedily absorbed the blood of tens of thousands of fallen heroes from both sides – is now covered, as far as the eye can see, by thousands of tiny candles, yellow flowers like wax torches burning at the headstones of the fallen. It is a harrowing sight. Nature, with its overwhelming force, seems determined to remind us, through the spontaneously grown flowers, that those who perished there must not be forgotten (*Ibidem*: 252) [trad. mea]⁴⁷.

Based on these selected fragments from *Eroi la 16 ani*, we can assert that the aftermath of the war undeniably generated deep psychological trauma. The shock, and therefore the trauma, is further intensified by Daia's record of the enormous number of war casualties, such as in the entry dated October 15, 1918: "The total losses since the beginning of the year, including the dead, wounded, and captured Germans, are estimated at 1,500,000 men" (*Ibidem*: 262) [trad. mea]⁴⁸. Thus, the period of the First World War marked the emergence of new poetic material, one that would give rise to literature expressing the profound traumas born from the tragic realities of war. This new poetic discourse is infused with a spirit of revolt and characterized by chaos, violence, fragmentation, contradiction, and crisis.

This concise analysis of Alexandru Daia's text aimed to highlight the trauma induced by the extreme violence of the First World War, clearly illustrating its negative effects on the human psyche. The alienating trauma experienced by individuals also triggered a crisis of embodiment, as the body is depicted in numerous vulnerable states: wounded, fragmented, afflicted, or diseased. Like any military conflict, the First World War encompasses a semantic field marked by the tragedy of war: violence, injuries, illness, suffering, bombardments, chaos, and hospitals.

Regarding the link between such a cataclysmic event and avant-garde movements, we may consider that these movements emerged from the contradictions inherent to war. Therefore, we can confidently affirm that the elements characteristic of war correlate directly with the radicalization found in the avant-garde aesthetics. This movement, in

⁴⁷ Romanian: „În *no man's land*ul dintre fostele noastre poziții și cele germane, câmpia întinsă, unde s-au dat acele înverșunate lupte piept la piept, și unde pământul a sorbit cu lăcomie sângele zecilor de mii de eroi, căzuți de amândouă părțile, mii de lumânările, flori galbene ca niște făclii de ceară aprinse la căpătâiul celor căzuți, se înalță, acoperind cât vezi cu ochii întreaga câmpie. Este o impresie răscolitoare. Natura cu forța ei biruitoare și-a pus în gând să amintească, prin florile sale crescute de la sine că cei căzuți acolo nu trebuie uitați”.

⁴⁸ Romanian: „Pierderile totale de la începutul anului, în morți, răniți și prizonieri ale germanilor sunt evaluate la 1 500 000 de oameni”.

turn, is defined by shock, crisis, violence, chaos, anarchy, automatism, and fragmentation. We may thus conclude that there exists a direct connection between the effects of the First World War and the avant-garde movements, which succeeded in crafting new and striking artistic material resonating with the traumas wrought by war.

Other examples from war memoirs

Alongside Alexandru Daia's *Eroi la 16 ani*, war memoirs undeniably encompass a considerable number of notable works. Several writers successfully captured the dramatic landscape of the First World War. Ethel Greening Pantazzi, a Canadian settled in Romania, authored *România în lumini și umbre (1909–1919)*, from which we shall quote two significant fragments that reveal the devastating effects of war on the human condition:

I drew the curtain slightly, but immediately heard a whistle from the street, an officer's warning to extinguish the lights or fully draw the curtains. Five minutes later, a powerful explosion filled our house with dust and smoke; the first bomb had destroyed the corner of a house three courtyards away. We could hear the rattle of anti-aircraft shells falling like hail on the roof. Five bombs were dropped that night (Pantazzi, 2015: 165) [trad. mea]⁴⁹.

The news from the front grows ever more alarming. Hundreds of wounded are filling the hospitals, and the Germans are concentrating their bombardments on the train stations and their surroundings [...] Gripped by panic, our soldiers fled toward the Danube in an attempt to save themselves... the Romanian defeat at Turtucaia was a dreadful massacre. As I had feared, the Germans' long-range artillery mowed down our poor soldiers... One of the questions our men keep asking is: Why are our guns not like theirs? (*Ibidem*: 170) [trad. mea]⁵⁰.

Likewise, Count de Saint-Aulaire, French ambassador to Romania in 1916, offers corroborating testimony in his *Însemnările unui diplomat de altădată în România, 1916–1920*, echoing several observations found in Alexandru Daia's text:

⁴⁹ Romanian: „Am ridicat puțin draperia, dar am auzit numaidecât un fluier din stradă, avertismentul unui polițist să stingem luminile sau să tragem draperiile. Cinci minute mai târziu o explozie puternică ne-a umplut casa de praf și fum; prima bombă dărmase colțul casei de la trei curți mai încolo. Auzeam răpăitul cartușelor tunurilor antiaeriene, ce ne cădeau ca grindina pe acoperiș. Cinci bombe au fost aruncate în acea noapte”.

⁵⁰ Romanian: „Veștile de pe front sunt tot mai îngrijorătoare. Sute de răniți umplu spitalele, iar nemții își concentrează bombardamentele asupra gărilor și împrejurimilor lor [...] Cuprinși de panică, soldații noștri au fugit spre Dunăre ca să se salveze... înfrângerea românilor la Turtucaia a fost un măcel cumplit. Cum mă temeam, tunurile cu bătaie lungă ale nemților i-au secerat pe bieții noștri soldați... una din întrebările pe care ai noștri și le pun este: De ce nu sunt și tunurile noastre ca ale lor?”.

In this overcrowded, undernourished, and devastated Moldavia, misery and famine, breeding grounds for epidemic typhus, were claiming more victims than enemy fire. In hospitals that had ceased to accept new patients, everything was lacking except dedication. There was no firewood, no linens, no bandages, no surgical instruments, no anesthetics. The wounded and the ill were begging the nurses to end their suffering, to kill them. Cries of pain drowned out the groans of the dying. Medical supplies sent from France – through negligence or sadism – were retained by Russia, which, after having unleashed all this suffering, withheld the remedies provided by others (Count de Saint-Aulaire, 2016: 106) [trad. mea]⁵¹.

The body in modern and avant-garde art

The reverberations of the tragic consequences of the First World War can be observed in early 20th-century modern art. In this part, we focus on the connections between visual art and the avant-garde movements within Romanian literature, given that the aftermath of the First World War was felt across various artistic spheres of the period.

Amid the war, Tristan Tzara initiated a revolt, noting that:

The epicenter of the cataclysm was the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, in 1916, the year when another cataclysm, orchestrated in the chanceries of embassies and by cannon manufacturers, tore through continents, rending the earth's intestines, meant to flow with blood and 30 million lives. This Europe, burning like Rome around Switzerland, found its spiritual counterpart in a youth of all nationalities, brimming with rebellion, then taking refuge in the country which, on the map, looks like a child's hand placed over the heart of the continent (Tzara, 1971: 108) [trad. mea]⁵².

Thus, the initiators of one of the major avant-garde movements were acutely aware of the immediate danger posed by the First World War, as well as of the crises, effects, and traumas it inflicted upon humanity, and upon the human body itself.

⁵¹ Romanian: „În această Moldovă suprapopulată, subnutrită, devastată, mizeria și foametea, din care ia naștere tifosul exantematic, făceau mai multe victime decât focul inamicului. În spitalele care refuzau să mai primească lume lipsea totul în afară de devotament. Lipseau lemnele, rufăria, pansamentele, instrumentele chirurgicale, lipseau anestezicele. Răniții și bolnavii le implorau pe infirmiere să pună capăt suferințelor lor, să-i ucidă. Urletele de durere acopereau gemetele muribunzilor. Materialul sanitar expediat din Franța – neglijență sau sadism – era reținut tot de Rusia, care, după ce dezlănțuise toate aceste suferințe, nu preda leacurile furnizate de alții”.

⁵² Romanian: „Epicentrul cataclismului a fost Cabaretul Voltaire din Zürich, în 1916, anul când alt cataclism, pregătit în cancelariile legațiilor și ale fabricanților de tunuri, sfârtecă prin continente intestine de pământ prin cari trebuiau să șiroiască sângele și 30 000 000 de vieți. Această Europă care ardea ca o Romă în jurul Elveției și-a găsit pe planul spiritual corespondența într-un tineret de toate naționalitățile doldora de revoltă, refugiat atunci în țara care pe hartă pare o mână de copil așezată pe inima continentului”.

The central concept of our analysis, *the body*, is depicted in 20th-century art through a variety of representations, as it appears in forms such as the mutilated, wounded, diseased, or fragmented body, or even as a corpse. Such striking images are emblematic of the war experience. In what follows, we will offer several examples of visual representations (Teliban, 2017), through which we can observe how the visual arts became influenced by this perspective on the human body, namely, one in which the individual is portrayed as physically impaired, a suggestion of the body's inherent fragility.

An example can be found in a graphic representation by Alexandru Moscu, *Instructorii invalizi* (1917), which depicts military instruction being carried out by a disabled man. The disrupted unity of the body is made visible through the signs of infirmity, a segmented, fragmented form marked by the absence of arms. In the visual art of the 20th century, monstrous deformations of human corporeality can be observed. Disabled individuals, represented repeatedly in modern art, stand as a direct consequence of the disastrous effects of war.

Another example is the visual representation *După bombardament pe câmpul de luptă. Scenă din Războiul Mondial 1914–1918*, created by Ștefan Stoica I. Dumitrescu. As illustrated in the scene composed by the artist, the emphasis falls on one of the war's most tragic consequences: the high number of casualties. This depiction includes a multitude of human corpses, as well as dead or wounded animal bodies, an evocative suggestion of the vulnerability and the swift perishability of the body. The crisis conveyed here is precisely that of the weakened body, worn, powerless, and defenseless in the face of external forces and pressures.

While the previously mentioned paintings allowed us to observe the human body as fragmented, wounded, or destroyed in war, or even reduced to a cadaver, another visual representation introduces the image of the captive, tortured body. This is the case in Nicolae Tonitza's autobiographical work *Ofițer român prizonier. Kridjali. 1917*, a depiction that conveys one of the war's most horrifying realities, the degeneration of the body under torture.

These works incorporate various autobiographical elements, as the artists were contemporaries of the First World War and experienced, either directly or indirectly, the trauma of this devastating military conflict. In her article *Marele război al artiștilor*, published in the journal *Trenul nostru*, Andreea Teliban notes that Tonitza's painting is particularly significant from the perspective of the painter's autobiography, emphasizing that "the captive officer is depicted in a

disordered room, standing before an easel, holding a paint palette in his left hand. A prisoner-painter” (Teliban, 2017) [trad. mea]⁵³.

Alongside visual artists, writers too bore witness to the dramatic realities of war, as evidenced by the example of Alexandru Daia’s book. The avant-garde writers were likewise directly or indirectly influenced by the chaos of the World Wars.

The obsessions with the body and with the morbid have thus constituted enduring themes in Romanian and European literature, including in the movement that preceded the avant-garde, namely, Symbolism/Decadentism. It is from this earlier current that many of the avant-garde’s striking visions of corporeality originate. These representations are, consequently, transposed into the poetic universe of the writers, who, particularly in their formative years, were influenced by the Symbolist movement. This influence is evident in their inclination toward the radicalization of imagery and language, as well as in the “Symbolist spleen, the neurotic irritability, as an effect of clearly defined experiences such as illness, solitude, monotony, etc.” (Buciu, 2003: 24) [trad. mea]⁵⁴. The pre-avant-garde atmosphere in Romanian literature was therefore shaped by the Symbolist current, whose influence can be discerned in the early poetic texts of Tristan Tzara, Ilarie Voronca, and even Ion Vinea. Both Mario De Micheli, in *Avangarda artistică a secolului XX*, and Matei Călinescu, in *Conceptul modern de poezie: de la romantism la avangardă*, draw connections between the two aforementioned movements, Symbolism/Decadentism and the Avant-Garde.

Both Symbolism and the Avant-Garde exhibit a “restructuring of the perception of the body” (Dinescu, 2007: 8) [trad. mea]⁵⁵, as one may observe the transition from the conception of the “harmonious and symmetrical body of Antiquity and the Renaissance to the dislocated and dismembered bodies of the avant-garde” (*Ibidem*: 7) [trad. mea]⁵⁶. The body, though in crisis, is displayed as a spectacle and offered to the reader in order to generate a visual field that is as striking and radical as possible. Thus, it is the destroyed body that has truly experienced the “representation of the ‘disasters of war’” (De Micheli, 1968: 115) [trad. mea]⁵⁷; yet the witness to this dramatic scene is also psychically affected by the trauma of such a tragic event. War constitutes a world of

⁵³ Romanian: „Ofițerul captiv este surprins într-o încăpere dezordonată, în fața unui șevalet, cu o paletă pentru culori în mâna stângă. Un prizonier-pictor”.

⁵⁴ Romanian: „Spleenul simbolist, iritarea nevrotică, ca efect al unor trăiri precizate, ca boala, singurătatea, monotonia etc.”.

⁵⁵ Romanian: „Restructurare a percepției asupra corpului”.

⁵⁶ Romanian: „Corp armonios și simetric al Antichității și, respectiv, renașcentist, la cele dislocate și dezmembrate ale avangardei”.

⁵⁷ Romanian: „Reprezentarea «dezastrelor războiului”.

“battlefields, where weapons, barbed wire, corpses, and decaying carcasses merge into a cursed landscape” (*Ibidem*: 116) [trad. mea]⁵⁸, one that imprints itself deeply into the consciousness of the observer.

Returning to our exploration of visual representations, we shall now turn our attention to other works, this time by European artists influenced by the tragic aftermath of the First World War. These artists capture with striking intensity the sinister nature of chaotic warfare, placing particular emphasis on the vulnerability of the human body. A notable example is Otto Dix, the German visual artist who was especially preoccupied with the brutality of war. Deeply affected by the severity of the conflict and having personally experienced its realities, Otto Dix conveys this traumatic experience in his works, most notably in the 1924 etching series *Der Krieg* (*The War*).

In a 1932 painting bearing the same evocative title, *Der Krieg*, we observe the chaos wrought by such a conflict: the armed body, seemingly protected; the wounded body, ravaged by relentless battles; the corpse depicted with legs upturned, a suggestion of a disordered world, of upheaval, imbalance, and fragmentation. Dix also portrays the human skeleton, the remains of the body caught in a perpetual state of disintegration and decay. Otto Dix’s paintings thus reflect the tragic sensibility of war and, consequently, the “suffering of deformity” (Rosenkranz, 1984: 100) [trad. mea]⁵⁹, an experience also felt by avant-garde writers. War and the avant-garde are inextricably linked, and art inevitably comes to be shaped by a tragic vision of the human condition.

Another example is *The Match Seller*, from 1920, also by Otto Dix, in which we observe how the human form physically exhibits certain deformities, having been rendered an invalid as a result of the war. The seller embodies a male presence without limbs, situated on the periphery of society in the post-World War I period. The male figure in Otto Dix’s work is also found within an alienating society, his existence vehemently ignored by those around him. The world during and after the war, therefore, is one of ruin, misery, poverty, and crisis, with one of these crises being the crisis of the body.

Otto Dix created a multitude of visual works that embody the theme of war, and the examples presented in this preliminary chapter contribute to shaping an overarching perspective on the dramatic scenario of this conflict.

The writer and artist Ruth Hartley examines the visual works of Otto Dix in an article discussing the German artist’s pieces that depict the theme of war. One of the first examples she mentions is *The Skat*

⁵⁸ Romanian: „Câmpurilor de bătălie, unde arme, rețele de sârmă ghimpată, cadavre și stârvuri în putrefacție se amestecă într-un peisaj blestemat”.

⁵⁹ Romanian: „Suferința diformității”.

Players, in which we observe the representation of survivors from the First World War, with emphasis on their physical deformities. These figures are portrayed as grotesque, having experienced the “relentless reality” (De Micheli, 1968: 217) [trad. mea]⁶⁰ of the conflict. The images of open wounds are particularly striking, a feature also present in *In Memory of the Glorious Time*, from 1924. In this visual representation, Otto Dix conveys a reality he himself lived through, just as Alexandru Daia did when writing about his war experience, attempting to depict, much like the avant-garde writers, a world of chaos, contradictions, rupture, bodily disintegration, randomness, and anarchy.

Mario de Micheli, in *Avangarda artistică a secolului XX*, also mentions George Grosz as an illustrator of post-World War I German life, noting that “his drawings express despair, anger, resentment. He drew drunks, people vomiting, murderers, suicides. He also drew soldiers without noses, war cripples with steel arms” (*Ibidem*: 117) [trad. mea]⁶¹. A relevant example of the German artist’s work is *The Grey Man Dances*, which portrays a “soldier driven mad in a straitjacket” (*Ibidem*) [trad. mea]⁶², symbolizing a human being affected by the cruelty of war and, by extension, the traumatic consequences of such experiences.

In addition to these examples from visual art, we also mention other works that are pertinent to our analysis, several titles that highlight a crisis of the vulnerable body. This tension is, in fact, a common element that unites these works. These include the following visual representations by Otto Dix: *Dying Soldier*, *Transplantation* (1924), *Wounded Man – Autumn 1916*, *Bapaume*, and *Dead Man – St. Clement* (1924).

As evidenced by the numerous selected visual examples, as well as the specific case of Alexandru Daia’s wartime writing, the experience of war emerges as a fertile source of creative material, ripe for artistic and literary exploration. This potential was also harnessed by the avant-garde, in the sense that the artists of these radical movements were deeply influenced by the sight of mutilated, wounded, and deformed bodies, by the war cripples they encountered directly or indirectly. They sought to comprehend the inner turmoil, tensions, psychological traumas, and thus, the crises embodied by these figures.

In this regard, the destroyed bodies left in the wake of the First World War provoked shock, astonishment, and visceral impact among those who witnessed them, a response that resonates profoundly with the

⁶⁰ Romanian: „Realitatea nemiloasă”.

⁶¹ Romanian: „Desenele lui exprimând disperare, mânie, resentiment. El desena bețivani, oameni care vomitau, asasini, sinucigași. Desena, de asemenea, soldați fără nas, invalizi de război cu brațe de oțel”.

⁶² Romanian: „Ostaș înnebunit într-o cămașă de forță”.

major contradictions and subversive energies characteristic of the avant-garde movements.

Mario De Micheli asserts that:

The war of 1914, together with the social and political issues that emerged violently in the postwar period, compelled many artists to reflect on the past experience and on the figurative cultural situation as it was developing at the time (*Ibidem*: 111) [trad. mea]⁶³.

Thus, writers and visual artists alike contributed to the construction of a tragic horizon of war, shaped by “cruelty, the horrors of hunger, and social contrasts” (*Ibidem*: 129) [trad. mea]⁶⁴. These merciless realities were explored by artists and writers, serving as the foundation upon which crises and tensions could be generated and articulated.

Adrian Marino further explains:

We are witnessing the systematic contestation and overturning of the entire traditional conception of literature in all its aspects, along with the rejection of all its fundamental principles and postulates. Every form of negation is expressed with great freedom, often with extreme nonchalance, elevated even to ostentation” (Marino, 2000: 133) [trad. mea]⁶⁵.

The Romanian avant-garde fully embraces these objectives, its discourse being directly influenced by the traumatic and tragic experiences, and, by extension, the “crises, dramas, and lived experiences” (*Ibidem*: 168) [trad. mea]⁶⁶, of the war.

Conclusions

Since the avant-garde movements can be seen as belonging to the (radical) modern paradigm, the human body is no longer perceived as a fundamental value, as it was in Antiquity or the Renaissance, central, harmonious, and balanced. Instead, it is seen as a new type of body, one that undergoes the crises of modernity: fragmented, distorted, vulnerable, and wounded. As we have observed, the literature produced by representatives of the avant-garde is in direct contact with a reality

⁶³ Romanian: „Războiul din 1914, împreună cu probleme sociale și politice, violent venite la rampă în perioada postbelică, determinaseră pe mulți artiști să reflecteze asupra experienței trecute și asupra situației culturale figurative așa cum se dezvoltă ea în acei ani”.

⁶⁴ Romanian: „Cruzime, ororile foamei, contraste sociale”.

⁶⁵ Romanian: „Asistăm la contestarea și răsturnarea sistematică a întregii concepții tradiționale a literaturii, sub toate aspectele, la negarea tuturor principiilor și postulatelor sale fundamentale. Orice formă de negație este foarte liber exprimată, adesea cu o dezinvoltură extremă, valorizată până la ostentație”.

⁶⁶ Romanian: „Crizele, dramele, experiențele”.

marked by chaos, anarchy, and war. All these are elements that also resonate in the visual arts of the 20th century.

Alexandru Mușina, in *Paradigme moderne*, refers to the emergence of the concept of *crisis* as follows:

Fulfilled individualism generates three major crises, around which the entire modern culture is structured and toward the resolution of which it strives: 1) the crisis of language; 2) the crisis of the self; 3) the crisis of reality. All three crises fundamentally question the individual, the very possibility of his genuine existence (Mușina, 2004: 104) [trad. mea]⁶⁷.

Thus, the concept of *crisis of corporeality*, which highlights the body 'in ruins', is closely intertwined with the three notions identified by Alexandru Mușina, being in direct contact with the language of avant-garde discourse, with the inner tensions of 'the self', and with the tragic nature of a traumatizing reality, intensified by the dramatic context of the First World War and, consequently, by its devastating aftermath.

We can conclude that the tragic experience of the First World War undoubtedly induced a profound crisis of corporeality, of the vulnerable human body. The body is depicted as ruined, and not idealized as a whole, but wounded, fragmented, decomposed, reflecting the existential disintegration brought on by war. Both modern and avant-garde aesthetics responded to the war by rejecting traditional artistic norms, and creating works that highlighted chaos, anarchy, disjointed imagery, and absurdity.

Both visual arts and literature emphasize death, post-traumatic alienation, as well as the corporeal disintegration. Despite differences in form and medium, the trauma of war serves as a shared foundation for modernist and avant-garde artists. Literature, diaries, paintings, and graphics all converge in their depiction of the ruined, disposable, and suffering body – the human body 'in ruins'.

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⁶⁷ Romanian: „Individualismul realizat generează trei crize majore, în jurul cărora se constituie, întru rezolvarea cărora se străduiește întreaga cultură modernă: 1) criza limbajului; 2) criza eului; 3) criza realității. Toate aceste trei crize pun în discuție tocmai individul, posibilitatea existenței cu adevărat a acestuia”.

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From Brontë to Ishiguro: The Dystopian Evolution of the Boarding School Motif

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Abstract:

The present study proposes to examine the setting in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* as an important motif that invites comparisons to classic works while foregrounding the novel's dystopian elements. By engaging with Foucault's discursive ideas, this study will argue that *Never Let Me Go* transforms the traditional motif of boarding school as seen in such Victorian bildungsromans as *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield* into a biopolitical institution of care and control. It will examine the subject positions made available by this institution as well as the roles and activities that characters can adopt for themselves or assign to others. As this essay will demonstrate, these discursive positions are sustained through a medical gaze that reduces each character from an entity to a set of organs to be observed, examined, and labeled. The findings of this study suggest that *Never Let Me Go* could be interpreted as an allegorical tale of how modern institutions use discourses to normalize violence and erase individual agency under the pretext of progress and survival imperatives.

Keywords: bildungsroman, institution, discourse, subject position, gaze

Introduction

The boarding school has long served as a significant motif¹ in English literature, captivating readers by offering a microcosm of self-discovery and a tumultuous journey from childhood to adulthood. It is no

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¹ Motifs, topos, and, more recently tropes have frequently been used interchangeably in literary and film studies. The present analysis, however, adopts the definitions provided by M. H. Abrams (1999), who distinguishes between these concepts. Abrams defines a motif as "a conspicuous element, such as a type of incident, device, reference, or formula, which occurs frequently in works of literature" (189). In contrast, he describes topos (Greek for a commonplace) as an "older term for recurrent poetic concepts or formulas" (189). Additionally, Abrams explains that tropes (meaning turns, conversions) constitute a category of figurative language "in which words or phrases are used in a way that effects a conspicuous change in what we take to be their standard meaning" (116). Given that the 'boarding school' is a modern phenomenon, particularly in the context of girls' education, and its literary prominence emerged largely in 19th-century novels rather than in ancient Greek/Roman literature, the term 'motif' is deemed more appropriate for this study. See Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. US: Heinle & Heinle.

surprise that it has become a popular setting in numerous renowned coming-of-age tales, often embodying themes of growth, rebellion, and social criticism. In nineteenth-century literature, boarding schools commonly figure as oppressive and harsh environments, typically overseen by a cruel and abusive headmaster or headmistress. The first notable example is Charlotte Brontë's renowned novel *Jane Eyre*, in which the protagonist, Jane, is sent to a private school called Lowood Institution to escape her unloving aunt, Mrs. Reed. Lowood is overseen by a clergyman named Mr. Brocklehurst who claims his mission is "to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh, to teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety" (Brontë, 2006: 107). Brontë does not delve deeply into the specifics of nineteenth-century English schooling and offers little direct social commentary. She focuses on exposing the hypocrisy of Christian clergymen like Brocklehurst who subject the impoverished Lowood girls to deprivation, illness, and even death while indulging their own families in worldly comforts. In contrast to Brocklehurst, Brontë portrays Helen Burns as a true embodiment of Christian virtues. As Jane's first friend at Lowood, Helen's teachings and example leave a lasting impression, ultimately guiding the heroine to forgive her aunt and cousins later in the novel and attain a sense of inner peace.

Boarding schools also feature prominently in the works of Charles Dickens, particularly in his semi-autobiographical bildungsroman, *David Copperfield*. In this novel, the protagonist, David, is sent by his tyrannical stepfather, Edward Murdstone, to Salem House, a private school ruled by the oppressive Mr. Creakle. At Salem House, David endures immense hardship and bullying. Yet, he also forms genuine friendships and experiences loyalty, all of which shape his compassionate nature and contribute to his resilience and moral development. Unlike Brontë, Dickens provides a more detailed critique of the educational system, and Salem House serves as a powerful example of his ability to use the setting to criticize the flaws of Victorian-era educational institutions.

Similarly, in the early twentieth-century children's literature, the boarding school functions as an important institution of life where the upper class sends their children to acquire the usual accomplishments. One of the most famous examples is Miss Minchin's Select Seminary for Young Girls, the setting of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*. In this story, Burnett takes the reader from "a beautiful Indian bungalow" to the seemingly respectable environment of a London private school populated by "a set of dull, matter-of-fact young people" who are "accustomed to being rich and comfortable" (Burnett, 2009: 101). As the plot unfolds and the protagonist's fortunes decline, the school's true nature is revealed – harsher than the Indian climate, it exploits impoverished orphan girls as mere laborers. To Miss Minchin, the pupils are no longer 'children of grace' but 'children of greed' as her sole concern is material gain. The story resolves with a deus ex

machina, as a wealthy acquaintance intervenes to rescue the protagonist from the clutches of the greedy headmistress.

Boarding schools also take center stage in twentieth-century fantasy literature, often operating on a symbolic level. J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series follows a narrative trajectory similar to that of the earlier works mentioned. The protagonist, Harry, escapes his oppressive relatives, the Dursleys, to attend a private school known as Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. At Hogwarts, Harry must fight for his survival, confronting new challenges in each book posed by the dark wizard Lord Voldemort, a spirit who murdered his parents and seeks Harry's blood to restore his body. In the final instalment, Harry triumphs over his nemesis and, like the protagonists before him, achieves a happy ending.

Though significant differences in terms of both time and genre separate these works from the science fiction of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, they are linked by a common interest in the motif of boarding school.² In this work, Ishiguro depicts a society highly advanced in the medical field of cloning human embryos that promises longevity to its citizens. In the early days, these clones exist "as shadowy objects in test tubes" (Ishiguro, 2012: 401). Then a movement starts that objects to the entire way the donation programme is run. It proposes that if the clones are reared in a humane, cultivated environment, they will grow as "sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being" (Ishiguro: 401). This revolutionary movement materializes in Hailsham, a boarding school established to keep a selective number of clones away from "the worst of those horrors" (400–401). The story revolves around a love triangle between Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy from their early days at Hailsham till Ruth and Tommy complete (a euphemism used throughout the text for post-donation death).

Vorhaus (2007) argues that although *Never Let Me Go* is a story about clones, it subverts the conventional image of clone qua zombie to offer a captivating alternative. As we follow Kathy and other clones from their early years till the completion of their operations, it becomes brutally clear that "these clones carry unique names, faces, and personalities" (99). By the time Ishiguro unveils the truth, it is too late as his clones have already established themselves as ordinary humans. They

² Japanese-born British author and Noble Prize winner, Kazuo Ishiguro (1954–) sets his early works *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) in post–World War II Japan. He then delves into post-war England in *The Remains of the Day* (1989), for which he is awarded a Booker Prize. At the turn of the century, Ishiguro shifted his writing to the speculative genre, publishing *Never Let Me Go* (2005), *The Buried Giant* (2015), and *Klara and the Sun* (2021). Ishiguro has also written a collection of 16 lyrics for the Jazz singer Stacy Kent, published in the book, *The Summer We Crossed Europe in the Rain: Lyrics for Stacy Kent* (2024) by Faber & Faber.

laugh, cry, gossip, reconcile, age and, even fall in and out of love. For all its unmistakable air of science fiction, Ishiguro's tale presents a difficulty for the reader to view its clone protagonists as something other than 'normal' (99–100).

In his discussion of Ishiguro's novels, Chris Holmes (2019) contends that Ishiguro's recent transition to genres of speculative fiction in *Never Let Me Go* and *The Buried Giant* should be interpreted "as a sustained interest in the dynamic between constraint and freedom that generic conceits force upon us in any conceptualization [of] the world" (4). He describes Ishiguro as "a writer hemming his style and characters into worlds in which structures necessary for understanding have been stripped bare, reduced to the barest elements by which meaning might be still produced" (4–5). Holmes suggests that in Ishiguro's works when characters are disconnected from the frameworks of meaning that give context to their experiences, they find themselves lacking the linguistic tools necessary to articulate or fully comprehend the structures of power that dominate their lives. In this view, it is possible to exist within the world, shaped by its systems and influenced by its ideologies, without fully belonging to it – meaning one might remain unable to recognize or reveal the underlying forces that shape and drive their actions and experiences (Holmes, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Despite several studies on Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, no research has yet treated the boarding school as an important motif within the narrative, one that invites comparisons to classic literary works while highlighting its dystopian elements. Drawing on Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (1977), the present study contends that *Never Let Me Go* reimagines the traditional motif of boarding school as seen in such bildungsromans as *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield*, transforming it into a biopolitical institution focused on surveillance. Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power—particularly the mechanism of control and normalization—provides a framework for understanding how Hailsham operates as a mechanism of power. In contrast to its predecessors, where boarding schools serve as harsh testing grounds for fortitude and perseverance, molding protagonists into morally upright citizens, Hailsham functions as a disciplinary apparatus designed to create a human-like environment for clones, conditioning them to accept their inevitable fate as organ donors. Comparing Hailsham to a Victorian-era boarding school thus reveals a dystopian reversal: rather than fostering individual agency, Hailsham stifles individuality and normalizes ethical transgression, masking the brutality of its purpose with a façade of care and normalcy.

To further analyze this transformation, this study employs Foucault's concept of discourse and the medical gaze, as articulated in

The Birth of Clinic (1994). Foucault describes discourse as a collection of statements that establish a framework for discussing a specific topic within a particular historical moment context. It revolves around “the production of knowledge through language” (Hall, 1992: 291). Foucault further characterizes discourse as “the capillary structure of social cohesion and conformity” which “situates us as individuals, and silently legislates the boundaries of what is possible for us to think and say” (Davis, 1997: 71). Building on Foucault’s ideas, this essay argues that the dominant discourse in *Never Let Me Go* reinforces the institution of Hailsham and perpetuates existing power dynamics. Specifically, the study will examine the subject positions made available by this discourse as well as the roles and activities that characters can adopt for themselves or assign to others. As Gibbs (2015) notes, subjects do not merely accept discourses and their associated ideas; they also actively locate and position themselves within these conceptual frameworks, internalizing the roles defined by such discourses and understanding themselves accordingly. This essay will contend that these discursive positions are maintained through a medical gaze that reduces each character from a whole entity to a set of organs to be observed, analyzed, and categorized. Furthermore, it will propose that this gaze extends beyond institutional practices, encompassing the creation of discourses that regulate behaviors, enforce order, and exert control over individuals.

Hailsham and the Subject Positions

Similar to *Jane Eyre*, *Never Let Me Go* features a first-person female narrator who is also the protagonist. Kathy H. begins her narrative by stating, “My name is Kathy H. I’m thirty-one years old, and I’ve been a carer now for over eleven years” (Ishiguro: 3). Unlike *Jane Eyre*, however, Kathy offers no additional information about her family background. After briefly describing her job, she uses a conjunction to introduce a pivotal statement: “And I’m a Hailsham student,” which shifts the narrative focus from her identity to the institution (4). This declaration is particularly significant, as she adds that mentioning Hailsham “is enough by itself sometimes to get people’s backs up” (4). Upon invoking Hailsham, Kathy transitions into a flashback to an indistinct period referred to as “in the Juniors” when she first recalls being at the boarding school. Situated in an unspecified English countryside, Hailsham is managed by a group of individuals known as *guardians*, who resemble “the normal people outside” and reside in their separate quarters, Orangery, within the institution (109). With the exception of Madame, a guardian who maintains a cold demeanor and avoids direct interaction with the students, the Hailsham guardians are not portrayed as stereotypically cruel figures like Miss Minchin or Mr. Brocklehurst. In fact, some, such as Miss Geraldine, are described as “gentle,

soft-spoken, and always comforted you when you needed it, even when you'd done something bad" (29). Nevertheless, the guardians are officially prohibited from exhibiting partiality by "bending the rules and doing something special" for the clones like "a spontaneous hug, a secret letter, a gift" (95). Reflecting on her time at Hailsham, Kathy observes that the guardians often appeared uneasy when the topic of organ donations arose. To avoid such discomfort, she notes that the guardian meticulously timed and structured their lessons to ensure the clones were always just too young to fully grasp the implications of the information being conveyed.

The guardians refer to their clones as "students", similar to those in ordinary boarding schools, to differentiate them from non-Hailsham clones who "existed only to supply medical science" (Ishiguro: 401). Although not in any profound sense, all Hailsham students are aware that they differ from their guardians in that organ donations await them in the future. Despite this knowledge, they do not attempt to rebel or escape Hailsham; instead, they willingly participate in their subjugation. This complicity of the students (subjects) with the discursive process challenges the traditional repressive hypothesis, which equates power with repression (Habib, 2005: 770). As Foucault observes, "discourse is normative: not because disobedience and dissent are impossible but because they too are 'grammatical,' already anticipated and positioned in the hegemonic syntax of discursive power" (Davis, 1997: 71). Even the older students admit to "missing the guardians" after relocating from Hailsham to the Farm Cottages, where only an elderly man named Keffers – who "was having none of it" – oversees them (183). Despite knowing that no one would stop them, they rarely venture beyond the confines of the cottages in their initial months there, not even walking "about the surrounding countryside or wander into the nearby village" (184).

After the students arrive at the cottages, Keffers provides them with a list of chores to "keep the place up" (182). At this point, the text introduces the role of the *veteran*, an established group of older students already living in the cottages. These veterans have created a "rota" that the newcomers diligently follow (182). Unlike the newcomers, the veterans are permitted to occasionally pack their bags and go on two- or three-day excursions, an unfamiliar concept for the newcomers. Another new experience for the newcomers is observing that the majority of veterans are in relationships, "going about in a sensible sort of way, like a mother and father might do in a normal family" (188). However, the narrator notes that their mannerism – "the way they gestured to each other, sat together on sofas, even the way they argued and stormed out of rooms", seem unnatural, largely imitated from television (189).

Kathy also notes the quiet demeanor that surrounds some of the veterans when they begin training to become *carers*. This role involves "driving across the country, centre to centre, hospital to hospital, sleeping in

overnights” (Ishiguro: 317). Carers are often required to rush “between three or four ailing donors in different parts of the country” (362). While some carers are asked to stop after two or three years, others continue for as long as fourteen years. Kathy explains that the carers differ from typical nurses in that they provide non-medical services for their fellow clones. For instance, carers know “when to hang around and comfort them, when to leave them to themselves; when to listen to everything they have to say, and when just to shrug and tell them to snap out of it” (5). Although this role is not mandatory, there is a shared belief among the Hailsham students that becoming a carer is the natural path to follow. Consequently, Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth all leave the cottages within two years to serve as carers, with only Kathy continuing in the role for twelve years.

No miraculous intervention, a stroke of luck, or magic can save these clones from their ultimate fate as donors. Not even true love can grant couples a chance at deferral, as Ruth had hoped to offer Kathy and Tommy in atonement for pulling them apart. For these clones, becoming a donor is not just an inevitability but a meticulously structured process that defines their existence. Among the trio, Ruth is the first to begin donating, followed by Tommy, and both eventually become Kathy’s donors. Although the text does not explicitly state it, it is understood that the type and sequence of organs to be donated depend on each donor’s strength and condition after each operation. Ruth, one of the weakest donors, completes after her second donation, while Tommy endures four surgeries, underscoring the harsh nature of their predetermined roles.

Hailsham and the Medical Gaze

Hailsham serves a dual purpose as both a school and a clinic, requiring the students “to have some form of medical almost every week—usually up in Room 18 at the very top of the house—with stern Nurse Trisha,” (Ishiguro: 13). Additionally, the institution enforces strict rules to protect the students’ health, such as prohibiting smoking entirely. In fact, the guardians would prefer that the students never learn about smoking at all. Since this is impossible, they ensure that any mention of cigarettes is accompanied by “some sort of lecture” (107). For example, if a photograph of a famous figure holding a cigarette is shown during a lecture, “the whole lesson would grind to a halt” (197). A rumor even circulates at Hailsham that certain books, like *Sherlock Holmes*, are excluded from the library because the character smokes excessively. Whenever students find pages torn out of illustrated books, it is often because those pages depict someone smoking. The guardians go to great lengths to educate the students about the dangers of smoking, using graphic images to show the potential damage it could cause to their bodies.

These precautionary measures also extend to the realm of sexuality, not by denying its existence but by deploying “entire machinery for producing true discourses” about sex, carefully crafted to align with the demands of power (Habib, 2005: 770). When the guardians begin educating the students about sex, they tend “to run them together with talk about donations” (Ishiguro: 130–131). Kathy recalls one instance where a guardian used a life-size skeleton to demonstrate the mechanics of sex, explaining it as a matter of fact “like this was still Geography” (131). The guardian then emphasized the importance of being cautious about sexual partners, particularly with individuals outside Hailsham. Reflecting on this, Kathy notes that the students were confused about “this whole area around sex” (149). On the one hand, the guardians encouraged them not to feel ashamed of their bodies, to respect their “physical needs,” and to view sex as “a very beautiful gift as long as both people really wanted it” (150). Yet, in practice, the guardians imposed so many restrictions that it became nearly impossible for the students to engage in any sexual activity “without breaking rules” (150). Despite the rhetoric of “sex being beautiful,” the students felt they would face consequences if caught (150). They were prohibited from visiting the boys’ dorms after nine o’clock, and the same rule applied to the girls’ dorms. Additionally, classrooms were officially “out of bounds” in the evenings, as were “the areas behind the sheds” (75).

Caroll (2010) observes that there is something distinctly “queer” about the protagonists of Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*. As their queerness is not merely “commonplace” but also relates to their nonnormative heterosexuality, it may be conceivable to classify them under the extended definition of queer in theorized sense (59). Though nominally heterosexual, as Caroll (2010) goes on to argue, the protagonists of *Never let me go* seem to defy heterosexual norms, representing a heterosexual identity that heteronormativity has disempowered and marginalized. As such, they reveal the tensions and conflicts that exist both within and between heterosexuality as an identity and as an institution. Caroll (2010) concludes that the peculiar nature of Hailsham – as an imitative educational regime that teaches the clones to pass as normal – exposes the contradictions and perversity of heteronormativity as well as its performative nature.

Conclusion

Never Let Me Go (2005) comes full circle as Kathy, now thirty-one, drives around the countryside reminiscing about Hailsham. By this point, Hailsham itself has become a relic of the past, having fulfilled its mission and shut its doors, much like the fates of Ruth and Tommy. While Kathy’s role as the narrator spares her from the same appalling

end within the story, the novel's conclusion remains profoundly tragic. The final image of Kathy in tears, imagining Tommy waving to her across a field, poignantly foreshadows her impending donation procedure, underscoring the inescapable tragedy that characterizes the clones' lives. This grim destiny, however, is not specific to Hailsham's students; it is a systemic reality for all clones, regardless of their background. Yet, Hailsham's distinctive approach to education provides a lens through which this essay could examine the motif of boarding school, juxtaposing it with classic coming-of-age tales such as *Jane Eyre*, *David Copperfield*, and *A Little Princess*. It argues that Ishiguro reconfigures the traditional motif of the institution, drawing on Foucault's theories of discourse and power, to present Hailsham not merely as a setting of Bildung (formation) but as a site of care that simultaneously normalizes and controls its students. By examining the subject positions and activities constructed within Hailsham, the essay highlights how the institution sustains the "medical gaze" – a discursive mechanism that legitimizes the clones' established social roles. This gaze, pervasive throughout the novel, reinforces the systemic dehumanization of the clones, despite Hailsham's efforts to provide them with a semblance of humanity.

In conclusion, the essay shall briefly explore the significance of the novel's title. *Never Let Me Go* refers to a love song by a fictional singer, Judy Bridgewater, in which a female voice pleads with her lover not to abandon her. The title gains deeper meaning in a scene where eleven-year-old Kathy is caught by Madame while swaying softly, holding a pillow, and singing along to the song. Madame, moved to tears, interprets Kathy's actions as symbolic: the little girl, clutching the pillow and dancing to the melancholic lyrics of 'Never Let Me Go,' represents a fading world of compassion and humanity, desperately clinging to it as a new, more scientific and efficient yet harsher and crueler world emerges. This occurrence might prompt readers to reflect on what it means to be 'human' in the face of swift technological advancement, particularly as artificial intelligence pushes the limits of the conventional notion of human agency.

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De la războiul sexelor la cunoașterea de sine în *Scorpia* de Anne Tyler

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From the War of the Sexes to Self-Knowledge in Anne Tyler's *Vinegar girl*

Abstract:

The study analyzes Anne Tyler's novel, *Vinegar Girl*, as a narrative rewrite of the well-known Shakespearean comedy *The Taming of the Shrew*, part of the Hogarth–Shakespeare project, started in 2015. Two levels on which the American writer's rewriting innovates are pursued: the discursive changes due to the change in the mode (from *mimesis* to *diegesis*, in the Aristotelian sense) and those related to the recontextualization of the subject and the infusion of a contemporary, post-feminist ethos. Anne Tyler emphasizes not the undermining of the misogynistic vision that was imputed to Shakespeare, but the relationship of the female character with her own self that she discovers through the "other", the other sex. The novel gives a current response to the traditional imaginary of the struggle for domination between the sexes by proposing the formula of "similarity in difference" as a *modus vivendi* in the couple, but also in a broader, socio-cultural horizon.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Anne Tyler, *Vinegar girl*, rewriting, transmodalization, scorpion-woman, post-feminism, immigrant

Romanul lui Anne Tyler *Scorpia* (traducere și note de George Volceanov, Humanitas, 2017; în original, *Vinegar girl*, Hogarth, 2016), este probabil ultimul avatar al popularei comedii shakespeariene *Îmblânzirea scorpiei*, care a avut parte de un lung cortegiu de adaptări și preluări literare, muzicale, cinematografice, plastice. În 2015, prestigioasa editură englezească Hogarth a decis celebrarea a 400 de ani de la moartea lui Shakespeare printr-o serie de transpuneri în narativ ale câtorva dintre cele mai populare piese ale sale, care să probeze că adevărul uman din intrigile imaginate de marele Bard transcende povestea în sine, adaptându-se la fel de bine problematicei lumii contemporane și gustului actual de lectură. Sub miza acestei schimbări de ton a standardului cultural reprezentat de canonul shakespearian, proiectul Hogarth Shakespeare s-a concretizat, până acum, în șapte rescieri românești de succes, grație faptului că inițiatorii lui au convocat scriitori

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consacrați din întreaga lume. Pe lângă Anne Tyler care rescrie *Îmblânzirea scorpiei* în *Vinegar girl*, din colecție mai fac parte *Shylock is my name* de Howard Jacobson (2016), după *Neguțătorul din Veneția*, *A Gap of Time* (2015) de Jeanette Winterson care reia *Povestea de iarnă*, *Hag-Seed* (2016) de Margaret Atwood, variantă etajată, de piesă în piesă a *Furtunei*, *New boy* (2017) de Tracy Chevalier, un *Othello* reimaginat, *Macbeth* (2019) de Jo Nesbø – titluri apărute și în română la Editura Humanitas –, precum și *Dunbar* (2017) de Edward St. Aubyn, ca metabolizare a *Regelui Lear*. Rescrierea piesei *Hamlet* încredințată lui Gillian Flynn nu a fost încă publicată.

Anne Tyler construiește o intrigă pe tema căsătoriei aranjate care devine dragoste conjugală autentică. *Happy-endul* lui Shakespeare, tributar moralei și conduitei elisabetane, se susține pe norma ascultării soțului de către soția supusă și recunoscătoare, condiție a armoniei familiale și a cosmosului social, dar lasă în suspans orice idee de afecțiune. Mai degrabă, cum spune Mihaela Ursa (2012: 102), textul comediei „încurajează lectura piesei ca lecție despre frumusețile și urăciunile feminității, respectiv despre domesticirea masculină pe care o presupune transformarea fetei în femeie”. Că dragostea „îmblânzește” la propriu, că ascultarea lui Kate e izvorâtă din convingere sau – cum crede Harold Bloom (1998: 28–35) – e doar aparența prin care ea poate conduce inteligent și subtil barca familială, Shakespeare nu spune, și de aici multiplele lecturi ale finalului piesei, care i-au asigurat vitalitatea rescriptivă de-a lungul timpului. Oricare ar fi lectura corectă, în comedie exercițiul diferenței dintre sexe își spune și în final cuvântul, erotomahia rămâne implicită, cel puțin ca serios avertisment pentru o politică maritală reușită. Reimaginând pentru secolul XXI scenariul „educației sentimentale”, romanul lui Anne Tyler lasă să triumfe ideea egalitarismului în dragoste, pe când discursul Caterinei recunoștea, susținea chiar, supunerea femeii, funciar *slabă, fragilă, expusă*, în fața bărbatului *puternic, luptător, binefăcător, îngrijitor, ocrotitor, furnizor*. În condițiile acestei repartiții dublu legitimate, de datul natural și deopotrivă, de organizarea socială, „dragostea recunoscătoare” devine monedă de schimb:

Ți-e soțul tău/ Stăpânul, viața ta, ți-e paznicul,/ Ți-e capul, suveranul; te-ocrotește,/ 'Și supune trupul la munci grele și/ Pe mări și pe uscat, treaz în furtună./ Și frig, și zi și noapte, -n timp ce tu/ Stai în cămin, ți-e cald, ți-e bine./ Unic tribut îți cere: să-l iubești./ Blând să-l privești și să ascuți de el./ Infimă plată pentru-o datorie/ Atât de mare. Cum e obligat/ Supusul către prințul său, la fel/ Este soția ce-și respectă soțul./ Și când e capricioasă și ursuză,/ Neascultând dorința lui cinstită./ Ce-i ea, de nu rebelă, trădătoare/ De neiertat de tandrul ei stăpân?/ Mi-e jenă că femeile n-au minte/ Și-s gata de război în loc și cadă/ 'N genunchi, dorindu-și pacea, ori că vor/ A se impune și a stăpâni./ Când roslul lor e numai să slujească/ Și să iubească și s-asculte. Trupul/ De ce

ni-i slab, nepotrivit să lupte/ Cu greu lumii, de nu spre-a avea/ 'N acord cu ce-i
extern inima noastră? (Shakespeare, 2016: 155).

Strategiile pe care poznașul Petruccio, prefăcându-se nebun, le pune în practică pentru disciplinarea năbădăioasei Kate, devenită nevastă fără voie, ocupă în *Scorpio* faza premaritală. Noua Kate, pe numele ei întreg Kate Battista, trebuie să se lase convinsă să-l accepte de soț pe Piotr Șcerbacov, asistentul de cercetare al tatălui ei, asistent care, în condițiile expirării vizei, are nevoie de o căsătorie de conveniență pentru a rămâne în State și în laboratorul profesorului. Interesele sunt duble, presiunea la fel: pe orfanul Piotr, care a luat drumul Americii, nimic nu-l mai așteaptă în Rusia natală, nici măcar prietenii conjuncturali, iar pentru marginalizatul doctor Battista, plecarea colaboratorului ar însemna întreruperea proiectului de cercetare a bolilor autoimune, ce pare să ajungă la liman când nimeni nu mai credea aceasta. Lui Kate, fata de douăzeci și nouă de ani, retrasă de la studii și prizonieră a multiplelor roluri – administrator al casei, gospodină, babysitter și gardian pentru sora adolescentă, grădinar de plăcere, când nu e la slujba obscură de asistent de educatoare –, i se propune, așadar, o căsătorie „pe hârtie” și temporară, care nu i-ar schimba cu nimic viața, nici măcar domiciliul. I se propune chiar mult mai puțin decât o căsătorie, „un trafic cu carne umană”, după spusele ei, în urma căruia toți se aranjează sau rămân să se bucure de vechiul *statu quo*, iar ea e folosită, vândută, obiectualizată. Devoalarea procesului prin care Kate devine „victimă fericită” a alianței interesate dintre Battista și Piotr este piesa de rezistență a acestui *romance* reținut, infuzat subtil de problematici actuale precum statutul imigrantului, corectitudinea politică, ecologie, postfeminism. Un *exemplum* grăitor pentru avantajul modului narativ față de cel dramatic, avantaj care constă în focalizarea unui discurs nefocalizat în hipotext, respectiv în introducerea punctului de vedere al protagonistei. Acolo unde Shakespeare păstrează tăcerea asupra motivațiilor Caterinei, Anne Tyler recurge la psihologizarea lui Kate prin monologul interior și prin retrospecțiile care reconstituie istoricul său familial și afectiv. Absența arhetipului matern (preluată din piesa lui Shakespeare care nu pomenește nimic despre mama celor două surori), maturizarea forțată, ca și locul secund ocupat în grația paternă sunt elementele care o psihanalizează, explicând prin complexul neubirii răceala și cerebralitatea ei intimidantă, pulverizarea sinelui, starea de provizorat: „Nu are. Nici un. Plan” (Tyler, 2016: 22). O orfană sub aspect spiritual care, întâlnindu-se cu un orfan în sens propriu, avid de apartenență socială și familială, ajunge să se cunoască pe sine, să spargă carapacea celorlalți și a ideilor preconcepute despre ei și, în final, să se vindece. Rezultatul introducerii

motivațiilor este un personaj *valorizat* (Genette, 1982: 393¹), mult mai simpatic, mai uman, mai transparent și mai apropiat cititorului decât cel al textului prim.

Arhetipal, femeia „scorpie”, „harpie”, „talpa iadului”, „diavoliță”, „pisică sălbatică”, „viespe” – ca să selectăm doar câteva dintre denominativele ultimei traduceri a piesei – reprezintă fața inferioară și socială a demoniei metafizice a femininului, cu aspectul său devirilizant, arată Evola (2006, 242–249), ceea ce explică atemporalitatea acestui tip de imaginar erotic. Fundalul priorităților și al mentalului colectiv al epocii elisabetane oferă chiar motive de augmentare a profilului scorpiei care însă, privită de pe cealaltă parte a versantului, devine ilustrarea ideii de revoltă împotriva supunerii necondiționate față de soț în instituția căsătoriei, idee preluată după modelul feudal al relației suzeran–vasal. Spiritul ei insurgent, clamarea dreptului de alegere, care anunță emanciparea femeii Renașterii, eșuează lamentabil și inevitabil în lațul dresorului medieval, dar, în mod sigur, ar avea câștig de cauză în vremurile moderne. Este intuiția lui Anne Tyler, care, transplantând-o în secolul XXI în persoana lui Kate Battista, îi recunoaște pionieratul în materie.

Kate nu e o scorpie decât cel mult pentru sora sa Bunny („*una bitcha*”), pe care o strunește în pornirile ei erotico-mondene, ci o *vinegar girl*, cum sună în original titlul romanului, sau o „fată oțetită”, cum o numește la un moment dat Piotr; a se citi „critică”, „dificilă”, de fapt cu o personalitate pronunțată, lipsită complet de ipocrizie, ceea ce, departe de orice notă peiorativă, o fixează în modul atitudinal contemporan al femeii mature și independente *versus* „gâsculița” obsedată de relații romantice. În locul construcției temperamentale și caracterologice a scorpiei shakespeariene, Anne Tyler propune determinări exterioare, construind un personaj excedat de rolul său dublu, de femeie și bărbat în casă. La fel, „ciudățenia” comportamentului lui Petruccio cel vulgar, violent și disprețuitor față de reguli, dar pitoresc, își găsește echivalentul funcțional în Piotr prin *motivul străinului* corelat cu cel al *savantului distrat*. Se creează astfel premisele unui permanent ecart între, pe de o parte, ceea ce înseamnă civilitatea și „omul de lume” american, pe care mătușa Thelma le întruchipează perfect, respectiv directetea de-a dreptul bolovănoasă a sufletului rusesc, de cealaltă parte. Nu poate fi trecută cu

¹ „La valorisation d'un personnage consiste à lui attribuer, par voie de transformation pragmatique ou psychologique, un rôle plus important et/ou plus «simpatique», dans le système de valeurs de l'hypertexte, que ne lui en accordait l'hypertexte.”

vederea nici prezența, în *macrotema confruntărilor identitare*, a elementelor de critică socială implicate de dezvăluirea politeției-ipocriziei și a distanței umane pe care societatea americană o menține în ciuda familiarităților de limbaj. Intriga se dezvoltă și pe direcția opoziției dintre nativi și imigranți, dintre „acasă” și „străinătate”, iar personajele viitorului cuplu intră în dialog și ca fenotipuri culturale. Lectura în cheie imagologică nu a fost ignorată; prin Kate și Piotr, consideră Pia Brânzeu (2022: 149), „Estul și Vestul stau față în față, gata de luptă, pentru ca în cele din urmă, mariajul fericit al celor două personaje să sugereze că se poate ajunge la pace fără sacrificii prea mari. Doar cu împlânzirea propriei imagini despre celălalt”.

Kate poartă masca unei amazoane moderne, neatrase de proiectul clasic al feminității – flirt, familie, anturaj obiectual specific. Pentru toți cei care o cunosc e o mașinărie ambigen, absorbită de responsabilitatea pentru viețile altora și de rutina domestică, cu o existență guvernată de legea minimalismului și a eficienței: cina e invariabil compusă dintr-un piure cu carne de vită, bine dozat caloric, părul ei e o vâltoare indisciplinată fiindcă urăște flecăreala de la coafor, hainele ei sunt comode, de culori închise și indistincte. La grădiniță i se reproșează că nu are „tact, autocontrol și diplomație” pentru că, până și în relația cu copii, spune lucrurilor pe nume și îi tratează de la egal la egal. Și-a întrerupt studiile de biologie după ce s-a contrazis public cu un profesor. O ființă retrasă, introvertită, dar cu o acerbă nevoie de dragoste sau măcar de prietenie:

În fiecare zi mergea la lucru pe jos și se simțea complet, iremediabil, singură. I se părea că toți ceilalți trecători au pe cineva, un companion cu care să râdă, căruia să-i facă o confesiune, căruia să-i tragă un ghiont în coaste (Tyler, 2016: 70).

Succesul cuplului imaginat de Anne Tyler stă în descoperirea asemănării în diferență, diferențele sociale și culturale care le insolitează relația și asemănarea dintre două caractere puternice, aparent autosuficiente, care împărtășesc *fair-play*-ul, directetea limbajului, disprețul conveniențelor, stângăcia socială și autenticitatea comportamentului. Principiul oglinzirii în persoana celuilalt are același rol pedagogic precum în cuplul shakespearian. Caterina recunoaște în Petruccio un caracter dominant, mai puternic decât al ei (o „scorpie” *versus* un „scorpion”) și e nevoită să se schimbe într-o mielușcă căci își realizează prin el propriile excese și imaginea exterioară repulsivă. La fel, perechea contemporană, conștientizându-și încrucișat carențele sociale și afective, ajunge să stăpânească retorica amoroasă și să înțeleagă rolul comunicării, al deschiderii față de oameni, ca și vulnerabilitățile celuilalt sex.

În sistemul ideologic al simetriei inverse pe care îl propune rescrierea, ne-am aștepta ca discursul supușeniei Caterinei din finalul comediei, care i-a adus lui Shakespeare acuza de misoginism radical, să-și găsească replica într-unul apăsător feminist. Deși marchează transformarea eroinei sale în aceeași schemă binară a inversării rolurilor de gen dintre ea și sora ei, dintre „scorpie” și „înger”, Anne Tyler face procesul sensibilității și fragilității masculine pe care stereotipurile culturale și antropologice le împiedică să se manifeste. Demonstrația de forță a masculului alfa în problema autorității e contrabalansată de discursul empatic al lui Kate, centrat pe ideea presiunii pe care o suportă bărbatul, sexul „discriminat”, mai expus decât femeia, pentru că – am spune în termeni actuali – societatea, interzicându-i exprimarea inteligenței emoționale, îl obligă la un comportament schizoid:

E greu [s.a.] să fii bărbat. Te-ai gândit vreodată la asta? Bărbații cred că trebuie să țină ascuns tot ce-i deranjează. Ei cred că trebuie să lase impresia că se descurcă, că sunt stăpâni pe situație; n-au curajul să dea pe față ceea ce simt cu adevărat. Indiferent dacă îi doare ceva, sunt disperați, suferă cumplit, sunt cu inima grea, dacă le e dor de casă sau dacă îi apasă povara unui păcat uriaș, întunecat, sau dacă-s pe cale să înregistreze un eșec răsunător, ei nu spun decât: „Ah, mi-e bine. Totu-i minunat”. Sunt cu mult mai puțin liberi decât femeile, dacă stai să te gândești. Femeile studiază încă din leagăn sentimentele oamenilor; își perfecționează radarul — intuiția sau empatia sau chestia aia interpersonală, zi să-i zic. Ele își dau seama cum stau lucrurile în realitate, pe când, bărbații se împotmolesc în competițiile lor sportive, în războaie, în lupta pentru faimă și succes. E ca și cum bărbații și femeile ar trăi în două țări diferite! „Nu dau înapoi”, cum spui tu; îi fac și lui loc în țara mea. Îi ofer spațiu într-un loc unde amândoi să putem fi noi înșine. Pentru Dumnezeu, Bunny, las-o și tu mai *moale* [s.a.]! (Tyler, 2016: 237–238).

Dincolo de imaginarea unui univers ficțional complet nou, romanul lui Anne Tyler își omagiază sursa printr-un mecanism de întreținere a reperelor textului canonic. Dubletul femeii dezirabile și al celei dizgrațiate și în ochii tatălui, și în cei ai pețitorilor, distanța dintre „mască” și „față”, ce se ilustrează prin dinamica binomului drăgălășenie – severitate în portretizarea celor două surori, simbolistica mâncării sau renumirea femeii ca semn al accederii ei la o nouă identitate prin „modelarea”, voită sau nu, a bărbatului (celebrul „Sărută-mă, Kate/Katia!”) sună cunoscut lectorului care l-a parcurs în prealabil pe Shakespeare. E adevărat că pe schema fabulei cunoscute se altoiesc la tot pasul contratexte ce marchează răsturnări de ideologie, cum se întâmplă în privința relației dintre jocurile dragostei și consumarea mâncării. Pe lângă limbajul violenței (aplicat, indirect, slugilor, dar ca un *memento* pentru proaspăta soție), Petruccio „comunică” cu Caterina prin limbajul abstenenței, privând-o de somn și înfometând-o. „Restricționând accesul

nevastei îndărătnice la mâncare – scrie Dana Percec în prefața ultimei traduceri în românește a piesei – reușește să-i potolească umorile”, căci, invocând medicina galenică, el susține că „firii înfierbântate a scorpiei nu-i pică bine bucatele trecute prin foc, ci doar cele de la polul opus, reci și umede” (2016: 12). Anne Tyler insistă însă asupra austerității alimentare a familiei de origine, imaginea ei fiind piureul de carne vită, cu aspectul dizgrațios de sos maroniu, și mărul-desert servite invariabil la cină în toate zilele săptămânii, după o regulă impusă de profesorul Battista și agreată de Kate. Lista de cumpărături mereu aceeași, redactată în ordinea în care produsele se găsesc așezate în supermarket, sandviciurile și cârnații de vită, care sunt mâncarea de peste zi, vorbesc despre percepția strict utilitaristă a hranei. Excentricitatea vine dinspre Bunny care hotărăște să se facă vegană (aluzie la abundența de fripturi shakespeareane), dar se integrează în aceeași zonă dietetică, a hrănirii, în care alimentele sunt doar substanțe nutritive necesare, nicidecum parte a unei culturi culinare. Piotr e cel ce va sparge șablonul cinelor standard, va aduce în casă ciocolata (chiar dacă amăruie), puiul de la KFC sau va pregăti o pulpă de porc pe pat de legume și stropită cu sirop de arțar. Și tot el, obligat la exhibiție de controlul celor de la Imigrări, va deschide calea meselor festive și a ieșirii la restaurant. Descoperirea plăcerii de a mânca și a convivialității scandează evoluția relației de cuplu, a lui Kate în special, cea care, până în momentul când își recunoaște sentimentele, se încrâncenează să respecte consemnul căsătoriei formale: „Nimeni nu trebuie să fie mort după nimeni” (Tyler, 2016: 126). Rafinarea mâncării este, de fapt, simptomul cel mai evident al descoperirii frumuseții și diversității vieții de către o ființă minimalistă și utilitaristă. Pe măsură ce intriga avansează, viața capătă gust și culoare, acreala oțetului și amăreala ciocolatei se îndulcesc cu miere, iar proverbul care zice că „poți să prinzi mai multe muște cu miere decât cu oțet” (*Ibidem*) se vede confirmat de poveste. O poveste nu a îmblânzirii, ci a îndulcirii scorpiei sau varianta modernă a fabulei umanizării / reumanizării prin eros.

Rescrierea lui Anne Tyler metabolizează până la limita ultimă capitalul cultural al *Îmblânzirii scorpiei* cu topoi săi consacrați: căsătoria aranjată, femeia tentantă / femeia-scorpie, autoritatea patriarhală, viclenia feminină, îmblânzirea prin dragoste. Am putea spune că scenariul shakespearean al adversității amoroase e doar hârtia de turnesol pe care se devoalează, de fapt, punctele nevralgice ale existenței omului actual: singurătatea alergătorului de cursă lungă, nevoia de a fi apreciat pentru ceea ce ești și nu pentru ceea ce e convenabil social, vulnerabilitatea ce se ascunde în spatele platoșei de femeie puternică și de bărbat puternic; un bildungsroman despre reconstrucția sinelui prin autocunoașterea la care conduce iubirea. Cartea a fost apreciată și ca o reușită comedie de moravuri și de caracter, afinitățile venind mai degrabă dinspre romanele

lui Jane Austen, cu subtilele lor intrigi matrimoniale, decât dinspre procedeele comice complet lipsite de plauzibilitate ale lui Shakespeare (Grigore, 2017). I se poate imputa aspectul *light* al conflictului și urmarea schemei previzibile a *romance*-ului (amintind de comedia romantică *Cartea verde* regizată de Peter Weir, cu Gerard Depardieu și Andie MacDowell în rolurile principale) care o plasează într-o poziție de minorat față de textul canonic, dar și față de alte rescrieri elaborate din cadrul proiectului Hogarth Shakespeare, precum *Pui de cotoroață* sau *Shylok este numele meu*, dar reușita autoarei stă în metamorfoza tipologiilor shakespeareiene astfel încât acestea să devină perfect credibile într-un scenariu și un ethos contemporan.

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Referențialitate culturală și conceptuală în teoriile lui Virgil Nemoianu

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Cultural and Conceptual Referentiality in the Theories of Virgil Nemoianu

Abstract:

According to the Romanian theorist Virgil Nemoianu, the evolution of thought compels us to consider literature as interconnected with the changes in perception that occur everywhere in society and human history. The way the author chooses to express their ideas (with balance and using a methodology of details reminiscent of great cultural and historical events) reveals a classic equidistance related to the changes taking place within culture. The Romanian professor proposes a re-examination of past centuries, as well as creating a literary and critical mapping that allows us to observe the oscillations between the phenomenology of modernity and that of anti-modernity. This methodological detail can be seen in the studies dedicated to *Minor Romanticism*. As a relevant detail, *The Taming of Romanticism* is the study that emphasizes this perspective of cultural transformation, the revising of an era, but also the blurring of a perennial dominant trend – the exposure within literary texts of European romanticism in relation to *mimesis* and *the idyllic literary description*.

The theorist Virgil Nemoianu notes in works such as *Micro-harmony*, *The Taming of Romanticism*, *The Triumph of Imperfection*, or *Postmodernism and Cultural Identities* historical facts, but does not judge the pejorative or historical accidents. Also, he does not draw hierarchies or destructive judgments, but examines subtle details, adjacent to literary / philological culture. The description of the cultural collage created by Professor Nemoianu becomes a map that notes personal opinions, but also an overview: objectively measuring the argumentative opinions of other specialists in the philological field. We believe that this is primarily an evidence of a special balance – which European academics forums tends to respect, especially regarding the working method, theories, and the investigation of literary text describing the European Romantic Centuries.

Keywords: degraded / minor *Romanticism*, canonicity, historical filters, conceptual delimitations

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Acceptând presupoziția conform căreia cărțile lui Virgil Nemoianu pot fi citite în cheia unui *antimodernism*, înțelegem că teoreticianul român se opune în primul rând unei agresivități pe care progresul (social și tehnologic) o imprimă, în anumite circumstanțe, asupra unui cadru echilibrat al tradiției și învățării de tip filologic. Teoretizările sale sunt un act de intensă reflecție, mărturie a deschiderii către detaliu – spre transcrierea unei lumi culturale care își modifică în permanență structurile de sens prin raportare directă la amprenta istoriei. O observație recurentă este aceea că studiile literare ale profesorului român examinează cu o aplecare spre detalii (vreme de șase decade) literatura canonică europeană. Descriind și examinând angrenajele transformării sociale în secolele romantice, gesturile culturale, opiniile și exemplele de notații literare biografice, Virgil Nemoianu va accentua funcțiile unei lecturi conceptuale, repetative, circulare și care resemantizează perpetuu identitatea culturală asumată a unui lector specializat – care poate înțelege atemporalitatea literară ca pe o manifestare ciclică.

Un argument subiectiv și sensibil – pe care Nemoianu îl explică în 1971, în capitolul *Câteva rosturi ale literaturii*, din volumul *Calmul valorilor* – vine să dezvolte o astfel de idee (în fond, și ea romantică și purtând o rezonanță culturală specifică):

Literatura este cea care oferă desfășurarea deplină a tuturor virtuților umanului, ea pornește de la realitatea existentă și o completează creator, desfășurând gama largă a acestor posibilități. Nu putem să nu întuim aici, ca mai înainte, îmbogățirea ființei umane prin punerea ei într-un context mai amplu, lămuritor și el în fond. În jurul acestei valori umane centrale gravitează aproape toate celelalte: funcția de cunoaștere, funcția educativă și politică, funcția morală, cea psihologică și cea sociologică și așa mai departe. Ele toate sunt, în fond, părți integrante ale caracterului de creație umană și ale universului de care vorbeam (Nemoianu, 1971: 8).

Acest extras de text, conținut în volumul *Calmul valorilor*, ne determină să realizăm o comparație raportată la teoretizările expuse de către un alt reputat filolog, profesorul Adrian Marino. În interiorul volumului *Comparatisme et théorie de la littérature*, publicat în Franța, în anul 1988, Adrian Marino propune discutarea literaturii universale prin prisma unor definiții sintetice, globale și fenomenologice axate pe trei direcții: unitate conceptuală, patrimoniu comun al umanității și identitate specifică – structurală, morfologică și fenomenologică (Marino, 1998: 1–28). Cele trei axe de definire a literaturii sunt descrise de către Adrian Marino cu următoarele argumente:

a) Literatura universală - una și indivizibilă - în calitate de concept (logic) - se compune din totalitatea sa din «suma» literaturilor, fără excepție. Acest punct

de vedere, care consideră literaturile din întreaga lume ca un tot, se detașează radical de perspectiva istoricistă și pozitivistă a literaturii. [...]

b) Literatura universală - ca sumă cantitativă și calitativă, constituie patrimoniul comun, reprezentativ și exemplar al umanității. Este «Panteonul» (sau «Pandemoniul») Literaturii, consemnat în «bibliotecile ideale» ale «întregului neam omenesc», ale marilor «clasici» de pretutindeni și dintotdeauna. Seria din ce în ce mai lungă a «istoriilor» și a «dicționarelor» operelor și personajelor din literatura universală se străduie să identifice și să inventarieze - de aproape sau de departe - tocmai acest patrimoniu comun. Ideea esențială este contribuția tuturor literaturilor lumii la «depozitul legal» al umanității. Fiecare literatură aparține lumii întregi, este un bun comun al tuturor popoarelor.

c) Prin universalitatea sa, literatura universală este un fenomen comun întregii umanități: identitatea sa esențială (structurală, morfologică, fenomenologică) necesită și justifică o definiție teoretică a literaturii în ansamblul ei (Marino, 1998: 28).

Deși Adrian Marino se revelează, în expunerea pasajului de mai sus, ca un mai idealist promotor al literaturii, profesorul Virgil Nemoianu apelează în volumul *Micro-Harmony: The Growth and Uses of the Idyllic Model in Literature* (Nemoianu, 1977) la detalii istoricizante ce devin instrumente de înțelegere a relației dintre mediu și literatură. Exersându-se, din tinerețe, ca un profesionist al sociocriticii și istoriei literare europene, Nemoianu nu va ezita să examineze cadrele spațiale și istorice ale secolelor al XVIII-lea și al XIX-lea. Provincia culturală, dar și spațiul etnic, cel al tabieturilor și al vieții personale, sunt astfel considerate detalii esențiale, care ajută la definirea literaturilor locale și naționale. Observațiile din zona antropologiei sunt dublate de curiozitatea față de marile teme ale culturii occidentale, iar prin aceasta, studiile sale dedicate literaturii și culturii europene devin fresce care examinează nu doar detaliul canonic oferit lumii de scriitori erudiți, ci și micile variațiuni culturale care ornamează perioada de sfârșit de Romantism european.

Fără dubii, înțelegem că pentru teoreticianul Virgil Nemoianu spațiul culturii nu poate fi definit decât ca o interesantă platformă, găzduind o imensitate de idei aflate în circulație și coexistând perpetuu. Accentul se pune, în cărțile sale, pe înțelegerea ideii de literatură care subliniază și anunță existența unor forțe convergente care definesc socialul, politicul, economicul și artisticul. Prin prisma acestui proces de revelare a sensului pe care literatura îl are în educarea unor societăți, expresia de creație capătă o altă valoare estetică. La contactul cu argumentele studiilor sale, cititorul observă o socio-critică și o filosofie a echilibrului de idei. Pe lângă aceasta, în repetate rânduri *criticul* Virgil Nemoianu se transformă în *scriitorul* Virgil Nemoianu, iar scriitorul își alege subiectele cu o voluptate care transpare nestăpânită în desfășurarea argumentărilor sale. Cu tot ceea ce revelează (în materie de subiecte literare dezbătute și examinate critic), în volume precum: *Structuralismul* (Nemoianu, 1967), *O teorie a secundarului* (Nemoianu, 1977) sau

Calmul valorilor (Nemoianu, 1971) prezintă un mediu intelectual de rezonanță și, chiar, de reacție, o continuă chestionare a problemelor legate de o evoluție culturală și literară europeană. Spațiul identității europene este astfel văzut de către profesorul român ca o geografie a valorilor pe care cultura americană s-a străduit inițial să o conserve și să o imite, iar mai apoi să o depășească printr-o transformare identitară proprie – începută încă înainte de al Doilea Război Mondial.

Într-un interviu acordat în 2003 lui Cristian Bădiliță – și inserat ulterior în volumul *Nostalgia Europei* (Bădiliță, Urian 2023: 67 – 73), Virgil Nemoianu afirma faptul că există o tranziție evidentă – dinspre o continuitate culturală europeană – către o cristalizare a unui model cultural american nou (preluat, mai ales în țările fostului bloc comunist, chiar înainte de anii '90). Punctând idei pregnante privind manifestarea influenței americane, profesorul român va discuta despre detaliile cele mai banale care au determinat emergența modelului cultural american. Se remarcă în discursul său descrierea unei societăți europene plictisite, ca și tendința acesteia spre consumul de *iconic american patterns* – alături de degradarea valorilor sale perene și tradiționale.

Răspunzând întrebării „*La ce nivel se manifestă această influență americană?*”, teoreticianul Virgil Nemoianu va formula implicit o observație socio-critică relevantă – menită să arate faptul că imitația culturală este determinată de supremația politică și economică a spațiului ce o dictează:

Organizarea economică, întâi, principiile politice îndată după ea, apoi (cu furie auto-destructivă) modalitățile culturale. Adică filmele, moda, bucătăria, vocabularul, scrierea ziarelor, viața practică, preferințele de lectură. Exemplul cu filmele este prea evident ca să-l mai repet și eu. Dar mă uit pe listele cu *best-seller-uri* din Franța, Germania, Anglia, Italia, Spania. Jumătate sunt traduceri de la americani, iar cealaltă jumătate sunt imitații ieftine locale. Dar să luăm și un caz de ne-imitare: religia. În America, religia, cu toate dificultățile ei, cu toate conflictele interioare, e sănătoasă și puternică. Europeanii (cei din vest, dar cât va mai dura până când acest *pattern* le va fi aplicat și celor din est) au renunțat parcă definitiv la religie. Au mai rămas câteva ecouri întârziate, câteva straturi nestructurate de religiozitate. Apoi, în America există în continuare un respect (paradoxal, dacă vrei!) al tradiției (în muzica populară, în muzealitate). În Europa acestea s-au dus pe apă în jos. Cel mai caracteristic și surprinzător lucru mi se pare, de fiecare dată când mă întorc în Europa, plictiseala și scârba europenilor față de ei înșiși (Bădiliță, Urian, 2023: 67–73).

Potrivit lui Nemoianu, evoluția gândirii ne obligă să socotim literatura ca fiind interconectată cu schimbările de percepție care se realizează pretutindeni în societate și în istorie. Felul în care autorul alege să-și exprime ideile (cu echilibru și uzând de o metodică a detaliilor care amintesc de mari evenimente culturale și istorice) relevă o

clasică echidistanță raportată la modificările care au loc în interiorul culturii. Profesorul român propune o reexaminare a secolelor trecute, dar și o cartografiere literară și critică care ne permite să observăm pendulările existente între fenomenologia modernității și cea a antimodernității. Acest detaliu metodologic poate fi observat în studiile dedicate Romantismului Minor. *Îmblânzirea romantismului* este un asemenea macro-studiu care accentuează această perspectivă a transformării culturale, a redimensionării unei epoci, dar și a estompării unei tendințe dominante perene – expunerea în interiorul textelor literare a romantismului european prin raportare la *mimesis* și *descrierea idilizantă* (Nemoianu, 2024: 200–294).

Teoreticianul Virgil Nemoianu notează faptul istoric, dar nu judecă peiorativul sau accidente istorice, nu trasează topuri sau judecăți distructive, ci examinează și notează detalii subtile, adiacente culturii literare și filologice. Colajul cultural la care recurge profesorul Nemoianu se transformă, de cele mai multe ori, într-o hartă ce notează păreri personale, dar și o viziune de ansamblu: obiectivă, măsurând argumentativ opiniile altor specialiști din domeniul filologic. Fără doar și poate, considerăm că aceasta este, în primul rând, dovada unui echilibru intelectual pe care critica universitară europeană tinde să îl respecte; mai ales în privința metodei de lucru, a teoriilor și a investigării textului literar acest echilibru argumentativ oferă consistență teoretică.

În linii ample, putem judeca faptul că întreaga operă a lui Virgil Nemoianu este un jurnal al ideii de înțelegere a limitelor culturale, o căutare a unor noi semnificații în interiorul unor texte vechi, dar care dețin un prestigiu canonic de netăgăduit.

Sunt situații în care promotorul *canonului ospitalier* (Nemoianu, Royal, 1991) poate fi considerat deopotrivă un intelectual modern și tradiționalist (antimodernul – ce discută relaxat despre o letargie a spiritului, dar și despre o transformare spirituală care reduce literatura la structuri descriptive sau naratologice de tipul celor dictate de *corectitudinea politică*). Păcatele *supraexpunerii critice* nu sunt judecate de către Nemoianu chiar în termenii unei superficialități în trend, ci sunt indexate la capitolul tematică ultra-specializată în studiul literar. Teoria sa este aceea că studiile critice de specialitate au evoluat spre direcții de nișă – la fel ca textele literare pe care marile case de editură le promovează cu frenezie și entuziasm.

În cazul textelor eseistice, observăm că atât în cele dedicate literaturii române, cât și în cele care examinează literatura clasică europeană există o concentrare spre aspecte ale culturii minore, locale sau etnice (Nemoianu, 2004: 152–199). Corelând această preocupare a studierii marginalului în raport cu centralitatea secolelor trecute, se accentuează ideea de *obiectiv critic preexistent*.

În acest punct al cercetării, suntem de părere că tocmai *obiectivul critic preexistent* în aproape toate teoretizările lui Virgil Nemoianu se sprijină pe regândirea structurală, tematică și istorică a secolelor romantice europene, dar și a ideii de *modernitate conceptuală evolutivă* (Nemoianu, 2011: 33–99). Pe măsură ce teoriile profesorului român au în intenție să ofere exemple ale interdependențelor tematice, filosofice și sociologice existente în interiorul unor nuclee literare europene, se observă și o țesătură structurală a ideilor sale care pare a se repeta de la o lucrare la alta. Perspectiva unei literaturi de panoramare a secolelor culturale europene oferă instrumente de înțelegere a dimensiunii evolutive a operei literare canonice, astfel, putem deduce că preocuparea constantă pentru regândirea Romantismului european conduce în mod natural spre înțelegerea unui tip de canon constituit în jurul ideii de *decadență romantică*, denumită cu un termen mult mai nuanțat: *romantism minor european* dar și: *romantism reinventat sau kitsch de secol XIX* (Nemoianu, 2011: 383–456).

De aici par a se desprinde derivate subtile ale unui studiu care ne introduce într-o teorie literară ce face, de multe ori, abstracție de biografismul autorilor, dar și de psihanalizele care disecă opera în căutarea sensurilor. Tocmai fiindcă examinarea contextelor culturale și socio-istorice oferă o mai relevantă hartă a pluri-perspectivismelor, a mesajelor și a semnificațiilor macro-textuale, aceasta este o metodă de examinare literară preferată și des întrebuințată de către profesorul Virgil Nemoianu.

Și în teoriile sale de dată recentă, tema culturii minore trimite analogic spre un spațiu în care individul încearcă să se afirme în permanență, fie din punct de vedere social, politic sau educațional, fie încercând o mimare sau o copiere a marilor modele culturale. Deși dezbate ideea de provincie culturală, corelând-o în mod pozitiv cu cea legată de expansiunea sau dezvoltarea culturală, Nemoianu creează totuși și un tablou al simptomaticei provincialității culturale. Cu aceste două mari talere ale argumentării, autorul *Microarmoniei* reevaluează mituri ale literaturii feerice, dar și ideea de Kitsch literar / romantic. Iată un argument care trimite spre teoriile ce examinează spațiul social care determină apariția unei literaturi marginale, derivată din marile genuri ale romantismului:

Această fugară descriere a naturii și dezvoltării modelului social în literatură (dacă recunoaștem utilitatea sa literară) ar trebui să încurajeze investigarea altor modele, în alte contexte. Astfel, în secolul al XX-lea, întâlnim deseori un alt model social, cel al «societății pestrițe» - «motley society» - (la Waugh și Graham Green, Hemingway și T.S. Eliot și, chiar mai frecvent, în proza de cel de-al doilea război mondial), o societate rezultată din paradoxala alăturare a membrilor ruși de grupurile lor sociale, a unor indivizi în derivă, desprinși din

diverse curente intelectuale, «organizații» de mișcări intermitent, oscilând între exploziile de energie și inerția ursuză. Acest model, și probabil, multe altele au fost analizate ca atare; de fapt, în acest moment, o discuție asupra naturii modelului idilic trebuie să fie, provizoriu, acceptată ca punct de referință pentru toate celelalte (Nemoianu, 2003: 24).

O sumă de idei analitice care acordă interes macro-imaginei culturale (și implicit fenomenului identitar-cultural) pare a se fi cristalizat și în argumentările continuatoare legate de expunerile socio-culturale care pot fi observate și în *O teorie a secundarului* (*A Theory of the Secondary: Literature, Progress, and Reaction*).

Publicat în SUA în 1989, la 12 ani după apariția în spațiul american a primei ediții a volumului *Microarmonia* (*Micro-Harmony: The Growth and Uses of the Idyllic Model in Literature*), volumul *O teorie a secundarului* pare a pregăti termenii discuției privind înțelegerea postmodernismul cultural. Extrapolându-și argumentele și spre „o re-sintetizare a viziunii” asupra istoriei și societății care se modernizează în fiecare secol într-o altă manieră, Virgil Nemoianu devine prin aceste demersuri teoretice un artizan al unei narațiuni care precedă un text teoretic dedicat identității literare și culturale. Se observă faptul că argumentațiile despre mutații istorice și identitare anticipează teorii ale înțelegerii procesului de dezvoltare și declin al unor epoci culturale europene extrem de afectate de reducționisme și clișeizare (romantismul și postmodernismul).

Deși studiile sale literare poartă însemnul unei concepții legată, mai degrabă, de șansele și reușitele istorice ale culturii, totuși transpare ideea de organicitate și ciclicitate care presupune și un permanent declin și o eternă reînnoire mentală a spiritului critic.

Atunci când textele lui Virgil Nemoianu expun, prin nuanțare, un declin al unor idei și principii istorice (declinul Romantismului european înspre Biedermeier și Kitsch, ca și resemantizarea avangardelor și regândirea Modernității prin filtrele istoriei și ale opozițiilor principiale, etice și estetice), aspectul acestora este unul expozitiv, de explicitare – în manieră aproape didactică. Se poate observa faptul că volume precum *Microarmonia* și *Îmblânzirea romantismului* sunt, totodată, capabile de a recompune lumi aflate într-o vizibilă transformare istorică și identitară. Ele reconstituie un canon al Romantismului propagat între masele europene, în grupuri sociale diferite de cele ale marilor saloane literare europene. În bună măsură, acest procedeu hermeneutic impune o nouă manieră de judecare a literaturilor – și astfel se realizează și o reexaminare a canonul literar. Dincolo de aceasta, teoreticianul instrumentează o critică rațională, care descrie evoluția și tranziția de la o etapă literară și culturală la alta (Nemoianu, 2011: 383). În fiecare dintre cercetările sale, teoreticianul face vizibile istoriile culturale mai puțin

cunoscute nespecialistului, fenomenologiile, gusturile estetice și doctrinele epocilor apuse. Cu această manieră teoretică, discutarea *contextului* cultural devine aproape la fel de interesantă ca literatura propriu-zisă. Adiacent, dinspre istoria secolelor culturale apuse, se profilează un model de înțelegere a declinului cultural și a nevoii de reevaluare a literaturii genetice.

Evident, ideile enunțate în teoriilor lui Virgil Nemoianu ne conduc spre observarea faptului că literatura lumii poate fi un instrument care are capacitatea de a aproxima cultura și educația unei societăți viitoare (Nemoianu, 2011: 310). Este de reținut și faptul că opinia profesorului român pare a fi aceea că un canon academic respectabil poate stabili care sunt literaturile globaliste care adună atribute demne de a fi plasate într-o paradigmă canonică europeană. La fel de important este și faptul că în interiorul teoretizărilor pe care Virgil Nemoianu le realizează pe marginea postmodernismului se regăsește și ideea că un canon cultural actual poate stabili ce manifestări artistice sau literare (ale viitorului) pot produce o culturalizare și o educare accelerată a maselor.

Ca un detaliu monografic, să-l privim pe Virgil Nemoianu în calitate de antimodern (atunci când constatăm criticismul său, spiritul de analiză, meticulozitatea de care dă dovadă) poate fi și un act de afirmare a supremației sale intelectuale, enciclopedice, dar și un comentariu care poate părea un afront teoretic.

Folosim, la rândul-ne, această sintagmă a *antimodernismului paradoxal* – care deja a făcut istorie sub semnătura altui reputat teoretician al culturii filologice – Antoine Compagnon (Compagnon, 2005) pentru a marca o sumă de atribute ce îl definesc pe Virgil Nemoianu ca fiind un teoretician sobru și echilibrat în opinii, ce se străduiește să apere și să militeze pentru conservarea valorilor majore ale literaturii europene. Paradoxal, prin vivacitatea și ușurința de a accepta nevoia de adaptare culturală (pe care se străduiește să o explice cu pertinență și în studiile, conferințele, articolele și cărțile sale din ultimii 20 de ani), Virgil Nemoianu este și un teoretician modern – ce utilizează un minimum de resurse pentru a capta atenția asupra detaliului de fond, asupra cadrelor contextuale și a evenimentelor globale majore.

Iată o exemplificare – ce așază contextual epoci și cadrane istorice – etalând sugestiv eterna dinamică a raportului *tradiție – modernitate*:

În contrast cu toate disputele «canonice» din literatură, precum reabilitarea romantică a lui Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes, a arhitecturii gotice și a romanului cavaleresc par a fi adăugat o simplă coloratură unei istorii care avansa în orice caz. Chiar mai interesant (și puțin hazliu) e punctul de răscruce anterior din literatura europeană când s-a dezbătut problema dacă autorii contemporaneității merită un rang egal cu cei din antichitatea (greco-latină)

clasică. Vestita «Querelle des Anciens et Modernes» (aproximativ 1659 – 1700, în care în principal, s-au contrazis Boileau cu Perrault și Fontenelle) sau *Bătălia cărților*, a lui Swift (scrisă pe la 1697 și publicată în 1704), au marcat aceste conflicte care, în general, s-au sfârșit cu victoria vechilor «canoane», o victorie care nu a folosit nimănui, de vreme ce clasicii au pierdut (încet) teren, iar «modernii» au câștigat (rapid) teren și prestigiu (Nemoianu, 2011: 262).

Ideile din paragraful anterior atrag atenția asupra înțelegerii faptului că identitatea culturală europeană se creează printr-o sedimentare spectaculoasă ce supraexpune dinamica modernitate – antimodernitate și relevă mutațiile culturale ale secolelor XIX și XX. Totodată, în plan metodic și didactic, citatul de mai sus apropie textele lui Virgil Nemoianu de câteva demonstrații clasice ale profesorului Terry Eagleton legate de hermeneutica și receptarea critică a literaturii și adunate în volumul *Teoria literară. O introducere* (Eagleton, 2008: 15–111). Ca o corelare biografică relevantă, prima ediție a volumului *Literary Theory: An Introduction* a apărut în 1983 și a fost publicată la Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Oxford. Aproximativ în aceeași perioadă a anilor 80, Virgil Nemoianu va suprapune filtre hermeneutice care permit observarea romantismului european minor. Este lesne de înțeles că cele două percepții teoretizante pleacă de la aceeași idee a transformării sociale, politice și culturale care determină modificarea paradigmei literare. Peste ani, profesorul român va lăsa la vedere același profil teoretic exersat în tinerețe, în interiorul teoriei dedicată *Postmodernismului cultural* (Nemoianu, 2011), iar astfel pare a se crea o punte spre un dialog al ideilor ce scot în relief circularitatea culturii. Totodată, nu putem să nu remarcăm similitudinile discursive existente între cele privind perenitatea culturală europeană (expuse de Nemoianu) și canonicitatea discursivă europeană – nuanțată, subiectiv, prin apel la celebra *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, tradusă în românește cu titlul: *Canonul occidental. Cărțile și școala epocilor* (Bloom, 1998) – apariție ce propune destructurarea vechilor canoane academice, impunând și o revizitare dictată de gustul subiectiv al lecturii și de preferințele aleatorii asupra clasicilor literaturii europene (Bloom, 1998, 5–14).

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SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

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The Salon, the Café, and the Art of Cards: Configurations of Late-Century Social Life

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Abstract:

This study explores the reconfiguration of sociability at the end of the 19th century, focusing on three emblematic spaces of interaction: the salon, the café, and the card table. These sites, deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of the *fin de siècle*, served not only as stages for refined leisure and polite conversation, but also as subtle arenas of political maneuvering, image construction, and symbolic negotiation. By examining both the performative dimension of social rituals and the material culture associated with them – fashion, accessories, architecture, and etiquette – the article illuminates the emergence of a new *civilité*, one that reflects shifting gender roles, expanding public discourse, and evolving practices of memory and representation. Anchored in historical accounts, epistolary sources, and contemporary cultural theory, the analysis situates these *loci* of sociability within broader dynamics of modernity and national identity construction. As spaces of sociability, the salon and the café host new human types and serve as fertile ground for the emergence of activities inherent to social life. Card games, the learning of foreign languages, and the adoption of the era's behavioral code are representative practices for the individual at the turn of the century.

Keywords: *fin de siècle* sociability, salon culture, cafés, card games, symbolic spaces, memory sites

1. The Royal Path. The Premises of a New World

When it comes to the strictures of a court society, as is the case with Romania during the period under discussion (1866-1914), Norbert Elias emphasizes that etiquette is no longer subject to relative practices but rather becomes a genuine governing principle:

The meticulousness with which every movement during meals, every rule of etiquette, or the art of conversation is refined in court society corresponds to the importance these functions hold for courtiers, both as means of distinction from the lower strata and as instruments in the competitive struggle for the king's favor. The careful arrangement of the house or park [...] the spirituality

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of a conversation or even a romantic relationship, all these represent [...] not merely personal pleasures of individuals but vital requirements inherent in social position (Elias, 2002: 261).

Beyond etiquette, the opinion of others about the individual seeking to adhere to a “prestigious group” is crucial. This term refers to a group of people united by a shared set of values, recognized by other groups engaged in social competition. This phenomenon emerges as a natural consequence of Romania’s modernization process in the 19th century. Entry into this “prestigious group” is conditioned by customs or rituals, through which the aspirant to symbolic capital gains validation from others. Thus, these forms of social existence implicitly serve to confer identity upon their members. Given the timeframe under examination in this research, the prestigious group in question is the court of Prince and later King Carol I, characterized by the particularities of a constitutional monarchy. In societies based on the monarchical principle of state governance, etiquette – understood as the regulation of behavior meant to command respect and inspire emulation – is not merely a form of ostentatious preciousness but an ally in the country’s political leadership:

Everything that the nobility could highlight in terms of etiquette is also found when viewed from the king’s perspective: distancing as an end in itself, rationality, nuance, control of emotions. However, from the king’s perspective, all these elements hold a meaning beyond the already specified one. Etiquette is not only an instrument of distancing for the king but also a tool of governance (Elias, 2011: 161-162).

Beyond implementing necessary reforms in education, the railway system, infrastructure, agriculture, and the economy, the arrival of Carol I introduced values such as honor, dignity, faith, and balance. Numerous contemporary testimonies about the royal couple, which will be discussed later, serve as living proof of a certain fact: the figure of the monarch exerted a fascination in Romania similar to the one Napoleon Bonaparte inspired in his people at the beginning of the century. Regarding Napoleon’s image, the researcher Constantina Raveca Buleu notes in her work *The Paradigm of Power in the 19th Century* that he embodies “The Savior Figure” in the collective consciousness. This imageological archetype has its roots in the caste of heroes, founders of religions, and creators of new and necessary orders in times of social and human chaos and disarray. Acting against this backdrop, the leader assumes the role of a charismatic figure admired by the “public”. This is also the case with King Carol I, who fascinated the majority of his people while provoking intrigue among those resistant to the

constitutional monarchy. In any case, similar to Napoleon – whose foreign policy actions were highly mythologized (both in and by collective memory) and attributed to the authority of the divinely chosen ruler – Carol I was perceived as the fortunate “product” of a combination of factors such as dignity, bravery, power, and, last but not least, honor. The military discipline he acquired during his years at the cadet school in Münster and later at the Berlin Artillery School is reflected in how he chose to organize the country’s army, which he considered vital for both national security and Romania’s global image. This is evident from memoirs about Carol I, written by individuals who had the opportunity to be in his presence beyond official settings.

One significant source of testimony regarding King Carol’s military posture in service to the nation is Martha Bibescu, one of the most emblematic women of the early 20th century. Through her father, Ion Lahovary, Minister of Foreign Affairs during Carol I’s reign, she spent part of her childhood at the royal court. This experience left her profoundly impressed by the king’s austere demeanor, which she captures vividly in her book *Images d’Épinal*:

Employing courtesy in speech, the same manner as the offered hand and the greeting, he addressed individuals by name only when he wished to bestow special honor upon them. Thus, his words carried a general meaning, and only with a brief, fixed gaze upon the interlocutor – one might say the prey – did he draw the assembly’s attention to the individual [...] Lacking any of the external attributes of human majesty – neither very tall nor particularly handsome, without what one might call imposing presence or grand demeanor, and even less so, radiance – King Carol nevertheless commanded respect through an indefinable quality, something internal that transcended his small stature, his modest court, his restricted kingdom: an immense sense of royal dignity. Very upright, holding his head high to make the most of the limited height nature had granted him, with his left arm bent and his thumb hooked – like Napoleon – through the buttonhole of his uniform (that of an infantry general, the simplest rank in the army), he imposed through his grave expression and rare gestures (Bibescu, 2021: 152-153).

The same impression of austerity and rigor was shared by Elena Văcărescu, who, as a lady-in-waiting to Queen Elisabeth, participated in all court ceremonies, invariably attended by the King. He remained patient and unwavering, showing no sign of fatigue, always displaying the posture of an incorruptible monarch, as reflected in his extensive correspondence with Queen Elisabeth:

Later, when I became a lady-in-waiting to Queen Carmen Sylva, the Easter service, despite its splendor, became simply odious to me. King Carol remained motionless throughout the four-hour Resurrection service, which began at midnight. Nothing – not even the thought of the sumptuous feast, the glittering lights and crystal that awaited us afterward at the royal palace – could prevent

us from feeling utterly exhausted. Many times, I was on the verge of fainting (Văcărescu, 2001: 175).

A fascinating perspective on the association between royal authority and divine omnipotence is outlined by French philosopher Jean-Jacques Wunenburger in *The Imaginaries of Politics*, where he asserts that people need to perceive in their ruler an analogous image of superhuman omnipotence: “Political power is not, in itself, the power of a man, but that of a son of a god” (Wunenburger, 2015: 19).

The king himself was conscious of his civilizing mission, as revealed in a letter he wrote to Emperor Napoleon regarding a financial loan request for Romania:

Accepting the throne of Romania, I was aware that the tasks awaiting me were enormous. Yet, I must confess that the difficulties to be overcome are even greater than I had anticipated [...] The happiness of the Romanian nation has become the goal of my life. I have dedicated all my time and aspirations to this mission (Kremnitz, 2014: 39).

The king’s presence inherently conveyed honor and responsibility, making a protocol-driven conduct increasingly desirable. This was guided by new codes (behavioral, sartorial, and ideological) introduced into Romanian society alongside a new sociological mechanism of power representation and, at the human level, a model figure – the gentleman. According to historian Mihai Chiper, in Romanian culture, the practice of dueling played a decisive role in crystallizing this type. Rather than a literal fight, the duel symbolized the defense of masculine honor, an essential coordinate on the moral map of any *bon viri* at the century’s end. The modernization of Romania reached its peak during this era, in which a new lifestyle emerged, shaped by princely etiquette. The image of King Carol I thus became emblematic of an honorable, devoted, and uncompromising military leader, as attested by the accounts of Elena Văcărescu and Martha Bibescu.

2. Royal Sociability – From Whist to the Politics of Courtly Control

The Ottoman legacy, once deeply embedded in the social practices of the Romanian people, began to gradually fade, while, as Nicoleta Roman observes, the competition among elites striving to emulate the customs of the Royal Court triggered rapid shifts in attitude among the representatives of royal power, who sought to maintain their social distinction. From the perspective of sociability, the reign of Carol I was marked by a remarkable versatility in forms of entertainment. At the Court, one of the principal customs associated with conviviality and social interaction was card playing, which served a dual function – as a

source of amusement and as a strategic means of better understanding one's opponents. The fact that King Carol diligently fulfilled his role as ruler and defender of the country, regardless of the context in which he found himself, profoundly influenced the manner in which he chose to spend his so-called "leisure time". The interpretation of this phrase, in light of its contextual usage, is provided by Vasile Docea, professor at the West University of Timișoara, who has dedicated part of his scholarship to the forms of "recreation" favored by Carol I:

Leisure time and work time are not, at the Court of King Carol I, two entirely opposed concepts, as they are for most people of the era [...] This manner of perceiving things – the absence of a clear distinction between the two concepts – is a specific trait of the European aristocracy. It is, to some extent, the way in which it sought to set itself apart from the 'bourgeois world' (Docea, 2015: 110).

The King's preferred games included piquet and whist, both frequently mentioned in his personal journal, where he would also record the context of the games and the identity of his partners. Vasile Docea's observations suggest that these were never merely gratuitous social pastimes; their execution was often underpinned by various strategic intentions: either to rekindle the conjugal bond (as in the King's visits to the Queen during her exile), to establish a familial atmosphere (notably through his pleasure in playing whist with family members during travels to Sigmaringen, or with his mother-in-law and wife at Neuwied), or to extract information from his interlocutor – who, during his stays in Sinaia or Bucharest, was invariably a figure involved in contemporary politics (such as Petre Mavrogheni).

Taking into account the entries from the King's journal (Carol I of Romania, 2007), one may conclude that card playing represented, perhaps unconsciously, an expression of the King's desire to be perceived as "a man of the people" by those under his rule:

The game smooths over asperities, brings together divergent viewpoints, and enables the transmission of messages that, if formulated in another context, might provoke undesirable reactions or open opposition. In such instances, the game becomes a diplomatic instrument (Docea, 2015: 121).

3. The Aesthetic of Presence: Salons, Balls, and the Reconfiguration of Female Identity

Life beyond the castle gates was far from dull. The balls previously mentioned, the competition for luxury, and the chase after shops offering the finest fabrics and cuts all fueled the elite's desire to approximate the lifestyle of the Royal Court. Alongside balls, salons served as venues for fashionable conversation and cultural activities, aspiring to mirror, albeit on a smaller scale, the refinement of princely

courts. As liminal spaces, the salons of the time permit a dual perspective: on the one hand, they reflect changes in the domestic space of the home – reshaped according to Western fashion, though still retaining aesthetic elements of Ottoman provenance; on the other hand, they reveal the newly adopted behaviors of salon hosts, who were predominantly women:

The homes of the wealthy began to open up. Columns appeared, wide and luminous windows, and internal staircases. One of the period's image clichés became the descent of the lady of the house, clad in full evening dress or crinoline, into the midst of her guests [...] The furniture changed, but the noblewomen quickly adapted. Porcelain dinnerware, silver cutlery, and Bohemian crystal glasses replaced the previously poor-quality silverware. Turkish furniture gave way to French styles, notably that of Louis XIV [...] By the end of the century, the two most prestigious salons in Bucharest were that of Princess Grigore Suțu on Colței Street and that of Madame Oteteleşanu on Calea Victoriei (Bulei, 2006: 87–88).

As noted, salons were localized adaptations of the Court's grandiose social events. The balls hosted by the Royal House were without equal at the time, occurring only twice a year – much to the dismay of those who awaited the indispensable written invitation. Participation in Court balls or in the salons maintained by the era's aristocratic women was an inherent part of social advancement. Beyond the dress codes imposed, the unfolding of these events was anything but spontaneous, especially at Court, where protocol was strictly observed:

The royal couple would enter the ballroom of the Palace around 10 p.m., following three ceremonial strikes of the sword upon the floor by the royal adjutant [...] At midnight, dinner was served in successive rounds in the downstairs hall, and guests descended the stairs led by the sovereigns, followed by a dazzling procession adorned in sumptuous jewels and resplendent uniforms and evening attire. This descent was a most captivating spectacle, bathed in the glow of light filtered through chandeliers and lamps. The other courses – three in total – followed, according to the importance of each group. The King and Queen would retire after the first round, while the guests continued to enjoy themselves until dawn, dancing, dining, or socializing at the buffet – except, of course, the political invitees – senators, deputies, or high-ranking officials – who discussed politics while awaiting their companions (Bilciurescu, 2003: 48).

The salon was not only a venue for showcasing various forms of acquisition – ranging from attire to mastery of foreign languages – but also a platform for the elevation of women's social status, still constrained by patriarchal norms at the time. Dan Dumitru Iacob discusses the salon's emancipatory function:

Societal events prompted, in a particular manner, the acceleration of shifts in the mentality and behavior of the boyar class with respect to matrimonial politics and the woman's role in both family and society. They offered opportunities for the assimilation – albeit sometimes superficially – of new codes of civility. These changes spanned the entire behavioral spectrum, from seemingly banal but essential rules of politeness to affective relations. Thus, in an era when the discovery of eros coincided with the discovery of poetry, the salon became the ideal space for a new kind of sentimental conduct, enabling mutual and unmediated acquaintance between potential partners (Iacob, 2015: 152).

The manifestations of female emancipation, which began to emerge – albeit timidly – in the second half of the nineteenth century, included more than the adoption of Western-inspired fashion codes and formative practices acquired in girls' pension schools (such as piano playing, learning French, and acquiring proper conversational etiquette). They also encompassed the creation of distinctly feminine spaces – both physical and symbolic – whose access by men, if not entirely forbidden, had to be earned. These spaces included both tangible locales, such as salons or the wartime nursing wards into which some were later transformed, and imagined communities shaped by a shared desire to escape the dominant patriarchal authority. New practices, interpreted as signs of female solidarity, sustained this impulse. Letters exchanged among women, wherein they shared reading impressions; the patronage of cultural salons – such as that of Catinca Rolla, sister of poet Vasile Alecsandri; and the initiative to transform these salons into recovery rooms for the sick and wounded during the War of Independence, all served as essential coordinates in the transformation of women's status.

Equally decisive was the figure of Queen Elisabeth, herself a writer and advocate for women's causes and pursuits. As historian Alin Ciupală notes, the Queen's image played a significant role in redefining women's status during the period. He also highlights the importance of literary encouragement received by women writers from members of the *Junimea* society:

Women were also literary authors in this period, and two factors were key in removing the taboos surrounding their creative work: the sustained literary activity of Queen Elisabeth, and the supportive stance toward women's writing adopted by the Junimea Society, whose critics encouraged young female authors, some of whom – like Smara, Aida Vrioni, Calipso Dumitriu, Adela Xenopol, or Veronica Micle – came to be recognized (Ciupală, 2003: 81).

Queen Elisabeth's literary engagement not only supported the emancipation and artistic development of women with creative potential but also contributed to shaping a “fairy-tale” image of Romania abroad. Though King Carol I was personally reserved regarding his wife's

cultural endeavors, he nonetheless supported her literary activities insofar as they served the Crown's interests¹ – particularly by promoting, through the Queen's texts, a favorable foreign policy rooted in the traditional and folkloric dimension of the country:

Princess Elisabeth of Neuwied, upon arriving as Prince Carol's consort, struggled to adapt to local realities, which fell short of her status expectations. Her openness to the arts and her ability to find purpose in her new role enabled her to valorize Romanian cultural heritage in the interest of improving her adoptive country's image. In a way, this became one of her new duties. The Oriental framework within which Romania still functioned was not eradicated but rather integrated into a broader narrative – that of a fairy-tale kingdom, whose identity emerged through the figure of a victorious king and a queen whose poetic inclinations compensated for her husband's militaristic demeanor (Roman, 2013: 149).

4. Mapping Sociability: Sites and Models in *Fin-de-Siècle* Urban Culture

If the salons belonged to women, cafés and pastry shops were, at least theoretically, open to all those eager for sociability, consumption, and self-display. Coffee, which can easily be transformed into a symbolic seal of spiritual gathering, brought together not only people, but also ideas, gossip, and rumors. Around the café – as a symbolic space² – two postures gradually took shape: that of the *bohemian*, who conceived of life and artistic creation as inherently tied to these liminal, transitional spaces and who attracted public scrutiny through his nonconformism (in dress, behavior, or mentality); and that of the *causeur*, whose fundamental rhythm found nourishment in short or extended conversations, upon which he thrived.

What is particularly compelling is that these publicly performed postures were often embraced in private correspondence as well, as will be discussed in the following chapter. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the most prestigious cafés in Bucharest included *High Life*, “the café of the elite”; *Kubler*, “frequented by the city's German colony and

¹ “But not all of her writings were allowed to see the light of print, as it was Carol I himself who subjected her to harsh censorship”, states Dan-Silviu Boerescu in *Carmen Sylva. The Queen with an Artist's Soul. Docu-dramas and Controversial Historical Myths, Accompanied by Press Accounts and Other Sources Related to the Stories of Romania's First Queen and of the Figures Whose Paths Intersected with Hers*, Neverland Publishing House, Bucharest, 2023, p. 20.

² Recently, I have written a comprehensive study on other symbolic spaces of the 19th century: Smărăndița-Elena Costin, “Intimate Correspondence as a Site of Collective Memory. Postures & Image Commerce in the Epistolary Texts of Romanian Writers From the Second Half of the 19th Century”, in *The Review for Literary History and Theory*, New Series, XVIII, 2024, p. 168–182. doi: 10.59277/ritl.2024.18.16.

by a circle of writers, musicians, painters, and sculptors”; and the *Café de Paris*, where:

post-theatre suppers were held, dance soirées were scheduled, and the most fashionable melodies from around the world could be heard, performed by Grigoraş Dinicu’s orchestra (Bulei, 2006: 52).

However, the true *lieux de mémoire*³ remained *Capşa* and *Fialkowski*, known not merely as cafés, but more famously as pastry shops. The assortment of sweets, ice creams, and chocolate confections often remained in the background, as these two spaces became essential in the study of turn-of-the-century sociability, particularly through their character as *genius loci*. The historian Ion Bulei offers insight into the atmosphere that governed these sites of memory:

At *Capşa*, one could encounter renowned writers, major landowners, foreign ministers, and political figures of the day. In the café’s private booths, all wagers, all duels, all adulteries, all political machinations, and all diplomatic intrigues of the late nineteenth century took place. [...] The *Fialkowski Café*, located next to the National Theatre, was a newly established venue, decorated in Parisian luxury. Here one could find Parisian bonbons of the highest quality. [...] The game rooms were frequented by all lovers of billiards, backgammon, ghiubahar, and dominoes. The café also had a salon for patrons of coffee, chocolate, and tea (Bulei, 2003: 53).

Historian George Potra records that at *Fialkowski*, “nearly all marble tables were stained with coffee and ink, and on some, one could find all kinds of notes or verses” (Potra, 1992: 260).

It appears that King Carol I himself appreciated the high-quality services provided by the *Capşa* brothers, who were entrusted with organizing most of the buffets served during events held at Court. This detail is noted by Mădălina Niţelea, curator at the National Cotroceni Museum, in her study *Ceremonial at the Court of Carol I of Hohenzollern (1866–1914)*:

The *Capşa* buffet was a staple at every banquet and reception hosted by the Palace and was also present in the great households of Bucharest. It was

³ According to Pierre Nora’s understanding, *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) may be regarded as those spaces which, although no longer physically present in contemporary reality, retain a certain permanence within a specific spatio-temporal context due to their symbolic value: “Indeed, it is this very push and pull that produces *lieux de mémoire* – moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded [...] it is also clear that *lieux de mémoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications.” (Excerpt from Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” in *Representations*, no. 26/ 1989, p. 12–19).

Grigore Capșa, in fact, who prepared and served the official banquet at Turnu Severin during the festivities marking the inauguration of the Iron Gates Canal on September 15, 1896, in the presence of King Carol, Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary, and King Alexander of Serbia. Over the years, various important occasions also inspired the creation of pastry, confectionery, and culinary products dedicated to the to the sovereigns (Nițelea, 2009: 61-62).

The new form of civility unfolds within symbolic spaces that must be examined not only as settings conducive to sociability, but also as subversive arenas. The salon, the ballroom, the café – all these social nuclei, wrapped in gowns, tailcoats, monocles, wristwatches, and lace parasols – conceal many of the political and diplomatic interests of the time, as exemplified by the ball hosted in Rosetti's house, on the very night when the decision to depose Prince Cuza was made, upstairs in the same building.

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MISS

La masa starurilor literare

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Dining with Literary Stars

Abstract:

The author intends to capture significant moments from the history of the Romanian P.E.N. Club, especially in the years right after WWI. An emphasis is placed on the activity of Marcu Beza, the Romanian Consul in London at the time. Dragosh Protopopescu, the Executive Secretary of the Romanian P.E.N. Centre, is also mentioned within the larger social and cultural context of the events organized by the English P.E.N. in the capital of Great Britain.

Keywords: P.E.N. Club Romania, Marcu Beza, Dragoș Protopopescu, P.E.N. English/International, 1920s

Introducere

La începutul lui iunie 1924, imaginea P.E.N. Club-ului Român a atins cote de apogeu, prin prezența, la dineul lunar al P.E.N. Club-ului Englez/Internațional,¹ a Reginei Maria, invitată special alături de oaspetele de onoare, Karel Čapek. Era o mutare pregătită din timp de Președintele P.E.N. Internațional, John Galsworthy, recunoscut pentru meticulozitatea sa, dar și pentru tenacitatea și eleganța cu care aborda fiecare provocare. Într-o scrisoare din 21 decembrie 1923, către Catherine Amy Dawson Scott, fondatoarea club-ului, cea care-l convinsese să accepte funcția de președinte și cu care se consulta în permanență, romancierul își exprima opiniile cu privire la locația dineului și contura o posibilă listă de invitați pentru anul următor: Merejkovski în februarie, Čapek în martie și regina României în aprilie. „Va fi excelent”, concluziona el. (API 18.6). Însă întâmplarea a făcut ca drumurile lui Karel Čapek și ale Reginei Maria să se suprapună efectiv la începutul verii lui 1924.

Marea absență de la dineu a fost chiar doamna Dawson Scott, iar din partea României marele absent a fost încă unul dintre cei care

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¹ Se convenise, din rațiuni practice, ca sediul ambelor și chiar echipa executivă să fie aceleași. Apele aveau să se despartă, pe măsură ce numărul de centre sporea și, în egală măsură, volumul de muncă aferent.

puseseră premisele acestui gen de întâlniri admirabile între scriitori, Marcu Beza, Consulul României la Londra în acea perioadă. Alți români au fost însă de față, printre care Emanoil Bucuța, Secretarul General al P.E.N. Club-ului Român, care avea să descrie evenimentul din iunie cu atâta forță nostalgică încât să-l plaseze în mai, în retrospectiva sa din 1934, într-un decor floral demn de toate floricele de stil (Bucuța, 1934: 288). Marcu Beza era membru fondator al clubului în Marea Britanie, poziția sa diplomatică se pliașe, în 1921, pe o temeinică oportunitate, și reușise să înființeze, un an mai târziu, centrul P.E.N. din România. Dar, la începutul lui iunie 1924, încă nu revenise în capitala imperiului, dat fiind că participase, alături de Catherine Amy Dawson Scott, la Congresul P.E.N. de la New York. „Sol al țării și literaturii noastre pornise într’acolo încă de la 3 mai, [...] Marcu Beza” (Bucuța, 1934: 287).

În documentele congresului am găsit numele celor doi pe o listă cu oaspeții europeni invitați la Clubul Național al Artelor din New York. Lista începe cu May Sinclair – distinsa sufragetă britanică și autoare de texte beletristice și critice, responsabilă pentru consacrarea conceptului de „flux al conștiinței” – și se încheie cu Lajos Biro – scriitor evreu de limbă maghiară, născut în Oradea în 1880 și nominalizat la Oscar în 1929 pentru cel mai bun scenariu original, al filmului *Ultimul ordin*.² (API 101.9) Iar dintr-o scrisoare în patru paragrafe mici, numerotate, trimisă lui Galsworthy în 10 iunie 1924, după întoarcerea la Londra, Catherine Amy Dawson Scott face referire la Marcu Beza, la punctul trei, și la București, la ultimul punct (API 18.5).

Fondatoarea clubului admite că P.E.N. înseamnă propagandă, dar la un nivel superior, fiind „înghimarea celor mai rafinate minți din lume la o singură căruță”, spre a *trage* un ideal care, crede ea, este mai presus de „opera de artă individuală” (API 18.5). Din această perspectivă, arta este menită a servi comunitatea, dar la o anvergură internațională. Și îl menționează pe Marcu Beza, care i-ar fi atras atenția asupra unei reviste pariziene cu format unic, perfect adaptată acestui scop și în mare vogă pe continent, *L’Illustration*.³ De asemenea, subliniază faptul că guvernul

² Lajos Biró prospecta probabil, în 1924, posibilitatea de a rezida în Statele Unite, unde a și locuit între 1925 și 1928. Dar a sfârșit prin a se stabili la Londra, unde a colaborat cu London Film Productions, studioul condus de Alexander Korda, alt evreu de limbă maghiară cu carieră de excepție în lumea filmului.

³ *L’Illustration* era un săptămânal care apărea din 1843, primul periodic francez de acest fel, iar din 1906 era recunoscut ca primul magazin internațional ilustrat. C. A. Dawson Scott ne surprinde oarecum, prin neștiința acoperitoare a unei astfel de mondenități, dar această situație ne mai spune ceva cu privire la rezerva britanică față de ce întâmpla pe continent, cu precădere în Franța. „Comunitățile de limbă engleză ar trebui să aibă și ele ceva asemănător,” afirma ea în aceeași scrisoare către Galsworthy, „o ediție la Londra și o alta la New York.” (API 18.5)

francez a încurajat câteva edituri prestigioase să deschidă filiale la Viena și în capitala României. Scrisoarea nu face decât să demonstreze recunoașterea de care se bucura Beza, căci activitatea acestuia de până atunci urmase, aproape pas cu pas, evenimentele P.E.N. din metropola londoneză, dar păstrând, în același timp, și întărind legătura cu cei de acasă, în special cu Emanoil Bucuța.

Între etichetă și oportunism

Pe baza documentelor la care am avut acces, știm că, de la începutul anului 1924, Marcu Beza fusese prezent la dineurile lunare ale P.E.N. Club-ului,⁴ unde scriitorii, sub oblăduirea lui Galsworthy și a doamnei Dawson Scott, se străduiau să atingă, dincolo de socializare și recunoașterea reciprocă, un standard de comunicare compatibil cu idealurile formulate inițial. Era vorba, pe de o parte, de plăcerea de a se revedea la intervale regulate, de a întări legături mai vechi sau recent stabilite, într-un mediu relaxant pe un tipar tradițional, specific britanic. Dar cu toții se așteptau la mai mult și simțeau că lucrurile se îndreaptă într-o direcție nouă, spre un cadru mai cuprinzător, favorizat de starea națiunilor, de emulație și reconstrucție, după convulsiile Primul Război Mondial.

La 1 ianuarie 1924, la dineul prezidat de Sheila Kaye-Smith, Marcu Beza prezida, la rândul-i, masa 8 (API 101.9). Se aflau acolo: Margaret Radcliffe-Hall, cea care în 1928 avea să publice *The Well of Lonelines/Fântâna singurătății*, un roman deschizător de drumuri în literatura autoarelor cu altă orientare sexuală; partenera lui Margaret, Una Lady Troubridge, sculptoriță și admiratoare a basului Nicola-Rossi Lemeni, căruia i-a botezat fiul avut cu Virginia Zeani, soprana originară din Solovăstru, Transilvania; Horace Wyndham, despre a cărui carte, *Following the Drum/Urmându-l pe toboșar*, periodicul *The Scotsman* scrisese, în septembrie 1923, că avea „un stil plăcut și colocvial”, reproșându-i însă amatorismul ilustrațiilor; Mary Webb, al cărei roman din 1926, *Precious Bane/Stigmatul de preț*, avea să ia premiul Femina în 1927⁵; Langton Prendergast Walsh, jurnalist de război și autor al unei cărți despre experiența sa colonială; vecina acestuia din urmă în viața de toate zilele, Edith Nepean, romanciera galeză de limbă engleză, care în 1933 avea să publice *Romance and Realism in the Near East/Iubire și realism în Orientul Apropiat*, în carte fiind vorba și despre estul Europei, respectiv călătoriile ei prin România, Bulgaria și Turcia; Colby Borley,

⁴ Cu siguranță că participase la multe din dineurile de până atunci, dar fie nu am găsit dovezi în acest sens fie, atunci când numele lui Beza se regăsea pe listă, documentul nu era datat, deci nu am putut să îl încadrăm într-o cronologie.

⁵ Printre laureații premiului Femina din anii 1920 s-au numărat E. M. Forster și Virginia Woolf.

probabil autorul unui roman exotic despre Himalaya, *The Lost Horizon/Orizontul pierdut*, publicat în 1921; Aishie Pharall, Edgar Jensen și Nora Heald.⁶

Autori de toate orientările și calibrele, poate nu neapărat pe gustul lui C.A. Dawson Scott, care îi scria lui Galsworthy, în octombrie 1923, într-o misivă adnotată „Foarte confidențial” că îi era din ce în ce mai dificil să răspundă atunci când era întrebată despre criteriile de primire a noi membri (API 62.2). Fondatorii proveniseră din toate cinurile literare. După primii cincizeci acceptați, numai autorii considerați artiști primiseră avizul. Diletanții și autorii comerciali fuseseră refuzați. Ulterior, diletanții își croiseră drum, ceea ce a cauzat „multă amărăciune”. C. A. Dawson Scott relatează situația jenantă în care fusese pusă de întrebările unor autoare cu succes comercial, precum Coralie Stanton sau Berta Ruck – aceasta din urmă cu peste douăzeci de romane de dragoste la activ în 1923 – cu privire la calitatea de membru a lui Lizzie Le Blond, care publicase până atunci doar niște „insignifiante cărți de călătorie” (API 62.2).

Astfel de autori creau probleme de reprezentare, dacă vizitau centre din alte țări și, pe plan local, de socializare adecvată. A nu se uita că societatea britanică era încă destul de stratificată, iar autorii diletanți era bine să își cunoască locul, pentru că viața centrului P.E.N. Englez, cum apărea în documentele oficiale, depindea în bună măsură de „succesul dineurilor”. Unde autorii în cauză se comportau ca niște prădători, spre enervarea leilor grei ai literaturii britanice, ca de pildă H. G. Wells și May Sinclair, care se plânseseră deja de astfel de intruziuni. C.A. Dawson Scott mai dădea ca exemplu solicitarea unei jurnaliste de la *The Times*, care ca scriitoare nu era cu nimic mai bună decât Coralie Stanton și, mai mult, „era foarte greu de plasat la orice dineu” (API 62.2). În consecință, îi propunea lui Galsworthy să ridice problema la prima ședință a Comitetului Executiv.

Centrul de la Londra număra deja, în 1923, peste 250 de membri, iar Marcu Beza era printre autorii cu greutate. Publicase în România, la București, *Romantismul englez*, în 1921, iar în 1923, la Iași, *Din Anglia, însemnările unui literat*. În Marea Britanie îi apăruse la Londra, în 1920, *Papers on the Romanian People and Literature/Studii despre poporul român și literatura lui*. La Londra și New York, un an mai târziu, trei dintre povestirile sale fuseseră incluse în volumul *Roumanian Stories/Povestiri românești*, alături de texte de Negruzzi, Creangă, Caragiale, Brătescu-Voinești, Slavici, Delavrancea, Sadoveanu. În scurta

⁶ În ce privește ultimele trei nume am avut acces la mai puține informații, unele erau colaterale iar sursele păreau nesigure sau incomplete.

prezentare pe care i-o face în prefața volumului, Simion Mehedinți scria că „Beza are o poziție singulară. El aduce din Munții Macedoniei nota originală a vieții păstorilor din Balcani” și că peste proza acestuia „plutește un mister și o rezervă care îl fascinează pe cititor în totalitate” (*Roumanian Stories*, 1921: xi). Într-o altă prefață, cea dintâi din volum, autoarea le mulțumește simplu editorilor pentru efortul de „a trimite în lume o carte într-un moment în care sunt atât de anxioasă ca țara mea să fie mai bine cunoscută și înțeleasă în Anglia.” Și semnează, la fel de simplu, MARIE⁷ (*Roumanian Stories*, 1921: viii).

La dineul din ianuarie 1924, participanții erau, de bună seamă, de mai multe categorii. Nu au existat invitați de onoare, iar așa-zișii invitați ai clubului erau: Mrs./Doamna Philis Millin – pare ciudat să apară astfel, ca soție a unui domn Millin și nu cu numele ei de scriitoare, Sarah Gertrude Millin, autoare sud-africană cu rădăcini lituanieni; Mdle/Domnișoara Husca O’Hashi, din Japonia⁸; și Mary Stuart Cutting (Stewart este scrierea corectă a numelui, nu cum apare în documentele P.E.N.), autoare și sufragetă americană. Ne-a mai rămas, dintre cei cu care Marcu Beza a petrecut o seară, bănuim plăcută, la început de an, prezidenta Sheila Kaye-Smith, fosta președintă a clubului TOMORROW, fondat tot de C.A. Dawson Scott în 1917, cu scopul de a-i aduce împreună pe scriitorii mai tineri. Sheila Kaye-Smith preluase TOMORROW când doamna Dawson Scott începuse să se simtă copleșită de activitățile paralele ale celor două cluburi.

La dineul din ianuarie 1924, Sheila Kaye-Smith era deja o „autoare cu pană”, conform clasificărilor doamnei Dawson Scott, deoarece publicase șaisprezece cărți. Ultima, *The End of the House of Alard/Sfârșitul Casei Alard* fusese un best-seller al anului 1923 și o propulsase pe piața literară internațională. Câțiva ani mai târziu, C. A. Dawson Scott îi va face un portret plin de afecțiune într-unul din articolele aparținând unei serii, *As I Know Them. Some Women Writers of To-day/Așa cum le știu Câteva autoare de astăzi*. Rememorând prima lor întâlnire, pe meleagurile din Cornwall, unde Sheila, venită din Sussex, locuia în apropiere de Dawson Scott, fondatoarea P.E.N. scria: „eram cu toții oameni care munceau din greu, dimineața scriam, iar în timpul după-amiezii o luam pe Sheila pe țărmul mării și pe faleză și către văile mai îndepărtate din interior ca să văd cum îi surâde peisajul”⁹ (API 257.4). Nu a convins-o să rămână în Cornwall, dar a realizat că are de a face cu o persoană de absolută determinare și încredere. Carisma și diligența mai tinerei scriitoare sunt subliniate în aprecierile, numeroase, la

⁷ Regina Maria, desigur, încă o lecție de patriotism real, o expresie a iubirii profunde pentru țara de adopție.

⁸ Am găsit-o pe un singur site, pe internet, într-un clip de presă din *The West Australian*, Wednesday, July 4, 1923 cu referire la congresul Alianței Internaționale a Sufragetelor, de la Roma.

⁹ Traducerea ne aparține.

adresa lucrărilor acesteia, concluzia fiind: „Cu cât este mai mare artistul cu atâta mai puțin probabil ca arta lui să fie stereotipă” (API 257.4).

Rutină, mondenitate și *glamour*

Între lista cu invitații P.E.N. Club-ului Englez din ianuarie și cea cu invitații din martie 1924, este intercalată o alta, nedată, în fruntea căreia se află însăși doamna Dawson Scott (API 101.9). Dincolo de idiosincraziile acesteia, dorința ei de a prezida în acea seară e de înțeles, dat fiind că invitatul de onoare era Maxwell Aley, unul dintre fondatorii centrului P.E.N. din New York. Într-una din scrisorile trimise lui John Galsworthy în 1921, Dawson Scott își exprima convingerea că organizația creată de ei avea șanse maxime de dezvoltare și influențare a lumii literare numai dacă reușea să treacă Atlanticul. Mai mult, vorbea chiar despre „Statele Unite ale Europei și Americii în literatură” (Watts, 1971: 13). Scriitorii americani erau, în consecință, mai mult decât bineveniți la dineurile londoneze.

Alte nume de reținut din acea seară, probabil din februarie 1924, la masa la care se afla Marcu Beza, ar fi: Madame Kallas, recte Aino Kallas, romancieră finlandeză și soție a ambasadorului Finlandei, o dovadă în plus că relațiile la un anumit nivel trebuie cultivate; Muriel Gibbon, jurnalistă și romancieră, politician liberal; Sidney Dark, jurnalist și critic; Horace Wyndham, cu care am făcut deja cunoștință; Gerard Hopkins, traducător și nepot al lui Gerard Manley Hopkins, deconcertantul poet victorian. În fine, câteva nume, ale căror activități de natură literară sunt mai greu de detectat, au rămas în planul secund al cercetării noastre,¹⁰ care urmărește îndeosebi să contureze o imagine – e de dorit cât mai convingătoare, chiar dacă uneori cu mijloace limitate – a mediului în care Marcu Beza a funcționat ca *ambasador* cultural al centrului P.E.N. din România, în prima decadă a perioadei interbelice.

În seara de 4 martie 1924, sub președinția scriitorului și filosofului William Leonard Courtney, oaspetele de onoare a fost Pieter Cornelies Boutens, poet și mistic olandez, clasicist de formație și, evident, admirator al antichității. Oaspeții clubului, care de regulă formau o echipă asociată, prin proveniență sau preocupări, cu invitatul de

¹⁰ Nu am reușit să aflăm, de pildă, cine erau Helen Williams, care prezida masa unde se afla Marcu Beza. Sau William Cary, care apărea ca invitat al clubului, apoi Donald Weaver, Frank Challis și J. Johnston Abraham. O altă problemă este că uneori aceste persoane apar doar cu inițiala prenumelui (R. Dingle) sau cu titulatura de M, Mr. (de la Mister/Domnul), respectiv Mrs. (de la Mistress/Doamna). Spre exemplu, se află pe listă o anume Mrs. Webb, dar e greu de spus dacă este vorba despre Mary Webb, pe care am pomenit-o deja, sau Marion Webb, și ea scriitoare din aceeași perioadă.

onoare, îi numărau pe: Prof. Geyl, recte Pieter Catharinus Arie Geyl, profesor olandez la Universitatea din Londra¹¹; Pieter Nicolaas van Eyck, poet și critic, tot neerlandez; Jacob Thomas Grein, impresar și critic britanic de origine olandeză, întemeietor al Societății Teatrului Independent; și J. R. Stuwe, imposibil de decis dacă era vorba despre Jacqueline Reyneke van Stuwe sau Jeanne Reyneke van Stuwe, ambele scriitoare din Țările de Jos, surori și cu inițiale identice, spre deliciul celor care scotocesc prin arhive. Singura excepție din comandoul de invitați olandezi era Sir Sidney Low, jurnalist și istoric britanic, dar a cărui soție, Ebba Byström, era traducătoarea în spațiul scandinav a lui Bernard Shaw. Ea avea să îi și faciliteze, un an mai târziu, lui Marcu Beza, contactul cu dramaturgul anglo-irlandez, în vederea punerii în scenă a unora dintre piesele acestuia, la Teatrul Național din București.

Cât despre Marcu Beza, el a stat în acea seară la masa 4, alături de: poetul Trevor Blakemore și de Charles Fry, pe care îl suspectăm a fi fost Charles B. Fry, jucător de cricket, dar și autor de cărți și articole pe teme sportive și politice; Bernard Gilbert, alt suspect, dar în calitate de poet, dramaturg și romancier; Constance Farmer, suspectă la rândul ei de a fi autoare de poezie¹²; și Edith Nepean, pe care o cunoaștem deja și pe care Marcu Beza, conform protocolului, avea să o invite să îl acompanieze la alte dineuri,¹³ în funcție de circumstanțe. Ca și în cazul dineului P.E.N. din februarie, alte nume de pe listă nu au fost suficient de relevante pentru cercetarea noastră.¹⁴ Eterogeneitatea ansamblului era contracarată, după caz, de vectorul de omogenitate indus de grupul invitaților clubului, care-l secondau, așa cum am arătat, pe oaspetele de onoare.

La 1 aprilie 1924, de Ziua Păcălelilor, Marcu Beza prezida la masa 4, la un dineu P.E.N. fără invitați de onoare și fără invitați ai clubului. Îi țineau companie: Marion Webb, autoare de romane și poezii pentru copii; Fielding Ould, autor atât de cărți de poezie cât și de dogmatică religioasă; Evelyn Sharp, o sufragetă pacifistă, jurnalistă rebelă și scriitoare consacrată prin cărțile ei pentru copii; Henry Nevinston, iubitul și ulterior soțul lui Evelyn, jurnalist și corespondent de război, scriitor și viitor președinte al P.E.N. Club-ului Internațional¹⁵;

¹¹ Critic al ideilor lui Arnold J. Toynbee și supraviețuitor al lagărului de la Buchenwald.

¹² Toți acești suspecți au fost parțial identificați pe internet, datele din arhiva P.E.N. Internațional la care am avut acces nefiind concludente.

¹³ Protocolul prevedea că fiecare membru P.E.N., care își exprima dorința de a participa, putea să vină la dineurile lunare însoțit de un invitat, cu condiția ca numele persoanei să fie de asemenea menționat din timp organizatorilor.

¹⁴ Ca de pildă Marion Ashworth, Cora Phiel și J.R. Hobman. O altă participantă la dineu apare ca Mrs./Doamna Walsh, dar nici un domn Walsh nu este prezent.

¹⁵ După moartea soției lui Nevinston, Margaret Wynne, sufragetă și autoare, cu care Evelyn fusese bună prietenă.

Sidney Webb, politician socialist, membru al Societății Fabian și co-fondator al London School of Economics,¹⁶ satirizat în 1911 de H. G. Wells, prin portretul pe care acesta i-l făcuse în romanul *The New Machiavelli/Noul Machiavelly*¹⁷; Lizzie Allen Harker, prozatoare și autoare de piese de teatru. Ca și până acum, alte nume nu ne-au reținut atenția,¹⁸ dar cel al președintelui de dineu, romancierul și dramaturgul William Babington Maxwell, merită pomenit pentru că, la acea dată, beneficiase de nu mai puțin de opt ecranizări pentru șase din cele douăzeci de cărți publicate.

S-ar putea crede că acest format, al dineurilor P.E.N., era reprezentativ pentru Londra anilor 1920. Într-o măsură, era adevărat, pentru că se dorea, în fond, o întoarcere la matca ritualurilor de dinainte de război, la calmul și stabilitatea post-victoriană. Da, scriitorii doreau să se întâlnească, chiar să se cunoască, dar dineurile P.E.N. nu erau genul petrecerilor extravagante care au ajuns să caracterizeze epoca jazz-ului. Formalismul domina aceste întâlniri, poate că unii dintre bărbați mai exagerau cu consumul anumitor licori inspiratoare, dar pentru doamna Dawson Scott, cel puțin, situația trebuia să fie ținută sub control, fiecare își avea un loc bine stabilit la masă. Nu întâmplător, listele cu participanți sunt elaborate în detaliu, se ținea cont de interesele și relațiile fiecăruia, unele nume erau șterse și înlocuite cu altele, se și specifica dacă cineva era contraindicat să stea lângă o anumită persoană, cu care, presupunem, ar fi intrat în conflict. Desigur, nu se punea problema ca scriitorii să „facă frumos”, pur și simplu se dorea elevarea și menținerea unui statut de cât se poate de înaltă civilitate și spiritualitate.

Dar nu trebuie să uităm că anii 1920 au fost și anii presei de senzație. Presă mai orientată, adresându-se unor categorii de cititori cu apetit pentru bârfa care nu mai era de salon. Bârfa coborâse în stradă și nu oricum, ci de la cel mai înalt nivel. „Dați cât mai multe nume în ziar. Cu cât mai aristocratice, cu atât mai bine”, era una din recomandările editorilor executivi, o alta fiind „mai puține știri și dezbateri pe teme politice” (Taylor, 2007/2009: 16). Cei care țineau paginile ziarelor erau membrii unui grup care, din 1924, avea să fie cunoscut ca Bright Young People/Tinerii scilpitori. Cu statut social cel puțin din partea superioară a clasei de mijloc, cu potențial intelectual și creativ hrănit la cele mai bune școli și universități din Marea Britanie, ei vor rămâne în istoria culturală

¹⁶ Astăzi una din cele mai prestigioase instituții de învățământ superior economic și de științe sociale, clasată pe locul 6 în lume în martie 2025.

¹⁷ Cartea fusese un adevărat scandal la momentul apariției.

¹⁸ Ruth Rogers, Basile Ispie și o anume Mrs/Doamnă Aria.

a imperiului ca niște tineri mai degrabă zgomotoși decât furioși.¹⁹ Exagerările lor vor face deliciul cititorilor de toate categoriile, care îi vor urmări, pe viu sau cu ajutorul reporterilor, pe traseul curselor nocturne, la care participau câte cincizeci de mașini odată, prin întreaga Londră sau într-o vânătoare de comori la fel de dispersată. Mașinile de ultimă generație, mai puternice, presupun și toalete pe măsură, petreceri improvizate, dar sofisticate, pentru câștigători și uite așa se nasc manifestările de tip *cult*, chiar dacă miezul lucrurilor putea să fie găunos.

Prin comparație, oferta P.E.N. Club-ului Englez/ Internațional părea mai puțin atrăgătoare. Și totuși, paleta largă a genurilor abordate de membrii clubului asigura ceea ce s-ar putea astăzi numi diversitate și incluziune. După cum sub aceeași mantie se puteau adăposti scriitori mici și mari, dar cu vieți turbulente și apetisante pentru presa de scandal. Nu lipsea dimensiunea de *glamour*, mijloacele financiare ale unora permițându-le să strălucească la aceste dineuri. Iar cei mai dezavantajați financiar se străduiau să cultive aparențele, știind că ochii reporterilor acreditați²⁰ erau necruțători. În ce-i privește pe organizatori, una din priorități era atragerea unor invitați de marcă și, în acest sens, lunile mai și iunie ale anului 1924 aveau să întrecă orice așteptări.

Galsworthy însuși a prezidat întâlnirea din 6 mai, la care invitatul de onoare era Thomas Mann. Presa s-a grăbit să prefăteze evenimentul, dar pare-se că sărăcia cu duhul era o calitate și în acele vremuri pe care azi le vedem învăluite în aburul de *haute culture*. Astfel, *Manchester Guardian* din 25 aprilie își informează cititorii că „distingii oaspeți la dineul din 6 mai îi vor include pe Lady Byng de Vimy, soția Guvernatorului General al Canadei și Dl. Thomas Mann”, acesta din urmă menționat ca autor al unei povestiri despre un animal de companie și fără nici o urmă de referire la *Casa Buddenbrook*. O altă publicație, din aceeași dată,²¹ îi ține hangul celei dintâi, prezentându-l pe scriitorul german doar ca autor al unei „încântătoare povestiri despre un câine,” adăugând la lista de invitați demni de reținut pe nu mai puțin faimosul „Sir Leo Chiezza Money, a cărui carte de poeme e pe punctul de a fi publicată” (MSS_PEN_112_7_054).

Lui Thomas Mann i se face parțial dreptate de către Brother Savage/Fratele Sălbatic, pseudonimul cuiva desigur mai avizat, într-un articol, nedatat, publicat în *Books and Bookmen/Cărți și oameni de literă*

¹⁹ Câteva nume mai faimoase, totuși, se desprind din acest amalgam: Evelyn Waugh și Graham Greene.

²⁰ Dacă se poate spune așa, am găsit câteva invitații pentru *The Times*, bănuim că au primit și alte publicații. În mod cert, la evenimente mai mari, cum ar fi congresele, lista periodicelor acreditate ocupă cel puțin o pagină.

²¹ Nu am reușit să o identificăm, recte să-i descifrăm titlul scris, în arhivă, cu litere de mână.

(MSS_PEN_112_7_055). Articolul pare să fie orientat (din)spre bârfa literară londoneză. Înțelegem mai bine contextul, căci cartea lui Thomas Mann despre Bashan, câinele cu pricina, tocmai fusese tradusă în limba engleză și, în opinia autorului, evidenția o legătură spirituală între „Galsworthy al Germaniei” și John Galsworthy. Totuși, Mann era prezentat ca autorul nu doar al unei singure cărți și era de așteptat ca „oamenii cultivați” care urmau să participe la dîneu să fie conștienți de acest lucru. Nici acest journalist însă nu menționează cel puțin *Casa Buddenbrook*. Cât despre faima europeană a lui „Her Mann” se făcea trimitere la o doamnă, critic literar în vogă, care nici măcar nu auzise de el.

În ce-i privește pe invitații clubului, lista îi includea pe: Dna Thomas Mann, evident; Max Meyerfeld, jurnalist și primul traducător al lui Oscar Wilde în limba germană; Lilian Wald, autoare și feministă americană²²; Josep Batista Roca, istoric și politician catalan; Joan Crexells, un alt intelectual catalan, filosof și scriitor; o Mrs/Doamnă Wreford, pe care nu am reușit să o identificăm, știm doar că a stat la masa lui Galsworthy, în compania lui Thomas Mann și Sir Leo Chiozza Money, dar și a lui Emanoil (sic) Bucuța; Emanoil Bucuța se afla în Londra ca organizator al unei expoziții etnografice și de artă românească, în cadrul mai larg al Expoziției Imperiului Britanic; și Dr. Dragoș Protopopescu, care a fost așezat la masa prezidată de Marjorie Scott, Secretara Executivă a P.E.N. Club-ului Englez/Internațional.

În loc de concluzii sau la masa starurilor literare

Pentru Dragoș Protopopescu, era cel mai semnificativ moment de conectare la Londra literară înainte de întoarcerea în țară. Își terminase teza despre Congreve, începută la Paris și consolidată cu stagii de studii și cercetare în capitala Marii Britanii. Fusese o perioadă de provocări, în care acționase nu doar în interesul propriu, pentru împlinirea sa profesională ca anglist, ci și ca promotor al intereselor României în climatul politic bulversant de după Primul Război Mondial. O scrisoare din 1921, adresată lui Nicolae Titulescu, ambasadorul nostru la acea vreme, este însoțită de o recomandare din partea lui Mihail Dragomirescu. Acesta din urmă considera că tânărul doctorand „prin sânguința, vivacitatea condeiului și ușurința asimilării și-a expresiunii, ne poate fi de cel mai mare folos pentru propaganda noastră în Anglia” (Arhiva Titulescu).

²² Ca și Gertrude Stein, Lilian Wald provenea dintr-o familie de evrei de limbă germană. Interesul lui Wald pentru medicină – spre deosebire de Stein, care a abandonat studiile în domeniu, e drept că de la Johns Hopkins – s-a concretizat în absolvirea școlii de asistente și, ulterior, în organizarea și promovarea unui sistem de asistență medicală și socială.

În scrisoare, Protopopescu își exprima speranța că numirea lui Titulescu ca ambasador avea să schimbe fața politicii românești de până atunci, date fiind calitățile acestuia și că vor fi create „punți reale de activitate”, mai ales în domeniul „propagandei culturale românești”, afectată de „indiferența noastră în materie”. Era deci de așteptat ca noul ministru plenipotențiar să „răscumpere decepțiile plecărilor” celor de dinaintea lui și, încurajat în acest sens, Protopopescu își oferea serviciile, dispus să efectueze „simple asistențe Dlor Ciotori²³ și Beza (care nădăjduiesc să nu aibe o părere prea rea despre mine)”. Atașa și niște articole care-i dovedeau aptitudinile, articole pe care le avea la îndemână „în lipsa altora publicate în reviste mai mari, ca *Viața Românească*” (Arhiva Titulescu).

Tânărul doctorand și-a urmărit cu perseverență obiectivele, după cum o dovedește o altă scrisoare, din 18 mai 1922, în care îi transmite lui Titulescu că nu a vrut să-l „importuneze” cu o vizită la Legație, dar dorea să îi reamintească de promisiunea facilitării unui ajutor financiar, din partea unei bănci, pentru o carte a lui Nicolae Iorga. „Aș fi făcut-o eu, ca să vă scutesc de oboseală, dar n’am calitatea întrebărei și deci nici probabilitatea răspunsului”, continua el, într-un limbaj mai mult decât ceremonios, o mostră perfectă de discurs deopotrivă literar și diplomatic (Arhiva Titulescu).

Scrisoarea mai detaliază un proiect mai vechi, despre care Marcu Beza îl informase pe Titulescu, „Casa de Cetire a Românilor la Londra”, înființată în urmă cu câteva luni. În acest scop, Protopopescu tocmai adusese din țară două geamantane cu cărți, dar „multe au rămas încă la Academie [...] urmând a fi ridicate ulterior”. Solicita apoi găsirea unei modalități adecvate de depozitare a cărților, conținutul celor două geamantane adăugându-se la cele câteva sute care „simt nevoia unui salonaș (oricât de mic și neînsemnat)”. Dacă acest lucru nu era posibil – deși Marcu Beza era invocat din nou ca a-i fi transmis deja lui Titulescu rugămintea – atunci „s-ar putea găsi măcar un dulap cu sticlă”. Protopopescu dorea să pună bazele unei biblioteci româno-engleze, accesibilă unui public mai larg și, în această ordine de idei, dădea ca exemplu situația de la alte ambasade: „La Legația Ungară, cu prilejul vizei, am văzut o frumoasă bibliotecă de acest gen, scoasă chiar cu oarecare provocare în ochii vizitatorilor streini” (Arhiva Titulescu).

Nu știm câte din inițiativele sale au fost fructificate, câte din obiectivele sale au fost atinse, dar un lucru este sigur, că s-a străduit să își asigure colaborarea la orice nivel diplomatic și cultural accesibil. Sentimentul nostru a fost că, în relația cu Titulescu, prefera să îl

²³ Dimitri N. Ciotori (1885-1965), diplomat și om de cultură, ocazional avea să mai participe la evenimentele P.E.N.

informeze în prealabil pe Marcu Beza, al cărui nume revine, după cum se poate observa, în misivele trimise. Marcu Beza era, pentru românii din capitala imperiului, un reper, poate chiar un mentor pentru cei ca Dragoș Protopopescu. Marcu Beza nu a fost prezent la dineul P.E.N. din mai 1924, fiind deja în drum spre Congresul P.E.N. de la New York. Și, așa cum am menționat la începutul acestei lucrări, nu avea să fie prezent nici la dineul din iunie, unde Regina Maria a strălucit împreună cu Karel Čapek. Beza era în drum spre Londra, întorcându-se de la New York.

Dar intrarea românilor, adecvarea lor la standardele europene, fuseseseră, prin efortul lui neprecupețit, deja asigurate. Pe urmele lui, un al tânăr și strălucit anglist, ca Dragoș Protopopescu, stătea, în pragul plecării sale din Londra, în preajma unor personalități literare de prim rang: invitat, Thomas Mann, viitor laureat al Premiului Nobel în 1929; amfitrion, John Galsworthy, viitor laureat al Premiului Nobel în 1932; unul din subiectele discuției de la dineu – crearea unui lobby internațional pentru candidatura lui Thomas Hardy la același premiu, în anul în curs. Nu putem decât să rezonăm cu cuvintele Reginei Maria din 1922, din scrisoarea de acceptare a invitației trimisă de John Galsworthy, de a sprijini înființarea unui centru P.E.N. la București: „vă mulțumesc că v-ați gândit la românii mei.” (API 34.6)

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Ethnic Stereotypes and Dimensions of Identity. Cross-Cultural Investigation

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Abstract:

A stereotype is a complex mechanism, through which social connotations of personal and business qualities are passed on from generation to generation, and even more than that. In fact, it contains some filters which allow us to highlight the defining characteristics of the subject, on the basis of which we can draw the image of the person representing the ethnic group. In this context, the logic of the research is based on the principle of value judgment, which allowed us to answer the following questions: *How is the person representing the ethnic group perceived today? What are his/her distinctive features? Can living environment and context have an impact on value judgment?*. Questions to which we tried to answer through the social representations of Moldovan adolescents who are immigrants in Italy and Moldovan adolescents who live in the Republic of Moldova.

Keywords: Moldovan immigrant adolescents in Italy, ethnic group representation, stereotypical image, social context, migration

Introduction

Stereotype is defined by psychologists as a preconceived opinion about a class of individuals, groups, or objects that reproduce schematic forms of perception and judgment or common beliefs about the personal attributes of a human group in general, such as personality traits and behavior (Lippman, 1946).

From a linguistic point of view, analyzing the etymology of the word *stereotype*, we see that *stereo* derives from Greek and means *rigid, firm, fixed, stable*, and *type* means *model* (Billig, Tajfel, 1973: 27-52). There are two forms of stereotyping:

1. Dynamic stereotype, which is a relatively stable system of conditioned human reactions and reflexes to common stimuli.
2. Social stereotype, which is a schematic, standardized, universally significant image, an emotional image, a stable idea of a particular phenomenon or object, expressing the ordinary attitude of

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people toward other people, formed under the influence of the conditions of existence and their previous experience.

In this sense, the social stereotype is considered as a complex formation, in which there is an inseparable unity of its three components:

- cognitive (informational);
- affective (evaluative);
- social (behavioral).

The cognitive aspect of stereotyping is that social stereotypes own the underdevelopment of cognitive content, containing social attitudes (clear regulators of group behavior). Such information contained in a stereotype, as a rule, is merely an extract or a “collection” of the characteristics of an event, phenomenon or person, which falls within the existing “baggage” of personal experience and is significant for the development and stable functioning of society (Mazzara, 1996: 124). The rest of the information is thrown away, having no influence in relation to the event or stereotyped person, because of its irreducibility to previous experience or lack of opportunity and time to know them more deeply.

Therefore, on the basis of this superficial information, a false judgment can be formed, which often leads to the conclusion that the stereotype is loaded with an erroneous component and contains information which does not correspond to the real state of things.

In the same context, social stereotypes are characterized by lack of ambiguity, which means that a judgment cannot simultaneously have two contradictory meanings. As a result, the stereotype is a rigid and specific fixation, which manifests itself in a variety of situations and it is stable over a long period of time. This is why social stereotypes successfully put up resistance against any information about their change.

The affective aspect of stereotyping refers to a person's evaluation processes, which goes through *color phases* (Mazzara, 1993: 192). For this reason, the affective component is subjective and sets the direction for people's thinking and actions. Social stereotypes are therefore often characterized by a high degree of evaluative attitude with the intensity of emotional response, both verbally and behaviorally. Emotions (most often negative) clearly testify to the explicit evaluative expression of stereotypes in people's minds and behavior.

The most important function of stereotypes is to simplify the world according to the established cultural modality and fulfilling the defensive function with the aim of maintaining forms of social organization.

Along the same lines, H. Tajfel (1984: 118) points out that stereotype, as preferential thinking, can be both positive and negative. It derives from selection or exaggeration processes, which may or may not have correspondence with reality: *The perception of the world is conditioned by people's values, attitudes and goals and is based on the correlation between the individual level, social and cultural dynamics, which in turn are based on the axiological systems.*

Literature review

The etymological origin of the term *stereotype* can be traced back to typographical art, which identifies a reproduction process of the 18th century that utilizes fixed, unchanging plates for printing. Thus, the transition from the literary to the metaphorical meaning of the term is evident in many works in French literature from the beginning of the 19th century, where the aspect of rigidity and repetitiveness has been used metaphorically to describe verbal and nonverbal behavior. In the social sciences, the term *stereotype* first appeared as a *model* or *image* in the 20th century thanks to W. Lippman's 1922 study *The world outside and the pictures in our heads*.

The concept of stereotype is closely related to that of prejudice and often, they are even used synonymously. The researcher Mazzara (1996: 124) defines the stereotype as the cognitive core of prejudice, a set of information and beliefs about a particular category of objects, re-elaborated in coherent and tangential stable images, capable of supporting and reproducing a prejudice against the object. According to the author, prejudice is defined according to the level of generality taken. If it reaches its highest point, it corresponds to the etymological meaning, which is derived from the Latin term *praejudicium*, which is a judgment made prior to experience or without empirical data. It is a judgment that is more or less incorrect, oriented in a favorable or unfavorable way, referring both to facts and individuals or groups. If a more specific degree of analysis is adopted, it may be defined as a tendency to consider people belonging to a particular group as unfairly unfavorable.

The beginning of the 20th century studies on the extent and nature of differences between large human groups played a major role in understanding the evolution of stereotype concept. These subjects were considered of interest in so-called *race psychology* (Leyen, Yzerbyt, Schadron, 1994). This is a theoretical construct based on the belief that psychological characteristics, like physical characteristics, are encoded in the genetic heritage and are transmissible to the descendants. Ethnicity, the concept of "race" and the presumed existence of a biological link to individual abilities and psychological characteristics were the main themes addressed in this regard.

Race psychology was criticized for its focus on individual prejudices and for failing to recognize the socio-political dynamics behind discrimination. Therefore, *the transition from the perspective of race psychology to that of prejudice is one of the moments of the strongest discontinuity in psycho-social studies of group relations, marking the focus on cultural determinants and a new awareness of socio-political implications.*

The adoption of the term “ethnic group” instead of “race” is for instance a first sign of a change in theoretical and empirical perspective.

In Lippmann's view, stereotypes would have a predominantly social origin, essentially deriving from the cultural context and performing an important function in explaining existing social behavior and organization. However, although Lippman's ideas remain somewhat vague from a theoretical point of view, they do anticipate some essential points Lippman (1946):

- a) the stereotype is based on a simplification process;
- b) this simplification takes place in culturally determined ways;
- c) the stereotype performs a defensive function to maintain culture and forms of social organization;
- d) the stereotype is responsible for *conducting research and evaluating data based on experience.*

In the same context, Allport (1973: 123) states that prejudice can only be understood by starting from an analysis of the community, the thought processes that characterize the functioning of the mind and imply the following:

- a) the mechanisms for simplifying and organizing knowledge, which are essential for dealing with an excessively complex and differentiated reality;
- b) the fundamental categorization process which involves grouping stimuli and events in a homogenous manner in order to quickly organize new events into a coherent system of interpretations and behaviors.
- c) the process of generalization, defined as the constant tendency of the human mind to extend observations made on a few available events to large series of events.

Another interesting perspective takes into account the level of “social judgment” of the stereotype, starting from the premise that traditional stereotype approaches are limited to considering aspects of good or bad functioning of the cognitive system. Social judgments are not determined by logical procedures, but rather by the need to assign meaning to the world in line with social codes. Stereotypes in this sense can be conceived as social explanations whose functionality needs to be



explored in relation to a specific context of intergroup relations (Bochmann, 2001: 93-102).

The processes of causal attribution are therefore profoundly altered by cultural dynamics. Hewston and Ward (1985: 614-622) pointed out that the fundamental effect of *attributional favoritism* towards a group is by no means universal, but tends to reflect the state of relations between ethnic groups, as well as the predominant ways of socio-political definition of the relationship between the majority and the minority.

Similarly, Newcomb (1952: 37), interprets prejudice and conflict between ethno-religious groups in terms of group norms, which prescribe a certain relationship to be maintained with out-group members. His studies on multiple and marginal belonging, as well as strategies for solving tensions that emphasize differences in favor of one's own group, are of particular interest. More specifically, the author highlights the importance of communication processes as a bridge for building and sharing group norms and as a key element for structuring relationships. He believes that communication is a means of sharing information among groups and collectively defining meaningful memories and experiences, in order to establish positive and negative attitudes towards other groups, as well as fostering common social norms. The identification of *language as one of the main tools for creating and transmitting stereotypes* was based on the identification of its fundamental role in the processes of cognitive coding and decoding.

In this way, from the perspective of the constructivist matrix, stereotypes and prejudices are the constant product of a collective process of assigning meaning to reality (Tajfel, Forgas, 1982:113-140). Thus, the dynamics of social identity and relationships between groups create a collective memory that each individual can use to make sense of things. In this context, thinking stereotypically or through prejudice is a common method of functioning in popular thought, which is also known as *common sense*.

Methodology

The aim of this work is to uncover ethnic stereotypes towards the person representing the ethnic group in the case of Moldovan adolescents who are immigrants in Italy and Moldovan adolescents who live in the Republic of Moldova.

Research hypothesis: Ethnic identity of Moldovan adolescents is determined by status and place of living.

Participants

Considering the factors involved in the process of ethnic identity construction, several variables-characteristics of Moldovan adolescents were taken into account such as: age, residence according to place of

living, migration experience (in the case of Moldovan adolescents from the diaspora), non-migration experience (in the case of Moldovan adolescents from the Republic of Moldova), current status, gender and citizenship of the Republic of Moldova.

The investigation involved 215 adolescents: 105 Moldovan adolescents (62 boys and 43 girls), holders of Moldovan citizenship, who are legally residing in Italy, from the regions of Lombardia, Emilia-Romagna, Liguria, and Veneto; with school status, enrolled in 14 educational institutions; with an average age of 16.2; average time of stay on the territory of the Italian Republic – 7.4 years and 110 Moldovan adolescents (43 boys and 67 girls), holders of citizenship of the Republic of Moldova, legally residing in the Republic of Moldova; with school status, enrolled in 4 educational institutions: 2 – from Chişinău and 2 – from Floreşti; with an average age of 15.8.

The research took place between December 2018 and October 2019. The research sample consisted of 215 adolescents (in the 14-20 years age): 110 of them were from Moldova (Chişinău and Floreşti) and 105 of them were from Italy (Lombardia, Emilia-Romagna, Liguria and Veneto).

Instrument

In order to study ethnic stereotypes, in the case of Moldovan adolescents who are immigrants in Italy and in the case of Moldovan adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova, we used *The Semantic Differential Scale*, which was created by T. G. Stefanenko and it was applied to adolescents of different ethnic groups (Polish, Russian, and Belarusian). The given method was designed to diagnose ethnic stereotypes and measures affective attitudes towards the person representing the ethnic group. The procedure consists in assessing 16 pairs of qualities which have positive and negative meaning, related to different spheres of human activity. According to researcher T. Stefanenko (1999) these qualities were divided into eight pairs of business qualities and eight pairs of personal qualities.

Therefore, respondents were asked to assess the degree of accentuation of qualities, using a seven-point scale. As a result, the mean value (M) for each scale and the standard deviation were calculated.

Subsequently, the procedure for comparing empirical data regarding ethnic stereotypes towards the person representing the ethnic group among Moldovan adolescents in Italy and Moldovan adolescents in the Republic of Moldova was carried out. For this purpose, *Student's t-test* was applied to both groups of adolescents.

Results

The results of the analysis are listed below (Table 1):

Table 1: Comparing Moldovan business qualities based on the opinions of Moldovan adolescents in Italy and in the Republic of Moldova

Qualities	The mean of Moldovan adolescents in the Republic of Moldova +/- The Standard Deviation	The mean of Moldovan adolescents in Italy +/- The Standard Deviation	t-test
Indecision - Determination	4,76 +/- 1,93	5,48 +/- 1,41	-3,108
Organization-Disorganization	3,45 +/- 1,89	5,98 +/- 1,13	-11,991
Spirit of initiative- Lack of initiative	4,68 +/- 1,81	2,38 +/- 1,34	10,619
Bad household management- Good household management	5,07 +/- 1,65	5,07 +/- 1,44	0,029
Diligence- Laziness	2,60 +/- 1,48	4,22 +/- 1,94	-6,867
Flexibility - Rigidity	5,43 +/- 1,37	2,59 +/- 1,51	14,396
Predisposition to lead- - Predisposition to obey	4,74 +/- 1,71	5,84 +/- 1,08	-5,652
Passivity - Activism	3,00 +/- 1,68	3,70 +/- 1,78	-2,990

As shown in Table 1, in terms of business qualities, Moldovan adolescents in Italy consider Moldovans to have both positive and less positive traits.

Additionally, as a stereotypical image, Moldovans are seen as having *good household management* ($M = 5.07$). This mean value applies both to Moldovan adolescents living in Italy and to Moldovan adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova. The given quality is strengthened even more in the context of migration, as a prerequisite for the integration into the labor market of the host country.

Considering *determination*, we see that this is an accentuated feature according to the mean value ($M = 5.48$), which is confirmed both by the decision of the adolescents' parents who decided to emigrate and by the decision of many of their compatriots who go abroad to overcome the social condition experienced in the Republic of Moldova, having the motivation for a better life.

As for *flexibility*, we see that it is present with a slight tendency toward rigidity ($M = 2.59$), which is less visible, but certainly played through physical and mental capacities. Anyway, this allows Moldovans to face the trials and difficulties of life together with the ability to

appreciate “this journey”, which is sometimes quite complex and complicated.

Flexibility among Moldovans, no matter how weak, makes them more open to new unpredictable circumstances. This allows them to adapt to the dynamic of life, which is constantly changing, especially on the background of migration.

Also, it follows that *good household management, determination and flexibility* are for Moldovan adolescents in Italy, the pillar of *the spirit of initiative*, which according to the results is a less highlighted quality ($M = 2.38$). In our opinion, this choice depends on how adolescents value themselves in relation to their ethnic group, in other words, to the people of the host country. However, Moldovans’ spirit of initiative, regardless of intensity, gives them the possibility to identify new opportunities from a professional, social or familial perspective and all this through planning, management, communication, evaluation and negotiation of all the chances in order to master the strengths and weaknesses, including taking a certain risk. In this sense, Moldovans’ spirit of initiative demonstrates the ability to anticipate some events by taking responsibility for their actions.

In the same vein, if we look at the *passivity-activism* dyad ($M = 3.70$), we see how difficult it is for Moldovan adolescents living in Italy to choose one of these qualities. It gives us the impression of a certain level of passivity, uncertainty and latent activism of the Moldovan people, which cannot be fully expressed, probably because of the bureaucratic barriers existing both in the Republic of Moldova and in Italy. Then on top of that, we should mention the disadvantaged social position they have in the host country, too.

Further, Moldovan adolescents from Italy see the Moldovan people *predisposed to organization* ($M = 5.98$). Due to this fact, Moldovans’ life seems to include a well thought-out plan that allows them to achieve all their goals.

Surprisingly, in the same context, the Moldovan people are presented with a slight tendency toward *diligence* ($M = 4.22$). Referring to the multicultural environment of the host country, it makes us understand that adolescents in the diaspora see the Moldovan people as being less qualified to perform some jobs according to certain standards and less willing to learn to do it. Moreover, it may be the case of the Moldovans who are satisfied with the things they have or with the basic social assistance they get. Consequently, they do not want to work.

Regarding the *predisposition to lead* ($M = 5.84$), in the opinion of adolescents from the diaspora, we can notice that Moldovans are considered to have a dominant personality, being pushed by the

competition to have a better life and to change things, of course, this is within the limits of the migration context.

When it comes to adolescents in the Republic of Moldova, in terms of business qualities, the image of the Moldovan people is rather contrasted.

In the stereotypical perception of Moldovan adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova, the Moldovan people have *good household management* ($M = 5.07$), which is probably due to the expression handed down from generation to generation "to be a good householder". It reflects the feeling of self-worth of the Moldovans and it is valid for any citizen of the Republic of Moldova, regardless of status, profession or function, which is translated by the care for the goods that Moldovan people have and the prudence they show in gathering them during their lives.

In the case of *determination*, we see that there is a slight tendency towards this quality ($M = 4.76$), which is an indicator of will power and the ability to be aware of what the Moldovan people want.

To our surprise, the Moldovan people also seem to be oriented towards *laziness* ($M = 2.60$). This suggests that contemporary adolescents probably value laziness in other aspects: being in line with technological trends, keeping up with fashion, etc.

In the same context, based on the mean value ($M = 3.45$), Moldovan adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova seem to oscillate between perceiving Moldovans as *organized* or *disorganized*. In our opinion, this is fuelled by the difficulty of drawing an axis of priorities according to which they can live their lives as they really want to.

Adolescents relate, in this regard, to the reality which is a matter of not getting enough physical activity, skipping meals, postponing things, self-neglect and the Moldovan inability to rest properly.

Equally, on the background of the above-mentioned characteristics, the Moldovan people don't seem to have a lot of *initiative* ($M = 4.68$). We explain this aspect by the fact that Moldovans have not been taught to manage their life on their own, by the lack of self-confidence and by the lack of optimism to seize life's opportunities. This behavior is also generated by some stereotypes created by society, especially by those based on popular beliefs such as *if you are a sheep without a shepherd, you will be ruined*. This fact is in contrast to Moldovan's *flexibility* ($M = 5.43$), which is the most emphasized feature in relation to others and it is translated by facing the unknown and openness to change.

Thus, in the amalgamation of these traits, we also notice a slight *tendency to lead* ($M = 4.74$), which gives us the hope that this quality is still significant for Moldovans.

In the same context, Moldovans are perceived as passive people ($M = 3.00$). This trait is also justified by the saying *to give up*, which is rooted in the tendency of the Moldovan people to stop trying to achieve something and accept failure in the fight for meritocracy, by choosing to disrespect their rights and always wanting to appear “good”. As a result, Moldovans often resign themselves to something quite easily.

In order to highlight statistically significant differences between the groups participating in the investigation, we applied the t-test. Therefore, after comparing the means with the studied variables, which express business qualities, we observed some significant differences, apart from *good household management* (5.07; $T = -6.867$, $p = 0.977$), a quality which is predominantly attributed to the Moldovan people by the adolescents of both groups.

However, referring to the stereotypical perception of adolescents in terms of business qualities, we notice that Moldovan adolescents in Italy, compared to those in the Republic of Moldova, consider the Moldovan people being much more *determined* (5.48; $T = -3.108$, $p < 0.01$), much more *organized* (5.98; $T = -11.991$, $p < 0.001$) and much more *predisposed to lead* (5.84; $T = -5.652$, $p < 0.01$). In other words, in the representation of Moldovan adolescents in Italy, the image of the Moldovan people is much more positive compared to that of adolescents in the Republic of Moldova. Of course, in part, this may be justified by idealizing the person that represents the ethnic group, but also we cannot exclude the fact that Moldovans have developed these qualities in order to adapt as effectively as possible to the new conditions of the host country on the background of migration.

Consequently, when we refer to business qualities, we conclude that Moldovan adolescents living in Italy have a rather positive image of the person representing their ethnic group, as they have chosen the following qualities: *determination*, *organization*, *good household management* and *predisposition to lead*. On the contrary, *diligence* is also a quality with a positive trend, even if it is not very well highlighted. At the same time, in the stereotypical perception of Moldovan adolescents living in Italy, the Moldovan people are seen as *lacking in initiative* and *rigid*. We can see here that these traits are predominant over *spirit of initiative* and *flexibility*.

Concerning the “passivity-activism” dyad, we note that Moldovan adolescents had some difficulty in determining the intensity of one of these traits, probably due to their minority position in Italy, fuelled by the need for psychological adaptation to the different cultural living environment, intrinsically comparing themselves with the dominant group (Italian adolescents).

On the whole, therefore, we observe that the stereotypical image of the Moldovan people is quite generous in positive qualities, which decorates their image positively. In our opinion, it is an important basis for self-identification for these adolescents, especially in a foreign cultural space, by maintaining social and personal identity.

At the same time, Moldovan adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova have a negative image of the person representing their ethnic group, being quite critical in this regard. In their view, the most highlighted qualities of the Moldovans are: *flexibility* and *good household management*. Similarly, according to them, Moldovans are seen as *determined people*, having *initiative* and being *predisposed to lead*. These qualities remain at a low level, probably because of the need to be confirmed by the socio-cultural environment in which adolescents live every day.

Comparisons between ethnic autostereotypes generated by Moldovan adolescents in Italy and Moldovan adolescents in the Republic of Moldova revealed the fact that both groups have a positive image of the Moldovan people. However, the autostereotype of Moldovan adolescents living in Italy is much clearer when referring to the qualities: *determination*, *organization*, *good household management* and *predisposition to lead*, which are more evident ($p < 0.001$) than in the case of adolescents in the Republic of Moldova. In the same way, explicit differences were identified between the autostereotypes of adolescents of both groups in the case of *organization-disorganization* dyad, where adolescents from the Republic of Moldova had the difficulty in choosing the degree of intensity of the following trait: *organization*. Concerning *good household management* instead, we see that both groups expressed themselves identical here, because they see it as a significant quality for Moldovans. This leads us to assume that, in terms of ethnic group representation, good management of the household is the defining quality of Moldovans. Therefore, regarding the business qualities, in the case of Moldovan adolescents in Italy, the positive orientation of the heterostereotype is more pronounced.

Table 2: Comparing Moldovan personal qualities based on the opinions of Moldovan adolescents in Italy and in the Republic of Moldova

Qualities	The mean of Moldovan adolescents in the Republic of Moldova +/- The Standard Deviation	The mean of Moldovan adolescents in Italy +/- The Standard Deviation	T-test
Openness - Reservation	2,88 +/- 1,66	4,76 +/- 1,75	-8,100
Aggression -	2,77 +/- 1,72	4,97 +/- 1,75	-9,310

Peace-loving			
Kindness - Wickedness	3,10 +/- 1,63	2,70 +/- 1,63	1,777
Honesty - Falsity	4,55 +/- 1,78	5,01 +/- 1,73	-1,900
Hospitality - Lack of hospitality	1,72 +/- 0,91	4,11 +/- 1,9	-11,715
Cunning - Sincerity	3,55 +/- 1,82	2,81 +/- 1,55	3,200
Delicacy, finesse - Arrogance, uneducatedness	4,58 +/- 1,77	4,60 +/- 1,74	-0,076
Receptivity - Insensitivity	2,42 +/- 1,36	4,76 +/- 1,72	-11,022

Table 2 highlights the following stereotypical picture of the Moldovan people:

Thus, referring to personal qualities, adolescents from the diaspora see the Moldovans as *peace-loving people* ($M = 4.97$), a quality rendered by adapting to the world around them (new people, culture and traditions), being quite tolerant and respectful, with a quiet personality, sometimes neutral in stressful situations or when it comes to making decisions, presenting themselves as peaceful people, with the ability to control themselves, which also emerges from the interview conducted in the context of the research.

However, based on the research results, the pacifist character of Moldovan people appears to be challenged by a weak tendency towards *wickedness* ($M = 2.70$), a fact that makes us believe that this trait, being latent, would disclose some dissatisfactions and personal unfulfillments of Moldovans, especially in the context of migration.

At the same time, in the case of personal qualities, Moldovan adolescents in Italy present the Moldovan people with a tendency towards *honesty* ($M = 5.01$), which gives us the impression that they are genuine and make less use of those social masks, which, in our opinion would help them to integrate and adapt better to the new social realities.

Further, Moldovan people are appreciated as being reserved, with a slight predisposition to *openness* ($M = 4.76$), which tells us about a more isolated character, which probably derives from the conviction of inferiority, a feeling felt more acutely in the context of migration, where the lack of friends or social life „like at home” manifests its effects through fear of non-acceptance or rejection, as a defense mechanisms adopted to avoid this suffering. Alternatively, all these difficulties encourage the Moldovan people to be more open to new circumstances and lifestyle, in order to adapt and integrate more easily to the offers and requirements of the hospitable country.

In this case, the Moldovan's solitary character also leaves its mark on *hospitality*, which according to the obtained value ($M = 4.11$), it

does not represent a predominant quality, to our surprise (as we are used to hearing), which would mean that diaspora adolescents do not see this trait related only to the traditional custom of welcoming guests and eating meals, but along with them, they value the social sharing of emotions, which seems to not exist, especially in a society increasingly sick of individualism, where the fundamental value of the community is less recognized and it invades the sphere of social relations

Another less honorable trait for Moldovans, in contrast to honesty, is their tendency towards *cunning* ($M = 2.81$). In our opinion, Moldovans are “forced” to activate it to take advantage of someone/something, otherwise they risk losing some opportunities that life offers them.

However, this disguise they choose can have a negative connotation when means of manipulation and exploitation of others, including lies, are utilized. Even if the saying “the end justifies the means” seems less valid here, when *cunning* is too far from fair schemes, risks are dangerous here.

Moreover, the Moldovan people are perceived as being prone to *receptivity* ($M = 4.76$). In our view, this feature emphasizes sensitivity, helpfulness and understanding, which are confirmed by the Moldovan tendency towards openness.

As in the case of adolescents in the Republic of Moldova, adolescents in the diaspora consider Moldovans to be inclined towards *delicacy* and *finesse* ($M = 4.60$), a typical representation, which also corresponds to the idea of Moldovans in general. The person representing the ethnic group of Moldovans is also seen in this way, consistently compared with the person representing the majority group (Italians).

In terms of personal qualities, adolescents in the Republic of Moldova see the Moldovans as people with weak tendency towards *reservation* ($M = 2.88$). We assume that this fact can be explained by moderate mental openness of Moldovans when they interact with other people which is expressed by some fears to be themselves to show their vulnerabilities or by some hesitation to accept new ideas and experiences.

In the same vein, it is with great perplexity that we note that contemporary adolescents in the Republic of Moldova no longer consider Moldovans to have a *brand of hospitality* ($M = 1.72$), as illustrated by D. Cantemir (1909) in *A Description of Moldova*: “...the face with which Moldovans receive foreign guests is worthy of the highest praise...”. In this way, hospitality is no longer perceived by them as the basis for Moldovan culture, a trait which has probably faded over time. Anyway, in our opinion, a more detailed study is needed in this case.

Similarly, it was surprising for us to see that Moldovans are perceived as *insensitive people* ($M = 2.42$), an attitude probably derived from social egoism, which is increasingly fueled by the survival instinct. Additionally, if we speak about Moldovan's *kindness* ($M = 3.10$), we see that it also has a rather chameleonic character, being close to *wickedness*, which would mean that the Moldovan people are sometimes inauthentic and they probably seek benefit from their own kindness.

According to the research results, this fact is reinforced by *sincerity* ($M = 3.55$), which is ambiguous and there is no certainty about it as adolescents had difficulty choosing between *cunning* and *sincerity*. It is still complemented by the tendency of Moldovan people towards *honesty* ($M = 4.55$). This feature has a high degree of similarity, which leads us to believe that Moldovan adolescents in the Republic of Moldova, basically perceive the Moldovan as an integrated and coherent personality.

As in the case of Moldovan adolescents in Italy, adolescents in the Republic of Moldova perceive the representative of our ethnic group as prone to *delicacy* and *finesse* ($M = 4.58$). However, we want to mention that in the case of adolescents in the Republic of Moldova, this trait is contrasted with the weak tendency towards *aggression* ($M = 2.77$). In our view, it is determined by the life of the Moldovan people between the limits of hope and hopelessness, which is currently aggravated by the social and political situation in the Republic of Moldova.

Thus, as an ethnic stereotypical representation of the ethnic group, adolescents in the Republic of Moldova view the Moldovans as *honest, delicate and hospitable people*, which is different from our expectations (in the case of this last trait we observe the lowest dispersion index $\sigma = 0.91$), a result which requires, as mentioned above, additional research, in order to clarify this aspect and have a more certain answer to the question: *Is the moderate degree of hospitality of Moldovans only a critical representation specific to adolescents or does it represent a stable, well-formed idea about the person representing the ethnic group?* In the same context, adolescents in the Republic of Moldova consider Moldovans to be *aggressive, less receptive and reserved people* (even if these are estimated at a low level), having also the difficulty of choosing between *cunning* and *sincerity*. Therefore, we observe that adolescents are quite critical of both personal and business qualities of the person representing the ethnic group, but the latter are defined more positively.

As a result, we are able to conclude the following:

The autostereotype with reference to personal qualities of the Moldovans, in the case of Moldovan adolescents in Italy, is dominated by positive qualities, but it is less clear compared to its image in terms of business qualities, where the most highlighted quality is *honesty*. At the same time, in the perception of Moldovan adolescents in Italy, the person representing the ethnic group is seen as a *peace-loving person*, endowed with *openness*, *delicacy*, *finesse* and *receptivity*, although these qualities remain at a low level. However, in our opinion, these qualities can be strengthened by the adolescents who are currently immigrants in Italy, through direct experience, once they return to the Republic of Moldova, as well as by expanding contacts and experience with their compatriots (people representing their ethnic group). In this context, the positive orientation of adolescents with reference to the autostereotype of the person representing the ethnic group is essential.

The autostereotype regarding personal qualities of Moldovan adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova can be characterized as diffuse and equivocal, which somewhat surprised us, as we assumed that in the case of adolescents from the Republic of Moldova the representation of Moldovan people would be perceived more positively and it would be more clearly defined. Therefore, the most pronounced personal qualities of Moldovan people, in the perception of adolescents, are: *honesty*, *delicacy* and *finesse*. In the same context, adolescents in the Republic of Moldova, perceive Moldovans as *aggressive*, *reserved* and *insensitive* people. Although these characteristics are estimated at a low level, they underline the process of ethnic identity formation, especially when the image of the person representing the ethnic group is contradictory. Similarly, *hospitality* is estimated at an average level, which again does not correspond to traditional ideas about Moldovans, a result which challenges us to look for factors or processes which determine the formation of such an attitude about the representative of one's own ethnic group.

At the same time, if we compare the autostereotype related to the perception of Moldovans in both groups of adolescents, we observe that the image of the person representing the ethnic group among Moldovan adolescents in Italy, with reference to personal qualities, is more positive, even if it is not expressed very clearly, as in the case of business qualities. In other words, in the perception of Moldovan adolescents in Italy, the image of Moldovans is more positive and contradictory, but in the case of adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova, it is diffuse. At the same time, the traits where no differences are attested are: *honesty*, *delicacy*, *finesse* and *wickedness* – qualities which are estimated identically in both groups of adolescents. This suggests that *honesty*, *delicacy* and *finesse* are the defining qualities of the person representing the ethnic group. In the same context, *wickedness* is estimated at a low

level. In our opinion, this calls for further investigation, whereas we can only assume that behind the choice of this trait lies adolescent maximalism and a specific desire to stand out, even if the trait has a less positive connotation. In a similar manner, we admit that we were surprised by the fact that the image of the Moldovan people with reference to personal qualities is poorly expressed and inconsistent in both groups, especially in the case of Moldovan adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova.

Consistently, the comparison of autostereotype generated by Moldovan adolescents in Italy and in the Republic of Moldova, with reference to business and personal qualities, revealed that in the case of Moldovan immigrant adolescents in Italy, the image of the person representing the ethnic group, with regard to both business and personal qualities, is more positive than in the case of adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova. As we can see, the problem lies in the orientation of the qualities at a personal level, so in the division of the image of the Moldovan people, both positively and critically. Therefore, such a “split” identity of Moldovan adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova could indicate that the processes of identification reflect the inconsistency and contradiction of the socio-cultural context of the current society.

Moldovan adolescents in Italy present a more positive image of the person representing their ethnic group, both in terms of personal and business qualities. But, with regard to business qualities, the autostereotype is more pronounced and positive here. In our opinion, this is not surprising as these qualities are *the fulcrum* of self-realization and self-affirmation in a different socio-cultural environment.

Table 3: Comparing Moldovan business qualities based on the opinions of Moldovan male adolescents in Italy and in the Republic of Moldova

Qualities	The mean of Moldovan male adolescents in the Republic of Moldova +/- The Standard Deviation	The mean of Moldovan male adolescents in Italy +/- The Standard Deviation	T-test
Indecision - Determination	4,70 +/- 1,95	5,31 +/- 1,29	-1,797
Organization- Disorganization	3,53 +/- 1,99	5,97 +/- 1,10	-7,274
Spirit of initiative- Lack of initiative	4,30 +/- 1,99	2,40 +/- 1,26	5,525
Bad household management- Good household management	5,19 +/- 1,65	5,15 +/- 1,39	0,137
Diligence- Laziness	2,44 +/- 1,28	3,79 +/- 1,93	-4,300

Flexibility - Rigidity	5,56 +/- 1,35	2,58 +/- 1,57	10,09 1
Predisposition to lead- Predisposition to obey	4,72 +/- 1,80	5,76 +/- 1,16	-3,327
Passivity - Activism	3,02 +/- 1,67	3,92 +/- 1,77	-2,613

According to the stereotypical perception of adolescent boys in both groups with reference to business qualities, Table 3 highlights the following profile of the Moldovan:

In the case of Moldovan male adolescents from the diaspora, the Moldovan is perceived as *determined* (M = 5.31), with a tendency toward *organization* (M = 5.97) and *good household management* (M = 5.15). We also observe the tendency toward *initiative* (M = 2.40), even if it is estimated at a low level and the *predisposition to lead* (M = 5.76). In the same context, according to the perception of Moldovan male adolescents in Italy, the Moldovans are also seen as *rigid* people (M = 2.58). They also have a noticeable difficulty in expressing themselves in the case of the following dyads: *diligence-laziness* (M = 3.79), *passivity-activism* (M = 3.92). Referring to the same qualities, in the case of Moldovan male adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova, we see that the Moldovan people seem to be oriented towards *good management household* (M = 5.19), *flexibility* (M = 5.56) which is the most highlighted quality, even if it is estimated at an average level and *determination* (M = 4.70). In the same vein, the person representing their ethnic group seems to have a tendency toward *initiative* (M = 4.30) and *predisposition to lead* (M = 4.72), both traits are estimated at a low level. To our surprise, there is also a slight tendency toward *laziness* (M = 2.44). Similarly, in the case of male adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova, we note their difficulty in expressing themselves in terms of *passivity* and *activism*. (M = 3.02).

In conclusion, in conformity to the data reported in Table 1.3, in the case of Moldovan male adolescents living in Italy, we mention that the ethnic stereotype of the person representing the ethnic group includes the qualities: *organization*, *determination* and *spirit of initiative*, which are more accentuated, compared to the autostereotype generated by male adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova. Correspondingly, we note the lack of statistically significant differences in terms of the following qualities: *determination* and *good household management*. Therefore, these are the fundamental traits of the person representing the ethnic group.

Regarding male adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova, we observe that the most pronounced quality in the ethnic stereotype is *flexibility*, which in the representation of Moldovan male adolescents in Italy contrasts with the rigidity of the Moldovan people. In our opinion, this is because of the constant comparison with the majority group

(Italians), which would give the impression that Moldovans are lacking in flexibility and leadership.

In the same context, both male adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova and in Italy have a clear difficulty in expressing themselves in relation to the *passivity-activism* dyad.

Thus, in the perception of both Moldovan male adolescents living in Italy and in the Republic of Moldova, the image of the person representing their ethnic group was characterized by: *good household management* and *determination*. However, in the case of Moldovan male adolescents living in Italy, the image of business qualities of the Moldovans is more positive and more emphasized than that of Moldovan male adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova.

Table 4: Comparing Moldovan personal qualities based on the opinions of Moldovan male adolescents in Italy and in the Republic of Moldova

Qualities	The mean of Moldovan male adolescents in the Republic of Moldova +/- The Standard Deviation	The mean of Moldovan male adolescents in Italy +/- The Standard Deviation	t-test
Openness - Reservation	2,70 +/- 1,64	4,95 +/- 1,81	-6,526
Aggression - Peace-loving	2,58 +/- 1,50	5,06 +/- 1,72	-7,669
Kindness - Wickedness	3,14 +/- 1,70	2,82 +/- 1,56	0,986
Honesty - Falsity	4,65 +/- 1,77	5,08 +/- 1,66	-1,285
Hospitality - Lack of hospitality	1,70 +/- 0,91	4,03 +/- 1,93	-8,298
Cunning - Sincerity	3,28 +/- 1,75	2,94 +/- 1,64	1,028
Delicacy, finesse - Arrogance, uneducatedness	4,58 +/- 1,83	4,19 +/- 1,76	1,092
Receptivity - Insensitivity	2,47 +/- 1,39	4,71 +/- 1,77	-6,967

Regarding the perception of personal qualities of Moldovans, Table 4 shows the following:

In the case of Moldovan male adolescents in Italy, the qualities which highlight the ethnic stereotype of Moldovans are: *the tendency to be peace-loving people* (M = 5.06), *honesty* (M = 5.08) and *openness* (M = 4.95). In the same context, the image of the person representing their ethnic group also includes qualities such as *hospitality* (M = 4.03), *delicacy, finesse* (M = 4.19) and *receptivity* (M = 4.71), even if these

characteristics remain at a low level. At the same time, contradictory to them, the Moldovans are perceived as people prone to *cunning* ($M = 2.94$) and *wickedness* ($M = 2.82$). In our opinion, *cunning* has a positive connotation in their real life. At the same time, it is surprising that the same quality is expressed almost to the same extent by male adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova. For this reason, generalizing the perception of Moldovan male adolescents in Italy, we conclude that the image of the person representing their ethnic group with reference to personal qualities is quite satisfactory.

With reference to the same qualities, in the case of male adolescents in the Republic of Moldova, the most pronounced traits of the Moldovan are: *honesty* ($M = 4.65$), *delicacy* and *finesse* ($M = 4.58$). However, the image of the person representing their ethnic group is defined, as a whole, by the following characteristics: *reservation* ($M = 2.70$), *aggression* ($M = 2.58$), *insensitivity* ($M = 2.47$) and *lack of hospitality* ($M = 1.70$). Although they remain at a low level, based on these results, we can deplore the stereotypical attitudes of adolescents. For this reason, the image of the Moldovan with regard to personal qualities among male adolescents in the Republic of Moldova can be classified as “controversial”.

If we compare the perception of the person representing the ethnic group, in both groups of adolescents, we observe that in the case of Moldovan male adolescents in Italy, it is more positive than that in the case of male adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova. In the same context, in the perception of both groups, the following qualities: *honesty*, *delicacy*, *finesse*, *cunning* and *wickedness* are represented equally. Also, *honesty* seems to be the most emphasized trait here, being cataloged as defining the Moldovan people. At the same time, given the current social and economic conditions, *cunning*, as mentioned later, can have positive connotations.

Table 5: Comparing Moldovan business qualities based on the opinions of Moldovan female adolescents in Italy and in the Republic of Moldova

Qualities	The mean of Moldovan female adolescents in the Republic of Moldova +/- The Standard Deviation	The mean of Moldovan female adolescents in Italy +/- The Standard Deviation	t-test
Indecision - Determination	4,81 +/- 1,93	5,72 +/- 1,55	-2,746
Organization- Disorganization	3,39 +/- 1,84	6,00 +/- 1,18	-9,080
Spirit of initiative- Lack of initiative	4,93 +/- 1,65	2,35 +/- 1,46	8,333

Bad household management- Good household management	5,00 +/- 1,66	4,95 +/- 1,51	0,148
Diligence- Laziness	2,70 +/- 1,60	4,84 +/- 1,79	-6,537
Flexibility - Rigidity	5,34 +/- 1,39	2,60 +/- 1,45	9,925
Predisposition to lead- - Predisposition to obey	4,75 +/- 1,67	5,95 +/- 0,98	-4,777
Passivity - Activism	2,99 +/- 1,70	3,40 +/- 1,76	-1,217

Table 5 highlights the following aspects:

In the perception of Moldovan female adolescents in Italy, the most pronounced business qualities of the person representing his/her ethnic group are: *organization* (M = 6.00), *predisposition to lead* (M = 5.95) and *determination* (M = 5.72). Similarly, we observe some tendencies towards the following traits: *diligence* (M = 4.84) and *good household management* (M = 4.95), which remain at a low level. More specifically, for Moldovan female adolescents in Italy, the Moldovan people, in terms of business qualities, are: *organized*, *inclined to lead*, *determined*, *diligent* and prone to *good household management*. Thus, from the above mentioned, it is obvious that the image of the person representing the ethnic group is predominantly “drawn” with positive qualities. At the same time, they perceive the person representing their ethnic group as *lacking in initiative* (M = 3.35), which apparently contrasts with *determination* and *rigidity* (M = 2.60), which remain at a low level. In the same vein, we note how difficult it is for adolescents to determine themselves in the case of *passivity-activism* dyad. (M = 3.40). On the whole, therefore, the autostereotype regarding the business qualities of the person representing his/her ethnic group appears to be quite positive.

In the case of female adolescents in the Republic of Moldova, the most highlighted business qualities of the person representing the ethnic group are: *good household management* (M = 5.00) and *flexibility* (M = 5.34). At the same time, from the obtained results, we note that no statistically significant differences were noted with regard to *good household management* in both groups of adolescents, which means that this is the defining quality of Moldovan people, both in the perception of Moldovan female adolescents in Italy and the Republic of Moldova. In the same way, we also observe that there is a slight tendency to include *the spirit of initiative* (M = 4.93), *predisposition to lead* (M = 4.75) and *determination* (M = 4.81) in the representation of Moldovan people, which again remain at a low level. In the same context, we also note the girls’ difficulty in choosing between *organization* and *disorganization* (M = 3.39). But on the whole, in the perception of female adolescents in

the Republic of Moldova, a positive representation of their ethnic group prevails, although it is not as clear as we expected it to be, considering the fact that in adolescence a clear image of the person representing the ethnic group is already formed.

The comparative analysis of the autostereotypes regarding Moldovan business qualities in the case of Moldovan female adolescent in Italy and in the Republic of Moldova allows us to conclude the following:

a) As *good household management* is evaluated identically in both groups, we can assume that this quality is a defining characteristic and it is a basic trait of the Moldovan people.

b) In both groups of adolescents, the difficulty in making a choice between *passivity* and *activism* was noted, where there were no statistically significant differences (Table 1.5.).

c) The difference regarding the image of the person representing the ethnic group with reference to business qualities is noticeable in the case of the other pairs of qualities.

As a result, according to Moldovan female adolescents living in Italy, Moldovan people are characterized by *determination, organization, diligence* and *predisposition to lead*, while female adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova mention only *flexibility* and *initiative*. Therefore, the differences in the choices of female adolescents can be explained by their location in different contexts and by different assumed statuses. In other words, female adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova and being part of the majority group, consider themselves *flexible* and *predisposed do lead* (which depends on the majority group and its position in society), while for an effective integration as a minority group (immigrant group), they see themselves as *open, determined, organized, diligent* and *inclined to lead*.

Table 6: Comparing Moldovan personal qualities based on the opinions of Moldovan female adolescents in Italy and in the Republic of Moldova

Qualities	The mean of Moldovan adolescents in the Republic of Moldova +/- The Standard Deviation	The mean of Moldovan adolescents in Italy +/- The Standard Deviation	t-test
Openness - Reservation	3,00 +/- 1,67	4,49 +/- 1,64	-4,595
Aggression - Peace-loving	2,90 +/- 1,84	4,84 +/- 1,80	-5,442
Kindness - Wickedness	3,07 +/- 1,60	2,53 +/- 1,72	1,676
Honesty - Falsity	4,49 +/- 1,83	4,91 +/- 1,84	-1,158
Hospitality - Lack of hospitality	1,73 +/- 0,91	4,23 +/- 1,88	-8,148
Cunning - Sincerity	3,72 +/- 1,85	2,63 +/- 1,42	3,485

Delicacy, finesse - Arrogance, uneducatedness	4,58 +/- 1,75	5,19 +/- 1,53	-1,852
Receptivity - Insensitivity	2,39 +/- 1,36	4,84 +/- 1,68	-8,412

Analyzing the results of the comparison of the personal qualities of the person representing the ethnic group (Table 6), the following scenario is presented:

In the perception of Moldovan female adolescents in Italy, the most highlighted personal qualities of the Moldovan people are: *openness* (M = 4.49), *the tendency to be peace-loving people* (M = 4.84), *honesty* (M = 4.91), *hospitality* (M = 4.23), *delicacy, finesse* (M = 5.19) and *receptivity* (M = 4.84). Thus, on the basis of these qualities, although they are at a moderate level, with the exception of delicacy, finesse (which remains at a low level), the positive autostereotype of the ethnic group representation is summarized. At the same time, in the representation of Moldovan female adolescents living in Italy, *cunning* (M = 2.63) and *wickedness* (M = 2.53) – which are at a low level, but which deserve particular attention and consideration when it comes to immigrant adolescents – are also highlighted. Consequently, the positive and poorly exteriorized image of Moldovans can be explained by the adolescents' stay in a foreign cultural space and the lack of real ethical practices (which should be implemented in the family and in the circle of relatives at least in the moments of return to their home country).

In the case of adolescent girls from the Republic of Moldova, the image of the person representing the ethnic group, with reference to personal qualities, contains the following qualities: *honesty* (M = 4.49) and *delicacy, finesse* (M = 4.58), which are the most accentuated compared to the others. At the same time, to our surprise, Moldovan female adolescents perceive Moldovans as *insensitive* (M = 2.39) and *lacking in hospitality* (M = 1.73). The choice of given traits, in our opinion, is nothing more than a projection of their reality to the immediate environment. For this reason, we allow ourselves to conclude that the image of the person representing their ethnic group, with regard to personal qualities, is quite "scattered" and confused. The comparative analysis of the image of the Moldovan people, in terms of personal qualities, in the case of Moldovan female adolescents living in Italy and those living in the Republic of Moldova, highlights the common traits of the person representing their ethnic group: *wickedness, honesty, delicacy* and *finesse*, which are expressed almost identically in both groups of female adolescents (Table 6.1). However, if in the perception of female adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova, Moldovans are lacking in

hospitality, then in the case of female adolescents living in Italy, the Moldovan people are endowed with this quality. Analogically, we observe the same thing in the case of the following pairs: *receptivity-insensitivity*, where for Moldovan female adolescents in Italy, the Moldovans are seen as *receptive* and *insensitive*, but for female adolescents in the Republic of Moldova – the Moldovans are only *insensitive*, although these traits are estimated at a low level in both cases. In the same context, probably due to the current socio-economic situation in which we live, *cunning* does not seem to have negative connotations for both groups of female adolescents. Therefore, the image of the person representing their ethnic group in the case of Moldovan female adolescents in Italy is more positive compared to the image of female adolescents in the Republic of Moldova.

Conclusions

1. Moldovan adolescents living in Italy have a positive image of the person representing their ethnic group with regard to business qualities. Therefore, the autostereotype with reference to business qualities incorporates *determination, organization, good household management* and *predisposition to lead*. However, as the adolescents are quite critical, they also highlight some less positive traits: *lack of initiative* and *rigidity*, which are part of the overall picture of the Moldovan people, although they remain at a low level. In the case of Moldovan adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova, the perception of the person representing the ethnic group is equally positive, except that, in terms of assessing the qualities, they are inferior to their colleagues in Italy. Therefore, in their perception, the image of the person representing their ethnic group is dominated by *flexibility* and *spirit of initiative*.

2. Moldovan adolescents, with reference to the stereotype of the business qualities of the person representing the ethnic group, show both similarities and differences. Thus, in the case of both groups, *good household management* is highlighted- a characteristic which reflects the agricultural character of the Republic of Moldova. However, referring to Moldovan adolescents living in Italy, *good household management* reflects that resource of integration in a foreign cultural environment, through the maintenance of the social image, which is a fundamental support point in their integration in the host country.

3. The autostereotype with reference to personal qualities in the case of Moldovan adolescents living in Italy, is dominated by positive traits, but is less clear compared to the autostereotype with regard to business qualities. At the same time, in addition to *honesty*, which has a higher prevalence, the person representing the ethnic group is also “controlled” by *openness, delicacy, finesse, receptivity* and *the tendency*

to be a peace-loving person. In the same context, the autostereotype on personal qualities generated by adolescents from the Republic of Moldova can be characterized by confusion and contradiction, as adolescents highlight positive traits such as *honesty, delicacy, finesse*, “combined” with less positive traits such as *aggression, reservation* and *insensitivity*.

4. The comparative analysis of autostereotypes with regard to personal qualities of the person representing the ethnic group, in the case of Moldovan adolescents living in Italy and in the Republic of Moldova, points out that the autostereotype is more positive and less controversial in the case of Moldovan adolescents living in Italy compared to Moldovan adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova, where it is confusing and contradictory. Consequently, the qualities for which there are no differences are *honesty, delicacy, finesse* and *wickedness*, which are estimated equally in both groups. Similarly, we observe that *honesty, delicacy* and *finesse* are the basic features of the stereotype of the person representing the ethnic group.

5. Moldovan adolescents living in Italy have a positive image of the person who represents the ethnic group, both in terms of personal and business qualities. However, in the case of business qualities, the autostereotype is more pronounced and positive, which is not surprising, as the above mentioned qualities represent a strong foundation for the inclusion and integration of adolescents in the host country.

6. Gender-based comparative analysis revealed in both groups of adolescents the following features of the person representing the ethnic group:

6.1 On the whole, in the case of Moldovan male adolescents who are immigrants in Italy, with regard to personal qualities, the person representing the ethnic group has a positive image which is expressed through the following qualities: *hospitality, delicacy, finesse* and *receptivity*. At the same time, the image of the Moldovan people, in terms of personal qualities, in the case of male adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova, is dominated by *honesty, delicacy, finesse* and by traits with negative connotations such as *reservation, aggression, insensitivity* and *lack of hospitality*, although these qualities remain at a low level. Therefore, the autostereotype of male adolescents living in Italy, with reference to personal qualities of the person representing the ethnic group, is more positive, compared to that of male adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova.

6.2 With regard to business qualities, in the case of Moldovan male adolescents living in Italy, the positive stereotype prevails, being represented by the following qualities: *organization, determination* and

predisposition to lead. In a similar manner, the comparative analysis of autostereotypes with regard to business qualities for male adolescents in Italy and those in the Republic of Moldova, highlighted the fact that in the case of male adolescents living in Italy the autostereotype reflects the characteristics and requirements of the socio-cultural environment in the hospitable country, which implicitly “requires” them to be organized, determined and prone to leadership.

6.3 In the case of Moldovan female adolescents in Italy, the autostereotype referring to personal qualities of the person representing the ethnic group is positive, but poorly expressed. This aspect can be explained by the foreign cultural context in which they live and the lack of real interactions with their family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins). In the same context, in the case of female adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova, the autostereotype regarding personal qualities of the Moldovan people can be categorized as confusing and contradictory. For the most part, Moldovan female adolescents living in Italy have a more positive image of the person representing the ethnic group, compared to Moldovan female adolescents in the Republic of Moldova.

6.4 For Moldovan female adolescents living in Italy, in terms of business qualities, the person representing the ethnic group is equipped with *organization, predisposition to lead, determination, diligence* and *good household management*, which outlines a positive image of the Moldovan people. At the same time, the comparative analysis of autostereotypes with reference to business qualities of the person representing the ethnic group among Moldovan female adolescents in Italy and in the Republic of Moldova, allows us to conclude the existence of a pronounced common quality -*good household management*, as well as some differences in the case of the following traits: *flexibility* and *spirit of initiative*, which are more pronounced in the case of female adolescents in the Republic of Moldova. This fact reflects some particularities related to Moldovan female adolescents living in different socio-cultural environments and the difference in their status (majority-minority).

General conclusion:

The image of the person representing the Moldovan ethnic group, based on the opinions of Moldovan adolescents who are immigrants in Italy and Moldovan adolescents living in the Republic of Moldova, reveals both common and distinctive qualities. Therefore, in the perception of Moldovan adolescents living in Italy and in the Republic of Moldova, the person representing their ethnic group stands out by the common feature – *good household management*, which is an essential business quality, regardless of status, gender or place of living. In the same sense (not taking into account the same criteria: status,

gender, place of living), the evaluation of personal qualities of Moldovan people highlights the following characteristics: *delicacy, finesse, honesty*, but also *wickedness* (although they are estimated at a low level). Consequently, based on these results, it seems that the mentioned qualities are basic in the perception of adolescents of both groups. For this reason, it is necessary to carry out further investigations on other groups of Moldovan adolescents who emigrated to other countries.

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Examining the Effects of Attitudes on English: A Contextualized Exploration of TVT Institute Learners

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Abstract:

English proficiency is vital for the career success of technical and vocational trainees, yet factors influencing proficiency in technical contexts remain underexplored. This study examined the impact of behavioural, cognitive, and motivational attitudes on English proficiency among 46 Ethiopian technical vocational trainees, with a focus on potential gender differences. Data were collected through a quantitative survey and standardized language assessments. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that attitudes significantly predicted proficiency, with cognitive attitudes having the strongest influence. However, gender did not moderate the relationship between attitudes and proficiency. These results highlight the importance of fostering adaptive attitudes to enhance language proficiency among vocational learners. Despite aligning with previous research, the lack of gender-based interaction effects suggests the need for a more nuanced understanding of language acquisition processes. The findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions to support the development of career-oriented language skills in diverse learning environments.

Keywords: behavioural attitude, cognitive attitude, English proficiency, motivational attitude, technical and vocational trainees

Introduction

English language proficiency is crucial for Ethiopian technical and vocational trainees, enhancing their employability and access to global opportunities. Attitudes towards English are significant predictors of language learning outcomes (MacIntyre et al., 2019). However, limited research has explored the relationship between these attitudes and English proficiency among Ethiopian vocational trainees. In addition to this, the potential moderating effect of gender on this relationship remains largely unexplored (Coates, 2015). Understanding these

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dynamics can aid educators and policymakers in developing effective language programs tailored to this specific learner group (Adamu, 2016).

The Ethiopian Technical and Vocational Training Institute (TVTI) plays a pivotal role in the country's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system. As the sole higher education institution offering technical and vocational teacher training at the BSc and MSc levels, TVTI is instrumental in developing the workforce for TVET colleges nationwide. English proficiency is particularly vital in Ethiopia, where a skilled and English-proficient workforce is essential for economic growth and social development (Chemir & Kitila, 2022; Gessese, 2018; Mekonnen et al., 2024).

Research indicates that attitudes towards English are complex and multifaceted, encompassing behavioral, cognitive, and motivational components (MacIntyre et al., 2019). Recent studies have also highlighted the need to consider contextual factors unique to TVET environments, such as the emphasis on demonstration and hands-on skills, which shape linguistic experiences differently from other educational settings (Mesuwini, 2021).

Investigating the relationship between attitudes towards English and proficiency among Ethiopian TVET trainees can provide valuable insights for their professional development. Additionally, exploring the potential moderating effect of gender can help design language learning programs that address the unique needs of both male and female trainees.

Despite the importance of English proficiency in TVET colleges, there is a dearth of empirical research on the factors affecting the English proficiency of TVET trainees in Ethiopia. While previous studies have identified behavioral, cognitive, and motivational orientations as critical for second language acquisition (MacIntyre et al., 2019), there has been limited focus specifically on TVET trainees (Tadesse, 2020).

Models of language development often overlook the unique contextual dimensions of TVET environments, which prioritize practical skills over theoretical knowledge, thereby influencing linguistic experiences differently (Mesuwini, 2021). Significant gaps exist in identifying factors associated with English communication competence for TVET educators, who must balance student training with modern workplace expectations (Mesuwini, 2021; Billett, 2014). While attitudinal components are foundational (MacIntyre et al., 2019), environmental moderators such as context-specific factors warrant examination (Mesuwini, 2021).

Based on these gaps, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

- (1) Behavioral attitudes will significantly predict English proficiency.
- (2) Cognitive attitudes will significantly predict English proficiency.
- (3) Motivational attitudes will significantly predict English proficiency.
- (4) Gender will moderate the effects of attitudinal factors on English proficiency.

This study aims to explore attitudes towards English language learning specifically among Ethiopian TVET trainees. While prior research has investigated attitudinal factors among general student populations, few studies have focused on technical and vocational learners. Moreover, no known studies have examined the interaction effects between attitudinal predictors and demographic characteristics like gender in this population. Addressing these research gaps is crucial for providing contextualized insights into optimizing English proficiency development for Ethiopia's technical and vocational training workforce. Empowering TVET graduates with strong language and practical skills is vital for advancing the country's industrial goals and global competitiveness.

Literature Review

A growing body of research has explored the impact of motivational attitude, behavioral attitude, and cognitive attitude on an individual's proficiency in the English language (Gardner, 2014). These factors are interconnected and can play significant roles in shaping language learners' outcomes.

Motivational Attitude and English Proficiency

Motivational attitude is a critical component of language learning, influencing an individual's desire to learn and engage with the language. Research has shown that intrinsic motivation, based on personal interest and satisfaction, is particularly important for language learning (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). This is because intrinsic motivation fosters a deep approach to learning, leading to better long-term retention and understanding of the language (Carrió-Pastor & Mestre, 2014).

The role of motivational attitude in language learning has been well-established, with learners who are more motivated demonstrating greater willingness to communicate, increased effort, and better language performance (Vidhya et al., 2024). Intrinsic motivation, in particular, has been associated with positive emotions, self-confidence, and a sense of accomplishment, which can further enhance language learning (Kim, 2021).

Moreover, motivational attitudes can be influenced by external factors, such as social pressure, rewards, and expectations. Extrinsic motivation, for example, can be useful in initiating language learning, but it may not be as effective in sustaining long-term engagement as intrinsic motivation (Carrió-Pastor & Mestre, 2014).

Behavioral Attitude and English Proficiency

Behavioral attitude refers to the observable actions and behaviors associated with language learning, including effort, persistence, and engagement in learning activities. Research has shown that learners who exhibit positive behavioral attitudes towards language learning, such as attending classes regularly, completing homework, and practicing outside of class, tend to perform better in language proficiency tests (Bagheri & Andi, 2015).

The relationship between behavioral attitude and English proficiency is complex, with various factors influencing this relationship. For example, learners who are more self-regulated, setting higher learning goals and using metacognitive strategies, are more likely to exhibit positive behavioral attitudes towards language learning, which in turn, leads to better language proficiency (Zhou, 2021).

Behavioral attitudes can also be influenced by social and environmental factors, such as teacher support, peer influence, and cultural background. For instance, learners from collectivist cultures, where cooperation and social harmony are highly valued, may be more likely to exhibit positive behavioral attitudes towards language learning, as they view language learning as a means to build relationships and connect with others (Li, 2023; Trumbull et al., 2014).

Cognitive Attitude and English Proficiency

Cognitive attitude encompasses the mental processes and beliefs that influence an individual's approach to language learning, including self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, and interest value (Muir, 2021). Self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to perform a task, has been consistently associated with language learning outcomes (Zhou, 2021).

Cognitive attitudes are shaped by previous experiences, cultural background, and social context, and can influence learners' perceptions of their own language learning abilities. For example, learners with a fixed mindset, who believe that abilities are innate and unchangeable, may be less likely to take on challenges, persist in the face of difficulties, and invest effort in language learning, compared to learners with a growth mindset, who view abilities as flexible and subject to improvement (Miyake et al., 2010).

Moreover, Pressley (1990) stated that cognitive attitudes can affect learners' use of cognitive strategies, such as rehearsal, elaboration, and organization, which can enhance language learning. For instance, learners who employ elaboration strategies, such as connecting new information to existing knowledge or visualizing concepts, tend to demonstrate better language comprehension and retention (Pressley, 1990).

In general, motivational, behavioral, and cognitive attitudes are interrelated and can significantly influence language learning outcomes. Research has consistently shown that learners who exhibit positive attitudes towards language learning, who are self-regulated and engaged, and who employ effective cognitive strategies, tend to perform better in language proficiency tests. However, the relationship between attitudes and language learning is complex and influenced by various factors, such as social context, cultural background, and previous experiences.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between attitudes and English proficiency among vocational trainees in Ethiopia. The study utilized a cross-sectional study approach and involved 46 participants from a specific training program.

Sampling Technique

The target population was all graduating trainees in the regular Garment and Apparel Fashion program at the Federal TVT Institute in Ethiopia during the 2022 academic year. Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on enrollment in this specific training program and stream (regular daytime). The population size for regular Garment and Apparel Fashion trainees was 46. All 46 trainees were requested to participate, and all agreed and provided consent, resulting in a final sample size of 46 participants representing 100% of the target population. As such, no separate sample size calculation was needed since the entire population was included in the study through purposive sampling methods.

Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments used in this study included a questionnaire and standardized tests.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to collect data on attitudinal factors and demographics. Attitudinal scales were employed to assess behavioral attitudes towards English learning (BAE), cognitive attitudes (CAE), and motivational attitudes (MAE). These scales utilized a 5-point Likert format adapted from previously validated instruments.

Standardized Tests

English proficiency was measured through standardized tests administered to all participants. The test was taken from Cambridge English Proficiency (CPE) 2, and it included four distinct components to comprehensively evaluate different language skills.

The speaking component consisted of a 10-minute interview scored on a 4-point rubric. This interview was conducted by trained assessors and focused on topics related to the participants' experiences, interests, and opinions. This approach ensured that the speaking tasks

were relevant and engaging for the participants, allowing them to demonstrate their conversational skills in a familiar context.

The listening component involved responses to recorded dialogs and lectures through multiple-choice questions. The listening passages were carefully chosen to reflect the language used in real-world situations, such as classroom lectures and everyday conversations. This selection aimed to assess the participants' ability to understand spoken English in practical and varied contexts.

The reading component included short passages followed by literal and inferential open-response questions. The reading passages were selected to be relevant to the participants' interests and experiences, facilitating their engagement with the text and enabling a more accurate assessment of their reading comprehension skills.

The writing component required participants to compose a 250-word essay, which was assessed on content, organization, vocabulary, and grammar using an analytic rubric. The essay topic was related to the participants' training program, allowing them to demonstrate their ability to write clearly and effectively about subjects pertinent to their vocational education. This component aimed to evaluate their written communication skills in a structured and contextually relevant manner.

Both the writing and speaking rubrics used in this study were adapted from the "TFU Foreign Language Assessment Rubrics", which are widely recognized and validated instruments for assessing language proficiency. These rubrics were carefully selected and modified to suit the specific context of the study. The evaluation of the writing and speaking components was conducted by experts in the field of language assessment, ensuring the reliability and validity of the scoring process. The expertise and experience of these assessors contribute to the credibility and accuracy of the results obtained from the evaluation of writing and speaking skills. Prior pilot studies provided evidence of the instruments' reliability, with a reliability coefficient (α) of 0.89.

Test Administration

The speaking evaluations were conducted in a quiet, private room, with one assessor and one participant. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and scored based on the adapted rubrics. The listening, reading comprehension, and writing evaluations were administered in a computer lab, with participants completing the tests individually and in a controlled environment. The tests were administered during regular class hours, and participants were given adequate time to complete all components.

Ethical Consideration

This study was conducted with utmost respect for the rights and dignity of the participants. Participants were fully informed about the

purpose, methodology, and potential risks and benefits of the study. They provided written consent before participating in the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequence.

Data Analysis

Responses were first analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS 25 to obtain an overview of the sample characteristics, with measures of central tendency (mean) and variability (standard deviation) calculated for all variables. Normality testing of the English proficiency data was then conducted using the Shapiro-Wilk tests to assess assumptions of parametric tests. Rather than Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, the Shapiro–Wilk test is used because the sample size is small (<50 samples). Hierarchical linear regression was employed to investigate predictive relationships between attitudes and English proficiency, allowing for comparison of models with stepwise inclusion of predictor blocks - Model 1 included the behavior, cognitive and motivational attitude scales as predictors, while Model 2 added interaction terms between each attitude scale and sex as additional predictors. The regression process produced model summaries with R² change statistics and standardized (β) and unstandardized (B) coefficients, while t-tests and significance levels determined predictive ability. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) evaluated overall model fit through assessment of explained/unexplained variance proportions using sum of squares values, degrees of freedom, mean squares and F-ratios. Collinearity diagnostics including variance inflation factors and tolerance values checked for multicollinearity issues between predictors, while the Durbin-Watson statistic examined independence of residuals. A 95% confidence level was used to interpret results addressing study hypotheses regarding attitudes English proficiency and potential moderation by sex among vocational trainees.

Results

The next sections provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing English proficiency through linear regression modeling. The analysis encompasses various aspects, including description, assessment of normality, residual analysis, model development, predictor significance, and model summary.

Variable Characteristics

This section presents the descriptive statistics for the variables included in the study. It provides insights into the average level and variability of the factors, including English proficiency, attitudinal factors, and their interactions with participants' sex. These statistics serve as a foundation for further analysis and interpretation of the study's findings.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the variables in the study. It shows the mean and standard deviation for the dependent variable, English Proficiency, indicating moderate proficiency with variability. Descriptive statistics for attitudinal factors (Behavioral Attitude towards English, Cognitive Attitude towards English, Motivational Attitude towards English) reveal average scores and standard deviations, reflecting participants' attitudes towards English. The table also includes interaction variables (Inter_BASex, Inter_CASex, Inter_MASex), showing combined effects of attitudinal factors and sex on English proficiency.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variables	N	Mean	SD
English Proficiency	46	14.8043	3.64307
Behavioral attitudinal to English	46	3.3761	0.32331
Cognitive attitudinal to English	46	3.4000	0.34383
Motivational attitudinal to English	46	3.2239	0.38597
Inter BASex	46	-0.1343	1.07234
Inter CASex	46	-0.0854	1.06368
Inter MASex	46	0.0745	0.99396

The dependent variable, English Proficiency, has a mean score of 14.8043 and a standard deviation of 3.64307. This suggests that, on average, the participants in the study have a moderate level of English proficiency, with a considerable amount of variability in their proficiency levels.

Regarding the independent variables, we have three attitudinal factors related to English language learning: Behavioral Attitude towards English, Cognitive Attitude towards English, and Motivational Attitude towards English. The mean score for Behavioral Attitude towards English is 3.3761 with a standard deviation of 0.32331, indicating that, on average, participants have a moderately positive attitude towards English. Similarly, the mean score for Cognitive Attitude towards English is 3.4000 with a standard deviation of 0.34383, suggesting a moderately positive attitude towards conversational English. For Motivational Attitude towards English, the mean score is 3.2239 with a standard deviation of 0.38597, indicating a slightly lower average attitude towards English motivation.

In addition, the table provides descriptive statistics for the interaction variables. These variables represent the combined influence of specific attitudinal factors and participants' sex on English

proficiency. The mean score for Inter_BASex (Interaction between Behavioral Attitude and Sex) is -0.1343 with a standard deviation of 1.07234. For Inter_CASex (Interaction between Cognitive Attitude and Sex), the mean score is -0.0854, with a standard deviation of 1.06368. Lastly, Inter_MASex (Interaction between Motivational Attitude and Sex) has a mean score of 0.0745, with a standard deviation of 0.99396. These statistics provide insights into how the interaction of attitudinal factors and participants' sex may influence English proficiency.

In brief, the descriptive statistics in Table 1 give an overview of the sample and provide information about the participants' English proficiency levels, attitudes towards different aspects of English language learning, and the interaction effects between attitudinal factors and sex. These statistics offer valuable insights into the characteristics of the variables under investigation in the study.

Assessment of Normality and Residual Analysis

This section focuses on the assessment of normality and residual analysis for the regression model predicting English Proficiency. The analysis includes two components: Tests of Normality and a Normal P-P Plot of Standardized Residuals.

Table 2. Tests of Normality

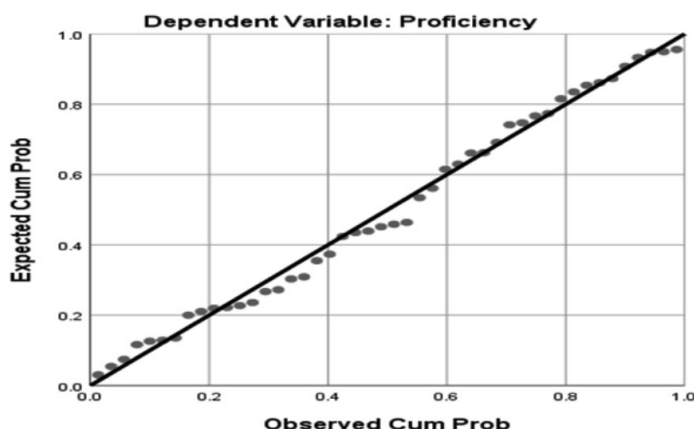
	Shapiro-Wilk Statistic	df	Sig.
English Proficiency	.983	46	.735

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The Shapiro-Wilk test was employed to evaluate the normality of the distribution. The Shapiro-Wilk statistic value is 0.983, with a significance level (Sig.) of 0.735. Since the significance level is greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that the data is normally distributed. Shapiro-Wilk tests suggest that the variable “English Proficiency” is likely to be normally distributed in the sample. The high significance value (0.735) indicates that there is no significant deviation from normality. It is important to note that the Shapiro-Wilk test is generally more powerful for detecting deviations from normality, especially in smaller sample sizes.

Generally, the data on normality suggests that the assumption of normality for the variable “English Proficiency” is met, which is a desirable condition for conducting parametric statistical analyses.



Graph 1. Normal P-P Plot of Standardized Residuals

The normal P-P plot is a graphical tool used to assess the normality assumption of the residuals in a linear regression model. Ideally, the points on the graph should fall closely along the diagonal line, indicating that the residuals follow a normal distribution. Deviations from the diagonal line may indicate departures from normality.

In this case, the points on Graph 1 appear to be quite close to the diagonal line, indicating that the residuals are reasonably normally distributed. This is in line with one of the key assumptions of linear regression, which assumes that the residuals follow a normal distribution. When the residuals are normally distributed, it suggests that the model adequately captures the underlying patterns and variability in the data.

Generally, based on the information provided in Graph 1, it can be concluded that the assumption of normality for the residuals in the linear regression model is reasonably satisfied.

All in all, these outputs effectively evaluate the research question by testing hypothesized relationships between variables, identifying significant predictors, and checking assumptions to validate results and conclusions.

Hierarchical Regression Models Predicting Technical Trainees' English Proficiency

The preceding sections analyzed data from a series of hierarchical regression models examining relationships between English proficiency scores and predictor variables among a sample of technical vocational trainees. Table 3 displays key outputs from the regression process, including standardized beta coefficients and confidence intervals for each variable across the four models. By interpreting information in Table 3, insights could be drawn regarding the predictive ability of

included variables on trainees’ English proficiency levels. Specifically, the analysis highlighted which factors emerged as most impactful while also shedding light on potential interaction effects between predictors.

The data in Table 3 represents the coefficients from four separate regression models analyzing the relationship between trainees’ English proficiency and various predictors. I will analyze and interpret each model’s results below.

Table 3. Variables Predicting Technical Trainees’ English Proficiency across Models

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Beta	CI: 95%	Beta	CI: 95%	Beta	CI: 95%	Beta	CI:95%
Behavioral attitude	0.784 ***	2.12- 3.47	0.547 **	0.68- 3.22	0.546**	0.84- 3.06	0.544 **	0.77- 3.11
Cognitive attitude			0.277	-0.28- 2.26	0.217	-0.34- 1.89	0.205	-0.46- 1.92
Motivational attitude					0.311 ***	0.52- 1.70	0.312 **	0.483- 1.74
Interaction sex*attitude							-0.101	-1.54- 0.87
Model Fit Statistics								
F-value	70.06 ***		37.41 ***		37.43*		17.85 ***	
R ²	0.614		0.635		0.728		0.733	
Δ R ²	0.614		0.021		0.093		0.005	

Note. *** P<0.001, ** P<0.005

Model 1 included only the behavioral attitude factor as a predictor. The results show that this factor had a strong, significant positive relationship with English proficiency, accounting for 61.4% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.614$). The standardized beta coefficient of 0.784 indicates that a one-unit increase in behavioral attitudes is associated with a 0.784 standard deviation increase in English proficiency.

Model 2 added the cognitive attitude factor as a second predictor. While this increased the overall R^2 to 63.5%, the change in R^2 of 0.021 was not statistically significant. Both the behavioral ($\beta = 0.547$, $p < 0.005$) and cognitive ($\beta = 0.277$, $p > 0.05$) attitude factors were significant predictors in this model.

Model 3 incorporated the motivational attitude factor as a third predictor. This substantially improved the model fit, increasing the R^2 to 72.8%, a significant change ($\Delta R^2 = 0.093$, $p < 0.001$). In this model, two of the attitudinal factors were significant predictors, with behavioral ($\beta = 0.546$, $p < 0.005$), and motivational ($\beta = 0.311$, $p < 0.001$) attitudes contributing uniquely. However, cognitive attitude did not achieve statistical significance ($p > 0.05$) as an independent predictor.

Model 4 added interaction terms between the attitudinal factors and sex (Inter_BASex, Inter_CASex, Inter_MASex). However, the change in R^2 of 0.005 was not statistically significant, indicating that the interaction effects did not meaningfully improve the model's predictive ability beyond the main effects alone. This indicates that after accounting for the main effects of the individual predictors, adding the interaction terms did not meaningfully improve the model's predictive ability or explain additional variability in English proficiency scores. In other words, the findings suggest sex did not significantly moderate or change the relationships between the attitude factors and proficiency identified in previous models. The interaction effects did not contribute substantial explanatory power independent of the main predictors alone.

The results suggest that behavioral and motivational attitudes are the strongest predictors of English proficiency among the trainees, with behavioral attitudes demonstrating the largest unique contribution. In a practical, skill-based training environment like TVET in Ethiopia, behavioral attitude contributes more significantly to proficiency gains compared to cognitive and motivational factors. This is because the development of practical skills requires consistent effort, practice, and repetition, which are directly observable behaviors. The lack of significant interaction effects implies that the relationships between the attitudinal factors and proficiency do not depend on or vary by sex.

Generally, these findings highlight the importance of considering multiple attitudinal dimensions when examining language learning outcomes, with behavioral and motivational factors emerging as particularly salient predictors of English proficiency in this context.

Discussion

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the relationships between attitudinal factors and English proficiency among vocational trainees. Consistent with previous research, the findings suggest that attitudes, particularly motivational attitudes, have a significant direct effect on English proficiency. This is in line with socio-educational and socio-cognitive theories, which emphasize the importance of attitudes in language learning (Ghavidel & Valipour, 2020; Kim, 2021).

The study's findings highlight the critical role of attitudes in shaping English proficiency among vocational trainees. This is consistent with the broader understanding of the influence of attitudes on second language acquisition (SLA) (Vidhya et al., 2024). The results underscore the need for educators and policymakers to consider the impact of attitudes when designing and implementing language learning programs

for vocational learners. This is particularly relevant in the Ethiopian context, where English is a crucial tool for accessing employment opportunities and participating in the globalized economy (Gessese, 2018; Mekonnen et al., 2024).

While prior research has highlighted the importance of cognitive attitudes in predicting language proficiency (Ghavidel & Valipour, 2020), this study reveals a unique contribution of motivational attitudes. This finding suggests that the specific context of vocational training, where practical skills and job-related language are paramount, may prioritize motivational factors over cognitive ones. This aligns with the notion that vocational learners may be driven by intrinsic motivations, such as career aspirations and personal growth, which can significantly influence their engagement with language learning (Miyake et al., 2010). This finding contrasts with the findings of Ghavidel & Valipour, 2020, who identified cognitive attitudes as the strongest predictor in their study involving Iranian students in general higher education settings. This divergence can potentially be attributed to contextual differences, as the present study focused on vocational trainees in Ethiopia, whose motivations and learning priorities may differ from those in academic settings. This underscores the importance of considering the specific context of language learning when examining attitudinal influences.

The observed differences in the relative importance of attitudinal factors between this study and previous research, particularly Ghavidel & Valipour (2020), can be attributed to contextual variations. The present study focused on vocational trainees in Ethiopia, while Ghavidel and Valipour study involved Iranian students in general higher education. This difference in educational contexts, along with potential cultural and societal variations, may explain the divergent findings regarding the relative influence of cognitive and motivational attitudes.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the need to consider the specific context of language learning when examining attitudinal influences. As argued by Ye & Ren (2023), the relationship between attitudes and proficiency may vary situationally depending on the role requirements and learning objectives. This underscores the importance of context-sensitive research in understanding the complex dynamics of attitude-proficiency relationships.

The study's findings suggest that behavioral attitudes play a particularly significant role in vocational training, where practical skills are emphasized. This is because the development of practical skills requires consistent effort, practice, and repetition, which are directly observable behaviors. The study's findings highlight the importance of encouraging positive behavioral attitudes among trainees, such as attending classes regularly, completing assignments, and engaging in practice activities. This finding is consistent with the broader

understanding of the importance of behavioral engagement in language learning (Zhou, 2021). The prominence of behavioral attitudes in the current vocational context contrasts with the findings of Ghavidel and Valipour (2020), who identified cognitive attitudes as the strongest predictor in their study. This divergence highlights the need to consider the specific demands and learning objectives of different educational contexts when examining attitudinal influences on language proficiency (Ye & Ren, 2023). The current research adds to the limited body of knowledge on attitudinal influences in vocational settings, which have been understudied compared to academic contexts.

The study's findings also highlight the importance of motivational attitudes in vocational training. Motivational attitudes, such as interest, value, and expectation to succeed, can significantly influence a learner's engagement with language learning activities and their persistence in the face of challenges. This is particularly important in vocational training, where learners may face practical challenges and require a strong sense of purpose to stay motivated (Muir, 2021).

The study's findings highlight the need for individualized support and tailored instruction in vocational language learning. The study's findings suggest that different learners may have different attitudinal profiles and may be influenced by different factors (Li, 2023; Trumbull et al., 2014). Educators should consider these individual differences when designing and implementing language learning programs.

Qualitative studies informed by socialization perspectives, such as those by Altınsoy & Okan (2017) and Carrió-Pastor & Mestre (2014), have uncovered contextual influences on language learning. These studies highlight the importance of considering the social and cultural contexts in which language learning occurs. This includes factors such as peer influence, classroom dynamics, and cultural norms. The contrast between the current study's findings and the insights from qualitative research suggests that a more comprehensive understanding of attitudinal influences on language learning can be achieved by integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

This study, like many cross-sectional studies, is limited by its inability to capture the dynamic interplay of attitudes and proficiency over time. Unlike Teng's (2024) longitudinal work, which explored developmental processes, this study could not fully substantiate the potential interaction effects between attitudes and other factors, such as sex. Future research employing longitudinal designs or mixed-methods approaches could address this limitation and provide a more

comprehensive understanding of the dynamic interplay between attitudes and proficiency development in vocational contexts.

The study's reliance on general measures of attitudes may have limited the ability to capture contextually salient influences, as suggested by Bagheri Nevisi & Farhani (2022). Future research could benefit from incorporating more refined and context-specific measures of attitudes to better understand their influence on language learning in vocational settings.

Furthermore, the study's quantitative approach did not allow for exploring the rich contextual influences on language learning through participants' own perspectives, as demonstrated in qualitative studies by Carrió-Pastor & Mestre (2014) and Lam (2020). Integrating qualitative methodologies with quantitative approaches could provide a more holistic understanding of the complex interplay of attitudes, context, and language learning in vocational settings.

The findings of this study have significant implications for practitioners and policymakers involved in vocational education and language training. The emphasis on the importance of motivational attitudes suggests that fostering a positive learning environment that promotes intrinsic motivation and a sense of purpose is crucial for enhancing language proficiency among trainees. This can be achieved through several strategies such as rehearsal, elaboration, and organization, and connecting new information to existing knowledge or visualizing concepts (Pressley, 1990).

First, integrating language learning with practical skills is essential. Linking language learning to real-world applications and job-related tasks can enhance motivation and engagement. This approach aligns with the principles of "content and language integrated learning" (CLIL), which has been gaining traction in Ethiopia as a means of promoting both language and subject matter learning (Gessese, 2018). Second, providing opportunities for authentic communication is vital. Creating opportunities for trainees to use English in meaningful and authentic contexts, such as role-playing, simulations, and real-world projects, can foster motivation and improve language proficiency (Bondarchuk et al, 2024; Budiman et al., 2023). This approach aligns with the recommendations of Ethiopian educators who emphasize the importance of creating "real-life" learning experiences for vocational students (Abiy et al., 2014). Third, encouraging learner autonomy can significantly enhance motivation and promote language acquisition. Empowering trainees to take ownership of their learning process by providing them with choices and opportunities for self-directed learning can enhance motivation and promote language acquisition (Abiche et al., 2018). This approach aligns with the growing emphasis on learner-centered pedagogy in Ethiopian education (Billett, 2014). Finally,

providing individualized support is crucial. Recognizing the diverse needs and learning styles of trainees through individualized support and tailored instruction can enhance motivation and promote success (Chemir & Kitila, 2022). This approach aligns with the recommendations of Ethiopian educators who emphasize the importance of providing differentiated instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners (Tesema & Woldemariam, 2016).

Future research should explore several key areas to build on the findings of this study. Longitudinal studies can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic interplay between attitudes and proficiency over time (Teng, 2024). This is particularly important in the Ethiopian context, where the development of English proficiency is often influenced by factors such as access to education, socioeconomic background, and exposure to the language (Tesema & Woldemariam, 2016).

Mixed-methods research, which combines quantitative and qualitative data, can offer a more holistic understanding of the complex interplay of attitudes, context, and language learning (Creswell & Clark, 2017). This approach would allow researchers to delve deeper into the lived experiences of Ethiopian vocational trainees and understand the nuances of their attitudes towards English learning.

Researchers should also develop and use context-specific measures of attitudes to better understand their influence on language learning in vocational settings (Bagheri Nevisi & Farhani, 2022). This is particularly important in the Ethiopian context, where the specific demands of vocational training and the cultural context can influence learners' attitudes and motivations.

Finally, future research should explore the role of social and cultural factors in shaping attitudes and language learning outcomes. This is crucial in the Ethiopian context, where cultural values, language ideologies, and societal expectations can significantly influence learners' attitudes towards English and their motivation to learn the language.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the complex relationships between attitudes and English proficiency among vocational trainees in Ethiopia. The findings highlight the significant influence of attitudinal factors, particularly motivational and behavioral attitudes, in predicting English language proficiency in this specific educational context. The emphasis on motivational attitudes suggests that in the vocational training setting, where practical skills and job-related language are paramount, intrinsic factors such as career aspirations and personal growth may play a more crucial role than cognitive attitudes.

This contrasts with previous research in more general academic settings, underscoring the importance of considering the unique contextual factors that shape language learning processes. In addition, the prominent role of behavioral attitudes, reflecting consistent effort, practice, and repetition, underlines the importance of developing practical language skills in vocational training. This finding aligns with the broader understanding of the significance of behavioral engagement in language learning. The observed differences in the relative importance of attitudinal factors compared to previous studies can be attributed to the unique contextual factors of the current study, such as the focus on vocational trainees in Ethiopia. This highlights the need for more context-sensitive research to fully capture the exact interplay between attitudes, context, and language proficiency development.

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ISSN

REVIEW ARTICLES

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New Perspectives on Translation: Cătălina Iliescu, *Relevancia y traducción. Una retrospectiva con lentes actualizantes*

Luiza Caraivan*

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Relevancia y traducción
Una retrospectiva
con lentes actualizantes



Cătălina Iliescu Gheorghiu

EDITORIAL COMARES



Interlingua

Cătălina Iliescu Gheorghiu's book *Relevance and Translation. A Retrospective through Updating Lenses* (*Relevancia y traducción. Una retrospectiva con lentes actualizantes*, Editorial Comares, 2022) offers a contemporary perspective on dramaturgical translation. The seven chapters of the book focus on translation, adaptation, dramaturgy and cultural appropriation: starting from an overview of verbal and non-verbal communication and the theory of relevance, the author moves towards the role of equivalence nowadays “between glory and

oblivion” and finishes with an analysis of relevant equivalence in the translation of dramatic texts, taking as an example Marin Sorescu's play *A treia țepă* (*La tercera estaca, Vlad the Impaler*).

The author's stated purpose for this study is to verify the applicability of the theory of relevance to the comparative analysis of the translation of theatre plays, adopting Ernst August Gutt's point of view (in the 1990s, Gutt linked cognitive linguistics and translation – as a communicative activity). However, Cătălina Iliescu Gheorghiu proposes an analytical tool (the “model of relevant equivalence”) to be used on a Romanian pseudo-historical play and its translations into English and Spanish. Moreover, the author moves beyond a simple comparative analysis and incorporates the receivers' reactions into the theory of relevance. By including the readers or the spectators in the analysis (their inferences and their expectations), Ms. Gheorghiu observes the text from a different angle, thus uniting all those involved in the act of

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communication (the author, the translator, the theatre director and the spectator/ reader).

In the chapter that focuses on the translation of theatre plays, Cătălina Iliescu Gheorghiu briefly reviews some of the most relevant positions on the interlingual translation of dramatic texts, starting with Susan Bassnett who started a debate in 1985 based on the metaphor of the labyrinth, adding the problem of cultural clash to the complicated conventions of text-stage translation. Ms. Gheorghiu underlines the importance of analysing and translating a text differently in different contexts and times, depending on the conventions, expectations and narratives of the audience at different historical moments, and emphasizing the collaboration between all those involved in the distribution of the final product. She also underlines the fact that her analysis aligns with the traditional translation position, which ascribes the translation of theatre to literary studies, as one of its constituent genres. From Susan Bassnett, Ms. Gheorghiu moves to Mary Gaddis Rose, who is a representative of the hermeneutic paradigm in modern translation studies, and who proposes an intertextual and multidimensional approach to the translation of theatre plays. Further on, she points out that some useful studies in her analysis of Sorescu's play are the volumes coordinated by Zuber-Skerritt, *The Language of Theatre* and *Page to Stage*, as they bring together the opinions of dramatic translation theorists, directors, translators, and authors, joining different points of view (literary, artistic, hermeneutic, semiotic, linguistic), in order to address the main difficulty of theatrical work (its teleological duplicity between text and stage). The end of this chapter offers the Spanish view on translating theater plays, introducing theorists such as Poyatos, Santoyo, Pujante, or Bobes Naves, representatives of a new generation of researchers who accompany their theoretical hypotheses with models applicable to theatrical texts translated into Spanish.

The chapter "Analysis of the relevant equivalence of the dramatic text *A treia țepă* (*La tercera estaca, Vlad the Impaler*) by Marin Sorescu" introduces an analysis model that addresses equivalence from a cognitive perspective, using concepts such as interpretive similarity, contextual effects, inferential communication or the principle of relevance, proposed by Sperber and Wilson and applied by Gutt to translation. With this new model of "relevant equivalence", Cătălina Iliescu Gheorghiu proposes some instruments for translation analysis that contribute to the transversality of translation studies and draw on the theoretical apparatus from related disciplines such as linguistics or literary studies. Not only does she explain the model of relevant equivalence, but she also verifies its viability by applying it to selected

lines from the pseudo-historical drama *A treia țeapă* by Marin Sorescu and its translations into English (*The Impaler's Third Stake*, 1980; *Vlad Dracula the Impaler*, 1987/ 1990) and Spanish (*La tercera estaca*, 2018). Ms. Gheorghiu also emphasizes the fact that she has taken into consideration the following factors: the complicated aspects of the source language or culture, which could cause difficulties in understanding; the differences in the perception of the source text even among a homogeneous group of Romanian readers/ spectators, as shown by a survey carried out with fifty Romanian respondents, who were asked to offer their understanding of some lines from Sorescu's play. Moreover, Ms. Gheorghiu also presents the results of the surveys that were applied on 25 English-speaking respondents and 20 Spanish respondents who were asked to comment on the English and the Spanish translations of the play. Although it would have been advisable to include responses from 50 English speakers and 50 Spanish speakers for a more balanced opinion, the results of the surveys confirm the usefulness of the relevance model for the comparative study of translated theatre plays.

The new analytical framework introduced by Cătălina Iliescu Gheorghiu encompasses parameters such as communicative intentions (as reflected in several target texts) or the relevance principle. The proposed "relevant equivalence model" provides an instrument for detailed introspection of the translation of the dramaturgical text, both in the case of linguistic and cultural differences. It is obvious that the book is aimed at researchers or students interested in translation studies, as it offers a thorough analysis useful for future studies in this field. Cătălina Iliescu Gheorghiu successfully demonstrates that the field of translation studies has more to offer.

MISS

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

Grațiela Benga-Țuțuianu*

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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.

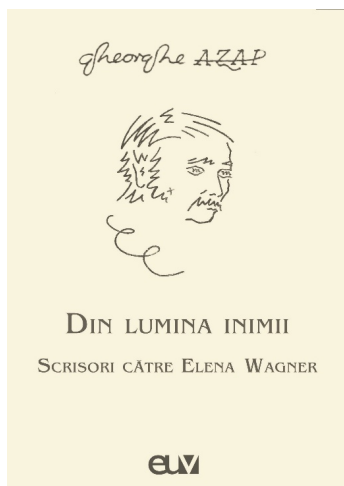
Aimed at both specialized and general audiences, *Sociabilité de loisir (The Sociability of Leisure)* is rich in examples and also grounded in a reliable theoretical framework. It successfully pleads for an inclusive approach to literature (broadly, to arts), while meditating on the aesthetic of coming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

Sistole afective: Gheorghe Azap, *Din lumina inimii. Scrisori către Elena Wagner*

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Affective Systoles Version: Gheorghe Azap, *Din lumina inimii. Scrisori către Elena Wagner*



Lucian Ionică a îngrijit, cu delicatețe și smerenie, un volum-bijuterie: Gheorghe Azap, *Din lumina inimii. Scrisori către Elena Wagner* (Timișoara, Editura Universității de Vest, 2024). Mărturisește că demersul se înscrie în logica unui proiect vast, face parte din documentarea la „Muzeul Online al Literaturii din Banat – MOLB”. În format *livre de poche*, cu o prefață de Cornel Ungureanu, acesta se convertește în mărturia unei vieți trăite în numele literaturii. Corespondența dintre Gheorghe Azap și Elena Wagner durează zece ani, din 1977 până-n 1986. Chiar dacă nu este

una de iubire, se înscrie, *mutatis mutandis*, în paradigma epistolelor celebre, cum ar fi cele dintre Alfred de Musset – George Sand, Albert Camus – Maria Casarès, Henry Miller – Anaïs Nin, Guillaume Apollinaire – Louise de Coligny Chatillon, Victor Hugo – Juliette Drouet, Franz Kafka – Milena Pollak, Albert Einstein – Mileva Marić, Mihai Eminescu – Veronica Micle etc. În alte culturi, dacă ar fi să ne referim doar la spațiul european, aceste gesturi firești, de înscriere într-o matrice indispensabilă, de semnificație biografică, de recuperare a unor momente de istorie literară, sunt la ordinea zilei. Apar, în mod constant, ediții de acest tip, volume de corespondență ale unor scriitori, artiști sau filosofi celebri. Corespondența îi pune într-o altă lumină, adaugă ceva indestructibil la parcursul existențial, la întreaga lor creație, pentru că, oricât ar fi de diferite genurile în care s-au exersat, inima e locul spre care conduc finalmente toate edificiile textuale. Toate căile literaturii converg spre *interiora ama*.

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În spatele fiecărui proiect există o poveste de viață. După moartea soțului, la doar 27 de ani, în condiții neelucidate, Elena Wagner găsește alinare în poezia și prietenia lui Gheorghe Azap. Ea este cea care-i scrie prima, entuziasmată, după ce un prieten îi semnalează prezența-n librării a volumului *Maria – o caterincă zbuciumată* (Timișoara, Editura Facla, 1975), care i-a impresionat pe amândoi. Găsește adresa poetului în revista „Orizont” și astfel demarează inedita călătorie epistolară. *Din lumina inimii* reunește scrisori între doi oameni care nu s-au cunoscut, nu s-au privit în ochi, direct, niciodată. Este vorba despre un *epistolarium*, o carte în care Gheorghe Azap își arată o altă față, una a însingurării, a tristeții covârșitoare. Cel care-și vede viața ca pe un iad, conchide: „Ce trist plouă în noaptea acestei singurătăți!” (p. 105); „[...] lespedeza tăcerilor m-apasă zilnic mai avan.” (p. 107).

Locuiește cu părinții într-un sat din Caraș-Severin, în Ticvaniu Mic, cu o populație de 300 și ceva de locuitori, la cca. 20 de km de Oravița. Fire retractilă, preferă să se izoleze în satul cărășan, unde-și câștigă existența în principal din munca pământului. „Izolarea îi pune un nimb exponențial, nu lipsit de un statut eroic.” (p. 5) spune Cornel Ungureanu în prefață. Spirit boem, necăsătorit, tânjește după prezența Roxanei, o iubire neîmpărtășită. Asemenea altor confrăți, precum poetul reșițean Ion Chichere sau pictorul naiv Viorel Cristea, trăiește în sărăcie, cu grija zilei de mâine, măcinat de reumatism. Ar dori să aibă o teracotă caldă, un televizor. Dar nimic nu-l împiedică să fie livresc și să țină la prieteni foarte mult. Versurile sale ajung să fie cântate. Mircea Vintilă e unul dintre compozitorii care-l preferă. Despre orice ar scrie, poetul de la Ticvaniu Mic se va întoarce, la un moment dat, tot la cărțile sale, ale confrăților, la ceea ce intenționează să publice. Dedicat ființei iubite, apărut în 1978, *Roxana, Roxana, Roxana* e un volum laitmotiv, derulat constant în memoria discursivă, asemenea unui ecou. Iubirea himerică, pe care-o dorește cu ardoare, la care se întoarce mereu, devine o formă de supliciu. Afirmă, de câteva ori, folosind o conexiune inedită-ntrre cuvinte: „Am auzit cum şuieră ghilotina timpului, scurtându-mă!” (p. 99). Într-alt context, insistent și abrupt: „nu-mi pot ghilotina dorul” (p. 41-42) sau, apropo de dorința Elenei de a părăsi Deva, „ghilotinându-ți inima” (p. 55).

Interesant este faptul că multe dintre scrisorile trimise Elenei Wagner sunt însoțite de poeme proaspete ori de cărți nou apărute ale autorului, în chip de cadou. La schimb, ea, *prietena filatelică*, îi pune-n plic timbre, pentru a fi lipite pe următoarele epistole. O prietenie încremenită-n timp, care atinge, inevitabil, și firele iubirii. Textele pe care le-anină, adresate, cele mai multe, Roxanei, pot fi cu ușurință îndreptate spre Elena Wagner. Remarc apropierea care se produce, în

mod tacit, între cele două femei care nu se cunosc; pe de o parte, iluzia, *fata morgana*, și, într-alt zenit, corespondenta fidelă, la fel de vag conturată și ea, în lipsa prezenței fizice.

Genul epistolar se deosebește de celelalte forme ale literaturii, prin aceea că implică un nivel de intimitate la care devine părtaș cititorul obișnuit. Imersiunea în textul de mici dimensiuni provoacă o ședere la masă cu expeditorul, o subtilă observare, „peste umăr”, a gesturilor sale. Formulele de introducere și de încheiere sunt esențiale, modul în care poetul i se adresează destinatarului, o femeie, în cazul de față. Dacă ne referim la scris, ce poate fi mai intim decât o scrisoare adresată unui prieten? Formula literară centrată pe biografeme, codificată, pe alocuri, impune practicarea unui stil, a unui limbaj prin care corespondenții reușesc să se înțeleagă perfect. Pentru ca parteneriatul să se realizeze, intervine afectul, se consolidează vultele inimii, ale timpului interior.

Conectat la febrilitatea momentului trăit, avântul de început, care durează, totuși, ani buni, se va stinge ușor. Poetul afirmă, adesea, că e copleșit de numărul mare de scrisori cărora trebuie să le facă față. Sub aburii alcoolului, stă până târziu în noapte, sub lumina inspiratoare a lunii, încercând să țină pasul cu cohorta de texte în așteptare. Sau e plecat la București, la vreun festival de poezie, dar, în general, totul se concentrează în satul cărășan, unde pare că s-a născut nemurirea. Portretul scriitorului bănățean poate fi extras, în chip facil, din acest schimb de replici epistolare. Și te întrebi, la sfârșit, ce i-a împiedicat pe cei doi protagoniști să urce-n tren și să se viziteze? Distanța dintre Deva, unde locuia doamna Wagner, și Ticvaniu Mic nu e foarte mare. Conținutul livresc nu poate fi înlocuit, oare, cu o conversație vie, într-o livadă cu meri, la țară? E una dintre necunoscutele acestei relații la distanță. Amândoi călătoresc. Vorbesc și de vacanțe. Elena îi povestește, spre pildă, cum își petrece sejururi la mare ori în Munții Retezat, în străinătate, în Polonia sau Cehoslovacia. Poetul îi spune cum i-ar plăcea să se stabilească la Vălenii de Munte. Când prietena de suflet îi mărturisește că ar vrea să se stabilească la Cluj, el face elogiu Bucureștiului, ca spațiu cultural inegalabil, raportat la țara noastră.

Gheorghe Azap îmbină admirabil tonurile arhaizante, de curtoazie, cvasi trubadurești, cu unele moderne, impregnate cu subtilități și unde ironice. M-au surprins unele cuvinte sau locuțiuni pe care nu le mai auzisem de ceva vreme, unele asocieri surprinzătoare, extrem de poetice. Există un termen folosit în mod repetat, neidentificat în dicționarele limbii române, extras din recuzita metalurgiei, *incorodabilă* (cf. fr. *corroder* < lat. clas. *corodare* < pref. intensiv *cum-* + *rodere*), cu trimitere la *încredere* și la *iubirea* față de Roxana, personajul feminin nelipsit din scrisorile trimise Elenei Wagner, efemeridă, muză, asemănătoare cu fapturnle mitologice mai mult decât cu o pământeană,

un fel de spirit al vagului creator, neliniște a firii, ecou inspirator sau distructiv. Delicatețea cu care nota unele lucruri mă face să cred că povestea epistolară ar fi putut să se transforme într-o veritabilă *histoire d'amour*, dacă cei doi ar fi cedat ispitei. „Îți mulțumesc pentru panseluța trimisă.” sau „Ești o frățioară de aur!” (p. 45) sunt mostre ale sentimentului puternic de apropiere platonice între protagoniști. Predomină figurile feminine, Elena și fiica ei, Roxana, Maria, Bițuca (o nepoată a lui Șt. O. Iosif). Bărbații apar mai rar și par a nu fi esențiali, ci doar prelungiri ale stării deja create, în conexiune cu femeia.

La Ticvaniu Mic, în 5 făurar, 1978, Gheorghe Azap scrie, cu referire la transformarea duminicilor, considerate în trecut „fetițele sărbătorilor mari”: „Acum le simt doar ca pe niște borne înfipite, riguros și calp, în timp; ori ca niște păsări rapace, care înghit câte șase, câte șase, zile, dintr-o dată” (p. 66). Ascultă muzica lui Connie Francis, „pasăre cântătoare”, de peste mări și oceane, pe care o vede ca pe „una dintre zeițele sublime ale împătimitului meu suflet”, mărturisind că se află „sub vraja cântecelor” ei (p. 80). Se autoportretează, folosind forma de plural, *gorgoane*, pentru cea literară, *gorgone*: „[...] eu nu sunt nimic altceva decât un biet scripcar al nimănui, și odrasla zbuțuită cam vitregă a insomniilor. Ținta gorgoanelor veninoase...” (p. 35). Cu referire la dificultatea și chiar imposibilitatea de a capta bogăția sufletească, sfârșește prin a nota, într-una din scrisorile trimise prietenei de la Deva, cea din 14/15 octombrie 1977: „[...] mi-e imposibil să traduc limbajul inimii.” (p. 39).

Correspondența e luată foarte în serios de către scriitor. O consideră când sărbătoare, când povară: „Totuși mă prea copleșește corespondența, înstrăinându-mă de beletristică și harcea-parcea făcându-mi din stil” (p. 114). Există, în dialogurile de acest fel, o alianță între voci distincte, care au nevoie una de cealaltă, care se solidarizează, se sprijină necondiționat, permanent, se cheamă, se despart, tânjesec una după căldura sufletească a celeilalte. *Magnetism* e, în această optică, termenul motivat de circumstanțe, esențial, pentru a descrie pertinent corespondența bazată pe iubire sau prietenie.

Materialul inedit, care impresionează poate cel mai mult, arătând cât de puternică era legătura lor, este scrisoarea trimisă peste timp lui Gheorghe Azap de către Elena Wagner. Trăiește tot la Deva, are azi 84 de ani și rândurile scrise acum continuă povestea unei prietenii fără egal. *Din lumina inimii* e o carte a fragilității omenești, construită din fragmente desprinse cu delicatețe din realitatea unei singurătăți aspre, a unei autoizolări în satul bănățean Ticvaniu Mic. Ca un organism complex, asemănător cu inima, discursul epistolar funcționează după limbajul propriu, în sistole, aritmii, forme ale conservării sau întreruperii

vieții, cu devianțe, uneori, de la traseul inițial. Toate bucuriile, iubirile, tristețile se varsă-n cord, ca-ntr-un edificiu primordial, al afectivității, universal, de neînlocuit.

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