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**BRUKENTHAL. ACTA MVSEI  
XIII. 5**

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## **BRVKENTHAL. ACTA MVSEI**

### **BRUKENTHALIA** **Romanian Cultural History Review** **Revistă Română de Istorie Culturală**

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## Editorial Policies and Instructions for Contributors

The Brukenthalia Journal proposes a subject for its new issue – **The Wars after the Great War in Memoirs, Literature and Arts (Part I, 1918-1923)**

For some historians, especially those contemporary with the event, the Armistice (11/11/ 1918, the 11th hour) meant the end of the Great War and the carnage. However, between 1918-1920, in Europe, even after the collapse of the empires, there were still bilateral military conflicts, international litigations, great social upheavals, civil wars. A new geopolitical configuration emerged as a result of the dissolution of empires, while Bolshevism grew as a totalitarian socio-political system. The installation of the Armistice, the negotiations and peace treaties concluded (see the case of the Paris Peace Conference, 1919-1920) are not always synonymous with the restoration of peace and the return to „normalcy”. The repercussions on the lives of civilians and demobbed soldiers rejoining civilian life were difficult and rather unpredictable. The collective trauma took a long time to recede, the society’s reconstruction was slow and the economic revival was fragile. Frustration and skepticism became generalized attitudes, especially among the working class and the intellectuals. The political landscape was determined by fluctuations, institutional reconfigurations, the writing and rewriting of constitutions and the reconsideration, from a modern perspective, of citizenship.

Social polarization and the deployment of class hatred, anti-Semitism, ethno-cultural variations and geopolitical changes, the accelerated liberation of women, all led to a diminished tolerance of women, ethno-cultural minorities and foreigners.

The war itself and the diseases which, after the war, decimated the civilian population, famine and the difficult reconstruction reinstated another imagery of Death. It emerged, in the representations of this age, with the full power of medieval symbolism. Conversely, the conservative social norm was eluded by reinventing music, literature and art, the culture of the body.

Memoirs, literature and visual arts reacted against the new challenges, expressing the traumas of the age and evoking pacifism, as well as the disbelief in the moral progress. In the countries where the national dream came true or which pushed the cause of autonomy further (see Ireland), another phenomenon occurred, the construction of a mythical aura around the emblematic figures of the war, the birth of a cultural pantheon. Both the official and the popular discourse framed the mythology of victory, the new axiological pantheon. But there is also a mythology of defeat, an exacerbation of the Golden Ages, stimulating the desire for payback and recovery.

Specifically, visual arts, literature and film best reflect, in our view, these mutations. That is why we welcome the papers which will choose to focus on the investigation of this area.

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## **A. STUDIES**



**POLITICS, RELIGION AND THE GREAT WAR IN FRANCE AND ITALY (1910-1922).  
ANTI-GERMANISM, ANTISOCIALISM AND ANTICLERICALISM IN THE ARCONATI  
VISCONTI-CUMONT CORRESPONDENCE**

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**Abstract:** *This article analyzes the correspondence (1910-1923) between a French 'salonnière', the marchioness Arconati Visconti (1840-1923), and the Belgian historian of religions Franz Cumont (1868-1947), who lived in Brussels and Rome, and who, among other eminent personalities of the time such as Alfred Dreyfus (1859-1935), Jean Jaurès (1859-1914) and Emile Combes (1835-1921), regularly participated in Thursday night dinners, the so-called 'salons du jeudi' - participants were called Thursdays or 'jeudistes', organized by the marchioness. Two central themes are at the heart of this study, i.e., religion and (geo)politics, shortly before, during and after the First World War. Notably in the light of the marchioness' 'soft power' over political and intellectual life, a closer look at her opinions, as well as at those of one of her closest friends and allies, hopefully will contribute to a better understanding of European high society during this particularly crucial era in European and global, history.*

**Keywords:** *marchioness Arconati Visconti, Franz Cumont, salon culture, the Great War, politics and religion*

The present article analyzes the correspondence (1910-1923) between a French 'salonnière', the marchioness Arconati Visconti (1840-1923),<sup>1</sup> and the Belgian historian of religions Franz Cumont (1868-1947), who lived in Brussels and Rome, and who, among other eminent personalities of the time such as Alfred Dreyfus (1859-1935), Jean Jaurès (1859-1914) and Emile Combes (1835-1921), regularly participated in Thursday night dinners, the so-called 'salons du jeudi' -participants were called Thursdays or 'jeudistes', organized by the marchioness. Two central themes will be at the heart of this short study, i.e., religion and (geo)politics, shortly before, during and after the First World War. Notably in the light of the marchioness' 'soft power' over political and intellectual life, a closer look at her opinions, as well as at those of one of her closest friends and allies, can contribute to a better understanding of European high society during this particularly crucial era in European, and global, history.

Let us start by taking a closer look at some of the main characteristics of the relationship between the marchioness and Cumont, as well as, more generally, at the

marchioness' role as salonnière, based on the relevant secondary literature. What directly stands out is the fact that politics seems to be central to the persona of the marchioness, this to such an extent that Anne Martin-Fugier labels her activities as salonnière as political, her *salon du jeudi* as a political salon or political dinner. Also revealing is the fact that in Martin-Fugier's 508 page book, a mere three pages are dedicated to political salons (Martin-Fugier, 2003, 290-293). Indeed, only very little work has been undertaken in this field. The political dimension is often mentioned, but only rarely developed or analyzed in a far-going manner, in spite, in the case of the marchioness, of what Jean Stengers called her intellectual passion for politics, a passion which he linked to another typical aspect of the marchioness' activities and relations, i.e., the nearly total absence of women in her inner circle: "quand, pour répondre à cette passion [her intellectual passion for politics and political life], elle voit des hommes politiques, ce sont aussi, comme leur nom même l'indique, des hommes. C'est donc bien intellectuellement que la marquise ne s'intéressait pas aux femmes." (Stengers, 2000, 217) To this we should add that, as also counts for political salons in general (cf. supra), the marchioness has only been studied in a relatively small number of scholarly papers, not in the least, as has been observed by Gérard Baal (Baal, 1981, 433), because of the absence, in her salons, of a certain type of 'intellectual' - a notion

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<sup>1</sup> Born Marie Peyrat, after marrying the marquis Arconati Visconti, she became a widow at the age of 36. The author wishes to thank Danny Praet (Ghent University) and Corinne Bonnet (Université de Toulouse-Jean Jaurès) for liberating various funds which made the present research possible.

which started taking shape during the latter half of the nineteenth century -, i.e., the writer, who in this precise era disposes of great legitimacy at the level of his political opinions, as typically evidenced by the figure of Emile Zola.

When we turn to the marchioness' political opinions, a clear evolution immediately stands out. Republicans and 'dreyfusards', she and the men who participated in her dinners "ont [during the first decades of the twentieth century] effectué un virage qui, s'il ne les conduit pas vraiment 'à droite', au sens précis et antirépublicain qu'a encore ce terme en 1914, les amène à prendre des attitudes de plus en plus conservatrices, à adopter notamment, à l'égard du mouvement ouvrier dont ils se sentaient assez proches vers 1900, les réflexes et les analyses de la droite au sens éternel du terme." (Baal, 1981, 434) In this context, any socialist initiative is notably the object of near-repulsion (Baal, 1981, 441). Such highly conservative opinions (which we will also encounter in the Arconati Visconti-Cumont correspondence) might at first seem somewhat surprising, but that is without taking into account the general climate of the time, i.e., a climate in which the blinding fever of nationalism and patriotism was omnipresent, before, during and in many cases also after the Great War. However, and in spite of the jeudistes' growing antisocialism, the people were always at the heart of their concerns and ambitions, but in a rather particular manner, as in "theory, the Marquise championed 'the people,' but she meant to shape their vision of the past through elite institutions, money, and objects." (Harris, 2009, 241) It is also here that her activities as *mécène*, notably of scientific institutions, comes into play, as has been expertly laid out by Thérèse Charmasson (Charmasson, 2014).

Whatever their precise nature, the 'political' activities of salonnières such as the marchioness but also, for example, Gyp (1849-1932),<sup>2</sup> are all but conventional. These were exceptional women who evolved in a world dominated by men. Being salonnière required huge efforts, at the level of logistics, but also, intellectually, at the level of interaction with participants, who were often part of the *crème de la crème* of intellectual life at their time. Salonnières created a 'context', but not only: as they were at the centre of their network, they were pivotal, crucial elements in this latter structure, in spite of a certain amount of discretion and *retenue* during the dinners (which was notably typical of the marchioness, cf. Cumont (Cumont, 1978, 24)).

The most poignant example is the *Affaire Dreyfus*, during which several salonnières played a central role, even if backstage, forging, in an indirect but rather effective manner, political life at the time. Indeed, political, social and intellectual life were closely intertwined; as a consequence, "the affair [the Affaire Dreyfus] cannot be analyzed within the tidy confines of conventional history: the private and the political overlapped with dinnertime conversation, intimate correspondence, literary and historical production as well as political advocacy." (Harris, 2009, 237) In other words, what we can observe in this epoch is an all but conventional way of 'doing politics', a culture from which we feel at the same time distant, and close (Harris, 2009, 246).

The marchioness' 'power' also translated into a more open interest in political life, leading to direct contact with several politicians active at the time. Indeed, no need for the marchioness to rely on newspaper reports on French political debate, as her Paris home was a place "où les députés arrivent au sortir du palais Bourbon, lui apporter toutes brûlantes leurs impressions de la séance [...] elle parlait de cet âge héroïque avec une sorte de nostalgie [...] De ses nombreuses relations avec les parlementaires, elle conserva toujours quelques amitiés fidèles, comme celles de Brisson [politician Henri Brisson (1835-1912)] et de Combes [politician Emile Combes, cf. supra]..." (Cumont, 1978, 16) In addition, she did not only use her considerable financial means to finance scientific research and teaching (cf. supra), but also directly funded political initiatives such as, e.g., socialist politician Jean Jaurès' newspaper *l'Humanité* (Baal, 1997, 54) -at one occasion, she even covered Jaurès' campaign funds (Baal, 1979, 4). To this it should be added that she was in very close contact with politician Joseph Reinach (1856-1921, cf. Baal, 1997, 53), a central figure in French political life at the time.

As for the marchioness' position towards religion and the Catholic Church, a radical, aggressive (Baal, 1997, 50) anticlerical attitude clearly dominates her discourse and *Weltanschauung*. Indeed, she was not so much opposed to catholic faith as she was opposed to the Church as an institution (Harris, 2009, 245), whereby the latter was regularly the subject of scorn and mockery (Stengers, 2000, 224). As for religion itself, she above all seemed to be devoid of any sense of devotion; for Cumont, she was "la personne la plus étrangère à toute préoccupation religieuse que j'ai connue" (Cumont, 1978, 9), a person whose ideas also became increasingly anachronistic. In the context of her relationship to Cumont, it should furthermore also be noted that

<sup>2</sup> On Gyp, see Harris (2009).

it was precisely religion, i.e., catholic politics in Belgium, which was at the origin of their friendship (Cumont, 1978, 18). Finally, the marchioness' anticlericalism also seems to originate in her upbringing: her father, whom she revered (along with his friend, the politician Léon Gambetta (1838-1882), was journalist and politician Alphonse Peyrat (1812-1890), a poor man who, as legend has it, first launched the slogan "le cléricalisme voilà l'ennemi" (Cumont, 1978, 9); apart from his political aversion towards the Church, he had also written a series of articles which were later published as independent volumes, showcasing his positivist, rational anticlerical political stance (Goossens, 1999, 31): *Histoire et religion* (1858), *Etudes historiques et religieuses* (1863) and *Histoire élémentaire et critique de la vie de Jésus* (1864).

Anticlericalism and political activism thus clearly were central, constituent elements of the marchioness' personality. She had a profound interest in the organization of society, of the *polis*. Indeed, in her mindset politics was a crucial, all-encompassing and structuring notion; she was a "femme d'ordre" (Stengers, 2000, 221), who lived for "la politique, encore la politique, toujours la politique. Trois thèmes majeurs dans ses lettres: la politique internationale, l'actualité politique française et la vie de l'Eglise, vue sous l'angle de l'anticléricalisme." (Stengers, 2000, 219)

Our analysis of Cumont's letters to the marchioness will focus on two themes, i.e., politics and religion, whereby the former will be subdivided in three aspects, i.e., the relationship politics-religion, party politics (with a focus on socialism and the first years of fascism in Italy), and international politics at the time of the Great War. In Cumont's letters, the most vivid and developed political opinions can be encountered directly before the outbreak of and during the war. That being said, and contrary to the marchioness, Cumont was above all a keen observer, much in the same way as, during the Thursday dinners, he and other academics such as Henri Pirenne (1862-1935) in a sense seemed to abandon their professorial togas for a less predominant role (Cumont, 1978, 25).

As for the relationship politics-religion, a first observation which should be made is that this latter relationship was above all a central element during the first years of the Arconati Visconti-Cumont correspondence, no doubt also a consequence of the modernist crisis (cf. also *infra*). In a context of raging Vatican opposition against 'modern' attitudes towards science and religion, Cumont keenly observed that his native country Belgium was at a turning point in its

history, as the country, "soumis depuis un quart de siècle à un régime clérical, qui poursuit avec ténacité l'asservissement de l'instruction publique, se détache néanmoins peu à peu de l'Eglise. L'Esprit souffle maintenant contre elle. A chaque élection on constate que les masses profondes du peuple échappent à la domination du clergé. Même les campagnes flamandes, auparavant impénétrables, sont entamées. A Courtrai, sous l'influence de la France voisine, le nombre des voix socialistes a triplé."<sup>3</sup> At least at the moment, for Cumont socialism is a counterweight against clerical power, a sort of 'necessary evil'; one can even encounter a timid, albeit hesitating and critical, appreciation of what socialism represents, especially when compared with catholic political activism, when in August 1911 Cumont writes, once again in the context of Belgian politics: "Les socialistes sont devenus ici - ce qu'ils n'étaient pas - nettement anticléricaux. Ils ont une autre religion: et la conviction qu'ils apportaient à manifester égale celle qu'ils mettaient dans leurs pèlerinages autrefois. En voyant défiler sans fin et sans cesse ces groupes venus de Flandre et de Wallonie avec cartels, drapeaux et musiques on se sentait en présence d'une force immense devenue consciente d'elle-même."<sup>4</sup> He continuously, and explicitly, criticizes catholic power, especially when, at the occasion of general elections held in 1912, liberals and socialists constitute a block against Catholics. But the newly established block loses the elections, and Cumont does not hide his frustration: "Toute la petite bourgeoisie s'est détournée des libéraux par peur de leurs alliés les socialistes. Elle est peu sensible aux idées et beaucoup à la considération de ses intérêts. Tout le monde de la bourse s'est rangé contre nous [i.e., liberals and socialists] par crainte de voir des socialistes au ministère et l'on m'a assuré que les Juifs avaient donné en masse pour les catholiques. Bref, ce sont les élections de la peur."<sup>5</sup> The inevitable consequence, for Cumont: socialist strikes and disorder, whereby the Catholics are in power, in one word: total defeat.

From now on, Cumont's discourse becomes increasingly antisocialist (and, as we well see *infra*, pro-war), and constantly

<sup>3</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, June 6, 1910, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

<sup>4</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, probably August 16, 1911, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

<sup>5</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, June 5, 1912, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

anticlerical. In this context it becomes clear that Cumont, the marchioness and their entourage are to a certain extent unaware of certain realities, as can be observed in a September 1915 letter in which Cumont speaks of his brother, whose opinion regarding the British working class he seems to share, stating that during the war British workers “ne partagent pas tout à fait l’admiration officielle pour le ‘magnifique effort’ de nos voisins insulaires. Si les classes éclairées comprennent toute la grandeur d’une lutte formidable et tous les sacrifices qu’elle exige, il n’en est pas de même pour les ouvriers. Ils profitent avec un égoïsme monstrueux des gros salaires que la guerre leur procure, en travaillant le moins possible.”<sup>6</sup> A similar discourse can be encountered in Cumont’s description, in a long series of letters, of the social and political situation (socialist strikes and factory occupations, the first actions of the fascists,...) in Italy after the 1918 armistice. Socialists and socialist workers are here described as demagogues who propose “un remède souverain aux maux qu’ils ont eux-mêmes rendus insupportables.”<sup>7</sup>

It is in this same context that Cumont first mentions the ‘fasci’, i.e., groups of often young men, who are frustrated by the war effort, and are radically opposed to socialism, when he speaks of the “syndicats rouges et les ‘fasci’ d’autres combattants qui se sont constitués un peu partout.”<sup>8</sup> In these turbulent times, Cumont, who as he lives in Italy, is a privileged witness, still considers the fascists to be a force, albeit in essence deplorable and mafia-like, against socialist upheaval: “C’est une vieille tradition de ce pays que quand le gouvernement est impuissant une camorra se substitue à lui, pour empêcher les abus -par d’autres abus. La lutte contre les rouges est passée aux mains des fasci di combattimento, solidement organisés comme les syndicats et qui opposent la violence à la violence”.<sup>9</sup> Still in the same period, he never mentions their leader Mussolini, but rather focuses on the famous poet Gabriele D’Annunzio, closely linked, at the time, to the *fasci*. While it is increasingly lucid,

Cumont’s vision of fascism still remains embedded in a rather elitist, or in any case antisocialist, concept of society. Thus, in a letter written on February 19, 1922, i.e., some eight months before the fascist takeover of power, Cumont states that fascism would never have flourished without the communist takeover in Russia.<sup>10</sup> His position regarding the political evolution in Italy is one shared by many at the time: fear of socialist and increasingly fascist violence in the chaotic, turbulent context of the immediate afterwar period, fear of political instability, and fear of a (proletarian) revolution. As history has shown, at the end of October 1922 a different kind of revolution, which has been termed a ‘conservative revolution’ (Salvatorelli, 1977 (1° 1923), 64), took place, catalyzed by a charismatic leader whom Cumont, in March 1922, still calls “Mussolino”.<sup>11</sup> Cumont is not in Rome when on October 28 the so-called fascist ‘March on Rome’ takes place, but he returns to Italy shortly afterwards; his first impressions are timidly optimistic, as he refers to “l’enthousiasme des gens du monde pour Mussolini, l’homme qui les a sauvés du socialisme”.<sup>12</sup> Also noteworthy is the fact that even in this early period he already labels Mussolini a dictator -fascism only became a dictatorship in 1925-, and that he seems to increasingly doubt its effectiveness, when he observes, in a letter written shortly before the marchioness’ death, that “on peut se demander si cette puissance sera capable de remédier à des maux si graves dont il nous offre l’énumération complaisante. Pour le moment, on l’espère encore...”<sup>13</sup>

Apart from Italian political life, international, global politics is a highly recurrent element in the Arconati Visconti-Cumont correspondence, whereby enormous attention is paid to the war effort. The letters read as quite remarkable *chroniques*, which offer the reader an impression of the spirit of the times (Cumont, 1978, 33), and allow the writer, c.q. Cumont, to refine and in a sense forge, through the act of writing and reflection, his ideas in matters of

<sup>6</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, September 19, 1915, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

<sup>7</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, probably April 1, 1920, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

<sup>8</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, October 20, 1920, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

<sup>9</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, November 7, 1920, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

<sup>10</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, February 19, 1922, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

<sup>11</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, March 5, 1922, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

<sup>12</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, January 30, 1923, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

<sup>13</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, probably February 5, 1923, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

geopolitics. The first time international politics is mentioned, in postscriptum, is in a letter which probably goes back to 1912;<sup>14</sup> from now on this theme is constantly at the heart of the correspondence. What immediately stands out from a reading of Cumont's letters is the fact that he is highly conscious of the danger supposedly represented by Germany, notably, even if not only, to Italy. For example, in an April 22, 1915 letter, he describes a climate which in many aspects already resembles the post-war situation, when nascent fascism (°1919) crucially depended on the support and ideological heritage of World War I veterans. Prophetically, in 1915 Cumont writes: "il est certain qu'au moment où les soldats dont on a échauffé l'enthousiasme guerrier, seront rentrés dans leurs foyers, les causes accumulées de mécontentement provoqueront une formidable explosion, où pourrait sombrer la dynastie et bien d'autres choses..."<sup>15</sup> Like the marchioness, who for this precise reason had interrupted her turbulent (intellectual) relationship with Jean Jaurès, Cumont is not opposed to the war, rather the contrary, as an April 30, 1915 letter shows: "Nous sommes à une des heures critiques de l'histoire du monde, et bientôt les destins vont s'accomplir. Ce sera une grande joie certes, pour vous comme pour moi, de voir les latins du Tibre et du Danube défendre avec nous notre idéal de liberté et d'humanité et nous aider à détruire la force de ceux qui prêchèrent le culte de la force."<sup>16</sup> In August, he had already declared, much in the same, rather grandiloquent, manner: "Nous avons pour nous une force immense: le sentiment de notre bon droit, celui que, si nous succombons, ç'en est fait de notre indépendance. L'ultimatum insolent et l'invasion brutale des Allemands ont déchaîné ici contre eux une fureur sacrée. Le vieil esprit de liberté qui a soulevé autrefois nos provinces contre la tyrannie Espagnole les poussent aujourd'hui contre la prépotence germanique."<sup>17</sup> However, his sentiments are not entirely anti-German, not even in 1918, as he for example observes -here, once again, politics and religion meet- that "les haines

de race égarent l'esprit aussi violemment que les disputes théologiques."<sup>18</sup> Finally, and as was the case for many contemporaries, at the end of the war Cumont seems well aware of the disappointing, perilous outcome of the war, even if the concept of war in itself is not criticized, and never will, by Cumont, who on February 3, 1919 again quite prophetically declares: "Si j'ai été optimiste pendant toute la guerre, je vous avoue que je ne le suis plus après l'armistice, et si je n'ai jamais douté de la victoire, je commence à craindre sérieusement pour ses conséquences."<sup>19</sup>

As for the second focus of the present article, religion, a first observation which can be made is the fact that, based on his correspondence with the marchioness, Cumont is all but antireligious, in contrast with the marchioness. In this context, he makes, in an August 31, 1912 letter, the following observation concerning protestantism: "J'ai souvent été surpris de constater en Hollande, en Ecosse, à Genève, aux Etats-Unis, de quelle forte empreinte le calvinisme a marqué les peuples qu'il a conquis. Et quel individualisme puissant y a grandi. C'est de là que sont sorties non seulement la liberté religieuse mais la liberté politique."<sup>20</sup> In so doing he criticizes, by contrast, Catholicism. Even so, at the same time a certain appreciation of the religious element also seems present, as can also be observed when he repeats his idea in a December 25, 1918 letter in which he reflects upon the League of Nations: "Les calvinistes soutiennent -et il y a dans leur prétention quelque vérité- que l'honneur d'avoir fait triompher dans le monde la tolérance et la liberté appartient à leur secte démocratique. Genève et la Hollande ont été longtemps des îlots perdus dans la mer d'une Europe autocratique. - Puis les puritains ont transporté en Amérique leur esprit d'indépendance et d'égalité et ont marqué de leur forte empreinte toute la civilisation des Etats-Unis. La 'Société des Nations' serait l'épanouissement universel des conventicules protestants et la ferveur que témoigne Wilson pour les principes qui la régiraient, vient de la profondeur de ses convictions religieuses."<sup>21</sup> Once

<sup>14</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, probably 1912, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France. 3143.

<sup>15</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, April 22, 1915, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

<sup>16</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, April 30, 1915, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

<sup>17</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, August 12, 1914, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

<sup>18</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, December 25, 1918, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

<sup>19</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, February 3, 1919, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

<sup>20</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, August 31, 1912, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

<sup>21</sup> Cumont to Arconati Visconti, December 25, 1918, Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Sorbonne University,



again, Cumont the historian of religions, ancient and present, intimately links contemporary politics and religion.

Let us now turn to the letters of the marchioness. When we take into account the numerous letters written by her -it is not always clear when or where the more than 2000 letters to Cumont have been written-, it immediately stands out that they are structured in quite a loose manner, especially when compared to Cumont's letters. Indeed, the Arconati Visconti-Cumont correspondence does not so much present itself as a 'dialogue' as it is the expression of, a platform for, both interlocutors' opinions and feelings. Especially the marchioness seems, through writing, to forge and model her thoughts, in a constantly evolving discussion with Cumont, and with the other members of her network, to whom she often refers. As is the case for Cumont, two themes are omnipresent in her letters: politics (her political vision, her political activism, her antigermanism, her antisocialism) and religion (anticlericalism).

As for politics, it seems that the marchioness saw it as a true passion, from the very beginning of the correspondence in 1910, even since she was a very young child. In this context, she observed: "J'ai commencé à faire de la politique dans le ventre de ma mère, mes cendres en feront encore dans mon urne."<sup>22</sup> This passion remains with her throughout the years covered by the correspondence with Cumont; at the level of its contents, it first and foremost led to a need for order -she describes a 1911 Thursday dinner where Jean Jaurès was present-: "je m'en fous, refous et contrefous: l'ordre dans la rue, une forte défense nationale, voilà les deux nécessités vitales, les deux plats de résistance de la nourriture d'un peuple, le reste, c'est de la confiture."<sup>23</sup> She constantly repeats this idea, whereby socialists and other revolutionaries are the preferred victims. This can for example be seen in another letter, written shortly after the war, when she cannot hide her deception, writing that "l'ordre et le respect de la loi sont les conditions sans lesquelles il n'y a pas de vie sociale possible, ni surtout d'amélioration de la vie - On a abusé depuis des années de tous les principes; on les a tordus, faussés, dégradés au service de toute sorte d'intérêts vulgaires."<sup>24</sup>

Paris, France.

<sup>22</sup> Arconati Visconti to Cumont, probably 1910, archives of the Castle of Gaasbeek, Belgium.

<sup>23</sup> Arconati Visconti to Cumont, probably 1911, archives of the Castle of Gaasbeek, Belgium.

<sup>24</sup> Arconati Visconti to Cumont, probably 1920, archives of the Castle of Gaasbeek, Belgium.

Indeed, as also counts for Cumont, the outcome of the war is all but what had been expected, whereby in the opinion of the marchioness "la civilisation s'effrite, et nous sommes en train de subir, après une dépense extraordinaire d'héroïsme, une régression morale épouvantable." Finally, as mentioned before, the socialists are a privileged target. Thus she states that the "socialistes de tous les pays me dégoûtent au-delà de tout",<sup>25</sup> that French socialists "mériteraient d'être fusillés",<sup>26</sup> and that Bolshevism is a "danger universel".<sup>27</sup>

However, the marchioness' antisocialism is at times eclipsed by anti-German feelings. Indeed her anti-Bermanism is simply visceral, even in 1910, when she observed: "C'est que si l'Allemagne est une nation puissante et triomphante, elle n'est pas encore une nation policée - Elle a pris à la civilisation tous les instruments de conquête et d'expansion que la science peut mettre au service de la force; elle n'a su ni voulu lui prendre ses fleurs, c'est-à-dire l'affinement de l'esprit et du goût, la générosité de caractère, la courtoisie des formes, l'adoucissement des mœurs, la grâce et la cordialité des rapports, et moins encore que tout cela, la communion de l'âme allemande avec le reste du monde."<sup>28</sup> During the war, this message in very often, and increasingly so, conveyed, leading to essentially racist outings of rage following the devastating effects of the war effort. As was also the case for Cumont -we did not speak of his anti-Germanism, but it has to be added that he also occasionally expressed explicitly anti-German feelings-, such hostile feelings were widely diffused in Western Europe at the time, following the war, but not only.

Finally, in the case of the marchioness a true political 'activism' can be observed, a passion which does not only translate into writings (the thousands of letters sent to the members of her network), but also in active support. As far as we have been able to observe, she did not speak of this to Cumont, but instead actively stimulated discussion and contact between the members of her network, as she for example also did for historian of religions Alfred Loisy (1857-1940) and Joseph Reinach, by copying their letters and sending them to her

<sup>25</sup> Arconati Visconti to Cumont, probably 1918, archives of the Castle of Gaasbeek, Belgium.

<sup>26</sup> Arconati Visconti to Cumont, probably 1919, archives of the Castle of Gaasbeek, Belgium.

<sup>27</sup> Arconati Visconti to Cumont, probably 1919, archives of the Castle of Gaasbeek, Belgium.

<sup>28</sup> Arconati Visconti to Cumont, probably 1910, archives of the Castle of Gaasbeek, Belgium.

friends, or simply by citing them where necessary. This was for example the case with a letter she had sent to Jean Jaurès, and which she cited in a letter to Cumont. Here we see a marchioness who actively tries to influence Jaurès -who at the time was opposed to the war. The marchioness to Jaurès, cited in a 1913 letter to Cumont: “Si ce que vous faites est un effort national, il vaut mieux ne plus parler politique - Vous êtes attelé à trop de besognes, aucune ne m’intéresse - Je me f... et ref... de l’avènement du prolétariat et de l’avènement de l’ordre collectiviste dans l’humanité, pour moi: Ordre dans la rue, Forte défense nationale, voilà les deux nécessités vitales, les deux plats de résistance de la nourriture d’un peuple, après ça, je ne m’intéresse absolument qu’au développement intellectuel de la France”.<sup>29</sup> In this context, and one week after Jaurès, who in the meantime had embraced the war effort, had been murdered, she wrote about his assassination: “Il tombe à l’heure même où son idéalisme dut descendre des hauteurs sereines de la pensée, pour appeler tous les amis au combat pour la patrie qui se trouve être, en même temps, le combat pour l’idée. Une grande force nous est enlevée.”<sup>30</sup>

As for her anticlericalism, as we have already shown it is intimately linked to politics, as can notably be seen in her reaction to what Cumont wrote regarding general elections in Belgium in 1912 (cf. supra).<sup>31</sup> However, whereas Cumont’s anticlericalism was rather timid and intellectually underbuilt, the marchioness’ stance in matters of clericalism seemed more viral, less thought through, as was also the case with her anti-Germanism. Thus she produced observations such as the following, which constitutes, with slight variations, a constant element in her correspondence with Cumont: “Ah! L’église est bien l’abominable institution qu’il faut combattre sans trêve ni merci. Après plus d’un demi-siècle de ruses, la puissance romaine s’offre à nous dans toute son exécrable tyrannie. Il n’est plus possible désormais de parler d’un prétendu libéralisme catholique.”<sup>32</sup> At this time, in the midst of the so-called ‘modernist crisis’, this anticlerical attitude knows no boundaries: “Souvenez-vous caro Silvio -for reasons unknown, she often calls Cumont Silvio- du mot de Renan: ‘Quand l’église se verra

perdue, elle mordra comme un chien enragé-’ Certainement, vous verrez la fin de ce parti qui s’effrite tous les jours un peu plus - si je pouvais j’aurais dit comme [unreadable]: tuez-les tous-Ah! Quelle Vermine!”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, it seems that, when religion (i.e., Catholicism above all) and the religious are concerned, the marchioness knew no limits, whereby her writings could at times even become vulgar, such as, for example, when she referred to the housekeeper of her castle at Gaasbeek near Brussels as the “sale jésuite Van Cromphout”.<sup>34</sup>

In conclusion, we have seen that in the correspondence between the marchioness Arconati Visconti and Cumont, both interlocutors showed great mutual respect, whereby they in a sense refined their discourse and thought in matters of politics, of their vision of society, before, during and after the Great War. In this vision anti-Germanism and religion occupied a central spot. The marchioness’ discourse on politics and religion is clearly more outspoken and at the same time less structured than Cumont’s. It seems that precisely for this reason Cumont, the university professor, always expresses himself in a highly lucid, clear manner. It is also clear that, while Cumont’s ideology is not always easy to define, for all the emotional weight she attached to the perverse role of religions (and of Germany) in society, the marchioness did believe in one thing: human progress. However, and in spite of being all but a religious person, especially near the end of her life she saw mankind as powerless... much in the same way as a religious person would, as can be observed in a letter written shortly after the war, with which we conclude the present article: “Tout au fond de moi-même j’incline à penser que depuis quelques années -et peut-être en a-t-il toujours été ainsi- ce sont les événements qui mènent les hommes, et non pas les hommes qui gouvernent les événements; les hommes s’en accommodent et en tirent parti selon leur courte sagesse; ils peuvent par leur folie en aggraver les mauvaises conséquences.”<sup>35</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Arconati Visconti to Cumont, probably 1913, archives of the Castle of Gaasbeek, Belgium.

<sup>30</sup> Arconati Visconti to Cumont, August 6, 1914, archives of the Castle of Gaasbeek, Belgium.

<sup>31</sup> Arconati Visconti to Cumont, probably 1912, archives of the Castle of Gaasbeek, Belgium.

<sup>32</sup> Arconati Visconti to Cumont, probably 1910, archives of the Castle of Gaasbeek, Belgium.

<sup>33</sup> Arconati Visconti to Cumont, probably 1911, archives of the Castle of Gaasbeek, Belgium.

<sup>34</sup> Arconati Visconti to Cumont, probably 1912, archives of the Castle of Gaasbeek, Belgium.

<sup>35</sup> Arconati Visconti to Cumont, probably 1920, archives of the Castle of Gaasbeek, Belgium.

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## THE FIRST WORLD WAR DEPICTED IN THE FILMS OF THE FIRST DECADES OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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**Abstract:** *As The Great War took its toll on every aspect of the society, propaganda movies became increasingly popular. Due to the generalized military conflict that generated millions of victims, famine and a new geopolitical configuration that followed the war's ending, the movie industry started to develop its own discourse about the war. In the years after the war ended, as a reaction to the horrors of the war, anti-war films gained popularity. Also, the war's depiction in comedies was used to give a more humanly interpretation to the war. Thus, we will proceed in taking a look at some of the movies that were made during and after the war and their approach on The Great War subject.*

**Keywords:** *The Great War, drama, anti-war, propaganda, silent films*

Even nowadays the topic of World War I is still debated, still regarded as one of the main events in the World history and is still portrayed in movies and other art forms. No wonder that in the years of the war and after the war, while the population of the belligerent countries was still going through hardships because of the military conflicts and the famine, that films on the subject of the Great War gained popularity.

Such a film is the 1918 "Lest we forget". The phrase "Lest we forget" is commonly used in war remembrance services and commemorative occasions in English speaking countries, so even from the title we can anticipate the dramatic tone of the movie. The movie is essentially an espionage drama film that may also be considered a propaganda film directed by Leonce Perret and produced by and starring Rita Jolivet, on the subject of the 1915 Lusitania sinking. To get a better feel of the movie it is important to know some details about the historical importance of the sinking of Lusitania (Langman, 1998).

In early 1915, submarines began to be used in the German maritime campaign against the British. Even if they were initially used to attack naval ships, soon they also began to attack merchant vessels. In spite of the Cruiser Rules in place it was quite clear that ships, which sailed in the seas around the British isles were at risk of being attacked by German submarines. The German embassy in Washington D.C. placed a warning advertisement in American newspapers telling passengers travelling to Great Britain that they

would travel at their own risk. Some passengers were concerned about the warning, but the majority did not assume there was a serious threat. Survivors of the disaster have mentioned that the threat of being attacked was taken light-heartedly and was even the subject of jokes on board of the ship.

On 7 May 1915, the Lusitania had almost reached its destination of Liverpool when she crossed in front of the German submarine U-20, captained by Kapitänleutnant Walther Schwieger, who gave the command to fire a torpedo, which struck the Lusitania on the starboard side. A second explosion occurred moments later and rocked the boat further. The ship tilted to one side, meaning that lifeboats on this side became completely unusable and only the six remaining lifeboats could successfully be launched. Some passengers jumped overboard and clung onto rafts, while others were offered refuge when the collapsible lifeboats floated out of the sinking ship. After only 18 minutes, the Lusitania had completely sunk. Of the 1,961 verified passengers aboard the ship, only 764 survived. The sinking of a passenger liner without warning caused an international uproar, and the loss of 128 American citizens is widely considered to be one of the main reasons that the United States eventually declared war on Germany in 1917 (Bass, 1967).

As we looked into the disaster that of the sinking of Lusitania and its consequences in the development of the war, as well as the American public opinion regarding the war, we

can understand why this disaster became the subject of a movie.

The most interesting aspect regarding the film "Lest we forget" is the fact that the actress Rita Jolivet as her character in the movie was a passenger on the RMS Lusitania on 7 May 1915, when it was torpedoed by a German U-boat and sank in the Atlantic Ocean and a survivor of the disaster. Jolivet was standing on the bridge when the liner went down. She climbed onto a chair and obtained a life preserver that was in her stateroom, then plunged into the Atlantic Ocean. She was saved with others when boats arrived from Ireland but some of her relatives died during the sinking.

When it comes to the film's portraying of Germans, "Lest we forget" places emphasis on the fact that Lusitania was unarmed and refers to the Germans as Huns who must be stopped. The film also shows an excerpt which appears to be from a German newspaper and reads, "With joyful pride we contemplate this latest deed of our navy". Here the British are not only condemning the German navy for sinking the ship, but portraying the whole nation as cruel and merciless enemies.

"Lest we forget" was not the only film on the subject of Lusitania's sinking. The 1918 film, "The Sinking of the Lusitania", from the archives of the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique, was made by American animator Winsor McCay in the style of a documentary and aimed to inspire an anti-German sentiment by describing the incident as "the most violent cruelty that was ever perpetrated upon an unsuspecting and innocent people" and as "the crime that shocked Humanity.

The film is the earliest surviving animated documentary and a serious, dramatic work of animation. The sinking of Lusitania outraged McCay, but the newspapers of his employer William Randolph Hearst downplayed the event, as Hearst was opposed to the US joining World War I. McCay was required to illustrate anti-war and anti-British editorial cartoons for Hearst's papers. In 1916, McCay rebelled against his employer's stance and began the work on the patriotic Sinking of the Lusitania on his own time with his own money (Inman, 2017).

Another World War I themed film is "Shoulder Arms". Released in 1918, it is a silent comedy set in France during World War I. The main part of the film actually occurs in a

dream. Charlie is in boot camp in the "awkward squad". Once in France he gets no letters from home. He finally gets a package containing limburger cheese which requires a gas mask and which he throws over into the German trench. He goes "over the top" and captures thirteen Germans ("I surrounded them"), then volunteers to wander through the German lines disguised as a tree trunk. With the help of a French girl he captures the Kaiser and the Crown Prince and is rewarded with a statue and victory parade in New York and then ... fellow soldiers wake him from his dream.

"Shoulder Arms" proved to be Chaplin's most popular film, critically and commercially, up to that point. A review in the October 21, 1918 New York Times was typical: "The fool's funny," was the funny observation of one of those who saw Charlie Chaplin's new film. "Shoulder Arms", at the Strand yesterday—and, apparently, that's the way everybody felt. There have been learned discussions as to whether Chaplin's comedy is low or high, artistic or crude, but no one can deny that when he impersonates a screen fool he is funny. Most of those who go to find fault with him remain to laugh. They may still find fault, but they will keep on laughing."

Some background information regarding "Shoulder Arms" would shed a different light on the analysis. In the beginning of 1918 Charlie's cinematic activity did not involve the subject of war, as he produced and directed the film "A Dog's Life". However, the rest of the year 1918 Chaplin dedicated to raising money and awareness for the war. He embarked on the Third Liberty Bond campaign, touring the United States for one month to raise money for the Allies of the First World War. A Liberty bond (or liberty loan) was a war bond that was sold in the United States to support the allied cause. Subscribing to the bonds became a symbol of patriotic duty in the United States and introduced the idea of financial security to many citizens for the first time.

Although "A Dog's Life" wasn't a movie about the war, it reflects a facet of life in times of conflict: the scarcity of food and the lack of money. In this film Charlie's character, "The Tramp", is a jobless and homeless man who tries to steal food from a lunch cart and is nearly caught by a police officer. "The Tramp" then rescues a stray dog

named Scraps from other dogs and they become friends. Charlie meets a girl who works in the cabaret and they fall in love but they have no money to get married. Charlie is kicked out of the café for having no money and soon finds out that some thieves have buried a stolen wallet nearby that is laden with a small fortune when Scraps digs up the wallet. The thieves tried to get back the wallet from Charlie but they are arrested. the movie ends with the pair of newlyweds peering fondly into a cradle with Scraps and her puppies.

In 1918, Chaplin also produced a short propaganda film at his own expense, called "The Bond", and donated the film to the government for fund-raising. "The Bond" is essentially a series of sketches illustrating various bonds: friendship and marriage and, most importantly, the Liberty Bond. Charlie meets the character Uncle Sam, a laborer representing industry and proceeds to buy a liberty bond; the industrial laborer supplies a rifle for an American soldier. Impressed by the result of his contribution, the hero buys another liberty bond and an American Naval sailor is then equipped with a rifle. Thus, when Chaplin directed "Shoulder Arms" he was very involved in helping the funding of the campaigns and was aware of the extent of the conflict and its consequences. This light-hearted comedy was meant to bring a little hope in the horrors of the war, rather than to minimize the importance of the conflict.

Before making the movie, Chaplin himself had doubts about the potential for humor in the bloodiest conflict in the history of mankind, but he must have ultimately understood what all the most astute comedians do: that comedy and tragedy have always gone hand-in-hand. "Saying something is too terrible to joke about is like saying a disease is too terrible to try to cure," as the particularly astute Louis C.K. recently put it — a man of our own comedic and tragic times, and one who certainly knows them as well as Chaplin knew his.

Another film that depicts the horrors of the Great War is the 1919 French silent film, "J'accuse". The film directed by Abel Gance is a romantic drama that takes place in World War I, and it is described as a pacifist or anti-war film. The story revolves around a love triangle. Marie Lazare (Marise Dauvray) is forced by her father to marry the much-older Francois Laurin (Severin-Mars), even though

she's in love with Jean Diaz (Romuald Joubé), a poet. The film reflects the impact that the Great War had on a personal level. Laurin goes wild at the idea that his young wife may have betrayed him. When the World War breaks out, he goes to the front. Diaz, a pacifist, stays home until Marie is captured by the Germans. Then he enlists and winds up being in command over Laurin. Over the course of four years, the two men become friends. Diaz gets trench fever and is sent home. Marie returns with a baby because she was raped by her captors. When Laurin comes home, he mistakenly believes that the child is Diaz's. After he is convinced he was wrong, he goes back to his regiment, and is killed in the fighting. Diaz also returns to battle and is wounded. He comes home, but he has lost his mind. He has a vision in which the dead return from their graves to see if their loved ones are worthy of their sacrifice. He dies, leaving Marie alone with her child.

The details are the most impressive thing about the movie. Abel Gance had already served briefly in World War I, but he enlisted again so he could film footage of soldiers under fire. He used the shots in this compelling anti-war film, which originally ran 14 reels (it was cut down to ten for release in the U.S., which unfortunately damaged its continuity).

For the film's opening title, a large group of soldiers, filmed from above, is formed up to shape the letters J, A, C, C, U, S, E. In the middle of preparing the shot, a general asked Gance what was happening. Gance stalled until the shot was complete, and then explained to the startled general that he was "accusing the war... accusing men... accusing universal stupidity".

Asked whether he regarded "J'accuse" as a pacifist film, Gance replied: "I'm not interested in politics... But I am against war, because war is futile. Ten or twenty years afterward, one reflects that millions have died and all for nothing. One has found friends among one's old enemies, and enemies among one's friends. "When "J'accuse" was first projected in France in April 1919, it was a great success with the public, whose mood in the aftermath of the war it seemed to convey.

Another war film that puts emphasis on the personal experience in the Great War is "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse", a 1921 American silent epic war film and directed by Rex Ingram. The film is considered

one of the first anti-war films based on the Spanish novel *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, it was adapted for the screen by June Mathis.

The plot revolves around Madariaga (Pomeroy Cannon), an Argentine landowner who has two sons-in-law, a German one and a French one. He openly favors his French son-in-law and his grandson Julio (Rudolph Valentino). Sometime later, Madariaga dies. The extended family breaks up, one half returning to Germany and the other to France. In Paris Julio falls in love with a married woman Marguerite Laurier (Alice Terry), the wife of Etienne Laurier, a friend of Julio's father. The affair is discovered, and Marguerite's husband agrees to give her a divorce to avoid a scandal. Julio and Marguerite wanted to get married, but both ended up getting caught up in the start of the Great War.

Marguerite becomes a nurse in Lourdes. Etienne is injured in a battle, leaving him blind and happens to end up at the hospital where Marguerite is working. Marguerite takes care of Etienne and, as Julio travels to Lourdes to see Marguerite, he sees her taking care of Etienne. Julio, ashamed of his wastrel life, enlists in the French Army.

Four years later Julio has survived and become renowned for his bravery in the trenches at the front. During a mission in no man's land, he encounters his last surviving German cousin. Moments later, they are both killed by a shell. Back in Paris, Marguerite considers abandoning the blinded Etienne, but Julio's ghost guides her to continue her care for him.

The ending scene Julio's father mourning over his son's grave. The man who lived upstairs from Julio watches over him. The father asks him, "Did you know my son?" The man, with a remorseful expression, lifts his arms, forming the shape of a cross with his body, and says "I knew them all!" He then points to the sky and shows the father the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse riding away into the clouds. With this, the man assures him that "Peace has come—but the Four Horsemen will still ravage humanity—stirring unrest in the world—until all hatred is dead and only love reigns in the heart of mankind."

One of the most tragic events in human history, World War I, was an inspiration for various movies over time. However, in my

opinion, the films made in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reflected marvelously the tragedy, the reality and the crisis that the military conflict brought upon nations and millions of civilians.

While films like "Lest we forget" rely on a particular tragic event such as the sinking of Lusitania to tell the story of the war and to transform such an event into a symbol of the war, the films "J'accuse" and "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" emphasize the impact that the military conflict had on a personal level. Such films reveal the pain that individuals and families have to go through when someone they care about fights in the war. Besides, these movies touch on a major reality that struck many civilians during the war - dealing with the loss of a loved one and having to let go a beloved person for the homeland.

However, even in the darkest of times there are reasons to smile and Charlie Chaplin proves just that with his approach of the First World War in the movie "Shoulder Arms" and with the help of his beloved character "The Tramp".

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**“I WISH WE COULD DO SOMETHING REALLY SINFUL”:  
ERNEST HEMINGWAY’S A FAREWELL TO ARMS AND THE EROTIC LANGUAGE IN THE  
AFTERMATH OF THE GREAT WAR**

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**Abstract:** *The Great War changed the map of political power and also the way we speak about intimacy. Ernest Hemingway’s A Farewell to Arms is among the books which predicted the displacement of romantic sensibility by a rather clinic approach to affection. The paper draws on both Paul Fussell’s identification of specific tropes in war fiction and on Michael S. Reynolds’ proof that A Farewell to Arms is not an autobiographical novel. The character of Catherine Barkley is tackled in the particular context concerning the representation of nurses in the American fiction after 1918.*

**Keywords:** *The Great War, Ernest Hemingway, Catherine Barkley, VAD nurses, erotic language*

**Introduction: His not so coy mistress**

During the evening before his return to the front lieutenant Frederic Henry, Hemingway’s problematic hero from *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), sends his luggage to the station, roams the streets of Milan – he has already spent the summer months and early autumn in the town after he was wounded by an Austrian mortar shell –, sees his lover, the English nurse Catherine Barkley, through the window of a wine shop where he enters to drink coffee and grappa, and rushes to meet her. For a while they walk together on the sidewalk, buy a few things – Frederic needs a new pistol, Catherine cannot resist an extravagant nightgown – and decide to go to a rather garish hotel by carriage. She does not feel comfortable surrounded by so much red plush and satin, at least until dinner. While talking somehow awkwardly about their tryst and their families, anything but war, and while devising plans for the future he makes a gnomic remark by picking a well-known verse from Andrew Marvell’s 1681 poem *To His Coy Mistress*: “But at my back I always hear Time’s wingèd chariot hurrying near” (Hemingway, 2014, 135). In order to grasp the context better the dark undertones of the ensuing corollary should be mentioned as well: “But at my back I always hear /Time’s wingèd chariot hurrying near: /And yonder all before us lie /Deserts of vast eternity” (Marvell, 2005, 51).

In this sophisticated poem about the shortness of life adopting the form of erotic lyricism – it lacks neither cosmological tropes nor bawdy esotericism – Marvell seems to draw on the Cavalier poetic tradition of the English Civil Wars adopting the *carpe diem* motif and the topos

of the soldier trying to seduce a woman rapidly before going to fulfill his military duties (Bate, 2005, xi-xii). Critics have been speculating about the reason Ernest Hemingway chose this particular verse to be invoked over the dinner table by Frederic Henry. Some of them consider that despite his constant mocking of T.S. Eliot Hemingway paid close attention to Eliot’s poetic work and his poetic preferences also (Kenneth S. Lynn, 1995, 246). However, if by quoting *To His Coy Mistress* Hemingway eulogizes or not tacitly one of Eliot’s favorite poems is less important than the implications the “time’s wingèd chariot” has in chapter XXIII which comprises the hotel scene and the first unfolding night of the love story outside the Ospedale Maggiore in Milan. Actually the episode closes one phase in the American lieutenant’s combat experience – that is the initial long waiting of the military offensive followed by his wounding – and opens the second one (Henry’s arbitrary killing of an Italian sergeant during the Caporetto retreat, his own unfortunate encounter with the *carabinieri*, a narrow escape from summary execution, and his desertion).

The time pressure Frederic Henry conveys poetically may be the result of the incoming departure or just the natural anxious presentiment of a soldier bound for the front. It has nothing to do with the hastening of seduction. The protagonists are already in love and Catherine Barkley is pregnant with their child. Although she recognizes Marvell’s verse Catherine does not grasp the reason her lover quotes it: “I know that poem. [...] But it’s about a girl who wouldn’t live with a man” (Hemingway, 2014, 135). It is not

her case for sure but she still adds something that conjures up the verses Frederic Henry does not recite: “Don’t worry, darling. We may have several babies before the war is over” (Hemingway, 2014, 135). Thus Andrew Marvell’s silenced death metaphor, “deserts of vast eternity”, becomes in the red room a portent of everlasting war. The original erotic and martial tropes transfigured by Marvell in his metaphysical poetry regain some of their old significance in Hemingway’s novel about the Great War.

In his famous 1948 introduction to *A Farewell to Arms* Ernest Hemingway states that “except for three years there has been war of some kind almost ever since it has been written” (Hemingway, 2014, ix). One should rephrase this by noticing that since the historical events that frame Hemingway’s narrative until this day there has been war of some kind. According to the Second World War veteran, literary critic, and historian Paul Fussell during 1916 the feeling among troops that the war was endless had become very strong. This possibility shattered the morale of combatants and civilians alike. Considering that the majority of men enlisted in the Great War were highly literate, the refinement of irony and satire proved to be the sanest intellectual means in coping with the situation (Fussell, 2013, 77-79, 170-171). The prospect of a perpetual stalemate highlighted a pervasive fear and turned into a state of affairs: “The idea of endless war as an inevitable condition of modern life would seem to have become seriously available to the imagination around 1916. Events, never far behindhand in fleshing out the nightmares of imagination, obliged with the Spanish War, the Second World War, the Greek War, the Korean War, the Arab-Israeli War, and the Vietnam War” (Fussell, 2013, 80). We can make our own pick from more recent wars to complete Paul Fussell’s list.

Together with the tremendous human casualties at the end of 1918 a sense of cultural continuum within a coherent historical time and the Western confidence in a vigorous axiology were also lost. The language of innocence which had made a credo of telling the truth preserving a comfort zone for moral issues was debased brutally (Fussell, 2013, 21-23). Before the war words such as “intercourse”, “ejaculation”, “erection” or “twat” were conversationally safe and free of sexual connotations. Even in the morning of November 11, 1918, the day of the Armistice, the British warning specifying that “there will be no intercourse of any description with the enemy” could not have been misunderstood. With the advent of the modernist

writers on the literary scene – James Joyce, Marcel Proust, T.S. Eliot, Franz Kafka, F. Scott Fitzgerald, E.E. Cummings, Ernest Hemingway, and many others – the gap between the traditional moral language and the new aesthetic reflecting the damage caused by the war became obvious (Fussell, 2013, 24).

The United States joined the European conflict by declaring war on Germany on April 6, 1917. Ernest Hemingway, not yet nineteen years old, too young for the combat field and suffering from a congenitally weakened eye enlisted voluntarily as a driver for the Red Cross Ambulance Corps in the summer of 1918. On July 8 he was wounded at Fossalta di Piave by two hundred and thirty shrapnel fragments from an Austrian trench mortar while he was supplying the Italian soldiers with coffee, chocolate, and refreshments (Vernon, 2013, 388-390). As Alex Vernon put it, “When [Fredric] Henry walks offstage alone in the rain in April 1918, Hemingway had not yet left the United States for the war” (Vernon, 2013, 391). One should not confound the writer’s time with the fictive time span of his protagonist. For decades after its publication many critics and readers sought biographical accuracy in *A Farewell to Arms* based on Hemingway’s firsthand experience during the war and his affair with the American nurse Agnes von Kurowsky in Milan. It took many years for Michael S. Reynolds, one of Ernest Hemingway’s foremost biographers and critics, to impose a different view on the 1929 novel, especially in *Hemingway’s First War: the Making of A Farewell to Arms* (1976) and in his subsequent work: *A Farewell to Arms* is a fiction which proved historically accurate, a book written rather in the vein of Stendhal’s *The Charterhouse of Parma*. Michael Reynolds urges us to see the novel as what it really is, namely a crafted masterpiece based on in depth research after the war had ended, a classic piece of literature whose artistic merits render the details concerning the author’s private life quite irrelevant (Reynolds, 2005, 109-112).

Although Hemingway’s first novel, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), a wonderful “elegy for the self” (Bloom, 2002, 573) concerning a bunch of disgruntled American expatriates drinking, fornicating, quarreling in Paris and during the Fiesta at Pamplona tackles the impossibility of romantic love in the aftermath of the Great War, it is in *A Farewell to Arms* where one can discern why the amorous language did not in fact fare well after 1918. Catherine Barkley seems coy indeed in comparison with Lady Brett Ashley, the main female protagonist from *The Sun Also Rises*.

Brett is undoubtedly a woman of the '20s, a genuine flapper, whereas Catherine might appear stranded in the Belle Époque. However in the latter's alleged submissiveness and innocence there is more than meets the eye.

### The flapper in nurse uniform

Hemingway's admiration for *The Great Gatsby* (1925), the other major American novel in which the effects of the Great War ripple in the main characters' lives, makes *The Sun Also Rises* a very idiosyncratic accomplishment, not a mere skillful imitation. Seán Hemingway, the author's grandson, recounts how F. Scott Fitzgerald critically edited the manuscript making amendments to *The Sun Also Rises* while sincerely praising it. Hemingway even suggested jokingly to his friend in a letter that the novel should be titled *A Greater Gatsby* (Hemingway, 2014, xviii-xx). Therefore understanding Jake Barnes' concern for Lady Brett Ashley as akin to Nick Carraway's preoccupation with Jay Gatsby, as Harold Bloom does (Bloom, 2011, 1), proves utterly sound.

Jake, a wounded war veteran – the nature of his sexual mutilation is never mentioned (is it physical or just a psychological trauma?) –, has a destructive relationship with a former VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) nurse, the seductive Brett Ashley, an independent New Woman of the '20s, the modern reincarnation of the goddess Circe able to bring out the worst in the men around (Nagel, 2005, 92-93, 96), and “a lost image of sexual fulfillment” at the same time (Bloom, 2011, 1). Anyway, despite her hidden vulnerability she earned the status of a mythical *femme fatale* responsible to a great degree for engendering the figure of the dangerous temptress in the hard-boiled fiction. When Jake Barnes sees Brett Ashley at the *bal musette* in the Rue de la Montagne Sainte Geneviève her description contains all the boyish, short-haired, capricious yet delicate women who were to become one of Hemingway's distinctive marks. Even her first name is masculine:

“Brett was damned good-looking. She wore a slipover jersey sweater and a tweed skirt, and her hair was brushed back like a boy's. She started all that. She was built with curves like the hull of a racing yacht, and you missed none of it with that wool jersey” (Hemingway, 2016, 18).

At thirty four she has been married twice – “her own true love” (Hemingway, 2016, 32) died of dysentery during the war –, she drinks in public, flirts and sleeps with many male partners, some of them much younger than her, jokes sarcastically, and wears no stockings so everyone

can notice that when she sits cross-legged on the bar stools. As James Nagel rightly points out Brett is at home in the progressive Paris but out of place in conservative Spain where her fatal, witch-like presence shows its potential (Nagel, 2005, 96). When Jake and Brett who love each other meet at the dancing club – he at the arm of the prostitute Georgette, she in the company of gay men – the implied irony stresses that “the world is out of sexual order” and that the evening is a complete waste of erotic possibilities (Nagel, 2005, 94): the impotent Jake Barnes hangs out with a prostitute while the promiscuous heterosexual Brett Ashley spends her time with a group of gay pals. Almost everywhere in the novel the dysfunctional friendships or relationships the characters cultivate bring to light unhealed traumas related to a war only occasionally mentioned.

From a social perspective, Brett Ashley fits perfectly in the vintage picture. The illusion of relative stability pertaining to the Belle Époque broke apart in 1914. After the war a world “without fathers” where patriarchy had been irremediably undermined and women had to take some of the economic responsibilities or supply the working force in industrial sectors until then reserved exclusively to men, affected the traditional gender roles. These empowered modern amazons, the independent, defying, and sportive flappers (*les garçonnnes*, as they were known in France) were active not so much ideologically, but, in the ostentatious way, they sustained an ethos of nonconformity and wear their unconventional clothes (Babeți, 2013, 182-184). It was a time when the androgynous body had become a vogue: “Twenties fashion had brought its own kind of loose freedom: bobbed hair, dropped waists, shortened skirts and rolled stockings. Curves became more visible under less structured clothes. There was the magic of Molyneux, Chanel's sleek silhouettes, and, later in the decade, Schiaparelli's Surrealist designs” (LaCava, 2012). The fashion historian David Kunzle explains how the Great War put an end to the waist-compressive corset, outsized hats, and unnecessary underclothes and how the '20s gave rise to a truly emancipated and educated middle-class woman. However, in spite of this permissiveness, new means of sexual restraint were available through psychoanalysis. The erotic behavior became the object of clearly defined parameters and clinic taxonomies so that any private matter could become a “deviation” in a pathological spectrum (Kunzle, 2006, 208). Freudian jargon also liberated the language from the aseptic euphemisms concerning sexual issues. One of the first psychoanalytical tenets is that a

wounded mind could be healed as long as the repressed material is acknowledged through talking.

Definitely Hemingway's female characters epitomize the post-war era, yet their androgyny is beyond Freudian categories. It has an uncanny touch, a Shakespearian quality signifying to us, women and men alike, the contingency of our erotic choices based on what we see and on how we imagine the others see us in the process of falling in love. Disapproving some of the speculations made by the biographer Kenneth S. Lynn on the so called "drama of sexual confusion" in Hemingway's life, the writer Diane Johnson deftly concludes: "After all, good writers are androgynous" (Johnson, 1987). Short-haired women are Hemingway's specific characters as the nymphets are recognizably Nabokovian. They belong to a third sex.

As a literary personage, Catherine Barkley comes from both ages, the late romantic years before the advent of war, on the one hand, and the turbulent and cynical decade between 1918 and late '20s, on the other, the period when *A Farewell to Arms* was written. She even suggests to Frederic Henry that he should let his hair grow a little bit longer whereas she would cut hers short: "Then we'd both be alike" (Hemingway, 2014, 257). This strange proposal concerning the sexual partners' morphing into non identical twins – "one of us blonde and one of us dark" (Hemingway, 2014, 257) –, the last stage of wishful thinking in Catherine's and Frederic's incessant "let's pretend to be married" game, takes place toward the end of the novel, three days before the 1917 Christmas, at Montreux, after their escape from Italy. The cold snow has replaced the never stopping cold rain, the latter being another permanent image that was to grow soon into a distinctive trope of the *noir* aesthetic in literature and cinema. Catherine is afraid that her pregnant woman's body has become repulsive to Frederic Henry but when she tries to find out his thoughts on the issue he gives her an unexpected excursus on venereal diseases. Afterwards they reassure themselves on their mutual future. That night is sleepless nevertheless.

A few months earlier the love story unfolded in the hospital at night and on the sunny parks of Milan during the day, Frederic Henry walking the streets on crutches, Catherine Barkley working passionately on night shifts. The Milanese vignette's ornaments consist of open carriages, galleries, outdoor seating restaurants, tasty alcoholic drinks but the most enduring detail of that summer is Catherine's fairy-like hair from which he adores to take out the pins meticulously

so that it can rush down like a waterfall:

"She had wonderfully beautiful hair and I would lie sometimes and watch her twisting it up in the light that came in the open door and it shone even in the night as water shines sometimes just before it is really daylight. She had a lovely face and body and lovely smooth skin too. We would be lying together and I would touch her cheeks and her forehead and under her eyes and her chin and throat with the tips of my fingers and say 'Smooth as piano keys,' and she would stroke my chin with her finger and say, 'Smooth as emery paper and very hard on piano keys.'

'Is it rough?'

'No, darling. I was just making fun of you'" (Hemingway, 2014, 98-99).

One cannot imagine Frederic Henry comparing Catherine Barkley's body with "the curves of a racing yacht" as Jake Barnes does when he appreciates Brett Ashley. Catherine seems idealistic, innocent, and shy although she does not hesitate a second to slap the impertinent American lieutenant (just to regret it immediately) when he kisses her without permission at their second meeting at the British hospital in Gorizia. By forcing himself on her, Frederic Henry may either have yielded to the common wartime male fantasy that nurses are nymphomaniacs – let us not forget that she was his friend's (the military surgeon Rinaldi) love interest at that time – or, as Alex Vernon suggests, felt free to act narcissistically as on his female reflection: he is an ambulance driver, she is a Red Cross nurse, "his erotic double in both word and job" (Vernon, 2004, 71). Like Brett Ashley, she lost her true love, the man who she was supposed to marry, in the 1916 Somme Offensive. When Frederic meets her for the first time she is still carrying the dead boy's rattan stick like a character in a pastoral poem. Catherine broods on her wanting to cut her beautiful hair short as a mourning offer to her departed beloved (Hemingway, 2014, 16). The symmetries in *A Farewell to Arms* have overtones pertaining to Romanticism and the lovers' narcissism constructed "on the principle of the mirror and the echo" expresses not only the way the narrator projects his male desires onto Catherine, but also enhance the mingling of the war story and the love story (Norris, 2011, 50-52). The aseptic Ospedale Maggiore turns out as a proper place for erotic play, while the brothel-like hotel has an inhibiting effect. This incongruity is conspicuous in Catherine's confused reactions, namely the initial awkwardness, "I never felt like a whore before", and her subsequent boasting at dinner: "I wish we could do something really sinful. [...] Everything we do seems so innocent

and simple. I can't believe we do anything wrong" (Hemingway, 2014, 133-134).

The Great War has not been the first conflict in human history to render explicit the analogies between warfare and sexuality, as Paul Fussell attests: "Since antiquity everyone who has experienced both war and love has known that there is a curious intercourse between them. The language of military attack – *assault, impact, thrust, penetration* – has always overlapped with that of sexual importunity. Seventeenth-century wit, so conscious of its classical inheritance, would be sadly enfeebled if deprived of its staple figure of 'dying' on one's 'enemy' " (Fussell, 2013, 293). However, the scale of this matter was different during the Great War: the intense sexual activity behind the lines, the flowering of homoerotic passions between the enlisted men and the rich literature it spawned, the proliferation of official brothels, "Blue Lights" for officers, "Red Lights" for the rest, the spectacular contextualization of old botanical symbols in war poetry ("roses" for wounds and sacrifice, "poppies" for men loving an protecting each other in the trenches), the lesbian couples in tweeds, a common post-war sight in a world of widows and disconsolate lovers (Fussell, 2013, 264-277, 293-294, 342). Last but not least the Great War marked a significant progress in contraceptive methods such as the vulcanizing of condoms by using a technology developed in mending air balloons and the large availability of diaphragms with spermicide (Reynolds, 2005, 121-122).

None of these contraceptives are of any interest to Catherine and Frederic. She hides the pregnancy from him for three months. Even so their affectionate language accommodates the clinical symptoms: " 'You've such a lovely temperature.' [...] I'm awfully proud of your temperature' " (Hemingway, 2014, 89), Catherine assures Frederic tenderly the day before his operation. In Switzerland she dismisses his concern regarding a gynecologist's advice on her pregnancy by bragging " 'I have a wonderful blood-pressure, darling' " (Hemingway, 2014, 253), and during her prolonged and painful labor she asks Frederic for higher and higher doses of anesthetic gas through mask while sobbing ecstatically: " 'That was lovely, darling. Oh, you're so good to me' " (Hemingway, 2014, 276). The war renders indistinct the difference between the accuracy of the medical jargon and the lovers' intimate talk, between physical pain and sensuality. Their erratic behavior throughout the novel might be a consequence, as Michael Reynolds surmises, of "shell shock" – the old denomination for the "post-traumatic shock

syndrome" – in the narrator's case and of a guilty feeling toward her dead fiancé in Catherine's case. They both suffer from unexpected changing moods and develop a reciprocal interdependence verging on pathology – he needs a passionate lover and a caring nurse at the same time to allay his fears whereas she needs a man's body in order to deliver the child of a ghost – which surfaces through their often contradictory language and verbal tics (Reynolds, 2005, 119-121). Their relationship is a mixture of desperation, lust, role playing, medical addictiveness, self-delusion, genuine tenderness, and conviction that somehow they will survive the endless war. She once tells him in the hospital in Milan: " 'For three years I looked forward very childishly to the war ending at Christmas. But now I look forward till when our son will be a lieutenant commander' " (Hemingway, 2014, 122). Ultimately their child is stillborn, Catherine dies of hemorrhage at a hospital in the ever neutral Switzerland – Hemingway's sad irony does not allow her to be killed by the military conflict but by her own anatomical constitution and the unwise decision to remain pregnant in a war-torn Europe (Baker, 2010, 69, 71) –, Frederic returns to the hotel alone in the rain, and the war would continue for a whole century as both of them rightly anticipated.

### **Conclusion: Catherine Barkley's sisters in arms**

The fascist rule of Mussolini banned *A Farewell to Arms* for what it considered an unflattering portrayal of the Italian army but Hemingway encountered censorship at home, too. Despite the lack of any graphic sexuality the book's serialization initially published by *Scribner's Magazine* was deemed pornographic and consequently banned in Boston. In 1940 the Librarian of Congress, Archibald MacLeish, delivered a speech at the American Association for Adult Education in which he criticized vehemently the anti-militaristic novels of John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Henri Barbusse, and Erich Maria Remarque conjecturing that their disillusioned views of war, their skepticism toward patriotic rhetoric are a bad example for the young and "have done more to disarm democracy in the face of fascism than any other single influence" (Fussell, 1990, 173). According to Michael Reynolds there is *A Farewell to Arms* for each generation: it was written for those who experienced the Great War, it used to be misread as profoundly autobiographical by the generation of the Second World War, and the Vietnam experience brought the critical interpretation of *A Farewell to Arms* into postmodernity (Reynolds,

2005, 109). One should hope that this classic love story will not lose its appeal to readers in our conflictual time and in our highly visual culture.

Among the persistent war damages that shaped the modern thought dichotomy has been probably the most conspicuous in writing, the political discourse, and academia. Since the Great War the Western mindset seems not to have been able to shed its binary categories “friend” or “enemy”, “us” and “them”. After 1918 divisions of all kinds – between winners and losers, veterans and civilians, scientific disciplines and humanistic studies, subversive aesthetes and Oxford and Cambridge dons and so on – brought the battlefield into everyday life (Fussell, 2013, 82, 114-120). On the other hand some dichotomies vanished in the aftermath of war. Hysteria which had been considered for centuries an exclusively female disease received a plethora of clinical denominations meant to cover the various combatants’ traumas such as “the burial alive neurosis”, “gas neurosis”, “soldier’s heart”, “hysterical sympathy with the enemy” (Leed, 1981, 163). The acknowledgment of “shell shock” baffled officers and “public mind” alike because it undermined the traditional belief in manliness, strong military values, self-control during battle and jeopardized “the moral categories of courage, honor, and duty” (Leed, 1981, 166).

Thus the dichotomy concerning the novel’s reception over the years comes as no surprise: *A Farewell to Arms* has been read either as the self-portrait of the writer as a young warrior or as a veiled projection of a rather effeminate temperament. Catherine Barkley turned out even more problematic than Frederic Henry. F. Scott Fitzgerald was the first who reproached Hemingway his heroine’s idealized features telling him that this is how she might eventually appear to the eyes of an adolescent male. Many others have been endorsing the perception of the young nurse as a submissive girl, most probably Hemingway’s own “fantasy of wish fulfillment” after his failed relation with Agnes von Kurowsky. The fact that Catherine often proves to be quite the opposite – that is a determined, shrewd woman “with an ear for empty posturing” able to create a whole afterlife for her dead fiancé in which she and her new lover play very dramatic roles (Lockridge, 1988, 170-171, 174-176) – has bended the critical response only occasionally.

The image of the nurse in popular culture – the nurse as medical vixen, the nurse as sexual object, the nurse as pin-up *etc.* – has definitely debased the figure of Catherine Barkley and her fictive peers. One might say that she, like Cassandra, was cursed to prophecy her own

literary undoing without anyone around listening. In her 2014 book, *Veiled Warriors: Allied Nurses of the First World War*, the historian Christine E. Hallett identifies three main distorting myths regarding nurses which belittle their real efforts and contribution to the front: the bullied VAD, the romantic nurse, and ‘the nurse as heroine’ (Hallett, 2014, 3). In the British dominions and the United States of America the army nursing services had strong ranks of professional nurses but the British Voluntary Aid detachments (VADs) created in 1909 were a different matter. They were an elite group – the volunteer nurses came exclusively from rich families – under the patronage of the Red Cross Society, or the Order of St John of Jerusalem. Many of them had fought for female suffrage during peacetime. They viewed themselves as the enlisted men’s counterparts engaged in a tripartite battle: the war zone proper, the ward, and their professional battlefield in a male dominated world. The professional sisters’ hostility that the VAD nurses had to face sometimes is not just a myth (Hallett, 2014, 4-5, 11, 18-19). Unfortunately, Hallett ascribes to writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Boris Pasternak the main responsibility in the romanticizing of the nurse considering that both Catherine Barkley and Larissa Antipova from *Doctor Zhivago*, although memorable characters, are mere male fantasies, literary embodiments of the “angel and whore”/ “mother and innocent child” archetypes (Hallett, 2014, 6-9). Therefore, the historian favors biography to the detriment of artistry by simply equating these female characters with the erotic misfortunes from the novelists’ lives.

The sexual objectification of the nurse in popular imagination has still to be fully assessed. Perhaps the stereotype belongs to the Second World War rather than the First. The former was more frustrating in terms of sexual deprivation, more racial and gender aggressive than the latter. It might also be a consequence of its acute “boyish” nature. The enlisted men of the Second World War were extremely young on the Allies’ and on the Axis’ part as well: “The soldiers played not just at being killers but at being grown-ups” (Fussell, 1990, 52). The study of military slang between the two wars reveals surprising facts. It looks like even our daily vulgar language and explicit approach to intimacy were forged during those devastating conflicts. Paul Fussell explains how the adjective “fucking” which was used mainly for comical effects by the English speakers in the Great War became a ubiquitous modifier among the combatants of the Second World War. The f-word went into interjections,

compound nouns, puns, acronyms, and sneaked into official pamphlets. Although the British still associated it with class divisions and the American services forbade the obscene language the soldiers were so tired of using the same curse derivatives that they felt the urge to play on substituting equivalents taken from the conjugal sphere: "What the matrimonial bloody hell do you think you're doing?" (Fussell, 1990, 92-95). However, the best literature that the two wars produced has always been able to catch the embitterment, the fear, the irony directed at those in power or at their empty rhetoric, and the feeling of annihilated humanity pertaining to the front line. When playful or bawdy the fiction writers know how to evoke pain through poetic forms. Their nurses defy shallowness, too, while dancing on the subtle tunes of hopelessness as one can find out by reading two major fictions about the Second World War, namely Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961) and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). Heller took part in the war with the U.S. Air Force as a bomber pilot, Pynchon, born in 1937, did not.

Captain John Yossarian, the bombardier of *Catch-22* whose squadron is based in the Mediterranean Sea, longs for an illness worse than jaundice, one that might ensure his stay away from dangerous missions. The hospital on the island of Pianosa has a certain apotropaic and sheltering appeal to put up with the horrors of war, a sinister mock of safety actually, considering that almost every day new echelons of mutilated soldiers keep rushing in. At the very beginning, the reader finds him already in bed passing his time on the assignment to censor the other wounded enlisted-men's letters to those at home. He plays with the words, deletes addresses, blacks out introductory formulas, changes signatures, and saves only the romantic effusions. After many such hospitalized respites, sexual exploits, and another failed mission, this time near Parma – Yossarian is hit by Flak anti-aircraft guns –, in the last third of the novel the hapless aviator finally manages to win Nurse Sue Ann Duckett over, who initially could not stand him. His interest in this attractive, mature, and self-reliant woman is ostentatiously carnal. He and his fellow GIs from the ward play nasty pranks on the industrious nurse by slipping their hands under her skirt without her being aware of that or chasing her over the beds taking delight in the woman's screams. Yossarian brings Sue Ann Duckett to the beach where she puts on mascara coquettishly, „squinting into a tiny pocket mirror”, and mixes the cards for the men lying on the towels. The nurse is unaware of her charms

and her vulnerability:

“She would prattle nonsensically when they were striving hardest to think, and a pink flush of elation crept into her cheeks when they gave her more sharp reps on the arms and legs with their fists and told her to shut up. Nurse Duckett reveled in such attention and ducked her short chestnut bangs with joy when Yossarian and the others focused upon her. It gave her a peculiar feeling of warm and expectant well-being to know that so many naked boys and men were idling close by on the other side of the sand dunes. [...] Her own body was such a familiar and unremarkable thing to her that she was puzzled by the convulsive ecstasy men could take from it, by the intense and amusing need they had merely to touch it, to reach out urgently and press it, squeeze it, pinch it, rub it” (Heller, 2011, 385-386).

Her body becomes the object of morbid veneration, desired with the urgent desperation of those who know themselves to be in the death's proximity. This scene of erotic fooling around conceived as a funny idyll – at a closer reading one can easily notice the menacing sadness that undermines it – is followed by McWatt's insane prank. One sunny day this unstable pilot dives his plane at high speed over the beach so as to scare those below but one propeller slices handsome Kid Sampson who was sunbathing on a floating raft with the force of gargantuan meat grinder. The intimation of erotic bliss is turned into mayhem. The unfortunate accident wreaks havoc on the soldiers and their girlfriends more so since McWatt, horrified by his cockpit error, cannot gather the courage to come back on the ground choosing instead to crash the airplane into the mountains. The ghastly image of “blond”, “pale”, “scrawny” Kid Sampson (Heller, 2011, 388) butchered by the propeller epitomizes the annihilation of flesh by the iron-made killing machines, the sexual attractiveness converted to the violent acknowledgment of the ephemeral, a topos pervasive in the literature after the Great War (Fussell, 2013, 334-335).

*Gravity's Rainbow's* convoluted plot is set at the end of the Second World War. It was written during the Vietnam War, yet it works as an ambitious historical remainder of the '40s atrocities and political upheaval, as a complex satire of its own era, and as a prophecy of our paranoid and information drowned post-Cold War age. Lieutenant Tyrone Slothrop, Pynchon's protagonist who aspires to be a comic superhero during Hitler's Blitz, is based in London under the preoccupied surveillance of the British and American secret services because an unusual



causal relation makes the map of his erotic encounters to perfectly match the random hits of the Nazi V-2 rockets. Darlene, one of Slothrop's occasional girlfriends, a nurse at St Veronica Hospital, calls him merrily one morning on the street – “blonde hair flying in telltales, white wedgies clattering on cobblestone” (Pynchon, 2000, 117) – and introduces Tyrone to her widowed landlady, Mrs. Quoad, the keeper of the most bizarre assortment of sweets. Mrs. Quoad looks like the Fisher King of the prewar confectionary, the preserver of the European *chocolaterie* tradition and candy making, only that her treasure verges toward the toxic scale despite the ornate Joycean language that conveys each piece: menthol drops, pastel green confections, wine jellies, lavender beads, synthetic raspberries, blue gelatins, “luscious pepsin-flavoured nougat”, and many more. Some of these impossible sweets – Slothrop, used to Hershey's bars, feels rapidly sick, “his tongue's a hopeless holocaust” (Pynchon, 2000, 120) – evoke the military arsenal (the Mills hand grenades, the .455 Webley cartridges, “a licorice bazooka”) while others, such as Mrs. Quoad's Meggezzone cough drops (these are not Pynchon's invention) taste like numbing medicines. The whole taxonomy changes the significance of that day's tryst:

“Even an hour later, the Meggezzone still lingers, a mint ghost in the air. Slothrop lies with Darlene, the Disgusting English Candy Drill a thing of the past, his groin now against her warm bottom. The one candy he did not get to taste – one Mrs. Quoad withheld – was the Fire of Paradise, that famous confection of high price and protean taste – ‘salted plum’ to one, ‘artificial cherry’ to another ... ‘sugared violets’ ... ‘Worcestershire sauce’ ... ‘spiced treacle’ ... any number of like descriptions, positive, terse – never exceeding two words in lengths – resembling the descriptions of poison and debilitating gases found in training manuals, ‘sweet-and-sour eggplant’ being perhaps the lengthiest to date. The Fire of Paradise today is operationally extinct, and in 1945 can hardly be found: certainly nowhere among the sunlit shops and polished windows of Bond Street or waste Belgravia” (Pynchon, 2000, 121).

The “poison and debilitating gases” are definitely those used for the first time by the Germans in the Great War and in the concentration camps of the second afterwards, whereas the drills and the Fire of Paradise may be not just proleptic metaphors for the incoming of a new V-2 rocket explosion at the climax of the GI's and the nurse's carnal embrace, but also a portent of atomic holocaust. Thus Mrs. Quoad's

marvelous 1945 kitchen is somehow like Borges' *aleph*, only this time it resembles a doomed crack in the time continuum through which one can see past and future atrocities.

Neither Nurse Duckett nor Darlene resembles Catherine Barkley closely but they all remind us the same bitter fact: making love after 1918 always conjures up the specter of the war just finished so that a new generation could be delivred to the next one.

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## IMAGES OF NATIONAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY IN IOSIF BERMAN'S PHOTOGRAPHY

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**Abstract.** *This paper aims to analyze, from the perspective of cultural history, the visual translation of national identity in the photographic works of Iosif Berman. It is about pictures printed in reviews like The Illustrated Reality (1929-1940), Illustrated Romania (1926-1928), Weekly Illustration (1923-1924), The National Geographic Magazine (1934) and two albums (1998, 2013) exposing the collections archived at the Museum of the Romanian Peasant and at the National Library of Romania. At the same time, the analysis explores the role and expression of ethnicity in Berman's photography, as he is one of the few professional photo-journalists capturing Jewish identity, in times when visual representation of Jewishness was eluded from any reference to the "national body". The hypothesis of the research is that Berman's photography stands as visual source for creating/reproducing national and ethnic identity based on authenticity, rather than specificity. The more so as sometimes, photographs reveal more about the society and period when they were produced, than the subject under the lens.*

**Keywords:** *documentary photography, national identity, ethnicity, Jewish identity, Iosif Berman.*

### The life path of a Romanian-Jewish photographer

Iosif Berman was born in 1890, in Burdujeni, Suceava, a small town at the border between the Kingdom of Romania and Bukovina, province incorporated at that time within the Austrian Empire. After secondary education in Suceava, Berman went to Bucharest where he took a contest as photographer at *Revista ilustrată* (*The Illustrated Magazine*) (1911). But his first connections with the camera took place back home, where he was an apprentice of the local Jewish photographers. In fact, the ties with the Jewish community are much deeper, as he comes from a well-integrated Jewish family. His father was a naturalized Jew and a former military volunteer in the Independence War of 1877. Mr. Berman and his family were granted the Romanian citizenship, in a period when only Christian inhabitants of Romania could benefit of the official citizenship. They also received land and became farmers, giving up the merchant activities. A couple of years later, Iosif's older brother will lose his life on the battlefield during the WWI (Martor, 1998, 24). Berman originates thus from a family whose life paths dismantle the stereotypes related to Jews: performing trade as main

profession, the unwillingness to work the land, the lack of fidelity to the Romanian state and even the proverbial cowardice.

During the WWI, Berman spent some years in the midst of Bolshevik Russia taking pictures that were unfortunately confiscated. All this time he kept sending pictures to the Romanian newspapers. In Russia he met his future wife, and after the war he returned to Bucharest where he started working as a professional photographer for the main press titles: *Dimineața* (*The Morning*) and *Adevărul* (*The Truth*) (1924-1938), *Realitatea ilustrată* (*The Illustrated Reality*) and also papers from abroad (*New York Times*) (Martor, 1998, 26). Berman is the pioneer of photojournalism and of the documentary photography, as he is recruited in the monograph campaigns coordinated by the sociologist Dimitrie Gusti, exploring the life of the Romanian village. At the same time, he became the official photographer of the Royal House. The administration of the Royal House was delighted by the pictures taken by Berman on the occasion of proclaiming the union of Transylvania with Romania, in 1918, at Alba Iulia. For almost 20 years, he created documentary photography, custom albums, as well as protocol photo. Although contributing

to the creation of the personality cult for King Carol II, his photographic propaganda was somehow distinct, revealing the human side of his characters (Dumitran, 2014, 85).

However, the ascension of the King Carol II to absolute power meant the decline of the favourite photographer. The Royal dictatorship established in 1938 marked the turning point in Berman's career. The authoritarian regime imposed the dissolution of classical parties, a new constitution, a state of siege, and also the first anti-Semitic legislative measures (implemented even since 1937, in the short Goga-Cuza government). Anti-Jewish legislation included the closing of the newspapers with Jews among the editors. Berman was directly affected by these measures, but he still managed to publish some of his photos in uncensored newspapers, under different names.

After the territorial losses in summer of 1940, the king abdicated and the power was taken over by the far right regime of collaboration between legionaries and Ion Antonescu. Anti-Semitism became the main state politics involving the loss of citizenship, the exclusion from liberal professions, trade, businesses, schools. The period was also marked by the violent pogrom committed by legionnaires in Bucharest, in January 1941. The tension of the events, the loss of the right to perform his profession, the confiscation of the equipment speeded up Berman's disease and he died later that year (Martor, 1998, 28).

The post-war totalitarian regime confiscated the photographic heritage of Berman. Only a couple of years after the fall of Communism, the photo archives started to be explored. Today, they are located at the Romanian Peasant Museum, at the Village Museum, the Metropolitan Library, in private collections, while the main source remains the illustrated press.

The life path of Berman reflects a dynamic and turbulent period of the Romanian history. Interwar decades were a time of defining and consolidation the nation, of searching the proper ways to unify the provinces into a national state. The new configuration of Europe after WWI transformed Romania in a state which doubled its territory and population. Once the state was created, it was aimed at building the nation through centralizing cultural policies, since the provinces had particular profiles and multi-

ethnic populations. The main ethnic minorities (Hungarians, Germans, Jews) were more educated and urbanized than Romanians, so they were perceived as rival "foreign" populations. The Jewish community constituted a thorny issue, as it confronted a difficult history marked by the long process of naturalization, stereotypic perceptions and anti-Semitism. In his last years, Berman faced not only the triggering of the WWII, but also the preliminaries of the most dramatic moments of the Jewish history in Romania.

Thus, Romanian nation followed the pattern of a nation built from top to bottom, by creating and reproducing a shared culture. As the constructivist approach argues, the press and national literature had a considerable impact for developing the national consciousness (Anderson, 2000), although, in Romania, almost half of the population was illiterate. For the printings, the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also meant switching from illustrations to photo reportage, while photographic art made the leap from studio photo to instant and documentary photos. Iosif Berman was the main photographer of the era involved in the transition to new photographic technique.

### Photography and photographs

Photojournalism appeared as an adaptation of the photographers to the economic conditions after WWI. Since 1927, they became photojournalists for a living in some industrialized countries from Western Europe. Germany was the main cradle with *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* and *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, while France had its *Vu* launched in 1928. In the United States, *Life Magazine* was founded in 1936, based on the template of the European photo journals. The appearance of illustrated magazines was linked to the increasing activities of the modern life, lacking the time for contemplation (Warner Marien, 2010, 236, 238), while during the interwar period, a fast development of journals devoted to pictures took place, with an emphasis on eye-catching pictures and far less text. The public of these printings was mainly the middle-class (Warner Marien, 2010, 237).

As for Romania, in 1922, the first Association of Professional Photographers was founded in Transylvania. The Association printed the trilingual magazine (in Romanian, Hungarian, German) *The photo* in Cluj, under

the leadership of Eugen Mayer and Gheorghe Joanovics. The association advocated the organizing of photographers from all over the country in a professional body that could represent their interests. The review contained articles related to photographic techniques – real tutorials for professionals and amateurs. Since 1923, the technique of “moving pictures on the go” has been introduced as a procedure subsequent to the one in which the photographer “moves” to the home of the subject: “The one that was photographed without his knowledge receives a note mentioning the following: *You have been photographed while you were walking; you can check your face on a postal card at my workshop, without any obligation* (the address)” (Hansen, 1923, 17). It is the transition from studio photography to snapshots or to what the renowned photograph Henri Cartier-Bresson called as the “decisive moment”. In fact, that unique moment in time that captures some truth or essence about the subject. Any photograph represents thus a choice of the photographer to depict one among infinite number of moments (Stanczak, 2007, 71-72). Berman embraced this technique of snapshots, making an art out of it.

Berman's photography was subject to many analyzes regarding the photo techniques or the artistic expression. The following pages will try to depict two stances of Berman's visual creation: the national and the ethnic, using as sources two albums based on archives from the Museum of Romanian Peasant and Museum of the Village, the collection of Metropolitan Library and some press photos. On the one hand, his photography can be perceived as a visual source for creating and reproducing national identity based on authenticity, rather than specificity (the latter being abundantly presented in the interwar press or albums). This is one of the distinct features of Berman's work in relation, for instance, with another set of pictures created in the 30's, by the photographer Kurt Hielscher (Hielscher, 1933)<sup>36</sup>. Furthermore, Berman's

images are among the few including Jewish ethnics among the inhabitants of the state – an eluded aspect from the pictures of that era.

On the other hand, his creation stands as a mirror of the artist reflecting the dual identity of the author. Wright Morris, a documentary photographer emphasised: “we should make the distinction, while it is still clear, between photographs that mirror the subject, and images that reveal the photographer. One is intrinsically photographic, the other is not” (Stanczak, 2007, 33).

### **Images of national identity in a country of contrasts**

#### *The Romanian peasant*

In a country marked by the tangle between massive rural and incipient urban, national identity is delivered by the main cultural trends, but also by the official discourse as pertaining to the Romanian peasant, with strong faith in Christian orthodoxy and church, strong related to tradition and customs. As Thiesse put it, the construction of nations and their entrance into modernity is made backwards, by proposing a very happy yesterday, rather than the promise of a thriving tomorrow (Thiesse, 2000, 116). The peasantry appears as the essence of the patriarchal, and also of the Romanian continuity on the land.

Berman captures the finest aspects of the village life as member of the monographic teams led by Dimitrie Gusti. He depicts the *authenticity* of the Romanian peasant, presenting him/her in all stances, without making appeal to any embellishment. Of course, this derives from thorough documentation, but also from the direct contact of the observer with his subject. Berman turns to be a careful creator of anthropological photography. He opts for the *image of truth*, to the detriment of the picture show, allowing all sorts of uncontrolled intervention in the picture.

Berman's peasants can be cheerful, clean, serene, amused by the presence of the photographer, but also preoccupied, sober, poor, dirty, tired. Almost all human stances are immortalized at some point. That is why, in

<sup>36</sup> Hielscher's album is conceived like a visual “business card” of Romania assumed by the Royal House and is designed for an audience outside Romania. The introduction signed by a leader of the Romanian nationalist movement, Octavian Goga, insists on the objective manner in which Romania is reflected through Hielscher's lens.

However, all pictures are static, people are posing, peasants usually wear their festive clothes, so the whole scene seems to be well directed.

Communism, Berman's peasants were useless: Berman's peasants were smiling (Ciuciu, 2011, 210). The basis of Berman's photographic outcomes is collaboration and acceptance, and not a relationship of domination (Fig. 1).

*The Orthodox Church and Christian life* are captured in connection with the values of the rural life. Berman is no photographer of Church as building, or as institution. While taking pictures of ceremonies, he is interested in the expression of faith, in the spiritual relation of people with God, intermediated by church and priests. Berman seemed to have a particular interest in Christian religiosity; he followed regularly the religious processions on Christian holydays, in Suceava, his home region (Fig. 2).

*Folk and Christian traditions* make their way in Berman's pictures, in different periods of the year, according to the orthodox calendar. Every holyday is translated through symbols, masks, specific clothing, parades, songs. At the country side, the main milestones of life are highly valued with symbolic significance, as it is the case for weddings or funerals. The "rites of passage", are visual documented through anthropological photography (Fig. 3, 4).

But Berman doesn't focus only on villages. City life is also the stage for reproducing Romanian tradition, mostly linked to specific activities in certain seasons: *mărțișorul* – as the symbol of the spring celebrated on 1<sup>st</sup> of March; the moving/relocating process on Saint Dumitru; the carnival on the spring fair (Fig. 5).

*Encounters with modernity through city life* are another specific feature of Berman's pictures that distinguishes from other perspectives eluding the urban from any representation of the nation. In the interwar period, the development of the urban was still at the incipient level. With all that, the capital of Bucharest had certain visual elements with thorough significance for the national identity: institutions and buildings, parks, streets, squares and others as symbols of the monarchy or commemorating the Romanian heroic past. Without any propagandistic intentions, Berman does not stick to the official representations, but captures, again, the authentic, highlighting the simultaneous coexistence of urban life and rural appearance. Furthermore, he takes a close look to the marginal, to the periphery of the city,

emphasizing the contrasts, without taking a dramatic posture (Fig. 6).

*The Royal House* was also a symbol of the united nation under the sceptre of the king in the parliamentary monarchy of Romania. As the official photographer of the Royal House, Berman took formal pictures of the solemnities. But as said before, to a certain degree, he tried to depict "the human nature", or at least the spontaneous instances of the state officials (Fig. 7).

### **Romanian identity in National Geographic Magazine**

In 1934, Romanian identity becomes the subject of the American magazine *The National Geographic* that printed an article dedicated entirely to Romania, based on the narratives of its journalist, Henrietta Allen Holmes, who spent two years in the country. Her article called "The Spell of Romania" is an accurate description of the land marked by the mixture of Eastern and Western influences. The author reviews the same elements of national identity (peasants, religious life, provinces, ethnicity – without any Jews though), with an objective journalistic eye. For instance, she sees the Romanian peasant as lovable, gracious, courteous, good-natured, industrious, yet somewhat inefficient; more like shepherds "wearing large, furry capes, like pictures from the Old Testaments" (Holmes, 1934, 424).

What is noticeable is that the article uses about 30 photos of Romania, 18 of them being submitted by Iosif Berman. This can be considered a direct source of what Berman considered representative for his nation, by selecting images from all over the country. First of all, it was about official pictures of the King Carol II. Then, about his characters from the monographic campaigns – the peasants – in specific postures exposing the folk traditions (the dances *hora*, *bățuta*), the traditional events of weddings and funerals, the practices of farming and harvesting, or the making of all sorts of crafts. Romanian way of celebration is also depicted in pictures of a carnival. River Danube is captured as a main natural resource of wealth. The urban has a marginal place in sketching the Romanian identity and is represented by a single photo of the "skyline" of Bucharest – the Palace of the Telephones. As for the ethnic component of the Romanian state, only the gypsies are

portrayed as the most exotic minority group, performing the tradition of *ursaries* (the taming of the bear).

Other photographers also contribute to the portrait of the Eastern country, by following the same coordinates: Wilhelm Tobien (A gipsy flower girl; harvesting in Bukovina; Moreni petroleum refinery; the leather boots small shop in Cluj; a Romanian wedding with violin players; Rucăr wedding; byzantine paintings on Rucăr church; Byzantine columns of a Bucharest house; Queens Mary's residence in Balcic; peasant embroidery; Gypsy girl in Romanian costume, as "not all gypsy are nomads"; Sighișoara; frescoes on Moldavia monasteries); R. Raffus (Gypsy women with brushes; handmade Romanian rugs); the Romanian Legation (the blessing of the water in Constanța); Ewing Galloway (peasants harvesting thatch in the water; Bucharest poultry market; the "marriage market" – a custom in Apuseni); Franz Stoedtner (nomad gypsies); Cluj Ethnographic museum (the blessing of the water).

Minority ethnics seem to be visually reproduced only with a focus on the Roma people. I refer to ethnicity from the perspective of relational theories, as the interaction based forms of social organization, where certain cultural features are used by members as "emblems of difference" (Barth, 1969, 14). It is not very easy to evaluate the place of ethnicity in Berman's work, although Berman was a Romanian of Jewish ethnicity himself. A first observation is that Berman captures ethnicity out of the leftist perspective of marginals. Periphery (as social status/location) is one of the main protagonists of his photos, so when capturing minority ethnics, Berman probably didn't had an ideological-political purpose translated as a reaction to nationalism. His interest in minorities is revealed by exposing their crafts or clothing, but only as a secondary aspect of a spontaneous capture. The Roma portrayed as the most exotic group through their appearance and habits are also frequently used in Berman's photos. Undoubtedly, such pictures were extremely eye catching for the audience. But other ethnics, like Tartars or Lipovans can also be tracked (Fig. 8, 9).

### Depicting the Jews in the body of the nation

Only a small fraction of Berman's work is dedicated to the Jewish community. The main collection appears in *Adam* review (1929-30) and *The Israeli Courier* (1939) and represents photo reports on a Jewish *shtetl* in Sighet, Maramureș and, respectively, a periphery neighbourhood in Bucharest<sup>37</sup>. Other pictures are disparate, like the cover for the Jewish novel *20<sup>th</sup> century Ghetto*, of Ury Benador.

Sighet, an ultra-religious Jewish *shtetl*, is reproduced through daily life aspects, characters and the celebration of Sabbath. The visual elements of the Jewish identity are used to highlight the physical portrait of the Jewish inhabitants wearing specific clothing and the traditional Ashkenazi sideburns. The text that accompanies the photos, written by Berman's friend and collaborator, reporter F. Brunea-Fox, contains lots of Yiddish idioms and denotes the profound knowledge on Ashkenazy community, but also the fact that the Spectator of the reportage is the Jews – probably also those from Bucharest, with many Sephardic members with different tradition from the ones from the province (Brunea-Fox, 1929, 1930) (Fig. 10, 11).

Berman and Brunea-Fox also take a close look to one of the poorest periphery of the metropolis – Dudești neighborhood. Here, acculturated Jews are represented especially through their professional activities. Pictures reveal their commercial shops and hovels with Jewish firms and names. Tradition is depicted on celebration of Purim, the feast of joy that commemorates the liberation of the Jewish people from the ancient Persian-Babylonian Empire. Although the traditional wearing of masks does not hide poverty, the event revitalizes the street, creating the atmosphere of a carnival. Poverty also flashes through the antithesis between the seemingly happy photo of masked children and Fox's text that recreates one's family dramatic story. In the reprinted version of 1939 (*The Israeli Courier*), Fox's comments are bleak, expressing the feeling of bad times approaching (Brunea-Fox, 1939) (Fig. 12).

Thus, exploring Jewish communities in Northern or Southern Romania, Berman addresses the marginal condition generated by

<sup>37</sup> A detailed analysis of the written and photo reports in Ciuciu 2011.



poverty, maintaining though a serene note. Today, these pictures are places of memory, as the community in Sighet got deported during the Holocaust, while the Jews in Dudești were also the victims of the racial laws and of the pogrom in Bucharest in January 1941. After WWII, most of the Jews emigrated (Ciuciu 2011, 200). Bermans' photography reveals that "the Photograph does not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only for certain *what has been*. [...] In front of a photograph, our consciousness does not necessarily take the nostalgic path of memory [...], but for every photograph existing in the world, the path of certainty" (Barthes, 1982, 85).

### Some final remarks

Berman's portfolio stands as a source for shaping identities on different levels (national/ethnic/individual). In fact, as Barthes argues, "photography [...] began, historically, as an art of the Person: of identity, of civil status, of what we might call, in all sense of the term, the body's *formality*" (Barthes, 1982, 79).

The focus of the photographer is placed on aspects of the Romanian society not only because Romanians were the dominant nation (the Royal House and the Romanian villages were Romanian emblems very often recorded by Berman), but also because it reflected the degree of integration for a large part of the Romanian-Jewish artists and intellectuals. To this respect, it seems that even within Berman's double identity, the Romanian component is dominant. At the professional level, he worked close with Romanian scientists, journalist, and even with the Royal house.

Jewish identity appeared as a marginal topic in Bermans's works, but not lacking consistency. And although he seemed less committed to his Jewishness, his identity as Jew was the source of profound sorrow when the first anti-Semitic legislation was implemented. With the instauration of the Royal dictatorship, Jewish newspapers were abolished, his professional license was withdrawn, and his equipment was confiscated. Between 1938 and 1939, some of his pictures were still published in *The Illustrated Reality*, either unsigned, or under the name I.B. Ursian. His huge contribution to the visual documentation of the Romanian national identity was erase. And the

prohibition of access to his work put him in the grave. Berman passed from an artistic-professional identity which surpassed the ethnic identity dilemma, to the sad case of a Jewish individual integrated into Romanian culture for which the double identity became a great disillusionment.

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**Fig. 3.** Wedding.

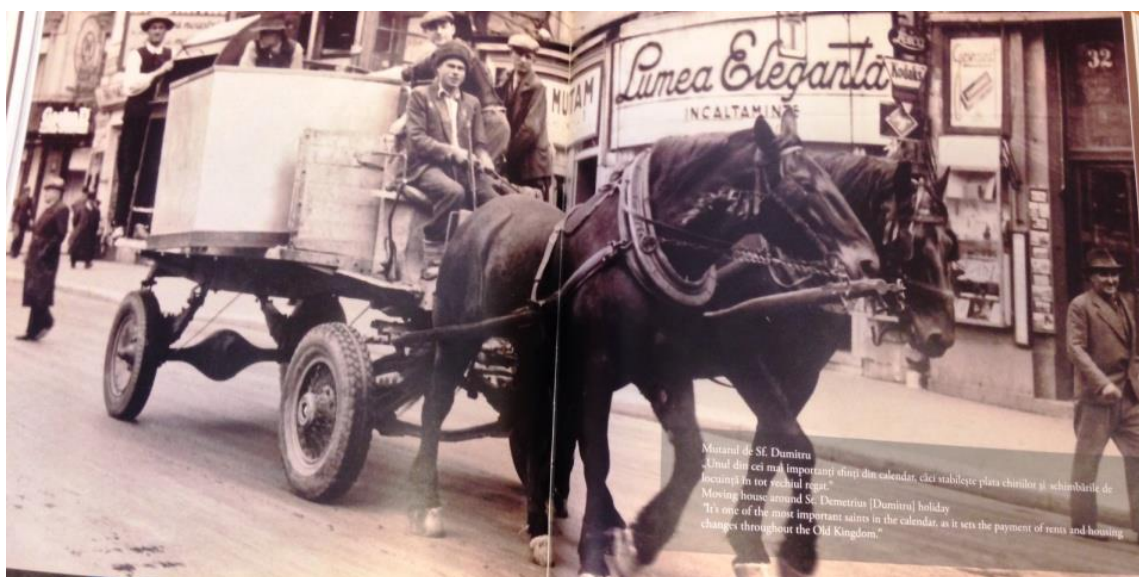
Source: *Iosif Berman. A Photo-album conceived by Ioana Popescu, Martor III-1998. Supplement.*





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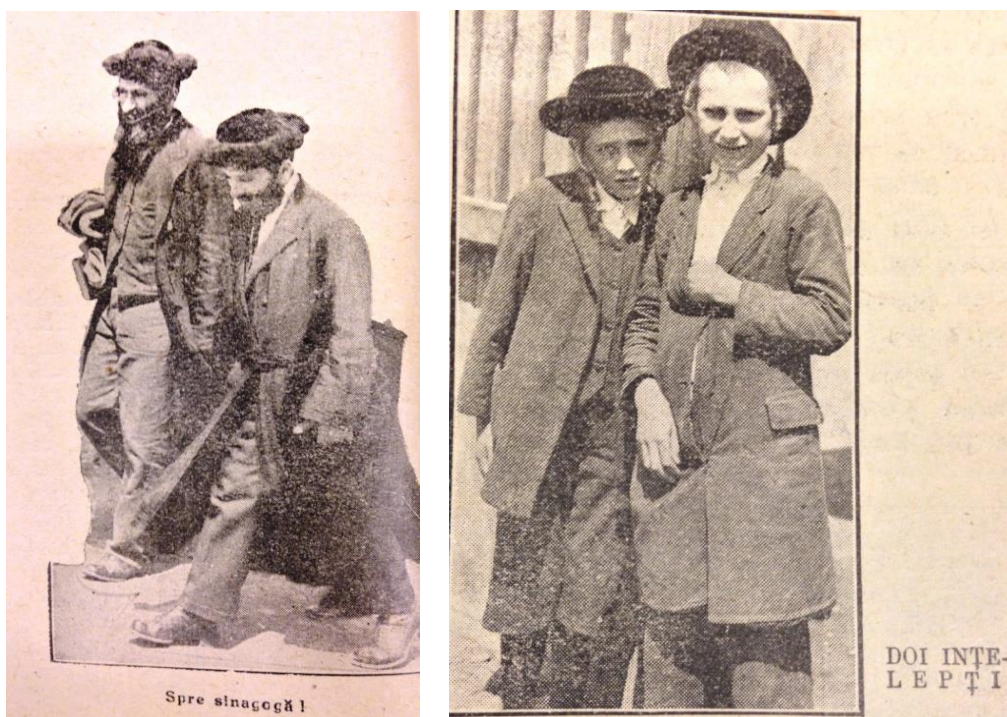
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**Fig. 12.** Children celebrating Purim.





**THE STREET AS A NEW BATTLEFIELD.  
REVERBERATIONS OF THE GREAT WAR IN *DIE STRASSE* (KARL GRUNE, 1923) AND *DIE  
FREUDLOSE GASSE* (G. W. PABST, 1925)**

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims to provide an insight into the Weimar cinema dealing with the consequences of the First World War. It firstly argues that, besides its institutional development, the Weimar cinema experienced the main art movements of that period – Expressionism and New Objectivity – as first reverberations of the war. Secondly, special attention is drawn to the cinematic street scenarios, the street being considered as a “new battlefield” of the post-war period. The representations of inner and outer conflicts of the German society are shown by investigating the street as a cinematic motif in two feature films *Die Strasse* (Karl Grune, 1923) and *Die freudlose Gasse* (G. W. Pabst, 1925).*

**Keywords:** *Expressionism, New Objectivity, Weimar cinema, First World War, post-war upheavals*

## Introduction

The First World War was far from over after the Armistice of 11 November 1918, the capitulation of Germany, and the abdication and flight of Kaiser Wilhelm II into exile, but it split into several smaller wars and took on other types of conflict, all of which the combatant countries were increasingly aware. The Great War and the subsequent smaller wars, whether in form of interstate or domestic conflicts, changed the international map, state forms, world orders, value systems, and thus introduced what Eric Hobsbawm (Hobsbawm, 1998) calls the “age of extremes.” The new, short-lived democracies soon turned into dictatorial and even totalitarian forms of power, driven by left or right-wing political forces. The question “Ende?!” (“The End?!”) posed by G. W. Pabst in the last intertitle of his famous feature film *Westfront 1918* (1930) – as also pointed out by Anton Kaes (Kaes, 2009, 211) in his study about “shell shock cinema” – proved to be appropriate at that time. The war ended neither for artists nor for the entire German society, but reverberated in the economic, political, and social upheavals of the post-war period,<sup>38</sup> as well as in the lasting “memory boom” (Winter, 2006) it triggered. The consequences of the war were devastating especially for the Central Powers, with Germany also having to admit its war guilt and the reparations demands of the Treaty of Versailles. However, the post-war years, marked by war trauma and misery on the one hand, and regarded as the “Golden Twenties”

on the other, proved to be contradictory, providing an appropriate climate for contrasting worldviews. The present paper deals less with explicit visual depictions of the First World War, but primarily with the cinematic phenomena of Expressionism and New Objectivity, which, according to Lotte Eisner quoting the Expressionist writer Herwarth Walden (Eisner, 1969, 12), unfolded as a post-war “Weltanschauung”. The traumatic war experiences and their consequences as well as the awareness of defeat initially prevented any documentary or naturalistic cinematic approach. This does not mean, however, that the confrontation with the war was given no significance. The Great War and especially subsequent wars were extremely present in the Expressionist and New Objectivity works, though in a more abstract form.

In this regard, the paper will first address the two “worldviews” or art movements of the Weimar cinema, their content and formal elements, and overall their motives in the light of the wartime and post-war experiences of the German society. Consequently, the focus will be placed on the “street” as a cinematic motif which has been used both by Expressionists and New Objectivity filmmakers. The street became the new battlefield of the post-war society. Workers’ uprisings, strikes, demonstrations or marches took place on the street. Unemployment, the queues in front of the stores, black-marketers, war invalids, and prostitution were all visible here. The streets delivered even the latest headlines. In order to provide a more detailed look at the cinematic motif of the street, two feature films will be

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<sup>38</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the term “post-war” refer to the period after the World War I.

examined: *Die Strasse* (*The Street*, 1923, Karl Grune) and *Die freudlose Gasse* (*The Joyless Street*, 1925, G. W. Pabst). The questions to be addressed in this regard are the following: how is the post-war society portrayed on the street? What conflicts of the post-war era come to the fore here? What function does the street perform for Expressionist and New Objectivity filmmakers and how can the differences be explained? In order to answer these questions, we will first approach the Weimar cinema, as the institutional transformations and artistic creation emerged after the war, which in turn created an effervescent climate for the Expressionist and New Objectivity tendencies in the film. In the following section, the two artistic movements and their motives are given concrete attention, to finally investigate the visual motif of the street as a living space and new battlefield.

### **The film of the Weimar Republic**

Before the war, the international markets were dominated by French, English and Italian productions and film companies which even opened their own offices in the USA (Uricchio, 1997, 63). However, the international film trade changed dramatically during the war and favored the rise of the Hollywood industry (*ibid.*). The industrialization of film production and distribution in a favorable, war-distant context, as well as the star-system enabled Hollywood to surpass the previous dominant position of European film and gain global influence (Uricchio, 1997, 63; Williams 2007, 375). For American films, whose production and distribution were highly standardized and regulated, new markets opened up due to the weakened international competition (Uricchio, 1997, 63; Keil, 2007, 76). Hollywood experienced a major boom during and after the World War I, although signs of these transformations were visible earlier. On the other hand, the negative consequences of the war influenced European cinemas, for which protectionist and propaganda measures introduced by the central political authorities were not necessarily favorable. The war led to centralization and nationalization of the often heterogeneous and highly internationalized film companies, which were now set in the service of propaganda, education of the masses and entertainment. Some countries such as Germany or Russia managed to overcome these new conditions, while others – such as France, England or Italy – could hardly recover after the war (Williams, 2007, 375; Keil, 2007, 75). William Uricchio (Uricchio, 1997) briefly enumerates these changes: in France the adoption

of American tendencies such as adventure or action stories changed viewer expectations and fostered the influence of American productions after the war (Uricchio, 1997, 63, 65), and Britain had to reorganize its hitherto strong film export industry, prioritizing war materials during the war (Uricchio, 1997, 65). Italy, which shot successful monumental films before the war, grappled with the same challenges existing in other belligerent countries: insufficient footage, warfare priorities in the maritime transport, redistribution of labor and economic decline (Uricchio, 1997, 66). On the other hand, Russia took a different course during the war. In the 1920s, imports were stopped by Lenin's film policy, while agit-prop now played an important role. Filmmakers like Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov and Vsevolod Pudovkin could nevertheless assert themselves with film works of artistic value (Williams, 2007, 381-382). However, it can be also argued that it was not the war itself, but the regime established in wartime circumstances that led to the development of cinema and to what was to be called the socialist film. It was the Bolshevik regime that introduced a strongly ideologically charged and politically controlled film production which at the beginning did not lose any of its artistic value.

Furthermore one can argue that, even in terms of cinema, the war circumstances have shifted the power constellations rather than led to a decline of the European cinemas. This is also evident in the reaction of several European cinemas to the invasion of mass-oriented Hollywood films. Expressionism in Germany, Impressionism in France and the Montage School in Russia are some of the decisive film movements and art tendencies which entered into film history as also mentioned by Charlie Keil (Keil, 2007, 81; cf. Sadoul, 1961).

Germany was, however, an exception, being able to draw benefits from war restrictions especially on film imports. The number of film studios and annual production increased significantly and the film industry was ultimately better positioned after the war than before (Keil, 2007, 75). According to Uricchio (Uricchio, 1997, 66), the post-war success of the German film industry relied on two aspects: first, the abolition of imports from Great Britain, France and Italy, and the accompanying demands for domestic production. German film exports were already discontinued in November 1915 in Great Britain, then in France and Italy, and finally in Russia (Williams, 2007, 381). With the support of General von Ludendorff and influential German industrialists, several film companies were

acquired, most of them from Danish Nordisk, and merged into a central institution in order to better influence public opinion (Uricchio, 1997, 66). Thus, Universum Film AG (Ufa) was founded in 1917 and evolved like Hollywood into a film industry that centralized both film production and distribution (Uricchio, 1997, 66; Keil 2007, 75; Horak, 2007b, 277). But unlike American filmmakers, German filmmakers had significantly more artistic freedom, particularly encouraged by Erich Pommer, for whom German productions had to increasingly penetrate the international market (Horak, 2007b, 278; Elsaesser, 1997, 144). The German cinema had played a leading role in post-war Europe in that over 2000 feature films were produced in the 1920s (according to Kester, 2003, 17, the annual output was about 200 films) and the share of domestic productions reached 60% in 1923 (Keil, 2007, 81), while at the outbreak of the war it was only 14% (Elsaesser, 1997, 137). During the Weimar Republic, Ufa developed a dynamic and – in addition to mass production – also a creative atmosphere for art films, which attracted many filmmakers from the former Austria-Hungary (such as G. W. Pabst and Karl Grune) or Russia (Williams, 2007 381).

#### *The economic logic of the Weimar cinema*

An explanation for the rise of the Weimar cinema was provided by the film scholar Thomas Elsaesser (Elsaesser, 1997). In his view, the institutional development of the German cinema or the merger of several corporations of film production and distribution (vertical and horizontal integration), supported by large industrialists, was less a consequence of the war, but rather determined by a new understanding of media usage and of public opinion (Elsaesser, 1997, 142). The economic function of cinema has now been added to its political one. The fact that the German cinema pursued primarily a market-oriented logic, showed its further development after the war, in which the German film had to be internationally marketed, but not internationalized (Elsaesser, 1997, 142). Elsaesser brings several arguments in this regard: firstly, this logic has been reinforced by the “product differentiation” pursued by filmmakers, as they were not only concerned with the “stylized” Expressionist film, but also with adventure series or historical epics. That the narrative of these feature films relies on newspaper articles, national literature or entertainment literature is Elsaesser’s further argument for the market-oriented film production, based on already famous or well-known patterns (Elsaesser, 1997, 143). In addition, he also mentions the market orientation of Ufa-producer

Erich Pommer, who supported both “product differentiation” and creative freedom of filmmakers, so that German film export could reach the international artistic film community, as well as the masses and thus compete with Hollywood (Elsaesser, 1997, 144). Thereby, the German film and the national themes had to prevail internationally. Pommer’s second strategy was to strengthen European film under the steerage of Ufa, which explains the lasting cooperation between international film networks built in this regard, especially between Germany, France and Great Britain until shortly after the beginning of the Second World War (Elsaesser, 1997, 144).

Finally, Elsaesser argues that the end of the Weimar film was not entirely a consequence of the political circumstances, in other words of the National Socialist seizure of power. He stresses again the economic reasons as well as the technical development to the sound film, which determined, even before the National Socialist regime, a reorientation of Ufa from art films to an increasingly entertainment-based, Hollywoodian approach. This change intensified as famous filmmakers emigrated to Hollywood, mainly for economic reasons (Elsaesser, 1997, 150-151, cf. Sadoul, 1961, 255).

Considering the Weimar film from its economic perspective it is convincing, but insufficient to explain the effervescence of the Expressionist and New Objectivity approach. Therefore, a multilateral view is preferred, also asserting the importance of the war. As shown earlier in this paper, unlike in other European countries, the war has led in Germany to a stronger institutionalization and politicization of the cinema. Furthermore, the relative artistic freedom granted to filmmakers in the post-war period favored the much needed creative atmosphere; and finally, the traumatic experiences of the war and its turbulent aftermath were the circumstances in which Expressionism and then New Objectivity occurred in the cinema, as they were already present in painting and literature. In the following, the motivations of these two movements are discussed.

#### **Reverberations of the First World War: Expressionism and New Objectivity**

Expressionism, which has its origins earlier in literature, fine art and theatre, is linked by film historians to the cinema of the Weimar Republic. It emerged as a film style opposed to realism, focusing on visual representations and messages derived from psychological processes and emotions and not primarily from external

realities (Horak, 2007a, 171). As asserted by its initiators and also emphasized by Jan Christopher Horak, Expressionism was an answer to French Impressionism, in which the artist had to reproduce the impression of time and reality. Expressionism, on the other hand, does not consider the artist as a communication agent, but as a creator of an abstract world that ought to be the result of emotions and inner experiences (Horak, 2007a, 171).

The Expressionist movement was supported in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by several groups of artists: in visual art *Die Brücke* in Berlin and *Der Blaue Reiter* in Munich, as well as in literature *Aktion* and *Sturm*. Their revolutionary approach relied on the ideologically charged artistic orientation turned against traditionalists and realists (Eisner, 1969, 12; Horak, 2007a 171-72; cf. Rado, 2006). Except for some earlier attempts, Expressionism in cinema can be traced back to *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920, Robert Wiene), and therefore to the period after the war. A significant number of German films addressed at that time unusual themes and figures such as power obsessed psychiatrists, hypnotized masses, possessed creatures, malefic doubles, people without shadow, mechanical men, vampires and evil spirits. This relied on the Expressionist conception, which „privileges the subjective over the objective, the fantastic and the uncanny over the mundane and everyday“ (Horak 2007a, 177). The stylistic means were not used in order to create realistic representations at all, which could bring the audience closer to the depicted action, but rather they were used to emphasize the story by a distorted, unusual and distancing imagery by means of “high key lightening, canted camera angles, subjective camera movement, stylized sets, nonnaturalistic acting, nonlinear narratives, a tendency toward dream-like images, and Gothic content“ (Horak, 2007a, 177). However, the light-shadow compositions, the so called *chiaroscuro* previously used in other arts, remain the main visual element of Expressionism in cinema, often being painted on the sets, than using technical lighting methods (Eisner, 1969, 47; Horak, 2007a, 173).

Between Expressionism and the realistic representations of the New Objectivity emerged the *Kammerspiel*, which meant an alleged recourse to realism to Expressionists (Sadoul, 1961, 163). Giving up former fantastic creatures, tyrants and ghosts, the *Kammerspiel* brought ordinary people in their intimate surroundings of the everyday world into the foreground of a now linear act (Sadoul, 1961, 163). But unlike realism,

the simplicity of represented film characters or objects, exhibiting also a symbolic function, can be often overstated (Sadoul, 1961, 163-64; cf. Eisner, 1969, 177).

The New Objectivity differs significantly from the previous Expressionist movement, using realism as a starting point. The term has been traced back to Gustav Hartlaub's eponymous art exhibition that took place in Mannheim in May 1925 (Vögele, 1993, 68; Kester, 2003, 89; Kracauer, 1979, 175). Hartlaub relates these realistic tendencies to the relative stability of the Weimar Republic after the economic crisis 1923 (Kester, 2003, 89), which does not mean, in Bernadette Kester's view, that this movement simply relied on a sense of resignation and adaptation to the new political circumstances. It rather expressed a turn to reality, which nevertheless was not free of social criticism (Kester, 2003, 89). In his dissertation on German and Swiss New Objectivity painting, Christoph Vögele (Vögele, 1993) draws on Hartlaub's distinction between Verists and the representatives of Magical Realism, asserting contemporary issues and critical views on reality on the one hand, and a more conservative, indirect and internalized representation of the time, on the other (Vögele, 1993, 68/ 70; cf. Kracauer, 1979, 175). For both approaches, street landscapes were an important motif. The “human living space” (“Lebensraum des Menschen”) could be critically represented from the Verist perspective, or it could be reflected as an “existential condition” (“existentielles Befinden”) by Magic Realism (Vögele, 1993, 70). In the perception of New Objectivity, the human being is narrowed and isolated in his environment, which is why motifs such as claustrophobic spaces, boundaries and walls are often being used by artists (Vögele, 1993, 150). The *Lebensraum* or living space is not reduced to claustrophobic, tight interiors and still scenes, as it can also depict life in motion. In this imagery one can also find street landscapes, as well as big cities or industrial scenes reflecting insecurity, restlessness and anonymity. These awaken the desire for experiencing another transcendental or profane world (Vögele, 1993, 153). Finally, the enclosed spaces, streets and lanes do not have any way out. This claustrophobic world view is stylistically no longer emphasized by the *mise en scène*, as in Expressionism, but rather by framing, the combination of different perspectives and visual distances that represent the isolated human in his environment – though in the urban crowd (Vögele, 1993, 91, 94).

After the main features of these movements have been outlined, one should raise the question of their motivations. Siegfried Kracauer (Kracauer, 1979) and Lotte Eisner (Eisner, 1969) are the classic authors who provided significant studies on German Expressionism in cinema. Kracauer emphasized in his book "From Caligari to Hitler" (Kracauer, 1947) the thesis that the Weimar film was an early symptom of the rise of National Socialism. He relied on the arguments that these feature films dealt mostly with tyrant figures or the motif of submission, pointing to the desire of the German society for an authoritarian figure. Although a classic of film history, Kracauer's study continued to be controversial among film scholars (cf. Kaes, 2009, 4-5), considering that it was written after the Second World War, the author being eventually influenced by the subsequent political events.

Lotte Eisner (Eisner, 1969) emphasizes the German's sense of loss after the war and their inability to cope with the collapse of the German Reich, in order to explain the enthusiasm for Expressionist tendencies in cinema. It was the claims of the Treaty of Versailles and the domestic instability such as the Spartacist uprising, the Ruhr uprising, the Kapp Putsch, the invasion of Ruhr and the inflation, what shook the new republic. Moreover, these circumstances determined artists to abandon this reality, turning towards a romantic, mystical imaginary world, to Expressionism (Eisner, 1969, 9). According to Eisner, the filmmakers were also influenced in this respect by the theatre of Max Reinhardt and by other Expressionist painters who already became famous before the war.

Expressionism has been related recently more explicitly to the traumatic experiences of the war. In his study, film scholar Anton Kaes (Kaes, 2009) seeks to contradict the view of Siegfried Kracauer, arguing in reverse that the Weimar post-war, Expressionist films are not that much an early symptom of National Socialism, but a post-traumatic symptom of the First World War. These are considered by Kaes as "shell shock cinema". The term "shell shock" stands for the traumatic consequences of the war, Kaes using it metaphorically in order to describe the psychological wounds that have been moved into the society's subconscious. These so-called "post-traumatic films" reveal the war-traumas through their narratives and images, in which military aggression and defeat were translated into cinema as "crime and horror" (Kaes, 2009, 2-3). Although extending his thesis to the entire Expressionist film, Kaes takes a more detailed look to representative productions of this period, such as

*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920), *Nosferatu* (F. W. Murnau, 1922) and Fritz Lang's *Nibelungen* (1924) and *Metropolis* (1927). However, he does not consider that Expressionist motifs – which he attributes to "shell shock cinema" – had already existed before the war.

Unlike Expressionism, the New Objectivity in cinema traced back to the mid-1920s, is less related to the traumatic experiences of war, but to a relatively stabilizing period of the Weimar era. This period permitted not only a return to the immediate reality, but also the first cinematic representations of the war. Therefore, the confrontation with warfare, battlefields and war atrocities in a realistic manner did not begin until 1925 (except for the films shot during the war). The first feature films in this respect were *Namenlose Helden* (1925) and *Volk in Not* (1926), while between 1925 and 1933 more than 30 war films were produced (Kester, 2003, 49).

The main reason for this turning point is in Bernadette Kester's view (Kester, 2003, 53) the change which occurred in the political situation once with Paul von Hindenburg's election as Reichspräsident in 1925; as he represented German militarism.<sup>39</sup> The filmic confrontation with the war has now become a struggle of interpretations that actually reflected the divided society of the Weimar period. Taboo-breaking elements could only be found in the mainly left-wing, pacifist feature films such as *Westfront 1918* (G. W. Pabst, 1930) and *Niemandsland* (Viktor Trivas, 1931) (Kester, 2003, 224). The aim of these war films, however, was to achieve a realistic representation, advocated by the critics in the context of the New Objectivity (Kester, 2003, 225).

Christoph Vögele (Vögele, 1993) also claims that the internalized consequences of the war and thus the turbulent post-war period constitute the main motive of the New Objectivity. He relies on Dorothea Christ (Christ, 1969) as he emphasizes the differences between the German and Swiss approaches. In Germany a social criticism emerged that pointed to the victims of these circumstances and the perpetrators of the war and its aftermath. Artists, most of them politically engaged, commented these post-war conditions in an ironic, cynical tone, even calling for revolt or class

<sup>39</sup> In her investigation of war films of the Weimar cinema, Bernadette Kester (Kester, 2003) examines 25 of more than 30 war films produced since 1925, identifying the main narratives. She reveals war glorifying, guilt-rejecting and pacifist narratives, each of them being differently received in terms of the political orientation of the audiences.

consciousness; whereas in Switzerland, the New Objectivity artists mostly focused on victim constellations, on the role of the loners and outsiders, as the war was not present in the same way (Christ, 1979, 30 quoted in Vögele, 1993, 70).

Moreover, the living spaces of the post-war period were marked by “life-weariness and life fears” (“Lebensmüdigkeit und Lebensfurcht”); the death was already part of everyday life and the old values became unstable. The New Objectivity artists turned to this reality with irony and cynicism, but also with new hope. However, the reality images remained distant and uncertain (Vögele, 1993, 156). How these images of inner or outer reality are represented by Expressionism and New Objectivity will be discussed in the following chapter, focused on the motif of the street as a living space and new battlefield.

### Visions of the post-war streets

The street is meanwhile a recognized and often used cinematic motif, as it can best convey the “pulse” of the society with its political and economic upheavals. So it serves the filmmakers not only as a film set – with or without a documentary function –, but also as a bearer of messages or as an agent, who can intervene in the action. Besides its role in the road movie-genre, the street as a cinematic motif can be thus recognized in the Russian film of the 20s and 30s, the German “Trümmerfilme” (ruddle film) after the Second World War, in the Italian Neorealism and in the French Nouvelle Vague, each serving a different purpose.

Already during the silent film era, a series of feature films produced in Germany after the First World War addressed the street as a cinematic motif, using it even in the film’s title.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, as they are dealing with social and political conflicts of the post-war period, with political upraising, inflation and poverty, social discrepancies, or even with the alienation of the society, these films can be viewed as a confrontation with “new battlefields” of the war’s aftermath.

*Die Strasse* (1923), directed by Karl Grune is considered to be an Expressionist film, already revealing realistic features (cf. Kracauer,

1979, 130; Eisner, 1969, 254). Power-obsessed hypnotists, sleepwalkers or monsters, the horror world of the preceding Expressionist films are no longer to be seen, but they have been assigned to the motif of the street. The main character of *Die Strasse* is a simple citizen who decide one night to leave his sheltered but stifling home to discover the world on the street. But this experience brings him after a short excitement at the edge of suicide, when, due to confusion, he is arrested as a murder suspect. The film ends, however, with a less moralizing message: the real killer is discovered by a child, and the main character returns home, back to the environment protected from the dangers of the street.

The street plays an active role in this story. Already in the first scene, it lures him with its flashing lights, the restless flow of cars, carriages and bicycles and the rushing pedestrians, this dynamic outside world contrasting the monotonous interior, from where he looks at the living city. These images of the street now turn to amusement parks, clowns, elegant women, the evening’s magic with dancing couples and fireworks, and finally to a man with a fortune-teller parrot. Thus the street does not represent the realities of the outer world, but the ideal image of an ordinary man, pointing to its inner struggle. Kracauer (Kracauer, 1979, 133) highlights in this respect the duality between revolt and submission as a problematic of the double, exalted by Expressionists. This time, the double is no longer a distinct character, but is envisioned by the inner cleavage of the main hero, the ordinary citizen living in a monotonous place, with his wife repeatedly preparing the meal. He follows the attraction of the street, revealing his double and acting – in Kracauer’s terms (Kracauer, 1979, 130) – like a “sleepwalker”, but he finally returns to his domestic condition. According to Lotte Eisner (Eisner, 1969, 251), the street, especially during the night, is the “call of Destiny”, the lure of a mystical, unknown world that allows the escape from a safe but fade place. As soon as the main character leaves his room, the street appears in its cruelty. The Expressionist elements introduced here are also noteworthy: the face of a woman turning into a skull; the shining hand on asphalt indicating the way to the shop fronts; the two enormous eyes blinking on an optician sign, as well as the people’s shadow silhouettes on the buildings. These reveal the enigmatic streets by night with their dangers and enticements. The man continues to respond to the invitations of the street: he spends the night in the company of an unknown woman, plays card games in a dance club and encounters a group of offenders, in

<sup>40</sup> See also *Dirnentragödie* (*Tragedy of a Street*, 1927 Bruno Rahn); *Asphalt* (1928 Joe May); *Jenseits der Straße* (1929 Leo Mittler); *Hans in allen Gassen* (1930 Carl Froehlich); *Geld auf der Straße* (1930 Georg Jacoby). For this classification, following studies have been consulted: Sadoul, 1961; Eisner, 1961; Kracauer, 1979.

whose surroundings he witnessed the murder. The course of his experiences is linked to the image of the street, because the more he gives in to the temptations and thus experiencing failures, the calmer the street becomes, in the morning turning even into a deserted landscape.

After all, the street at night is described as a place of immorality, crime, gambling, cabaret dance, and entertainment that can lure a middle-class conformist citizen into a trap. Being visually overemphasized especially in the first part of the film – but also because of the impersonal and anonymous characters (their names are not mentioned) –, the street becomes an allegorical function which reveals the inner state of mind of the German post-war society. The film points thus to an inner battlefield and indicates the split between conformism and escapism.

Shortly after Karl Grune's *Die Strasse*, another film addressed the post-war street issues. *Die freudlose Gasse* (*The Joyless Street*) was released on May 18, 1925 and directed by the more prominent Ufa-filmmaker G. W. Pabst. His films evinced in that period the transition from Expressionism to New Objectivity, portraying the everyday life in its cruelty and making use of social criticism. Though, Pabst himself considers only his war film *Kameradschaft* (1931) to be a realistic one (Rado 2006, 230-1). *Die freudlose Gasse* addresses the issues of the street in a different way, namely in the realistic light of the New Objectivity. It is the so called *Gasse* (side street) which stands metonymically for Vienna's post-war conditions, showing not only the marginalized society's living conditions on the back streets of the city. The film describes also the social transformations and the shift between social classes in the context of a world order in decline. The street is now a place where the division between the impoverished society and the rich newcomers increasingly grows and where these social discrepancies are more visible. The consequences of the war are more clearly illustrated as in *Die Strasse*: the invalid war veterans, unemployment and poverty, inflation, manipulation of media, stock market gambling and prostitution. These social and economic issues are not necessarily allocated to one or the other social class, but are rather connected with moral questions confronting the impoverished middle and lower class as well.

The film begins with a scene that point to the inflation of that time: on Melchior Street, several people queue up in front of the butcher shop of Josef Geiringer, the "tyrant of Melchior Street", as it clearly the intertitle formulates. The expected meat is not sold to them, but they are

urged instead by the police at the butcher's request. As it later became evident, only women who resort to physical attraction practices are privileged to achieve a piece of meat. This triggers, therefore, a moral issue among the starving women on Melchior Street. The queue in front of the butcher's store emerges as a street scenario throughout the story and contrasts with the subsequent scene, set in a luxury hotel, in which rich newcomers plan their businesses by media manipulation and stock market speculations in order to achieve a safe and consistent profit.

The film introduces several characters and their stories that finally intersect in the secret room of the matchmaker Ms. Greifer on Melchior Street; this confluence of individual stories culminating in the end with the revolt of the street inhabitants against the ruthless profiteers of the post-war era.

Two stories are presented in more detail. It is first of all the story of Marie Lechner (played by the famous actress Asta Nielsen) who wants to get rid of her poor and authoritarian family from the house basement on Melchior Street by marrying the bank employee and director's Rosenow personal secretary Egon Stirner. Their relationship seems to have no chance under the economic circumstances and fails due to the enrichment interests of Egon Stirner. Marie Lechner pursues her love instincts and murders his mistress, a woman of high society. On the second floor of the same house lives the Rumford family, a former magistrate with his two daughters. Also on the verge of impoverishment, they can hardly accept their new living conditions. The father tries his luck at the stock market, thereby becoming a victim of the market manipulation initiated by the corrupt business men. The attempt of his daughter Grete Rumford (Greta Garbo) to engage in Ms. Greifer's house with the same purpose of saving the family's living conditions, ultimately fails due to her own moral processes. It is an American lieutenant from the Red Cross who finally gets her out of these immoral compulsions. The new unbearable situation of the middle class, split between the image of prosperity and the cruel reality is visually expressed in a scene in which Grete Rumford puts on the hanger her newly acquired elegant coat next to the old, tattered one. This in turn points to the social recognition that loses its importance under the new conditions of poverty in the post-war transition period.

The film ends tragically, but reveals an ambivalent message about the failure of interpersonal relationships during economic and social upheavals, and, on the other hand, the emerging movements against the establishment.



As in *Die Strasse*, it is particularly the street during the night, which describes the post-war society. The street also shows here a world of immorality, crime, corruption, misery as well as luxury, though in a more contrasting manner. But it is here no longer a romantic perspective of an inner state of mind, the breakout of a comfortable yet claustrophobic perceived space in a world of tempting freedom, which eventually turns out to be a nightmare, forcing the main character back into his safe space. The street rather describes here the simple outer reality of the post-war society, with its misery and opulence, being not a temptation but a compulsion. Different scenarios emerge during the night: the meeting in Ms. Greifer's house between women on the verge of despair and business men from the new high society, one out of compulsion, the other out of pleasure. Already during the night, locals of the Melchiorgasse appear in front of the butchery and also at night the uprising of the inhabitants against the immoral practices takes place. The street finally portrays a compulsory society, struggling with moral issues and being vulnerable to these scenarios. This space is now turning into a social and economic battlefield in which the external struggle for survival and the internal moral conflicts occur.

## Conclusions

The cinematic confrontation with the consequences of the First World War has been outlined in this paper starting from two main aspects: firstly, the Weimar cinema's institutional development has been placed in the context of the First World War and the two formative film movements of Expressionism and New Objectivity has been described as "reverberations of the war." Based on this contextualization, the motif of the street as a new battlefield has been examined in two different feature films *Die Strasse* (1923 Karl Grune) and *Die freudlose Gasse* (1925 G. W. Pabst).

The traumatic experiences of the First World War triggered an intense and extremely politicized confrontation with the warfare itself and with its turbulent aftermath. The cinema's significant role in this respect was due to its increased popularity in the society, as well as its instrumentalization by groups of any political orientation.

In this regard, the Weimar film can be considered an exception among the European countries. The film industry was first of all technically and institutionally more developed after the war than before. Moreover, the emergence of Expressionism and – though with a

lower international resonance – of the New Objectivity was also a consequence of the war and according to Lotte Eisner (Eisner, 1969) an expression of the difficulties in adapting to the experience of loss and to the new political circumstances. The traumatic reality was abandoned in favor of an inner world of fantasies and dreams, with the war and its consequences being expressed in an indirect form, as Anton Kaes (Kaes, 2009) describes it in his study about "shell shock cinema." A realistic cinematic account of the war appeared no earlier than 1925 (Kester, 2003). Under these circumstances, it was argued that the war still had further reverberations, as the conflict venue has been shifted from the battlefield to the street. Further conflicts of the post-war period, be they economic, social, political or even psychological, have been carried out in these new locations.

*Die Strasse* and *Die freudlose Gasse* take different accounts on this subject, as they both deal with the phenomena of crime, poverty, as well as amusement or social and economic rise, but they differ in that the street represents from the Expressionist perspective an inner battlefield, while Pabst's realistic approach emphasizes the economic and social conflicts or even the struggle for survival unfolding on the battlefield of an external reality. In both views, the street offered neither a solution nor a way out, but remained a "joyless" place where the internal or external conflicts continued to exist.

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## KAFKA'S MARTIAL NIGHTMARE. IN THE PENAL COLONY

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**Abstract:** *Franz Kafka wrote his seminal works in a period that approximately coincides with the years of the Great War. In the short story In the Penal Colony, written in 1914 and published in 1919, the historical, political and transcendental tension of those years is reflected in a series of martial elements that coagulate some of Kafka's most prominent metaphors and themes. The article presents aspects of the short story's genesis and publication and points out interpretative facets, with special focus on Kafkian recurrent themes - disobedience and punishment, the presence of a mystical, transcendent or divine Law, and the quest for enlightenment and revelation through physical pain and torture.*

**Keywords:** *martial imagination, torture, injustice, the Great War, the law*

Immediately after the outbreak of World War I, Kafka started to work on what would posthumously become his best-known novel, *The Trial*. Later, in the autumn of 1914, he wrote the bleak novella *In the Penal Colony*, but had no intention to publish it, as he was dissatisfied with its ending, which he considered disappointing and botched. In a diary entry of 9 February 1915, he did not hesitate to express his desolation, and later, in 1917, on 4 September, he complained to his friend and editor Kurt Wolff: "I have never been entirely wholehearted in asking for it to be published. Two or three of its final pages are botched, and their presence points to some deeper flaw; there is a worm somewhere which hollows out the story" (Kafka, 1977, 137). The initial manuscript, with this "unsatisfactory" version of the story, is not available for comparison, so one can only imagine its contents and stylistics. In November 1918, Kafka operated certain revisions of the ending, and sent the short story to Wolff for publication. It was printed in October 1919.

It could easily be noted that the writing, rewriting, editing and publication of *In the Penal Colony* spanned the entire period of WWI, since Kafka wrote the story just two months after its outbreak. Although it does not make direct references to war, its framework, setting, characters and allegorical structures

are heavily anchored in a martial territory – the penal colony in the tropics, the old commander and the new commander appear to be members of the military, one of the protagonists is the officer, and, despite the high temperatures of the tropical island where the penal colony is, he presents himself in full uniform. Also, there is a soldier guarding the machine and the condemned man to be executed. Indeed, the novel focuses on some of Kafka's recurrent themes – disobedience and punishment, the presence of a mystical, transcendent or divine Law, and the quest for enlightenment and revelation through physical pain and torture. Kafka's strategies for involving corporal violence are omnipresent in his work. From the blunt trauma that ultimately kills Gregor Samsa in *The Metamorphosis* to the extreme fasting and starvation of the *Hunger Artist*, Kafka's protagonists are constantly challenged by severe physical suffering. It is important to note that the writing of literature was understood by the author as a painful process, of which he often wrote dramatically in his diary and correspondence. Indeed, writing was, for Kafka, a liberating and enlightening experience, as his entire oeuvre was mostly written at night, at the end of many exhausting days at the office, especially after Kafka took a semi-governmental position at the Workers' Accident Insurance Bureau, in 1908.

I intend to briefly explore the martial component of Kafka's novella, tracing the shadows of WWI and the climate of crisis and moral collapse that massively impacted the arts in 1914-1918 and had a powerful impact on postwar imagination. Published in the year following the end of the Great War, this particular work reflects both worlds – a dark, hopeless time when human life was of little significance in the face of absurd (political/religious) ideologies and another one, represented by the foreign explorer, which makes active efforts to preserve values and, although tempted, does not surrender to corrupt justice. Indeed, as Martin Greenberg noted, Kafka's novella is a "historical allegory" (Greenberg, 1968, 108). However, in the critic's view, it has no historical specificity, but rather a spiritual one:

*"In the Penal Colony takes place in historical time—the colony is a more or less recognizable possession of a European power of the late-nineteenth or early-twentieth century—rather than in the timeless subjective dimension into which the protagonists of Kafka's dream narratives awaken out of historical time. Its subject matter is the religious history of the world, which it recapitulates in terms of the old times and the new times of a penal colony"* (Greenberg, 1968, 108).

The story, considered by Heinz Politzer Kafka's most conclusive oeuvre (Politzer, 1966, 98) opposes two present protagonists – the officer and the explorer, and two absent ones – the new commander and the old one (who is dead). The two men face each other at the scene where an execution is about to commence – a soldier disrespected his superior and he would suffer the consequences of his defiance. The victim was about to be tied to a complicated machine that would tattoo a sentence directly on his skin: "Honor thy superiors!" and, at the end of a twelve-hour process that would leave the soldier exhausted with pain but, according to the officer's speculation, strangely enlightened by his martyrdom, he would be killed, thrown into a pit, then buried. His guilt is not debated and his defense is non-existent. Although his offence is minor – he "had been asleep on duty" (Kafka, 1971, 171), the officer explains

– his duty is meaningless, absurd. "It is his duty, you see, to get up every time the hour strikes and salute the captain's door" (Kafka, 1971, 171) The man receives the death sentence without a fair trial. The officer boasts to the foreign explorer that he was given absolute power by the former commander, and he does not hesitate to abuse it freely:

*"This is how the matter stands. I have been appointed judge in this penal colony. Despite my youth. For I was the former Commandant's assistant in all penal matters and know more about the apparatus than anyone. My guiding principle is this: Guilt is never to be doubted. Other courts cannot follow that principle, for they consist of several opinions and have higher courts to scrutinize them. That is not the case here, or at least, it was not the case in the former Commandant's time"* (Kafka, 1971, 170).

The novella revolves around a simple literalization of a metaphor – the condemned feel the punishment and its meaning "on their own skin" ("am eigenen Leib erfahren") – and the technique was employed by Kafka on several other occasions. Like war itself, unforgiving, inhumane experiences can only be completely understood if experienced directly. *The Metamorphosis* is also based on a literal meaning of a figure of speech regarding parasitic behaviour – Gregor Samsa awakes to find himself transformed into a giant bug. As Paul Peters observes, the title of the story bears more than one meaning, as it could be read both in its original sense, *In der Strafkolonie*, and as a "Kolonie als Strafe", meaning a colony as punishment, making a direct reference to the colonization process as a brutal phenomenon involving violence and abuse (Peters, 2001, 402).

The officer's long, convoluted, exposition and planned demonstration have one solid purpose – the explorer is expected to plead the officer's cause in front of the new commander. He needs political support, technology to maintain the torture machine and, above all, he needs to regain his former prestige. Large crowds would gather in the past to witness the executions he orchestrated. He is in dire need of an advocate, and the foreigner would be an appropriate ambassador.

Lured into ambiguous territory, the explorer becomes interested in both the machine and the officer's method. But when he is pressed to offer specific support, he refuses. Convinced that he must stay faithful to his ideal, the officer places himself under the harrow of the machine, knowing that he would experience the enlightenment he saw in the soldiers he had previously executed. His ideal proves corrupt and unspiritual – the machine starts to disintegrate and kills him before he has the chance to be disappointed by his illusion.

The role of the explorer echoes issues such as intervention and involvement in foreign affairs, of great importance and impact in war times. As Kafka was definitely familiar with the international climate of WWI, the explorer's thought process could be read as a reflection of those times:

“It's always a ticklish matter to intervene decisively in other people's affairs. He was neither a member of the penal colony nor a citizen of the state to which it belonged. Were he to denounce this execution or actually try to stop it, they could say to him: You are a foreigner, mind your own business. He could make no answer to that, unless he were to add that he was amazed at himself in this connection, for he traveled only as an observer, with no intention at all of altering other people's methods of administering justice. Yet here he found himself strongly tempted. The injustice of the procedure and the inhumanity of the execution were undeniable. No one could suppose that he had any selfish interest in the matter, for the condemned man was a complete stranger, not a fellow countryman or even at all sympathetic to him” (Kafka, 1971, 176).

In one of the most comprehensive interpretations concerning the poetics of *In the Penal Colony*, Walter H. Sokel (Sokel, 2002, 48) connects it to *The Metamorphosis* and *The Judgment*, as it is well known that Kafka intended to publish the three stories together under the title *Strafen (Punishments)* (see also Gray, Gross, Goebel, Koelb, 2005, 134). Sokel believes that “In *In the Penal Colony* Kafka systematized the underlying idea of the two

earlier punitive fantasies. The penal machine produces, in a six-hour process of physical torture and laceration, that assent to death which the judgment of their families produced in Kafka's earlier protagonists” (Sokel, 2002, 48). Sokel concludes that the paternal authority, the judgment and verdict of the family have become the penal system, the law and the mechanisms that apply punitive acts (Sokel, 2002, 48).

Besides the obvious martial plot of the narrative, the presence of uniforms, military elements and blind obedience is reminiscent of the political and cultural context of the war. Sokel remarks the story's direct focus on the individual (particularly the soldier about to be executed), invoking a certain degree of “‘brainwashing’ of the subject” (Sokel, 2002, 49) who willingly surrenders to be tortured and killed in the hope of gaining an improbable kind of metaphysical illumination. The critic connects the plot to “the political and cultural irrationalism of the First World War [...] and the nascent totalitarianism that was to transform most of Europe into a huge penal colony” (Sokel, 2002, 50).

The dark aura of the narrative is even deeper, once the story is further connected to the writer's own assertions, as present in his diaries and correspondence. Kafka's punitive fantasies seem to be double-edged from more than one perspective, as the writer confesses to find strange comfort in the death of his characters. According to his diary, on December 13, 1914, he was able to experience his own death “through the vicarious dying of his characters” (Sokel, 2002, 50):

“On the way home told Max that I shall lie very contentedly on my deathbed, provided the pain isn't too great. I forgot— and later purposely omitted— to add that the best things I have written have their basis in this capacity of mine to meet death with contentment. All these fine and very convincing passages always deal with the fact that someone is dying, that it is hard for him to do, that it seems unjust to him, or at least harsh, and the reader is moved by this, or at least he should be. But for me, who believe that I shall be able to lie contentedly on my deathbed, such scenes are secretly a game; indeed, in the death enacted I rejoice in my own

death, hence calculatingly exploit the attention that the reader concentrates on death, have a much clearer understanding of it than he, of whom I suppose that he will loudly lament on his deathbed, and for these reasons my lament is as perfect as can be, nor does it suddenly break off, as is likely to be the case with a real lament, but dies beautifully and purely away” (Kafka, 1949, 102).

Under the apparent purity of uniforms, of military gear, discourse and discipline, there is a boiling chaos, revealed by the unforgiving authority that sentences the soldier to death for a common, minor act of disobedience. Isolated from the rest of the world (the penal colony is an island in the tropics), it follows its own rules and laws that do not necessarily resonate with an international climate. Ahistorical, generic and culturally uprooted, the colony’s legal system seems anchored into ancient grounds, reminding of the commandments of the Old Testament.

The religious fundament of the colony’s martial system is present throughout Kafka’s novella, and a brief discussion of this element is in order. First, it is essential to notice the double meaning of the word *Schrift* (Sokel, 2002, 50), understood here as both writing and scripture. Leonard Mendelsohn (Mendelsohn, 1961) opted for a Christian interpretation of the punitive ritual, and saw the officer in the role of a priest that performs a sacrificial rite with the help of the penal machine. Despite the tropical heat, the officer wears his uniform, and defends his act in a firm exchange of views with the explorer: “‘These uniforms are too heavy for the tropics, surely,’ said the explorer, instead of making some inquiry about the apparatus, as the officer had expected. ‘Of course,’ said the officer, washing his oily and greasy hands in a bucket of water that stood ready, ‘but they mean home to us; we don’t want to forget about home’” (Kafka, 1971, 166). The food the condemned man can reach out his head to taste is there in lieu of the last rites, and, as the officer remarks, “Not one of them ever misses the chance” (Kafka, 1971, 174). Heinz Politzer, exploring the religious dimension of *In the Penal Colony*, noted that, indeed, a Christian connection is more plausible than a Jewish one. In his view, the machine

resembles the cross, and the officer’s death equates a Christic sacrifice. The inscription on the old Commander’s grave, “Have faith and wait!” (Kafka, 1971, 192) has an evangelical undertone (Politzer, 1966, 107) and the two handkerchiefs given to the condemned man by the women in the new commander’s entourage are a clear reminder of Veronica’s handing a veil to Jesus to wipe his forehead as he was carrying his cross to Golgotha. Erwin E. Steinberg (Steinberg, 1976, 492-514) argues that the old commander’s semi-divine nature is doubtless, as he was the architect and creator of the island’s small, closed universe. He had become a sacred figure, as he had followers who were awaiting his return, founding a cult dedicated to him. The old commander’s manuscripts had become cult objects, sacred texts that had to be maneuvered with piety and great care, much like the Torah scrolls. They are used as guiding plans for the machine’s drawer, the part that actually coordinates the needles to inscribe the sentence on the body. “I’m sorry I can’t let you handle them, they are my most precious possessions” (Kafka, 1971, 173), the officer apologizes to the explorer. Also, he warns the explorer that “it’s no calligraphy for school children. It needs to be studied closely. I’m quite sure that in the end you would understand it too. Of course, the script can’t be a simple one” (Kafka, 1971, 174). However, this ideology, much like the ones that fuel conflict and wars, is a destructive, poisonous one. It is not meant to save, but to kill and annihilate. The officer is quite clear in his explanation of the process, emphasizing the seductive power of the so-called enlightenment visible on the martyr’s face:

“But how quiet he grows at just about the sixth hour! Enlightenment comes to the most dull-witted. It begins around the eyes. From there it radiates. A moment that might tempt one to get under the Harrow oneself. Nothing more happens than that the man begins to understand the inscription, he purses his mouth as if he were listening. You have seen how difficult it is to decipher the script with one’s eyes; but our man deciphers it with his wounds. To be sure, that is a hard task; he needs six hours to accomplish it” (Kafka, 1971, 175).

But the pain and sacrifice are useless, as the man dies and is thrown away like waste and buried: "By that time the Harrow has pierced him quite through and casts him into the pit, where he pitches down upon the blood and water and the cotton wool. Then the judgment has been fulfilled, and we, the soldier and I, bury him" (Kafka, 1971, 175).

The power of the sacred, mysterious ideology passed on from the old commander to the officer makes the latter a true believer in its absolute truth. The explorer does not remain impartial and indifferent after he hears the officer's long, effervescent exposition. At first, he was impressed with the officer's long speech, martial allure and self-confidence. Once again, much like in *The Metamorphosis*, where the father regains his prominence and position of power in the family once he starts wearing a uniform, the formal coat becomes an emblem of authority, although illusory and deceitful: "All the more did he admire the officer, who in spite of his tight-fitting full-dress uniform coat, amply befrogged and weighed down by epaulettes, was pursuing his subject with such enthusiasm and, besides talking, was still tightening a screw here and there with a spanner" (Kafka, 1971, 167).

Clayton Koelb (Koelb, 1982, 511-525) argues that the explorer respects authority, although he disagrees with the officer's method, that is the use of the penal machine itself. He does not hesitate to simply refuse defending the officer's ideology and his means of implementing it, triggering the climactic moment of the story – the officer's decision to tie himself to the machine and have the "Be just!" sentence tattooed on his back. Although aware of the absurd injustice of the condemned man, his lack of involvement is the ultimate sign of his foreigner status. The story ends with his blunt refusal to take the soldier and the condemned man with him on the boat as he was fleeing the island.

Probably the most haunting element of Kafka's martial nightmare, as developed in this novella, is its often disregarded visionary power. At one point, the officer, as the active element who implemented and promoted the island's primitive penal system says "I was not informed, it is not my fault" (Kafka, 1971, 169). Almost a century later, after the devastation of WWII and the Holocaust, this simple, elementary sentence bears the resonance of a heavy, yet wasted and futile warning.



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## QUEEN MARIE AND “THE CULT OF OUR HEROES”

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**Abstract:** *The Society “Tombs of the Heroes” issued a publication with the title Cultul Eroilor Noștri (The Cult of Our Heroes) during 1920-1935. Starting of 1928 it became the official cultural and national body under the aegis of H.M. Queen Marie, given her tireless involvement and dedication as a nurse during the war. It was only natural that she was named the patron of the Society, especially because of her devotion to the remembrance of those fallen in the battles of the Great War and for their widows and orphans. Moreover, after 1938 the society was named in her honour. On the other hand, the publication The Cult of Our Heroes contributed to an impressive organization of military cemeteries and mausoleums, offering thus the chance for younger generations to understand the dimension of the conflict and human loss.*

**Keywords:** *The Cult of Our Heroes, Great War, Queen Marie of Romania, military cemeteries, Great Unification*

Thomas Carlyle was fully convinced that it necessary to define the “heroic” as a supreme manifestation of the role of elites in history. Using the 19<sup>th</sup> century style, he chose phrases of Romanticism for this purpose – “the light that shines, the one who lighted up the darkness of the world” (Carlyle, 1910, 1). Unfortunately, the humankind used the direct conflict to solve most of its problems and, as a consequence, the dead during the war were commemorated by those who rejoiced due to the victory or grieved because of defeat.

The consequences of the Great War were complex and difficult to grasp, given their breadth at the end of 1918. Thus, before the Peace Conference in Paris (1919-1920), all the belligerent countries faced a multitude of issues whose solving required time and understanding. The Romanian case was an enviable one, as the aftermath of the Great War gave the opportunity for the Romanians to unite as a state for the first time in history. However, the consequences of the war were harsh even in the Romanian case: more than 400,000 dead soldiers, lots of wounded, widows and orphans, not to mention the material losses and the dead civilians.

The first years after the Great Unification were characterized by the fear of not being able to convince the new generation that all those efforts were necessary for a unified Romanian state. The victorious unification was possible due to the sacrifice of

an entire generation so that its commemoration was not only an obligation, but also an objective necessity.

The Romanian situation was complicated due to its questioned belonging to the Entente and the disaster provoked by the Russia’s peace at Brest-Litovsk, followed by the one at Buftea-Bucharest in 1918. Re-entering the war a day before the armistice on November 11, 1918 was followed by at least two years of conflicts with the Bolshevik Russia. Both Russia and Hungary (with the leader Bela Kun) decided to maintain the same external policies of the former empires, namely – keeping Bessarabia as part of the Bolshevik Russia and, respectively, Banat and Transylvania as parts of Hungary.

What was left then after the victories of the year 1917 at Mărăști, Mărășești și Oituz? While the joy of the Great Unification managed to alleviate the harsh social consequences of the war, the grief of the widows and orphans deepened the toughness of the daily life.

Dealing with the afterwar reality meant the involvement of the new generation in all its aspects, including the organization of the military cemeteries and solemn festivities dedicated to the war heroes. The new generation also established a national day of commemoration and supported a publication – *The Cult of Our Heroes* (1920-1935) – the propaganda journal of the Society “Tombs of

the Heroes.” Moreover, the schools and churches had pictures of the most famous war heroes from their region.

On the other hand, the remembrance of those fallen during the war was easily appropriated by the political people from the interwar period so that there was an opposition between the politicians and the Queen Marie, also called “den mother”, whose exhausting work on the front was much more evident. We may add Carol II’s desire to rewrite the history of the years 1917-1918 after 1930s, taking into account the fact that he was only a figurehead during the war.

The chaplain Dumitru Furtuna was convinced that the history of our war does not reside only in statistics, expressing in a poetical manner the fact that “the crosses at the head of the dead are not that visible, in the same way we cannot see the tears shed over the swaths of the defended land” (Furtuna, 1924, 1). The same volume of discourses includes the verses of the Belgian poet Maurice Maeterlink for whom the heroes must not be regarded among the dead ones, as their memory disappears in the very moment when they “descend into oblivion. And oblivion itself makes the eternal separation between the living and the dead” (Furtuna, 1924, 21-22). Besides, during the Communist period, when one could refer only to certain heroes, the poet Nichita Stănescu urged the readers in a famous poem “Do not forget him!”

This study is an attempt to present the way in which the Great Romania established the main commemorative directions for the war heroes in order to ensure their remembrance as a duty for the next generations. The most efficient manner was the establishment in 1919 of the Society “Tombs of the Heroes” under the aegis of H.M. Queen Marie, with the headquarters in Bucharest, at Cercul Militar and then at Palatul Metropolitan since 1921. Nevertheless, it is the publication that offers us the information about the special activity of the Society focused on organizing military cemeteries and commemoration of Romanian war heroes.

The first number of the publication appeared in April 1920 together with the journal of the branch Dragalina dedicated to one of the great Romanian heroes from Banat. The name of the publication was changed several times over the years so that it was *The Cult of Our Heroes* since 1925 and *Heroic*

*Romania* since 1926 until its last issue in 1936. Discount subscriptions were available for schools, for the army, for reading clubs and parishes with more than two subscribers.

The journal of the Society aimed at accomplishing two major objectives: to establish and take care of the military tombs throughout the country and beyond the Romanian borders and to make out of the cult of Romanian heroes “the most prominent moral teaching for the generations that will follow” (1921, no. 2-5, 1). The pages of the *Romanian Telegraph* presented the obligations of the Society: to search and discover the tombs of the heroes regardless of their nationality; to take care of these tombs; to commemorate the heroes on the Heroes’ Day; to exhume and transport the remains of the heroes at the request of their families.

The Society adopted the principle of gathering the remains in common cemeteries, organized in counties and regions. Over 80 military cemeteries had been planned and maintained, with over 200,000 tombs. The Society pleaded to continue with the financial support of the Romanians. In order to raise the necessary funds, “the commemorative plaques of Romanian heroism” were sold (*Romanian Telegraph*, 1928, no. 33-34, 3).

The first Central Committee of the Society had the following members: by the patronage of Queen Marie, the executive director was Metropolitan, then Patriarch Miron Cristea, while the vice-president was Olga Văitoianu. Among the members were Elena Dragalina, Elena Praporgescu, Maria Poetaș – widows of the most known Romanian generals who died during the war or delegates of the Ministry of War, of Internal Affairs, of Public Works and of Cults. Gala Galaction, Octavian Goga, George Lungulescu, V. Teodorescu Țincu, Mihail Botez and Captain Șerbănescu were involved in the editorial board.

The Society “Tombs of the Heroes” was recognized as juridical by the high decree no. 4106 on September 12, 1919, signed by the Ministry of War, General Arthur Văitoianu (*The Cult of Heroes*, 1928, no. 2, 1-2). The Society was under the patronage of the Ministry of War in 1920 and since 1921 under the patronage of the Romanian Orthodox Church and Ministry of National Defence.

According to the Decree-Law no. 1693 of 1920, published in M.O. no. 20 on

April 29, 1920 the necessary land for the tombs of the dead during the war was obtained by expropriation. The most important articles from the decree were the first three that mentioned the following: expropriation was made based on article 19 from the Constitution and they were transferred to the Ministry of War for tombs, monuments, parks, chapels and spaces for maintenance, access to places of great battles (*The Cult of Our Heroes*, 1921, no. 2-5, 65).

The Day of Heroes was established in 1920 on the Ascension Day; three years later, based on the model imposed by France, there were military ceremonies and the inauguration of the tomb of the Unknown Hero in Bucharest, in the park Carol. The tomb was chosen by the pupil of a military school, Amilcar Săndulescu, from Mădulari, Vâlcea county, from the battle of Mărășești, on May 17, 1923.

The memo issued by the Transylvanian Metropolitan no. 2772/1920 mentioned the fact that there was a general plan to follow regarding the celebration of the Day of Heroes, a national holiday. The Central Committee of the Society "Tombs of the Heroes" designed the structure of the celebration: the gathering in the big square of the city, the participation of the citizens along with the army to highlight the bond between the two, pictures with heroes from the region on display in schools and churches. It was advisable for schools to have their own flag at the festivities, followed by a pilgrimage at the cemeteries of the heroes, a religious service, laying flowers on the tombs and then cultural manifestations dedicated to the heroes (*Romanian Telegraph*, 1920, no. 24, 1).

The main supporters of the Society were the Orthodox Church and the Army; later on, the Ministry of Finances established a subsidy. The memo no. 4914/1920 called the priests to be an example by maintaining the tombs of the fallen heroes and the foreigners until their exhumation and gathering into a common cemetery (Annex D of Protocol of the Ordinary Synod of Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in Transylvania, Sibiu, 1920, 444). 200,000 tombs were gathered by the Society during the interwar period; remains of foreign soldiers were sent to their homelands, while remains of Romanian soldiers were brought into the country. The Society found

1,500 heroes and built 106 military cemeteries and 14 mausoleums.

The clear proof of Queen Marie's connection to the cause of Romanian heroes is the fact that after her passing away, the Society changed its title in 1938 - „Așezământul Regina Maria pentru Cultul Eroilor”/ The Settlement Queen Marie for the Cult of Heroes. Unfortunately, the Decree no. 48/1948 disbanded the Society, along with other organizations, being the expression of the new popular democracy of the Soviet type. During 1949-1975 this Settlement, with branches in every county, was under the aegis of the Ministry of National Defence, while the Day of Heroes was celebrated on May 9.

The activity of Queen Marie was linked to the experience of the Great War, including the refuge to Iasi, the utter despair of the royal house and the sacrifice of those who fell heroically on the battlefields of Mărăști, Mărășești and Oituz, followed by the joy of reentering the liberated Bucharest. In Queen Marie's writings and diaries - *Povestea vieții mele/ Story of My Life*, *Jurnalul de război/ War Diary*, *Însemnări zilnice/ Daily Notes*, and also in *Capitole târzii din viața mea. Memorii redescoperite/ Late Chapters of My Life. Rediscovered Memoirs* – all her actions were marked by the painstaking involvement in hospitals with the wounded and with inhabitants of destroyed villages. She was motivated by the desire to encourage the others to believe in a better future, in victory. And that was particularly difficult when no one else dared to believe such a thing, when despair surrounded all Romanians awaiting the final act of the disaster (Queen Mary, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2014-15).

The same subject appeared in her books published during the war - *Țara pe care o iubesc. Memorii din exil/ The Country I Love. Memoirs from the Exile* and *Gânduri și icoane din vremea războiului/ Thoughts and Icons from the War Period* – true poems in prose, considered by the historian Nicolae Iorga. A sad moment is remembered in both books – the tragic death of Prince Mircea of only 3 years old because of scrub typhus, hastily buried in the Cotroceni church. Other episodes of the war are also described – the retreat to Iasi and the harsh process of recovery under gloomy circumstances for the country and the people. Here is one relevant fragment of Queen Marie's fearless activity: "I

got used to live among the wounded and sick, among those who suffer that it seemed almost impossible for me to start living a normal life” (Queen Marie, 2016, 145). Moreover, she considered the unknown heroes her only sincere friends during the hideous war years: “and to you who sleep peacefully, I cannot believe that this is the true ending of our road” (Queen Marie, 2016, 45).

Even the enemies of the crown could not deny the fundamental role played by the Queen Marie during the Great War, and not only concerning the establishment of the hospitals “Queen Marie” and providing the necessary material means during critical moments of the Romanian nation. Here are some examples to support this statement. Hannah Pakula, the author of a biography, although interested in the personal life of Queen Marie, could not avoid mentioning the support for the hospitals and their organization especially after the chaos brought by the retreat to Iasi. Pakula considers that the Queen was motivated only by the matters of image in her journeys from one hospital to another, taking care of the special trains sent by the French for the hospitals of Moldova (Pakula, 2017, 222-232). While the biography written by Guy Gauthier remains in the same sensational area of a romantic type (Gauthier, 2000), Constantin Argetoianu, who was not among the sympathizers of the Queen, recognized her fundamental role during the war and her special place in national history. And that was due to her continuous support for the sick and the wounded as well as political and simple men, and due to her tenacious opposing to the ratification of the Bucharest peace (Argetoianu, 1992, 109).

The military doctor Raul Dona wrote in his diary from hopeless perspective on the events, because of the military disaster and the retreat to Iasi; he also mentioned the Queen Marie’s determination to survive and to surpass any circumstances. In his vision, her activity in hospitals was a cynical attempt to become popular (Dona, 2018). We highlight two illuminating fragments from his diary: “a vain queen, she gave no pack of cigarettes, only her books for popularity and some candies. She offers her hand or glove to be kissed for each and every one to gain something for her vanity, while she only gives her time. It is a great satisfaction, however, to root yourself so cheaply in candid souls of the

others who are bought by a glance and a smile of a sphinx. It would be a greater disgrace not to do even that ... an occasion to be glorified” (Dona, 2018, 200). Another fragment points out ironically the “sacrifice made by our kind and great queen of all Romanians, according to Goga, the poet by command, gone to Transylvania” (Dona, 2018, 200). On the other hand, the journalist Cristian Pătrășconiu underlined the important role played by the Queen Marie, using the phrase “patriotism of deeds” to express better her involvement and dedication (Pătrășconiu, 2015).

The Society and the publication *The Cult of Our Heroes* were from the very beginning linked to the Queen Marie of Romania; the first page mentioned at least three quotations referring to the heroes’ remembrance and the gratefulness we should bear for them (*The Cult of Our Heroes*, 1920, no. 1, 1; *Heroic Romania*, 1926, no. 3, 10-11). Queen Marie was also the author of the editorial of the first issue of the journal, where she explained the motivation of remembrance and the antidote of oblivion: “Many died without knowing which would be the ending – victory or defeat. Their young bodies lie in the ground and we could never tell them that we owe this victory and free great country to their bravery!” (*The Cult of Our Heroes*, 1920, no. 1, 1). Her activity noted in the pages of the publication may be divided in three categories: official duties within the country; official duties outside the country, and actions of the heart. The official ones included participation at the solemn events dedicated to the Unknown Hero, celebration of the Day of Heroes in Bucharest, inauguration of monuments. The second category supposed her visits to Paris, supporting the Romania’s diplomacy at the Peace Conference, to Verdun and searching for Romanian prisoners in German camps from Alsace and Lorraine. The third category is represented by yearly visits in Vrancea, Mărăști, Mărășești and Oituz, centenary of Avram Iancu in Țebea, inauguration of the statue of Ecaterina Teodorescu in Slatina and the monument of the heroes in Roșiorii de Vede, the birthplace of those who formed the regiment 4 Roșiori.

After the Unknown Hero was chosen in Mărășești by a pupil, Queen Marie published an editorial in which she expressed her gratitude for those who gave their life for an ideal that seemed so far away: “In the

darkest days of the war, when many doubted and stopped believing, I wandered among the tombs of the brave and faithful ones to talk to them and to promise that I would defend the ideal they had died for” (*The Cult of Our Heroes*, 1923, no. 102, 4-19; *Romanian Telegraph*, 1920, no. 25, 3). During her visit in France, Queen Marie visited the battlefield of Verdun and the cemeteries where the Romanian prisoners were buried. The publication *The Cult of Our Heroes* republished the article written by Queen Marie for the French newspaper *Le Lorrain* about her visit at Dieuze, where during the war were the prisoner camps. The visit of the Queen Marie was prepared by the Society “Amintirea Română”/ “Romanian Memory”, expressing the French-Romanian friendship; a monument was opened on this occasion for the dead from these camps (*Romanian Telegraph*, 1920, no. 33, 3; *The Cult of Our Heroes*, 1921, no. 1, 18-20).

The tragic loss of more than 125 Romanian soldiers near the train station of Bartolomeu because of the improper preparation of the retreat was honoured in the presence of the King and Queen in 1921, when the cemetery of heroes in Brasov was opened due to the efforts of Captain Ioan Iorga and priest dr. Nicolae Stinghe (*Romanian Telegraph*, 1922, no. 38, 4). Both of the members of the royal family were also present in Slatina, on May 28, 1925, at the opening of the monument dedicated to Ecaterina Teodoroiu, and at the monuments in front of the Infantry School in Sibiu, dedicated to 1,200 infantry officers who fell on the battlefield with General Dragalina (*Romanian Telegraph*, 1925, no. 36, 3; 1926, no. 50-51, 1-2). After opening the monument of heroes in Roşiorii de Vede, on September 21, 1927, in the presence of Queen Marie and Princess Ileana, the monument dedicated to King Ferdinand in Orăştie was inaugurated (*Heroic Romania*, 1928, no. 12, 12; *Romanian Telegraph*, 1929, no. 83, 3). Both the King and the Queen were present at the opening of two monuments dedicated to the Great Unification and the Heroes of Cavalry (*Romanian Telegraph*, 1927, no. 42-43, 5). In 1927 the publication presented commemorative medals dedicated to the King and Queen – “To the one who alleviated the sufferings of the soldiers” and “Marie, Queen of all Romanians and

Ferdinand, King of all Romanians” (*Heroic Romania*, 1927, no. 3, 7).

It was obvious during the first decade after the Great Unification that Queen Marie was also attached to the cause of inhabitants of the Apuseni Mountains, and especially to those from Vrancea region, as she was their symbol of hope. She donated to orphans from Apuseni the income of the film adaptation of her book, *Lily of Life*, in 1921. The visit paid by the Queen on the occasion of the centenary of Avraam Iancu in the region offered her plenty of information about the world of the Apuseni Mountains. The celebrations from Ţebea and Câmpeni were presented in the pages of *The Cult of Our Heroes* in photographs, while the subject was described by the Transylvanian press in vivid details. The cemetery from Blaj was surrounded by a fence and the remains of two of Iancu’s fellows, as well as the remains of two Romanian officers who died at Tisa, together with 70 soldiers from the Old Kingdom at the battles of Petrosani and Vulcan in autumn of 1916 were buried there. The cemetery had the shape of a theater, guarded by Avram Iancu himself (*Romanian Telegraph*, 1921, no. 94; *The Cult of Our Heroes*, 1924, no. 5-6, 16-19; *Unirea*, 1924, no. 35, 1).

The heroic region of Vrancea remained in the Queen’s memory, along with the bitter period spent in the refuge in Iasi. The visits at the heroic cemeteries from these lands had been a mandatory symbolic path for a decade. In 1920, the Queen Marie of Romania lighted candles on the tombs of the heroes and offered gift for widows and orphans. Moreover, the Queen chose the front of Oituz to receive the symbolic rank of the general on behalf of the regiment 4 Roşiori (*The Cult of Our Heroes*, 1921, no. 1, 1). The royal visit of 1925 combined the relationship with the local inhabitants and the attention paid to the heroes’ tombs. Many photographs present Queen Marie and Princess Ileana, dressed up in traditional costumes of the area talking to the elders of the region, at the school in Măraşti, in the mountains, at a gathering and among the tombs of Germans and Romanians alike at Măraşti, Caşin and Curiţa. During the same year the two members of the royal family visited the place where the Church of the People stands nowadays, as well as the tomb of General Grigorescu and his brave soldiers. General Mărgineanu, the former Command of

the 3rd Division presented the way in which the battles took place (*The Cult of Our Heroes*, 1925, no. 4-6, 1-6). The cemetery from Mărăști was organized by the Society "Tombs of the Heroes"; 14,000 Romanian and foreign soldiers lie there.

Carol II intervened in the way commemorations were handled by the Queen Marie, as he was disturbed by her popularity. He attempted to occupy the void by attending the same ceremonies, but to no avail. An example of that attempt may be seen in the pages of the mentioned publication in 1930 dedicated to King Carol II, while the images with Queen Marie remained the old ones, with her wearing the cloths of the nurse, among wounded soldiers, in the hospital (*Heroic*

*Romania*, 1930, 26). The publication ceased its appearance in 1936, while the Queen died in 1938. Her tomb had no inscription until 1998 when non Alexandra, Princess Ileana, engraved it on the behalf of Arges Monastery. This may be the result of a pathological envy of King Carol II, unwilling to draw attention to the Queen Mother once again. On the other hand, Princess Ileana was the one to accompany her mother in all her commemorative travels, establishing thus a symbolical map of the historical places of this country. It is only suggestive that the engraving reads: "Marie, Queen of unified Romania, Princess of Great Britain and Ireland, den mother..."

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# TRADITIONAL VERSUS MODERN REDISCOVERY IN THE WORK OF ION ISAC (1885-1950)

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**Abstract:** *I. Isac was a painter born in Ciclova Montană (Caraș Severin county), who, in the period around the First World War, investigated tradition by the current use of symbols which remind of Romanian identity. His entire creation which ranges over a period of five decades when he created hundreds of paintings was intended by the author to form the personal museum collection, hosted in the house he had built in Timișoara in 1932. The analysis will focus on the early works painted until the formation of modern Romania, in the political context which imposed the change in the artistic behaviour, from merely recording the contemporary scene to interpreting the casual atmosphere of rural Banat, in his case. Modern means of expression capitalize on his outcome, in a period when he struggled with the rules imposed by the Austro-Hungarian authorities, when Romanians were banned from public positions. How was the Banat province's multicultural and multiethnic solution so viable, one may observe in the milieu of collaborators Isac had in his career, and the Romanian personalities who influenced his artistic career in a time when attending the Belle Arte School in Budapest was difficult. The influences he received articulated his taste for light and color, best illustrated in the Banat mountain area of the villages he evoked affectionately.*

**Keywords:** *Ion Isac, Banat mountaneous area, vetust vs. modern, World War I*

## Introduction

If we take a look at the European events of the period when I. Isac was professionally formed until World War I, one may notice a general consonance in the evolution of the artistic phenomenon. The art of the period gains a wholeness never before encountered, with artistic and aesthetic experiences of immeasurable value for humanity. The most paradigmatic case of tradition is reflected in the creation of the painter Ioan Isac<sup>41</sup>. In Vârtăciu, as well as in other authors who reflected upon Isac's work, we find many passages that present his development as an artist, the difficult path he chose to follow in a period when the world entirely reinvented itself. There is a close connection between art and political change, a situation which is clearly perceptible throughout history, specifically in a period when nations collided in search of a better future, redefining frontiers and

assessing the power of economy, politics and culture primacy.

## Painter of consecrated traditional themes

Consecrated by the special exegesis as painter of the Banat mountain area, Ioan Isac represents for the 20<sup>th</sup> century an episode in which the creation and formation was in accordance with the general European phenomenon. His personal input can be situated between traditional and modern, creating a dichotomy between the rural village seen as outdated and the urban area seen as modern. In fact, Isac opened a dialogue between the two, a phenomenon present in the evolution of any artistic movement. How he managed to reveal the village before World War I with all the traditional images that individualized the Banat mountain area paradigm will be the subject of the present paper, that aims comparatively to underline Isac's contribution to the traditional national heritage.

## Biographical literature

Born in Ciclova Montană village from Banat, on April 2 ,1885, Ion Isac

<sup>41</sup> We do not insist on the painter's biographical literature, as it has been very well presented by Rodica Vârtăciu in: *Ioan Isac. Catalog de expoziție*, the Banat Museum, Timișoara, December 2000-January 2001.

follows, professionally, a course of formation in which his early talent signalled a later development in the artistic field. His formation starts early, when he was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade at the Oravița school, where documents point to the fact that he prepared for the artistic career with Profesor Kellerman, mastering the techniques which marked his entire creation: ink and watercolor. Later, we find Isac in the presence of another consecrated professor, N.Hrabetz of Timișoara, who had a major influence on his sketching talent. The laws and regulations adopted by Apponyi<sup>42</sup>, kept Isac apart from the teaching experience, only to find him in such a position later, in 1910, in the villages of Banat, surrounding his native Ciclova Montană: Sacul, Anina, Steierdorf and others. His Romanian origins can be traced in Oltenia, from where his ancestors, the so called *bufeni*, came.

### Stylistic traits and influences

One of the great Impressionist painters, P. Gauguin, thoroughly expressed the ideas related to the form and function of the artistic movement he represented so well:

„The Impressionists study color exclusively, but without freedom, always shackled by the need of probability. For them, the ideal landscape, created from many different entities does not exist. Their edifice rest upon no solid base and ignores the nature of the sensations perceived by means of color. They heed only the eye and neglect the mysterious centers of thought, so falling into merely scientific reasoning. When they speak of their art, what is it? A purely superficial thing, full of affectations and only material. In it though does not exist...” (Gardner, 1980, 787)

In this quotation we find some traits of Isac's evolution, a painter who observed and demonstrated the intimate connection between talent, passion for national values and artistic rigour.

Throughout his creation, Isac demonstrated his affiliation to the local and national tradition using symbols that expressed both the old and the new in a manner that was shaped by the people who influenced his entire career, and we refer here especially to the input that H.M. Georgescu had on Isac when they worked together in the summer of 1922<sup>43</sup>. This would be the dominant trend in Isac's evolution, restoring the rural and urban outlook by means of light, color, a path undertaken also by his predecessors.

In Isac's creation, the political events of the period come forward through symbols, like the most representative for the Romanian tradition, the clay pitcher. It should be pointed out when commenting on Isac's work that these symbols become recurrent as they emerge in many of his works. His creation can be divided into periods according to the stages of formation and influences by the contacts he had in the country and abroad, where he travelled to gain more experience. His reality was both European and local, traditional, Romanian, in the images that project the rural environment where he was born, to the urban realities of the period, where he encountered many difficulties in attending various teaching positions. The symbol-object<sup>44</sup> present in the art between the two world wars was highlighted by the historiography of the subject, and had to do with the character of Europe, as we perceive it today.

In Isac's case, these symbols are recurrent and they refer back to the origins (as the case of the clay pitcher). Emotion is also present in his creation. The objects are endowed with the critical observation spirit, which is fully reflected in a line which is equivalent to an artistic creed:

„I paint as I see, what I see...”

Another obstacle in his career was when, because of his Bachelor degree, he was not allowed at the *Belle Arte* School in Budapest. But he pursued and nurtured his talent in a manner which shaped his creation with imagination and sometimes preconceived themes.

<sup>42</sup> The Apponyi Education Law, which led to the closure of hundreds of Romanian schools, was considered as the climax of the Magyarization policy, initiated by Alber Apponyi, who was minister of cults and public instruction. The law was enforced as of 1907.

<sup>43</sup> A follower of N. Grigorescu, H. M. Georgescu travelled a lot, being under the influence of the school of Barbizon. He had, in turn, a tremendous influence on Isac's evolution, consecrating him as a *plein air* painter.

<sup>44</sup> Subject debated by Amelia Pavel (Pavel, 1996, 38).

A slight distortion of shapes can be observed in the way the painter suggests nature, apparent in the symbolic elements placed as hallmarks of his works, with identity value. It is a free interpretation of a world of colors and sensations, vibrating with inner consciousness, where the artist becomes a true investigator.

Though not associated with Impressionism as a movement, only with the effects of a brief contact with H.M.Georgescu, when he came to work in Ciclova in 1922, Isac will gain experience in what we can call *plein air* values, such as color fading, tonalities and shades, sketching speed, etc. He will master the artistic truth, as a symbol of his emotions. Isac's art can be perceived as a complex mixture of influences, of themes shared by the great masters, treated in a manner which underlines his sensibility based on the academic study of color and artistic trends. This so-called academism in his case relates to the self-taught artist he will become. He chose to illustrate a casual atmosphere of the Banat Mountains he was so familiar with, fragments of national history, parts of our cultural heritage, the wooden and stone houses of the villages stretching along narrow streets filled with the warm light of the morning or evening sun, the wooden churches, the river mills of Eftimie Murgu village (Caraș-Severin county), all hallmarks of the Romanian traditional civilization. This idyllic rural world is seen in the painter's early creation, until World War I, with undamaged landscapes, where haystacks guard the valleys, where the hills are always present, as well as the blue sky in the background, suggesting serenity. Having found the formula of color balance, he uses light (with warm tones) though this feature made him less professional in terms of the preparation techniques he used<sup>45</sup>. Some of the landscapes Isac painted during the summer holidays he spent at Ciclova in the summer of 1912 and 1913 were partially influenced by the Hungarian painters who came from Budapest to visit and work with him: Manyai Mihali, Kabor Gyula and Kiss Reszö, who were also

interested in the observation and interpretation of nature.

World War I interrupted this period of creation in Isac's evolution toward modernity. We find him enrolled in the Hanovese 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment. After the war, the particular situation of the Banat under the occupation of Serbian troops makes Isac join the National Guard, and it was only with the help of the French Army stationed in Lugoj that he managed to escape and flee to Sibiu. Here he finds Vasile Goldiș, who sends him to Baia Mare where he finds a teaching position. In 1919, he returns to Timișoara where he becomes master of drawing at the Boys' School.

### **Style and technique in Isac's early creation**

Many of the works Isac painted were the subject of thematic exhibitions organized in various places, such as the official exhibition in Timișoara<sup>46</sup>, in which I. Isac took part with works which highlight the rural versus the urban dichotomy, seen through the painter's eyes after years of experimenting with the European tradition. He gets acquainted with this tradition when visiting, as any other artist would do, the historical cities of Europe, where he makes several journeys, becoming familiar with the works of the Impressionists, keeping the trend with the technique of *alla prima* which he pursues and experiments on his return home. Sometimes his works reflect the painter's favourite subjects, but he will always reiterate the rural traditional world with its emphatic values. His creation is crossed by permanences, introspections of the inner self, where the rural world finds its outmost representation. The free and dynamic world of the Banat village, the warm light of the sun projected on the alignment of stones which border the streets reveal in fact the village seen through the eyes of the painter.

The universe of sensations revealed by Isac stands even today for a valuable footage of the recurrent images. Looking at these works today, we become part of the intricate perspective, a mixture of feelings, which makes the viewer present in the unchanged perception of the rural landscape of Banat. Isac used many historical themes

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<sup>45</sup> In his book, T. Octavian mentions the technique which altered the color of Isac's works and made them turn red-brownish as if seen through a warm color filter.

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<sup>46</sup> The exhibition was organized in 1923 and Isac participated with 40 works.

in his works, but for the period surrounding World War I, one may notice a recurrence of the images which shape the national imagery. The paper aims to underline this aspect in his creation, which shapes the entire evolution, consecrating I. Isac as the painter of the mountain area of Banat. The house he had built in Timișoara in 1932 was meant to present his entire collection of over 400 works of variable quality and from different stages of his formation. The house was designed by his good friend Cornel Liuba in 1932, who also designed plans for other structures of the period<sup>47</sup>.

As we operate in theory with concepts, we might state that one of these could be in the case of Isac the paradigm of the Banat village, connected to the harsh realities of the history of that period, where outdated becomes synonymous with rural and modern with urban.

## Conclusions

The transformation of the world at the end of World War I in all ways defining modernity entailed a reassessment of the national values for each belligerent party. In a province of Romania where multiculturalism was a well defined policy which took its shape in centuries, we find an artist and his development in relation with the European phenomenon, shaped by permanent contacts in an area where the West meets the East. The artwork is generally considered a historical document, as it relates to the past in a direct manner, it makes the past present by means of imagery. The objectiveness of this reality is seen through the eyes of a painter which suffered *damnatio memoriae* after his death, in 1950s.

Isac was only recently rediscovered, being considered forgotten<sup>48</sup> by some researchers of his artistic formation. There are catalogues published on the occasion of various exhibitions, presenting his *oeuvre*, among these the most comprehensive to be quoted are the two catalogues edited by R. Vărtaciu in 2001

and the Art Museum in Bucharest in 2002<sup>49</sup>, a comprehensive exhibition organized by Professor Aurelia Mihailovici in Bucharest, who in fact owns many of the works presented. Or, as one recent online article mentions, Isac thought that „nature was my workshop”<sup>50</sup>, a motto that makes us reconsider him as a *plein air* painter with all due respect to the notion.

The works which highlight the early stage in Isac's evolution are part of the private collection of Dr. Caius Streian, who bought the house intended by Isac to become a museum, together with all the works of the collection, of which some were presented to the public on various occasions generated by the exhibitions organized by the local or national museums. The works chosen to highlight Isac's creation (see the list of illustrations) place it on a well deserved position among the painters of that period. Beyond the analytical approach which is mandatory for such a scientific intervention, we have insisted on the dichotomy of the two terms which define I. Isac's creation in the period surrounding World War I: traditional versus modern, a period when he faced identity challenges due to the political status of the area he depicted so vividly and truthfully. His creation was influenced by the political events, and will become modern in the sense that, after 1922, he will manage to visit Europe and the Orient where he receives the output required for an eclectic creation, setting him among the painters who have a considerable influence on generations to follow, as Isac was all his life a teacher. Despite the rich variety of themes and techniques used, I. Isac's works instruct, having a didactic value, where the symbols are recurrent, obvious, never dissimulated

<sup>47</sup> C.Liuba was also a painter who became an architect in Prague, in this position we find him as author of 7 schools in rural Banat, 14 houses in Timișoara, also the mausoleum of I. D. Ștefănescu, *apud* Catalog de expoziție, 1980, 6.

<sup>48</sup> See in this respect the catalogue published by T. Octavian, *Pictori români uitați*, Noi Media Print, București, 2003.

<sup>49</sup> We find the collection presented under the title: *Ioan Isac. Natură și tradiție*, Ed. Oscar Print, București, 2002.

<sup>50</sup> See Radu Iancu Burcea, online article <https://www.banatulazi.ro/un-mare-artist-banatean-o-epoca-aparent-uitata/>.

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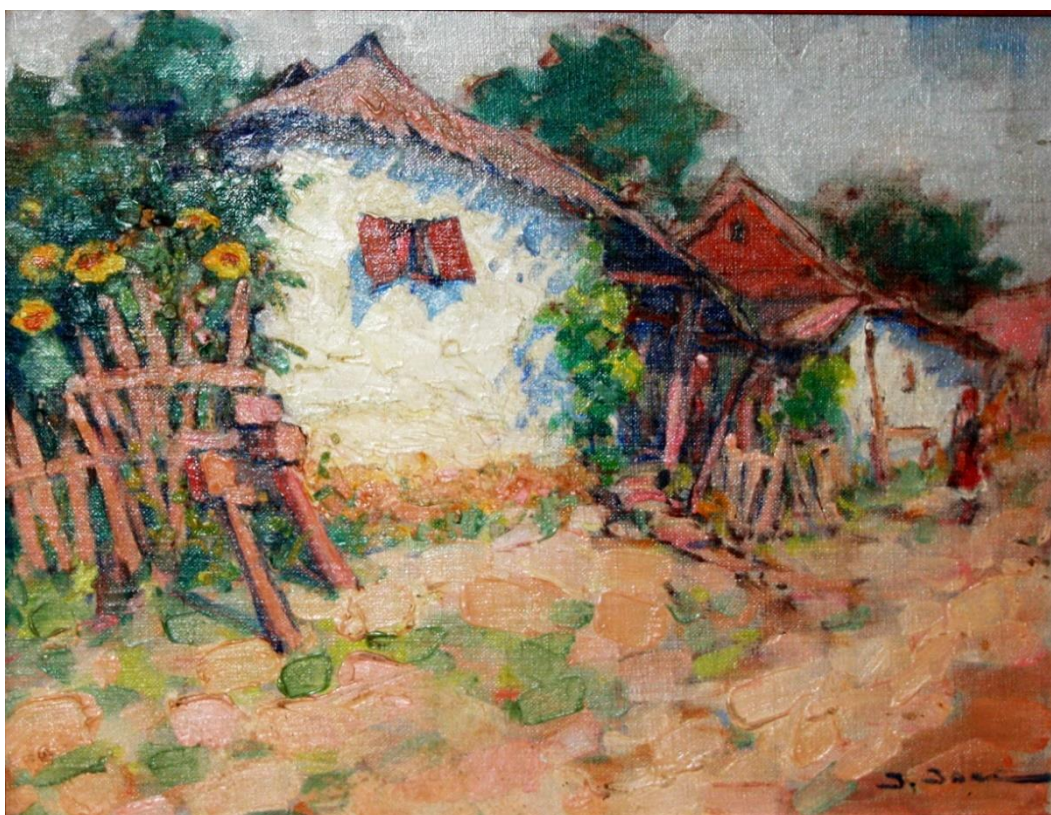


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## REVISITING THE PAST: FROM IMPERIAL TO POST-SOVIET RUSSIA. CASE STUDY: FILMS *THE ADMIRAL* AND *THE HERITAGE OF LOVE*

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**Abstract:** *Being part of a national reconstruction process, Russian post-Soviet films about the Civil War present a nostalgic picture of the “lost Russia” (poteriannaia Rossia) or “Russia that we’ve lost” (Rossia kotoruiu my poteriali). The article sets the cultural background of the recent Russian cinema focused on the subject of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, as well as World War I. The main aim of the study is the analysis of two recent films: The Admiral (2008) and Geroi/ The Heritage of Love (2016), based on recent film theories, especially Mark Lipovetsky’s Post-Sots category of post-Soviet films. The article reveals how the “imperial and religious turn” (Berezhnaya, 2013) is articulated in the mentioned films, which are considered melodramatic blockbusters due to their search for moral clarity and the highly praised core values of honour and dignity.*

**Keywords:** *Soviet legacy, post-Soviet revisionism, World War I and the Russian Civil War, melodramatic blockbuster, honour and dignity*

### Introductory considerations

After a decline in the Russian film industry during the first post-Soviet decade, we witness a double tendency: the attempt to equal Hollywood and even to surpass it, on the one hand, and the desire to combine recognizable cinematographic formulae with (more or less consciously used) Postmodernist strategies, on the other. Post-Soviet filmmakers approach the Soviet legacy, especially the thorny subject of the Russian Civil War, offering nuanced perspectives on such a sensitive matter. In a period of Russian (debatable) national/imperial reconstruction process, the Russian cinema may be described as an “opportunistic bricolage of opposing discourses” (Lipovetsky, 2004, 374). Firstly, due to the fact that most directors are considerate toward the (elder generation) public sensitivities and continue to use narrative stereotypes of Socialist Realism. Secondly, Russian filmmakers balance their regard for history with the commercial aspects.

After surpassing the identity crisis of the Russian film industry and adjusting to both heterogeneous audience and marketing strategies (Larsen, 2003, 492), Russian post-Soviet filmmakers found a successful path for their cinematographic products, named by Mark Lipovetsky “Post-Sots”. The main traits

of these post-Soviet films are clearly defined characters (positive heroes and enemies), heroic archetypes and recognizable hints to Soviet culture, with plots set during the war or in a war-like background (Lipovetsky, 2004, 361).

The post-Soviet films about the First World War and the Russian Civil War are less numerous than those from the Soviet period. This may have several explanations. The main explanation resides in the difficulty in tackling a subject considered “holy” during the Stalinist period, especially taking into account the fact that Stalinist art and rhetoric of the ’30s install a temporal hierarchy of high importance for the Soviet Union. Thus, the October Revolution and Russian Civil War are designated as crucial moments, a variation of the Great Time in Mircea Eliade’s understanding (Clark, 2000, 39-40). These crucial moments were celebrated by great Soviet directors in doubtless masterpieces<sup>51</sup>, in films inspired by historical figures and in film adaptations and films from Leniniana and Staliniana cycles (see more in Grădinaru, 2017, 120-130). Moreover, the difficulty in

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<sup>51</sup> For example, *October* (1927) directed by S. Eisenstein or *The End of St. Petersburg* (1927) directed by V. Pudovkin.

approaching this subject has to do with the populace's sensitivities and deeply rooted Soviet convictions as the result of the successful acculturation of the masses (Hoffmann, 2003). The Soviet shaped worldview of most post-Soviet Russian citizens may be expressed by a quote from Svetlana Alexievich's book: "No communism was built, but communist conscience was educated" (Alexievich, 1994).

The popularity of the Civil War cult in the Stalinist cinema is above all Stalin's attempt of legitimization and a component in ensuring the social cohesion of the newly established state and nation<sup>52</sup>. Revisiting the topic of the Civil War and Bolshevik Revolution might be seen as an opportunity of re-reading the recent past in a different key. The gloomy Civil War period represents the starting point for cinematographic meditations on Russia's fate and generates alternative perspectives on the White and Red movements. It is also the point of reference for a new type of legitimization from the Imperial Russia to the nowadays Russia - or, in N. Berdyaev's view (Berdyaev, 1948), the "new Russia". The delicate process in building cultural bridges across the Soviet period supposes the usage of the (same old Stalinist) motif of legacy – from the so-called "lost Russia" to the nowadays recovered Russia under the Red ruins of the Soviet Union.

Whereas the traumatic memory of the Civil War was repressed in the collective memory during the Stalinist era and replaced with historicised filmic versions of the events, the post-Soviet directors offer alternative glimpses into that disturbingly complicated period. The recent films reveal fine links between the Imperial and post-Soviet Russia: feminist beginnings during the First World War (*Battalion*, 2015, directed by D. Meskhiev); breath-taking love stories (*Solnechnyi udar/ Sunstroke*, 2014, directed by N. Mikhalkov) and love triangles (*The Admiral*, 2008, directed by A. Kravchuk and

*Geroi (The Heritage of Love*, 2016, directed by Yu. Vasiliev). The complicated love affairs in troubled times are also present in a subcategory of historical detectives, such as *Kontributsia (Contribution*, 2016, directed by S. Snezhkin) and Alyona Demyanenko's *Kazaroza*, 2006. TV series like *Gibel Imperii (The Fall of the Empire*, 2005, directed by V. Khotinenko) and *Gospoda-tovarishchi (Gentlemen-Comrades*, 2014-2015 directed by V. Serikov, V. Aravin and A. Rudakov) present the torn Russia in complicated plots.

Another subcategory of post-Soviet films approaches the subject of Romanov's dynasty: Gleb Panfilov's *Romanovy: Ventsenosnaya semya (The Romanovs: An Imperial Family*, 2000), two of them - Alexei Uchitel's *Matilda* (2017) and Evgeni Sokolov's *Zvezda Imperii (The Star of the Empire*, 2007) – are focused on the famous ballerina Matilda Kshesinskaya. Several films are related to Imperial family due to Raspoutine's involvement (*Zagovor*, 2007 and *Raspoutine*, 2012), as well as a myriad of documentaries. Other TV series offer perspectives on the people's destiny in the tsarist Russia till the Civil War period both in the aristocratic milieu (see Alexandr Proshkin's film adaptation of B. Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*, 2005-2006) and in the rural world (Andrei Smirnov's *Zhila-byla odna baba/ Once Upon a Time there Lived a Simple Woman*, 2011). Two other documentary serials have shaped the Russian post-Soviet self-perception and understanding of their pre-revolutionary past – *Rossia, kotoruiu my poteriali (Russia that We've Lost*, 1992), directed by S. Govorukhin and *Rossiiskaia Imperia (The Russian Empire*, 2022-2003), directed by L. Parfenov.

### Between assumed legacy and performative legitimization

Although the number and variety of films and TV series focused on that dismal period in Russian history is impressive, our analysis addresses only several films that may be safely called blockbusters. Following Denise Youngblood's classification of war films (Youngblood, 2007), we zoom in on *The Admiral* and *The Heritage of Love*, which follow a recognizable plot line and aim at bringing into the foreground the notions of honour and dignity. This may be considered a successful recipe established by Nikita

<sup>52</sup> The Soviet propaganda insisted on the existence of a "Soviet people". According to *Nauchnyi Kommunizm*, "Soviet people is a new historical social and international community that appeared in USSR based on Socialism victory after a long, difficult and complex process" (*Nauchnyi Kommunizm* 1983, 278-280). See more in Grădinaru, 2013, 115.

Mikhalkov in *Sibirskii tsirulnik* (*Barber of Siberia*, 1999), also used in *Utomlionnye solntsem* (*Burnt by the Sun*, 1994). In fact, the recipe proved to be that successful that Mikhalkov reuses several patterns in *Sunstroke*. These three movies belong to the category of “melodramatic blockbuster”<sup>53</sup>, in Susan Larsen’s terms (Larsen 1999). As the same researcher points out, using Peter Brook’s concept of “melodramatic imagination”, the quest for moral clarity is at the core of such films (Larsen, 2003, 493-494).

As in the case of Soviet historical films, the Russian post-Soviet mentioned movies mirror contemporary Russian anxieties and concerns of legitimization. After the gloomy 1990’s, in epic cinematic productions, the obsessive motif seems to be the search for a new “hero of our time”, a partial replacement of the Socialist Realism positive hero. At times, the Soviet patterns and schemata in constructing the plot and positive hero are evident. Even the fact that plots revolve around the matters of honour and dignity remind of examples of the depicted mandatory communist mores in Soviet films about the Civil War and Revolution.

Susan Larsen’s statement about the anxiety of “what it means to be Russian at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” as a direction of interpreting the Russian blockbusters of the 1990s may be expanded to films of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The aforementioned films are attempts to answer the question of “what it means to be Russian after the fall of the Soviet Union” after accepting other perspectives on the same controversial historical periods (than it was ideologically correct during the Soviet era). The profile of the Russian hero of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be traced back to the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century before the October Revolution, the Red Terror and the Great Purges, establishing patterns of masculine heroism in times when the hero was at odds with the whole world. In doing so, filmmakers of recent Russian films are constantly criticized for the tendency to embrace the

opposite perspective than the only one ideologically accepted in the Soviet period.

This is precisely the fate of Aleksandr Kolchak, the hero of Andrei Kravchuk’s *The Admiral*, the leader of the White movement, former vice-admiral of the Imperial Russian fleet. Some historians take their time to painstakingly point out the historical errors and mistakes of the movie too sloppy turned from TV series to feature film. A. Soyustov analyses the lack of historical accuracy in the first 38 minutes, concluding that the artificial marvels of the script were unnecessary since Kolchak’s actual life could have served as brilliant inspiration (Soyustov, 2008). Moreover, director’s focus rather on the Revolution and Civil War than on the First World War is understandable since that is the period of admiral’s love story with Anna Timiryova.

Despite the love affair between the admiral and Anna (played by Konstantin Habensky and Elizaveta Boyarskaya), the film is much more than a classical love story. Clearly anti-Bolshevik, Kravchuk’s film is about Russia and its lack of order during revolutionary and Civil War period and about admiral Kolchak’s struggle to bring order into a chaotic world (Arkhangelsky, 2008). As noticed by Russian reviewers, Kolchak is the mere symbol of order, honour and dignity as an officer and aristocrat, the opposite of a faceless Red plague, represented in the film by brutal sailors with red ribbons and dubious commissars preoccupied with destroying and killing. *The Admiral* offers no explanations about the Reds’ reasons – the painful question stays with the viewer in Anna’s eyes.

As stated by Andrei Arkhangelsky, the assumed idealization of the Whites is better than any artificial attempt to unite pre-Soviet with Soviet past (Ibidem). This conflict between Reds and Whites is not presented as an ideological clash between two worlds, but replacing the Imperial order with chaos and ruthless destruction. It is relevant that previously lazy or passive sailors become active Bolsheviks who establish the “new order” on Kolchak’s ship. On the other hand, this lack of narrative explanations in the film may be due to cutting key-scenes from the TV series (Nersesov, 2008) or simply because (post-Soviet) spectators know their political recent past fairly well to need superfluous explanations. Besides, it only seems fair for

<sup>53</sup> Stephen M. Norris uses the term “blockbusterization/ *blokbasterizatsiia* of the market” when referring to the Russian cinema of the 2000s, while mentioning an attempt of Russian filmmakers to Russianize the form of the Hollywood blockbuster (Norris, 2012, 307).



the post-Soviet directors not to dwell on the details in depicting the Bolsheviks and their traits and motives since the Soviet cinema portrayed in the same scarce and antithetic manner the White movement and its representatives<sup>54</sup>.

Therefore, in Kravchuk's film, as well as in Mikhalkov's *Sunstroke*, the idealization of the White movement supposes the idealization of the entire period of Imperial Russia so much so that it becomes the land of masculine/ military glory, order, harmony and abundance. The so-called "Golden Age of the Russian history" created by Russian directors is the replacement of the myth of the New World during the Soviet era. Moreover, the Soviet new man is replaced by the honourable officer, defender of the Russia's Golden Age. The "myth of paradise lost under the Bolshevik power" is one of the forms of expressing the longing for the empire (Berezhnaya, 2013, 103) or the "imperial trace" (Condee, 2009). The argued imperial and religious turn is best represented in Russian cinema by N. Mikhalkov, the one who set the trend of imperial reconstruction in *Barber of Siberia* and supported his cinematographic work with a text, entitled "Right and Truth. The Manifesto of Enlightened Conservatism".

The common trait of both the *Barber of Siberia* and *The Admiral* is, in S. M. Norris's view, "packaging the past for the present" due to their claims to present "Russianness" (Norris, 2008). And this is obvious in Kolchak's oath scene in front of his army and gathered people, with the blessing of a priest (one of the multiple signs of the "religious turn"). Admiral's oath contains references to the inextricable link between state and church, as he swears "in front of God, His holy gospel and His wonderful cross to be loyal and true to the Russian state as my Fatherland [...] as High Command of Russia not sparing my life, not being distracted by relatives, friendship or enmity, or sorrow, and having in mind only *Russian state's renaissance and wellbeing!*" This performative legitimation displayed by Aleksandr Kolchak may be regarded as echoing Vladimir Putin's evolution as a much needed ruler in chaotic times. Russia of the Civil War period

resembles the post-Soviet Russia, when it was looted and disfigured by corruption, mafia and oligarchic rise.

Despite the Russian reviewers' belief that Kravchuk's film offers no link between Imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, one might detect several Stalinist motives projected into the pre-revolutionary past as part of the viewer-friendly recipe developed over time by the Foundation for the Support of Patriotic Film, founded in 2005. The most prominent one is the mentioned oath, a recycled version of the Stalinist graveside oath, originated in Stalin's oath at Lenin's burial (Clark, 2000, 86-87)<sup>55</sup>. Two previous scenes of the movie with brutally murdered Russian officers in Petrograd and others drowned in Sevastopol may be linked to Kolchak's decision to step up as command of a movement of Russian revival.

Among others, Ilya Smirnov expresses his discontent with the film as a failure to represent Kolchak's tragedy, an "anti-Soviet flyer in soap opera sauce" (Smirnov, 2008). Besides, he considers the religious component of the movie too easy and obvious for characterizing the White movement. The religious imagery of the film is yet another "packaging the past for the present" strategy and a component of the Imperial Russian legacy for post-Soviet times. The "religious turn" and post-socialist spiritual revival of Russia is also depicted in Vasiliev's film in the battle scene between the voluntary army lead by general Kornilov and the merely unseen Red enemy. A priest praying for the dead is intentionally shot by heartless unfaithful Reds from the other side of the river and says his (and Christ's) last prayer: "Forgive them, Father, for they don't know what they are doing".

The Soviet films about the same period depict the harsh living conditions of the people and the misery of the soldiers sent to the front to fight for a foreign cause. The films of the "imperial trace" are, on the contrary, infatuated with the military and the upper class (*dvoryanstvo*) and show little if any of the Russian people. As Mark Lipovetsky has already explained, the strange infatuation of

<sup>54</sup> See the film *Chapaev* (1934), the canonical product of Socialist Realism.

<sup>55</sup> See similar scenes in Stalinist films: Kotovsky's oath in the film of 1942, and other variation of the same motif in *We Are from Kronstadt*, 1936, and *Baltic Sailors*, 1937 – Grădinaru 2017, 126.

post-Communist culture with military uniforms stands both for a binder between Soviet military discourse and post-Soviet national reconstruction, on the one hand, and a replacement of the blurred post-Soviet “self” with a “we”, the belongingness to a collective body, on the other (Lipovetsky, 2003, 362). The binder may be extended to pre-revolutionary Russia, where the cinematographic trend of the “imperial trace” searches for imperial legacy.

### Recurrent motifs

#### *Heroes and actors*

Both *The Admiral* and *The Heritage of Love* use the flashback aplenty, but the script of the latter seems overcomplicated with either visions into the past or day dreaming about a golden Russian era of a simple Russian mechanic tempted by a dishonest deal. Besides, the script is complicated by the choice of the same actor – Dima Bilan – for two roles (both the brave officer in Imperial Russia and his grand-grandson in contemporary Russia). This is not a first in recent Russian cinema, as Nikita Mikhalkov uses the same actor for both father and son in *Barber of Siberia* in order to link the Russian heroism with masculinity (Larsen, 2003, 501). Moreover, director Yuri Vasiliev decides to use the same actress (Svetlana Ivanova) for Officer Andrei Dolmatov’s lover and Andrei’s instant crush, Elisaveta Ivanovna’s grand-daughter, in nowadays Paris. The reason may be the desire to unite the Russian ethereal beauty, grace and femininity over the generations.

Furthermore, A. Arkhangelsky proposes a much more blunt reading for the choice of singer Dima Bilan, winner of Eurovision 2008, in the double role – an “attempt to combine patriotism and mass character” (*massovost*) and a shroud desire to transfer fans’ passion for the singer to the state (Arkhangelsky, 2016). The critic would go even further suggesting that the important roles in the movie are nothing else but functions in an already familiar narrative about the Civil War: the function of the noble military hero, the function of the liberal opposing the Imperial rule, and the function of the damsel in distress. This narrative oversimplification is in our opinion another attempt to bring back the cinema to its former glorious mass character, following the

transparent cinematographic language of the Stalinist period. In this respect, V. Propp’s narrative patterns based on clearly established functions that proved essential in Socialist Realism products may be yet again useful in a detailed analysis of “Post-Sots”.

In fact, *The Heritage of Love* seems a summary of recent Russian cinematographic clichés concerning the lost Russia, reiterating many of Mikhalkov’s ideas, techniques, and specific features of melodrama. The film was regarded as a cheap expression of patriotic pathos, with multiple problematic components (script, weak leading actor, irrelevant title, unconvincing characters and much more – Ukhov, 2016). However, the film is of interest as we consider it representative for the entire genre of Russian melodrama about the “lost Russia”, especially after *The Admiral*, which is regarded as the “pioneer of Disney-ization of (Russian) culture of nobility” (Gorelov, 2016).

#### *Imperial Russia versus Bolshevik Russia*

The core issue of Vasiliev’s film is presenting the values of Imperial Russia, reduced to “faith, honour and fatherland” in Dolmatov’s words, as opposed to general looting, raping and destruction generated by the Red faceless “freedom”. An officer declares on his deathbed that “generals, ministers and the tzar betrayed them all and betrayed Russia”, while another states that the new rulers would “bring them all to perish”. In this way, the bearers of the values of Imperial Russia are gradually dying and the Bolshevik supporters are spreading throughout the country. Furthermore, aware of his loss, Kolchak liberates his officers from further duties and continues his journey to Irkutsk to certain death. In the same way, conscious of his physical weakness, Dolmatov returns to war after nearly being killed. Moreover, conscious of his chances to survive in a fratricide war, he refuses Tereshchenko’s proposal to fight the war against Germany in Europe, in the same way Kolchak refuses Kerensky’s proposal to continue the war on the United States’ side.

The idea of a revolution going wrong is also expressed in the metonymical presence of Tereshchenko, a former merchant (*lavochnik*) and supporter of the February Revolution. This entrepreneur (*predpriimchivyi chelovek*) stole money from Russia’s funds and left for Paris with Irina Chernyshova as his mistress. Three years

afterwards, Irina leaves him, with a similar regret on her face as Anna in Kravchuk's film, mourning "my family, my house and my Russia", everything that could have happened in that nostalgic Imperial Russia. This couple formed under the threatening circumstances of the Civil War and Bolshevik Revolution could not survive because of the different values that may be reduced to imperial vs. anti-imperial. Tereshchenko uses the authority void in revolutionary Russia to his material benefit, winning over the beautiful and proud daughter of a Russian nobleman. However, his protection becomes unbearable for young Chernyshova; she leaves Tereshchenko for the former White Army officer, one of the few survivors of the battle where Dolmatov died.

Faith and religious attitude characterizes those involved in the White movement, while Bolsheviks are godless brutes. The scene in *The Admiral* when mocking Bolsheviks wait for a White soldier to say his prayers before being drowned is telling of the different values of the two sides.

*In search of identity or "père fatal"*

Another recurrent motif of the recent Russian films is the absent or missing father from the son's life in various hypostases and variations (see Goscilo, Hashamova, 2010). In Kravchuk's film, admiral is kept away from his son by his position (vice-admiral, admiral and then head of the White movement) and busy social life, while in Vasiliev's film, *geroi/ the hero* Dolmatov leaves Maria<sup>56</sup>, unaware of their love scene and her pregnancy. This grand motif echoes the loss of the czar as the archetypal father of the Russians (*batiushka-tzar*) and the Russian search for identity and, implicitly, a new father figure, found in Lenin and then in Stalin.

In terms of the plot, the nowadays character, mechanic Andrei Petrovich Kulikov, is set on a path of identity search, lured into a dishonest affair, tempted to assess an exceptional car at a fraction of its price. At the same time, Andrei is desperately searching for

a girl met on the streets of Paris, his love at first sight. However, he disrupts the dishonest deal in the last moment, which draws the old noble lady Elizaveta Ivanovna (daughter of baron von Lieven and Irina Chernyshova) and the young mechanic close enough to discover their link. As it turned out, officer Andrei Petrovich Dolmatov was Vera Chernyshova's lover and Andrei's grand-grandfather after a brief (semi-conscious) romance with Maria Kulikova.

Yu. Vasiliev's film is yet another tragic *agitka*<sup>57</sup> about "*Rossia, kotoruiu my poteriali*" with one battle scene and meandering story of two souls with the chance to love each other one century later as descendants. Hence, the English title of the film – *The Heritage of Love*. It is only significant that Andrei Kulikov finds his instant love from Paris in Russia only after restoring her grand-mother's inherited valuable car, after understanding the value of honesty and assuming his ancestor's values. It is only then that he finds his true identity and gets the chance to fulfil his grand-grandfather's unaccomplished love. Kulikov's path may be seen in Katerina Clark's terms applied to Socialist Realism hero – from spontaneity to consciousness (Clark, 2000). This touching fairy tale with an uninspired Russian title – *Geroi/ Hero* – leaves the viewers with unanswered questions, especially given the combination of heroism with a fratricide war (Arkhangelsky, 2016).

*Of romance and disruption*

The grand love story between Anna and Kolchak serves as a frame for the events of the two wars and revolutions. But the viewer may notice a manipulation of Anna's character and main points of the plot so that she appears as an untainted monument of pure aristocratic love (*dvorianskaia liubov*). The script appeals to Socialist Realism stereotypes in constructing Anna's character: there is no love scene and a year of separation between the two lovers is inserted<sup>58</sup>. Anna is working as

<sup>56</sup> Maria recognized and saved him after being shot by Bolsheviks in Kuban, after the young officer saved her and her family in Petrograd. It is also significant that honourable officer Dolmatov is not aware of his faux pas and his fatherly status. The love scene between Dolmatov and Maria is shot from a double perspective: Maria's and Andrei's longing for Vera in a semi-conscious state.

<sup>57</sup> In the Soviet Union the term was used for reedited newsreels for the purpose of agitation and propaganda during the Russian Civil War.

<sup>58</sup> Anna of the filmic version spends a year in Omsk as a nurse before being accidentally discovered by Kolchak, while in real life she served as a translator in Kolchak's government (Nersesov, 2008; Soyustov, 2008).

a nurse in a redemptive way for her guilt of leaving her estranged husband (Timiryov becomes a Bolshevik commissar in the film). Moreover, her reason of staying away from Kolchak is underlined in extradiegetic voiceover of Anna's written and unsent letter to her love as a consequence of witnessing his oath. The real life Anna's involvement in Kolchak's government wouldn't seem worthy to a post-Soviet spectator used to pictures of self-sacrificing and pure love during the war.

The image of a nurse during the war is a clever usage of a key symbol of the Soviet imaginary and proof of producers' considerate attitude toward viewers' sensitivities. Starting with Stalinist films about World War I and Civil War and moving to a plethora of Soviet films about World War II, the nurse is invariably present as a marginal, but well established (holy) figure. On the other hand, see the negative reactions to recent Russian films where women are depicted in a different manner, especially the controversial TV series *Shtrafbat* (*Penal Battalion*, 2005), considered the extreme example of revisionism (Norris, 2007). The holy image of the Soviet woman during the war is part of the Soviet war mythology, as Svetlana Alexievich had to wage the same war against the censors while working on her book *U voyny ne zhenskoe litso/ The Unwomanly Face of War* (Alexievich, 1985 and see the English version Alexievich, 2017, xxxxi-xxxv).

Furthermore, the railway station is the meeting point between nurse Vera and officer and nobleman Andrei (as in *The Admiral* and the farewell point as in *Barber of Siberia*), but Andrei saves her life, putting her on the same train to Paris with her sister and Tereshchenko. The film's anti-Bolshevik position is also evident in baron von Lieven's story telling of the first Kuban campaign in winter 1918: "it was as if nature wanted to deter this fratricide war (*bratoubiistvennaia voina*), but everyone who felt he was a Russian man, a man, not a beast, was with us".

While the idea of representing the archetypal love in *The Heritage of Love* is marvellous (in the last scene both couples<sup>59</sup> meet in the park of Chernyshovy's house, under the summer rain), its *mise-en-scène* is unfortunate and difficult to watch. The viewer

is sometimes left adrift wondering about the link between same looking characters with the same names in different eras. The hints are left sloppy throughout the movie and the final concluding dialogue between the characters – Elizaveta, heiress of Chernyshovy fortune and Andrei, the young mechanic – are hastily and unnaturally presented.

Moreover, while the Revolution disrupted the romance between Anna and Kolchak ("unfortunately, the Revolution overshadowed our future"), news about World War I interrupts Dolmatov's kiss with Vera. The following revolutions are hardly presented or explained in the film except for their destructive effects, summed up in Irina's reproaches to Tereshchenko: "you destroyed thousands of people, the most noble, the best of them, and everything for money".

#### *Objects as melodramatic signs*

The motif of the letter also comes up in the ending of the film: Andrei is reading his grand-grandfather's last letter for Vera in the same park where they met under the rain. The photographs are also used as pretexts for flashbacks (the photograph with Chernyshovy and their car and with Maria Kulikova and her son), while the entire film revolves around the car so that the script has a spiral structure (opening scene with the new car driven into the Chernyshovy park in Imperial Russia, the car in a deplorable state in Paris and the restored car brought back to the same park).

Objects – the car, the photographs, the letter – are melodramatic signs of (symbolic) continuity and social rupture, remnants of a former aristocratic glory, generating nostalgic feelings. The theme of (lost and found) objects is related to the idea of rightful ownership, exile (as a form of displacement) and usurpation, as well as looting as a form of violent appropriation of other's goods in seemingly peaceful times (the scheming Russian businessman aiming to become owner of a priceless car with a fraction of its value).

In *The Heritage of Love*, Elizaveta Ivanovna plans to sell a rare and expensive car in order to restore the family mansion. Both the car and the mansion have symbolic value, pertaining to the social status and grandeur of her ancestors from Imperial Russia. However, being able to keep and restore the car brings the heiress a sense of gratitude and elevates the car at the level of evocative object, reminding of her dear father and family. Once the car is

<sup>59</sup> Andrei Dolmatov and Vera Chernyshova, Andrei Kulikov and Elizaveta's grand-daughter.



restored, the car may signify reversing the evil and harm done to her family, restoring harmony.

### Final thoughts

Overall, Yuri Vasiliev's and Andrei Kravchuk's films share the same melodrama traits as Nikita Mikhalkov's films, centered around variations of moral and emotional compromise set in richly ornamented interior (aristocratic) spaces. The main heroes of these films are representatives of their epoch, deeply devoted to their ideals and values standing for larger political dynamics (Condee, 2009, 100). Besides, the delineated melodramatic elements in Mikhalkov's films (Condee, 2009, 102) – "self-conscious localizing of time and place" and the intermingling of two temporal spaces – are also present in Vasiliev's *The Heritage of Love*. This tension between the two historical periods – one, where deeply aware of imminent death, nobles would sacrifice for an ideal, and the present, where for a quick earn middle class entrepreneurs would compromise – is a source of nostalgia and increases the feeling of displacement and retrospection (Condee, 2009, 103).

As the article revealed, the Russian cinematography combines Hollywood and Socialist Realism features in an attempt to balance the external influences and Soviet legacy. In doing so with a sensitive subject as the Russian Civil War, directors rely on melodramatic content with patterns borrowed from their familiar background – the Soviet legacy. The chosen films are symptomatic both for the nostalgic feeling for the "lost (Imperial) Russia" and for the clichés in representing the period. As pointed out above, both directors seem to draw their inspiration from Nikita Mikhalkov's first melodramatic blockbuster (*Barber of Siberia*) and to follow the proposed type of hero whose main values are honour, dignity and fatherland. The new Russian hero aims at filling the cultural void of the Soviet positive hero in N. Chernyshevsky's tradition, given the "imperial and religious turn" of the recent Russian movies.

Both films are quite taken by the aristocratic milieu and almost neglect the presence of the people, sometimes reduced to confused looting hooligans because of the unexpected and misunderstood freedom. The nostalgic patterns both reflect and restore the material and cultural background of the

Russian tsarist nobility (*dvorianstvo*) – a perspective that inevitably neglects the overused Soviet cinematographic direction of (re)presenting only workers and peasants. Kravchuk's and Vasiliev's films are clear anti-Bolshevik statements, attempts to link the nowadays Russia with the Imperial Russia. However, the link apparently cannot be transmitted without the usage of Soviet mythological and structural patterns even if they are packaged in *blockbusterized* visual wrapping.

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## **B. MISCELLANEA**



## DISCUSSIONS ON FEMININE PRESENCE AT THE BANAT COUNTY SEATS (14<sup>TH</sup> C. – FIRST HALF OF 15<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)

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**Abstract:** *This paper tackles the introspection of the Banat medieval feminine image based on documents of that time, the only ones that could offer a glimpse into the matter, as there are no other sources available. By focusing my research on the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, I took into consideration some objective reasons. After the long “silence” of the documents of the previous centuries, the woman’s presence, especially the noble one, had taken shape if not spectacularly, then substantially enough to let us sketch an evolutionary feature. I believe it to be extendable to the aristocratic social universe of the time. The statistic reports tried to quantify the feminine presence in documents, some patterns being drawn out, as I consider they are sufficiently close to the social realities of that epoch. Noble women were an active part in financial transactions, being heiresses of lands apart from their dowry, or going to court to obtain their rights in local or central institutions. The documentary data clearly show that the noble women owned lands, gardens, hay fields, houses and currency, serfs, cattle, precious jewels and garments, all of them being true estates they inherited from their noble parents or acquired along their lifetime through marriages, transactions or pledges. Not for once the documents stipulated that certain belongings had been acquired by the noble women from their own revenues, frequently being obtained during their widowhood.*

**Keywords:** *the Banat counties, Angevin era, noble women, marriage, quarta puellaris*

The discourse about the feminine presence and its role in the Banat medieval society must start from the general valuable finding in any such investigations, namely, that we speak about a society deeply impregnated with the masculine ascendance and religiousness. Besides, what we know about women of the time is through men’s spectrum and vision. The masculine preeminence is a natural result of the era’s specific feature: a time of wars, of political and social instability within which the economic and socio-juridical basis gravitated around the land ownership that was mainly handed down on male line. Woman’s statute in society was reduced by the state and the church to the limited sphere of the family. Jacques le Goff pointed out that the female subordination during the Middle Age was to be accepted by the theorists as the lack of poise between the two sexes was but a natural one, in accordance with Creation (Le Goff, Schmitt, 2002, 442), when it was to the woman’s disadvantage.

### **Brief statistics**

This investigation doesn’t intend to be exhaustive. It starts from about 200 published and unpublished documents we have traced out in several collections concerning the counties of Banat. But it is certain that such acts referring to the woman’s existence and problems are much more complex. We consider this part of the documents a substantial enough sample to allow us to draw significant results.

First of all, we deem it right to make an analogy with the studies on the female anthroponomy in Transylvania during the 14<sup>th</sup> century carried by a group of researchers in Cluj. According to their statistic reports, there are 513 references to female persons in the investigated documents, 406 of them belonging to different persons (Turcuș *et al.*, 2011, 164). The 200 documentary units we have traced out give a reasonable proportion if we take into consideration the territorial extension of the Banat counties and of the Principality of

Transylvania. In our case, despite of certain preconceptions, the balance between the anonymous and the nominal mentions is a severe one: 111 documents register women without denominating them (widows, wives, daughters), while 126 different women's first names are referred to in 89 documents.

Reference	Documents	Percentage
Anonymous	111	55,5 %
Nominal	89	45,5 %

Secondly, by examining the social-legal status of women in analyzed references we find out that they belonged to an overwhelming proportion to the aristocratic class of that time.

Social status	Documents	Percentage
Noble women	190	95%
Serfs' women	8	4%
Townswomen	2	1%

We might believe that the explanation is a convenient one: the predominant patrimonial subjects and the privileged social status were the main reasons for the noble women's almost exclusive access in the period's recordings. At the first view the small number of the townswomen might be a surprising one. But we have to note that the urban centers in the Banat at that time were few, in direct connection with the handicraft works that were mainly present on the aristocratic estates rather than in the urban centers (belonging to *civitas* or *oppidum* type). Referring to the rural milieu, women were registered only in the context of their owners' proceeding rights, which were always based on aggressions and spoliations those women became a pray to. As a result of the above, we might conclude that the present issue is mainly an analysis of the image of the Banat noble women, according to the documents of the years 1300–1450.

Thirdly and directly connected to the predominant masculine society of the Middle Ages, we might note that, in all the documents we have investigated, women are ever referred to as related or belonging to males: fathers, husbands, sons, grandchildren/nephews, brothers-in-law or

other collateral relatives. Not a single document was found to mention a woman independently of a familial or marital context.

Fourthly, the percentage of different hypostases under which women are represented in those documents is of real interest. The trinom "wife – widow – daughter" concentrates the largest part of those rates in such documents, as they were concerned mainly with the patrimonial, financial or succession rights of women of the noble class in the Banat region.

Status	Documents	Percentage
Daughters	59	29,5%
Wives	53	26,5%
Widows	43	21,5%
Mothers	25	12,5%
Sisters	15	7,5%
Grandmothers	3	1,5%
Aunts	1	0,5%
Step-mothers	1	0,5%

When it comes to the females' age, we highlight the same lack of poise between the adult females' presence and the little girls' presence:

Age	Documents	Percentage
Adult	189	94,5%
Little girls	11	5,5%

### Current problems

After that sample analysis, we might note a major discrepancy concerning aspects of women's public or private life during that time. Nearly 60% of the documents that present opportunities for women to take part in economical transactions or to be directly involved in litigious causes finalized in front of the central or regional courts. This entails a diversified picture regarding the medieval woman's public life. However, we have focused on the aspects concerning the daughters' dowering right.

### The women's dowering right: dowry and wedding gifts (*res paraphernales*, *res dotalitiae*, *dos paraphernalis*, *dotalitium*)

In the medieval aristocratic milieu, wedding was always accompanied by real

negotiations on women's dowering; dowry and the wedding gifts were in fact a *sine qua non* condition of making a marital alliance, being a parental concern for the daughters' destiny and also for the legally privileged status (Fodor, 2011, 194). Based on the studied references, we may suppose that the same was true with the matrimonial transactions in the Banat medieval social milieu. Following their dowering, daughters weren't excluded from their parental inheritance rights; it seems that many times dowry and wedding gifts consisted not only in valuable goods, but also in land or money. The father granted the dowry and gifts<sup>60</sup> (DIR, C, XIV/II, 1958, 54-56), as he was the head of the family and manager of its belongings. If deceased, his sons took over<sup>61</sup> (Ortvay, 1896, 72); if deceased without male descendants, we may suppose that those matrimonial talks were incumbent upon his widow or his collateral relatives. When a family disappeared, the king himself was to look after the girl's dowry, and such a moment was referred to in a document of the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 1331 (DL, 76441), through which king Charles Robert gave the villages of *Zeheus* and *Feltymor* in Cenad County, and *Wereseghaz* in Arad County to the noble of Hasmas' daughter, as he had died without male descendants.

Unfortunately, we haven't found any relevant documents of the time. We suppose through analogy with neighboring areas that daughters' gifts consisted in different goods (clothes, jewelry, and china, furniture and linens) and cattle, reflecting their families' position and financial power. The only preserved references mention dowry consisting in money or estates in the cases of litigious or atypical causes. We have presented above the case of a noble girl dowering with estates through the king's care, but she was an orphan girl. Two other cases might be of interest in order to outline possible reasons of some land transfers. Coming back to the matrimonial alliance between Theodor of Veyteh's daughter and

Gall of Omor in 1322, we have to say that the famous man granted his daughter a series of familial possessions, according to his family's prestige. However, he donated the couple the villages of St. Ladislav and St. Margarete in Cenad County, as well as those of *Denta*, *Wuiudwar*, *Giera* and *Gungudeghaza* in Timis County, all of them with churches in stone, a fact that suggests those rural communities' prosperity and viability. Only a couple of years later (1329), after ban Theodor's death, his family sold another part of the family's possessions, for 1,000 silver marks (DIR, C, XIV/II, 1958, 287), to the above named Gall of Omor. We might conclude that it was a successive transfer of proprieties between the two families, on the presumptive reason of the family's falling into disgrace, as Theodor had been one of Charles Robert's opponents during the fights for his reign consolidation. That marriage to one of the king's loyal men and the transfer of a part of their belongings probably secured the future and wealth to the descendants of Theodor of Veyteh [Voiteni]

A second case that has drawn our attention was also in the family of the former royal notary in Omor, and it was to some extent connected to the previous one. As we have already noticed, in 1343, his son, Ladislav of Omor engaged his little sister Clara to the son of the count of Caras, Blasiu of Szer, an occasion to be extremely generous, as he donated the couple half of the estates inherited from his father, some of them being bought from the family in Voiteni, in 1329. It was a substantial donation, with half of the following possessions: *Wyoduor*, *Gewr* (Giera), *Chud*, *Dowch*, and the entire village of *Kyseud*, in Timis County, as well as half of the villages *Donath*, *Teleki*, *Medjies*, *Gwngudijghaza*, *Zarnier*, and *Gataia* estate, in Caras County. If the couple would had no children, all those proprieties would have came back to Ladislav and his descendants. This seemed to have been the clause he had stipulated at that point. A later document, dated on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 1347 (DL, 91383), shows the donator's duplicity and cupidity, as Clara's husband, Blasiu of Szer, would lodge a complaint in Arad Capitulum: Ladislav had convinced his little sister at the engagement ceremony to yield to him the right of

<sup>60</sup> In 1322 for instance, ban Teodor of Veyteh got his daughter married to the royal notary Gall of Omor, granting her more villages in Cenad and Timis counties.

<sup>61</sup> Ladislav, son of deceased Gall of Omor got her sister married to Blasiu, son of Posa of Szer.



possession on Gataia estate and on half of *Vyuduor* possession, and the honest-minded Clara had done it. Frustrated, Blasiu of Szer asked the Capitulum to forbid Ladislav of Omor to occupy those estates as being dishonestly obtained. It is one of the samples regarding the daughters' partiality, onerous or disrespected dowering.

We have also discovered cases when dowry and wedding gifts were converted into money, as a document from the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1439 (Pesty, 2014, 50) revealed; it is the case of lady Elisabeth who asserted in Arad Capitulum that she had reached an agreement with Andrew Beseney called Wysad, to get 400 forints from him on account of her dowry and wedding gifts. A document dated on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July 1435 (Pesty, 2014, 57) let us infer that the specified amount of money did not reach the beneficiary as her husband, Sebastian of Varyas required it from another member of the family of Wysad, in front of the archdeacon of Timisoara; the two parties were to meet in Timisoara to regulate the situation.

Rare were the cases of dowry conversion from money into lands, as it is shown in a document dated on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1449 (Pesty, 2014, 205) in Cenad Capitulum, an agreement between Blasiu and Nicolas Thegede of Sajan on the one hand, and Ursula, a noble lady, on the other hand, the latter accepting 15 imperial square fathoms at Sajan, on account of her dowry of 18 forints.

There may have been cases when dowry and wedding gifts became litigious subjects, the noble ladies or their descendants being forced to claim them. Following the investigated documents, we may say that a situation is predominant: the suits against the families the noble ladies join through their marriage. We haven't found a single document to mention a daughter or her husband asking for the parents/ guardians to respect the right of dowering. We don't reject the possibility that such cases existed, but there are no material evidence on the subject, or the possibility that a dowry may have come into the possession of a third party – a fact that must have complicated the way to get it back.

As we have written above, there were cases of women in front of a court to demand dowering rights. It was, for instance, the case of Helene, Nicolas Himfi's widow, who demanded her dowry in front of the king, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1388 (Pesty, 1882, 179), from her kin in-law. There were other cases when the parties reached an agreement that was sanctioned before a Capitulum; a sample was the case of Elisabeth and Cecilia, widows in the family Varyas of Thelek (sisters-in-law probably) who concurred, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1449 (Pesty, 2014, 202), that Cecilia keep the estate of *Thelek* up to the moment the other party respected her dowry and wedding gifts; she was obliged to return that estate later to Elisabeth and her son.

There were other cases when the dowry was claimed by the beneficiary woman's descendants after her death and there were many situations of real judiciary battles between the former families in-law. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1385 (Pesty, 1882, 163), the children of deceased lady Elisabeth were involved in such a litigious case; they were Mathew and his sisters Bagow and Helene, who asked for 200 forints from Benedict's descendants, Nicolas and Peter Himfi, on account of the right dowry from the possession of *Noyermin*. The conflict between the families of Dancs of Macedonia and Himfi of Remetea was more virulent, with drastic short-term results, between 1433 and 1435 (Boldea, 2010, 128). Stephen of Remetea and Caterina Dancs's descendants tried to recuperate the dowry and wedding gifts of their deceased aunt Caterina Himfi, who had been married to Andrew Dancs of Macedonia, going to court against the family in Macedonia, Dancs, namely Simon's son (a cousin of deceased Andrew Dancs). On the other hand, the same descendants of the family of Himfi went to court against Nicolas, son of Peter of Macedonia, and his son, Nicolas, for their mother's dowry and wedding gifts apparently (the documents did not mention the subject) (Magina, 2008, 158, 165, 167). The verdict of the ecclesiastic court of Timis archidiaconry was a significant one; as a consequence, archdeacon Albertus imposed the ecclesiastic interdiction on Nicolas Dancs of Macedonia and his serfs until the parties' reconciliation.

There were also cases of an amiable dowry transfer from the former family of a re-married widow to the new family, under the ecclesiastic institutions' sanctioning. It was, for instance, the case of the noble lady Caterina, Elye of Wadaz's widow, re-married to Ladislaw of Nadab, who confessed in front of Cenad Capitulum, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1422 (Ortvay, 1896, 576), that, according to the Kingdom consuetudinary right, she had got the dowry and wedding gifts from the possessions and parts of possessions of her deceased husband; the Capitulum was to issue the privilege sealed letter. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 1449 (Țigău, 2011, 100), Lady Margarete, Stanislaw of Recas' widow, re-married John Pathoczy, claimed in front of the same court that she had got 400 forints from the Romanian nobles Michel and Blasiu of Cerna (bans of Severin at that time), Nicolas of Bizerea, and Sandrin of Densus, on account of her dowry, even if they had formerly refused to respect her rights in the case of Recas estate, where the families of Cerna and Bizerea also had possessions as early as 1443 (Boldea, 2002-2003, 326).

Finally, we may underline that there was a case when a noble lady renounced her daughter's quarter because the dowry and wedding gifts she had received from her family had been more than generous. It was the case of Margarete, Paul of Szer's daughter and the vice-chatelain of Hateg's wife, who confessed in front of the abbot of Bizere convent, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 1346 (Miscellanea Heimiana, 64; Popa-Gorjanu, 2007, 368; Boldea, 2013, 236) that she discharged her uncle (the influential count of Caras, Posa of Szer) and her cousins to give her daughter's quarter, as they had given her very generous

matrimonial gifts at the age she had been allowed to inherit her father's estate. It was a special case, almost an exception, which probably was based on very strong family relations.

It is suggestive to note the substantial difference that a dowry in money might make, as the amount of 18, 200 or 400 forints, the only ones we have found.

### **Final considerations**

The foray on the Banat feminine medieval imagery we have proposed is exclusively based on documents from that period, the only ones that can bring to light a possibly unsubstantial subject, given the absence of other sources. We have focused our investigation on the period between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries for certain objective reasons; after the long "silence" of the office documents in the previous centuries, the women's presence, preponderantly the noble ones, in the Banat medieval counties starts appearing in documents, sufficiently enough to sketch some directions that might be extrapolated to the level of the aristocratic social universe of that age. Statistical data were to quantify the feminine presence within the references and we consider that the patterns are relevant for the social realities of that time.

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## “LESSONS” AFTER THE ROMANIAN ARMY’S LIBERATION CAMPAIGN OF BESSARABIA, 1941

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**Abstract:** *In this short study I will try to comment upon the lessons which the Romanian Army had addressed after the first month of war – 22.06.1941 – 26.07.1941. The booklet, which represents the basis of my analysis, has been kept in the Military Archives, which I have accessed. The document written at the request of General Ion Antonescu – the Leader of the State – comprised considerations regarding the Soviet forces and their battle tactics, as well as advices for the Romanian Army. The booklet was compiled while the Romanians were still fighting, providing information about the enemy and the general situation on the front.*

**Keywords:** *Liberation Campaign, Bessarabia, Romanian Army, German Army, General Antonescu, World War II*

In the wake of the liberation campaign of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina (finalized officially on July 26th, 1941), the Romanian Army edited a booklet (File 50, 168) with “observations and lessons” after the first month of war. It is interesting to observe the haste manifested in the making of this document, given the fact that the Romanian forces were still fighting (the 4th Army was beginning the long and costly siege of Odessa and many other forces were advancing alongside the Wehrmacht, east of the Dniester). Probably it had to be stressed that Romania had already reached its goals in the conflict – liberating the territories occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940, thus it was necessary to reach some conclusions even before the fights were properly finalized or the soldiers returned to the country. We shall return to this particular aspect later on.

In this booklet we find interesting reflections: the Soviet Army was considered to be a serious opponent, with units that were well organized, trained, equipped and prepared for war. (*Nota Bene:* in the very first days of the conflict, in the sectors where the main attack had been executed by the German forces, the Soviet resistance quickly crumbled, allowing the Germans to advance at an unexpected pace and to capture countless supplies and weaponry)

Quote: “the Soviet infantry resisted tenaciously” to the attacks; also, “they were shooting well at medium and small distances, but were not aiming well”. Much like the

soldiers of the old Tsarist Army, who had fought alongside the Romanians during the Great War, the Soviet soldiers “were quick in digging foxholes and they were very careful in organizing the terrain” (camouflage, most likely). Their tenacity, however, was not the result of some remarkable instruction process, or of the high morale or nationalism (the latter being considered by the Romanian intelligence officers as non-existent). What drove the Soviets on to fighting was “the terror instilled by the Political Commissars of the Military Police formations waiting behind the combat troops”. Anyway, “like the Tsarists”, the Soviet forces were “familiar and trained” with long-distance retreats. “The inferior commanders of the rear-guards have shown courage, initiative and skills in leading their units. They have lost few men and materials, they had retreated methodically, during the night-time – and counter-attacked energetically”. While “the small units are skillfully led”, the enemy is considered inferior in the field of lacking strategic initiative, moral force and superior leadership (File 50, 168).

Concerning the equipment of the Red Army, we are told that all the inferior-level units met by the Romanians were well-equipped with weapons, including the automatic-type. Moreover, “even the Romanian-nationality soldiers (from Bessarabia and Bukovina) were equipped with new uniforms and foot gear. The material is, however, of low-quality. It is noticed the

shortage of the so-called «small equipment» (underwear)”. Regarding food, the bread found on the Soviet prisoners or in the captured supply-depots was of good quality, but meat was scarce. There were also captured Soviet soldiers who declared that they came short of food for a few days (File 50).

The Red Army used tanks quite often against the Romanian forces, “both to maintain contact and to mount counterattacks. There were no meetings with important masses of armored forces”. According to what was deemed necessary by the enemy commanders, the number of tanks involved in counterattacks varied from two-three tanks (a tank platoon had the nominal strength of three tanks) up to a company. In those first weeks, the Soviet forces ripostes consisted only in limited, yet frequent counterattacks, made by “combined arms units (infantry, cavalry, artillery, tanks, many times with air support), with waste of ammunition, against the attacking flanks”. The document also states that “our units are very well equipped with anti-tank artillery and these weapons proved extremely efficient against the Russian tanks, which in most cases were destroyed or scattered away”. It is admitted that “it was not mentioned on our front – up to date – the presence of heavy tanks, of 30 or 50 tons” (File 50). This must be read “*cum grano salis*”, because the standard anti-tank artillery of the Romanian Infantry divisions consisted of the 37mm. antitank gun, with a low power of armor penetration. The regular anti-tank weapons were: a platoon (6 guns) of 37mm. Bofors guns at each infantry regiment and of 12 47 mm. guns (Boehler, Breda or Schneider) at division level (Anti-tank divisional guns). In March 1941 the 37mm. guns were present in just 70% of their required numbers and the 47mm. ones in only about 40%. What is more, the ammunition for them was scarce – ranging between 20% and 65% of the necessary (Fund 948, File 565, 25). So we might believe that Soviet armored cars (BA-10 or later in the war the new BA-64) were “listed” by the gunners as tanks; we note that this occurred on other fronts, during the war.

The document mentions though, that it was not enough for our units to be well-equipped, but it was also necessary to “take all the measures needed for the units not to be surprised”. It is given the example – although without mentioning specific details, such as

number of the division or names of the commanding officers – of the 35 Infantry (Reserve) Division and its failure at Vărzărești: a column of two regiments (infantry and artillery) which “executed a march in peace-time conditions, without any precautionary measures, although every probability indicated that meeting the enemy was almost certain. The column’s vanguard forces, entering a trap laid by the Soviet forces, alongside the Bessarabian inhabitants of a village, were completely surprised and [were] counterattacked; they panicked [and fled] and exposed the artillery and the main forces behind. This resulted in unnecessary losses, which could have been prevented if the most elementary precautionary measures would have been taken, measures which were mentioned in each and every military regulation. It can be thus said that this column has been defeated by its very commanding officer, who did not take the necessary safety measures which were imposed by the situation” (File 50).

Concerning the enemy air forces, they were “timid in their important actions”, sustaining a high rate of losses. The shells that were used had exploded only “in reduced quantities”. One of their preferred tactics was to fly low and shoot their machine guns at the Romanian and German soldiers, but also at the peasants working in the fields. (Again, as far as it is known, the civilians were previously evacuated from the conflict areas, so the “peasants shooting” might be an exaggeration, deemed to present the Soviets as even more sadistic and careless than they actually were). What is more, “it is ascertained an insufficiency of the commanders, which had not initiated any coherent, well-prepared, large-scale action” (File 50).

The Soviet Danube naval forces “have judiciously used their available fluvial ships. The Russian naval actions have had a lot of activity, offensive spirit and close camouflage. It has been noted a strong connection between the naval activity and those of air forces and land-based forces. The Soviet had useful information in the Danube sector because of the presence of the Russian-speaking Lippovan population in the Danube Delta” (File 50). We note that the offensive movements of the Soviets in the Danube Delta are pretty much consistent with the theory of a planned Soviet attack which had not been

called off in due time, attack rendered useless by the beginning of the “Operation Barbarossa” on June 22nd.

A particular focus is on the “different ruses” used by the Soviet soldiers to entrap, demoralize and to cause losses to our troops; it is stated that “this system is not new, being a favorite tactic of the ancient Mongols”. It is presented the situation of a German unit which tried to occupy a village: “after the first echelons had passed, they were received with automatic gunfire from the weapons hidden inside the houses, trees, attics”. The examples go on: “a reconnaissance patrol was allowed to close in to a distance of meters away from a crop in which the Russians were perfectly hidden and they had fired, producing losses [...] Russian soldiers lift their hands up, signaling surrender, but at 100-200 meters away to open fire with concealed automatic weapons. Soldiers pretend to be dead, just to open surprising fire at close quarters. It is also mentioned that Soviet sharpshooters and certain special teams are carefully watching for officers and fire at them. As a consequence, the officers at the frontline shall avoid appearing as targets and shall try to hide their distinctive markings” (File 50). One must not understand that the commanders of smaller units would remain behind the frontline, as their place was alongside the soldiers.

The Soviets were using a “special and somewhat ingenious method”, which consisted of using “connected boats, armed with machine guns”, in the water areas.

All these ways of Soviet warfare were to be thoroughly studied by the Romanian rank and file, so as to “take the necessary cautionary measures imposed, especially when from interrogating the wounded, it turns out that a large part of our losses is due to the skill of the enemy’s using deceitful fighting tactics and, of course our troops’ «greenness»” (File 50) (lack of experience, gullibility – n.n.)

The second part of the booklet is also of interest, as it briefly depicts the Romanians’ fighting manner, but it stresses mainly the mistakes and the blunders that were perpetrated. “Some units went directly to the frontal attack of the organized enemy resistance points, seeking to pass through the enemy fire barrage, thus causing unnecessary losses. Every time when it is possible, such

resistance points ought to be maneuvered and passed-by”. When crossing the Prut River, a large Romanian unit has made a series of blunders, any of them not allowed at crossing a wide river. There was no aerial protection, “although there were important air forces available, without no other mission” and the anti-aircraft artillery which was earmarked for protecting the crossing was not yet ready. Then, “from the field guns and the heavy guns, in the moment of crossing, there were ready to fire only a single battery of heavy artillery and a battalion of field guns”. The specialized pioneers’ battalion (which had river crossing equipment – “assault bridges”) had not been used, because it had not arrived on time. So “the crossing was made with the boats of the bridging company, which were difficult to handle”. The transmissions were also down: the regiments of the division were linked neither to their subordinate units, nor to the division’s command; if there had appeared a critical situation, no calls for help could have been issued. But perhaps the most striking aspect was noticed at the “ground level”, among the ranks: “in the crossing area, the infantry units were amassed instead of being dispersed into an articulated, camouflaged formation; yells and loud-voiced commands were accompanying the operation, although the enemy shore was at a distance of 100-200 meters. The soldiers, who had been on march the whole night, hadn’t have, until the moment of crossing, more than one or two hours of sleep and had only eaten a quarter of bread, as the field kitchens hadn’t arrived yet” (Turturică, 2012, 138-139). To conclude, this action had been unprepared. It succeeded only because the enemy wasn’t there; if the enemy had resisted even the least, the operation, in the way it had been planned and executed, would have been a complete and utter failure” (Turturică, 2012, 138-139).

Another case, in this instance with consequences, had been that of a large unit which was temporary assuming a defensive position: “Although possessing abundant and timely information indicating precisely the moment and place of the enemy attack, the unit took on the brunt of the air force bombing raid and of the artillery barrage on the very place it was settled – and then counterattacked. In similar situations, it is recommended to proceed as such: withdraw the troops from the attacked area, creating thus an empty space in



front of the enemy; when the enemy enters that space, it should be suddenly attacked from both flanks“ (File 50).

Regarding the organization of the rear services (behind the frontline), the situation was even worse. Here, general Antonescu discovered “a complete lack of method and discipline”. The transports (both by horse and auto) were working without respecting the wartime regulations, without any measures of safety or camouflage. The trucks were used at the pleasure of the commanding officers, for minor transports. Even more, individuals were bustling around everywhere, over the fields, on the roads, without any precise assignment”. Also, there were daily observed carts and trucks loaded with stuff which was not necessary for the frontline operations: tables, chairs, or other household items. In an area occupied by a division, “all the regimental supply trains and the services’ formations were scattered around in a cultivated area of a few hundreds of hectares. All the plants were trampled and destroyed by the horses which were allowed to graze unhindered, leading to the ruination of the cultivated fields, labored with great toil by the local peasants – and, implicitly, of the national wealth. The respective commanders, of lesser or greater ranks, were carelessly watching «*the show*», without addressing any of the problems”. Finally, the conclusion is expressed best by the following lines: “with this deficiency in method and the disturbances in traffic and with this stirring, unknown even for the commanders from the rear, beyond the fact that the soldiers and the animals are exhausted up to being unfit for duty, the rear columns and the services’ sections could very easily panic at the first signs of an artillery fire or of an air raid; or they can be victims of sabotage acts coming from enemy elements remaining behind the frontline” (Turturică, 2012, 140).

We note that the commander of the 5th Army Corps, of which the aforementioned division belonged (The Guard Division) had been relieved of command following General Antonescu’s tour of inspection on the frontline. The commander of the 4th Romanian Army, General Nicolae Ciupercă, had afterwards provided some pertinent explanations for the “bustling individuals”: he said that “Behind this large unit (The Guard Division – n.n.), in a sector of only 6

kilometers, there were fifteen field artillery battalions and four heavy artillery battalions [...] so one shouldn’t be surprised of the rather impressive crowd [...] which seemed untidy” (Duțu, 2005, 45-46).

An enlightening characterisation of Antonescu’s behaviour during the inspection tour is given in the memories of general Ion Gheorghe: „frequent and unforeseen controls and harsh punishments resulted in the paralisation of the initiative and finally made the frontline commanders lose confidence in their own abilities” (Gheorghe, 1996, 195).

We can go on quoting from the analysis made by the General Staff of the Guard Division after the first week of war. They observed the difficulties provoked by an “insufficient neutralization of the enemy’s artillery, by not properly identifying the Soviet pillboxes and strong points. Also the lack of teams specialized in assaulting and destroying pillboxes, equipped with specialized devices and the lack of combined arms support (artillery and aerial – especially dive-bombers) is noted” (Duțu, Retegan, 1999, 195). It is a distinct possibility that the other Romanian divisions have met similar shortages, given the fact that The Guard Division and The Armored Division were regarded as “top units” of the Romanian Army.

To conclude, many of the problems faced by the liberating (or “attacking”, by the Soviet terminology) army were actually recorded and duly reported. But a number of objective causes have prevented their remediation. The most important (which also prevented a better reforming and rearming during the first months of General Antonescu’s regime) was that in times of war the modern equipment was very difficult to find. Another reason was that in spite of many opinions, the war wasn’t over yet, not even for the Romanian soldiers: the siege of Odessa was to last until mid-October and quite a number of Romanian units continued advancing alongside the Wehrmacht, both East of the Dniester and in Crimea. Finally, there was the simple truth that our army was “too small for such a big war”: we simply didn’t have the manpower, the logistics or the resources to lead a war of the new “total” kind, against the Soviet Union.

## **Epilogue**

General Antonescu had not even waited for the siege of Odessa to be concluded in order to get the rank of Marshall – which he actually decided to bestow upon himself, as “Conducator”, the supreme executive leader of the country. The ceremony took place on August 22nd, after he had been advanced in rank in March 1941 as Army General (highest rank in the Romanian military in times of peace) and awarded with the German “Iron Cross”, in the rank of Knight (on August 6th) and with the “Mihai Viteazu” Order, Ist and IInd Class, on August 21st.

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**THE MEMORY OF THE TOTALITARIAN-COMMUNIST REGIME'S VICTIMS:  
FROM THE DICTATE OF SILENCE TO THE STATUS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE.  
THE AVATAR OF AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

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**Abstract:** *The study presents the results of research projects carried out within the framework of the State Program “The Recovery and Historical Valorization of the Totalitarian-Communist Regime Victims’ Memory in the Moldovan SSR in the period 1940-1941, 1944-1953” implemented in the Republic of Moldova, especially those obtained from museum collections and historical investigation. The absence of systematic and scientific approaches to the problem of memory and trauma of the totalitarian-communist regime in the Republic of Moldova has de-synchronized the processes of de-communization for several decades, and the memory of the totalitarian-communist period is still fragile, not fully acknowledged or integrated by all memory communities. Through the State Program, for the first time in the Republic of Moldova, in 2015, a series of interdisciplinary projects started to collect and to investigate testimonies from survivors in the context of other documentary sources, the valorization of which was an unpostponable task. The research has expanded the horizon of historical knowledge concerning the period of forced Sovietization in Bessarabia and the mechanisms of totalitarian-Communist terror in Moldovan SSR in the years 1940-1941, 1944-1953, as well as providing a database for the investigation of post-totalitarian memory and the memory culture in the Republic of Moldova.*

**Keywords:** *memories, oral history, politics of memory, post-Soviet society, Republic of Moldova.*

## Introduction

In the Republic of Moldova, the processes of de-communization have had a sinuous path since Independence until today. The publication of collections of archive documents (Postică, 1999-2005; Moraru, 2009; Cojocaru, 2010; Varta et al., 2010; Varta, 2011; Tașcă, 2014), the inauguration of museums<sup>62</sup>, the publishing of memoirs (Petrencu et al., 2014, 305-319; Cojocaru, Pădureac, 2015, 7-58) and, last but not least, the actions taken at the political level<sup>63</sup> have

proven plausible but insufficient efforts for a definitive and irreversible detachment from the totalitarian past. The pursuit of hybrid governments, typical for the whole post-Soviet space, has been characterized by “cyclically determined nostalgia and backward leaps, increasing distance and multiplying the discrepancies between the memory communities” (Bîrlădeanu, Pădureac, 2017, 5). In the same way, from one government to another, the political class has developed an opportunistic strategy, preferring to silently pass through the serious themes<sup>64</sup> of the past, and rather, to spread its own mythologies. The historian’s profession in the Republic of Moldova has been, until a few years ago, marked by restricted access to archives, along with insufficient resources for historical research and editing; clearly, it continues to be

<sup>62</sup> For example, the Museum of Victims of Deportation and Political Repression in Chișinău; the “Siberiada” Museum (concerning deportations to Siberia) in the village of Mereni, Anenii Noi county; and the “Memoria Neamului” Museum in Chișinău.

<sup>63</sup> Presidential Decree of 24 June 2010, declaring the 28 June 1940 “The Day of the Soviet Occupation and Commemoration of the Victims of the Totalitarian-Communist Regime”; unveiling the “Commemorative Stone” in the Great National Assembly Square in Chișinău; the funding of “The commission for studying

and appreciating the totalitarian-Communist regime in the Republic of Moldova”.

<sup>64</sup> A phenomenon known as the “history-less elite”, found in post-Soviet societies (see: Cohen, 1999).

understood by the state officials<sup>65</sup> only as a function that should support and legitimate “the party line” or the officials’ policies. Indeed, the same also often advise historians not to disturb the silence of the (post-Soviet) nomenclature (“not to shake the past”) and not to provoke the victims’ desire for revenge. In fact, the institutions of the post-totalitarian state tacitly suggested that they would remain silent about the past, even in the case of actual crimes committed during the totalitarian-Communist regime. They have accepted only the discussion of the formal recognition and partial compensation of costs for property confiscated by the Soviet state. In such circumstances, undocumented, arbitrary and tendentious assessments of the totalitarian-Communist regime have left their mark on the interpretations of this same past by its victims. The memory, state of mind and status of victims has been directly affected. They too, for the most part, have chosen to keep silent about their memories and pain.<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, even after the publication of a series of monographs elaborated on the basis of research with archival documents (Pasat, 2006; Pasat, 2009; Pasat, 2011; Petrencu, 2013; Olaru-Cemîrtan, 2013; Cașu, 2015), the partisans of the inherited historiographical trend of proverbial sadness continue to interpret the horrors of the Sovietization of Bessarabia from 1940-1941 and 1944-1953 as a regrettable phenomenon. They see it as episodic and uncharacteristic for the (established) Soviet regime, largely determined by the unprofessionalism and abuses in service committed by party officials and local and republican rank administration (Nazarija, 2016, 452-453; Repida, 2008, 146, 218). It is as if, for them, the horrors ended with the acts of deportation, torture or murder. Yet the figures ought to give pause for reflection: it is well known that the repressive system and “The Red Terror” were put into action by the party-state “in the struggle against class enemies” during the first years of Soviet power. Researchers, analyzing archive documents, have calculated that a total of 6 to 14.5 million people were deported in the course of the 52 deportation campaigns deployed throughout the USSR during the period 1920-

1952<sup>67</sup>. The magnitude of this phenomenon is unprecedented in universal history. Surely, there were grave consequences for the communities and regions affected by this advance of Soviet totalitarianism (Jakovlev, 2005, 9-10, 12; Carevna-Djakina, 2004, 23).

Analyzing the essence of Stalinism and its social consequences, researchers have emphasized that the survival of Stalinist terror itself has become a painful problem for those who have returned from the Gulag. It is as painful as the problem faced by the returning victims of Nazi concentration camps (Cohen, 2012, 26). For some of the victims, the repression was such a traumatic experience that until the end of their lives they continued to fear, hide the past, and refuse to talk about it even with their closest friends; they even avoided meetings with other survivors (Cohen, 2012, 57). Tortured by memories, regrets and feelings of guilt, other survivors have nevertheless found the power to confront their memory and to start talking about what had happened. Concerning the dilemmas of traumatized memory, a suggestive contribution is signed by Stefan Ionescu. Referring to the trauma of Holocaust survivors, he writes that failing to bury their own trauma with their own eyes, these people

“[...] tried to understand, to give meaning to everything that happened in that nightmare. They have found an important role in society, that of the *witness* – the person who relates his experience to others in order to commemorate the victims, but also to prevent the repetition of the tragedy. Thus, they found part of their self-confidence and human dignity that they had lost in the Inferno. By telling of the experience to the whole world and warning society of the danger of its repetition, the witness has become a real institution in contemporary society that can no longer be abstracted.”(Ionescu, 2004, 362-390)

Without capitalizing on these first-hand historical sources with reference to the phenomenon of totalitarianism<sup>68</sup> and by further postponing the undertaking of complex and systematic interdisciplinary studies on the subject we risk feeding the competing memories and even the growth in nostalgic feelings and attitudes for the regime of Soviet occupation in the Moldavian

<sup>65</sup> The state is responsible for overseeing the universities, the Academy of Sciences, museums and other major sites of historiographical training, research and professional activity.

<sup>66</sup> About the relation between memory-silence-oblivion, see: *Ricoeur*, 2001; Passerini, 2003, 238-254; Vinitzky-Seroussi, Teeger, 2010, 1103-1122; Fivush, 2010, 88-98.

<sup>67</sup> The difference in total figures arises from differences in the categorizations used by individual researchers.

<sup>68</sup> We consider totalitarian phenomenon both the Holocaust and the forced Sovietization within the space between the Prut and Nistru in the years 1940-1941 and 1944-1953.

SSR (Bîrlădeanu, 2012, 693-700; Cojocaru, 2011, 170-182).

The present study aims at presenting the efforts undertaken by Moldovan researchers in the historical recovery and valorization of the memory of the victims of the totalitarian-communist regime in the Moldovan SSR. Our further aim is to remove this memory from the shadows and promote its understanding at the wider societal level. Following a theoretical approach to documentation in line with recent Western publications and a methodological elaboration that linked new data to the historical-cultural context of the space in question ensured that during the years 2010-2018, a group of researchers assembled a complex database (oral history interviews, family archives, journals, and photographs) for the interdisciplinary approach to memory. Reviewing the most representative research results carried out within the State Program "The Recovery and Historical Valorization of the Totalitarian-Communist Regime Victims' Memory in the Moldovan SSR in the period 1940-1941, 1944-1953"<sup>69</sup>, we will present their scientific potential for raised awareness about the consequences of the totalitarian-Communist regime on the generation of survivors and the prospects for reconciliation in today's society.

### **The memory of the totalitarian-Communist regime's victims: between memory politics and research directions**

Following the dramatic events of 7 April 2009<sup>70</sup>, transformations in the field of memory politics have encouraged new directions and research projects close to the European path of the Republic of Moldova. Our preoccupations to know the memory of the survivors of the totalitarian-Communist regime began in early 2010 with work on the book collection "Romanians in the Gulag: Memoirs, Testimonies, Documents"<sup>71</sup>. The experience gained in this

research project drew our attention toward two key elements: the status of *witness* of the interviewed person and the *historical document condition* of the memories he or she shared. Thus, we chose to publish not only the *life story* but integral *case studies* that were constituted by an introductory note (capable of highlighting "interest centers of the story relating to the personality of the narrator, and also common ways of understanding situations, circumscribing facts, interpreting realities" (Vultur, 1997, 15), the testimonies of the interviewed person, fortifying testimonies from the family archive, as well as further documentation from the mass-media of the period and documents from the archives of the former institutions of Soviet repression.

Furthermore, during 2012, the Center of Excellence of the "ProMemoria" Institute (CE Institute "ProMemoria") of the State University of Moldova addressed the board of the Academy of Sciences of Moldova (ASM) regarding the necessity to recover the testimonies of the survivors of deportations and repression policies from 1940-1941 and 1944-1953 and of the organized famine in 1946-1947. We argued that these needed to be recovered, valorized and introduced into the scientific circuit and made accessible to the public. The addresses in mass-media and the research proposals initiated by the CE Institute "ProMemoria" did not meet the support of Moldovan officials (Petrencu, Cojocaru, 2013, 2). However, based on the experience gained by the CE Institute "ProMemoria" and encouraged by the survivors' efforts to share their memoirs, we continued our research into the issue of Stalinist deportations, so that, in 2014, after repeated submission of the same project application, we succeeded in obtaining the recognition of this historical theme and including it in the State Program of Moldova's Academy of Sciences.

Thus, as of 2015, the State Program "The Recovery and Historical Valorization of the Totalitarian-Communist Regime Victims' Memory in the Moldovan SSR in the period 1940-1941, 1944-1953" carried out for the first time in the Republic of Moldova a complex interdisciplinary research on the memory of the totalitarian-Communist regime. By extending the theoretical foundations and modernizing the

<sup>69</sup> Neither funding nor support from the state was forthcoming until 2015 (see below). Then we succeeded in gaining both with the State Program of the ASM, code 15.857.06.02F, coordinated by Prof. dr. hab. Anatol Petrencu, Centre of Excellence of the "ProMemoria" Institute, USM.

<sup>70</sup> We refer to public riots against the results of a parliamentary election that favored the Communist Party and the Parliament building was burned, possibly following orders of the government itself rather than from the hands of the rioters.

<sup>71</sup> Collective research project "Romanians in the Gulag: The Recovery and Historical Valorization of the Memory of the Victims of the Totalitarian-Communist

Regime in Bessarabia (1940-1941, 1944-1953)", supported by the Policy Department for Romanians Abroad, November 2013 – February 2014; January – December 2015, code U1-1/717/28.06.2013 MAE-DPRRP, resulted with the publication of collection "Romanians in the Gulag" (Petrencu et al., 2014; Petrencu et al., 2015).

research tools, the testimonies of the victims of the totalitarian-Communist regime can now be included in the category of historical sources of documentary value, thus giving historical research a more complex and convincing dimension in the restitution of the totalitarian past. The activity of memory recovery and research proposes a new reading of the traditional sources of the field, confronted, supplemented and put into dialogue with oral history documents, documents, photos, and testimonies kept in family archives. In each instance, newly collected case studies start with the consultation, analysis and, if necessary, the addition of the data published in the documentary collection "Book of Memory. The Catalog of the Victims of the Communist Totalitarianism" (Postică, 1999-2005, vol. I-IV).

The achievements of the State Program are approached through individual and team efforts designed to stimulate the process of the democratization of society through reflections, interpretations, and conclusions formulated and disseminated in the mass-media about the period of Soviet power in the Moldavian SSR. They are designed to encourage communication at the public level with the people ("memory communities") previously discriminated by the totalitarian-Communist regime.

In the period 2015-2018, the State Program has been implemented by researchers from research centers at the State University of Moldova, the State University "Al. Russo" of Bălți, the State University "B.P. Hasdeu" of Cahul, the National Museum of History of Moldova, and the Institute of History and the Institute of Encyclopedic Studies of the ASM. The main goal of the State Program is the recovery and historical research of collective memory regarding the period of establishment and constitution of the totalitarian-Communist regime in the Moldovan SSR between 1940-1941, 1944-1953 (political repression, provoked famine, deportations, forced labor, and collectivization). This is being accomplished by collecting and digitizing testimonies and interviews, securing their scientific valorization, and bringing about their publication and discussion in the mass-media. We are informing public opinion and disseminating the results of historical research through publications and round tables, scientific conferences, and thematic exhibitions. We are expanding and sharing the valorization of collective memory by developing support materials and instructions for teaching staff. The State Program is further developing an action plan with the potential to stimulate the communication process between the memory communities of the

Republic of Moldova. Finally, we seek to combine our data with the experience accumulated by other researchers from Romania, Lithuania and Moldova involved in historical research of the victims of the totalitarian regime in Bessarabia.

Through its activities, the State Program continues to promote and create a new field for the scientific milieu of the Republic of Moldova. The research of the totalitarian past has fundamental implications and presents an important element in the emergence of a society undergoing democratization. We use a combined approach to memory that consists of the collection of oral history supported by the methods of participatory observation and the ethnographic method, as well as by the use of archival documents, testimonies, and documents held by families. This combined approach offers new perspectives and elucidates multiple aspects of the history of the totalitarian-Communist regime in the Moldovan SSR.

At the end of 2017, the first six volumes of the book collection "Archives of Memory" were printed. Testimonies of persons who were victims of political repression, famine, deportation, and collectivization by the Soviet state between 1940-1941 and 1944-1953 present relevant sources of historical documentary value in the knowledge of the causes, manifestations and consequences of the totalitarian phenomenon in today's Moldovan society. In cooperation with the National Museum of History of Moldova, two photo-documentary exhibitions were opened in the museums of the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (Postică, Cojocaru, 2016; Postică, Cojocaru, 2018). A digital archive was created that includes all the materials collected within the State Program.

### **Methodological aspects**

Exploiting the memory of the Stalinist deportations from the Moldovan SSR is, first of all, a project of historical recuperation. From a methodological point of view, the research encompasses the study of archival documents, periodicals of that historical period and materials published after the rehabilitation of deportees, consultations of family archives and thematic bibliographies. All of these sources are corroborated with oral history testimonies. During field research, our choice was specifically directed at ordinary people who had not previously been able to share their memoirs in a public context, but who were open to sharing their tragic experience. Field surveys included memory communities from different regions of the

Republic of Moldova, including representatives of ethnic communities: Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians, Gagauz, Jews, and Lithuanians. On request, interviewees were allowed to speak in Russian or Ukrainian, their memories later being translated into Romanian. We also took into account the results of previous researches on the theme of commemorative culture in the Republic of Moldova; they reveal numerous cases when the overstretched media coverage of a restricted circle of respondents risks creating stereotyped memories taken over by the commemorative discourse practices. (Bîrlădeanu, Cojocaru, 2009, 22-31; Cojocaru, 2008, 233-247; Cojocaru, 2007, 87-116) In addition, it has been taken into account that the memory of Stalinist deportations in the Republic of Moldova is still under the influence of collective sensitivities and recent political agendas; some parties often instrumentalize or abhor commemorative practices and discourse exclusively for election purposes, encouraging and increasing the distance between competitive memories.

The research was carried out by the method of deep interview, discreetly intervening in the narrative of the interviewed person. The guide for a semi-structured interview, developed in advance for this project concept, was applied during field work according to the situation, the working style and the interviewer's experience. The interaction between the researcher and the interviewee has been stated as an extremely important factor in the elucidation of the past, the narrative being determined by the trust established between the two parties, by the researcher's skills in coordinating the dialogue and, last but not least, by the context of the oral history interview. Similarly, the magnitude of the emotional experiences through which memories are transmitted has been prioritized in their valorization. Certainly, this kind of memory is predominantly fractured, given the dramatic events experienced by interviewees (forced labor, arrests, war, famine) and semantic mutations in power discourse after Stalin's death, the dissolution of the USSR and the subsequent return of the Communist Party in politics.

In order to obtain a complex image, during fieldwork we have extended the chronological limits and geographic frames of reference for the memories we elicit. Accordingly, we have collected, as a matter of course: memories of everyday life, schooling, health conditions, relationships with local populations (in and out of exile), interactions with the institutions of power, restoration of relationships with relatives, preservation of identity traditions during exile, as

well as any other testimonies capable of clarifying the informant's experience of the interwar period, the Second World War and the post-Soviet period. Research of oral history narratives as sources of study, beyond the emotional intensity and strides of the historical context in which they were lived, reveals generous information at the level of perceptions, experiences, and attitudes from the moment of occurrence (Maynes, 2008, 67).

It is also relevant that the field research also involves observing and recording silence. Silence is inherent to the process of collecting and recovering testimonies (Grele, 1985, 136; Fivush, 2010, 88-98; Adler et al., 2011; Vinitzky-Seroussi, Teeger, 2010, 1118). Silence of the survivors of the totalitarian-Communist regime is deeply articulated to the trauma generated in individual and collective consciousness by the mechanisms of forced Sovietization (Cojocaru, 2018, 326-340). As a social construct, silence is unstable and unpredictable because, being dressed in social-humanistic reasoning, there have been both conscious attempts from the side of the authorities and, most often, unconscious ones, by the society in general, to forget, deny, and rationalize this dramatic moment (Bolea, 2017, 85).

In all cases of transcribing interviews, the texts have been reproduced fully, eliminating only the unintelligible parts. Frequent repetitions or reasons of confidentiality for some interview cases where the narrative cannot be reproduced are replaced by [...]. Words that help to understand meaning are inserted between hooks [], and the transcription of interviews was made as close as possible to the original testimonies, preserving, for example, regionalisms and phrases in Russian. Translations and explanations are made at the bottom of the page or in the compartment *Abbreviations*.

### **The traumatic dimension of the deportation memory**

The memory of the Stalinist deportations reveals traumatic experiences: the ordeal of a journey to the "end of the world"; the fear of being exterminated ("they will make soap from their bones", "we will be thrown into the Volga"); frustration due to inhuman transportation conditions; the reticence of the local population toward the deportees during the first months of exile ("they were told that cannibals are coming", "they thought we were like monkeys"); the conditions of exhausting labor ("I almost did not see my father", "Mommy was at work, somewhere on Syrdarija"); chronic malnutrition ("Everybody counts the potatoes put in the pot");



the precariousness of resources and sanitation (barracks, bedbugs, lice); the lack of water and severe cold in the first years of exile (“the potato for the next day had to be put under the pillow so it would not freeze”); the continuous surveillance regime (“we were kept all the time so that we wouldn’t run away...”). The revisiting of these memories produces suffering and pain, never succeeding in fully healing over. These are not scars but scabs: “it seems as if everything has been settled, but now we have shaken these memories and they are bleeding again”.

Most of the collected testimonies refer to the process of implementing the forced resettlement policies of Moldovan SSR in the eastern regions of the Soviet Union as a *time* and *place of trauma* (“we were in captivity”, “when we returned from that exile...”). *The memory of the places* of deportation is articulated as a space lived under the mark of everyday life “which memorizes the stories still unspoken, the relationship and the confrontation between people and the historical and socio-cultural backgrounds of their lives” (Radosav, 2005, 10). The place of “forever” dislocation of the Bessarabians deported with the whole family as they were on the night of raising – only wearing their clothes (“in our shirts”) – is revealed as foreign, unfriendly, unknown (“surging” “Siberia of ice”, “food for wolves”, “to the white bears”). The geography of the Soviet Union was taught live, with a frightened child gazing at the barriers of the freight carriage window (“these are the Ural Mountains”, “I saw the Volga”, “there were Russian hamlets”, “I was on the river Irtyš”). The mature people lived in their own way the trauma of crossing the border between *freedom* and *surging*, as from a place of *the homeland* to that of *foreignness* (“how women were crying when they crossed the bridge in Ukraine!”, “how they sang songs of sorrow!”).

The first years of exile, especially the first winter, are remembered as the maximum intensity of the trauma of deportation (“the hardest was in the early years, especially the first winter”). Memories of subsequent years might soften: before the liberation, after having managed to achieve the survival of households and families with the price of superhuman efforts, the perception of the time and place of deportation sometimes reveals an appreciation for the beauty of local nature and the kindness of the natives (“how rich it was; me, I would not have been able to see such beauty of nature”, “there were nice people”, “they do not betray”). Still, these remembrances of later times are full with the sounds of the deportation: weeping, carriages,

Russian insults, mourning, and especially the jerked Russian speech of orders and the place of the first forced displacement (“otdelenie No. 1”, “barrak No. 8”, “Kurganskaja oblast”, “Kosyginiskijrajon, derevnja Konstantinovka”) – as an address of life imprisonment.

The feeling of *foreignness* and *exile* was intensified by their assignment to a “special” and restricted zone (Rus. *Спецпереселенцы/ spetspereselentsy* or *спецпоселенцы/ spetsposelentsy*). The first term emphasizes transit and the second settlement, but both terms were euphemisms concealing the actual condemnation of deportees to forced labor and residence in the eastern regions of the Soviet Union. Today, some of the settlements recorded in the topography of the deportees’ memory no longer exist. The people who were taken there by the Bolshevik terror and remained silent forever in the land of deportation exist only in the memory of those who have met them. Local Soviet government bodies made systematic efforts to maintain the sentiment of being a condemned person by systematic controls and intimidations and, rarely exercised these functions in the interests of those who were under surveillance.

Trauma of the deportees is also articulated by the application of the stigma “kulak” and “enemy of the people”. These were the names which were applied to a person as justification for his or her removal. The introduction into the power discourse of the notion “kulak” produced confusion and perplexity among the locals (“I did not know what this thing is that is called *kulak*!”). Field testimonies reveal the dramatic evolution of the meaning of this word in the context of the rise of Soviet power in the Moldovan SSR. Therefore, being a *kulak* served the purpose of personifying the “enemy” (Viola, 2007) and designated inhumane features (“*kulaks* kill their relatives, their children”, “they are cannibals”). Thus, the notion *kulak* articulated the forms of “absolute alterity” (“cannibal”, “thugs”, “gypsies”) and served as a tool for inoculating those who remained a collective sense of guilt for the deportation of others.

In contrast to the image of *foreignness*, the deportees’ memories relate the image of their *homeland* and of their *parental house* (Ro. *casa părintească*). Their mention is found in all the memories of the deportees, leaving the impression of a life lived simultaneously in two different worlds: the real one and the imaginary homeland. These experiences were manifested in different ways, common being their anchoring in the homeland calendar: the sacred time of the holidays (“today is Christmas in the village”,

“today is Easter”), the village’s *hram* (“if it was the *hram* of someone’s village, they invited guests and celebrated it”), family traditions (baptism, weddings, funerals). The longing for *homeland* made the deportees able to face the cycle of seasons in the conditions of exile: despite the harsh frosts or the mud outside, the Bessarabians lived in the rhythm of the four seasons of their homeland (“now it’s time when the grapes are ripe”, “the cherries are blossoming”, “it’s the time when apricots are blooming”).

The shortage and misery of deportation life contrasts sharply with the image kept in memory of the *parental house* and the households left after the rise of the *village’s forefront* (“the vineyard was abandoned”, “the house was unkempt”, “they stole everything”). The image of the parents’ house is outlined by the grapes in the school notebooks<sup>72</sup>, through the Bessarabian carpet rushed from the “guests’ room” (Ro. *casa mare*) on the night of the deportation<sup>73</sup> or by the stain left by the foot of a wineglass on the newspapers packed in parcels from Moldova<sup>74</sup>. This sentiment of home-missing is authenticated by the many pictures of the house in Bessarabia that was sent to the deportees by those left at home<sup>75</sup>. Similarly, the memories synthesize practices of ethnic solidarity (“Moldovans from other villages were as our relatives”) with solidarity in repairing barracks or house-building, even as the awareness of ethnic identity was marginalized through processes of Russification and Sovietization (“I could not forgive the Communists that they deprived me of my mother tongue”, “they punished us because I used the Bible”, “they forced us to sing *chastushki*...”).

The themes of traumatized memory and marginalized voices, as they have taken shape in public space since 1991, have been engaged with the legitimization of the various nation-building projects of each post-Soviet government. They have been much less engaged in terms of commemoration or reconciliation with the past. Going beyond the experience of trauma for the victims of Stalinist deportations calls for

continuous work on their own experiences, with their own society however difficult, unacceptable or unpleasant this is for the political class. In every family in the Republic of Moldova we find echoes of totalitarian-Communist repressions: it is important to remember that these echoes include both the victims and the authors of these atrocities. The assumption of the role of victim is largely maintained through family memories, but there is no similar family memory of those involved in the criminal actions initiated by the Soviet state. This past is still silent and undocumented.

### Final considerations

The perception of the totalitarian-Communist past in the Republic of Moldova is characterized by dramatic discrepancies between private and public opinion, between biography and history, between official policies and local commemoration practices. The new articulation of images, attitudes, and perceptions about the life that people experienced is necessary to help us to know the past. Collective memory in a democratic society admits the justice and the message of the opposing memoirs, constituting as a whole a compatible (if competitive) community of memories.

The initiative of this research program is part of a long-standing oral history project to study the memory of Communist repressions in Soviet Moldova, and the support of academic structures and civil society are more than welcome. These people are still waiting for us to document their experience of life and their untold trauma in the decades to come because they are part of our common past. Collecting, recording and analyzing the memories of those who have suffered and survived the Communist regime is what we can do today so that the phenomenon of totalitarianism and the committed crimes do not happen again.

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<sup>72</sup>Nadejda Pascal (b. 1943), deported in 1949 from the village of Durlești to the region of Tjumen (Petrencu et al. 2014, 63).

<sup>73</sup>Viorica Ilașciuc (b. 1938), deported in 1949 from the village of Aluniș to the region of Kurgan (Petrencu et al. 2014, 130).

<sup>74</sup>Gheorghe Bunescu (b. 1942), deported in 1949 from the village of Logănești to the region of Tjumen (Petrencu et al. 2014, 102).

<sup>75</sup>Maria Zmău (b. 1935), deported in 1949 from the village of Limbenii Vechi to Kurgan (Petrencu et al. 2014, 237).

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Cojocaru      *Siberian Shackles. Bessarabian Children Deported by the Totalitarian-Communist Regime*  
2018      *during the Years 1940-1941 and 1944-1953*”, Chişinău, National Museum of History of  
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## PARADOXES OF A ROMANIAN PROPAGANDA PRONATALIST FILM POSTCARD WITH WILD FLOWERS

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**Abstract:** *The article explores the narrative, characters and social-cultural background of the only Romanian communist film on the matter of abortion during the period 1966-1989 after the Decree 770 declared abortion illegal in 1966. Although Andrei Blaier was a submissive communist director, the film Postcard with Wild Flowers failed to comply with the pronatalist policy and its message impresses due to the tragic dimensions and authenticity of stereotypical characters, as well as significant colorful details of Romanian communist era. The film is a pretext for presenting the paradoxical status of the Romanian woman under national communism, subject to a complicated social pressure. On the other hand, the same period turned out to be a period of undesirable babies, many of them murdered coldheartedly with the help of an entire underground system. We offer a glimpse into this tragic phenomenon with little research.*

**Keywords:** *Pronatalist policy, Decree 770, Romanian propaganda film, national-communist regime, woman's status*

### Ceaușescu's pronatalist policy. General considerations

The propaganda film may be considered a fruitful source of getting to know a historical period and/or a certain subject, along with other sources, such as the historical documentation and the historiographical discourse. The film is situated at the interference between the political area and the people's expectations.

In order to know the history of communism the official documents generated by the system remain one substantial source despite the fact that it is situated in the category of recent history. That is why the subjective sources of the period are essential and useful to obtain a complex image of the epoch. Regarding the cinema, we may say that due to its specific cinematographic language, it offers the rational understanding, as well as the empathetic involvement of the culture consumer, ensuring thus the perception of a conflicting interaction between the axiological constants of the era, an interaction that generates collective suffering.

An unprecedented pronatalist policy was imposed in communist Romania by Nicolae Ceaușescu on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1966

by the Decree 770 concerning the abortion. Despite the pronatalist policy applied during the next 20 years<sup>76</sup>, with all the other alterations brought to the mentioned decree, the effects were genocidal, affecting all citizens regardless of their marital and/or reproductive status<sup>77</sup>.

The party declared that the project of the *new man* determines the policies of the state, as well as the status of the family, especially women and children. The family was regarded as a reproductive unit, while the woman was reduced to her biological status and the child was significant as a necessary potential for asserting the national-communist nation. Thus

<sup>76</sup> The Decree 770/1966 criminalized abortion, abolishing the Decree 463/1957 that liberalized it; it presented the exemptions and established the sanctions (published in *Buletinul Oficial al RSR*, no. 60 of 1 October 1966). Demographic strategies had three legislative stages: 1966-73, 1974-84, 1984-9.

<sup>77</sup> See the Law 1/1977, Chapter III: Contribution of people with no children who work in state socialist units in *Buletinul Oficial al RSR*, no. 60 of 8 July 1977; Decree 409/1985 regarding the increase of contributions of people with no children in *Buletinul Oficial al RSR*, no. 76 of 26 December 1985.



the woman's body was manipulated and divested of her right to plan her maternal moment; the individual project was annihilated, along with the private life of a couple. Moreover, we may say that the population was subject to a collective rape (Petre, 1998, 268)<sup>78</sup>. In other words, by implementing the Decree 770/1966 a system of institutionalized surveillance was established, a functional system of constantly supervising the fertile woman (Jinga, 2015, 140<sup>78</sup>). Such monitoring was the visible sign of duplicity regarding the gender equality (Betea, 2004, 244). During the period of national communism, the Romanian woman was forced to recognize and accept the difference and subordination (Gorsuch, 1996, 646)<sup>79</sup>. While at least in theory in Stalinism the woman was 'reinvented' as an omnipresent social being, in national communism she was minimized, as the Ministry of Education elaborated a list of professions suitable for women in 1966. That was the proof of a double standard regarding woman's equality and liberty of choice when it comes to choosing an occupation. Eighty three out of 233 professions ensured by professional schools were indicated for women, seen as suitable to their level of intelligence and physical qualities (Jinga, 2015, 248-9).

The daily press was one of the channels for pronatalist propaganda, addressed to the feminine segment (see *Femeia, Almanahul Femeia, Sănătatea*), as well as brochures and documentaries (as *The Abortion* and *Fulfilment* – Jinga, 2015, 141) that were seen in factories where numerous women were working.

### **Postcard with Wild Flowers – pro-life propaganda film**

A single film approaches the subject of illegal abortion during the national communist period – *Postcard with Wild Flowers*. The movie appeared in 1974, the year when

Ceaușescu instituted the status of President of the Socialist Romanian Republic, as the cult of personality became a certainty for every Romanian. This being the background, Andrei Blaier, a director who complied with the party direction, was about to make a movie ordered from above<sup>80</sup> but inspired by a true story, a movie that turned out to be not that efficient as a propaganda product<sup>81</sup>. This cinematographic piece was transformed into a 'dramatic story due to its simplicity, two lives brutally crushed in the most original film of an otherwise conformist cinema-maker' (Caranfil, 2008, 431). The movie continues to impress due to its realistic heroes and investigated mentalities. The director's formula may be described as the choice of 'the game of being out of time concerning the moods, the situations, and the events. The movie presents the sequence of a wedding, while 'illegal' events take place that lead to a tragic end for two young heroines' (Rădulescu, 2013).

The narrative of the movie supposes three tragic episodes that take place in a marginal neighborhood during two days, a micro-universe populated with philistine people or those caught in the routine of socio-professional habits, hypocrisies and inertia. The background is a seemingly endless wedding in a rhythm constituted by a permanent rush, petty concerns.

The analyzed movie announced the birth of minimalism in the Romanian cinematography. The beginning of the movie is constituted by images that seem to be excerpts from a documentary or coverage<sup>82</sup>: the sunflowers grow in abundance on the side of a river-port town, the banks are covered with corn; in the background people sunbathe or work on those parcels with corn. Some other details are presented through binoculars, as if watched by sailors who return home. The details, faded colors, short, yet significant sequences are specific to these first images of

<sup>78</sup> See details on the institutionalised functioning of female repression in Jinga, Soare 2011.

<sup>79</sup> Women's fundamental otherness made them less than the equals of men: less fortunate individuals who had to be educated into political awareness and given "something practical" to do", in Gorsuch, 1996, 646 apud Călin Morar-Vulcu, „Între „noi” și „ei”: identitatea politică a femeii în discursul comunist” [“Between us and them: the Political Identity of Women in Communist Discourse”] in Cosma, Țârău, 2002, 210.

<sup>80</sup> The film had a substantial budget, as the authorities insisted to launch it as soon as possible, regarding it as a propaganda piece. The film had 2.158.909 viewers until 2005 – “Sinopsis” [http://www.secvente.ro/2012/06/ilustrate-cu-floride-camp.html, accessed 13 February 2013].

<sup>81</sup> Party propaganda would confer a different angle of interpretation to the film in the spirit of national-communism. See Vasile, 2011, 276-89.

<sup>82</sup> Andrei Blaier was an experienced documentary director.

the film. Although apparently contrasting daily activities with the lyrical music of Radu Șerban, they don't offer a taste of the dramatic plot. Whilst the wedding becomes noisy since exiting the city hall, a young woman from Bucharest arrives into the city in search for a 'midwife' ('aunty Titina') in order to get an abortion. She is met at the railway station by the daughter of a third party, innocent Irina, unaware of her mother's involvement in such dreadful affairs. Nevertheless, Irina senses at a certain moment the confusion of the young Laura. The 'midwife' and Irina's old mother make a mistake while inducing the abortion, and Laura dies. Irina feels guilty of her involuntary complicity to this unpredictable and traumatic situation; the disgust towards her mother's moral decay prevails in a mix of feelings. Hiding Laura's death is yet another horrible act that pushes young Irina to the horrid suicide in order to 'atone'.

The film provides several stereotypical characters. Fear and rapacity transform people into negative characters, foolish, even burlesque ones. The manager Marin, Titina's lover, is always ready to drink a beer, to make others feel good, even if he does it out of an egotistic social exhibitionism. He is a petty parvenu who manages to earn money out of anything. Titina the 'midwife' is a carnal, loud and brutal woman while relating to those who are vulnerable; at the same time, as a godmother of the groom, she is helpful and involved (humorous episodes are generated by her involvement in the wedding). Both Marin and Titina are atypical and ridiculous lovers united by their voracity to supplement their income. Laura's secret lover, the architect Titiel, is a spoiled offspring, a late seducer, an adulterer willing to get rid of Laura at any costs because of her pregnancy, considered a 'complication'. They represent the illegal couple: a young flippant woman who worships her lover and a conformist family guy who spices up his life with Laura.

Andrei Blaier, the director and script writer, used in his movie consecrated comical forms, especially situations and characters, forms generated by ambiguous situations also specific to dramas and melodramas. Titina's and Niculina's hysteria after killing Laura negligently are lamenting and accusing each other; after they threaten to expose one another, both calm down and try to find solutions while drinking coffee in their fancy dresses, coming

directly from the wedding. Both 'midwives' try to guess how many years of imprisonment await them for their deed and harass Irina into helping them to cover the murder.

The language of negative characters is a way of portraying them and a source that generates smiles, as they use the common language, vulgar phrases, especially with those weaker than themselves (see Titina humiliating Laura and bullying her). The formal faith of these social circles is also transposed on the screen: making the sign of the cross or mentioning religious symbols – aspects that add to the sarcasm and cynicism of the situation.

The abortion is only suggested in the movie; the *mise-en-scène* is less cynical than in the later well-known movie 432 of Cristian Mungiu (Grancea, 2014, 22-32). The abortion is preceded by Irina's attempts to make Laura change her mind; Laura's regrets and doubts are evident after starting the procedure. The heart rending tones of music cover the preparations for the procedure in the bathroom and suggest convincingly the trauma of both young women. Irritated by the confusion of the two young women, Titina and Niculina hurry to finish everything as soon as possible in order to return to the wedding.

Unable to cope with remorse and guilt, Irina wanders on the streets and after facing the hallucinating reality of a body in her home, commits suicide in the toy shop where she was working, leaving a message to Victor with clues concerning the murder. However, Irina's last message on a postcard with wild flowers arrives later to Victor on the ship.

A documentary film from the post-communist period - *Născuți la comandă. Decreșii* [*Custom Born. Decreers*]<sup>83</sup>, a mainstream documentary (Blaga, 2003) - combines documentary sources (images from archives) and interviews of oral history and presents the real case, the inspiration for Blaier's movie. Maria Goran's remains, the victim of an illegal abortion, were discovered in the garden of a specialized 'midwife' two years after her tragic death; the 'midwife' herself, Trandafira Popescu, offered an interview about her activity, mentioning the

<sup>83</sup> Directed by Florin Iepan, 2005, a film produced by Subcultura Production, Westend Film&TV and Periscope Production.

fact that *Postcard with Wild Flowers* was too fictional.

### Unknown victims

Unfortunately, both the scientific investigation, as well as the communist cinematographic approach on the 'refuse-children' is overshadowed in post-communist Romanian environment. In embarking on such a research project one must take into account the specificity of the traditional education, according to which the communist morals condemned premarital sex so that accidental pregnancies were considered shameful. The social customary laws considered a baby born outside marriage a social stigma, while the Church regarded it as the fruit of sin; a baby born outside marriage was called *copil din flori*.

On the other hand, the cult of reproduction had another side effect – the increased death rate of infants, mostly babies predestined to abandonment. The desirable population growth supposed the birth of many unwanted children, either abandoned or raised with no parental affection as burdens. While some of them were raised in orphanages, others ended up in the hospitals of infantile psychiatry.

It was not until 1990 when the genocide of handicapped children at the Centre of Recovery and Rehabilitation for Handicapped People in Cighid, Bihor county, became known. There children ended up after being declared 'irrecoverable' by medical committees. Cighid was the place where children were left to die slowly with no food, heating, medicine or affection, being regarded as a burden, consumers of resources. Sixty two such children died there in 1988, most of them coming from families with up to ten children. The truth came out three months after the fall of the communist regime, when reporters from Spiegel TV<sup>84</sup> entered the horrid medical center, filmed and made public those images in a documentary. Ghastly images: children left

in their feces, yelling and 120 rusty beds, where children got together during cold winter months to warm themselves, found covered in rime in the morning. The German reporters said that Cighid medical center was one of the most horrifying places seen in Europe (Bonchiș, 2015).

Unfortunately, Romania had fifty such medical centers where similar atrocities took place. Most employees were people with lack of empathy and professionalism (see the testimonies about the neuro-psychic recovery from Siret, Suceava county)<sup>85</sup>. Thus, a collective guilt of a vicious system – doctors evaluated wrongly undesirable children, while the medical staff from those centers constantly ignored them till death.

### Several conclusions

The Romanian film on the illegal abortion offered several renowned cinematographic masterpieces, as well as the occasion to discuss one of the most obscure subjects of communism and to meditate on the related topics.

Ceaușescu's 'social experiment' was a collective tragedy, as its negative effects number 11.000 deceased women, countless moral and physically injured women, as well as family dramas<sup>86</sup>. Some death cases were due to the zeal on the behalf of militia that carried over the interrogations of women who aborted illegally in the hospital. Unfortunately, after 1989 there are no laws and lawyers to bring under justice those zealous fellows.

Even historians of the communist regime, when approaching the first years of Ceaușescu's period (1965-71) have a masculine perspective, as they mention the relative opening of the communist system, ignoring the fact that the advance of family values meant from 1966 the reduction of woman to her biological status. Forbidding abortion is linked to the project of national communism as a unique initiative in the socialist block of that period.

<sup>84</sup><http://www.spiegel.de/video/25-jahre-spiegel-tv-die-kinder-von-cighid-video-1270517.html>;  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9mZ1o\\_lJvg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9mZ1o_lJvg);  
<http://www.filmdocumentare.com/cighid-lagarul-de-exterminare-a-copiilor-din-romania/>, accessed 10 October 2016].

<sup>85</sup> "România Irecurabilă" ["Irrecoverable Romania"]  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5klH\\_IX-QI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5klH_IX-QI), accessed 22 November 2016].

<sup>86</sup> For yearly statistical data on the category of abortions and mortality see Jinga, Soare, 2010, 159-70; Roman, 2010, 172-83.

Therefore, we may conclude that under national communism the woman was in a paradoxical way both raved and subject to a complex pressure; the woman was imagined as an active citizen, a fertile and devoted mother, an axis of education, a worker etc., while her life was dominated by schizoid perceptions and self-perceptions, fatalism and man's egoism. One consecrated conclusion in the specialized literature supports the idea that by the mentioned Decree (1966) and subsequent

legislative regulations, the socialist state detained the instrument to control the body of the citizen, perverting thus the private life of couples: 'The relation that resulted from the interference of state policy and demographic factors had direct consequences over the family; it changed the relations between the sexes and their roles, it highlighted mostly contradictory interests of the state and citizens, especially women' (Kligman, 2000, 32).

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# BACK TO THE ROOTS. THE REPRESENTATION OF LIFE AND NATURE IN STUDIO GHIBLI'S ANIME WORKS

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**Abstract:** *The current paper tackles the problematic of life and nature as well as their representation by means of artistic media – in this case, Japanese animation – while focusing on four anime works released by Studio Ghibli: Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War (1994, director: Takahata Isao) and Princess Mononoke (1997, director: Miyazaki Hayao), on the one hand, and The Wind Rises (2013, director: Miyazaki Hayao) and The Tale of Princess Kaguya (2013, director: Takahata Isao), on the other hand. This paper draws on extensive fieldwork with producers and consumers of (Japanese) popular culture, as well as extensive literature research, and searches for answers to the ultimately fundamental question of the human being: what is life and how can we protect it, with its beautiful vulnerability and unique ephemerality? As to be shown in the course of the hermeneutic analysis, important concepts of Japanese traditional aesthetics, such as mono no aware (the “pathos of things”, going as far back in the past as the monumental Tale of Prince Genji from 11th century), the jo-ha-kyū structural principle (“exposition, acceleration, explosion”, as theorized by Zeami in 14th century for the Nō theater), the tension between giri (social obligations) and ninjō (individual emotions), indelibly established during Japan’s long seclusion from the world (Edo period, 1603-1868), which are organically integrated within the ideology of the wakon yōsai (“Japanese spirit/roots, Western knowledge/technology”) slogan of the Meiji era (1868-1912), emerge in the visual display of life in late-modern Japan, and its profound connection to nature, as the most important asset one possesses and could ever possess.*

**Keywords:** *representation of life and nature, Studio Ghibli, Japanese popular culture, Japanese traditional aesthetics, Japanese anime*

## **Introduction: animation between arts and new media**

In his vision of the evolution of media, Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) referred to four historical stages: printed media (books, newspapers), visual media (paintings, sculptures), electronic media (radio, TV), virtual media (Internet). In this hierarchy, the anime as the Japanese version of animation is situated between arts and new media, profoundly reflecting the tense relation between medium and message, as well as the ambivalent transition from ethics to aesthetics and from imagination to ideology carried out by productions of popular culture. Moreover, in its inherently ambiguous form, the anime carries over into the entertainment industry the traditionally transmitted stress ratio between Japanese Visual Arts and their Western counterparts.

The goal of this paper is to creatively and critically outline the contents of selected anime works released by Studio Ghibli in their directors’ efforts to represent in the bi-dimensionality of the animated medium the multi-dimensionality of life (not of reality) and its deep-going connection to

nature. Among the selected four anime works, two were released by mid-1990s when the socio-economic climate in Japan was continuously shaken by skyrocketing numbers of suicides (particularly high among the male population) and constant revelations of fraud and strategic failures on the side of the ruling class. Two works came into cinemas by mid-2010s, during the third decade of uninterrupted broken promises on a political level, compounded by international pressures.

Studio Ghibli has become, since its foundation in 1985, the epitome of successful cultural enterprise, releasing anime works highly acknowledged due to their constructive combination between aesthetic-ideological visions and consumption-related compromises. Both grounders – Takahata Isao and Miyazaki Hayao – had previously gathered plenty of experience in the field of animation and of the anime industry, which they consequently employed for their own studio. In addition to the so-called Takahata-Miyazaki combination, two further persons have accompanied the Ghibli enterprise and contributed to its worldwide popularity: the producer Suzuki

Toshio and the composer Hisaishi Joe<sup>87</sup>. In the current paper, structured in three parts, I'll argue that a large part of Studio Ghibli's success emerged from its directors' pragmatic approach to reflecting the value of life as the most important asset one possesses and could ever possess, particularly since mid-1990s, as well as the fundamental function of nature in developing the ability to become aware of life's importance:

1. Firstly, *Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War*<sup>88</sup> and *Princess Mononoke*<sup>89</sup> are regarded from the perspective of dialectical discourses on life and nature aiming a profound impact on the Japanese public perception and processing of these two parameters during the "roaring 1990s";
2. Secondly, *The Wind Rises* (director Miyazaki Hayao) and *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* (director Takahata Isao)<sup>90</sup> undergo a critical analysis highlighting their function in re-directing the public awareness by mid-2010 towards a more compassionate and loving interaction with the self and with the others, while outlining human life as fundamental element within the cosmic order of things;
3. Thirdly, I'll draw a historical comparison between these four anime works, which take into account the specific features of each of them among the other four, observing the general narrative lines crisscrossing prevalent beliefs and efforts in engaging with the value of life – human or not.

<sup>87</sup> Among the anime works released by Studio Ghibli, the most famous are: *Laputa: The Castle in the Sky* (1986, director: Miyazaki Hayao, Music: Hisaishi Joe), *The Grave of the Fireflies* (1988, director: Takahata Isao, music: Mamiya Michio), *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988, director: Miyazaki Hayao, music: Hisaishi Joe), *Memories like Raindrops* (1991, director: Takahata Isao, music: Hoshi Katsu), *Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War* (1994), *Princess Mononoke* (1997), *Spirited Away* (literally *Sen and Chihiro's Sudden Disappearance*, 2001, director: Miyazaki Hayao, music: Hisaishi Joe), *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004, director: Miyazaki Hayao, music: Hisaishi Joe), *Tales from Earthsea* (literally: *Ged's War Chronicles*, 2006, director: Miyazaki Gorô, music: Terashima Tamiya), *Ponyo on the Cliff* (2008, director: Miyazaki Hayao, music: Hisaishi Joe), *The Borrowers Arietty* (2010, director: Hiromasa Yonebayashi, music: Cecile Corbel), *From Up On Poppy Hill* (2011, director: Miyazaki Gorô, music: Takebe Satoshi), *The Wind Rises*, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*, *When Marnie Was There* (2014, director: Hiromasa Yonebayashi, music: Muramatsu Takatsugu).

<sup>88</sup> 1994, director Takahata Isao, music Shang Shang Taiphon.

<sup>89</sup> 1997, director Miyazaki Hayao, music Hisaishi Joe.

<sup>90</sup> Both films were released in 2013, with music composed by Hisaishi Joe.

In the neo-Marxist post-Adornist logic of critical thinking, the tense dialectics between cultural production and cultural consumption can only be challenged by a fresh focus on the media connecting these two fundamental dimensions of the capitalist worldview and its employment in the entertainment industry. As to be shown further below, though, a re-framing of the unquestioned contents contained in the very products of the entertainment industry might deliver a more valid and effective answer as to how to address the burning issues of the world in the all-encompassing flows of information, without sacrificing its economic relevance.

### Life and nature as inseparable units in the cosmic order

From tanuki to forests' gods and spirits, from wartime epics to storylines infused by the patina of ancient folk-tales, the four anime works engage with powerful discourses on longing and love, on power, desire and the will to live. All the analyzed works deliver in their exemplary ways answers and solutions to a more peaceful, more compassionate and more cooperative attitude towards self and others.

#### *The struggle of life and the roughness of nature*

Tanuki (*Nyctereutes procyonoides*) – raccoon-like mammals – are the main protagonists in the anime movie *Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War* released by Studio Ghibli in 1994 and directed by Takahata Isao. The anime movie presents the gradually vanishing homeland of the tanuki as a result of human intervention in its strive for progress and technological development, observed through the eyes of the affected protagonists, unable to defend themselves. Rather than being a fantastic narration with talking animals, *Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War* is a huge fable executed with documentary precision (Takahata, 1999a, 68). However, despite unified forces, *Ponpoko: The Tanuki Heisei War* didn't make it into the final stage to the Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film in 1994.

Superficially speaking, *Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War* transmits a common ecology-oriented message, supported by the deliberately deceptive music of Shang Shang Typhoon and its powerfully colored allusions to Japanese folk songs. Major figures descending from famous Japanese folk tales, the mischievous tanuki, still massively present in the Japanese quotidian life, are employed by Takahata in his task to convey an emotional version of the ecological message so intimately attached to the Ghibli enterprise (Drazen, 2003, 189). The whole situation seems

indeed inspired by the historical transformation of the Tama Hills in Western Tokyo in the first half of the 1970s, when new suburbs were built. Simultaneously with the active voice against the destruction of the natural habitat, as in *Nausicaä from the Valley of the Winds* or later in *Princess Mononoke*, the happy, peaceful rurality from *My Neighbor Totoro* is evoked in the characters of the tanuki, who had come back into fashion and public awareness by mid-1990s in Japan.

On a deeper level, though, it becomes clear that *Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War* is a hymn to life as the most important asset one possesses and could ever possess. I could even go as far as to state that *Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War* is for Takahata what *Princess Mononoke* would be later for Miyazaki (see further below): the artistic confrontation with that apparently favorite leisure activity of the modern human being consisting of constant attempts to kill the gods, to turn the sacred into the profane, to demystify the magic of life and of the world. In other words: bringing the netherworld into this world, out of pure fun (see Eagleton, 2003, 54). The main problem, however, emerges when the modern human being shows its inability to replace this lost world brought to the surface with something new, equally mysterious and beautiful. Technology, science or longer life span cannot fill-in the gaps in the existence of late-modern social actors, caused by the loss, the disappearance and the disenchantment process of old folk tales and folk beliefs, fairy tales, myths and ghosts stories. They used to provide magic and miracles to a life otherwise dreary and bleak. In *Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War*, Takahata navigates against this suffocating everyday life by delivering a soft touch of light and joy in his hymn to life – the life of humans and of nature with its animals and plants – as something extremely valuable.

An immense fable itself, *Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War* talks about the destruction of the forest not only as the loss of the homes for those living there, but also as the destruction of what Hannah Arendt called “the common world” (quoted in Bauman, 2004, 22). Living beings are not separate entities, but they exist and co-exist within complex temporal and spatial as well as emotional networks. If their habitat is destroyed, an entire life-network is destroyed, at the same time: a small, vital, circular universe is ruined in the name of human progress and development. Nevertheless, it is worth going on living. Somehow. The tanuki learn this hard lesson in spite of their inner resistance; they subsequently adapt their ability to change shape to the new

circumstances – originating in their mythological ability to metamorphose – and take into account, pragmatically, the unavoidable victimization, followed by the mourning of the innocent victims. The restoration of the original state of harmony is an endless process, and alongside this process, both victories and defeats are faced and accepted as such. This state of harmony which is yearned for by all living beings is never an existential circumstance in itself not to be addressed or challenged, but a process to be sought and attained within a long instructive and exhausting journey. This journey is commonly called “life”.

A long way from the utopian idealism in *Nausicaä from the Valley of the Winds* from the year 1984, directed by the same Miyazaki Hayao, the mature and warm humanism in *Princess Mononoke* (1997) unfolds in the depiction of epical battles between gods and humans: regardless of the final solution, the world will never be the same. The composer Hisaishi Joe, one of the cult figures in the anime industry, constructs in *Princess Mononoke* a universe of ludic allusions and contradictory combinations, which are indicative of the fragmented fabric of cultural identity in late modernity.

The initiation trip pursued by Ashitaka, *Princess Mononoke*'s main male character, is, like all heroes' initiation trips since the dawn of history, a journey of identity construction and awareness building, as well as an incursion into the unknown fields of the world: he must learn to see with clear, unclouded eyes (*kumori naki me*, as stated in the movie) the truth of the West, from where the enraged, deadly wounded boar had come. Accompanied by the words of the old wise woman in his home-village – “No one can change his destiny. However, you can decide if you just wait for its fulfillment or if you stand up and face it” –, Ashitaka starts his trip towards new territories. His wound is his curse, the symbol of the forbidden fruit and of the impossible recovery, of hatred, and also of irreversible knowledge. What he discovers in the confused West, torn between wars, is the power and beauty of life despite its difficulties and failures, in the answers of nature to the curiosity and greed of the humans – summed up in the words of the leper Osa: “Life is painful, life is tough. The world is damned, the human being is damned, and still, we want to live”. The vital power of love emerges from hope, courage and the confidence, which overcome destruction and despair, death and loss. Like Nausicaä in distant times and spaces, San, the girl from the forests, raised by the wolves, must witness how her pure, harmonious, peaceful world is destroyed by unexpected intrusions of evil



outsiders – and like Nausicaä, she initially reacts with anger, hatred, revenge. Still, while in Nausicaä's world, the humans had no chance in their struggles against the forces of nature (as embodied by the giant insects), in San's world, the forces of nature (the animals, the forest) have no chance in their resistance against the destructive, technological advancement of the humans.

At the end-point of their journey, both Ashitaka and San understand the futility of asking for security and stability, and simply do their best to learn the most constructive lessons out of the events. A co-existence between nature and culture is possible only in the brains of idealists or idiots, as expressed by the shady character Jiko: "I give up ... One cannot win against idiots". Pain, fear, lack of orientation are compensated through hope, laughter and friendship: these are by no means complicated discursive inventions of late modernity, but human basic attitudes of all times.

The main and fundamental underlying theme of *Princess Mononoke* is a deep-going love of nature – and nature is neither soft, nor sentimental, but a tough, tremendous power, which can, in the same way as the god Shishigami, give and take life. There is no happy-end to the epic battle between nature and culture, between gods and humans: San remains in her world and there is no question that she would give up her world out there for the world of the humans, like Tarzan did. In the same way, Ashitaka will not leave his noisy, messy, compromise-heavy universe which is the human world, out of love for San. Instead, they rely on the possibility of a common, though rather tense future, which can be crafted through their efforts, wills and cooperation skills. Technology may have the upper hand at the moment, but in the long run, the human essence of those involved will definitely prevail.

*The celebration of life and the duality of nature.*

The linear plot in *The Wind Rises* allows for a complex development in-depth of the characters and the ideological message they are carrying, so that the anime movie as a whole can transcend the limitations and challenges of a war-related entertainment product towards the strangely familiar space of perennial works of human experience and longing. Thus, *The Wind Rises* expresses anew the necessities and intricacies of "war", as a "Ghibli anime", as a poetical meditation on life and death, and as a *bildungsroman* (novel of formation). Though it paints the reality of the lurking war, the anime movie *The Wind Rises* is neither an anti-war

manifesto nor a pro-war revisionist re-writing of history. I would state that it is not even a movie about war, equally as the anime movie *The Grave of the Fireflies*<sup>91</sup> was not about war, as well: both anime works simply depict the life of human beings who happen to live in times of war, therefore sending an appeal to re-consider war as part of daily life. On the background of continuous wars, life goes on, with its ups and downs, with its challenges and discoveries, with its love-stories and solitudes.

On a conceptual level, beyond the classical story of star-crossed lovers Jirô and Nahoko on the life-path of a brilliant young man with nerdy features, and surpassing the characteristics of the classical *bildungsroman*, there is the prevalent, almost obsessive message of life as being the most important asset one possesses or could ever possess. The final words of Nahoko, Jirô's wife, while floating through the air and eventually vanishing carried away by the white clouds in a dream scene short before the film ends, are: "Live, my love!", a final appeal, clearly transmitting the message which was supposed to be perceived throughout the whole anime movie.

There are two main elements highlighting this path of interpretation in *The Wind Rises*. The first indicator is the quote from Paul Valéry (1871-1945) from which the title itself *The Wind Rises* is derived: "The wind rises ... we must try to live" is the first line from the last strophe of the poem *Le cimetière marin* (*The Graveyard by the Sea*, 1920/1922), one of the most important poems of the French literature and Paul Valéry's most famous poetical work. The symbolist poem, with a hermetic character, *The Graveyard by the Sea* is a seaside metaphysical meditation on the meaning of life and death, inspired by the walk through a graveyard in which soldiers fallen during the WWI are buried. The poem is composed of 24 strophes of six lines each: in the first lines of the final strophes – "Le vent se lève! ... Il faut tenter de vivre!" / "The wind is rising! ... We must try to live!" – the poem metamorphoses into a reflection on time, on the contradiction between consciousness and object, as well as between consciousness and body. The final choice overpasses this contradiction without, in fact, solving it. The first-person author contemplates life and death, engagement and withdrawal, love and estrangement, in a setting dominated by the sea, the sky, stars, rocky cliffs, and the rising sun.

<sup>91</sup> Director: Takahata Isao, the double-pack release with *My Neighbor Totoro*, director: Miyazaki Hayao, from 1988.

From this perspective, the anime work *The Wind Rises* becomes a meditation on life and death on the background of the emerging and gradually unfolding Pacific War, and the circumstances individuals living in that era were facing. Employing the animated medium as the means by which this content is transmitted to the audiences, the director Miyazaki Hayao fulfills his lifetime's goal of re-defining animation in terms of an artistic language, able to possess and develop the strength to mediate real-life messages and teachings.

The second element indicating the fact that the anime work *The Wind Rises* is not a propagandistic work on war, but a groundbreaking piece of art and a novel of formation permeated by the deep message of "Ikuro!" ("Live!"). It is composed of two direct references to Thomas Mann's (1875-1955) monumental novel *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*, 1924): firstly, the character of Hans Castorp showing up briefly in Miyazaki's anime work, and, secondly, Nahoko's tuberculosis and her short retreat in the sanatorium in the mountains. A highly ambiguous and elusive literary work, *The Magic Mountain* blends a scrupulous realism with deeper symbolic undertones, and within this complexity, forces the reader to weigh up the artistic significance of the pattern of events set out within the narrative, a difficult task, given the overall ironic tone of the narrator.

Like *The Magic Mountain*, *The Wind Rises* is a *bildungsroman*, a "novel of education" or a "novel of formation", employing the animated medium as representation channel. Moreover, like *The Magic Mountain*, *The Wind Rises* reconsiders the message and structure of the classical *bildungsroman*. Whereas the classical *bildungsroman* would conclude by having "formed" Hans Castorp into a mature member of society, with his own worldview and greater self-knowledge, *The Magic Mountain* ends with a hint that Hans Castorp would be killed on the battlefields of the World War I. In the same way, instead of living with the girl of his dreams happily ever after, Horikoshi Jirô loses her to her incurable illness, and the airplanes he's been struggling to create so far are employed by the army to spread war, death and chaos. Still, as Thomas Mann once stated on the meaning of *The Magic Mountain*, there are two ways to attain a mature life: The one is the common, direct, and brave path. The other is the bad and dangerous path, leading through death, and that is the genius way (as stated by Thomas Mann himself in his discussion of the work, written in English and published in the *Atlantic* in 1953: "what [Hans]

came to understand is that one must go through the deep experience of sickness and death to arrive at a higher sanity and health.""). This concept of illness and death as a necessary rite of passage to access higher awareness to life, knowledge and health turns *The Magic Mountain*, as well as *The Wind Rises*, into real *bildungsroman* masterpieces.

On the background of these two main influences – French symbolism with hermeneutic visions and German realism with deeper allegorical undertones –, Miyazaki Hayao displays his own vision on life, health, illness, personal dreams, historical belonging and the role of the intellectuals as creators of (fictional or not) role-models. In the same line as the two European authors, Paul Valéry and Thomas Mann, Miyazaki uses the phenomenon of "war" as an impetus to meditate over the value and significance of life and death. While in case of the European authors, "war" – specifically the WWI – was only an artistic means to express ambivalent emotions and abstract thoughts on the significance of the human existence, on frailty and love, for Miyazaki, the specter of war – that is, of the WWII – was an opportunity to express his "very complex feelings" about war.

From the other end of history, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* is the story of a Thumbelina-like girl, found in a bamboo in a forest by an old bamboo-cutter who decides to raise the small girl together with his wife in their rural home. It is based on the oldest-known Japanese folk-tale named *The Tale of the Bamboo-Cutter* (*Taketori Monogatari*), which dates back to the 10th century and is considered the oldest extant Japanese prose narrative, although the oldest manuscript dates to 1592. The story is well rehearsed, yet still startlingly strange, and turns this richly evocative anime movie into a timeless vision corresponding to the tale that inspired it – a parable of the emptiness of earthly possessions and the transcendental power of love. On the surface, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* is the story of a reluctant young girl painfully yearning to go back to the forests and hillsides of her childhood, but in Takahata's vision, it becomes a meditation on life's heartbreaking ephemerality. The film was drawn over roughly a painstaking decade of quests and drawbacks (though arguably rooted in Uchida Tomu's [1898-1970] unfinished Toei Animation project from the 1960s), in an unfinished-looking freehand as if the animators were chasing after the princess in person, desperately trying to capture the essence of each moment as it flew away. Moreover, Takahata uses the setting of classical Japan as an opportunity to

work in an eerie register that blends humane social-realism with a clear-eyed spirituality, and pushes the challenges and limitations of the animated medium to its expressive boundaries. Landscapes fade towards the edges of the frames, and at moments of heightened emotion – such as the princess’ frenzied escape from her coming-of-age celebrations, one of Ghibli’s greatest-ever sequences – characters fall apart into flurries of watercolor and charcoal. The visual result is a surrealistic construction with the haunting simplicity of an ancient scroll-painting coming back to life.

The most important element in the construction process of individual identity appears in *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* as a profound crisis followed by a conscious commitment towards one’s own self, ideals and flaws included, separated from external compulsions. Overcoming the individual levels of self-questioning and self-recovery, this process of identity construction finds its completion in unexpected ways: there is a specific dystopian undertone in *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*, with its loss of community and the dismantlement of family ideals, visible in the uncanny ending, respectively, in the sudden leap into fantasy in the love scene at the climax of the movie (an adultery love scene, unique in Studio Ghibli’s strict moral guidelines). There is a deep wisdom in this film, but a deep sadness, too. The film’s tag line, “A princess’ crime and punishment,” offers a clue, while Takahata himself has said he wanted to explore what “crime” Princess Kaguya might have committed, since the original story is silent on that point. His exploration, though, has little to do with plot, and everything to do with his heroine’s emotional and spiritual journey and the way it ends. The climax, that love scene of forbidden desire, is a haunting, wrenching evocation of *mono no aware* – or as it is literally translated, the “pathos of things”.

The basis of Japanese aesthetics since time immemorial, *mono no aware* is hard to define, but *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* brilliantly illuminates it with images of life being the loveliest in its transience, of parting in its terrible finality. It is a very different approach, if compared to the other 2013-blockbuster of feminine rehearsal *Frozen* (released by Walt Disney Pictures and a major box-office hit at the box-office worldwide – Japan included), which scores points mainly for its originality in the tender acuity with which the relationship between the two sisters, Elsa and Anna, is observed.

In *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*, individual fulfillment and a clear sense of self emerge from “love” as what one could call an

“invented emotion” intensively negotiated by proto-feminists in their quest for a working definition of femininity and its features, its necessities and its challenges, as well as its ideals. It allows for transfer of significance in historical terms, which leads, in its turn, to socio-cultural affiliation as the result of conscious choices based on everyday events and cumulated life experience. Emotional ambivalence delivers the impetus to intellectual activism, transcending time and space. More than being a plain animated *bildungsroman* in terms of classical education and formation, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* (like *Frozen* in its own way) creates aesthetic-ideological spaces where the overcoming of loss and fear leads to the creation of the mature individual, embedded in historical reality, which metamorphoses, again, into a site of responsible, self-aware citizen participation. The responsible citizen becomes able to live in the moment and to respect life as the most precious asset one possesses and could ever possess. Thus, instead of running away without looking back and rejecting any sort of responsible awareness, the “feminine self” of late modernity accepts its role as part of a larger community. Moreover, she emerges from within this very community as a messenger of love, of gratitude and forgiveness, as well as of the power of remembrance.

Liberation and empowerment are powerful mindsets in defining individuality and happiness, therefore revealing one’s position within the larger framework of the national society or of the world at large. They are important mental assets, fashioning a sense of self, both in its own structure and dynamics, and in its relation to another, in its correlation to another, eventually, in its transcendence through another. Being a liberated and empowered human being, as a man or as a woman, means to comprehend responsibilities which come with the right to be free and self-determining. These responsibilities include, for better or for worse, a sense of awareness of the others and of togetherness in imperfection, of one’s own fragility and vulnerability, and of one’s own need to belong and to be accepted.

*Life as an ambivalent game between love and death*

This message of life as being the most important asset one could ever possess permeates anime works released by Studio Ghibli since 1994, with *Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War* (director: Takahata Isao) being the pilot-project in this concern, and with the monumental *Princess Mononoke* (director: Miyazaki Hayao) from 1997,

univocally representing this statement beyond the ecological propaganda, which was, for that matter, the superficial layer in *Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War* as well. In *Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War*, the message of the necessity to live one's life at its fullest and to move continuously with the flow of history was slightly humorously displayed within the ethnocentric framework of the tanuki community's destruction by means of human progress and technology. There is a subtle reactive nostalgia in this movie, in the subtext of questioning human progress and its effects on other living beings, with clinical realism, but lacking cynicism, compounded by tender humor and warm humanism: two fundamental dimensions of the creative reaction to the realities of life and its challenges while simultaneously enjoying life to its full extent.

On the other hand, in *Princess Mononoke*, the murder of gods which goes hand in hand with the devastation of nature – again, pursued and fulfilled by means of human progress and technology – is, in fact, the foundation on which the significance of human life, unique in its transience and beautiful in its transcendence, emerges and thrives. In the scene where Ashitaka first time encounters San directly – that is, where she tries to kill him and stops in the last moment –, Ashitaka opens his eyes while lying on his back with San pointing with his sword towards his forehead. Then he says – “You’re beautiful. Live!”. This “Ikiri!” (“Live!”) becomes the essence of their fight against the complete destruction of the world as it used to be. As stated by Miyazaki himself in an interview on the meaning of *Princess Mononoke* as a Japanese work of art, the motif of “Ikiri!” (“Live!”) as the main message of *Princess Mononoke* is to be understood as it follows: “The human being has this only choice, to keep on living while permanently thinking ‘What am I going to do from now on?’ This is the only way in which life makes sense. This is what I mean through ‘Ikiri!’” This urge to move forward in life despite all difficulties and hardships, while simultaneously enjoying the beautiful moments in their very ephemerality, is the fundamental topos in *Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War* and *Princess Mononoke*, deeply hidden beyond the layers of ecological propaganda – and finding their ideological climax further on in *The Wind Rises* and *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*.

The individual consciousness of historical belonging in what Miyazaki displays as a multi-layered “look at how Horikoshi Jirô’s passion for flight was captured by capital-flow and militarism” (*Asia-Pacific Journal*) is subtly

counterpointed by this emotional ambivalence towards the position of the intellectuals in times of historical turmoil. A symbolical return to Takahata’s *The Grave of the Fireflies*, *The Wind Rises* is both an appeal to accept war as an unavoidable and (to a certain degree) necessary evil, and a reminder upon the position of the individual within the political system. It is a late echo of the credo in intellectual activism, strongly represented by the so-called anpo movement of the late 1960s, of which Takahata Isao and Miyazaki Hayao, the “Big Two” of the “Ghibli Quartet” were main representatives<sup>92</sup>. *The Wind Rises* depicts “war” simply as an additional dimension of “evil”, transcending the limits of time and space, resulting in the revitalization of the past via cultural artifacts in praising technology, human bonding and nature, thus creating social cohesion and mutual acceptance among individuals living in here and now. In this bildungsroman with the animated medium as representation channel, flying becomes a *raison d’être*, like in the oeuvres delivered by the French elite pilot and writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944), while airplanes are instrumental towards exploring a fresh existential attitude, as stated in the anime movie by the Italian aviator Giovanni Caproni (Jirô’s imaginary mentor) at the beginning of the movie: “Airplanes are not for war or making money. Airplanes are beautiful dreams waiting to be swallowed by the sky.”

On a slightly different note, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* sends a reminder that in times of ubiquitous Cool Japan symptomatology, the reinvigoration of local myths and legends provokes a nostalgic U-turn. This shift is towards a more classical worldview with the simultaneous intellectualization of popular culture encompassing the rather conservative message that love, happiness and existential fulfillment are, more than ever, individual choices in late-modernity. Its mediated sense of *mono no aware* emerges from images of life, being the loveliest in its transience and of terrible finality. Rising above impossible standards of success and likeability, the late-modern “feminine woman” in the stature of Princess Kaguya decides that her destiny lies in

<sup>92</sup> The *anpo* movement was a student movement in Japan, comparable to the Western 1968-movement, and opposing the renewal of the *Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan*. *Nippon-koku to Amerika-gasshūkoku to no Aida no sôgo kyôryoku oyobi anzen hoshô jôyaku* (also known as *anpo jôyaku* or just *anpo*), first signed in 1952 in San Francisco, then amended in 1960 in Washington and extended in 1970, in spite of the protests in Japan by students and leftist intellectuals.

the very choices she is making. Princess Kaguya doesn't find, indeed, her fulfillment in direct connection with a man, but rather in her decision to pursue her own path in life, and in her determination and commitment to stay true to herself. It takes sacrifice and pain, as love is not something to take: it is something to give, to oneself and to the others, a daily choice like happiness and the warm, soft sense of belonging. Beyond the solitude, which might arise from such an attitude towards life, there is the ineffable promise of a better world to emerge from the chaos and confusion of this one, suffocated in sex, consumerism and hatred. There is a promise of acceptance and solace, of quiet celebration of the human being and of humanity in its astonishing diversity and unleashed potential.

### **Conclusion: towards a fresh paradigm of life as unconditional love**

The ambiguous representation of progress and its impact on human life in the analyzed anime productions refers to the efforts of their creators to show the dangers of the serious, imminent (and to a great extent deliberately ignored) problems lurking beyond the surface of peace and freedom. If one takes into account the fact that the power of the anime as genre, aesthetics and ideology resides in its abstract form and its concrete contents, such anime works as *Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War*, *Princess Mononoke*, *The Wind Rises* or *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* appear as representative among those disenchanting works of art which display solutions and alternatives without being intrusive or dystopian in doing so. This way of dealing with the reality (that is, suggesting answers to agonizing questions while being entertaining) occurs via a re-dimensionalization of cultural identity from its perception as a hopeless case in late modernity<sup>93</sup> to its processing as a four-layered phenomenon.

On a first level, *Ponpoko: The Heisei Tanuki War*, as a celebratory work of art, takes over the positive tones from *The Wings of Honneamise* and announces later masterpieces such as *Spirited Away*<sup>94</sup>, which talk about the need for dreams and gods in a crumbling world as the epic representation of a little girl searching for her true self and working hard to rescue her parents (Murase, 2004, 65). The climax of this

development is *Hôhokekyo: My Neighbors, the Yamadas*<sup>95</sup>, which transmits the following message encapsulated in small vignettes: Humans lead an uneventful life, mocked by one's own children, neglected by the spouse, despised at the workplace, but still they dream of a heroic existence to save the world (Nakamura, 1999, 29; Takahata, 1999, 21). Herein, not only the Japanese youth in post-recession Japan, but also Western youths in super-saturated societies can find models for new, fresh life projects. Despite being a financial failure at the box-office, this bright, cheerful family comedy talks of family values and inter-generational interdependence, of social conformism and personal fulfillment, of everyday love in the life of average social actors, of individual solutions to general constraints and obligations.

On a second level, *Princess Mononoke*, as a nostalgic work, draws its creative energies from the bright humanism of Kiki's Delivery Service and prepares the way to such anime blockbusters as *Innocence* (2004), which speaks even more intensively than *Ghost in the Shell*<sup>96</sup> of the yearning for human essence and contact in a world populated by cyborgs and robots, or to such TV anime series as *Cowboy Bebop*<sup>97</sup>. The adventures and worries of the *Cowboy Bebop*'s protagonists are those of everyday people, even though they live in an era in which the whole universe had been transformed into a human habitat. They do not confess it, but they long for love and security, as well as for clear relationships on the background of a past often dark or left unsolved. Their quest is the quest for the authentic self of a whole generation, which feels left alone in the unknown, without any satisfactory orientation boards or reliable direction signs. The old models rusted in intellectual treatises on humanity, rationality and progress, while those who were supposed to be inspired by those very treatises, find themselves increasingly sinking into the uncharted depths of confusion, loneliness and despair (see Bauman, 2002, 31). The climax of this development is displayed by the anime movie *Five centimeters per Second*<sup>98</sup>, which evokes human existence as reflected in and connected to the speed of falling cherry blossoms

<sup>95</sup> *Hôhokekyo tonari no Yamada-kun*, 1999, director: Takahata Isao, music: Yano Akiko.

<sup>96</sup> *Shell*, 1995, directed by Oshii Mamoru [born 1951] with music by KAWAI Kenji [born 1957].

<sup>97</sup> *Cowboy Bebop*, 1998, director: WATANABE Shin'ichirô [born 1965], music: KANNO Yôko [born 1963].

<sup>98</sup> *Byôsoku go senchimêtoru*, 2007, director: Shinkai Makoto, music: Tenmon/Radwimps.

<sup>93</sup> Namely, identity is either fragmented or liquefied, or both, so there is no meaning in dealing with it.

<sup>94</sup> *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi*, literally: *Chihiro's sudden disappearance*, 2001, director: Miyazaki Hayao, music: Hisaishi Joe.

(five centimeters per second), and talks of loss, recovery and cowardice in the age of a collapsing human network, in painfully hopeless tones.

On a third level, in *The Wind Rises*, Miyazaki Hayao overcomes the existential attitude of flying as liberation and survival strategy, as based on the model of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, for whom flying was an existential attitude of strategic liberation and survival. Miyazaki had employed it as such in most of his previous anime works, starting with *Nausicaa from the Valley of the Winds*, released in 1984, whose heroine negotiates the post-apocalyptic jungle by glider, throughout *Laputa: The Castle in the Sky*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle*.

This existential attitude of flying as liberation and survival strategy based on Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's writings is most prominent in *Porco Rosso* from 1992. In *Porco Rosso*, Miyazaki explicitly adopts Saint-Exupéry's existential model and extrapolates it on the intricate relationship between war and flying in the character of a flying ace, a pilot, who happens to have the body appearance of a pig, chasing air pirates across the Adriatic Sea in the interwar period. This aviator-pig flying a red plane – which gives the name of the anime movie *Porco Rosso*, meaning *The Red Pig* – becomes a metaphor for the position of the individual in times of historical turmoil. Besides, it heavily employed Saint-Exupéry's ideological attitude in Miyazaki's vision and definition of masculinity and masculine role-models for apathetic middle-aged men by the early 1990s in Japan<sup>99</sup>. However, flying metamorphoses in *The Wind Rises* into a *raison d'être*, as the main character grows and matures in times of historical distraught and confusion, and learns to cope with the reality and the choices this reality imposes upon him.

On a fourth level, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* offers an alternative to this perspective, while deeply touching on the problematic of the return to those tales which made humanity a soft, warm place to embrace all inhabitants. While clearly successful life is measured nowadays in terms of materialist accomplishments, deeper levels of contentment and happiness are shut-down through education and role-models imposed by Macchiavelic mainstream media (Luhmann, 1996, 32). The meaning of "male" and "female" moves from the biological dimension into the discursive formation, and the very nature of

masculinity and femininity is challenged in the light of permanently shifting patterns of success and progress based on hedonist criteria. In this late-modern chaos, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* brings a ray of order and hope. There is, to be sure, no reassuring, superficial optimism, no place for a lesson along the lines "the charming prince will come one day" and its aggressive cousin "nevertheless, you are perfectly fine without him – and you can even live happily ever after without him". Instead, there is the powerful, encouraging suggestion of the admittedly more difficult alternative: discipline and hard-work, humility and self-confidence, loyalty and respect, the establishing of a life-goal and its steady nurturing, cherishing victories and learning from setbacks along the way. In displaying this existential alternative, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* unveils the delusional charm of a worldview based on the cultural consumption of pre-fabricated emotions and instant gratification, and discloses the beauty of human life as a project of love, belonging and compassion.

What these four anime works have in common, is that they overcome the apocalyptic celebrations of fear and turn that very fear into joyous hymns of life, while employing echoes of ancient beliefs to illuminate the fragmented inconsistency of cultural identity in late-modern Japan. It is an ambivalent, partially optimistic, partially disenchanting negotiation of cultural identity, with anime works functioning as popular productions emerged in one of Japan's most uncertain historical times. These times combine the necessity of *National Cool* (*Kakkoi Nippon*) in opposition to the Japan-defined cult of cuteness (*kawaii*) and carefully balance the stress ratio between "domesticating plagiarism" as tendencies borrowed from the West and "hybridizing authenticity" as structures strongly related to Asian values. "Being cool" means in today's Japan displaying a variety of attitudes without consciously committing to any of them, and showing a flexible personality towards outside influences (see Bornoff, 2002, 43). In opposition to that, cuteness becomes the pre-condition of a pure world which doesn't disappear when adulthood is attained, but which goes fully on into adulthood. Insecurity, clumsiness, confusion are as much parts of the emotional dimension of grown-ups as a healthy dose of self-confidence and a happy smile (Drazen, 2003, 84). Social affiliation is transcended as emotional belonging, translated, in turn, into happiness as a chance to re-visit one's own childhood with the eyes and the experience of the mature mind. In this cacophony of identities, "invented emotions" allow for the

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<sup>99</sup> *Princess Mononoke* and *Ponyo On The Cliff* are blatant exceptions to this almost all-encompassing cinematic paradigm.

transfer of significance in historical terms, which lead, again, to socio-cultural sustainability because of mindful choices, based on everyday events and personal life experience. This draws on the informal appearance of the Studio Ghibli as a building and enterprise nurturing a co existence with nature among equal humans from its *anpo* ideology. Takahata and Miyazaki re-created the idealized memory of a serene world in which the principle of “competitive undertaking” was replaced by that of “peaceful togetherness” – a principle observed in an archaic nature able to regenerate and live on eternally.

As an alternative to the Japanese everyday life, excruciatingly modern, overwhelmed by Western influence, consumption-driven, dominated by excess and obsessed with public displays of affluence, the anime provides through the oversized presentation of these very parameters<sup>100</sup> the model of a rigorous, disciplined lifestyle, focused on important tasks and goals. Like comparable phenomena of the entertainment industry (manga, live-action movies, video games, J-Pop, online socializing), the anime industry is indubitably part of the organized capital, while serving simultaneously the unfolding of the individual and of the collective creativity in various ways, within a fourfold process: production, marketing, consumption and reproduction. Superficially conventional and stylistically eclectic, ideologically confusing and aesthetically challenging, naive and cool, the anime has established itself along the decades as a new form of Soft Power, actively threatening to dissolve traditional concepts of identity, self and culture, which had previously never been questioned or re-evaluated. Within this seductive, contradictory, interactive universe, with the concurrent re-negotiation of major existential paradigms<sup>101</sup> Takahata Isao and Miyazaki Hayao have built their own “empire of signs”: a delicate, warm incursion into the life’s toughest challenges and highest rewards.

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<sup>100</sup> We refer to the apparently Western appearance of the characters, the consumption-oriented marketing strategies, the design practices celebrating over-the-top emotions.

<sup>101</sup> Such as identity and alterity, historical awareness and artistic creativity, ideological disenchantment and aesthetic liberalism.

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## A TWO-SIDED CHRONOTOPE – TIMIȘOARA'S HISTORICAL NEIGHBOURHOODS

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**Abstract:** *The paper discusses two sets of literary texts and subsequent cultural experiments related to them which are meant to capitalize on the heritage of two neighbourhoods in historical Timișoara, Cetate and Mehala. The authors, Daniel Vighi and Dan Negrescu, get involved in a creative project of preservation and restoration by evoking these neighbourhoods with a view to raising the awareness of both local inhabitants and tourists visiting this area. Their efforts, which started more than a decade ago, must be regarded as a cultural preparation for the events that were celebrated in Timișoara in 2016 – the anniversary of 300 years since the conquest of the city by the Austrian Prince Eugen of Savoy and the victory in the competition for the title of European City of Culture in 2021.*

**Keywords:** *celebration, cultural heritage, literary experiment, memory, tourism*

### Introduction

The retrieval, by means of the literary text, of a significant component of the material urban heritage inevitably achieves a form of capitalization of the non-material heritage. Beyond the manifest aesthetic goals of a piece of fiction, the volumes taken into consideration in this article are meant to preserve and retrieve the memory and historical function of buildings and streets in the city of Timișoara, to rescue from oblivion areas which must be revalued both for the local inhabitants and for the tourists visiting them. The development of a higher local sensitivity for culture and the rise of cultural tourism in Timișoara must be set against a double backdrop – the celebration of three hundred years since the city was liberated from Ottoman domination by the Austrian armies led by Prince Eugen of Savoy, in 2016 and, also in 2016, the victory this city obtained in the national competition for the title of European City of Culture in 2021.

Despite this common goal, the two concepts the article describes are divergent. The former concept is supported by Ariergarda Cultural Association, a regional institution which had, in the past two decades, the courage to launch new forms of cultural and industrial tourism in the western counties of Romania, the so-called underground trips, which include visiting post-industrial sites, old houses and mansions, railroads and stations, all surrounded by a romantic aura of past glamour and success and imbued with local

history. One of the leaders of the association, Daniel Vighi, in partnership with Timișoara-based writer Viorel Marineasa, started, in 2008, an editorial project of books (collections of contributions, short stories, essays, memoirs, pieces of oral history, doubled by historical documentation) about streets and buildings in the historical neighbourhood Cetate (*The City*).

What recommends Daniel Vighi and Viorel Marineasa for this project is a life-long experience as writers, academics, book editors and involvement in cultural projects. Among others, Daniel Vighi is known for his multidisciplinary collaboration in complex international artistic programs, which include TV productions (epic projects and artistic documentaries, such as „The Boema of Timișoara”, a production which received several international awards and nominations), or graphic experiments on application of video installation and the organization of international workshops of art and literature (like „SOS with art”).

The second concept is provided by Dan Negrescu, Timișoara-based prose writer and academic, who initiated, as early as the 1990s, a series of collections of short stories dedicated to his native neighbourhood, Mehala, focusing, successively, on real and imaginary figures who populated this area, events that marked the life of the community, its multicultural and plurilingual quality. Dan Negrescu is also known for his pamphlets inspired by contemporary Romanian realities

and his active involvement in the preservation and promotion of the teaching of Latin language and culture among the young generation of Romania today.

A possible prologue for both concepts could be an excerpt written by Daniel Vighi in his book dedicated to Eugen of Savoy Street, one of the oldest streets in the central historical area of Timișoara:

The secret life of the street we cross is most often misunderstood. We live there for years. Sometimes, we spend our entire lives there. When nothing changes, the street acquires a somewhat metaphysical air, perceivable in the poetry of mold-eaten walls, followed by the history of the street incapsulated by the faint smell of cat urine and ashes. I have done my best to catch scenes taken from the life of the street, being fascinated by something I cannot name, although everything in the street is epic rather than poetic, like the fiction included in this book, whose subject is the epic life of the historical street. (Vighi 2009: 8, *my translation*)

Here, Daniel Vighi brings to the forefront a particular gesture of retrieval – a ritual commemoration which, due to its epic quality, reassembles the community around a meaningful space and raises the sensitivity of this community to a heritage which is both concrete – a street, a building and its surroundings, a neighbourhood – and abstract, non-material, containing the historical as well as emotional aura with which certain urban areas are charged.

### **The Past is Another Country**

Daniel Vighi's concept, launched by Ariergarda Cultural Association in 2008, gained a material dimension by virtue of the local Open Art City program – whose main objective was the promotion of cultural tourism, the establishment of a unifying cultural identity, providing local cultural actors with more freedom and flexibility. When it was launched, the concept brought together writers, anthropologists, historians, film directors, visual artists, journalists and IT specialists, the written volumes being doubled

by a string of events which took the form of street performances. These performances, as well as other related happenings, were recorded on CD-ROMs within the project entitled *Portal for the promotion of cultural e-tourism – Street history*. According to its manager, Maria Goian, the project's main aims were: capitalizing on the local and regional cultural heritage resources; maintaining the specific multicultural character of the area; obtaining a partnership between the academic and the civil communities, whose activities could be harmonized by means of regular meetings, focus groups and workshops; acquiring concrete development goals, such as the pedestrianization of the central historical streets in Cetate (a lengthy process, which was initiated in 2009 and was finished in 2015); all envisaged the major objective of celebrating 300 years since the city of Timișoara was liberated by the Austrian armies and the preparation of Timișoara's application for European Capital of Culture in 2021 (Vighi 2009: 6).

The means for this capitalization were to be found in the specific areas of historical and literary documentation: historical data, photographs, architecture details, cadastral information, oral history. When put together, they formed a complex event, known as *Strassenfest* (frequently used in Germany, hence its name), aimed at promoting historical neighbourhoods in the local community and among tourists. In 2008, the organizers started planning to integrate these neighbourhoods of Cetate in a creative and dynamic tourist circuit, while retrieving the memory of 16 streets in this area: Emanoil Ungureanu (2008), Eugen of Savoy (2009), Florimund Mercy (2010), Augustin Pacha (2011), etc., the book about Eugen of Savoy Street being re-edited in an abridged version in 2016, for the tercentenary. The books, CD-ROMs, street performances and related events of promotion blended literature, art, music and the media for the preservation of the urban heritage.

Three books of the streets (*Eugen of Savoy* 2009, 2016; *Augustin Pacha – Inner Courtyards* 2011) are bi-, tri- or quadrilingual instances (Romanian, German, Hungarian, Serbian / English) of urban history, focusing on the destiny of emblematic buildings and their surroundings, witnesses of the crucial social and political changes that took place

between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The contributors convey a kaleidoscopic, polyphonic perspective by mixing a variety of discourses – historical, objective, technical; interior, subjective, impressionistic; epic, fictional. The volumes trace back a chronology which starts with the erection and demolition of the Austrian military barracks, the changing function of emblematic buildings in the area, the fluctuating name of the streets, which reflect the strategies of the current political regimes, the architecture which embodies an aesthetic and functional evolution from the 1-storey houses in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to 2-storey buildings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the high palaces of the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>, the purely functional blocks of flats in the inter-war and post-war period, etc. These buildings harbour daily routines and exceptional events and accommodate well-known historical figures as well as obscure fictional characters.

Parts of these books emphasize the epic dimension. This is especially the case of the *Eugen of Savoy Street Book*, which is mainly aimed at the democratization of the history of the area, which is, in fact, the history of Timișoara in general. The volume includes a narrative of the prince's victory against the Turks and his triumphant march through the gates of the city – the famous Forforoza Gate, whose remains are still incorporated in the house at the end of the Eugen of Savoy street, currently a wine bar. Daniela Rațiu, a TV producer, offers a cinematic version of the events in the summer of 1716 from the Prince's perspective:

So be it! His own little Vienna. These dirty lanes will be sparkling, the buildings will be rid of their ornaments, the shalvars will be burnt and only the smoke, which will also dissipate in a few minutes, will remain of the rags these bastards have left behind. The air of Timișoara is special, he can feel this was meant to happen – to march under the Forforoza Gate with this dream that has obsessed him for so long, and it is only now, after this march, that he can finally understand this dream. (Vighi 2009: 83, *my translation*)

The story continues with a romance which blossoms between the glorious prince

and the innkeeper's daughter, thus reshaping, as many other contributions in this volume, the borders between real and virtual. Literary means are employed for many emblematic buildings in this neighbourhood to tell their history, the impact being enhanced by photography and documentary analysis. Several palaces, which had been erected by important political or military figures or by mayors of Timișoara, this ancestry being retrievable now only in the name of the buildings (Mercy Palace, Solderer Palace, etc.) are evoked in a fictional frame. The stories narrate the fate of consecutive lodgers of these houses, who vary from famous painters (Karl Brocky, born at no.12, famous at the courts in Vienna and London by the 1850s), photographers and composers, well-known local women of the world, in the palaces' earlier, more glamorous days, to drunkards, poor workers, destitute pensioners in the 1980s and 1990s. Contributing to the overall image, there are the functional buildings – the former hotels (The Trumpet Player, Hungaria), the law court, the military headquarters. Last but not least, there are the buildings whose groundfloor has always been occupied by workshops or studios reminiscent of obsolete professions: the hatter and the milliner, the tailor and the upholsterer, the wig maker and the clock maker. The stories come in a succession, like a virtual tour of the street, in which the traveller is guided from one house to the next: no.4, accommodating a lawyer and, after 1949, a workers' association, no.6, hosting a librarian, a pub, or a shop selling feathers and medicinal plants, no.7, boasting a hotel, a bank, a candy shop, no.14, occupied by a midwife, a jeweller, an engraver, etc.

On the CD-ROM accompanying the book, this impression is much more powerful. In *sepie*, the film shows the three centuries of history, in which we can recognize various events witnessed by the street and its buildings, including a famous robbery or the last night spent by Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza on Romanian territory after his abdication and before his exile in 1866.

The book devoted to Augustin Pacha Street is more impressionistic, as its subtitle indicates – *Inner Courtyards*. Another street in the currently pedestrianized core of Cetate, intersecting Eugen of Savoy, Pacha is mainly the street hosting the Roman-Catholic Bishop's headquarters, with a spectacular

history, also dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century during the Turkish occupation and culminating in the communist period, when the bishopric was abolished and the bishop arrested by the dictatorial regime. The texts collected in this volume by Daniel Vighi and Viorel Marineasa belong to writers who were born in Timișoara and lived in this neighbourhood, who feel the old city from within, or newcomers who perceive this cultural and historical experience from without. Such examples are offered by writer and local bookshop keeper Alexandru Potcoavă, whose grandmother lived in a building of this neighbourhood, who summarizes the diverse narratives of lodgers renting apartments or rooms in a once grandiose palace. Polyphonic, his tale captures the life stories of a once elegant socialite, now living in poverty, who is murdered by a worker in his search for long-gone fortunes, of a Russian officer who lived here with his family during the Stalinist period, of old craftsmen whose skills are no longer needed by the community. Alina Radu, writer and editor who moved to Timișoara more recently, admires the last traces of old architectural glory in wooden gates, stone portals, window panes, stained glass, graceful curves and ornamental draining pipes, vanishing details in crumbling buildings. They can only be admired and appreciated by the nostalgic for their romantic aura and observed by those patient enough to pursue them in the general desolation of a dilapidated building or in the equally general haste of daily routine:

What can I say? This city has a thousand gates, each of them leading to another version of Timișoara: the modern one, of fancy cafes – futuristic or vintage– in Cetate, the historical one, the bohemian one, the intellectual one... I don't know what I would call my own Timișoara, but I know what its gate reads: „Close the gate quickly so the cat doesn't run out.” (2011: 68, *my translation*)

The CD-ROM that accompanies this book is a more faithful rendition of the events and performances grouped around the concept of *Strassenfest*. A filmed costume parade evoked life in the streets of Timișoara in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with all the highlights and premieres which contributed to

the completion of the city's application for European Capital of Culture in 2021 (the first city with street electricity, the first electric tram, the first navigable canal on the Bega River, the first brewery, etc.). The Arts House in Augustin Pacha Street hosted a reading session by local writers and students and a happening organized at the crossroads between Eugen of Savoy and A. Pacha Street, which evoked Roman Catholic Bishop Pacha's dissidence during the communist regime, his arrest, interrogation and imprisonment. This last event was a culmination of a street narrative which stressed another turning point in the history of the city, witness of the most radical political transformations in only a few decades, from the onset of World War I under Austrian Hungarian administration and the arrival of the Romanian authorities in 1919, to the installation of the communist regime in 1948 and its removal through bloodshed in 1989, during a revolution that was ignited in Timișoara.

That Daniel Vighi should have had this initiative of immortalizing the emblematic spaces of Timișoara in a series of books and related public events is not surprising. A native of Lipova, a town near Arad, Vighi piloted the concept described above in a summer camp for writers, artists and students, and a resulting book, in 2009. Also under the auspices of Ariergarda Cultural Association, Vighi organized a field trip to Lipova, where poets, anthropologists, historians and visual artists made a joint effort of saving the local heritage and highlighting the historical and natural resources in the area. An old Turkish settlement, Lipova became, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an important place of pilgrimage, at Maria Radna Monastery. The town's most emblematic places, frozen in time, were made famous by literature, especially by Ioan Slavici's 1906 novel *Mara*: the bridge across the Mureș River, Maria Radna, the old school, the ruins of the Șoimoș fortress, etc. The summer camp drew the attention of intellectuals to the potential of the area, so their lobby could result in the concrete action of authorities and the development of cultural tourism.

### Within a Walking Distance

The second study in the fictionalization of memory is provided by Dan Negrescu, who presents another area in which

the native neighbourhood has an impact on those who live there. *Mehala, A Story*, published in 2017, is the fifth book in a series that was initiated as early as 1998 (*A Mythology of Timișoara, Mehala*, 1998; *People, Places, Horses, and Angels*, 1999, 2005; *Mehala in Heaven. A Mythology for the Connoisseurs*, 2010; *The Mysterious Stories of Mehala*, 2016). The main topic of all these volumes is the people and places of the old Timișoara, evoked in a mythical-nostalgic key. Focusing more on the human characters than Vighi's project, Negrescu emphasizes the uniqueness of this neighbourhood, not central and full of famous historical landmarks, but marginal and more obscure, nonetheless, inimitable. This uniqueness is secured not only by the vast amount of evidence about its multicultural and multiconfessional aspect, but also by the inclusion of fictional characters who are portrayed by means of a surrealist touch. Such a character, who might have been inspired by a real person, also stands for an invariable feature of small, closed traditional communities – that of including, in their midst, even when this inclusion worked as an exclusion, an oddity. This strange personage is Baba Buba, whose alliterative name suggests how obsessively she insinuates herself in the individual and collective consciousness of the old Mehala. A woman of indescript age – almost of indescript gender, for that matter – she is the *raisonneur* of the short stories, being present whenever and wherever something important or uncanny happens, a real *genius loci*. Buba has a constant, though problematic relation with the religious authorities (many of her conversations are with the Romanian, Serbian, or German priest and many of her arcane teachings are remotely connected with religious lore) and is part of the community in a unique way – neither fully inside, because she is not married, has no relatives and all the children are afraid of her, nor fully outside, since she is accepted by everyone as a source of genuine knowledge or gossip. She knows secrets and mysteries about human nature and about the natural world which often make her the engine that pulls various events towards their denouement. For example, when “four evil men” (who are, in fact, communist party representatives and apparatchiks) do injustice to several innocent people in the community of Mehala, Buba is there to witness their ruin and death, giving the impression that she was

directly involved in their demise. Like the cunning folk in archaic communities, her recipes and advice can work wonders – whether in a positive or destructive way it is debatable.

The titles of the books in the series indicate the perspectives from which the world of Mehala is captured: emblematic characters, newcomers, craftsmen (professions with an aura of obsolescence, like publicans, tailors, blacksmiths), obscure clerks and civil servants working for the communist regime (gendarmes and militia men, with their distinctive uniform, jargon and mission). The „mythology” announced by one of the titles consists of the creation and repetition, in the short stories collected here, of symbolic spaces – the place where tram no.4 stops, the water pump, the big square, etc. As Otilia Hedeșan observes in the preface to the latest volume (2017: 8), the apparently weird events of the area become meaningful after they are revised and clarified by the inhabitants. Mehala's mythology is paradoxical, the author of the preface continues – obvious, like any exceptional instance, but also discreet. It has an *illo tempore* quality – no precise year is mentioned, characters seem immortal, travelling from one volume to another – but precise determinations are available, by means of detailed references to the first decade of communism – the deportation of the Germans, for example, evoked in the story of a girl who disappears one morning from home, carried away in a truck to Siberia, where she survives incredible hardships only to collapse and die the very day she returns home and sees her native neighbourhood once more.

Thus, a tension is created between the mythical ideal (this neighbourhood is presented in the terms applicable to a centre of the world) and the place per se in a given moment in time. This tension puts this place at an advantage, though: it creates a remote, unknown space, which is sheltered, less exposed and vulnerable, a space which can thus be better preserved.

From the onset, the stories of Mehala are introduced by a founding legend with a nostalgic flavour. The paradox of Mehala's mythology is enhanced by the very instability of the founding legend. While some inhabitants think the name of the neighbourhood is derived from the name of a boyar who owned land here (Măhăleanu, since

the natives of this area call themselves *măhălenți*), others tell the story of the last pasha of Timișoara, Mustafa, who had a passion for this area at the outskirts of the city. While the former legend is rather unlikely, since the Romanian boyars in Banat were few and far between, the latter story, with a hint of fairytale, catches the readers' attention. In Turkish, *mahala* means the space outside the gates of the city. But this is not connoted negatively, like the noun adopted in modern Romanian. Mehala is, for the last pasha, a place far away from the noise, dust and smells of the city, where he can grow chestnut trees and roses. Mustafa had a summer residence built here, which he sadly abandoned in the summer of 1716, when Prince Eugen of Savoy asked him to sign his resignation in this very house. The myth evokes Mustafa Pasha's departure and his gesture to cast a last glance at his chestnut trees and roses, a local version of the Moor's last sigh, which appears to us in sheer contrast with the victor's version, evoked by Vighi's book.

What is more interesting is the fact that even every-day facts and realities are given, by the old and wise in the community, a mythic, legendary aura, abstract explanations and spiritual connections and references being provided in order to render the mundane detail more authoritative and impactful within the community. A short story describes the traditional brick pavements which decorate Mehala's streets, about whose purpose, however, the author's grandfather, "good Peter", is in disagreement with his old neighbours. Practically, walking on bricks was harmless on good weather and uncomfortable during rainy days, when stepping on bricks meant splashing mud on one's shoes and on other people's clothes. But this practice is charged with a metaphysical dimension, as "good Peter" advises walking on the ground, because stones and bricks are cold and insensitive and he lives longer and better who walks on the ground, while another old man thinks the ground is a thief stealing one's vitality and life, so the bricks are preferable by far.

The anchorage in an *illo tempore* persists even after the founding legend is finished. The time of the stories, if, objectively, not better or brighter than the present day, has an aura about it, possibly explained by the fact that it is associated

mostly with the author's childhood, a moment which is beyond satisfaction or sorrow, a moment which simply is, a present continuous. This time belongs to the child and those dear to him – his mother and grandfather – all of them contributing to its stretching, to the past by means of memories, and to the future, by means of voiced desires and expectations. This frozen moment contains daily gestures, which seem part of a ritual, landscapes, sounds and customs, performed slowly, almost dedicately, as rituals must be performed.

Many stories are about the fragility of this moment, stressing the ephemeral nature of individuals and even entire communities, who fight to belong to an outside world which seems too dynamic for the traditional rhythms, a world that has cruelly moved on and left them behind. It is the story of the blacksmith who used to put hooves on horses but now, in the newly technologized collective farm, he has to learn how to fix Russian tractors. A common sight up to a point, the knife-sharpening man, lame but neatly dressed, disappears from the routine of the community once the sharpening factory opens in town. He must retire discreetly when technology makes his presence in people's homes redundant. The Bessarabian refugees who travelled to Mehala with their circus live a drama when they are forced to give up the animals they can no longer afford to feed and only one stubborn raven keeps returning to their camp, a sorrowful reminder of their practical uselessness in the community.

The stories offer the impression of an implacable cyclicity, like that of the seasons. Just like them, there are human seasons which go hand in hand with the irreversibility of the destiny of some ethnic and professional groups. Spring, in Mehala, used to mean the arrival of flocks of sheep, an event which was discontinued by the incorporation of the green area in the big city and the transformation of pastures into parks. Summer came along with the *milonen*, the melons and watermelons advertised by Suabian women at the top of their voices: they would lay straws on the pavement and place the fruits on them. What impressed the less neat and orderly Romanian watchers of this ceremony was that, at sunset, when they left, they picked the very last straw and left the place with no visible track of their presence. Autumn and winter, more melancholy seasons, were associated with the

arrival, from far, far away, of highlanders, who led a nomadic existence:

They approached slowly, in a line, calling their clients, in a somewhat resigned manner, like the echo of remote bells: Lime... and apples, lime.... and apples; [...] What was stunning in these people's presence was that resignation, implacable like the length of the way they rode, year after year, or, sometimes, from one year to another. Always fewer and fewer, with ever older horses, stopping only to ask for water and, not finding buyers, left quietly, taking the lime... and apples with them. Then they stopped coming. (Negrescu 2017: 104-5, *my translation*)

These retrospective views are accompanied by other memorable close-ups, remarkable in the slowness of the characters' gestures, which, in this *relanti* quality, slide from reality to myth. Examples include the tale of the old blind couple, who continue living their romance in a charming little cottage among flowers and fruit trees, even if life had actually been cruel to both of them. Similarly, a talented seamstress receives commissions from an important luxury retailer in Germany who sells fine ladies' underwear. Day and night, the young woman sews and embroiders, applying the beautiful black and white lace on the silk of her clients' night gowns, delivering her merchandise with great punctuality. She sews in the sole company of her reverie, which takes her far away from reality.

The voices of these characters are as much a part of Mehala's legends as Mustafa Pasha's last sigh. Whereas the Ottoman prince unearthed the last hidden rose bush, taking it back to Istanbul with him, as a souvenir of Timișoara, Baba Buba buried her cookbook and her diary, which were discovered post-mortem, evidence of life in this neighbourhood, a puzzle which is hard to fully remake. In order to save these pieces of the puzzle, Negrescu picks them under a protective motto he confesses in the last pages of the 2017 book, which he announces to be the last in the series about Mehala. He argues that, while fairytales refer to something that might have happened once upon a time and, in

the Romanian saying, „if these things hadn't happened, no one would be telling about them”, his own effort of retrieval is motivated by his desire to fight the danger of no longer telling the stories of what once happened and so few – if any – still remember.

What makes these books more inviting and their impact on the general public, native of Timișoara and Mehala or not, is the fact that they are accompanied by an audio-book, with a selection of the best short stories in the author's own reading. The stories' attractiveness, as well as their purpose beyond literariness, in the area of cultural heritage, is enhanced by the author's collaboration with the makers of a popular TVR Timișoara and TVR 3 documentary, *Journeys nearby*. Initiated in 2005 by Diana Bogeia, this documentary is a travelogue, which brings to the public's attention beautiful natural places, communities, urban areas in Banat by means of the stories they tell. The documentaries combine the information *per se* with the pleasure of the journey, which is regarded as an adventure even if it covers only a small distance from home and does not reveal an exotic destination. The places which are discovered by the producer, her guests and her public are, as the very documentary announces in its introduction, places nearby which are virtually unknown, places we pass by everyday ignoring them altogether, but, nonetheless, places which are enriched by the people and their memories or memorable happenings. From tourist attractions and itineraries like the Retezat Natural Reservation, the Nera River Gorge or the Danube Banks, to more or less anonymous streets in towns and villages, the documentary tells a unique story. Each episode has the format of a first-person narrative, in which the “traveller” is a guide but also an explorer into the history of a memorable place, more often than not a genuine *lieu de mémoire*. Being very informative, the documentary has the appearance of story-telling, a tale, as the title suggests, of something next door, which, by virtue of this very vicinity, is unjustly looked down upon. However, the information provided is culturally relevant and draws the viewers towards a more complete and sincere appreciation of their heritage.

Memorably, in the episode dedicated to Mehala, Dan Negrescu offers a wonderful *mise en abyme* of the type of story-telling he



employs in his volumes. He takes the producer to the place which used to host the neighbourhood's cinema, back in the 1950s, a setting, in his short stories, with a high romantic potential despite its mundane surroundings, its Soviet name ("The Red Flag"), and its unheroic spectatorship. Now a restaurant, the place was visited by the author one day, some years ago, on the very day when the cinema closed for good, the author offering, in the documentary, a full description of the complicated process of dismantling and removing the screen through one of the building's front windows. This description, suggesting a mixture between the fictional realm (the stories which were filmed on reel and projected on the screen) and reality (the screen as an object, manipulated by a group of workers) becomes the quintessence of the Mehala stories, in their declared purpose of retrieving a past which is equally real and ineffable.

### **Conclusion**

Despite several obvious differences between the two concepts, what brings them together is more substantial. They both evoke and try to recover a fragmentary universe by means of a cumulation of major events (founding legends, which gravitate, one way or another, around the idealized, heroic figure of Prince Eugen of Savoy, whose projection seems inspired by cloak and dagger plots) and minor events (which, though, have a great potential to become exemplary, in the process of the fictionalization of memory). Secondly, both concepts focus on historical urban neighbourhoods, presented as oases of peace and tranquility, where people lead a regulated life, after having internalized the functions of the symbolic spaces they inhabit, accepting the importance of a clear value system.

The texts which are included in the two series of volumes, the short stories, are brief and essentialized, like the space-time they evoke. Their target public can be the newcomers to Timișoara, tourists who are introduced to a historical realm they enter as if it were a portal fantasy, since both concepts imply a degree of time travelling. On the other hand, the readers can be the local population who, by means of these books and related events, rediscovers a universe close-by, familiar and arcane at the same time, developing a sense of complicity with the

narrators, characters, stories and spaces confined in the pages. The narratives appear, thus, as genuine breaches in time, moments which mark the memory of the local community.

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## **C. REVIEWS**



**FROM EMPIRE TO KINGDOM. ROMANIAN BESSARABIANS AND THE GREAT WAR  
BY GHEORGHE NEGUSTOR AND MIRCEA-CRISTIAN GHENGHEA (REVIEW)**

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The analysis of the Bessarabian society in the context of the Great War mutations replenishes the larger picture of the evolution of phenomena of political and socio-cultural significance. The present work<sup>102</sup> is an ample research referring to aspects of both political and socio-cultural nature, a laudable contribution to the description of Romania after 1918 in the year of the Romanian centenary celebration.

The efforts of the Romanian Bessarabians in the uproar of the war, preceding the Great Union, are approached from multiple perspectives, which represent the original aspect of the book. Given the impressive works focused on the presentation and interpretation of the historical background of the Great War in a year of historic importance for Romania, the book *From Empire to Kingdom. Romanian Bessarabians and the Great War* proposes several directions of research in an attempt to portray key-actors in the Bessarabian community regarding the Great Union.

Published in the commemorative year of the centenary, edited by two historians, Gheorghe Negustor și Mircea-Cristian Ghenghea, the book represents the work of young historians preoccupied with the illustration of a world beyond the global political interests of the war. It is rather the interest in individual portraits, Bessarabian elite and its behaviour prior to the Great Union that characterizes the present studies. The Bessarabian community is represented between *bliss* (for those preoccupied with ideology) and *anguish* (for those called to serve this ideal in the trenches).

The originality of the book resides in the attention for the documentary details and analytical subtlety in an area insufficiently researched from the historiographical perspective probably due to the sensitivity of the subject to this day. And this should be regarded in the larger context of losing Bessarabia after World War II and the present regret given the efforts and hardships made 100 years ago. The studies of the collective volume offer unknown details for the larger public concerning facts, people and events that preceded the union of Bessarabia with Romania.

In a global political context of the war, Bessarabia filed the ideological project of its society as most of the belligerent parties. Researchers point out two antagonical aspects of the region: a conservation of the Slavic elements in the daily life, despite the Romanian linguistic adherence, and maintenance of pro-Russian social opinions, taking into account the importance of the religious factor, on one hand, and a community estranged from the Slavic influence, given the late migration of Romanians to the west, on the other.

The movement of national identity in Bessarabia was slow because of no press involvement in the motivational discourse and because of a lack of education in the national spirit. The elites become the mobilizing force, and we have the examples of Onisifor Ghibu (presented by Mihai Teodor Nicoară in his study) and Ion Mihalache. Mihalache's input in shaping the Romanian national spirit is impressive, according to Mihai-Cristian Ghenghea. The authors of the studies appreciate these emblematic figures for the strengthening of the civic spirit for the union in the context of militantism of the cultural associations for national mobilization; on the other hand, the religious factor should not be

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<sup>102</sup> Gheorghe Negustor, Mircea – Cristian Ghenghea (eds.), *De la Imperiu la Regat. Românii basarabeni și Marele Război*. Editura Mega, Cluj-Napoca, 2018, 281 p.

omitted, as it contributed to shaping the new options and directions of collective identity.

The studies of the book reveal the active role of the Bessarabian nobility not only in the pro-union movement, but also involved in the fund and material aid raising for the soldiers on the front, as well as for civilians in difficulty (organizing evacuation, mobilizing recruits, instituting sanitary zones). As pointed out by Cristina Gherasim, the elites also organized social events for fund raising although they were directed towards the Russian front during the war; sums were also directed for the help of war invalids.

The Bessarabian society was weakened at the end of the Great War not only by its involvement in the front, but also by the pressure of the news of Russian revolutions and fear of their consequences. Given the fact that the elites of the region were either Russophile or pro-unification with Romania, the anguish and fear of uncertainty were augmented so that the inhabitants of this area were torn “between refuge and revolution”, in Daniel Cain’s view. The author of this chapter offers a detailed account of a world affected by the war during 1916 and by social anguish.

The authors of the studies emphasize that the ideological manipulation throughout the Bessarabian Tsarist province was done relatively easy, as the native inhabitants had virtually no access to education - over 80% rate of illiteracy at the end of the 19th century is telling. Moreover, there was no thriving cultural life in the region; the museums, libraries and theatres would appear only after 1905-1906 in the cities, as Gheorghe Negustor states in his study about the daily and military life during 1914-1918 in Bessarabia. As two other studies reveal – written by Eugen-Tudor Sclifos and Gheorghe Calcan – the national ideal of unification between Bessarabia and Romania were covered in the French and Romanian press, shaping the mentality of the people in a positive way.

The studies of the book *From Empire to Kingdom. Romanian Bessarabians and the Great War* are a timely and welcoming approach of the topic of the union of Bessarabia with Romania in 1918, offering glimpses into the socio-economic, political and cultural life of a former Tsarist province. The revealed facets contribute to painting the picture of a society in search of its identity prior to the unification. All the studies are

signed by young historians enlivened by the analytical profundity and objective perspective on complex events, through the interdisciplinary lenses. The book represents an alluring and consistent offer for those interested in socio-cultural facets of a region with a rich yet conflicting heritage.

**ORIENT ET OCCIDENT. CONSTRUCTION DES IDENTITÉS EN EUROPE MÉDIÉVALE**  
**BY LUMINIȚA DIACONU (REVIEW)**

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The result of a constant interest in studying the complex phenomenon of identity, in relation to the various aspects of medieval culture at the crossroads between East and West, the volume *Orient et Occident. Construction des identités en Europe médiévale*<sup>103</sup> brings together 12 contributions by leading specialists in the field, most of which were presented at the conference organized by the Center for Medieval Studies of the University of Bucharest in 2013.

Drawing on the general contours and lines of force of the work, the *Avant-propos* (written by Luminița Diaconu, 2015, 7-11) resumes the specificity of each study and, at the same time, the interdisciplinary character that underpinned the whole process, the interdisciplinarity being an imperative designed to facilitate the deeper understanding of such a complex theme. In essence, the emergence and the definition of identity are inscribed in the *longue durée* and involve not only several stages, but also many dimensions: ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic and even physical. However, religious beliefs and representations have a privileged status in forming a group identity, as evidenced by a large number of contributions, such as that signed by Anca Manolescu ("Le philosophe évêque et l'évêque philosophe: Synésios de Cyrène et Augustin de Thagaste. Définitions de l'intellectuel dans l'Orient et dans l'Occident chrétiens", Manolescu, 2015, 13-28), which highlights the way in which two theologians have understood to define their Christian identity by reference to ancient culture. One of them is Augustin, the theologian *par excellence* and the founding father of the medieval Christian culture in the West, and the other is Synesios, a singular figure cherished by the intellectual circles of Byzantium.

Structured according to the diachronic principle, the volume further proposes the article

by Robert Mirica ("The figure of Hermolaos: the Oriental Identity of an Occidental Demon?", Mirica, 2015, 29-42). The chapter follows the movement of demonological motives in Europe (for example, the figure of Hermolaos-Armilos), which also implies an inevitable process of reinterpretation, as it appears from two texts of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the first written in the Jewish space, the second under the influence of Christianity.

Exceeding the strictly religious dimension, Ecaterina Lung ("Paul the Deacon and the Identity of the Lombards between Byzantium and the West", Lung, 2015, 43-63) is interested in the Lombard identity, which takes shape at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, according to the work of Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, making use of two opposing cultural patterns (the barbarian world and the Byzantine Empire).

The personality of Saint Simeon The New Theologian is at the heart of Anna-Maria Răducan's contribution ("The Biography of Saint Symeon the New Theologian Seen by Nikita Stethatos. Shaping an Identity", Răducan, 2015, 65-74), as the biography written by his disciple, Nichita Stethatos, remodels his identity after death. The problem of religious identity is also present in the study of Cătălina Gîrbea ("*Le dit du vrai anel* ou le paradoxe de l'altérité fraternelle", Gîrbea, 2015, 75-92) about a text from the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, *Le dit du vrai anel*, which resumes the parable of the three rings to bring into question the relations between the three monotheistic religions of the Middle Ages. In the continuation of this direction, Mihaela Voicu ("L'autre peut-il devenir mon prochain? Métamorphoses de la perception de l'Oriental par les chroniqueurs français (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles)", Voicu, 2015, 93-117) follows the metamorphoses of the oriental perception of the French chroniclers from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the context of the Fourth Crusade. Luminița Ciuchindel's article ("Le Prêtre Jean à la lumière des chroniques et des relations de voyage occidentales (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècles)", Ciuchindel, 2015, 118-134) uses a series of chronicles and accounts of pilgrims from the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries in

<sup>103</sup> Diaconu, Luminița (dir.), *Orient et Occident. Construction des identités en Europe médiévale*, E.U.B., colecția „Mediaevalia”, n<sup>o</sup>. 5/ 2015, 225 p.



order to analyze the representations of a mythical figure, the Priest John, who fascinated the West for a long time. The meeting with Oriental alterity in the context of Western pilgrimages to Jerusalem and the rejection of difference, especially when it comes to religion, is the subject of the contribution proposed by Luminița Diaconu ("Les Pèlerins occidentaux face à l'altérité sarrasine : préjugés et vécus d'une rencontre vouée à l'échec (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles)", Diaconu, 2015, 135-151).

Focusing his attention on Central and Eastern Europe, Ovidiu Cristea ("Knocking at the Enemy's Gate: a Gesture of Power of Bogdan III of Moldavia (1509)", Cristea, 2015, 153-172) is interested in the symbolism of a memorable gesture of Bogdan III during the campaign against Poland, a gesture recalled by several later sources, which put an emphasis on the episode in order to underline the identity of the Moldovan ruler. Based on another corpus of historical sources from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Șarolta Solcan ("L'étranger dans la société des Pays Roumains au Moyen Âge", Solcan, 2015, 173-195) analyzes the friendly or hostile attitude of the inhabitants of the Romanian Principalities towards foreigners of different ethnicities and confessions with which they entered in contact for various reasons.

Irina Ionescu ("Dimitrie Cantemir and Sofronie Vrachanski – The Beginning of the Modern Bulgarian Culture and Literature", Ionescu, 2015, 197-208) highlights the first written text in Bulgarian, the work of Bishop Sofronie, which, apart from many parts borrowed from a work of the Romanian prince Dimitrie Cantemir, is a testimony to the fact that language has a major role in identity construction. The volume ends with the contribution of Óscar Alfredo Ruiz Fernández ("Persia y la lucha europea por la supremacía mundial. Creación de identidades orientales a comienzos del siglo XVII", Fernández, 2015, 211-224) about the identity of Persia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, space coveted by the major maritime powers of Europe, Spain and England. The author considers that this issue can lead towards new research directions, beyond the "classic" landmarks of the Western Middle Ages.

Through the depth of the analysis proposed by each author and the diversity of perspectives, reading the volume thus allows for a more nuanced understanding of the different aspects of identity, especially in the context of the contacts that took place in the medieval European universe between the East and the West, which recommends this collective work to the scholars

interested in Medieval Studies and to a larger audience as well.

**THE SOVIET WAR – BETWEEN IDEALISATION AND DEMYSTIFICATION  
BY OLGA GRĂDINARU (REVIEW)**

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The author's demarch<sup>104</sup> to initiate a critical overview of the rich Soviet literature dedicated to the Second World War from a balanced perspective represents a necessary instrument and a starting point for future researchers of the topic. An advantage in this respect is the cumulation of Soviet and western bibliography, given the linguistic barrier for Romanian speakers in consulting Soviet critical sources.

The Second World War has a special status in the Soviet cultural background. It is not accidental that the so-called Great Patriotic War became the most prolific literary motif in the USSR, especially when we take into account the involvement of the Soviet man during the war. Although analyzed by many researchers, the topic is far from being depleted. Olga Grădinaru analyses rigorously the stylistic and theoretical aspects of the war representation in literature, as well as the specificity in socio-political context, along with the ideological mutations of the Soviet state. The principles and main stages of the Socialist Realism are highlighted in connection to the ideological facets.

The author offers a concise analysis of heroism and the myth of the hero in the Russian literature starting with *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, the grand Russian literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the Bolshevik period when the culture began to be subordinated to ideology of the emerging Soviet state, reflecting (mandatory) ideals and realities of the propaganda machine. L. Tolstoy and the literature dedicated to the Patriotic War (Russians facing the French invasion of 1812) are considered the link between Napoleon's and Hitler's invasions and used as such by Stalinist propaganda.

The most consistent part of the book is dedicated to several perspectives and stages of

the Soviet literature on the subject of the Second World War, with special focus on the semantic changes in representing heroism in the war prose. The author offers a consistent analysis of the mutations in the Soviet heroization and key moments that contribute to successive changes in the category hero-heroic. Moreover, heroism is examined in the context hero-individual, as well as in the representation hero-people/collective.

The impressive number of literary works about World War II must have made difficult the selection process of representative novels for several periods. The author's choice for the romantic-heroic perspective on the Great Patriotic War is the classical novel *The Young Guard* by A. Fadeyev and B. Polevoy's *Story about a Real Man*. The just character of the war and, respectively, the heroic invalid are the key aspects that illustrate the specificity of the first post-war decade.

The following post-war decades are marked by the Thaw and the impact of writers like Vasili Grossman and Konstantin Simonov. However, the novels *The Russian Forest*, written by Leonid Leonov and *The Hot Snow* by Yuri Bondarev are analysed as symptomatic for the philosophical and, respectively, psychological perspectives.

We consider that Olga Grădinaru's analysis accomplishes its target, namely, emphasizing the occurred mutations in the war representation of the Soviet period, starting from the canon of hero and heroism in the Stalinist era to the demystification process of the last Soviet decades. Given the generosity of the topic, *The Soviet War – between Idealisation and Demystification* is a commendable and concise analytical form of an impressive bibliography, constituting a useful introduction into a vast area for those interested (specialists or not) in the war representation in Soviet and post-Soviet space.

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<sup>104</sup> Olga Grădinaru, *Războiul sovietic – Între idealizare și demitizare*. Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2018, 224 p.



**AGAINST MEMORY. FROM THE SOCIALIST AESTHETICISM TO THE NEW ROMANIAN CINEMA  
BY CLAUDIU TURCUȘ (REVIEW)**

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The book *Against Memory. From the Socialist Aestheticism to the New Romanian Cinema* is a masterly attempt to build bridges between Romanian literary and filmic texts of the last three socialist decades, on one hand, and between recent novels and films focused on remembering communism, on the other. The choice of two specific types of socialist literary writings and films – political novels and films about socialist society of those years – marks the interdisciplinary character of the book. The interdisciplinarity is strengthened by the nuanced and impressive analysis of the books and films of the Romanian transition. If read together with another collective exploration of the Romanian film of the transition period (where the author has also contributed) – *The Film of Transition. Contributions to the Interpretation of the Romanian Cinema of the '90s* –, the book has the merit of putting into perspective the ideological and cultural mutations of the Romanian communist and post-communist milieu.

While the first part of the book offers a conceptual background of the cultural products of socialist Romania, the second part articulates the specificity of the transition era and introduces the reader to alternative analytical ways of exploring the much discussed New Romanian Cinema. Since the author establishes that the concept of “socialist aestheticism” (as defined by Mircea Martin) is functional only in the literary area, he expands his analytical and methodological approach. Although the survey of the political novel of the post-war period from the first part of the book, establishing three types of subversion (fighting, passive and retractable when referring to novels of Nicolae Breban, Mircea Nedelciu and Norman Manea) is competent and convincing, more appealing is the categorization of socialist eroticism in filmic productions of the last communist decades. Highlighting the specificity of the socialist cultural products in similar terms as Katerina Clark’s “modal schizophrenia”, the author also mentions ways of configuring the Other from the capitalist world in the opposition “decadent eroticism” vs. “revolutionary eroticism”.

Moving forward to the analysis of cultural texts of transition, the author distinguishes roughly three perspectives: “black” (with C. Mungiu’s film *432* and L. D. Teodorovici’s novel *Matei Brunul* as symptomatic); “pink” or bitter idealizations of the communist life, and “grey” or detached, parody-like perspective. Analyzing the “fluid mythology of communism”, Claudiu Turcuș mentions different perceptions about the communist period of writers and filmmakers from different generations. The author points out the “residual” marks of communist aestheticism during the first period of the Romanian transition, on one hand, and a shift of perspective starting with the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Among the exciting examples of post-communist literary and filmic ways of remembering the communist era, one film adaptation stirs the most controversy – Dan Lungu’s novel *I Am an Old Communist Hag!* (2007) and Stere Gulea’s film (2013). Rightfully highlighted in the analysis, the transition from the book to the film marks the difference between the “nostalgic anti-communism” and the coexistence of anti-communist reactions and eager illusions of capitalism. Applying Thomas Leitch’s concept of “ethics of infidelity”, the author attributes to Stere Gulea the title of “post-ideological critic” while not only adapting the novel, but also personalizing it.

The last chapter of the book is conceptually the densest, as it aims at answering one crucial question: whether the Romanian films after 2000 represent a new cinema or a new wave. The methodological facets of the issue bring into the foreground the adjacent matter of the film morphology. The complex answer takes into account three different readings of the Romanian film phenomenon: Andrei Gorzo’s approach from the perspective of Andre Bazin’s cinematic philosophy; Dominique Nasta’s proposed “minimalism” and Doru Pop’s integration of this “Romanian new wave cinema” in the history of European film. The survey of three major themes of the recent Romanian cinema

– trauma, community and revolution – underlines the ethical/normative and self-colonial stages of the communist period representation. Refined and balanced, *Against Memory* is a much needed investigation of the Romanian cultural products from their subversive to self-colonizing status.

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# THE ART OF METALS IN BESSARABIA: A CULTURAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH BY LILIANA CONDRATICOVA(\*)

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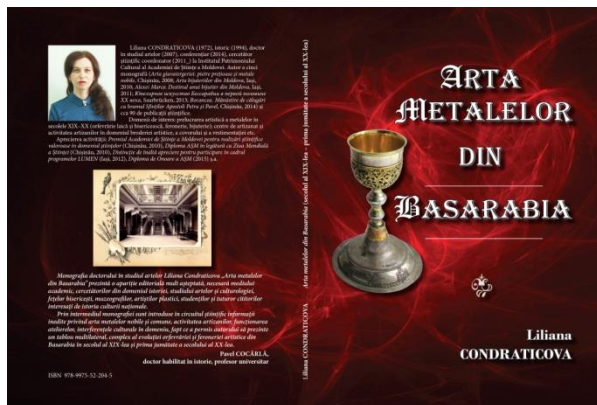
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The Art of Metals in Bessarabia is the new book elaborated by Liliana Condraticova, leading researcher at the Institute of Cultural Heritage from Chişinău – a significant interdisciplinary contribution to the investigation of material culture, as part of our common European Cultural Heritage. “Despite the fact that some aspects of the problem of the artistic processing of metal in Bessarabia were covered in previous studies by both the author and other historians and art critics, it should be noted that at this stage there is no interdisciplinary study that would reflect the artistic and historical development of the jewelry Art of Bessarabia” (Condraticova, 2017, 14-30). Therefore, the monograph will be of great interest for a large audience of people from the lovers of artistic metal processing, jewelry art and museum heritage to the consecrated scholars studying cultural history, museology or metals art history. As the author suggest, “thanks to the diversity, constructive possibilities and details, artistic metal plays a large role in the development of society, which determines the functionality, shapes and character of the items” (Condraticova, 2017, 374).

The book fructifies the efforts of

several years of investigation and now is putting in value novel scientific information on noble metals, artisans’ activity, cultural and historical interferences. The book content is designed into five chapters, an Introduction signed by Professor Pavel Cocâră (Condraticova, 2017, 2-13) and is followed by the Album (353-358) with an impressive data of documents and color illustrations. Through original investigations and elaborated analyses, the author invites readers to deepen their knowledge on the following aspects on artistic metal-working in Bessarabia, of the period between the 19th – first half of the 20th century: the legal basis for the silver craftsmen workshop activities (1817), prohibition of the religious objects manufacture by foreign masters (1827), constitution of a separate jewelers workshop (1854-1858), activity of a jewelry workshop in Orhei (the ‘60s – ‘80s of the 19th century, investigation of the Chisinau Metropolia workshops’ foundation (1911) and its reopening in 1942, workshops for the repairs and manufacture of church utensils in Bălţi (1918-1940), gold and silver craftsmen activity in Soroca, Izmail, Hotin, Bălţi, Chilia and the growing number of their masters, cooperation of Bessarabian jewelers and the owners of jewelry salons from neighboring historical regions and countries.

Relying on the large specter of documentary sources, the author points out the multilateral and diverse study of metal art with valuable information: “Our research has established the importance of museum collections, silverware items, secular and religious objects, which are a part of the country’s cultural heritage. It is necessary for the identification, inventory, evaluation and examination of metal products, based on the historical and artistic value of the products. The church utensils made of silver, gold,

brass, tin are the objects of exceptional value.” (Condraticova, 2017, 369-377)

The author devotes a special attention to the legislation elaboration in Bessarabia of that period. The investigation on the instructions issued by the church and secular officials show that the legislation of Bessarabia in the field of the development of artistic metal processing mainly reproduced the legislation of the tsarist Russia (1812-1917) and Romania (1918-1940, 1941-1944), thereby had influenced the development of secular art and the production of church utensils. These directions, in the author’s opinion, determined the obligations of the clergy in the decoration of the church ornamentation, stipulating the presence of the necessary church utensils in the churches of Bessarabia, thus the responsibility for observing all instructions and prescriptions, assigned to the priests, church elders and deaneries. Basic rules and instructions were adopted at the beginning of the 19th century, revealing the interest of the ecclesiastical authority in promoting religious objects made of precious metals and prohibiting the use of tin, iron and other metals for making utensils. In the interwar period, mentions the author, there were favorable conditions and a legal basis for the further development of artistic metal processing, the activity of the workshops and the work of jewelers in Bessarabia, as a part of Romania; the corresponding policy towards the church and its heritage was also noted during the period of the Second World War (Condraticova, 2017, 91-119).

The historical and artistic data collected by the author made it possible to prove, between the 19th and first half of the 20th century in Bessarabia, the processing of noble and non-ferrous metals by the local silver and goldsmiths, jewelers and smiths. And, if in Europe the jewelers had to work only within the local guild, in the case of Bessarabia this rule was less strict and mandatory. Research on craft guilds, workshops, associations revealed the multifaceted nature of this problem and the importance for studying the history of artistic metal processing in the whole Romanian space. In this context, of great relevance is the systematization of jewelry made of precious metals, elaborated by the author as a result of a complex approach toward archival sources, museum collections and field researches:

sacred vessels (chalice, cross-shaped metal support over paten, plate), metal icons, crowns, metal casing and mounting of icons, and frameworks of the Gospels, various censers, lamps, candlesticks and candelabra (used both in church furniture and in the secular world), church chandeliers, crosses (handheld, altar), and silverware, metal accessories (Condraticova, 2017, 369-377). The author also reiterates the wide representation of the metal products from non-ferrous metals (made by local craftsmen) and expensive church utensils (made by masters of neighboring countries for a local aristocracy and Bessarabian churches) in the contemporary museum collections and churches of the Republic of Moldova. These items, states the author, testify the spread of various secular and religious jewelry made in the jeweler art centers in Eastern and Western Europe; they are also indicators of financial possibilities of the church and local boyars representatives.

Of special interest for readers will be the author’s elaboration on the silversmiths who settled in Bessarabia. They made various costly items for local representatives of the elite; besides, the Church had a special influence on the development of artistic metal and contributed to many innovations in the jewelry trade of the region, mainly concerning the ideas and artistic trends noted in Poland, Podolia, Austria-Hungary and Ukraine. The mutual relations between ethnic minorities of Bessarabia and Bulgarians, Poles, Ukrainians, Russians living in their historical homeland made an indisputable contribution to the development of individual elements of costume, ornaments and accessories, as well as details of artistic forging of metal. Undoubtedly, states the author, the jewelry art of Polish, Ukrainian or Russian masters, whose products were used in secular and church decoration, had a significant influence on the development of artistic metalworking in Bessarabia. Thus, the process relative to the masters migrating from one region to another one had a special impact on the development of art in Bessarabia: the jewelers presented new models of products, other motifs of jewelry, details and shapes introduced by European jewelry art. Metal products indicate a special relationship with the masters of neighboring countries, as well as near abroad, the production of utensils by order of

representatives of the local elite or the founders of Bessarabian churches. The free movement of secular and church products is an important phenomenon, which also denote the migration of ideas and objects, new and fashionable artistic tendencies that reflect the interest of the official secular and ecclesiastical administration of the region in the development of jewelry trade, as well as in decorating Bessarabian churches and private houses of the local elite.

In the Romanian area, art forging and casting has a special place, as evidenced by the numerous and cast iron, tin articles made by blacksmiths. The attitude of parishioners to art forging or casting was different for all centuries. Also, the author draws our attention to the fact that numerous items of cultural value were lost irrevocably for historians and art critics, despite the efforts made to classify and typify products, as well as create the modern conditions for their conservation. The objects of art forging and casting are one of the most striking manifestations of the jewelry business of Bessarabia. Non-ferrous metal products made by casting, forging and electroforming techniques have been systematized depending on application and significance in the following groups: objects of religious use and architectural objects used for interior and exterior decoration of temples and secular buildings. In this context, the author proposes the following typology of metal products recorded in rural and urban areas, including forged iron crosses of temples and belfries; a variety of bells found both in factories owned by Vlasie Losenko, Piotr Ryžov, Pavel Finljandsky, Pavel Olov'anišnikov, Andrei Samgin and, in the interwar period, at Romanian plants in the cities of Arad, Timisoara etc.; metal window and balcony grilles; various awnings (marquees, canopies) and metal brackets; fences and enclosures of religious and secular buildings; doors, wickets and gates of various buildings. Separately, the author designates the products which preserved the monograms of the former owners of buildings, as well as different symbols associated with the protection of the house. Based on this typology, the author notes the undeniable contribution of cast-iron foundries and workshops belonging to Ștefan Sârbu and Nicolai Krimarževsky, whose products of cast-iron staircases, balusters, steps, and handrails

attached special interest to the buildings of the historic center of Chișinău and other settlements of Bessarabia. The presented typology performs a special role for the process of the research of artistic metal processing and systematization of the main objects of historical and artistic value. It also suggests the identification of recommendations for the protection of monuments of the cultural heritage of the Republic of Moldova, based on the historical significance of the objects, artistic value, materials and techniques of work with metals, originality and authenticity, decorative motifs.

The original pieces of art forging and casting found in the historical buildings of Chișinău, according to the author's investigation, are made of cast-iron, iron or copper, and also represent artistic tendencies of a certain historical time. To some degree, its manufacturing at the turn of the 19th-20th centuries was inspired by various motives and ideas of Ukrainian masters. The book identifies and refers to many architects and engineers who worked in Chișinău and designed buildings with cast-iron stairs, maintained regular contacts with craftsmen and the specialized factories in Odessa, thus the influence and use of identical motifs, shapes and parameters of cast-iron staircases and handrails were fixed in historic buildings, both in Chișinău and Odessa.

Referring to the fact that the manufacturers of forged and cast metal objects were installed due to marking on manufactured items, the author emphasizes the importance to study the monograms, hallmarks who can indicate the manufacturer or owner of a building or mansion, the year of construction or installation of a staircase, balcony (Condraticova, 2017, 325-352). In this context, the monograph identifies the need of scientific research of these objects as a significant layer of the national cultural heritage, artistic restoration and state protection, so far as many monuments were in a dilapidated condition or disappeared.

This monograph should be read in the context of studies of interdisciplinary approaches and issues of material culture. The book is also a valuable contribution to studying the phenomenon of national culture in Bessarabia, the 19th – the first half of the 20th centuries, “as an original symbiosis of the material possibilities of the ktitors



(representatives of the local elite and church) and artistic directions clearly expressed in the neighboring regions and countries, becoming a kind of artistic boundary between the countries of Eastern and Western Europe” (Condraticova, 2017, 369-373). In this regard, the larger historical context, scrutinising the whole 20th century, would offer the readers a most complex image toward the historical and cultural evolution of metal art in the region between Prut and Dniester rivers. Despite this remark, the chosen approach of the author works well in achieving the goals defined in the introduction. We would kindly recommend this work for specialists interested in the field, as well as for those interested in (re)visiting and (re)discovering the cultural heritage of Bessarabia during the 19th – the first half of the 20th centuries, that reflect its cultural identity and remain the eternal values of the people, integral part of their material and spiritual culture.

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