

New Europe College Regional Program

2003-2004

2004-2005



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Editor: Irina Vainovski-Mihai

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ISSN 1584-0298

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“Words, words, words...”

Hamlet, William Shakespeare

Prologue

A title such as this could sound similar to an advertisement in the personal column of a local newspaper. On the other hand, expressed in one short sentence, it could also describe what I see when I look in the mirror – or at least what I would like to see. Looking into the mirror in itself is not sufficient for me to know who I am, however, if this at all is my goal. Just as it isn't necessary to know who am I – at any cost – in order to face the mirror, it is at least necessary to want to find out about this issue. But not everyone needs such knowledge: for some it may be something like the bait to the fish, for others it is the air they breathe. I believe that we – you and I – belong to the latter set. Or at least I would like to...

I will use as background in this article a number of Southeastern European psychological novels from the period between the World Wars – three Romanian, one Bulgarian and one Serbian. Based on these, we will discuss the narrator/protagonist and some ideas surrounding his personality. We are going to talk about...

The relationship between our common concepts of self-revelation and works of art, between the very processes of self-defying and that of creating, has an intimate nature. It is a love relationship. I imagine that there hardly exists another cognitive form that is more proficient in revealing what man has inside him than fiction (with the possible exception of anatomy, of course). And the psychological novel, made of mental archeology, is his favorite obsession.

Proust says the novel is a mirror held up to life. Let us then take up a position behind the mirror and try to see through it; let us see through the text, through the flesh of fiction and face the narrator/protagonist of the Southeastern European psychological novel between the World Wars. Let us strip down the personality of he who narrated the interwar psychological novel at the moment when this form of fiction produced its best works. Let us make it more clear what that personality combined, what the problems and complexes of the narrator/protagonist in the Southeastern European psychological novel between the World Wars were and to what extent they corresponded to their time and place – because all these problems, manifested or hidden therein, were also our problems. And some still are. Every time we raise our line of sight, we can see them, hanging above us, fastened with only a single strand of ancient horsehair...

From a close distance this personality does not seem so fictional. We would meet mostly a young man, a European – where European means an inhabitant of that resurrected and worse than ever Babylon of the Old continent following the First World War; he is as a rule an intellectual, together with his self-awareness of the fact in the company of his quests, breakaways and returns, he is all the time tossing himself into the whole crowd of existential questions. When we meet someone, in our world, the first issue to arise is normally the social aspect of his identity. What later on tries to sneak up on us, sometimes in the form of obsession, is the appearance of the psychological, the personal identity of the narrator/protagonist, in which his human problems are indexed. These mark every step he has taken on the road to self-defying and self-improving in an all too familiar way that has a sobering influence on us. If we move our attention over and across borders to the national aspect of identity, we can then outline an early sense of an intellectual European community that is representative of the interwar period. This sense is traceable from the Southeastern European to the global in a time of historic cataclysms.

We would not try to exhaust this topic. Thus we could only exhaust our patience...

We begin with the words of others, the result of long and weary searching, in order, along the way, to find our own words, which could lead us to something original, beyond the mirror.

Man is a historical animal, said Terry Eagleton. Man could not be himself without belonging to both the universal and the individual at one and the same time, without belonging to the self-identity of the human

spirit, without belonging to his species, his essence that makes him what he is, without being a part of the history of mankind. Here is ours...

Babyloniad

Europe between the World Wars – a few decades like a leap into the nothingness. After the First World War, the Old Continent resembled a crowd disheveled by visions of horror, disgust, melancholy and the quests of a super-active consciousness. The times had become fierce. It seemed as if mankind had departed, its face washed away in a stunning vortex of all names of madness. War strengthened the trust in violence as a relatively fast means of achieving aims, or at least what were considered to be aims. The crisis of democracy had already infected the wounds of war. A new disease pulsed within the social changes, in the disappointment, the newborn faith in domination, which produced social transpositions, brought large human masses under unified leadership and tore many away from their original environment. Expatriations, internal resettlements – migrations became a way of life again. A new disease pulsed into a gradual distortion of world economics, in internal discords, in the newly created multi-national states such as Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. An old damnation corroded the sick boundaries of young nations: the strengthened sense of nationality with its inherent primitive emotions and demagogies. In interwar Europe nightmares substituted conscious dreaming. Typhus, cholera, mass graves... The anemic Old World entered the vestibule of a wicked illness. Wild abundance of reparations and debts impeded its economic growth. The children of the new world order – the young democracies – reeled upon their low political literacy. Social transpositions increased the burden of the miserable working class. Europe emaciated due to political egoism, national rivalry and malnutrition. It lost its world leader position. Post-war stabilization appeared to be a feigned upsurge. The 1929 world economic crisis also served to overwhelm the Old World. This was followed by national catastrophes, economic downfalls, inflation, reparation debts, poverty, unemployment, political falseness, social chaos, steep social division... With the impatience of a child eager to go out in the yard to play, the people of Europe set about developing their arms industries. In the scorched garden of the Old Continent ancient games with new bombastic names began to be played all too often: military coup, military dictatorship, coup d'état,

personal regime, royal dictatorship, president dictatorship, one-party authoritarian state... One might say nothing but concepts as hard to pronounce as to endure. Interwar Europe saw more than twenty dictatorships and fostered fascism and National Socialism...

...And a generation of authors, although some assumed them and at times they even assumed themselves, were rather demolishers. A generation, which called itself "*lost*". Lost after the Belle Epoque in the unusual silence of the ideological vacuum, the social disorder and the hollow guiltiness of Cain... A somber adventure of that generation was the First World War. The sobering effect of the disgusting spectacle and its subsequences aroused a personality crisis, a kind of roaming through the blurred reality where consciousness no more managed to be adequate to itself, was disabled from finding an identical image. An enlarged consciousness, which as though it sometimes went and faced the mirror, was as indifferent as if merely left aside and the wide open coffin of a dead child...

In the interwar period – vertiginous due to the rate of all these things happening – a certain vast process that pervaded mainly the sphere of the spirit as early as the end of 19th century, known as *modernism*, raged unrestrained. The notion of *modernism* is quite a general and abstract term denoting a movement conditioned by history, in principle inevitable, with original causes in the socio-political climate of its ideological and philosophical concepts, the common European and world literary context and increasing exchange of cultural values and ideas of art; a movement, stimulated by crisis that transformed the world in revolutionary way, producing events of global significance. *Modernism* stirred the realistic surface of art. The reasons for this could be not only sociologically global, but also purely esthetic. At any rate, disturbing energies always came from the recesses. However, seen from another viewpoint – that of the historical time – it could seem like a boundless impulse towards *transcending* a certain context. Besides, its striking presence is not in any way a proof – neither of the inescapability and indispensability of modernistic art, nor of the idea that this is the true art of the *modern times*... But for sure, *modernism* is a notion one could speak a lot about without saying anything at all.

Interwar modernism appeared to be the artistic destiny of a whole generation of authors, forced by historical conditions to discover its own path and its own image, wandering the unavoidable adventures of quests, experiments, and failures, until making its choice of self-definition in

terms of esthetics, ethics and philosophy; until finding its ideological vaulted arch, which is at once unattainable and found in its entirety.

Reaction against tradition was one of the most essential ideological components of any of the modernistic trends. The esthetics of modernism, to a great extent, was constructed on the basis of negation – as an antithesis to the preceding cultural model in its cultural-historical and esthetical aspect, a negation that applied to its face the mask of surprise. This negation was rooted in the necessity of driving the spiritual life of society to excess in that very historical moment. While vigorously opposed to the traditional values and models of art, modernism surprised while experimenting with the communicative and significative nature of the expression of art. Modern art was an art of the innovative, it was experimental, formally sophisticated and indistinct, and comprised creative and non-creative elements; its social content was non-conformist... This modernistic gesture was not evolutionary but revolutionary, and always placed modernism into a sort of a romantic situation.

It is a fact that there exists neither indefeasible tradition, nor hermetic culture. A couple of factors – the national-specific, which is tradition, and that which is acquired from outside, the inevitable impression by the vigorous trends of world-wide importance – coexist and interact with each other during every moment of the cultural development. This introduces a specific character to the models of both: modernistic art, on the one hand, and every national traditional culture, on the other.

It is as if the earth began to rotate faster after the First World War and as if life found itself shorter of breath, more determined to get somewhere...

The nature novel – under the classification of the literary genders and genres – is the latest (though not necessarily the slightest) phenomenon which theorists still find hard to frame in a crystal-clear definition. Its development is usually considered to be dependent on the recognition of fiction as an empirical and skeptical means of cognition, of investigating the familiar environment. This made the novel more contingent on realism than other known genres. Notions formulated as to its range would not remain for long on their pedestals since this range became wider with each new novel. Its fiction juggled various registers, structures, and typologies, all the time discovering new levels of presence, traveling, free of all restrictions, from history and documentary prose to the heights of literary formalism and beyond. Its fiction had access to the magic coherence of all the domains of human knowledge and loved to surprise

with the unsuspected directions it often took. In a fascinating way, the novel was able to give the imaginary formal limits of authenticity, for the entire relative fortuity of its form, no matter how uneven, perceived reality as an object. *Visible unrealities were always that which art wanted.* In this sense, realism is also a product of imagination. Until the beginning of the 20th century, the novel – in close connection with realism – established itself as a mimetic genre, and the methodology used to study it worked exclusively with its mimetic characteristics: poetics peered at the object of imitation, thereby taking us to the realistic novel of the 19th century. The beginning of the 20th century saw a gradual altering of concepts, together with a poetics that was already focusing on the very means of fictionalizing, which take us to the modernist novel. It did not hide the fact that it was an outcome of a realized and determined action of human consciousness, which in essence represented a material verbal construction that often carried things too far – for example, to a state where rhetorical and linguistic features gain the upper hand over all other features in the construction of a work.

As an *institution* of modern society, said Malcolm Bradbury, the novel is especially manageable to the chances of life and the prevailing structures of perception. With the naked eye, one could see the domination of realism throughout 19th century, followed by the naturalism, some forms of the modernist novel, the antinovel and so forth... The novel clearly went through definite phases in its development, which make a chronological approach a suitable method with which to study it; nevertheless, a satisfactory definition of the novel is still missing. But perhaps this very fact defines the novel sufficiently well... As with *modernism*, there is only relative agreement about what is *not* a novel.

Whatever the content of this questionable definition might be, in terms of its diachronic nature, it did not correspond to the Southeastern European manifestations of the novel and, in particular, that of Romanian, Bulgarian and Serbian interwar fiction, which was an original *rara avis* under the common European classification of literary genders and genres. Or perhaps they were *avis incognita* on the European market, and maybe they still are... In 19th-century fiction in England, France, Russia and, gradually, in the other developed European countries, the novel established itself to such a degree as to become a synonym for the century itself. Belinsky emphasized that there are ideas of time as well as forms of time, thereby hinting at the novel, which had begun to be perceived as the genre most suited to the new times. But while the novelistic form crowned the fiction

of the then developed European countries, throughout the peculiar Southeastern European time zone, also called the Balkans, the novel was in the form of a literary embryo and the prose of these nations was associated with little more than the so-called pre-novelistic forms such as the cyclic-combined narratives. At the gates of the Orient, the development of almost all genres came late. This oddity of new Southeastern European literature was born of the unusual revival of the countries in this region, and its novel was a product of the Renaissance. Out of the special historical conditions prevalent in this region began a compulsive, accelerated development of national cultures that had been revived in the 19th century. The inconsequent, incomplete outliving of the stages in literature – representative of the Western European countries – and the eccentric coexistence of diverse styles in the works of one and the same author became a regularity. The Southeastern European Renaissance appeared to be deprived of a self-dependant stage throughout the course of the accelerated development when renaissance processes, perforce, were performed in an impure way and at times diverged into anecdotic eclecticism.

The peculiarities of the Southeastern European novel did not only come from the quickened pace of breath in Balkan literature. A national tradition of the genre was missing entirely from the Balkans, where the medieval novel had not existed. In one sense, entire episodes of national history of the Balkan peoples were also missing. At this point, another gap opened wide: the great forms of fiction had critical history as a background, but here, in the Balkans, there was no original concept of history, no philosophy of history. And, while at the organic development of the novel short fictional forms – memoirs, short stories, novellas, feuilleton, etc. – in a sense marked the decline of the realist and romantic novel, in the late and accelerated development of Southeastern European literature the same genre forms preceded and, to an extent, filled the role of the novel. As such, the unavoidably eclectic approach of literature in the Balkans was only a matter of course, as if these short forms appeared more suitable and more appropriate forms with which to react to the fast-developing plethora of new moments. The greatest achievements of Southeastern European literature during their revival and the close post-revival period remained in the field of short prose forms (in the other area of large fictional works they were for a time in many ways imitative).

What is tempting about the novel is its incompleteness, the openness of its genre; and here I perceive a sort of *mirror-ness* relationship between

the way we apprehend the novel and the way we think about the Other, since what makes the Other difficult to gain access to is the fact that he or she is first of all never completed, never entirely determined by the context, but always somewhat “open” and “drifting”.

The prose of Southeastern European writers after the First World War appears to have been tempted by the novelistic form. A true outburst of the genre of the novel followed – in the Bulgarian literary context it lasted less than three decades, but produced more than 400 novels... Looked at from a bird’s eye view, interwar fiction by Balkan writers appeared to be dominated by a realistic method of representation – the imaginary path of development of Balkan writers towards a new realism.

In search of... the psychological novel

The novel is built around the human being. Every novel tells the story (or history) of one or more human beings. Put briefly, the psychological novel is a first-person narrative of a self who, in one way or another, is in search of himself or his Self. Alexander Woolcott said: “Reading Proust is like bathing in someone else’s dirty water.” In fact, the psychological novel is first of all a label. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, it presents “a work of fiction, in which the thoughts, feelings and motivations of the characters are of equal or greater interest than is the external action of the narrative.” The reason that external events form part of the psychological novel to the extent that they do relates to the emotional reactions and internal states of the characters, which in their turn are prompted by external events –sometimes the size of a pea.

This is a cause and effect relationship, a vicious circle in which the particular, personal perspective of the psychological novel focuses exclusively on a person’s inner life, a vision always intermediated by a confessed point of view. In Pompiliu Constantinescu’s opinion, for example, in *Ioana* by Anton Holban, external action is missing entirely. Consequently, the plot of the psychological novel is subordinate to and dependent upon the probing manner of delineating the character. The chronological order of representing events is thus replaced by the events’ habit of occurrence in the character’s mind, by thoughts, associations, memories, fantasies, reverie, contemplation, dreams, analysis, obsessions...

This entire interiority did not appear of course as *deus ex machina* out of nowhere. It has its history and its causes. Shakespeare's Hamlet is probably the prime example, at least in terms of drama, of this stress on the internal life of characters seen in a large number of works of art. Psychological approaches and psychological moments in general can, of course, even be found among the earliest novels in England, France and Spain, but the psychological novel itself was only to reach its full potential during the 20th century, predominantly in the interwar years. This development suspiciously coincided with progress in the field of psychology and Freud's discoveries, though without necessarily being a result of it, nor an accidental fact. This reminds me of a skeptical remark about psychoanalysis which said that theory itself appeared to be the disease, even though it was itself trying to heal. Perhaps we are dealing with a similar case in the psychological novel? The psychological novel could itself be the very path it is trying to walk...

The reason for these essential processes, as is true for others also, could be a part of the global subjectivist turning of modern culture towards the individual, towards and sinking into the self; a new form of interiority in which we start to think of ourselves as creatures in possession of inner depths. The first versions of this concept rendered by Jean-Jacques Rousseau are theistic, or at least pantheistic. Novelty could be detected through the analogy of the previous moral concepts in which complete existence was possible only if one is in touch with some moral source such as God or the idea of good, for example. In times of modernity, the source is moved deep within our selves. This circumstance is a part of the global subjectivist change in modern culture, that new form of interiority in which we start to think about ourselves as creatures with inner depths. Psychological complexity and the subconscious incentives belonging to it are undeniable in the painful introspections of Fedor Dostoyevsky and Lev Tolstoy; in techniques such the recording of detailed descriptions of the effects external events exert upon an individual consciousness in the works of Henry James and Thomas Mann; in the suggestive cobweb of recollections of Marcel Proust; in the overwhelming and devastating stream of consciousness of James Joyce and William Faulkner; in the shady womanly flow of experience of Virginia Woolf; in the hybrid world of Franz Kafka in which reality hangs upon the skeleton of the subjective logic of dreams... These are actually some of the adepts of the psychological novel and they all have their individual approaches, reached

individually by every one of them, under the sign of a comprehensive individualization of human consciousness.

Characteristic features of modernity such as the “instrumental mind” or individualism and psychological analysis were often explained as a secondary product of social transformation, as just an occasional and attendant result of industrialization, higher mobility and urbanization. This could be read in every history book. But there must be important casual connections here: what made us *chose* exactly this way?

With the arrival of the 20th century, the novel began to change its character. For there to be sufficient transformations of content, alterations of form were needed. The old certainty that experience could be appropriate as represented by the language and structures of the conventional novel became more and more questionable. Writers began to examine the ways in which reality eluded the grasp of literature just as mankind began to gain new freedom by breaking off *the old moral horizons*. In their experiments and attempts to capture the complex and fragmentary essence of experience, some of these authors were *stretching the limits* of the conventional novel to such an extent that it became increasingly remote from the expectations – sometimes also the comprehension, interest and needs – of the average reader. I perceive this – let’s call it *mirror-ness* – here between the cited literary process and the real human situation. After the First World War, the European intellectual was intentionally *stretching his/her own limits* with varying success... These modernist experiments sometimes produced works of art of great interest, which also tended to widen the gap between the popular and the “literary” novel, between the convention and high culture, just like the state of affairs among people.

The “epiphanic”, as Charles Taylor called it, the creation of high culture on the one hand and the low and common, but undoubtedly indispensable reality, on the other, could never be harmonized perfectly. In fact, a lot of modernist writers felt the widening gap between the language and what it pointed out. This made of the people of modernity, and those who followed, creatures doomed to dwell upon more than one level and encouraged them to turn toward the inside. Those seated on more than one chair at once would inevitably fall to the floor, and probably this is the way it should be. This movement towards psychological analysis in art is traceable exclusively in the novel.

It was as though – though this was not everything – man gradually turned, put in a figurative way, from searching for himself in God to

searching for God in himself. We have real indications that the Southeastern European intellectual began to believe that the way to achieve this goal really went through man himself by diving into the human being, *stretching our own limits* and piercing our own selves completely, intentionally and conscious of the risk... Or, if you would prefer, breaking through and beyond the mirror...

The writers whose fiction we are trying to focus on are popular in a different manner and are known personalities, such as Camil Petrescu, Anton Holban and Mircea Eliade. Although diverse, one from another – whether in terms of individualities or in terms of being peculiar as writers, in their path of life or in their creative approaches and research, or even simply chronologically – there are few things which can equal them. They were all Romanian prose writers, connected in one way or another to the interwar period of the 20th century. They were also more or less connected to that phenomenon, the so-called psychological novel. Moreover, they were all connected to another phenomenon: the similar tendencies of the novel in the light (and shadow) of its Southeastern European context. This already leads us towards a comparison when observing this complex identity, for the novel in its Southeastern European manifestations showed a proximity in terms of the problems of the intellectual, for example, and not only that...

Words are ill mannered: they never listen, just as old teachers never learn; they have an awful habit of interference, between those who speak them and the things we speak about, thereby increasing a basic distance. As a result, we forget we are speaking about human beings, made of flesh and blood, who, for sure, just like us, once felt naked, dumb and frightened...

Heart of Darkness

Many others have taken this road – from Joseph Conrad to Francis Ford Copola, from Heart of Darkness to Apocalypse: Now, and beyond... But we are still there where we started. Are we still there?

As a graduate of the department of literature and philosophy in the University of Bucharest, a teacher in Timișora, an influential journalist, critic and polemicist, a director of the Bucharest Theater and a member

of the Romanian Academy, Camil Petrescu (1894-1957) is well-known, not least as a prose-writer, dramatist and drama critic. His importance comes from his interwar novels, *The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War* (“*Ultima Noapte De Dragoste, Întâia Noapte de Razboi*”) (1930) and *Procrustean Bed* (“*Patul Lui Procust*”) (1933). His third major narrative, *A Man Amongst Men* (“*Un Om Dintre Oameni*”) (1958), is much more subsequent, much more different and never completed... Being an orphan, he had had a hard existence, learning assiduously and working to support himself. In 1916 he was drafted into the armed forces and sent to the battlefields of the by then raging First World War where he was wounded and taken prisoner by the Austro-Hungarians. He was released in 1918, but it would seem the war had been implanted into his being and would never leave. In a sense, every one of these writers – in a similar way to all the intellectuals belonging to the interwar generation and the people who had endured the war – was a veteran of sorts in so far as the war and jaws of history had left them crushed and with divided mind, with eyes and corpse bitten, and with a disabled heart and consciousness turned upside down, naked and horrified. It could be no other way. I think that even characters like Mateiu Caragialle’s *kings of night* from *Craii de Curtea Veche* were somehow veterans in their own way, even if they wasted themselves away earlier in that the war had withered away their creator too. Later, that war environment and the breath of massacre would be built-in to *The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War* – a work of fiction that probed the consciousness of the interwar generation, torn away from the bygone days, a generation without a plan, and without wanting to have one. With subtlety and accuracy, parallels were drawn between individual, social and national psychology, on the one hand, and between the personal, internal suffering, searching, experiments and breakdowns, and the cruel exterior experience of war, on the other. Petrescu’s strength presumably lies in his ability to describe the psychological dimensions of an inner impact at a moment when, as Charles Taylor calls them, *old moral horizons* were buried six feet under and the *instrumental mind* was overcoming the increasingly urbanized social structures; at a moment when human being probably began to be aware of the loss of faith, freedom and sense, sinking into the mirror... Certainly there were merits of form as well as content: namely, clean factual style and innovative techniques – a new form vis-à-vis a new content. Camil Petrescu has been often reproached for burdening the text with over-theorizing in places full of philosophical moments. Here I see the

intellectual and the creator himself – the narrator/protagonist facing the mirror of narrative, perched on the edge between two nights, between love and death, trying to keep his balance, just like Holban’s Sandu reeling upon an old rail somewhere on the edge of Cavarna Port – one of his favorite games... The narrator/protagonist in *The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War* is Ștefan Gheorghidiu – a young European, or at least a Southeastern European. His mental health is increasingly called into question after every gaze into the mirror of narrative, with the approach of introspection; he is lost amidst the *desolation* of war, he himself becoming a *desolate tract*. He has a university degree in philosophy; he is also manifestly a Romanian writer, part of the capital’s literary milieu, and he is married – a marriage that is questionable enough to cause me to hesitate to use the word.

According to critics, Camil Petrescu represents something of a theorist of the new epic style in Romanian interwar prose writing. Despite recurrent personal differences, he was close to Eugen Lovinescu’s (1881-1943) modern, urban and Western-oriented intellectual circle, in which one would often happen upon the name and figure of one of Lovinescu’s nephews: Anton Holban (1902-1937). As French language professor in Galați and in Bucharest and an assistant to the most outstanding Romanian literary magazines of the day – *Sburătorul*, *Viața literară*, *Rampa*, *Vremea*, *Azi*, *Critica*, *Critica actualității*, *România literară* etc. – his life ended rather hastily and unexpectedly after complications during surgery. He read French at the University of Bucharest and subsequently spent some time at the Sorbonne in Paris working on a Ph.D thesis on Barbey d’Aurville which he never finished... *Death That Proves Nothing* (“*O Moarte Care Nu Dovedește Nimic*”) (1931) and *Ioana* (1934) are the novels that his name has mostly been connected with and which earned him the award of the Society of Romanian Writers in 1934. The artistic approaches of Holban and Petrescu have been compared from the point of view of sincerity, authenticity and the refusal of refined and sophisticated writing. Like Petrescu, Holban was absorbed by interpreting the works of Marcel Proust. In fact his contribution to Romanian interpretations of this adept of the psychological novel probably counts among the most important. Of both Romanian writers – Petrescu and Holban – it could equally be said that they were exclusively novelists, (auto)analysts, theorists and practitioners of first-person narration. But let the author him-self pique our curiosity and stir our imagination: “*Death That Proves Nothing* is a dynamic novel, *Ioana* is a static one. That is the

first difference between them. (...) Why should the first person be more unvaried than the third person? (...) As for me, it was sufficient to have the opportunity to examine myself, since I am the one bound to live with me all the time, until the comedy of my life is not completely brought to the end. *Besides I had also the chance to know myself better that way.* As for Sandu, I could make him as sophisticated as I wanted to. Inside him I could let coexist even the most contradictory characteristics. Since transparency plays a major role, he can afford himself every kind of confession. Still, some things are untenable, but that doesn't matter. Everything in his soul is set off by accidental intrigue. Anyway, one shouldn't believe that the author and Sandu are perfect fits..." In fact, I don't think there can be a fit at all, even with his self, even compared with the day before. The narrator/protagonist in *Ioana* is Sandu. He is young and also a European, or at least Southeastern European – "at the end of the world", on the very edge of both *deserts* – that of the desolated Cavarna Port and the "wilderness" of the sea, on the one hand, and the *desert* that is Sandu, as we might call it, on the other. His mental health is such as the mental health of any human being on the verge of committing suicide could be – that is to say, doubtful. Stingily, he preserves and cultivates this state of his, not wanting to share it, even with Ioana, who to an extent resembles an incarnation of his soul in a world he doesn't belong to despite being in touch with it. Sandu is extremely refined and clearly has a university degree; he is clearly a Romanian writer who is part of the capital's literary milieu. As to the marriage, this is an issue of an exceedingly obscure nature, a fact that automatically strips it of value. One could only say their souls had been lovers. At any rate, Sandu's prototype (the writer himself) had already been married for some two years to Ioana's prototype (Maria Dumitrescu).

Another graduate of the department of literature and philosophy of the University of Bucharest was Mircea Eliade (1907-1986). Excepting the fact that he graduated in philosophy, there exists a mountain of other facts testifying to his personality: he performed research in India, studying Sanskrit, the Tibetan monasteries and the practices of Hinduism; initially, after returning from India, he became an assistant-professor in the department of literature and philosophy at the University of Bucharest, where he himself had studied; after this he became a cultural attaché in London (1940), a cultural counselor in Lisbon (1941-1944), and a lecturer in the history of religion in Paris (1946-1948); he was invited to be a visiting professor at the University of Chicago in 1956-1957 and

subsequently held a chair and was a coordinator at the department of history of religion (renamed the Mircea Eliade department in 1985); he was a member and later a president of the American Society for the Study of Religion and also a member of the Belgian Royal Academy and Dr. honoris causa in many universities; and, finally, he was enormously prolific in literary, scientific, publicist and editorial activities, the 1930s being a particularly fruitful time for his fiction writing. Overall, his personality has provided a significant amount of material to his biographers – seemingly he is better known as a researcher of Yoga, occult practices, comparative religion studies, and other fields, than as a novelist and prose writer, even though it is precisely there – in his novels – that I think he contrived to express himself as completely as was possible. As a young man, Eliade was divided between the mysticism of the East and the modernity of the West, something which probably magnetized him more than the Romanian perspective. *Maitreyi* (1933) is considered to be his finest piece of literary work, which, put criminally briefly, represents the striking of balance in a love affair tempted by psychoanalysis. This novel is preceded by only one completed work of fiction, *Isabel and the Devil's Waters (Isabel Și Apele Diabolului)* (1930), an overt and purposeful analysis of the youth's sexuality. In *Maitreyi* – a novel considered rather Anglo-Saxon and openly based upon his diaries – Eliade openly aims to see the Anglo-Saxon and then the Asian in the mirror, to find someone else within himself. Spiritualism, which is as old as myth, hunts this fusion with a feverish eroticism, which is as glamorous as could be in the consciousness of a twenty-six-year-old European, or at least what is often “the only white man” in the surroundings – an engineer with a university degree from somewhere in Europe, the narrator/protagonist in *Maitreyi* whose name was *Alan*. The more his story progresses, the more he is transformed from an engineer devoted to construction works into a young man of words with definite literary and philosophical inclinations and a talent to suffer; the deeper he falls into newfound inner vibrations, the more he becomes an owner of a reeling mentality and health, devoted to self deconstruction. He finds himself in the *wilderness* of an unknown country, the single holder of an unknown that is turning into a *desert* of consciousness. In addition, he is the complete, young bachelor.

If I were to mention here a couple of other narrators/protagonists they would seem completely suitable to the sort of stereotype I am outlining – Miloš Crnjanski's Petar Raic from *Diary of Charnoevic* (1921) and Juan or Ivan Bistrov from Boris Shivachev's *The Inventor* (1931) – and one would

initially notice how similar these characters are, and it would be not until later that the differences start to show. But if I were to mention Proust's Marcel, Joyce's Leopold Bloom, or even Stephen Dedalus, I do not think it would turn out in exactly the same way. First thing, then, comes the distinction...

Boris Shivachev (1902-1932) was a Bulgarian. He was a writer who remained in the shadows. He died at a very early age and *The Inventor* is the only book he published. On top of this, the book was banned immediately after publication, leaving it almost entirely unknown until near the end of the century. And yet this is probably the novel most approximate to the idea of the psychological novel in the Bulgarian literary reality of the period. Georgi Raichev, for example, was Bulgaria's most famous psychological writer, though he never wrote a novel. The somewhat outshined narrator/protagonist in *The Inventor*, Juan, has similar features to both Alan and Sandu, or to Ștefan... The Argentinean environment made of him a noticeable European, or at least a Southeastern European, that was thrown away in Latin America. He might not be "the only white man", but at the end of his story he was simply the only man in the wastelands of Patagonia. An adolescent with a degree in engineering, dosed in vanities and self-pity, passion and suffering, breakdowns and more breakdowns, he was torn between his ebullient sexuality and indications of homosexuality, which was treated as a disease and prohibited as a crime at the time. The way Shivachev dealt with this issue reminds me of Panait Istrati's "Chira Chiralina". Again, Juan walked the path from construction to deconstructing himself and from drawing up plans to keep on taking down notes of a quest for something unnamed. All this transformed him into creature that was similar to a madman. Alienation from civilization went in parallel with alienation from the outer world, a departing journey into one's self, where the remoteness of horizon began to resemble an identity... He was single, lonely and a virgin. Into the *wilderness* of Patagonia Juan – himself a *desert* – vanished without leaving a trace, except that poor notebook that was turned into the source for a novel, or at least that is what the author claimed. It would seem he broke through the mirror...

Miloš Crnjanski (1892-1977) is a Serb from the Vojvodina Province and his *Diary of Charnoevich* is perhaps one of the most prominent achievements in psychological prose in South Slavic literature. He was considered the creator of one of the manifestoes of Serbian postwar modernism and was a leading poet of the expressionist wing of Serbian

modernism. The poetic escape from reality, launched by Crnjanski, outlined the contours of reality itself. *Reality was self-accomplished through escaping itself...* In its appearance this novel is like pale-existentialistic pastel nuance upon warm aquarelles and a piece of extreme lyrical devotion of a poet and a broken man. Sad evidence of the incurable breakdown of an artist and the fatal deepening of his personality trauma is the other Crnjanski: submissive publicists and a man from the diplomatic service after the end of 1920s, a conformist or just a very tired man. Like all until now, the narrator/protagonist here also represented *otherness*. His name was Petar Raic. He was a veteran from the First World War and his journey of alienation from the outer world was almost complete at the time of his returning home. He was simply a dead man. Only the artist living within his personality was closing its eyes more slowly. But through the blurred and purposely unfocused sight we can recognize the silhouette of an at least outwardly young European, an ex-sculptor... In fact "ex" is all there is left of him except for the transparent suffering whole he had turned into. Somewhere, so far and away, where dreams play childish games, perched upon the horizon, and where past and future seem to be one and the same thing... somewhere there he had a sense of community, youth, a university degree, wife, mental health – he was an artist and he had a life. But that was so long ago... Nothing of these had any value any more: even his wife – his closest Other – was already living across the street, which was actually much more. Now the only thing he was left with was a diary and a *desolate tract* – an inner and outer *desert* – to describe before the final smile of the void.

The writers, whose fiction we are trying to focus upon here, are well-known personalities such as Camil Petrescu, Anton Holban and Mircea Eliade. They have been gone a long time. We only have their words left. And what we used to forget all the time – we who dwell upon these words of theirs – is that they were also human beings of flesh and blood who – just like us – have felt naked, dumb and frightened...

The novel is built around the human being. Every novel is the story (or the history) of one or more human beings. The Psychological novel, put briefly, is a first-person narrative of one's own self, which, in one way or another, is searching for itself or for its Self. The narrator/protagonist in these stories is constant prey for Simplegades, constantly between Scylla and Charybdis, persistently in the maelstrom formed *intentionally* by continuously complicating interpersonal relationships, persistently inlaid

somewhere in the strata of all kinds of problems and dilemmas that one can find on the modern market of the soul. The narrator/protagonist in these stories is frequently also the generator and accelerator of the same troubles, where, after a time, the reader can find his own fossils. This might be his way of eluding the more severe questions that life, the world and the universe place before his eyes or even load upon his shoulders. Could we claim it is not a routine even for us today? In these stories, the narrator/protagonist appears to be desperately trying to find his identity, while stubbornly escaping it. He reaches for his self-definition while turning away from it and taking a step into the abyss he appears to be. But is it indeed true that sinking with a one-way ticket into one's self means escapism, evading the problem, getting round and endless delay, common surviving and vegetating...? For sure, this could be true; however I do not think this is the case here, with these stories, protagonists and authors. I do think that they all represent some kind of *otherness* – a feeling I get from the suggestive whisper, drifting from their part – that is a sort of knowledge they more or less possess...

Stories, they say, are few, and mankind has been repeating and will repeat them over and over again until the end of time. The first story is about a fortified and besieged city, whose defense is doomed to failure. This is a story about every Troy, or perhaps it is about the subject – fortified and besieging him or herself. The second story is about every search filled with impediments, about every Jason in his search for the Golden Fleece, and maybe this is the story about the search for the Other and his acknowledgement, or about the subject – searching for and simultaneously searched by him or herself. The third story is about every long return, or every Odyssey on his way back to Ithaca. This could be the story of the subject looking for his or her way back home and being that home at the same time...

The first story, they say, is about the city – fortified and besieged, about the subject – fortified and besieging him or herself. I imagine them all as a prepared city – a consciousness, fortified, more or less, against everyone else, where sometimes even its own soul can not break in; a consciousness drawn into a certain personal space, a *desert*, or *heart of darkness*, where it could achieve the dreamt of self-revelation and self-definition. And I imagine that *same* consciousness also besieging itself in order to break through *itself*, aiming to pierce and transcend itself towards a greater sense. Initially one needed to outline, define and express his identity as limpidly as possible and then one might transcend

it. Somehow they needed their identity in order not to need it anymore... *The desert was the way*. Into the wilderness – sooner or later every one of them found himself roaming the wilderness and the wilderness itself roamed through every one of them. And all of them brought with them something to be sacrificed and a diary to kill with. After all, the narrator/protagonist's besetting sin in these psychological novels was the diary he left behind. None of these novels concealed the fact it was an artifact, and all of them were in fact more or less based on personal notes. One could even sense the books' cool striving to articulate themselves. Each resembled a system of mirrors, a narcissistic ensemble, which all the time was rearranged and adjusted in the search of certain old or proper new angles. Perhaps then it was not by accident that one of the chapters in *The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War* was called *Between a Couple of Mirrors*, or that initially *Death That Proves Nothing* was called *Parallel Mirrors*. Of course, Petrescu and Holban were both admirers of Proust anyway. Through the use of the first-person the narrator/protagonist devoted himself to a painful process of zooming in his lens upon his mirror image like someone who has faced the mirror, undisturbed and on his own. Even when staring into someone else's eyes, into the eyes of the Other, he was actually seeking his own reflection. Even when he scrutinized Ella, or Ioana, or Maitreyi, he was seeking an image, a notion, a conception or solution of his own. And in this we are the voyeurs, enticed into his boudoir. As for his diary, perhaps it was his only crime... All these were more or less diaries of an intellectual from that time and location. Ștefan Gheorghidiu, Sandu and Alan, as well as Juan and Petar Raic could all be classified as Southeastern European intellectuals. What does this mean? After all, only a real intellectual could summarize while speaking aloud the entirety of human philosophical science while together with a naked young woman in bed, as did Ștefan Gheorghidiu...

Socio-derivative identity by its nature is dependant on society, said Charles Taylor. *Social acknowledgement is built into the socio-derivative aspect of identity by force of the fact it is based upon social categories, which everyone takes on trust*. On getting inside these very narratives it is mostly the social aspect of the narrator/protagonist's identity that we meet. Indeed, this is the way we are used to acting in real-life situations where social status comes first. It is not until then that we start to discover other strata and dimensions of the other in an on-going communication.

They were all men, young men with higher education and also men of words – intellectuals placed in non-intellectual situations, whether

voluntarily or not, where they forced themselves to photosynthesize their limpid self-conscious intellectuality. The intellectual was seemingly a comparatively new appearance of an old romantic position, which had its presence in each epoch. They were neither rich nor poor, but were living a *modest life*, which was mainly a personal choice. They all had certain social positions and social concepts, were always critical or at least skeptical towards politics, but at the same time always distant and intermediated by the personal and intimate modes of their points of view. One could say they were building around themselves walls of private manias in order not to mix with all those sophisticated and needless worldly matters. Even when drafted into the very core of world events, even being Ștefan Gheorghidiu on the front line, mingled with and killing others to survive, even then he perceived in all this a *desert* of his own, something more – a wished-for one... Being among people was always felt to pollute and infect self-perception. They all needed the *desert* in order to outline themselves. Call it desolation of the battlefields somewhere in the surroundings of Sibiu, if you wish, or that of the inhumanly deserted Caverna Port, the dusk jungles of India or the similar unsure moisture in the wastelands of Patagonia, or possibly home itself, which on returning there one day he found had been transformed by a certain broken mood of autumn merely into an open and waiting grave. *If the circumstances did not take them there – into this desert of theirs – they would invent it by themselves anyway.* Even before their desert that was to come, in society and among people they alienated themselves by all means available, fortifying themselves with books and music, or prolific and elaborated complexes or obsessions. Ștefan and Sandu had their Bucharest, the old, glittering and fashionable Bucharest of the good times; Alan: his Calcutta with the cozy house of the engineer and all those lodgings; Juan: a Buenos Aires of his own, especially by night; and Petar Raic: his unnamed native town, the town of his mother. And gradually no one was left – in that wilderness – except the narrator/protagonist and the Other, his partner, oddly made to resemble an identity by the remoteness. Before withdrawing, they all carefully estranged themselves from this background. They desperately needed another empty canvas, a certain personal space, which became tangible, which, by delineating their difference from the others, delineating the unique and genuine issues within them, would enable them to reach out for some self-definition. They reached out for self-revelation through *authenticity*. In order to reveal and comprehend themselves, they had to define, delineate themselves,

to articulate and interpret these issues, in the form, for instance, of a diary, or – why not? – a novel.

Comprehension of the self is an interpretation, said Paul Ricoeur. *In its turn amongst other signs and symbols interpretation finds in the narrative a privileged mediator*. And thus the story of one's life could grow to be a fictional history, or even at times a historic fiction.

The concept of modernity that each one of us has his or her own way of being human requires from each of us that we find out what it really means to be ourselves. And people discover what they should be on turning it into a way of life, expressing through words and action the original issue in their selves. Thus the modern idea of the individual is somewhat expressionistic because of the conception of achieving revelation through expression. Here one can perceive the connection between self-revelation and fiction. In times of modernity, fiction became a paradigm of self-definition. The creator somehow turned into the paradigmatic case of human existence, in so far as he accomplished original self-definition. That intellectual was the narrator/protagonist in the Southeastern European psychological novel, a phenomenon that probably crowned the general subjectivist change to modernity in literature. The path to his self-revelation went through the creation, through the making of something original and innovative; or through murdering something, which could be perceived as a creation... Self-revelation requires creation. Creation is interpretation. Interpretation is comprehension of the self. The mission that fell on delicate shoulders of art, literature, and the psychological novel in particular, with its fragile protagonist, was neither simple nor painless, especially in the years after the First World War. The narrator/protagonist in all of these novels naturally turned towards the inside, towards experience and subjectivity. But such an act would not simply signify a turning towards oneself, which then follows to be articulated and thus revealed, provided revelation really is achievable, through expression and stopping at that point – dipped in and stuck into a subject; a turning towards the inside could take us further, beyond the self, towards structures outside of the self... Thus, in order to find his way through the mirror, the narrator/protagonist needed to identify himself, to define his identity. His modern identity represented his authenticity or the modern ideal of authenticity. To be himself, to be true to himself, would then mean being true to his originality, to his own genuineness, which only he could express and reveal. By expressing that issue he at the same time defined and defied himself. Thus he realized

an opportunity which was only his own. This was the basis on which the modern ideal of authenticity unfolded and on which people set themselves the aims of self-expression and self-realization, to which is usually connected the ideal concerned.

Breaking off the old habits, discrediting the previous "moral horizons" led us to gain the new freedom. They call this change "disenchantment" of the world. People got rid of the magic together with the passion. They raised the lath of pleasure too high. They focused upon their individual existence at the price of the breadth of their horizons, the reduction of dimensions, the loss of their aims. If once people used to say they had "horizons", now they say they have "a point of view". The new ideal is for them to be true to themselves, that is to say, genuineness and authenticity. Authenticity began to be comprehended in similar way to beauty – as authenticity for authenticity's sake. This brings authenticity and art closer. Authenticity would be convulsive or it wouldn't be at all, one might say, using the words of Breton. If comprehension of the self is an interpretation then interpretation leads us towards comprehension of the self. But is it true that comprehension of the self, self-revelation and self-definition is the real aim? The Golden Core, the Philosophical Stone, Shangri-La, Avalon, the Island of the Blessed, the Holy Grail, the Parrot with the Color of an Orange, the Blue Flower, the Aim of the Aims... In fact, the real aim could be the very searching and the process of interpretation itself. It might be that the questions are more important than the answers and, after that, the aim-like-horizon, the always-receding-aim would be the real aim...

When he strived to comprehend what it means to define himself, to specify what it was that constituted his genuineness, he saw immediately that he must take as a basis the sense all that is significant. To define himself meant discovering his characteristic from others. And he could only determine his identity against the background of the things that were significant. Authenticity was not incompatible with requirements that came from outside the self; in fact, it premised them. But he needed to be left to go alone into the *desert* to face them.

Some issues that were transcendent to the self were needed and they always have been. I believe the narrators/protagonists of our interwar psychological novel somehow unconsciously realized this, albeit not clearly. Consciously, subconsciously or unconsciously – this has always been the aim of the aims, and the way towards such an aim passes through

our selves, through the mirror, amidst a wilderness of our own. We need first to find ourselves in order to step over.

The Golden Fleece

Stories, they say, are few, and mankind has been repeating and will repeat them over and over again until the end of time... *The second story* is about every search filled with impediments, about every Jason in his search for the Golden Fleece, and maybe this is the story about the search for the Other and his acknowledgement, or about the subject – searching for and simultaneously searched by him or herself.

Love is a basic problem in literature as literature is a frequent topic in the conversations of those in love. Love and death went together in modern culture as did Laurel and Hardy. Love and death are *identical* notions in so far as within their essence they deny the individual existence, in so far as they *transcend* the limits of the particular individual. Death is what ruins the discontinued human being. It is a *stepping over the limits* which that human being identifies with himself. Love is a *psychological* search. Unfolding itself, love ruins the structure of the enclosed being, what each one represents out of it. It is disturbing because it breaks the self-possession of the individual; it breaks the possessing of this existing and fixed individuality within each one. Love is communication, which, in its essence, represents a searching for a possible continuity for the discontinued human being. It is a *stepping over the limits* of the individual, a *transcending* of the individual existence.

One might meet that pink-and-black unity at every step while walking the path of the art of modernity. However I perceive a touch of difference here: *love and death, and their unity, were the basic obsession of the Southeastern European psychological novel*. Petrescu's title *The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War* is emblematic. Who could say war didn't mean death? In fact, I believe war is an attribute of death and not quite the contrary.

A common feature of human life, said Charles Taylor, *is its fundamentally dialogic character. People become complete representatives of human kind, capable of comprehending themselves, hence of defying their identity, through acquiring the treasure of human languages of expression, including those of art, gesture and love. But people acquire them through exchange with the others. No one, on his*

own, could achieve the languages needed for his or her self-determination. Namely, the connection between expression and the finding of the self, creation and self-revealing, transformed the intellectual, the creator, the narrator/protagonist, into the paradigmatic case of complete human existence in so far as he accomplished original self-definition, no matter how tragic and contradictory he was, and even because of that. People are expected to develop their own opinions, conceptions, and positions to a considerable extent by self-dependent reflection. But how could anyone manage to resolve significant issues, such as all the questions surrounding identity, without having the means to do so? This issue is resolved in dialog with the others – partly open, partly interior. The narrator/protagonist needed a certain personal space – a *desert* of his own to define and defy himself, to realize and accomplish himself, but he also desperately needed the Other for the same purpose and more. The so-called *desert*, which became touchable, meant *the way* to do that. And I think he knew that the *Other* meant *the means* to do that – the acknowledgement and the language to express, and, of course, the very impulse towards transcending. The development of the modern ideal of inwardly conceived identity gave a new significance to the acknowledgement on the part of the other. His own identity depended on his dialogical relationships with the Other. Each of the aspects of his identity – personal, social or national identity – was dependent on the closest others, or the others in his social milieu, or those from a larger region, but always others. In those moments, when the other is confused and not completely connected with his or her context, we are able to penetrate as deep as we ever could, into him or her, because this self-incomprehensibility is also valid for our own selves. One comprehends the other when one realizes that what bothers one about the other, the other's enigmatic nature, is also one's own problem. If the other still remains puzzling, the very cause of this must lie in the other's own self-incomprehensibility. What makes the other difficult to access is the fact that he or she is first of all never completed, never entirely determined from the context but always somewhat "open" and "drifting". The dimension of the universal appears when that what is lacking – both from him and that of the other – are put together. *What one and the unattainable other share is the vacant denotative in the place of X, which eludes both of them*, said Terry Eagleton. We are all discontinued human beings and all we can share is to take a peep into the gap between us... The universal is that break through or crack in one's identity which opens from the

inside towards the other and prevents one from completely defining him or herself with any sort of a context. But this is our way of belonging to the context, and not to miss it. *Tempestuous disruption that comes after connecting the universal with a particular content is what we know as a human subject. Human existing is moving into the conjuncture of what is particular and what is universal, that of the body and the symbolic environment. And this is not a place where one could feel like home.*

Raising the problem of identity is symptomatic. For sure, in pre-modern times people also had identities and these identities were also dependant on the acknowledgement of others, but clearly that issue was not so problematic as in the period we are talking about. The ideal of authenticity forms both the social and the intimate aspect of identity. In the social aspect, people maintain a permanent policy of equal acknowledgement. However, the inwardly conceived identity does not have that a priori acknowledgement. On an intimate level they are able to conceive how much an original identity needs the acknowledgement, given or refused, of others – the closest others – and to what extent it is vulnerable by its absence. In the culture of authenticity, private relationships are considered as key-positions of self-revelation and self-approval. Love relations are important, and not only because of the general focus of modern culture on the satisfaction of common needs; they are also decisive because they are a kind of test of the inwardly conceived identity.

In the wilderness – sooner or later every one of them found himself roaming there and the wilderness itself roamed through every one of them. And sooner or later they found themselves in the maelstrom, squeezed in-between Scylla and Charybdis. In one sense or another, this worsening vortex of interpersonal relationships was a complete invention of theirs. Ștefan and Sandu created their mysterious and somehow immaterial third angle in their love triangles by themselves and almost out of thin air. Alan confidently took actions to loose Maitreyi, keeping his decisions always on the opposite strand. The more his disgust for the inventor grew, the more Juan strived to get closer to that mythologized evil creature and his wife, who, on the top of this, was the untouchable beloved. Petar Raic precisely engraved an autumn of his own in his entire inner space, turning himself skillfully into an *authumn-holic*, intentionally wiping out the woman he loved and devoting himself to an apathy he grew and painted with care. Since the great mental suffering was comprehended as the obvious and probably the only passageway to the inner depths the narrator/protagonist made violent efforts to obtain more

and more pain. There was plenty of worldwide suffering in the years between the World Wars, however, but of a totally different nature. He needed a pain of his own. He found or invented – or both – the proper way, created the suitable circumstances, chose the required medium and drove deep into the mirror at the right moment, when the last break had come. Inside his mind he made not castles in the air but real flaws and then he used all the optics of his imagination to turn them into gaps to explore. But there was one more thing: he had to delude himself and the others about the purpose of his intentions because living in our world with a transcendent statute would be self-annihilating. In other people's eyes he was a self-tortured, introverted creature, whose exaggerated sensibility has condemned to a futile pining. So he fortified himself within and set off on a quest while simultaneously besieging himself and being the quest's goal himself, though not quite.

The narrator/protagonist in these stories was clear about the values' currency of the day. Most likely he knew that the most valuable thing he had – the opportunity to realize, to accomplish himself – was extremely dependent on the Other. And in the end he always realized the negative side of his relationships with his most valuable Other. The Other, was the first to give acknowledgement to his personal, inwardly conceived identity. Then, in the middle of that self-invented *desert* of his own, at ease and methodically he sacrificed his *love* for the Other, whom he had brought there himself. *He was self-accomplished through escaping himself.* The narrator/protagonist prepared everything about this breakdown by himself. Then he used the pieces of that collapse to create a horrifying tension, to stretch his own limits. And he missed a lot of opportunities to quit while all this – to which he was devoted – in people's eyes looked like escapism. In fact, I believe it was a reach out for universal issues beyond his depths. Because nothing could resemble the *universal* more than that which is purely *essential*, simply taken alone without external relations. The *universal* is not just the opposite of the *individual*, just as the narrator/protagonist is not simply the opposite of the common human being, but its own paradigm. In the very *essence* of a thing, in its particular core and taste, we can find that which *transcends* its ordinary characteristics. *Individuality* is the mediator of the *universal*, while the peculiar characteristics are absolutely accidental. Art reproduces individual things in the form of their universal essences and thus makes them unique. During this process art turns them from accidental into indispensable, from dependable into free. The esthetic artifact is one of the great

resolutions modernity gave to one of its toughest problems: that irritating relationship between what is individual and what is universal. Thus questions concerning esthetics appear frequently as society is less capable to spare time for art. Conscious of this or not, this knowledge sprang from the narrator/protagonist in the Southeastern European psychological novel between the World Wars like a suggestive otherness.

What is peculiar about the creating symbols being is that it is in its nature to transcend itself, said Terry Eagleton. It is in human nature to create excesses. It would be unnatural for human beings not to exceed themselves. Human nature is naturally unnatural, going beyond the measure simply by virtue of what it represents. That is the way we are constructed and aspirations excel our needs. A certain potential of affluence is built into us and then every real situation owns a certain hidden, unrealized potential.

If we want to understand modern art, we must distinguish these two kinds of subjectivities. The first is that distorted by the *instrumental mind* and the ideologies of the *egocentric manifestation* stuck into the blind alley of one self's inner shallows. The other is the subjectivity that aims not at the self but at something beyond the self, something beyond the mirror... Some of the greatest writers of the 20th century are subjectivist writers in this second sense – Rilke, Elliot, Pound, Joyce, Mann etc., all of whom explore some kind of order beyond the self. I believe the case of the so-called psychological novel from Southeastern European and its representatives is similar. I believe also that authors like Camil Petrescu, Anton Holban, Mircea Eliade, Boris Shivachev, and Miloš Crnjanski, whether they gave us masterpieces or not, explored some structures outside the self and gave us indications of this.

Odyssey

Proust says the novel is a mirror held up to life. The virtue of the work is in the quality of the mirror, not of the life it reflects. What if the mirror is a novel held up to your eyes? There is recognition that life, as we live it, is not particularly linear, and that a really accurate mirror held up to it would portray this deflection of line. Life itself is more of a spiral than a straight line. In a perfect spiral you would end up back where you began, meaning nowhere; but in a real-life spiral you get closer, if not to the goal, than at least to some result, entropy, age and death... *Sometimes*

the long way round is the shortest way home, said Joyce – a nice, strange device for the banner of twentieth-century literature. Why a spiral and not a progression? Because the narrator/protagonist is exactly there where he was, but only worse. Stories, they say, are few and mankind has been repeating and will repeat them over and over again till the end of time. *The third story* is about every long return, or about every Odysseus on his way back to Ithaca. This could be the story about the subject looking for his or her way back home and being that home at the same time.

Epilogue

Stories are few they say and there is one more: *the last one*. This is a story about the sacrifice of a god, about the death of Egyptian Oziris, about the mutilation and murder of the Phrygian Attis, about the underworld trip of Sumerian Ishtar, about the tearing of the Thracian Dionis, about Baal, about Odin, sacrificed in the name of Odin, about Jesus, crucified on the cross of the Romans... This could be a story about stretching and stepping over the limits of the individual, about transcending the discontinued being, about transcending self-consciousness by sinking deeper into it, about the self beyond the self, although we are all naked, dumb and horrified; a story about the sacrifice upon the secret altar of the universal or just about an author, who wanted to kill something within himself and therefore created. This must be the story of the one and only human being existing in the world. Whoever or whatever you ask as to who that human being really is, to whomever or whatever you appeal, everything always whispers: *you*.

The end

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